Are you as green as the Grinch – or is it just an illusion?

A qualitative study conceptualising factors contributing to the gap between green consumer attitude and behaviour online

by

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Abstract

Title: Are you as green as the grinch - or is it just an illusion?

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Keywords: Attitude-behaviour gap, online consumer behaviour, green consumption, green marketing, green communication strategies.

Thesis purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to reveal what critical factors affect the attitude-behaviour gap when consuming green apparel online, and what aspects in retailers' green communication strategies that are perceived to have an influence on performing a green consumer behaviour online.

Theoretical perspective: An own illustration of a theoretical framework has emerged from the reviewed literature. This framework includes theories that have been used in order to argue for our findings. The most prominent theories used are the theory of the attitude-behaviour gap, consumers' online behaviour, literature conceptualising green communication strategies, and literature investigating factors that influence consumers' green consumption.

Methodology: This thesis uses a qualitative method with an abductive approach to gain in-depth understandings, and takes on a relativist philosophical stance to understand consumers' attitudes and behaviours. The data collection includes online observations of two fast fashion companies and 15 semi-structured consumer interviews.

Empirical data: Our empirical data consists of consumer perspectives on what factors are critical in order to consume environmentally friendly. The collected data from online observations is used to illustrate sustainability actions taken by the studied companies, and to illustrate examples from retailers' communication on their purchasing websites.

Conclusions: Firstly, our thesis confirms a gap between attitude and behaviour when consuming environmentally friendly. Secondly, the study has resulted in a framework including three prominent factors that influence green consumer behaviour. The framework demonstrates that in order for a consumer to be influenced to perform a green behaviour, sustainability has to become fashionable, transparency and simplification in online communication strategies are needed, and retailers' have to create a sense of obligation with the consumer.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

Imagine yourself shopping for your upcoming master's graduation ceremony. You are browsing all your favourite online websites for the best outfit, and you find some nice potential dresses for one of the most memorable days of your life. Since you in recent times have started to be more environmentally conscious when shopping, always having the intention to purchase clothes and products that are eco-friendly, you certainly do so when shopping for this special occasion as well. When trying to make a decision between two dresses from your favourite brand that now meets your initial thought of the design of the dress, you notice that one of the dresses has no green label. However, the other dress has such a label, meaning that this product is more environmentally friendly. Suddenly you find yourself in a situation where you actually prefer the design of the dress with no green label, yet you decide to look more into the dress with the green label due to your recent intention to purchase eco-friendly products. Nevertheless, when reading the product background, you are only faced with general information and no specific nor sufficient eco-friendly information about the product. After reading this information, you are not convinced that this product is environmentally friendly. You return to the other dress, put it in your online shopping cart, go to the checkout, and order the dress. You feel good about your purchase, perhaps thinking about the other eco-friendly dress, but since you are confused about how eco-friendly the other dress actually was, you don't put that much effort into feeling anxious and only look forward to your spectacular upcoming graduation ceremony. But why did you break your promise about being environmentally friendly and do the opposite of your initial intention?

1.1 Background

In 2010, the textile industry's production growth exceeded the human population growth (Niinimäki, Peters, Dahlbo, Perry, Rissanen & Gwilt, 2020), and the sector of fashion produces more greenhouse gas emissions than the sector of shipping and aviation do together (Science Based Target, n.d.). One of the main drivers for this occurrence is related to the fast fashion phenomenon, which has emerged through people's requirements for fashionable and cheap clothes (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Moreover, online consumption has increased during the past years (Song, Zhu & Zhao, 2020), and there is an increased concern about environmental damage worldwide (Sharma, 2021). Consequently, green consumption and environmentally friendly

consumption behaviour have become important topics, especially within the marketing literature (Haws, Winterich, & Naylor, 2014; Peloza, White, & Shang, 2013). However, marketing has been considered to be partly responsible for the damage to the environment since marketing activities have given rise to increased consumption and waste. Hence, there is an increased necessity for green marketing and a modification of strategies and functions (Sharma, 2021).

Adopting green techniques in marketing means not seeing the consumers as mere customers with a constant appetite for new material goods but as customers that aim to sustain a healthy lifestyle (Ottman, 2011). It means acknowledging how different stakeholders interact with nature, and how production, as well as consumption, affect the environment, both positively and negatively (Ottman, 2011). Moreover, due to a growing environmental concern, sustainability consumption has increased in importance (Godemann, 2021), and is believed to be a marketing tool to inform and persuade society in embracing a sustainable lifestyle (Elving, 2021). If there is an absence of sufficient communication about sustainability, sustainable lifestyles will not be implemented in society (Godemann, 2021). However, communication can establish public awareness and inform consumers about sustainable development (Anderson, 2021), and ultimately change the lifestyle of consumers (Elving, 2021). In conclusion, it is believed that green consumption can be the solution to some of the deteriorations of the environment (Nguyen, Nguyen & Hoang, 2019).

1.2 Problematisation

Today, businesses and consumers are aware that their production and consumption habits have a direct impact on the environment, and there is a big challenge concerning the need to preserve and protect natural resources (Singh Malyan & Duhan, 2019). Hence, there is an increasing demand for green products (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2010; Williams, 2008). A recently conducted study by Statista (2021b) made on five European countries indicates that the majority of consumers think it is important for brands to publish both social and environmental policies. However, studies reveal that even though consumers understand the significance of acting environmentally friendly while consuming apparel, their behaviour is not consistent in this respect (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2010; Carey, 2009; Dhir, Sadiq, Talwar, Sakashita & Kaur, 2021; Kim & Damhorst, 1998). In the car industry, the purchase of a green-luxury car signals a sustainable behaviour and the reach of a pro-social status, which has been found to be a

favourable status to reach (Ali, Xiaoling, Ali, Sherwani & Muneeb, 2019). However, in the fashion industry, a pro-environmental behaviour has not reached the same status (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

The phenomenon of the inconsistency between attitude and behaviour regarding sustainable consumption is called the attitude-behaviour gap (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). Minimising the gap between attitude and behaviour could be helpful to make the economies and environments more sustainable. In order to accomplish this, an understanding of environmentally friendly consumption is substantial (Dhir et al., 2021). However, regarding the fashion industry specifically, consumers lack knowledge about environmental impacts (Sharma & Pal, 2020), and a lack of communication regarding sustainability may be the reason for this issue (Godemann, 2021). However, sustainability communication may be subject for consumers engaging in environmentally friendly behaviour if communicated sufficiently (Godemann, 2021).

In the online environment specifically, communication about sustainability efforts has fundamentally changed as we are increasingly engaging in media in the digital environment. However, media still play an important part in effectively communicating sustainability (Anderson, 2021). As online shopping increases (Song, Zhu & Zhao, 2020), it requires strategies that enhance the experience for the consumers (Aljukhadar & Senecal, 2017). To accomplish this, supportive communication is necessary within the online environment (Aljukhadar & Senecal, 2017). Communication itself can be extremely complex, as it needs to be established who is receiving the message, the content of the message, how the communication is taking form and the aim of the message (Guillen Mandujano, Vergragt & Fischer, 2021). The perception of sustainable communication in media and the online environment specifically has detected that media seems to be a trustworthy source for climate information (Kannengießer, 2021). Additionally, knowledge about climate change can increase as a result of media usage, however, the effects on the behaviour of the media recipients is still undetected (Kannengießer, 2021). Moreover, the content of the communication can be perceived as manipulative, but on the other hand, be a powerful tool to influence the behaviour of consumers (Guillen Mandujano, Vergragt & Fischer, 2021). The question remains as to how communication effectively can influence consumers to adopt a more sustainable consumption behaviour (Guillen Mandujano, Vergragt & Fischer, 2021).

Furthermore, previous research has identified different factors affecting the purchase decision when consuming fashion (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011; McNeill & Moore, 2015), and these factors are claimed to intervene between consumption intentions and the actual behaviour of a consumer and contribute to the existing gap (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011). There is a need to address how consumers behave in an online environment when consuming fast fashion to make online retailers adapt their marketing and communication strategies, since it is explained by Park & Lin (2020) that consumers tend to have various motivations affecting the process of a purchase decision. What is interesting is that previous research scholars do not examine the factors affecting the consumer behaviour online, to our knowledge. Moreover, only a few studies have examined the attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable consumption within the area of fast fashion (Park & Lin, 2020). Hence, there is a current need to study the factors in retailers' communication influencing the attitude-behaviour gap when consuming green products in the fast fashion online environment.

1.3   Purpose and research questions

Women's apparel account for the biggest segment in the apparel market (Statista, 2021a), and the segment of women has the highest intention to buy eco-friendly products (Hunt, 2020). Additionally, this segment performs the highest online consumption (Song, Zhu & Zhao, 2020). Hence, there is a need to understand the attitude-behaviour gap of consuming environmentally friendly online within this segment.

The interest in environmentally friendly consumption increases, but because of various barriers, the purchasing behaviour is affected differently. Hence, the concern for the environment among consumers is not sufficient to study solely when striving to persuade consumers to act sustainably (Sharma & Pal, 2020). This thesis aims to investigate why there exists an attitude-behaviour gap in consuming environmentally friendly fast fashion online, and what communication factors consumers demand in order to actually perform an environmentally friendly behaviour. This is done by investigating the consumers' perception of retailers' sustainable communication strategies online. Consequently, the main objective of this thesis aims   to   address   the   following   research   question(s):

- *What factors in the online retail environment lead to the inconsistency between female consumers' attitudes and actual behaviour toward purchasing environmentally*

friendly?

- *What aspects of retailers' online communication strategies lead to higher green purchase intention according to consumers?*

1.4   Aimed contributions

The answers to the research questions in this study will broaden existing literature within the field of the attitude-behaviour gap and sustainable communication strategies in the fashion industry. Building on the existing theory of the attitude-behaviour gap and the reasons for its existence, this study will provide an understanding of what online factors affect the gap between intention and behaviour to consume environmentally friendly fashion. Moreover, this research will extend existing theories conceptualising online consumer behaviour with insights into how consumers behave in the online environment to find sustainability information. By acknowledging the previously mentioned, this study will also extend literature about green communication strategies, highlighting critical factors in firms' communication that affect consumer behaviour in the online environment. Furthermore, by conducting online observations on two e-commerce companies, this study will provide retailers with insights into what elements in their online communication strategies influence consumer behaviour to buy environmentally friendly products. By interviewing consumers, this research also provides an understanding of what the consumer requires to perceive a supportive online shopping experience, with sustainability communication at the centre of attention.

1.5   Delimitations

The concept of sustainability usually includes environmental, social and economic aspects and was defined by the United Nations Brundtland Commission in 1987 as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987, n.p.). However, this study is limited to dealing with the environmental aspect of sustainability. By narrowing the definition to the aspect of environmental sustainability, the concept relates to the responsibility to interact with the planet in order to maintain natural resources without putting any risks to future generations (Evans, 2020). The reason for limiting the study only investigating the environmental issue, is because of the aim of investigating the attitude-behaviour gap between the intentions and actions to

consume in an environmentally friendly way. By only examining the environmental aspect, an in-depth investigation is possible, not only touching upon the three aspects lightly.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

In this first chapter, an introduction to the thesis has been outlined. The second chapter includes a literature review, including a critical summary of the most prominent theories and phenomenons of the study. The next chapter involves the chosen methodology and covers parts such as research philosophy, research approach, research design, data collection, data analysis method, research ethics, trustworthiness and the limitations of the study. The fourth chapter demonstrate the empirical findings collected in order to answer the research questions and achieve the main objective of the study. These constitues of online observations and consumer interviews. In the fifth chapter, an analysis on the main findings in relation to literature is done. The purpose is to demonstrate our findings in relation to literature, to strengthen our findings. The last section of the fifth chapter includes a critical discussion with the aim to highlight the most prominent discoveries. Chapter six presents our conclusions to achieve the purpose and answer the research questions. This is done by demonstrating an own illustrated framework including the main results emerged from the study. This chapter also includes the theoretical contributions and managerial implications emphasising new insights, both theoretically and practically. Lastly, the chapter ends with suggestions for future study.

2. Literature review

This chapter provides a comprehensive outline of the reviewed literature and theoretical concepts. Since the study takes its starting point in the online green consumer behaviour, the first two sections take on the consumer perspective. Firstly, online consumer behaviour is reviewed, giving an understanding of different elements during the online consumer journey. Secondly, green consumer behaviour is discussed, providing an overview of consumers intention to being environmentally friendly and different aspects that affects the green behaviour. This section is later divided into four subcategories, discussing different factors that influence green consumer behaviour. To understand the different features of marketing and communications displayed in the online environment, green marketing and green communication strategies are evaluated and discussed. Proceeding to the next section, the attitude-behaviour gap is reviewed. In order to answer the research questions, the review of this theory is vital in order to understand the factors leading to the gap. Ultimately, an own illustration of a theoretical framework is presented, summarising the main facets of the reviewed literature.

2.1 Online consumer behaviour

The loyalty of young consumers is changeable due to fashion trends, style and quality (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Furthermore, the group of young adults shop more frequently and make decisions faster than any other segment, yet, they are more aware of marketing tactics, which make them more suspicious since they have the ability to access information on the internet easily (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016). Consumers' purchase decision tend to be affected by social influences, such as the people they interact with and trust. Moreover, it has been found that consumers who do not find adequate information in the online environment, often turn to other sources of information, such as previous customers (Kim & Sirvastava, 2007).

Adopting and familiarising with the internet to perform online shopping or seek information has become more popular as the internet continuously develops. Most consumers who preferably shop online do it due to the time they save and the high convenience (Lissitsa & Kol, 2016). In contrast to physical stores, the online environment lacks the ability for the consumer to interact with the merchandise and store clerk, which increases the perceived risk of online

shopping for online consumers (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu, 2007). Hence, to ensure consumers do not suffer any loss when making an online purchase, they search for cues in the online environment (Hsin Chang & Wen Chen, 2008). Consequently, the online store environment set out as the only atmosphere where the consumer can search for cues of trustworthiness. The cues can be hyperlinks, design, layout, and web borders which all ultimately stimulate the internal state of mind of the consumers (Hsin Chang & Wen Chen, 2008). Moreover, it has been found that the quality of the website as well as the website brand has a positive influence on consumer trustworthiness, however, has a negative effect on the perceived risk. In turn, these factors affect the consumers' intention to purchase on the online website (Hsin Chang & Wen Chen, 2008). Furthermore, when consumers make an online purchase decision they tend do it through a two-stage process (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). Typically, the consumers begin the process by screening a generous amount of available products and sorting out the most favourable products. Secondly, they evaluate the selected products more profoundly and compare them on the essential and crucial attributes to finally make a decision (Häubl & Trifts, 2000).

To communicate with their customers, the purchasing website may be the only way for online e-commerce companies, and in this online environment, interaction aids and cues can potentially transform consumers' way in how they search for information about the product and make a buying decision (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). Moreover, Aladwani and Palvia (2002) have developed four dimensions to measure the quality of the website, namely content quality, technical adequacy, appearance, and specific content. Content quality means measuring the quality of the content, i.e. how useful the information is, the accuracy of the content, and how complete the content is. Technical adequacy involves the right actions taken by the website retailer with regard to the appropriate technological advancements such as reasonable links, page load and ease of navigation. Web appearance relates to the website's overall visual attractiveness. Finally, specific content corresponds to finding and perceiving details and information about the product details, privacy policies, customer service and other information that is helpful for the consumer (Aladwani & Palvia, 2002).

Furthermore, Parboteeah, Valacich and Wells (2009) discuss impulsive buying online and emphasise that buying decisions online are influenced by the consumers' reactions to the characteristics of the shopping environment. The reactions are based on the buying intention of the consumer, which can be directed by a goal, or if the consumer is just browsing the website (Parboteeah, Valacich & Wells, 2009). Additionally, Li and Hitt (2008) suggest that online

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consumer reviews have an impact on the way consumers shop, and can be seen as a substitute for traditional advertising. However, they emphasise that such reviews may cease to function as a source of information, especially about the quality of the product. Firstly, they may be manipulated by the retailer in order to get high ratings artificially. Secondly, the consumer reviews may not represent the whole consumer population, especially over a wider time frame (Li & Hitt, 2008).

2.2 Green consumption

As seen in **Table 1**, there is a shared environmental concern among the population worldwide. One of the main issues individuals are concerned about is global warming or climate change, as well as air pollution and the dealings of waste.

Table 1: "Most important environmental issues faced worldwide in 2020", based on Statista (2020)
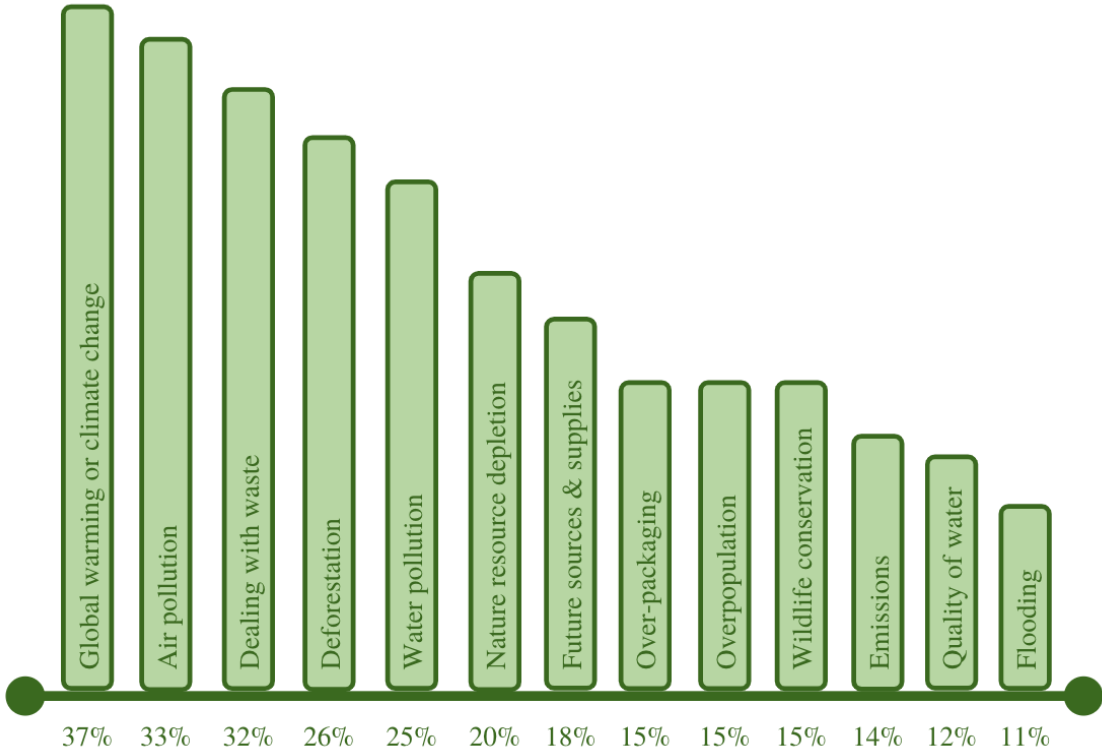
When a consumer wants to satisfy a need, they can do so by looking for services, products or ideas that can fulfil their quest. This search can be referred to as a consumer's buying behaviour (Lin & Niu, 2018). When performing a buying behaviour that involves an acknowledged selection and purchase of products that positively affect on the environment during their life

cycle, a consumer is performing a green consumption behaviour (Vazifehdoust, Taleghani, Esmaeilpour, Nazari, Khadang, 2013). Green consumption behaviour is often associated with consuming in a responsible way that has minimised environmental impacts, which can include purchasing products that are energy-efficient, prioritising recyclable items, and avoiding products that are over-packaged (Do Paco, Shiel & Alves, 2019). The most important characteristics that consumers are searching for when buying green products are products that have a minimal release of pollutants, require little water usage, energy and little waste generation (Vazifehdoust et al., 2013). In this study, green consumption refers to the demand by consumers for services and products of firms that are sustainable in their production, and consumers who take a big responsibility for the effects on the climate of their consumed products (Singh Malyan & Duhan, 2019).

2.2.1 Green knowledge

One critical element in the process of making a purchase decision of green products is green knowledge (Chan, 1999). The definition of green knowledge is an individual's perceived understanding and evaluation of the ecosystem's effects on society (Tan, 2011), and the degree of knowledge of environmental issues a consumer has (Mohd Suki, 2016). To possess green knowledge is to recognise ecologically associated concepts, behaviours and symbols (Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001). Additionally, concerns and knowledge about the environment positively impacts the intention to purchase (Paul, Modi & Patel, 2016). According to Schahn and Holzer (1990), green knowledge can be divided into concrete and abstract knowledge. Concrete knowledge applies to objective knowledge and the use of green products, and abstract knowledge relates to subjective knowledge, attained from self-perception.

Green consciousness, which derives from environmental concerns, induces green knowledge (Lin & Niu, 2018). Sufficient green knowledge enables the consumers to make literate purchases, however, Kumar, Manrai and Manrai (2017) have observed that such consistency is yet to be validated. Moreover, while some researchers have found that green knowledge and pro-environmental purchase behaviours do not have any consequential connection (Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001), other studies have found that there is a strong consistency between green knowledge and green behaviour (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Nevertheless, when a consumer attains the wrong information or when there is an absence of knowledge regarding

the environment, there might occur a decreased pro-environmental behaviour (Vicente-Molina, Fernandez-Sainz & Izagirre-Olaizola, 2013). A study conducted on consumers in Canada revealed that when their knowledge about environmental problems and their effects were limited, their pro-environmental behaviour was hindered (Kennedy, Beckeley, McFarlane & Nadeau, 2009).

2.2.2 Green awareness

Green knowledge induces green awareness, and a green attitude is positively derived from green knowledge and awareness (Burgees, Harrison & Filius, 1998). However, it has been found that such attitudes do not initiate pro-environmental behaviour, but still, organisations ground their communication and marketing campaigns on the belief that knowledge would generate literate behaviour (Burgees, Harrison & Filius, 1998). Awareness is the constitution of realisation, consciousness, and knowledge among people and the shared concern among society to preserve nature and it encourages people to take action to safeguard the environment (Singh Malyan & Duhan, 2019).

Moreover, the necessity of green awareness among consumers derives from the recognition of the need to protect nature (Singh Malyan & Duhan, 2019). Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) emphasise that emotional commitment leads to environmental attitude and awareness. Green awareness leads to a comprehensive understanding of contamination of the environment and it also sheds light on the conflict between humans and nature, enabling an understanding of the need to protect natural resources (Singh Malyan & Duhan, 2019). Additionally, it authorises the movement from conflict to a partnership between nature and humankind (Singh Malyan & Duhan, 2019).

2.2.3 Situational factors

Situational factors include, among others, product attributes (Muratore, 2016), the environment in the store (Chang, Yan & Eckman, 2014), and the behaviour of employees (Amos, Holmes, & Keneson, 2014). Such situational factors have an impact on purchase behaviours. Moreover, situational factors such as availability (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011) and accessibility (Sharma, 2021) affect the intention among consumers to buy green products. Nevertheless, consumers can, to some extent, indicate a positive attitude toward a company's sustainability initiatives even though their concerns are more related to the issues of the product quality (Allen, 2016).

Research made on the consumption of eco-friendly products shows that the performance of products is a purchase barrier, and consumers tend to have the impression that green products have low performance when used (Ku, Kuo, Wu, Wu, 2012). The most implicit green products are those that have high value in both sustainability, price and quality (Lewis & Stanley, 2012). It has also been found that there seems to be a negative association between sustainability and fashion since many consumers take part in an identity construction when consuming fashion clothes, which overweigh the sustainability aspect when consuming (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Hence, the acceptance of green clothing seems to be low (Niinimäki, 2010).

Furthermore, being concerned about the environment does not necessarily turn into right actions taken. Barriers to acting environmentally friendly are divided into individuality, responsibility and practicality (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Individuality enacts a person's attitude and temperament, if the person's environmental concern is low, these barriers are particularly influential. However, even if the person's environmental concern is strong it can be overcome by needs and desires that are stronger. Additionally, Nguyen, Nguyen and Hoang (2019) found that when green products more easily are available to consumers, and when they know that their purchase and use of green products may lead to beneficial impacts on the environment, they will more likely proceed with their intention to actually use green products. The second barrier, responsibility, (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) relates to people who do not act entirely environmentally and do not believe they can influence the situation, it could also be affected by the lack of trust in the local and national government, suspiciousness makes people less willing to act in accordance with the imposed actions. The third barrier, practicality, refers to the social and institutional hindrances that make people not act environmentally friendly despite their attitudes and intentions, which could depend on several factors such as lack of time, lack of money and lack of information (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

2.2.4 Green trust

Trust involves to what degree a party can rely on another party's words, statements or promises (Rotter, 1971). The appearance of trust is dependent on three factors, namely ability, kindness and honesty (Schur & Ozanne, 1985). Consequently, one's trust in another person is dependent on his or her belief in the other person's ability, kindness and honesty (Ganesan & Hess, 1997). Green trust refers to the fact that a consumer relies on a product's ability, benevolence and ability to convey positive environmental performance (Chen, 2013). Consumers tend to be

concerned about the trustworthiness of green products when they are suspicious about claims made about environmental affability, leading to them questioning the environmental usefulness, dependability and competence (Chen & Chang, 2012).

2.3 Green marketing

The association between marketing and the protection of the environment has been described in numerous ways, namely ecological marketing (Fisk, 1974), sustainability marketing (Fuller, 1999), environmental marketing (Coddington, 1993), and green marketing (Mishra & Sharma, 2010; Polonsky, 1994; Polonsky & Charter, 1999). Modification in advertising, making changes in production processes, packaging and products are all activities that green marketing consists of (Polonsky, 1994). Additionally, green marketing involves activities such as recycling (Parkash, 2002). Polonsky (1994) defines green marketing as "(...) all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment" (n.p). Businesses utilising green marketing do that to perform activities that cater to the needs of the consumers and society, as well as try to develop a path for sustainable manners with a less negative impact on the environment (Cahal, Dangwal & Raina, 2014).

The increased green awareness among consumers when purchasing products and services (Straughan & Roberts, 1999) has resulted in green marketing being an essential activity for companies, and their response to this development have resulted in green products (Narula & Desore, 2016). According to Polonsky (1994), the increased importance of green marketing is explained by the issue of Economics, namely how individuals utilise their limited resources to please their unlimited needs. Accordingly, humankind has limited resources with which we have to satisfy the unlimited needs of the world. Companies experience limited natural resources, hence, they need to establish new methods to reassure that these unlimited desires are satisfied. Thus, green marketing includes looking at how marketing activities apply the limited resources and simultaneously fulfil the needs of the consumers, as the company succeeds in achieving the organisation's objectives (Polonsky, 1994). However, some have criticised green marketing, claiming that it overexaggerates claims about the environment, and forsaking the consumers' individual behaviours (Gordon, Carrigan & Hastings, 2011). Additionally, there are challenges for firms taking part in environmental development,

including distrust in environmental claims in advertising, adverse customer consciousness of environmentally friendly products, variations in preferences among consumers, and high costs (Chen & Chai, 2010).

Following the concern about the environment, both by individuals and industries, it can be concluded that firms performing marketing activities that include products and goods that have environmental friendly characteristics will obtain a competitive advantage over those firms that do not (Polonsky, 1994). Traditional marketing has expired since it no longer satisfies the needs of the consumer's concerns regarding their social and environmental awareness. The change in consumer awareness requires new strategies adapting to environmental friendliness (Ottman, 2011). The 'win-win' philosophy developed by Elkington (1994) and Porter and Van Der Linde (1995) motivates firms to develop new marketing strategies embracing environmental concerns. The characteristics of the traditional marketing campaigns were the catchy slogans, however, green marketing is complex to a greater extent and requires two different strategies (Ottman, 2011). The first strategy includes the development of products that satisfy the needs of consumers regarding performance, quality, convenience and affordability, while still having minimum impact on the environment. The second strategy involves communication, emphasising the need for valuable communication that includes practical advantages whilst informing consumers about environmental aspects and issues. Such communication often includes the company's track record of pro-environmental aspects as well (Ottman, 2011).

2.4 Green communication strategies

Today, firms are using words such as natural, organic, eco, sustainable and green in their advertising and messages to promote their fashion brands in a sustainable manner (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). Communication plays a significant role in influencing consumers' consumption habits from passive to informed performers of change. Sustainable communication creates sense-making, which ultimately initiates a willingness to actively engage in processes to develop sustainable consumption (Guillen Mandujano, Vergragt & Fischer, 2021). Environmental communication can be described as a practical and fundamental tool that can be used to shape people's understandings of the environment and its relation to the natural world (Allen, 2016), and the general persuasiveness technique of a green product is that it has less impact on the environment than another direct alternative (Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). Communicating sustainability needs to be adequate according to Godemann

(2021), otherwise, there is a risk of asserting that consumers will not perform environmentally friendly behaviours. It is highly important for firms to decide in an early process how they will position and market their brand and products (Lewis & Stanley, 2012). Aligning with its business processes, the company subsequently should set its communication and marketing activities.

Firms are now increasingly using product declarations to provide consumers with information regarding the environmental impacts the products they are purchasing have (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017). However, the attempt to encourage consumers to buy environmentally friendly products remains unsuccessful. One of the reasons for this is that the product's environmental impact declarations are seen as less significant factors than attributes such as brand, quality and price (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017). Another distinguishing factor influencing the unsuccessful use of product declarations is that consumers' understanding of the product declaration's environmental specificities is limited, and the language and terms used in the product declarations are too hard for the consumers to understand. Additionally, scepticism towards the environmental efforts done by companies, and suspicions regarding greenwashing, also contribute to the unsuccessful attempts to make consumers buy more environmentally friendly products (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017).

Moreover, firms are encountering challenges in being transparent in their sustainability actions and communicating the efforts and results of their actions (Stacchezzini, Melloni & Lai, 2016). Consequently, firms implement management techniques to manage and measure their performance with regard to sustainability. Sustainability reporting (SR) refers to a company's external efforts to communicate information about the actions taken to minimise its environmental footprint (Stacchezzini, Melloni & Lai, 2016). Additionally, the extent to which firms are incorporating sustainability initiatives in their communication channels enables for giving insights into important strategies within the business (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). Sustainability information is shared and reported annually by firms using different approaches and media. This arena is considered fundamental for corporations to share innovative practices of their business strategies, especially due to its direct information sharing with the end consumer (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). Moreover, social media is an increasingly used tool by firms to communicate corporate information. The reason is the effective way to reach out and engage with the end customer at low costs, in comparison with traditional communication and marketing tools (Reilly & Hynan, 2014).

2.5.1 Message content

Ever since the era of capitalism arose, consumers have been encouraged to continuously consume and purchase commodities, which has caused overproduction and led to the global crisis (Hobson, 2006). Consequently, this has engendered the idea of sustainable development. However, the quality of life still depends on material acquisition instead of protecting the common good, with the notion of the individual as the consumer (Hobson, 2006). Based on information from different referents, consumers are supposed to make sense of sustainable development and consumption that is under constant fluctuation with debated discourses. Additionally, they are faced with overwhelming information about sustainable consumption simultaneously as they challenge with applying it in their own lives (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). Producers and brands within the fashion industry have also been relatively slow in applying communication strategies that aim at strengthening the persuasiveness among consumers concerning sustainable fashion and implementing rhetorical approaches to emphasise the sustainable initiatives taken (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017).

Selling sustainability still remain a challenge for companies. Many consumers have started to question whether the company's communicated activities actually are environmentally friendly or if it is just an effort to become more profitable in their marketing strategy since sustainable activities have become very attractive for companies to use for the purpose of marketing (Kang & Kim, 2017). Saha and Darnton (2005) also highlight the carefulness of only using the concept of green as a marketing tool and the need for the relationship between efforts and the brand's nature. Thus, choosing appropriate strategies when communicating a brand's content to avoid greenwashing and suspicion or distrust in regard to a brand's green marketing has become highly relevant.

Furthermore, the association between fashion and sustainability is not natural anticipation (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017), leading to consumers' low willingness to substitute fashion clothes with fully green clothing (Niinimäki, 2010). Furthermore, research emphasises that sustainable fashion has to be more appealing to consumers than other alternatives (McNeill & Moore, 2015). For example, words used in advertising such as 'sustainable', 'recycled', and 'natural' have been considered harmful according to Annonziato (2001). Controversially it was found that advertising that supported donation to a chosen good purpose had a more favourable impact on the consumers (Kim & Damhorst, 1999). The lack of explicit information in

advertising messages requires consumers to be aware of the environment and knowledge about different options from brands, which is claimed to might be too complex for many consumers (Moisander, 2007). According to Yan, Hyllegard and Blaesi (2012), marketers need to use more explicit messages when marketing environmentally friendly products in order to achieve improved understanding among consumers. This could eventually result in enhanced attitudes toward a brand and, in turn, positively affect the consumer's purchase intention. Nonetheless, arguments for having too much explicit information in such messages in fashion advertisements emphasise that it can become a distraction to consumers (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi, 2012).

Previous research claims that it is beneficial to emphasise the individual's advantages of purchasing an environmentally friendly product and linking the personal advantages to the specific product in order to convince the consumer (Phau & Ong, 2007). Further, it is claimed by Allen (2016) that to make the consumers receivable to a company's communicated message, they have to be motivated, which can be achieved if the message is personally meaningful. However, messages that promote green aspects and functions of the products often leave the consumer confused and uncertain as the strategic message lacks descriptive meaning (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). Research also indicates that consumers' motivation to process environmentally related messages is low, as well as their ability to understand and act upon the information they receive regarding companies' environmentally friendly initiatives (Allen, 2016).

Transparency has become a prominent concept among today's consumers and according to Kim, Kim and Rothenberg (2020) young adults preferably search for information about the product's background before making a purchase. The younger generation of consumers is, in combination with demanding sustainable products and an increased environmental concern, seeking transparent business practices (Kim, Kim & Rothenberg, 2020). Furthermore, fashion retailers could incorporate transparency by breaking down the production costs into different categories such as labour, material, transportation, and duties for each garment. However, a critical aspect of transparency from a retailer's perspective is related to the fact that the fashion industry is continuously scrutinised for its poor supply chain (Amed, Balchandani, Beltrami, Berg, Hedrich & Rölkens, 2019). According to Egels-Zandén, Hulthén and Wulff (2015) an ideally transparent firm should provide traceability, sustainability, purchasing dimensions (i.e. breaking down the costs), and publish the names, conditions and purchasing practices related to every single supplier. Benefits can be received by providing transparency to the consumers

since it can build legitimacy, customer loyalty, brand image and confirm product quality (Kim, Kim & Rothenberg, 2020). Furthermore, consumers' willingness to make a purchase decision increases simultaneously as the company reveals information about the production process and becomes more transparent (Kim, Kim & Rothenberg, 2020).

2.5.1.1 Message composition

Brands within the fashion industry have increasingly used sustainability terms in their daily language (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). Consumers may not always understand this discourse and the term's meaning has been questioned in general, which highlights the need for transparency in the matter. Schmeltz (2012) emphasises that favourable beliefs among consumers concerning sustainability lead to eminent intentions to purchase among consumers. Additionally, Bhattacharya and Sen (2004) emphasise that negative rather than positive information about sustainable actions leads to more sensitive reactions among consumers. Consequently, firms need to be aware of the risks that may follow by being perceived as not sustainably responsible. It is also found that the influence of sustainability initiatives on consumers' behaviour is more intricate than the influence on their attitudes, which calls for firms to acknowledge these tensions (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). However, it is suggested that positive sustainability beliefs among consumers are held by brand loyalty (Schmeltz, 2012). Furthermore, it is suggested that "framing the discourse in simple and grounded language while avoiding empty clichéd words and phrases to engage responsible fashion usage can effect meaningful change" (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017, p. 394).

2.5 The attitude-behaviour gap

Since the 1990s, research within the field of green consumption has increased (Caruana, Carrington & Chatzidakis, 2016), and according to Belz and Peattie (2009), the most persistent results from different researchers concern the inconsistency between individuals' expressions of their attitude and their actual actions. Although green attitudes have been found to positively influence substantial behaviours towards green consumption (Nguyen, Nguyen & Hoang, 2019), individuals actually practising sustainable consumption is still reported to be limited (Abdulrazaka & Quoquab, 2018). Consequently, it still seems to occur an attitude-behaviour gap (Nguyen, Nguyen & Hoang, 2019). As seen in **Figure 1**, the potential of buying green products gets lost during the path to purchase (Lewis & Stanley, 2012). Within the field of

green consumption, the attitude-behaviour gap refers to the discrepancy between an individual's attitudes and his or her actual behaviour (Park & Lin, 2018).
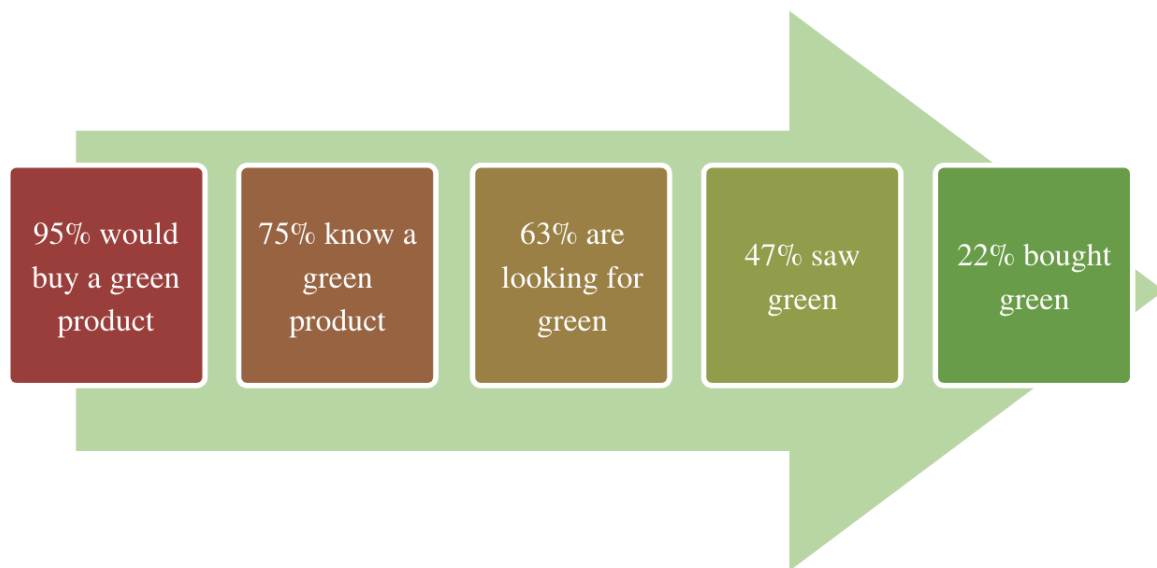
Figure 1: "The path to purchase" (Lewis & Stanley, 2012)

Behaviours or actions assume to be associated with an individual's attitudes. The attitudes of a person can vary from both extremely positive and negative positions, an example of an extremely negative attitude can be related to a behaviour someone only should practice under threat, controversy, an extremely positive attitude is related to things a person would perform without any enforcement (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995). According to Gupta and Ogden's (2009) research within the area of consumer attitude, individuals' behaviour and attitude are consistent with each other. Nevertheless, within the area of environmental consumerism research demonstrates that there is both consistency and inconsistency among consumers' attitude and actual behaviour (Gupta & Ogden, 2009). Guagnano, Stern and Dietz (1995) examined the discrepancy between behaviour and action by an example of recycling. In the experiment, some households were provided with their own curbside recycling bins and some were not. The study showed that to act altruistically, the individual need to be aware of the negative consequences and impacts the action and behaviour will have. Usually, when a person feels responsible for something and has the option to prevent something negative, he or she often experiences a feeling of obligation to act in a specific manner (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995). Furthermore, De Young (1990) describes people's general attitudes towards recycling

as positive, but that there is a barrier to the actual behaviour, which can be due to the issue of not having enough information (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995; De Young, 1990).

Furthermore, the reason for the appearance of the attitude-behaviour gap of purchasing environmentally friendly clothes can also be explained by the principles of being green often turn out to be secondary in relation to other decision aspects, for example when someone has to choose between green choices and fashionable choices (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011). Bray, Johns and Kilburn (2011) also identified other factors that have an effect on the gap between attitudes and behaviours which include price, experience, lack of information, and quality perception. Most consumers are trying to fulfil a need or favour a self-interest, which most likely appears through the activity of purchasing (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Related to green marketing, individual characteristics, lifestyle, value, knowledge, perceived behavioural control, social norms, and factors based on the situation such as discounts are different circumstances that can explain the gap between attitudes and actions (Park & Lin, 2020).

Moreover, research on the attitude-behaviour gap can broadly be distinguished into psychological and attitudinal research, and cross-disciplinary research (Caruana, Carrington & Chatzidakis, 2016). The first mentioned questions the methodology of the excessive reliance on quantitative survey methods that encourage rational answers from the participants rather than in-depth reasoning. The second is observed as 'interpretive' and relates the attitude-behaviour gap to decision-making modelling research where it is assumed that the broader context of social, historical and culture is taken away when it comes to consumer behaviour (Caruana, Carrington & Chatzidakis, 2016).

2.5.1 Theory of planned behaviour

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) addresses a theory of assumptions of people considering the associations of their actions before any decision of engagement is taken. It is based on the pillars of attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control, which lead to the central factor of the TPB, which is "(...) the individual's intention to perform a given behaviour" (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181; see **Figure 2**).
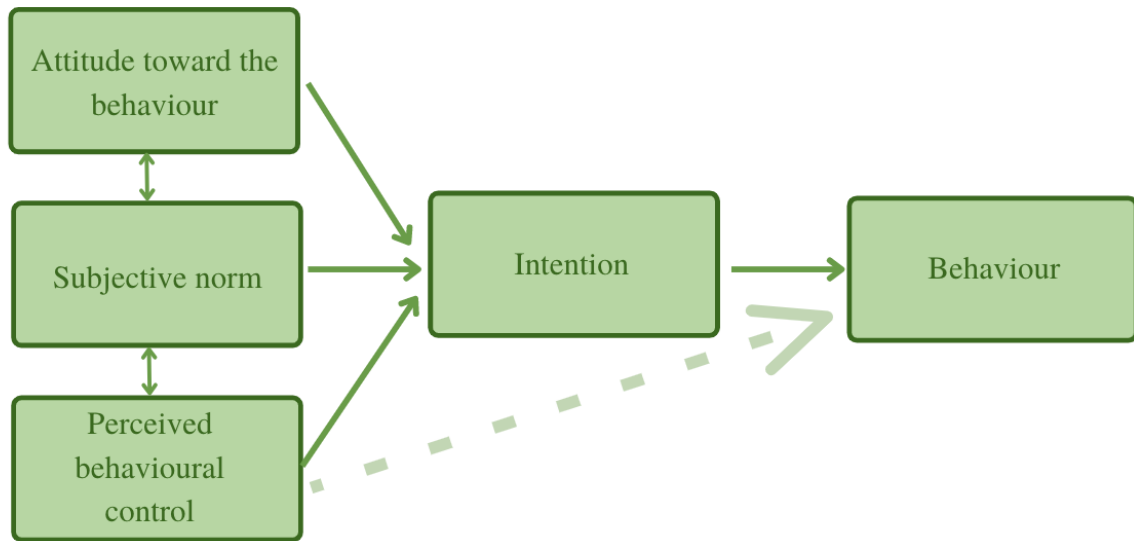
Figure 2: "Theory of Planned Behaviour" (Ajzen, 1991)

Intentions are related to the different pillars that affect and influence behaviour, the stronger the intention to engage in a certain behaviour, the more likely the action will actually occur (Ajzen, 1991). The pillar of attitude toward the behaviour refers to the person's positive or negative judgement of performing the behaviour if it will favour or disfavour the person according to the person himself (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Secondly, Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) explain that subjective norm involves the effect of how the person interprets the social pressure to perform or not perform the behaviour, which means people are often listening to the people they think is important to them and perform regarding their suggestion. Considering these two pillars, generally, people tend to perform a behaviour if it is evaluated positively by the person himself and if someone 'important' also believes it is a good idea to perform (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Thirdly, Ajzen (1991) claims that perceived behavioural control refers to the person's impression of performing the behaviour, regarding the difficulty or ease of performing a particular behaviour. The TPB suggests that performing a certain behaviour is formed by an individual's intentions and perceived behavioural control (see **Figure 2**).

2.6 Theoretical framework

To conceptualise the reviewed literature and summarise the key findings contributing to answering the research questions, an own illustration of a theoretical framework is proposed, see **Figure 3**.
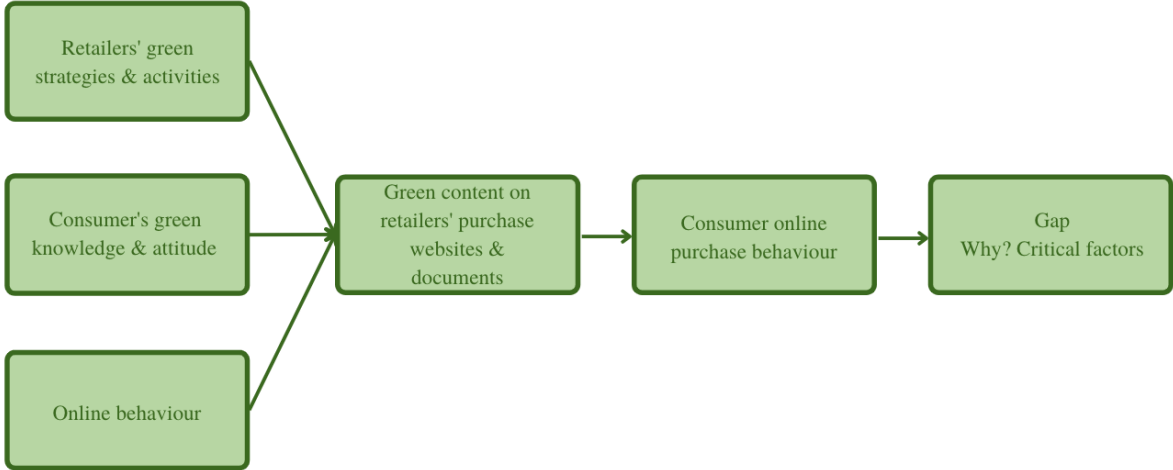
Figure 3: Theoretical framework

The elements presented in this figure highlight the relationship between the main findings of the literature review and illustrate how they intertwine. The concepts of content quality, technical adequacy, appearance, and specific content (Aladwani & Palvia, 2002) is relevant for this study since the context of online consumer behaviour focuses on the online website interface and the consumer's browsing skills and actions when shopping online, acknowledge in this study through online observations and consumer interviews. Additionally, the theory of green consumption behaviour is critical to review in this study as it enables an analysis of online factors influencing consumers' green behaviour based on the findings from consumer interviews. Factors influencing consumer behaviour can include for example, situational factors, social influence, knowledge, awareness, transparency, trust and others. By understanding the factors influencing green behaviour within online retailing, consumers' communication strategies can be outlined and the issue concerning what aspects lead to higher green purchase intention can be analysed.

The theory of green marketing (Ottman, 2011) reveals the significance of performing sustainable practices. Since this research includes online observations on fast fashion retailers, the literature conceptualising green marketing lays the foundation for these findings, enabling analysis to distinguish the actions taken by the studied retailers and the importance of performing green activities. Moreover, the literature review proceeds with an in-depth review of green communication strategies. Research conceptualising communication strategies (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017; Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017) is used during the consumer interviews in order to simplify the interview process where examples are shown for the respondents. The theories about message content (Annonziato, 2001; Moisander, 2007; Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi, 2012) function as a guide for what elements in the online communication strategies are to be evaluated during the online observations and consumer interviews. The theory of green communication strategies also enables an analysis of the findings from online observations and consumer interviews, in order to acknowledge the vital aspects of retailers' communication that influence consumers' attitudes and behaviours to consume environmentally friendly.

Moreover, as the study investigates aspects leading to the attitude-behaviour gap in the online environment, it is essential to review consumers' online purchase behaviour (Häubl & Trifts, 2000; Aladwani and Palvia, 2002; Parboteeah, Valacich & Wells, 2009). By examining this literature, a comprehension of how consumers behave in the online environment can be obtained, which is critical in order to understand online factors and their impact on the attitude and behaviour of the consumers.

To be able to analyse the empirical data in relation to the existing theory, there is a need for a comprehension of the theory of the attitude-behaviour gap. It seems relevant to review this theory in order to answer the research questions and understand the potential disrepancy between the attitude and the behaviour of the participants in this study (Niniimäki et al., 2020). As this thesis aims to examine different factors leading to inconsistency between intention and behaviour, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) is useful since the framework includes pillars that affect and explain an individual's intention, which also is an important factor when understanding the attitude-behaviour gap. The three pillars: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control are interesting factors that will be used in order to explain a certain attitude toward a behaviour found in the interviews.

Furthermore, Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) describe three types of barriers people could have towards acting environmentally friendly even though their intention is to behave in the manner of sustainability. The barriers contribute to the analysis by explaining the underlying reasons for individuals' performed behaviour (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). These barriers constitute some of the critical factors that should be evaluated when investigating inconsistencies and the occurrence of the gap based on the findings from the interviews.

3. Research methodology

This chapter presents the methodological choices to answer the research questions. In the first section, the research philosophy of the study is discussed, presenting the relativist and social constructionist philosophical stances. The second section justifies the choice of the qualitative strategy and the abductive approach. Furthermore, the study's research design is presented, arguing for the choice of doing online observations before the individual interviews and the structure of the interviews. The fourth section proposes the data collection, the actions taken and the sampling method of the online observation and interviews. The fifth section explains the analysis method. In the sixth section, research ethics is considered, followed by a discussion concerning the trustworthiness and reflexivity of the study in the seventh section. Finally, this chapter ends with a justification of the study's limitations

3.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy refers to how the researcher develops knowledge within a certain field on the basis of beliefs and assumptions and can be separated into ontology and epistemology (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). Consciously or unconsciously the researcher will make several assumptions throughout the process when conducting the study, these assumptions take on different appearances due to the type of ontology and epistemology the research is constructing (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The assumptions the researchers make about the nature of reality are related to ontology, which represents how we interpret and study our research objects (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). A general perspective of ontology is, according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016), based on the assumptions of the realities which the study is encountered with. Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen, Thorpe and Valizade (2021) present four different ontological positions: realism, internal realism, relativism and nominalism. Since this study tend to focus on individuals' behaviours and attitudes where the social actions and expressions are taken into consideration by the researchers, the thesis takes on a relativist position of ontology (Easterby-Smith et al. (2021). This means that the revealed facts are based on the participants' viewpoints of the facts they reveal, and the outcome can vary since people usually interpret things differently depending on social class, race or country they live in (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

The question concerning assumptions about knowledge refers to epistemology (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The concept of a social constructionist epistemology relates to that the reality is constructed by people instead of external factors and objectives (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), and that the gained understanding of the social world is examined through how the participants interpret it (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Social constructionism is usually adopted in qualitative studies (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016), and in this study, we as researchers take on the role of social constructionists as we want to find different truths and create an understanding of how they are constructed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The intention is to gain an understanding of different factors, from the viewpoint of the respondents, as to why their behaviour is inconsistent with their attitude of consuming environmentally friendly. Instead of searching for answers in the format yes or no, we are gaining more in-depth answers from the qualitative method used. The objective is to study how reality is created by acknowledging the interpretations, attitudes and expressions of the participants in order to gain an understanding of the interplay between their attitudes and actual behaviour. When we are explaining the factors for the inconsistency of the attitude-behaviour gap, our intention is to provide an in-depth explanation of individuals' viewpoints since it is the individuals' actions and attitudes that are vital for this study.

Furthermore, the third section described by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) pertains to the role of the researchers' own values as well as the values of the research participants, and to what extent these influence the research process. The study is reflected by our own values unconsciously when deciding the topic of the thesis and the way we were designing the research. For example, the choice of having interviews as an approach to gathering data was partly influenced by the fact that we value personal interaction more than receiving anonymous viewpoints through a questionnaire.

3.2 Research approach

3.2.1 Qualitative strategy

When asking someone if they care about the environment, their spontaneous answer will probably be that they do, but asking if they recycle, might be inconsistent with the first answer since it is a more specific question. In previous research, individual's attitudes are often measured within a broader perspective than actions, which creates large discrepancies in the

results (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). It is claimed that formulating a research methodology that compares and measure attitude behaviour is an issue (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002), and therefore we believe a qualitative approach would be convenient and enable an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the attitude-behaviour gap in relation to fast fashion.

This study adopts a qualitative approach since its emphasis is on words and in-depth viewpoints, in the processes of collecting data and analysing data, and looks at the social reality as a continually changing phenomenon (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). As mentioned earlier, the thesis adopts a social constructionist epistemology which is the epistemology that tends to subscribe to a qualitative research strategy (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). This thesis uses a qualitative approach to investigate and understand the inconsistency of young females' attitudes and actual behaviours towards an environmentally friendly purchasing process of fast fashion online. Our study intend to be rather interpretive since we as researchers have to understand the socially constructed meanings in the context of our research question where the attitude-behaviour gap is considered, which according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016) is an argument for a study having a qualitative method. Since the ambition of this study is to understand why individuals' attitudes are inconsistent with their behaviours in the context of purchasing fast fashion online, and what aspects of the communication in the online environment enables them to pursue a green purchasing behaviour, we need to delve deeper than a quantitative approach would have made possible. However, a qualitative methodology would not make it possible for us to have as many participants as a quantitative study usually has, nevertheless, a qualitative methodology will generate answers touching more than the surface, which is the intention of our study. To achieve high quality of the study, it is necessary to treat the data collection and the data analysis in relation to each other to allow insights to be clarified and explored (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

3.2.2 Abductive strategy

The strategy for developing theory, or having the theory contribute to answering the research question depends on the aim of the study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). According to Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019), this is constantly depicted as a choice to make for adopting either a deductive or inductive approach. This study adopts an abductive research approach, which is seen as a third way to make logical inferences and create theories about the world but with no strict limitations as deductive and inductive approaches have (Bryman, Bell & Harley,

2019). The abductive approach can also be confirmed in this study as we began with a theoretical basis, which further continued to be developed during the research process. In accordance with Bryman, Bell and Harley's (2019) claim to symbolise abduction, we are involving the empirical findings from the social world which generate new theoretical ideas to engage with literature. We have also been working between theory and data iteratively when reasoning and exploring new information and insights about the attitude-behaviour gap in relation to online fast fashion.

3.3 Research design

To answer the research questions effectively, this section of the research methodology presents the structure of the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The intention of presenting the research design is to give an overview of the process of the data collection and the analysis of the data as well as introduce the main components of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). At the beginning of the research process, theories were reviewed from scientific articles in order to appertain and acknowledge already existing data within the field of online consumerism, green consumer behaviour, the attitude-behaviour gap, green marketing and green communication strategies. After this process, online observations were conducted on two different fast fashion retailers operating online. The choice of the companies was a consequence of the research questions, aiming at the online fast fashion industry. The reason for investigating these companies was to obtain a comprehensive overview of the marketing and communication strategies used by online fast fashion retailers. When the online observations were performed, the interview process began. The semi-structured interviews were carried out following a specific pre-determined approach. At the beginning of the interviews, the respondents did not know about the specific topic of the interview, which was the environmentally friendly attitude in relation to the actual behaviour of the participants. The respondents started out by answering questions about their general online consumer behaviour, and what information they are seeking when consuming online. Afterwards, they answered environmental questions. The reason for this structure was to gain as rich data as possible about the gap between their initial behaviour and their attitude towards environmentally friendly clothing. By following this approach, we believe we gained as honest answers as possible from the respondents.

Since the research questions are focused on the viewpoint of the consumer, understanding the online factors leading to the attitude-behaviour gap, how the consumers behave in the online

environment, and what factors in retailers' communication strategies that are important for consumers in order to behave in an environmentally friendly way, the data collected from the interviews was crucial. However, to acknowledge what communication strategies the online retailers are currently performing, online observations were also necessary. In **Figure 4** the research process is outlined.

Figure 4: Outline of the research process

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Online observations: netnography

The social world is increasingly going digital (Kozinetz, 2010). The number of people interacting in online communities exceeds hundreds of millions of people, hence, it is necessary to adapt the research methods in order to stay current. New ways of understanding society are taking form, and as a result, netnography has been developed (Kozinetz, 2010). Since this study has of interest in understanding consumers' actions on online shopping platforms in relation to their attitudes, it is necessary to observe the online communication and advertising practices within two different fashion brands, acting as complete observers within the online environment. Thus, the method of netnography is particularly applicable in this study. Interestingly, netnography has become an increasingly used method within marketing and consumer research, often used to answer questions about advertising online (Kozinetz, 2010). By conducting online observations in this study, an acknowledgement of the retailers' green strategies and activities, the green content in their online stores and web pages, is gained.

The beginning of the netnographic method involved the observation of H&M's and NA-KD's public documents and corporate website reports. Since we did not have direct access to representatives or employees of the selected companies, we collected information that was publicly available on the corporate website, gaining information about environmental actions performed by the companies, respectively. Such information was gained through the observation of organisational documents within the public domain, accessible on the company

websites (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By studying these documents, we as researchers could gain an understanding of the environmentally friendly activities performed by the companies. However, it should be remembered that these documents are not directly accessible to consumers, whilst the product background on the e-commerce online shopping site is available on the product page for consumers directly.

By investigating the brand's corporate sustainability reports, an understanding of the sustainability actions taken by the companies could be acknowledged. This data was used to recognise if the actual communication strategies on the purchasing website were consistent with the information provided in the sustainability reports. This acknowledgement was necessary in order to prove that the companies actually were performing sustainability actions, in order to compare this data with the data collected on the company's purchasing websites (see below). The comparison was made in order to acknowledge what was communicated on the purchasing website, and what was not. While collecting this data, we used specific guidelines for what information we were supposed to gather. Since the study is limited to only contributing to the knowledge concerning the environmental aspect, and not the social and economic concerns, only aspects related to this domain were studied. This concerns the environmental impact of the production and waste, how much impact the materials used in the production have on the environment, the circularity initiatives made by the online retailers, actions taken to minimise the environmental impact of shipping and returns, and lastly, the overall climate objectives on behalf of the retailers. The materials chosen are cotton and polyester since these are predominantly used in fabrics within the fashion industry (Silver Bobbin, 2022). By examining these factors, a comprehensive overview of the overall climate positive initiatives of online retailers could be presented in the findings of this study.

In the second process of the online observations, we obtained an overview of the information about different green products by observing the e-commerce shopping page for each brand respectively and noticed their marketing and communication strategies and skills concerning their more environmentally friendly product collections. H&M's green collection is called 'Conscious collection', and NA-KD's collection is called 'Reborn collection', only including products that are considered more environmentally friendly in the collections respectively. We browsed the e-commerce websites, giving special attention to how the green products were placed on the websites. This included the observation of how easily accessible the green

products are, and where and how the information guiding the consumer to these products and collections was displayed.

Additionally, we inspected the product page for some selected green products, reading the product background to gain an understanding of what information is accessible for the consumer that wishes to seek information about the product's environmentally friendliness, using the same strategy as before in the observation of the public documents, as to which aspects to give special attention to. Firstly, we observed what information was directly displayed for the consumer to see, observing the message content and how and where the information was placed for the consumer to recognise it. Secondly, we observed what actions the consumer has to take in order to obtain more information about the garment and other aspects, as well as the information content that was accessible in this respect.

By conducting these actions within the frame of the netnographic method, we took the role of consumers, trying to understand how they can be assisted to maintain an environmentally friendly lifestyle. The intention of collecting this data was also to distinguish whether the studied brands' communication strategies included information that could be found in their sustainability reports. Moreover, this data also enabled us to distinguish what elements were supposed to be discussed during the interviews, which made the interview process more efficient. The observations helped us understand what information the respondents think is missing, and how the respondents want it to be displayed.

3.4.1.1 Selecting the companies

The appropriate targeted domain in this study is the fast fashion market. The fast fashion market was chosen due to it being one of the biggest industrial polluters (de Aguiar Hugo, de Nadae & da Silva Lima, 2021; Sharma & Pal, 2020). Furthermore, there is a big pressure on the fashion industry to become more sustainable, currently driving some of the new innovations toward a more sustainable environment (de Aguiar Hugo, de Nadae & da Silva Lima, 2021). Subsequently, the companies were selected within this domain accordingly. The companies were selected with three distinctive criteria: they had to have online e-commerce, they had to have some kind of sustainability objectives and goals with collections that are marked with green labels, and they had to be within the non-luxury apparel segment.

Furthermore, the research is dependent on theoretical sampling since the companies are selected for theoretical reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989). The objective is to extend emergent theories and provide sufficient information for theoretical categories. The choice of NA-KD and H&M was because the respondents in the interview were chosen within the geographical area of Sweden. Hence, the choice of Swedish companies would most likely lead to the likelihood that the respondents had been shopping on these websites at some point. Thus, their relatedness and experience of the likeliness that the respondents had been shopping from the chosen companies were increased, which were essential during the interviews since we wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the consumer's viewpoints within the context of their actions during online shopping (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Since the purpose of this thesis is to gain an in-depth understanding of consumers' experiences about a particular topic, the qualitative interview is particularly applicable (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). A qualitative interview is a conversation that evolves around a topic and related questions and is negotiated between the respondents and the interviewee. In this study, the use of qualitative interviews in order to collect data about the consumers' understandings of the phenomenon was especially useful since we wanted to access more extensive information about the factors within the online environment leading to the attitude-behaviour gap (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), which we believe cannot be accessed through quantitative surveys. We wanted to explore this relatively unexplored research area since little knowledge is obtained about consumer purchase behaviour in relation to sustainable clothing (Sharma & Pal, 2020), with special attention to the online environment. We also wanted to understand the respondent's constructs they use as foundations for their beliefs and opinions within the specific studied context (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Before the interviews were conducted, an interview guide was prepared, see **Appendix C**, hence, the interviews in this study have taken the semi-structured approach (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The formulation of the interview guide followed Bryman and Bell's (2011) specific process for the issue. It started with the formulation of questions within the general research area, and many questions were written, taking a quite general approach. Specific questions were then formulated within the frame of three different interview topics, namely online shopping behaviour in general, questions about what environmental information and communication

strategies the respondents' thought are important online and their environmental-friendly attitude and behaviour when shopping online. Interview questions were formulated within the frame of the interview topics, which were later reviewed and revised. This resulted in a pilot guide, which was reviewed by our supervisor, who identified some novel issues. We identified some other issues, revised the guide again, and finally, a finalised interview guide was assembled (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The interview guide consisted of opening questions, questions about the topic, and closing questions (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The opening questions concerned the respondent's shopping behaviour online in general. While asking these questions we did not mention or ask anything about their environmentally friendly behaviour when consuming unless they mentioned it themselves. The reason for this approach is that we wanted to get as honest and reliable answers as possible when we asked the questions regarding sustainability later in the interview. Thus, they could not change their previous answers. Moving on, we started to ask more in-depth questions about the topic, now asking about their environmentally friendly behaviour, and what kind of information and communication on behalf of the retailer they think is essential while shopping online. Among other questions (see **Appendix C**) we asked questions about what information the consumer is looking for when shopping online, both general and information about sustainability. We also wanted to understand what kind of information the respondent is looking for, in order for us to acknowledge if that information corresponds to what information is actually displayed by the online retailers. We used examples from the same companies we had done online observations on since we had observed the communication strategies used at these online retailers. Hence, we knew what questions to ask the respondents and what to give special attention to. When showing the examples, we compared H&M and NA-KD, using specific garments from their green collections, H&M conscious and NA-KD Reborn, respectively. We illustrated the examples since we had found during the online observations that their communication strategies both on the online homepage and the product pages were different to some extent as to what message content they used. The primary objective of showing the example was for the respondent to give practical examples as to what they thought of the information and message content. By showing the examples from the online retailer's website, we conducted photo-interviewing, which is when the interviewers illustrate pictures during the interview process (Bryman & Bell, 2011). By showing photographs, complex emotions can be evoked within the respondent, and the respondent can overcome potential discomfort he or she may feel by being interviewed. In this way, the

respondent may feel more encouraged to discuss issues more in-depth (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, we also asked the respondents how they believe the online retailer can support them in order to become more environmentally friendly.

The interview guide provided some structure and was an efficient approach. However, the semi-structured interview enabled the interviewee to add some new ideas that we had not thought of (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), which we could pick up on and ask the interviewee to elaborate on (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Semi-structured interviews also authorise for flexibility (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), which we thought was essential during our interviews since we wanted the respondent to have some freedom in replying (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Using this approach, the interviewees could freely discuss their individual experiences of shopping online, and more in-depth give their views on what they think is important when shopping online, especially environmentally friendly products. The reason for not using focus groups was due to this specific aspect, as we wanted the respondents to truly reflect on their own individual actions when consuming online and how they can be supported in consuming in an environmentally responsible manner. Also, especially since shopping online often is an individual activity and not a collective action (Vazquez, Cheung, Nguyen, Dennis & Kent, 2020).

Before the interview started, the respondents were asked to give their consent for us to record the interview, which all respondents consented to. Both researchers were present during the interviews, which enabled one of us to take thorough notes, and the other to ask the questions and look for remarkable reactions of the interviewee (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Some disadvantages of having multiple people conducting an interview is that the respondent may be intimidated, as well as it is time-consuming. The interviewers also have to be sensitive to each other's conversational cues (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, since we are familiar with each other and know each other well, this was not seen as an issue. The respondent was the one deciding where the interview should take place, however, all interviews were conducted through Zoom or Teams, which makes the interviews in this study mediated interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the digital interview approach was time efficient. When all the interviews were finished, the audio recordings were transcribed following a specific method for data analysis in order to get a data overview, for more information about the transcription process see **section 3.5**. All interviews were conducted in Swedish since that was the native language among both the researchers and all the participants. Before the analysis, the individual transcribing document was sent out to each interviewee for their approval.

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One issue with the interviews in this study was the difficulty in obtaining trust since the respondents and the interview persons had not met before (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In order to obtain the trust of the research participants we presented the research in a professional way as possible (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), as well as we offered to give the participants something in return, which was to recommend some different paths after the bachelor graduation, as we previously have been bachelor students. Some respondents did not have any specific questions, but we did our best to offer some support so that they felt that they got something in return, which we hope increased the trust. We also had a lottery of three different gift cards at the Swedish national cinema 'Filmstaden' that was given to three of the respondents.

3.4.2.1 Sample

Since statistics show that women account for the biggest segment within the apparel market (Statista, 2021a), our study aims toward this segment due to our positioning in the fast fashion industry. Thus, we decided early in the process that we wanted our participants for the interviews to identify themselves as women. A participant letter was sent out to two specific departments at Lund University after we had contacted a professor responsible for each department (see **Appendix A**). The chosen departments were Logistics Service Management and Science of Fashion. Thus, the sampling approach in this study is characterised by the non-probability sampling method, since not all people that identify themselves as women performing online shopping have the same probability to be chosen to participate (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), only the people that are reached by our participant letter studying at the chosen specific departments at Lund University. The reason for contacting students was due to the aimed segment of this study. In the year 2020, the most people participating in higher education in Sweden were between the ages of 20 to 24, 25 to 29 and 30 to 34, respectively (Statista, 2022). Thus, we thought it was most plausible to find suitable participants for our study at a University since we wanted our participants to be between the ages of 18 and 35.

The reason for choosing the two chosen departments at Lund University was because we are both students at Lund University. One of the departments were also chosen due to our contact with the responsible professor at this department. Thus, convenience sampling has taken place, as the respondents are chosen due to how accessible they were to the researchers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The department Science of Fashion was contacted in accordance with a

stratified purposive sampling since the participants who recevied an email were students with an interest in fashion (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In accordance with what Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019) describe a stratified purposive sampling, the specific department was chosen due to the typical individuals within subgroups of interest, which in this case was an interest in fashion. The responsible professors for each department agreed to send out participant letter to all students at the departments, and approximately 300 students were reached by the letter and encouraged to contact us if they wanted to participate. Five students did contact us after the forms were sent out to the departments within the University.

Furthermore, since not many people were willing to participate as a result of the participant letter sent out to the department within Lund University, a post was announced on two Swedish Facebook pages called 'Säker Stil' and 'Damernas Värld Stilklubb' in a later stage of the research process. The former Facebook group has approximately 59,000 group members and the latter 5,600 members, and both are groups for fashion interested people. As a result of these initiatives, six individuals were willing to participate. This approach is not a convenience sample, since the group members are not chosen on the basis of how accessible they are to us (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Nevertheless, this sample approach has the characteristics of a purposive sample, as we did not want to choose the participants on a random basis, however, the participants were chosen on the basis of the research questions (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Hence, a criterion sample has taken place, since it is believed that the group members in the Facebook groups have some interest in fashion, thus, some experience in shopping. In this way, the participants are chosen based on this criterion (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). In order to gain more participants for the study, each respondent that participated was encouraged to give suggestions if they knew anyone else that could participate. This resulted in four more participants. By performing this approach, snowball sampling was implemented (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). When saturation was reached during the interview process, we did not conduct any more interviews (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). 15 interviews were conducted in total, and the participants are presented in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Interview respondents

Female	Age	Date of interview	Time of interview
Female 1	25 years	2022-04-13	47 minutes
Female 2	21 years	2022-04-14	65 minutes
Female 3	30 years	2022-04-19	49 minutes
Female 4	18 years	2022-04-19	43 minutes
Female 5	26 years	2022-04-26	44 minutes
Female 6	26 years	2022-04-27	42 minutes
Female 7	25 years	2022-04-27	40 minutes
Female 8	25 years	2022-04-28	45 minutes
Female 9	26 years	2022-04-28	41 minutes
Female 10	35 years	2022-04-29	53 minutes
Female 11	27 years	2022-05-02	49 minutes
Female 12	24 years	2022-05-04	42 minutes
Female 13	34 years	2022-05-05	39 minutes
Female 14	35 years	2022-05-05	49 minutes
Female 15	24 years	2022-05-07	51 minutes

3.5 Data analysis method

The data analysis of this study was divided into two different parts, namely findings and discussion of the analysis. The reason for keeping these sections separate is to get a better overview of the different parts of the collected data, namely the online observations and the data from the interviews. The first process of the data analysis in this study was to prepare the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The preparation process included the transcription of the interviews. In the transcription process, every word said in the interviews was typed down. However, silences, gestures and hesitations were not taken into account since it was not seen as crucial to note in order to answer the research questions. Furthermore, in the process of analysing the data, the intention is to make the empirical data coherent by framing the data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In particular, story analysis has been used during the framing of the data. Since we during the interviews asked the interviewees to elaborate upon and tell the story in-depth of the last time they were shopping online, it enabled an opening into the minds of the respondents. The analysis of this data revealed some principal aspects on behalf of the respondents, which resulted in rich data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

Additionally, template analysis has also been used during the analysis process (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), and Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) imply that this part of the data analysis is characterised by coding and thematising. Coding can be divided into two types, coding could be either initial or focused according to Charmaz (2006, cited in Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Since we are not coding every single sentence in the interview transcripts, this thesis takes on a focused approach to coding, which means we identified the most salient initial codes (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We approached this since there are often a lot of useless and unnecessary data in the transcripts, which does not have to be coded (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). However, a code can be in the format of a descriptive label or a metaphor and is supposed to assign a meaning to the gathered information (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). Coding can be seen as one step of the analysis and is used to categorise similar data sections in order to easier access different segments relating to the research question (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). By doing this the data was prepared for the next step of the analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Furthermore, the thematic analysis is usually adopted within qualitative research in the process of data analysis (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). The definition of thematic analysis seems diffused since some methodologists claim codes and themes are more or less the same, whereas others imply that a theme consists of a group of codes. In our study, a theme is a group of codes identified from the transcripts. When we were searching for themes, we were doing this in accordance with the suggestions recommended by Ryan and Bernard (2003), thus, we distinguished how the respondents' expressed themselves by following these guidelines: recurrent topics; similarities and differences in how the interviewees discussed the topic; ways the participants expressed their opinions in terms or metaphors or analogies; transitions of the way topics shifted in the transcripts; how the words like 'because' and 'since' were used; things that might have been omitted by the participants; theory-related material by having social scientific concepts in mind. The themes found were: (1) attitudes toward sustainability in the online fast fashion industry, (2) satisfying information provided by the retailers, (3) complexity in finding and understanding the information, (4) actions taken to gain more information, (5) trust and transparency, and (6) actual online sustainability shopping habits. Each theme was highlighted in the transcription documents in order to easily distinguish them from each other and simplify the analysis process.

Furthermore, the structure of the data analysis has followed three activities that are used in order to address common problems when analysing qualitative data, namely sorting, reducing and arguing (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). These concepts correspond to the problem of chaos, the problem of representation and the problem of authority (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The reason for sorting the material is to provide ourselves as researchers with an overview and knowledge of the material (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Preparing the data for analysis is seen as a first step in the analysis process (Bailey, 2008), however, our preparations constituted of transcribing the interviews (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). By doing this, we got acquainted with the data by reading it thoroughly.

An interview transcript is often unstructured, even if we did use an interview guide in our semi-structured interviews. A conversation often moves back and forth across different topics, which makes sorting the data an important task to deal with (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The sorting process is conducted by the process of coding and thematising (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). The next step of the data analysis is to reduce the data, with the motive of having a more manageable quantity of categories to work with (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). Generally, the researcher can choose whatever excerpts from the data, but we chose particular excerpts that seemed to stimulate the study, although it is important to not neglect the overall picture by excluding too much data (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018).

The final step of the process involved arguing, which imply that sorting and reducing is not enough, the researchers also had to argue in order to receive authority (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018). We created an independent position in comparison to authorities, where the argumentation occurred based on the findings of the data. During the process of arguing, we also theorised (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018) whereby concepts and theories emerged out of our collected data that was used in the analysis (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019).

When engaging with the online observations we did this in a systematic way, we searched for information in the sustainability reports and on the retailers' purchasing website regarding five different predetermined topics that we developed from the need and interest we believed would be of relevance for the study. The topics were: climate objectives, production and waste, materials, circularity and shipping and returns. We combined the information we found on the webshop with the report topic by topic systematically to get the information more

understandable and coherent. The data we considered relevant was compiled in the section of findings.

The themes emerging from the transcripts and from the online observations are related to each other by their regard to the same area of interest, namely attitudes and consumption behaviour in an online environment within the field of fast fashion, and how the purchase decision is made and how information is provided, received and interpreted.

3.6 Research ethics

Ethical considerations are essential to consider when conducting research to protect the privacy and the interests of participants of the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Since the empirical data collected during the online observations were collected from publicly accessible sources, and since we had informal access to these documents (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021), no ethical issues are related to this information collected for this study. However, ethical issues were considered before, during and after the individual interviews were conducted. Personal information that could be tracked to each respondent was only shared among the two of us conducting the study, ensuring the participants' privacy (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, the transcription of the interviews was only performed by us, and the materials were not shared with anyone else but each individual. Thus, the confidentiality of the research data was ensured, and any misleading of the research findings was avoided since each respondent could confirm that all their sayings were true (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, when the respondents are mentioned in the analysis of this study, the respondents are not mentioned by name. However, they are given aliases such as female 1, female 2 and female 3 to protect their anonymity (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021).

3.7 Trustworthiness

Unlike quantitative research, some alternative concepts to reliability and validity have been evaluated and formed into two primary criteria: trustworthiness and authenticity (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Trustworthiness consists of four concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in regard to the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first criterion of trustworthiness is credibility, which refers to how credible and plausible the interpreted social reality is

(Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). To assure the research was conducted with credibility and that the information was correctly understood, we informed our participants about the findings received from them in order to have them confirmed. Hence, the participants' representations of their realities were equal to what they intended (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). This was made possible by sending the transcription documents to each participant respectively. Moreover, since we are in a research team of two, we reached a higher level of credibility due to having both of us interpreting and discussing the collected data from the interviews and the online observations.

Secondly, transferability refers to if the study's findings apply to other contexts. Since this study has a convenience and purposive sampling strategy, there can be some difficulty in transferring the findings of this study into other contexts since people that did not fulfil the requirements of our sample were rejected (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). Since we only used females and not males, and a pretty small number of participants, opposite to what a quantitative study commonly has (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019), the findings might be difficult to apply to other contexts than online shopping of fashion. Furthermore, we have chosen to present the empirical material and the analysis separately to allow the readers to make their interpretations of our presented findings since some researchers propose it is the reader who determines if the findings are transferable or not (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014).

Dependability corresponds to the notion of getting the same results when executing the same study at another time, i.e., how consistent and reasonably stable the study process is over time (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014). We believe our study could be conducted and is replicable to some extent since we have described our research process and our approach to data analysis sufficiently in detail. Thus, it is possible to reach out to the same Facebook groups as we have done. Since this is a qualitative study and the interpretations from the respondents can vary, it is not likely to achieve the same results since individuals experience the social reality differently, and their attitudes towards a specific behaviour can change over time. However, the reports published by the retailers are accessible to everyone, and the theoretical stances are explicitly described. Concerning our aim of providing transparency throughout the research process, we believe this study performs an acceptable level of the dependability if the circumstances are the same (Guba & Lincoln, 1982).

Guba and Lincoln (1982) claim confirmability to be the same as objectivity and the importance of being objective when conducting qualitative research. Throughout the study, we were objective in order to avoid bias. The interview guide was formulated so that the questions were open and left the capacity for the participants to be transparent in their answers. However, according to Bryman, Bell and Harley (2019), it is impossible to be completely objective in business research. The researchers can only act in good faith and proclaim they have not incorporated and allowed personal values to become a part of the study and affect the result. Since this thesis is conducted by a team consisting of two, we have evaluated the data separately and then discussed it with each other not to have our values influence the findings. Thereby we reduced the potential of bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The concept of authenticity deals with the researchers' ability to communicate the participants' feelings accurately when they are expressing themselves (Cope, 2014). In order to make the research authentic, we have used the participants' expressions in the form of quotes in the findings. The authenticity criteria are developed to increase fairness, which can be achieved by representing all views in the study and leading to raised awareness, knowledge, and change (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Since information is sometimes hidden in the nature of the social phenomenon, we used interviews to reach authenticity (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016).

3.8 Limitations of the study

Regarding this thesis being of a qualitative approach, the study includes a limited number of interview participants, which makes the result of the study difficult to generalise (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Since we have chosen to investigate two specific companies, our result is limited to the information gained from these two companies. It can be questioned whether the outcome would have resulted differently if, for example, upscale online retailers had been considered instead. As we did not conduct personal interviews with employees from the observed companies, it can be seen as a shortcoming of not getting enough in-depth information about the companies' processes towards being environmentally friendly. Nevertheless, we believe observing the sustainability reports would give us insights into how they intend to work and more detailed information than probably one person could give us. The examined documents are accessible to the public, and the information they consist of is informative and complete. Since H&M is a part of the H&M Group, there is a limitation only to include H&M and not the other brands within the H&M group.

Furthermore, this study cannot be generalised to the whole sustainability perspective as the intention is to focus on the environmental point of view. Nonetheless, when examining what has been stated in previous studies on the attitude-behaviour gap concerning the factors affecting a purchase decision, previous research has included sustainability involving economic, environmental and social aspects. Nevertheless, when conducting our study and analysing the gap, our main objective has been to contribute with research explicitly focusing on the environmental aspect of sustainability. Therefore, questions in the interview guide do not concern the other two aspects of sustainability, nor do the online observations touch upon these areas.

Moreover, when this research was conducted and the sample was evaluated, different demographical factors were not considered. A study can be based on, for example, demographical factors such as income, profession, ethnicity, and education (Bryman, Bell & Harley, 2019). However, this study is limited to only being of a certain age and being a female as characteristics for participating in an interview.

4. Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the data collections are presented. The first section presents the findings from the online observations, and the second chapter presents the findings from the interviews. By having this structure, the aim is to provide an overview of the communication used by H&M and NA-KD, in order to obtain a better insight of what the consumers are faced with in the online environment. Consequently, we aim to provide the reader with a better understanding of the findings from the interviews.

4.1 Findings from online observations

This section aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the sustainability actions taken by the observed companies, H&M and NA-KD. This information is compared with the marketing and communication strategies used by the companies on the product- and apparel pages, i.e. where the end consumer is browsing when purchasing clothes. The aim is to yield an understanding of what the companies actually practice in terms of minimising their environmental footprint, and their strategies used to inform these actions to the consumer by using their communication strategies. In order to illustrate examples from our findings of the purchasing websites, we make references to appendixes.

4.1.1 Online observation on H&M

4.1.1.1 Climate objectives

According to H&M (2022a), they engage with their customers to learn what their needs are and understand their expectations in order to make sustainable choices as easy and appealing as possible. H&M strives to treat the people, the planet, the industry and their business in a way that favours all parts. Furthermore, the climate positive approach now includes work towards the goal of having net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040. The net-zero standard refers to a framework for organisations to target a net-zero setting in relation to climate science, which follows the limited goal of not exceeding the global temperature to 1.5 degrees (Science Based Target, 2021). To achieve the goal of becoming net-zero, H&M explains that the key is to adopt circularity throughout the business. Furthermore, H&M has a climate strategy where they are trying to reduce the use of chemicals, energy, production waste and water (H&M Group, 2022a). Moreover, they strive to dimidiate their emissions every decade, therefore, H&M will

not collaborate with any new supplier that has on-site coal boilers (H&M Group, 2022a). Energy savings throughout the value chain will also constitute a part of the climate strategy as well as finding nature-based and engineered solutions for getting rid of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

H&M believes in transparency where honest communication creates accountability and comparability, which not always leads to improved sustainability, but encourages the whole industry to do the same (H&M Group, 2022a). In 2021, H&M implemented a transparency tool called Sustainable Apparel Coalition's (SAC) Higg Index Sustainability Profile, which is supposed to be applied to their products during 2022. The Higg Index is a tool invented by a non-profit organisation called Sustainable Apparel Coalition. This tool enables to share environmental performance scores for the materials for a specific product, with the aim to provide the information to customers, and is currently used on 850 products online in Europe and the US (H&M Group, 2022a). H&M offers to reward members who buy from their conscious collection with 'conscious points' to encourage people to make more sustainable choices.

When browsing the purchase website there is no explicit category to choose from called 'conscious'. The different 'conscious' products are not found among the ordinary product categories, instead they are displayed further down the option bar (see **Appendix E**), under the category 'sustainability'. Proceeding to a specific product's page labelled 'conscious choice' the information visible is including what material the product contains as well as a specific category of 'more sustainable material', which for example, declares that the product is made of 62 percent LivaEco viscose (H&M, n.d.a). On the product's page, it is possible to enter a side window with information about the background, however, this information is the same for every product and emphasises the goal of only having 100 percent recycled or other sustainable material by 2030 (H&M, n.d.a; see **Appendix G**). On the same page, the country of origin of the product is also accessible. If a consumer chooses to enter page of a product that is labelled 'new arrival' and 'conscious choice', both of these labels will be shown on the product's page. However, the label 'new arrival' compared to the 'conscious choice', is displayed in a bold font while the label 'conscious choice' is not as clearly visible (H&M, n.d.b).

4.1.1.2 Productions and waste

To minimise their environmental impact of their production, H&M have partnered up with WWF. The partnership's purpose is to improve soil and pollinator biodiversity and help farmers to receive sustainable wages, currently, they are supporting 150 farmers (H&M Group, 2022a). The partnership with WWF also aims to focus on water, just like several other collaborations with organisations, since the availability of water is one of the most impacted issues by the climate crisis. In H&M's sustainability report, they express a concern about achieving their goal of reducing water use by 25 percent by 2022, since the reduction last year was only 6.6 percent and since 2017 it is 10.3 percent. However, the company worked with suppliers in Bangladesh in order to increase the recycling of water in denim washing facilities. According to the report, H&M states that 34 suppliers have such washing facilities, and nowadays, 21 percent of the water is re-used while washing denim. Moreover, 43 percent of the H&M factories have rainwater in their harvesting system (H&M Group, 2022a). H&M also promotes how they are changing towards becoming more envriontmentally friendly by using less water in the processes of dying fabric, usage per metre of fabric and usage per piece (H&M Group, 2022a).

On the product page, in the product background, information about the production includes that all H&M products are made by independent suppliers in developing countries (H&M, n.d.a; see **Appendix G**). There is also information provided in what country the specific production line is produced, with an overview of the country's different production facilities (H&M, n.d.a).

4.1.1.3 Materials

H&M claims that they are only using cotton that is organic, in conversion, recycled or sourced through the better cotton initiative. The lastly mentioned refers to an organisation, that supports cotton farmers to convert to more environmentally friendly methods (H&M Group, 2022b). The cotton is mostly in the category of another more sustainably sourced cotton, this category constitutes 71.3 percent of the total cotton usage in H&M's production (H&M Group, 2022b). Furthermore, the in-conversion cotton refers to the usage of cotton from farmers that are in the process of converting to organic cotton, since the supply for organic cotton does not meet the demands to be able to produce the garments, which is a more sustainable alternative than conventional cotton (H&M Group, 2022b). In 2019 8.3 percent of the used polyester was recycled polyester, and in 2021 this number had increased to 63.7 percent (H&M Group, 2022a) and is getting closer to the goal of having 100 percent recycled polyester. Overall, 80 percent of H&M's materials come from recycled or other sustainably sourced materials (H&M Group,

2022a) which results in them having 20 percent left to reach their goal by 2030. Moreover, H&M state that for them to be able to claim and label a product as sustainable, it has to consist of at least 50 percent sustainable materials, and the garment needs a description of the material and what part of the garment constitutes it (H&M Group, 2022c).

On the product's page on H&M's purchasing website, no information about if the 100 percent organic cotton product is made from completely organic cotton or in-conversion cotton is visible (H&M, n.d.a). Moreover, the information provided is a short summary of the material used in this product, including that cotton requires a large amount of water. H&M also state that all the cotton they use in their production should come from sustainable sources before 2020 (H&M, n.d.c). Furthermore, the consumer is able to read more about H&M's ambitions to produce more sustainable materials and that they are developing sustainable processes regarding production. However, not any other explicit information about the specific garment or material is visible on the product page (see **Appendix F**). Additionally, at the bottom of the page, H&M presents their ambition of managing only recyclable, organic or other more sustainably sourced materials and asserts how far they have come in the current situation, and the consumer is provided with a hyperlink to read more about H&M's actions to minimise the environmental impact (H&M, n.d.a).

4.1.1.4 Circularity

According to H&M Group (2022a), the company is transforming into a circular ecosystem, where three areas are mainly in focus: circular products, circular supply chains and circular customer journeys. The aim is to manufacture long-lasting products from safe, recycled and sustainable sources that have the ability to circulate multiple times, and to provide customers with the possibility to engage and experience a circular fashion where the products can be used longer, can be repaired, reused and recycled by the customer (H&M Group, 2022a). H&M Group (2022c) presents that in 2018, the percentage of recycled materials used amounted to 1.4 percent, and by 2021 the number had increased to 17.9 percent. By 2030, H&M's endeavour is to reach 100 percent of the materials to be recycled materials or derive from a more sustainable source.

The company has the ambition to make all the products possible for circularity by 2025, which is supposed to be possible through the new tool called the 'circulator'. A reduction in plastic packaging and an increased share of recycled materials used when producing new garments are

some of the actions taken toward sustainability during 2021 (H&M Group, 2022a). Regarding H&M's work of increasing the circularity and the ambition of maximising the products' lifetime, they promote customers to 'use and care' for the items and repair them when broken. They also support customers to donate pre-owned items by offering the 'circulator' service (H&M Group, 2022a).

On the purchasing website, there is a category called 'second hand' (H&M, n.d.d). Under the category of second hand, there is a subcategory called 'This is Pre-loved', which is a page that includes information emphasising the importance of changing consumers' consumption habits as well as information about what pre-loved clothes mean (H&M, n.d.e). On this webpage, H&M encourage the consumer to purchase pre-loved garments since they claim that consumers choosing this option reduce their impact on the climate as well as contribute to keeping the clothes within the circular system. To encourage the consumers even more towards becoming more circular, they have information on this page saying that they reward all members who recycle textiles and shop pre-loved. Once consumers enter a pre-loved product's page, they can choose to read about what pre-loved is and a short description of the material of the garment, as well as a photo of the product label (H&M, n.d.f).

Moreover, browsing H&M's purchase website, they are promoting a new collection called 'Cherish Waste', which revolves around the concept of circularity (H&M, n.d.g). On the website, they are communicating about the usage of innovative technologies to make the garments last for a long time, and materials that often are claimed to be waste, are turned into garments and accessories that can be used and recycled. H&M expresses themselves as the following quote "Wear them, love them and then pass them on the next one" (H&M, n.d.g, n.p.). This collection has a small description of the techniques that have been used in the manufacturing process and the prices are above their regular prices (H&M, n.d.g).

4.1.1.5 Shipping and returns

According to H&M's sustainability report they have made partnerships with peers to minimise emissions by sharing information about transport supply chains and evaluating different sea transporters' environmental performance, which they are required to publish by H&M (H&M Group, 2022a). Furthermore, the company have adopted climate-smart delivery solutions in 34 markets and the utilisation of electric vehicles has been implemented for improved last-mile delivery to actively contribute toward fossil-free transportation (H&M Group, 2022a).

At the top of H&M's homepage it is stated that they offer free standard delivery for their members if they purchase clothes for more than 200 SEK or 25 dollars (H&M, n.d.d; see **Appendix D**). However, there is no information about the delivery being climate-smart. Nevertheless, if the consumer purchases products from the department of pre-loved clothing, they will automatically get free returns (H&M, n.d.e). When the consumer has entered a product's page, the information regarding delivery solely consists of different delivery methods such as home delivery, store delivery and delivery points (H&M, n.d.a).

4.1.2 Online observation on Nakdcom one world AB (NA-KD)

4.1.2.1 Climate objectives

By the year 2030, NA-KD announce that they will have reduced their climate emissions throughout the supply chain, according to an ambitious plan stated on their corporate website (NA-KD, 2020). They also emphasise that they strongly believe in working with business partners and suppliers to reach sustainability goals and solutions (Nakdcom one world AB, 2020). In order to evaluate how suppliers are performing regarding sustainable operations and performance, NA-KD uses the Higg Index tool, which is a self-assessment instrument that manufacturers and suppliers use to evaluate their environmental performance and compare their achievements with industry benchmarks. Furthermore, NA-KD highlight that they thoroughly communicate with their suppliers when encountering environmental issues, assuring that their suppliers are taking the right actions in order to address the matter in question (Nakdcom one world AB, 2020). Some of the goals, targets and KPIs that NA-KD has includes reducing emissions by 80 percent from their operations and reducing the emissions by 50 percent per sold product by the year 2025 (NA-KD, 2020). Furthermore, NA-KD state that they are aware of the increasing demand from consumers wanting to obtain more information about the products, concerning their impact on the environment and where they come from (NA-KD, n.d.a). Currently, they have a collection called NA-KD reborn, which includes their most sustainable apparel (NA-KD, n.d.a).

Entering the NA-KD online purchasing website, any signs of sustainable actions or offers are first encountered at the bottom of the page (NA-KD, n.d.b; see **Appendix H**). However, it is not their sustainable collection NA-KD Reborn that is displayed but a sustainability announcement and their circularity services, i.e. second hand. Proceeding to the page with their

sustainability announcements, the visitor can read about their sustainability goals and commitments concerning climate action, circularity, sustainable products, diversity and inclusion (NA-KD, n.d.c). Nevertheless, no products are available for purchase on this page or on either of the linking pages. However, on product pages specifically, under the product background rubric, NA-KD starts by emphasising their ambitions regarding becoming the top 1 percent most environmentally friendly brands globally (NA-KD, n.d.d; see **Appendix K**). They also provide information that 63 percent of their products were produced in a more environmentally friendly way, and made in more sustainable fabrics (NA-KD, n.d.d; see **Appendix K**).

4.1.2.2 Production and waste

NA-KD presents some of their sustainable initiatives and implemented strategies, and one of them includes the goal of having sustainable packaging, meaning that they aim to use fossil-fuel-based packaging, and withdraw hazardous chemicals in their packaging (Nakdcom one world AB, 2020). To minimise their waste management, NA-KD state that they are "currently in the process of implementing an extensive waste management system" (Nakdcom one world AB, 2020, p. 4). NA-KD also emphasises that they are aiming toward transparency within their whole supply chain, in order to develop healthy relationships with stakeholders, and easier notice when any supplier is not working in an environmentally friendly way. Having a close and good relationship with suppliers, they say, also enables them to require more detailed reports and information from the suppliers (Nakdcom one world AB, 2020).

On any product page available for sale specifically, there is information about general sustainability goals and targets available for the consumer, giving them information about what the company of NA-KD strives to accomplish when it comes to environmental actions (see **Appendix K**). The information that can be gained about where and how the product is produced involves the production country, and it seems that they have the ambition to display supplier and factory information, however, they state that some garments may have been produced before they started using the system they use to provide such information, hence, the information may be missing (NA-KD, n.d.d). NA-KD also provides information on the product page that all suppliers need to sign their Code of Conduct, which includes different requirements that are needed, such as working conditions.

4.1.2.3 Materials

In order to make sure that they produce clothes that are eco-friendly, NA-KD have implemented a list of restricted substances that the manufacturers are enforced to follow, which lists the chemicals that are forbidden to use in the manufacturing process. NA-KD also emphasise in their environmental policy report (Nakdcom one world AB, 2020), that from Q1 2019 there has been a transformation to only use eco-friendly and healthy material, both for the customer and the environment. NA-KD made their first sustainable collection produced only out of sustainable materials. At the beginning of 2020, they had a production of NA-KD products of recycled materials accounting for as little as 0 percent, since they started the production in November 2019. However, at the end of 2020, they had had an increase of almost 45 percent meaning that 45 percent of all newly produced products were made out of more sustainable materials, and at the end of 2025, they are aiming for 100 percent (NA-KD, n.d.a). Moreover, in the year 2020, 46 percent of the cotton NA-KD used was organic, and 1 percent was recycled (NA-KD, n.d.a). However, 53 percent was conventional cotton. In order to further reduce their environmental impact, NA-KD is committed to increasing its use of recyclable polyamide and polyester. Additionally, they emphasise in their sustainability report (NA-KD, 2020f) that in order to make the product life cycle longer for products made out of polyamide or polyester, they should be carefully washed, preferably aired instead of washed and hang dried. Such actions would minimise microplastics being released. By the year 2020, NA-KD used 93 percent conventional polyester, and 7 percent of their polyester was recycled. 99 percent of their polyamide was conventional, and 1 percent was recycled.

In order to find the Reborn collection, the consumer has to click on the 'browse products' option, which takes the visitor to a landing page that shows all NA-KD products included in the Reborn collection (see **Appendix I**). The customer has to choose the Reborn collection at the left of the page (NA-KD, n.d.e). However, when arriving on the landing page for the Reborn collection, the visitor can browse among all the products that are included in this collection (NA-KD, n.d.f). The information that is available for the visitor on this page is displayed on each picture of the different products, with the caption 'more sustainable' (see **Appendix I**).

On the product page for apparel from the Reborn collection, the visitor can access information about the product background (NA-KD, n.d.g; see **Appendix K**). The product background includes information about the fabrics the product is made of. Additionally, NA-KD presents

information about what their recycled material is made of specifically. For example, a black ribbed knitted skirt that is included in the Reborn collection is made out of 45 percent recycled polyester, 32 percent polyester, and 23 percent viscose, where they state that their recycled polyester is made out of production waste, PET bottles, nylon, fishing nets and other plastic waste, which requires a lot less process steps in the production and less energy use (NA-KD, n.d.g). Other information accessible about recycled polyester on the product background includes facts about the recycled polyester that NA-KD use in their production processes, including that their recycled polyester meets the 'Global Recycle Standard', with a minimum of 20 percent recycled fibres. The information accessible about the other non-recyclable materials, polyester and viscose, includes general information about the fabrics such as what it is made of and their impact on the environment, however, not in statistics. This information also includes encouragement to the consumer to recycle clothes (NA-KD, n.d.g; see **Appendix K**).

4.1.2.5 Circularity

NA-KD writes on their corporate website that one of their key actions is to educate consumers on circularity actions (NA-KD, n.d.h). One aim is also to prevent overstock and collaborate with consumers in the development of products. Additionally, they want to encourage consumers to behave in a more circular manner, engaging in the innovative business models that they have implemented, i.e. consuming the products that are put up for second hand on their online shopping website. This service enables consumers to prolong the life of garments, which ultimately will save tons of CO2e (NA-KD, n.d.h).

The service where customers can buy and sell garments is called NA-KD Circle and is available online. If proceeding to the second-hand page that was displayed on the home page, the visitor comes across different second-hand clothes that are available for sale (NA-KD, n.d.i). If clicking on one of the different second-hand products, the visitor lands on the product page. The information gained on the product page is that consuming second-hand clothes is a sustainable choice, there are reduced CO emissions, and the customer can benefit from free climate compensated deliveries (NA-KD, n.d.j). There is also an option to gain information about the product background on the product page. However, the information available there only corresponds to the general objectives and achievements that NA-KD has within their company, thus, no specific nor detailed information about the product's production process is available. For example, under the headline 'Where is it produced?' the sentence starts with "All

our products are produced by independent suppliers" (NA-KD, n.d.j, n.p.). The only information that can be gathered about the specific apparel and material is that it is made out of 100 percent polyester.

Nevertheless, NA-KD emphasises that circularity needs to be implemented throughout the entire value chain (NA-KD, n.d.h). They highlight on their corporate website that they have the ambition to consider how the garment can have a long life, how to boost its value, and how to recycle the product, as early as in the design stage. They also aim to make services such as upcycling, reselling, and recycling common practices and components in their business. Furthermore, they strive to have packaging that is 100 percent circular in 2023 and reuse 100 percent of materials from packaging (NA-KD, n.d.g). When pursuing to the online purchasing website, and any product available for sale specifically, there is an option to "Join the circular fashion movement" (NA-KD, n.d.d, n.p.; see **Appendix K**), with a direct link to the service for consumers to sell their clothes online using the NA-KD reselling option.

4.1.2.4 Shipping and returns

On their corporate website, NA-KD stress that they are implementing some sustainable initiatives in their shipping and packaging business, including all their shipping containers to consumers are made out of plastic that is 100 percent recycled, that they add Biodegradable Organic Polymer to each plastic bag which guarantees that no microplastics is created, that they wrap all accessories such as jewellery and sunglasses in sustainable paper made out of grass (NA-KD, n.d.k). However, the only information gained on the product page for each product specifically, is that NA-KD offers free climate compensated returns, and shipping (NA-KD, n.d.d; see **Appendix J**).

4.2 Findings from interviews

This section presents the findings from consumer interviews, contexting their general intention to buy environmentally friendly, and their perceptions of sustainability actions taken by companies. The data found also comprehends the interviewed consumers' viewpoint of the information they acquire when shopping for fashion online. The main objective of this data is to understand the consumer's perception of the online retailer's communication strategies and to what extent they feel supported to buy environmentally friendly. Additionally, we acknowledge what factors in the retailer's communication strategies are affecting the attitude-

behaviour gap, and what improvements, from the consumer perspective, that can be implemented in order to increase awareness among consumers to be more environmentally friendly in their consumption.

4.2.1 Attitudes toward sustainability in the online fast fashion industry

A general idea of sustainability in the online fast fashion industry was quite negative among the participants, and it was expressed to be a bad habit to buy clothes that are only trendy for a short time period. Nevertheless, female 7 had to some extent a positive attitude toward fast fashion since she thought that from an economical perspective, everyone is able to afford the clothes sold at these companies. Additionally, with a small budget and a large interest in fashion, she believed fast fashion clothes were the most suitable option for her. Interestingly, female 12 also emphasised that companies like H&M will always, or for a long time, exist because that is the option of cheap clothes for people that cannot afford more expensive clothes. Hence, she thinks it is important that these companies adopt more sustainable productions and other ways of being more sustainable. Moreover, most participants expressed that they often buy clothes from fast fashion companies, however, had an intention to only buy timeless clothes which they meant eased their intention to consume more environmentally friendly when buying from fast fashion companies (females 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15). Additionally, most of the participants knew that many fast fashion brands have more sustainable collections, and the general attitude towards these collections was good, and they thought these initiatives were actions in the right direction on behalf of the retailers.

Furthermore, female 13 had a strong negative attitude toward fast fashion being sustainable. She expressed herself as the following quote:

> *"(...) you get exposed to 'oh look at this, this is so good, but if the fast fashion companies truly would have wanted to do something about their climate footprint, they would not just had one production line saying 'this is good', they would have had done it all in an environmentally friendly manner".*

Her saying implies her negative attitude toward only having a small number of sustainable clothes. She has a negative attitude towards fast fashion since she had the opinion that the problem is not that companies have to create more environmentally friendly clothes, instead,

they have to make the garments long-lasting so they could be reused and worn for many years. Female 13 agrees that in that case, there will not be the same amount of material produced, and fewer garments have to be transported which is followed by fewer carbon emissions and less water usage. This indicates that the respondent thinks that emphasis should be on sustainable, long-lasting materials. Another issue expressed by female 13 was that the companies producing only a small amount of collections of sustainable clothes only do that for the charades. However, if they were striving to become environmentally friendly, all their clothes should involve an environmentally friendly production process, according to female 13. This shows high customer demand and the necessity to prioritise environmentally friendly collections within the fast fashion industry since, in order for her to believe that fashion retailers actually are sustainable. Furthermore, she expressed a demand for circularity into their ordinary assortment.

4.2.2 Satisfying information provided by the retailers

During the interviews, the participants were shown two garments from H&M's and NA-KD's sustainable collections on the purchase websites. They were then asked what their impression of the sustainable information was, on each product page respectively. Interestingly, females 8 and 11 thought that the sustainable collections on companies such as H&M's websites are rather displayed in a visually clear manner. And when showing the example of a dress from H&M's conscious collection, female 11 thought it was clearly described and that it was easy to understand that you made a sustainable choice by purchasing this dress. For example, she said expressed hereself as follows:

> *"(...) perhaps the information is not put on all product pages, but recently I purchased a garment and I remember it stood in a small box how much of the garment that was sustainable. So I believe they are incorporating it more and more in their communication".*

This indicates that she is to some extent satisfied with how visually clear the retailer communicates a more sustainable option for the consumer. Moreover, females 3, 6 and 12 also expressed that they to some extent are satisfied with how visually clear the sustainable communication is. According to them, terms such as 'sustainable choice' and others indicates that the products are environmentally friendly, hence, making the sustainable communication

clear. As these findings show, the participants think that the sustainable communication provided by the retailers does initiate some thought in order to make a sustainable choice. However, it also indicates that the communication they are referring to relates to the information on the purchase website in general, and not the product pages respectively, where the purchase decision is made. It also shows that it does not have any direct impact on the purchase decision, as the respondents expressed that the information provided is not enough for them to choose one garment that is environmentally friendly over another that is not.

Furthermore, female 12 expressed that she sometimes tries to be up-to-date about the proenvironmental initiatives made by companies like H&M by reading information about their latest actions on their websites. When asked where she finds this information, she said that she thinks they are somewhat good at marketing their initiatives on social media, and when she visits their purchasing websites she usually clicks on the options where the company have written something about their sustainability work. She expresses herself as in the following quote:

> *"Yes, I probably click there and read about on these links about their sustainability actions, and I probably do so since I feel that it is a consumer obligation, and if I see something about them being more sustainable, then I want to obtain more knowledge about that. I think I have a feeling that I don't want to do something wrong when buying fast fashion".*

Female 12 also thinks that companies like H&M and Zara are good at making their more sustainable collections, like H&M's conscious collection, more explicit and easier for the consumer to find. According to this respondent's view solely, information about sustainable collections appears in their campaigns as well as it is easy to navigate on the purchasing websites. According to her expression, it is believed she has a positive attitude toward the information communicated by the retailers. However, she also implies that her willingness to actually search and read this information is because of her interest and current education, as she studies science of fashion. This indicates that since she has an interest in the topic, she does put an extra effort into gaining more information about environmentally friendly actions and initiatives on behalf of the retailers, which ultimately enhance her knowledge and awareness when purchasing clothes from the websites she has such information about.

Furthermore, remaining respondents expressed that they find information about aspects such as size, fitting, payment, and shipment mostly satisfying when browsing fast fashion retailers' product pages. However, they did not find information about the climate footprint or other sustainable information as satisfying in any manner. Female 10 illustrates this issue in the following quote:

> *"I don't think the information about the climate footprint of the garment is satisfying at all, it is quite inadequate. Actually, I have seen information about the climate footprint on some websites, I think it was Peak Performance or Polarn and Pyret, but still, I do not know what that information means".*

This quote indicates that the respondent does not find the information about sustainability issues put on the websites sufficient, hence, leaving her feeling unsatisfied with the provided information. However, there seem to exist some retailers where she has found information regarding sustainability and the climate footprint of the garment. This leaves her more satisfied with the provided information. Nevertheless, Peak Performance and Polarn and Pyret are not fast fashion companies, and Peak Performance is producing clothes fully made from recycled materials.

Moreover, some participants find information that highlights the benefits for each consumer respectively as satisfying, however, such information do not exist in the examples shown they expressed (females 6, 7, 10, 12 & 15). However, female 6 expressed that if such information is provided and she can acknowledge what benefits there are in making a purchase decision, this would signify that she is doing something for the common good, which she expressed to be an individual benefit since it highlights what she can do as an individual. This indicates that if the retailer communicates what benefits a purchase decision will have for each consumer individually, using terms that are directed to each consumer individually, it will have an effect on the purchase decision for the consumer.

4.2.3 Complexity

4.2.3.1 Complexity in finding information

When the participants were shown the practical examples, female 1, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10 expressed that they do not feel that they get support to buy environmentally friendly from online retailers. They were of the impression that they think that information about other occurrences, such as information about the garment being a new arrival, was more prominent than it being a sustainable choice. Female 10 expressed herself like the following quote when she was shown the examples from H&M and NA-KD and when asked if she thinks she gets support from online retailers:

> *"I don't understand what the information is about (...), the information is just general, and it says conscious choice here but it's even in a smaller font than other information such as it being a new arrival".*

This quote indicates a lack of consumer-friendly information that can be understood easily by the consumers, as well as an absence of information that is more visually attractive and conspicuous. This indicates that the lack of support from retailers to purchase environmentally friendly clothing may be due to other information being more visible on the product pages, and sustainability information not being as highlighted or understandable.

All participants except female 13 described that the information they search for in the online environment often is on the product page. However, some thought that the information was limited on the product pages and could have been presented in a more visually clear manner since this is the only place they search for the information. Concerning information about product's sustainability, female 12 expressed herself as the quote below when an example from a product page of a dress from H&M was demonstrated:

> *"(...) no, it is not clear at all, you can only see that it says more sustainable, and it seems like you have to click somewhere on the page. It seems like you have to put a lot of effort to look for further information, which I do not believe people do when browsing since you usually are looking at many*

products at the same time at a fast pace, so I think it is about being more
explicit on the front page that the garment is sustainable".

This quote indicates that since consumers are shopping online in a fast pace, they require that information that needs to reach the consumer has to be more informative in order for the consumers to recognise the information and have an impact on their shopping behaviour.

When searching for information about the garment online, some participants expressed that they look for whether the material is recycled or not, as they use that as a criterion to acknowledge if the garment is more environmentally friendly (females 6, 11 & 12). Some participants explained that in order to find information about the company or garment being environmentally friendly, they have to browse and search for the information on the website individually, and they think that it could definitely have been more clear and easier to access (females 2, 4, 10 & 12). Interestingly, females 2 and 7 claimed that they know that the information is possible to find, but due to the inconvenience in finding it, they believe it is hard to purchase environmentally friendly clothes from the fast fashion retailers such as H&M and NA-KD. Moreover, females 2, 7, 8 and 10 thought that the sustainable collections were not very explicit, and they thought that the information about their more sustainable collections could be more visible. This indicates that the way retailers have chosen to display their environmentally friendly information is not consistent with the way consumers want it to be displayed, as they find it inconvenient to find the information. It also shows that consumers do know that the retailers are performing environmentally friendly actions, hence, are susceptible to such information, however, are not exposed to such information.

Moreover, female 8 expressed that she does not filter the clothes on the criteria of clothes that are more environmentally friendly because she does not have any knowledge about it, referring to the knowledge about what it means that they are more sustainable. She also expressed that she does not buy environmentally friendly clothes because she thinks they are too expensive. However, when she was informed that the environmentally friendly clothes at H&M, for example, not necessarily are more expensive, she said:

"(...) if it would have been clearer that you could filter by looking at only the H&M conscious collection, I might would have noticed that they actually were not more expensive".

This indicates that her shopping behaviour could have been influenced as she believes she would have considered prioritising to look at these clothes before other garments if it would have been easy distinguishable. Moreover, female 8 was not the only one who responded that she had an absence of knowledge about what the clothes being more environmentally friendly actually meant (females 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11). However some the respondents possessed more knowledge than others, such as materials' environmental impact. Interestingly, those who possessed more knowledge were the ones more interested in finding information about what kind of materials the garment consisted of on their own.

Female 2 thought the concept of second-hand was a good option in order to be more environmentally friendly, and have noticed that some fast fashion companies have started on a small scale to market second-hand clothes online, for example, NA-KD. Nevertheless, she believed companies could inform the consumer about the concept of second-hand to a larger extent and encourage the consumers to buy already used clothes in order to be more supportive since she never has used this service before. In order be more informed about the service of selling clothes second hand, she said that the service could be more visible on both the purchasing website and product page. This indicates that she finds the way online retailers communicate such initiatives inadequately, since she described herself as a new user of this service. Interestingly, female 15 said that she once ended up by chance on the page for the second-hand clothes on NA-KD's purchase website. However, she said that she found the page since she was eager to buy a pair of jeans which was out of stock in her size. Hence, since she carefully scanned the product page, she found the link to the second-hand page where the jeans were in stock. This means that she only found the second-hand product page since she carefully searched the page and probably would have missed it if she was browsing as she normally does.

When asked if the respondents think they get the most satisfying information about the product online or offline, all respondents except respondent 10 thought that they get the most sufficient information online. On the contrary, female 10 said that she thinks one is more able to ask more questions and get an answer right away in a physical store, however, she expresses that it

requires a lot from the store clerk, and it depends on their engagement to sell something. Female 11 explains why she thinks she gets more sufficient information online in the following quote:

> *"There is a much greater opportunity for them to display more information online. H&M has these small tables online, which they cannot print on the tag on the garment in a physical store, not what I have seen anyway. What you can find on the garment is a small part of this tag where it may say '80 percent recycled', but more information than that, where it is made, for example, I cannot find in the physical store".*

This indicates that the prime way for retailers to communicate product information is on online platforms. Furthermore, female 15 also said that in order for the retail companies to be more supportive in terms of environmentally friendly purchasing of clothes, she thinks they have to explain what it means that the customer buys the more sustainable product, preferably with the use of a language that is understandable by customers. Retailers should avoid scientific language including complex terms, since the common opinion was that it does not provide the consumer with any comprehension or sense of what the information implicate.

4.2.3.1 Complexity in understanding the communication and information content

When the respondents were asked if they are sustainable in their consumption of clothes, most of them answered that they think they are, but since they do not have any information about the environmental impact of the clothes they are buying, they were not sure (females 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10 & 11). When female 10 was asked to elaborate on that answer, she was asked how she thinks she could be more sustainable in her shopping behaviour, to which she answered:

> *"(...) it is all about information, that I believe that I would have needed more of".*

Female 14 was of the opinion that companies should implement strategies that increases the awareness of the consumer about sustainable options when shopping. However, since she does not have much knowledge about sustainability as regards to environmentally friendly materials, and what the effects of choosing environmentally friendly clothing are, she could not say she

was supported and influenced to consume environmentally friendly to a larger extent by the retailers.

Discussing whether the participants would have taken different actions if they had information about the environmental impact of specific products they were buying, a common answer among all participants was that they would have. Female 6 says:

"I think that if there had been more information that is in your face, like clear numbers on the product pages, then it is difficult to simply ignore it, and it would have affected me more. (...) if the information would have been clearer, if you were given the information about the environmental footprint of the product it would have been another thing".

Information such as the environmental effects of the material the garment is made of should be easily accessible according to several of the respondents and have to be reached directly on the product's page. Information about what kind of material the garment consists of is explained by female 11 as follows:

"(...) if I look at this garment, I can see that it is 80 percent recycled material, but what does that mean and how much impact does that have on the environment - I do not know that".

Furthermore, some of the participants want information about the actual impact the garment has because they expressed that a regular consumer like them does not understand the difference between or the meaning of the material is 50 percent or 80 percent recycled (females 2, 11 & 14). Female 11 expressed that it would have been favourable to have information as to how big the climate footprint has been during the production process of a specific garment. She also believed that if a consumer understands the consequences of buying a specific garment as regards to the impact on the environment, one will make more conscious choices. Female 2 expressed herself as follows:

"I want to know why it is better. Why a certain garment is better to the environment than something else".

This indicates the significance of highlighting and putting emphasis on the reason why a consumer should choose a specific garment that is more environmentally friendly than a garment that is not produced in a sustainable way on any level. Some respondents even expressed that they would prefer a comparison between the environmental effects of a sustainable choice and a non-sustainable choice (females 3, 6, 9 & 11).

Moreover, females 7 and 8 expressed that they think that companies should incorporate sustainability communication in influencer marketing, letting influencers promote environmentally friendly clothes, and putting emphasis on the green aspects of the garments. Most collaborations with influencers today only include discounts and other promotions, but having collaborations with a focus on sustainable clothes females 7 and 8 believe would have influenced them into becoming more sustainable in their online purchase behaviour. Interestingly, female 4 expressed that she is very influenced by her social environment, namely friends, social media, and celebrities and influencers that she follows on Instagram, for example. Consequently, she explains that if her friends or an influencer that she respects and admires would have encouraged such a sustainable lifestyle, she probably would have adopted the same lifestyle as them. This indicates that using a third party that already has the power of influencing people's lives, would minimise the complexity and increase the awareness among consumers to do more environmentally friendly choices. It also shows the significance of simplifying green communication with consumers, incorporating it in social networks where people go to interact with others as well as get inspired.

4.2.4 Actions taken to gain more information

A common theme among the respondents was that there is some frustration in not feeling that the information they gain on the website or product page is sufficient enough for them to make a purchase decision on. It seems that the respondents mainly turn to the product page in order to gain information about the product and material. Interestingly, they do not browse any other page to find relevant information about the product. This indicates that if the information is not presented on the product's page, they will not search for it somewhere else, which goes for all respondents except females 12, 15 and 13. Additionally, some expressed that they would still

buy the garment, even if they find the information not sufficient enough since it is easy to return the clothing (females 1, 3, 7 & 8). Female 3 expressed this concern as in the following quote:

"It should be easily accessible. If I cannot find it in connection with the garment on the product page, I do not look further. And perhaps that's also the point of time when I usually decide that if I did not find enough information, I take the chance and order it anyway".

This quote indicates that in order for the information to reach the consumer, it has to be placed in direct connection with the garment on the product page. However, female 15 did turn to other sources of information if not finding it on the product page. She explained that when she finds herself in situations where she does not find the information about the materials on the product pages sufficiently convincing or informative, she has other tactics to gain information, illustrated in the following quote:

"I usually google the name of the material, for example viscose, and check how it is produced on another website that is not trying to sell me something and gives me another perspective. That is the reason why I google it instead of just browsing H&M because I do not think they would publicly publish how good or bad they actually are".

As this quote shows, female 15 turns to other sources in order to gain knowledge about the environmental impacts of a specific material used in a garment. This indicates that the customer needs to take individual actions in order to possess knowledge about the garment, in addition, from another source than the purchasing website. Additionally, female 12 said that if she visits a fashion website that does not have any sustainable information provided or any sustainable collections, she automatically turns to other websites where she knows she can consume something similar that is environmentally friendly.

Moreover, female 3 expressed that she acknowledges climate actions taken by companies and their environmentally friendly products and collections by listening to podcasts. However, she did not do so as an active action to gain such knowledge. Nevertheless, this illustrates that there

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are other forms for the consumer to possess knowledge and gain awareness about the sustainable products and collections of fashion retailers.

4.2.5 Trust and transparency

Concerning trust in the information that the companies are communicating, most participants expressed that they usually trust the information since they often choose to buy clothes from big companies that they have experience buying from. Moreover, female 6 expressed that she trusts the information but even more if there are reviews from other customers on the product page. Female 8 expressed herself as in the following quote:

"Yes, I do trust the information provided. But I only buy from companies that I have experience in buying from, and I usually do not buy from many different pages - I have my favourites".

This quote indicates that previous experiences and familiarisation with the shopping experience do initiate trust in the retailer from the consumer perspective. By relating to other occasions when the consumer has made a purchase at a retailer's website, the consumer trusts the retailer in a later state of a purchase decision.

Females 2, 9 and 13 expressed that it is difficult to distinguish how trustworthy sustainable information is and that they are sceptical towards such information in general. Moreover, female 9 said that she prefers regulations that exist in the food industry, where the products that are produced in a certain way, for example, ecological or not sprayed with chemicals. This makes it easy for her to distinguish the products and make the right decision, according to her. She further described she believes that there are not as many regulations in the fashion industry as in the food industry, which she thought is problematic. This indicates a consumer demand from higher authorities to insert laws and regulations for certain production approaches, which will distinguish the sustainable garments from the unsustainable garments, and simplify the purchase decision process for the consumer who wants to consume environmentally friendly. Moreover, female 14 expressed that she only trusts the information to some extent. She expressed herself as follows:

"At H&M, I know that there are such large variations in their production lines, there are so many clothes coming out in the stores and selling online, and the variations are large".

This statement indicates that female 14 find it difficult to trust the information that online retailers communicate because of the large production lines and big variations in clothes. Additionally, female 15 also finds it hard to possess trust for companies when only a small piece of the garment is called recycled. She says that in order for her to trust that the garment is environmentally friendly, she has to gain more information about the other materials, and their environmental impact, for her to make a decision if it is really an item of environmentally friendly clothing or not. Moreover, many respondents find it difficult to believe that the garment is sustainable because of the price, as they were of the opinion that environmentally friendly clothes have to be more expensive. This shows the significance for companies such as H&M and NA-KD to communicate the benefits of buying the environmentally friendly clothes they provide and be transparent in the environmental outcomes of each production line respectively. It also shows the importance of distinguishing the environmentally friendly production lines from the unsustainable lines. Furthermore, female 13 had some individual thoughts about companies being contradictory in their communication and actions. The information about their actual actions does not come from the company's sources but from other external sources, which indicates that she rather trusts information published by other sources than from the online retailers themselves.

Female 3 had a critical attitude towards the sustainability goals presented by the retailers. She expressed that retailers cannot claim that they are striving towards a specific goal in certain years and state an environmentally friendly vision if they cannot be transparent about if the goals are achieved or not. Her viewpoint is a critical perspective toward whether the online fast fashion companies can be trusted in respect to if the initiatives and goals actually are achieved within the given time frame.

The statements above indicate that females 6, 13 and 15 wish for more transparency in the communication from the retailers to find the company trustworthy. Moreover, they expressed that they also require the companies to put sustainability reports easily accessible on the product pages, visually under the pictures of the product, as they believe it is hard to find as it is. Female

11 explained that since she only is looking for information on the product pages, she would like information regarding the climate footprint presented there before making an online purchase decision, in order to have trust in the communication provided by the company.

4.2.6 Actual online sustainability shopping habits

A general idea among the participants was that environmentally friendly consumption is very important, but none of them thought that they were very good at consuming environmentally friendly online and were of the general idea that if they saw a piece of clothing that they wanted, it is easy to buy it without thinking of the environmental consequences that their choice results in. Often, if eventually ending up buying a garment that is sustainable, some respondents expressed that that was seen as an extra advantageous aspect, beyond the initial thought of buying the product (female 4, 6, 8 & 10). Furthermore, all the participants were aware of H&M's conscious collection, but still, it was merely females 6 and 11 who paid attention to the garment being more sustainable. Consequently, this indicates that the purchase decision is not based on this specific aspect for most participants. However, female 12 said that she does consume fast fashion clothes by giving some extra thought to the purchase. She also said that she is trying to be environmentally friendly by buying fast fashion clothes second hand, which indicates that she is trying to consume in an environmentally friendly manner by actively choosing to buy fast fashion clothes in a circular way. She expressed herself as follows:

> *"I mean, I think it's bad, and you are in a paradox with yourself. They have such good tactics in making us buy from them, so you always end up shopping there anyway, and such companies as H&M and others will always be there because they are the only ones having cheap clothes. It's more about them having to be sustainable. But I still do not think it's good of course, and I try to make conscious choices when buying fast fashion by thinking 'will I really use this, is it worth it, how do I get this to last' and so on. At the same time, I try to turn away from fast fashion even more, and it's a big part of my education, how much you learn about sustainability and such, here second hand comes in a lot - that one can buy fast fashion, but second hand"*.

Numerous of the participants said that they perhaps in the future would have a wardrobe consisting of more environmentally friendly clothes and that their intention was to become more

environmentally friendly when consuming and purchasing clothes online in the future (females 6, 9, 12 & 14). The predominantly objective to not changing the actual behaviour immediately was due to the pricing and that they tend to prefer to make the purchase decision based on the style of the clothing, rather than other aspects such as sustainability. Therefore, if they had two alternatives to choose from, one environmentally friendly garment and one garment that was not made from any recycled materials or other, the interviewees said that they most likely choose the garment they consider having the best style. Additionally, they also consider the price, choosing the cheapest one. For example, female 15 was looking for a pair of pants in a sustainable material, but due to the high price, she bought a cheaper pair which was not made from the material she intended to buy from the beginning. Hence, she did not make her purchase decision based on if it was produced in a more environmentally friendly way. Female 8 expressed it as follows:

"(...) it's probably because I do not have much knowledge about it, and I usually do not filter my search looking only at sustainable clothes, if I want a pair of pants, I choose the filter 'all pants'. But, if it had been clear that there was a category of only sustainable clothes, or if it had been clear which clothes are more sustainable, then perhaps I would have noticed that those clothes are not necessarily much more expensive".

Female 11 said that H&M was the store she bought the most of her fast fashion clothes from online. She was aware of their 'conscious collection' and knew that they recently have added some information on the product's page regarding sustainability. Simultaneously as she said that being aware of this could be decisive if she hesitates whether she should purchase the garment or not when it is more of a contemporary trend and not made of recycled material, she also explains that it does not influence her choice today as it may do in the upcoming years, hopefully. She ends the discussion by admitting being contradictory in her intentions and behaviour since she deep down knows she should make more environmentally friendly purchase decisions.

Female 13 explained that she tries to be circular when buying clothes since she believes it might almost be the only way to be a sustainable fashion consumer. However, she admitted that she sometimes deserts her intentions to buy second hand. This might happen when she needs

something very quickly or as she explained when she was going to buy her bridesmaid dresses and they had to look similar.

5. Analysis and discussion

The following chapter presents the analysis of the findings discovered from the empirical material of online observations and interviews supported by previous literature presented earlier in chapter 2. Moreover, the findings contradicting previous studies provide the research with new insights. In the second section of this chapter, interesting discoveries will be highlighted and discussed.

5.1 Analysis

This section will provide an in-depth analysis following the structure of the themes highlighted during the analysis process. The themes emerged during the transcription process as recurrent and interesting topics appeared. The predetermined topics used in collecting empirical data during the online observations worked as guidelines in the analysis process. However, these topics were associated with the themes that emerged from the interviews by connecting similar subjects. Since the study intends to (1) provide insights into what factors in the online environment affect the attitude-behaviour gap and (2) what aspects of retailers' communication strategies lead to higher green purchase intention, examples of the main insights from the findings will be analysed with to theory.

In order to achieve clarification during the analysis, examples from the online observations will be referred to (see **Appendixes D, E, F & G**). Only examples from H&M have been used, and examples from NA-KD have been excluded. This is to provide the reader with clarity and since H&M were predominantly referred to during the interviews.

5.1.1 Barriers to green online consumption behaviour

Ottman's (2011) theory about the two-stage process of green marketing included green products that still met the consumer requirements and communication providing consumers with information about environmental aspects. The online observations sympathise with the first stage of the process since H&M and NA-KD are implementing strategies to develop high-quality products whilst still having minimum impact on the environment. However, this study shows that H&M and NA-KD do not fulfil the entire process of green marketing, as the interview findings show a lack of sufficient sustainability communication.

When discussing information about the product's environmental impact on the purchasing website and the product page more precisely (see **Appendix F**), the respondents discerned that the information was limited. Additionally, they thought that the information was too vague and unclear and insufficient to convince them to make a purchase decision based on the implication of making an environmentally friendly purchase. Literature shows that consumers feel an obligation to perform a specific action when they have the option to prevent something negative or experience a certain responsibility (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995). This indicates that since the consumers do not feel convinced to perform an environmentally friendly purchase, there seems to be a lack of obligation in the retailer's communication online. If consumers acknowledged the consequences of their actions, they most likely would feel the obligation to make an environmentally friendly purchase decision (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995).

Even though the respondent's intentions are expressed in accordance with environmentally friendly behaviour, their actual behaviours are not consistent as they do not perform any sustainable consumption to any more considerable extent, which is confirmed in previous studies made by Park and Lin (2018), Nguyen, Nguyen and Hoang (2019) and Dhir et al. (2021). This study's findings on the existing attitude-behaviour gap can also be applied to Ajzen's (1991) framework Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), where the intention to perform a specific behaviour is based upon three pillars: attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control. In line with Ajzen's (1991) theory, the findings from the interviews can be applied to the first pillar since the findings indicate a negative judgement of performing an environmentally friendly behaviour since it will not favour consumers' desires concerning style, design or price.

The second pillar in Ajzen's (1991) framework deals with the subjective norm. It refers to what extent an individual interprets social pressure to either perform or not perform a specific behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which applies to the findings asserting that consumers do not believe they receive enough support or are encouraged by online retailers and their social environment to consume fashion sustainably based on the information they are provided with on the purchasing website (see **Appendix D, E, F & G**). The second pillar (Ajzen, 1991) can also be associated with the interview findings indicating that consumers' behaviour depends mainly on to what extent they get affected by social pressure to perform a certain behaviour. Additionally, the respondents expressed that their attitude is influenced by external factors such

as social media and influencers, i.e. people they admire. This finding relates to research indicating that social influence affects purchase behaviour (Kim & Sirvastava, 2007). Moreover, these findings also correlate with other research on the association between sustainability and fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015). McNeill and Moore (2015) state that identity construction is a significant part of fashion consumption. Hence, the key factors to being trendy and in fashion are prioritised before consuming sustainably. Consequently, it can be argued that since the respondent's social environment does not guide them in their consumption of fashion to consume sustainably, the inconsistency in attitude and actual behaviour when consuming fashion increases. This paradox underlines the conflict in wanting to perform a certain sustainable behaviour, whilst the actual consumption still fulfils the purpose of constructing an identity that does not include the elements of sustainability (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Lastly, the third pillar in Ajzen's (1991) framework (TPB) revolves around perceived behavioural control. This pillar asserts that an individual's willingness to perform an intended behaviour depends on whether the behaviour is perceived as difficult or easy to perform by the individual. However, the interview findings in this study do not entirely support this theory since the majority of the respondents expressed that if they could not receive information about the garment easily, they would still proceed with the purchasing process, which contradicts the theory. However, a minority of the respondents expressed that they would proceed to another retailer if they did not find any information about the products' climate footprint or similar, which aligns with the third pillar of perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991).

5.1.2 Absence of knowledge about green consumption

According to Chan (1999), a consumer needs green knowledge in making green purchase decisions. However, today's consumers possess a basic knowledge about sustainability. However, according to Sharma and Pal (2020), knowledge is absent in fashion and textile, which is also noticed by the empirical findings in this study. According to Vicente-Molina, Fernandez-Sainz and Izagirre-Olaizola (2013), an absence of knowledge about the environment aligns with less environmentally friendly behaviour. This acknowledgement can be related to the findings where most of the participants paid no attention to whether they bought a garment from a sustainable collection or not based on the information provided on the purchasing website (see **Appendix D, F** & **G**). Many of them also believed that if they had more knowledge

about the different terms and materials, they would probably buy more environmentally friendly fashion online.

The majority of the participants expressed that they will most likely behave differently in the future since they believe they will possess more knowledge about sustainable fashion and textiles. This finding aligns with Peattie's (2010) theory, describing that one contributing factor affecting the attitude-behaviour gap is referring to knowledge. Possessing green knowledge also refers to the recognition of ecologically associated concepts, symbols, and behaviours (Laroche, Bergeron, & Barbaro-Forleo, 2001), which goes in line with the participants' knowledge and recognition of H&M's conscious collection. However, according to the findings, the respondents recognise H&M's conscious collection due to their many previous shopping experiences at this specific brand. According to Kollmus and Agyeman (2002), education can increase people's environmental knowledge, and increased knowledge about sustainability could generate a minimised gap between individuals' attitudes and behaviours (Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002).

5.1.3 The significance of balancing the communication between fashion and sustainability

From the findings in the online observations, it was found that H&M and NA-KD are performing improvements in their production processes, packaging and developing modifications in their products and recycling, which are all green marketing activities according to Polonsky (1994). Furthermore, according to literature, firms performing environmentally friendly actions have a competitive advantage over firms that do not (Polonsky, 1994), indicating that H&M and NA-KD have a competitive advantage over firms that do not perform such sustainable actions. Moreover, as the online observations show, there is a disparity in what the companies do concerning environmentally friendly efforts and how they communicate these efforts to the consumers on the purchasing website (see **Appendix D, E, F** & **G**). If sustainability communication is not sufficient, people will not engage in environmentally friendly actions (Godemann, 2021). Hence, by communicating the efforts H&M and NA-KD present in their sustainability reports on their purchasing website in an explicit way appealing to the consumers, they can effectively achieve engagement in performing environmentally friendly behaviour among consumers (Godemann, 2021).

As the findings from the interviews show, a common desire among the respondents is that they would prefer more precise information that is easy to understand regarding the environmental footprint of each product respectively. Concerning information about recycled materials specifically, the respondents demand clarity on what it means that a garment is recycled, the benefits, and information about the environmental impact of the rest of the material the product is made of that is not recyclable. These findings align with Peirson-Smith and Evans (2017) suggestion that firms should avoid empty words when promoting sustainable clothing for the communication to be effective and influence the consumer for the better. It also sympathises with Bhattacharya and Sen's (2004) theory, emphasising that negative rather than positive information has a more significant impact on the sensitive reactions among consumers.

Some participants also expressed that they would not choose a more environmentally friendly garment as a substitute for other clothing that they prefer in terms of design and other aspects, based on the current information and communication strategies of the retailers (see **Appendix D, E, F** & **G**). Literature suggests that the low willingness to choose an environmentally friendly garment over another clothing the consumer finds more likeable (Niinimäki, 2010), is due to the unnatural association between fashion and sustainability (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). Hence, the retailers need to make sustainable clothing more appealing to the consumers (McNeill & Moore, 2015). According to the findings from the interviews, one way to achieve this is to incorporate sustainable offers in influencer marketing since they have such a significant influence in today's social environment. According to literature, social media is an increasing tool for companies to communicate corporate actions and interact effectively with the end consumer (Reilly & Hynan, 2014). Our findings from the interviews confirm this acknowledgement, as the respondents would favour receiving information about sustainability information through this approach. Moreover, it has been found that social influence has a significant impact on the purchase decision of consumers (Kim & Sirvastava, 2007). Hence, the findings from the interviews sympathise with previous research since it was expressed that if a person they trust promotes environmentally friendly products, they will most likely accept this behaviour and perform it themselves.

Another advantage of using influencers in companies' communication strategies promoting environmentally friendly garments can be related to previous research where it has been stated that the subjective norm includes an individual's anticipated social pressure to perform or not to perform a behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This means that if influencers promote more

environmentally friendly suggestions, consumers would perceive an extensive social pressure to perform an environmentally friendly behaviour when shopping for fashion.

Moreover, the participants expressed that they require information that is intelligible in order for them to consider buying environmentally friendly clothing. Literature suggests that marketers need to use explicit messages when communicating sustainability, which ultimately would lead to enhanced purchase intention of environmentally friendly clothes (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi, 2012). However, the retailers need to balance the given information and still keep it as appealing to the customers as possible (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi, 2012). According to the respondents, they have to put much effort into finding information about the product's ecological footprint or other sustainability efforts (see **Appendix F** & **G**), leaving them confused and not satisfied with the given information. Regarding how visually clear the respondents want the information about environmentally friendly efforts, they expressed that the information should be put directly on the product page, more visible and apparent than other information such as if the garment is a new arrival, in contrast to how it is displayed today (see **Appendix F**).

Since many respondents expressed that they would prefer to buy more environmentally friendly clothing if they knew the benefits it would generate, providing explicitly displayed sustainable information would make the sustainable offer more appealing to the consumers. According to the interview findings, it would have a positive influence on their purchase intention. The respondents' thoughts sympathise with Moisander's (2007) research. He explains the disadvantage of not having enough explicit information displayed in advertising messages as it will require the consumers to be aware of the environment and different available options. In contradiction to what has previously been stated in a research by Annonziato (2001), where terms such as 'sustainable', 'recycled' and 'natural' are negative terms to use in fashion advertising, the findings from the interviews point out that the respondents tend to acknowledge a product being sustainable by reading such terms that Annonziato (2001) claimed not having a positive effect on consumers. As the findings from the interviews show, the offer will not be less appealing, which contradicts theory.

According to literature, the general persuasiveness technique of green products is the minimised impacts on the environment that such alternative has, opposite to other unsustainable alternatives (Schuhwerk & Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). One of the main issues of the difficulty in

encouraging consumers to buy environmentally friendly products is because other aspects such as quality and price are more appealing (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017), which the findings from the interviews confirm as the respondents expressed that the price was a reason for them to not buy sustainable fashion.

5.1.4 Simplification and prioritisation in online message content

Literature suggests that the online shopping process is twofold (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). Consumers start by browsing the website, looking at many clothes simultaneously, and sorting the most favourable pieces. In the second process, the consumer does a more thorough evaluation of the selected items, analysing the benefits of each garment to decide on what garment to purchase finally. The findings from the interviews confirm the literature since the respondents expressed that when shopping online, it is done at a fast pace by looking at many garments simultaneously.

Moreover, the literature suggests that when consumers are impulsive buying, their purchase decisions are influenced by the characteristics of the online environment and the aim of the consumer being in the online environment making a purchase (Parboteeah, Valacich & Wells, 2009). Since the online environment is the only place for retailers to communicate with their customers, the cues in this environment have the power to influence the purchase decision and influence how the consumer searches for the information (Häubl & Trifts, 2000). According to the findings from the interviews, this indicates that the information should be visually clear not only on the product page but also on the browsing page where all the products are displayed in order for the consumer to pay attention to sustainable information (see **Appendix F**). It also indicates that as the online environment is the only place for the firms to interact with their consumers (Häubl & Trifts, 2000), the consumers do not get exposed to the information provided in the sustainability reports, which were examined during the online observations. Hence, according to the respondents, to create an enhanced awareness among consumers to purchase environmentally friendly clothes, they need to use explicit messages on their product page. However, Yan, Hyllegard and Blaesi (2012) emphasise that having too much explicit information may become a distraction when promoting fashion. Nevertheless, as our findings show, the respondents do want clear formulated information that is displayed visually for the consumer to distinguish the information directly in order for it to make them do an environmentally friendly purchase.

As the online observations show, the information communicated in the online environment includes the companies' general climate actions and objectives, including their agreements and contracts with suppliers and others. Additionally, NA-KD presents information about what their recycled materials are made of specifically. However, the information does not include information about the climate footprint of each production line respectively, which was expressed by some of the respondents to be valuable in order to get influenced to make a more environmentally friendly purchase decision based on the communication provided by the retailers. Additionally, they expressed that the information is too complex and hard to understand. The literature suggests that in order for the consumers to perceive the content displayed in the online environment to be of high quality, it should be valuable and accurate for the user, and the content should be complete (Aladwani & Palvia, 2002). The respondents expressed this issue when shown the examples from H&M and NA-KD. Most of them said that the information provided by the retailers was not valuable to them in any aspect as they did not understand the information. They also said that it is not the correct sustainability information they prefer.

Moreover, the literature also suggests that the content quality could be measured by looking at the technical adequacy, meaning the actions taken by the retailers in terms of appropriate technological advancements such as ease of navigation (Aladwani & Palvia, 2002). Moreover, Aladwani and Palvia (2002) also suggest that content quality can be measured by looking at the specific content, which involves how easy it is for the consumer to find helpful information online. Concerning the consumer views of how visually clear the information was on the home page of the purchasing website and the product pages, it can be stated that the respondents did not find the sustainable information displayed in a visually clear manner, which indicates that the ease of navigation of the sustainable information was rather low.

A common opinion among the respondents was that they wanted a detailed overview of the environmental footprint of each product respectively. They expressed that such information would indicate the consequence of their actions and influence their shopping behaviour. This means that individually directed communication ultimately can influence consumer behaviour, which sympathises with literature stating that it is valuable to emphasise the personal advantages of purchasing an environmentally friendly product (Phau & Ong, 2007). The findings indicating that individual benefits influence consumer behaviour also sympathise with

the theory of attitude toward the behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This theory emphasises that the consumer determines if a behaviour is favourable or not (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). This means that if the consumer favours a specific behaviour, they will most likely perform it. Hence, highlighting the individual benefits will most likely result in environmentally friendly behaviour.

5.1.5 Transparency in online communication

The respondents tend to find the information online more sufficient than the information provided in a physical store, as it is more easily displayed according to the respondents. The literature suggests that since consumers do not have the opportunity to interact with the store clerk, the perceived risk increases for the consumers. They may lose trustworthiness by not interacting with sales clerks (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalíu, 2007). However, according to the findings in the consumer interviews, this seems contradictory as they were more satisfied with the information provided in the online environment than in any physical store. The literature also suggests that not to suffer any loss, the consumer searches for cues such as hyperlinks and web borders in the online environment (Hsin Chang & Wen Chen, 2008). As the findings in the interviews show, the consumers seem to find the cues in the online environment sufficient to increase the brand's trustworthiness. Some respondents also said that their trustworthiness increases when they have experience buying from a specific brand. This finding is in accordance with the literature, as it is stated that the brand the consumer is buying from has a positive influence on the trustworthiness of the consumer (Hsin Chang & Wen Chen, 2008).

The findings from the interviews highlight the importance of providing transparent information. As found in the online observations, information about the water usage in the production included that cotton requires a large amount of water. However, other transparent information about the production of the garment is not provided. Additionally, this information is put in small text in the product background (see **Appendix G**). As the online environment is the only place where consumers can search for cues to increase their trustworthiness (Hsin Chang & Wen Chen, 2008), the information previously mentioned include cues that may increase trustworthiness. However, the findings from the interviews indicate that these cues for trustworthiness in the information are too vague. Hence, our study strengthens Hsin Chang and Wen Chen's (2008) theory, saying that trustworthiness is low.

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Moreover, according to the respondents, trusting the information also became problematic when the online observations and interviews revealed that H&M had put information about sustainability targets aimed to be reached by 2020 since that year had passed. Based on the interviews, providing two years old information on the product page makes the consumers wonder if they take their visions seriously or if it is just an approach to seem caring externally to gain consumers by giving them lip service. In relation to what Saha and Darnton (2005) suggest, retailers have to be careful when exposing sustainable information as H&M does to avoid suspicion or distrust regarding the brand's other environmentally friendly marketing strategies when trying to become greener. The findings from the observations can also be related to what Kang and Kim (2017) believe can make consumers start questioning the company's intention of providing information about its sustainability initiatives and achievements, which our findings also indicate.

Moreover, the literature suggests that when firms are developing their communication strategies, it is essential to find a balance between the efforts taken by the companies and the brand's nature (Saha & Darnton, 2005). As the findings from the interviews show, some respondents expressed that it is difficult to find sustainable information from fast fashion companies as trustworthy as they did not find it credible that a garment at that price could be sustainable. As this finding indicates, companies such as H&M and NA-KD should balance the information in accordance with their nature being fast fashion companies, according to Saha and Darnton's (2005) finding. According to the findings from the interviews, they should not confuse the consumers by claiming that the garment is entirely environmentally friendly. Instead, they should be more transparent in displaying other information as well in order to make the information more trustworthy.

The findings from the interviews also revealed that the lack of trustworthiness among consumers might depend on information gained from other sources. As the interviews showed, this information did not benefit fast fashion companies since consumers may trust that information. This underlines the importance of using communication strategically as a powerful tool to affect consumer perceptions and, ultimately, consumer behaviour (Guillen Mandujano, Vergragt, Fischer, 2021). The avoidance of scepticism towards the initiatives taken by the fast fashion retailers online is essential for the companies to prevent impressions of greenwashing, which can lead to abortive attempts to make consumers consume in an environmentally friendly

way (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017). Finally, it can be stated that retailers need to choose appropriate tactics when communicating sustainability to avoid distrust (Saha & Danton, 2005).

5.2 Discussion

In this chapter, the two research questions of this study will be outlined with an amplification of the significant discoveries to achieve the purpose of the thesis. The discussion will revolve around the identifications considered as most prominent and those which provided the research with the most exciting insights concerning the factors affecting the attitude-behaviour gap and the most significant aspects in retailers' communication strategies that lead to higher purchase intention of green products.

The first question this study had the objective to answer was: *what factors in the online retail environment lead to the inconsistency between female consumers' attitudes and actual behaviour toward purchasing environmentally friendly?*

One major discovery during the analysis was that the responsibility to close the attitude-behaviour gap lies on the retailers. The factors leading to the appearance of the attitude-behaviour gap have been outlined in the analysis, and this is the first study to our knowledge to examine the factors in the online environment specifically. Moreover, it is also the first study to our knowledge to investigate the communication strategies used by retailers in the online environment to inform the consumers about their sustainability actions. The data is broadly consistent with the major trends in the literature as to the attitude-behaviour gap existing because of consumers not being aware of the negative consequences of their actions (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995), as well as the consumers lacking knowledge about what sustainable information signify (Park & Lin, 2020). However, our findings show what the consumer requires in order for them to be persuaded by and acknowledge the information regarding sustainability. The reason for the responsibility laying on the retailers can be explained by the results from the analysis, which indicated that the factors leading to the attitude-behaviour gap, i.e. knowledge, awareness, trust, simplification in message content, as well as the ability to balance the communication of sustainability and fashion, are all aspects that are subjects for improvement on behalf of the retailer.

In contrast to some reports in the literature, one difference was found relating to factors that lead to the inconsistency between attitude and behaviour. Previous studies found that behaviours of consumers are associated with individual attitudes (Guagnano, Stern & Dietz, 1995). However, our study showed that a central factor leading to the attitude-behaviour gap is the influence the consumer receives from their social environment involving external factors such as influencers, social media and others. Another contrasting finding was that sustainable information not necessarily has to be unappealing for the consumer, as Annonziato's (2001) research suggests. Our results describe for the first time that consumers find it captivating being presented with such information in the communication by the retailers, viewing it as a positive characteristic making the retailer trustworthy and ultimately influencing them to make a green purchase.

Furthermore, our findings support previous research regarding sustainable strategic messages lacking descriptive meaning (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017) since our results demonstrate how information regarding sustainability in fast fashion clothing is displayed and perceived in the online environment influences the inconsistency between attitude and behaviour. However, this is the first study, to our knowledge, to find that consumers think that there is a lack of clarification and find it difficult to distinguish the environmentally friendly options when browsing the purchase page of a fast fashion online retailer. Additionally, our results can explain 'the path to purchase' (Lewis & Stanley, 2012). Nevertheless, our findings build upon this theory, indicating that the decrease in the potential of buying a green product is because of the lack of displayed information.

Another main finding of this study was the low willingness to substitute fashion clothes with fully green clothes. This data is broadly consistent with the significant trends in the literature as to the finding that the association between fashion and sustainability is not natural anticipation (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). This study shows that consumers prioritise the garment's design rather than the product being sustainable. Consequently, this leads to the attitude-behaviour gap as the factor of the clothing being sustainable is not considered when consuming fashion clothes, leading to the attitude-behaviour gap.

The second question this thesis had the aim to answer was: *what aspects of retailers' communication strategies lead to higher green purchase intention according to consumers?*

This study indicates that transparency in the communication strategies was a major part of the consumers to obtain an intention to consume environmentally friendly. These results concur with other studies that show that providing transparency could lead to customer loyalty. The consumer willingness to make a purchase decision increases as the company provides information about the production process (Kim, Kim & Rothenberg, 2020). These results are of direct practical relevance as they indicate what aspects of the communication strategies lead to higher green purchase intention.

Another recurrent discovery in the analysis concerned consumer satisfaction with the information provided in the online environment. The retailers need to incorporate details about the actual climate footprints of each product line produced, which to our knowledge is information that only exists in the sustainability reports today. It has been discovered that this information has a significant impact on the consumer's purchase intention. These discoveries strengthen previous research arguing that the purchase website might be the only way for online retailers to provide the consumers with cues that influence the purchase decision (Häubl & Trifts, 2020).

As highlighted before, consumers find it hard to balance being fashionable and sustainable, which is broadly consistent with previous research concerning the difficulty of choosing between green and fashion (Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011). Our results show that environmentally friendly products have to be as appealing as products that are not in order for the consumer not to put the aspect of upholding a green lifestyle as a secondary aspect. The concept of sustainability has to be embraced differently in online communication to increase its status for the consumers, which our results mean is necessary for retailers to imply.

6. Conclusions and contributions

The present study was designed to determine what factors within the online environment affect the attitude-behaviour gap and what aspects of retailers' communication strategies lead to higher green purchase intention according to consumers. The investigation and the results of these elements have generated a conceptual framework including critical elements in the online environment affecting green consumer behaviour. This study has not investigated if the elements lead to actual green behaviour. However, the elements illustrate factors that influence increased green consumer behaviour. The framework intends to conclude and present the contributions of this study and depict a coherent illustration of the most prominent and encompassing influential factors. Suppose the three elements in the framework are aligned. In that case, we believe the possibility that the attitude toward the consumption of sustainable fast fashion online will increase and become consistent with actual behaviour.
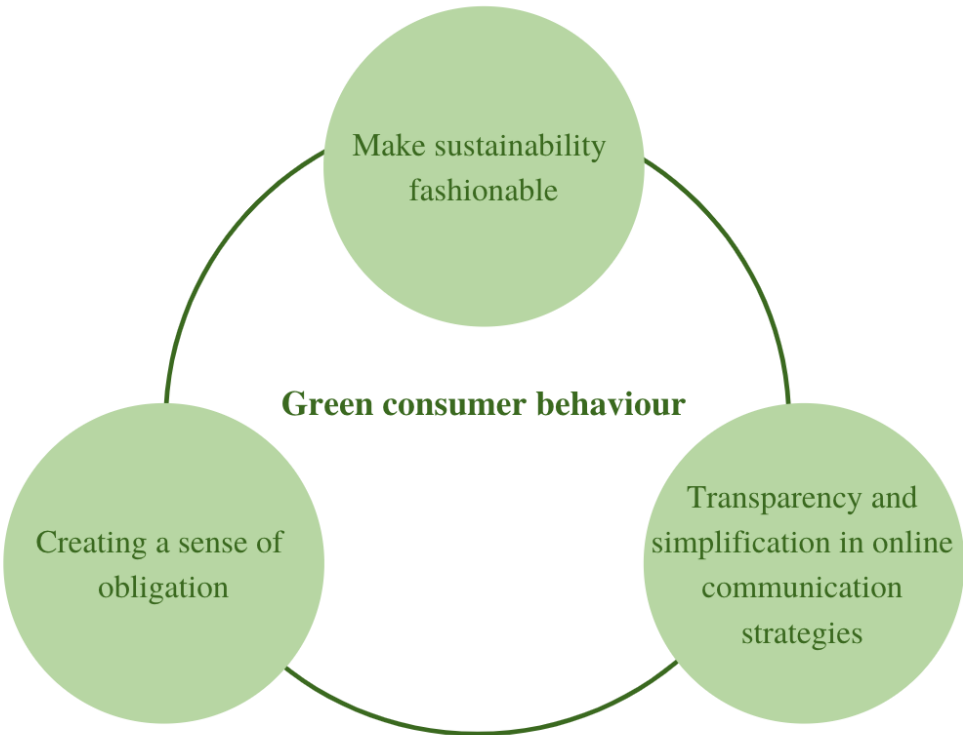
Figure 5: The green consumer behaviour alignment

The first circle in the framework represents one of the more significant findings to emerge from this study, namely the issue of making sustainability fashionable. A recurrent theme in this

study was that being green is often secondary, and being fashionable is primary since consumers make their purchase decision based on aspects such as design and style rather than making a green purchase. We emphasise the importance of balancing the aspects of being sustainable and fashionable, as it is one of the essential drivers of increasing green consumer behaviour. The relevance of this conclusion is supported by the current findings in this study, indicating that social influence and situational factors affect the gap between attitude and behaviour of making a green purchase decision. The results indicate that it is highly relevant to integrate sustainability communication into other channels in order for the communication to be influential, making the association between fashion and sustainability a natural interpretation. By finding the balance between communicating sustainability and fashion, it is believed that green consumer behaviour can increase.

The second circle includes another significant finding illustrating the importance of online communication being transparent and easy to understand. It can be concluded that online communication has to include transparency as it affects the trustworthiness of the company. Incorporating transparency in communication online means displaying detailed information about the product's environmental impact. This allows the consumer to distinguish the environmentally friendly products, making the green consumer journey more efficient as the green products become more eminent. The study has also shown that consumers are more susceptible to information provided in the online environment, which is practical evidence of the online environment being the appropriate platform for retailers to communicate their sustainability actions. This underlines the importance of incorporating transparency and simplification in online communication.

This study has also identified the importance of incorporating simplification in online communication strategies. It is of high relevance to simplify the provided information because of the high pace in consumers' online consumer behaviour since this behaviour has a major impact on how consumers perceive retailers' communication strategies online. If the information is not sufficiently explicit, consumers do not acknowledge it. The information has to be presented visually apparent on the browsing website and the product page, making the information easy to distinguish from other information and implying a sense of directness.

The third circle within the framework concerns the importance of creating a sense of consumer obligation. The appearance of this element derives from the acknowledgement indicating that

the aspect of sustainability does not have any major impact on the purchase decision. The intention to perform environmentally friendly has been established. However, the results of this study show that this intention does not turn into actual behaviour. This indicates that factors not concerning sustainability are more influential when shopping for fashion online, which leads to the inconsistency between attitude and behaviour. Consequently, the consumer has to sense a form of obligation to actually perform a green behaviour at the last stage of the consumer journey. This means defining what aspects of online communication that create a sense of consumer obligation. Accordingly, the element of creating a sense of consumer obligation aligns with the other two elements in the framework, illustrating two major factors that guide and create a sense of obligation. How the consumer is led by the retailer in the online environment depends mainly on how the company communicates the sustainable information, emphasising the importance of being more explicitly clear and direct. The connection to the other circle refers to the retailer's need to lead and change the interpretation of being fashionable and sustainable, making the association more natural.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

Firstly, this study strengthens the acknowledgement of the attitude-behaviour gap. Hence, this thesis builds upon Brosdahl & Carpenter (2016), Carey (2009), Dhir et al.'s (2021), Kim and Damhorst (1998), and Lewis and Stanley's (2012) theories of the inconsistency in attitude and behaviour when consuming environmentally friendly apparel. However, this thesis contributes with further ideas on factors leading to the attitude-behaviour gap in consuming environmentally friendly, previously examined by Bray, Johns and Kilburn (2011), shedding light on external situational factors such as social influence, availability of substitutes of clothes, price and transparency. The present thesis contributes with that personal knowledge is a considerable factor influencing the attitude-behaviour gap. Moreover, it also extends research with factors affecting the attitude-behaviour gap in the online environment specifically. These factors include making sustainability fashionable, transparency and simplification in online communication, and creating a sense of consumer obligation.

Secondly, a principal theoretical implication of this study is that consumers do not intend to perform a green behaviour if an unsustainable option that is more appealing than a sustainable option is available, which strengthens Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour involving the attitude toward behaviour. Furthermore, the findings expand the already existing theory

about subjective norms outlined by Ajzen (1991) with knowledge about external pressures to perform or not perform a certain behaviour, indicating that external factors such as consumers' social environment impact their ultimate behaviour.

Thirdly, another predominant theory this study has been permeated by is the theory about message content. Consequently, this study agrees with the difficulties retailers have in providing satisfying green communication messages to consumers in the online environment (Townsend & Niemtzow, 2015). The study also confirms the previous research indicating that communicating green initiatives is only used as a marketing strategy (Ertz, François, & Durif, 2017; Kang & Kim, 2017) by strengthening the theory conducted by Saha and Darnton (2005) by its indications of suspicion toward green communication strategies. It highlights the importance of selecting the desired and appropriate information in order to increase a consumer's intention to make more sustainable purchasing decisions. Undoubtedly, this research enhances transparency as one of the prime facets of the theory of message content and as a way to prevent the perception of greenwashing.

6.2 Managerial implications

This thesis has provided a deeper insight into aspects of retailers' communication strategies that leads to a higher intention of purchasing green. There is no doubt that sustainable consumption will lead the fashion industry. However, this study demonstrates that it is in the retailer's hands to guide the consumers to purchase sustainable clothing. Green apparel needs to become the primary choice and the association between fashion and sustainability have to become natural anticipation. Consequently, this study reinforces the recommendation to introduce messages illustrating elements of sustainable consequences in the purchasing process. A more thorough investigation of why retailers do not put more emphasis on their sustainability initiatives in the online purchasing environment has not been investigated. However, this study reinforces the recommendation for the adoption of displaying explicit sustainable information in the online environment to create a sense of obligation with the consumer and become transparent.

Since this study encompasses a consumer perspective provided by a qualitative approach, it has contributed with insights into consumers' way of thinking and acting within the field of consumption of fast fashion in the online environment. The findings contribute considerably to the need for retailers to be aware that their communication strategies are overlooked if not

demonstrated in accordance with consumers' online shopping behaviour, as well as an urgent need for transparency and simplification in the communication online. An implementation of carefully considered strategies in their communication practices may yield green consumption behaviour. Moreover, the results are of practical relevance, as they have identified the application of influencers in retailers' communication strategies. Through a collaboration between retailers and social influencers on social media retailers can guide the consumers in choosing green apparel.

6.3 Limitations and recommendations for future study

One limitation of this study was to investigate consumers' online behaviour and intention to perform a green purchase decision and actual behaviour, conceptualising different barriers in the online environment that lead to the attitude-behaviour gap. This study shows the great significance of making the association between sustainability and fashion natural anticipation. Further research should therefore examine how sustainability can become fashionable and a primary choice when consuming fashion.

Another question raised in this study is whether the research of aspects in the online environment that leads to the attitude-behaviour gap is applicable to other fields other than the consumption of fast fashion. The interview findings discovered that the respondents experienced an absence of regulations in the fashion industry, however, had acknowledged that regulations do exist in the food industry. Hence, future studies should apply the present research to other fields, such as home furniture or food consumption, in order to investigate if the attitude-behaviour gap is as significant in such industries as in the fast fashion industry.

Another limitation of this study is that the collected data is limited to firms' sustainability reports and purchasing websites. A natural progression would be to collect data through interviews with content marketing managers or others within the field of marketing at the studied companies. This approach would generate elements from the company's perspectives, revealing their intentions with their current communication strategies. However, it is important to remember that one strength of this study is that the empirical data collected from retailers do not have any partial elements, which interviews with company representatives may have. Moreover, it could also be beneficial to look into retailers' social media marketing strategies, as the findings from the consumer interviews showed that consumers' acknowledgements of

fast fashion retailers' sustainability actions were perceived through social media. By collecting further empirical data in this way, additional elements and themes could be identified in order to understand the reasons for the inconsistency in attitude and behaviour.

Since one finding in this study was that consumers lack knowledge of environmentally friendly fashion, including materials and other aspects, research conducted a few years from now could gain new insights regarding the existence of the attitude-behaviour gap. It would be interesting to examine if the same aspects leading to the attitude-behaviour gap still exist, as sustainable lifestyles are increasing and consumers are more experienced with the phenomenon of green clothing. Will the demanded communication factors online that are supposed to empower consumers to perform environmentally friendly purchase decisions be replaced in a couple of years - this is a question raised while this study was conducted.

This study was limited to studying the attitude-behaviour gap of young female adults. Hence, a natural progression is conducting a study involving other segments such as men and a more comprehensive age range. Furthermore, including a wider sample is applicable, using a quantitative research philosophy. A quantitative research would most likely provide more generally applicable results compared to a qualitative approach limited to 15 interviews as in the present study. However, it should be remembered that the strength of this study is the in-depth understanding of the critical factors affecting the attitude-behaviour gap. It is believed that a quantitative study would not generate such insights since a survey does not enable a thorough explanation from the participants' perspectives.

Ultimately, it is worth mentioning that during this study, H&M has started an implementation process of displaying the Higg Index tool on each product page. This program includes the option for consumers to evaluate the environmental impact of an individual product included in the conscious collection. The Higg Index demonstrate the percentage of decreased effect of global warming in each production line i.e., less fossil fuels used, less water used and less water pollution. Hence, our recommendation for future study is to evaluate what impact this new implementation and communication strategy has on consumers' purchase intention of green apparel. It would have been interesting to examine if this instrument is valuable for consumers, and if it is a factor influencing the attitude-behaviour gap.

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Appendix A: Participant letter sent to University students

Hello!

Are you identifying yourself as a woman between the age of 18 and 35? And do you usually purchase clothes from fast fashion companies (e.g. H&M and Zara)?

In that case, you are the perfect candidate for our study. We are two students at Lund University studying the Master's programme in International Marketing and Brand Management. We are currently writing our master thesis, and are looking for candidates to take part in our study.

What are we asking from you? We want to conduct an interview, where we will ask questions about your consumption habits. Depending on what fits you the best, it will take place digitally on Teams/Zoom or physically in Lund. Everyone that participates will have the chance to win a gift card at Filmstaden for 100 SEK, there will be three gift cards in the lottery.

Do you want to help two students achieve their master's degrees? And also help contribute to academic research? Please participate!

If you are willing to participate, or have any further questions, contact us! sonjalinnea.svensson@gmail.com or emeliepersson97@gmail.com.

Yours faithfully,

Linnea Svensson and Emelie Persson

Appendix B: Post published in Facebook groups

Hello!

Our names are Linnea and Emelie, and we study the master's program in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University.

We are currently writing our final master's thesis before we graduate this summer and are in great need of interviewees for our study!

We write about the behaviour of consumers online (between the ages of 18 to 35) and online companies' communication strategies. The interview would last digitally for 30-45 minutes, and you who participate are competing for a gift card of 100 SEK at Filmstaden!

If you are willing to participate, you are warmly welcome to write me a DM!

Stylish greetings from Linnea Svensson and Emelie Persson!

Appendix C: Interview guide

- Do you usually purchase clothes online?
- When was the last time you purchased clothes online?
- Can you describe the process in-depth?

- What attributes are important when choosing an online retailer?
- How do you make a purchase decision when hesitating between different apparel online?

- Do you search for information about the garment on the website you are purchasing from?
- How do you find the information?
- Do you think that the information you gain on the website satisfies your needs, regarding what kind of information you seek?
- Do you trust the information received from the retailer's website?

- What are your opinions regarding fast fashion?
- Are you aware that some fast fashion companies do have collections that consist of, among other things, products that are more sustainable materials etc.?

- Do you have an intention to consume environmentally friendly? How? Why?
- Do you think environmentally friendly consumption is important? Why?
- How do you know you are being environmentally friendly when shopping online?
- How do you think you could be more environmentally friendly when shopping online?
- Do you think that your social environment (e.g. online retailers) supports and/or influences you to consume in an environmentally friendly manner? How?
  - o How do you think they could be more supportive?

- Do you think that you would buy more eco-friendly clothes if you gained more sufficient information about the product background?
- What kind of aspects are you evaluating when looking at sustainable information about the garment?

- Is information about the garment important to you when you are purchasing environmentally-friendly clothing?

- If you compare the information you gain in a physical store and online - where do you think you get the most satisfying information about the product? Why?

- *Show examples from NA-KD and H&M* - do you think this information is enough for you to gain an understanding of the ecological footprint of this specific product?
- Is there any information you are missing? Elaborate!
- What information is needed for you to make a decision to buy more environmentally friendly, do you think?

- Finally, do you think that you are behaving in accordance with your attitude when you consume?
- Do you have anything you want to add?

Appendix D: Landing page purchasing website H&M
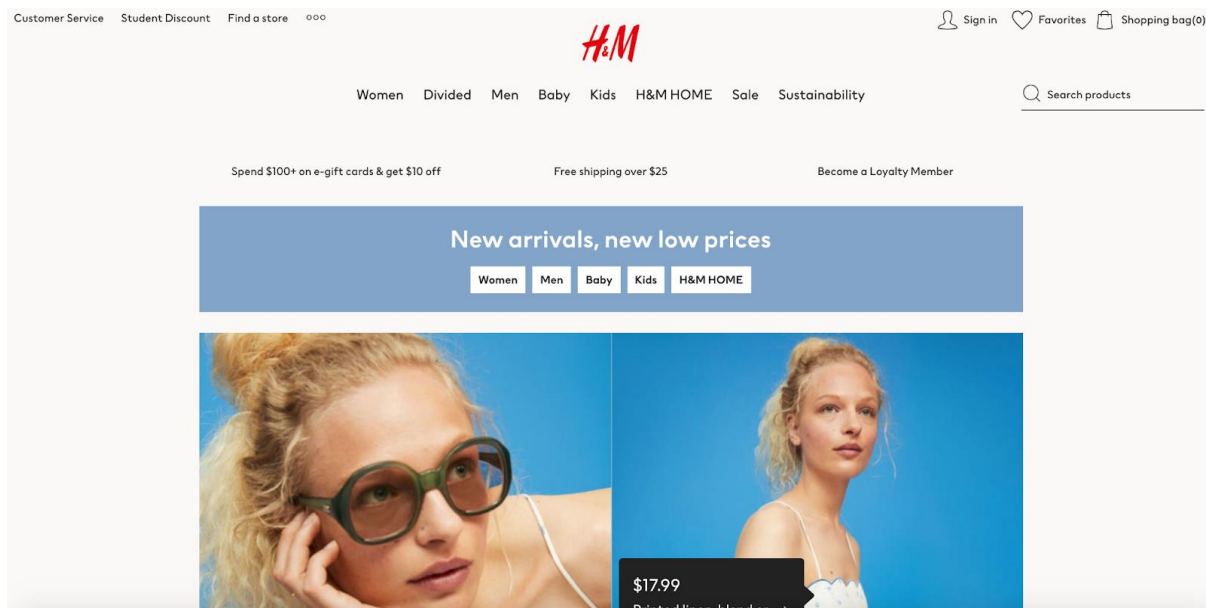
H&M. (n.d.). H&M, Available online: https://www2.hm.com/en_us/index.html [Accessed 26 May]

Appendix E: Landing page conscious collection H&M

H&M. (n.d.). Conscious Choice, Available online:

https://www2.hm.com/en_us/women/sustainability/our-products.html [Accessed 26 May]
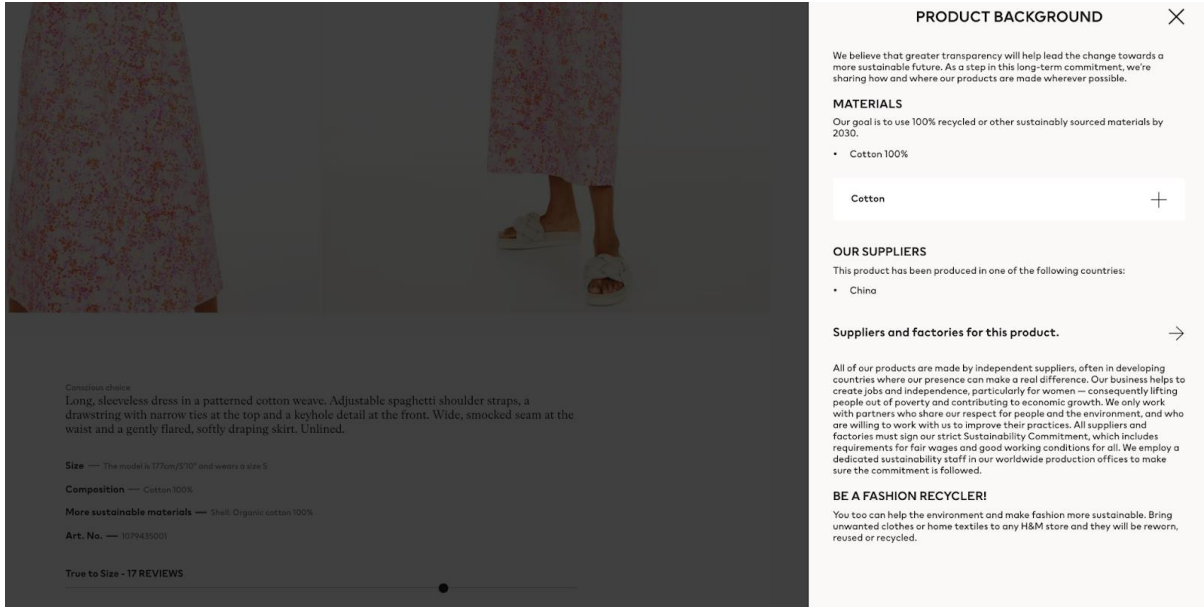
Appendix F: Product landing page H&M
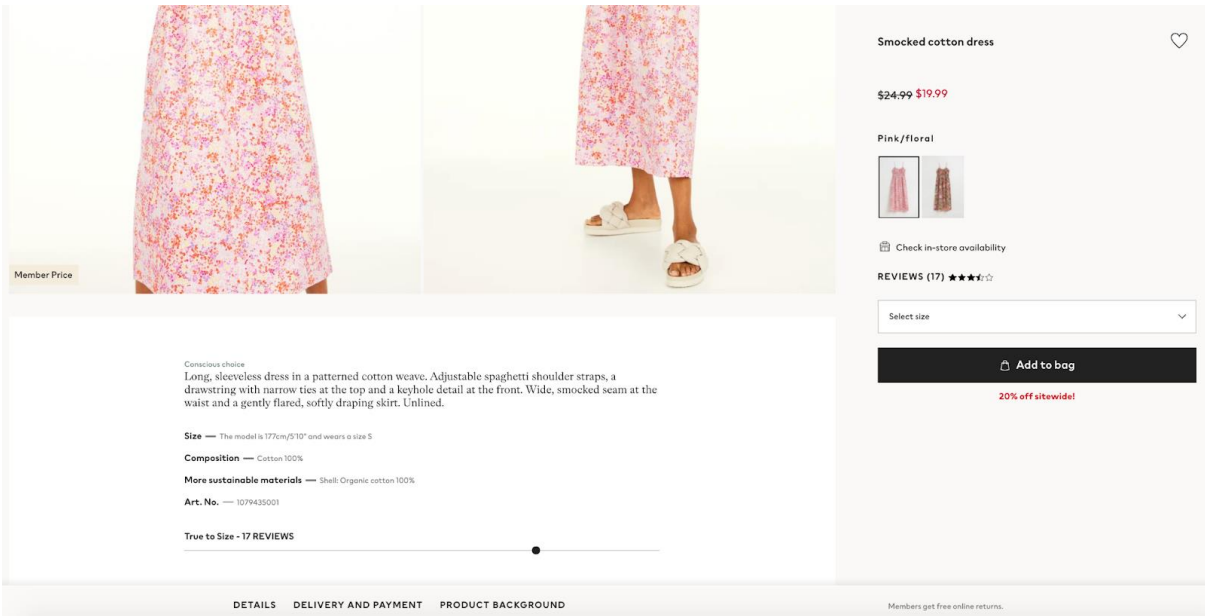
H&M. (n.d.). Smocked Cotton Dress, Available online:

https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.1079435001.html [Accessed 26 May]

Appendix G: Product background information H&M

H&M. (n.d.). Product background, Available online:

https://www2.hm.com/en_us/productpage.1079435001.html [Accessed 26 May]

Appendix H: Landing page purchasing website NA-KD
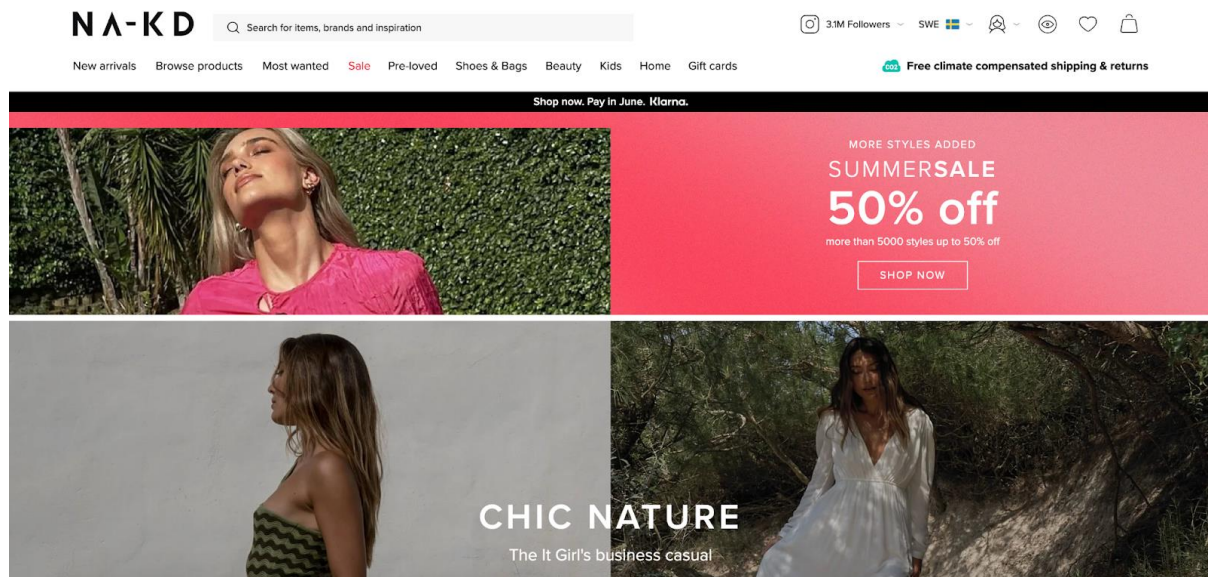
NA-KD. (n.d.). NA-KD, Available online: https://www.na-kd.com/en [Accessed 26 May]

Appendix I: Landing page conscious collection NA-KD

NA-KD. (n.d.). Reborn Collection, Available online: https://www.na-kd.com/en/reborn-collection [Accessed 26 May]

Appendix J: Product landing page NA-KD

NA-KD. (n.d.). Recycled Drawstring Chest Maxi Dress, Available online: https://www.na-kd.com/en/products/drawstring-chest-maxi-dress-whiteyellow-flower-1014-001447-9158 [Accessed 26 May]

Appendix K: Product background information NA-KD

NA-KD. (n.d.). Recycled Drawstring Chest Maxi Dress, Available online: https://www.na-kd.com/en/products/drawstring-chest-maxi-dress-whiteyellow-flower-1014-001447-9158 [Accessed 26 May]