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Understanding consumer's view on sustainable fashion and its influence on their consumption

by

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Abstract

This research explores how sustainable fashion fits into our social landscape, emphasizing its importance due to the fashion industry's growing environmental concerns. With the fashion industry facing environmental challenges, the integration of fashion with sustainability becomes imperative for its evolution in the future. To address this, fashion brands have begun integrating sustainable practices into their operations, communicating these efforts to consumers. To gain insights into how young consumers perceive sustainable fashion, a qualitative study was conducted involving 12 interviews and video ads with young people between 20- and 39-years old living in Sweden.

This study provides a comprehensive review of theories surrounding sustainable fashion, consumer relationships, business models, and communication strategies, aligning them with insights gathered from interviews. Through data analysis, three key consumer views on sustainable fashion emerge: distrust due to lack of transparency, an ethical and emotionally aware mindset, and perceptions of inconsistent and contradictory communication.

Recommendations for the future fashion industry include prioritizing sustainability education for consumers and implementing initiatives to track and audit brand practices. Video advertisements, predominantly appealing to consumers' emotional responses, align with the Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM), indicating different effectiveness based on consumer knowledge levels.

Practical implications highlight the importance of understanding consumer perceptions and behaviors in sustainable fashion. Companies must adapt marketing strategies to align with consumer expectations for transparency and authenticity, fostering greater environmental consciousness in the fashion industry. Failure to address consumer skepticism and doubts regarding sustainable practices may render communication efforts ineffective for the future.

Keywords: sustainability, sustainable fashion, consumers perceptions, greenwashing, sustainable practices, ethics, values, norms, communication

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1 Introduction

"The private sector is an indispensable partner for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Businesses can contribute as part of their core business. We therefore call on companies around the world to measure the impact of their actions, set ambitious targets and communicate their progress transparently."

– Ban Ki-moon, former Secretary-General of the United Nations (Sengupta, 2021)

1.1 Background

According to Agarwal and Kumar (2021) over the past 30 years, sustainability studies in marketing have focused on consumer behavior, corporate advertising, eco seals and regulations, green washing, and pricing and strategies in green advertising.

“Philip Kotler first explained societal marketing and its impact on consumerism (Kotler, 1972). From societal marketing the trend transitioned to sustainable development. The term sustainable development was defined in the 1987 World Commission for Environment and Development and its Brundtland Report, also known as “Our Common Future,” as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations, 1987, cited in Agarwal & Kumar, 2021).

Over the years, this term has been adopted in marketing as socially responsible activities that generate a positive impact on the environment, developing products that are directly considered eco-friendly or developing actions in different business sectors, committing to environmental causes. Some of these initiatives according to Gavin (2019) creating climate funds to reduce its carbon footprint, using sustainable ingredients and eco-friendly packaging materials, encouraging customers to repair and reuse their products, and encouraging employee time for philanthropic efforts.

“Climate change, economic inequality, and other global challenges that impact communities worldwide have compelled companies to be purpose-driven and contribute to the greater good.” (Gavin, 2019, n.p.). Therefore, the fashion industry has a significant impact on global challenges, for its environmental impact in resource consumption, pollution, waste, and in terms of labor practices and communities' well-being. The crisis in the fashion world has been accentuated in recent years, especially in apparel manufacturing in a way opposite to sustainability. This illustrates the importance of conducting this study, of understanding sustainable fashion consumption.

Communication of sustainable fashion has become increasingly important and have grown over the past few years. According to Da Giau et al. (2016), "sustainable communication" refers to a collection of tactics and related behaviors that are important for spreading knowledge about an organization's social and environmental policies. Businesses are required to produce collections with an ecological focus and provide reports on sustainability (Rutter et al. (2017).

Additionally, Corporate sustainability communications (CSC) are communications regarding sustainability that are widely used by corporations (Signitzer and Prexl, 2007), as well as advertising to promote companies' actions. Banerjee et al (1995) defined this advertising, usually called green advertising as commercial ("paid for") communication that showcases the business's eco-friendly goods, services, and features that can be distributed through a variety of media, including print, television, and company websites. At the same time, in a study made by Maziriri (2020), green promotion plays a key role in boosting company's competitive advantage and financial success.

In this study, I have explored sustainable fashion communication to understand how consumers view it.

1.2 Problematization

This research is positioned within the field of marketing and consumer research and within the literature body of sustainable fashion.

Previous research on sustainable fashion has explored ethical clothing (Reimers et al. 2016; Carey & Cervellon 2014), eco-fashion (Niinimäki, 2010; Fu and Kim 2019), slow fashion (Jung & Jin 2016; Sung & Wu 2019), and environmentally sustainable apparel (Kim & Jin, 2019).

Scholars in sustainable fashion literature have studied behaviors of various industry participants (Fletcher & Tham, 2015; Ozdamar-Ertekin et al., 2020), factors that influence consumer practices (Dabas & Whang, 2022; Sheran & Webb, 2016; Niinimäki et al, 2020), such as personal values (Dabas & Whang, 2022) and psychological determinants (Joanes et al., 2020), brands communication of sustainability to consumers (Brydges et al, 2022; Fletcher & Tham, 2015), current and future directions of sustainable fashion (Mukendi et al., 2020; Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2014), and green advertising (Agarwal & Kumar, 2021, Segev et al. 2016).

However, consumers' understanding of sustainable fashion communication remains understudied, particularly. To address this limitation, in this research I have studied: How do consumers view sustainable fashion and its influence on consumption. I have interviewed young consumers in Sweden to explore their understanding of sustainable fashion communication.

1.3 Research Motivation

The relationship between sustainable studies and sustainable fashion is essential to address environmental and social challenges within the fashion industry. Fashion and sustainability are divergent, not compatible, so it is important to understand how fashion and sustainability discourses are viewed. Given the increasing emphasis on sustainability in Sweden and the expanding usage of eco-friendly marketing efforts by the apparel sector, there is a crucial need to understand better how young consumers respond to these tactics.

Research on consumers' interactions with sustainability-focused marketing campaigns is therefore significantly needed because it will help companies to have a better understanding of the consumer so that they can redesign their marketing tactics towards sustainable fashion and the creation of greater environmental awareness in the fashion sector.

1.4 Aimed Theoretical Contribution

This study aims to contribute to the literature on sustainable fashion within consumer research/marketing by expanding our understanding of how consumers view these sustainable fashion discourses, in particular, to understand the views of young adult consumers in Sweden.

1.5 Research Context

To understand consumer' views on sustainable fashion consumption, I have used Sweden as an empirical context. Environmental sustainability has been a major concern these days in Europe, especially in Sweden. Although the total share of global carbon emissions in Europe is quite low, these countries have been actively working on eco-friendly initiatives. (Statista, [2023a](#)). European countries have significantly controlled the carbon emissions which shows their intent towards the crises. (Statista, [2023b](#)). All the key stakeholders are taking revolutionary steps to contribute their role in protection of climate related challenges. Given that industries significantly impact on the current climate crises, state leaders have proactively collaborative efforts to address this emerging issue. They are implementing measures to regulate industrial emissions and promote eco-friendly production processes for goods. To overcome this challenge, the Conference of the Parties (COP) was founded in 1995. During these annual gatherings, state leaders come together to tackle this urgent issue, as the world temperature was dropping down each passing day (Statista, [2024](#)).

I have studied views of young consumers in Sweden because this country is known for its commitment to sustainability, exemplified by a range of eco-friendly initiatives. These include electric public transport, bike-friendly infrastructure, district heating system, bottle recycling

programs, and secondhand stores. There are many Swedish companies which also started presenting more sustainability related content in their advertisements as they want to attract a generation of young adults as consumers. This generation is quite vocal about sustainability and often engage in conversations about climate change in many aspect (Statista, [2023c](#)).

This growing awareness about environmental sustainability, has resulted in a shift in marketing methods in the clothing business, as Swedish companies increasingly incorporate sustainability-focused material into their brand marketing. This study will include young adults or GenZ and Millennials because these consumers are highly educated, tech-savvy and community oriented. They have a strong sense of social responsibility, and 59% of them express genuine interest in leading change in sustainable development. They understand the “why” of being ecologically friendly but have difficulty in the “how” to get involved ([Deloitte, 2023](#); Su et al. [2019](#)). Previous studies have also discussed that Swedish Generation Z also considers price factors when making product choices, especially since many of them rely on student loans throughout their university years (Björnler et al. [2022](#)). Young consumers participate actively in prioritizing buying decisions that consider the planet’s well-being more than other generations (Li & Vigren, 2020; Sønderskov & Daugbjerg, 2010; Morel & Kwakye, 2012).

Companies aiming to appeal to the environmentally concerned young adult’s demographic confront a significant challenge. It is therefore important that they comprehend the way this group thinks, perceive, and makes decisions.

Also, considering the importance of advertisements as a marketing strategy to attract consumers, during my interview with respondents, I have used three videos that promote sustainability practices of three brands: H&M, Vinted and Fjällräven, to know the perceptions and reactions of consumers. The reason for using the videos is to probe responses of the interviewees by communicating the information offered by the brands.

1.6 Delimitations

In this study, the qualitative method will be used because the aim is to know the perceptions and opinions of a group of people knowledgeable about sustainable fashion, through interviews.

Regarding the subjects, the study is limited to the type of sample composition: young people between 20- and 39-years old studying in Sweden.

The participants are of different nationalities (Swedish, African, Asian, Croatian, Ecuadorian), a characteristic that gives them a different perspective because, coming from different cultures, this may influence their perception of the phenomenon under study.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

The private sector plays a crucial role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals, with companies urged to measure impacts, set targets, and communicate progress transparently. Over the past 30 years, sustainability in marketing has evolved, focusing on consumer behavior, corporate advertising, greenwashing, and eco-friendly strategies. The fashion industry, significantly impacting the environment and society, is increasingly adopting sustainable practices like using eco-friendly materials and promoting product reuse. However, effectively communicating these efforts to build consumer trust remains a challenge.

This research examines how sustainable fashion communication influences consumer perceptions, focusing on young consumers in Sweden. Despite extensive research on sustainable fashion, consumer understanding of sustainability messages is still limited. Through interviews with young consumers, this study explores their views on sustainable fashion communication. Sweden's strong commitment to sustainability and the eco-conscious attitudes of its youth make it an ideal context for this investigation.

The study aims to provide insights for companies to improve their sustainability communication strategies, helping businesses redesign their marketing to foster greater environmental awareness and authentic sustainability practices. By understanding young consumers' perceptions, this research contributes to the broader literature on sustainable fashion and consumer behavior, emphasizing the need for transparent communication to build trust and encourage sustainable consumption.

2 Literature Review

For the present research, literature on sustainable development, sustainable fashion, theories that analyze sustainable fashion, the relationship between sustainable studies and the consumer, sustainable fashion and business models and communication of sustainable fashion has been reviewed.

2.1 Sustainable studies and sustainable fashion

The relationship between sustainable studies and sustainable fashion is essential to address environmental and social challenges within the fashion industry. The vast field of sustainable studies looks at sustainable behaviors (Javed et al., 2020; Rahman et al., 2023), policies (Bokolo, 2023; Ishak & Thiruchelvam, 2024), and practices (Islam et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021) in a variety of contexts, beyond fashion, such as energy, agriculture, urban planning, and natural resource management. However, sustainable studies contribute to understanding the impact of fashion on the environment and society because the fashion industry utilizes a big number of non-renewable resources to produce clothes, shoes and accessories, and significantly contributes to the climate and ecological crisis, both directly and indirectly (Condé Nast, n.d.). First, the meaning of sustainable fashion must be analyzed.

2.1.1 Sustainable fashion

The expansion of the concept of sustainable fashion has changed in the last three decades. The broadest definition made by Gardetti, 2018, about sustainable fashion is that "during the development and use of a garment no harm was done to people or the planet". At the same time, sustainable fashion can be defined as "clothing which incorporates one or more aspects of social and environmental sustainability" (Su et al., 2019, p. 1141). These aspects include fair trading principles and using materials that bring no harm to the environment (Chang et al., 2018; Goworek et al., 2012).

Various perspectives exist regarding sustainable fashion. While many focus on the environmental aspect, some also highlight the social dimension. According to Kim & Jin (2019), recycled or "upcycle" clothing, which "means to recycle or reuse something in a way that increases the value of the original object." (Cassidy & Han, 2017; Taubenfeld, 2023), and second-hand clothing are also considered within the concept of sustainable fashion, not just new clothing.

Previous studies on sustainable fashion:

Different studies have been conducted over the years on sustainable fashion, considering that the fashion world changes rapidly and incorporates new options or techniques to reach consumers. Busalim et al (2022), Jim Gam (2011), and Kang et al. (2013) indicate that most consumer-focused articles emphasize environmental (climate and resources protection) and economic dimensions, often overlooking the social aspects (related to fair trade, labor practices, ethical fashion consumption).

On the determinants of sustainable fashion consumption, Joanes et al. (2020) applied the Comprehensive action determination model (CADM), that combines three existing models related to environmentally friendly attitudes and consumer actions: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985; Ajzen, 1987), the Normative Activation Model (NAM) (Schwartz, 1977), and the Normative Value Belief Theory (VBN) (Stern, 2000). According to CADM, intentions are the primary predictor of behavior, and perceived behavioral control is directly linked to behavior. In their study they conclude that personal and social norms are important factors influencing the intention to reduce consumption. Although people may intend to reduce their clothing consumption, they often do not act on those intentions, reflecting a gap between intention and behavior. Personal norms (moral beliefs that play a big role in motivation) have a stronger and direct relationship with intentions to reduce consumption than social norms. Although they are important to a lesser extent because people tend to follow social norms more when their behavior is easily noticeable by others (Vesely & Klöckner, 2018).

Based on these findings, Joanes et al. (2020) recommend that to make people aware of why they should reduce their clothing consumption, relevant and specific information is needed thoroughly large-scale ads, by mentioning more customize details that can be more effective. For example, by explaining water and energy savings if only one person reduces it's clothing consumption, and reflecting on impulsive purchases can help raise awareness of unnecessary spending and lead to reduced consumption in the future.

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping consumers' perspectives on sustainable fashion products. Researchers have observed differences in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior related to sustainability across various cultures in the global marketplace.” (Mostafa 2007; Johnson et al. 2004).

McNeill & Moore (2015) employed Developmental Theory Model to examine consumers' attitudes toward sustainable fashion products. Their study identified three consumer categories: self-consumers focused on hedonic needs, social-consumers concerned about their social image, and sacrifice-consumers aiming to minimize their impact on the world. Self-consumers are individuals that put their hedonistic wants first. They value novelty and see fashion as essential to their personal expression; socially conscious consumers care about their social image. They are willing to incorporate sustainable practices, but not at the expense of their image. For them, sustainable fashion is a way to align their choices with their values while maintaining a positive social image. Sacrifice-consumers group strives to reduce their impact

on the world. They prioritize sustainability over personal desires and are willing to make sacrifices for the greater good. Sacrifice consumers actively seek out sustainable and ethical fashion products.

Authors Murphy & Zajonc (1993) and Pachankis (2007) determined that consumers' perceptions are shaped by two separate modes of analyzing data: emotional (affective) and rational (cognitive).

Importance of ethics

Ethics are defined as “a system of accepted beliefs that control behaviour, especially such a system based on morals” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.p.). Moral principles are related to “the standards of good or bad behaviour, fairness, honesty, etc. that each person believes in, rather than to laws” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.p.)

The Value - Belief- Attitude logic (VBA), according to Jung et al. (2016) indicates that utilitarian and hedonic values are important to the consumer when considering and purchasing a product and carry greater weight than conspicuous values that refer to acquiring a higher social status by purchasing sustainable products. Conspicuous values are not as important to consumers in environmental contexts. This difference also depends on the context of the participants. In their study, there were differences between Chinese and Koreans, where the former were influenced by utilitarian and hedonistic values, and the latter, only hedonistic. Thus, in terms of corporate communication, they suggest that marketing strategies should consider the type of values that consumers prioritize most and the context to be most successful.

Slow and fast fashion

Busalim et al. (2022) mentions that during the 2000's studies explaining the difference between slow fashion and fast fashion emerged, but it was soon discovered that applying the term slow fashion in reality was more difficult than previously assumed (Clark, 2008; Dabas, et al., 2022; Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). As consumers become more knowledgeable about sustainable fashion, this could help connect their beliefs and actual shopping behavior (Busalim et al., 2022). Thus, in this research I have explored consumers' views and understanding of sustainable fashion.

Slow fashion is defined by Sung and Woo (2019) as clothing produced using environmentally conscious, socially responsible, and ethical practices. Clark (2008) mentions that the concept of slow fashion as a solution for sustainable fashion, it is about knowing the value of local resources and distributed economies, transparency in the production system, and products with a greater range of useful life. On the other hand, Fletcher (2014), extends the meaning of slow fashion to adapt it in comparison to the new context of fast fashion, which are “clothes that are made and sold cheaply, so that people can buy new clothes often (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.)” The author argues, as opposite of what fast fashion does, the need to go from slow production to a large production but in a sustainable way to balance the companies' commercials goals

with sustainability goals and highlight the importance of collaboration and innovation in the design of garments for the development of sustainable practices.

2.1.2 How sustainable fashion studies relate to the consumer:

Studies of sustainable fashion in relation to the consumer indicate that consumers have changed their habits over the years thanks to new options offered by fashion companies such as renting and redesigning clothes, and mainly buying second-hand clothes (Armstrong et al., 2015; McNeill & Venter, 2019; Niinimäki, 2011).

People who frequently purchase clothing from fast fashion retailers recognize sustainable collaborative fashion alternatives, purchasing second-hand items and renting clothing (McNeill & Venter, 2019), considering four aspects: emotions, pleasure, adherence to social norms, expressing individuality, and considering the social consequences of sustainable behavior.

Also using a means-end theory approach, the values and motivations of consumers sustainable fashion consumption were analyzed by Lundblad & Davies (2016), where they identified that the following motivations: financial benefits, self-expression, health concerns, environmental responsibility, a sense of accomplishment, and social justice, are applied during the consumer's decision-making process.

2.1.3 Communication of sustainable fashion:

Brydges et al., (2022) investigate the narratives of sustainable fashion companies to get closer to the consumers, however, they criticize that companies declare that they are sustainable autonomously, without any external regulation that validates them, generating lower trust from the consumer to the companies, and enterprises do not mention in their messages how customers should act to contribute to the environment. The research found that too much information was too much for the consumer and too little generated little trust in the brand. Brands communicate their sustainability actions in different ways. In stores they are less specific, and the messages are short, but online, customers can find the information in greater detail.

At the same time, social media platforms are used in a more informal way to communicate the sustainable practices of fashion companies. Not all of them want to differentiate themselves with this attribute, but the majority do, and as other studies indicate, there is a positive impact that fashion companies' social networks have in attracting consumers and influencing them to buy sustainable fashion (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017; Salem & Alanadoly, 2021; Wu et al., 2020).

Chang & Jai (2015) identified that the most effective way to influence consumers to purchase their products, highlighting and positioning sustainability and its impact are the perceived Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) effort, price value and brand equity.

Chang & Jai (2015) applied the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) model, which provides a flexible perspective for comprehending consumer behavior, to examine the strategies used by fast fashion retailers to position sustainability and how such strategies influenced consumer's perceived CSR effort and brand equity. They conclude that different positioning strategies such as the effects of attribute positioning (highlighting actual sustainability actions like conserving water) and benefit positioning (offering incentives like recycling vouchers) impact positively to the consumer's perception of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts of a company. However, the way that consumers view brand equity has not improved with any positioning strategy. Brand equity is usually a long-term impression associated with a well-known brand and as Aaker (2009) mentions, it could be difficult to alter customers' opinions of brand equity solely on a single test campaign.

Childs et al. (2019) used attribution theory to examine how Corporate social responsibility (CSR) campaigns impact consumers' views of brand authenticity and their attitudes toward the brand. The findings suggest that sustainable brands benefit more from CSR campaigns, especially when information is shared on the brand's website rather than through news sources. However, for disposable brands, such as fast fashion brands, CSR campaigns can be confusing to consumers and may not align with the brand's everyday practices.

2.1.4 Sustainable fashion and business models

According to Fletcher (2014), the objectives of the fashion production system are to increase the profits of businesses to grow in the market, they do not have primarily an objective to benefit the environment, for this a radical change is needed from the industry. Business norms need to be challenged. For example, the famous brand Patagonia showed the slogan "Don't buy unless you really need it" with the aim to encourage consumers to live a more sustainable lifestyle. Nowadays, several brands develop disruptive campaigns to keep up with the sustainable focus and it is important to know how the consumer response to them is. However, not all brands will challenge business norms 100%, some will not risk it and therefore commit greenwashing practices.

Ozdamar Ertekin et al. (2020) argue that there are different logics in the fashion and sustainability system that are counterproductive. It seems improbable that eco-fashion can be promoted within the postmodern brand paradigm. The three logics (logic of commerce, art and sustainability) have different dynamics but if they manage to work together a new fashion culture can be created. However, authors emphasize that this situation will take time to achieve because today's fashion world is dominated by the fast fashion business system.

2.1.5 Green advertising

According to Eren-Erdogmus et al. (2016), green advertising involves promoting products as environmentally friendly to consumers and influences people's attitudes toward ads and their intention to support eco-friendly practices (Kim, Malek, & Roberts, 2019). Matthes et al.

(2014), according to the Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1990), mentions that there is a differentiation in ad attraction that influences consumer perceptions of an ad, especially according to its level of involvement (high or low) in environmental causes. There are two sorts of ad appeals: a functional appeal that stresses imagery linked to ecologically friendly processes and products, and an emotional appeal that emphasizes abstract green images (breathtaking scenery). Mathes et al. (2014) argues that people with low involvement in a specific cause prefer emotional messages, and those with more knowledge and involvement in a subject prefer ads that focus on the product's functionality.

However, as mentioned by Kong & Zhang (2014), it's still unclear if green appeals are a successful communication tactic, because green advertising does not work successfully for all products, it depends on the product environmental impact, and consumers perceptions of this in relation to green claims. This is the reason why sometimes consumers can view green advertisements as an attempt of green washing. However, in general, green advertising has the potential to collaborate with other marketing strategies to achieve social objectives (Wiener & Doescher, 1991).

2.1.6 Greenwashing

Greenwashing meaning it's not clearly established in the previous literature. Is it defined, on one side, as false advertising, or deceptive statements (Lane, 2010, 2013; Mills, 2009) and as the selective release of positive information about a company's social or environmental difficulties without disclosing all relevant negative information (Kim & Lyon, 2011; Lyon & Maxwell, 2006).

On the other side, "Greenwashing is the practice of promoting environmentally friendly programs to deflect attention from an organization's environmentally unfriendly or less savory activities" (Marquis & Toffel, 2011, p.19), and on the contrary, for Gatti et al. (2019), no matter how much Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) advertising is untrue, greenwashing only occurs, according to the authors, when a message is emphasized as such by NGOs, the media, or other stakeholders. Therefore, a crucial component of greenwashing is the charge made by a third party.

However, it is concluded that greenwashing has a negative connotation, and it is defined more broadly as "the creation or propagation of an unfounded or misleading environmentalist image." (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023)

In recent years, there have been many cases of greenwashing in the news by large companies such as H&M, Inditex and Adidas (Stern, 2022; Ferris et al, 2023; Kent,2023) related to labor rights violations and complains, waste of materials in large volumes, environmental pollution, increasing deforestation and carbon emissions in the production process.

These claims about companies' sustainability practices have generated a great deal of distrust among consumers and they are more cautious when listening to companies' messages and advertising.

2.2 Chapter Summary

Previous studies in sustainable fashion are valuable for this study because they identify consumer behaviors, moral and ethics and greenwashing awareness.

- Consumer behavior: These studies identify various consumer behaviors related to sustainable fashion. For instance, how consumers make choices based on their values and beliefs.
- Moral and ethics: The importance of morals and ethics influences how consumers perceive sustainable practices in fashion companies. When brands align with ethical values, consumers respond positively.
- Greenwashing awareness: Consumers who prioritize environmental protection are vigilant to fashion business sustainable practices. They can recognize greenwashing, when companies falsely claim to be sustainable, when it does not meet their expectations. They judge the brands and actively seek transparency and detailed information.

3 Methodology

This chapter will show the qualitative approach, the research and sampling strategies, the data collection methods, and the limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Approach

The objective of this research is to gain young consumers insights into sustainability fashion consumption. Through an inductive logic, trends will be identified within the data to induce fundamental concepts or themes about the consumer's vision of sustainable fashion. However, for the data analysis, an abductive approach will be used. As mentioned by Atkinson et al. (2003) abductive research does not primarily rely on data or hypotheses as inductive or deductive approaches; instead, it simultaneously and impartially involves both empirical data and existing theoretical knowledge. In this approach, Thompson (2022) reaffirms that a researcher utilizing abductive reasoning access the field with specific theoretical frameworks in mind, which guide their initial inquiries and help avoid the emergence of unrelated findings that do not answer to the research question. This approach is not in pursuit of a single definitive truth (Hurley et al., 2021, cited in Thompson, 2022, p.1411), and its goal is to uncover the most reasonable and practical explanation for observed phenomena (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Hurley et al., 2021; Peirce, 1974; Reichertz, 2013).

The abductive approach offers a valuable perspective for this research. It recognizes that empirical data, that will be collected through interviews, and existing theories are equally important to reach conclusions. The method of data collection choose are interviews. During the research process, an interview questionnaire was design upon prior literature related to sustainable fashion. After this step, interviews will be conducted to young consumers and analyzed to generate conclusions.

3.2 Research Design: Qualitative Method

This research takes a qualitative approach. This method collects non-numerical data and was chosen because it focuses on obtaining participant's multiple perspectives and meanings, and involves an emergent and evolving design which means that the process might change once the data is collected (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The focus of the research is to identify young

consumers' multiple views about sustainable fashion and the qualitative method is suitable because it requires a detailed understanding of the research topic considering consumer's different context (Sweden) and backgrounds that will guide their opinions. Compared to a quantitative method, consumer's thoughts and behaviors can be analyzed within a deep interview, which in this study proves to be the most valuable tool for the research. At the same time, this type of research is flexible, which means that the focus and some interview questions were modified or added according to the interview's responses.

However, qualitative methods often involve smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies. The findings are context-specific and may not be easily generalized to broader populations in terms of age (older generations) and context (outside of Sweden), and it involves a subjective interpretation of results, where biases can influence the process of the research.

3.3 Data Collection Method

Based on the adoption of qualitative methods to answer the research question, the data collection method employed are interviews. The aim of the interview is "to understand the constructs that the respondents use as a basis for their opinions and beliefs about a particular situation" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021, 195). With the qualitative interview, the goal is to learn more about young consumer's perspectives of sustainable fashion, exploring both broad and detailed aspects.

The type of interview chosen are semi-structured interviews. As mentioned by Easterby-Smith et al. (2021) this type of interviews includes specific topics and occasionally predefined questions, but also maintains some flexibility in terms of bringing new ideas or follow-up questions. Semi-structured interviews were the most suitable choice because it allowed participants to discuss in depth about the topic following a structure and allow them to elaborate more on their responses, which led to new findings. Some limitations of this type of interview included that the set of obtained data was extensive and make the analysis more complex.

An interview guide of fifteen questions was designed to address relevant themes in sustainable fashion. The guide included questions about sustainability awareness, factors influencing consumer's brand choices, greenwashing, opinion on sustainable practices communication, and future expectations in the fashion industry (view interview questions in Appendix 1). The interview was divided in two parts, the first part was a set of ten questions related to sustainable fashion, and the second part included five questions related to three video advertising from the brands H&M, Vinted and Fjällräven that were showed to the participants before asking the questions. These brands were chosen due to their grand popularity in Sweden and their claims of sustainability in the communication (SB Insight, 2024; Statista, 2024a).

The three video ads showed to interviewees were about the brands promoting sustainable habits to the audience, and they were used in this research to understand if interviewees recognize the ads' objective or had a contrary opinion about them and the brand.

Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy included young adults between 20 and 39 years (Statista, 2024b), with a good knowledge and interest in sustainable fashion company practices and advertisement. This age ranges were chosen because they represent the biggest number of populations in the Sweden (Statatista, 2024b). This sample was targeted because according to Jankowicz (2004), the most ideas will be collected from those who find the topic intriguing, have experience in the field, encounter the topic regularly in daily life, and have previously thought about the topic. Therefore, it will result in the most relevant collection of data.

Among the participants, some with knowledge of sustainability pursued master's degrees in Sustainable Service Management, Human Ecology, Environmental and Human Rights Law, and Management, in Sweden (View interviewees information in Table 1).

Table 1: Interview participants information

Interviewee number	Studie Program	Age	Country
1	Master in Sustainable Service Management	26	China
2	Master's in human Ecology	28	China
3	Master's in environmental and human rights Law	27	Africa
4	Bachelor's in business administration	22	Sweden
5	Bachelor's in business administration	21	Sweden
6	Master's in business administration and Strategy	32	Peru
7	Master's in international marketing and brand management	30	Croatia
8	Master's in international marketing and brand management	30	Indonesia
9	Master's in human Ecology	31	Ecuador
10	Master's in international marketing and brand management	28	Czech Republic
11	Bachelor's in politics	21	Sweden
12	Bachelor's in behavioral science	22	Sweden

Source: Own elaboration

Sample size

To demonstrate particular information of the research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), it has been recommended that qualitative studies require a minimum sample size of at least 12 to reach data saturation (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Fugard & Potts, 2014; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006) meaning that data collection should continue until there are no new discoveries (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Based on this information, a minimum sample size of 12 people was targeted.

One-on-one synchronous (direct and immediate interaction between researcher and research participant) interviews online and in person were conducted, with a duration of 45 – 60 minutes per interview.

3.4 Data Analysis

To effectively analyze the data, several steps has been taken in this study: approaching the data set as a whole and getting the most out of the data transcription, organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The analysis of the data followed Rennstam & Wästerfors' (2018) approach of sorting, reducing, and arguing.

To analyze the data, a sorting process was developed to generate categories and themes to argue discovered concepts based on the empirical facts collected.

After collecting the data, significant information was identified from participant responses and then labels were assigned to them. By “identifying, highlighting, differentiating and listing different kinds of data leads to order and an overview” (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2018, p.105).

For the coding process, first some common words or relations within the data were identified and then it was developed a list of codes with the “lean coding” approach to create an accurate list of codes. After a re-review of the codes, a final code list was developed with a few categories, to then reduce the analysis in three themes.

Coding of the transcribed data

After transcribing the data, the interviewees' responses were read again to identify similar concepts among them, and a coding framework was developed. “A code is a word or a short phrase that summarizes the meaning of a chunk of data. Codes create a link between messy and overwhelming data and more systematic categories, which are developed from sets of codes that appear similar or related (Easterby-Smith et al.,2021, p.274).”

During this process, twelve codes were determined that were associated with the eight categories, which were subsequently reduced to three final themes to carry out the analysis of the interviews. The process is outlined below:

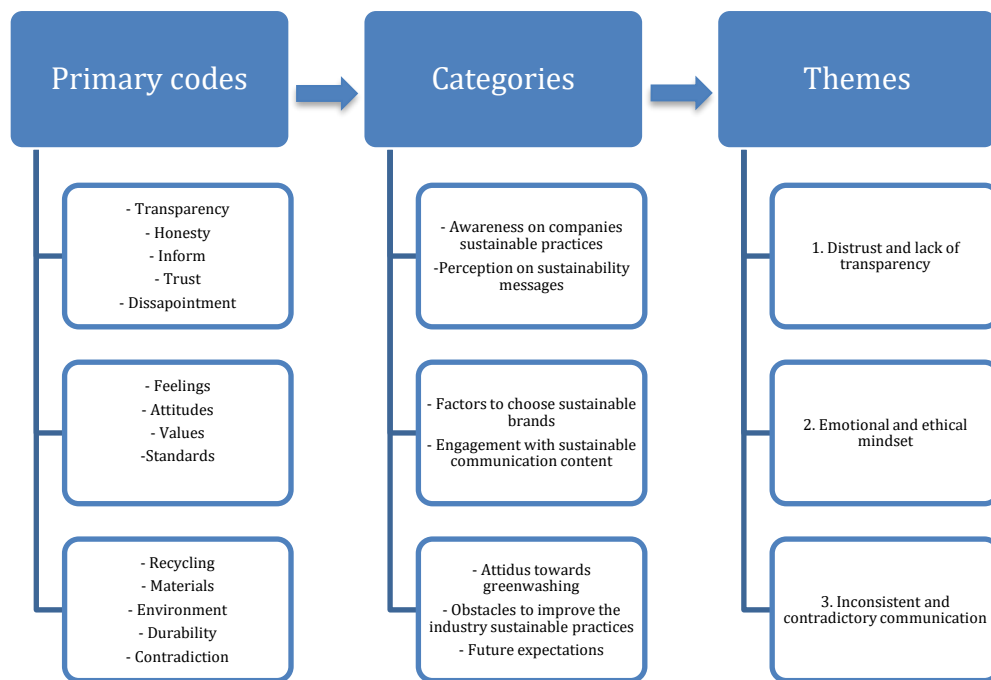


Figure 1: Coding process

Source: Own elaboration

Ethical consideration

Privacy and consent of participants guided the ethical research. At the beginning of conducting the study, before the interviews, the purpose of the study was disclosed, and participants signed consent forms. While collecting the data process, it was explained to the participants the research purpose and use of the study data. Participants were recruited using the purpose sampling method that ensure fair participation and avoid biases as possible. To avoid potential power imbalances dynamics between the participants and the researcher leading questions and personal impressions were avoided.

After recording the interviews, the data obtained was securely storage digitally (audio files and interview transcript documents) to protect private information and confidentiality.

During the process of analyzing the data, the different perspectives of all participants were reported to avoid siding with a particular participant and disclose only positive results. When demonstrating the findings of the interviews, participants privacy was respected by anonymizing their identity.

3.5 Validity and reliability

To ensure the quality of the study the Lincoln & Guba (1982) four-dimension criteria was used: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. To ensure credibility, long interviews were held, and open-ended interview questions contributed to the authenticity, validity, and quality of the data. Participants were free to respond to follow-up questions and were not limited to answering a specific set of questions to provide their ideas and experiences, resulting in detailed qualitative data. This technique captures the intricacy of people's perspectives. The motivation behind inquiries without a right or wrong answer is to advance contribution from respondents and decrease response bias. This approach contrasts with closed-ended questions that limits respondents to selecting from predefined statements.

Regarding the dependability criteria, detailed and clear research design was implemented by stating the study's purpose, methods, and data collection procedures. This included giving intensive preparation to the interview questionnaire and recording the audio of the participants reactions and responses. These actions were carried out to limit information blunders and disparities.

To ensure the verification or confirmability of results, the strategy used was triangulation of different data sources (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021) by collecting information from journals of marketing, fashion and communication, newspapers, and interviews, and the transferability criteria means the use of the purposive sampling technique and a sample of 12 participants.

3.6 Limitations

The results cannot be generalized to other countries because the research context is Sweden, the sample size is the minimum, and considering that interviewees have different nationalities and haven't lived in Sweden for a long time, their perceptions of the sustainable fashion market in Sweden are not well grounded because they do not know the Swedish culture in depth. However, interviewees compare the situation of this market with its home country and that can bring valuable insights to the research as well.

To address the challenge of generalizability to other countries, future research could conduct the study in diverse cultural contexts or a cross-cultural comparison. This approach would enable cross-cultural comparisons and yield a more comprehensive insight into the variations in perceptions of sustainable fashion across different regions.

To address the issue of participants' limited familiarity with Swedish culture, researchers could consider conducting interviews with individuals who have resided in Sweden for a longer duration or have a deeper understanding of Swedish society. Furthermore, incorporating

supplementary methods such as observational studies or surveys targeting a broader demographic could provide additional context and validate the findings obtained from the interviews.

3.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research approach, design, data collection methods, and limitations of the study. The research adopts an inductive logic to identify trends within the data, while employing an abductive approach for data analysis, which integrates empirical data with existing theoretical knowledge. This approach aims understand young consumers' perspectives on sustainable fashion.

Utilizing a qualitative research design, the study collects non-numerical data from young consumers in Sweden. The qualitative method is suitable for its ability to capture detailed insights and adapt to the progressive findings of the research. Qualitative research was carried out using the in-depth interview to a 12 participants sample size.

To ensure the quality and rigor of the study, measures are taken to address ethical considerations and enhance the validity and reliability of the research. Participants are provided with informed consent and their privacy is safeguarded throughout the data collection and analysis process. The study considered Lincoln and Guba's criteria for credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability to ensure validity or trustworthiness of the findings.

Despite these measures, limitations such as the minimum sample size and participants' limited familiarity with Swedish culture are acknowledged, suggesting actions for future research to enhance the study's generalizability and validity.

4 Results and Discussion

The results or findings of the interviews conducted to young consumers will be analyzed and discussed with mainly four theories mention in the literature review: The Comprehensive Action Determination Model (CADM), Developmental Theory Model, Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM), and the Value - Belief- Attitude logic (VBA).

4.1 Results/Findings

4.1.1 Themes

For the interview's analysis the following three themes were considered that emerged from the empirical materials during the analysis: distrust and lack of transparency; emotional and ethical mindset; inconsistent and contradictory communication.

1. Distrust and lack of transparency

During the interviews, most participants acknowledged that clothing brands are committed to sustainable practices. For instance, they noticed labels indicating recycled materials in clothing production or water-saving production methods. However, all the interviewees expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of marketing messages related to sustainability because they have seen contradictory information on the news, especially about fast fashion brands, and almost half of the interviewees (5 of 12) think that sustainability is nowadays a trend that most of the brands are trying to join. One interviewee reflects distrust towards the authenticity of sustainability claims made by many fashion companies, particularly those that have only recently adopted sustainable practices, he expresses a preference for companies that have a longstanding commitment to sustainability, suggesting that such dedication is necessary for genuine trust to be established. Interviewee 6 said:

I don't believe that now some companies are sustainable, most of them just joined the recent trend, especially in Europe, I think that the only way I can really believe them is if a company builds its foundation on sustainability, so I know that is one of the cores of their business, not just something new they added.

This highlights a desire for transparency and a deeper integration of sustainability into a company's values and operations, rather than it being treated as a suspicious trend.

However, at the same time, most interviewees perceive that exist some brands that do accomplish their efforts to be sustainable, although is not the majority within the fashion industry. Brands like Levis, Patagonia, Sicurezza.pe, Second Female, Filippa K, and Decathlon are examples of a positive review by consumers because their sustainability messages can be proven through the good quality of their clothing.

In the domain of fast fashion brands, consumers are aware that products often do not meet the sustainability standards in their production processes, largely attributed to bad manufacturing practices and disposal of materials that pollute the environment. This awareness is largely informed by investigative reports featured in the news regarding the environmental impacts of fast fashion. Consequently, most participants of the study believe that companies engage in greenwashing. As a result, when participants visit big fast fashion stores, they consider suspicious the presence of a sustainable fashion section.

Another finding relates to the lack of trust in companies promoting recycling practices. For example, participants said that although brands ask for clothes donations to be recycled by giving a monetary benefit (discounts), they still distrust if whether their clothes will really be recycled or will only serve the company to make more profit. Once brands loose consumer's trust it will be very difficult for gain it again. Interviewee 4 expressed doubt about the authenticity of such initiatives, citing past experiences of feeling misled by brands, Additionally, the speaker highlighted concerns about the potential for these initiatives to encourage increased consumption rather than promoting genuine sustainability. Overall, the speaker acknowledges the positive intent behind such initiatives but remains skeptical about their true impact and the underlying motivations of brands. Participant 4 mentioned:

I'm very skeptical when it comes to sustainable marketing, because I just feel like I have been misled so many times by brands, and especially if you want to buy some more affordable clothing, like in H&M. For example, like H&M, another brand called Weekday had a similar initiative where you can bring in your old clothes and donate them, and then you get 10% or 15% off discount in your next purchase. So, you are bringing clothes, and they recycle, but you don't know if they're actually recycling them. And then, in another way, it's just also making you consume more because you get that discount code like as a thank you gift. So, I feel like what they do it is a good thing, but at the same time I feel like in the end it's just for them to make more money”

Participants suggests that establishing genuine sustainability in the fashion industry will be a slow and challenging process. An interesting finding is that a participant compares

the negative societal impacts of fashion brands to those of oil companies, noting that both industries contribute significantly to pollution and indirectly affect human health. He argues that while the harmful effects of oil companies are more immediate, the environmental damage caused by fashion brands manifests over the long term. Therefore, he emphasizes that for fashion brands to gain credibility in their sustainability efforts, is key that they must first prioritize transparency. Interviewee 3 said:

It will take time to actually create establish the authenticity of sustainability, especially for fashion brands. Because actually fashion brands and the oil companies are classified in the same categories, like in terms of how they affect negatively to society. Because when you look at oil companies, they have a negative impact in human health, and in terms of the fashion industry, it impacts indirectly to human health, but in relation with increasing the pollution. So, both have the same impact, but in different areas. And one of them is more long-term and the other short-term. You can see the short-terms effects quite easily. So, I don't think it's quite straightforward for fashion brands to establish their authenticity. The first step to take is actually to try to be transparent, and then, after that, the consistency of the transparency will actually start becoming in authenticity.

As another finding of the research is related to the eco-labels fashion brands use to prove their authenticity as sustainable companies. This is refuted by interviewee 3 by comparing the sustainable food industry to the clothing industry. He mentions recounts discovering that "cage-free" labels do not significantly differentiate from standard factory farms in terms of animal welfare. This revelation has led to a distrust of such labels and influences their purchasing decisions, as he find difficult to believe in brands claims:

In relation with the meat industry, I've seen some informational ads on the supermarket that said that products come from a cage free factory. and I found years later that there's no difference between that cage free factory farm and a normal factory farm, the animal life is mostly standard in all factories. There's no open space in it, but someone just put that eco-label so that they can sell their products. I think that this situation also addresses my choices, why should I go for this particular brand, when I can't determine that what they're claiming to do is true or genuine.

Additionally, his distrust is influenced by his cultural background because trusting in authorities and sustainability labels can be a challenge in developing countries with high rates of corruption (such as Africa), where laws are hardly enforced. This situation represents the importance of

cultural factors on consumers perspectives argued by Johnson et al. (2004) and Mostafa (2007) in their study.

The sample of the study recognizes this heterogeneity in cultural factors (Johnson et al., 2004 and Mostafa, 2007) that originates differences in knowledge, attitudes and behaviors depending on the social group to which it belongs, because the interviewees come from different cultures.

Participants in the study noted confusion about the material information provided on clothing labels. While they acknowledged that including this information is a positive step for companies, they still demanded greater transparency in fashion labeling. One participant likened this to food product labels, arguing that consumers want to know the exact materials used in their clothing. Participant 12 questions the vague labeling of "responsible cotton" and the use of recycled materials, expressing doubt about the actual content and quality of these sustainable claims:

H&M is the brand I'm thinking of that wants to be more sustainable by using sustainable cotton and putting labels and green ads at the stores behind the cash register, but for example, they have these ads that say, "These jeans are made of responsible cotton", but you don't really know what that means. Lately, they've also been putting that most of the garments are made with recycled materials, but I wondered if those clothes are still good, I would ask myself if recycled polyester were better and how much recycled polyester are they using. Would it be like 5%? If you could put that percentage on a label, you don't know if there is a rule or law that determines the amount in a garment to be worth it. Can you imagine if only 5% out of 100% is recycled?

2. Emotional and ethical mindset

The most common feelings identified in the interviews were feelings of betrayal, doubt, guilt, and anger.

Emotional mindset

One interviewer felt betrayed by the brands when she finds out that the popular return-refund system does not work, and clothes are just dumped in landfills. At the same time, a participant showed concerned about the exploitation of developing countries for recycling efforts of advanced economies. There are developing countries that are being burdened with imports of waste for recycling, but compliance with environmental laws is not fully monitored or enforced. As interviewee 3 mentions:

I think when you look at beyond in the recycling situation, for most Western countries, usually, regardless of what they recycle, there's an export of the waste

to a developing country, or in a different way, indigenous tribes or minorities had been exploited in pursuit of that endeavor. So, I think when you think about recycling in general, the recycling process must be done in a facility that doesn't harm people.”

Another interesting finding is that some interviewees also feel disappointed by the clothing brands when the quality of the clothes are not good, and a participant mentioned that clothing companies joining sustainability are only a marketing gimmick

How sustainable can a company be? Because I've also heard my friend's sister studying fashion. And then somewhere in Denmark, like designer school, and she had to, like, quit studying there, because she felt so much pressure from just like the fashion industry and the things you got to know about the fashion industry. And like, for example, if you buy like black clothes, that's like, the worst thing you can do, because the black dye is so bad for the environment. So, I just feel like no clothing can be sustainable. And that's why I also just don't trust any marketing.” (Interviewee 4)

Two out of twelve people were upset with companies' bad greenwashing practices. As these comments represent:

“...when I heard that a very famous leather company in Ecuador was launching sustainable marketing campaigns, knowing their background, I felt that they were lying to me basically. So, I was angry, and I remember I was fighting with them in social media” (Interviewee 9)

“Even though I'm not really into sustainability, I can say that H&M made me really angry when I saw the pictures from the desert in Chile where they dumped all of the clothes and materials that wasn't need it anymore or sell. So, I got angry because you can give it to some poor people in Africa instead” (Interviewee 7)

How consumers make sustainable choices:

The most considered factors are quality, price and sustainability. They are associated with their beliefs about clothing, recycling and second-hand culture in Sweden, are influenced by their knowledge of sustainability and by the news they read in the newspapers. The culture of their country also influences them, knowing that in Sweden they can trust authority, and in Africa, they can't because there is a lot of corruption. As mentioned in the following quote:

When you live in Sweden, you can trust like the authority will actually do their work. For a developing country where corruption is impregnated, like it's the daily occurrence, like from the basic traffic stop to the like, its discretion is just

presumptively for the trust. I didn't know for a fact you can't trust the standards authorities, like for the foods? So how do you buy a product that's been branded sustainable by a particular authority?" (Participant 3)

The context also affects the frequency of purchase of consumers, they find very beneficial the possibility to buy good quality second-hand clothes offered in stores or markets in Sweden at an affordable price, which may not be possible in their respective countries (China, Africa, Serbia), where they bought more frequently, one or two times a month. In addition, their purchasing power also influences because being students they have a limited budget and do not buy clothes so often, about 2 times a year especially for the winter and summer season.

A pre-established idea about sustainable fashion is also the price, which they believe increases only because of this factor. However, the increase in the quality of the garment and the price is not equal, and when consumers go to the stores and touch the garments, they do not feel that the quality increases with the price, therefore, the brand does not meet their expectations. However, if the brand provides a good quality garment that is durable, a participant is willing to pay a higher price for the garment:

When we bought a gift for my mom, a thin bathrobe, it had this really nice cotton fabric with different colors, and I think the fabric was from India confectioned by a woman collective that worked in good conditions. This bathrobe was obviously more expensive than other ones, but it felt kind of good to buy it because the money will go back to the people that made the clothes and the good initiative, so it felt reasonable that it was more expensive. Besides this occasion, I just read the information on ads they showed me in the store" (Interviewee 12).

Ethical mindset

The Value - Belief- Attitude logic (VBA), according to Jung et al. (2016) indicates that utilitarian and hedonic values are important to the consumer when considering and purchasing a product and carry greater weight than conspicuous values that refer to acquiring a higher social status by purchasing sustainable products. This difference also depends on the context of the participants. In their study, there were differences between Chinese and Koreans, where the former were influenced by utilitarian and hedonistic values, and the latter, only hedonistic. Thus, in terms of corporate communication, they suggest that marketing strategies should consider the type of values that consumers prioritize most and the context to be most successful.

For their part, conspicuous values, mentioned by Jun et al. (2016), are not as important to consumers in environmental contexts, these values make consumers who wear certain brands feel that they acquire a higher social status. As the research reflects, none of the interviewees mentioned the importance of brands to demonstrate their wealth in

Sweden, and in their home country, they focused more on utilitarian and hedonic values, seeking clothes for their functionality first and secondly for the aesthetics of the clothes through design and color.

Young people believe more in their own morals than in social norms, companies can fill them with information but if they do not see anything, they will not believe it, they act based on their own conscience and morals. This is consistent with what the authors indicate in the Comprehensive Action Determination Model (CADM). They demand that there should be more detailed information about everything in the process to reduce consumption.

The influence of ethics on consumption, as long as the value of ethics prevails, consumer will not easily accept the actions of companies that are moving forward in sustainable fashion, because consumers want to see real signs.

3. Inconsistent and contradictory communication

Sustainable practices or initiatives made by fashion companies are transmitted to the consumers through their communication. However, consumers identify the communication to have contradictory messages in relation to companies' actions. This situation can be identified by companies' greenwashing practices.

The results of this study show all participants are aware of the term *greenwashing*, which is "the act or practice of making a product, policy, activity, etc. appear more environmentally friendly or less environmentally damaging than it actually is" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., n.p.). The most common company mentioned in the interviews that presents greenwashing practices is H&M. Discrepancies between the companies' actions and their communication was identified within their business goals, unclear information in products tags, supply chain operations, business model, and recycling initiatives.

While the brand promotes sustainability goals for the future, there's a disconnect because those goals can't be verified by an external organization. Participant 12 said:

Yes, H&M is the brand I'm thinking of because it feels that it has double messages. They want to be more sustainable by using sustainable cotton, putting some green ads behind the cash register at the store, and by showing their green goals. I believe those companies' goals are very misleading. For example, "We want to achieve this goal by 2040" but nothing says they can't push that date once it arrives...They also shouldn't use plastic materials in their clothes confection or packaging either if they say they're a green company, and on the other hand, a lot of newspapers investigate H&M sustainability practices. You

will find a lot of bad news suggesting that they can't reach those good promises, so I guess there is a conflict with the business and sustainability side.”

While brands communicate that they care about sustainability, there are some areas of the company that do not meet sustainability standards. One interesting finding is that participants believe that brands always hide something negative within the entire chain of operations, even if it is small, and that this does not really make them a sustainable company. As the big chain stores outsource their operations, it is very difficult to have a uniform and strict control over everything. As interviewer 3 illustrates:

So, there is this concept of greenwashing made by the UN campaign on climate change or climate action. And this means that regarding sustainability, particular fashion brands hide to the public bad practices that you can come across. I think that for sports brand it's a bit easier to keep track of what they do, because they try to source their products from smaller suppliers. So, it's easier to actually assess a smaller supplier rather than a big fashion brand that sources their clothes from a developing country, in that case it's a bit trickier to track the production process and also to keep track of whose fault is it, the suppliers only or the whole company. Absence of transparency actually relates to the reliability of the sustainability aspect of a brand”.

Another finding in the study is that participants recognize that the essence of a company needs to have sustainability as a main pillar of the brand to be credible. An example of greenwashing in a leather company in Ecuador mentioned by interviewee 9:

I can say an example of greenwashing about my country, I'm from Ecuador and in my city there's a leather company that exist for a long time and has a monopoly in the market, but their 50-year lifetime, they have never cared about the environment and the pollution that they have create is a lot. But since the last five years ago, I've noticed that they have changed their marketing strategies and then you will say that now they are becoming a green company, a sustainable company and if you go into their website and social media, you'll see this new advertisement and I think is only because they've changed some machine or some process inside. However, the core of this business is pollution because leather comes from animals, if you want to be really sustainable, you don't have to use animals, so at the end, it's just a very small part of the company that they have changed.

It's going to be a struggle and dilemma for fashion companies of how they're going to combine business with sustainability. Consumers do not believe that specially the fast

fashion business model where they overproduce clothes at low costs can have a sustainable point of view. This situation is exemplified by some interviewees:

Last year I was on a store, which is like this big fast fashion store, and I saw they had a section about tech sustainability clothes. And I was looking around and at the same time I thought that it's kind of strange that this big fast fashion brand has this section, so I'm not sure that they're really sustainable. After so many years just selling fast fashion, why are they changing now and why would they? (Interviewee 10)

At the same time, the fashion industry prioritizes profit over sustainability due to cost concerns. Interviewees understand that it is expensive for companies to invest in technology to find ways to be sustainable, therefore, not all companies can afford this. This situation reveals divergence between profitability and sustainable fashion.

A surprising finding was recycling practices. All interviewees complained that brands like H&M, Zara and Mango, despite communicating consumers, via online or in-stores, to recycle the clothes they no longer need, were not clear enough about the real benefits of their donations, and instead they've watched on the news that these companies burned, threw tons of clothes into landfills or ship them to developing countries. Clothing labels mentioning that the garment was made with recyclable materials or is of better quality (either 100% cotton or wool), while fast fashion stores like H&M or Zara keep creating new collections of clothes that they launch in stores in a short period of time, every 1 or 2 weeks, which represents overproduction of clothes. Additionally, these brands indicate that they prioritize sustainability, but again then promote overconsumption through frequent advertising and mailing campaigns with the latest collections to encourage consumers to buy more.

4.1.2 Comparing findings in terms of previous literature

McNeill and Moore (2015) used developmental theory modeling to explore consumer attitudes towards sustainable fashion. Their research identified three types of consumers: those who prioritize personal pleasure (self-consumers), those who are mindful of their social image (social consumers), and those who aim to reduce their environmental impact (sacrificial consumers). Among the interview participants, both self-consumers and sacrificial consumers were identifiable.

The study by Brydges et al. highlights that sustainable fashion brands' self-proclaimed sustainability, without third-party verification, leads to consumer distrust. Moreover, these brands do not provide clear guidance on how consumers can contribute to environmental

sustainability, further diminishing trust. Interviewees frequently mentioned this distrust and lack of transparency.

Using developmental theory modeling, McNeill and Moore (2015) explored consumer attitudes toward sustainable fashion. They classified consumers into three groups: self-consumers who prioritize personal enjoyment, social consumers who care about their social image, and sacrificial consumers who aim to reduce their environmental footprint. Among the interviewees, both self-consumers and sacrificial consumers were identifiable in the research.

4.1.3 Recommendations for the fashion industry in terms of marketing/communication strategies

The current investigation found that to provide authenticity and transparency to their messages on sustainability, brands need to share real facts and data about their supply chain and production processes, to build trust with consumers. They want and need to know more about materials used, manufactures facilities, and compliance with environmental and labor laws.

Interview participants suggests that brands could showcase collections over a longer period encouraging to influence and change the consumer behavior of buying lots of clothes.

Companies could implement unique codes on garments that can be scanned to see garment details, this will give consumers easy access to material information, because usually the garments tags are not too clear for all consumers. Additionally, participants mentioned that companies offer extensive monthly sustainable reports, but since reading them is time consuming, they prefer not to read them. Therefore, brands should try to transform the information to a more friendly way such as videos or images highlighting the most important facts of the company, and in case of displaying numerical information and metrics such as CO2 emissions or water consumption, they should use relatable comparisons so the reader can understand it better.

There is hope that brands will not only focus on marketing their garments but also educate consumers about recycling methods through social media. As interviewer 12 suggested:

Maybe that brands do not advertise every new clothing collection that they launch. They mention that you must buy this one and the next one and so on. But maybe instead they should have some clothing pieces that are always the same and can be used over time. Create bigger campaigns in social media making more emphasis on the sustainability actions of a brand. Not only speak about their clothes materials but also, they can create videos where they teach people about

sustainability. It can be small actions like learning how to sew to redesign your clothes. In that way, it's not necessary to throw them away.

4.1.4 Recommendations for the future fashion industry

- Brands need to change the mindset of consumers to prioritize sustainability, however, changing consumer mindsets will be a challenge for companies and it is the most difficult change.
- Sustainability in the fashion industry will become more important in the next 10 years, perhaps due to climate change.
- Due consumers student context, they prioritize both affordability and sustainability in apparel purchasing, which reveals market needs.
- Most consumers advocated for better working conditions in the fashion industry, using sustainability to achieve this goal.
- The intervention and control by the authorities is needed. By implementing initiatives such as tracking systems and policies to adequately audit the properly audit the brand's sustainability practices.
- It was suggested during the study to give brands the flexibility to carry out their sustainability efforts and governments should not impose the same policies for everyone.

4.2 Analysis of video ads

An analysis of Vinted, H&M and Fjällräven video ads was conducted (see full video ads in Appendix 2). The purpose of the ads was to convey directly (H&M and Vinted brands) or indirectly (Fjällräven) sustainable habits: consume less, recycle and buy quality products that will have a long life.

Participants rated the commercials mostly with positive adjectives such as: creative, original and familiar, and negative adjectives such as: consumerist and disappointing, demonstrating the different perspectives from which a brand's message can be viewed (See table 2).

Table 2: Video advertising perceptions

	Video advertising perceptions	
Advertising Brand	Positive adjectives	Negative adjectives

Vinted	Old fashion (positive connotation), creative, quirky.	Consumerist, overconsumption.
H&M	Innovative, technological, cool, sustainable, recycling	Disappointing
Fjällräven	Original, functional, cute, familiar.	Extensive

Source: Own elaboration

According to perception theory, authors Murphy & Zajonc (1993) and Pachankis (2007) determined that consumers' perceptions are shaped by two separate modes of analyzing data: emotional (affective) and rational (cognitive). All three ads appeal primarily to the emotional side of the consumer. However, in the case of Fjällräven, it demonstrates more the functionality of its products. Similarly, as mentioned by Matthes et al. (2014), according to the Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1990), there is a differentiation in ad appeal that influences consumer perceptions of the ad, especially according to its level of involvement (high or low) in environmental causes. There are two sorts of ad appeals: a functional appeal that stresses imagery linked to ecologically friendly processes and products, and an emotional appeal that emphasizes abstract green images (such as breathtaking scenery), for example used in the brand Fjällräven commercial.

The study by Matthes et al. (2014) argues that people with low involvement prefer emotional messages, and those with more knowledge and involvement in a subject prefer ads that focus on the product's functionality. This situation is consistent with what some participants think about the ads. The ones that have more knowledge on the topic of sustainability and environment, as indicated by the ELM model, question the videos and argue that in the video of H&M, they do not have enough information to incentivize recycling and generate a real change in people's behavior. In the case of Vinted, consumers consider the message as contradictory to its purpose because by omitting information and using its narrative in favor of the company, the brand does not directly indicate that the consumer should stop consuming, in contrast, it is understood that they can continue buying many fashion products as they can to then sell them through Vinted.

Another aspect to consider as well is that green advertising typically appeals to consumers' affective and cognitive views (Yoon et al., 2020), by using emotional (such as pictures of stunning natural resources, such as grasslands and endangered species) and factual signals (such as numbers relating to energy and water savings), and as

mentioned by Batra & Ray (1986), affective perceptions symbolize sentiments of kindness, empathy, joy, and sorrow, and cognitive perceptions relate to their convictions, ideas and knowledge.

In this way, Vinted's commercial generates empathy because people identify themselves with the situation of overconsumption that they present, and acknowledging this behavior can lead to change. In the case of Fjällräven, the feelings of kindness presented about the culture of the company and its employees positively affect the consumer's perception and reinforces the interviewees' interest in this brand. By demonstrating through testimonials, the durability and functionality of its products, consumers also recognize the values of authenticity and honesty, and although the commercial does not directly indicate that the brand is sustainable, consumers can perceive that by purchasing a Fjällräven product, they will last a long time and avoid early disposal.

4.3 Chapter Summary

By recollecting and categorizing the data through interviews to young consumers, three views on sustainable fashion were identified: distrust due to lack of transparency, ethical and emotional aware mindset, and with an inconsistent and contradictory communication.

Additionally, the study examined the responses of the interview participants about video ads from three brands: Vinted, H&M, and Fjällräven. These ads aimed to promote sustainable habits like consuming less, recycling, and buying durable products. While H&M and Vinted directly conveyed these messages, Fjällräven did so indirectly. Participants generally viewed the commercials positively, describing them as creative and original and understanding the companies' intended messages, but also had negative perceptions, labeling them as consumerist and disappointing, highlighting varied perspectives on the brands' messages.

5 Conclusion

This study reviewed various theories that analyze sustainable fashion, the relationship between sustainable studies and the consumer, sustainable fashion and business models and communication of sustainable fashion, which are related to the results obtained from the group of people interviewed. Analyzing the data obtained from the interviews, three consumer views on sustainable fashion were generated: distrust due to lack of transparency, ethical and emotional aware mindset, and with an inconsistent and contradictory communication. This data was contrasted with various theories mentioned in the literature review and the following conclusions were reached:

Distrust and lack of transparency

Companies show attitudes committed to sustainable practices, but do not fully convince consumers because they believe that companies should show greater transparency and demonstrate their commitment to sustainable fashion through their actions. Consumers' ethical beliefs influence the way they judge companies for not complying with their commitments to the consumer.

In Joanes et al.'s (2020) theory on the determinants of sustainable fashion consumption, he applies the Comprehensive Action Determination Model (CADM), where he concludes that personal and social norms are important factors influencing the intention to reduce consumption, but personal norms (moral beliefs that play an important role in motivation) have a stronger and more direct relationship with intentions to reduce consumption than social norms. In this study, respondents have expressed their own personal beliefs and demonstrated that they are not influenced by marketing messages related to sustainability.

On the communication of sustainable fashion, Brydges et al. (2022) investigate the narratives of sustainable fashion companies to approach consumers, however, they criticize that companies declare that they are sustainable autonomously, without any external regulation that validates them, generating less consumer trust towards companies, and companies do not mention in their messages how customers should act to contribute to the environment. The existence of distrust and lack of transparency on the part of the companies was identified among the responses of the interviewees.

According to Fletcher (2014), the objectives of the fashion production system are to increase the profits of companies to grow in the market, they are not primarily aimed at benefiting the environment, for that a radical change from the industry is needed. One of the interviewees thinks that it is totally contradictory for fashion brands to focus on sustainability, because that

is not possible for the fashion industry itself, therefore, sending those messages to consumers is a marketing gimmick.

McNeill and Moore (2015) employed developmental theory modeling to examine consumer attitudes toward sustainable fashion products. Their study identified three categories of consumers: self-consumers focused on hedonic needs, social consumers concerned about their social image, and sacrificial consumers seeking to minimize their impact on the world. Within the interview participants, the group of self-consumers focused on hedonic needs and the group of sacrificial consumers can be identified.

Emotional mindset

On the emotional content of perceptions, the most common feelings in the interviews were feelings of betrayal, doubt, guilt and anger. Participants mention that this trend of apparel companies joining sustainability it's just a trend and a sales tactic.

For its part, conspicuous values, mentioned by Jun et al. (2016), are not as important to consumers in environmental contexts, these values make consumers who wear certain brands feel that they acquire a higher social status. As the research reflects, none of the interviewees mentioned the importance of brands to demonstrate their wealth in Sweden, and in their home country they focused more on utilitarian and hedonic values, seeking garments for their functionality first and secondly for the aesthetics of the clothing through design and color.

Inconsistent and contradictory communication

Consumers identify that communication has contradictory messages in relation to companies' actions. This situation can be identified by companies' greenwashing practices.

About the videos used to learn about the perceptions of the interviewees, according to perception theory, authors Murphy and Zajonc (1993) and Pachankis (2007) determined that consumer perceptions are determined by two separate modes of data analysis: emotional (affective) and rational (cognitive). All three ads appeal primarily to the emotional side of the consumer. However, in the case of Fjällräven, it demonstrates more the functionality of its products. Most of the interviewees rated the content of the videos as creative and familiar, and therefore had a positive impact on them.

Recommendations for brand communication

The current research found that in order to bring authenticity and transparency to their sustainability messaging, brands need to share facts and real data about their supply chain and production processes to build trust with consumers. Companies need to not only try to market their garments, but also educate consumers about recycling methods through social media.

Recommendations for the future fashion industry

Brands need to change the mindset of consumers to prioritize sustainability, however, changing the mindset of consumers will be a challenge for companies and is the most difficult change. Intervention and control by authorities is necessary. Implementing initiatives such as tracking systems and policies to properly audit brand sustainability practices.

It is suggested that brands be given the flexibility to carry out their sustainability efforts and governments should not impose the same policies for all.

Video ads

The study reinforces the Elaboration-Likelihood Model (ELM) used by Matthes et al. (2014). This shows that advertising aimed at increasing consumption of sustainable fashion is not effective for everyone. Some consumers understand a contrary message of what brands intended. Consumers will not readily believe if they are more knowledgeable about environmental causes, but if the ads appeal to the emotionality of the consumer, they will be effective with consumers who have little or a lot of knowledge, if not, they will be more questionable.

5.1 Practical Implications

This study can contribute to the literature on sustainable fashion within consumer research/marketing by expanding our understandings of how consumer view sustainable fashion discourses, in particular to understand the views of young adult consumers in Sweden. Investigating consumers' responses to sustainability-driven marketing campaigns is essential. This research will provide companies with valuable insights into consumer behavior, allowing them to adjust their marketing strategies to better promote sustainable fashion and enhance greater environmental consciousness in the fashion industry. An implication of the findings is that consumers increasingly demand transparency regarding the practices of sustainable fashion brands. If brands don't share enough information, and people continue to doubt their sustainable practices, their communication efforts will be ineffective.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

It is proposed for the future to expand the coverage of the study by interviewing people with a more varied profile in terms of age, culture and profession, with the aim of validating the results obtained on perceptions about sustainable fashion communication. First, it is recommended to extend the research to the general population, in order to make the sample more representative in Sweden. Considering that most of the current study participants had an interest in sustainable fashion and were studying topics associated with environmental sustainability at university, a bias was generated in their responses and perceptions of sustainable fashion communication.

By broadening the audience in future studies and assessing consumers who have no interest in sustainability, different impressions will be gathered that may also be of interest and value to brands in the fashion industry. Second, making a comparison between these two groups of people, those with little knowledge and those with a lot of knowledge on sustainability issues, can gather new insights for the market. Lastly, future research can also investigate this types on consumers in different countries where governments do not necessarily have a strong commitment to sustainable development in environmental, economic and social terms.

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Appendix A

Interview questions:

Sustainable fashion awareness

1. How familiar are you with sustainability-focused fashion brands marketing campaigns?

Perceptions on sustainability messaging

2. What name comes to your mind when you think about sustainable fashion brands/advertising? Can you recall an example of a communication that you saw recently?
3. When was the last time you bought something (clothing)? How frequently do you buy clothes? Did you take sustainability into account the last time you shopped?
4. What elements contribute to the effectiveness of sustainability-focused advertising in the fashion industry?

Consumer's attitudes towards greenwashing

5. Have you ever felt misled by a clothing brand's statements on sustainability? If so, how did it make you feel, can you provide examples?
6. What steps do you believe fashion brands should take to ensure transparency and authenticity in their sustainability messaging?
7. Can you name the brands you usually buy clothes from? Have you seen their advertisements or any communication in terms of sustainability? Do you actively look for sustainable communication from brands before you buy?

Relation with sustainability content

8. How do you think your consumption of clothing makes you feel about yourself? How does it influence your sense of self? How does it make you feel when you do (or don't) shop sustainable? Do you follow sustainability in all aspects of your life, for example do you frequently fly?

Future expectations

9. What specific initiatives or reforms in sustainability and ethical standards would you like to see from the fashion industry in the future?

Barriers to sustainability adoption

10. What obstacles or challenges do you think prevent more clothing brands from prioritizing sustainability in their marketing campaigns?

Questions related to video Ads: Please respond the 5 questions for each video

11. What are the most notable characteristics that you observe in the advertisement?
12. How could you describe the advertisement in one word?
13. What type of claim/message appears in the ad?
14. Do you think that this claim/messages encourages the customer to acquire sustainable habits, buy the products of the brand, or is misleading? Why do you think that?
15. Do you think this advertisement informs or engage with the consumer? Or both? Why? Could you elaborate a bit more on it please.

Appendix B

Videos

Three advertising campaigns were chosen from three popular fashion brands in Sweden: Vinted, H&M and Fjällräven.

1. Vinted: [https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/too-many-Too Many? | Vinted \(youtube.com\)](https://www.adsoftheworld.com/campaigns/too-many-Too-Many?|Vinted(youtube.com))



2. H&M: [Let's remake: Join the recycling revolution! \(youtube.com\)](#)



3. Fjällräven: [We are Fjällräven \(youtube.com\)](#)

