



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

Department of Business Administration

FEKH99

Bachelor thesis in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management

Spring Semester 2024

## Consumer Adoption of Sustainability Initiatives within Fashion: Impacts on Behavior

*A qualitative study analyzing consumers' purchase intention with fashion brands' innovative  
and sustainable approaches*

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## Sammanfattning

<b>Examensarbetets titel</b>	Konsument Anpassning av Hållbarhetsinitiativ Inom Mode: Påverkan På Engagemang och Beteende – En kvalitativ studie som analyserar konsumenters köpintention med klädföretags innovativa och hållbara tillvägagångssätt
<b>Seminariedatum</b>	30 maj 2024
<b>Kurs</b>	FEKH99, Examensarbete i entreprenörskap och innovation på kandidatnivå, 15 högskolepoäng
<b>Författare</b>	Adam Bengtsson, Kristina Stolica & Liv Edler
<b>Handledare</b>	Joakim Winborg
<b>Nyckelord</b>	Hållbart mode, Anpassningsbarriärer, Konsumentmotstånd, Innovationsmotstånd, Diffusion av innovation
<b>Forskningsfråga</b>	Vilka faktorer påverkar konsumenters beslut att anta eller förkasta hållbar klädkonsumtion, och hur påverkar dessa faktorer köpavsikten?
<b>Syfte</b>	Denna studie syftar till att analysera och förstå konsumenters engagemang med modeföretagens innovativa och hållbara tillvägagångssätt genom att undersöka vilka faktorer som fungerar som de främsta motivationerna bakom köpintentioner av hållbara kläder.
<b>Teoretiska perspektiv</b>	Diffusion of innovation, Innovation Resistance, Consumer resistance, Consumer resistance to innovations in the sustainable fashion industry
<b>Metod</b>	Uppsatsen utgår från en kvalitativ undersökningsmetod och deduktiv ansats. Detta görs med syfte att besvara rapportens forskningsfråga, som tog utgångspunkt i det teoretiska ramverket samt tidigare forskning. Den kvalitativa datainsamlingen gjordes genom elva intervjuer som baserades på ett målmedvetet urval. I undersökningen fick intervjupersonerna ta ställning till dels personliga frågor och dels till frågor som utformades utifrån det teoretiska ramverket. Analysen gjordes baserat på det teoretiska ramverket i relation till den empiriska datainsamlingen, vilken utformade sig utifrån transkribering av intervjuerna.
<b>Resultat</b>	Sju huvudfaktorer har identifierats, som påverkar konsumenters motstånd till att konsumera hållbart mode. Dessa är <i>Anknytning</i> , <i>Förtrogenhet</i> , <i>Image</i> , <i>Kommunikation</i> , <i>Transparens</i> , <i>Medvetenhet</i> och <i>Pris</i> . Emellertid finns det flera faktorer som ligger till grund för dessa, såsom olika barriärer, rate of adoption och “adopter-specific” faktorer.
<b>Slutsats</b>	Resultaten bidrar till den befintliga forskningen om resistens mot hållbart mode och uppmärksammar den komplexa dynamiken mellan olika faktorer samt sambandet mellan avsikt och beteende inom hållbar modekonsumtion. Trots positiva attityder till hållbarhet är fast fashion fortfarande det primära valet för konsumenter, vilket indikerar en avvikelse mellan attityder och beteenden.

## Abstract

<b>Title</b>	Consumer Adoption of Sustainability Initiatives within Fashion: Impacts on Engagement and Behavior – A qualitative study analyzing consumers' purchase intention with fashion brands' innovative and sustainable approaches
<b>Date of the seminar</b>	May 30th, 2024
<b>Course</b>	FEKH99, Bachelor Degree Project in Entrepreneurship and Innovation Management, Business administration, Undergraduate level, 15 University Credit Points
<b>Authors</b>	Adam Bengtsson, Kristina Stolica & Liv Edler
<b>Supervisor</b>	Joakim Winborg
<b>Keywords</b>	Sustainable fashion, Adoption barriers, Consumer resistance, Innovation resistance, Diffusion of innovation
<b>Research question</b>	What factors influence consumers' decisions to adopt or reject sustainable fashion consumption, and how do these factors impact purchase intention?
<b>Purpose</b>	This study aims to analyze and understand consumer engagement with fashion brands' innovative and sustainable approaches by investigating what factors serve as the main motivators behind purchase intentions of sustainable clothing.
<b>Theoretical perspective</b>	Diffusion of innovation, Innovation Resistance, Consumer resistance, Consumer resistance to innovations in the sustainable fashion industry
<b>Methodology</b>	The thesis is based on a qualitative research method and deductive approach. This is done with the aim of answering the report's research question, which was based on the theoretical framework and previous research. The qualitative data collection was done through eleven interviews which were based on a purposive sampling. In the research, the interviewees had to take a stand on partly personal questions and partly on questions that were designed based on the theoretical framework. The analysis was based on the theoretical framework in relation to the empirical data collection, which was based on transcription of the interviews.
<b>Result</b>	Seven main factors have been identified, which influence consumers' resistance to consuming sustainable fashion. These are <i>Attachment</i> , <i>Familiarity</i> , <i>Image</i> , <i>Communication</i> , <i>Transparency</i> , <i>Awareness</i> and <i>Price</i> . However, there are several factors that underlie these, such as various barriers, rate of adoption and adopter-specific factors.
<b>Conclusion</b>	The findings contribute to the existing research on resistance to sustainable fashion and highlight the complex dynamics between various factors and the connection between intention and behavior in sustainable fashion consumption. Despite positive attitudes towards sustainability, fast fashion remains the primary choice for consumers, indicating a discrepancy between attitudes and behaviors.

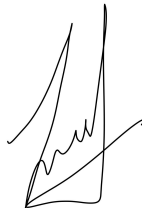
## Acknowledgement

First of all, we would like to express a big thank you to our supervisor, Joakim Winborg, Sten K. Johnson Center for Entrepreneurship, Department of Business Administration at the School of Economics at Lund University. Through the course of the work, he has guided us tremendously. He has shared academic perspectives and contributed very valuable insights which has made this work both fun and educational. Thanks to his trust in our vision, we have designed a thesis on a research topic that we know will contribute valuable insights and further knowledge in innovation and within the sphere of sustainable fashion.

We also want to take the opportunity to thank each other for a very good collaboration and for all the laughter and fighting spirit we have contributed to completing this thesis. Last but not least, to all interviewees who took the time to participate in interviews making the data collection possible; A heartfelt thank you.



Adam Bengtsson



Liv Edler



Kristina Stolica

Lund, 27th of May 2024

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# 1. Introduction

*In this introduction, the reader is provided with an overview of the study's context by explaining current phenomena in the field of fashion and trends related to ethical and sustainable consumption. Building upon the background, a problematization is formulated to connect our research to previous studies and literature, as well as, examine current research gaps in this field. Lastly, concluding this section, the purpose of this study and the research questions are introduced.*

## 1.1 Background

The fashion industry has a tremendous, global environmental impact (Niinimäki et al., 2020) contributing to 8-10% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions annually (United Nations Climate Change, 2018; Quantis, 2018) as well as being a major user of water resources, utilizing 79 trillion liters yearly while also being responsible for around 20 % of water pollution resulting from various textile treatments and dyeing processes (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Kant, 2012). In addition, the industry is responsible for 35% of the primary microplastic pollution in the oceans, which is equivalent to 190,000 tonnes per year (United Nations Climate Change, 2018) while also generating 92 million tonnes of textile waste annually, much of which ends up being burnt or disposed of in landfills (Dahlbo et al., 2017). As for the social impact, the fashion industry is characterized by significant ethical and moral issues related its troubled relationship with worker welfare, with claims of physical and sexual harassment, child labor, sweatshop conditions, dangerous and inadequate working environments, long working hours, and low wages (Stringer et al., 2021; Taplin, 2014).

Despite these facts, a phenomenon called fast fashion has arised, being the main driving factor behind the fashion industry's recent growth (Bruce & Daly, 2006; Smith, 2023). Global fast-fashion retailers such as Inditex, H&M, and Uniqlo have shifted the paradigm so that speed and low costs are prioritized before sustainability and quality (Bruce & Daly, 2006), leading to even more emissions and pollution from the fashion industry because of the shortened product life cycle (Taplin, 2014).

In the light of both environmental and social issues created by fast fashion and the fashion industry, awareness and criticism are on the rise (Fashion United, 2020) along with the

demand for sustainable products (Coronado Robles & Darke, 2020; Westbrook & Angus, 2021). However, in a report conducted by WWF Italy and Bain & Company Inc. (2022) regarding sustainable purchase trends in fashion, approximately 65% of global fashion consumers expressed great concern about the industry's sustainability efforts, but only 15% consistently made sustainable purchase decisions to lower their impact. The difference in percentage showcases a discrepancy between consumer attitudes and consumer behavior and is therefore worth investigating further.

## 1.2 Problematization

In an era where fast fashion dominates the fashion market, understanding the challenges facing the consumer adoption of sustainable fashion is crucial. In this study, sustainable fashion is defined as the form of fashion consumption that prioritizes reducing the environmental impact, in regards to carbon emission and land-and-water pollution, as well as reflecting a broader societal welfare perspective where the garments are produced under safe and good working conditions (Ronda, 2023).

Without consumers' adoption to sustainability consumption, the issue of excessive consumption, and its consequences, will remain. There are various barriers that can be identified to understand the processes of sustainable behavior adoption. These factors include expectation of higher price, low trust and transparency regarding sustainability claims, lack of awareness of their consumption's impact, limited availability and identity (Ronda, 2023).

The first identified issue is the perception of a higher price for sustainable fashion products, meaning that price is a critical attribute that would affect consumers' purchasing behavior (James & Montgomery, 2017). The expectation of the higher price associated with sustainable fashion generally prevents customers from transitioning to sustainable fashion (Ronda, 2023). Additionally, previous studies have shown that consumers' perspective on the importance of sustainability in the fashion industry is relatively low compared to other industries (Alevizou et al. 2017; Kong & Ko, 2017) which has contributed to the assumption that sustainable fashion is overpriced, and does not indicate better quality of the clothing pieces compared to cheaper alternatives (Han et al., 2017).

The second barrier that hinders consumers to adopt sustainable fashion is the lack of knowledge and awareness about the impact that fast fashion has on the environment. Many consumers are unaware of the environmental impact that the fabrics in their clothing have, which makes it difficult to differentiate between eco-friendly materials and those with a high carbon footprint (Ronda, 2023). Additionally, there is a considerable gap between consumers and workers, leaving consumers disconnected from the working conditions endured during the garment-making process. Even the clothing company may not have visibility into every factory within the supply chain they work with. Research indicates that the fundamental barrier lies in consumers' lack of firsthand insight and understanding, hindering their ability to make responsible fashion choices (James & Montgomery, 2017).

The third barrier is the low trust in fashion companies' sustainability claims. Many fashion companies have decided to implement terms like “eco-friendly” or “sustainable” on their labels, for marketing reasons, to attract customers. However, this has often led to greenwashing, which in turn fosters skepticism about the authenticity of such claims. There is a growing demand from consumers for companies to inform them regarding their sustainability efforts and maintaining this information transparently, which can be advantageous for companies as it contributes to legitimacy and strengthens their reputation (Ronda, 2023).

Furthermore, clothing has been shown to play a crucial role in representing people's identity which expresses the connection between the individual's fashion consumption and their desire to express their self-identity. Moreover, clothing has been proven to serve as a mechanism to express individual identity and influence social hierarchies. Therefore people tend to stick to clothes that are socially connected to and are accepted by their social environment, representing the fourth barrier to transitioning to sustainable fashion (Ronda, 2023).

The fifth, and final, factor is the low availability of sustainable fashion. This perception poses challenges for consumers trying to find and purchase sustainable clothing, leading them to rely on mainstream clothing brands, often fast fashion ones, which offer a wide variety of designs and styles that are easily available and affordable. Consumers often struggle to find sustainable clothing with their desired characteristics, such as specific styles, sizes, or quality standards and due to the limited supply of sustainable clothing, it is easy for consumers to choose fast fashion brands that offer a wide supply (Ronda, 2023).

The factors highlighted in this problematization are a few of the many reasons why fashion consumers still choose to purchase unethically sourced clothes and support the fast fashion industry. Other factors that will be discussed in this thesis are connected to theories of innovation management, for instance passive and active resistance factors formulated by Talke and Heidenreich (2014) that explore barriers related to functionality, psychology and the individual adopting the innovation. However, the reader should keep in mind that the picture is bigger than this, meaning that there are other potential components influencing the purchase decision.

### 1.3 Purpose and Research Question

This study aims to analyze and understand purchase intention with fashion brands' innovative and sustainable approaches by investigating what factors serve as the main motivators behind purchase intentions of sustainable fashion, and on the contrary understand what factors act as the main barriers to sustainable fashion consumption.

In regards to the purpose of the study, the research question has been formulated as:

*What factors influence consumers' decisions to adopt or reject sustainable fashion consumption, and how do these factors impact purchase intention?*

## 2. Theory

*In this chapter, the reader is introduced to the theoretical framework of this study, which is based on theories within the field of innovation management. The theoretical framework aims to provide a nuanced picture highlighting both the adoption, diffusion, and resistance of innovations to gain an understanding of consumers' adoption processes and how they may engage and react to sustainable practices within the fashion industry.*

### 2.1 Diffusion of innovation

Diffusion of innovation is a theory coined by Everett Rogers in the year of 1962 but has since been developed. Diffusion is described as a process in which the communication of the innovation is fulfilled, through different channels, over time among stakeholders and members of social systems. Communication is defined as the process of information sharing between individuals resulting in reaching a common understanding. Communication can be viewed as a mutual process of convergence, rather than as a linear act where one individual seeks to transmit a message to another with specific outcomes in mind. Diffusion represents a unique form of communication centered around novel ideas. The newness inherent in the message content distinguishes diffusion. This newness introduces some degree of uncertainty into the process of diffusion. Diffusion constitutes a form of social change, characterized by the progression in the structure and function of social systems. Certain consequences arise as a result of the new ideas being invented and diffused; they are either adopted or rejected, and thus social change will occur. (Rogers, 2003)

Rogers (2003) further explains the importance of the term *rate of adoption*. This can be defined as the comparative speed at which an innovation is embraced and adopted by individuals of a social system. Typically it is quantified by the number of individuals adopting the new idea within a certain timeframe, for instance annually. The term serves as a numerical measure of the incline of the adoption curve for an innovation. Rogers (2003) states that there are different attributes affecting the adoption rate. The five attributes that influence the variance in rate of adoption the most are; relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and lastly, observability. These can be defined as:

- Relative Advantage - The extent to which an innovation is perceived as superior to the idea, program, or product it replaces. (Rogers, 2003)
- Compatibility - The extent to which the innovation aligns with the values, experiences, and needs of potential adopters. (Rogers, 2003)
- Complexity - The complexity of understanding and/or using the innovation. (Rogers, 2003)
- Trialability - The opportunity for experimentation or testing of the innovation before committing to adoption. (Rogers, 2003)
- Observability - How tangible the results provided by the innovation are. (Rogers, 2003)

Furthermore, there are other variables impacting the rate of adoption, such as; innovation-decision, different communication channels diffusing the innovation depending on what stage in the innovation-decision process the corporation is in, and the nature of the social system. Regarding rate of adoption, the innovation resistance model discusses its characteristics further.

## 2.2 Innovation Resistance

Innovation resistance is a concept that describes the consumers' reaction towards an innovation. The reaction can imply a satisfactory change in consumer behavior meaning that the innovation is adopted. Contrastingly, it can imply a conflict with the consumers' belief structure, creating resistance towards the innovation (Ram & Sheth, 1989). However, this concept is not to be seen as the obverse of innovation adoption, since adoption can only take place after the initial resistance from the consumer has passed. This implies that if the resistance is too high, there would be no adoption because the innovation would experience market failure (Ram, 1987).

Resistance to innovation influences when it is adopted. Furthermore, the degree of resistance to innovation varies. Resistance spans a spectrum, ranging from passive reluctance to active opposition. Consumers who become aware of an innovation may react in several ways:

1. They might exhibit passivity, feeling disinclined to adopt the innovation.
2. They may perceive the innovation as too risky and delay their adoption decision.
3. Consumers might deem the innovation unsuitable and actively oppose its adoption.

Resistance to innovation transcends product categories. What matters isn't the specific type of product the innovation pertains to, but rather two fundamental causes of resistance: the extent of change or discontinuity introduced by the innovation and/or its alignment with the consumer's belief system. A highly discontinuous innovation imposes substantial change upon consumers and is likely to face significant resistance. Innovations rooted in new technologies often provoke high levels of discontinuity. Conversely, continuous innovation entails minimal change for consumers. However, even such innovations can encounter resistance due to conflicts with established belief structures. (Ram & Sheth, 1989)

In the year of 1989, Ram and Sheth created a model to explain why resistance to innovation occurs among consumers. Their model is created of two main barriers, the functional barrier and the psychological barrier, where each barrier has a subset of barriers. However, the work of Ram and Sheth (1989) has been developed over the years and different researchers have altered the model. In 2014, Talke and Heidenreich created their framework intending to explain the pro-change bias, which is often overlooked in traditional innovation decision models. The pro-change bias refers to the resistance and rejection before the persuasion stage, meaning that consumers refuse to even consider an innovation's potential. Talke and Heidenreich (2014) redefined the innovation-decision model by dividing the drivers of innovation resistance into active and passive forms, which will be explained further.

### 2.2.1 Passive Innovation Resistance

The first part of Talke and Heidenreich's (2014) model regards passive resistance and it refers to a reluctance or inertia toward change, where individuals or groups may not actively oppose innovation but are hesitant to embrace it due to factors such as inertia, habit, or fear of the unknown (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). According to Talke and Heidenreich (2014), research has shown that passive innovation comprises adopter-specific and situation-specific factors.

The adopter-specific factors refer to the individuals' inclination to resist change which traces back to the individual's unique personality traits. The tendency to resist change can be divided into six related but separate elements;

1. Reluctance to lose control: Individuals resist change due to the fear of losing control over aspects of their lives (Oreg, 2003).
2. Cognitive rigidity: Individuals exhibit stubbornness and an unwillingness to consider alternative ideas or perspectives (Rokeach, 1960).
3. Lack of psychological resilience: Individuals struggle to cope with change and therefore change is to be seen as a stressor (Judge et al., 1999).
4. Intolerance to the adjustment period: Individuals resist change and avoid increased effort in the short term (Kanter, 1985).
5. Preference for low levels of stimulation: Some individuals have a weaker inclination for novelty and stimulation, making them more averse to change (Goldsmith, 1984).
6. Reluctance to give up old habits: People resist change because familiar responses may clash with the new situation, leading to stress (Oreg, 2003).

The second factor that contributes to passive resistance is the situation-specific factors, which determine an individual's satisfaction with the status quo, which refers to the current situation. Individuals tend to regard the status quo as a significant point of reference (Bell, 1985), which leads to a preference for the current situation rather than any other alternative, despite the alternative offering higher utility (Falk et al., 2007). This phenomenon termed the status quo bias (Gourville, 2006; Samuelson & Zeckhauser, 1988), describes individuals' inclination to avoid change by favoring the current state, primarily because of the perceived notion that "the disadvantages of leaving it loom larger than the advantages" (Kahneman et al., 1991, p. 68).

According to Talke and Heidenreich (2014), a product owned by an individual serves as a pivotal, situation-specific factor that consequently shapes the perceived status quo and serves as a point of reference when making decisions related to innovation. Due to the emotional bond an individual makes to a product they own, exposure to innovations tends to lead to rejection because individuals typically favor familiar and established products (Hetts et al., 2000). This is a result of the aim to preserve the current status quo which hinders the processing of information related to innovation (Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1983), reinforcing passive resistance. As a consequence of this emotional attachment, alternatives that are superior to the status quo are often overlooked (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998).



Passive resistance towards innovation depends on adopter-specific and situation-specific factors, but can also be a combination of both factors (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014), as depicted in the figure below.

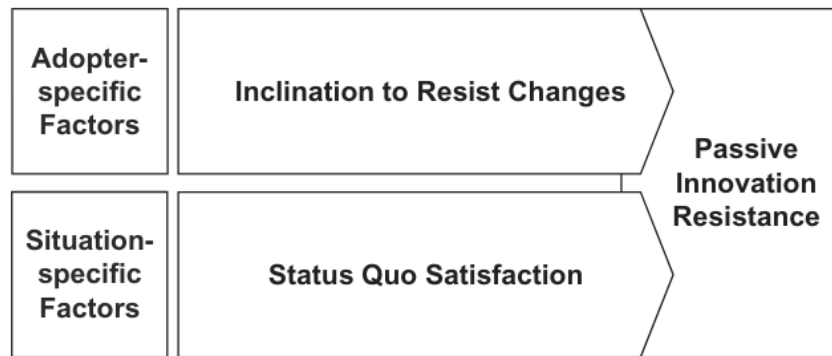


Figure 1: Passive Innovation Resistance Model (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014)

### 2.2.2 Active Innovation Resistance

The second part of Talke and Heidenreich's model from 2014 describes what constitutes active resistance toward innovation. In this altered version, active resistance stems from innovation-specific factors that interact with the different attitudes of the consumers. Consumers' attitudes toward innovation are based on their evaluation of the innovation attributes (Rogers, 2003) and if their perception of certain attributes does not align with their expectations, innovation-specific barriers arise (Laukkanen et al., 2008) leading to non-purchase behavior. Active resistance to innovation comprises two separate main barriers: the functional barriers and the psychological barriers, each with its subset of barriers, as illustrated in the model below.

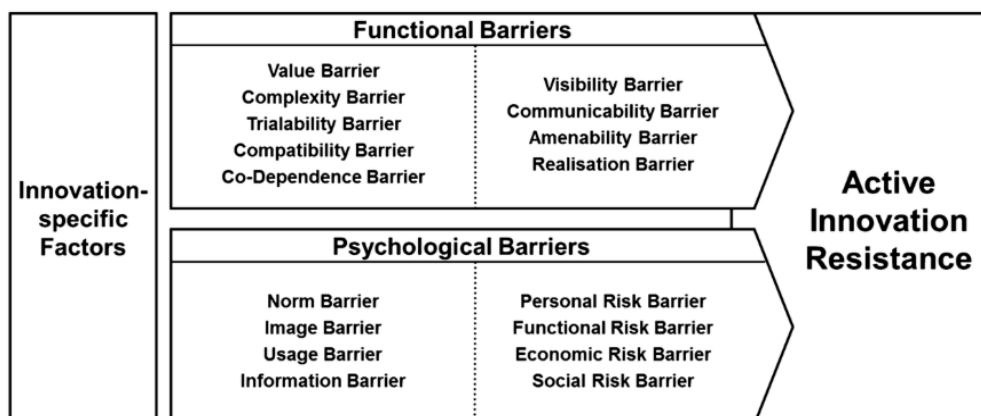


Figure 2: Active Innovation Resistance Model (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014)

The functional barriers emerge when a consumer perceives any product attributes as inadequate or dysfunctional based on their personal needs and usage expectations (Bagozzi & Lee, 1999; Nabih et al., 1997). The active resistance may happen through any of the nine sub-barriers comprising the functional barriers.

The first of nine barriers to be presented is the *value barrier*, which constitutes the value of innovation and refers to the perceived lack of superior performance or relative advantage by the innovation compared to existing alternatives (Ram & Sheth, 1989). Continuing, the *complexity barrier* implies that resistance to innovation happens if the innovation is difficult to use or complex to understand (Ram, 1987; Rogers, 2003). The *trialability barrier* is a form of barrier that relates to the consumer's perceptions of problems or difficulties in testing the innovation before adoption (Kuisma et al., 2007; Ram, 1987). *Compatibility barriers* emerge when consumers perceive an innovation as incompatible with existing or past products, while *co-dependence barriers* arise if consumers feel a product relies too heavily on additional products to fully function (Laukkanen et al., 2008; Molesworth & Suortti, 2002). Another functional barrier is the *communicability barrier* which reflects a perception of ineffectiveness when describing the pros and cons of innovation to others (Moore and Benbasat, 1991; Rogers, 2003). The *visibility barriers* arise when consumers encounter challenges in observing others using the innovation (Molesworth & Suortti, 2002; Moore & Benbasat, 1991). *Amenability barriers* emerge when an innovation seems to offer limited potential for modification, updating, or customization to suit specific consumer needs (Ram, 1987; Szmigin and Foxall, 1998). Finally, the last one of the functional barriers is the *realization barrier*, which happens when consumers perceive the period, before experiencing the benefits of the innovation, as too long (Ram, 1987).

According to Ram and Sheth (1989), psychological barriers arise due to conflicts with consumers' prior beliefs, societal perceptions, or usage patterns. The psychological barrier can be separated into eight barriers; norm, image, usage, information, and four different forms of risk.

The first of eight psychological barriers to be introduced is the *norm barrier* which occurs if an innovation is seen as conflicting with group norms, or societal and family values (Laukkanen et al., 2008; Ram, 1987). The second factor is the *image barrier*. If a consumer has an unfavorable view of the image connected to the product's category, brand, country of

origin, or perceived quality, it will affect the consumer's acceptance of the product (Ram & Sheth, 1989), hence acting as a barrier and creating resistance. The *usage barrier* is another central form of active resistance towards an innovation. According to Ram and Sheth (1989), one of the most common reasons consumers resist an innovation is because the innovation is not compatible with the consumers' existing workflows, practices, or habits. If an innovation necessitates adjustments to consumers' daily habits it is more likely that the innovation will face resistance because it is not easy to use and adapt to. Innovations that require adjustments are more likely to undergo longer development processes before they are accepted by the consumers, however, unless the usage is simplified the resistance will persist (Ram & Sheth, 1989). The fourth active resistance barrier to be presented is the information barrier, which relates to the perceived information asymmetries that can make consumers unsure about the innovation and its potential, unwanted consequences (Kuisma et al., 2007).

According to Talke and Heidenreich (2014), a form of active resistance can happen if the usage of an innovation is perceived as being too risky. Overall, the risk barrier describes the potential side effects and the uncertainty that comes with innovation, as well as, the consumers' tendency to postpone the adoption of innovation until the potential users have acquired enough information (Ram & Sheth, 1989). According to Ram and Sheth (1989), the first type of risk barrier is *physical risk*, in other words, the harm to a person or property that may be intrinsic to the innovation. Secondly, there is the *economic risk barrier* which showcases a correlation between risk and cost. As the cost of an innovation increases, so does the perceived economic risk associated with it (Ram & Sheth, 1989). The third type of risk barrier is the *functional risk*, which is based on the uncertainty of the performance of an innovation. This leads to the consumer being concerned that the innovation may not have undergone thorough testing, therefore leading to potential issues with its functionality or reliability (Ram & Sheth, 1989). Lastly, the fourth type of risk barrier relates to *social risk*, which implies that consumers may be more prone to resisting an innovation because they think that "they will face social ostracism or peer ridicule when they adopt it" (Ram & Sheth, 1989, p. 8).

To conclude, Talke and Heidenreich's (2014) proposition suggests that active resistance to innovation stems from a combination of innovation-specific functional and psychological obstacles arising from negative evaluations of new products.

### 2.2.3 Consumer Resistance Response

Consumer resistance response can result in three forms of responses; rejection, postponement, or opposition (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998; Mirella et al., 2009).

According to Mirella et al. (2009), resistance can take different forms, where a direct *rejection* from consumers is the most extreme form. When there is a group of consumers rejecting the innovation, it is common for the manufacturer to modify it suitably and thus introduce it in the market once again. If there is a lack of a valuable advantage, or if the innovation is too complex or risky, there will be a risk of rejection occurring (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998). There are two types of rejection: passive and active rejection. When an innovation is never adopted or implemented, the innovation can be characterized as passive, while when an innovation is being considered and later rejected, the innovation can be characterized as active. (Woodside Arch & Biemans Wim, 2005)

The act of *postponement* happens when a consumer delays the adoption of an innovation. According to Kuisima's et al. (2007) definition, postponement implies deferring the adoption decision to a later time. Despite the innovation potentially being acceptable to the consumer, postponement happens due to situational factors. These include, for instance, waiting for the right time, wanting to make sure the product works efficiently, or waiting to become capable. The act of postponement has two possible results, either acceptance or definitive rejection (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998).

*Opposition*, according to Kuisima et al. (2007, p. 464) refers to “protesting the innovation or searching for further information after the trial”. Several factors influence the consumer to oppose an innovation. These are, for instance, habit resistance and individual cognitive styles (Mirella et al., 2009). The act of opposition has two outcomes, either rejection or acceptance. Because the consumer is willing to make their assessment by trying out the innovation, one may reject it because of the gained awareness about the innovation, and realizing that innovation is not suitable for them. Contradictory, the assessment and search for more information can also result in the acceptance of an innovation (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998).



Figure 3: Consumer Resistance Model based on studies by Szmigin & Foxall (1998) and Mirella et al. (2009).

### 2.3 Consumer resistance to innovations in the sustainable fashion industry

Since the 1960's consumers have become increasingly aware of the impact that the fast-fashion industry has on the environment and its concerns regarding safe and fair working conditions. This increased awareness has led to some consumers choosing to consume sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion aims to reduce the environmental impact and improve working conditions within the fashion industry, by considering the entire lifecycle of the clothing pieces and making these more sustainable. Because it is a holistic approach, the life cycle includes material selection, design, production, transportation and distribution channels. Sustainable fashion prioritizes natural fibers and materials that need less energy and water for production, as well as fair working conditions for their workers. Consequently, this can lead to higher production costs and retail prices, compared to clothing pieces that are mass-produced (Ronda, 2023).

Sustainable consumption practices have also gained increased awareness in literature, especially regarding how it impacts consumers' decision-making processes. According to Peattie (2010) many consumers who express a strong motivation to consume responsibly may not consistently act accordingly. Despite the increased positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption, there often exists a gap between attitudes and behaviors meaning that even though most consumers have a positive attitude towards sustainable consumption, they still do not change their consumption habits.

Attitude can be defined according to Weigel (1983, p. 257) as “an enduring set of beliefs about an object that predisposes people to behave in a particular way toward the object”. However, when consumers still do not adjust to their values, it leads to an attitude-behavior

gap, also known as the intention-behavior gap. The attitude-behavior gap framework is central to understanding sustainable consumption and the low rates of adoption of sustainable practices. This gap has been studied in the sustainable fashion industry, and research has shown that despite the awareness of the benefits of sustainable consumption, consumers often continue to choose fast-fashion brands over sustainable ones (Ronda, 2023). This gap suggests that, despite supporting sustainable principles in theory, consumers may struggle to implement them due to high adaptation barriers (Ronda, 2023). One significant barrier is the price difference between sustainable clothing and fast fashion garments. Sustainable clothing often commands a premium, which discourages price-sensitive consumers from making sustainable choices. Additionally, the lack of standardized eco-labeling on clothing complicates consumers' decision-making processes, making it difficult to align their purchases with their sustainability initiatives. Another barrier is the doubts surrounding the credibility of claims and lack of transparency from fashion companies sustainability claims, which challenges establishing and maintaining consumers' trust. The existence of information gaps and frequent accusations of greenwashing provoke skepticism among consumers, creating an environment where perceptive a genuine commitment to sustainability becomes a complicated task. Concluding, the most persistent barrier contributing to resistance is the lack of willingness to compromise on attributes such as aesthetics, comfort, and convenience (Nguyen & Mai, 2019).

## 2.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis is designed to analyze the factors as to why fashion consumers choose to or not choose to participate in sustainable fashion consumption.

By incorporating the *Diffusion theory* by Everett Rogers the study aims to understand how the *diffusion* of sustainable fashion takes place and how consumers *adopt* different kinds of sustainability practices made on behalf of fashion brands. Regarding adoption, the *rate of adoption* is a crucial concept that will enrich this study with the perspective of acceptance over time and explain how the five attributes of adoption rate; *relative advantage*, *compatibility*, *complexity*, *trialability*, and lastly, *observability*, are expressed when related to sustainable fashion. Furthermore, the diffusion theory will provide this study with the understanding of how *communication* of fashion brand's sustainable practices influences diffusion among consumers.

However, innovations often face resistance, and according to Ram and Sheth (1989), the adoption can only take place after the initial resistance from the consumer has passed. The resistance is also evident within the fashion industry in the form of fast fashion and its rapid growth. In order to understand the consumer's resistance towards sustainable fashion, from an innovation management perspective, this study incorporates the *Innovation Resistance theory*, coined by Ram and Sheth, but later modified by Talke and Heidenreich. This thesis will examine innovation barriers based on Talke and Heidenreich's (2014) model which incorporates *active* and *passive resistance* factors. Active and Passive resistance factors will provide this study with an understanding of the origin of resistance, whether it is adopter-, situation-, or innovation-specific by assessing psychological and functional barriers.

To further nuance the understanding of rejection, the model *Consumer Resistance Response* based on studies by Szmigin & Foxall (1998) and Mirella et al., (2009), is included. This model aims to explain consumer engagement by examining three prominent responses; *rejection, postponement, or opposition* (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998; Mirella et al., 2009).

To conclude the theoretical chapter, the reader is provided with information about consumer resistance to innovations in the sustainable fashion industry. This part intends to bring together the concepts of innovation management and current barriers within sustainable fashion by providing a historical explanation and current trends and events in the fashion industry.

## 3. Methodology

*In this chapter, the research strategies are presented, which are then followed by the research design. After discussing the sampling method, the collection of data is outlined. Subsequently, the reliability and validity of the research are addressed, leading into an explanation of how the empirical data will be analyzed. Finally, the ethical approach and the research's limitations are discussed.*

### 3.1 Research Strategies

When discussing the research strategy for the thesis, Bryman et al. (2022) embraced us with deep knowledge regarding both the quantitative and the qualitative strategy. Quantitative research encompasses strategies aimed at quantifying and analyzing social phenomena and their interconnections. Historically, this method has been predominant in business research and continues to maintain its prominence. Meanwhile, qualitative research is a strategy that typically emphasizes words over numerical data in gathering and analyzing data. Generally, it is inductive, constructionist and interpretive, although researchers do not always accede to all of these intellectual positions. (Bryman et al., 2022)

As Bryman et al. (2022) demonstrate, the report aims to, based on theoretical considerations, deduce research questions that are subjected to an empirical investigation. With the aspiration to gather qualitative data linked to the report's purpose and research questions, the interview questions were designed based on the presented theory and previous research in the field. In this way, the aspect of reliability and validity was also in mind when designing these. Considering the fact that we collected data based on the presented theories, we applied a deductive approach to our study. Furthermore, deductivism entails constructing a theoretical framework by formulating hypotheses, whereas inductivism suggests that the accumulation of facts leads to the acquisition of knowledge, serving as the foundation for identifying regular patterns. (Bryman et al., 2022)

This research paper has a qualitative approach when collecting data, and this approach was determined to be the most appropriate when taking the key features of the approaches in consideration. Initially, qualitative research emphasizes an epistemological position, also explained as interpretivist, stressing on the understanding of the social world by examining



the interpretation of the world of its members (Bryman et al., 2022). Interpretivism is highly connected to this thesis' research question and subject, since the main focus of the research was to analyze the social world and is primarily concerned with understanding human behavior (Bryman et al., 2022). Additionally, as the research is based on analyzing consumers' actions towards sustainable fashion consumption and simultaneously coupled with the interviewees' values and beliefs, as well as norms of the society, interpretivism was present. Moreover, another relevant aspect of the qualitative research that can be applied to this research regards the approach being constructionist. This ontological position argues for social properties to be results of individuals' interactions, rather than seeing the social world as external to social elements (Bryman et al., 2022).

In summary, qualitative research is well-suited for exploring the complex, context-dependent, and nuanced factors that influence consumers' decisions regarding sustainable fashion consumption. Its ability to provide rich, detailed insights, adapt to new findings, and uncover emotional and psychological drivers makes it an ideal approach for this type of research question. Researching this question with a quantitative approach would not have given us the depth and reasonings regarding different barriers, attitudes and factors affecting purchase intentions and consumer behavior regarding sustainable fashion.

## 3.2 Research Design

Considering that the thesis' data collection was obtained from individual, qualitative interviews, we ascertain with the support of Bryman et al. (2022), that the thesis' research design is a combination of the cross-sectional design and the case-study design.

To substantiate why the thesis' research design is colored by cross-sectional, its characteristics can be highlighted. Cross-sectional design implies that the researchers are interested in a diversity of people, organizations or anything else being studied. This variation can be initiated when more than one case, or interview, is examined. (Bryman et al., 2022) Furthermore, a cross-sectional design can be described to have no interest in the context, rather doing interviews to gain knowledge about the subject, whereas surroundings and background is not significant (Winborg, J., 2024).

In contrast, to substantiate why the thesis' research design also could be defined as case-study, Bryman et al. (2022) means that case study focuses more on a bounded situation and an entity with a purpose. Even though it is common for qualitative research designed through case studies to often imply unstructured interviews, we assess the thesis to include a context through surroundings and background (Bryman et al., 2022). We support this assertion by connecting surroundings and background to the personal questions included in the interview guide, giving us personas for every interview person and their general sustainability attitude, *see Appendix A*.

Consequently, as the data collection was carried out through interviews where the interviewees contain a diversity of people and to gain knowledge about their attitude towards sustainable fashion, we assess the thesis to be designed more towards the cross-sectional direction. Case-studies do, indeed, include context and background of the interviewees, however since they are rather characterized by unstructured interviews, and this thesis applies semi-structured interviews, the case-study design is not as prominent as the cross-sectional.

### 3.3 Search and selection of literature

The primary source of information for this thesis came from academic journals. These journals have been instrumental in supporting the thesis' theoretical perspectives, but they have also been inspirations to further perspectives. According to Bryman et al. (2022), an academic journal is defined as one that has been peer-reviewed, meaning the articles have been evaluated impartially by two to four experts in the relevant field. The research question was designed by reviewing academic journals and other relevant literature in order to stay within the fields of entrepreneurship and innovation but also to explore what could be researched further.

To find relevant literature, specific keywords such as *sustainability*, *fashion*, *innovation* and *barriers* were implemented. This facilitated the identification of pertinent academic journals. Bryman et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of using and identifying keywords to streamline the search for suitable references. Given the vast amount of literature available, it was crucial to evaluate each article's purpose, meaning, and relevance to our thesis. The majority of our literature was accessed via the internet, using online libraries and databases. Bryman et al. (2022) highlight the importance of critically assessing online sources by

considering the author's identity and motives, the site's location, and the currency of the information. The digital academic journals and books were accessed through LUBsearch, while the physical sources were accessed through the library of the School of Economics and Management.

### 3.3.1 AI usage

AI has been used in the thesis in order to streamline the search of literature and academic journals within the field of innovation, sustainability and fashion. In order to enhance the reliability of the thesis further, and contribute to future research within the field, the prompts used for AI searches are stated in *Appendix B*.

## 3.4 Sampling

In order to collect data relevant to the research question and the subject of the thesis, we chose to sample the data collection through a purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is characterized by seeking participants in a strategic, non-probable way allowing for including participants relevant for the thesis' research question. Thus, applying purposive sampling increases the opportunities to include sample members that differ from each other in regards to attributes pertinent to the research question. In other words, the participants in the qualitative approach were selected with the goals of the research in mind, making sure that the characteristics of the interviewee are of utmost importance. Consequently, we have during the selection process set out distinct criterias that are relevant for the exclusion and/or inclusion of certain participants. (Bryman et al., 2022). These criterias were: interested in consuming fashion products, sustainable to different extents and resident in the southern part of Sweden, in order to be able to interview the interviewees physically. To find interviewees who are sustainable in their fashion consumption to different extents, we made an evaluation of people we knew. This ensured that the sampling would include some interviewees who are very sustainable, some to an average extent and some who were not very sustainable. As some interviewees recommended us to interview friends of theirs who had similar interests and characteristics, one could argue that the thesis also applied to snowball sampling (Bryman et al., 2022).

Bryman et al. (2022) highlights that it is vital to prioritize the importance of quality and detail and not the amount of interviews carried out. In this thesis it is noteworthy to mention who

the participants are, due to characteristics and thus receiving diverse answers. In that sense, the sampling approach regarding purposive sampling goes in line with the sample size perspective; highlighting the depth of the interviews.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Sustainable fashion consumption (frequency, e.g. second hand, sustainable fashion companies, organic material)</b>
Alba (F)	22	Student	Three times a month
Beata (F)	21	Student	Six times a month
Calle (M)	26	Student and employed	Few times a year
Diana (F)	23	Student	Once every second month
Elias (M)	25	Student	Twice a month
Fabian (M)	26	Student	Four times a year
Gabriela (F)	23	Student	Purchases clothes once every 5 months, 80% of the time it is second hand
Hollie (F)	22	Student	Once a month
Isak (M)	24	Student	Second-hand once every second month. New clothes a few garments a year.
Julianna (F)	22	Student	Does not buy clothes very often, but if she does it is always Sellpy or second hand
Kristian (M)	22	Student	Second hand once a week

*Table 1: Description of interviewees' age and occupation*

### 3.5 Collection of data

The data collection, through interviews, was structured in a semi-structured way. Semi-structured interviews are, according to Bryman et al. (2022), defined as a context where the interviewer has an amount of questions that are usually designed in an interview guide. However semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to vary the sequence of questions (Bryman et al., 2022). The interviewer also has latitude to ask follow up questions, in regards to what the interviewee has said. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were chosen to provide the study with the flexibility needed when studying human purchase behavior and intentions. Moreover, they were divided into these sections in order to arrange them through the themes which will be further presented in the next sub-section.

In order to obtain personal background and context of the interviewees, the interviews started with personal questions. The purpose of general questions is to obtain a background in the interviewees' stance regarding sustainable fashion and to get an overview of their purchasing behavior. Furthermore, it served as an introduction for the interviewees to upcoming questions that concern theory-specific perspectives.

When personal questions had been asked and a persona could be formed of the interviewee, the interview was followed by questions specific to the Diffusion of Innovation theory. These questions were designed with the aim of gaining an insight into the interviewees' knowledge about environmental or social sustainability initiatives, their rate of adoption, their purchase intentions regarding sustainable fashion, and how vital they perceive communication channels to be.

Hereafter, questions regarding innovation resistance were asked. These questions were designed with the aim of gaining an insight into the interviewees' status quo, their perception of authenticity and credibility of fashion brands' sustainability claims and what factors influence their trust in brands, and the challenges and barriers when adopting social and environmental sustainability in fashion consumption.

Questions regarding innovation resistance were followed by questions regarding consumer resistance response. These questions were designed with the aim of gaining an insight into the interviewees' attitudes towards sustainable fashion options, and their response to the

options based on the concepts of rejection, opposition and postponement. Finally questions regarding consumer resistance to innovations in the sustainable fashion industry were asked. These questions were designed with the aim of gaining an insight into the interviewees' factors to resisting sustainable fashion with regards to norms and habits and how they balance their considerations of sustainability with other factors. All of the specific interview questions are stated in *Appendix A*.

### 3.6 Analysis of data collection

Braun & Clarke (2006) present thematic analysis as vital for qualitative research, where the process initiates as the analyst begins to observe and seek out patterns of significance and potential areas of interest within the data, which may occur concurrently with data collection. The culmination of this process is the presentation of the substance and implications of identified patterns (themes) within the data, whereby 'themes' are conceptual constructs that investigators recognize before, during, and after analysis. Analysis entails a continual oscillation between the entirety of the dataset, the coded segments of data being analyzed, and the ongoing interpretation of the data being generated. Writing plays an integral role in the analysis process, commencing in the initial phase with the noting down of ideas and potential coding frameworks, and persisting throughout the entirety of the coding and analysis endeavor, unlike statistical analyses where writing typically occurs at the conclusion of the analysis.

Furthermore, Braun & Clarke (2006) mean that various perspectives exist regarding the timing of engaging with relevant literature for the analysis. Some suggest that early reading may restrict the analytical scope, causing the researcher to concentrate on certain data aspects while overlooking potentially vital ones. Consequently, there is not a singular correct method for approaching literature review in thematic analysis. However, an inductive approach is typically bolstered by delaying engagement with literature during the initial analysis stages, while a theoretical approach necessitates involvement with the literature before analysis begins.

With regards to Braun & Clarke's (2006) presented step-to-step approach in qualitative research, this thesis will analyze the data collection according to this process, as depicted

below. The themes of this thesis are divided according to the different theoretical frameworks.

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

*Table 2: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)*

In order to visualize how the Phases of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006) were implemented in this thesis, a descriptive table is presented below.

Phase	Description of application
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data	<p>The first step involved transcribing all eleven interviews. This process was meticulously carried out to ensure that every detail and nuance of the interviewees' responses were captured accurately.</p> <p>Through the transcriptions we engaged in repeated readings of the transcripts. This repetitive engagement helped in gaining a comprehensive understanding of the content, identifying initial patterns, and becoming intimately familiar with the nuances of the data.</p>
2. Generating initial codes	By systematically coding the interesting features of the data, we were able to organize and collate relevant information across the entire dataset. This process ensured a comprehensive and structured analysis of key themes such as sustainability, barriers, and purchase intentions. The rigorous approach to coding allowed us to capture the depth and complexity of the interview data, providing a solid foundation for subsequent analysis and interpretation.
3. Searching for themes	By systematically collating codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant data for each theme, we were able to organize our findings in a coherent and meaningful way. This process ensured that each theme was well-supported by the data and accurately represented the key aspects of the research. The resulting themes (factors and terms within the areas of the theoretical framework) provided a solid foundation for further analysis and interpretation, allowing us to draw insightful conclusions about consumer behavior in sustainable fashion.
4. Reviewing themes	By checking the themes against both the coded extracts and the entire dataset, we ensured that our themes were robust and accurately represented the data. Generating a thematic map provided a visual summary of the analysis,

	highlighting the relationships between themes and offering a clear overview of the findings. This comprehensive approach allowed us to draw meaningful conclusions and insights from the research on consumer behavior in sustainable fashion.
5. Defining and naming themes	The ongoing analysis and refinement process allowed us to enhance the specificity and clarity of each theme. By generating clear definitions and names, we ensured that the themes accurately represented the data and contributed to a coherent and compelling overall narrative. This rigorous approach enabled us to draw detailed and insightful conclusions about the factors influencing consumers' decisions to adopt or reject sustainable fashion consumption.
6. Producing the report	The final stage of our thematic analysis involved selecting vivid extracts, performing a thorough final analysis, and relating our findings back to the research question and literature. This process ensured that our analysis was robust, well-supported by data, and situated within the broader academic discourse. The resulting scholarly report provided a clear and compelling account of our findings, contributing valuable insights into the factors influencing consumers' decisions regarding sustainable fashion.

*Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis in relation to the thesis*

### 3.7 Reliability and validity in qualitative research

Bryman et al. (2022) suggest that there are more efficient ways to analyze reliability and validity in qualitative research than just discussing the terms themselves. Trustworthiness comprises four criteria, each of which corresponds to an equivalent criterion in quantitative research:

- 1) Credibility, regarding internal validity
- 2) Transferability, regarding external validity
- 3) Dependability, regarding reliability
- 4) Confirmability, regarding objectivity

A major reason for the unease about the simple application of reliability and validity standards to qualitative research is that the criteria presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible. In other words, there exists a critical view that there are absolute truths about the social world that it is the job of the social scientist to reveal. Instead, they argue that there can be more than one and possibly several accounts.

#### 3.7.1 Internal validity substantiated by credibility

The emphasis on multiple interpretations of social reality becomes particularly apparent when considering the credibility criterion. If there are numerous potential interpretations of an



aspect of social reality, the likelihood or credibility of the interpretation a researcher presents will influence its acceptance by others. Establishing the credibility of findings involves both adhering to established research standards and presenting research findings to the individuals within the studied social context for confirmation that the researcher has accurately grasped their view of the social world. (Bryman et al., 2022) Accordingly, the internal validity of the thesis was ensured through understanding the already established research standards, but further by getting back to the interviewees, allowing them to confirm their responses. The internal validity and credibility was further strengthened by studying the social world through connecting the personal questions of the interviews to the theory-specific questions. Thus, analysis of perceptions and values within the studied field could be made.

### 3.7.2 External validity substantiated by transferability

Since qualitative research often involves the thorough examination of a limited number of participants or a specific group with shared attributes (emphasizing depth rather than breadth, as commonly seen in quantitative research), qualitative findings typically focus on the contextual distinctiveness and importance of the aspect of the social world being studied. Qualitative researchers are exhorted to generate detailed descriptions, offering comprehensive insights into the details of a culture. These detailed descriptions serve as a foundation for others to assess the potential applicability of findings to different social settings. (Bryman et al., 2022) The external validity was ensured through the personal questions mentioned in 3.5 *Collection of data*, acquiring different aspects of the social world, where a diversity of interviewees are ensured. Thus, the depth is enhanced rather than the breadth of the data collection. Similar to the internal validity of the study, the external validity is strengthened through obtaining details of the “culture” and social world through including interviewees of different gender, age and background.

### 3.7.3 Reliability substantiated by dependability

In the realm of qualitative research, parallel to the concept of reliability is the concept of dependability, which is designed to ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings. Dependability is established through an "auditing" methodology, which involves maintaining track of all records throughout all the different stages of the research process in an accessible way. The records should cover aspects such as problem formulation, participant selection, fieldwork notes, interview transcriptions, and data analysis choices. However, despite its

potential benefits, auditing as a means to enhance the dependability of qualitative research has not gained widespread acceptance, due to inherent challenges. (Bryman et al., 2022) The reliability of the thesis was strengthened through ensuring a coherence throughout the whole process, from problem formulation to selecting interviewees and conducting the interviews and finally analyzing the data collected. Transcribing all of the interviews results in giving us the most out of the interviewees' responses to the question and thus eliminating any lack of information or contexts.

#### 3.7.4 Objectivity substantiated by confirmability

Confirmability pertains to ensuring that, although acknowledging the impossibility of absolute objectivity in business research, the researcher can demonstrate their commitment to acting in good faith. In essence, it should be evident that they have not expressly allowed personal beliefs or theoretical biases to influence the research process and the resulting findings. (Bryman et al., 2022) Although we have used theories to formulate questions for the interviews, we have ensured that their permeation does not manipulate the data collection, with the aim of increasing the objectivity of the study. Furthermore, in order to make the interviewees feel comfortable in responding to the questions faithfully, they are completely anonymous and were offered the option to get the transcription of their interview deleted directly after the transcription was done.

### 3.8 Ethical approach, consent and GDPR

According to Rienecker and Jørgensen (2018), there are a number of different recommendations when it comes to taking an ethical position. The anonymity requirement means that preferably people should be anonymous to keep the interviewees unidentifiable and untraceable. In this research, anonymity was made possible as the execution took place only with individuals in the thesis group and the collected information about the people would neither make them traceable nor identifiable. Furthermore, as mentioned in *3.7.4 Objectivity substantiated by confirmability*, the interviewees were completely anonymous and were offered the option to get the transcription of their interview deleted directly after the transcription was done.

Consent and information requirements are also ethical principles that were considered in the interviews to continue to take interviewees' confidentiality and integrity into account

(Bryman et al., 2022). Before starting the interview, we clarified that the information collected is only used for the purpose of the data collection for this thesis. All of the interviewees included in the research participated entirely voluntarily, meaning that none of the interviewees were forced or convinced to participate. We did not use a physical agreement for the interviewees to sign regarding consent and information concerning the anonymity and exclusion of sensitive personal data. However we made sure to inform the interviewees about what was said in the previous paragraph.

In line with GDPR and consent, the thesis is permeated by never asking for any personal information, such as social security number, as it has not been of interest or relevance. Including sensitive personal data would not have strengthened the quality of the thesis either. Moreover, the thesis excludes sensitive personal data such as ethnic origin, political position, religion, health and sexual orientation. Voice recordings were made during the interviews, but as previously mentioned, the interviewee always had the option of having the recording deleted when the transcription was done.

### 3.9 Research limitations

This thesis is based from a consumer perspective and was limited to consumers who have an interest in fashion. Furthermore, there was also a methodological limitation in that the selection of interviewees were only people in southern Sweden, in order to enable physical interviews. By studying innovation and sustainability, the study made it possible to contribute to literature within the subjects studied.

## 4. Empirical data

*In this chapter the collected data from the conducted interviews will be presented. With the aim of presenting the results as pedagogical as possible, hence making it easier for the reader to understand the data, each individual interview will be explained in separate sections. Additionally the interviewees have been divided into three categories depending on the main factors that affect their purchasing decisions related to fashion: design, price and sustainability.*

Category	Interviewees	Prioritization
I	Calle, Gabriela & Isak	Sustainability → Design
<p>The interviewees in this category identified sustainability, design and durability of design, as the central motives behind their purchasing decisions. The interviewees also demonstrated a high level of reflection regarding environmental and social sustainability, in general and related to the fashion industry, hence this categorization.</p>		
II	Alba, Beata, Diana, Elias, Hollie & Julianna	Design → Price → Sustainability
<p>The interviewees in this category identified design, followed by price and lastly sustainability as the central motives behind their purchasing decisions. The interviewees demonstrated some level of reflection regarding environmental and social sustainability, in general and related to the fashion industry, hence this categorization.</p>		
II	Fabian & Kristian	Price → Design
<p>The interviewees in this category demonstrated a limited degree of reflection and intention to purchase sustainably, with factors such as design and primarily price being the main drivers.</p>		

### 4.1 Interview C – “Calle”

Calle, a 26-year-old male, works as a shop assistant while completing his studies within fashion. His top fashion brands include Stenströms, Oscar Jacobson, and Tagliatore. He prioritizes environmental impact in his consumption decisions, particularly valuing good working conditions. Calle aims to buy sustainable clothing with a long lifespan whenever

possible, favoring European-produced items. He purchases clothes infrequently, approximately once every two months, and mostly opts for European-made garments.

#### 4.1.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Calle discusses recent sustainability practices in the fashion industry, including new technology for machine wash tablets and initiatives by brands like Pangaia. He describes himself as open to new innovations and willing to try them regardless of trends. Calle actively considers environmental and social sustainability when purchasing clothes, opting for sustainable fashion over fast fashion due to reasons like longer garment lifespan and better working conditions. He feels unaffected by social media and influencer marketing, relying on his own awareness of brands and industry practices to inform his decisions.

#### 4.1.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Calle highlights that pricing and awareness impact consumer adoption of sustainable fashion, with financial constraints and supply being key barriers. He believes fast fashion's ability to quickly produce cheap, trendy clothes increases resistance. While financial constraints were once a barrier for him, Calle now prioritizes sustainability in his fashion consumption. He believes sustainable clothing is worth the price if reasonable and finds it easier to care for than non-sustainable garments. Calle sees value in purchasing sustainable clothes and acknowledges the positive feeling associated with making sustainable choices, noting a mix of sustainability practices among his friends and peers. Calle credits his increased awareness of textile studies for influencing his fashion consumption decisions more than traditional norms and habits. When considering sustainability alongside price, quality, and style, he prioritizes quality, viewing durable garments produced in Europe as inherently sustainable. The citation *“If it is a sustainable garment produced in Europe, quality will always be an important factor. Even if each step in the process is not sustainable, it will be sustainable. If I buy a great quality garment that I wear 2 times a week over several years, it is automatically durable.”* explains Calles knowledge of sustainability through quality but also the importance of the production being geographically allocated to Europe. Additionally, he acknowledges challenges in assessing the authenticity of sustainability claims by fashion brands and emphasizes the importance of certifications and detailed product descriptions.

### 4.1.3 Consumer resistance response

Calle typically researches sustainable fashion options before making a decision and may postpone purchasing until other factors align. He has occasionally reconsidered and purchased sustainable fashion products after initially rejecting them, especially after researching their sustainability characteristics. Talking about balancing considerations of sustainability with other factors when making purchasing decisions, Calle mentions: *“What will always be most important to me is quality. (...) If it is a sustainable garment produced in Europe, quality will always be an important factor. Even if each step in the process is not sustainable, it will be sustainable.”*

## 4.2 Interview G – “Gabriela”

Gabriela is a 23-year-old female yoga teacher and student studying human ecology at Lund University. She reflects on the environmental impact of her consumption and is motivated to choose environmentally friendly options by factors such as organic materials, good working conditions, and overall environmental impact. Gabriela actively purchases sustainable clothing, with 80% of her choices being second-hand items, while occasionally resorting to regular stores for specialized items like outdoor gear. Gabriela consumes sustainable clothing every half year and her top fashion choices include second-hand stores and indie brands.

### 4.2.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Gabriela is aware of sustainability practices by outdoor brands like Arc'teryx, Patagonia, and Naturkompaniet, which offer lifetime guarantees on their products and repair them regardless of purchase date. She describes herself as passive in adapting to new innovations, particularly in technology, but more open to environmental innovations, where she has actively sought out fashion companies with environmental or social sustainability initiatives, such as a local hat maker called Hvilepuls, emphasizing small-scale production and local sourcing. Gabriela's decision to prioritize sustainable fashion over fast fashion is influenced by her knowledge of the environmental impact of fast fashion and social norms within their friend group. *“Me going shopping from big brands or doing shopping sprees, not from second hand, I would not be fully comfortable with wearing that. I fear my friends judging me for that through social norms and makes me be more conscious”*, depicts both a risk and an image barrier pushing Gabriela to be more sustainable. While she acknowledges the potential

influence of social media in staying informed about sustainable fashion, she is less affected by influencer marketing due to limited exposure to such channels.

#### 4.2.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Gabriela believes that the status quo significantly influences consumer willingness to adopt sustainable fashion. Identity and as Gabriela describes it “(...) *climate identity*” also plays a role, as adopting sustainable fashion may not align with everyone's self-image. In addition, traditional norms contribute to her expressed resentment towards the fashion industry which she cites “*I find traditional norms problematic because people want to satisfy their own needs temporarily all the time*”. Gabriela finds it challenging to trust fashion brands' sustainability claims, often doubting their authenticity due to the difficulty in verifying these claims. Regarding the cost of sustainable clothing, the interviewee does not perceive it as exceedingly expensive. She also does not find sustainable clothing more difficult to take care of. She sees value in sustainable clothing compared to regular or fast fashion, aligning with her values and studies about environmental impact, even if she can not fully commit to sustainable practices every time she shops. She believes key factors affecting resistance to sustainable fashion include the efficiency and availability of such brands and knowledge about them.

#### 4.2.3 Consumer resistance response

Gabriela identifies herself as being open to sustainable fashion, but in the cases that she does not immediately purchase and therefore accept the sustainable product, she pivots back to the information seeking stage, meaning a decision is postponed.

### 4.3 Interview I – “Isak”

Isak, a 24-year-old student, reflects deeply on the environmental impact of his consumption. He prioritizes high-quality materials and manufacturing processes when choosing clothing, valuing durability and repairability. Isak emphasizes building a relationship with his garments, preferring to know how they were produced. While he buys second-hand items approximately every other month, he purchases new sustainable clothing a few times a year, however he has not bought clothing from fast fashion brands since he was 15.

#### 4.3.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Isak highlights several sustainability initiatives within fashion brands, including traceability features, lifetime guarantees, and made-to-order production. He values high-quality garments and emphasizes buying less but investing in durable pieces. Isak admits to being slow in adapting to new innovations and trends, preferring traditional approaches. While he does not specifically buy from brands for their sustainability initiatives, he prioritizes high-quality clothes and sometimes opts for vintage items. Isak acknowledges the significant impact of social media and influencer marketing on his consumption decisions, noting the cult-like appeal some sustainable brands achieve through branding and social media presence.

#### 4.3.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Isak highlights the importance of validation from others in assessing the authenticity and credibility of sustainability claims made by fashion brands. He expresses that his traditional mindset influences his willingness to embrace sustainable fashion, as he prioritizes design and appeal in his clothing choices. He considers himself generally sustainable, influenced by his father's interest in quality garments and his own preference for timeless pieces that last a long time. Isak identifies design as a significant barrier in adopting sustainable fashion, noting that many sustainable brands lack appealing features. Regarding the price of sustainable clothing, he believes it is justified when considering factors like durability and production transparency. However, he recognizes economic factors as a barrier for many people, along with lack of knowledge, and interest as primary reasons for resistance to purchasing sustainable clothing. In his case, traditional norms have positively influenced his fashion choices by emphasizing quality over quantity, but acknowledges occasional negative impacts from following trends. Isak does not find sustainable clothing more difficult to take care of and sees value in purchasing sustainable clothes because *“If you buy something that is sustainable, you are almost proud of the garment”* and due to the sense of making a difference.

#### 4.3.3 Consumer resistance response

Isak reacts positively to sustainable fashion options, showing interest in learning about the brands' production processes and materials. He typically conducts thorough research before making a purchase, spending several hours daily reading about clothes. His purchasing decisions are often planned and based on the garment's design and quality. Isak tends to stick with brands he knows and trusts, rarely deviating from his preferences. Isak expresses his



response to sustainable fashion as “(...)I am interested and want to learn more about brands. The first is the look of the garment, then the website to read about the people behind it and its production, which materials and suppliers they have. Also who works in their factory.”

#### 4.4 Interview A – “Alba”

Alba is a 22-year-old woman studying marketing in Lund, originally from Stockholm. She reflects on her consumption's environmental impact, mentioning cost-effectiveness and concern for the environment as primary motivators. Alba purchases second-hand clothing occasionally, estimating about three times a month, mostly from Sellpy. However, she primarily purchases clothes from fast fashion retailers such as Zara, H&M or NA-KD, and occasionally buys from brands like GANNI or Djerf Avenue that prioritize environmental considerations in their production.

##### 4.4.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Alba mentions several recent environmental and social sustainability practices implemented by fashion brands, including GANNI's environmentally friendly materials and CO<sub>2</sub> initiatives, Djerf Avenue's eco-friendly materials and return policies, and Boozt's vintage site. When asked about adapting to new innovations, she expresses openness to trying new things but prefers to research others' experiences first. While she considers sustainability initiatives when purchasing, she emphasizes that they must offer something more than just eco-friendliness because she “(...) would never buy clothes only because of it being eco-friendly”. She acknowledges when choosing sustainable fashion over fast fashion it derives from sustainable fashion often being more associated with higher quality. Regarding the influence of social media on her consumption decisions, she indicates that while they may raise awareness, it does not influence her to consume more sustainable clothing. Alba trusts brands' sustainability claims based on website information and media coverage, and admits to not making any research on the topic.

##### 4.4.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Alba discusses various factors influencing consumer willingness to embrace sustainable fashion, including social status, financial constraints, and shifting perceptions towards second-hand clothing. Alba discusses factors affecting resistance to purchasing sustainable clothing, identifying awareness and price as significant barriers: “(...) it is the price mostly, if

*it is new clothes. Second hand is obviously cheaper*". Despite financial barriers, Alba prioritizes design and quality but expresses a desire to buy sustainable and high-quality items if financially feasible. She does not perceive sustainable clothing as more difficult to take care of and acknowledges the value in purchasing sustainable clothes for personal and environmental reasons. While Alba strives to make sustainable choices, she does not consider herself as extremely sustainable. She observes similar behavior in her surroundings, with sustainability being a consideration but not a defining characteristic of lifestyle choices. The influence of traditional norms and habits is notable, but Alba has noticed a recent shift towards eco-friendliness.

#### 4.4.3 Consumer resistance response

When presented with sustainable fashion options, Alba typically feels skeptical and seeks more information, especially for expensive items. She may postpone decisions or reconsider purchases if a company modifies a product based on feedback. While she has occasionally bought fashion products informed about in advance, she prioritizes quality and is hesitant to buy solely for sustainability reasons.

### 4.5 Interview D – “Diana”

Diana identifies as a 23-year-old female student with an interest in marketing, fashion, and sustainability. She prioritizes purchasing from brands like Skall Studios, Ganni, and Stylein. She reflects on the environmental impact of her consumption, aiming to avoid fast fashion brands and opting for quality and sustainably produced clothing. Factors motivating her to be environmentally friendly include textile quality, good working conditions, and low emissions. While sustainability is a consideration, she primarily buys based on personal preference and style, viewing sustainability as a bonus. She estimates buying sustainably produced clothing approximately five times a year.

#### 4.5.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Diana mentions H&M's recycling initiative and some brands transitioning to sustainable fabrics as recent sustainability practices in the fashion industry. She describes herself as passive when it comes to adopting new innovations. Diana likes brands like Reformation for their sustainability initiatives, discussing their marketing and product offerings as reasons for her support. She actively chooses sustainable fashion over fast fashion due to concerns about

quality, working conditions, environmental impact, and the desire for unique clothing. While she acknowledges the potential influence of social media and influencer marketing on her consumption decisions, she primarily relies on information about the environmental impact of fast fashion to guide her shopping choices.

#### 4.5.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Diana expresses skepticism about fashion brands' sustainability claims, citing instances of greenwashing and the need for brands to demonstrate their sustainability practices. Diana discusses factors affecting resistance to purchasing sustainable clothing citing *“The price and the liability. And just like people not having enough knowledge about it. Like it is easier to just go to H&M or NA-KD and just buy something and not think that much about it”*. Furthermore she expresses the importance of price citing *“I would say like the price tag is definitively higher for sustainable clothing, and it is not as affordable”*. In terms of value, she believes sustainable clothing is worth the price because it adds to her self-perception. She does not find sustainable clothing more difficult to care for.

#### 4.5.3 Consumer resistance response

While price, design, and brand are most important to Diana when shopping, sustainability adds value to the clothing. However, when presented with sustainable fashion options, Diana feels skeptical and seeks more information before making a decision. She acknowledges that sustainability may influence her purchase decisions retroactively, especially if she discovers sustainable characteristics after buying an item.

### 4.6 Interview E – “Elias”

Elias identifies as male and is 25 years old, currently studying at Lund University. His top three fashion brands include Acne Studios, Our Legacy, Stockholm Surfboard Club, and Hope. While he does not always consider the environmental impact of his consumption, he tends to lean towards more exclusive brands like Acne Studios and Our Legacy, assuming they prioritize sustainability. However, he does not always prioritize sustainability when making purchases. Elias is motivated to consume environmentally friendly products when brands are publicized for being unsustainable or having poor working conditions. While he does not actively seek out sustainable clothing, he acknowledges it as a positive aspect when

making purchases. He frequently buys second-hand clothing, averaging around one to two pieces per month, and also sells his own second-hand items through platforms like Sellpy.

#### 4.6.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Elias mentions Patagonia as an example of a fashion brand implementing environmental and social sustainability practices, particularly their CEO's decision to transform the brand into a donation-based model with a focus on sustainability. He describes his approach to adopting new innovations in fashion as somewhat independent, sometimes aligning with trends but often choosing his own path. While Elias considers sustainability a significant factor in his clothing purchases, it is not the sole reason he buys from a brand, citing Patagonia's sustainable practices as a positive but not decisive factor. He has not actively chosen sustainable fashion over fast fashion but acknowledges the influence of communication channels like social media and influencer marketing in shaping consumer behavior towards sustainability, especially through platforms like Vinted, Plick, and Tradera promoting second-hand clothing.

#### 4.6.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Elias does not actively seek out new brands, preferring those he is familiar with, but is open to trending brands, sustainable or not. As for brands' authenticity in sustainability claims, he expresses *"What makes me believe that a brand is sustainable is if it is fact checked by another governmental entity or similar. For example the Swedish Kravmarkt or Svanmarkt for clothes."* indicating that a form of information barrier obtains. Moreover, Elias highlighted challenges in adopting sustainable fashion, noting that his preferred brands are often not available second-hand, leading him to buy new. He believes sustainable clothing is worth the higher price due to its durability and quality, and that the durability makes it easier to maintain and take care of in comparison to fast fashion garments. Elias values sustainable clothing for its durability and potential to reduce exploitative labor practices. Traditional norms and trends, such as the popularity of buying second-hand, influence his decisions toward sustainability. However, price is nonetheless a central aspect to consider, as he identified price as the primary factor affecting resistance to purchasing sustainable clothing.

#### 4.6.3 Consumer resistance response

When presented with sustainable options, he does not immediately reject them but may research further if unfamiliar with the brand. He sometimes postpones decision-making for

alignment with other factors. Elias has bought discounted fashion products later released for sale but has not reconsidered sustainable purchases after initial rejection.

## 4.7 Interview H – “Hollie”

Hollie is a 22-year-old student studying international business. She occasionally shops at H&M or Zara for quick purchases but prefers Marco Polo for more considered purchases. She reflects on the environmental impact of her consumption, favoring second-hand clothes. She finds it financially challenging as a student to prioritize sustainability and notes that sustainable options often do not align with her generation's style.

### 4.7.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Hollie is aware of sustainability efforts in fashion, mentioning H&M's initiatives with organic and reused cotton but expresses skepticism about greenwashing. She values transparency in material sourcing and production methods, often checking labels and websites and avoiding very cheap fast fashion brands. While she is an early adopter in some areas, she is slower to embrace innovations in fashion. She expresses awareness of a brand that has the approach to seasonal collections. Social media trends have influenced her perception of sustainable clothing, making it more accessible and appealing.

### 4.7.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

When balancing sustainability with price, quality, and style, she admits that sustainability is not her primary consideration due to financial constraints. She highlights the low trust in fashion brands' sustainable efforts as a key factor influencing her resistance to purchasing sustainable clothing. Hollie places less trust in big commercial brands regarding sustainability claims but is more willing to believe smaller brands that demonstrate dedication. Hollie faces barriers in adopting sustainable fashion, discussing style preferences, cost, and the time-consuming research. Hollie believes it can be too expensive with sustainable clothing. However, she expresses its positive impact on the environment, citing *“I think for me as a student it is too expensive. For me as a person that is working it is acceptable. It encourages anti consumption, as it is more expensive so I still believe it is goods that are on the pricier side as we will consume less so it is more sustainable”*.

Furthermore she expresses the design of sustainable clothing as a barrier following *“First of all, I think style is my main barrier, as I believe that sustainable clothing does not identify with my style and is not so classy. I believe that sustainable fashion often gives the sense of a hippie style”*. Hollie reflects on societal pressures affecting consumer willingness to embrace sustainable fashion, noting how perceptions vary among different social circles.

#### 4.7.3 Consumer resistance response

Her initial reaction to sustainable fashion options is to examine them closely, followed by a skeptical search for more information. Hollie tends to postpone decisions unless she's genuinely curious about a new sustainable product. She is unlikely to reconsider rejected sustainable products unless they undergo significant modifications. While she has not purchased fashion products informed by sustainability that later went on sale, she is open to reconsidering them based on friends' recommendations or further research into their sustainability characteristics.

### 4.8 Interview B – “Beata”

Beata is a 21 year old female student with interests in fashion and business economics. She reflects on the environmental impact of her consumption habits and is motivated to consume environmentally friendly products, with a preference for second-hand clothing due to its lower environmental footprint. She prefers purchasing clothes from second-hand stores such as Sellpy and Erikshjälpen, and she rarely buys from specific fashion brands. On average, Beata consumes sustainable clothing approximately six pieces a month.

#### 4.8.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Beata is aware of recent environmental and social sustainability practices implemented by fashion brands such as climate compensation by Sellpy and recycling initiatives by H&M. She considers herself quick to adapt to new innovations, mentioning her early adoption of the second-hand app Sellpy. While she has not specifically chosen to purchase from fashion companies due to their sustainability initiatives, she has been buying second-hand for years, driven by factors like uniqueness, affordability, and environmental friendliness. She acknowledges the influence of communication channels like social media and influencer marketing on her decision to consume sustainable clothing, particularly through platforms like YouTube and TikTok, where she comes across hauls of second-hand clothes.

#### 4.8.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Beata questions the authenticity of sustainability claims made by fashion brands, such as practices of greenwashing and skepticism towards recycled materials and plastic use. Beata highlights financial constraints as a barrier to adopting sustainable fashion, as she cites *“I am really poor, so I can't afford normal clothes anyway”*. Additionally, she identifies challenges in finding specific items when shopping sustainably following *“(…) if you need a pair of shoes, when you really want a specific pair, for example white heels. Then I would buy it in a regular shop”*. She perceives sustainable clothing as equally easy to maintain as regular clothing. While she considers herself environmentally friendly, she notes that having a supportive social environment can facilitate sustainable habits.

#### 4.8.3 Consumer resistance response

Beata indicates a tendency to initially reject sustainable fashion options and expresses skepticism, preferring to search for more information before making a purchase decision. She often postpones decision-making until other factors align. However, she mentions being open to reconsidering a sustainable fashion product if the company modifies it based on low engagement, particularly if there are improvements in price or design. While she has not personally experienced buying a fashion product that was previously rejected but later released for sales, she acknowledges her limited interest in non-second-hand companies. Additionally, she has not yet decided to purchase a sustainable fashion product after initially rejecting it, even after researching its sustainability characteristics.

### 4.9 Interview J – “Julianna”

Julianna is a 22-year-old woman studying Business and Economics at Lund University. Her top three clothing brands are Sellpy, Gina Tricot, and H&M. While she is somewhat aware of the environmental impact of her consumption, she admits to not reflecting on it much due to being a student with a low income. Instead she prioritizes social factors like avoiding brands associated with child labor. She is open to buying sustainable clothing, primarily opting for second-hand items.

#### 4.9.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Julianna is aware of some sustainability practices in the fashion industry but is not fully informed. While she has not directly purchased from fashion brands due to sustainability

initiatives, she does shop on Sellpy and Plick with sustainability in mind, partly due to environmental considerations and affordability. In regards to her rate of adoption, she only adopts innovations after observing others doing so. Furthermore, she explained that social media and influencer marketing play a significant role in her consumption decisions, although they express fatigue with influencers promoting mass consumption.

#### 4.9.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Julianna believes that her status quo influences consumer willingness to embrace sustainable fashion, discussing indirect pressure to avoid brands with poor sustainability records. She expresses *“I think it affects quite a lot indirectly, for example I wouldn't have dared to tell my friends that I shopped at Shein because you know it is bad”*. However, financial constraints and a lack of active research, or *“ignorance”* as she refers to, into sustainability present barriers to adopting more environmentally and socially sustainable fashion habits. Despite the potential higher cost, she believes sustainable clothing is worth it for its quality and environmental benefits and therefore considers a combination of price and quality when making a purchase decision, prioritizing sustainability over just price. She expresses skepticism about the authenticity of sustainability claims from large global companies due to perceived greenwashing. In regards to traditional norms and habits she expresses *“I think in a way, that in society in general, sustainability has started to be talked about a lot in all sectors. And it is clear that it affects me, but maybe not really that much, because in my circle we do not talk about it that much, because then I think I would have thought and consumed differently.”* indicating psychological barriers.

#### 4.9.3 Consumer resistance response

Julianna does not actively reject sustainable fashion, however she does feel skeptical and therefore her main response is to search up more information before making a purchase. This is most evident when related to influencer brands that beforehand a collection drops because the information is given out beforehand the opportunity to purchase.

### 4.10 Interview F – “Fabian”

Fabian, a 26-year-old male and student. He primarily purchases clothing from Lager 157, H&M, and Tommy Hilfiger. Fabians primary concern is the well-being of the workers in clothing factories due to personal reasons as he originates from a country known for mass



production. Other than that, his reflection on the environmental impact of his consumption is limited. Fabian's purchasing decisions are largely influenced by price rather than sustainability factors. He buys second-hand clothing approximately four times a year but is not very knowledgeable about the sustainability of his clothing.

#### 4.10.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Fabian mentions the "Good Cotton Initiative" as a recent sustainability practice in fashion, focusing on environmentally friendly cotton sources and improved working conditions for workers. He describes himself as more passive in adapting to new innovations and trends. While he has not specifically bought from fashion companies for their sustainability initiatives, he recently opted for sustainable fashion because of personal reasons, citing *"The recent time I chose sustainable fashion was because it got personal for me. The good cotton initiative is based on the weaver workers in China not having good working conditions."* Fabian acknowledges the impact of social media and influencer marketing on his decision to consume sustainable clothing.

#### 4.10.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Fabian expresses financial constraints as a barrier to consistently embracing sustainable fashion, noting that it is economically challenging compared to fast fashion, stating *"For my status right now, it is not worth it as a student."* When considering sustainability alongside price, style, and quality, he prioritizes price first, followed by style and then sustainability. However, he acknowledges the value of sustainable fashion in terms of boosted morale. Another barrier identified by him is the trustworthiness of the source. He finds it difficult to authenticate fashion brands' sustainability claims and suggests third-party verification would enhance trust. Fabian mentioned a third barrier, which is the limited accessibility of sustainable clothing. In regards to traditional norms and habits, he does not feel influenced by that, Fabian rather feels influenced by peers who make sustainable purchases, stating *"Most of the people in my circle buy sustainable clothing, but I am probably not one of those people yet. I am getting influenced by them little by little"*.

#### 4.10.3 Consumer resistance response

Upon encountering sustainable fashion, he may initially be skeptical and would conduct research before making a decision, sometimes postponing it for later. Fabian might reconsider a sustainable product if the company adjusts its price, and recalls purchasing sustainable

fashion after initially rejecting it but conducting further research, citing an example with clothing from Muji.

#### 4.11 Interview K – “Kristian”

Kristian is a 22-year-old male studying medicine in Lund, originally from Södermalm in Stockholm. He does not prioritize specific fashion brands but mentions Acne Studios, Beyond Retro, and Sellpy as options. He acknowledges some concern about his consumption's environmental impact but to a very little extent. However, factors like low CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and good working conditions could potentially matter to him, but does not right now. He estimates purchasing one sustainable clothing piece per week.

##### 4.11.1 Diffusion of innovation & sustainable fashion

Kristian admits to not being particularly aware of recent environmental or social sustainability practices implemented by fashion brands. Environmental or social sustainability initiatives haven't been decisive factors in his fashion purchases, although he has occasionally chosen sustainable fashion over fast fashion, influenced by cheaper prices and design, citing “(...) *I shop a lot second-hand and what influenced me to do so probably depends a lot on the price and the design mainly. There is also a much larger selection so I would have rather bought from Sellpy than H&M*”. Furthermore, he describes himself as not being quick to adapt to new innovations unless necessary. The impact of social media and influencer marketing on his decision-making process appears minimal.

##### 4.11.2 Resistance to innovation & sustainable fashion

Kristian expresses skepticism about the authenticity of sustainability claims by large fashion brands, deriving the practices to financial motives. When purchasing, Kristian prioritizes the design and price of clothing over sustainability considerations, citing “*First of all, that I think that the clothing pieces look nice and the price. So the price and design. Sustainability does not weigh much in, if so, then it is subconscious*”. He notes that traditional norms may have influenced his earlier reluctance to shop second-hand, by reasoning on the matter of second-hand clothing.

He also mentions challenges in adopting sustainability include sizing issues when ordering online, the limited availability of sustainable options compared to non-sustainable ones and

that it can be too pricey. Kristian acknowledges the influence of his social circle on his adoption of sustainable fashion practices, particularly second-hand shopping. However, his sustainability is limited to fashion because he states that he does not take measures to reduce his environmental impact, and he perceives a similar lack of emphasis on sustainability among his friends. Lastly, Kristian does not find sustainable clothing more difficult to care for and sees value in purchasing sustainable pieces for financial and design related reasons.

#### 4.11.3 Consumer resistance response

Regarding his response to sustainable fashion options, Kristian does not immediately reject them or seek further information but instead focuses on whether the item is visually appealing. He acknowledges considering purchasing previously rejected sustainable products if they become available at a later time. Furthermore he has not bought a sustainable fashion product after initially rejecting it and researching its sustainability characteristics.

## 5. Analysis

*In this chapter, the study's analysis is carried out based on the data presented in the previous chapter. The analysis is structured into four primary domains, where the first three are central factors that influence adoption and resistance, and the fourth depicts how the factors influence consumer behavior. Lastly, a model is presented with the aim to tie together the analysis.*

### 5.1 Attachment, Familiarity & Image

Individuals' satisfaction with their current products often stems from a deep emotional attachment formed through repeated use over time that fosters a strong resistance to change, as consumers may feel loyal and comfortable to their selected fashion brands, and do not feel that they have to explore further options (Talke & Heidenreich, 2014). The emotional attachment, in terms of an adopter specific barrier, was observed in category II and category III but not in category I. In regards to category I, which expressed emotional attachment towards sustainable clothing brands, this adopter specific passive barrier instead acted as a motivator to the adoption of sustainable fashion. In contrast, category II and category III showed emotional attachment to the current brands they consume from. Since category II and III did not display a high degree of reflection of sustainable clothes, as well as, sustainable clothing purchases, their emotional attachment is towards fast fashion. The emotional attachment towards fast fashion is displayed in a quote by Diana:

*“(...) it is easier to just go to H&M or NA-KD and just buy something and not think that much about it.”*

The quotation above also displays how Diana's status quo creates resistance towards sustainable fashion, since the familiarity she has with brands like H&M and NA-KD suggests that her ease of access and habit make her less inclined to explore new innovative sustainable options. Another passive resistance barrier which can be detected in the quotation and the data is the *reluctance to give up old habits*, since there is a distinguishable preference for familiar fashion brands. This barrier is more prominent in category II and III. As for category I, the interviewees already have the habit of sustainable fashion consumption. To summarize,

familiarity in the form of emotional attachment and habits, as well as, status quo act as barriers creating passive resistance towards sustainable fashion.

Another factor identified is Image, which aligns with Conner's (1992) notion of reluctance to lose control, where individuals resist change to maintain control over their preferences and routines. Ten out of eleven of the interviewees, prioritized design over sustainability, as evidenced by comments made by Alba and Kristian:

*"(...) would never buy clothes only because of it being eco-friendly."*

*"First of all, that I think that the clothing pieces look nice and the price. So the price and design. Sustainability does not weigh much in, if so, then it is subconscious"*

These two comments suggest a reluctance to deviate from for instance style preferences, which can be seen as an attempt to maintain control over their personal style and image. To purchase sustainable fashion could be seen as a potential loss of control and an inclination to resist change because it would disrupt their established preferences and reduce their sense of control over their personal style and choices. This can be traced back to the need for belonging because one's personal style communicates the image of a person and helps others detect what type of person one identifies as. Since six out of eleven interviewees expressed that they value style above sustainability, image barrier can also be detected since their responses would imply that sustainable fashion as a product criteria is not on trend and hence not in alignment with their priorities. Hollie's statement showcases this barrier, which creates active resistance towards sustainable fashion:

*"First of all, I think style is my main barrier, as I believe that sustainable clothing does not identify with my style and is not so classy. I believe that sustainable fashion often gives the sense of a hippie style".*

Despite barriers to sustainable fashion, a notable social risk barrier emerged among the interviewees regarding their choices to not shop sustainably. For instance , Julianna shared:

*"I wouldn't have dared to tell my friends that I shopped at Shein because you know it is bad."*

This indicates a perceived social risk associated with admitting to unsustainable shopping choices. Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy as eight out of eleven interviewees still purchase from fast fashion brands. This discrepancy might be explained by the factors passive resistance, such as status quo and high inclination to resist change. Coupled with the fact that several interviewees mentioned sustainable fashion is not as readily available as fast fashion, Elias and Fabian explains:

*“There is nothing [stopping me] from shopping at second hand stores, but the brands I like may not be available to buy second hand. Therefore, it will not be sustainable. Therefore, I may choose to buy a new garment or a garment on sale elsewhere.”*

*“Then it would be that the source may be hard to find, such as a sustainable clothing brand”.*

Their answers implied a reversed trend, where consuming fast fashion posed as both an image and a norm barrier along with creating a social risk. However, other normative barriers to sustainable fashion could be discerned from the data. The interviewee Kristian expressed that consumers might reject second hand clothing because of the perception that second hand is uncool or not hygienic as cited:

*“It seems that many people find it difficult to take the step in, as you may think it is uncool to buy second hand because someone else has worn it before.”.*

Furthermore with regards to the usage barrier, none of the interviewees found sustainable clothing as challenging in relation to their existing habits or practices. On the contrary, all of the interviewees expressed that they don't believe that sustainable fashion is harder to maintain, and Elias expresses that he believes the maintenance of sustainable clothing often is easier because the garments are made with qualitative materials that are more durable in comparison to fast fashion pieces. This therefore implies that the usage factor could act as a motivator and thus encourage adoption of sustainable fashion.

In summary, attachment, familiarity and image were recurring factors, prominently acting as barriers rather than motivators for adoption.

## 5.2 Communication and Transparency

The empirical evidence has shown that the process of communications, as Rogers (2003) discusses, within innovations and sustainability is something that affects purchase intention, mostly positively. Even though Rogers (2003) means that communication regards information sharing between individuals and thus reaching a common understanding, the empirical evidence shows that this is diffuse. Parts of the empirical evidence show that consumers are impacted by communication channels, like Beata, Diana, Elias, Fabian, Isak and Julianna, whereas consumers like Alba, Calle and Kristian think the opposite. For instance when Calle was asked if he thinks that communication channels impacts his decision to consume sustainably, he replied:

*“No, I wouldn't say that because I would say that I am quite aware of the clothing industry and different brands.”*

On the other hand, those believing in communication channels affecting their willingness to purchase sustainable products, showed that there exists a different attitude. For instance interviewees in category II and III tend to be distinctively more affected by factors like influencer and social media marketing than those in category I. Based on the interviewees responses we found communication channels' effect on consumers mainly through these points:

- Innovative second hand companies using communication channels emphasizing the supply of second hand products.
- The easy accessibility of certain clothes, being marketed through communication channels.
- Using communication channels to spread awareness of sustainability implementations in companies, almost making some sustainable fashion companies become a cult.

The empirical evidence aligns with the theoretical framework of diffusion of innovation, as it demonstrates how communication channels play a crucial role in conveying novel ideas about sustainable fashion to consumers. In contrast, some interviewees tend to mean that communication channels like social media and influencer marketing do not affect purchase intention and sustainability whatsoever. However, Rogers' theory of diffusion (2003) does

not regard influencer marketing and social media, since that is a communication style that implies a linear act where one individual seeks to transmit a message to another with specific outcomes in mind, while the model discusses a mutual communication leading to social change. Contrariwise, as previously mentioned, diffusion constitutes a form of social change and certain consequences arise as a result of new ideas, such as influencer and social media marketing, being invented and diffused. They are either adopted or rejected, and based on the empirical evidence gathered, one could assume that communication channels affect a large number of consumers, but undoubtedly not all. This suggests that diffusion of sustainable fashion occurs through various communication channels, contributing to social change in consumer behavior for many towards fashion and, to some extent, sustainability.

Building on communication, there are several similarities in how the interviewees perceive sustainable initiatives between Rogers' communication attribute and the *communicability barrier*, reflecting a perception of ineffectiveness when describing the pros and cons of innovation to others (Moore and Benbasat, 1991; Rogers, 2003) The communicability barrier is observed in eight out of eleven interviewees. In which, the only subjects who do not perceive negative characteristics are Isak, Gabriela and Olle, who exhibit a high degree of reflection on sustainability and sustainable fashion consumption.

Another aspect of communication and transparency regards the *information barrier*, which relates to the perceived information asymmetries that make consumers unsure about the innovation and its potential (Kuisima et al., 2007) which can be distinguished in the data. Ten out of eleven interviewees expressed skepticism towards the authenticity and credibility of fashion brands' sustainability claims. The perceived information barrier can be traced to two underlying causes. The first cause, as revealed by the data, is the scandals related to both environmental and social sustainability that have been exposed in the media in recent years, reducing the public's trust in these initiatives. Many interviewees cited Greenwashing and workplace scandals, such as the invocation of child labor, as a source of concern in relation to the sustainable fashion industry. The second underlying cause is that interviewees, as consumers, feel that there is no infrastructure for sustainability metrics that allows consumers to verify the information. With the insertion of a third party entity to verify the sustainability claims made by particular brands, interviewees express that the information asymmetry would decrease. The information barrier is showcased in a quote by respondent Elias,



*“What makes me believe that a brand is sustainable is if [the claims are] fact checked by another governmental entity or [something] similar. For example the Swedish Kravmärkt or Svanmärkt for clothes.”*

This barrier can create a sense of uncertainty, leading to what is known as a relevant *functional risk*. As defined by Ram and Sheth in 1989, functional risk pertains to consumers' concerns about the potential performance of an innovation. In the context of sustainable fashion, consumers may express worries about reliability and the accuracy of claims made by companies.

Trustworthiness and transparency can be identified as active resistance in the forms of information barriers and functional risk barriers. However, they can also be viewed as passive resistance since the mistrust in fashion brands' sustainability claims mentioned by ten out of eleven interviewees may create a reluctance to easily accept new information or change existing beliefs, which is characteristic of low psychological resilience (Judge et al., 1999).

Building on the trust consumers experience and the transparency the fashion companies do or do not fulfill, the *observability* attribute by Rogers (2003) is evident in the collected data. In terms of tangibility of the results provided by the innovation, the interviewees discuss various sustainable initiatives implemented by fashion brands. Diana (category II) mentions GANNI and Alba (category II) mentions Djerf Avenue for their environmentally friendly materials and eco-friendly return policies, while Boozt offers some environmentally friendly options on their vintage site. H&M allows consumers to recycle clothes in-store and uses recycled materials, and Sellpy offers climate compensation. They also mention new technologies like machine wash tablets that strengthen garment fibers and brands like Pangaia that focus entirely on sustainability.

Patagonia is highlighted for transitioning to a donation-based model with a focus on sustainability. Brands like Arc'teryx, Patagonia, and Naturkompaniet offer lifetime guarantees and repair services. However, they express skepticism towards some brands' sustainability claims, suggesting that there may be instances of greenwashing. All these points mentioned by different interviewees shows that the results provided by sustainability innovations is tangible considering the knowledge and positive attitude towards different sustainable companies.

### 5.2.1 Awareness

Another factor connected to the sphere of communication was awareness. The interviewees in category III showed low awareness of fashion brands' sustainable innovation initiatives, for instance Kristian who was asked if he knew any recent sustainability initiatives whereby he could not mention any. The empirical finding can be explained by the *status quo*, permeating the data collection through interviewees mentioning that the current fashion offerings meet their needs, thereby reducing their motivation to seek out sustainable and innovative fashion options and adopt them. In addition, low awareness can be explained by cognitive *rigidity* which refers to the difficulty in changing one's thinking or adapting to new perspectives (Rokeach, 1960), creating passive resistance towards sustainable fashion. However, cognitive rigidity was also prevalent in category II, which, despite being aware of sustainability initiatives, still dismissed or ignored new information regarding the benefits of sustainable fashion as it conflicts with their preexisting preferences for design and aesthetics, leading to non-purchase behavior. One potential cause for the low awareness is the intolerance to the adjustment period as when individuals tend to resist change because they are unwilling to investigate for extra information in the short term (Kanter, 1985).

To conclude, these psychological barriers and the attributes presented by Rogers (2003) can consequently be reconnected to what was mentioned previously regarding the importance of communication. On one hand, the interviewees seem to lack the information provided by the fashion companies regarding what sustainability claims they actually make. On the other hand, as presented in this section, many of the interviewees, especially in category I, showed great understanding of companies prioritizing sustainability and what initiatives they pursue. These factors, demonstrably, affect the purchase intentions of consumers.

### 5.3 Price

In terms of psychological barriers, price as a factor can be observed as an *economic risk barrier*, which implies that as the cost increases so does the perceived risk and hence resistance towards innovation emerges (Ram & Sheth, 1989). Eight out of the eleven interviewees, category II and III, alluded to an economic risk, stating that the price point of sustainable fashion is too high for them. The majority of the interviewees encountering this barrier can be explained by the fact that they are students. For instance Hollie stated

“*I think for me as a student it is too expensive.*”, an opinion which can also be identified in Fabian’s statement: “*For my status right now, it is not worth it as a student.*”.

However, interviewees in Group I, Calle, Gabriela and Isak, did not share this sentiment. They acknowledged that the costs may pose a major barrier for many consumers, but that sustainable fashion holds enough value that the price tag is not alone a factor for resistance towards sustainable clothing. Seeing that these interviewees' opinions deviate from the majority can likely be attributed to Calle, Gabriela and Isak displaying a lower degree of inclination to resist change, which is an adopter-specific factor. Since adopter-specific factors are based on personal characteristics, their large amount of knowledge of fashion and high level of reflection regarding environmental and social sustainability can play a significant role here by increasing their adoption rate since they experience that sustainable fashion already aligns with their values and needs. This would showcase Rogers *compatibility attribute* for Group I. Furthermore, this discrepancy may be explained by the three experiencing a different type of status quo, where it is more of a norm to shop sustainably.

However, the higher price point also serves as a leading cause for *compatibility barriers* detected in the data. The higher price makes sustainable fashion incompatible with current market demands and renders fast fashion garments as the preferred alternative. This factor then prevents consumers who do not place a high emphasis on sustainability from adopting the more sustainable fashion, for instance interviewees in the second and third group. In regard to Rogers *compatibility attribute* (2003), which explains the extent to which the innovation aligns with the values, experiences, and needs of potential adopters, sustainable fashion does not depict a compatibility attribute since majority of the interviewees seem to be more dependent on trends and what other consumers do, like Julianna that expresses she is “... *probably more of a person who adopts when others have chosen to do so*”.

In terms of the inherent value of sustainable fashion, the higher price point could arguably act as a *value barrier*; however ten out of eleven interviewees expressed that they see more value in sustainable garments in comparison to fast fashion ones. The perceived value is according to the data, related to the sustainable fashion garments’ durability, quality, uniqueness as well as the option of being able to tailor your own wardrobe and go against trends and the stores’ preferences, combined with personal value and morale. This leads to the conclusion that sustainable fashion is superior and more advantageous than fast fashion in terms of inherent

value, which also showcases the *Relative advantage* attribute by Rogers (2003) that explains the extent to which an innovation is perceived as superior to the idea, program, or product it replaces. Since the interviewees are aware of fashion brands active work with both social and environmental sustainability, which both adds value and increases the relative advantage of sustainable fashion in comparison to fast fashion, it is arguable that sustainability work has a positive impact on consumers attitudes and thus purchase intention.

To summarize, price as a factor serves as great economic risk, creating a discrepancy in attitudes toward sustainable fashion and purchase behavior, while value serves as a motivator for adoption enhancing purchase behavior.

## 5.4 Consumer responses to sustainable fashion

The empirical data indicates that direct rejection among interviewees is minimal, as ten out of eleven interviewees do not blatantly reject sustainable fashion options. Beata is the only respondent admitting to that behavior and explains that she rejects sustainable fashion because she is skeptical of the brands sustainability claims. This implies that the transparency factor leads to passive rejection, meaning that sustainable fashion is not ever considered when making a purchase.

Instead, interviewees tend to either oppose or postpone their decision. Opposition is primarily due to the information barrier, referring to the interviewees' experienced information asymmetries as people do not trust the sustainability claims made by brands and because of the lack of infrastructure available to verify the information. Postponement may arise from the need to gather more information in regards to the sustainability claims, however, the main reason for postponement is the economic risk barrier which arises from sustainable fashion having a higher price point, as individuals need to assess whether the value of sustainable garments outweighs the risk it will pose to their personal finances.

Despite the act of postponement by eight out of eleven interviewees, and the act of opposition by nine out of eleven interviewees, there is a high likelihood of acceptance and adoption of sustainable fashion since the act of postponement has two possible results, either acceptance or definitive rejection and because the act of opposition, the assessment and search for more information can also result in the acceptance of an innovation (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998).

However, opposition and postponement may lead to active rejection, since that implies that sustainable fashion is considered but later rejected (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998). However, it is difficult to make a conclusion regarding the consumers final choice since this study did not analyze one purchase, but rather the interviewees behavior when presented with fashion options over a longer period of time. Nonetheless, it can be assumed that for the most part the interviewees lean towards rejection of sustainable fashion because the majority, category II and III consume mostly fast fashion.

### 5.5 Factors & Consumer responses: The Relationship

Based on the analysis presented above, this model has been created to illustrate what factors influence consumers' decisions to adopt or reject sustainable fashion consumption, as well as, how these factors impact their purchase intentions.

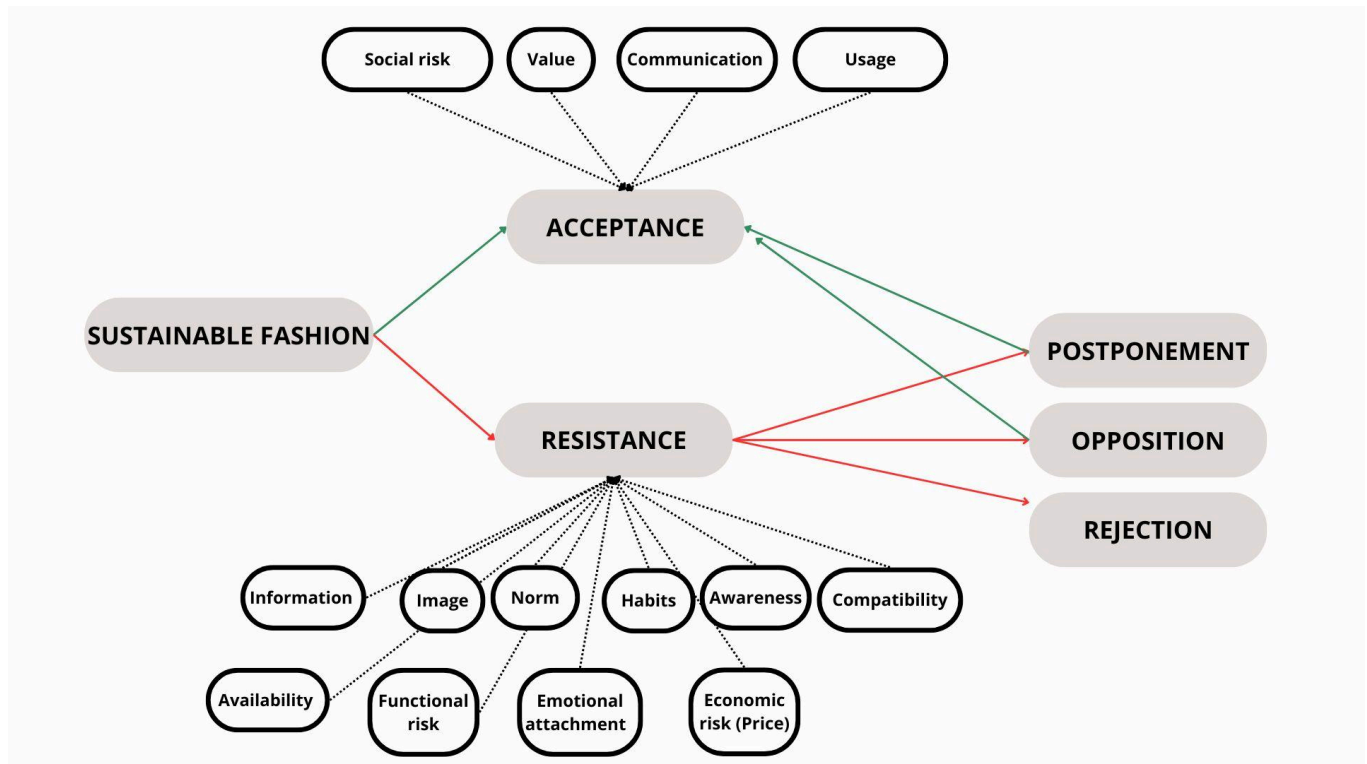


Figure 4: Summarizing model showcasing the relationship between adoption and resistance factors and consumer responses to sustainable fashion.

## 6. Conclusion & Discussion

*In the following chapter the conclusions of the thesis will be presented followed by discussions regarding the research and its limitations, along with future research. Then, the theoretical and practical contributions are discussed and lastly, the methodological discussion is presented.*

### 6.1 Conclusions

This thesis aimed to understand how consumers adopt innovation and sustainability implementations within the fashion industry, coupled with the factors affecting their attitudes. In regards to the research subject, the research question was designed:

*What factors influence consumers' decisions to adopt or reject sustainable fashion consumption, and how do these factors impact purchase intention?*

With regards to the collected data and the analysis, several factors affecting adoption of sustainable fashion have been identified. These constitute the first conclusion of the thesis.

#### **Conclusion 1**

The factors influencing consumer adoption of sustainable fashion are:

- *Communication channels* canalizing information to consumers about fashion brands' sustainability initiatives.
- *Value* in the sense that consumers perceive sustainable fashion as more valuable because the garments are more qualitative because they are made from better materials, as well as, an perceived intrinsic value of knowing one made a sustainable purchase.
- *Usage*, due to consumers feeling that the clothing pieces are easier to take care of because they are made from better materials, enhancing both quality and durability.
- *Social risk barrier* associated with shopping from unsustainable fast fashion brands.

Based on the collected data, a discrepancy between purchasing behavior and attitudes towards sustainable fashion has been observed, which can be explained by active and passive resistance barriers, which in combination constitute the second conclusion of the thesis.

## Conclusion 2

The factors creating resistance toward sustainable fashion consumption are:

- *Information barrier*, since most interviewees, eleven out of ten are skeptical about the authenticity of fashion brands' sustainability claims, influenced by media reports on greenwashing and labor issues.
- *Image barrier*, as design is prioritized before sustainability in connection to sustainable fashion being incompatible with the style and identity interviewees are trying to convey.
- *Norm barrier* in terms of negative biases toward second hand shopping as there is a preconceived notion that it is unhygienic and uncool.
- *Functional risk barrier* pertains to the concerns expressed by consumers about the reliability and accuracy of claims made by fashion brands, which in turn reduces trust.
- *Compatibility barrier* in the sense that the higher price point and perceived untrendiness of sustainable fashion does not align with the needs of the consumers.
- *Economic risk barrier*, because of sustainable fashion having a higher price than fast fashion.
- *Emotional attachment and familiarity* to current fast fashion clothing which is rooted in long-term use and brand loyalty.
- *Status quo*, in terms of habits which is entrenched in a long term use of fast fashion.
- *Availability and awareness*, which was perceived as limited making it harder for consumers to switch to sustainable alternatives.

In relation to consumers' purchase intentions of sustainable fashion, the empirical data reveals minimal direct rejection of sustainable fashion among interviewees. Instead, opposition and postponement were more common consumer responses. Both opposition and postponement are affected by the resistance factors, however some were more prominent, which constitute the third and fourth conclusion of this study.

## Conclusion 3

Opposition to sustainable fashion primarily stems from information barriers, where interviewees experience information asymmetries and lack the infrastructure to verify sustainability claims creating skepticism towards fashion brands' claims.

#### **Conclusion 4**

Postponement arises mainly from economic risk barriers, as the higher price point of sustainable fashion.

Other findings were related to the importance of communication, as it was a vital part of how the interviewees perceive the fashion industry and companies claims to sustainability, whether they are authentic or not. Communication in different forms have shown to be affecting consumers' purchase intentions both positively and negatively. Moreover, better verification of sustainability claims and improved availability of sustainable brands could enhance consumer trust and adoption. Something that is consistent in the research is that it is proven that consumers do not feel that they receive enough information from sustainable clothing companies, but also that it is not as accessible to get hold of sustainable clothing. Based on this, the final conclusion of the analysis can be presented.

#### **Conclusion 5**

In order to canalize sustainability implementations, fashion companies need to prioritize enhanced communication of information and accessibility.

To summarize, several factors affecting both adoption and rejection of sustainable fashion have been identified which together impact the diffusion of sustainable fashion as an innovation. Factors like price and information asymmetries affect consumer behavior the most, since they are the cause behind acts of opposition and postponement. Despite direct rejection not being a prominent response, there is still a discrepancy in attitude and behavior as fast fashion remains as the consumers first choice.

## **6.2 Discussion**

The theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in its exploration of the factors influencing consumers' decisions to adopt or reject sustainable fashion consumption, as well as the impact of these factors on purchase intention. Our empirical evidence adds credibility to the theoretical frameworks underlying sustainable consumption and by identifying and analyzing these factors, we provide valuable insights into the motivations that drive consumers' adoption or rejection of sustainable fashion. Despite positive attitudes towards sustainability, consumers often face barriers that prevent them from translating these attitudes into actual consumption decisions. Our study was conducted through interviews with students, providing



valuable insights into the factors influencing sustainable fashion consumption among this demographic. While our findings contribute notably to the existing literature on sustainable consumption, it's important to acknowledge the potential limitations of our sample. The student population may have unique perspectives and behaviors compared to the general consumer population, which could impact the generalizability of our findings.

One key finding of our study is the lack of consumer awareness regarding the negative impacts of fast fashion. This knowledge gap underscores the need for education and awareness initiatives to bridge the divide between attitudes and behaviors in sustainable fashion consumption. Our findings align with previous research, such as Ronda (2023), which also identified a lack of awareness as a significant barrier to sustainable fashion consumption. This suggests that solely emphasizing social and environmental concerns may not be sufficient to drive behavioral change among consumers, particularly when there is limited awareness of the negative impacts of fast fashion.

Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of effective communication and accessibility in promoting consumer engagement with sustainable fashion. The findings suggest that better verification of sustainability claims and improved availability of sustainable brands could enhance consumer trust and adoption which emphasizes the need for fashion companies to enhance their communication strategies and make sustainable options more accessible to consumers.

Moreover, this study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address these barriers effectively. By understanding the specific challenges faced by consumers, businesses can develop strategies to reduce these barriers and encourage greater adoption of sustainable fashion. This may include initiatives to improve transparency in sustainability claims, enhance accessibility to sustainable brands, and shift societal perceptions of sustainable fashion.

### 6.3 Future research

The findings of this thesis shed light on several avenues for future research in the realm of consumer adoption of sustainable fashion, where the limitations of the research have been taken into account. One potential area for exploration is the development of strategies to

bridge the gap between consumer attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability. Understanding why consumers express positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion yet exhibit reluctance in adopting it in their purchasing decisions could provide valuable insights. Future studies could delve deeper into the psychological mechanisms underlying this phenomenon, examining factors such as cognitive dissonance and the role of social norms in shaping consumer behavior.

Furthermore, there is a need for continued investigation into the effectiveness of communication strategies employed by fashion companies to convey their sustainability initiatives. Research could explore the impact of different communication channels, such as social media, influencer marketing, and traditional advertising, on consumer perceptions and behaviors. Additionally, studies focusing on the credibility and authenticity of sustainability claims made by fashion brands could help build consumer trust and confidence in sustainable fashion.

Another important area for future research is the exploration of interventions aimed at reducing barriers to adoption of sustainable fashion. Strategies to address economic barriers, such as pricing mechanisms and affordability initiatives, could be examined to make sustainable fashion more accessible to a wider consumer base. Additionally, efforts to overcome social barriers, such as stigma associated with second-hand clothing and perceptions of sustainability as lacking in style, could be explored through targeted marketing campaigns and educational programs.

Moreover, future research could delve into the role of regulatory frameworks and industry standards in driving sustainable practices within the fashion industry. Evaluating the impact of policies related to labor rights, environmental regulations, and supply chain transparency on consumer perceptions and behaviors could provide valuable insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders.

In conclusion, the findings of this thesis offer valuable contributions to the understanding of consumer adoption of sustainable fashion. Moving forward, further research is needed to address key challenges and opportunities in promoting sustainable consumption practices within the fashion industry, ultimately contributing to more environmentally and socially

responsible consumer behaviors. Some examples of possible research questions for the future could include:

1. How can fashion companies effectively communicate their sustainability initiatives to consumers to bridge the gap between positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion and reluctance in adoption?
2. What are the underlying psychological mechanisms driving consumer resistance to adopting sustainable fashion, and how can interventions be designed to address these barriers?
3. How do different communication channels, such as social media, influencer marketing, and traditional advertising, impact consumer perceptions and behaviors towards sustainable fashion innovations?

## 6.4 Practical implications

This thesis provides valuable insights for companies seeking to expand their target audience to include students by understanding attitudes and behaviors towards sustainability and fashion. To effectively reach young consumers, as researched in this study, companies should focus on transparent and relatable communication. Highlighting the environmental and social benefits of sustainable fashion can resonate well with this group. Utilizing social media platforms and engaging content that speaks directly to the values and lifestyle of students can enhance reach and engagement.

Furthermore, affordability is a crucial factor for students when it comes to purchasing decisions. Companies should consider offering budget-friendly sustainable options or student discounts to make sustainable fashion more accessible. Implementing pricing strategies that align with students' financial constraints can drive higher adoption rates. In addition, companies should work on increasing the distribution and visibility of their sustainable clothing to address the availability issues. This can for instance include expanding online stores, partnering with popular retail outlets frequented by students, and ensuring a wide range of sizes and styles to cater to diverse preferences.

Beyond giving insight to how companies can target students, this thesis can serve as a reflective tool for all readers. It encourages individuals to examine their own habits and

behaviors related to sustainability and fashion. By understanding their own impact, readers can make more informed and conscious choices, contributing to a broader cultural shift towards sustainability.

## 6.5 Discussion of methodology

Something that is consistent in many of the interviewees' replies is that it is often mentioned that there is a financial risk or a financial barrier in purchasing sustainable clothes, as they are often more expensive than, for example, fast-fashion clothes. Our assessment is that this problem has arisen as a result of all the interviewees being students with limited finances. If we had had a different sample, with a more diversified sample, both from an economic perspective and from an age aspect, the empirical data would have had a different outcome.

Purposive sampling in combination with snowball sampling has been applied in the thesis. Something interesting that can be discussed is whether the results for variables and other questions would have looked like if the age distribution had been different or not. Perceptually, younger consumers today are more influenced by external factors when purchasing decisions are made because that age group spends more time on social channels and is influenced by trends and influencers.

### 6.5.1 Discussion of reliability, validity and objectivity

The discussion of reliability, validity, and objectivity in the context of qualitative research is essential for ensuring the rigor and trustworthiness of the thesis' findings. In this thesis, these concepts were substantiated through different approaches, each aimed at addressing specific aspects of research quality.

Internal validity, or credibility, which concerns the credibility of the research findings, were supported through respondent validation. By involving the interviewees in confirming their responses, we ensured that their interpretations accurately reflected their perspectives. All of the interviewees were contacted afterwards, in which they confirmed the validity of the empirical data collection. This process enhances the credibility of the findings by aligning them with the views of those directly involved in the studied social context.

External validity, or transferability, was ensured by incorporating personal questions, as outlined in section 3.5 *Collection of Data*, to capture diverse aspects of the social world. This approach ensured a variety of interviewees, enhancing the depth rather than the breadth of data collection. Similar to internal validity, external validity was strengthened by obtaining detailed insights into the "culture" and social context through the inclusion of interviewees of different genders, ages, and backgrounds.

Reliability, or dependability, was enhanced by maintaining coherence throughout the entire research process. This was achieved by carefully aligning each step, from problem formulation to the selection of interviewees, conducting the interviews, and ultimately analyzing the collected data. Transcribing all interviews ensured that we captured the full breadth of the interviewees' responses, thereby minimizing any potential loss of information or context. This comprehensive approach allowed for a thorough and accurate analysis, bolstering the overall reliability of the study.

Objectivity, or confirmability, were achieved by demonstrating a commitment to acting in good faith and minimizing personal biases or theoretical influences on the research process and findings where all interviewees were anonymous and the names mentioned in the empirical data collection were made up. While theories were used to formulate interview questions, steps were also taken to ensure that they did not unduly influenced the data collection, thereby increasing the objectivity of the study.

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# Appendix

## Appendix A – Interview guide

Hello and welcome to this interview. To begin with, we would like to thank you for participating and sharing your opinion on our thesis' research subject. Our thesis regards sustainable fashion and how fashion companies use innovative approaches towards sustainable practices. To be able to transcribe the interview, do you consent to being recorded while answering the questions and if so, would you like us to delete the recording immediately after the transcription has been done?

### **Reply:**

The interview will initially begin with some personal questions, and then be followed by questions specific for the research, and please have in mind that you are allowed to think before answering the questions.

### **Reply:**

### **Introduction**

- What gender do you identify yourself as?
- How old are you?
- Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? What is your current occupation?
- Which are your top 3 fashion brands that you consider purchasing your clothes from?
- Would you consider yourself as a person that reflects on what impact your consumption has on the environment?
  - If yes, what factors motivate you to consume environmentally friendly? e.g. low CO<sub>2</sub>-emissions, organic materials, energy efficient production, good working conditions
- Would you consider buying clothing pieces that are sustainable? And have you ever purchased clothing that is sustainable?

- How often do you consume sustainable clothing, e.g. second hand, organically sourced garments, clothes produced within European countries, non-mass-production? Please answer numerically.

### **Diffusion of Innovation**

- Can you describe any recent environmental or social sustainability practices implemented by fashion brands that you are aware of?
- Would you consider yourself as a person that is quick to adapt to new innovations when they are introduced, or do you usually stay passive and wait until others adopt them first?
- Have you considered buying from a fashion company due to their environmental or social sustainability initiatives specifically?
- Building on the previous question, have you during any time actively chosen to purchase sustainable fashion over fast fashion and what influenced that decision?
- Do you think communication channels such as social media and influencer marketing impacts your decision to consume sustainable clothing?

### **Innovation Resistance Model**

- How do you think the status quo, also known as your current situation, affects consumer willingness to embrace sustainable fashion?
- How do you perceive the authenticity and credibility of fashion brands' sustainability claims? What factors influence your trust in brands when it comes to their sustainability practices?
- Can you share any experiences where you've encountered **challenges or barriers** in adopting environmental or social sustainability practices in your fashion consumption habits?
  - Do you think sustainable clothing is worth the price or is it too expensive?
  - Do you feel that sustainable clothing is more difficult to take care of? For instance, washing, general maintenance etc.
  - Do you perceive that there is a value when purchasing sustainable clothes in comparison to regular or fast fashion pieces?
- Do you see yourself as a person that is sustainable? Do people in your surroundings make sustainable purchases and live sustainable lifestyles?

### **Consumer resistance**

- What reasons or factors do you believe affect the **resistance** of purchasing sustainable clothing pieces the most?
  - Do you think that traditional norms and habits have influenced your decision to/or not to consume sustainable fashion?
  - How do you balance considerations of sustainability with other factors, such as price, quality, and style, when making fashion purchasing decisions?

### **Consumer resistance response**

- How do you react when presented with a sustainable fashion option?
  - Is your first impulse to reject it, meaning to not buy it?
  - Or, do you feel skeptical and want to search up more information to make an informed decision?
  
- Or do you postpone the decision making and information seeking to the future when other factors are in alignment?
- When you have considered buying a sustainable fashion product, but have chosen to reject it, have you later thought about purchasing it if the company has chosen to modify it due to low engagement?
- Have you ever bought a fashion product that has been informed of, but a period of time later been released for sales?
- Have you ever decided to purchase a sustainable fashion product after first having rejected it but then researched its characteristics regarding sustainability and then chosen to purchase it?

### **Concluding**

- What do you think are the key challenges and opportunities for fashion brands that implement environmental and social sustainability practices?
- Finally, is there anything that you would like to add?

That was all the questions. Thank you so much for participating and your time!

## Appendix B – Prompts inserted when using AI tools

- Fashion Entrepreneurship & Innovation Models
- Give me a list of innovation management and entrepreneurship theories
- Adoption Resistance Dynamics
- Negative effects of the fashion industry
- Give me some theories on resistance to innovation
- Summarize this article S. Ram (1987) , "A Model of Innovation Resistance", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 14, eds. Melanie Wallendorf and Paul Anderson, Provo, UT : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 208-212.
- Consumer Resistance in Sustainable Fashion
- Consumer Resistance Response Study
- Fashion ESG and Greenwashing