



SCHOOL OF  
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MANAGEMENT

**Sustainable Fast Fashion: Paradox or Possibility?**

From Consumer Insight to Sustainable Marketing

by

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## **Abstract**

Awareness of sustainability-related issues within the fashion industry has increased. Fast fashion is specifically criticized for its negative impacts on the environment and society. Due to this, several fast fashion companies are trying to position themselves as more sustainable. However, fast fashion and sustainability are often considered paradoxical. The purpose of this study is to investigate what consumers think about green marketing by fast fashion companies. Moreover, this study seeks to understand which aspects of sustainability consumers find important in relation to consumption of clothes. A mixed methods approach was adopted, and a web-based survey was conducted to collect quantitative and qualitative data about consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences.

Based on the results, it was concluded that consumers are conscious and demand fashion that is more sustainable. The findings further support that consumers are critical and skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies. However, in contrast to previous studies, this study also found that consumers believe that fast fashion can be sustainable. In conclusion, this study presents practical implications for fast fashion companies and suggests how they can improve their marketing practices to meet consumer preferences in a better way. To summarize, implementing a more sustainable marketing mix is key. This mix, or strategy, encompasses sustainable and ethical products. Furthermore, credible and transparent promotional activities are fundamental to avoid accusations of greenwashing and boycotts. To establish consumer trust, investing in third-party sustainability labels is also recommended. Even if this study is based on a relatively small sample, it provides interesting consumer insights, which can be used as a starting point for future research. It is suggested that future studies continue to investigate how a sustainable marketing mix can be employed to make the fashion industry more sustainable.

**Keywords:** conscious consumers, fast fashion, marketing mix, sustainability, sustainability labels

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## Key Terms

**Conscious consumers:** mindful consumers who care about environmental and social sustainability among other things

**Corporate social responsibility (CSR):** a concept that includes the environmental, ethical, and social responsibility of business

**Fast fashion:** inexpensive fashion and clothing, which is produced rapidly in response to the latest trends

**Fast fashion companies:** companies that sell fast fashion, for example H&M and Zara

**Green marketing:** when companies market themselves or their products/services as environmentally friendly and sustainable

**Greenwashing:** when companies market themselves or their products/services to be more environmentally friendly and sustainable than they actually are

**Marketing mix:** a conceptual model used when creating a marketing strategy, the traditional marketing mix consists of four elements; product, price, place, and promotion

**Sustainability:** relates to both environmental and social (ethical) aspects of sustainability in this study

**Environmental sustainability:** sustainability relating to the environment, for example reduced emissions, pollution, and waste

**Social (ethical) sustainability:** sustainability relating to human- and animal rights, for example fair labor conditions and animal welfare

**Sustainability labels:** includes eco-labels and ethical labels

**Eco-labels:** indicating environmental sustainability

**Ethical labels:** indicating social (ethical) sustainability

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

Sustainability has become a common topic in today's society, specifically in regard to business, marketing, and consumption (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter, Peattie, Ottoman & Polonsky, 2002; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). However, sustainability is not just a short-lived trend. Sustainability, related to production and consumption, will be equally, if not more, relevant for companies and consumers worldwide in the future as it is today (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002). In fact, consumers are becoming increasingly more conscious in regard to their consumption behavior, which companies and marketers have to adapt to in order to survive and be profitable (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002; Halverson, 2018). Global sustainability goals, institutions, and the media also influence companies to implement corporate social responsibility practices to address sustainability issues (Charter et al. 2002; McKinsey & Company, 2019; United Nations, n.d.c).

As consumers are demanding more sustainable products and services, sustainability has become a top priority in many industries (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002). One industry that has been highlighted in regard to sustainability is the fashion industry. Fast fashion is specifically criticized because of its great environmental and social impact (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; McFall-Johnsen, 2019; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019; Szewczyk, 2016). Consequently, several scholars have questioned whether fast fashion companies can become sustainable (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Snijder, 2016). At the same time, others argue that with the right tools and strategies, and through responsible actions, fast fashion companies can act sustainably (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019; Szewczyk, 2016).

Fast fashion is described as inexpensive and widely available fashion, which is mass produced, consumed, and disposed of in a fast pace (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Improved production processes allow fast fashion to be sold at low prices (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). Furthermore, the production of fast fashion is usually moved to countries with low-cost labor, which further reduce the price (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Hence, due to their global supply chains, and worldwide marketing activities, most fast fashion companies are global or international (McKinsey & Company, 2019; Szewczyk, 2016). Fast

fashion is also fast because it follows the latest fashion trends that change quickly (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018).

In recent years, many international fast fashion companies have invested in more sustainable practices (McKinsey & Company, 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020). This also includes two of the world's largest fast fashion companies, Zara (Inditex) and H&M (H&M Group). These companies have started to produce, market, and sell fashion and related products that are more sustainable (H&M Group, n.d; Inditex, n.d.c; McKinsey & Company, 2019). Fast fashion companies are also committing to other corporate social responsibility activities (H&M Group, n.d; Inditex, n.d.b; McKinsey & Company, 2019).

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2018), the main link between companies and consumers is marketing. Furthermore, companies and their marketers use a combination of the so-called marketing mix when marketing their products or services (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The marketing mix is also known as the 4P model, which stands for product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The authors state that the marketing mix is the fundamentals of marketing, since it is used as a toolbox when creating a marketing strategy. Moreover, companies and marketers adjust their marketing mix to target specific consumer groups in the best possible way (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

Over the years, extended and alternative versions of the marketing mix have been discussed, studied, and proposed (Goi, 2009; Khan, 2014; Kumar, Rahman, Kazmi & Goyal, 2012). The sustainable marketing mix is one version, primarily stemming from the greater sustainability awareness of today's consumers (Charter et al. 2002; Kumar et al. 2012). This model is said to be a better representation for how marketers can address both environmentally and socially conscious consumers (Charter et al. 2002; Kumar et al. 2012), a growing segment and target market within the fashion industry and fast fashion (Amed, Balchandani, Beltrami, Berg, Hedrich & Rölkens, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2019).

At this point, previous studies have investigated how varieties of the marketing mix affect consumer behavior, purchase intention, satisfaction level, and brand loyalty (Davari & Strutton, 2014; Mahmoud, 2018; Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). However, even if the

environmental and social consequences of fast fashion are highlighted, little attention has been paid to how fast fashion companies should use the marketing mix when targeting consumers that are more conscious or when marketing clothes that are more sustainable. Ultimately, this study aims to decrease this knowledge gap and contribute to the existing literature in the field.

## **1.2 Problematization**

As today's consumers have become more conscious in regard to environmental and social issues, they also demand more sustainable fashion (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). However, several studies have shown that consumers, specifically today's more conscious consumers, do not find the green marketing by fast fashion companies credible or trustworthy (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman, Segerqvist, Wahlström & Edwards, 2017). The corporate social responsibility initiatives of fast fashion companies are also questioned (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Another related problem regards sustainability labels. These labels are and can be used as a marketing tool to inform about, increase awareness of, and help consumers to identify sustainable products (Henninger, 2015; Taufique, Polonsky, Vocino & Siwar, 2019). However, there is apparently a lack of standardized sustainability labels in the fashion industry (Henninger, 2015; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

The lack of standardized sustainability labels creates a problem for fashion companies. Studies by Forsman and Madsen (2017) and Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) found that consumers are often skeptical towards the trustworthiness of those labels currently in use. The same scholars also state that consumers are confused by today's sustainability labels within fashion. To establish trust among consumers, integrated communication, transparency, and traceability is said to be fundamental to all fashion companies if they want to meet the demand of current and future consumers (Henninger, 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Szewczyk, 2016; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Therefore, the future for standardized sustainability labels in the fashion industry needs further investigation (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Henninger, 2015).

Moreover, due to social media, consumer power has increased, which simultaneously affect the marketing strategies used by companies (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Ek & Åhsgren, 2009; Michaela & Orna, 2015). Increased consumer power can both have positive and negative impact on brand images and brand profitability, as today's consumers can both praise and criticize companies online (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Ek & Åhsgren, 2009). In addition, what is said on social media tends to go viral quickly (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Lindgren, 2017).

A recent report by the Euromonitor International further states that “[t]he [c]onscious [c]onsumer is here to stay. In the short, medium and long-term, mindful consumption, whether full-time or part-time, looks set to rise. Conscious [c]onsumers are influential, and the trend will spread to others.” (Angus & Westbrook, 2019, p. 24). The trend has further shown that conscious consumers tend to boycott unsustainable brands and have the power to influence others to do the same through social media (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019).

Ultimately, fast fashion companies have to address consumers in the right way if they want to survive competition and be seen as responsible (Amed et al. 2019). This does not mean that they should adopt greenwashing practices, since this can lead to further boycotts (Amed et al. 2019; Charter et al. 2002). Instead, they have to be innovative to be able to produce and market sustainable fashion products that align with their business model, that is to sell new fashion trends at affordable prices (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

In conclusion, if fast fashion companies want to succeed and be profitable, they need to become more sustainable (McKinsey & Company, 2019; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). However, even if fast fashion companies are starting to sell more sustainable fashion, they need to market this in a way that this growing segment of conscious consumers find trustworthy (Amed et al. 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020). Therefore, questions regarding how the marketing mix should be used by fast fashion companies, and its marketers, to meet consumer preferences arise. Is the traditional marketing mix useful or does it need improvements? Furthermore, what about sustainability labels and standards in the industry? Is there a future for sustainability labels within fast fashion?

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this thesis is to understand the attitudes, consumption behavior, and preferences of consumers concerning fashion, fast fashion, and sustainability. This is done to explore how fast fashion companies should use the marketing mix when engaging in sustainable marketing. In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives were defined. First, conduct a survey that obtains quantitative and qualitative data about consumers. Second, analyze the data. Finally, discuss and present the findings through the marketing mix framework.

### **1.4 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyze consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences regarding fashion consumption, fast fashion, and sustainability. The goal is to understand what consumers think about green marketing by fast fashion companies and related topics. Based on consumer insight, the second purpose of this study is to suggest how fast fashion companies should use the marketing mix to meet consumer preferences regarding sustainability. The findings of this study can be used by fast fashion companies and its marketers to improve their marketing strategies. Moreover, the findings can be used to guide new and established companies within the industry to become more sustainable.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

To address the research gap, and fulfill the research purpose, two research questions were formulated as a basis for this thesis. These questions also provide a focus within the study. Hence, with consumer insight, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1:** What do consumers think about green marketing by fast fashion companies?

**RQ2:** Which aspects of sustainability are important to consumers in relation to consumption of clothes?

### **1.6 Delimitations**

This thesis is limited for various reasons. First, to narrow down the scope, this study focuses on the fashion industry, and specifically fast fashion companies. The purpose of this thesis is not to investigate any individual case or fast fashion company in-depth, but rather highlight the

overarching issues that fast fashion companies share. Relevant examples and references are provided. However, no company is examined in detail.

To be able to answer the research questions, the web-based survey conducted in this study targeted consumers. The survey was designed to gain a deeper understanding of consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences. This was done so that fast fashion companies can prepare for current and future demand. Hence, to clarify, the respondents in the survey are assumed to be consumers.

Furthermore, the marketing mix serves as the conceptual framework in this thesis. Due to word constraints, specific elements of the marketing mix are emphasized. The product and promotion elements are in focus, while price and place are briefly addressed. More details about the conceptual framework can be found in chapter three.

Lastly, during the time period of this study, there was an ongoing pandemic caused by the coronavirus. Consequently, since personal interaction was restricted at the time, the survey had to be distributed online. Due to limited time, the survey was only released for a period of 10 days, resulting in 106 responses. In addition, focus groups could not be executed to gain deeper insights about conscious consumers.

## **1.7 Outline of the Thesis**

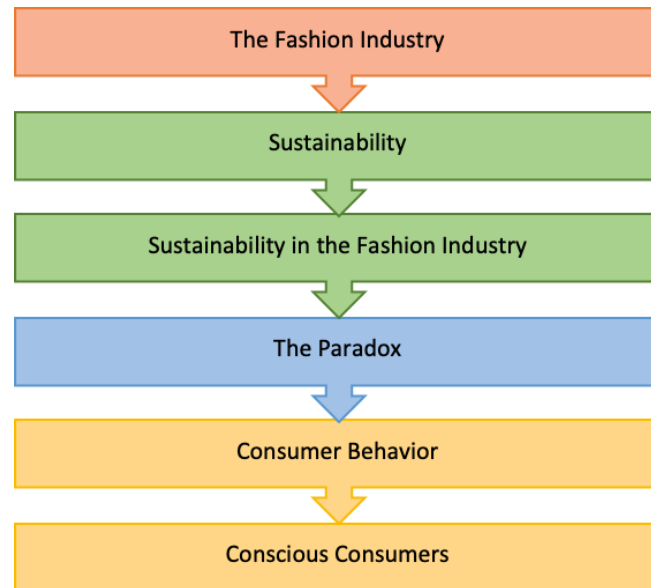
This thesis is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter is an introduction consisting of background information and problematization. The research aim and objectives, research purpose, and research questions are also stated in chapter one. Chapter two comprises a literature review of the field. In this chapter, key concepts, theories, models, and previous findings in relation to fast fashion, sustainability, marketing, and consumer behavior are highlighted. The third chapter is a review of the marketing mix, which is the conceptual framework used in this thesis. In chapter four, the hypotheses are stated, which were derived from the literature review.

Chapter five describes the methodology and includes a detailed explanation of the research approach, research design, research method, data collection method, and data analysis. The sixth

chapter presents the empirical findings from the survey, which is followed by an analysis and discussion of the data in chapter seven. Finally, in chapter eight, conclusions are made. Practical implications and suggestions for future research are also presented in this chapter.

## 2. Literature Review

This chapter provides a literature review of relevant topics, which will serve as a foundation in this thesis. The main themes in this review are fast fashion, sustainability, consumer behavior, and conscious consumers. The paradox of sustainable fast fashion is also acknowledged. Consequently, the hypotheses presented in chapter four are based on previous findings stated in this review. The outline of this chapter is pictured in Figure 1 below.



*Figure 1 - Outline of Chapter Two*

### 2.1 The Fashion Industry

#### 2.1.1 Fashion

Fashion has a long history, where changes in design, production, and consumption is evident (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2019). Today, new fashion trends come and go faster than ever, and due to globalization, trends are also more homogeneous (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Fletcher, 2008; Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012). Furthermore, since global consumption has increased, the demand for new fashion has risen (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). Because of this growing demand, new fashion trends, improvements in production processes, and the use of global supply chains, fast fashion has emerged (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

### ***2.1.2 Fast Fashion***

Fast fashion is a term used to describe inexpensive fashion, which is produced and sold rapidly in response to the latest trends (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). To be able to offer the newest fashion trends at an affordable price, a common strategy of fast fashion companies is to move production to countries with low-cost labor (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Hence, most fast fashion companies exist and operate on a global scale (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020).

In addition, the supply chains used by fast fashion companies are highly dynamic, flexible, and responsive to the continuously changing trends (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Efficient supply chains also make it possible to offer new and trendy fashion to consumers on a continuous basis (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). As a result, the production and consumption of fast fashion has increased, and the demand for new fashion continues to grow (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

Fast fashion companies are known for changing their offerings on a weekly basis (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). As highlighted by Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013), this means that the product life cycle of fashion has decreased from months, to only a matter of weeks or days. Ultimately, consumers are encouraged to frequently buy new clothing (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019). Moreover, common marketing strategies of fast fashion companies are short-time promotions and discount offers, which pressure buyers to immediately purchase new clothes often (Byun & Sternquist, 2008; Greenpeace, 2017).

Byun and Sternquist (2008) have compared fast fashion to fast food, emphasizing how both are produced and delivered quickly, yet both also go bad very fast. Fletcher (2008) further supports this analogy, arguing that fast fashion is standardized, homogenous, mass-produced, and sold in large volumes at an affordable price. Two well-known examples of fast fashion companies are H&M from Sweden and the Spanish retailer Zara, both operate globally and have quick inventory turnover thanks to efficient supply chains (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). Other examples of established fast fashion companies are GAP from the US, and Top Shop from the UK (Kenton, 2020).

### 2.1.3 Fast Fashion and Its Consequences

The business model of fast fashion companies, that is to produce and sell large quantities of fashion products at low prices, have become dominant in the fashion industry (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). This has resulted in an increase in the production and consumption of fast fashion worldwide (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Due to this, the scholars state that its negative effects on the environment and humans are growing in an alarming way.

According to Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018), fast fashion is causing social and environmental injustice. They state that human and environmental health are at risk due to the negative consequences caused by fast fashion production and consumption. The social and environmental cost involved in producing fast fashion is also evident throughout the product life cycle of fashion items (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). First, the sourcing of raw materials comes at an environmental cost as it tends to require lots of water and chemicals (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). Moreover, the production of fast fashion is often highly air and water pollutive (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019).

Table 1 below shows how regular clothes impact the environment and climate. For example, to produce 600 grams of regular denim requires approximately 6,200 liters of water and 1,4 kilograms of chemicals (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). The production of jeans further results in 13 kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e) (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019).

*Table 1 - Clothes' Impact on the Environment and Climate (adapted from Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019)*

<b>Clothes</b>	<b>Liters of water</b>	<b>Kilograms of chemicals</b>	<b>Kilograms of carbon dioxide equivalents (CO<sub>2</sub>e)</b>
T-shirt (250 grams of cotton)	2,600	0,8	4,5
Jeans (600 grams of denim)	6,200	1,4	13
Fleece sweater (300 grams of polyester)	100	0,8	11
Dress (500 grams of polyester)	150	1,4	17

The production and consumption of fast fashion also leads to frequent long-distance transportation of finished products, contributing to increased emissions (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019). Furthermore, tons of textile waste appear once the clothes are out of fashion (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019). Last but not least, the fast fashion industry is highlighted for its unethical labor conditions. Low wages, excessive working hours, and the use of child labor are common issues (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019).

Even though fast fashion has made it possible for almost anyone to buy the latest fashion trends, Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018) argue that policymakers, companies, and consumers have to take responsibility and reduce the negative externalities of the industry. The authors further state that in order to comply with the 12th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), defined by the United Nations (UN), regarding sustainable production and consumption, fast fashion companies must implement more sustainable business practices. Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019) also emphasize the environmental and social consequences of fast fashion, which fast fashion companies have to address, as consumption of fashion continues to grow.

Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018) propose how the problems with fast fashion can be reduced or solved. They state that innovations in the production of fashion is key since this would decrease both environmental and human health issues. Furthermore, they underline the need for industry-wide adoption of sustainable business practices, which should be internationally recognized and certified by trustworthy third-party organizations.

At the same time, Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018) highlight the importance of conscious consumers as key stakeholders pushing companies to act more responsibly. They argue that changes in consumer behavior and attitudes toward consumption is crucial. However, they state that consumers must be aware of greenwashing and be critical when confronted with green marketing by fashion companies. Hence, to make the industry more sustainable, and eliminate greenwashing, they claim that legislations and trade policies are needed. This is further supported by Aakko and Koskennurmi-Sivonen (2013) and The Business of Fashion and

McKinsey & Company (2020), who claim that without standards and regulations in place, greenwashing practices will continue to exist and flourish.

## **2.2 Sustainability**

### ***2.2.1 Sustainability and Sustainable Development***

According to Charter et al. (2002, p. 10), sustainability means “to maintain or prolong both environmental and human health”. The authors further state that sustainability is the change towards the use of renewable materials, and the minimization or elimination of polluting, toxic, and hazardous waste. They also state that today’s companies need to adopt sustainable business practices, not only to meet stricter regulations, but also to survive competition, and to meet the demand of more conscious consumers (Charter et al. 2002).

Additionally, sustainability has to be addressed since there is no business on a dead planet (Charter et al. 2002). Hence, sustainable development, which is well known as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” is key (UN Documents, 1987, n.p.). According to Charter et al. (2002), sustainable development is a complex challenge for companies. In spite of this, the scholars argue that with the right marketing strategies and tools, a sustainable future within business is possible.

Although the increased awareness and care about sustainability is evident, its meaning still differs depending on the context (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010). To most people it is related to consumption and lifestyle (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Westbrook & Angus, 2020; WWF, 2017). However, within the field of business and international business, sustainability is synonymous with corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 2008; Charter et al. 2002; Kuhlman & Farrington, 2010), which will be discussed in the next section.

### ***2.2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)***

Corporate social responsibility is when companies actively engage in activities and implement practices that address environmental and social aspects or issues (Carroll, 2008; Charter et al.

2002; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Due to globalization, and the growth of international business, corporate social responsibility has become more and more important (Carroll, 2008; Charter et al. 2002; Keegan & Green, 2017). The authors state that companies can face serious criticism, and might risk their licence to operate, if they act in an irresponsible or unethical way. Hence, the popularity of corporate social responsibility has grown and is highlighted by companies in most industries (B Corporation, 2020; Keegan & Green, 2017).

Responsible companies adopt a wider stakeholder approach by taking into account its employees, suppliers, and the general society (B Corporation, 2020; Carroll, 2008; Charter et al. 2002; Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). However, corporate social responsibility is a highly debated topic. It has been argued that a company's main responsibility is to engage in activities that create profits for its owners, as long as it complies with the laws (Friedman, 1970; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Others state that the purpose of a company is to be profitable so that it can do something good that goes beyond its core business activities (Freeman, 2002; Handy, 2002; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

Another debate regards if corporate social responsibility activities can create long-term value for companies or not (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Several scholars state, and empirical evidence supports, that there is a business case for corporate social responsibility (Charter et al. 2002; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Moreover, some say that it is difficult to evaluate and assess corporate social responsibility initiatives, as they should be voluntary and not used as a means to increase a company's reputation (Carroll, 2008; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Pomeroy (2017) further states that when companies communicate their corporate social responsibility activities, it has to be honest and legitimate, or else it will be regarded as fake or greenwashing.

One of the key drivers behind the increase in corporate social responsibility is the growing demand by conscious consumers (Charter et al. 2002). As consumers are becoming more aware of environmental and social issues, they demand more sustainable products and services (Charter et al. 2002; Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). However, Charter et al. (2002) claim that the problem of how well consumers can evaluate the sustainability of a product or service still exists.

Another driver for change is media (Charter et al. 2002). Over the years, several companies have been highlighted in the media for acting irresponsibly, behaving unethically, contributing to environmental degradation, and using greenwashing (Charter et al. 2002; Cohen & Munos, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Companies also influence each other to become more sustainable, as competition for market shares intensifies (Charter et al. 2002). The scholars argue that companies who do not innovate, and take sustainability into account, will be at a distance in comparison to more responsible businesses in the future. Finally, regulations regarding environmental and social sustainability force companies to take more responsibility (Charter et al. 2002).

Thus, to be able to operate and survive, today's companies need to integrate environmental and social sustainability with their financial goals and objectives (Charter et al. 2002; Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). This is well known as the triple bottom line, which refers to the financial, social, and environmental aspects of a company (Charter et al. 2002). The triple bottom line is therefore a growing strategic approach undertaken by many companies who strive to become more sustainable, while continuing to be financially profitable (Charter et al. 2002).

### ***2.2.3 Sustainable Production and Consumption***

In 2015, all UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, n.d.c). This agenda consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where the 12th goal regards sustainable and responsible production and consumption (United Nations, n.d.c). This goal emphasizes the importance of sustainable production methods and focus on resource and energy efficiency, reduced poverty, and minimal economic, environmental, and social costs (United Nations, n.d.a). Sustainable production starts with reducing the usage of natural resources, where the focus on sustainability continues throughout the whole supply chain, as well as the life cycle of a finished product (United Nations, n.d.a). Another important target related to this goal is to implement reduce, recycle, and reuse strategies to tackle global waste issues (United Nations, n.d.a).

The United Nations (n.d.a) further states that all countries are supposed to take actions in regard to the agenda. It is therefore crucial to encourage companies, specifically large and global

companies, to implement sustainability into their business activities and reporting cycles to reach the defined targets and goals (United Nations, n.d.a; United Nations, n.d.b). Since 2015, several large fast fashion companies have committed to the goals in the agenda and started to take actions to fulfill the set targets (Abercrombie & Fitch, n.d; Gap Inc, 2018; H&M Group, 2020a; Inditex, n.d.b).

To reach the goals, it is fundamental to increase awareness about sustainable development to people all over the globe, otherwise improvements will not be possible (United Nations, n.d.a; United Nations, n.d.b). A key facet is therefore to educate consumers about sustainable consumption, as well as to provide accurate information through standards and trustworthy labels (United Nations, n.d.a). Companies can and should also influence consumers to adopt more sustainable consumption behaviors (United Nations, n.d.b).

The United Nations (n.d.b) further states that consumers should consume consciously, buy locally produced and eco-labeled products, reduce their waste, and recycle as much as possible. They further highlight the fact that the textile industry is one of today's most polluting industries, and that many fashion companies exploit workers in the third world. Hence, if, or when, consumers make informed purchases and support sustainable companies, they also pressure other companies to implement more sustainable practices (United Nations, n.d.b).

#### ***2.2.4 Sustainable Marketing***

As previously stated, today's companies are investing in more sustainable business practices. This also includes their marketing activities (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). However, sustainable marketing is found to be a complex challenge for companies and marketers (Charter et al. 2002). It requires meeting consumer demand and staying competitive in the market, while making changes to core business activities, including new sourcing methods, production processes, and distribution channels (Charter et al. 2002). In addition, adhering to sustainability regulations and standards is crucial, which has to be done simultaneously (Charter et al. 2002).

Sustainable marketing is also known as green marketing (Charter et al. 2002). The term green marketing is described in numerous ways. However, in general, green marketing relates to when companies produce, package, promote, distribute, or recycle products in an environmentally

friendly way (Charter et al. 2002; Davari & Strutton, 2014; Polonsky, 1994). Polonsky (1994) argues that most people believe that green marketing only regards advertising and promotion. Although these elements are included in green marketing, he argues that the concept is much broader. Hence, Polonsky (1994, p. 2) defines green marketing as “all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment”.

Green marketing is further linked to greenwashing. Due to the increase in green marketing, greenwashing has also become more common (Gallicano, 2011; Halverson 2018; UL, 2016). Greenwashing is when companies market their products, services, or themselves as more environmentally friendly than they actually are (Carlson, Grove & Kangun, 1993). The phenomenon is also known as green marketing that is deceptive, exaggerated, or false, and used by companies to gain market share and increase profits (Dahl, 2010; UL, 2016).

The main problem with greenwashing is that it misleads consumers wanting to make sustainable purchases (UL, 2016). Hence, it reduces sustainable consumption (UL, 2016). Moreover, greenwashing practices tend to create confusion and skepticism among consumers towards green marketing (Gallicano, 2011; UL, 2016). This becomes an issue for companies that are honest in their green marketing (Gallicano, 2011; UL, 2016). Ultimately, long-term sustainability is threatened when greenwashing is used (Gallicano, 2011; UL, 2016).

## **2.3 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry**

### ***2.3.1 Fast Fashion and Sustainability***

There are several drivers behind sustainability in fashion, where consumer demand, trends, institutions, regulations, and standards play an important role (Henninger, 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2019; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2019). The pressure from different stakeholders, that is conscious consumers, governmental- and nongovernmental organizations, shareholders, the media, and society is evident (Charter et al. 2002; Henninger, 2015; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2019). Thus, fast fashion companies should or must act responsibly to survive in the long run (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019) further argue that since the global demand for new fashion trends will continue to grow, fast fashion companies need to become more sustainable. They also claim that younger generations and more conscious consumers expect companies to act responsible. In the long run, investing in sustainability will therefore safeguard companies from bad reputations and loss in long-term profitability (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019) suggest how fast fashion companies can address and reduce both environmental and social consequences caused by fast fashion. First, they state companies should invest in sustainable fibers that have less negative impact on the environment. Moreover, it is important to develop standards and practices on how to design clothes that can be reused or recycled in an easy way (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). They also say that companies should educate consumers on how to take care of their clothes in order to reduce energy consumption, but also to increase their durability. Finally, they state that it is important that fast fashion companies act responsibly and set higher labor and environmental standards.

The fashion industry and fast fashion companies are in fact moving towards a more sustainable future (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). The experts report that many fast fashion companies are investing in more sustainable value chains. Improved sourcing and production methods, and the use of organic and recycled fibers are some of the key initiatives described. Two of the world's largest fast fashion companies, Zara (Inditex) and H&M (H&M Group), are for instance producing, marketing, and selling more environmentally friendly collections. These collections typically consist of clothes made of organic cotton and recycled materials (H&M Group, 2020a; Inditex, n.d.c).

The H&M Group is at the forefront when it comes to sustainability within fashion. Their vision is to “lead the change towards a circular and climate positive fashion industry, while being a fair and equal company across our entire value chain” (H&M Group, 2020b, p. 1). Furthermore, the company has defined several ambitious goals and aims to become climate positive throughout their whole supply chain by 2040 (H&M Group, 2020a; Wilhelmson, 2020b). They also strive to improve transparency towards stakeholders, develop industry standards, contribute with new innovations, and establish fair and ethical working conditions for all people involved (H&M

Group, 2020a). Consequently, the company has been awarded and recognized by several external parties for their corporate social responsibility practices (H&M Group, 2020a).

Through partnerships and collaborations, the H&M Group are taking several steps towards a more sustainable future (H&M Group, 2020a). One initiative that has been highlighted is their partnership with the global organization I:Collect (I:CO), where they collect old textiles for reuse and recycling (H&M Group, 2020a; Wilhelmson, 2020b). Similar programs are also found at other fast fashion companies like Zara (Inditex, n.d.a), KappAhl, and Lindex (Kappahl, n.d; Lindex, n.d; Wilhelmson, 2020b).

According to Inditex (Inditex, n.d.b), sustainability permeates their entire value chain. The company admits that their business has a big impact on its surroundings. Therefore, they claim to be committed to make that impact as positive as possible for customers, employees, society, and the environment. This is done by taking responsibility, acting more sustainably, and improving every aspect of its business (Inditex, n.d.b).

KappAhl further underlines the importance of educating consumers on how to take care of their clothes to make them last longer (Kappahl, n.d; Wilhelmson, 2020b). Moreover, KappAhl engages in research to find new and sustainable innovations (Kappahl, n.d; Wilhelmson, 2020b). By adhering to the global sustainability goals, the company also continues to improve their supply chains and reduce their environmental footprint (Kappahl, n.d; Wilhelmson, 2020b). Lindex is yet another fast fashion company that is engaged in making the industry more sustainable (Lindex, n.d; Wilhelmson, 2020b). They collaborate with independent organizations to minimize environmental pollution and to establish better labor standards. In summary, Wilhelmson (2020b) argues that fast fashion companies are on the right track to make the industry more sustainable.

Even though many fashion companies have invested in sustainability and made efforts to target the growing segment of conscious consumers, Amed et al. (2019) and Cohen and Munos (2017) state that results have been mixed. In fact, several global companies have launched eco-friendly collections and simultaneously been accused of child labor and sweatshops (Cohen & Munos, 2017). However, when the companies have addressed the problems, their reputation among

conscious consumers or sustainability-minded people has often improved (Cohen & Munos, 2017).

### ***2.3.2 Green Marketing and Greenwashing in Fast Fashion***

Despite efforts to become more sustainable, fast fashion companies are often criticized when adopting sustainable business and marketing practices (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020). As mentioned in the introduction, previous studies have found that consumers are skeptical or critical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman et al. 2017). In addition, their green marketing activities tend to be perceived as greenwashing by consumers (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman et al. 2017; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Snijder (2016) states that greenwashing is a common phenomenon in today's fashion industry. She argues that if a fashion company launches a sustainable collection or product, or engages in a recycling program, it is still greenwashing if the core business of the company is unsustainable. Moreover, most recycling initiatives give consumers who hand in old textiles a voucher, ultimately incentivising more consumption (Snijder, 2016). She further claims that although fast fashion companies have started to sell clothes made of sustainable materials, these clothes are still usually produced by workers, in developing countries, with unethical working conditions. In spite of the criticism, she states that companies addressing environmental and social sustainability are moving in the right direction.

If fast fashion companies want to practice sustainable marketing, full transparency is needed to establish consumer trust (Hagman et al. 2017; McKinsey & Company, 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2019). This is further supported by Lewandowska, Witczak and Kurczewski (2017), who states that by disclosing information about the whole supply chain, green marketing claims become more trustworthy in the eyes of the consumers. Moreover, compliance with regulations is fundamental to tackle the lack of consumer trust (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020; UL, 2016).

### ***2.3.3 Sustainability Labels within Fashion***

Recently, the usage of sustainability labels within the fashion industry has increased (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Henninger, 2015; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019; Taufique et al. 2019). Consequently, the great number of different labels, both own labels and third-party labels, tend to make consumers confused (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Henninger, 2015; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019; Taufique et al. 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). The awareness and trustworthiness of sustainability labels in the fashion industry is also questionable (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Henninger, 2015; Laitala & Grimstad Klepp, 2013; Taufique et al. 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Naturskyddsforeningen (2020b) further highlights the problem of eco-labels that are misleading, hence greenwashing, since these only make consumers more confused.

At this point, there is a lack of standards regarding sustainability in the fashion industry (McKinsey & Company, 2019; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Furthermore, there is currently a limited amount of third-party sustainability labels within fashion (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020a; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Third-party sustainability labels are beneficial for companies as they can increase their brand image and reputation (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020a). It also becomes easier for consumers to trust companies who use third-party labels instead of their own labels (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020a). Last but not least, Naturskyddsforeningen (2020b) says that when consumers choose to buy products with third-party sustainability labels they contribute to a positive increase in the demand for sustainable products.

Despite the lack of third-party sustainability labels within fashion, Naturskyddsforeningen (2019) promotes the importance of the EU Ecolabel, Fairtrade labels, and GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard). These third-party labels indicate that the textile is more environmentally and socially sustainable (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019). GOTS is the international standard for textile and comprises the complete life cycle of the textile, from raw material to finished product (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020b). Thus, the processing, manufacturing, packaging, labeling, trading, and distribution of the textile is more sustainable (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020b). Moreover, this standard also considers the labor conditions in the factories where the textiles are produced (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020b).

In a study about consumer understanding of environmental labels, D'Souza, Taghian, Lamb and Peretiatko (2007) found that environmentally conscious consumers find third-party labels on green products more credible compared to others. A key issue for companies is that third-party labels come at an extra cost, and the question of whether consumers are willing to pay a premium price for this still remains unclear (D'Souza et al. 2007). Another study by Forsman and Madsen (2017) found that younger generations of consumers are well aware of sustainability labels in general, but not in regard to fashion. They also found that consumers are critical towards sustainability initiatives in the fashion industry. Additionally, although consumers were found to be interested in sustainable clothes, they tend to believe that it is expensive and hard to find. These findings are further supported in the study by Wiederhold and Martinez (2018).

Accordingly, institutions play an important role in the development, standardization, and certification of sustainability practices and labels in the fashion industry (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Charter et al. 2002; Henninger, 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020). A current example of this is that the European Union is looking at new environmental requirements, where fashion companies would have to account for the environmental impact of their products, that is the product environmental footprint (Wilhelmson, 2020a). Naturskyddsforeningen (2019) further argue that legislation has to be improved to ensure consumers that clothes are produced sustainably and that no toxic chemicals are used.

The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company (2019) specifically highlight the importance of radical transparency as consumers demand more insight into the value chains of fashion companies. This also includes the traceability of products (Henninger, 2015; McKinsey & Company, 2019). Hence, it is a top priority for fast fashion companies to implement transparency and traceability into their DNA, to reign the lack of trust that many consumers have towards the industry and its marketing strategies (McKinsey & Company, 2019; The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company, 2019).

### ***2.3.4 Sustainable Fashion Consumption***

As previously mentioned, fast fashion is known for quantity over quality, which has become the norm for how people consume in today's society (Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019; Persson, 2020). Therefore, Persson (2020) suggests how consumers can make fashion consumption more sustainable. She emphasizes the importance of looking for clothes that are made of sustainable or recycled materials. They should also be produced in an environmentally and ethically sustainable way, preferably locally produced. Moreover, she argues that sustainable fashion consumption regards the durability of the clothes, since buying new ones on a frequent basis, even if they are more sustainable, is not good in the long run. Finally, she states that recycling is an important step in fashion consumption, which links to the circular economy concept. These consumption behaviors are further supported by Naturskyddsforeningen (2020c).

## **2.4 The Paradox**

Over the years, fashion has been studied from different perspectives. However, recently, sustainable fashion production and consumption has gained more attention (Yang, Song & Tong, 2017; Vennström, 2012). As explained earlier, fast fashion has significant impacts on the environment and society (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2019). Therefore, it is argued that sustainable fashion, and specifically sustainable fast fashion, is paradoxical in nature (Bly, Gwozdz & Reisch, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

In spite of the efforts to become more sustainable, critics question if corporate social responsibility activities by fast fashion companies make up for the negative consequences that fast fashion is responsible for (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman et al. 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Snijder, 2016). Although great numbers showing improvements are reported, when compared relative to environmental impact and unethical labor conditions, the reality might not be as shiny as the sustainability reports display (Snijder, 2016). Critics therefore argue that fast fashion and sustainability is not an easy equation to solve (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Greenpeace, 2017; Snijder, 2016).

Another paradox linked to this is that of sustainable marketing. One of the main challenges in contemporary marketing is that marketing is regarded as the opposite of sustainability (Parsons

& MacLaran, 2009). According to Parsons and MacLaran (2009), marketing as a business activity has been criticized for accelerating and encouraging more consumption. This is also seen in fast fashion, where marketing activities and aggressive promotions stimulate consumption (Byun & Sternquist, 2008; Greenpeace, 2017).

Previous studies have found that when sustainable and green marketing strategies are used, purchase intention, consumer satisfaction, and brand loyalty often increase (Davari & Strutton, 2014; Mahmoud, 2018; Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). In contrast, consumers are found to be rather critical or skeptical when fast fashion companies engage in green marketing (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman et al. 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). The main reason why skepticism towards green marketing by fast fashion companies exists is because many consumers find fast fashion and sustainability paradoxical (Bly, Gwozdz & Reisch, 2015; Joy et al. 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Nevertheless, consumers are still found to disregard sustainability aspects and act selfish to satisfy their wants and needs (Greenpeace, 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Parsons & MacLaran, 2009; Vennström, 2012; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Thus, making fashion and marketing sustainable is a complex challenge (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Charter et al. 2002; Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman et al. 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). Even so, these sources claim that it is not impossible.

In contrast to fast fashion is the concept of slow fashion (Fletcher, 2010). Clark (2008) states that the slow fashion concept was inspired from the slow food movement, which emerged in Italy in 1986. According to Fletcher (2010), the slow fashion movement is based on sustainable development, and aims to decelerate the negative externalities that fast fashion has caused. Hence, slow fashion is a movement that promotes sustainable fashion production and consumption (Fletcher, 2010). She further suggests that slow fashion is synonymous with clothing that is durable and of high quality.

In addition, slow fashion is often claimed to be a lifestyle and a way of consuming less clothes, with minimal environmental impact (Fletcher, 2010; Greenpeace, 2017; Naturskyddsforeningen,

2020c). Therefore, the movement encompasses not only conscious consumers and companies that produce and sell sustainable fashion products. Initiatives that allow the sharing of clothes or other solutions that discourage the consumption of new fashion products are highly linked to the concept of slow fashion (Buzzo & Abreu, 2019; Greenpeace, 2017).

When reflecting on the two fashion systems, fast fashion and slow fashion, it is possible to interpret that they work in a paradoxical way, as they take different paths to achieve their goals (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Greenpeace, 2017). Moreover, it has been argued that only by engaging in slow fashion, the fashion industry can become truly sustainable (Greenpeace, 2017; Naturskyddsöreningen, 2020c). Although the transition from fast fashion to slow fashion, or sustainable fashion, is not found to be simple, it is not impossible (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Greenpeace, 2017; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019). Ultimately, this process of change is not immediate, but a process that is based on many facets of the market and society (Greenpeace, 2017; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

## **2.5 Consumer Behavior**

Consumer behavior is a common research area, where changes in buying patterns and habits have been investigated over the years (Peighambari, Sattari, Kordestani & Oghazi, 2016). To date, empirical studies have focused on consumer choice, consumption, attitudes, and satisfaction levels (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). Despite the extensive amount of literature in this field, much uncertainty still exists as it remains a complex and evolving topic (Peighambari et al. 2016). Consumer behavior is influenced by changes in the society, and since these are endless, it is a diverse field (Peighambari et al. 2016).

Given the complexity of consumer behavior, several issues have been presented, one being that consumer behavior is difficult to define (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). MacInnis and Folkes (2010) state that consumer behavior is a mix between different fields, including psychology, sociology, economics, history, and neurology (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). Other scholars argue that consumer behavior is a field within marketing, and not a field on its own (MacInnis & Folkes, 2010). Nevertheless, Solomon (2013, p. 7) defines consumer behavior as “the study of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires”.

The field of consumer behavior specifically addresses the principal reasons for why individuals consume (Hosany & Martin, 2012). The first reason is to consume brands, products, or services because of their functional value (Hosany & Martin, 2012). Secondly, there is the symbolic meaning related to consumption. Hence, Hosany and Martin (2012) state that consumers are not only buying for functionality. For instance, they state that consumers may purchase particular luxury brands to reinforce a high social status. Ultimately, consumer behavior is affected by personal attitudes, motivations, and social patterns (Greenpeace, 2017; Hosany & Martin, 2012; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). The authors further claim that consumer behavior is linked to lifestyle and personality. In addition, they argue that consumer behavior is tied to a form of self-expression.

### ***2.5.1 Attitudes***

Attitudes are characterized as positive or negative evaluations and feelings towards an object or issue (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Moreover, attitudes are interlinked to beliefs, values, and behavior (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2006; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Although attitudes affect behavior and purchase decisions, Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) state that there is often a gap between consumer attitudes and behavior. Prior research has found that consumers who are concerned with environmental and social issues do not always behave as if they do (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

This attitude-behavior gap is also evident in relation to fashion consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). In a study by Wiederhold and Martinez (2018), the attitude-behavior gap in regard to sustainable fashion was investigated. The scholars found that conscious consumers often find sustainable clothing expensive, that sustainability labels lack legitimacy, and that the availability of sustainable fashion is limited. Hence, these barriers were found to constrain consumers from purchasing sustainable fashion.

Another study by Christiansson, Sandberg and Larsson (2018), found that Swedish students have an overall negative attitude towards fast fashion because of its environmental and social costs. Similar findings were presented by Forsman and Madsen (2017). Their research found

that consumers are critical towards sustainability in the fashion industry due to its negative impact on the environment.

According to Solomon et al. (2006), it is important for companies and marketers to understand consumer attitudes in order to position a product and target consumers in the right way. Before targeting a specific consumer group, a common marketing tactic is therefore to do psychographic segmentation, that is to group people with similar attitudes, values, and lifestyles together (Keegan & Green, 2017). With credible marketing strategies, and persuasive communication, a marketer can also change consumer attitudes and influence purchase intentions (Charter et al. 2002; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Solomon et al. 2006).

### ***2.5.2 Motivation***

Motivation is said to be a process which influences individuals to act or behave in a certain way (Salomon, 2013). This can occur when a person needs something and wants to satisfy that need (Salomon, 2013). In a situation like that, motivation arises to eliminate the need (Salomon, 2013). Arnold and Reynolds (2012) discuss another aspect of motivation, namely avoidance, which appears as an act of resistance. Christiansson, Sandberg and Larsson (2018) argue that avoidance motivation is tied to anti-consumption, as it relates to the motivation of avoiding the process for making a particular purchase.

### ***2.5.3 Consumption***

Consumption is a process highly interlinked with the study of consumer behavior (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). Zukin and Maguire (2004) define consumption as the cultural, economic, and social process of selecting a product. According to Varey (2010), consumption is a means of self-defining oneself and an amusement.

Solomon (2013) explains how there are various stages in a consumption process (see Figure 2). He says that the process starts when the consumer decides that there is a need to purchase a specific product. This stage is known as the pre-purchase issue, which encompasses finding good sources of information about a product (Solomon, 2013). Afterwards comes the purchase stage (Solomon, 2013). Solomon (2013) states that the act of purchase is an experience, where the consumer creates feelings associated with this experience, for example enjoyment. Finally,

comes the post-purchase stage where he says that the consumer evaluates the product and its performance. Eventually, disposal of a product and the environmental consequences of this tend to follow (Solomon, 2013).



*Figure 2 - The Consumption Process (adapted from Solomon, 2013)*

Whilst consuming is natural for humans to survive, the extent of today's consumption is also predefined by society's cultural norms (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). In many cultures, scholars have noticed a pattern where individuals gain meaning and satisfaction through what is consumed (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). Hence, a materialistic culture is evident. Moreover, repairing a product today is often more costly than purchasing a new one (Watson, 2008). Therefore, a throw-away mentality has appeared in many cultures (Greenpeace, 2017; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). People also tend to buy and throw away clothes on a frequent basis, as new fashion trends come and go (Greenpeace, 2017; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). This behavior is specifically possible thanks to affordable and easily available fast fashion (Greenpeace, 2017; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019).

In total, the global level of consumption has increased, and today's consumption society is evident in many different cultures, leading to both environmental degradation and social implications (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). As the global consumption has increased, the phenomenon of mass consumption has appeared (de Castro, 2016). Key reasons for why consumption have skyrocketed is because of more efficient production processes, increased productivity, and decreased costs of production (de Castro, 2016). Moreover, social media tends to influence excessive consumption of for instance fashion (Greenpeace, 2017).

Ultimately, today's consumption patterns have become highly unsustainable (Axelsson, 2012). In fact, as the world population continues to grow, the United Nations (n.d.b) argue that we

would need almost three planets to sustain current lifestyles. Heiskanen and Pantzar (1997) and Hoque (2013) further argue that since consumption is a reason for production, both producers and consumers are responsible for the negative consequences that follow from these processes.

#### ***2.5.4 Anti-Consumption***

The concept of anti-consumption is linked to consumer resistance (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). Although the concepts are related, Christian, Sandberg and Larsson (2018) state that they are still different. They claim that consumer resistance is when consumers oppose a product offered by a company, or a company as a whole. In contrast, anti-consumption regards the reasons against consumption altogether (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). Nevertheless, they state that when resistance of specific companies or products lead to boycotts, this is a type of anti-consumption behavior. Resistance towards mass produced products can also lead to organized boycotts, a commonly known tactic used to influence companies marketing strategies (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018). Penaloza and Price (1993) further highlight the fact that individual acts of resistance often lead to negative word-of-mouth promotion.

There can be more than one motivator for anti-consumption behavior (Iyer & Muncy, 2009). Iyer and Muncy (2009) describe these and emphasize how consumers can be motivated by both social and personal issues. Social issues are related to both social and environmental problems, while personal issues relate to how less consumption can make life easier (Iyer & Muncy, 2009).

According to Lee, Roux, Cherrier and Cova (2011), anti-consumption does not need to be as radical as a boycott, instead it can be expressed in more subtle ways. First, they state that consumers can exclude consumption of specific products due to various reasons. For instance, consumers sometimes reject consumption because of symbolic and ethical reasons. Moreover, they explain that restricting is when one reduces or limits consumption. Finally, they discuss the reclaim phenomenon, which represents a shift in the way products are acquired, used, and disposed of.

### ***2.5.5 The Reclaim Phenomenon***

Reclaiming can be linked to the circular economy concept, which relates to minimizing or eliminating waste (Stahel, 2016). The concept of circular economy also considers the extended use and reuse of a product by repairing it or remanufacturing it (Stahel, 2016). Furthermore, used products should be transformed into resources that can be reused in new production (Stahel, 2016). This typically regards the transformation of recycled materials into new products (Stahel, 2016). Recently, this has become more common in fast fashion, where companies like H&M and Zara produce recycled clothing collections (H&M Group, 2020a; Inditex, n.d.c).

Mont and Heiskanen (2015) have defined three models for circular economy, namely second-hand consumption, access-based consumption, and collaborative consumption. Key reasons for why some consumers buy second-hand are practicality, economic, or environmental motives (Clausen, Blättel-Mink, Erdmann & Henseling, 2010). In this case, used products with high-quality is often preferred over new products with low-quality (Clausen et al. 2010). Hence, there is an underlying desire to step away from a wasteful consumption lifestyle and to consume less (Clausen et al. 2010).

On the other hand, access-based consumption regards renting, hiring, or leasing a product instead of buying it (Baumeister, 2014). An example of this within fashion is that H&M has started to engage in clothing rentals (H&M, 2019). Lastly, collaborative consumption is a relatively new and growing phenomenon, which reduces consumption by sharing or exchanging products (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Motives behind collaborative consumption are not only profit oriented, but simply also a desire to consume less (McArthur, 2014).

## **2.6 Conscious Consumers**

According to Angus and Westbrook (2019), conscious consumers are mindful consumers who seek for, purchase, and consume sustainable products and services. These consumers care about where products come from, how they are produced, and the overall sustainability of the items (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Price, 2018; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Furthermore, conscious consumers are concerned about environmental and social sustainability, including ethics, human rights, and animal welfare (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Price, 2018; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Angus and Westbrook (2019) specifically state that these

consumers are aware about the sustainability aspects of common products like food, beauty and personal care products, and fashion. Environmental and ethical reasons are arguably two key reasons why conscious consumers often avoid or boycott fast fashion (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Conscious consumers are flexible when making consumption choices (Angus & Westbrook, 2019). Moreover, Angus and Westbrook (2019) state that conscious consumers are informed and care about price differences. Hence, they demand value for their money, and seek out the best deals (Angus & Westbrook, 2019). Despite this, conscious consumers are still found to be willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020).

In addition, conscious consumers use the internet to search for information, compare, and look at reviews before making a purchase (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Their purchases are also influenced by recommendations from family, friends, and people on social media (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Conscious consumers are also influential and tend to impact others, specifically through social media (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002; Price, 2018; Westbrook & Angus, 2020).

Conscious consumers are not only changing their shopping behavior by buying more sustainable products and services, they also tend to reduce their consumption habits to minimize their environmental footprint (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002). Amed et al. (2019) and Charter et al. (2002) further highlight that conscious consumers are powerful consumers who boycott products or services sold by irresponsible companies. Hence, Angus and Westbrook (2019) state that since the number of conscious consumers is increasing, companies must innovate, become more responsible, sustainable, and transparent to meet new consumer demand. This is further supported by Amed et al. (2019), Charter et al. (2002), McKinsey & Company (2019), and Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019) to only name a few.

Angus and Westbrook (2019) claim that conscious consumers can be found in both developed economies and emerging markets. Hence, they exist on a global scale. Moreover, they say that these consumers are found in both middle- and high-income groups. Others state that younger

generations are specifically becoming more environmentally and socially conscious (Charter et al. 2002; Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; Price, 2018; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019; WWF, 2017). However, older generations are also found to be more conscious in regard to consumption and lifestyle choices (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019).

The younger consumers' awareness about social and environmental issues comes from more environmentally focused education, but also the use of internet and social media (Charter et al. 2002). Experts therefore argue that it is fundamental to target this group of people as they will become the key consumers, employees, and investors in the future to come (Amed et al. 2019; Charter et al. 2002). Thus, it is evident that in order to survive and prosper, companies, including fast fashion companies, need to adapt and adjust according to the values, needs, and wants of conscious consumers (Amed et al. 2019; Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2019).

### ***2.6.1 Consumer Power and Social Media***

Due to technological advances, the world has become more digital. Subsequently, the usage of internet and social media among companies and consumers has increased (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018; Michaela & Orna, 2015; Price, 2018; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Recent studies show that usage of social media often influences the buying behavior of consumers (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Greenpeace, 2017; Michaela & Orna, 2015; Price, 2018; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). With social media, fashion companies can for example promote new trends easily, at low cost, and motivate consumers to consume more (Amed et al. 2019; Michaela & Orna, 2015).

Online communication and social media have also given consumers more power, as they can influence others on a daily basis, including which brands to consume (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Michaela & Orna, 2015; Price, 2018). In summary, Michaela and Orna (2015) therefore argue that social media partly explains why consumption of fast fashion has increased. A cross-sectional study by Greenpeace (2017) further found that social media and online shopping are key drivers for the global overconsumption of fashion. In contrast, conscious consumers often promote sustainable consumption behavior through social media

channels (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002). Hence, social media can work in both ways.

Lindgren (2017) further argues that the internet and social media in itself is not good or bad, instead it depends on how it is used. Nevertheless, it is clear that social media gives consumers the power to influence others, which companies need to take into account, specifically since consumers are becoming more conscious and feedback, both positive and negative, can go viral within seconds (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Ek & Åhsgren, 2009; Price, 2018). Charter et al. (2002) further support this by saying that with today's media, bad news travels with the speed of light.

### 3. Conceptual Review and Framework

This chapter is a review and description of the marketing mix, which is used as a conceptual framework in this thesis. The marketing mix and relevant versions of the model is explained. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of why the model is applicable to this study.

#### 3.1 The Marketing Mix

According to Keegan and Green (2017, p. 24), marketing can be defined as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large”. The authors further claim that the marketing mix is the primary toolbox of any marketer. The traditional marketing mix (see Figure 3), also known as the 4P model, consists of four elements, namely product, price, place, and promotion (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). According to Peattie and Belz (2010), McCarthy was the first scholar to suggest the 4P model.

Ultimately, the marketing mix is a fundamental concept within marketing, as it consists of the elements that companies and marketers use when targeting consumers (Goi, 2009; Khan, 2014). Moreover, the marketing mix is adapted by the company, or marketer, to target consumers in the best possible way (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). This adaptation depends on the context, the product or service marketed, and the target consumer (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Hence, the marketing mix is the basis when creating a marketing strategy, whether it is on a local or global scale (Keegan & Green, 2017).



*Figure 3 - The Marketing Mix (adapted from Kotler & Armstrong, 2018)*

The product is the main element in the marketing mix, as this is what companies produce, market, and sell, and what consumers buy and consume (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The product is an item, service, or idea, with tangible and/or intangible attributes that create value for buyers and users (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Tangible attributes are typically color, size, weight, and materials used (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Moreover, Keegan and Green (2017) state that the intangible attributes are important since these often influence consumers' buying behavior. Examples of key intangible attributes are brands and their reputation, as well as status of product ownership (Keegan & Green, 2017).

Other attributes of a product are after sale service, warranties, packaging, and labels (Keegan & Green, 2017). Labels are specifically important since they provide vital information about the product to consumers (Keegan & Green, 2017). However, labels are often criticized for being difficult to understand, not trustworthy, or confusing (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Henninger, 2015; Naturskyddsforeningen, 2020b; Taufique et al. 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

The second element of the marketing mix is the price, which is what consumers pay for a product or service (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). A company's pricing decisions have to reflect its costs, but also the value of the product otherwise consumers will not buy it (Keegan & Green, 2017). In regard to fast fashion, the pricing strategy used by fast fashion companies is to sell large quantities of inexpensive clothes (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). To be able to keep prices low, fast fashion companies rely on arbitrage strategies (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Arbitrage is when companies outsource production to take advantage of low-cost labor (Ghemawat, 2008). As previously stated, this strategy is commonly criticized for being unethical (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Szewczyk, 2016).

The next element is the place, which concerns where and how a product or service is sold, hence, the distribution channels used by companies (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). As stated by Keegan and Green (2017), there are multiple distribution channels, ranging from small retail stores to large supermarkets and outlets. Moreover, due to the digital revolution, online stores and e-commerce have become a new trend within retail (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). This is also evident within fast fashion, as many fast fashion companies' market and sell their clothes online. According to Angus and

Westbrook (2019) and Greenpeace (2017), online shopping is specifically popular among younger generations. Place also relates to how products are moved throughout the supply chain before reaching the end consumer (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The mode of transportation ultimately affects the price of the product (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). To conclude, the key aspect of the place element is to make the product available in a place that is convenient for the consumer (Keegan & Green, 2017).

Finally, the last element of the marketing mix is promotion (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Promotion refers to all types of communication undertaken by companies and marketers in order to “inform, remind, explain, persuade, and influence the attitudes, perceptions, and buying behavior of customers and others” (Keegan & Green, 2017, p. 427). The promotion mix is a combination of advertising, public relations, personal selling, and sales promotion (Keegan & Green, 2017). These are all important marketing activities used when communicating the benefits and values that a company and their products offer (Keegan & Green, 2017). Advertising, through online media, is specifically used by fast fashion companies to promote current products and trends. Moreover, sales promotions are a common tactic used to sell more clothes within a limited time frame (Byun & Sternquist, 2008; Greenpeace, 2017). These promotions typically take the form of price discounts, like 20% off on specific product categories.

As stated by Kotler and Armstrong (2018), the different elements of the marketing mix are used as tactical marketing tools by companies and marketers to target consumers, satisfy their needs, and build strong relationships. Therefore, it is fundamental for any company to coordinate the elements of the marketing mix to be able to deliver a clear and consistent message to the target consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Furthermore, they state that to find the best marketing strategy, hence marketing mix, a company has to conduct a market analysis. They state that the mix must be aligned with a company’s goals and with the needs and wants of consumers. Hence, learning about consumer attitudes, buying behavior, and preferences is fundamental (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). To summarize, a well aligned marketing mix engages consumers, since it delivers what is desired (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

### **3.2 Varieties of the Marketing Mix**

The 4P model has been criticized for being too simplistic (Goi, 2009; Khan, 2014). Moreover, depending on the context, the different elements of the marketing mix vary in importance (Goi, 2009; Khan, 2014). Hence, as mentioned in the introduction, varieties and extended versions of the traditional marketing mix have been presented over the years (Goi, 2009; Khan, 2014). Goi (2009) and Khan (2014) further state that a company can establish a competitive position by adapting the marketing mix to meet the needs and wants of consumers.

A common extension of the 4P model is the 7P model, which consists of the 4P's, people, processes, and physical evidence (Khan, 2014; Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). The 7P model emphasizes the importance of employees who sell a product or deliver a service, and how they can influence consumers' decisions (Khan, 2014). In addition, physical evidence concerns the environment where a product is sold or a service is given (Khan, 2014). Khan (2014) and Novela, Novita and Hansopaheluwakan (2018) specifically explain how the atmosphere in a location can increase or decrease consumers satisfaction level. Other elements suggested to be added and prioritized in the marketing mix are packaging and e-commerce (Goi, 2009; Khan, 2014).

Peattie and Belz (2010) have proposed another model to address the need for sustainability within marketing. The scholars criticize the traditional marketing mix for being too producer oriented and excluding external stakeholders. Their version of the model is referred to as the 4C model, consisting of customer solution, customer cost, convenience, and communication. The 4C model highlights sustainability by focusing on long-term relationships with customers (Peattie & Belz, 2010). Similar to the 4C model, is the green marketing mix, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.3 The Green Marketing Mix**

As previously indicated, consumers have become more conscious and desire products and services that are environmentally friendly and sustainable (Charter et al. 2002; Davari & Strutton, 2014; UL, 2016). This demand influences companies and their marketing strategies, including how they adapt their marketing mix (Charter et al. 2002; Davari & Strutton, 2014). As

a result, the green marketing mix has emerged, which is yet another adaptation of the marketing mix (Davari & Strutton, 2014).

The green marketing mix consists of the green product, green price, green place, and green promotion (Davari & Strutton, 2014). Green products are environmentally friendly products, which tend to use fewer natural resources and be less harmful to the environment (Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). Other common attributes of green products are that they have environmentally friendly packaging and are marked with eco-labels to inform about their sustainability aspects (Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018).

The green price reflects the value added by making a product more environmentally friendly (Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). Due to this, green products are usually more expensive since green materials, green production processes, and green packaging often lead to higher costs for companies (Charter et al. 2002; Davari & Strutton, 2014). The literature concerning whether consumers are willing to pay more for green products is still contradictory (Boztepe, 2016; D'Souza et al. 2007; The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020; Westbrook & Angus, 2020; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

Green place relates to how companies are changing their supply chains and managing logistics to minimize their carbon footprint (Charter et al. 2002). Moreover, green companies tend to work with local suppliers and produce locally, instead of importing products for sale (Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). As previously stated, place also concerns where the product is available to consumers. Hence, a green place is a safe environment, for example a physical store that is not harmful to humans, nor the environment (Davari & Strutton, 2014).

Finally, green promotion is when companies communicate their green initiatives (Davari & Strutton, 2014; Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018). Charter et al. (2002) and (UL, 2016) advice companies to avoid complicated terms in their communication, since these can confuse consumers. Moreover, it is critical that companies do not engage in greenwashing, as this can damage their reputation, and lead to boycotts and penalties (Gallicano, 2011; Novela, Novita & Hansopaheluwakan, 2018; UL, 2016). Charter et al. (2002) further support that the information communicated by companies has to be correct and genuine to avoid greenwashing.

In their study, Novela, Novita and Hansopaheluwakan (2018), concluded that a green marketing mix can have a positive effect on customer satisfaction. The main limitation of their study is that the research objects were beauty and body treatment products from one specific brand, which constrains the generalization of their findings. Nonetheless, in line with their findings, Mahmoud (2018) found a significant positive relationship between the green marketing mix elements and consumer's purchase intentions. Mahmoud (2018) further states that companies using elements of the green marketing mix will score high on sustainability, but also increase their reputation among conscious consumers. This argument is supported by Charter et al. (2002).

### **3.4 The Sustainable Marketing Mix**

Charter et al. (2002) also suggest how companies can make their marketing mix more sustainable. They argue that the products or services marketed by companies need to be altered to suit the demand by conscious consumers, while adhering to laws and regulations. According to the scholars, sustainable products satisfy the needs of consumers, without being harmful to the environment or humans. Moreover, this should be true throughout the life cycle of the product (Charter et al. 2002).

Sustainable products are commonly characterized as having less impact on the environment and society (Charter et al. 2002). Therefore, the scholars suggest that sustainable products are preferably designed to last longer, made from renewable resources and locally sourced material, and have reduced and environmentally friendly packaging. The products should also be easy to repair, reuse, and recycle (Charter et al. 2002). Moreover, sustainable products should be produced ethically, with good labor conditions and no animal testing (Charter et al. 2002). In terms of product information, it is vital that companies follow legislations and provide trustworthy, transparent, and understandable information to consumers (Charter et al. 2002).

Charter et al. (2002) further state that the price of sustainable products or services tend to be higher than that of conventional ones. This is true both for producers and consumers (Charter et al. 2002). However, this is slowly changing as governmental legislation has led to higher costs for companies who act irresponsible, contribute to unnecessary high pollution, or releasing toxic chemicals (Charter et al. 2002). Charter et al. (2002) therefore argue that in the long run,

sustainable products could result in cost savings for producers, as well as lower prices for consumers. Moreover, studies have shown that conscious consumers are willing to pay a premium price for products that are more sustainable, as long as the value added is matching the consumers expectations (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002; Davari & Strutton, 2014; UL, 2016). Younger generations have also indicated that they would pay more for products that are less harmful to the environment (The Business of Fashion & McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Similar to green place, a sustainable place relates to making distribution channels and stores more energy efficient (Charter et al. 2002). Production facilities should be improved and if they are located closer to the end consumers, the need for long distance transportation is reduced (Charter et al. 2002). To decrease environmental footprint, it is also crucial to manage supplier networks and logistics efficiently (Charter et al. 2002).

In terms of promotion, sustainable promotion has to be correct, clear, transparent, and trustworthy (Charter et al. 2002). Failing to communicate in a proper way will cause damage to brand image and reputation (Charter et al. 2002). Moreover, today's consumers have the power to boycott companies, and influence others to do the same, if they do not trust a company (Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Charter et al. 2002; Ek & Åhsgren, 2009; Price, 2018). Regulations regarding what can be said or not has to be followed, or else accusations of greenwashing and penalties can follow (Charter et al. 2002). Avoiding complicated or confusing terms is also key when communicating with consumers about sustainability (Charter et al. 2002). Consequently, a coordinated approach to promotion and communication should be taken as this creates a clear and consistent message, which consumers will remember (Charter et al. 2002).

Finally, since sustainable marketing cannot be achieved without people, a company's employees should be educated on the topic of sustainability (Charter et al. 2002). Internal marketing programs and workshops could help to establish an organizational culture where sustainability becomes a core value within the company (Charter et al. 2002). In conclusion, Charter et al. (2002) argue that companies who manage to implement a sustainable marketing mix, see Figure 4 below, will be the champions when it comes to target future consumers, specifically conscious consumers.



*Figure 4 - The Sustainable Marketing Mix (adapted from Charter et al. 2002)*

### **3.5 Conceptual Framework**

As stated earlier, the marketing mix is used as a conceptual framework in this thesis. This framework is valid because it is the primary link between companies and consumers (Keegan & Green, 2017; Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). The marketing mix consists of the elements that companies, and marketers, use when targeting consumers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018). Moreover, companies and marketers have to make decisions about how to use the different elements of the marketing mix to target consumers in the best possible way (Kotler & Armstrong, 2018).

This study aims to understand what consumers think about green marketing by fast fashion companies. Moreover, the purpose is to explore how fast fashion companies should market their products to meet consumer preferences regarding sustainability. Hence, the marketing mix is the most relevant framework to use as a basis when collecting primary data and analyzing it. Aspects of the green marketing mix and the sustainable marketing mix is specifically used when investigating and analyzing consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences regarding fashion consumption, fast fashion, and sustainability. Ultimately, the marketing mix is also used as a base when answering the research questions.

Because of time and word constraints, this study focuses on the product and promotion elements of the marketing mix. Hence, the survey mainly included questions regarding the products that fast fashion companies sell and the promotion of these. The main product sold by fast fashion

companies is clothes. Therefore, the survey questions centered around clothes. Moreover, questions regarding sustainability labels were asked, since labels are an important facet of the product. Labels also link to promotion, as these provide consumers with information about a product. A limited amount of questions regarding price and place were also included in the survey questionnaire.

As consumers are found to care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability, the survey questions included both environmental and social (ethical) aspects. Moreover, both environmental and social (ethical) issues are highlighted in relation to fast fashion. By asking consumers relevant questions about the product, promotion, price, and place, including environmental and social sustainability, it is possible to explore how fast fashion companies should adapt their marketing mix to meet consumer preferences regarding sustainability. To summarize, with a well aligned marketing mix they should be able to target environmentally and socially conscious consumers in a more successful way.

#### **4. Hypotheses**

Before the survey was carried out, the following hypotheses were formulated. The main purpose of the hypotheses is to investigate if the findings in this study correlates with previous studies and the existing literature. Accordingly, the hypotheses are based on the literature review.

The first hypothesis regards conscious consumers. As stated by Angus and Westbrook (2019), among others, today's consumers are becoming more conscious in regard to their consumption behavior, including consumption of fashion. Moreover, conscious consumers are found to care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Price, 2018; Westbrook & Angus, 2020). Hence, the first hypothesis is that consumers care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability when buying clothes.

**H1:** Consumers care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability when buying clothes.

The next hypotheses regard eco-labels and consumer attitudes. Previous studies have found that consumers tend to find eco-labels confusing (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Henninger, 2015; Taufique et al. 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Moreover, consumers are found to be critical towards the trustworthiness of the eco-labels used in the fashion industry (Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Henninger, 2015; Laitala & Grimstad Klepp, 2013; Taufique et al. 2019; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). In addition, D'Souza et al. (2007) states that consumers often find third-party labels more credible. Therefore, the following two hypotheses were formulated.

**H2:** Consumers think that eco-labels on clothes are difficult to understand, and do not trust the eco-labels on clothes sold by fast fashion companies.

**H3:** Consumers think that sustainability labels on clothes should only be certified by third-party (independent) organizations.

The final hypothesis concerns green marketing by fast fashion companies. Several studies have found that consumers are skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies, often because of their negative impact on the environment and society (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; Forsman & Madsen, 2017; Hagman et al. 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Hence, the last hypothesis is based on these findings.

**H4:** Consumers are skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies.

## **5. Methodology**

In this chapter, the methodology of the study is described. The research approach, research design, research method, data collection method, and data analysis are presented in detail. Moreover, the reliability and validity of the study is discussed, as well as the limitations of the chosen methods.

### **5.1 Research Philosophy**

Research philosophy is related to how a researcher views the world, which evidently influences how knowledge is interpreted and assumptions are made (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Hence, the choice of research strategies and methods are based on the research philosophy (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Given the purpose of this study and the nature of the research questions, choosing a research philosophy is relatively complex, as both quantitative and qualitative research strategies can be employed. Moreover, the research questions can be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Due to this, a mixed methods approach is adopted.

This pragmatic research philosophy enables the use of different philosophical positions, whilst simultaneously allowing for credible and relevant data to be collected (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Furthermore, a pragmatic stance argues that the research questions are the most important aspects when determining the research philosophy, and thus it is possible to adopt both a positivist and interpretivist approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In addition, this pragmatic approach is practical since it allows one to use different methods when collecting and analyzing data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

### **5.2 Research Approach**

When selecting a research approach, it should align with the purpose and framework of the study. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), there are three main research approaches that can be adopted, deductive, inductive, and abductive. The purpose of a deductive approach is to test an existing theory, usually by developing hypotheses and use collected data to accept or reject these (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In contrast, an inductive approach regards collecting data to identify relationships and patterns to generate a theory (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

In order to not limit this research by confining to a deductive or an inductive approach, an abductive approach is used. This approach is a combination of both deductive and inductive (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The aim of an abductive approach is to collect data “to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and explain patterns, to generate a new or modify an existing theory” (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012, p. 145). With this approach, it is possible to use existing literature, while simultaneously interpreting new findings to answer the research questions. Thus, to fulfill the research purpose of this study, an abductive approach is favorable.

### **5.3 The Nature of the Research**

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) further identifies three types of research purposes, exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. An explanatory research is centered around finding causality between variables, which requires a large amount of numerical data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The purpose of descriptive studies is to understand problems, people, or situations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Due to this, and given the nature of the research questions, a descriptive approach is taken. To gather the descriptive information, a survey was conducted. The descriptive approach is also used as a base to the exploratory part, to obtain a correct image of the problem, consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences.

An exploratory approach aims at understanding a problem by asking open-ended questions, which is beneficial as it allows for greater understanding of and insights about a topic (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Hence, this was done by including two open-ended questions in the survey. By combining a descriptive approach with exploratory elements, it is possible to answer “what” and “how” questions, and to draw more powerful conclusions when analyzing the collected data.

### **5.4 Research Strategy**

As this study aims to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, this study has a mixed methods design. Moreover, since data collection and analysis are done once, it is a concurrent mixed methods research (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). This method allows for a richer and more complete conclusion when answering the research questions, as results can be interpreted in several ways (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

The quantitative data relates to positivism, where the aim is to collect data, explore relationships, and potentially create generalizations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). On the other hand, qualitative data is used to better understand individuals and their attitudes, which is related to interpretivism (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). In summary, in order to accept or reject the hypotheses and to answer the research questions, both quantitative and qualitative data is collected and analyzed.

### **5.5 Research Design**

This study has a cross-sectional research design. A cross-sectional design is used because it allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, within a short time frame, and in more than one case (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order to answer the defined research questions, in-depth understanding of consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences is needed. Due to this, and because of the coronavirus, data was collected through a web-based survey in the form of a self-completion questionnaire.

### **5.6 Research Method**

When the research area and topic of the study had been decided, a review of relevant literature and theory began. Key concepts and previous findings were established during this process. At the same time, the research purpose, research questions, and hypotheses were formulated. In addition, the layout of the survey (see Appendix A) was developed simultaneously as the literature review was conducted. This was done to not delay the data collection and to ensure sufficient time to receive enough responses through the survey.

The survey was created in Google Forms. Survey questions were designed with the aim of answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses in a descriptive and exploratory way. To reduce the risk of misunderstandings, complex words were avoided in the survey (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, questions were formulated carefully to not influence the respondents' answers (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Before the survey was administered, feedback was given from the supervisor and a pilot study was made. After some modifications, the survey layout was finalized.

### ***5.6.1 Survey Layout***

The survey began with a brief introduction. In this introduction, the purpose of the survey and important information concerning ethical considerations were stated. After the introduction, the respondents were asked to provide their age, gender, highest level of education, current occupation, and monthly income. Then, important keywords were explained. These keywords were available during the whole survey. Subsequently, questions linked to the research questions and hypotheses were asked. In addition, the questions related to the different elements of the marketing mix used by fast fashion companies. The survey questions were designed to understand consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences in regard to fashion consumption, fast fashion, and sustainability.

Most questions asked respondents to rate how strongly they agree with specific statements. These questions were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. The scale ranged from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, to strongly agree. In addition, a few questions had other answer alternatives to better understand consumer behavior and preferences. Hence, the survey included mostly closed questions. Moreover, most questions only allowed the respondents to choose one answer. However, the survey ended with two open-ended questions, to potentially gain more insight and enhance the quality of the results. In contrast to the rest of the questionnaire, the open-ended questions were not mandatory to answer.

### ***5.6.2 Data Collection Method***

The survey was administered through Google Forms, and distributed online. Different online channels, more specifically social media accounts and social networks, were used for distribution. Each author of this thesis distributed the survey on different days, as a way to reach the widest range of people. To prevent a skewed sample, the aim was to allow for different genders and age groups to answer the survey.

In regard to ethical considerations, respondents were informed that the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and that their answers are used for academic purposes only. Moreover, people below the age of 16 were not allowed to take part in the survey. Therefore, no harm to respondents was recognized.

The survey was released before Easter, giving respondents time to answer. However, due to time constraints, the data collection was completed within 10 days. This resulted in 106 complete responses for the mandatory questions. In contrast, the two open-ended questions were not answered by all respondents. Ultimately, they received 70 and 64 responses respectively.

### ***5.6.3 Sampling Method***

In this study, a non-probability sample was made. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), non-probability sampling is a common technique used in descriptive and exploratory research. A technique within non-probability sampling is known as convenience sampling, which was the method used in this study. This type of sampling method is beneficial because it allows for quick and easy access to respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, convenience sampling can result in a biased sample (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Nevertheless, this study effortlessly and conveniently obtained respondents to answer the survey. The sampling method did however limit the ability to collect data from a larger geographical pool. Moreover, this method has other constraints, which will be discussed further in section 5.9.

### ***5.6.4 Primary and Secondary Data***

The empirical data that was collected through the survey is regarded as primary data. To be able to reach the aim of this thesis, this data is used as the main source of data. Hence, the data obtained through the survey is analyzed to accept or reject the hypotheses and to answer the research questions. As a result, the findings contribute to new insights within the field.

Chapter two and three in this study consists of theory and previous empirical findings, which is used as a base throughout this thesis. Due to this, and according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), this can be referred to as secondary data. When collecting this secondary data, two databases were used, namely LUBsearch Lund University Libraries and Google Scholar. Keywords used when searching for secondary data included; conscious consumers, consumer behavior, corporate social responsibility, fast fashion, green marketing, greenwashing, marketing mix, sustainability, and sustainability labels. Moreover, relevant and reliable books and other electronic sources were used when writing this thesis.

## **5.7 Data Analysis**

When the primary data had been collected, the quantitative data was exported to an Excel file. In Excel, the data was coded and analyzed through basic statistical techniques. The quantitative data was divided into both categorical and numerical data. Moreover, both nominal and ordinal variables were used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics were determined, which regards the analysis of one variable at a time (Bryman & Bell, 2011). First, an overview of the whole sample and its demographics was established. Then, the specific answers to the survey questions were analyzed. Finally, the results of the analyzed data were summarized and visualized in figures and tables.

Once the quantitative results section was done, the qualitative data was analyzed. Given the time constraints, a generic approach was employed to analyze this data. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012), a generic approach is structured in several steps. First, categories are identified, then data is compiled, and relationships are identified (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Finally, after potential hypotheses are tested, conclusions are drawn (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

The first step was therefore to identify relevant categories. Second, the collected data was coded and separated into the different categories. Once the data had been divided into corresponding categories, relationships between different questions and answers were identified. By identifying themes, patterns were found in the data, which made it possible to draw conclusions. Different data units, in this case direct quotes, were also used in the analysis to support the conclusions.

Finally, the quantitative and qualitative results from the survey were interpreted and discussed to make conclusions. The results from the survey were also linked to previous findings presented in the literature review. Accordingly, the defined hypotheses were accepted or rejected, and the research questions were answered. This abductive procedure of using and iterating between theory and empirics also made it possible to provide practical implications and theoretical contributions. Hence, primary data was used interchangeably with the support from existing literature throughout the research process and analysis.

## **5.8 Reliability and Validity**

The findings in a study are affected by the methods used. Therefore, it is advised to use a mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis to obtain better conclusions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). That is why primary data is collected and secondary data, presented in chapter two and three, is used to corroborate the findings. In addition, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data is used to overcome trustworthiness issues. This approach is known as triangulation and can be used to create an in-depth level of analysis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). To assess the quality of the findings, several concepts are discussed below. First, reliability and validity are addressed. However, as these are found to apply mostly to quantitative findings, other criteria are highlighted in regard to the qualitative findings.

### **5.8.1 Reliability**

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), reliability refers to whether the findings would be consistent if the research, data collection methods, and analysis were repeated at a different occasion. Related to reliability is replicability, which regards if the study can be replicated (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this methodology chapter, the used methods are explained in detail, which makes the study possible to replicate. The reliability of the results in this study will be discussed later in section 7.4.

### **5.8.2 Validity**

Validity is a concept that regards the integrity of the conclusions made in a study, which further relates to the quality of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this cross-sectional study, ecological validity, external validity, internal validity, and measurement validity are relevant aspects to discuss. Ecological validity relates to how the findings are applicable to daily life, including people's surroundings, attitudes, opinions, and perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The questions in the survey were asked with the aim to reflect current situations. Hence, the ecological validity is found to be valid.

External validity is concerned with the generalizations across larger populations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Because a limited convenience sample was made, generalizations are not possible in this study. However, this study does not intend to generalize its findings to a broader population of consumers. Moreover, internal validity regards the causal relationships between multiple

variables (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Due to the fact a small convenience sample was made, it is not possible to find causality in this study.

Finally, measurement validity relates to how well the survey respondents were able to express themselves, their attitudes, opinions, and preferences so that it reflects what was asked. As previously described, the answer alternatives in the survey were well balanced. A majority of the questions were measured with a five-point Likert scale, while some questions were open-ended. These measurements ultimately generate the data needed to accept or reject the hypotheses and answer the research questions in a descriptive and exploratory way.

### ***5.8.3 Quality Criteria for the Qualitative Results***

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) state that the concepts of reliability and validity are mainly applicable to quantitative results. Therefore, other criteria are often used to assess the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative findings (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The most common criteria are dependability, transferability, and credibility (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

One way to ensure that the research is dependable is to clearly define the methods used and the data analysis process (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This evidently makes it possible for other researchers to replicate the study and it enables readers to better understand the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The dependability is guaranteed through the content of this methodology chapter.

Transferability regards the extent to which the same findings can occur in different scenarios and under other circumstances (Bryman & Bell, 2011). An issue is that oftentimes it is stated that results can be applied to larger populations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The main problem with this is that in research that collects qualitative data, findings are influenced by the individual's surroundings (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Due to the problems of transferability, it is difficult to assume that this study could be transferred to another country and result in similar findings. Therefore, the mixed methods approach is favorable to reach more trustworthy results (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

The quantitative questions also allow one to reach a larger population, which would not be the case if only qualitative data was collected (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Moreover, the results in this study relates to the fast fashion industry as a whole, and not a single company or case, which makes the results more robust.

Finally, the research credibility is key for establishing trustworthiness and shows the extent to which primary data represent reality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In order for this study to be credible, the survey was clear, well presented, and voluntary. Clear instructions, definitions of keywords, and contact information, in case of further questions, were provided at the beginning of the survey. The questions were also designed to avoid two or more answers. The majority of the questions were closed questions. Although, two open-ended questions were asked in the end. Open-ended questions tend to be more time consuming. However, if well answered they can be very useful when making conclusions. This clarification and variety ensure credibility.

## **5.9 Limitations**

In addition to what has previously been discussed, there are other limitations to this study that needs to be highlighted. First, incomplete or inaccurate answers are common limitations in cross-sectional studies (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Since the closed questions were mandatory, all 106 responses could be used in the analysis. However, the answers were still self-reported. Thus, they could be false or not reflect reality in terms of actual opinions and behavior. Another limitation, which is linked to the small convenience sample, is that advanced statistical analysis was not applicable when analyzing the data (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

## 6. Results

This chapter presents the main empirical findings from the survey (see Appendix A). The final sample consisted of 106 responses. However, for the two open-ended questions, 70 and 64 responses were collected respectively.

### 6.1 Quantitative Results from the Survey

#### 6.1.1 Demographics of the Sample

Table 2 and Table 3 show the demographics of the total sample. In terms of age, 74% of the respondents were between 18-25 years old. Another 18% of the respondents were between 26-33 years old. The remaining 9% were between 34-57 years old. Hence, the sample is skewed towards younger people. In addition, the sample consisted of 71% females and 27% males. Therefore, the sample is also skewed towards females.

Table 2 - Age and Gender of the Sample

Question	Answer	Percentage %	Count
Age:	18-25	74%	78
	26-33	18%	19
	34-41	1%	1
	42-49	3%	3
	50-57	5%	5
Gender:	Male	27%	29
	Female	71%	75
	Other	1%	1
	I do not want to specify	1%	1

With regard to education, 58% were currently studying at a university or similar. The number of respondents that had completed university, or similar, accounted for 39%. Moreover, a majority of respondents were either studying, studying and working, or working. Finally, 39% of the respondents answered that they had a monthly income, after tax, between 3,001-13,000 SEK. In total, 17% answered 0-3,000 SEK. The rest, 44%, indicated a monthly income above 13,000 SEK.

Table 3 - Education, Occupation, and Income of the Sample

Question	Answer	Percentage %	Count
Highest level of education:	Not completed High School	1%	1
	High School completed	3%	3
	Currently studying at a University (or similar)	58%	61
	University (or similar) completed	39%	41
Current occupation:	Student	37%	39
	Student and working	30%	32
	Working	32%	34
	Unemployed	1%	1
	Retired	0%	0
	I do not want to specify	0%	0
Monthly income (after tax) in SEK:	0 – 3,000	17%	18
	3,001 – 13,000	39%	41
	13,001 – 23,000	14%	15
	23,001 – 33,000	10%	11
	33,001 – 43,000	3%	3
	43,000+	7%	7
	I do not want to specify	10%	11

### 6.1.2 Care for Sustainability

Regarding care for sustainability, which relates to consciousness, respondents were asked if they care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability. Moreover, they were asked if they care about this when buying clothes. Figure 5 below illustrates the answers. In total, almost the whole sample indicated that they care about both environmental sustainability and social (ethical) sustainability. Only a few outliers answered “neutral” or “disagree”. The answers for whether the respondents care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability when buying clothes differed somewhat more. Overall, respondents answered “neutral” more often, 28% and 30% respectively. However, the majority, 63% and 59% respectively, declared that they either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statements.

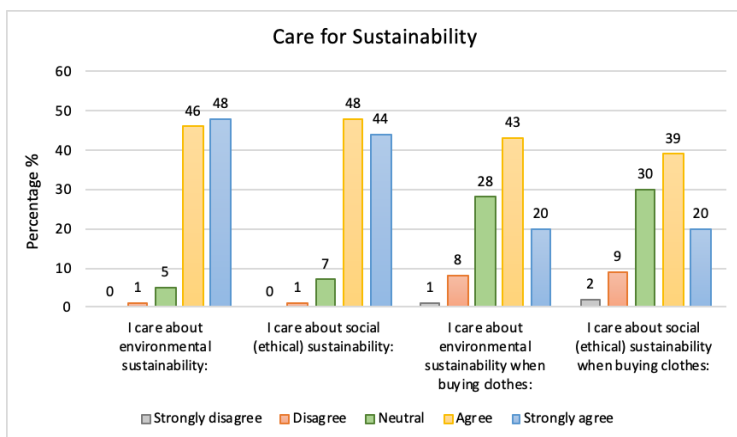


Figure 5 - Care for Sustainability

### 6.1.3 Questions Regarding Fast Fashion

Figure 6 presents the findings from the questions that asked respondents about their attitude or perception in regard to fast fashion. As can be seen in the figure, the respondents were relatively mixed in their attitude towards buying new clothes from fast fashion companies. Most respondents, 37%, were in fact “neutral”.

Regarding the statement “clothes sold by fast fashion companies are sustainable”, the majority, 74%, answered “strongly disagree” or “disagree”. This indicates that they did not associate clothes sold by fast fashion companies with sustainability. In spite of this, 55% answered that clothes sold by fast fashion companies can be sustainable. Although, different opinions were expressed. In addition, the results were also diverse when asked if they agree with the statement that “fast fashion is similar to fast food”. The respondents were also asked if they have bought new clothes from a fast fashion company this year (2020) (see question 7 in Appendix A). To this question, 55% answered yes, while 41% answered no.

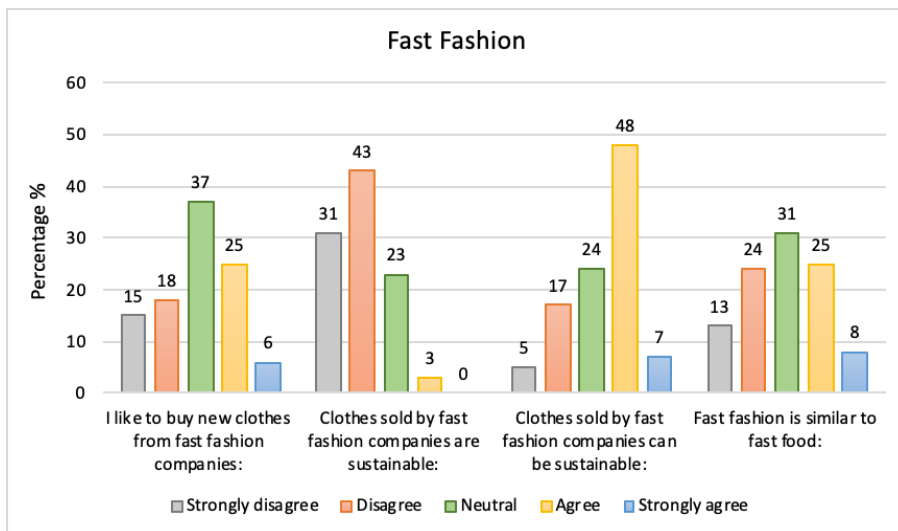


Figure 6 - Fast Fashion

### 6.1.4 Questions Regarding Product

In Figure 7 and Figure 8 the results related to clothes, sustainability, and consumer preferences are depicted. From the data in Figure 7 it is apparent that most respondents want their clothes to be produced in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. Some respondents were “neutral”, and a few outliers are found. Otherwise, the findings are consistent.

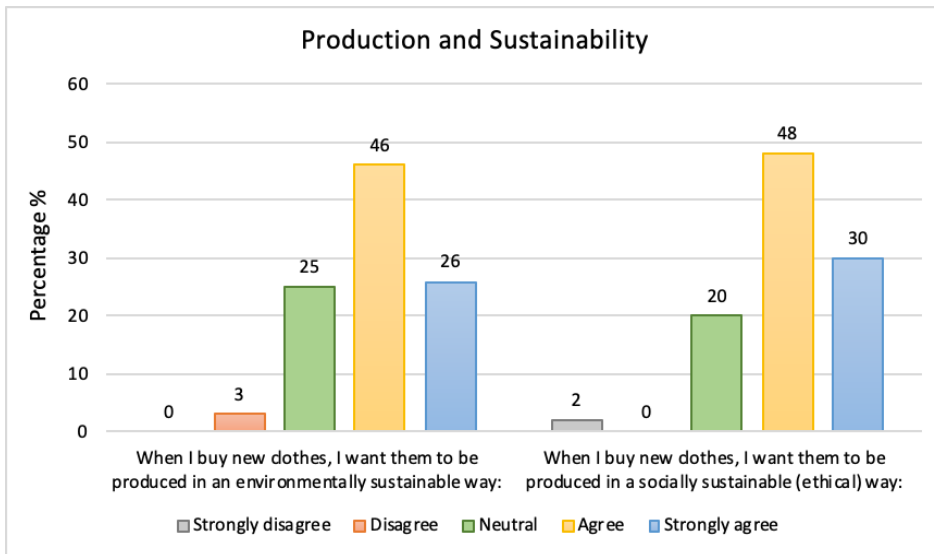


Figure 7 - Production and Sustainability

Figure 8 visualizes the respondents’ preferences in terms of organic and recycled materials when buying new clothes. As shown, the majority of respondents were “neutral” towards organic and recycled materials. The remaining were mostly positive. Finally, out of the total respondents, 80% answered that they “like when fast fashion companies collect old textiles for reuse and recycling”.

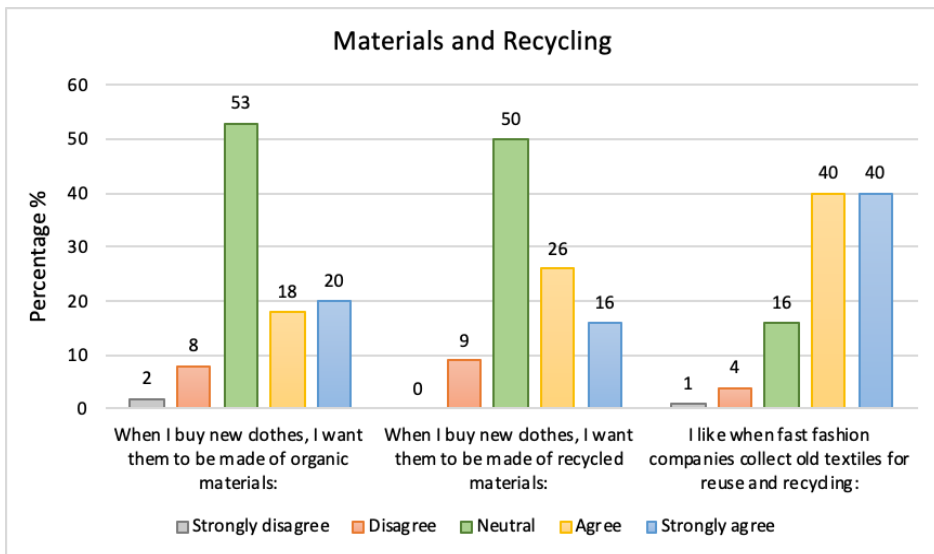


Figure 8 - Materials and Recycling

### 6.1.5 Questions Regarding Sustainability Labels

The results related to sustainability labels are presented in Figure 9 and Figure 10. First, in Figure 9, findings are quite homogenous. The majority of respondents indicated that they were “neutral” or “agree” to that they want to buy new clothes with an eco-label or an ethical label. When asked if “eco-labels on clothes are easy to understand” and if they “trust the eco-labels on clothes sold by fast fashion companies”, one fourth of the respondents answered “disagree”. This indicates some confusion and lack of trust.

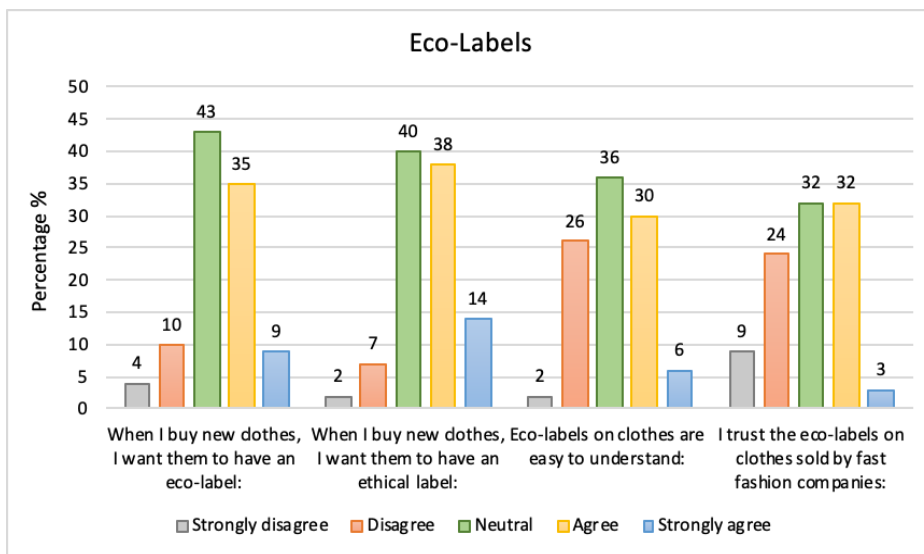


Figure 9 - Eco-Labels

Figure 10 illustrates respondents’ attitudes towards a piece of clothing with a sustainability label. The results reveal that in total 77% are more positive towards a piece of clothing when it has a sustainability label. A minority of 7% were not positive. Moreover, most respondents, 81% also responded that they think that “sustainability labels on clothes should only be certified by third-party (independent) organizations”. The survey also asked if respondents have bought new clothes with an eco-label this year (2020) (see question 8 in Appendix A). Answers to this question were mixed between “yes”, “no”, “I do not remember”, and “I do not know”. However, most respondents, 41%, answered “no”.

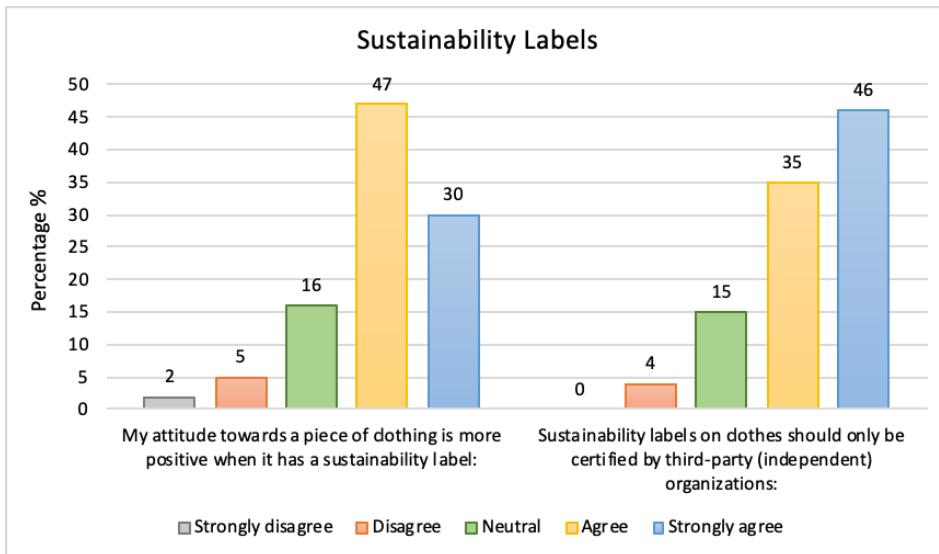


Figure 10 - Sustainability Labels

### 6.1.6 Questions Regarding Green Marketing and Promotion

When asked if they are “skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies”, 46% answered “agree”. Another 22% responded “strongly agree”. Only 9% disagreed. The majority, in total 56%, answered “disagree” or “strongly disagree” when asked if “short- time price offers by fast fashion companies are sustainable”. Additionally, 41% of the respondents were “neutral” to this statement.

The last question in Figure 11 concerns whether respondents think that “fast fashion companies should promote their suitable clothes more than they currently do”. As depicted below, 46% agreed and 19% strongly agreed to this statement. One third were “neutral”, whilst only 4% disagreed. To gain some more insight into the preference of consumers, respondents were asked where they would like to receive information about sustainable clothes (see question 33 in Appendix A). When answering this question, respondents could choose more than one alternative. The most common answers were “the company's own website”, “in-store advertisement”, “social media”, and on “product labels”.

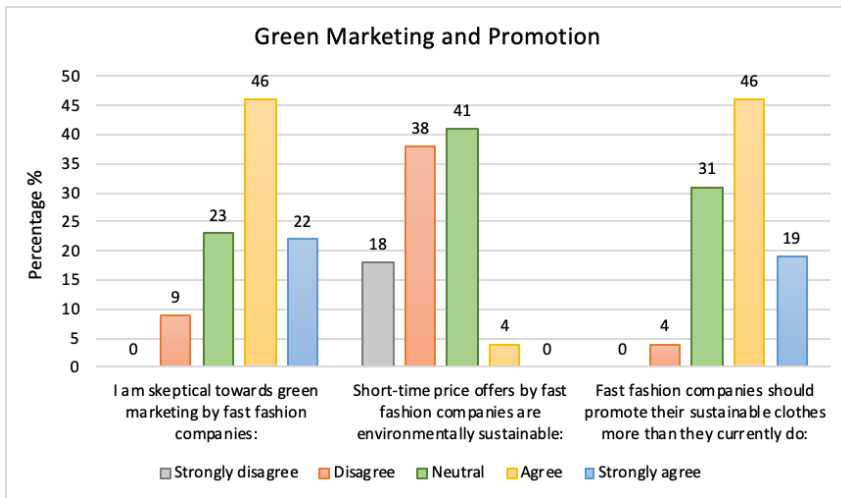


Figure 11 - Green Marketing and Promotion

### 6.1.7 Questions Regarding Price and Place

Figure 12 below illustrates the results from questions related to price and place. Respondents were asked if they are willing to pay more for new clothes if they are sustainable. To this question, 45% agreed and another 19% strongly agreed. In contrast, 25% were “neutral”, and a few indicated that they were not willing to do so. Regarding the place of production, almost half of the respondents, 47%, were “neutral” when asked if they want the new clothes that they buy to be produced locally. The rest of respondents’ preferences varied in regard to this question. Finally, respondents were also asked where they prefer to buy new clothes (see question 6 in Appendix A). The majority, 70%, answered that they prefer to buy new clothes “in a physical store”. Another 24% answered “online”.



Figure 12 - Price and Place

## 6.2 Qualitative Results from the Survey

### 6.2.1 *How Would You Define Sustainable Clothes?*

Question 34 in the survey asked respondents how they would define sustainable clothes. This question was open-ended and received 70 responses. After analyzing, coding, and categorizing the answers, the key themes that were identified were environmental, social, and ethical sustainability aspects. Most answers included words and phrases that relate to environmental sustainability. Common words were for example sustainable materials, production, supply chain, and transportation. Moreover, minimal impact on the environment and the possibility to recycle the clothes were stated.

In regard to social and ethical aspects, ethically produced, fair wage and labor conditions, human rights, and animal welfare were expressed. Other recurring words were; high quality, long lasting, fewer collections, classic design, standards, regulations, certification, and transparency. In contrast, several respondents also highlighted that sustainable clothes are synonymous with second-hand and referred to the circular economy concept, while some argued that clothes and sustainability are paradoxical. The following quotes represent the sample well.

Quote 1:

“Long lasting, good for the environment, and classic design.”

Quote 2:

“I would define sustainable clothes as products that are made by people with good working conditions and fair compensation, as well as made out of sustainable materials. Overall, I think the only “true” sustainable clothes are those that have already been circulating, so buying second-hand.”

Quote 3:

“Good for the planet, people, and animals.”

### ***6.2.2 What Do You Think About Green Marketing by Fast Fashion Companies?***

Finally, question 35 asked respondents to express what they think about green marketing by fast fashion companies. In total, 64 respondents answered this question. A number of issues were identified, and the word “greenwashing” was highlighted several times. When compared to the total damage or impact of a fast fashion company, their green marketing was said to be irrelevant or misleading. Moreover, many indicated that they were critical or skeptical. Some also answered that companies engage in green marketing mainly because it is a trend. Additionally, concerns about its trustworthiness and the lack of transparency were raised.

It also became clear that respondents demand improved practices in the fashion industry, including third-party certifications and more transparency. More focus on social aspects and human rights are desired. Furthermore, the importance of educating people on the topic was emphasized. Some respondents also argued that green marketing by fast fashion companies is paradoxical. However, several respondents claimed that as long as what is said or done is true, green marketing is good. Some of these respondents further stressed that more companies should engage in sustainable business and marketing practices.

Overall, different opinions were expressed, and some respondents were also found to be conflicted in their attitudes. In summary, the answers to this question provide insights on consumers attitudes and perceptions regarding the topic, which are valuable for further discussion. The quotes below illustrate the mixed results.

Quote 1:

“High risk of being profit-oriented green-washing.”

Quote 2:

“It’s quite hypocritical considering their business model is super unsustainable.”

Quote 3:

“I am a bit skeptical. It can be greenwashing, but it can also be good for the environment and society in general. It can also make people more aware and influence consumption behavior, like reducing excessive consumption.”

Quote 4:

“I think green labels and statements should be verified by outside parties and clearly state what they entail to the buyer.”

Quote 5:

“Seems paradoxical.”

Quote 6:

“Good to promote sustainability as long as you walk the talk.”

Quote 7:

“I think green marketing isn't bad per se. If a company is doing a lot to source their clothes sustainably and produce them in a fair way, then I think it's completely fine to use that as marketing.”

## **7. Analysis and Discussion**

In this chapter, the results from the survey are analyzed and discussed. The discussion is based on a combination of the quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey. First, a general discussion is presented. Then, the hypotheses are accepted or rejected. After that, the research questions are answered. Finally, the reliability of the results is discussed, and errors are highlighted. As stated in the introduction, the respondents in the survey are assumed to be consumers. Hence, in this and the following chapter, the respondents will also be referred to as consumers.

### **7.1 Discussion**

The findings in this study imply that consumers are both environmentally and socially conscious. Moreover, they care about several sustainability aspects when buying new clothes. These findings correlate with previous studies conducted by Angus and Westbrook (2019), Christiansson, Sandberg and Larsson (2018), and McNeill and Moore (2015).

Bly, Gwozdz and Reisch (2015) and McNeill and Moore (2015) argue that fast fashion and sustainability is paradoxical. This is supported by the findings in this study, as the majority of the respondents declared that they do not think that clothes sold by fast fashion companies are sustainable. However, the results indicate that consumers believe that fast fashion companies can become sustainable. This optimistic view is also noted by Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019).

As stated by Forsman and Madsen (2017), Hagman et al. (2017), and Wiederhold and Martinez (2018), green marketing by fast fashion companies is a complicated matter. This is further verified in this study. The respondents were found to be critical and skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies. Nevertheless, in contrast to the observations made by Christiansson, Sandberg and Larsson (2018), positive attitudes and optimism exist among consumers. Overall, and regardless of their opinion, consumers demand improvements in regard to marketing and promotion of clothes that are more sustainable. Radical transparency, which McKinsey & Company (2019) claims to be a top priority in the fashion industry, is also desired according to the consumer insights from this study.

In terms of sustainability labels on clothes, results were mixed. Although, as shown in Figure 10, it is clear that consumers' attitudes towards clothes with a sustainability label are positive. Additionally, consumers think that only third-party (independent) organizations should certify these labels. Sustainability labels are discussed more in-depth in relation to the hypotheses and research questions below.

This study further found that consumers associate sustainable clothes with environmental, social, and ethical sustainability aspects. The respondents stated that sustainable clothes should be produced with minimal impact on the planet, people, and animals. Moreover, sustainable clothes should have high quality, last long, and be easy to recycle. These results align well with the concept of slow fashion. As mentioned in the literature review, Fletcher (2010) states that slow fashion is a movement that is linked to lifestyle and consumption behavior. Furthermore, Greenpeace (2017) and Naturskyddsverket (2020c) argue that fashion production and consumption can only become sustainable by adopting the slow fashion concept.

According to Amed et al. (2019) and Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019), fast fashion companies need to adopt more sustainable business and marketing practices in order to survive competition and to meet current and future consumer demand. This is supported by the consumer insights presented in this study. When analyzing the quantitative and qualitative results, consumers were found to be aware of the sustainability issues related to fast fashion. Hence, one can expect a higher demand for more sustainable fashion in the future.

Based on the results, it is clear that there is a need for improvements in how fast fashion companies' market clothes that are more sustainable and how they use the marketing mix. If fast fashion companies do not take this into account or fail to address sustainability issues in the right way, they risk losing market share. Moreover, they could be criticized for being irresponsible and potentially be accused of greenwashing. These risks are specifically highlighted by Amed et al. (2019), Charter et al. (2002), Keegan and Green (2017), Pomeroy (2017), and Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019). Lastly, today's conscious, influential, and powerful consumers are not afraid to resist or boycott companies that do not act sustainably (Amed et al. 2019; Angus & Westbrook, 2019; Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Finally, as stated in the literature review, market segmentation is the process of identifying specific segments or consumer groups with similar characteristics, wants, needs, and behavior (Keegan & Green, 2017). Once a segment is identified, a tailored marketing mix can be used to target this specific segment of consumers (Keegan & Green, 2017). Hence, the conscious consumers, who care about sustainability in regard to fashion consumption, is a segment that could be targeted with a more sustainable marketing mix.

## **7.2 Discussion of Hypotheses**

To accurately accept or reject the hypotheses, a larger random probability sample should be conducted and studied. However, in this section, the hypotheses are accepted or rejected based on the findings from the data collected through the survey. Thus, what follows only applies to the sample in this study and should not be generalized to a greater population.

**H1:** Consumers care about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability when buying clothes.

The results presented in Figure 5 indicate that almost the whole sample cares about environmental and social (ethical) sustainability. Moreover, a majority declared that they care about environmental and (social) sustainability when buying clothes. Furthermore, as Figure 7 illustrates, the majority of respondents also answered that they want their clothes to be produced in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. Figure 8 further suggests that respondents do care about organic and recycled materials when they buy new clothes. These findings correlate with what Amed et al. (2019) and Angus and Westerbrook (2019), among others, have previously found. Hence, the first hypothesis is accepted.

**H2:** Consumers think that eco-labels on clothes are difficult to understand, and do not trust the eco-labels on clothes sold by fast fashion companies.

To accept or reject the second hypothesis, it is relevant to look at the results presented in Figure 9. The findings indicate that some consumers find eco-labels on clothes difficult to understand. Respondents also declared that there is a lack of trust in the eco-labels on clothes sold by fast

fashion companies. These results correspond to previous studies by Forsman and Madsen (2017), Laitala and Grimstad Klepp (2013), Taufique et al. (2019), and Wiederhold and Martinez (2018). Nonetheless, most respondents were “neutral” and around 30% answered that eco-labels on clothes are easy to understand. The same number of respondents, that is approximately 30%, answered that they do trust the eco-labels on clothes sold by fast fashion companies. Due to this, it is difficult to accept or reject the second hypothesis. Ultimately, the results were mixed, which suggest that further investigation is required.

**H3:** Consumers think that sustainability labels on clothes should only be certified by third-party (independent) organizations.

In regard to certification of sustainability labels on clothes, the results were more consistent. From the data in Figure 10, it is clear that the majority of respondents think that sustainability labels on clothes should only be certified by third-party (independent) organizations. Although this study is not explanatory, a possible explanation for this could be that third-party labels are perceived to be more trustworthy. As mentioned before, D’Souza et al. (2007) also state that consumers tend to find third-party labels more credible. Based on the results, the third hypothesis is therefore accepted.

**H4:** Consumers are skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies.

The last hypothesis is answered by analyzing the results in Figure 11 and by looking at the findings from question 35, one of the open-ended questions, in the survey. First, as Figure 11 depicts, most respondents answered that they are skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies. When analyzing the results from question 35, this skepticism is also evident. Moreover, further insights are given. Firstly, respondents were found to be skeptical since fast fashion and sustainability is argued to be paradoxical in nature. Secondly, the skepticism also relates to the lack of transparency that respondents expressed. Overall, these results are consistent with previous findings made by Christiansson, Sandberg and Larsson (2018), Forsman and Madsen (2017), McNeill and Moore (2015), and Wiederhold and Martinez (2018).

A great number of the respondents also believe that green marketing by fast fashion companies is, or could be, greenwashing. Forsman and Madsen (2017) and Hagman et al. (2017) found similar results in their studies about consumer attitudes. Moreover, Snijder (2017) argues that greenwashing is a common phenomenon in the fashion industry. Hence, as stressed by Hagman et al. (2017) and McKinsey & Company (2019), this issue has to be addressed to establish consumer trust. Nevertheless, some responded that green marketing by fast fashion companies is good, as long as it is true. Although the results were mixed, skepticism towards green marketing by fast fashion companies were clearly found among consumers. Due to this, the fourth hypothesis is accepted.

### **7.3 Discussion of Research Questions**

**RQ1:** What do consumers think about green marketing by fast fashion companies?

As stated in the results and when answering the fourth hypothesis, respondents in the sample, hence consumers, were skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies. The term “greenwashing” was highlighted and associated with this type of marketing. These results could be explained by the fact that fast fashion and sustainability are commonly seen as two opposites. Moreover, confusion and trust issues regarding the eco-labels used by fashion companies were found among consumers. Therefore, improvements in this arena are crucial if fast fashion companies want to become more sustainable and avoid accusations of using deceptive marketing techniques like greenwashing. As discussed above, these findings are also consistent with previous literature in the field.

Moreover, as stated before, the fashion industry needs to move in a more sustainable direction to decrease damage to life on earth (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; United Nations, n.d.b). Ultimately, the credibility and trustworthiness of green marketing by fast fashion companies is fundamental. Without trust between consumers and companies, long-term sustainability is at risk. This is further supported by Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018), Naturskyddsforeningen (2019), and the United Nations (n.d.b). The same sources state that sustainable production and consumption builds on cooperation between the fashion producers and its consumers, where trust and openness is key to reach positive outcomes.

The results in this study also indicate that consumers were positive towards more sustainable initiatives made by fast fashion companies. Consumers stated that green marketing should be encouraged, but it has to be transparent and true. Therefore, the future looks promising in terms of trust building. If consumers continue to become more conscious and demand more sustainable fashion, fast fashion companies have no alternative but to respond to this pressure if they want to stay in the market. This argument is specifically supported by Amed et al. (2019) and Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019). Ultimately, by increasing awareness among all stakeholders, promoting sustainable actions, and setting higher standards, the fashion industry, and its criticized fast fashion companies, could become more sustainable. As a result, the trustworthiness of their green marketing would improve.

**RQ2:** Which aspects of sustainability are important to consumers in relation to consumption of clothes?

This study has found that both environmental and social (ethical) sustainability aspects are important to consumers when they buy new clothes. However, environmental sustainability was specifically emphasized. Consumers were also found to perceive fast fashion as unsustainable. These results are aligned with the studies by Angus and Westbrook (2019), Christiansson, Sandberg and Larsson (2018) McNeill and Moore (2015), to name a few. Despite this, around 30% of the respondents still like to buy clothes from fast fashion companies. Moreover, 55% answered that they have bought new clothes from a fast fashion company in 2020. These results do indicate an attitude-behavior gap, which Wiederhold and Martinez (2018) also found in their study about ethical consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion industry.

This attitude-behavior cannot be explained in detail by the empirical findings in this study. However, in the literature review it was highlighted that consumer behavior and consumption is affected by several factors. Economic position can for example constrain consumers from buying more sustainable fashion (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Consumption is also related to symbolic meanings and self-expression (Hosany & Martin, 2012; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Building upon this, today's consumers are often influenced by social norms in society and social media to follow the latest trends, which ultimately stimulates the consumption of fast

fashion (Greenpeace, 2017; Michaela & Orna, 2015; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2019). Last but not least, aggressive and tactical marketing strategies also lead to excessive consumption (Byun & Sternquist, 2008; Greenpeace, 2017).

In addition, the respondents defined sustainable clothes by terms associated with environmental, social, and ethical sustainability. Durability and high quality were emphasized, which Naturskyddsföreningen (2020c) and Remy, Speelman and Swartz (2019) claim to be key aspects in relation to sustainable fashion consumption. Second-hand clothing was also highlighted by the respondents. As Clausen et al. (2010) state, consumers choose to buy second-hand due to several reasons, for example practical, economical, and environmental reasons. This type of consumption behavior can also be tied to acts of resistance to buy new products (Arnold & Reynolds, 2012), as well as anti-consumption (Christiansson, Sandberg & Larsson, 2018).

In regard to the products sold by fast fashion companies, consumers stated that they want their new clothes to be produced in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. The demand for organic and recycled materials when buying new clothes was moderate but did exist. On the other hand, consumers tend to like when fast fashion companies collect old textiles for reuse and recycling. The reason for this is unknown. A possible explanation for this result is that it is perceived as a sustainable initiative. Snijder (2016) also underlines that recycling programs by fast fashion companies usually give consumers a voucher. This could potentially influence consumer attitudes and opinions. Moreover, it could lead to increased consumption. In summary, this is a problem as the United Nations (n.d.b) states that if current consumption patterns continue, or grow, life on earth is threatened. In addition, the social issues related to fast fashion consumption could increase.

When it comes to sustainability labels, consumers want to buy new clothes with both eco-labels and ethical labels. Their attitudes towards a piece of clothing is also found to be more positive when it has a sustainability label. Despite this, most respondents answered that they have not bought new clothes with an eco-label in 2020. Regardless of this, because of the confusion and lack of trust in the eco-labels used by fast fashion companies, improvements are needed. As stated by D'Souza et al. (2007) and Naturskyddsverket (2020a), one way to increase credibility is to use sustainability labels that have been certified by third-party organizations. Moreover, as

shown in Figure 10 and discussed in regard to the third hypothesis, consumers stated that sustainability labels on clothes should only be certified by third-party (independent) organizations.

According to the literature, sustainability labels are linked to the product element of the marketing mix. However, the results emphasize how consumers demand more transparency, for example informative and trustworthy labels, when it comes to sustainable clothing. Due to this, one can argue that sustainability labels also relate to the promotion element of the marketing mix.

The promotion element further comprises green marketing. Besides the findings discussed in relation to the first research question, it should be noted that consumers do not find short-time price offers by fast fashion companies environmentally sustainable. Hence, using this promotion tactic when marketing sustainable fashion could result in greater skepticism among consumers. Moreover, consumers could potentially criticize companies for being hypocritical or engaging in greenwashing if using this.

In contrast, consumers responded that fast fashion companies should promote their sustainable clothes more than they currently do. This is supported by Bick, Halsey and Ekenga (2018), Greenpeace (2017), Naturskyddsforeningen (2020c), Snijder (2016), and the United Nations (n.d.b), as increased awareness of sustainable fashion consumption is important in order to decrease the negative impacts that the fashion industry cause. Finally, this study found that consumers want to receive information about sustainable clothes on company websites, social media, product labels, and in physical stores. The importance of online communication is aligned with the findings that Amed et al. (2019), Angus and Westbrook (2019), Charter et al. (2002), Michaela and Orna (2015), and Price (2018) have presented.

In terms of price, the results indicate that consumers are willing to pay more for new clothes if they are sustainable. This holds even if the sample was skewed towards consumers with lower income. Overall, this is a positive result since sustainable products usually come at an extra cost. If consumers are not willing to pay for this, improvements in the industry are threatened. Consequently, this result reflects the findings made by The Business of Fashion and McKinsey

& Company (2020). However, as stated earlier, other studies have found the opposite and conflicting results. Ultimately, this calls for experimental studies to test how consumers actually behave and whether they act in a hypocritical way or not.

Another interesting finding is that a majority of the respondents prefer to buy new clothes in a physical store. This is interesting since the sample was skewed towards younger age groups, which according to Angus and Westbrook (2019) and Greenpeace (2017) tend to find online shopping advantageous. Furthermore, consumers were mostly indifferent when it comes to locally produced clothes. Although, 30% answered that they want the new clothes that they buy to be locally produced. Hence, place of production is found to be relevant to consumers. As stated by Angus and Westbrook (2019), a typical characteristic of conscious consumers is to care about the origin of a product and where it is produced. Therefore, this finding further justifies that consumers are conscious in regard to fashion consumption.

#### **7.4 Reliability and Accuracy of Data**

Due to the structured data collection and sampling method, the results in this study are considered reliable. However, because a limited convenience sample was made, the findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Most answers to the survey questions were consistent, making it easy to analyze and discuss the results. In a few cases, results were mixed, and some outliers were found. This should not be disregarded and therefore future research should test the reliability of the results. Variations in the results can have several explanations, which also require further investigation.

Inaccurate answers, caused by for example an attitude-behavior gap, lower the reliability of the results. This bias is difficult to overcome when conducting a self-completion questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). The skewed sample could also have led to a biased result. Therefore, a larger random probability sample should be made to verify the results in this study.

Regarding the secondary data, the sources used in this study are considered reliable and relevant. The books, journals, and other sources that were used are written by credible authors. Most were also written during the 21st century.

Finally, the accuracy of the empirical data presented in this study should be discussed. The data is presented with quality and consistency. Firstly, the tables in chapter six consists of both percentage and count measurements. Secondly, the figures used to present the results have clearly defined scales on both the x-axis and y-axis. Percentages are shown in the figures and color patterns are consistent and distinguishable. This should make it easy for the reader to understand.

## **7.5 Errors**

### ***7.5.1 Sampling Errors***

A non-probability sample, more specifically a convenience sample, was made. Hence, the sample was not randomly selected. This implies that some units in the population were more likely to be included in the sample than others (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Online channels and social networks were used to reach the respondents. This sampling method led to a biased sample. Sampling error was evident as the majority of respondents had similar demographics. When looking at the demographics, the sample was skewed towards females, people between 18-25 years old, and students studying at a university. This is not strange as the respondents were collected from the authors personal contacts and surroundings. Due to this, and because of the fact that a limited convenience sample was made, the results cannot be generalized across a larger population (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### ***7.5.2 Sampling-Related Errors***

Sampling-related errors concern non-respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The closed questions in the survey were mandatory. Hence, no survey was incomplete and had to be excluded to avoid inaccurate results, figures, or tables. In contrast, the open-ended questions were not mandatory, which resulted in fewer answers and less qualitative data. Why respondents did not answer the open-ended questions are unfortunately not possible to explain.

### ***7.5.3 Data Collection Errors***

For the majority of the closed questions, a five-point Likert scale was used. The rest of the closed questions had answer alternatives that were properly balanced. Some questions also

included an option called “other (please specify)”. Finally, the open-ended questions allowed free writing. Hence, the possibility of data collection errors was reduced.

Most questions did not have an “I do not know” option, but some had. Not including this type of answer alternative can result in a bias if respondents are not sure how to answer. However, according to Bryman and Bell (2011), this option can hinder respondents from taking the time to complete a survey properly. Therefore, this option was not used widely.

Lastly, to avoid data collection errors, complicated terms and too general questions were not used in the survey. Nevertheless, there is still a risk that respondents misinterpreted the questions or found them difficult to answer. Thus, it is hard to completely eliminate data collection errors.

#### ***7.5.4 Data Processing Errors***

When transferring the empirical data from Google Forms to Excel for analysis, data processing errors could have occurred. During the analysis, potential errors could also have affected the results (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Moreover, human errors are possible when coding, categorizing, and analyzing data, specifically qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Some of the qualitative responses provided mixed answers and conflicting attitudes. Consequently, this made it more difficult to categorize the data.

## **8. Conclusion**

### **8.1 Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this thesis was to better understand consumers concerning the topics of fashion consumption, fast fashion, and sustainability. To reach this aim, a survey was conducted to collect quantitative and qualitative data about consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences. After collection, the data was analyzed in a structured manner and discussed through the marketing mix framework. Based on the findings, three out of four hypotheses were accepted, and the research questions were answered. Finally, practical implications for key stakeholders within the fashion industry are presented in this chapter.

### **8.2 Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and analyze consumer attitudes, behavior, and preferences regarding fashion consumption, fast fashion and sustainability. The main findings are that consumers care about environmental and social sustainability, both in general, and when buying clothes. Secondly, consumers have mixed perceptions of green marketing by fast fashion companies. Skepticism and accusations of greenwashing exists. However, positive attitudes were also expressed. This calls for improvements to further decrease the obstacles that hinder the fashion industry to become more sustainable.

This study also identified several aspects of sustainability that are important to consumers in relation to consumption of clothes. In summary, consumers demand more sustainable clothes. They specifically want their clothes to be produced with minimal harm to the environment, humans, and animals. Due to this demand for sustainable fashion, the importance of understanding the attitudes, behavior, and preferences of consumers is highlighted. Without further insight, fast fashion companies are left alone with several questions unanswered.

With the consumer insight presented in this study, suggestions for how fast fashion companies should use the marketing mix to meet consumer preferences regarding sustainability can be made. The practical implications for fast fashion companies and their marketers is presented below. These recommendations can also be used to guide other stakeholders within the fashion

industry. In conclusion, guidance on how to use the marketing mix efficiently will not only help practitioners to succeed, but also help to make the industry more sustainable.

### **8.3 Practical Implications**

To survive competition, meet consumer demand, and comply with regulations, fast fashion companies should adopt a more sustainable marketing mix. Supporting evidence for this is also expressed by Charter et al. (2002). The scholars state that companies who adopt a sustainable marketing mix will not only be at the forefront when it comes to long-term sustainability, they will also gain consumer trust and improve their reputation. Additionally, they claim that without a more sustainable marketing mix, companies will not be able to satisfy future consumer demand.

Consumers want their clothes to be produced in an environmentally and socially sustainable way. This includes raw materials, manufacturing, and ethical working conditions. High quality is also an important aspect to consumers, as well as the possibility to easily recycle old clothes. These aspects should therefore be accounted for when making decisions about the product element in the marketing mix, which includes everything from sourcing of raw materials, production processes, and distribution to recycling. Credible sustainability labels, preferably third-party labels, should also be used to avoid confusion and increase trust. Therefore, it is suggested that fast fashion companies invest in third-party sustainability labels.

Fast fashion companies should also focus on promoting clothes that are more sustainable. This should be done both online and in physical stores. However, they should specifically display their sustainable clothing collections in their physical stores to target conscious consumers who prefer to shop offline. Moreover, information about sustainability should be communicated online and in stores. Based on consumer preferences, social media marketing should be prioritized as a communication channel. This type of marketing is advantageous since one can easily reach many consumers at a low cost, which is supported in the literature by Amed et al. (2019) and Michaela and Orna (2015).

Even though the business model of fast fashion companies is to sell inexpensive clothes, this study found that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for clothes that are more

sustainable. Hence, fast fashion companies should invest in more sustainable materials, production methods, distribution channels, and marketing strategies, even if it comes at an extra cost. Although, how much more consumers are willing to pay still remains unclear. Finally, fast fashion companies should strive to establish higher sustainability standards in the fashion industry to boost their own reputation, as well as the reputation of the industry.

To conclude, sustainable value chains, establishing transparent and trustworthy communication, and pricing are key issues that fast fashion companies must consider when targeting conscious consumers in the future. According to Charter et al. (2002), implementing sustainable business and marketing practices is not straightforward, but rather a constant process which involves compromises. Following the above recommendations will not solve the paradox interlinked to fast fashion and sustainability, which has been highlighted throughout this thesis. However, green marketing by fast fashion companies could become more credible, ultimately reducing consumer skepticism and accusations of greenwashing. The demand for more sustainable fashion and the preferences of conscious consumers could also be met with a more sustainable and consumer-centered marketing mix. Most importantly, sustainable development in the fashion industry would be implemented.

#### **8.4 Contributions**

In spite of its limitations, this thesis adds to the overall understanding of the complexity related to sustainable fashion production and consumption. The findings in this study are in line with former research related to fast fashion and sustainability. However, this study also provides new and interesting consumer insights that are useful for fast fashion companies and its marketers. Recommendations for how fast fashion companies should use the marketing mix to improve their marketing strategies are presented. These insights and recommendations are specifically valuable and helpful when targeting today's more conscious consumers. To summarize, this study has contributed to the existing literature and decreased the knowledge gap that was highlighted in the introduction.

In regard to theory, this study used the marketing mix as a conceptual framework. As shown through the findings of this study, the traditional 4P model fails to see the overlap between product and promotion. Companies need to be aware of this, specifically when moving forward

with promotional activities. This is further emphasized by Charter et al. (2002), who acknowledges the critique of using the traditional model by proposing a more agile and sustainable marketing mix.

Charter et al. (2002) and Hagman et al. (2017) further underline how consumer skepticism towards green marketing by fast fashion companies could decrease with the correct frameworks in place. Moreover, with a sustainable marketing mix, greenwashing, and accusations of greenwashing, could be reduced (Charter et al. 2002). Moving away from the traditional marketing mix, recognizing the interrelationships between the 4P's, and adapting or modifying existing models to match consumer demand is thus the way forward for an industry that is coined to be the paradox of sustainability.

Finally, to comply with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) regarding responsible production and consumption, an updated and sustainable marketing mix is needed. Charter et al. (2002, p. 9) further supports this argument by stating that marketers “need appropriate education, information, training, and tools” to implement corporate social responsibility into their marketing practices. Hence, this thesis has resulted in both practical and theoretical contributions.

## **8.5 Future Research**

As stated, sustainable fashion production and consumption is complex, but not impossible. However, more research in this area is necessary to solve or minimize the issues with fast fashion. In this study, the small convenience sample confines the generalization of the findings to a larger population. Suggestions for future research is therefore to conduct a larger random probability sample. By doing this, generalizations could be made, and advanced statistical analysis could be applied. Further research is also needed to validate the findings in this study.

Moreover, this study did not investigate the price and place elements of the marketing mix in detail. Several questions related to these elements still remain to be resolved, particularly in regard to pricing. Thus, further investigation is required to be able to propose a complete conceptual framework. With an optimal marketing mix, fast fashion companies and their marketers will have a helpful tool when communicating their corporate social responsibility that

consumers demand. It would also be a useful tool for practitioners when on the path to become more sustainable.

Lastly, the purpose of this study was not to explain phenomenon through correlations or causation. Nevertheless, future research should seek to explain, for instance by incorporating a case study approach, how a fast fashion company can market their sustainability agenda in a consumer-centered way. Experimental studies or studies focusing on qualitative data are also suggested. These research approaches could lead to deeper knowledge about what has been observed in this thesis, namely that many consumers are critical and skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies and find it paradoxical.

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## **Appendix A - Survey**

### **Fast Fashion and Sustainability**

This survey is conducted by two bachelor students from Lund University as a part of our degree project in International Business.

The purpose of this survey is to investigate and analyze consumer behavior and attitudes regarding fashion consumption, fast fashion, and sustainability. The survey is voluntary and takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. Your answers are anonymous and used for academic purposes only.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey!

If you have any questions about the survey or our study, please contact us at:

au8154fa-s@student.lu.se

so4608ha-s@student.lu.se

Note: you have to be 16 years or older to participate in this survey.

\*Mandatory

#### **1. Your age (in numbers) \***

#### **2. Your gender \***

1. Male
2. Female
3. Other
4. I do not want to specify

#### **3. Your highest level of education \***

Please mark the answer that best represents you

1. Not completed High School
2. High School completed
3. Currently studying at a University (or similar)
4. University (or similar) completed
5. Other (please specify)

#### **4. Your current occupation \***

Please mark the answer that best represents you

1. Student
2. Student and working
3. Working
4. Unemployed
5. Retired
6. I do not want to specify
7. Other (please specify)

#### **5. Your monthly income (after tax) in SEK \***

Please mark the answer that best represents you (1 USD is approximately 10 SEK)

1. 0 - 3,000
2. 3,001 - 13,000
3. 13,001 - 23,000
4. 23,001 - 33,000
5. 33,001 - 43,000
6. 43,001+
7. I do not want to specify

#### **Keywords:**

- Sustainability: relates to both environmental and social (ethical) aspects in this survey.
- Environmental sustainability: sustainability relating to the environment (for example reduced emissions, pollution, and waste).
- Social (ethical) sustainability: sustainability relating to humans and animal rights (for example fair labor conditions).
  
- Sustainability labels: for example, eco-labels and ethical (fairtrade) labels.
- Eco-labels: indicating environmental sustainability.
- Ethical (fairtrade) labels: indicating social (ethical) sustainability.
  
- Fast fashion: inexpensive clothes, which are produced rapidly in response to the latest trends.
- Fast fashion companies: companies that sell fast fashion, for example H&M and Zara.
- Green marketing: when companies market themselves or their products/services as environmentally friendly and sustainable.

**6. Where do you prefer to buy new clothes? \***

Please mark the answer that best represents you

1. In a physical store
2. Online
3. I do not care
4. I do not know
5. I do not buy new clothes
6. Other (please specify)

**7. Have you bought new clothes from a fast fashion company this year (2020)? \***

1. Yes
2. No
3. I do not remember
4. I do not know

**8. Have you bought new clothes with an eco-label this year (2020)? \***

1. Yes
2. No
3. I do not remember
4. I do not know

**Please fill in how much you agree with the following statements:**

**9. I like to buy new clothes from fast fashion companies \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**10. I like when fast fashion companies collect old textiles for reuse and recycling \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**11. I care about environmental sustainability \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**12. I care about social (ethical) sustainability \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**13. I care about environmental sustainability when buying clothes \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**14. I care about social (ethical) sustainability when buying clothes \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**15. When I buy new clothes, I want them to be produced in an environmentally sustainable way \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**16. When I buy new clothes, I want them to be produced in a socially sustainable (ethical) way \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**17. When I buy new clothes, I want them to be made of organic materials \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**18. When I buy new clothes, I want them to be made of recycled materials \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**19. Clothes sold by fast fashion companies are sustainable \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**20. Clothes sold by fast fashion companies can be sustainable \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**21. Fast fashion is similar to fast food \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**22. When I buy new clothes, I want them to have an eco-label \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**23. When I buy new clothes, I want them to have an ethical label \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**24. My attitude towards a piece of clothing is more positive when it has a sustainability label \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**25. Eco-labels on clothes are easy to understand \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**26. I trust the eco-labels on clothes sold by fast fashion companies \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**27. Sustainability labels on clothes should only be certified by third-party (independent) organizations \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**28. I am skeptical towards green marketing by fast fashion companies \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**29. Short-time price offers by fast fashion companies are environmentally sustainable \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**30. Fast fashion companies should promote their sustainable clothes more than they currently do \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**31. When I buy new clothes, I am willing to pay more if they are sustainable \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**32. When I buy new clothes, I want them to be locally produced \***

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly agree

**33. Where would you like to get information about sustainable clothes \***

Please mark all answers that apply

1. TV
2. Print media
3. The company's own website
4. Social media
5. In-store advertisements
6. Product labels
7. Other (please specify)

**34. How would you define sustainable clothes?**

Please answer to the best of your ability

**35. What do you think about green marketing by fast fashion companies?**

Please answer to the best of your ability

**Your answer is registered. Thank you for your help!**