



**How consumers perceive sustainable fashion and the
influence of social media on their purchase decisions:
a case study in Brussels**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines sustainable fashion perceptions and behaviors among young consumers in Brussels, focusing on Generation Z (ages 20-27) and Millennials (ages 28-40). It identifies barriers and drivers of sustainable fashion and the influence of social media on purchasing decisions.

Key Findings regarding social media : Platforms like Instagram significantly affect purchasing decisions among individuals under 25, who are more susceptible to social media pressures. Those over 30 are less influenced by these trends, posing both opportunities and challenges for sustainable fashion.

Price Barrier: Many consumers perceive sustainable fashion as unaffordable. Challenges such as misinformation and greenwashing further complicate choices, emphasizing the need for better consumer education and brand transparency.

Key Drivers founded : Innovation and Creativity , Emotional Appeal, Personalization, Accessibility, Community Building.

The study offers insights into consumer motivations and proposes strategies to encourage more mindful fashion consumption, helping stakeholders address barriers and promote sustainable practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am profoundly grateful to everyone who has supported and encouraged me throughout the process of writing this thesis. This project has offered me the opportunity to delve deeply into a topic that combines two of my passions, fashion and marketing, with the purpose of providing insights that can contribute to a more sustainable world.

Primarily, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Philippe Roman, for his guidance and expertise throughout this project. His insightful feedback and constant support have been invaluable in shaping this thesis. Professor Roman's ability to challenge my thinking and push me to refine my ideas has significantly enriched this research.

Special thanks to the participants in my study, whose willingness to share their experiences and insights, added depth and authenticity to the study.

I would like to acknowledge my friends in Belgium, who have become like family to me during my Belgian journey. Their unconditional support, encouragement, and companionship have been a constant source of motivation and joy.

Finally, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to my parents , Rose and Hector Vázquez , whose love and support have been my foundation throughout my academic and life journey. Despite the distance, their encouragement to pursue my dreams and their belief in my potential have been my greatest source of strength , and I am eternally thankful for their presence in my life. The journey has been both challenging and rewarding, and I am deeply thankful for all those who helped make it possible.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This thesis seeks to understand the mechanisms influencing consumer perspectives and choices regarding sustainable fashion, with a particular emphasis on the role of social media. It aims to understand how social media platforms shape and drive consumer behavior towards sustainable fashion practices. By examining the intersection of environmental awareness and social media influence, this research intends to contribute valuable insights into how digital platforms impact consumer decision-making processes.

The thesis underscores the crucial role of consumer behavior, therefore questioning the rationale according to which the responsibility of greening the sector would fall to specific stakeholders. By emphasizing collective responsibility and the power of informed consumer choices, this research aims to inspire a broader societal movement towards sustainability in the fashion industry.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In the current global landscape marked by diminishing resources, transgressions of planetary boundaries, and shifts in market dynamics such as the surge in e-commerce and overconsumption patterns, the undeniable damage the fashion industry is causing needs to be addressed. Moreover, one should not overlook the economic potential of the sustainable fashion sector, that could contribute to enshrine this vital industry within the transition towards a carbon-neutral economy.

Therefore, it is imperative to understand consumer behaviors and drivers towards their fashion consumption habits. Recognizing the significant role of social media marketing, this study aims to leverage its positive potential to create a shift in consumer mentality by understanding what motivates consumers to embrace or which barriers prevent them from choosing sustainable

fashion. starting by the understanding of their level of awareness and interest in the impact of their fashion consumption habits on the environment.

This study seeks to not only analyze sustainable consumer behavior but also contribute value by formulating insights for effectively communicating the benefits of sustainable fashion among consumers.

The thesis underscores the crucial role of consumer behavior , therefore questioning the rationale according to which the responsibility of greening the sector would fall to specific stakeholders. By emphasizing collective responsibility and the power of informed consumer choices , this research aims to inspire a broader societal movement towards sustainability in the fashion industry.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The added value of this study resides within the in-depth analysis of consumer behavior in the unique economic and social ecosystem that Brussels represents. It is commonly admitted that the different cultures , origins and demographics that exist within the city and its metropolitan area make it a unique market, perfectly representative of the different consumer preferences that can exist within developed societies. This should provide the analysis with rich insights about the perceptions of sustainable fashion. A comprehensive assessment of these perceptions could then lead to a better understanding of the different existing possibilities for incurring a change in peoples' fashion consumption habits.

The choice to restrict the scope of the study to Brussels is also related to the capital's situations. As the epicenter of EU's and national decision-making, as well as a main trading hub, Brussels is a key location for understanding the factors that influence consumer buying decisions in the fashion industry . Gaining insights into market drivers and perceptions will provide a comprehensive overview of how sustainability is perceived by consumers. This knowledge will assist various stakeholders, including policymakers , governments, and fashion brands , in developing strategies to encourage a sustainable mindset.

Therefore , the scope of the thesis will be consumer choices of residents of the metropolitan Brussels area. Additionally the sample has been restricted age-wise , so as to focus the study on the generation Z and millennials. These segments have constantly evolving consuming profiles and patterns and make such evaluation particularly relevant. Each generation has its own consumption habits, but both share a strong familiarity with technology, social media, and online shopping. Additionally, both generations exhibit an increased interest in pro-environmental actions.

To this effect , a survey has been completed by a sample of more than 100 participants. The results and evaluation shall contribute to assess whether the consumer preferences and choices indicated in the answers allow to validate the following hypotheses.

Hypotheses

- **Hypothesis 1 : Social media influence in consumer's purchase decisions**

Social media has considerable influence in people's purchasing decisions, particularly in the fashion industry. This hypothesis suggests that the content and marketing strategies employed on social media platforms can effectively raise awareness and influence consumer behavior towards more sustainable fashion choices.

- **Hypothesis 2: Price as main barrier to sustainable fashion**

Consumer choices are substantially affected by purchasing power and the price barrier, often higher for sustainable clothing, eliminating sustainable alternatives for a large category of consumers. This hypothesis suggests that practical considerations such as cost of the product, that is perceived as unaffordable, and the level of awareness are the main drivers behind consumer behavior, creating a barrier to choosing sustainable fashion options.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The research will consist of both quantitative research and qualitative research. The quantitative research comprises a survey applied among residents of the Brussels metropolitan area with 105 respondents distributed among young adults aged 20-40 years old.

The survey was created online through the platform Google Forms and was presented as completely anonymous for academic purposes. It is composed of 16 questions, some with multiple options, a Likert scale, and one open question. The survey was distributed through various social media channels, including LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook groups.

The first part of the survey consists of identifying basic demographic data such as age range, municipality, gender, and occupation, allowing the survey to understand some correlations between the participants' answers and their demographics.

The chosen age range includes two generations: Millennials (Generation Y), aged 28-40, and Generation Z, aged 20-27.

The second part of the research is complemented with qualitative research that aims to gain deeper insights from the survey, open-ended interviews were conducted with participants from the quantitative research group. These interviews explored how social media influences sustainable fashion consumption and uncovered genuine beliefs and drivers behind consumer habits. They also addressed "social desirability bias," where participants might feel pressured to appear sustainability-minded.

As a complementary part of the qualitative research an ethnographic analysis was conducted to enhance the qualitative research by immersing in the environment of sustainable fashion events in Brussels. Through observation and interaction, this approach provided valuable insights into the cultural and social dynamics of sustainable fashion in the city.

CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE REVIEW

SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

“The heavy environmental effect of the fashion industry, along with the growing interest of consumers in sustainability issues, is driving this industry towards greater ecological integrity through the development of sustainable clothing. The clothing industry is considered as one of the most polluting industries in the world” (Fraccascia and Giannoccaro, 2019).

The textile production process, from raw materials to finished products, is resource-intensive and environmentally harmful. Factors such as population growth and the rise of fast fashion have led to a surge in textile consumption, contributing to environmental degradation.

However, the increasing consumer interest in sustainability has spurred the emergence of sustainable fashion, characterized by eco-friendly materials and fair production processes.

Studies on sustainable fashion explore its environmental benefits, product development processes, consumer engagement, and consumer behavior. Despite growing consumer awareness, only a small part currently prioritizes sustainability when shopping for clothes.

As consumers' concerns about, and interest in, sustainability translates into actions such as zero-waste consumption, companies are increasingly looking to engage in circular practices. In addition to responding to consumer pressure, businesses must embrace the circular economy (CE) to cut costs, reduce supply chain risk, and cope with the increasingly stringent regulations (European Commission, 2015; Rizos et al., 2016).

The arise of interest in sustainable products and services is a paradox, as this interest does not translate necessary in their fashion purchases . Despite the increment of consciousness of consumers specially the millennial generation, the researchers and academics have found certain insights of what lead people to go from merely interest in sustainability, to narrow the intention - action gap.

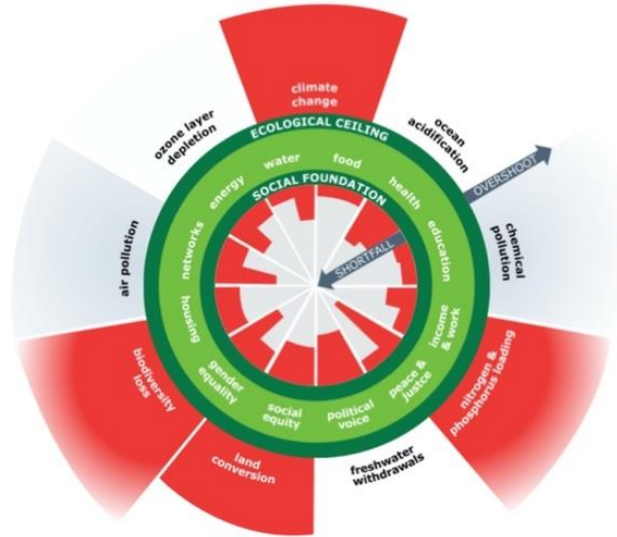
Marketers have a role to play in raising awareness and influencing policymakers, ensuring the discipline contributes positively to environmental objectives.

THE DOUGHNUT ECONOMY: A GUIDE TO A BETTER FASHION INDUSTRY

Achieving 100% sustainability is particularly challenging in the fashion industry. However, aligning efforts to reach this objective is crucial. One effective approach is following the principles of the Donut Economy model (Raworth, 2017).

This model aims to ensure that no one is left in the central hole, lacking life's essentials, while also preventing human activity from overshooting the outer crust and putting too much pressure on Earth's life-supporting systems. In other words, the goal is to meet everyone's needs within the planet's means.

One of Raworth's most compelling analogies in advocating for the adoption of Doughnut Economics in ethical fashion and beyond is the idea that nothing in nature experiences perpetual growth. For example, a tree's life involves an initial growth phase followed by a period where growth halts, and the tree merely exists until it eventually dies, decomposes, and contributes nutrients to the future generations of trees.



The Doughnut of Social and Planetary
Boundaries (2017)
Credits: Kate Raworth

Figure1 The Doughnut of Social and Planetary Boundaries (2012). Kate Raworth.

Our current economic system and GDP, however, do not operate this way. They attempt to defy nature by seeking perpetual growth. Raworth likens this to cancer, which grows uncontrollably in a body and ultimately leads to the death of that body by depleting its resources. Some sustainable fashion brands might need to be courageous and look beyond the endless pursuit of growth. They should seek a sustainable equilibrium that maintains eco-friendly clothing operations within the planetary boundaries outlined in The Donut (Boiten, 2022).

CHAPTER 2 BUSINESS MODELS ARCHETYPES APPLIED TO THE FASHION INDUSTRY

While the imperative to mitigate climate change and protect nature is significant, the number of business-driven initiatives to discourage consumption for the environment's sake remains low. Those initiatives may “seem very much at odds with current business practices” (Bocken and Short, 2016), moreover some business are adopting sustainable

model archetypes as alternatives to traditional ones that prioritize unsustainable economic growth and mass production. The archetypes presented below offer innovative approaches that could replace the conventional fashion industry model. By challenging the traditional methods of the fashion industry and adopting sustainable practices, businesses can help transition towards a greener industry, reducing environmental harm, resource depletion, and social inequities.

While these models are not without their challenges such as scalability, consumer acceptance, and potential trade-offs they provide tangible solutions for mitigating the adverse environmental and social impacts associated with the traditional fashion industry. These archetypes encourage a paradigm shift by promoting practices that emphasize circularity, ethical production, and reduced environmental footprints.

2.1 SUFFICIENCY MODEL

The concept of sufficiency, which advocates meeting human needs within the planetary limits by curbing excessive consumption levels, is gaining increasing attention.

As drivers of innovation businesses can be highly influential in steering consumption towards greater levels of sufficiency (Heikkurinen et al., 2019).

Research on sustainable business models has highlighted how firms can alter their business models to ensure value creation beyond financial profits for stakeholders (Stubbs and Cocklin, 2008; Upward and Jones, 2016).

To ensure sustainable development within the planet's physical limits, we must shift from a reliance on perpetual economic growth to a model that prioritizes reducing demand and consumption.

Encouraging individuals to reduce their consumption habits, aiming to fulfill only their basic needs might be more challenging than it seems as it also confronts some limitations such as subjectivity, for instance, while some may find a wardrobe of 10 clothing garments acceptable, others may require over 50. This discrepancy also reflects cultural and demographic differences, with certain cultures, such as Americans, being renowned for their high consumption habits beyond necessity.

Over the years, consumption habits in Europe have undergone notable changes, reflecting evolving societal values and environmental awareness. Only a few enterprises have embraced anti-marketing

strategies to promote the sufficiency model. Notable examples include the brand Houdini Sportswear, rooted in its Swedish origins, is deeply committed to sustainability, focusing on promoting more sustainable consumption.

The company's "Houdini Manifesto" highlights its mission to transition to a circular system and combat overconsumption, aiming to leave a positive impact on the world. While the term "sufficiency" is not explicitly mentioned, it underpins the company's values, as seen in its commitment to "do more with less." Houdini also emphasizes product durability, offering initiatives like "Houdini Reuse" and in-store repair services to extend the lifespan of its products.(Garcia-Ortega et al.,2024).

A simple solution lies in consumers' hands: resisting the allure of trends and embracing sufficiency as the new trend. By shifting our consumption patterns, we can make sufficiency not only socially and environmentally ideal, but appealing to our own benefit and for the environment as well.

The challenge relies on promoting the idea of shopping less, contrasting the contemporary materialist society, and opting for thoughtful buying. This will be achieved by promoting the value of acquiring durable, quality garments over fast fashion driven solely by impulses.

2.1 ADOPTION PRODUCT SERVICE SYSTEM (PSS)

While Product-Service Systems (PSS) are often considered sustainable business models, their actual sustainability depends on many factors, such as the type of PSS (with performance-based models being more sustainable than product-based ones), product type, logistics management, and the practices they replace. The literature on PSS is divided, with some viewing it as a competitive business model and others seeing it as inherently sustainable. However, the concept of "Sustainable PSS" (SPSS) lacks a clear definition, and what makes a PSS truly sustainable is still unclear, especially when analyzed from a strong sustainability perspective. Roman, P., Thiry, G., Muylaert, C., Ruwet, C., & Maréchal, K. (2023). Defining and identifying strongly sustainable product-service systems (SSPSS). *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 391, 136295. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2023.136295>

The PSS model applied in the fashion industry has met some limitations that had been previously studied such as clothing sector, for instance morphology, as consumers are unsure if PSS clothes will fit them. This is due to the time and effort consumers have the habit of investing time in finding clothes that suit them, making them hesitant to change their practices.

This model confronts other subconscious barriers. For instance, when talking about fashion, pleasure is derived from the act of purchasing, while in mobility, it is linked to owning a high-performance object. Payment schemes also influence consumer beliefs, with pay-per-use options being more attractive than subscriptions.

Hence the need for tailored strategies to address sector-specific barriers and transform them into motivators for PSS (Product-Service System) adoption.

In Belgium, some fashion businesses are adopting the PSS (Product-Service System) model. For example, the Belgian fashion brand **.dressr** from Antwerp has built an impressive platform that creates a win-win situation for both renters and local sustainable brands. Members enjoy the freedom of a nearly unlimited wardrobe without the cost, ecological impact, and hassle of ownership. Their business model offers two sustainable fashion alternatives: the PSS model and the incorporation of sustainable brands as added value, .dressr adapts to consumer needs by offering both a one-time rental option and a membership model with exclusive benefits for users. Additionally, brands receive support in reducing their environmental footprint, gain valuable data on the quality and rental performance of their products, and are compensated for each item rented.

Despite barriers, there stays an opportunity to explore alternative approaches to drive the adoption of this business model in Brussels, doing so not only promotes sustainable fashion options but also offers significant benefits for consumers such a reduced cost per use that reflects positively on people's economy.

Rent. Return. Repeat.



pieces arrive clean and
in perfect condition



choose from one-time
rental or a membership



fitting sessions in our
Antwerp showroom



900+ premium styles in
various sizes

Source: dressr.be

2.2 SECOND - HAND

The increasing popularity of the second hand, vintage, luxury second hand and kilogram shops has continued through the recent years, especially among young generations, one of the possible reasons being related to their higher pro-environment behavior of gen Z and millennials, and affordable prices, moreover, this business model is increasingly attracting people to sell and buy.

"Le Petits Riens" is a prime example of a sustainable business dedicated to selling second-hand clothing with a mission to create a positive societal impact by combating poverty and supporting individuals in precarious situations. This Belgian enterprise has gained significant brand recognition among the participants of this research.

Despite not heavily relying on social media for promotion, Le Petits Riens has established a strong brand presence in Brussels, as evidenced by the widespread recognition of their stores and donation containers. This demonstrates that a genuine commitment to social well-being and a clear purpose can effectively position a brand, even without a dominant social media presence. Source : (Les Petits Riens.be)



Les petits riens collecting containers Brussels.

Contrasting perspectives on second hand might question its advantages as a sustainable fashion business model. There are some evident downsides such as the carbon emissions generated in the transport for the sales process when the selling process is not local, and the second one, it might lead to over consumption due to lower prices that incentivizes higher levels of consumption

For instance, the online store “Vinted also highly recognized second-hand platform in Europe has among its most frequent consumers individuals aged 36-45, as revealed by a study conducted by the Joko shopping application, there’s a notable surge in the proportion of 18-30-year-olds among its regular clientele, reaching 22% by 2023. *Le Monde*. (2024, mayo 17). Les jeunes accros aux fripes: «J'avais tendance à me dire que, comme c'était de la fripe et que ce n'était pas cher, je pouvais acheter encore plus de choses». *Le Monde*.

This presents an intriguing paradox: while choosing second-hand, particularly online, is often seen as a more sustainable option, it doesn't necessarily result in reduced consumption. The appeal of second-hand platform, that offer significantly lower prices, accessibility, and a wide variety of choices, makes them appealing to consumers, especially younger generations.

However, these very benefits can sometimes lead to overconsumption, as the ease and affordability of purchasing second-hand items may encourage buying in excess rather than mindful

consumption. This highlights the complexity of sustainability in the fashion industry, where the intentions behind choosing second-hand do not always align with sustainable outcomes.

Buying and selling second-hand clothing on platforms may increase the number of transactions and the associated transport-related carbon impacts. This underscores the need for a more critical examination of these practices and the consideration of potential rebound effects they might create.

2.3UPCYCLING

“Textile wastes, including clothing (retail stocks or personal used items) and fabrics (knitting, woven or non-woven industrial products) from various sources, need to lose negative image achieving new consumers’ value and to become “raw materials” to close the loop.” Marques, A. D., Moreira, B., Cunha, J., & Moreira, S. (2019). From waste to fashion – A fashion upcycling contest

Upcycling has enormous potential to be embraced by both creative and non-creative individuals seeking a unique style. Beyond that, the fundamental principle of learning how to repair and adapt garments to fit current needs (such as size changes or season changes) is crucial.

On average, repair can increase a garment’s use by 75% (source: Ellen MacArthur Foundation). In an economy where repairing clothes tends to be more costly than buying new garments from fast fashion, people are more inclined to discard their clothes instead of repairing them.

Sewing is traditionally associated with the feminine gender. However, fostering a culture where everyone, regardless of background, learns from a young age how to repair their own clothes can result in meaningful change. This simple, learned skill can make a significant difference, increasing our consciousness about taking care of our clothing.

Upcycling workshops also have potential as a growing trend but need to be adapted to be affordable, as price is a critical factor for consumers.

Educating people about making their clothes last for a longer time by transforming them, adapting them or merely to keep them in good conditions to have a longer life, is a basic principle to avoid over consumption and at the same time adopt sufficiency as a sustainable alternative.

By adopting these innovative business approaches, the fashion industry can transition toward a more sustainable future, one that not only balances economic objectives but also prioritizes environmental stewardship and social responsibility. This transformation requires a concerted

effort from all industry stakeholders, including designers, manufacturers, retailers, and consumers, to embrace new values and practices that support long-term sustainability and ethical growth.

CHAPTER 3 THE ROLE OF BRANDS IN THE TRANSITION TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The role of fashion brands in this transition is profoundly impactful. This research briefly analyzes examples of sustainable brands that have successfully applied the principles of business model archetypes, providing insights into the evolution of contemporary brands that are achieving success by adhering to respectful principles toward both people and the planet.

In 2018, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) released the “Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action” in Poland, which is committed to promoting the fashion industry while reducing its impact on the environment and negative impact on society to help achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In 2019, a global alliance of 56 companies joined the “Fashion Pact” in France, covering more than 200 fashion brands such as Gucci, H&M, and Chanel, to combat the industry's negative impact on climate, biodiversity, and oceans. According to Ponte et al. (2023)

Moreover, the journey toward genuine change is a challenge that most brands do not embrace, despite their claims in marketing campaigns, often resulting in greenwashing practices.

A large investigation by the Changing Markets Foundation published in July 2023 found that three-quarters of clothing donated to major fashion stores for reuse or recycling are destroyed, abandoned in warehouses, or sent to Africa where they are often shredded or dumped. Using Apple Air Tags, the NGO tracked 21 items donated to stores like H&M, Zara, C&A, and others across Europe. Despite slogans promising sustainability, most items were not reused or recycled. Instead, they were destroyed or exported, with only five items reused in Europe. fate of donated clothes, calling it a form of greenwashing. The EU is planning new waste rules but needs stricter measures to ensure clothing sustainability. Source: Changing Markets Foundation, 2024

Today, almost every brand claims some form of sustainability, including the fast-fashion giant SHEIN. According to their CEO, Sky Xu, “Everyone deserves a more equitable and sustainable

future. And I am confident that SHEIN can become a catalyst for that transition.” However, SHEIN is criticized for excessive production, unfair wages, and unethical practices. Source : SHEIN Group

Zara, a leading brand from the Inditex Group, has promoted its reuse and repair services to extend the life of garments as part of its sustainability efforts. Yet, as of July 2024, these services have not been implemented in Brussels. Additionally, the cost and effort required for repairs often lead consumers to replace damaged garments with new ones due to convenience and accessibility.

The credibility of fast fashion brands is complicated by their association with greenwashing. These companies spend heavily on marketing and advertising to create a consumer-friendly image, yet many initiatives are superficial. Current regulations lack the rigor needed to ensure a truthful representation of their sustainability practices.

Nevertheless, some brands lead the example of transparency and innovation regarding sustainable practices, for instance the following ones :

Patagonia

The climbing gear brand founded in 1973 in Ventura, California, . Even with Patagonia's expansion, founder Yvon Chouinard remained focused on making products sustainably, treating employees well, and engaging in corporate responsibility with transparency.

Patagonia is a blueprint that embraces the Donut economy principles, being pioneer of sustainability practices such as promoting sufficiency, repairability, second hand, sustainable materials and durability of their products as well as promoting Anti consumption campaigns, they aim to create awareness among their customers before purchasing, becoming a disruptor of traditional marketing that merely aims to increase sales.

For instance, their ad campaign “Don’t buy this jacket displayed at the New York Times in 2011 as part as their black Friday campaign, creating controversy for their contradiction to traditional marketing strategies. Source : Patagonia website.

Stella Mc Cartney

A lifelong vegetarian and staunch advocate for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), has consistently designed and produced clothing and accessories that are "animal-free," avoiding the use of leather and fur. Her commitment to sustainability is evident in her transparent and traceable supply chains. Her stores are constructed with recyclable materials, and many operate using sustainable energy sources. Since 2013, McCartney has published an Environmental Profit and Loss report (EP&L) to assess the environmental impact of her supply chain "from farms to finished products."

In the fashion industry, which is constantly seeking innovation, McCartney believes that taking responsibility for the environment is "the most modern thing that you can do."

However, as sustainability and worker rights have gained prominence in the mainstream, there has been a growing public demand for fashion that is consciously designed and produced. Millennial and Generation Z consumers now rank social and environmental responsibility among the top five factors they consider before making a purchase.

"Millennials want their brands to behave responsibly," says Elisa Niemtow, director of consumer sectors for Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), the world's largest nonprofit professional network dedicated to sustainability. (Thomas, D. 2019)

Veja

"At VEJA, instead of relying on marketing hype to have an impact, we'd rather rely on collective intelligence." Since 2005, VEJA has been redefining sneaker production by combining social projects, economic justice, and ecological materials. Their sneakers are crafted using organic cotton from Brazil and Peru for the canvas and laces, Amazonian rubber for the soles, and innovative materials made from recycled plastic bottles and polyester. This commitment to sustainability and fair-trade means that producing a pair of VEJA sneakers costs five times more than conventional methods.

VEJA's manufacturing process takes place in high-standard factories in Brazil and Portugal, ensuring quality and ethical working conditions. In Europe, the logistics for their stores and e-commerce are managed by Log'ins, a company dedicated to professional and social inclusion.

A core aspect of the VEJA model is reallocating funds typically spent on advertising to support the people and processes involved in sneaker production. By eliminating traditional marketing expenses, VEJA invests in fair compensation for raw material producers, continually optimizing

social and environmental impacts, and maintaining respectful working conditions throughout the production chain. This approach allows VEJA to focus on what truly matters: the well-being of the communities and environments involved in creating their sneakers.

Vestiaire collective

Vestiaire Collective is the leading global app for desirable pre-loved fashion. It is dedicated to transforming the fashion industry for a more sustainable future by promoting the circular fashion movement as an alternative to overproduction and overconsumption and the wasteful practices of the fashion industry.

It provides its community with inspiration, tools and features to lead the change as they sell and buy unique pre-loved pieces from each other's wardrobes. The platform is unique thanks to its highly engaged community and its rare, desirable inventory of 3 million items. Launched in Paris in 2009, Vestiaire Collective is a Certified B Corporation with offices in Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Singapore and a tech hub in Berlin. B Corporation. Source :bcorporation.net

It is time for fashion companies to acknowledge their responsibility as major polluters and take bold steps toward sustainability. By doing so, they can lead the way in transforming the industry into a force for positive change, addressing the urgent environmental challenges we face today and contributing to a more sustainable future.

3.1 TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

To simplify the assessment of how to find a sustainable brand over those who are not sustainable and advertise themselves as so, becoming a greenwashing trap for consumers that might believe their sustainable efforts. A new tool that involves transparency of the process, supported by nowadays technology advances is the use of blockchain as a sustainable indicator.

Blockchain technology could create significant value for consumers and organizations in the fashion retail sector by offering transparency and reliable labeling of sustainability. This

technology has the potential to build new trust in sustainability labeling and set up new industry standards.

However, studies show that buying decisions are heavily influenced by both price and product ratings. Therefore, we do not examine the effect of blockchain-enabled sustainability labeling in isolation but rather in a context where price and product ratings also play a crucial role in the purchasing decision. To the best of our knowledge, this comprehensive approach has not been previously studied. Source : Everledger website.

3.2 DIGITAL FASHION

Fashion, in its pure sense of creativity and free expression, can still be fun and allow people to experiment with unique styles, trends, and self-expression. In the digital world, where people are increasingly active users, the concept of digital fashion respects the principle of people's preferences for keeping a unique style while following trends.

Despite its futuristic concept, digital fashion, which first appeared among gamers personalizing their avatars, blends perfectly with the increased use of digital platforms that present digital features such as the commonly used filters with body tracking found on Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, and others.

On these platforms, users play with features like ears, crowns, makeup, hairstyles, and more. There is a vast world to experiment with digital fashion through social media, which has significant growth potential in the coming years. The use of these augmented reality technologies has the potential to preserve the beauty of design and fashion for many brands, designers, and users, enabling them to experiment with their sense of fashion.



Digital clothing designed by virtual fashion house :The Fabricant.

Some recognized luxury brands have already joined this market with success, creating perceived value in intangible clothing. What they sell is the designs, styles, and the status of their brands. Hence, the main concepts and drives behind why people buy clothing, aside from mere functionality, are satisfied without compromising the environment, proving that the possibilities are immense when we use technology and social media creatively

3.3 SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Materials themselves can be a source of solutions for the fashion industry, for instance the employment of “algae” as a potential carbon sink and regenerative material, algae hold almost miraculous properties. The brand ALGIX is harnessing its power to create Bloom, a bioplastic foam used in sneakers for brands like Adidas and TOMS. Similarly, Notpla produces edible, biodegradable water sachets, and Evoware transforms algae into bags and other products.

These innovations prove how the issue of plastic waste is pushing industrial innovators to get creative. Beyond bioplastics, Adidas has also topped the 2020 Sustainable Cotton rankings by sourcing 99 percent Better Cotton-certified and 1 percent organic material. Meanwhile, Nike is making waves with its Space Hippie collection, a line of shoes with a lower carbon footprint that incorporates recycled materials like plastic water bottles, T-shirts, waste foam, and textile scraps.

The shift to regenerative fashion materials is clearly underway, with plant-based leather emerging as the next big trend.

The development of alternatives to animal leather is bringing eco-entrepreneurs into the spotlight. Faux leather materials are now being produced from various sources, including mushrooms (Amadou and Mycoworks), pineapple leaves (Piñatex), cork (Corkor), and even newer sources such as eggplant skins (by chef Omar Sartawi), cacti (Adriano Di Marti), and apple peels (Beyond Leather Materials ApS).

All these alternatives will need to prove their versatility and durability to match traditional leather. However, the challenge is worthwhile for the sake of animals, the environment, and the climate. (Visser,2022)

CHAPTER 4 CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

“Consumers do not think how they feel, they don't say what they think, and they don't do what they say” David Ogilvy.

To understand the consumer behavior, it is important to understand the concepts of wants and needs: needs are fundamental and essential for human existence, while wants are the personalized ways in which individuals choose to fulfil these needs. Kotler's framework helps to understand that while they cannot create needs, they can certainly influence wants by creating products and marketing messages that resonate with consumers' desires and aspirations.

A need can be classified:

- Utilitarian: desire to achieve some functional or practical benefit.
- Hedonic: experiential & subjective, involving emotional responses or fantasies.
- Biogenic: need for certain elements necessary to keep life such as food, water, air, shelter.
- Psychogenic: needs for status, power, and affiliation, and reflect the priorities of a culture.

Humans are creatures of habit, and 95% of buying behavior is driven by the anticipation of a reward. This reward is not just about the product itself; the journey toward obtaining it plays a crucial role. Consumers buy what they want, not what they need, because of the way it makes them feel, hence a good brand will make it easy for consumers to narrow the gap between what they believe and what they do.

Source: Syllabus Ichech Consumer Behavior

The arise of interest in sustainable products and services is a paradox, as this interest does not translate necessary in their purchases . Despite the increment of consciousness of consumers specially the millennial generation, the researchers and academics have found certain insights of what lead people to go from merely interest in sustainability, to narrow the intention -action gap.

For instance: the use of social influence, scores of studies show people have the inherent desire to fit and belong, at the same time we as humans imitate people around us to feel part and belong, for example people are influenced to install solar panels by near neighbours who have done so. At the same time the human posology suggests that creating a healthy competence is also a good strategy to impulse people to be more sustainable. Ultimately, marketers have a role to play in raising awareness and influencing policymakers, ensuring the discipline contributes positively to environmental objectives.

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Source: Harvard business review.

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The fast fashion model capitalizes on this anticipation by offering consumers significant advantages, such as accessibility and affordable prices, which create an easy reward scheme. Additionally, fast fashion's emphasis on novelty, innovation, and the latest trends provides constant stimuli, encouraging consumers to engage in frequent and even excessive consumption of clothing.

In addition to understanding customer needs and wants, it's essential to grasp the journey they take from the initial consideration to the final purchase. Philip Kotler's traditional purchasing funnel breaks down this journey into five distinct stages: Awareness, Consideration, Preference, Intention, and Purchase. Each of these steps represents a pivotal moment in the consumer's decision-making

process, where businesses have the opportunity to influence and guide their decisions. By understanding and addressing each stage, companies can more effectively meet consumer needs, leading to higher satisfaction and improved sales outcomes.



Figure 2. Buying funnel Kotler.

Studies offer key contributions by linking Firm-Generated Content (FGC) and User-Generated Content (UGC) to different stages of the marketing funnel. The findings show UGC is more effective at raising “brand awareness” due to its volume and valence, while FGC has a stronger persuasive impact during the consideration and purchase intent stages, particularly due to its vividness. This underscores the importance of FGC in mid-funnel activities.

Additionally, studies show that brands with higher corporate reputations benefit more from FGC, whereas those with lower reputations should focus on building credibility before leveraging FGC strategies. For these brands, UGC can still provide positive outcomes, especially in driving awareness.

The effectiveness of both depends specially on which part of the funnel they give better outcomes , while UGC is effective at the top (awareness) and bottom (satisfaction) of the funnel, FGC plays a crucial role in the mid-funnel stages, potentially leading to higher sales. This insight highlights the importance of investing in well-crafted FGC for stronger marketing impact. Colicev, A., Kumar, A., & O'Connor, P. (2019). Modeling the relationship between firm and user-generated content and the stages of the marketing funnel.

The rapid growth of social media as a marketing tool requires deeper understanding of its role in the customer journey. As consumers increasingly rely on social media platforms for information, recommendations, and inspiration, businesses have the opportunity to guide their purchasing decisions more effectively. By strategically leveraging social media, companies can not only raise awareness about sustainable fashion but also create compelling narratives that resonate with consumers' values.

This can lead to a stronger preference for eco-friendly options, ultimately driving more conscious consumption patterns. In doing so, social media becomes a powerful catalyst for promoting sustainable fashion alternatives, helping to shift consumer behavior towards more responsible and ethical choices. Understanding and applying these benefits is essential for brands efforts to influence the modern consumer's journey from awareness to purchase in a way that aligns with sustainability goals.

4.1 UNDERSTANDING CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: THE NEUROMARKETING APPROACH.

Decision-making requires evaluating relevant sensory stimuli to make the proper choice. It involves several cognitive processes, such as attention, learning, working memory, and the motor system, and has been studied extensively in the context of marketing and neuromarketing . Aiming to find out and analyze certain brain processes produced by stimuli from marketing elements to explain the reasons behind acts and the decision-making process of individuals.

Going deep in the understanding of consumers behavior neuromarketing studies ,through the use of MRI and EEG scans indicate that humans might mimic others' interactions with objects. These scans reveal that regions of the brain believed to contain mirror neurons, such as the inferior frontal cortex and the superior parietal lobule, are activated both when a person performs an action and when they observe another person performing the same action.

The evidence for mirror neurons in humans is compelling. A distinguished professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of California has even compared their significance to DNA in biology, suggesting that mirror neurons are fundamental to understanding psychology.(Lindstrom, M.2009)

Neuromarketing studies help us understand why social media is a successful marketing tool for brands aiming to reach consumers in a more natural and subtle way. Influencers and traditional visual advertisements on social media create an appeal that audiences want to emulate. This triggers a desire to mimic the actions, appearance, and behaviors of those they follow, leading to purchases driven by the aspiration to feel as the influencers project to feel.

Neuromarketing reveals that the success of social media marketing lies in its ability to tap into consumers' emotions and social desires, subtly influencing their purchasing decisions by creating relatable and aspirational content.

4.2 SUSTAINABLE FASHION BEHAVIOR (SFB)

“While research on fashion sustainability is new and emerging, current evidence suggests that consumers are more inclined to implement ethical forms of consumption (Carrington et al., 2021; Kong et al., 2021; Pangarkar et al., 2021). Young consumers are particularly interested in these topics (McNeill and Venter, 2019; Park and Lin, 2020), and market research has found an ongoing trend in which sustainability and more conscious shopping have become important priorities in the purchasing decisions of the younger generation” (McKinsey, 2019; Roberts, 2019).

Earlier researches acknowledge the early stage of understanding consumer motivations for sustainable fashion. A study conducted among 2,694 Italian consumers in 2020 aimed to grasp consumer behavioral intentions towards sustainable fashion, given the significant influence of the Italian fashion industry globally.

Research in Italy investigated how environmental concern, perceived value, and consumer familiarity influence behavioral intention for sustainable fashion, concluding that perceived value significantly affects both purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium for eco-friendly products, highlighting their importance in shaping consumer behavior in the sustainable fashion market.

Focusing on two dimensions of consumer behavioral intention: purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium for sustainable fashion, with environmental concerns appearing as a dominant factor, positively influencing both purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium for sustainable clothing, regardless of the specific eco-material used. Factors as: consumer familiarity with a product and sociodemographic such as gender significantly changes purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium for sustainable fashion made with eco-materials, highlighting woman in particular, showing a higher purchase intention towards buying garments made with sustainable materials.(Dangelico, R. M., Alvino, L., & Fraccascia, L.2022).

Previous research provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing consumer decision-making. These valuable insights offer context for this research, especially given the high number of Italian residents in Brussels. This understanding will help this thesis to better identify the drivers behind perceptions of sustainable fashion in the Brussels market.

Understanding the motivations driving consumers' engagement in *Sustainable Fashion Behavior (SFB)* holds profound significance for businesses and policymakers committed to advancing environmental and social sustainability.

In addition of the importance of understanding the consumer's SFB , the VBN theory, also known as the Value-Belief-Norm theory, is a psychological model that aims to explain pro-environmental behavior by examining the interplay between personal values, environmental beliefs, and social norms.

Developed within the field of environmental psychology, the theory posits that individuals' environmental values, which prioritize ecological concerns, influence their environmental beliefs and perceptions of the importance and urgency of environmental issues, and, in turn, shape their environmental norms internal moral standards related to environmental protection, and external the perceived expectations of others regarding environmentally responsible behavior.

According to the VBN theory, individuals who hold strong environmental values are more likely to develop environmental beliefs that emphasize the importance of protecting the environment. These beliefs, in turn, lead to the internalization of environmental norms, motivating individuals to engage in pro-environmental behavior to align their actions with their values and beliefs.

Additionally, external social norms, such as the behavior of peers or societal messages promoting environmental responsibility, can further reinforce individuals' pro-environmental norms and influence their behavior.

Overall, the VBN theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals' values, beliefs, and norms interact to shape their environmental attitudes and behaviors, offering insights into strategies for promoting sustainability and environmental conservation.

Understanding the costumer behavior drivers towards sustainable fashion require a deep analysis of the diverse factors that play a role in their buying decisions, as they differ from their sustainable behavior in general, the Sustainable Fashion Behaviors share some aspects such as the influence of environmental values, beliefs, and norms. Moreover , the existence of a puzzling “green gap,” wherein there’s a noticeable disparity between the environmentally conscious values professed and their actual consumption habits. It is essential to figure out the value people place on environmental causes and societal well-being, and to connect this with the perceived value they assign to clothing and fashion in their daily lives.

This thesis looks to explore this connection more deeply, particularly through qualitative research, to understand how individuals translate their sustainable behaviors into fashion purchasing decisions. Often, these behaviors do not align, as the negative impacts of the fashion industry are less known to consumers compared to other industries like transportation and food, resulting often in a lack of responsible actions when buying clothing understanding that consumer's behavior can't be described in one word, it's a very complex interplay between social, cultural, and individual factors that evolve with time is essential to create tailored strategies to attract consumers into sustainable fashion alternatives.

4.3 THE EVOCATION OF EMOTIONS

Effective messaging is crucial for sparking consumer interest in sustainability and guiding them through the purchasing journey. Today, consumers are increasingly skeptical of brands' sustainability claims and wary of greenwashing practices. This challenges brands to think creatively, delivering messages that resonate deeply with their target audience and genuinely connect with their values.

The ongoing discourse regarding effective communication strategies for fostering sustainable fashion consumption is still a subject of interest, because of the increasing focus on sustainable forms of fashion consumption. In this context, researchers have focused into the efficacy of positive and negative message framing as mechanisms for promoting sustainable fashion choices. Specifically, these studies have investigated how highlighting the beneficial versus detrimental environmental consequences of selecting second-hand clothing influences consumer behavior.

Through rigorous experimentation, researchers have uncovered valuable findings.

It was seen that messages framed in a positive light, emphasizing the benefits of opting for second-hand clothing, proved to be more influential in prompting consumers to engage in sustainable fashion practices.

This effectiveness was attributed, in part, to the emotion of elevation that such positively framed messages evoke in consumers. This emotion, characterized by feelings of upliftment and positivity, appears to play a pivotal role in driving individuals towards sustainable consumption behaviors. Specifically, consumers' emotional reactions were influenced by elevation, aligning with their desire for positive experiences in fashion consumption. (White et al., 2019)

Positive message framing consistently elicited elevation, regardless of consumers' perceived ethicality, while the impact of negative framing on elevation depended on consumers' subjective beliefs. Elevation appeared as a key driver of all consumer responses to sustainable fashion messaging, emphasizing its pivotal role in fostering sustainable behavior.

When brands evoke positive emotions through visuals on social media it is an effective strategy to foster sustainable consciousness, The sense of progress is also a significant motivator for people to act.

For instance, if the advertisement of a fashion brand communicates the number of trees or liters of water saved with the production of their clothing compared to fast fashion brands, this combination of positive messaging that make customers feel elevated as they contribute, and a measurable progress (the liters of water or trees saved) creating a profound impact on their behavior.

4.4 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FASHION

"Social media have changed marketing by shifting the scalability of influence, and the ways in which consumers share, evaluate and choose information" (Smithee, 2011)

The rapid growth of social media usage has significantly impacted consumer behavior due to the interactions related to consumption on these platforms. Social media, along with the ability for consumers to consult one another, has redefined the traditional brand-consumer relationship, empowering consumers like never before.

It has shifted marketing dynamics by expanding the reach of influence and altering how consumers share, evaluate, and choose information. With the rise of platforms like blogs, online forums, and social networks, consumers' voices have gained strength, and companies now understand that marketing to today's tech-savvy consumers requires engaging in two-way communication. (Moustakas, 2016).

Instagram, one of the most influential social media platforms in the fashion industry, has a significant impact. The use of hashtags to categorize trends and topics—such as the popular hashtag #ootd (Outfit of the Day), which by late 2018 had appeared in over two hundred million posts from influencers and their followers—demonstrates this influence. However, this phenomenon has also contributed to negative trends, such as the 'Cinderella Syndrome,' where individuals feel pressured to avoid being seen on social media in the same outfit more than once.

Consequently, many consumers buy clothing online, wear it once for a photo, and return it for free, causing challenges for several brands and harming the environment due to the transportation, and the big percentage of returned clothing that become waste. (Thomas, D. 2019)

Besides harmful trends that promote over consumption and waste generation, social media has changed the rules of traditional one-sided marketing, nowadays consumers can openly share their thoughts and preferences with brands and retailers, expressing their desires, emotions, and concerns.

This feedback provides brands with insights that go beyond surface-level data, resembling a comprehensive analysis of consumer sentiment. Fashion companies that excel are those that integrate these insights into a broader strategy that transcends conventional categories like luxury and athleisure. They establish a genuine philosophy focused around social and environmental consciousness, which resonates deeply with modern consumers. (Moustakas, 2016).

Effective social media strategies appear as a pivotal tool in promoting awareness of sustainable fashion, tailoring marketing messages to resonate with consumers' sustainability values and beliefs, harnessing the potential of social media platforms, forging partnerships with influencers, and crafting compelling storytelling campaigns all contribute to enhancing consumer engagement.

Emphasizing the environmental and social benefits of products, rooted in biosphere values, can effectively capture consumers' attention and foster their intention to adopt sustainable fashion practices.

Furthermore, businesses can harness digital solutions such as user-friendly mobile apps and e-commerce platforms to enhance the accessibility and convenience of second-hand fashion options. Leveraging technology-driven solutions for improving supply chains and tracking product sustainability further bolsters the sustainability credentials of fashion consumption.

Social media as a communication channel for sustainable fashion allows brands of any size to reach their target market and delve into creative strategies to connect with their consumers.

Studies that contrast digital communication strategies from slow fashion brands such as : (YosoLOVEamor, LIFEGIST, ECOALF, Alohas, and ECOOLOGY) highlight the public's growing interest in sustainability, ethics, and corporate social responsibility in fashion, emphasizing the necessity for slow fashion brands to implement robust online strategies, as well as a substantial interest in sustainability and ethical practices among consumers.

Slow fashion brands, although smaller and less resource-rich than fast fashion giants, can achieve significant impact through effective online strategies. Underscoring the importance of “genuine engagement and transparency “in communications to avoid greenwashing and build consumer trust. (Velasco-Molpeceres, Mateos-González, S. 2023).

Effective messaging, creativity and tailored digital strategies, on social media, are crucial for small brands to compete with fast fashion giants.

For instance, “Vestiaire collective” is an example of creative messaging with their campaign the campaign titled “think first , buy second”, they succeed to highlight the textile waste dumped on main streets showing the effects of over consumption driven by the fast fashion industry. The campaign presents a short-animated video generated with AI showing piles of discarded fast fashion littering Times Square, with the message: ‘what if fast fashion waste was on your doorstep’

Communicating this issue regarding by covering famous locations , that are familiar for consumers with the use of technology and creativity, by transforming the overconsumption problem into a "personal issue" and presenting it in a more tangible manner, it evokes emotions in people, creating consciousness. Making it visually impactful rather than simply expressing it with numbers or graphics.

The campaign presents a short-animated video generated with AI showing piles of discarded fast fashion littering Times Square, with the message: ‘what if fast fashion waste was on your doorstep’



Image source : Instagram Vestiaire Collective

According to Forbes, users spend 88% more time on websites with video content. Videos not only engage consumers but also drive traffic, as people retain 95% of a message from a video compared to just 10% from text. A study by Brightcove found that 74% of consumers say branded videos influence their purchasing decisions. To effectively influence buying habits and build brand support, create videos that connect emotionally with your audience.

Stories that evoke emotion, such as helping a customer achieve a significant milestone, resonate deeply and increase the likelihood of action. Additionally, using relatable elements like location, music, and themes can further engage the audience and make the content more memorable.

The use of social media advertisement, through influencer collaborations, and storytelling campaigns can enhance consumer awareness and engagement. For instance, in the case of second-hand clothing website stores and online stores, can focus on promoting the biosphere value of their products and emphasize the social and environmental benefits of using them to attract consumers.

Additionally, to improve sustainable fashion consumption, businesses can create digital solutions such as user-friendly mobile apps or e-commerce platforms for second-hand clothing. Rewards systems has shown success to engage consumers, as well as creating a sense of belonging and loyalty to the brands.

One of the goals of this thesis is to discover which sustainable brands have market positioning among Brussels residents and name their relationship with sustainable brands. In addition, identifying the impact of sustainable fashion social media campaigns and identifying the ones that are reaching the complex Brussel's market and why they have proven to be relatable.

CHAPTER 5 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

5.1 DEMOGRAPHICS

The results of this quantitative survey, applied to 105 residents of Brussels metropolitan area, brought interesting insights. From a sample of 105 people, 57% identified as women, 40% identified as men, and the remaining 3% identified as other, without specifying.

The place of origin of the participants to the survey was quite diverse, ranging from people living in Brussels city to individuals' living in all the different communes of Brussels area and the metropolitan area. Some participants were residents of cities nearby Brussels, with a slight predominance of people living in the communes of Etterbeek and Anderlecht.

It is very likely that this diversity had an influence on the results. The broad spectrum of places of origin contributed to the representativeness of the sample. There is space for other studies to go beyond this information and contrast the different Belgian regions, such as Wallonia and Flanders, to analyze their different consumption habits; this would certainly generate different outcomes and enlarge the scope.

Regarding occupational status, most of the sample was employed or self-employed (62%). This would lead to the assumption that they have an income that allows them to cover their basic needs, including clothing. A considerable percentage of the respondents were students. This is partly due to the local tropism of the study linked to the fact that this survey was shared among students from ICHEC Management School, students from ULB (Université libre de Bruxelles) and EPFC . Moreover, it is not specified if these students have a source of income, for instance if they have part time jobs, that could be a factor impacting their purchase power. Only a low percentage were NEETS (neither in employment, education or training).

The decision not to include a question about their income range was made after a preliminary survey suggested people felt considerably uncomfortable sharing their financial situation, which might have biased their answers related to their purchasing decisions.

Gender
105 respuestas

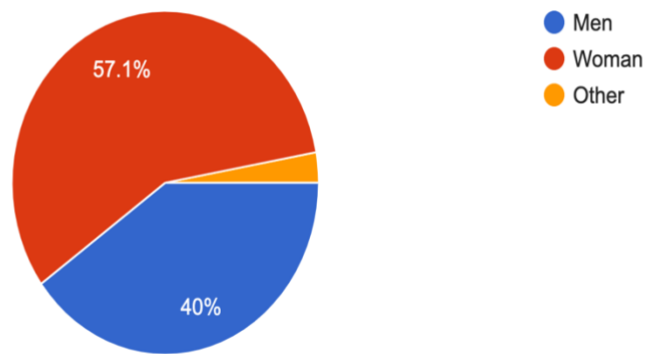


Figure 3. Gender composition of the audience.

Municipality
105 respuestas

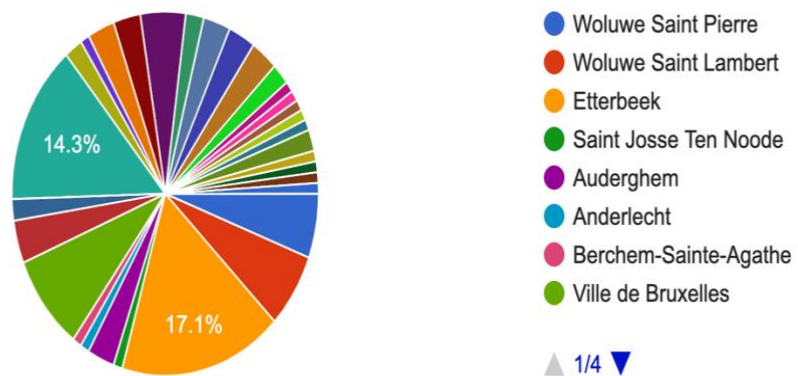


Figure 4. Municipality of the audience.

Occupation

105 respuestas

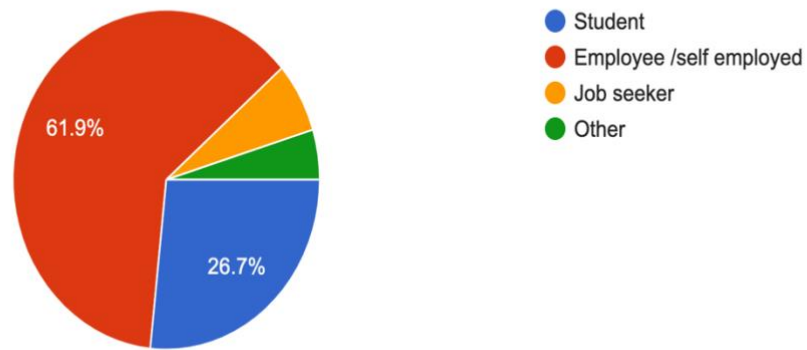


Figure 5. Occupation of the audience.

Age range

105 respuestas

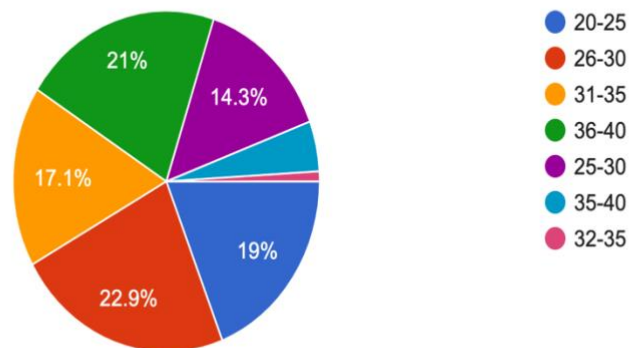


Figure 6. Age range of the audience.

There was an error in the age ranges, with a one-year variation between the groups 25-30 and 31-35. This was promptly rectified and updated. Consequently, the graphic shows a slight variation in the age groups. It is expected that this detail of ± 1 year will not significantly impact the results.

5.2 SOCIAL MEDIA PREFERENCES

The preferred social media channels are led by Instagram (78 out of 105 people), YouTube (63 out of 105), and Facebook (53 out of 105). The findings contrast with early beliefs that Facebook was no longer among the top three social media used, as it is still actively used by 53 of the 105 people surveyed.

Instagram, the most widely-used social media, is characterized by attractive visual content that works with a personalized algorithm costumed to each person preferences.

Instagram as a marketing tool for brands and small and large enterprises is a great medium that targets potential consumers in a more direct way with engaging audiovisual content. Besides displaying some traditional ads, it also relies on influencers and micro-influencers, switching the concept of traditional ads into subtle recommendations with a more authentic touch that is perceived as more reliable than traditional ones. This makes social media recommendations by influencers a contemporary style of word-of-mouth for this generation.

Which social media channels are you most active on? Mark all of them

105 respuestas

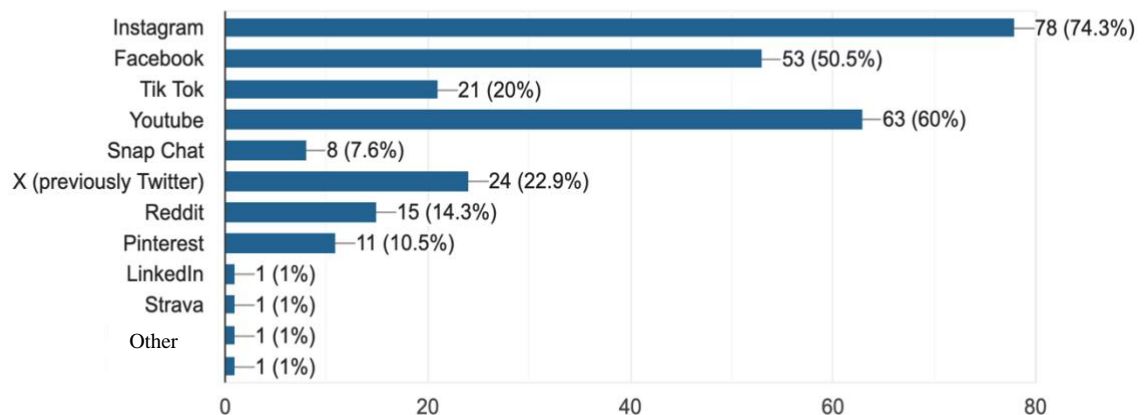


Figure 7. Social media channels chosen by audience.

How many hours per day do you spend in average on social media?

105 respuestas

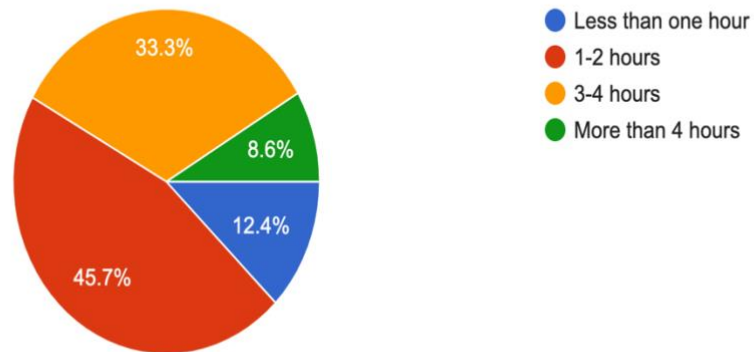


Figure 8. Spent time on social media

The measurement of time spent on social media had some limitations, as people often do not measure it correctly, and this could vary according to their daily activities. The average time spent on social media was 1-2 hours, followed by a considerable sum of 3-4 hours. In total, 80% of the surveyed individuals, aged 20-40, confirmed the elevated level of social media use in their daily lives, proving the power of social media nowadays in the chosen target group.

Research from the search engine WhistleOut shows that Instagram and Facebook display the most advertising in user feeds among all social media platforms. On Instagram, a platform favored by fashion and luxury brands, ads are shown at a higher rate to users who spend more time on the app. WhistleOut suggests that Instagram might be relying on the fact that these users enjoy the platform enough to tolerate a few more ads in their feeds. Fashion United. (2020, August 11)

5.3 SUSTAINABILITY AND FASHION PERCEPTION

Being retained in consumers' minds is a big challenge for brands, especially nowadays when we are exposed to hundreds of them across all media. Nevertheless, people struggle to identify or remember sustainable fashion brands, as they also confront the complexity to determine which one is in reality sustainable. The results of the open question, "mention sustainable brands that you know," provided interesting insights, such as the following:

Regarding the choices of brands that are considered as sustainable among participants of the research , the leading ones were as follows in order of mentions:

1. **Patagonia:** With 13 mentions, Patagonia is clearly at the top of people's minds when discussing sustainable brands. It displays creative campaigns that break the concept of promoting consumption by emphasizing durability and sufficiency principles.
2. **Veja:** The French brand Veja, which encourages sufficiency, sustainable materials, and fair practices for their products, is also among consumers preferences despite its policy of low investment in publicity and its focus on fair and equitable production processes, the brand has a considerable number of followers on Instagram and has a remarkable brand position among consumers.
3. **Second-hand Stores:** These have a considerable impact on people, with seven of the surveyed choosing this option, including physical stores like "Le Petite Rien" and the online second-hand platform "Vinted."
4. **H&M:** The Swedish multinational fast fashion brand H&M, which has a strong pro-recycling campaign as part of its brand image, was also prominently mentioned, showing its good positioning in consumer preferences.
5. **Stella McCartney:** With five mentions, the British brand Stella McCartney, a sustainable luxury brand that adopted eco-friendly materials , has relatively good brand positioning.

Brand	Number of followers on Instagram	Date of joining to the platform
PATAGONIA	5,4 million	May 2012
VEJA	1 million	August 2012
VINTED	563 thousand	September 2013
Petitsriens.be	19 thousand	September 2016
HM	38,3 million	February 2012
Stella Mc Cartney	7,4 million	September 2011

Figure 9 . Last updated on June 2024

How would you qualify the presence of these brands on social media?

105 respuestas

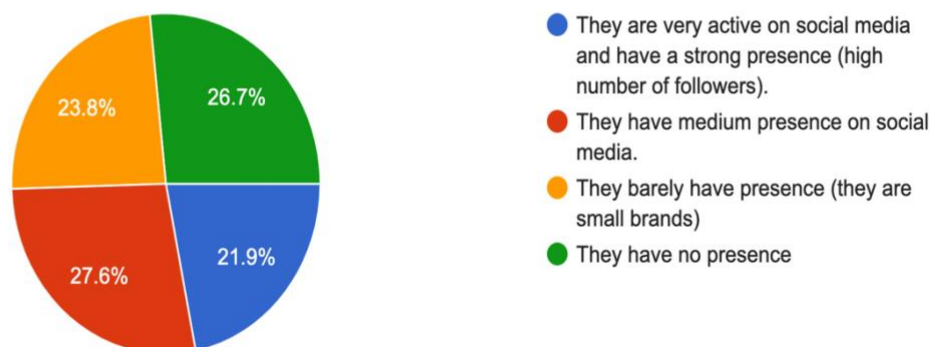


Figure10. Presence of brands on social media

Both large international brands and small local ones are leveraging social media for advertising. However, the research indicates that sustainable brands lack a strong presence on social media. The predominant findings suggest that these brands are either moderately active or not active at all online, highlighting a significant opportunity to enhance their marketing efforts in this area. Only 22% of respondents consider the sustainable brands they follow to be very active on social media.

The following table presents the number of followers for the most popular brands among participants, with H&M, Stella McCartney, and Patagonia being the top three most followed.

Even though there are no specific rules deciding if a brand is sustainable, partially sustainable, or not sustainable at all, the assessment stays subjective and often uninformed by the brands for their own benefit. Nowadays, presenting as a sustainable brand is a positive aspect that tends to incoherently increase sales for the brands. However, some criteria help us gain a perspective on the aspects of sustainability integrated with the brands.

Therefore, we will use the platform “Good on You” that evaluates fashion enterprises worldwide and has the following measurement criteria to make it easier for consumers to be informed about the sustainability efforts of the most well-known brands.

“Good on you” is an app that through the use of technology and independent analysts compiles and verifies information from brands’ public reports, third-party indices (like the Fashion Transparency Index and CDP projects), and certifications (like Fairtrade, Fair Wear Foundation, OEKO-TEX, and GOTS). Ensuring brands are transparent and consistent in reporting their impacts.

They assess brands based on three key issues: how they impact people, the planet, and animals. This helps consumers understanding the ethical and environmental implications of their fashion choices.

People

- **Worker Treatment:** Policies on child and forced labor, safety, union rights, gender equality, diversity, and fair wages.
- **Implementation:** Ensuring policies are enforced, empowering workers, keeping supportive supplier relationships, and conducting audits.

- **Health Protection:** Measures during crises like COVID-19.
- **Ethical Sourcing:** Avoiding materials from high-risk areas for modern slavery.

Planet

- **Resource Use:** Types of fibers, product durability, commitment to circularity, and waste management.
- **Environmental Impact:** Policies on energy use, carbon emissions, water impact, biodiversity, microfiber pollution, deforestation, and chemical use/disposal.

Animals

- **Welfare Standards:** Watching and certifications for animal welfare.
- **Material Use:** Avoidance of high-cruelty risk materials (e.g., fur, angora), and consideration of practices like “mulesing.”
- **Commitments:** Efforts to reduce or end animal products and clear welfare policies.

They rate brands with the following scales: we avoid, not good enough, it is a start, good, Great.

Brand	Overall Score	Labor	Environment	Animal	Sustainability assessment summary
Patagonia	Good		Good	Good	<p><u>Planet: Good</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses recycled and low-impact materials. • Aims to reduce emissions but lacks progress evidence. • Produces durable products. <p><u>People: Not Good Enough</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accredited by Fair Labor Association. • Scored 31-40% in the 2023 Fashion Transparency Index. • Lacks diversity and inclusion support.

		Not good enough			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linked to a labor rights scandal without proper remediation. <p><u>Animals: Good</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows the Five Freedoms of animal welfare. • Uses recycled exotic animal hair. • Certified by Responsible Wool and Down Standards. • Does not use fur, angora, or exotic skins. • Traces most animal materials. <p>Last updated February 2024</p>
Veja	Good	Good	Good	It's a start	<p><u>Planet: Good</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses medium proportion of lower-impact materials like organic cotton. • Limits chemicals, water, and wastewater. • Offers consumer recycling for textile waste. • Uses Leather Working Group Gold certified tanneries. <p><u>People: Good</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code of Conduct aligns with ILO principles. • Traces most of its supply chain. • Regular supplier visits. <p><u>Animals: It's a Start</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General statement on minimizing animal suffering, but no formal policy. • Uses leather. • Does not use wool, down, fur, angora, exotic skins, or exotic hair. <p>Last updated July 2023</p>

H&M	Not good enough	Not good enough	Not good enough	Not good enough	<p><u>Planet: Not Good Enough</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses some lower-impact materials, including recycled ones. • Follows an unsustainable fast fashion model. • Set a greenhouse gas reduction target but lacks evidence of progress. • Has a partial biodiversity protection policy. <p><u>People: Not Good Enough</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little of the supply chain is certified for labor standards. • Scored 71-80% in the 2023 Fashion Transparency Index. • Lacks evidence of diversity and inclusion support. • No evidence of living wage payments in the supply chain. • Inadequate COVID-19 worker protection policies. <p><u>Animals: Not Good Enough</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a policy aligned with the Five Domains of animal welfare. • Uses leather, exotic animal hair, and silk. • Some wool certified by Responsible Wool Standard. • Some down certified by Responsible Down Standard. • Does not use fur, angora, or exotic skins. • Traces some animal materials to the first production stage. <p>Last updated November 2023</p>
					<p><u>Environment: It's a Start</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses some eco-friendly materials, including organic cotton. • Has a deforestation prevention policy. • No evidence of water management or greenhouse gas reduction targets.

<p>Stella</p> <p>McCartney</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p>It's a start</p>	<p>It's a start</p>	<p>Good</p>	<p><u>Labour: It's a Start</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). • Traces and monitors most of its supply chain. • Unclear on ensuring living wages. • Partially adequate COVID-19 protection policies for workers. <p><u>Animals: Good</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General statement on minimizing animal suffering, no formal policy. • Uses exotic animal hair and non-mulesed wool. • Avoids leather, fur, angora, down, and exotic skins. • Traces most animal products to the first production stage. <p>Last updated August 2022</p>
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Figure 11. Sustainable brands assessment summary from Goodonyou.com

Other luxury brands such as Chanel, Dior, and Gucci were also mentioned. Typically, high prices have been associated with sustainable practices and quality. Even if in most cases, luxury brands are perceived by consumers as synonymous with high-quality materials, making them considered slow fashion as they offer durability in contrast to fast fashion known for their short-life products.

An interesting insight obtained is that a considerable number of people do not know any sustainable brands or are not familiar with them at all, with 15 survey respondents acknowledging that they do not know any sustainable brand or do not consider any brand as sustainable.

Being retained in consumers' minds is a big challenge for brands, especially nowadays when we are exposed to hundreds of them across all media. Nevertheless, people struggle to identify or remember sustainable fashion brands, and they struggle to identify which ones are sustainable from those that incur on green washing practices.

Which of the following archetypes (Bocken, 2014) would you use to define sustainable fashion?
Multiple answers are possible.

105 respuestas

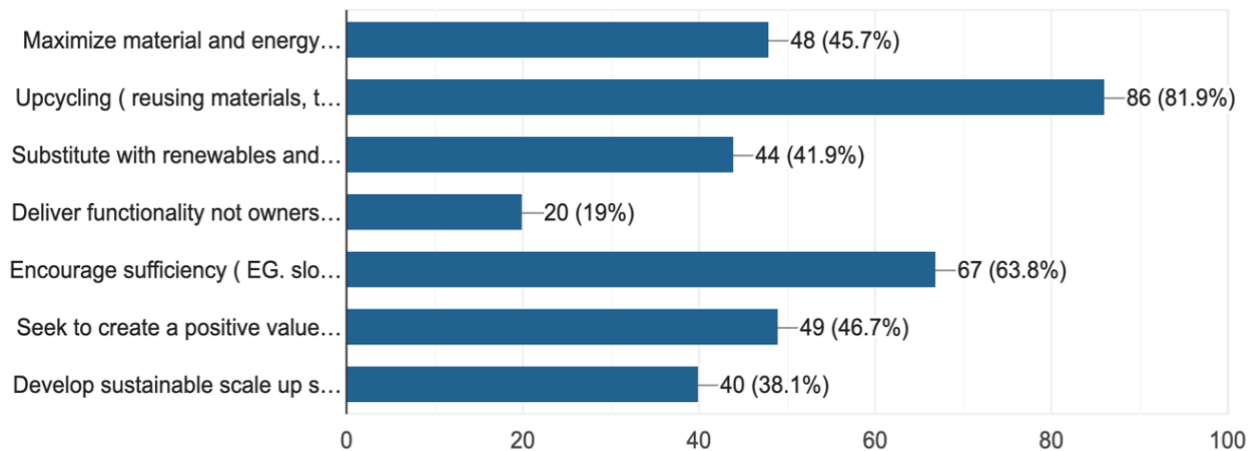


Figure12. Sustainable fashion definition

According to the opinions of 86 participants, upcycling is the archetype that best exemplifies the concept of sustainable fashion, reflecting that the chosen target audience is familiar with this concept. This method differs from recycling as it involves transforming waste materials or unwanted products that would normally end up in landfills.

This method involves creativity that aligns perfectly with the concept of fashion, creating new value for people through clothing garments. Examples include used jeans transformed into jackets, advertising canvases turned into trendy purses, plastic bottles made into sunglasses, jewelry, and many more. Upcycling offers interesting solutions to the fashion industry.

This insight will be reviewed more deeply in the qualitative research to verify the perceptions, added value, and frequency with which people use this concept in their lives.

Sufficiency follows in the top three options, chosen by 67 people. The concept of limiting consumption is undoubtedly a solution that seems easy and attainable for everyone. However, it is not sustainable by itself, based on the principle that societies today do not buy clothing solely for

basic primary reasons, but for other psychological reason previously analyzed such as creating sense of belonging, status, fulfilling a sense of instant gratification, FOMO (Fear of losing moment) , and others .

These aspects, along with individual subconscious motivations, make sufficiency challenging to adopt in certain contexts and cultures. While it might seem like a short-term solution, like any other form of deprivation, it cannot be sustained in the long term, nevertheless, switching to conscious shopping, which aims to create awareness of the amount, quantity, and materials we buy, can be adopted as a possible solution if its benefits are communicated properly.

5.4 BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION

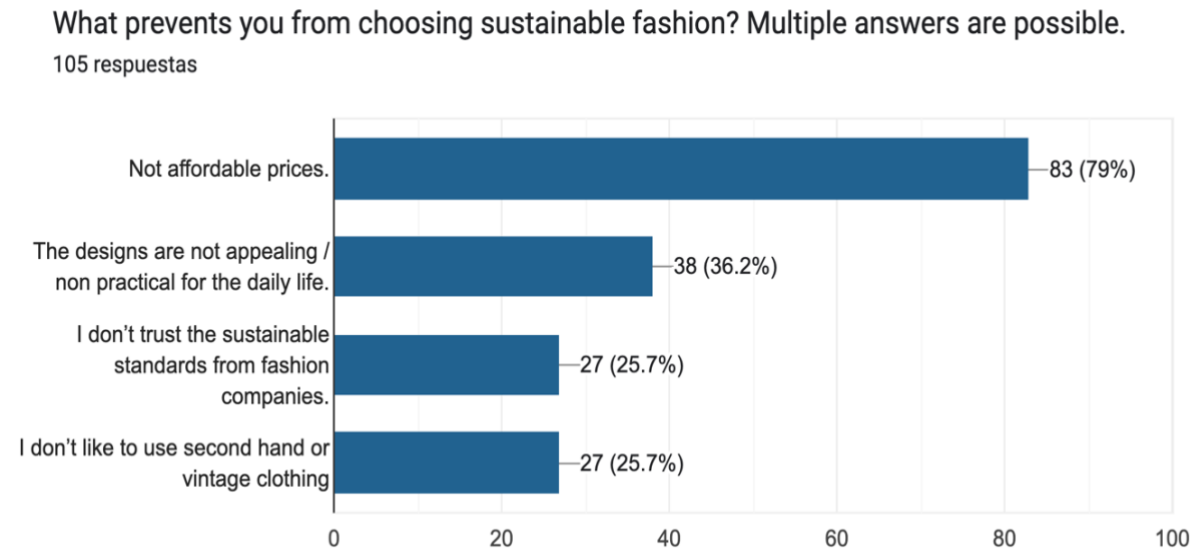


Figure13. Barriers to sustainable fashion

How much more are you willing to pay for clothes made from sustainable materials (organic fair trade fibers, alternative vegetable matter ,etc)

103 respuestas

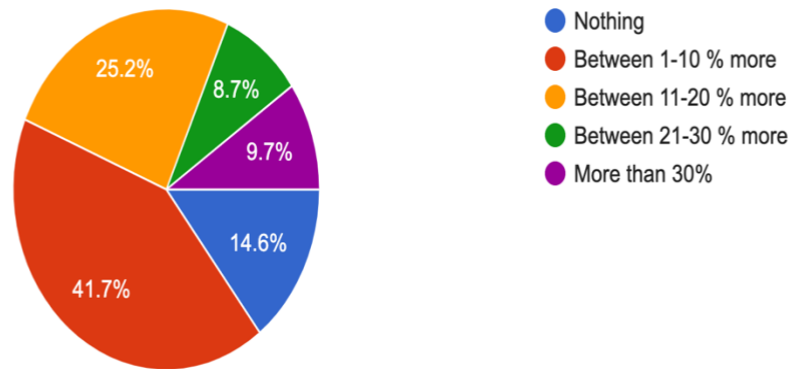


Figure14. Sustainability payment willingness

A large majority of the surveyed participants would be willing to pay only 1-10% extra for clothing made with sustainable materials (47.1%) compared with a low 9.7% willing to pay more than 30%. This highlights the significant resistance to higher prices as a barrier to adopting sustainable clothing.

Price is often the main barrier to adopting sustainable products, and the fashion industry is no exception. Recent generations have embraced the idea that clothing should be inexpensive, thanks in part to the low prices and appeal of the fast fashion industry. This perception is rooted in the desire to save money while still enjoying the pleasure and benefits of acquiring new items. The resulting instant gratification makes fast fashion appealing and a habit that is easy to adopt.

Unfortunately, this low price, are the product of many factors, such as globalization, unfair labor conditions, and the explosion of the fast fashion industry. Moreover, there is a dichotomy where people are used to paying high prices for luxury brands and other material things, such as technology where high prices does not represent a barrier to consumption.

Rethinking the value of things is necessary, especially nowadays when the well-being of people and the environment are priorities. It is important for sustainable fashion brands to understand how to communicate the *value* of their products and their brands in a more appealing way to reduce the barrier of price among consumers .

"The luxury fashion industry serves as a prime example of how perceived value can be effectively communicated to consumers, allowing brands to command premium prices for their garments. This industry demonstrates that while factors like quality and sustainability are important, they are not necessarily the primary motivators for consumers who are willing to pay higher prices.

Instead, the sense of exclusivity, brand prestige, and the status associated with owning luxury items often play a more significant role in driving consumer willingness to spend. This underscores the industry's ability to create a strong emotional connection with consumers, where the perceived value extends beyond the tangible attributes of the product, highlighting aspects as the entire brand experience that comes with owning luxury goods.

5.5 PURCHASING HABITS

How many clothes do you buy on average per month? This includes pants, shirts, jackets, dresses, sweaters, etc.

105 respuestas

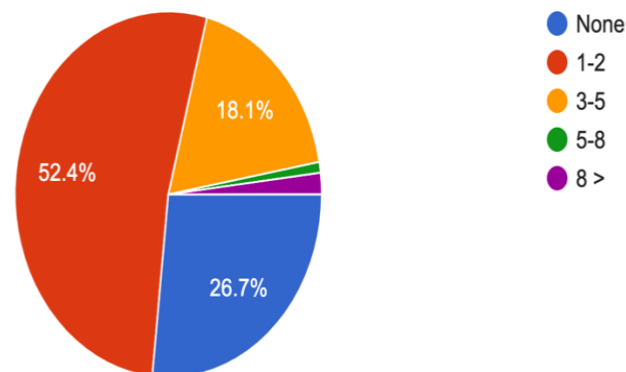


Figure15. Purchasing habits

The average number of clothes bought according to this survey shows a relatively low figure when contrasted with the increasing consumption of clothing (new and second-hand) in Europe. It is important to go deeper and analyze what kind of clothing is being purchased and the average budget spent to find new insights that help us understand consumer drivers better.

This subject will be study further in the qualitative research to gain a better understanding of these results. Only a very low 3% of respondents answered that they purchase 3 to 5 items, or more than 8 items, per month.

The results may be biased since most people do not track the number of garments they purchase each month, and purchasing habits can vary significantly. For instance, some individuals may buy clothing infrequently, perhaps only once or twice a year, but in larger quantities, which can skew the data.

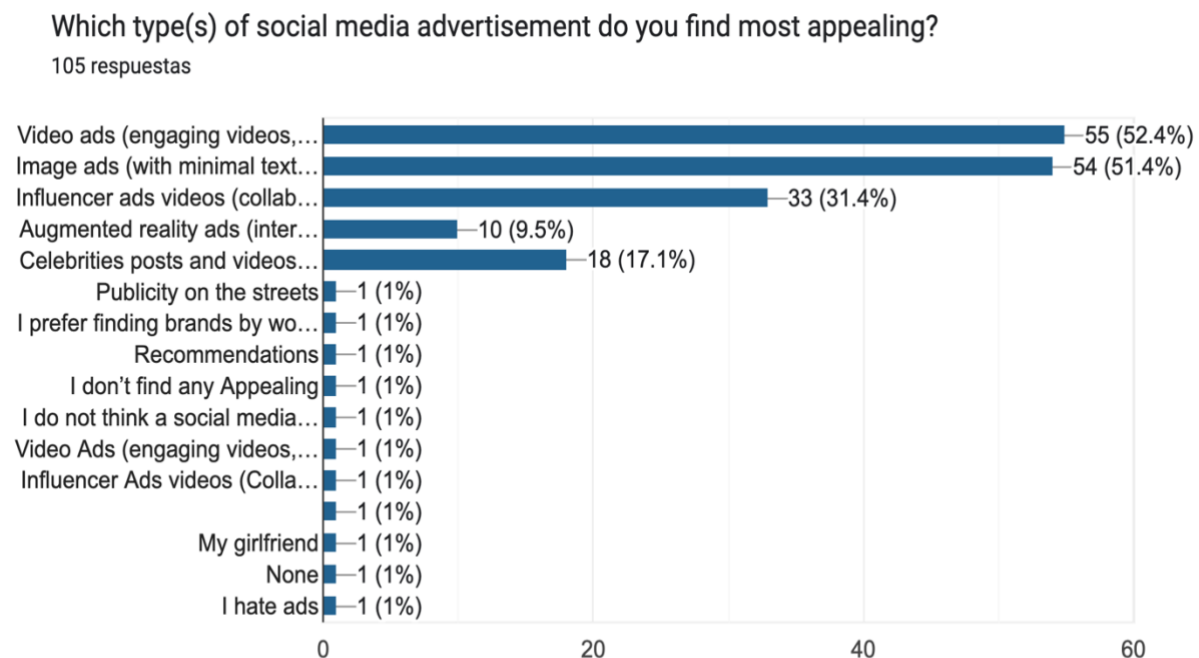


Figure16. Preferred social media advertisement.

Video ads and image ads lead the preferred social media advertisements, followed by the new trend of influencer ad videos that include paid collaborations and unpaid recommendations. The use of visuals is crucial to engage consumers. According to AdAge, the average attention span for consumers is 8.25 seconds, hence brands' marketing departments should be able to create content that can efficiently hook consumers' attention.

Emotions play a huge role in people's purchasing decisions. The main ones identified in this survey are as follows: the search for a sense of elevation and upliftment, the pursuit of self-improvement, and finally, the excitement of trying something new. Other emotions, such as the satisfaction of possessing something new or old, are also important drivers for people's decisions. The research will delve deeper into the role of emotions in the qualitative analysis.

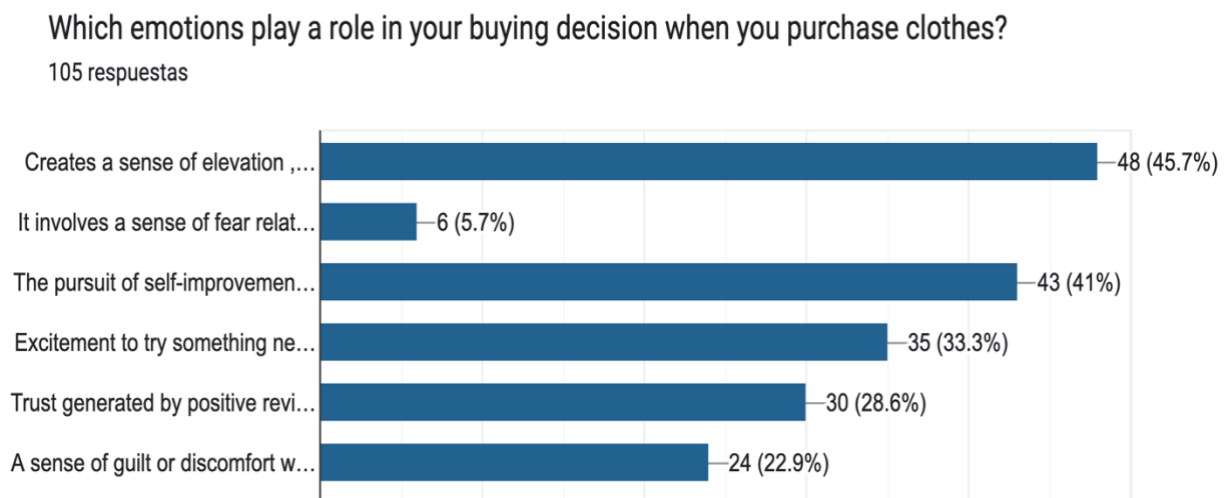


Figure 17. Emotions in the buying process.

Have you bought something that you saw advertised on social media this last month?

105 respuestas

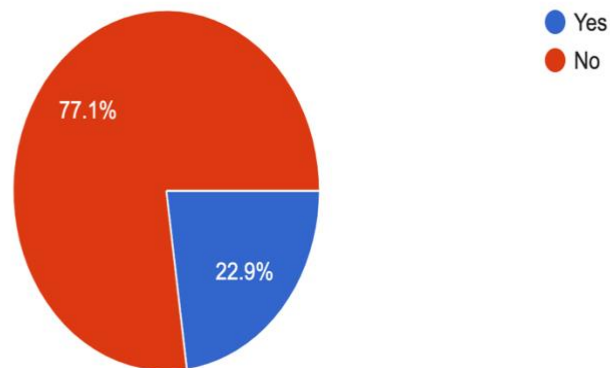


Figure 18. Purchasing driven by social media.

Where did you buy your last piece of clothing?

105 respuestas

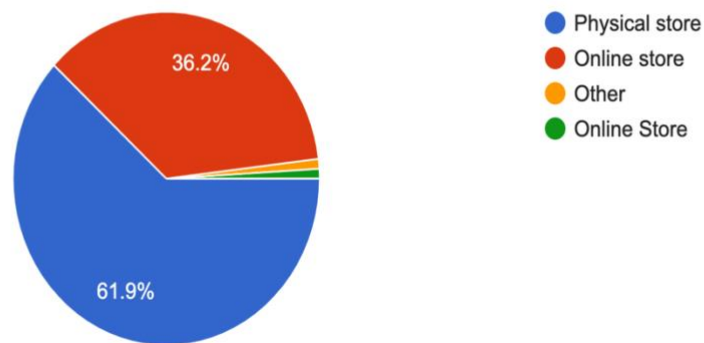


Figure 19. Buying preferences based on location.

The purchasing conversion rate after the influence of social media advertisement, according to the research, scores a low 22.9%. This contrasts with the previous hypothesis that social media advertisement was a highly influential channel for young generations between 20-40 years old and opposes the paradigm of the drivers that influence people to buy clothing.

If social media advertising does not appear to be the main driver for people to consume, despite their presence in consumer's habits of use, one of the possible reasons might be the exposure of people to a high quantity of advertisements without even realizing it.

It is important to note that advertisements, in all their forms, can trigger subconscious emotional responses. Social media advertising, in particular, is often more subtle than traditional ads. For example, influencers can promote products and services through recommendations, making it difficult for audiences to recognize that their purchasing decisions have been influenced by social media. Many people may not realize that their choices have been guided or manipulated, believing them to be entirely their own.

Additionally, a significant percentage of consumers have shifted from shopping in physical stores to online platforms, highlighting the growing importance of e-commerce in the buying process. This trend has been further accelerated by the pandemic, marking a pivotal moment in the growth of online shopping.

Among the most used online shops, people tend to buy directly from their preferred online stores, followed by the two big commerce businesses, such as Amazon, with a strong presence in Europe and Belgium, and Zalando, which specializes in clothing and shoes with a significant presence in Europe.

Which online stores do you use most often to shop online?

103 respuestas

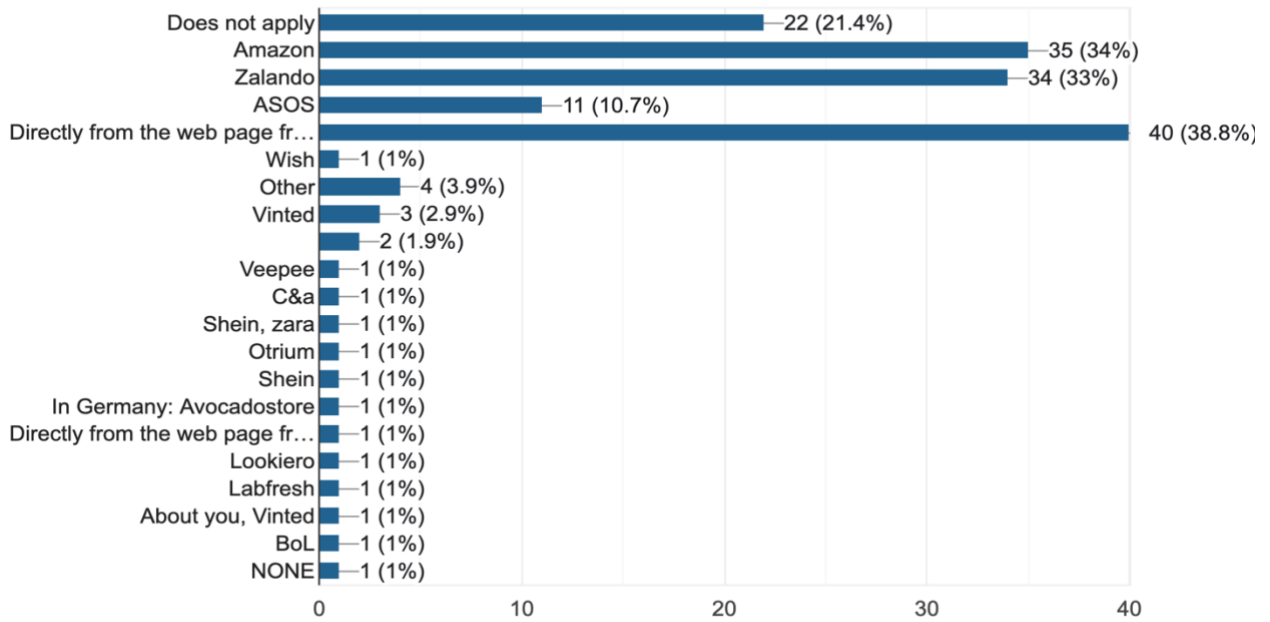


Figure 20. Online stores preferences .

5.6 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

How concerned are you about environmental issues on a scale of 1-5, where 1 is the least concerned and 5 is the most concerned?

104 respuestas

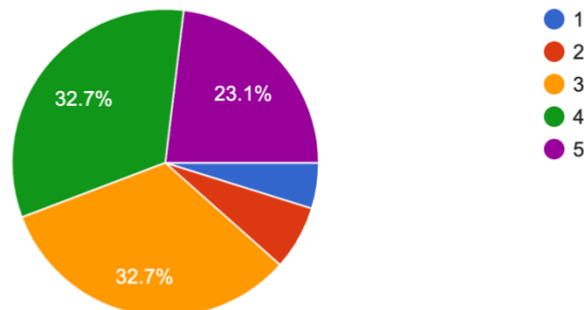


Figure 21. Level of environmental concern.

The age groups were divided into two: those from 20 to 30 and those from 31 to 40, to contrast their preferences and specially to obtain insights into what they consider important, attractive, and some of their consumption habits. In terms of environmental consciousness, the average result between these groups is quite similar.

People from 20-30 scored an average of 3.02, while people between 31-40 scored 3.05, confirming both generations have a level of interest and consciousness about the environment. Nevertheless, it is important to contrast how this is translated into their purchasing habits.

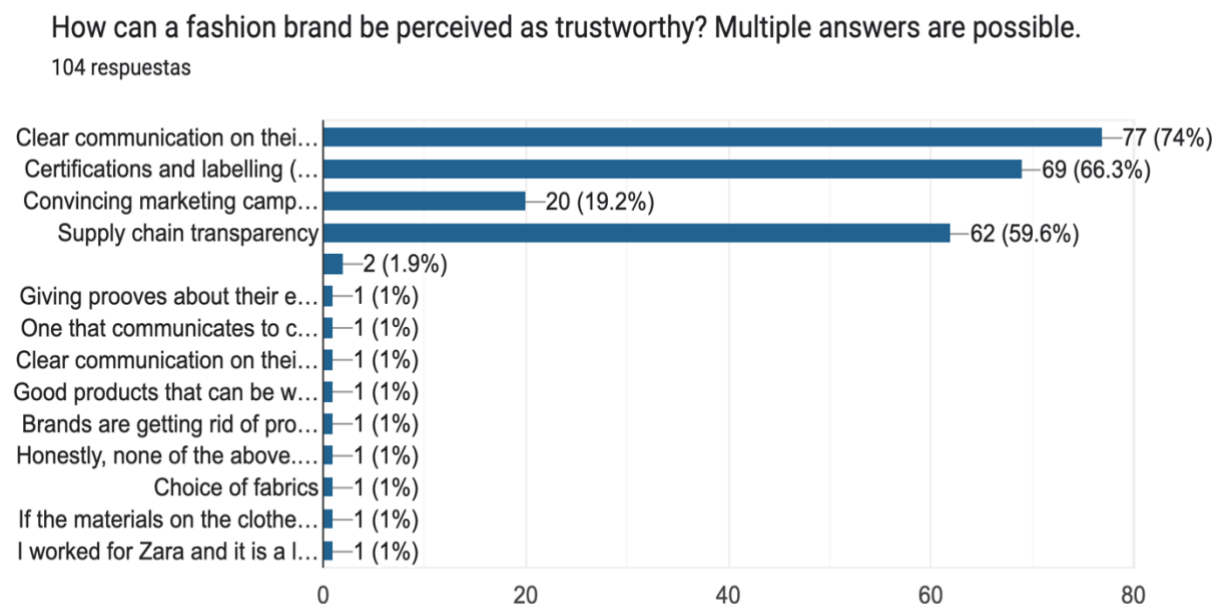


Figure 22. Perceived trustworthiness criteria.

How people perceive a brand can define their preference for it, and be translated in sales and brand loyalty, according to the survey the main traits that makes fashion brand be perceived as trustworthy are clear communication on their sustainable practices, followed by certifications and labelling, although labelling can be a tricky factor as hundreds of labeling are displayed nowadays without matching the reality of the brands actions towards the environment. And the third one showing with transparency their supply chain process.

While clear communication on sustainable practices, certifications, and transparent supply chain processes can enhance a fashion brand's perception of trustworthiness, it is essential to recognize that these factors alone may not be the sole determinants of consumer buying decisions. Other factors such as price, quality, style, and personal preferences also play significant roles in influencing consumers' choices when buying clothes.

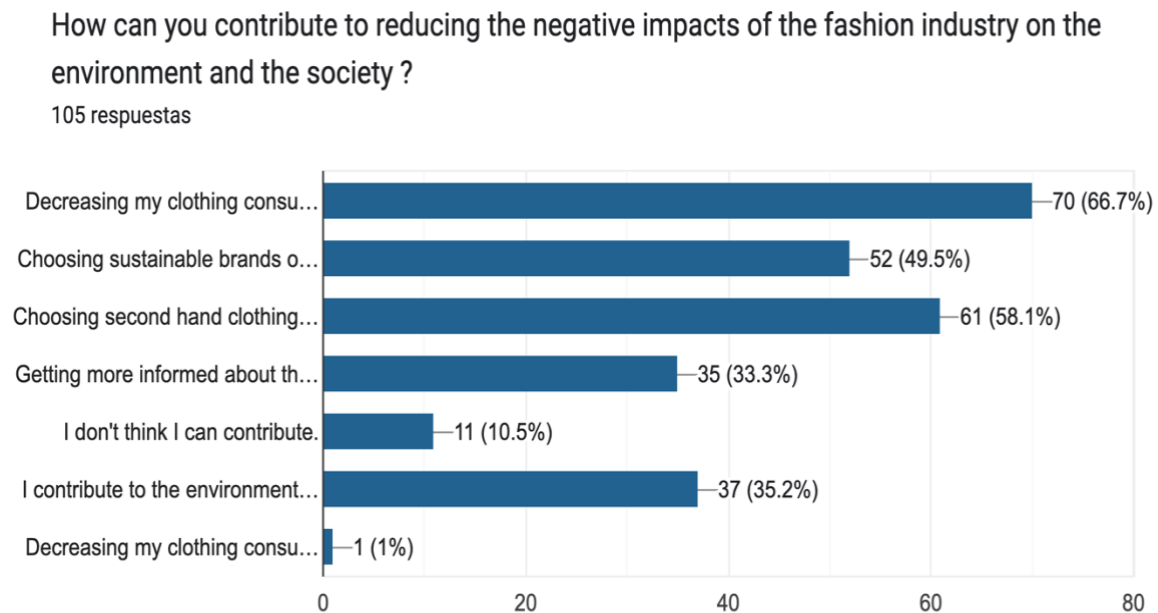


Figure 23 Pro- environmental and societal contribution.

The initiative to contribute to reducing the negative impact of the fashion industry has revealed some interesting insights. Among the 105 surveyed individuals, 70 preferred the intention of decreasing clothing consumption by adopting sufficiency. This was followed by 61 people who chose second-hand clothing, and 52 individuals who opted for sustainable clothing over fast fashion.

However, 10.5% of the participants recognized that they don't believe they can contribute significantly, which is notable given that the participants are generally perceived as environmentally conscious due to their demographics. Additionally, 37 participants chose alternative methods of contributing to the environment. This suggests a potential issue: consumers might not consider the environmental damage of their clothing consumption as

impactful as other actions, such as those in the mobility industry. Therefore, they might not assign significant environmental concern to their fashion consumption habits.

The collected information in this allows the research to have primary insights that will be completed and confirmed with the qualitative research.

CHAPTER 6 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The qualitative research will consist of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed and thoughtful responses, providing a deeper understanding of how social media influences people's consumption habits. This approach aims to confirm or refute the first hypothesis concerning the significant impact of social media channels on purchase decisions.

Following the quantitative research results, the qualitative study will focus on several key factors: consumers' perspectives on sufficiency and their preference for second-hand clothing as sustainable fashion options. Regarding social media channels, the research will primarily focus on Instagram, which was identified as a principal platform in the first research phase.

The interviews will be carefully crafted to minimize bias, ensuring that participants provide the most honest and relatable examples possible. Additionally, the interviews will highlight concepts such as greenwashing and gather personal perspectives on the fashion industry.

The sample includes eight individuals, aged 23 to 32 years, including an equal gender distribution of four women and four men. These participants come from diverse backgrounds, varying levels of education, and different professions, including those employed in European institutions, administrative roles, the Horeca industry (Hotel and restaurant and catering), as well as job seekers and students. Their nationalities reflect the multicultural population of Brussels, including Belgian, Italian, Latin American, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and Croatian.

The interviews had an average duration of 7.5 minutes each and were recorded in audio format. Two of the eight participants requested their interviews to still be anonymous.

Some limitations of the research were the language barrier, which may have influenced the participants' ability to fully convey the intended meaning of their insights. The qualitative research aims to determine whether specific demographic factors influence their consumption habits, particularly regarding sustainable fashion.

6.1 PRICE AS A BARRIER AND ITS RELATION WITH OCCUPATION

Income is a significant determinant of buying power. In general, having a stable job compared to a student job allows for greater consumption power, which is often reflected in garment purchases. However, this can negatively translate into buying larger quantities of clothes that does not belong to sustainable alternatives such as sustainable brands, upcycled clothes, and second-hand clothes. “In today's economy where the prices just keep skyrocketing, especially cost of living and costs of food and water in general ,it just depends mostly on the price and how much I can trust the brand for its recognition” ("see Appendix A participant 6 for the full interview transcripts")

Interestingly, lower income, which logically might be expected to result in less purchasing, does not always lead to reduced consumption. Some individuals with lower income still consume a considerable number of garments more adapted to their budget, choosing between fast fashion, super-fast fashion, and second-hand without decreasing their overall consumption.

The allure of instant gratification, without the barrier of unaffordable prices, may be a significant factor contributing to this paradoxical behavior.

6.2 SECOND HAND CLOTHING PERCEPTIONS

A brief analysis of the concept of second-hand clothing and its acceptance offered the following insights:

Second-hand clothes are now perceived as trendier among younger generations (20-25 years old) and as a way of self-expression of individual style thanks to the concepts of “vintage” and the opportunity to experiment with styles from previous generations, contrasting with contemporary fashion that produces mass quantities and tends to lose authenticity.

Earlier generations (millennials) still find the concept of second-hand less attractive for several reasons:

- It is associated with a lack of income and stays a stigmatized practice among people who cannot afford new clothing. This stigma persists in societies that value luxury and wealth as indicators of success.
- Participants acknowledged being familiar with second-hand shopping during their student years, which correlated with the absence of steady employment.
- There are misconceptions that second-hand clothing may not be clean or in good condition. There is uncertainty about the fairness of prices, as second-hand items might be expensive compared to brand-new clothes from the fast or super-fast fashion industry.
- There is a lack of incentives to try second-hand clothing, as publicity for it is almost non-existent and is usually adopted by people who grew up with these consumption habits.
- The belief in second-hand shopping also has a cultural background, being more developed, accessible, and socially accepted in some countries compared to others.

Another insight identified was the price as a barrier, despite the nature of second hand that translate to lower prices than new garments, secondhand clothing is perceived as expensive here in Brussels, especially compared to other cities in Europe with lower taxes. *“For example, second-hand clothes, they are sometimes expensive. So, I do not buy too much also for that”. “I have not bought second hand in Brussels, no. That is when I was back in Poland, we have a lot of them, and I might say is cheaper”* (See appendix B participant 3 and 4 for full transcriptions)

The inclination to buy second-hand clothing is often influenced by habits developed during childhood. If individuals grew up in households where buying second-hand clothing was a widespread practice, they are more likely to continue this behavior into adulthood. Those who did not grow up with second-hand shopping as part of their family’s purchasing habits may be less inclined to adopt it later in life.

These early experiences play a critical role in shaping consumer attitudes towards second-hand fashion. When sustainable behaviors, such as second-hand shopping, are normalized within a household, they become ingrained in an individual’s value system. This makes them more receptive to continuing these practices as adults, particularly when sustainability and cost-effectiveness are central to their decision-making.

On the other hand, individuals who are unfamiliar with second-hand purchases from an early age may view it with skepticism or associate it with negative connotations, such as the previously

mentioned. As a result, they may prefer buying novel items, even when they are environmentally conscious, because their early environment did not normalize second-hand consumption. Thus, promoting second-hand shopping requires a change of mindset, the fashion industry can foster a culture of sustainability that embraces second-hand shopping as a valuable if it is practiced thoughtfully.

Subjectivity plays a crucial role in shaping beliefs of consumption. For some individuals, purchasing 30 garments a year might be considered moderate or even minimal, while others perceive buying just 10 garments annually as excessive. This subjective freedom of consumption highlights the complexity of defining overconsumption in developed societies. There is no universally agreed-upon threshold that clearly delineates responsible consumption from overconsumption, as these judgments are deeply influenced by personal values, social norms, and cultural context.

This ambiguity complicates efforts to establish a standard that could guide sustainable consumption. For example, while one person might view their purchasing behavior as conscientious, another might see the same behavior as indulgent. These differing perspectives are often rooted in the individual's upbringing and the consumption habits modeled in their households during childhood. Just as with attitudes toward second-hand shopping, the consumption patterns learned early in life often serve as a blueprint for adult behavior.

If a person grew up in an environment where frequent shopping and accumulation of goods were the norm, they are more likely to carry these behaviors into adulthood, often without recognizing the potential for overconsumption. In contrast, those raised with an emphasis on minimalism or frugality may naturally adopt more restrained consumption habits, even if society at large encourages more frequent purchasing.

6.3 SUSTAINABLE FASHION AWARENESS

A common situation discovered is the lack of unawareness people have regarding what is behind the production process and materials of the brands they buy. The distinction between sustainable brands and fast fashion brands is completely blurry for consumers, mostly due to the following aspects found in the research:

- People do not have enough interest in the production process of what they wear and where it comes from.
- People associate sustainable products with higher and unaffordable prices, categorizing them easily as beyond their budget.
- There are no clear and regulated criteria that find sustainable products, and the wide range of sustainable labeling can be overwhelming prompting discernibility among consumers.

The main sustainable fashion alternatives that were chosen were decreasing consumption and along with choosing second-hand that confirm the results founded in the quantitative research. Nevertheless, both might come with advantages and disadvantages, secondhand shopping that stills promotes consumerism, and decreasing consumption that tends to be relative.

An important aspect analyzed in the research is the subjectivity involved in determining the quantities of garment buys that consumers consider suitable. The challenge lies in the difficulty of improving something that cannot be measured, making it hard to standardize the best quantity of clothing bought per year that would be considered environmentally sustainable.

While the concepts of greenwashing are clearly understood among the participants, the challenge lies in identifying it within brands. The concept of fast fashion stays unclear for some people, who might confuse fast fashion brands with sustainable brands thanks to their successful green marketing campaigns and their branding power. *“It's kind of a business now for any company to say that they respect some environmental rules, and that they know that it's very difficult for others to deny this greenwashing that they make so they know that they can claim everything and no one will ever lie and say that what they're saying is not true based on facts.”* (See Appendix B participant 4 for full transcription)

The misconception that mid-range and high-priced brands engage in pro-environmental practices and fair labor conditions is far from the truth. Unfortunately, the lack of regulations allows many brands to unethically promote false sustainable practices and gain trust among consumers. Participants mentioned that they are unsure whether the brands they buy from belong to the fast fashion category. This uncertainty highlights the problem that starts with a lack of information and transparency about brands' sustainability efforts.

The level of attachment from people to their clothes coincides primarily with the conclusion of using the garments as long as possible. However, this is also related to the quality of materials, and sometimes the nature of the garments does not allow them to be as durable as they should be. People interviewed shared the idea that when the time comes to dispose of their no longer usable

clothes, they opt for donating them to associations or placing them in containers with the intention of giving their clothes a second life or recycling them, which is a positive aspect.

Additionally, the concept of clothes swapping was mentioned and seems to be a practical choice. In contrast to donating or depositing them in containers, people can be more reassured their clothes will be used by family or friends who might share the same taste in fashion or sizes. This adds extra value to the clothes as they can bring a positive memory from the person who offered the garment.

The concept of upcycling is familiar among participants; most of them have inquired into this practice to adapt, adjust, and repair their clothing, although it is not a regular practice among participants. Nevertheless, this practice should be reinforced and taught everywhere so people can be self-sufficient and able to repair their own clothes. Sometimes, it can be even more expensive to repair rather than buy a new one from low-cost brands.

6.5 EMOTIONS INVOLVED IN THE PURCHASING DECISION.

While diminishing the feeling of guilt when buying sustainable options can influence some consumers, it is not the most significant driver for choosing sustainable options over fast fashion. The growing importance given to environmental and social causes, especially among younger generations, shows a positive trend. However, due to previously mentioned factors, this awareness alone is not sufficient to notably change people's consumption habits. Needs and desires often take precedence in the buying decision journey, which tends to be driven by less rational factors.

Therefore, even if a sense of guilt might act as a short-term motivator, it does not significantly influence long-term purchasing decisions. As highlighted in the literature review, the most effective emotions to evoke are positive ones, particularly those associated with feelings of elevation, which are commonly experienced when people buy tangible objects. These emotions can create a stronger, more lasting impact on consumer behavior.

To effectively promote sustainable options, it is crucial to focus on generating positive emotions related to the purchase experience. Marketing strategies should emphasize the joy, pride, and satisfaction that come from making eco-friendly choices. This approach can help align sustainable consumption with consumers' intrinsic desires and aspirations, making it a more attractive and rewarding option.

By fostering a sense of elevation and well-being associated with sustainable purchases, it is possible to shift consumer behavior towards more responsible choices. Highlighting the tangible

benefits, such as the quality and uniqueness of sustainable products, can further enhance this positive emotional response. Additionally, emphasizing the broader impact of their choices on the environment and society can reinforce a sense of purpose and fulfillment.

Ultimately, creating a positive and emotionally rewarding experience around sustainable consumption is key to encouraging long-term behavior change. By making sustainable options not only a responsible choice but also a desirable and enjoyable one, it is possible to drive more significant and lasting shifts in consumer habits.

6.6 SOCIAL MEDIA AND SUSTAINABLE FASHION.

Instagram emerged as the most used social media platform among the target audience in both quantitative and qualitative research, proving the success of social media algorithms in generating segmented advertisements. These algorithms efficiently target consumers based on their consumption interests. People interested in fashion, style, or lifestyle are easily exposed to fashion brand ads, influencers, and other types of publicity in their social media feeds, making the content highly engaging for their audiences.

“I'm not very influenced by social media. But I happen to sometimes see some ads on YouTube or Facebook, that would actually trigger me into buying some things. For example, I once saw an editor's brand, I think there was on YouTube. And basically, then I had the idea the entire day, in my mind, but that wasn't fashion, there was there was not like sustainable fashion. So, when it comes to fashion, I really think I've never seen an ad in my life actually.” (See Appendix B, Participant 5 for full transcription)

Hence the assumption is that even if social media can have an impact on consumer's purchasing habits, the algorithm plays a pivotal role in the segmentation of ads every consumer is exposed to. The audience of the research agrees on the importance of social media as a possible positive influence to people's sustainable behaviors, although there seems to be a long-term solution that is developing.

At the same time, the participants find that the sufficiency model would be more difficult to promote through social media, as normally its main function is increasing sales and promoting over consumption, *“We know that a lot of influencers are paid by companies and not always for a good*

company or for the right reason. So, depending on who was promoting it, I would be more likely or not to believe that" (See Appendix B participant 8 for full transcription)

A sense of relative awareness about the damages and impact of the fashion industry is perceived among the sample. It is also fair to say that a sense of consciousness and curiosity is shared among the participants in general, which opens the opportunity to develop strategies that lead to a switch of their consumption habits.

Unfortunately, the rapid pace at which the fashion industry is causing damage might not be counteracted by the gradual adoption of sustainable practices needed to mitigate these growing negative effects. Participants in the research recognize that this issue concerns multiple stakeholders. However, this understanding can have a negative impact, as some of them don't think they can contribute to solving the problem, leading them to barely change their consumption habits. *"I am a very pessimistic I think that the real way to change behavior is to put a taxation on some brands that are less sustainable, but this of course, is sort of a problem because you really have to have an independent body to check what is sustainable"* ("see Appendix D for the full interview transcripts")

6.7 CULTURE AND GENDER AS DETERMINANT VARIABLE.

Cultural background significantly influences habits related to clothing and fashion consumption. In some cultures, buying second-hand items is a frequent practice, while in others, it might be perceived negatively and associated with scarcity and a lack of status.

Similarly, the appreciation for trends, fashion, and design varies culturally. For instance, contrasting the Italian culture, where fashion holds considerable importance, unlike other cultures that do not assign the same value to clothing.

Belgium is a complex market where one in five habitants is Belgian with a foreign background. The percentage is the lowest in Flanders with 16.4%, rising to 24.8% in Wallonia and ending the highest at 40.2% in the Brussels-Capital Region. As well the Brussels-Capital Region has the smallest proportion of people from a neighboring country (Benelux and the Uk) with only a 13.5% compared to 19.0% at national level. This region also contains the largest proportion of people with a nationality of origin outside the EU 27 zone (excluding the United Kingdom): 61.3%, compared

to 59.0% in Flanders and 40.4% in Wallonia. Presenting a rich variety of cultures with different buying patterns. (Statbe.com)

Women, in general, have been stereotyped as the gender that buys more clothing. Even if the results of our quantitative research show similar purchasing quantities between men and women, the qualitative analysis reveals that the level of interest in fashion trends is clearer among women.

Socially, women face greater social pressure that extends to a vast beauty and fashion industry. “Specially, young girls, that they would like to be the same as influencers is too much ... It's becoming dangerous for us as a society and for our planet” (“see Appendix B for the full interview transcripts”)

There is an opportunity to explore gender variables further by examining social, cultural, and gender-related factors. Additionally, investigating the importance of social image and acceptance can provide insights into why women are a more significant target for fashion consumption.

Another finding of the qualitative research is that participants with a master's degree or higher demonstrated a deeper understanding of environmental issues, including the impact of the fashion industry and the concept of greenwashing, compared to those with lower educational attainment. This suggests that higher academic education fosters a heightened level of information regarding environmental issues, which may contribute to more thoughtful and responsible consumption habits. Thus, there appears to be a connection between academic knowledge and environmental behavior. That opens the possibility for other studies to find out more insights about this correlation.

CHAPTER 7. ETHNOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

To complement the research from a qualitative perspective, an ethnographic analysis was conducted through immersion in the studied environment to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social dynamics at play. This was achieved by attending sustainable fashion events in Brussels, where observations and interactions offered valuable insights into the landscape of sustainable fashion in the city.

The first event, “the Festival of the European Bauhaus” that took place the 11 April 2024, held at the Brussels Museum, displayed a captivating catwalk featuring sustainable fashion pieces. These creations, conceived by talented designers hailing from diverse backgrounds, were characterized

by a profound commitment to upcycling and sustainable materials. Plastic and other environmentally harmful materials were replaced, signifying a conscientious departure from conventional practices.

These events served as a testament to the escalating interest among individuals in contributing to a transformative movement. Motivated by a range of factors including environmental awareness, intellectual curiosity, and a passion for fashion as a mode of self-expression, attendees were inspired by the innovative designs on display. These forward-thinking brands are disrupting the status quo of fast fashion, challenging the notion of generic designs dictated by fleeting trends.

The showcased collections combined a harmonious fusion of creativity and environmental responsibility. Each piece not only reflected the designer's unique vision and background but also catered to the preferences of their target markets. It was clear that sustainability had become more than just a trend; it had become a guiding principle shaping the future of fashion in Europe and beyond.

The second event attended took place on April 23, hosting the “Elegantly right” afterwork by Human Rights Watch Next Gen + Fashion Revolution. This evening was dedicated to exploring the intersection of human rights and ethical considerations within the fashion industry. The event was focused on several key topics, including EU foreign policy and legislation regarding

forced labor and supply chains, as well as the phenomenon of greenwashing and the pivotal role of transparency in the fashion sector. Following these discussions, the spotlight turned to the creative endeavors of six talented designers based in Belgium. Their showcase emphasized themes of upcycling, sustainability, diversity, and inclusion through the presentation of exceptional clothing pieces. Among the featured designers were Juliet Bonhomme, Luz by Luz, Kwalé Hakiza, BeCultures, Catalina J, and YU.ME.BXL.

These local designers captivated the audience with their innovative creations, highlighting a growing trend within the fashion community to embrace environmental consciousness alongside creativity and passion for fashion and originality. For instance Luz Daniela Legrain, the fashion designer of “Luz by Luz” shared her experienced and her creative journey where she emphasizes the use of the upcycling business model in her designs, where she reflects emotions and stories, advocating a meaningful fashion with positive impact *“I transform materials no one uses, like the advertisement banners, so I take what others consider waste, and I see as resources to create accessories like bags. When people come to my workshop, they ask for customized bags that are sustainable and that they will not find anywhere else.”*



“Elegantly Right” April 23, 2024, Brussels



“The Festival of the European Bauhaus” April 11, 2024, Brussels

Despite being young brands that are working step by step to get recognition in the Belgian market, their collective efforts highlighted the industry's evolving commitment to sustainability and social responsibility.

The growing interest in sustainability within Brussels' fashion industry offers an optimistic outlook for the sector's efforts to become more eco-friendly. Designers and small brands are leading the

way, setting an example for multinational companies by demonstrating that style, design, and creativity can thrive alongside sustainable practices with minimal environmental impact.

Consumers are increasingly willing to embrace eco-conscious trends, and the strong attendance of millennials and Gen Z at these events underscores the rising desire among younger residents of Brussels to explore new alternatives and support a transition to a more sustainable future.

CHAPTER 8. LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Attitude-Behavioral Gap and Social Desirability Bias

Similarly to earlier studies that delve into consumer behavior topics about sustainable issues, the attitude-behavioral gap among consumers during both quantitative and qualitative research was an important limitation. This phenomenon occurs when there is a difference between what individuals say they will do and what they do. This gap is particularly clear due to the social desirability bias, where individuals feel pressured to present themselves as environmentally conscious. As it is expected among young generations in Europe, social judgment may lead to biases, affecting the accuracy of the results.

Sample Size and Composition in Qualitative Research

The qualitative research involved a small sample size of eight individuals, comprising an equal gender distribution of four women and four men. Despite this balance, the sample was heavily skewed toward millennials, with five out of the eight participants being aged between 27 and 29. This demographic focus offers valuable insights into the consumption patterns and attitudes of millennials but leaves a gap in understanding the perspectives of Generation Z.

Generation Z, having grown up in a world more attuned to sustainability, is often more familiar with concepts such as sustainable fashion and second-hand clothing. This younger cohort tends to have different attitudes toward sustainability, with a stronger emphasis on environmental responsibility and social impact as part of their everyday decision-making processes. Thus, by

primarily focusing on millennials, the study may overlook the unique perspectives and motivations of Generation Z, who are becoming increasingly influential in shaping consumer trends, particularly in areas like fashion.

The diversity of Brussels presents both opportunities and challenges for understanding its complex market. On one hand, the city's rich mix of cultures, nationalities, and demographics provides a unique advantage for businesses and researchers seeking to cater to a broad and multifaceted consumer base. This diversity enables the exploration of a wide range of consumer preferences, offering deeper insights into emerging trends, niche markets, and cross-cultural influences. As a result, Brussels serves as a microcosm for the European market, making it an ideal environment for testing new products or strategies with diverse audiences.

However, this very diversity can also lead to highly varied responses, making it difficult to achieve homogeneous results. The broad spectrum of cultural, social, and demographic backgrounds means that consumer behaviors, values, and preferences are often distinct and sometimes contradictory. For instance, while one group might prioritize sustainability and ethical consumption, another might focus on affordability and convenience. These differences create challenges in data analysis, as patterns that hold true for one subset of the population may not apply to another.

For businesses, this means that a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to succeed. Instead, companies must develop tailored marketing and product strategies that reflect the nuanced needs of different consumer groups in Brussels.

Language Barriers and Concept Familiarity

Despite efforts to adapt the questionnaires to be easily understandable for the audience, language barriers and unfamiliarity with certain concepts may have hindered participants' ability to fully express their answers. This issue is particularly relevant in a multicultural city like Brussels, where respondents may have varying levels of proficiency in the language used for the research and different levels of awareness about sustainable fashion concepts.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Hypothesis 1: Social media influence in consumer's purchase decisions

The first suggested hypothesis mentions substantial influence of social media on people's purchasing decisions, particularly in the fashion industry. This hypothesis suggests that the content and marketing strategies employed on social media platforms can effectively raise awareness and influence consumer behavior towards more sustainable fashion choices.

This hypothesis is partially confirmed by the research findings. The younger generation, especially those under 25, appears to be significantly influenced by social media. This demographic is more receptive to the content shared by influencers and brands on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook. Due to the strong influence and high social pressure, they experience within their social circles, young people are more likely to adopt new trends and values that are promoted online. The need to belong and gain social approval, amplified by the proliferation of social media, plays a crucial role in shaping their consumption habits.

In contrast, the research indicates that young adults over 30 years old are less influenced by social media trends and influencers. This age group tends to have more established and structured consumption habits, which are less susceptible to the influence from social media-driven trends. This stability can be positive, as it suggests that their purchasing decisions are less likely to be driven by overconsumption often promoted on social media.

However, there is a downside to this reduced influence. The established consumption habits of individuals over 30 may also mean they are less open to changing their behaviors towards more sustainable practices. Their entrenched habits can make it challenging for social media campaigns to penetrate and effect change on their perception as these individuals may prioritize convenience and familiarity over new, more sustainable options.

To effectively promote sustainable fashion across different age groups, tailored strategies are necessary. For the younger demographic, leveraging the power of influencers and creating engaging, authentic content that resonates with their values can drive significant change. For older consumers, a different approach might be needed, such as emphasizing the long-term benefits of sustainable fashion, including quality, durability, and cost-effectiveness, that might better align with their established purchasing criteria.

The qualitative part of the research focuses on the specific analysis of Instagram, as it was rated the number one social media platform among participants. This shows room to do research on other social media channels and their influence on different generations.

Unlike traditional advertising, which is often explicit and direct, social media advertising often integrates into the content that users consume daily. This is achieved through techniques such as influencer marketing, where products are promoted by individuals who have built trust and authenticity with their followers. Influencers often share personal stories or experiences related to a product, which can make the advertisement feel more organic and less intrusive.

Additionally, social media platforms use sophisticated algorithms to target advertisements based on user behavior, interests, and preferences. This means that users might not even realize they are being marketed to, as the ads align closely with their personal tastes and browsing history. As a result, advertisements blend seamlessly into their feeds, making it challenging for consumers to distinguish between genuine content and paid promotions increasing the chances of engagement.

Given these factors, it is important to recognize that while some participants may consciously believe they are not influenced by social media ads, the subconscious impact of these marketing strategies can still significantly affect their purchasing habits. This underscores the need for consumers to be more aware of how advertising works in digital spaces and for researchers to develop methodologies that better capture these nuanced influences.

Furthermore, based on the literature analyzed, qualitative analysis, and observations, it can be stated that social media advertising (both traditional and UGC, including influencer marketing) primarily serves as a motivational factor. It pushes consumers to act according to their pre-existing intentions, drivers, and desires. In other words, while social media can sometimes create a new want, it mostly shapes and accelerates already existing latent aspirations.

Most algorithms reinforce habits and actions rather than being the trigger factor for consumers, since they give them more of what they are already actively seeking.

Hypothesis 2: Price as main barrier to sustainable fashion

This hypothesis suggests that practical considerations such as cost that is perceived as unaffordable and the level of awareness influence their buying behavior, creating a barrier to choosing sustainable fashion options.

The research confirms that price remains a significant barrier to the adoption of sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion brands are often perceived as too expensive and lacking the immediate appeal of their fast fashion counterparts. This belief presents a major challenge for these brands, which struggle to compete with fast fashion's creative marketing campaigns, trendy designs, captivating aesthetics, and powerful branding strategies that resonate with a wide audience.

However, while price is undeniably a barrier, the issue is more nuanced. The concept of buying fashion has been closely tied to displays of power, freedom, and social status, the luxury fashion industry is a clear example of this assumption. Fast fashion brands have democratized this experience, making clothing accessible to a much broader range of consumers. By offering trendy, low-cost items, fast fashion has created a false sense of economic power, allowing people to engage in fashion consumption regardless of their financial limitations. The slogan "shop like a millionaire" of the new super-fast fashion brand "Temu" perfectly captures the emotions and experience the brand wants to provoke in consumers.

This phenomenon is also explained with the large market for counterfeit goods, where individuals unable to afford luxury or designer items turn to fake versions to fulfill their needs for belonging, affiliation, and status. The counterfeit market reflects deeper societal pressures and the desire for inclusion in aspirational lifestyles, even if through inauthentic means. In this sense, price sensitivity in fashion is not about affordability, it is also about fulfilling psychological and social needs.

As the research shows, the uniqueness of Brussels' market highlights the diversity of fashion perceptions among individuals, with purchasing decisions shaped by a complex interplay of factors such as cultural influences, personal habits, values, and social expectations.

While lower-priced fast fashion provides instant gratification and fulfilment to these needs, sustainable fashion brands face the challenge of redefining what consumers value in their clothing choices and try to advertise their long-term benefits.

Shifting the conversation from mere affordability to long-term benefits, such as quality, ethical production, and reduced environmental impact, could help reposition sustainable fashion as a desirable and accessible option for a wider audience.

Moreover, the societal attachment to fast fashion's affordability can be overcome by educating consumers on the true cost of their purchases, including the hidden environmental and social cost. Sustainable fashion brands need to develop creative strategies to demonstrate their value proposition beyond price, highlighting how investing in fewer, higher-quality items can lead to greater satisfaction, durability, and ethical alignment with consumers' values.

In conclusion, while price remains a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of sustainable fashion, the underlying issue extends beyond mere cost. Essentially, it is the complex way people view fashion as a sign of expression and belonging, as well as the value they attach to it. Addressing these deeper psychological and social factors, alongside providing affordable and accessible sustainable options, will be key to shifting consumer behavior towards thoughtful fashion choices.

Awareness and lack of information as determinant barriers toward sustainable fashion.

Consumers in Brussels face an overwhelming amount of information, making it difficult to establish legitimate trust in brands. While most consumers genuinely want to contribute to sustainable practices, they often find themselves unsure of how to do so. The sheer volume of information available can be overwhelming, leading to feelings of paralysis or complete detachment, where they don't see themselves as part of the solution.

Many brands engage in greenwashing, where they claim to be environmentally friendly without substantial evidence to back these claims. This practice misleads consumers and makes it challenging to discern genuine sustainable practices from superficial ones.

The complexity is highlighted by the role of social media and digital marketing, which amplify both correct and misleading information. As a result, consumers may struggle to differentiate between brands that are genuinely committed to sustainability and those that are merely exploiting

While price is still a major barrier, addressing misinformation, enhancing brand transparency, and improving regulatory frameworks are essential to overcoming the barriers to adopting sustainable fashion in Brussels and beyond.

The lack of stringent regulations and standardized certifications for sustainable fashion has worsened the issue, making it difficult to distinguish true sustainability from greenwashing. However, progress is being made. A key development is the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR), which came into force on 18 July 2024. The ESPR aims to improve product durability, reusability, upgradability, and reparability, pushing manufacturers to design longer-lasting, repairable items.

It also promotes energy and resource efficiency and increases the use of recycled content, moving the fashion industry towards more circular practices, rules for measuring carbon and environmental footprints and ensures greater transparency by improving the availability of sustainability information.

This will help consumers make more informed choices while encouraging brands to innovate with sustainability at the forefront, these actions and regulations mark a critical step toward closing the regulatory gap, fostering greater accountability in the fashion industry, and promoting sustainable practices across the European market.

Despite growing transparency from certain brands, many consumers, even those well-informed about the harmful practices of the fashion industry, do not consistently act on this knowledge. This was openly acknowledged during the qualitative research, revealing that while awareness of sustainability is increasing, it is not necessarily the primary driver behind consumer choices toward sustainable fashion alternatives.

This disconnect between knowledge and action highlights a significant gap in consumer behavior. It suggests that simply raising awareness about environmental and social issues in fashion is not enough to shift purchasing habits. Sustainability, while important, often takes a backseat to more immediate motivators such as convenience, price, aesthetics, and the emotional satisfaction derived from shopping.

To truly bridge the gap between consumers' intentions to support sustainable ideals and their actual behavior, it is essential to tap into the real motivators that drive purchasing decisions in cities like Brussels. These motivators may include a desire for status, belonging, or personal expression, as well as the instant gratification often associated with new clothing purchases and the buying experience itself. Brands that can align sustainable fashion with these deeper psychological needs are more likely to influence behavior changes.

A simplified, actionable guide could play a critical role in helping consumers develop lasting, sustainable habits. Rather than being overwhelmed with endless statistics and abstract figures, consumers are seeking messaging that is relatable and deeply connected to their personal experiences, messages that not only inform but also entertain, inspire and empower them to take meaningful action.

Furthermore, creating a seamless experience in purchasing sustainable products is crucial. This could mean making sustainable fashion more accessible, affordable, and appealing in terms of design and convenience. Brands need to move beyond merely informing consumers about the negative impacts of fast fashion and instead focus on delivering compelling reasons to act, such as emphasizing the longevity, quality, and unique style of sustainable clothing.

9.1 CONTRIBUTIONS

While there is no single solution to mitigate the negative impacts of the fashion industry, educating and informing consumers, regardless of their diverse demographic characteristics, can be valuable. A simple and easily shareable framework can help promote sustainable fashion practices without overwhelming the audience with ambiguous messaging. These practices are straightforward to implement and can guide consumers towards making more mindful purchasing decisions .

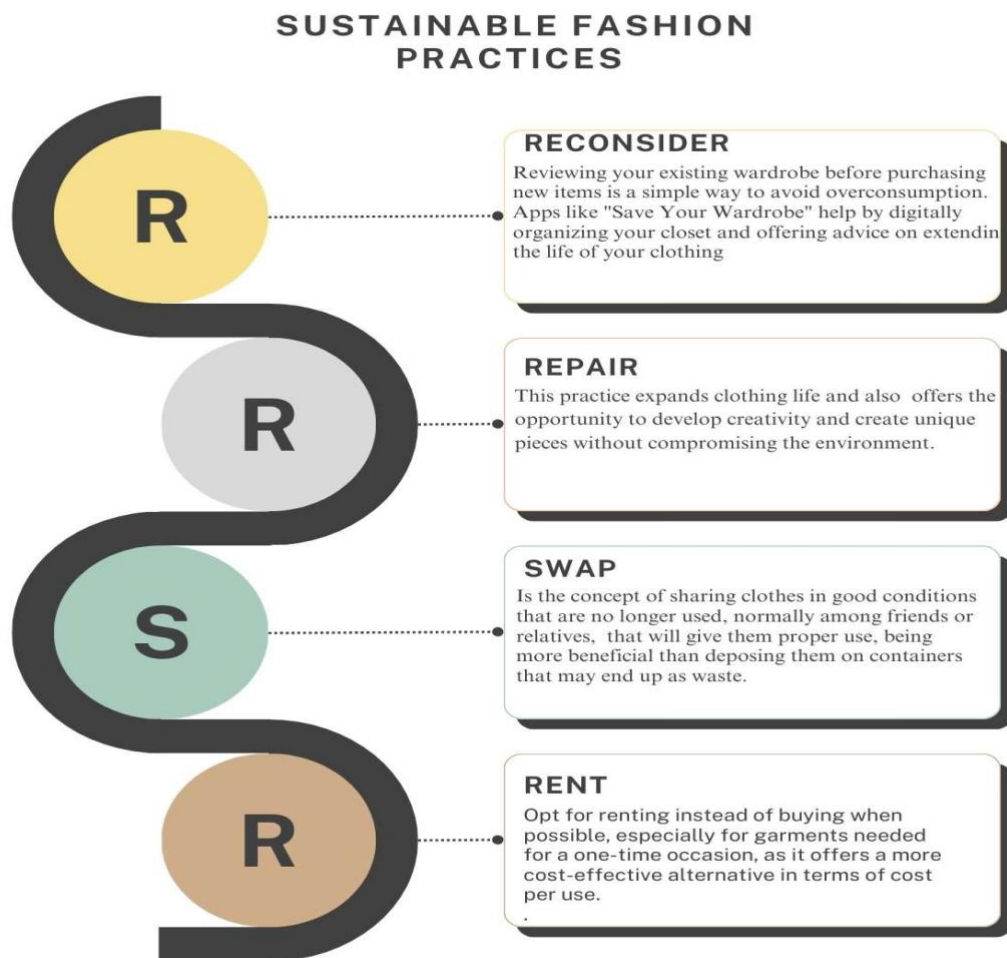


Figure24. Sustainable Fashion Practices .Vazquez.P

IDENTIFIED DRIVERS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FASHION

In summary with this research the identified drivers and motivators towards sustainable fashion among the participants can be summarized as follows:

1. **Innovation** **and** **creativity:**
Humans are attracted to novelty, innovation, and creativity, especially digital natives. Therefore, it is crucial for sustainable fashion to shift its focus and leverage new technologies such as AI and augmented reality to adapt to evolving markets. The options are limitless, and social media makes these innovations accessible even for small businesses, helping them target their buyer personas and act locally. Sustainable fashion should harness the power of attractive content to reach a broader audience.
2. **Emotional** **Appeal:**
Messaging that evokes positive and uplifting emotions is a key factor for consumers when searching for clothing. This has been demonstrated in previous studies and confirmed by this research. Awakening these feelings is crucial for sustainable fashion to be seen as appealing. Rather than focusing on guilt or sadness, consumers seek brands and sustainable alternatives that elicit positive emotions and enjoyable experiences throughout the buying process. Brands like Veja are excellent examples of how emotional engagement can foster consumer loyalty and contribute to their growth.
3. **Personalization:**
Effective messaging that makes sustainability feel like a personal concern is crucial. It's about forging a genuine connection with consumers, conveying the brand's purpose in a way that resonates on an individual level, and making sustainability relevant to their daily lives. Sustainable fashion (SF) should focus on engaging consumers more deeply, involving them in the solution rather than merely presenting it. To truly inspire change, the fashion industry must go beyond facts and figures, using relatable imagery and narratives that translate abstract concepts into concrete, everyday actions that consumers can adopt.

4. **Accessible** **education** :

Educating and informing consumers is essential for a sustainable transition in the fashion industry. Without awareness of the issues and the roles of key stakeholders such as brands, governments, and producers, consumers will struggle to take meaningful action and change their habits. For widespread adoption, the process of educating society should be presented as accessible and transparent, breaking away from the notion that sustainability is a secondary consideration for consumer and reinforce the awareness of the negative impact behind what we wear. Frugality, education, and collective consciousness play crucial roles in this paradigm shift. With the standardization of sustainable norms, consumers will be able to make better informed decisions. Use of technology, such as the ones mentioned before (blockchain, AI), can provide consumers with information about the manufacturing process for their garments, allowing them to take more informed decisions.

5. **Community** **Building** :

Encouraging collaboration based on shared values and recognizing the interconnectedness of nature and humanity, rather than viewing them as separate entities, is crucial. Social media holds significant potential to drive movements and trends toward sustainable practices, grounded in the principle of belonging. As previously analyzed in the literature review, humans tend to mirror the actions and behavior of others, which enhances the potential to make sustainable fashion, in its various forms, more accessible to younger generations. By fostering a sense of community and collaboration, social media can shift societal values away from overconsumption and motivate people toward more sustainable behaviors. If consumers feel like they're contributing to a greater good, they are more likely to select sustainable products, especially if they feel those products also represent their values.

9.2 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What we wear is an integral part of our personal brand, reflecting our personality, culture, age, and style. Fashion is more than just fabric or fulfilling basic needs; it is integrated with our identity and self-expression. The strong relationship between humans and fashion has evolved over the years, with fashion serving as a reflection of social and historical moments.

From the lavish gowns of the Renaissance to the punk styles of the late 20th century, fashion has marked significant generational and social movements. Throughout history, clothing has always been a powerful means of expression.

In the past, fashion and clothing were deeply personal. Consumers often knew the origins of their garments, including who made them and where they came from, which fostered a greater appreciation for each piece. The design process was deliberate and often tailored to the individual, resulting in higher but fair costs that reflected the garment's perceived value. People were more discerning about fabrics, understanding that superior materials meant better quality and longer durability. In contrast, today's fashion landscape is dominated by polyester clothing and mass-production, low quality, and often made with microplastics and harmful chemicals. This shift reflects a broader change in consumer priorities, where convenience and cost have largely supplanted the traditional emphasis on craftsmanship and sustainability.

As a society, we have the power to influence and demand brands to change their practices. Informed consumers hold the power of purchasing, without them brands cannot survive. When consumers raise their voices and demand better practices from the fashion industry, they can apply real pressure, accelerating the transition toward a more sustainable industry.

It is time to highlight the true environmental and social costs of each garment we wear, including the natural resources used in their production. This awareness can spark a shift in consumer beliefs that translates into real impact. However, real change requires collaboration among all stakeholders. Brands, for instance, must embrace transparency within their supply chains and better understand their target audience in order to captivate consumers and drive meaningful, positive change.

It's a fact that the merely fact of highlighting the environmental and social benefits of sustainable fashion is not enough motivator for consumers, hence brands and organizations should focus on what consumers value most according to their priorities and adapt to changing market dynamics without forgetting what people values the most about fashion itself and its buying process.

It is time to recall that, our actions leave an ecological footprint and that we must act now and be more mindful about our consumption habits. Understanding the value of what we wear, avoiding the culture of disposable ,embracing sufficiency , and learning to assign a higher value to what we wear.

The transition to a sustainable fashion industry is developing., Institutions, brands and consumers in Europe, particularly in Belgium, are opening their perspectives and aligning efforts for a better future. Minor changes made by one person might not make a difference, but if they are made by millions of people, they can have incredible repercussions.

Changing the fashion industry is possible, we can all contribute in small or large ways to spread the word, be more mindful when buying, and demand transparency from brands.

With technology readily available and creative minds developing innovative projects, the future is optimistic: *“Together, we can make a positive impact on the planet, while embracing the beauty and creativity of fashion, because sustainability and style can go hand in hand!”*.

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AI employed for this thesis :

Otter IA ,<https://otter.ai/>: Transcription of the interviews. Mentioned in the Appendix A

Open Chat GTP, <http://chat.openai.com/chat>: Improvement of grammar and coherence , refinement of the text, specified on Appendix C.