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**Master thesis**

**Factors of moving  
towards a Sustainable Consumption of Fashion Products**

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## MASTER THESIS ASSIGNMENT

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#### Zásady pro vypracování:

(v zásadách pro vypracování uveďte cíl práce a metodický postup)

**Objective/Cíl práce:** The aim of the thesis is to identify the factors of sustainable fashion consumption, to assess the current situation and consumer attitudes and to define the potential for improving the current situation.

#### **Methodological approach/Metodický postup:**

- Theoretical background
- Secondary data collection
- Data collection
- Data analysis
- Proposals and Conclusions

#### **Framework structure/Rámcová osnova:**

1. Introduction. Objectives.
2. Review of literature.
3. Methods.
4. Results, potentially discussion.
5. Conclusion.
- X. References
- X. List of Annexes (if any)

## X. Annexes

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Rozsah grafických prací: As necessary

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Dolan, P. (2002). The Sustainability of “sustainable consumption” *Journal of Macromarketing*, 22(2), 170–181.

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Nomin Batuuri

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is one of the key value-creating industries in the world economy (The Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company, 2017). However, in recent years, the industry had been struck severely by the Covid-19 pandemic. The industry is undergoing substantial changes that have raised the issue of its adverse impacts on the environment and societal well-being. Most significantly, changes include concerns about sustainability, shifts in consumer preferences, and the incorporation of technical enhancements into every aspect of the industry.

Sustainable fashion focuses on the ethical practices of producers and consumers, reduced production, and the associated impacts. Moreover, it prioritizes quality over quantity, that is, the production and purchase of quality products over the production and purchase of large quantities of products (Fletcher, 2010; Ertekin & Atik, 2014).

The sustainable production and consumption of fashion products incorporates many phases, including the cultivation and collection of materials, processing of textiles, manufacturing of garments, their distribution, and purchase and disposal of fashion products. Responsible consumption and post-sale behavior at the retailer-consumer level are therefore essential for a transition to sustainable consumption.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify and understand factors that influence the transition towards sustainable consumption of fashion products. The aim is to provide an overview of the sector which can assist in enabling stakeholders, including producers, retailers, consumers, and policymakers, to recognize the relevance of adopting sustainable practices in the industry and thereby contribute to addressing current environmental and social challenges.

This paper explores various factors related to sustainable consumption, including the importance of sustainable and responsible consumer behavior, the role of brands involvement in promoting sustainability, the adoption of smart and innovative practices across the entire production and consumption process. By examining these factors, the research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and prospects associated with sustainable fashion, thus providing potential pathways for improving the current industry.

Overall, the paper highlights the importance of sustainable practices and consumption as a means of addressing the environmental and social challenges that emerge from the production and consumption of fashion products. By identifying the factors that influence this transition, stakeholders can better understand the significance of integrating sustainable practices and advocating sustainable consumption within the industry, as well as collaborating to achieve a more environmentally and socially responsible, and thus sustainable fashion industry.



## 2. INDUSTRY BACKGROUND

The fashion industry is a multibillion-dollar worldwide industry dedicated to the production and sale of garments. It is one of the world's largest and most fragmented industries, divided into multiple product segments and categories, housed in many different types of organizations, and widely dispersed across geographies (Berg et al., 2017).

Fashion is a multifaceted concept of which definition depends on the context and perspective; however, it is best defined as a popular style of garment worn at any given time by groups of people. It is a constantly changing and evolving matter that is frequently considered as an added value to garment to make them more desirable to consumers (Arnold, 2022). The fashion industry encompasses many different smaller and more niche industries. The fashion industry, in general, encompasses resource cultivation and collecting, design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel. Industry and its consumers are constantly evolving, rendering fashion products consumption extremely rapid and wasteful.

Traditional apparel retailers used their capability to forecast consumer demand and fashion trends long before the actual time of consumption (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010). The product driven strategies emphasized on forecast driven supply chains (i.e., relying on forecasted future trends instead of using real-time data to access consumers' needs and wants) and low cost mass production of standardized styles that did not change frequently due to design restrictions of the factories (Gupta, 2018).

However, in the early twenty first century, mainstream fashion retailers dominated the market and switched the industry from product driven to buyer driven where retailers use real-time data to understand consumer desires and respond to their needs instantly (Sull & Turconi, 2008; Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010; Mehrjoo & Pasek, 2014). Today, the fashion industry has become extremely competitive, with constant pressure for retailers to update their product lines and consumer's desire to refresh their wardrobes. The era of fast fashion employs a method of production that is antithetical to sustainability, which is based essentially on a commitment to design ethics, environmental preservation, and labor rights.

Sustainable fashion is primordial in overcoming current challenges linked with the fashion industry. Moving toward sustainable fashion approaches and consumption may have a beneficial influence on the industry, improving the sector's social and economic conditions while minimizing its negative environmental implications. Collaboration among corporations, consumers, governments, and civil society is critical to achieving a sustainable future. Moreover, the fashion sector needs to alter its nature towards environmentally friendly virtues. Nevertheless, efforts are being made to transform this impactful industry towards more sustainable path.

## 2.1. FAST FASHION

Fast fashion refers to the production of clothing and accessories that are designed to be quickly and cheaply made, and quickly and cheaply sold to consumers (Bailey et al., 2022). The creation of the fast fashion industry began within the introduction of Progressive Bundle System, or PBS, during World War II and the growth of mass retailing, which shifted production towards large manufacturers in the early post-war period (Doeringer & Crean, 2005). The product driven industry then altered to buyer driven industry with an increased emphasis on responding swiftly to consumer demand by introducing the latest fashion trends in apparel to enhance product value. The concept of fast fashion is built on rapid mass production and consumption of predominantly inexpensive and trendy clothing that is designed to be worn for a short period before being discarded.

According to Cline (2013), garments go out of style rapidly, and companies constantly introduce new latest-trend collections, and often on a weekly or even daily basis. The fast fashion production method depends on copying everything that major international fashion houses offer from designs and manufacturing as quickly as possible at the lowest cost and providing the latest fashion trends to the consumer in large numbers and at the lowest prices (Mohamed, 2017).

Fast fashion industry has experienced rapid growth in the recent years, due to its business model that focuses on supply chain management and cost reduction. This expansion has led to a dramatic increase in garment production and consumption, which has raised significant environmental and social concerns. The detrimental impacts of fast fashion include generation of waste, emissions of greenhouse gases, various types of pollution, the prevalence of poor working conditions, the exploitation of employees, and violations of human rights.

Mainly, the production of fast fashion has significant environmental impacts. The industry emits vast amount of greenhouse gases and consumes a great deal of water. According to the United Nations (2019), the fashion industry is the second most polluting industry, contributing to **8 percent of all carbon emissions** and **20 percent of all global wastewater**. This contributes significantly to climate change and pollution of water sources, both of which impact

the biodiversity. The production of fast fashion involves the excessive use of polluting and over-excessive raw materials such as cotton, dyes, and water, as well as excessive waste in consumption (Cooke et al., 2022); as well as the use of chemicals in the production processes, which can be toxic and harmful not only to the environment, but also to the workers within the industry (UNEP, 2022). Furthermore, the fast fashion promotes the throwaway culture, with 85 percent of all textiles thrown in landfills each year (Maiti, 2023). Notwithstanding, the fast fashion industry promotes eventually excessive consumerism and contributes to the environmental degradation owing to consumers' reckless disposal of fashion items. These discarded garments can take hundreds of years to decompose (The University of Queensland, 2018). As a result of its unsustainable and unethical methods, the fast fashion industry depletes non-renewable resources and leads to environmental damage.

Fast fashion industry additionally generates societal issues, such as the exploitation of cheap labor, forced and child labor, unsafe working conditions, and poor salaries. The Worker Rights Consortium (2020) reported that more than 150 million workers in lower-income countries produce goods for export to North America, Europe, and Japan. This suggests that these socioeconomic challenges are particularly prevalent in developing countries. As the fast fashion brands heavily depend on cheap labor to maintain cost-effectiveness, this leads to poor working conditions, low wages for workers, and even forced and child labor. For instance, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (2018) found evidence of forced and child labor in the fashion industry in Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Turkey, Vietnam and others. According to Linden (2016), the garment industry has always been a low-capital and labor intensive industry.

The detrimental effects of fast fashion on the environment and society must be promptly addressed. The fashion industry needs to embrace more sustainable and ethical practices to minimize its impacts.

## 2.2. SUSTAINABLE FASHION

A new geological period emerged at the beginning of the Great Acceleration when humanity began producing greater amounts of technology and employing more materials, and the world's population surged rapidly. This new epoch, **the Anthropocene**, refers to the significant impacts of human activity on the Earth's environment, including climate, ecosystems, and natural resources (National Geographic Society, 2022). With the rise of unsustainable practices that contribute to environmental degradation, resource depletion, and labor exploitation, the fashion industry is one of the sectors responsible for the development of this era. Sustainable fashion has emerged as an alternative approach to the production and consumption of garments in response to growing awareness and concerns about these alarming consequences.

Scholars trace the origins of the emergence of the sustainable fashion movement back to the 1960s, coinciding with growing environmental concerns as issues began to emerge following the rapid increase in production and consumption in the modern era. Thus, sustainability became significant in connection with environmental activism, and later grew into its own movement.

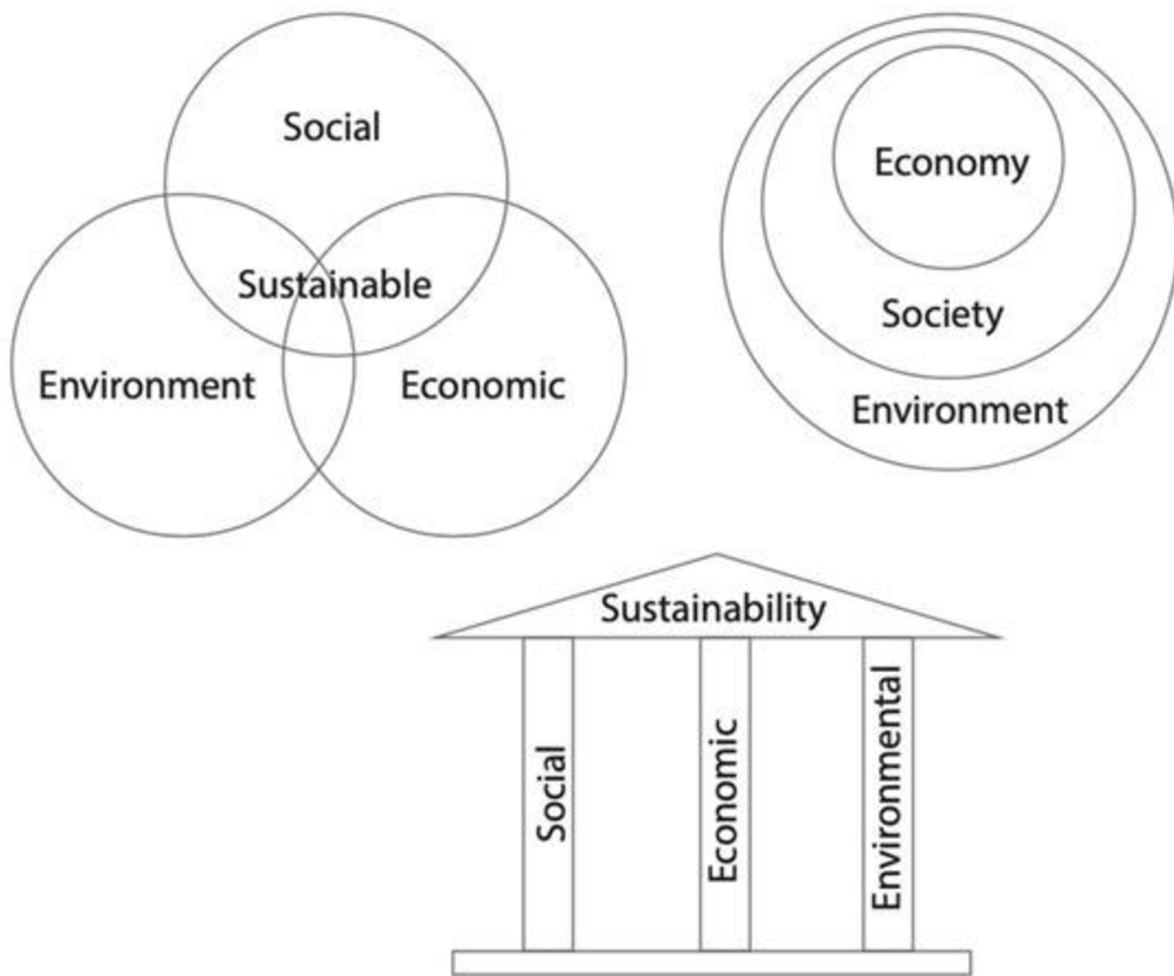
However, the term “sustainability” was first introduced in 1987 when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) pointed out the critical importance of sustainability as ‘sustainable development is development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Federal Office for Spatial Development, 1987). **Sustainability is thus a concept** that refers to the efficient use of resources by balancing its **three fundamental pillars**: economic development, environmental protection, and social welfare. Sustainable fashion focuses on promoting fair working environment, safe workplaces, local producers and artisanal labour, organic and natural materials. Sustainable fashion emphasises dignity, safety, worker recompense, quality and qualified productions. It includes various segments, such as slow, ethical, and eco-friendly fashion.

Judith Katharina Nyfeler & Kollnitz (2013) explains the three pillars of sustainability as following: environmental sustainability focuses on environmental protection and

preservation. It entails mitigating threats to the environment and assessing the environmental effect of human activities. Further, social sustainability promotes social development and equity by ensuring that workers are treated fairly and ethically. It involves ensuring that communities and individuals have access to basic necessities, as well as encouraging diversity, equality, and human rights, such as fair labor practices, safe working conditions, and fair wages for workers. Finally, economic sustainability focuses on ensuring long-term economic growth and prosperity. It involves balancing economic development with the efficient use of resources and minimizing negative impacts on the economy.

The figure 1 depicts a visual representation of aforementioned pillars of sustainability. The intersecting circles in the first visualisation reflect the overlap and interdependence of the three dimensions of sustainability (Bazan & Slawecki, 2002; Willard, 2015). It implies that establishing a balance between economic development, environmental protection, and social well-being is essential for sustainability. The nested concentric circles visualisation displays organized circles in concentric layers involving each dimension, with the largest circle encompassing all three dimensions (Bazan & Slawecki, 2002; Willard, 2015). This demonstrates that sustainability necessitates a comprehensive approach, as one dimension is nested inside and impacts the others. The third representation, the literal pillars, suggests that sustainability is founded on these fundamental pillars, which must be balanced and connected to achieve sustainability.

*Figure 1: The three pillars of sustainability - intersecting, concentric, and literal pillars*



Source: Purvis et al., 2019

These three intersecting pillars should function simultaneously to achieve ideal sustainability and shape the current and future development of human activities. Consequently, ideal sustainable consumption should embrace the economic, environmental as well as social aspects throughout the consumption chain.

The fashion industry needs to emphasize on reducing the negative impact of manufacturing and consumption of fashion products on the environment by using sustainable and eco-friendly materials, reducing waste, and promoting sustainable production practices. Fashion brands can contribute to environmental sustainability by adopting sustainable sourcing and manufacturing processes, using organic or recycled materials, minimizing water and energy usage, and implementing circular economy principles such as recycling and upcycling (Dissanayake

& Weerasinghe, 2021). In particular, it is crucial to ensure fair treatment of workers and promote responsible consumption, as it is, according to the United Nations, one of the most labor-intensive industries in the world. This includes supporting ethical practices and fair wages throughout the supply chain, promoting safe and healthy working conditions, and respecting workers' rights. Social sustainability encompasses promoting diversity, inclusion, and gender equality within the fashion industry.

Consumers can contribute to social sustainability by opting for brands that prioritize ethical practices and fair trade certifications. Eventually, in today's economic system, where private actors hold significant market power (Jahan & Mahmud, 2023), it is critical to contribute to the development of a sustainable and flourishing industry. This entails balancing economic growth with resource efficiency and limiting negative economic repercussions. Private actors can contribute to economic sustainability by supporting local and small-scale fashion businesses, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, and promoting sustainable business models that consider long-term profitability and social responsibility.

As a result of increased awareness of the negative consequences of this sector, sustainability has become one of the most essential topics for the continuance and growth of this economic sector. Thus, consumers and businesses are moving towards more sustainable practices that are both environmentally beneficial and socially equitable. Sustainable fashion has no clear definition due to the fact that it can mean several things and there is no standard definition that covers the entire industry (Lundblad & Davies, 2015).

Various alternative approaches have emerged in attempt to mitigate the existing fashion industry's social and environmental effects. Sustainable fashion is a well-known and growing alternative approach comprising several relevant initiatives such as eco-fashion, ethical fashion, collaborative fashion and recycling/upcycling. These are further reinforced by sub-categories differentiated by aspects such as green and clean, custom made and on demand, timeless design, ethical, upcycle, rent and second-hand. Shen et al. (2013) stated that from the fashion aspect, all terms labelled with organic, recycled, locally made, fair-trade certified, vegan and custom made are categorized as sustainable fashion.



### **2.2.1. Collaborative fashion**

Collaborative fashion is referred to as providing the consumers an option for the alternative of fashion instead of purchasing new fashion products (Iran et al., 2019). This is an emerging trend that could benefit the industry in achieving sustainable fashion consumption. Second-hand clothes, gifting, swapping, sharing, renting and lending are various instances of collaborative fashion. These alternatives are both cost-effective and easily accessible, giving the garments second chance and thereby contribute to the reduction of waste output in the sector.

Recent studies have found disparities in the motives of various populations to consume collaborative fashion (Iran et al., 2019; Norum & Norton, 2017; Gaur et al., 2019). Due to cultural differences, researchers found that consumers in developed Western European countries engage more in collaborative fashion than consumers in developing Western Asian countries. Additionally, researches discovered that consumers from one generation practice sustainability in fashion entirely through consumption of several forms of fashion alternatives compared to consumer from other generation who are keen on consuming only one type of fashion alternative. Furthermore, researchers found that consumers from different environment have different values affecting their consumption, which are mostly influenced by social norms of the concerned background.

Considering it fosters collaboration and resource sharing in the industry, collaborative fashion is a valuable approach for promoting sustainable practices. Through communication and collaboration among consumers and businesses, collaborative fashion may be expanded to worldwide consumers.

### **2.2.2. Slow fashion**

Slow fashion is one of the outcomes of sustainable fashion, the antithesis of fast fashion, whose rapid turnover leads to overproduction and overconsumption with further negative environmental and social impacts. Slow fashion businesses thus operate in opposition to the key characteristics of fast fashion, driven by high-speed business models, to reduce the significant impact of waste produced through this fast-moving system, as a result of overconsumption of rapidly changing trends in the form of minimum-quality garments and accessories (Brydges et al. 2014; Fletcher 2010; Jung and Jin 2014, 2016; Minney 2016; Pookulangara and Shephard 2013).

Slow fashion refers to a shift in consumers' mindsets from quantity to quality, including the promotion of traditional methods of garment production (Jung & Jin, 2014). This initiative emphasizes stewardship of local producers and communities through shared values and maximizes the lifespan and efficiency of garments through slow clothing. According to the industry report *The State of Fashion 2022*, fast and ultra-fast fashion companies hastened product launches by releasing thousands of limited-edition products each day and delivered in the least amount of time. In contrast, labels within the slow fashion movement commonly produce only two collections each year (Henninger et al. 2015).

Slow fashion is an essential approach to sustainable fashion since it promotes sustainability, ethical principles, and quality above quantity. Because it examines the whole life cycle of the product, it encourages buyers to invest in well-made and long-lasting clothing. Slow fashion businesses produce their items locally, allowing for complete transparency.

### **2.2.3. Eco fashion**

Eco-fashion refers to fashion that is produced in an environmentally conscious way, with a focus on reducing the negative impact of the fashion industry on the environment. It takes into account ethical considerations, such as fair labor practices and animal rights (Cheng, 2019). According to Cheng (2019), this approach encompasses environmental consciousness, ethical considerations and sustainable design strategies. This relates to the use of sustainable materials, the reduction of waste and pollution, the promotion of garment recycling and repurposing, along with the consideration of ethical practices that ensure fair labor conditions and animal welfare.

A new study indicates that decision to consume eco-fashion products depends on personal pro environmental values and previous experience (Abrar et al., 2021). However, one of the significant methods in eco-fashion is sustainable design strategies that use eco-friendly materials, employ efficient production processes, and take into consideration the entire product life cycle. Another two significant methods of eco-fashion that strive to reduce waste and promote sustainability are recycling and upcycling. Upcycling, in particular, is a developing trend that contributes to resource conservation and reduction of textile waste. Upcycling is defined as a recycling approach where “waste”—textile leftovers that would usually end up in landfill or incineration—is used to create products with a higher retail value than traditional recycled products (Aus, 2011).

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation's report "A new textiles economy Redesigning fashion's future" (2017) suggests that recycling can be improved by transforming clothing design, collection, and reprocessing. The report emphasizes the importance of capturing value from recycled content and creating a circular fashion system that creates no waste by design. According to recent study, upcycling can be a viable solution for reducing waste and promoting sustainability in fashion industry (Aus et al., 2021). Ultimately, eco-fashion is a smart approach that prioritizes primarily environmental sustainability, ethical practices, and consumer choices. The long-term objective is to create more sustainable and responsible fashion industry.

**Sustainable fashion consumption, thus, can be defined as the consumption of ethical fashion by making conscious choices that are socially and environmentally responsible while purchasing, using, and disposing of garments.** This concept focuses primarily on promoting the preservation of the environment and ethical labor practices by considering the entire life cycle of a garment, from raw material sourcing and manufacturing to transportation and end-of-life disposal. The key factors driving this concept are hence the increasing awareness of severe environmental impacts and labor rights malpractices. As a result, consumers are increasingly demanding greater transparency and sustainability from industry, which is initiating companies to integrate corporate social responsibilities into their business strategies. Companies, thus, can by providing ethical fashion products both attract new consumers and fulfill their responsibilities regarding the social and environmental issues (Shen et al., 2012).

Sustainable fashion consumption based on repositioning of strategies of consumption, use, and reuse might thus be one of the key approaches to achieve sustainable development. Eder-Hansen et al. (2012), defines sustainable fashion consumption as “the use of clothing for purposes beyond utilitarian needs, including “identity makin”, and which is achieved without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. Further, Eder-Hansen et al. (2012) explains that sustainable fashion consumption is a sub-set of the sustainable fashion system which includes consumer attitudes and behaviors that lead to reductions in the triple-bottom line impacts of buying, wearing, caring for, repairing and recycling fashion goods. That includes demanding sustainable alternatives, caring for garments in less impact intensive ways (e.g. cold wash and linedrying clothes) and responsible disposal or recycling of obsolete goods.

Nowadays, there are more and more initiatives that promote this sustainable practice. The most known global initiative is the collection of interlinked seventeen objectives known as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs that strive to ensure peace and prosperity for people and planet, now and into the future (United Nations, 2015). The **UN Sustainable Development Goal 12** in particular commits to **ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns**. Tackling the environmental and social issues related to clothing production and consumption can significantly contribute in achieving of SDG 12. This particular Sustainable Development Goal is structured over eleven targets, addressing the use

of natural resources, chemical waste, fossil fuels and the integration of sustainable practices into the production cycles (The Global Goals, 2022).

Nevertheless, since the Sustainable development Goals are interconnected complex system, addressing key challenges related to fashion industry can contribute to the achievement of other Sustainable Development Goals. The fashion industry has a direct impact on several additional SDGs. One relevant example is the fashion industry ensuring fair working conditions to its workers, which in consequence can have an impact on the achievement of **SDG 8<sup>1</sup> - decent work and economic growth** and **SDG 5<sup>2</sup> - gender equality**. Another relevant example is the fashion industry reducing its waste, resulting generation of various types of pollution, which has impact on **SDG 6<sup>3</sup> - clean water and sanitation**, **SDG 13<sup>4</sup> - climate action** and also **SDG 14<sup>5</sup> - life below water** (United Nations, 2015).

Another relative global initiative is the **Fashion Pact**, an industry wide movement, aimed at aligning the fashion industry with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Thirty- three major fashion brands, including their suppliers and distributors, all committed to a common core of key environmental goals. The emphasis is on following three pillars: climate, biodiversity, and oceans. Consequently, their objective is to halt global warming, restore biodiversity, and protect the oceans (The Fashion Pact, 2019; Fashion Revolution, 2019). The committed brands have agreed to implement the Science Based Targets to tackle environmental challenges into their strategies.

The most known initiative is called **Fashion Transparency Index**. It is an annual review of 250 of the biggest global fashion brands and retailers ranked according to their level of public disclosure on social and environmental policies, practices and impacts, in their operations and in their supply chains. The Index is a tool to push and incentivise the world's largest fashion brands to be more transparent about their social and environmental efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> SDG 8 – promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

<sup>2</sup> SDG 5 – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

<sup>3</sup> SDG 6 – ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

<sup>4</sup> SDG 13 – take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

<sup>5</sup> SDG 14 – conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

However, transparency is not to be confused with sustainability, but it is rather a significant tool in achieving a sustainable, accountable, and fair fashion industry (Fashion Revolution, 2021). According to Fashion Revolution (2021), a lack of transparency perpetuates an exclusive system, where people are expected to trust brands who have continued to put profit and growth above all else. When brands publicly disclose information, it allows anyone to scrutinise their policies, hold them accountable for their claims and advocate for positive change.

## **2.3. PRESENT STATE OF FASHION INDUSTRY**

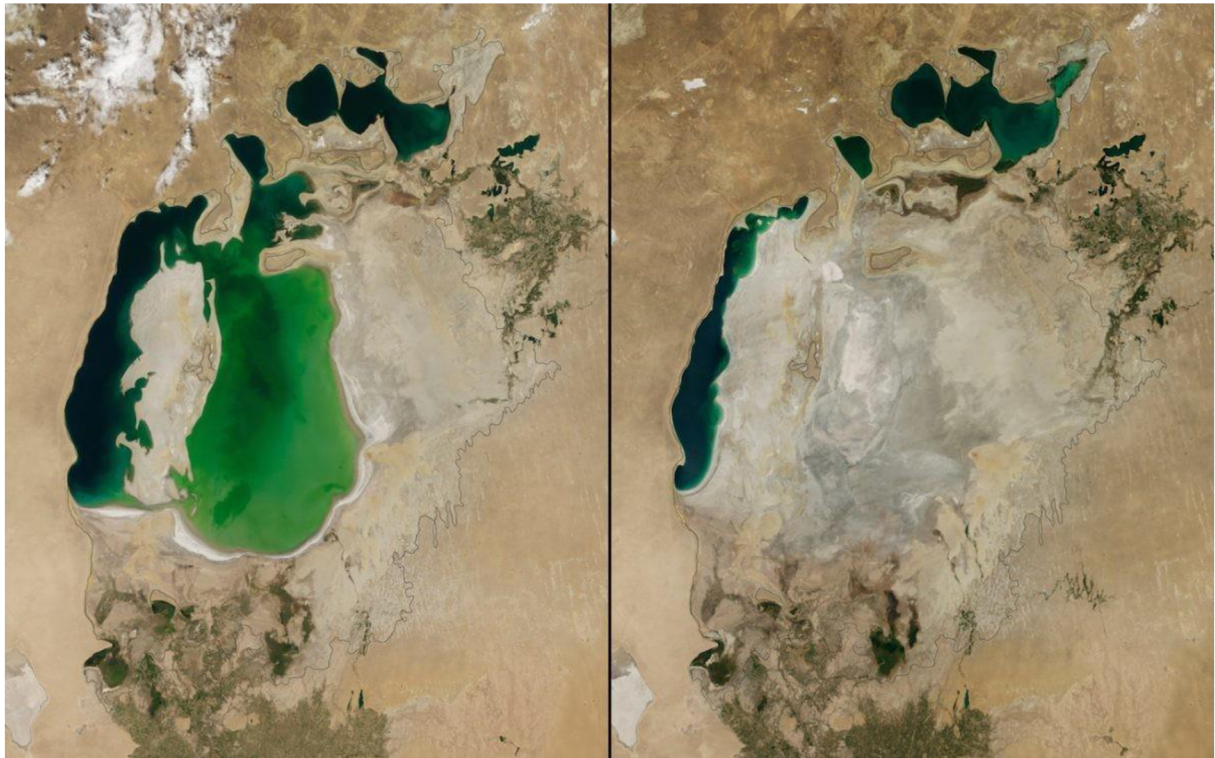
Fashion is one of the key sectors of the global economy, generating trillions of dollars in revenue each year. With this status, the industry has a significant impact on several fronts, including its harmful effects on the environment and society.

### **2.3.1. Impacts on the environment**

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTD) fashion is considered to be the second most polluting industry in the world, after oil. To stress the impact of pollution, eight to ten percent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from the fashion industry, which is more than the aviation and maritime shipping industries combined (United Nations, 2019). According to a MacArthur Foundation study, the fashion industry produces 1.2 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> each year.

Globally, the fashion industry manufactures and sells between 80 billion to 150 billion garments every year (Berg et al., 2017). This refers to excessive production and consumption in comparison to the present world population. In addition, the fashion industry generates 20 percent of global wastewater and utilizes 93 billion cubic meters of water, which is sufficient to sustain five million people. According to the Natural Resources Defense Council (2016), up to 200 tons of water, for instance, is used to produce a ton of fabric. Among other things, the industry dumps a half a million tons of microfiber, the equivalent of three million barrels of oil into the ocean every year (United Nations, 2019). Additionally, washing clothes releases 500,000 tons of microfibers into the ocean each year – the equivalent of 50 billion plastic bottles. Many of those fibers are polyester, a plastic found in an estimated 60% of garments. Producing polyester releases two to three times more carbon emissions than cotton, and polyester does not break down in the ocean (McFall-Johnsen, 2020). An example of the consequences of the overproduction of the fashion industry can be illustrated in the drainage of the Aral Sea basin in Uzbekistan (see Figure 2). The industry is partly responsible for the desertification of the Aral Sea basin as it exploited its water to cultivate one of the most water-intensive crops, notably cotton (Tansy Hoskins, 2014).

*Figure 2: Cotton farming used up so much water from the Aral Sea that it dried up after about 50 years*



Source: World Economic Forum, 2020. Image: NASA

Furthermore, three-fifths of all clothing produced is disposed of in incinerators or landfills within years of production (United Nations, 2019). Landfilling is the ultimate disposal technology which is relevant even when other advanced options are being used for recycling and/or volume reduction (Agamuthu, 2012). According to the World Bank (2022), the waste generation around the world in 2020 was estimated up to 2.24 billion tonnes of solid waste, and with rapid population growth and urbanization, annual waste generation is expected to increase by 73 percent from 2020 levels to 3.88 billion tonnes in 2050.

Nevertheless, this unsustainable method of waste management is often found in developing countries with limited financial resources due to the fact that it is the lowest-cost disposal option (Agamuthu, 2012). Therefore, the residents in these developing nations are impacted by its negative consequences, such as serious health problems and environmental degradation. In low-income countries, over 90% of waste is often disposed in unregulated dumps or openly burned (World Bank, 2022).



For instance, the fashion industry is turning parts of Ghana into toxic landfill (see Figure 3). According to Besser (2021), garments donated to charity end up in the second-hand clothing industry in Accra, Ghana’s capital, called Kantamanto markets, where an estimated 15 million used garments arrive every week from various countries, including UK, Europe, North America, and Australia; and about 40 percent of these clothes are of poor quality and deemed worthless, leading to their disposal in landfill. Although this specific second-hand industry provides employment for many individuals, it suffers from low wages and poor and hazardous working conditions. According to UNEP (2019), one garbage truck full of textiles is landfilled or incinerated. Dumping such volume of garments into the landfills is creating an environmental and social disaster.

*Figure 3: Landfill in Accra, Ghana*



Source: The Guardian, 2023. Photograph: Muntaka Chasant/Rex

Fashion is already exceeding numerous planetary boundaries and contributing significantly towards biodiversity loss through the pressure it puts on fragile ecosystems. Climate change and biodiversity loss are two major contemporary issues aggravated by the fashion industry. Nevertheless, these problems persist, and urgent action is needed to alleviate pressures on the planet.

### **2.3.2. Impacts on the society**

According to the International Labour Organisation, there are more than 60 million workers around the globe in textiles, clothing, leather, and footwear production from raw material sourcing to manufacturing. Ellen MacArthur Foundation states that globally, the clothing industry employs more than 300 million people along the value chain, including design, distribution, and retail divisions of the fashion industry.

The employment of such number of people leads to socially damaging practices. This sector creates severe ramifications, such as forced child labor, poor wages, and excess of safety precautions as a result of increased demand on manufacturers to meet quicker turnaround times and lower prices. Furthermore, manufacturing factories are typically located in developing nations, where working conditions are frequently deplorable, such as exhausting working hours and insufficient compensation. It follows that the fashion industry's activities promote modern slavery of the most vulnerable populations.

Thus, workers in the value chain are subjected to exploitation, systematic underpayment, forced labor, severe health concerns, and verbal and physical abuse. The Rana Plaza factory disaster is a prime example of this industrial issue. Over 1,100 people – mostly garment workers – lost their lives when the Rana Plaza factory collapsed (see Figure 4) in the outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh, on 24 April 2013 (International Labour Organization, 2023). According to multiple reports in the press, the building was occupied by several garment factories that manufactured apparel for international fast fashion brands, and the workers were subjected to poor working conditions in a dangerous environment to fulfill their demand for low-cost clothes production.

*Figure 4: Aerial view of the Rana Plaza building site after it collapsed in April 2013*



Source: The Guardian, 2014. Photograph: Munir Uz Zaman/AFP/Getty Images

A significant number of workers operate in poor working environments and endure many challenges that have harmful effects on their well-being. The main difficulties include activities in unsafe structures with dangerous working methods, as well as exposure to volatile compounds employed throughout the course of the job without adequate safety equipment.

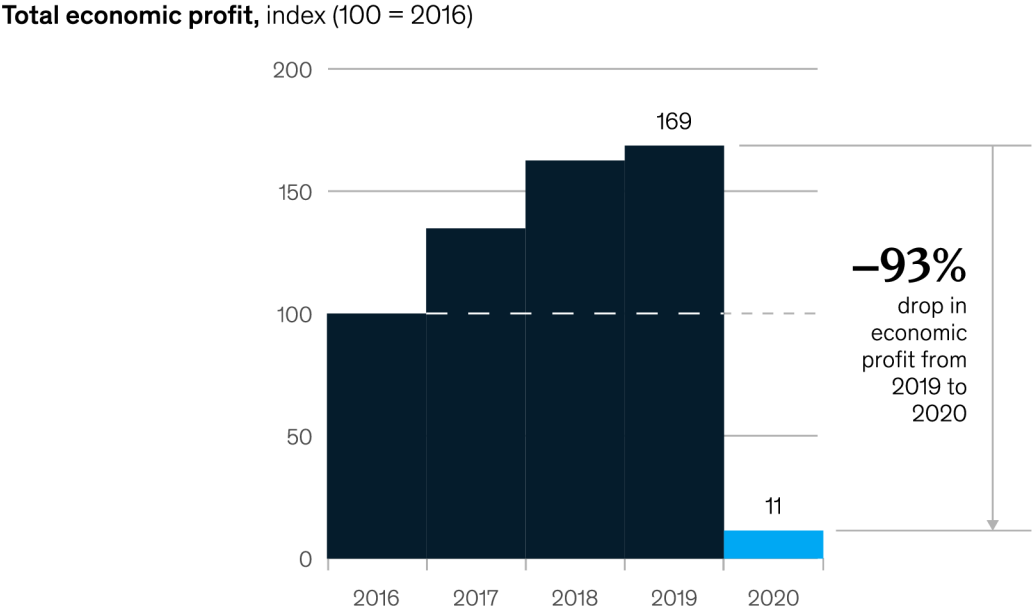
However, such practices have an impact not just on the lives of the workers, but also on the communities where the manufacturing takes place. Manufacturers, for example, discharge untreated manufacturing effluent into adjacent rivers, which then severely impacts hydration and sanitation sources, affecting the well-being of inhabitants. A report from Water Witness International (WWI) shows that the manufacture of fast fashion across Africa is linked to pollution that is killing rivers and denying access to safe water, toilets and washing facilities to workers and their communities. In Lesotho, south-east Africa, research revealed a river that had been dyed blue by the manufacture of jeans. The researchers additionally collected samples from Tanzania's Msimbazi river and discovered that it had a pH as high as 12, which is as strong as bleach (Water Witness International, 2021).

**2.3.3. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic**

According to State of Fashion (2022), the global fashion sector endured exceptionally challenging circumstances due to restrictions associated with Covid-19 in 2020 and 2021. The pandemic aggravated performance disparities, with a small number of prominent brands meeting or even exceeding their pre-pandemic success. However, many businesses struggled to generate value or even survive as the epidemic progressed. Brands that outperformed implemented alternative strategies, such as development of e-commerce. Companies that were unable to align with these markets faltered, increasing the frequency of takeovers and bankruptcies.

The fashion sector experienced a variety of limitations as a result of pandemic-related regulations that hindered regular operations. These included the closure of physical retail stores and as well as the government’s mandate for citizens stay at home owing to social distancing, both of which resulted in a decline in consumer demand for fashion products, and a decrease in total sales and revenue for fashion brands.

*Figure 5: Profit for the global fashion industry in 2020*



Source: McKinsey Global Fashion Index, McKinsey & Company, 2020

Figure 5 depicts the global fashion industry's profit decline predicted for 2020. It displays the growth in profit from the year 2016 to 2019, with an estimated drop of 93 percent in 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic.

Further, the shutdown of manufacturing facilities causing disruptions in the supply chain and reducing production capacity. This affected, in particular, the workers within the supply chain. According to Fashion Revolution (2021b), brands cancelled more than 40 billion U.S. dollars of finished and in-production orders of goods from factories and suppliers, leaving them powerless in the face of paying for materials and struggling to pay their workers, while keeping their businesses viable. According to Worker Rights Consortium (WRC), only 31 facilities investigated, 37,367 workers were denied 39.8 million U.S. dollars in wages to which they were entitled and additional 210 garment facilities across 18 countries where 160,000 workers were owed an estimated 171.5 million U.S. dollars in wages since the outbreak of Covid-19. Moreover, according to Center for Global Workers' Rights (2020), more than 1 million garment workers in Bangladesh lost their jobs or have been furloughed due to order cancellations and the failure of buyers to pay for canceled shipments. Furthermore, according to IndustriALL (2020), many fashion brands provided compensation packages for retail and office workers, yet not to the workers within their supply chain leaving them vulnerable in the times of crisis.

Another restrictions on international commerce and logistics causing delays in acquiring raw materials and components, as well as challenges in exporting finished products. However, this had favorable impact on the environment. The pandemic reduced international travel and transportation resulting in lower carbon emissions (Wicker, 2021). This benefits the environment as the fashion industry is currently responsible for more annual carbon emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined (Le, 2020). Further, owing to the decline in garment production, water consumption has decreased as well (Vladimirova et al., 2022).

Moreover, due to restriction on large gathering, many fashion events, such as fashion runaways and trade fairs were canceled or postponed, limiting the industry's ability to display new collections and interact with consumers. However, this contributed to a significant rise in the

use of digital and online platforms to influence consumer behavior, resulting in a boost in online sales. According to the Coronavirus Response Survey (2021) conducted in the US, 73 percent of consumers said that the coronavirus experience will change the way they shop in the future, while 64 percent indicated that they will buy more clothing online in the future.

The use of social media for marketing communications, in particular, have substantially increased in order for fashion brands to adapt to the market change. For instance, according to a report by Econsultancy (2021), Zara's parent company Inditex reported a 95 percent increase in online sales in Q2 and Zara's online sales grew by 74 percent in 2020. According to a report by Business of Fashion (2020), Nike's digital sales grew by 82 percent in Q1 2021 and its e-commerce sales accounted for 30 percent of total sales in Q1 2021.

Furthermore, the economic impact of the pandemic included loss of employment and financial uncertainties, which resulted in lower consumer expenditure on fashion products. However, as a result of this crisis, consumers began to prioritize essential items and acquired more knowledge about unsustainable practices of fashion industry, shifting their purchasing intentions towards sustainable alternatives. In 2020, more than 13,000 people contacted major fashion brands, urging them to safeguard the health and livelihoods of the garment workers (Fashion Revolution, 2021b). The consumers behavior has begun to shift to a circular economy and sustainability as a side effect of increased use of digital platforms as well as increased knowledge about sustainability. Consumers have shown an interest in sustainable and responsible alternatives to purchasing, consuming and disposing of garments (Nikolic, 2022).

The pandemic Covid-19 has prompted the fashion industry and its consumers to adapt and shift towards a more sustainable future.

## **2.4. CONSUMER BEHAVIORS TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FASHION CONSUMPTION**

Sustainability shapes purchasing decisions and behavior and has become one of the factors consumers frequently employ when deciding among different options. It is highly unlikely to avoid garment consumption, as it is part of the system and the society.

A consumer is a person who identifies a need or a desire, makes a purchase and then disposes of the product in the consumption process (Mehta et al., 2020). Niinimäki (2010) argues that people, by consuming products, fulfills unconscious needs and deep inner motivations. Furthermore, Blackwell et al. (2006) defines consumer behavior as the activities that people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services. Consumer buying behavior is complex and is influenced by various internal and external factors. Consumer behaviour is an important and constant decision-making process of searching, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services (Valaskova et al., 2015). Consumer purchasing behavior is continuously evolving, according to a survey, consumers are becoming more engaged in sustainability topics, and 88 percent of respondents believe that more attention should be paid to reducing pollution (Granskog et al., 2020); and with the rapid expansion of contemporary global concerns, market demand is shifting toward more sustainable and responsible purchasing behavior.

In a survey, 67 percent of consumers consider the use of sustainable materials to be an important purchasing factor, and 63 percent consider a brand's promotion of sustainability in the same way (Granskog et al., 2020). Consumers are thus becoming more conscious of the environmental and social impact of their fashion choices, and their behaviors towards sustainable fashion consumption are shifting towards a greater emphasis on environmental and social responsibility. Consumers reveal that they are aware of the detrimental effects of fashion consumption and production on the environment, natural resources and people (Beard, 2008); however, they persist in purchasing fast fashion (Johansson, 2010). Fast fashion evolved in reaction to consumers' demand for constant novelty, resulting in a culture of impulse purchases (Pankaj M. Madhani, 2013). Conversely, Domingos et al. (2022) discovered that consumers are motivated to engage in sustainable consumption by the capacity to find alternatives that

minimize the damage. When purchasing apparel, consumers are increasingly considering factors such as sustainable materials, minimized environmental impact, and ethical production approaches. This presents an opportunity for the fashion industry to respond to consumer demand and prioritize sustainability in its operations.

According to Mandarić et al. (2022), sustainable fashion practices, such as the use of renewable and environmentally friendly raw materials, carbon emission reduction, and ethical production, can influence consumer purchasing decisions. In order to embrace sustainable fashion consumption, effective consumer involvement with a focus on responsible consumption within the framework of the conscious consumer is essential.

Consumers are willing to pay more for garments from brands that follow ethical practices, give fair wages, use organic fibers, or create more durable items (Figueiredo, 2020). Sustainable fashion has the ability to positively impact consumer behavior by increasing awareness of environmental and social concerns and encouraging consumers to make more conscious and responsible purchasing decisions. In other words, by influencing purchasing decisions, promoting knowledge of environmental and social topics, and encouraging more mindful consumption, sustainable fashion can contribute significantly on sustainable consumer behavior.



### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this paper is to identify and understand factors that influence the transition towards sustainable consumption of fashion products. The aim is to provide an overview of the sector which can assist in enabling stakeholders, including producers, retailers, consumers, and policymakers, to recognize the relevance of adopting sustainable practices in the industry and thereby contribute to addressing current environmental and social challenges.

However, due to the extensive scope of the work and involvement of multiple stakeholders, acquiring primary data proved difficult. Primary data gathering entails collecting a vast number of samples from each stakeholder engaged in the fashion production and consumption process from a wide range of demographics and cultural backgrounds, which is resource-intensive and require a certain degree of expertise.

Therefore, in my Master thesis, I opted for secondary data collecting and analysis strategy. Secondary data is collected by different researches and organizations and provides a large number of samples involving different stakeholders of the fashion industry. This enabled me to collect adequate and pertinent data that is widely available, making my research valuable. Although the secondary data comes from different sources, it provides diverse insights, allowing this paper to incorporate a range of innovative approaches to achieving the objective.

Furthermore, in the first section of the thesis, data from various sources, such as online databases, academic journals, industry reports, and recommended references were collected. In the second section of the thesis, data mainly from industry reports, and publications from organizations dealing with the topic of the paper was collected and further analyzed. In addition, various figures were included in the scope of the work because I deem it essential to depict the detrimental impacts of the industry on the planet and people.

Fashion Revolution<sup>6</sup>, McKinsey & Company<sup>7</sup>, Bain & Company<sup>8</sup>, and Ellen MacArthur Foundation<sup>9</sup> were the primary organizations from which the data was derived.

Eventually, the findings of the research act as a summary of the importance of adopting sustainable approaches to address environmental and social challenges in the fashion industry for all stakeholders, including producers, retailers, consumers, and policymakers.

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<sup>6</sup> Fashion Revolution – world’s largest fashion activism movement striving for a global fashion industry that conserves and restores the environment and values people over growth and profit (Fashion Revolution, 2018b)

<sup>7</sup> McKinsey & Company – a global management consulting firm striving to accelerate sustainable and inclusive growth (McKinsey & Company, 2022)

<sup>8</sup> Bain & Company – one of the world’s leading management consulting firms that helps the world’s most ambitious change makers define the future (Bain & Company, n.d.)

<sup>9</sup> Ellen MacArthur Foundation – a charity committed to creating a circular economy, which is designed to eliminate waste and pollution, circulate products and materials (at their highest value), and regenerate nature (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, n.d.)

## 4. FACTORS OF MOVING TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION OF FASHION PRODUCTS

Consumer sentiment, circular fashion, social marketing and brand commitments, all interact and influence each other, creating a complex landscape that drives consumer behavior towards sustainable fashion consumption. By addressing these factors, stakeholders in the fashion industry can foster a more sustainable and responsible approach to fashion consumption.

### 4.1. CONSUMER SENTIMENT

Consumer sentiments is a significant factor in driving the shift towards sustainable fashion. Understanding consumer perception towards sustainable fashion and their willingness to invest in it is important for driving sustainable consumption (Stephan & Chugh, 2021). Consumers who happen to be more conscious and educated regarding issues related to the environment and society are more inclined to have positive sentiment towards sustainable fashion (Suganthi & Hariharan, 2022). According to Ciasullo et al. (2017), consumer perceptions play an important role when it comes to behavior choices. The better informed people are about the importance of having ethical consumer practices, the more involved they feel and therefore the consumer behavior improves towards better practices. Increasing knowledge and spreading awareness about the environmental and societal impact of the fashion industry and the benefits of sustainable fashion and its responsible consumption can influence consumer behavior (Apaolaza et al., 2022). Consumers who care about **ethical factors** such as fair labor practices, workers' rights, and animal welfare, play an important role in sustainable fashion consumption. Ethical concerns often prompt consumers to seek transparent supply chains and endorse brands with responsible production processes.

Recent research<sup>10</sup> reveals that there are five personas of fashion consumers with well-defined socio-demographic profiles and behaviors (Arpizio et al., 2022). In figure 6, the spectrum of consumers' concern about sustainability and their willingness to take action is illustrated

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<sup>10</sup> Bain & Company and WWF Italy surveyed nearly 5,900 fashion consumers in China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States; to examine consumer behavior related to sustainability and fashion during the last quarter of 2021 (Arpizio et al., 2022).

distinctly. This suggests that consumers may differ in their level of interest and attitude to sustainable fashion.

Figure 6: Five different personas of global fashion consumer when it comes to their sentiment on sustainability

	Sustainability Champions	Idealists	Good Citizens	Opportunity Shoppers	Indifferents
Willingness to take sustainable action	Very willing	Usually willing	Usually willing	Sometimes willing	Low willingness
Frequency of sustainable purchases	Often or always	Hardly ever/ sometimes	Often or always	Sometimes	Never/hardly ever
Concern about sustainability	High or very high	High	Mid	Mid	Low or very low
Generation	Millennials and Gen Z	Millennials	Millennials and Gen Z	Gen X and older	Older generations
Education	Undergrad/ graduate school	Undergrad/ graduate school	Undergrad/ graduate school	Secondary school/ undergrad	Secondary school
Gross family income	€€€€	€€€	€€€	€€	€€
Annual apparel spending	€€€€	€€€	€€€	€€	€€
Pre-purchase engagement	Extensively research purchases	Gather information from social media, TV, and conferences/talks	Gather information from in-store displays, social media, and brand websites	Gather information from in-store displays and word of mouth	Do not research purchases
<b>Consumers willing to pay a premium price for sustainable product</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>24%</b>
(Average premium price %)	(+32%)	(+25%)	(+25%)	(+20%)	(+17%)

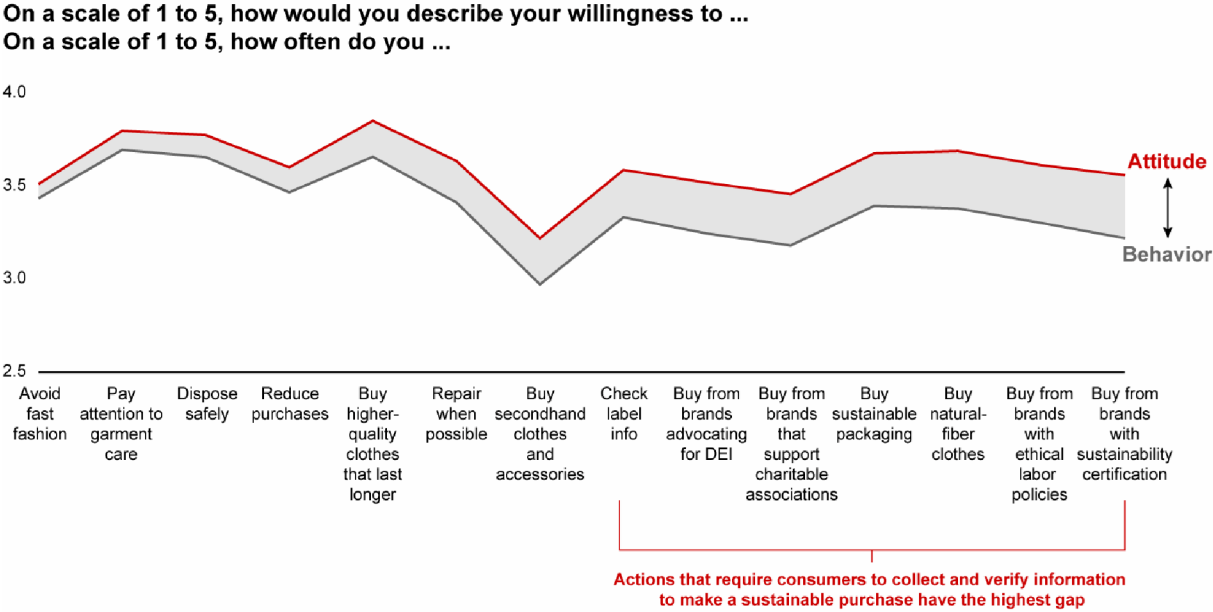
Source: Bain & Company and WWF analysis of global consumer survey. Arpizio et al., 2022

According to the survey results in Figure 6, Sustainability Champions are customers who feel strongly about the environment and are willing to frequently purchase sustainable clothing, implying that their intentions and behaviors are in accordance. Indifferent customers, on the other hand, are individuals who are unconcerned about sustainability and rarely consider it in their purchase decisions.

Fashion has always represented a significant part of an individual’s identity, and sense of wellbeing, but the pace, scale, and cost of fast fashion, has transformed the value of clothes. Basic jersey items from Primark such as T-shirts and leggings are cheaper than the price of an alcoholic beverage, so it is hardly surprising that young people perceive garments as disposable, and may only wear them a few times (McNeill and Moore, 2015). One of the major factors that influence sustainable consumption is **individual values and self-identity expression**. Consumers that are highly conscious seek choices that are aligned with their personal values that help them to express their identity as environmentally and socially friendly

responsible individuals. Arpizio et al. (2022) states that approximately 65 percent of fashion consumers care about the environment, however, only some regularly prioritize sustainability in their shopping. This demonstrates that, while consumers have positive sentiments about sustainability, they often struggle to act on these attitudes by engaging in responsible behaviors regarding sustainability.

Figure 7: Attitude-behavior gap

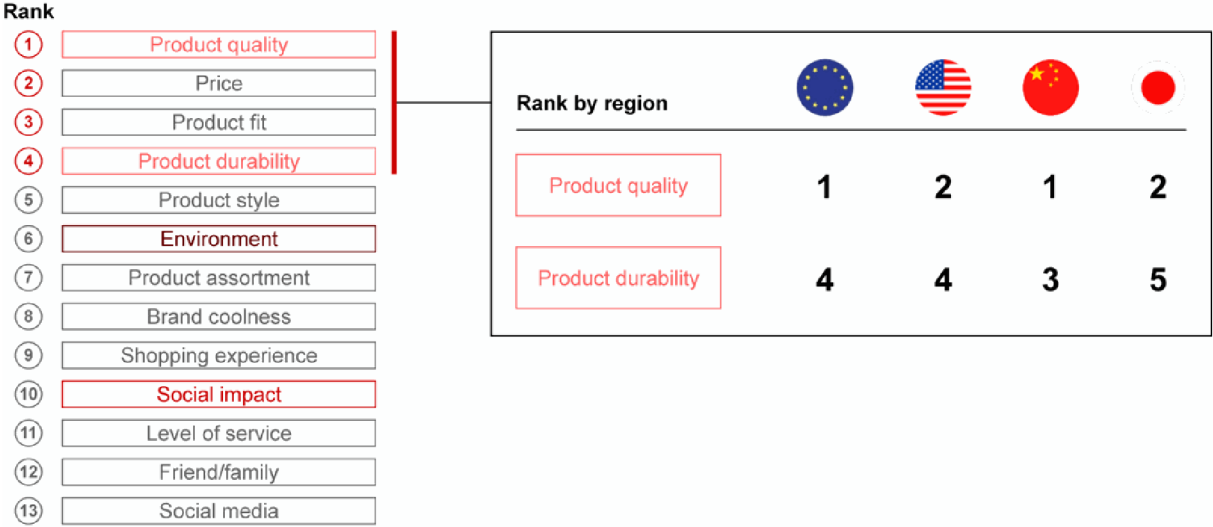


Source: Bain & Company and WWF analysis of global consumer survey. Arpizio et al., 2022

Figure 7 suggests that when it comes to the purchase of sustainable products, a clear inconsistency between attitudes towards sustainable consumption and actual behaviour is observed. This phenomenon is called the attitude-behaviour gap. According to Arpizio et al. (2022), this attitude-behavior gap is widest when sustainable action requires extra effort, such as collecting and verifying information. It’s much easier for consumers to discard a garment responsibly (through donation or reuse) than it is to check labels or investigate a brand. This phenomenon is further evident in surveys, where 30 percent to 50 percent of consumers report that they intend to purchase sustainable products, however, their market share is generally less than 5 percent of the total sales (Carrington et al., 2010; Young et al., 2010). International studies, such as Greendex 2012, have likewise corroborated this occurrence.

In the study by Arpizio et al. (2022), consumers’ sentiments regarding sustainability in fashion are influenced by various factors. The research uncovers thirteen relevant factors that drive the purchasing decisions of global fashion consumers, which are ranked in order of importance (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Purchase drivers for global fashion consumers



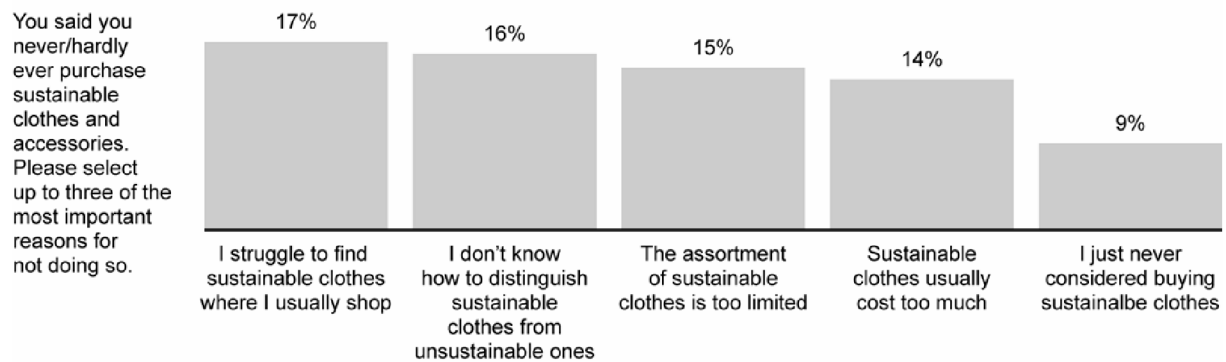
Source: Bain & Company and WWF analysis of global consumer survey. Arpizio et al., 2022

Figure 8 illustrates that sustainability is a somewhat lower priority, despite the fact that these global fashion consumers are more aware of it. Notwithstanding consumer’ concern about the environmental and social impacts of fashion industry, their importance is still relatively low, suggesting that sustainability is a secondary rather than primary purchase driver for most consumers. As illustrated in the figure, product quality is the most significant purchase criteria for fashion consumers, with durability ranking fourth. However, the authors contend that durability and quality have an inherent connection to sustainability, consequently sustainability becomes a key factor in consumers’ purchasing decisions.

Nevertheless, the research simultaneously identifies several barriers to sustainable fashion procurement (see figure 9). Limited availability and affordability are among the key obstacles.

Figure 9: Obstacles in purchasing sustainable fashion products

**Top 5 reasons for never or hardly ever buying sustainable products**



**Ranking by generation**

Generation	I struggle to find sustainable clothes where I usually shop	I don't know how to distinguish sustainable clothes from unsustainable ones	The assortment of sustainable clothes is too limited	Sustainable clothes usually cost too much	I just never considered buying sustainable clothes
Z	①	③	④	②	⑥
Y	④	③	②	①	⑤
X	①	②	③	④	⑤

Source: Bain & Company and WWF analysis of global consumer survey. Arpizio et al., 2022

Figure 9 displays the difficulties related to purchasing sustainable fashion products, which are apparent in every generation of fashion consumers. Consumers refrain from purchasing sustainable fashion for a variety of reasons, including a lack of availability and difficulties distinguishing sustainable garments. In order to alleviate this obstacle, according to the authors, fashion brands should expand the availability of sustainable options and offer wider range of sustainable assortments. Further, fashion brands need to increase their transparency in order to reduce the information gap. This is accomplished through displaying accurate labelling and product descriptions, and sharing trustworthy information about supply chains, business practices, and their effects on workers, communities, and the environment (Fashion Revolution, 2021a). On the other hand, price remains a significant factor impacting consumers' behavior in sustainable fashion. Due to affordability of fast fashion products, consumers who are aware of sustainable fashion often do not support sustainable consumption with their purchasing decisions and behavior (McNeill & Moore, 2015). While many consumers express their interest in sustainable fashion, high prices and limited accessibility can hinder widespread adoption. Currently, sustainable fashion tends to be associated with higher prices due to the application of resource-intensive fair practices. As a result, it is essential to render sustainable fashion more affordable and accessible to a diverse range of consumers.

## 4.2. CIRCULAR FASHION

*“Circular fashion is about moving away from a linear model of take, make, dispose and moving toward a new, regenerative model that can help us meet the UN Sustainable Development goals and revolutionize our consumption and production patterns to achieve a more sustainable world.”*

- Susan Harris, Technical Director, Anthesis<sup>11</sup>

The current fashion industry operates on the basis of a **linear open economy model** in which resources are extracted, exploited, and then disposed of as waste, leading to degradation of natural resources and the creation of pollution. The textiles industry relies mostly on non-renewable resources – 98 million tons in total per year – including oil to manufacture syntethic fibres, fertilizers to grow cotton, and chemicals to produce, dye, and finish fibers and textiles (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). This “take-make-waste” model illustrated in Figure 10 (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2023), is based on a model of extraction and waste generation, leads the industry to overproduction and consumption, with serious consequences for the environment and society. As a result, the linear economy model in the fashion industry is unsustainable and reform of the system is crucial in order to mitigate the detrimental effects of this industry.

Figure 10: The linear economy "take-make-waste" model in the fashion industry



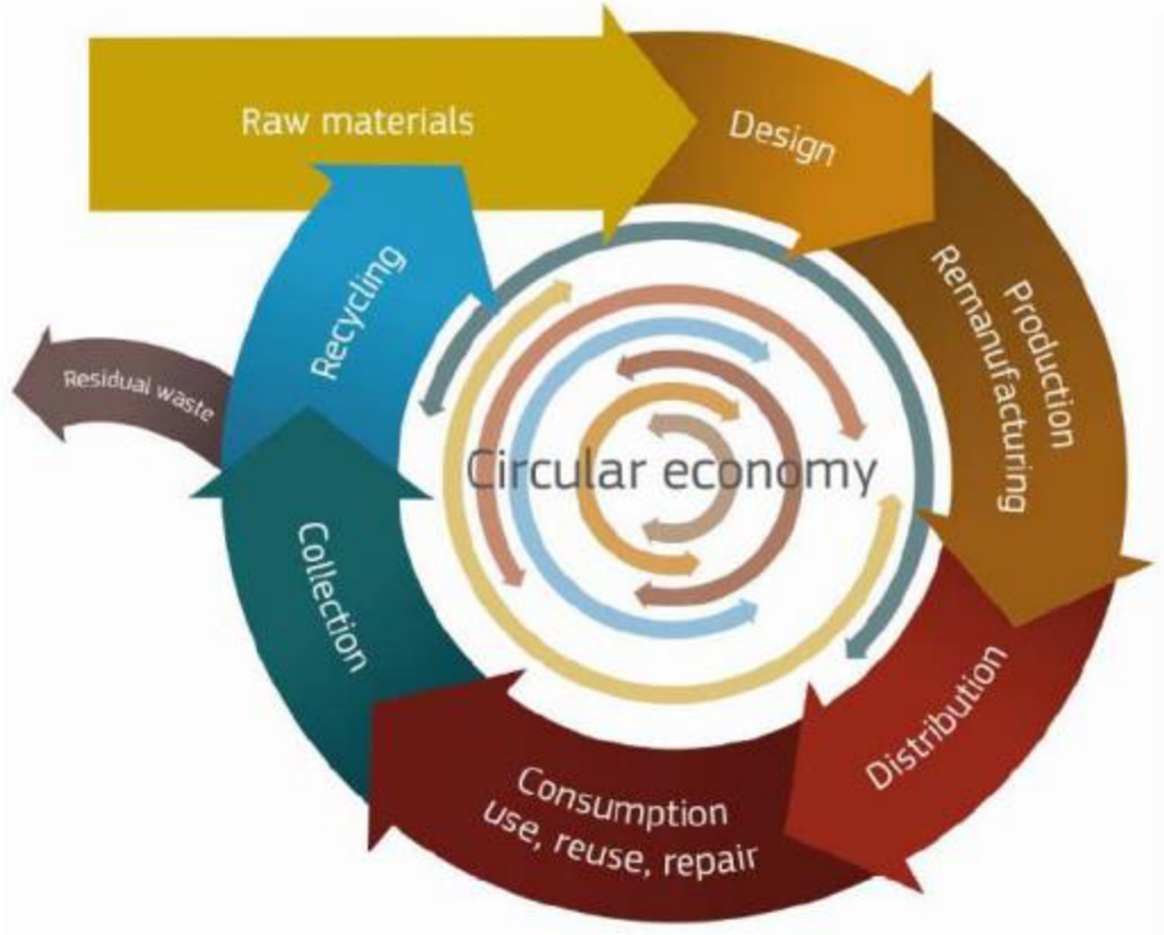
Source: author

<sup>11</sup> Anthesis is the largest group of sustainability experts globally. Anthesis is the sustainability activator that drives performance through sustainability. (Anthesis, 2019)



The circular economy model illustrated in Figure 11 is based on a model of resource conservation and waste reduction (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2023), and is one of the possible approaches to achieving sustainable consumption of fashion products. It has emerged as a phenomenon to counteract the fashion industry’s negative impacts, as it seeks to move away from the “take-make-use-dispose” economic system, towards a regenerative system that is based on closed-loops (Henninger et al., 2021).

Figure 11: The circular economy - Conceptual diagram



Source: Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe. European Commission, 2014

Circular Fashion is a sustainable, creative, rapidly growing concept which employs a closed-loop system approach to improve the fashion industry through the efficient utilization of resources while minimizing environmental impact and labor exploitation. It is a global effort

to adopt a sustainable approach to fashion production, which involves the reuse and recycling of materials to limit the extraction of primary raw materials and reduce textile waste. Circular fashion is about creating this closed-loop system where the production and end-of-life of garments are equally important (Pereira, 2020). Adopting the circular economy model and associated strategies across the value chain may be an opportunity to mitigate the adverse outcomes of the sector.

According to Recovery Worldwide (2019), fewer than 1 percent of clothes actually get recycled. However, recent McKinsey report (2022) states that 60 percent of fashion executives have already invested or plan to invest in closed-loop recycling upcoming year. Fashion brands are investing in recycling initiatives and coming up with new and creative technologies to recycle discarded garments into new yarns and textiles using less resources and less harmful materials. According to Ellen Macarthur Foundation, by increasing use of secondary and sustainably produced fibers, and fundamentally transforming the way clothes are designed, sold, used, and disposed of, businesses can reduce GHG emissions, leakage and pollution, as well as their use of fresh water and land.

Small But Perfect, a Fashion Revolution project, is an excellent example of a fashion companies endeavor to include circularity in its business operations. It is an initiative in which 28 European small and medium-sized (SMEs) fashion companies engage to accelerate the transition to circular and sustainable models (World Fair Trade Organisation & Fashion Revolution, n.d.). The initiative includes research and development support, business guidance, mentorship, and other services to assist these businesses in adopting circular fashion practices. By supporting and promoting circular fashion, Fashion Revolution aims to build a better fashion industry on a global scale (Fashion Revolution, 2020).

Vinted, an app-based marketplace that employs a peer-to-peer model in which sellers upload their own photos and descriptions of items and deliver them directly to buyers (Ellen Macarthur Foundation, 2021), is a further fine instance. This extends the lifespan of the garment by expanding the number of owners rather than dumping them in the landfills. This is an approach that is available and affordable to wide range of consumers.

Moreover, upcycling is an essential aspect of circular fashion that promotes the reuse of existing resources while reducing the demand for new materials and the issues associated with their extraction, transportation, and processing (Aus et al., 2021). Until recently, upcycling has mostly been used on a small scale, sold as unique pieces or added elements in some collections, and not on an industrial scale (Moorhouse & Moorhouse, 2017). Runnel et al., 2017, states that the volume of textile leftovers is systematically underreported and thus underestimated by the industry. According to Hans et al., 2015, implementing upcycling on the industrial level requires transparency to understand the waste created in mass production and create designs that suite the production system and make it less wasteful. Given that this approach differs from traditional design, upcycling stimulates creativity and innovation in fashion design. It involves making optimal use of excess stock of waste materials to create new garments. It is important to identify the waste streams and determine the types and quantities of resources available. Upcycling allows the creation of new garments without the need for additional technologies, making it a cost-effective method of recycling textile waste. Upcycling is a sustainable alternative to traditional recycling, and according to Nornajihah Nadia Hasbullah et al. (2020), consumers support the effort to reuse recycling textile waste to produce new garments, and people older than 50 years old with higher education are more likely to favor the integration of sustainable product design.

The aim of the circular fashion is to minimize waste and the deterioration of natural resources by designing products and processes in a way that enables resources to be used over and over again. Embracing circular fashion can therefore contribute to rendering the fashion industry more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

### **4.3. SOCIAL MARKETING**

Social marketing may be one of the most effective method for increasing the promotion of sustainable consumption of fashion products due to usage of technology in everyday life. Social marketing is about influencing behaviors, utilizing a systematic planning process that applies marketing principles and techniques, focusing on priority target audience segments, and delivering a positive benefit for individuals and society (Lee & Kotler, 2015, pp. 7–8). Lee and Kotler states that social marketing is a distinct marketing discipline that refers primarily to efforts focused on influencing behaviors that will improve health, prevent injuries, protect the environment, and contribute to communities.

In today's technologically evolved society, social media has emerged as one of the most significant advancements. Social media is a tool for fashion brands to promote their products and attract customers. It has rather tremendous influence on consumers perception and impacts their consumption in a variety of ways. Social media is an important tool for communication, informaiton sharing, and marketing. It has the ability to transform passive individuals into active users by supporting social interaction (Zolkepli & Kamarulzaman, 2015). Social media can be used as an efficient and effective tool for social marketing to promote sustainable fashion practices and consumption.

The rise of social media and online shopping has exposed consumers to the latest fashion, further fuelling consumer desires to be on trend (Bly et al., 2015). Digital technological developments, particularly this rise of social media, have transformed lifestyles, especially among young consumers due to their greater accessibility to global electronic networks and shopping opportunities. Furthermore, social marketing can be an ideal approach to promote sustainable fashion practices in the industry and to influence consumers' behavior and consumption. Social marketing strategies effectively raise consumers' awareness of sustainable fashion and its environmental and social benefits.

According to Fashion Revolution (2023), only one percent of major fashion brands disclose the number of workers in their supply chains being paid a living wage rate. A prominent example is the Good Clothes, Fair Play social campaign, which strives for a legislation requiring all

companies and retailers selling products in the EU to conduct due diligence on living wages across their global supply chains (Good Clothes, Fair Play, n.d.).

The greatest concern, however, is climate change, which is worsening mainly due to fashion manufacturing and consumption, prompting consumers to become more environmentally aware than ever before.

It is vital to raise public awareness and educate consumers' about the environmental, and furthermore, social pressures encountered by the global fashion industry. Social marketing campaigns launched by Fashion Revolution such as #WhoMadeMyClothes, #WhoMadeMyFabric, and #WhatIsInMyClothes strive to raise global awareness of impacts of our clothes, encouraging consumers' to increase their knowledge of their purchases and actively engage in responsible choices. Additionally, huge scandals like the factory collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 that killed over 1.000 workers have expanded the demand for greater transparency and more sustainable practices among consumers (Pasquarelli, 2019).

Social campaigns, particularly those performed through social media, have substantially increased public awareness and endorsement of sustainability. Social media platforms are an integral part of the day-to-day lives of people and have a tremendous impact on consumer behavior. Fashion companies use channels such as Instagram for brand or product promotion, and consumers engage and share content with other users, thus creating demand and desire (Nash, 2019). It is essential to enhance knowledge and promote awareness about sustainable fashion through social marketing campaigns on various platforms, such as social media, to educate consumers about the importance of sustainable fashion and its consumption, as well as the benefits of making conscious choices (Zhao et al., 2022; Skinner et al., 2023).

Fashion Revolution had significant impact on raising public awareness through its social campaign #WhoMadeMyClothes. The campaign expanded its global reach from 150 million people in 2017 to 275 million in 2018 (see Figure 12), with 720 million impressions of posts using this hashtag during April 2018 (Fashion Revolution, 2018a). This significant growth in public awareness, further resulted in global fashion companies to increase their transparency. According to the Fashion Transparency Index (2018), many global fashion brands only provide

a restricted amount of information about their supply chains. As a result of this effort, many companies around the world committed to improve transparency.

Figure 12: Social media impact of #whomademyclothes campaign during April 2018



Source: Fashion Revolution, 2018a

Social marketing can thus be a powerful tool for promoting sustainable fashion practices and consumption. Through effective use of smart campaigns via social media, fashion brands can attract consumers interests while emphasizing their favourable impact on the environment and workers. Moreover, it can be used to educate and foster consumers knowledge about the benefits of sustainable fashion.

#### 4.4. BRANDS COMMITMENT

Due to consumers becoming more aware of the detrimental effects of unsustainable practices of fashion brands' on the environment and workers well-being. Therefore, many fashion companies are committing to promotion and application of sustainable fashion practices.

Sustainability has been recognized as an important new driver in consumers' purchasing decisions (Stöckigt et al., 2018). According to several studies, conscious consumers question their favourite fashion brands contribution to the ecosystem wellbeing through actual measures. Further, it has been demonstrated that these aware consumers are willing to pay higher prices for sustainable products. These environmentally and socially conscious consumers expect fashion brands to be more sustainable and ethical in their manufacturing practices, and they additionally demand greater transparency.

Transparency is one of the fundamental commitments of fashion brands to creating systematic change in the global fashion industry. Transparency of fashion brands is necessary for building a sustainable, accountable and fair fashion industry. **Fashion Revolution** is the world's largest fashion activism movement, mobilising citizens, industry and policy makers through research, education and advocacy work (Fashion Revolution, 2018b).

**The Fashion Transparency Index**, a tool developed by the Fashion Revolution to encourage and incentivise the world's leading fashion brands to be more transparent about their social and environmental commitments. It is an *annual review of 250 of the world's largest fashion brands and retailers* ranked according to their level of public disclosure on human rights and environmental policies, practices and impacts in their own operations and in their supply chains across **258 indicators** in the following five key areas: *policies and commitments; governance; supply chain traceability; know, show and fix*; and *spotlight issues*, such as decent work; gender and racial equality; sustainable sourcing and materials; overconsumption, business, models, waste and circularity; water and chemicals; climate change, fossil fuels and biodiversity (Fashion Revolution, 2023).

According to Fashion Revolution (2023), the review over the years demonstrates obvious progress (see Figure 13), with the transparency participation increasing from 12 percent to 52 percent, from only 5 out of 40 brands publishing their factory lists in 2016 to now 129 out of 250 of the world’s largest fashion brands disclosing supplier lists at the first tier of manufacturing. However, in the Fashion Transparency Index (2023), only two brands scored 80 percent or higher in the level of transparency, with 70 out of 250 brands scoring in the 0 – 10 percent range, indicating a lack of transparency in their practices.

Figure 13: Average score improvement in transparency of fashion brands since 2017 to 2022



Source: Fashion Transparency Index 2023. Fashion Revolution, 2023

These findings underline the importance of fashion brands firmly committing to sustainable practices and delivering on these pledges.



The brands reviewed in this Index have the greatest detrimental impact the environment and society. Consistently, these major brands are primarily fast fashion brands led by some of the wealthiest people. According to Forbes, In Japan the richest person is Tadashi Yanai, owner of Uniqlo, and in Sweden, the richest man is Stefan Persson, owner of H&M. In Ireland, the owners of both Selfridges and Primark are the highest earning family. According to Fashion United (2018), Amancio Ortega, founder of Inditex, the parent company of fast-fashion pioneer Zara, is the richest person not just in Spain, but in all of Europe. This also implies that the brands concerned have sufficient resources to shift towards more sustainable practices.

Fashion brands further commit to a variety of initiatives focused on sustainability by mitigating the detrimental impacts of the industry. Fashion Pact is an excellent example. The Fashion pact is a voluntary agreement by signatory brands to implement Science Based Targets for both climate and nature (biodiversity), achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, and reduce their impacts on the oceans (Nast, 2022). It is based on the collective ambition of CEOs to commit to sustainability targets that are needed to bend the curve on climate (Fashion Pact, 2019). This is a unique opportunity to introduce innovations and solutions to over 60 fashion industry leaders representing one-third of the industry ((RE)SET, n.d.).

However, these commitments are constrained by the respective brands. Other fashion brands demonstrate their commitment to sustainable practices through different efforts, including Corporate Social Responsibility reports, sustainability reports, annual reports, social media or other kinds of advertising (Reilly & Hynan, 2014).

## **5. RESULTS**

### **5.1. Consumer sentiment**

Consumer sentiment play a crucial role in driving the shift towards sustainable fashion. Consumers who were more aware and educated about environmental and social issues were more likely to have positive sentiments about sustainable actions, and their intentions and behaviors were more likely to be consistent with this. Consumers' actual behavior, however, varied in terms of their level of interest and commitment to sustainable fashion. A difference was identified at this point between attitudes and behaviors of consumers, who, despite positive sentiments towards sustainable fashion, struggled in acting on these attitudes and engaging in responsible behavior regarding sustainability.

Consumers' individual values and self-identity expression were found to impact sustainable fashion consumption. Consumers who were highly mindful sought options that were consistent with their personal values. The availability, affordability, and transparency of sustainable fashion products were relevant barriers that hindered widespread adoption among consumers. Although consumers had positive sentiments about sustainability, many attached little importance to it. Thus, sustainability was found to be a secondary rather than primary buying motivator for most consumers.

## **5.2. Circular fashion**

The current fashion industry operates on the basis of a linear open economy model which contributes to degradation of natural resources and the creation of excessive waste. Circular economy model has emerged to offset the negative consequences of the fashion industry, as it enables the transition from the “take-make-waste” model to a regenerative system based on a closed-loop.

Therefore, the circular fashion was identified as a sustainable and rapidly growing concept that employs a closed-loop system approach to improve the fashion industry through the efficient utilization of resources while minimizing environmental and social impacts.

The adoption of circular economy model and associated strategies across the value chain was found to be an opportunity to mitigate the adverse outcomes of the fashion sector. Majority of fashion brands are reported to have invested or are planning to invest in closed-loop recycling to mitigate waste and the deterioration of natural resources by accelerating the transition towards sustainable and circular fashion.

The circular fashion model has been recognized as an attractive approach for promoting and implementing sustainability throughout the industry.

### **5.3. Social marketing**

The availability of the global internet network, including social media and online shopping opportunities, has increased consumer exposure to the latest trends, which has been shown to have a significant influence on consumer behavior.

Hereby, social marketing efforts has been proven to be an effective approach for promoting sustainable fashion by increasing consumers' knowledge of sustainable fashion and its benefits, encouraging them to actively engage in responsible choices. Social marketing campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the environmental and social issues generated by the global fashion industry were found to be successful in influencing consumers sentiment towards sustainable fashion. In particular, social campaigns conducted through social media were highly successful in raising public awareness, endorsing sustainability, and stimulating demand and desire for sustainable options among consumers.

Furthermore, this significant increase in public awareness and endorsing sustainability has led to a commitment by global fashion industry to increase its transparency. As a result of these efforts, many fashion brands around the world have committed to improving their transparency through various initiatives.

Overall, social marketing has been proven to be a powerful tool in promoting sustainable fashion practices and consumption.

#### **5.4. Brands commitment**

Consumers' attitudes toward sustainability, as well as their increased knowledge about the environmental and social repercussions of the fashion industry, have driven fashion brands to be more sustainable, ethical, and transparent in their activities.

Transparency has thus evolved into a vital commitment for fashion brands in creating systematic change in the industry. Over the last several years, there has been a considerable improvement in transparency. Many fashion brands displayed their commitment through various sustainability initiatives in order to minimize the industry's detrimental impacts, while also meeting worldwide demand from conscious consumers. Fashion brands communicated the results of these commitments either through internal means, such as Corporate Social Responsibility reports, quarterly and/or annual reports, or in collaboration with external entities.

Ultimately, the fashion brands commitment to sustainability has shown to be an important factor in the transition towards a sustainable fashion.

## 6. DISCUSSION

### 6.1. Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Fashion Consumption

A consumer is a person who identifies a need or a desire, makes a purchase and then disposes of the product in the consumption process (Mehta et al., 2020). Fashion consumers purchase garments for variety of reasons, however, the main purpose is to meet societal standards and individual desires. Consumers interested in sustainable fashion are driven by ethical concerns created through acquiring knowledge about environmental and social challenges generated by the fashion industry. Despite the fact that consumers are becoming more aware of the industry's unsustainable and unethical practices and their impacts, adoption of sustainable and responsible fashion approaches remains relatively low. This occurs due to several obstacles.

Garment production presents a major obstacle to attaining sustainability. It entails numerous challenges, among which are the cultivation and procurement of materials requiring large amount of water and energy consumption, the use of dangerous substances that are harmful to the environment and workers, manufacturing in hazardous environments endangering well-being of workers, and contributing to various sorts of pollution as a result of unsustainable operations. However, while addressing this bottleneck of environmental and ethical challenges, the industry must simultaneously continue to produce to ensure it remains economically viable. To attain sustainability, the industry is urged to consider a sustainable, ethical and circular approach throughout every phase of the garment production process. It comprises growing and sourcing of sustainable materials, efficient use of resources, ensuring fair wages and enhanced working conditions for workers along the supply chain, as well as smart waste management, and reduction of other adverse environmental effects.

Sustainable fashion adoption is also hindered by economic implications. Fair wages and improved working conditions for workers, the usage of sustainable materials, and the employment of innovative methods throughout the process all contribute to increased pricing for sustainable and ethical fashion products. This ultimately acts as a barrier, rendering sustainable fashion inaccessible and unaffordable to a wide spectrum of consumers. Therefore, it is important to raise consumers' awareness about the benefits of sustainable fashion

consumption, as well as educate them on the environmental and social advantages of consuming sustainable fashion products through social marketing, in order to encourage them towards making responsible choices.

Transparency is another barrier to enhancing sustainable fashion. This factor has a significant influence on consumer attitude when it involves considering sustainable alternatives. Although consumer awareness and demand for sustainable fashion continue to grow, there appears to be still an information gap that hinders the development of sustainable fashion consumption. Thus, it is crucial for brands to enhance transparency by providing accurate and easily available information about their sustainability efforts, including the environmental and social impact of their products.

Though the majority of brands are committed to various initiatives, cooperation among all stakeholders, including fashion brands, policymakers, marketers, and retailers, is crucial for driving the transition to a more sustainable sector. To accelerate sustainability efforts, all stakeholders need to collaborate, exchange knowledge, resources, and best practices. These challenges can be tackled and sustainability achieved by acting together.

## **6.2. Implications for the Fashion industry**

The fashion industry urgently needs to prioritise sustainability, ethical practices, and collaboration with all stakeholders to address these challenges. In particular, the fashion industry needs to address the ethical implications of unfair working conditions and labor exploitation by improving working conditions and ensuring fair compensation for all workers across the supply chain. By doing so, the industry will establish and enforce safe and ethical labor practices.

Furthermore, the fashion industry needs to assume responsibility for its contribution to the environmental deterioration, resource depletion, and waste generation. The industry should accelerate the implementation of sustainable fashion practices, such as the adoption of sustainable materials in production, the implementation of smart waste management, and the development of circular economy principles.

Moreover, the fashion industry creates overproduction, overconsumption and excessive waste generation. As the overproduction is driven by consumer desires, it is important to encourage consumers to make responsible choices and adopt sustainable consumption pattern by advocating sustainable alternatives through social marketing strategies.

An industry-wide effort can reduce the environmental and social impacts and thus accelerate the transition towards sustainable fashion.



## 7. CONCLUSION

Fast fashion is known as rapid production of inexpensive, trendy apparel and the sale of such items at low prices to consumers, resulting in overproduction, overconsumption and excessive waste generation, all of which have detrimental influence on the environment and society. As a result, a sustainable fashion, has emerged as an alternative approach to garment production and consumption. It focuses on decreasing the negative impact of the industry by encouraging the use of sustainable and eco-friendly materials in the manufacturing process, which can additionally contribute to reduce waste. The primary purpose, however, is to promote sustainable, responsible and ethical practices throughout the industry's supply chain, as well as consumer's sustainable and responsible consumption. Sustainable fashion provides wide range of approaches, such as collaborative fashion, slow fashion, eco fashion, which are appealing to a broad spectrum of consumers.

However, the current state of the fashion industry is concerning, emphasizing the need for a shift to sustainable practices. The industry's profits as well as its negative environmental repercussions are staggering. On the other hand, the social impact of an industry so detrimental to the general well-being not only of its workers, but also of its consumers, is also alarming.

Consumers are key actors in driving the transition to sustainable fashion. Consumers who are aware and conscious are motivated to engage in sustainable consumption by exploring alternatives that minimize environmental and social damages. Sustainable fashion practices, such as the use of renewable and environmentally friendly materials in manufacture, or ethical production, impact consumer behavior. To embrace sustainable fashion consumption, effective consumer involvement and emphasis on responsible purchasing within the conscious consumer framework is essential. This is accomplished through educating and increasing consumer awareness of the benefits of sustainable fashion.

The extent of consumer awareness and education regarding both the unsustainable methods of the fashion industry and the benefits of sustainable fashion influences significantly consumer sentiment. Consumers' intentions differ from their behavior in adopting sustainable fashion due to a range of factors that hinder a genuine commitment to sustainable fashion. However,

this can be enhanced by utilizing social marketing, which is an effective approach for developing consumer knowledge of the industry's sustainability efforts. Since consumer attitudes towards sustainability have driven fashion brands to be more sustainable, ethical and transparent in their activities, advocating transparency, in particular, is a critical commitment for fashion brands transitioning towards sustainability. Furthermore, moving towards sustainable fashion necessitates the implementation of a closed-loop system within the industry, creating a circular economic structure that benefits the industry as a whole.

In conclusion, the fashion industry must take responsibility for its contribution to environmental degradation and move towards sustainable fashion production and consumption through innovative and considerate approaches by all stakeholders. In addition, further in-depth study, particularly of circular fashion and social marketing within the fashion industry to ensure a successful transition to a sustainable future.

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