

Louvain School of Management

How and why sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media can impact consumers' behaviour?

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Introduction

1. Research topic and problem statement

World consumption and production have increased over the years and impacted our planet. The fashion industry is known to damage the planet with its excessive production, poor quality materials and unsold products which ends up burnt (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Nowadays, the urge to become more sustainable arise. On the one hand, companies are trying to evolve their business into a more sustainable one. On the other hand, consumers are trying to change their habits and routines.

However, even though the consumers are demanding more sustainable products, this change is overwhelming, and people are often not aware of what actions they can do to reduce their impact. The apparel industry is one of the most pollutive industries in the world. For example, to produce one single pair of jeans, 9,982 litres of water are needed (UN, 2019).

Moreover, the United Nations started to tackle this problem by developing Sustainable Development Goals to tackle unsustainable consumption. With the rise of awareness about this topic, companies have begun to address this issue and are trying to become greener. They are using marketing practices to communicate about their sustainable attributes, which can impact customer satisfaction and enhance corporate performance and reputation (Chu, & Chen, 2019).

Furthermore, while there is an increase in sustainable product consumption, branding sustainably raises doubts. The brand's willingness to change to a more sustainable business can be due to public pressure, either from policymakers or social movements, rather than their desire to do good. Consumers cannot perceive this well (Lehner, M., & Halliday, S. 2014).

Companies are promoting their sustainable products through social media, that has become, thanks to Web 4.0, a part of our daily lives. This marketing tool helps companies share their content and promote their brands on different platforms while engaging with their audience and creating a sense of community (de Lenne, & Vandenbosch, 2017).

Nonetheless, consumers receive much information on the sustainability attribute of the brand on social media, which can induce uncertainty in the customers' minds (Hassan et al., 2013) and generate mistrust (Huang et al., 2012).

Even though several authors focus their research on sustainability, consumer behaviour and social media separately, there is a gap in the literature. No one has examined the exposure to sustainable content on social media and its impact on the consumers' behaviour and attitude to act sustainably. In addition, no one has analysed the sustainable content of fast fashion companies on social media.

Therefore, thanks to the literature, this thesis aims to understand “*How and why sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media can impact consumers' behaviour?*”

2. Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into two major parts.

In the first section, the literature review was built on understanding the theoretical part of all the components of my research question. This part was based on academic sources and online sources such as websites.

The second section was based on qualitative research where the results will be analyzed.

Finally, a discussion of the topic and a general conclusion will be given to answer the research question.

Part I: Literature review

1. Fashion industry

The fashion industry englobes elements such as textile, clothing, and footwear industries. However, the term fashion can cover a wider range of goods such as food, music, or even automobiles (Hines, 2007). In this thesis, we will mainly focus on fashion markets such as textiles and clothing.

“Fashion is defined as an expression that is widely accepted by a group of people over time and has been characterized by several marketing factors such as low predictability, high impulse purchase, shorter life cycle, and high volatility of market demand” (Ferne and Sparks, 1998 retrieved from Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p.168).

In this section, after explaining the characteristics of fast fashion, the downside of the fashion industry on the environment, the workers, and the supply chain will be analyzed. Finally, we will deep dive into slow fashion, an alternative to fast fashion.

1.1. Fast Fashion

In the past 20 years, the fast fashion industry has evolved significantly (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). With a \$2.5 trillion, this industry employs over 75 million people worldwide (UNECE, 2018). In fact, over the years, the dynamic of this industry changed to become a synonym of a mass production (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) in which “the clothing production doubled and the average consumer buying 60 per cent more pieces of garment compared to 15 years ago” (UNECE, 2018). We can therefore call this a “fast fashion industry”.

Fast fashion can be defined as a segment of the fashion and retailing industries that “capitalise on rapid inventory turnover, proposing a new business model by dramatically reducing renewal cycles through constantly releasing new merchandise (rather than restocking merchandise) and by deliberately limiting production runs” (Byun & Sternquist, 2011, p.1). With the idea of “Here Today, Gone Tomorrow”, consumers are encouraged to visit fashion retailers more often (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). In fact, with this low-price strategy and the short renewal cycle, they are uncertain about product availability, which creates pressure on consumers and leads to an immediate purchase action (Byun & Sternquist, 2011).

To understand this well-known industry, it is essential first to analyse its history.

1.1.1. History & characteristics

Until the mid-1980s, the fashion industry focused on low-cost mass production of standardised styles that did not change frequently. In fact, at that time, “consumers were less sensitive toward style and fashion and preferred basic apparel” (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p.166). This results in a minimal life cycle for fashion with reduced ranges: Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. This was based on a fashion calendar, developed one full year in advance, based on fabric exhibitions, fashion shows and trade fairs (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

In the 1990s, due to modern lifestyles and consumerism, consumers became more interested in fashion. (Hines, 2007). Retailers started to expand their product range by adding more phases in the fashion calendar (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) which attracted more frequently young female customers into the stores (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Three to five mid-seasons were added, putting pressure on suppliers to deliver those clothes in smaller collections and reducing time frames (Tyler et al., 2006).

Quickly, fashion retailers started to consider consumer preferences in their design process, which considerably impacted their profit margins. Moreover, fashion runways and fashion shows began to become a public phenomenon. Those fashion shows were all over the place, from magazines to the web. “As a result, consumers started to be exposed to exclusive designs and styles inspired by runways” (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010, p.169). In addition, retailers such as H&M or Zara started to replicate those runway designs in their stores in three to five weeks (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The increased response to consumer demand created 20 seasons per year for those retailers. If retailers were not responding quickly enough to the market, it resulted in a missing sales and, therefore, profit and a higher risk of obsolescence. (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

The competition started to arise. To stay competitive and profitable, retailers began to change their supply chain by developing alliances with suppliers from different markets. Its strategy emphasised quick response through reduced lead times by maintaining low costs (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). This was the start of sourcing manufacturing overseas thanks to its low labour costs. Therefore, the supply chain became more complex due to the geographical distance between retailers, suppliers, and manufacturers (Tyler et al., 2006).

By the start of the 21st century, consumers became more demanding of newness (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). This highly competitive industry pressure fashion companies to provide a low price and constantly deliver new products in the market (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Moreover, the constant change in consumers' lifestyles creates a faster living pace and continuous evolution and progress. Consumer needs and wardrobes are changing more frequently than before (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

Moreover, mass communication and culture, such as music, film, and media, have significantly shifted how consumers are influenced when purchasing fashion products (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). This increase in consumption pushed companies to adopt new strategies to understand consumers' needs and eliminate the risk of longer lead times. Three new concepts were introduced to emphasise shorter supply lines and quick response: Just-in-Time (JIT), Computer Integrated Manufacturing (CIM), and Total Quality Management (TQM). Those practices helped retailers provide a variety and fashionable apparel to their customers with a low-cost mindset, poor quality, and speed to market (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

1.1.2. Impact of the fast fashion on society

Over the years, the fashion industry faced lots of challenges. Indeed, as said before, “the fast fashion industry relies on cheap manufacturing, frequent consumption and short-lived garment use” (Niinimäki et al., 2020, p.189). This industry is well known for its limited consideration of social and environmental issues (Niinimäki et al., 2020) and a lack of transparency regarding its supply chain operations (Hassan et al., 2013). Despite all of that, the industry is still growing today.

Fast fashion and the environment

In today's world, the global temperature has increased to 1.5 degrees Celsius (UNECE, 2021). The fashion industry is well known for damaging the environment. According to McKinsey (2020), the fashion industry represents 2.1 billion tons of global greenhouse gas emissions (GHG). It contributes to water pollution as well as microplastic pollution. The textile produced by the fast fashion industry is responsible for more than 92 million tons per year of waste, which ends up in landfills or is burnt, including unsold products (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

The history of the fast fashion industry shows the rise in the global consumers' consumption which caused companies to produce the double amount of apparel today compared to before

the year 2000. In fact, due to the emergence of fast fashion, we will reach 102 million tons of clothes by 2030 (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

- Water use and water pollution

60% of global (synthetic) fibre production is destined for the fashion industry. Polyester is one of the most used fibres, known for its cost-efficiency, representing 54 million tons of textile produced with this fibre (Niinimäki et al., 2020). “Polyester is produced from carbon-intensive processes requiring more than 70 million barrels of oil each year” (European Environment Agency, 2019). Cotton uses 26 million tons of textiles and is considered the highest water footprint (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Producing one cotton shirt requires 2700 litres of water, corresponding to the amount a person drinks in 2.5 years (UNECE, 2018). The production of textiles generates around 15 to 35 tons of CO₂ emissions (European Environment Agency, 2019).

Moreover, textile production is responsible for polluting 20% of global clean water (European Parliament, 2020) from wet processes such as bleaching, dyeing, and finishing products (Niinimäki et al., 2020) which cause massive waste as well (Niinimäki et al., 2020). In addition, “washing synthetics apparel releases around 0.5 million tons of microfibers into the ocean per year. Laundering of synthetic clothes accounts for 35% of primary microplastics released into the environment. A single laundry load of polyester clothes can discharge 700,000 microplastic fibres that can end up in the food chain”. (European Environment Agency, 2019).

- Global supply chains

Since fast fashion has dispersion globally in its process, each step of garment production occurs in a different country, which increases the logistic steps (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The following figure shows the supply chain of garment production and all the logistic processes needed to produce fast fashion apparel.

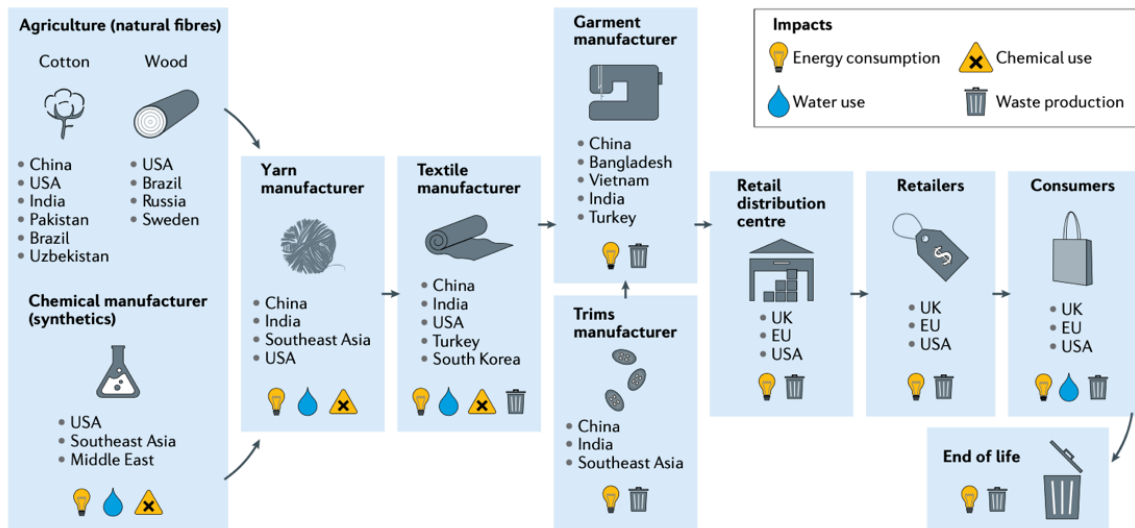


Fig. 1: Garment – manufacturing supply chain.
Source: Niinimäki et al. (2020)

Many garments are designed in the USA or EU, and the production often takes place in developing countries such as China, which have a competitive manufacturing process with lower labour costs (Niinimäki et al., 2020) and poor regulations around pollution (The Guardian, 2020).

“After manufacturing, garments are shipped in large quantities to central retail distribution centres, followed by smaller retailers where clothing is purchased, often in the UK, EU and USA. Garments are traditionally transported by container boats, but increasing amounts are shipped through air cargo to save time, especially online shopping” (Niinimäki et al., 2020, p.191).

Before hanging in your closet, your clothes have travelled worldwide during their manufacturing process, from raw material to end-product. Finally, many end-of-life products are incinerated or transported to landfills or other developing countries such as Africa (European Environment Agency, 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020). According to the European Parliament (2020), less than 1% of clothes are recycled.

Fast fashion and workers

Due to globalisation, the industry has expanded itself by adopting an outsourcing technique overseas (Bick et al., 2018; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). The supply chain became international,

where the supply chain was shifted to low and middle-income countries (Bick et al., 2018). Developing countries with a substantial competitive advantage in manufacturing have cheaper labour costs (Niinimäki et al., 2020). “The garment assembly employs 40 million workers worldwide” (Bick et al., 2018, p. 2).

The increasing demand puts enormous pressure on manufacturing factories, which results in employee abuse and unethical working practices such as discrimination, lousy treatment, low wages, and long working hours (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). Moreover, in Bangladesh, for example, forced labour and discrimination are pretty standard (Turker & Altuntas, 2014).

- Minimum wage & children’s labour

Most of the labour is composed of young and non-educated people, and the majority of those employees are women and children. Turker and Altuntas (2014) express that these people accept work at a minimum wage of around \$0,11 to \$0,35 per hour (Khurana & Muthu, 2021).

In Ethiopia, a country where H&M is manufacturing, the daily wage for an operator varies from \$32 to \$122, depending on the experience. This salary cannot cover basic needs such as food, housing, and transportation (Khurana & Muthu, 2021).

In addition to that, according to UNICEF (2020), 160 million children in the world are forced to work. Children who are constantly exposed to dust, chemicals, and pesticides cause long-term health repercussions (Khurana and Muthu,2021). Moreover, even though they are on age to go to school, “more than a quarter of children aged 5 to 11 and over a third of children aged 12 to 14 who are in child labour are out of school” (UNICEF, 2020, p.9). The latter will decrease to prospect of a future decent work (UNICEF, 2020).

- Health conditions & security

Due to a lack of organisational management, workers work in terrible conditions and unsafe infrastructure. Those infrastructures are creating health conditions such as respiratory problems due to poor ventilation caused by cotton dust and synthetic air particulates and muscular pain due to repetitive tasks (Bick et al., 2018). Issues “reporting life-threatening conditions such as lung disease and cancer, damage to endocrine function, adverse reproductive and fetal outcomes, accidental injuries, overuse injuries and death” (Bick et al., 2018, p.2). Furthermore,

the working conditions in those factories are intolerable, where the thermometer can go up to 60 degrees Celsius (Khurana & Muthu, 2021).

- Working hours

In addition to the lack of security and poor infrastructure, workers are expected to work from 10 to 18 hours a day, seven days a week (Clean Clothes Campaign, n.d.).

1.2. Slow fashion

Today's fashion sector is based on an ever-ending production and, therefore, consumption. As seen before, the products of the fast fashion industry are made with poor materials and poor working conditions. However, an alternative to this type of fashion is slow fashion (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

1.2.1. Definition & origin

Slow fashion originates from slow food, a concept born in Italy in the 80s. During those years, the first McDonald's arrived in Rome, emphasising this constant evolution of going fast and cheap. The slow food movement came to reinstall a way of living and eating more consciously, with pleasure and commitment (Jung & Jin, 2014). This concept is similar to slow fashion which is about "designing, producing, consuming and living better by considering environmental and social sustainability and producing beautiful and conscientious garments at a lower speed" (Jung & Jin, 2014, p.512).

Slow fashion can be defined as an objection to fast fashion (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013). This movement arrives in the early 2000s and does not operate from a mass-production point of view and does not have a fast stock turnover (Henninger et al., 2015). Niinimäki et al. (2020) define slow fashion as "minimising and mitigating the detrimental environmental impacts, to improve the long-term sustainability of the fashion supply chain" (p. 189). Moreover, slow fashion can also be named eco-fashion, a "type of clothing designed and manufactured to maximise benefits to people and society while minimising adverse environmental impacts" (Chan & Wong, 2012, p.194).

Sustainable fashion tries to modify the old perception that the fashion industry must include animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation. It focuses more on organic, fair trade, or even eco products and materials (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

1.2.2. Impact of the slow fashion on society

Fast fashion and the environment

To create a more sustainable business, sustainable fashion is slowing down production, which enables the environment to have the time to regenerate itself. Thanks to its slow-paced production, the raw material can grow naturally and slowly (Jung & Jin, 2014).

The aim of slow fashion is also to extend the product lifecycle by maximising its utility (Jung & Jin, 2014; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Slow fashion goes along with slow consumption. The aim is to change the way of consuming (Niinimäki et al., 2020) by changing the consumers' mindset from quantity to quality (Jung & Jin, 2014). In short, we need to consume less and in a better way (Oxfam, 2018). That is why the slow fashion companies are creating only two collections per year, in contrast to the fast fashion industry, known to have approximately 20 fashion seasons per year (Henninger et al., 2015). These quality sustainable products are designed to be timeless (Henninger et al., 2015). People can wear those clothes for an extended period, regardless of the fashion season (Jung & Jin, 2014).

To create quality clothes, slow fashion focuses its business on using biodegradable or recycled materials (Chan & Wong, 2012), such as organic cotton. According to the soil association (n.d.), using organic cotton eliminates toxins from the environment and has long-term benefits for the people and the planet. Farmers using organic cotton do not use fossil-fuel fertilisers and pesticides that harm the water. Instead, they use healthy soils and encourage wildlife (Soil Association, n.d.).

Moreover, to achieve more transparent production processes as possible, several labels exist to certify the production of the raw materials, such as OEKO-TEX. This label consists of developing test methods and limit values for the textile and leather. This label analyses the

manufacturing process for ecological and socially responsible fabric, testing harmful substances and other chemicals.

Another label named Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) helps commercialise organic garments in the world. This controlled process “guarantees environmentally friendly production and processing processes, respect and improvement of working conditions, promotion of fibres from organic agriculture and the prohibition of hazardous inputs such as toxic heavy metals” (Ecocert, n.d.).

In addition, those sustainable organisations adopt reverse logistics that operate at the end of the product’s life cycle. This process is known as the Seven R and focuses on: recycling, reusing, reducing, redesigning, reimagining, rewearing, and restyling (Henninger et al., 2015). This approach is close to the concept of the circular economy. Niinimäki et al. (2020) define the circular economy as the “processes of keeping materials in the system for as long as possible” (p.196). The aim is to close the loop by extracting, transforming, consumption by reducing waste and reusing it as raw material for a new product (Oxfam, 2018).

Fast fashion and workers

Sustainable fashion takes “ethical and responsible actions towards labour standards and fair working conditions” (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013, p.18). Jung & Jin (2014) emphasize that its slow production process improves the workers' quality of life. This concept creates a more transparent supply chain with fewer intermediaries (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013; Chan & Wong, 2012) based on a mutual relationship between producers and workers (Jung & Jin, 2014). In fact, instead of working an excessive amount of hours to meet the increasing demand of the fast fashion industry, workers are secured to work regular working hours (Jung & Jin, 2014).

1.3. Sustainability in fast fashion

In the previous section, the fashion industry was explained to build a framework and understand this concept of over-consumption and the increasing need to move into a more sustainable way of consumption.

1.3.1. Sustainability

In the past years, sustainable innovation has become an important topic. The world faces long term challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, social inequality, poverty, and pollution (Boons et al., 2013; White et al., 2019). Thus, the urge to find a solution arises (Boons et al., 2013). Companies are considered the leading players are creating environmental and social problems (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010). Marketers encourage consumptions that impact the environment negatively (White et al., 2019). In response, companies are trying to change or include sustainability in their core business and brand DNA (White et al., 2019). Stern (2000) expresses that people, as individuals, also affect the environment through their actions. Therefore, their behaviour and consumption choices can cause environmental damage.

However, it is essential to understand first what sustainability means. In this section, a broad definition will be given and a specific definition of sustainability in fashion.

Definition

Cambridge dictionary defines sustainability as the “quality of causing little or no damage to the environment and therefore able to continue for a long time” (Cambridge, s.d.).

Due to its increasing popularity over the years, sustainability has been widely researched among academics in many business areas, such as management and marketing. This multidisciplinary nature of sustainability includes sustainable development, triple bottom line, green business, environmental management, and corporate social responsibility (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

According to the United Nations Brundtland Commission (1987), sustainability can be defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development aims to build an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future for people and the planet (United Nations, 2019). To achieve sustainable development, three core elements need to be aligned: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Moreover, this is in line with the Triple Bottom Line approach that focuses on the environmental impacts and includes the social and economic criteria (Boons et al., 2013; Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014).

The European Commission (2008) expressed its willingness to support sustainable development through its Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy (SCP). The latter describes that it can contribute to economic growth. On the one hand, it encourages companies to innovate and, on the other hand, consumers to act more sustainably. The European Commission (2011) linked its strategy to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). According to them, companies should become socially responsible by integrating social, environmental, ethical, consumer and human rights concerns into their business strategy and operations.

Moreover, the United Nations (2019) has created 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to respond to the urgent call for action. The SDGs' goals highlighting the importance of sustainable consumption are Goal 12: "Ensure sustainable consumption production patterns" and Goal 13: "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts" (United Nations, 2019).

The fashion industry is often opposed to sustainability because fashion is often linked to short product life cycles, while sustainability implies ethics, durability, and the reuse of products (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Nevertheless, there is an increase in the emergence of the sustainable fashion consumer movement. The environment is considered more and more a new trend in fashion (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Huang et al., 2012). Geissdoerfer et al. (2015) express that sustainability is an emerging topic and is seen as a source of competitive advantage. Sustainability can also be defined as "a buzzword used by individuals and businesses alike to convey a sense of caring about the environment. It is often used interchangeably with other terms such as green or environmentally friendly" (Minton et al., 2012, p.70).

In addition, the interest of companies and consumers is on the rise for sustainable products (Geissdoerfer et al., 2015; Sarkar et al., 2019). "72 per cent of the young consumers are willing to buy and even pay more for the products belonging to companies known for conducting environmentally friendly business practices" (Sarkar et al., 2019, p.191). According to Minton et al. (2012), consumers defined sustainability as reducing overall purchases and consumption. It can also be linked to a lifestyle by using public transportation, living in smaller houses, or consuming organic foods.

1.3.2. Corporate Social Responsibility

Origin & Definition

The origin of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) comes from the 1800s. However, we started to pay attention to CSR in 1953, when CSR was defined as “how companies voluntarily contribute to a cleaner environment and a better society by structuring their responsibilities” (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020, p.3). These actions can influence the company’s success in the long run and affect the way of doing business. However, it is still unclear how a company can be called a socially responsible company (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020).

“It is not a simple task to define CSR, as the description of the concept can differ between institutions, businesses, countries where culture, business practice, and perceptions can affect how social issues and consequences are addressed” (Thorisdottir & Johannsdottir, 2020, p.3).

However, in this thesis, we will refer to CSR as a business ethical obligation that incorporates three sustainability pillars: economic, environmental, and social, into the company’s structure (European Commission, 2011).

Consumers’ perceptions and positive repercussions toward companies

Nowadays, “CSR has been recognised as an important branding component that benefits marketers by developing positive relationships with consumers” (Chu, & Chen, 2019, p. 453). Consumers also have a positive attitude and higher purchase intention toward brands who are involved in CSR activities (Wan et al., 2016; Smith, 2007).

Furthermore, CSR has become a popular marketing strategy because it can impact customer satisfaction, enhance corporate performance and reputation, and improve product evaluations (Chu, & Chen, 2019). “CSR includes respect for juridical and ethical guidelines, fair treatment of employees and the environment, and preventing harmful side-effects caused by organisational activities” (de Lenne, & Vandenbosch, 2017, p.484).

Consumers' perception of CSR practices can positively affect companies using CSR. Therefore, companies using CSR practices receive a competitive advantage because it helps them build a reputation and a certain legitimacy (Kurucz et al., 2008).

Companies associated with a CSR practice can attract, retain, and build stronger relationships with consumers. Moreover, CSR practices can be related to a "positive word-of-mouth, increased loyalty, or greater 'resilience' (a willingness to give a company the benefit of the doubt or forgive an apparent lapse in behaviour)" (Smith, 2007, p. 18).

Corporate Sustainability Communication

Companies are then using social media to promote their CSR initiatives. This type of communication is defined as Corporate Sustainability Communications (CSC), which includes three main categories: social aspects, environmental aspects, and consumer involvement (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

- Social aspects

These first characteristic concerns labour conditions for employees. Fast fashion brands treat their employees poorly and offer unsafe workplaces. They are trying to become more transparent on this matter (de Lenne, & Vandenbosch, 2017).

- Environmental aspects

This second characteristic refers to the impact of production practices on the environment. Sustainable brands use other products such as eco-friendly fibres, Tencel, and organic cotton. (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

- Consumer involvement

Communicating about sustainable consumption and another way to consume is the last aspect of the CSC. Information is given to consumers about their clothes' usage, durability, or recycling options (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

Chu and Chen (2019) stated that communications strategies about sustainability differ if the company is green or not. Green companies are maintaining a better presence on social media than non-green ones.

1.3.3. Ethical concerns & greenwashing

Due to several scandals, the fashion industry suffered a lot. According to BBC News (2018), in 2013, thousands of workers died in a garment factory in Bangladesh, the Rana Plaza, due to the collapse of a building. Since it was highly mediatised, it constituted the movement's start about the need for transparency and a more ethical way of doing business in the fashion industry. This pressure was a turn for the industry, and multiple companies started to take the initiative for change. Nowadays, more people are concerned about the fabrics the fashion industry uses, the ethics in their consumption, and human rights (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Sustainability is not only used by green companies which incorporate sustainability in their core business, such as Patagonia (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017). Fast fashion houses and retailers have begun to act on this matter even though they were known to focus on efficient production processes (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

Brands play a central role in creating sustainable products and services. As the interest of consumers in this topic grows, sustainability-oriented brands are on the rise. More consumers are paying attention to the information on specific brands and their products, such as the country of origin or the working conditions. The result: companies are trying to appear more ethically concerned about the worker's conditions and sustainability (Hassan et al. 2013). To do so, brands are using sustainability-oriented innovation (SOI) to “create and realise new (or improved) products, services, processes or practices which aim at environmental and social benefits in addition to economic returns” (Buhl et al. 2019), to satisfy the consumers (Lehner & Halliday, 2014).

As said before, fast fashion companies are less transparent regarding their supply chain and manufacturers (Hassan et al., 2013). Therefore, companies building or changing their business model into a sustainable one need to be careful about how they communicate about it. However, it is essential to note that brand managers face some challenges because they must balance the existing brand identity and be consistent with it while changing and innovating (Buhl et al., 2019).

Nowadays, sustainable branding, brand heritage, and corporate values are critical. There are reasons why companies are gaining customers' trust (Huang et al., 2012). However, while there is an increase in sustainable product consumption, branding sustainably raises doubts.

One of the biggest fast fashion brands to use CSR as a marketing technique was H&M, a fast-fashion brand with its organic Conscious Collection. Those companies are communicating and trying to integrate sustainability into their business and marketing practices (Hassan et al., 2013; Huang et al., 2012), even though they are known to be one of the biggest fast fashion brands, which is fast-paced overseas production, generating terrible working conditions in a minimum wage. Their desire to become 'green' is caused by their willingness to satisfy customers' needs (Minton et al., 2012). In fact, "more consumers prefer to purchase environmentally friendly products" (Huang et al., 2012, p.251) and thus keep asking for more green products (Huang et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2019).

As a reminder, green branding delivers a message about a product's attributes and benefits that reduce its environmental impact (Huang et al., 2012). Those fast fashion companies, such as H&M, are spreading their messages by using words such as 'pure and fair' in their communication. It can be misinterpreted, and consumers may think that the products are fair trade or organic. Moreover, using those marketing practices to promote their products can induce uncertainty in the customers' minds (Hassan et al., 2013) and generate mistrust (Huang et al., 2012).

Hassan et al. (2013) stated that "no single organisation regulates the industry or provides a mechanism for decoding such terminology" (p.182). Huang et al. (2012) said that "the act of joining incorrect green claims to a firm's products or brands, often referred to as greenwashing, has also become a growing public issue" (p.254).

Greenwashing can be defined as "a firm's intentionally misleading or cheating customers with false claims about their environmental actions and impacts to repair public reputation or further shape a good public image, a selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental performance while failing to disclose negative environmental information" (Zhang et al., 2018, p. 741). Moreover, those companies are using green marketing to become more famous. However, this is also a synonym for consumers' mistrust of green initiatives (Huang et al., 2012).

If fast fashion companies integrate sustainability into their core business and thus avoid greenwashing, they should communicate more about their positioning. Brand positioning is a central element to the brands' success since it allows them to occupy a significant place in the customers' minds (Huang et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2019). A green brand positioning communicates actively about the brand identity and its environmentally friendly value proposition. "A successful green brand identity should provide green benefits to environmentally conscious consumers" (Huang et al., 2012, p.254). It also helps the brand to distinguish itself from its competitors (Sarkar et al., 2019).

Huang et al. (2012) stated that "Aaker's (1991) brand model and Keller's (1993) customer-based equity model have concentrated on how consumers perceive and assess brands by searching certain knowledge dimensions such as "brand awareness," "image," and "personality" (p.252). Brand knowledge is the feeling, perception, and experiences in the consumers' minds. Two major components of this are brand awareness and brand image (Keller, 2009; Huang et al., 2012). Therefore, it is important to note that consumers' awareness is created with exposure, and the brand's image is enhanced by promotional efforts (Huang et al., 2012). However, "consumers' awareness of CSR issues and initiatives is low" (Kumar & Christodouloupoulou, 2014, p.11).

In addition to that, if brands create sustainable innovation and advertise their sustainability collection, that could not be well perceived by consumers. Marketing increases artificial customers' needs and increases over-consumption. It can thus lead to adverse environmental and social consequences (Lehner & Halliday, 2014). In addition to that, consumers might also think that the brand's willingness to change to a more sustainable business can be due to the public pressure, either from policymakers or social movements, rather than their willingness to do good (Lehner & Halliday, 2014). It can also have an economic impact (profit from that innovation).

Therefore, brands should stay authentic to be trustworthy (Eggers et al., 2013). The latter creates loyal customers. According to Eggers et al. (2013), "a brand is authentic if it is perceived as 'real' and 'honest' instead of 'artificial' and 'superficial'" (p.341). In fact, "authentic brands make defined core values their orientation for business actions and practices. This increases trust and has a significant and direct impact on a company's bottom line" (Eggers et al. 2013,

p. 341). Trust will help customers use more of its products and be more likely to recommend them.

A brand should include three factors: brand consistency, customer orientation, and congruency to be authentic. The brand should be consistent to ensure that the experience stays the same on all points, such as its corporate values, strategy, and defined vision. A brand should be customer-oriented, which means that the brand should satisfy and bring value to customers and stakeholders. Finally, a brand should be congruent. The latter is the uniformity of the brand, from the individual employee to the brand value.

However, if fast fashion brands create sustainable collections while producing fast fashion clothes, it might result in some tensions. Therefore, brands should maintain its consistency and relevance and thus be ambidextrous. Unfortunately, there is little guidance to help brand managers be ambidextrous (Beverland et al., 2015).

2. Attitude-Behaviour Gap

2.1. Introduction

As seen in the previous section, there has been an increasing number of sustainable products over the past few years due to the change in the customers' mindset. This increase could be explained by the various scandals that have been highly mediatised, the climate change mediatisation, several movements related to ethics, controversial advertisements, an increase in NGOs rising societal, ethical, and environmental issues. As a result, more consumers want to buy more sustainable products (Huang et al., 2012) and are constantly asking for more green products (Huang et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2019).

However, across the literature, consumers might be interested in sustainable fashion, but it does not necessarily result in purchasing them. Consumers who are interested in green products do not necessarily buy them. Only one-third of them are willing to pay higher prices to buy environmentally friendly products. This is called an attitude-behaviour gap phenomenon (Arli et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2012).

This section will first define the attitude-behaviour gap through the theory of planned behaviour. The cognitive dissonance and the negative factors influencing consumers' behaviour will be presented.

2.2. Theory of Planned Behavior

Consumers' attitudes can be linked to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) of Ajzen (2011). This theory links attitude toward the behaviour. "Consumers' perceived sense of responsibility and consumers' perceived readiness to be green as an effort to explore the gap between attitude and behaviour in the context of green marketing" (Arli et al., 2018, p.390).

"'To be green' is defined as engaging in environmentally friendly activities, including purchasing/using green products" (Arli et al., 2018, p.390). The theory explains how attitudes affect people's intentions to perform a specific behaviour and how intentions can also impact the person's behaviour (Arli et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2012). It also predicts that those behavioural intentions are affected by media exposure (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

It is also known as the green gap. “Even though consumers may have pro-environmental attitudes, their perceptions towards ‘being green’ may influence their perceived readiness, and thus intention to engage in green consumption behaviour” (Arli et al., 2018, p.391).

However, this theory helps understand the gap between consumers who intend to behave sustainably but are not engaging in this behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2019). In other words, “the theory of planned behaviour predicts that cognitions affect behavioural intentions and subsequent behaviour, and these cognitions are affected by media exposure” (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017, p.485).

The TPB based itself on three hypotheses: attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioural control.

“An *attitude* is a significant factor influencing consumer behaviours” (Arli et al., 2018, p.391). When consumers face green products, their purchasing decisions can be influenced by their attitudes (Arli et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2012). An attitude is based on three components: cognitive dimension (beliefs), affective dimension (feelings and emotions), and behavioural dimension (Girandola & Fointiat, 2016). Those components can conflict and evolve (de Lanauze & Siadou-Martin, 2019). The theory of cognitive dissonance explains this conflict, which will be described in detail in the next section.

Subjective norms derive from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). Chu and Chen (2019) express that “the theory of reasoned action (TRA) from Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) posits that consumer attitude toward the product/brand is positively related to increased purchase intention, and this framework can be used to explain consumer purchases from companies with CSR activities” (p.455). Subjective norms refer to the importance of reference groups on specific behaviour. “Subjective norm significantly influences various green-related consumer behavioural intention, such as intention to buy environmentally friendly products” (Arli et al., 2018, p.391). Consumers can therefore be influenced by their close friends or family to behave in a certain way. It can also lead to a higher social pressure (Arli et al., 2018; de Lenne, & Vandenbosch, 2017).

“*Perceived behavioural control* refers to the perceived difficulty or ease of performing the behaviour” (Arli et al., 2018, p.391; Ajzen, 2002, p.665). Studies have shown that it also predicts the influence on consumers to act green (Ajzen, 2011; Arli et al., 2018).

2.3. Cognitive dissonance

The theory of cognitive dissonance explains “how people react when their choices and actions contradict their beliefs and convictions” (de Lanauze & Siadou-Martin, 2019, p.566). Therefore, if a person has a positive attitude regarding green products, this attitude can conflict with their past behaviour, leading to psychological discomfort. The latter is a mediator between the attitude-behaviour gap and the willingness to change its behaviour. “People tend to modify at least one of the dissonant cognitions, either lowering the impact of the new attitude or modifying their behaviour” (de Lanauze & Siadou-Martin, 2019, p.566). Therefore, behaviours are often stronger than attitudes. As a result, people act the same way they did before, leading to the attitude-behaviour gap. To change our behaviour, cognition needs to be stronger than behaviour. This is why people are trying several strategies to reduce this psychological discomfort. The most popular one is selective exposure, where consumers avoid dissonant cognitions (de Lanauze & Siadou-Martin, 2019).

2.4. Negative factors influencing consumers’ behaviour not to act sustainably

Many authors confirm a gap between the intention to behave sustainably and the behaviour. We have seen that consumers might be interested in sustainable fashion, but it does not necessarily result in purchasing them. In this section, we will see the negative factors influencing such behaviour.

2.4.1. Attitudes

Consumers are driven by two actions: the affect and the cognition. Both can therefore result in decision making. However, this distinction can be relevant for information regarding sustainability issues (White et al., 2019).

Due to the increasing popularity of green products (Arli et al., 2018; Sarkar et al., 2019), consumers can be negatively and emotionally impacted by the effort they need to engage in sustainable behaviours. Three negative emotions can arise fear, guilt, and sadness.

Fear is often used in communications about sustainable behaviour. This communication can lead people to react negatively due to the fear of acting in the wrong way. In addition, people might think they are responsible for the environment. Therefore, this emotion of guilt influences intentions and behaviours to act sustainably. Finally, sadness is also a driver of sustainable attitudes and behaviours. This type of emotion can result in a change in behaviour but only for a certain period. When the emotional aspects have dissipated, sustainable actions are eliminated (White et al., 2019).

2.4.2. *Subjective norms*

Social influence

Social norms are the belief of what is socially acceptable and approved and can impact consumers' behaviours (White et al., 2019; Minton et al., 2012). It can predict behaviour in multiple contexts, from choosing sustainable clothes to recycling. The visible consumption of sustainable brands can be a way to show their environmental concern to others and enhance their social reputations (Sarkar et al., 2019; White et al., 2019).

Social identities can also impact social influence since the latter depends on how people identify themselves in a group. If a particular group person is behaving in a certain way, it is more likely that the rest of the group will follow. For example, if a person considers himself in a group that pays attention to sustainability, it will result in environmental choices and actions. It can therefore increase acceptance (White et al., 2019).

Social influence can also impact behaviours through **social desirability**. A person can therefore choose a particular product to give a positive impression on others. Moreover, those consumers are acting in that way in public when other people can see their actions (White et al. 2019).

Culture

Moreover, being in a particular culture or country can also impact the sense of responsibility of the consumers (Arli et al., 2018; Minton et al., 2012). If environmental issues are considered a significant concern, people will be more responsible for them. Furthermore, "consumers with

higher ethical obligation tend to support environmentally friendly behaviour such as recycling and purchasing green products” (Arli et al., 2018, p.392).

Age and gender

Age and sustainable knowledge can also be correlated. “The older a consumer is, the less environmental knowledge he or she is likely to have” (Minton et al., 2012, p.70). It can vary among different generations. Bhardwaj & Fairhurst (2010) state that generation Y, more commonly called millennials¹, prefers many low-quality, cheap clothes. In comparison, baby boomers² prefer purchasing a fewer number of higher quality clothes.

Even though women are the majority of the workers, they are also the most fast fashion consumers. Millennial women are spending 226% more than men on clothing per year (Oakes, 2020).

2.4.3. *“Perceived behavioural control*

Habits

White et al. (2019) express that habits are behaviours that persist over time because it comes with a certain automatism. It is, therefore, hard to change it. However, it is possible to break bad habits with interventions such as penalties and discontinuity. On the other hand, it is possible to strengthen a positive habit with easy actions, incentives, and feedback (White et al. 2019).

The lack of information

In addition to that, due to the number of sustainability claims, the information available could be very complex for the customers. This complex information creates uncertainty which can result in people’s inaction. Moreover, an overload of information can also increase customer uncertainty (Hassan et al., 2013).

¹ Millennials are people born from 1980 and 1999 (Lavallard, 2019).

² Baby boomers are people born from 1943 and 1960 (Lavallard, 2019).

Ambiguity can also lead to a lack of understanding where consumers re-evaluate their product assumptions. Hassan et al. (2013) expresses that “when faced with ambiguous and undifferentiated information about product attributes, a consumer cannot effectively process the information to make reasonable judgments of the relative merits of the diverse choices” (p.183).

A lack of knowledge, confusion, or situational factors can be the reason for non-purchase (Arlı et al., 2018; de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017; Huang et al., 2012). Customers might find it challenging to distinguish sustainable brands from all fast fashion brands communicating about sustainability (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

Distance

It can also create a distance between the customer and the environmental issue (White et al., 2019). Consumers are distracted and distanced from the garment’s production process (Oakes, 2020). One-third of 2000 women interviewed in the survey made by Fair Trade think that a garment is considered “old” after being worn one or two times. They are thus tempted to buy cheap clothes (Oakes, 2020).

The individual self

The self-expressive appeal of a brand is ‘how a person is willing to be seen by others while using a brand’ (Sarkar et al., 2019, p.195). Consumers also need to identify themselves with the product or the brand. Therefore, “self-identity serves both as a means to differentiate oneself from others and to conform to the values, beliefs and behaviour of the social groups to which one belongs” (Arlı et al., 2018, p.392; Chu, & Chen, 2019). “Consumers may like a brand due to the enhancement of self-esteem and self-image, and self-expressive appeal provides an opportunity to express their self-images in front of the others” (Sarkar et al., 2019, p.195). It can increase the consumers’ loyalty to the brand and induce a positive brand attitude and purchase intention (Sarkar et al., 2019).

3. Social Media

Social media plays an essential role in consumers' minds. It is, therefore, important to see its influence on consumers' behaviour. Before explaining the role of social media in our daily lives, it is essential to understand where it comes from.

3.1. History and concept

The British industrial revolution in the 19th century started the first wave of globalisation. The World Wide Web was created from 1989 to 1990, and it is defined as “a techno-social system to enable humans to interact based on technological networks” (Alves de Castro et al., 2021, p.34). The Web is built to enhance people's cognitions, communication and collaboration (Alves de Castro et al., 2021).

Over the years, the World Wide Web has faced four waves of evolution. Today, we are at our fourth wave, called Web 4.0. In this new era, digital and technological innovations are impacting our lives. There are changing our daily habits, attitudes and even our culture. As a result, many technologies started to arise, such as artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of things (IoT), the increasing number of social media channels, and many more (Alves de Castro et al., 2021).

Due to the rise of the World Wide Web, the 90s marked the start of social networks. However, those networks were not as we know them today. There had limited functions and possibilities to connect with other people. In addition to that, it was the start of blogging, where people shared their personal and daily life. Companies started to use bloggers to advertise their products and brands. In 2000, the increased popularisation of the internet, the rise of the middle class in emerging countries, and the integration of markets worldwide created a high demand for the product to facilitate relationships between individuals. This is the beginning of social media as we know it today with new technologies, well designed, interactive, and personalised tools (Alves de Castro et al., 2021).

In 2020, 4,57 million people were using the internet worldwide. The Internet has spread around the globe, and nowadays, the internet is accessible to almost everyone. Today, the internet is everywhere, shaping our relationships and interaction. The rise of this technology

resulted in a change in the way we communicate and how companies promote their products and services (Alves de Castro et al., 2021).

Social media is widely used nowadays. It has become an important marketing tool for sharing content and promoting brands (Alves de Castro et al., 2021). Consumers use social media to engage with people, share information, and communicate with companies. In addition, social media focuses on influential relationships and, on the other hand, on consumers' perceptions of themselves (Minton et al., 2012).

3.2. Roles

Social media is built on viral marketing. The latter is defined as “a form of marketing that happens when buzz marketing generates word-of-mouth (online or offline) interaction among users, especially on the internet” (Alves de Castro et al., 2021, p. 37). It can increase brand awareness, customer engagement, and visibility (Alves de Castro et al., 2021; Chu & Chen, 2019; Minton et al., 2012).

The advantage of social media is its interactive feature (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017) and has little cost (Minton et al., 2012). It allows interaction between companies and consumers by engaging with them and creating a sense of community. This interaction increases the importance of transparency as social media offers a direct dialogue with stakeholders (de Lenne, & Vandenbosch, 2017). Consumers can easily communicate with the company and therefore respond and engage with them through likes, shares, follow etc. (Chu, & Chen, 2019; Minton et al., 2012).

This level of interaction increases consumers' feelings of identification with the brand (Chu, & Chen, 2019). They create a sense of connection and belonging with the brand. “In social media, consumers tend to focus on their social relationships and develop their social identity through groups and communities” (Chu, & Chen, 2019, p.455).

“Social media can be more influential in affecting consumers' attitudes than traditional media, such as magazines” (de Lenne, & Vandenbosch, 2017, p. 486). Moreover, social networks are tools that allow customers to search for information about brands (Chaffey, 2022).

Targeted marketing is easier on social media because marketers can access consumers’ data. For example, marketers can “look to sustainability groups, search for sustainability-related feeds, and create ads that display when sustainability-related posts are made” (Minton et al., 2012, p.71).

Finally, since social media is two-way communication, thanks to its interactivity, it allows the company to receive instantaneous feedback about customer preferences (Minton et al., 2012).

3.3. Social media platforms

Marketing has changed over the years. As said before, social media has become an essential tool to promote a brand and is widely used today. In fact, “58,4% of the world’s population uses social media” (Chaffey, 2022). This represents more than half of the population in the world.

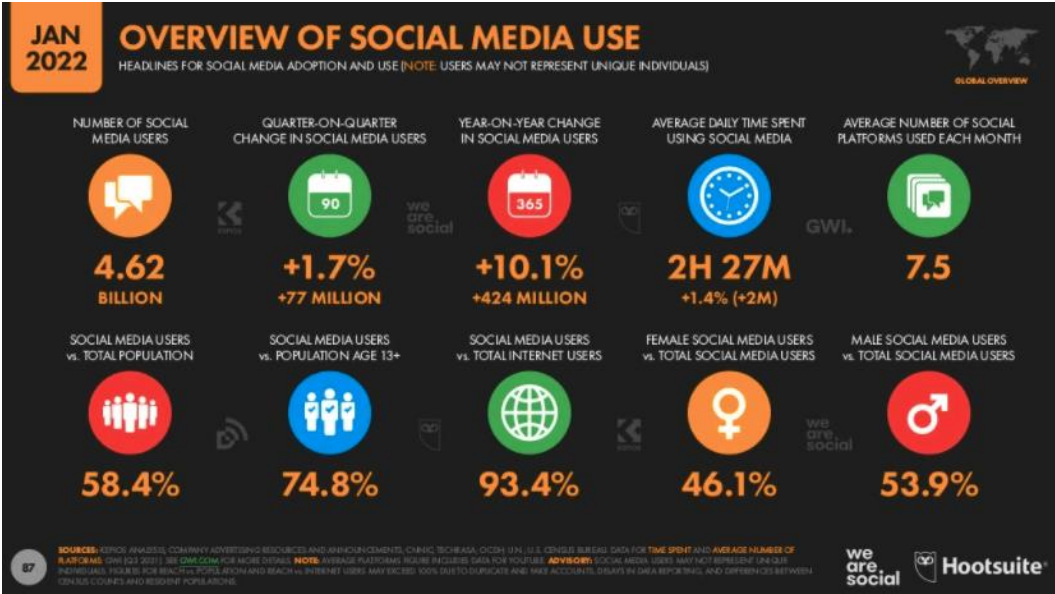


Fig. 2: Overview of social media use
Source: Chaffey (2022)

The COVID-19 lockdown in 2020 has influenced people’s behaviour. In fact, during the pandemic period, more people were present on social networks, with an average daily usage of 2 hours and 27 minutes. Since more people spent more time at home, digital activities increased, and more people tried new apps (Chaffey, 2022).

Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are among the most popular social networks. Even though other social networks exist, such as blogs, Twitter, or WhatsApp, we will mainly focus on the four most popular ones. However, Facebook dominates the ranking with more than 2,6 million users per month in 2022, followed by YouTube with 2,5 million monthly users, and Instagram with 1,4 million users. In less than two years, TikTok rapidly grew and became one of the main social networks with 1 million users (Chaffey, 2022). Those four social networks have a shared audience since most of their users are aged from 16 to 64 years old, and more than half of the audience are women (Chaffey, 2022).

3.3.1. Facebook

What it is & how does it works?

Facebook was created in 2004 by a college student, Mark Zuckerberg, at Harvard (Alves de Castro et al., 2021). Originally designed to be only a social network for students (GCFGlobal, n.d.), it is now the most famous and most prominent social network used by 2,6 million users worldwide (Chaffey, 2022).

Facebook aims to connect and share content, send messages, post statuses, and share pictures with your family and friends. Now, many other websites have integrated Facebook into their business, with an objective to use a Facebook account to log into their websites (GCFGlobal, n.d.).

Who are the users of Facebook?

Facebook is the largest social network, with users from 25 to 34 years old and 43% of them are women. However, people spend less time on this platform, around 33 minutes. It is because younger people prefer TikTok, another social platform (Barnhart, 2022).

Why do companies use Facebook?

Even though the first objective of Facebook was to connect individuals in one single network, nowadays, the characteristics have spread. Nowadays, companies can use Facebook to create pages for their organisation to communicate with its stakeholders and show their products/services (Caers et al., 2013). It is also a way to promote their business with Facebook ads, indicating that this ad is the main marketing highlight (Barnhart, 2022). Having their brand on Facebook allows them to increase their sales thanks to its interactive features that enable

users and consumers to share content, likes, and engagement. It also generates WOM (Caers et al., 2013).

3.3.2. Instagram

What it is & how it works

Instagram was created in 2010 in the US by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and was acquired by Facebook in 2012 for 1 million dollars (Leaver et al., 2020). In an early stage, the main characteristic of Instagram was to post only pictures. Nowadays, the app has increased its features. In fact, in 2013, it was extended to video content of a maximum of one minute. The social media network also provides filters to add to your photo before uploading it. In 2016, the stories featured appeared and allowed users to share their daily moments that will disappear in 24 hours. In 2017, a new feature appeared: post multiple photos or videos presented in a carousel format (Holak & McLaughlin, 2017).

The aim is to post content, pictures, and videos that allow users to view the content for both followers and non-followers. Thanks to the “hashtags” commonly used with the following symbol: #, the post will be more likely to be viewed. Moreover, users can interact through likes, comments, and shares (Forsey, 2022).

Who are the users of Instagram?

The most prominent target audience of Instagram are people from 18 to 34 years old, corresponding to Generation Z and Millennials, with mainly 48,4% of women. In the past three years, users have doubled (Barnhart, 2022).

Why are companies on Instagram?

This platform is also used to check what brands post and promote (Forsey, 2022). Half of its users are interested on brand content thanks to its Instagram ads. Moreover, 83% of its users discover new products thanks to the app (Sharma, 2022).

3.3.3. YouTube

What it is & how it works

YouTube was launched in 2005 and was bought by Google for 1,65 million dollars (NBC Universal, 2006). It is a video streaming service where people can share and watch videos. It can be seen as a “convergence of television, music, and film” 's traditional entertainment choices” (Khan, 2017, p.237). Users can subscribe to a variety of channels. YouTube has launched several In-app purchases. The most common is “YouTube Premium, a monthly subscription that removes ads on all videos” (Suciu, 2021).

Who are the users of YouTube?

YouTube has the highest reach of age group because the social media targets people from 15 to 35 years old, with 46% being women. They spend approximately 30 minutes per day on this platform. This demography shows the increasing popularity of video content. Most users are using YouTube for entertainment purposes only rather than to search for brands (Barnhart, 2022).

Why companies are on YouTube

YouTube offers many advertisement opportunities; therefore, YouTube’s ad revenue has increased by 43% since last year (Barnhart, 2022). “Brands also have a strong YouTube presence, and marketers increasingly rely on YouTube for promotion and customer feedback” (Khan, 2017, p.237). Thanks to its social interaction, content can be shared and discussed (Khan, 2017).

3.3.4. TikTok

What it is & how it works

TikTok is the most recent social media since it was created in 2019. This social media platform is a video-sharing app that allows users to create 15-second videos. TikTok has popularity and growth that no other social media has known before. This is because the company used celebrities to promote the app. Moreover, those celebrities drive buzz by generating viral content (Geysler, 2022).

Users can record anything about their daily lives and post it directly and quickly. In addition, “videos are played as soon as a user opens the app” (Geyser, 2022). This fun, entertaining and addictive video content allows users to keep them longer in the app.

Who are the users of TikTok

This recent social network targets mainly younger generations from 10 to 19 years old, with 61% mostly girls. 40% of Generation Z are influenced by products shown on the platform. The latter are spending approximately 89 minutes per day on the platform (Barnhart, 2022).

Why companies are on TikTok

Compared to its competitors, this social media platform does not have a traditional display ad. However, brands are using TikTok as a marketing channel. One common technique that brands use is TikTok challenges, where users generate content about the brand. Moreover, brands can also collaborate with celebrities, such as influencers, to create promotional content (Geyser, 2022).

3.4. The impact of sustainable content on the consumers' behaviour

As said before, the fashion industry negatively affects the environment and increases over-consumption. This growing information has led to an increasing concern for the environment and an ethical concern. If we take the example of child labour in those fast fashion factories, media, social media, and NGOs are constantly spreading these negative messages to sensitise the consumers on this matter. Therefore, it can result in a reverse influence on consumers instead of a persuasive effect. To stimulate, the message should be credible and legitimate for a customer to believe and trust the message (de Lanauze & Siadou-Martin, 2019).

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) of Petty and Cacioppo (1984) demonstrates that consumers are constantly examining and evaluating the brand message through its past experiences and its current level of knowledge. Therefore, their understanding of the environment plays a central role in their attitudes (Huang et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2019). Consumers who have a positive attitude toward sustainable products can result in a higher purchase intention.

82 per cent of companies are willing to increase their sustainable marketing, and 74 per cent of them are using the Internet to do so (Minton et al., 2012).

In addition to that, if the consumers perceive the brand as transparent and socially responsible, they will be more likely to trust the brand. It will result in a positive WOM and a possible purchase (Chu, & Chen, 2019).

Moreover, if a company is sharing its CSR message through its social media platform, it can also create trust and show the company's willingness to be more transparent. (Chu & Chen, 2019).

Social media provides more persuasive advertising. Therefore, it is harder for consumers to distinguish entertainment from persuasive content (Minton et al., 2012).

“Media have the ability to predict young individuals’ cognitions toward certain behaviours” (de Lenne, & Vandebosch, 2017, p.486). Scholars suggested that fashion magazines, specialised magazines, the social media content of sustainable organisations, eco-activists, and sustainable apparel brands, and the social media content of fashion bloggers and fast fashion brands are playing a role in consumers’ buying behaviour (de Lenne, & Vandebosch, 2017). Sustainable influencers are willing to change the mindset of people. They increase the awareness of the social pressure (Wan et al., 2016) to over-consume and emphasise the problem that this over-consumption has for the planet. They think beyond purchasing behaviour and focus only on use, reuse, and disposal. Moreover, they are aware of the life-cycle cost of consumption (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

The brand should deliver its environmentally friendly attributes and positioning to its customers because it will help them make a purchasing decision. Sarkar et al. (2019) express that “consumers may experience a feeling of affective satisfaction while using green brands because of a sense of contribution to the environment” (p.194).

Using sustainable products is often linked to the customers’ emotions. Non-verbal cues such as a positive image can be enough to evoke those emotional responses (Sarkar et al., 2019). The association of green brands and natural scenery can be an example of the non-verbal cue. If the

consumers appreciate the scenery, it will positively impact the customers' brand attitudes (Hartmann et al., 2005, Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibanez, 2008, Sarkar et al., 2019).

Moreover, Hartmann et al. (2005) state that the emotional benefits of a green brand positioning can be based on a "feeling of well-being ("warm glow") associated with acting in an altruistic way" (p.11).

Part II: Empirical study

The literature review aimed to build a theoretical framework to respond to the research question. A gap exists in the literature. The link between the sustainable content of a fast-fashion brand and its impact on consumers' behaviour has not been studied before.

This second part of the thesis aims to examine those theoretical concepts and compare them to the results of the interviews. This study seeks to answer the research question: "how and why sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media can impact consumers' behaviour?"

The empirical study will be structured in two parts: the methodology and the results. In the first section, the objectives of the methodology and the data gathering will be explained. Afterwards, based on the study, the results will be analysed.

1. Methodology

1.1. Objectives and methodology

As said before, the literature review aimed to build a theoretical framework on different elements, such as consumers' behaviour, social media, and sustainable content of fast fashion brands. The literature examined the impact of social media content on consumers. However, we have seen that even though sustainability is on the rise, there is a gap between consumers' intention to behave more sustainably and the real action to do so. In addition, there is not much information that links the sustainable content of fast fashion brands and its impact on consumer behaviour.

To assess this, the analysis will be based on a qualitative study. The advantage of qualitative research is that even though fewer participants are interviewed, they can give a more insightful explanation of their behaviour. Furthermore, this also helps to understand their body language during the interview and how interviewees react to external stimuli. Thus, it will give more richness and diversified results (Pleyers, 2020). Since the topic is related to the impact of sustainable content of fast fashion brands on consumers' behaviour, the choice of doing a qualitative study is relevant. This method can show stimuli such as content from fast fashion brands to the interviewees, which helps to understand and analyse what the interviewees think.

Since the aim is to deeply understand the interviewee's behaviour on subjects such as fast fashion and sustainable content, individual interviews, particularly thematic interviews, will be realised. Moreover, this study analyses the emotional consumption experience and can address confidential, sensitive, or embarrassing subjects. Additionally, having individual interviews avoid the bias incurred in focus group interviews. There are no social pressures related to other participants, and interviewees can also answer freely (Pleyers, 2020). In the literature review, social norms can impact consumers' behaviour (Sarkar et al., 2019; White et al., 2019). Therefore, it was essential to avoid any biases, and that other respondents influence the interviewee.

This study was based on an interview guide (see Appendix 1). The interview guide was made in French and English to allow more diversification among the respondents. The study has mainly been realised face to face. However, due to the COVID-19 crisis, online interviews were also considered as an option. Those interviews have been done by video chat through Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

Subjects were addressed in a broad way to more specific topics. The first step of the interview guide was to understand the customer profile. More general questions were asked at the beginning to break the ice. The interview guide was separated into three sub-sections: fast fashion, sustainability, and social media content. The division of the interview guide into those three sub-sections aims to understand what consumers think about fast fashion brands, assess their knowledge of sustainability, and have an overview of their presence on social media. However, to answer the research questions, interviews were based on different sub-questions:

- What do consumers think of fast fashion brands?
- What are their thoughts about sustainability in fashion?
- What attracts social media users' attention to fast fashion posts on social media?
- What is the role of social media when it comes to fashion?

Lastly, stimuli were shown to the interviewee to understand their reaction to the sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media. For this purpose, I showed them several posts on Facebook and Instagram and a video on YouTube. The brands offered in the stimuli were picked randomly; however, the relevant brands were shown depending on the interviewee and what had been said. The interview guide was composed of open questions to avoid answering with yes or no.

The interviewee did not receive the interview guide in advance to avoid any bias. Also, the interview was recorded with the interviewee's consent, and pilot testing was made to catch any potential flaws, limitations, or weaknesses in the interview guide.

1.1. Samples and data gathering of the qualitative study

Fifteen participants were interviewed. Twelve interviews were conducted in French and three in English. Since the interview was based on the impact of sustainable content of a fast-fashion brand on social media on consumers' behaviour, the study targeted social media users.

Moreover, the target of the interview was women because, in the literature review, we have seen that most fashion consumers are women. In addition, I did not focus on a specific age because, in the previous section, we have also noticed that age and sustainable knowledge can be correlated. However, I interviewed various respondents; ten interviewees were in their twenties, three were in their thirties, and two were in their fifties. One interviewee did not want to share her age.

Their level of education and professional activity was not considered for the interviewee's selections, but nine out of fifteen were working. In addition, two interviewees were not from Belgium. One was from Luxembourg, and one was from The Netherlands. All the participants were contacted via email or social media such as Facebook and Instagram.

Finally, the interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour.

1.2. Summary of key characteristics of the participants

Interviewee	Age	Status	Country
Sabrina	22	Student	Luxembourg
Emma	22	Student	Belgium
Mirthe	23	Student / Working	The Netherlands
Claire	24	Student / Working	Belgium
Lisa	24	Job search	Belgium
Marie	25	Working	Belgium
Laura	25	Working	Belgium
Séma	25	Working	Belgium
Betul	25	Job search	Belgium
Synthia	26	Student	Belgium
Andrea	30	Working	Belgium
Caroline	33	Working	Belgium
Anna	/	Working	Belgium
Hasibe	50	Not working	Belgium
Silvia	56	Working	Belgium

2. Results

After running the interviews, the results were analysed thanks to the coding tree (Appendix 2). After transcribing every interview, interviewees' response was sorted by categories. Those categories were grouped into different themes. An example of the quote for each theme was made to illustrate the themes. This technique helped me to analyse the results of the interviews.

Finally, the qualitative study results will be made by comparing the literature review and respondents' answers. The aim is to identify similarities and differences to understand their behaviour regarding sustainable content on fast fashion brands. This part will help me respond to the research question.

This section will therefore present the summary of the results. The globality of the interviewees' answers can be found in the folder 'Appendix'.

2.1. Consumers' knowledge of fast fashion brands

Before analysing what consumers think of fast fashion, it was essential first to understand what types of consumers they are. In the literature review, we have seen that the rise in global consumption in the 90s caused an increased amount in the production of clothes (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The consumers' lifestyles changed during those years, and consumers became more demanding to renew their wardrobes more often (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

The results showed that 12 interviewees out of 15 consumed fast fashion brands. However, five of those 12 respondents are not renewing their wardrobe that often but are still buying from fast-fashion retailers. The main reason is that on the one hand they are not a fan of shopping and on the other hand those brands are easily accessible offline and online while offering a large variety of clothes. In one shop, they can find all the items they need in their daily life: working clothes, casual clothes, and celebration clothes. Seeing all their garment in one place also reduces their time in the shop, which they prefer. On the other hand, two interviewees are more interested in fashion and monitor the trends and dress up accordingly.

“It is sometimes hard to resist. Besides, I think it gives me pleasure when I buy a new cute thing, so that is why sometimes it is like boosting my confidence. (...) we are just animals; flashy things drive us. Sometimes it's out of our control. I already have like 20 t-shirts, but I'll buy 21 t-shirts because it looks so pretty”, Anna.

Of those 12 interviewees, 5 of the interviewees are paying attention to their consumption. They consider themselves non-compulsive buyers because they prefer to save money rather than spend it. However, they are still consuming fast fashion brands.

Nevertheless, three interviewees buy their garments from secondhand shops or slow fashion brands. The main reason is that those brands have a good policy in place regarding environmental impact and fairness of production. They are also giving a second life to the garment. In addition, Mirthe prefers to buy clothes from countries as close to hers as possible.

In the literature, **fast fashion** is a quick replication of short-lived garment use and frequent consumption in a cheap manufacturing process. This industry caused social issues such as bad working conditions for women and children working at a minimum wage and environmental problems such as the waste of water used and the pollution due to chemicals

used in the garment. In addition, there is a lack of transparency in their supply chain operations (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Hassan et al., 2013; Niinimäki et al., 2020).

In parallel with the literature, 13 interviewees out of 15 knew the characteristics of the fast fashion industry. First, they define fast fashion as inexistent seasons all over the year, not being conscious of the environment, and poor quality materials. However, peoples' awareness and knowledge are deeper depending on their interest in the subject. Between those 13 interviewees, six interviewees added more information on the fast fashion industry—first, the traceability of the unsold items. Fast fashion brands that are not selling all their collection are packing the unsold clothes and sending them somewhere else. Most of the time, people are unaware of where those unsold items are going.

“Fast fashion brands are monitoring the trend of celebrities on social media, produce it immediately, and a few days later, the garment is available on the website at a lower cost. The best example of fast fashion brands is Shein, H&M, and Zara. I even think that Zara is renewing its collection every fifteen days”, Claire.

Second, labour conditions are also a part of the definition of the fast fashion industry. Thanks to the latest news, such as scandals, interviewees know that fast fashion brands outsource a part of their supply chain to countries where the labour conditions are critical.

“The fast-fashion planet is, on the one hand, the privileged Westerners and Americans, and on the other hand, the exploited. It is a vicious circle in which half of the planet is winning, and the other half is losing. It is inequality and organised poverty”, Marie.

Nevertheless, that strategy is well perceived by Sema because even though she has little knowledge about this industry, fast fashion brands producing cheap clothes can be positive for a specific type of population that cannot afford to buy expensive clothes. However, this contradicts the other respondents who think of the fast fashion industry as the rapid consumption of clothes and the frequency that people purchase those cheap garments.

“My friends buy things and do not even wear them; then they sell them at a flea market, and with this money, they buy new clothes. They have more than they need. So, for me, that is fast fashion”, Caroline.

This quote shows that consumers are also responsible for making fast fashion alive by always running after the last trendy clothes available in the market.

“Fast fashion brands have been developed and influenced by our overconsumption patterns to respond to an overconsumption society. So, I would say that it is society’s fault in general if these brands have developed”, Lisa.

On the other hand, fast fashion is not a common term for two interviewees who did not know what fast fashion is. Hasibe misinterpreted the word and linked it to Haute Couture with brands such as Dior and Chanel that organise runways that will dictate the fashion trends.

Although 13 interviewees have knowledge of the fast fashion industry, 12 of them are still buying from fast fashion brands. The ‘word and image association’ stimulus shown to the interviewee resulted in a difference of interpretation regarding the fast fashion brands. **Different degrees of fast fashion** appeared in the mind of consumers. However, this concept is not in line with the current literature review.

‘Premium brands’ such as Levi’s, Maje, and Bash are not considered as fast fashion but rather more as traditional shops. The main reason is the seasonality of the collection, mentioned earlier in the definition of fast fashion brands. Those brands are not renewing the collection as often as fast fashion brands, and the collection usually stays for a year in the shops.

Moreover, the price and quality are another reason for them to differentiate those brands from fast fashion ones. If the price is higher, the quality must be better. Therefore, it results in long-lasting and classical clothes that can be worn longer.

“I bought Levi’s jeans, and they lasted for years, and one time I bought H&M jeans, and it lasted five months”, Betul.

In addition to that, consumption is another aspect to consider. If the product is more expensive, they will be more likely to take care of it, and they will not buy as much as clothes as in other fashion brands because of the higher cost.

“I do not believe in low prices in fashion. Fast fashion is polluting the planet, so if the price is high, it already contributes to people consuming less”, Anna.

Furthermore, another assumption is the brand image. Even if they are not a customer of the brand, they will be more likely to think that the quality is better due to the idea of the brand.

“When you go to a COS store, you feel it's a bit classier. The colours are always more sober and plain, so I have the feeling that they do not change the collection every month or every week (...)”, Andrea.

To conclude this section on fast fashion, a difference was seen in the interviewees' behaviour and knowledge regarding fast fashion. 13 interviewees are aware of the downside effect of fast fashion brands. However, 12 of the interviewees are still buying from them. The different degrees of fast fashion brands are the results of this distinction.

2.2. Consumers' knowledge and behaviour on sustainability

After understanding the interviewees' behaviour and consumption of the fast fashion industry, it is essential to analyse their awareness and behaviour regarding **sustainability**. In the literature, we have seen that sustainability is the opposite of fast fashion (Aakko & Koskennurmi-Sivonen, 2013) since the aim is to minimise the environmental impacts to improve long-term sustainability and transparency in the supply chain (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

In parallel with the literature, 13 out of 15 interviewees link sustainability in fashion with respect for the planet, transparency in the production process, sustainable raw materials such as organic cotton or the reuse of materials, fair working conditions, and salary. In addition, sustainability in fashion has also been linked to reducing consumption and taking care of the environmental impact, CO₂ emissions, and concern long-term impact.

However, two interviewees have doubts when it comes to sustainability in fashion.

« Fashion and sustainability, I do not know how to link them because the fashion industry is not sustainable », Sema.

Sustainability in fashion is a two-way street. Sustainability is mentioned as a **shared responsibility in the literature** from, on the one hand, the companies and, on the other hand, the consumers (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010; Stern, 2000). The same results were shown in the interviews.

On the one hand, companies are considered the main players creating environmental and social problems (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2010) since they encourage consumption that results in a

negative impact on the environment (White et al., 2019). Companies are nowadays trying to change their business to include sustainability (White et al. 2019).

The results showed that 12 interviewees out of 15 think that brands that include sustainability in their business are positive. Moreover, one interviewee mentioned that the increased perception of sustainability also positively impacted secondhand shops and allowed the spread of secondhand shops in Brussels.

“I think it's a good thing that it's becoming more and more normal (...) I think it's good that we see a kind of an opportunity here to take some responsibility. Especially if you go ten years back in time or something, many people would have said it's impossible to do this differently. You can see that with more and more brands as well that it's becoming more the norm to really make a conscious decision there and to choose differently, so I like that the market for that is growing”, Mirthe.

Therefore, three other interviewees do not believe in sustainability when it comes to fashion and has doubts about companies including sustainability in their core business. Even though this industry is trying to be neutral in carbon, it is still highly polluting, using colourations, for instance. Nowadays, sustainability is a *“given gift for the consumer; it has become common”*, Caroline. In that way, sustainability became another way of doing business.

“I do not trust brands to be more sustainable, but I trust their social and cultural values, such as Nike”, Caroline.

This quote shows that those consumers prefer putting their trust in other aspects of the business, such as social and cultural values, rather than sustainability.

On the other hand, the consumers' behaviour and consumption choices can also damage the environment (Stern, 2000). The literature mentioned that there is a need to change their mindset from quantity to quality (Jung & Jin, 2014) to consume less and better (Oxfam, 2018). The aim is that people who buy sustainable clothes can wear them for a more extended period, regardless of the fashion season (Jung & Jin, 2014).

The results show that five interviewees out of 15 are starting to be aware of the problem caused by the fast fashion industry and are trying to change their consumption by turning themselves into secondhand shops. However, this alternative offers some limitations; there are therefore,

still consuming fast fashion brands. The main reason is that they cannot find their size or style in secondhand shops. Moreover, those shops are not often well spread in every city.

“I will shop at fast fashion brands when I need something specific that I cannot find anywhere else. It is also because in Luxembourg there are not many secondhand shops”, Sabrina.

This quote shows that even though the interviewee wants to change her consumption, it is difficult to do it, depending on the country. One interviewee mentioned that moving from a small city to a bigger one also helped her change her consumption because bigger cities have more vintage shops. This concept is in line with the literature that says that being in a particular culture or country can also impact the sense of responsibility of the consumers (Arli et al., 2018; Minton et al., 2012). These interviewees are therefore feeling guilty about still consuming fast fashion brands.

“I am not proud to shop there”, Betul.

Three other interviewees are already consuming less and in a more conscious way because they are already consuming in secondhand shops. Those interviewees share the same opinion that if they do not find something specific is because they do not need it. This optic is more in line with the literature on consuming less in a more qualitative way.

As opposed to the literature, two interviewees agree that it is harder for a specific part of the population to consume better, local, and organic because it is often more expensive. Since they do not have the financial capabilities to do so, they are obligated to turn themselves to cheaper brands.

“For me, it is the state’s responsibility to make it accessible to everyone and to adopt laws to avoid mass production of the garment. The state has the money, the means, and the power, not the precarious population of Molenbeek who wonder how they will finish the month.”
Marie.

The literature mentioned the political sector regarding the European Commission (2008) that supports companies to include sustainability in their core business. However, this quote shows that even though there is a start in the political sector to raise awareness about sustainability, it is not enough in the eyes of the consumers. The people who do not have the financial resources to consume sustainable brands do not have the choice to turn themselves into fast fashion brands

because of the competitive price they offer. Even though the literature mentioned that it is the responsibility of the consumers to change their mindset and behave more respectfully in the environment, it is not easy for the population to do so.

In addition, two interviewees are not paying attention to their consumption of clothes. The main reason is that they are not thinking about the issue of fast fashion, such as overproduction or workers' conditions while shopping. Also, sustainability is a balance that needs to be found in their daily lives. White et al. (2019) explained it in the literature by creating a certain distance between the consumer and the environmental issue.

“If I want to buy myself a gift, I will do it. I am already paying attention to the amount of plastic, beauty product, and the food I use; it is already a lot”, Silvia.

Even though some people are aware of the urge to pay attention to sustainability, it is still not easy for everyone to change their consumption. According to one of the interviewees, the main cause of not reacting to sustainability is peoples' interest, age, and the source of information.

“I think it depends on your education, but it mostly comes from an interesting point of view. I think those subjects' interest less old generations, 40 and more. Younger generations watch less television, and the information needs to come from other sources such as social media, bloggers, Instagram”, Caroline.

However, even if the interesting point of view was not present in the literature, the latter shows that the age and sustainability knowledge can be correlated. “The older a consumer is, the less environmental knowledge he or she is likely to have” (Minton et al., 2012, p.70). This is in line with the quote.

The interviews showed that the respondents' answers were in line with that quote. Nine interviewees mentioned that gaining knowledge on sustainability helped them be more aware of the downside effect of the fast fashion industry and the urge to consume more sustainably.

Four interviewees out of 15 gained their knowledge thanks to video content on YouTube from influencers explaining the fashion industry and greenwashing.

“On social networks, you have influencers who will talk about it, and you have brands that will be highlighted. For me, it's thanks to social networks that I discovered more ecological brands”, Claire.

Moreover, one interviewee mentioned an account on Instagram named ‘Good on You’ raising awareness about sustainable fashion and trying to educate consumers to act more responsibly.

In addition to that, four of them were influenced by their lessons at university. Having lessons about sustainability and sustainable consumption helped them be aware of the downside effect of fast fashion.

“I studied a scandal of a factory that collapsed which caused hundreds of deaths. I learned about the bad working conditions where people were sleeping in the factory by 10 or 12 per room”, Emma.

All of them tended to consume a lot when they were younger. Having courses about sustainability helped them change their consumption into a more conscious one.

*“I realised that it was useless to have new clothes every time. I took CSR courses at my university, which taught me about responsible consumption. I learned that textiles and fashion were one of the negative points in terms of sustainability, and therefore I completely switched my opinion, and I started to ask myself the right questions: ‘do I need all these items?’”,
Synthia.*

Similarly, one interviewee mentioned that having Bible school helped her change her consumption thanks to the weeks devoted to environmental impact and labor conditions.

Lastly, reading articles and watching documentaries about fast fashion and sustainability helped six interviewees to gain knowledge about the subject.

The results showed that even though there is a change in some consumers’ minds, a few people are reacting to it. Those results are linked to the Theory of Planned Behaviour seen in the literature (Ajzen, 2011). This theory explains the gap between consumers who intend to behave sustainably but are not engaging in this behaviour (Nguyen et al., 2019). Subjective norms are a part of the theory. White et al. (2019) argue that social influence and norms can influence people to behave in a certain way. The visible consumption of sustainable brands can

be a way to show their environmental concern to others and enhance their social reputations (Sarkar et al., 2019; White et al., 2019).

We have seen in the interviews that even though some people are aware of sustainability, their behaviour is not only dictated by their knowledge and willingness to change but also by their **influence**.

Four of the interviewees were influenced to change by their friends and family. Those people can impact the person to change their consumption because they consume less or act more sustainably.

“I have friends that were already a step ahead of me. The daily news about the fashion world also helped me change my consumption. I am still trying to help other friends to change as well but it is difficult to push people to consume in a certain way because they do not want to get out of their comfort zone. We must go gradually; it’s little by little to make people realise that there is a way to live with less”, Synthia.

During the interview, all the interviewees expressed that they seek advice from friends and family when it comes to fashion. Depending on the answer, they will be more likely to buy the product or not.

“I am very influenceable, but I try to detach myself from my mother's opinion and her view of me because I want to build myself as a person, I have my own convictions and I want to be able to detach myself from that”, Claire.

Therefore, it has become a habit for certain people to buy a certain brand depending on their influence. Two interviewees shared that they are used to buying at fast fashion brands because all their family and friends buy there.

However, this influence can cause a certain **social pressure** for the respondents to behave in a certain way.

“I sometimes think I can do more, but it is not a big deal because I do something else. For instance, my friends pay attention to fashion, but they have a car. For me, it’s the opposite, so it balances a little”, Laura.

The quote shows that the interviewee is feeling pressured by her friends and is questioning herself on her behaviour. However, it can also be the case regarding society in general.

“In some parts of Europe, it's a cultural difference. You're more motivated to dress nicer, buy more, reinforce your status, position in this world, how you are with your friends and social life. All of it has an impact. I think for the younger age it has more an impact. With older age, it reduces it, but I think we are driven by magazine messages, for instance”, Anna.

2.3. The role of social media of fast fashion brands on consumers' behaviour

To analyse the sustainable content on fast fashion brands on social media, it was essential to understand the relationship that the interviewees have with their social networks and brands' social media accounts. Moreover, it was also necessary to understand the role of social media when it comes to fashion.

In the literature, we have seen that social media has become an important marketing tool for sharing content and promoting brands, thanks to the spread of the internet (Alves de Castro et al., 2021). It is widely used to engage with people, increase the visibility and awareness of the brand, and create a sense of community thanks to its interactive feature (Alves de Castro et al., 2021; Chu & Chen, 2019; Minton et al., 2012). Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok are among the most popular social networks (Chaffey, 2022).

According to 13 interviewees out of 15, the most used social media is Instagram. When it comes to fashion, the interviewees use this social platform to get inspired and monitor the trends. On the other hand, only two think that TikTok is the most inspiring thanks to its short and well-transitioned videos.

The literature mentions that regarding Instagram, half of its users are interested in brand content and discover new products thanks to it (Sharma, 2022). However, the results show that eight interviewees out of 15 do not follow any social media brands. The main reason is that interviewees do not like to see promotional content on their newsfeeds.

“All posts are generally made to sell a product, and it was tiring to see someone trying to sell something on my newsfeed. When I see someone who is promoting a product, I unfollow immediately. (...) making ads on social media is good for people who have blind trust in the brand, but it does not work for me”, Synthia.

Social media is a source of inspiration; therefore, they prefer following friends or the search button on Instagram to get inspired. Three interviewees check the brand's account in some cases when they are curious about a new collection, but they will not follow them.

Seven of the interviewees are following brands. The main reason is to monitor the new trends and new collections closely. In addition, it can help associate the brand with its story while learning more about its activities and its message.

“I follow Septem, for instance, because of the story of the businesswomen behind the brand, it is not only focused on the products and the ad”, Caroline.

One of the seven interviewees that are following brands is following mostly brands that she is interested in buying. She is doing so to learn more about the brand and check how the products are worn. However, if she buys the product, she unfollows the brand.

Finally, all interviewees consider it essential for brands to be on social media since it is an excellent way to reach people and the right target.

2.4. Sustainable content of fast fashion brands on consumers' behaviour

In the previous section, we have seen the behaviour of consumers regarding two crucial aspects of this thesis: fast fashion brands and sustainability. We have also seen that social media plays a role in the consumer's mind because it is where people can find inspiration. This last part aims to understand their behaviour and what attracts them while facing sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media.

The literature shows that the emergence of sustainable fashion consumers (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Huang et al., 2012) created an opportunity for fast fashion brands to develop more sustainable products. For that purpose, they started to increase their CSR practices and communicate about it on social media (Chu, & Chen, 2019). Brands are aware that CSR practices can positively affect them and help them build a reputation (Kurucz et al., 2008).

Therefore, two stimuli were shown to the interviewees to understand their behaviour facing sustainable content. Those stimuli were also necessary to know if the interviewees would have a positive brand image when seeing the sustainable message.

First, sustainable content on social media such as Instagram and Facebook was shown to the interviewees. The results were almost unanimous. In fact, according to most of the interviewees, having an excellent **visual is key**. The visual needs to be appealing and relatable for the interviewees; otherwise, the content will be immediately skipped.

“I prefer to see a lifestyle picture with a situation where I can identify myself (...) rather than an item worn by a model I don’t like”, Caroline.

Independently of the visual, two interviewees are also paying attention to the brands themselves. If they face an ad from fast fashion brands, they will immediately skip them because they do not want to buy anything from those brands.

Secondly, sustainable content in a video format on YouTube was shown to the interviewees. The same observation was made for the first stimuli when it comes to the video. Two interviewees pay more attention to the **filmography** and the clothes rather than the message that the brands are trying to send. They both will pay attention to the colours, the filmography, and the clothes but not the music and the message. This aligns with the literature because the association of a brand and a natural scenery can result in a positive image of the brand and customers’ emotions (Sarkar et al., 2019).

The literature demonstrated that thanks to the Elaboration Likelihood Model of Petty and Cacioppo (1984), consumers constantly examine and evaluate the brand **message** through their past experiences and their current level of knowledge. Therefore, their awareness about the environment plays a central role in their attitudes (Huang et al., 2012; Sarkar et al., 2019). 12 interviewees did not pay attention to the message at a prior level, especially when the copy is too commercial. However, Sema will only pay attention to the message if there is a discount.

“If the visual is pleasing, I will read the message, and that is even something that makes me return to the post”, Emma.

However, two interviewees mentioned that it depends on the stimulus. If the message is in a written format in a video, for instance, with facts and numbers, they were mainly paying attention to the sustainability part because the brand highlighted it; it was more quantified information. It made easier for the interviewees to remember what was said in the video and react to it.

“I find it responsible from a brand perspective to ask the consumer to buy less and be aware of what they need to buy. It resonates with me because it is better to buy quality than quantity. I am happy to be consumer of a brand that has the same value; it makes me want to continue buying there but not more. It is good that they want to change”, Emma.

Moreover, when the interviewee is interested in the product and has read the message, only two of them will do research about the veracity of the copy. Nonetheless, if a brand is advertising about sustainability, the message can help the interviewee to have an idea about what they are doing to improve their business even though it is marketing oriented.

“Nike have good storytelling. I don't know how much it's true or not on what they are saying, but at least you get the idea that the brand is not ignoring it and they would do something about it”, Andrea.

Two interviewees said that if the copy mentions sustainability, it is a plus, but it is not a purchase requirement.

“I will not search for more information; if they are doing an ad, I assume that what they say is true”, Sema.

In addition, the reluctance to search for information can also be linked to the lack of awareness regarding what they need to look at.

“I will not verify what they are saying because I am not especially aware of the product's composition”, Emma.

These quotes are in line with the literature. Due to the number of sustainability claims, the information available could be very complex for the customers. This complex information creates uncertainty, resulting in people's inaction (Hassan et al., 2013).

On the other hand, two interviewees will always do research about the brands based on the message.

“If the message says ‘eco-friendly’, I am not against brands who are willing to put forward their sustainability, but I think that there are still a lot of their communication that is not true”, Synthia.

That is why, if she is interested in the visual and the item, she will do some research to check the production, the raw material used, and the history of the brand. If the brand is not sharing that information, they are not transparent enough and are doing greenwashing.

In parallel, “I am looking at the worst that the brand is doing, what does that look like and if that's not satisfactory to me, I'm going to move on. For instance, H&M has those two different lines, a conscious collection and a normal one. I don't believe it; I don't think that the conscious line is conscious (...). I think they're just changing one little aspect there, and I think it shows a lot of what the brand thinks about these values that are important to me”, Mirthe.

This enters in line with the literature on greenwashing. Companies are delivering a green message about their product attributes while not being transparent regarding their supply chains and manufacturers. Therefore, they communicate misleading messages that create uncertainty in the customers' minds (Hassan et al., 2013) and generate mistrust (Huang et al., 2012).

In the previous section, we have seen that 12 interviewees are thinking positively about brands that are increasing their sustainable products. However, when it comes to sustainable content, interviewees shared that we must look at it critically.

On the one hand, two interviewees said that the brands' communication is a good way to make people aware that they need to be responsible. It is good to communicate about sustainability because it shows the willingness of the brands to change.

“Fast fashion brands can influence people to consume more responsibly. Brands can influence changes but also the society itself”, Synthia.

In addition, it is also the customers' responsibility to pay attention and understand which information is true from what it is not.

“A brand should communicate about it, and by communicating about it, they also might teach a bit about it to the consumer but then it's also on the consumer side to try to digest and understand”, Andrea.

On the other hand, it can also give the impression to the consumers that brands are willing to change due to public pressure or the economic impact (Lehner & Halliday, 2014). Therefore, this feeling is generated by misleading messages from fast fashion brands to sensitise the consumers. However, the consumer does not perceive this well (de Lanauze & Siadou-Martin, 2019).

Interviewees have doubts about fast fashion brands who are promoting their new sustainable collections. They know that sustainability has become trendy, and brands are aware of that. Therefore, sustainable products of fast fashion brands are raising doubts among some of the interviewees.

Ten interviewees out of 15 think that even though many brands are taking responsibility, it has become the norm to make those conscious decisions and to choose differently. More brands are focusing on sustainability, such as H&M with its secondhand platform and its Conscious Collection. Those fast fashion brands are trying to follow the trend and use eco-friendly products. According to the interviewees, it is only a purpose to respond to the demand and not a genuine willingness to change.

“For me, it has no impact because I am persuaded that they are doing that to have a clear conscience, and that does not come from a willingness to change the fashion world”, Laura.

Moreover, those new sustainable collections are therefore representing a few percentages of all their collections, which makes them not credible enough in the eye of the consumer.

“The proportion is too small to think it is legitime because they are still producing the rest of the collection and create waste”, Laura.

Three interviewees out of 15 mentioned that brands creating sustainable clothes are doing it as a business strategy only to make a profit. It is more a commercial argument than a real commitment. Therefore, they will try to find the right message to do so because it can create a positive connection with the customers and generate more sales. Therefore, consumers who are interested in sustainability will be more likely to buy there.

“Fast fashion brands are ready to sell, which makes me even more suspicious towards them”, Marie.

In addition, only one of the interviewees pinpointed: *“by heavily communicating and creating video campaign, they are also contributing to the planet’s pollution because the video has to be filmed in a different spot, which is not good for the planet either”*, Betul.

Moreover, only five out of 15 interviewees used the term **greenwashing** for fast fashion brands that create sustainable products and heavily promoting them.

“Greenwashing, on the other hand, is not (helpful) because it heavily promotes sustainability even when change one minor factor in their big production chain, and I feel that's more a tactic to get away with all their bad policies and to attract people who are interested in a sustainable fashion for instance that a really a conscious decision to change impact”, Mirthe.

This quote shows that it is the company’s responsibility to promote truthful information. One interviewee pinpointed that H&M is communicating about the nature in their video, but according to her, it is not true since they are not paying attention to their supply chain.

“If they want to change, that will cost money, and those brands do not want to lose any money, so they will not change (...). However, people will feel better when they think they are doing something good”, Sabrina.

According to the Theory of Planned Behavior of Ajzen (2011), attitudes can influence consumer behaviours. Consumers can be negatively and emotionally impacted by the effort they need to engage in sustainable behaviours. Fear is often used in communications about sustainable behaviour. This sort of communication can lead people to react negatively due to the fear of acting in a wrong way. In addition, people might think they are responsible for the environment. Therefore, this emotion of guilt influences intentions and behaviours to act sustainably (White et al. 2019).

Four interviewees are in line with the literature because they agreed that they perceived fear and stress when a brand is communicating about its sustainable attributes.

“I feel like they are proposing you buy something out of pity: ‘you need to be conscious you need to be a responsible citizen so please buy waste’. They are doing this to make us fear. It's like we are here. We are doing something about it, so you have been conscious enough, and if you understand that the world is failing, you will buy our clothes”, Anna.

On the one hand, one interviewee mentioned that brands are trying to shift the blame on the consumer.

“The brand is communicating that the consumer must change his buying habits, but if the brand constantly pushes to buy, the brand also has a share of guilt”, Betul.

On the other hand, the communication given by the brand amplifies the *“urgency feeling, and you ask yourself what you can do more?”*, Caroline.

In addition, one of the interviewees mentioned that all the mediatisation around sustainability and the way brands communicate in their ads increases the feeling of stress after watching this video.

“They play with this feeling of stress and make you feel a bit responsible”, Andrea.

This type of emotion can result in a change in behaviour but only for a certain period. That was the case for one of the interviewees. The increasing mediatisation regarding fast fashion brands and the climate change messages were, at the beginning scary. It also constituted a pressure to behave more sustainably.

“Nowadays, sustainability is highly mediatised, and it is trendy. In the beginning, I was a bit scared, and I asked myself many questions about ecology, but now I am used to it”, Sema.

This quote shows that consumers’ behaviours are driven by their attitudes which drive their decision making. When the emotional aspects have dissipated, sustainable actions are eliminated (White et al., 2019).

The results showed that sustainable communication also depends on the brand itself. The same consumer can have a negative feeling about a certain fast-fashion brand communicating on sustainability but a higher feeling for another.

All interviewees share the same opinion regarding H&M. They all think that due to the scandals they are facing and all the campaigns they are doing, they are not putting their faith in this brand. Therefore, H&M acquired a bad reputation. This contradicts the literature because we

have seen that brands are using CSR practices to generate a positive reputation (Kurucz et al., 2008).

“I am not convinced that H&M is here to change the world to be our sustainable pioneer because they are far behind. It's not convincing considering the reputation that they have, and their track record. In addition to that, if brands are talking about women's rights or like having these feminist things on their shirts while many women are being exploited in their factories, that just feels very much like hypocrisy to me”, Mirthe.

Even though they are trying to be transparent by increasing their communication around sustainable campaigns and collections, they are still renewing their collection frequently.

“For me, they're just trying to avoid the responsibility. I still don't believe them. For me, it would be a better move if they increase the prices and reduce the bit the shops and reduce the frequency of the collections, which is like a clear sign of sustainability”, Anna.

That statement clearly shows the willingness of the interviewee to want transparency and more action. Five interviewees also express that this brand needs to do something bigger and take more risks.

“If tomorrow H&M reduced the number of collections by three, I think that's where I would say to myself, 'ok, now they are taking risks because there are many people who would stop buying at their shops'”, Laura.

If H&M communicates about sustainability, it is not perceived positively because they are mass producing and are still implemented everywhere. Betul finds it ironic and counterintuitive and adds: *“Sometimes it is just a willingness to not stay behind the competition”*.

In addition, even though 12 interviewees out of 15 are not paying attention to the brand's message, they are all aware of H&M's message. While still producing in large volume, communicating about sustainability is not well perceived by the interviewees.

“It is still a way to get richer and richer with a mindset that nothing can stop them. They try to convince people that buying at H&M is to do good for the planet”, Anna.

On the other hand, for one interviewee, it works: *“They are doing something at least. I don't know if I would love them more or not, I guess I would like them more, but I would feel less bad maybe to buy there”, Andrea.*

Five interviewees out of 15 ask for more actions from the brands than just creating content around their new collection. A brand that is trying to be more transparent by explaining where all the materials are coming from, even if it is only 10 per cent, is perceived more positively.

“It is better to do 20% better than saying that we will try to be 100% perfect. For me, a brand that says that above 100 euro of purchase we plant a tree is concrete, I know the action I know that I will give 100 euro and that I will plant a tree”, Caroline.

However, in addition to that, the interviewee added that to change behaviour, the message should be strong and followed by an easy transaction with a nearby store or online portal. Therefore, it will not always result in trust. Even if a brand is willing to change, that will not change how she perceives the brand.

“If H&M wants to change, then it's nice. It's a good change, but the image that people have of them is so bad that, in any case, I don't think it can change. They have a poor brand image, where children work in the factories. I would believe ten times more a brand positioning itself as sustainable since the beginning. I find it hard to imagine H&M sustainable as I find it difficult to imagine McDonald's and healthy; for me it's the same thing”, Claire

Discussion

In the previous section, the results of the fifteen interviews were analysed and allowed to answer the four sub-questions. In this part, we will discuss those results to answer the research question: “How and why sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media can impact consumers’ behaviour”?

According to what consumers think of fast fashion brands, the results showed that interviewees have a general point of view of it. According to them, fast fashion brands are outsourcing their supply chain in countries with poor labour conditions by using poor raw materials. Only two interviewees were not aware of the fast fashion industry. However, even though consumers are aware of the downside effect, the results show that most of the respondents still consume those brands regularly. The main reasons are the variety of clothes and the accessibility. This is even more in line with the literature explaining the gap between attitude and behaviour. We have seen in the results that the habits of consuming those brands are stronger than the willingness to change.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that there is a different degree of fast fashion, according to most of the interviewees. People who might think a certain brand enters this category might differ from another one. Even though it was not present in the literature, the degree of fast fashion depends on seasonality, price, consumption, and brand image. If the price is higher, it results in a higher quality. However, people will consume less because they are taking care of the garment.

Sustainability has become important in the eyes of consumers. However, sustainability in fashion is a shared responsibility. On the one hand, companies increasing their sustainable products need to pay attention to their products and stay true to their brand’s DNA. On the other hand, consumers need to consume less by preferring quality rather than quantity.

Even though consumers are aware of the need to pay attention to their consumption, only a few are consuming less when it comes to fashion. Some people establish a distance between them, and the environmental and societal impact generated by fast fashion. They are therefore not thinking of that aspect while shopping. Others are still consuming fast fashion brands but feel

guilty about doing so. They are trying to reduce the quantities because they do not want to be in contradiction with themselves, but they are buying there because it is accessible.

However, people's awareness depends on the person's interest and the source of information. The knowledge of the consumers and the culture of the country they live in might influence their behaviour. If consumers are willing to change their consumption; however, it can be difficult to do so because of the lack of secondhand shops in their country of origin.

In addition, we have seen that even though people are aware of the downside effect of fast fashion thanks to lessons taken at university or documentaries, it is still a topic centred on the consumer's interest. Consumers who have seen documentaries and deepen their knowledge daily are more aware and more willing to change.

Nonetheless, behaving sustainably can also be influenced by friends and families. Aligned with the literature, the results showed that social norms could impact the behaviour of consumers. First, results showed that all interviewees seek advice from friends and families when it comes to fashion. This is also defined by where their friends and families are buying their clothes from and the reflection that it can have on the person. If a person is surrounded by friends who are already a step ahead and consume less, it will be easier to change.

Social media is a marketing tool helping brands share and promote their content. The results showed that Instagram is the main social network used by the interviewee when it comes to fashion. Only two of them mentioned TikTok.

The literature explained that the interactive features make it easy for the brand to build a community. However, most of the interviewees are not following fast fashion brands. Interviewees who are following brands are usually doing it thanks to the story behind the brand and not as promotional content or to see the products.

The visual attracts social media users' attention to fast fashion posts on social media. Even though the authors agreed that a message is a powerful tool developed by the brands, the results showed that it is the visual that is the most important in the eyes of the interviewees. If the visual or the filmography is appealing and relatable, the consumer will be more likely to be interested in the brand and therefore visit its website or social media account. It is important to

note that if the brand is not well perceived, the content will be skipped when they can, without being seen.

However, most of the interviewees do not pay attention to the message. Thanks to the stimuli during the interviews, we have seen that written messages and facts can attract more attention. Nonetheless, only two interviewees will verify the information that the brand is sharing.

Even though we have seen that increasing sustainability is well perceived by the interviewee, the increasing communication around it is not. Companies are heavily promoting their CSR practices to look greener. However, some interviewees think that it can help people be more aware of the need to change their consumption, but the majority of them have doubts about the sustainable content of fast fashion brands. According to them, those brands are doing that for economic purposes only and not staying behind the increasing competition.

Moreover, the communication of those fast fashion brands is creating doubt because, on the one hand, they are promoting fear and stress in their ad. Even though the consumer faces an emotional state of fear or stress while seeing the ad, this will fade away with time. This shows that the behaviour is stronger than the attitude, and it takes much more effort for the consumers to change.

Finally, fast fashion brands' content is perceived as ironic and greenwashed. Those brands promote their sustainable attributes while still overproducing their collection and are not transparent enough.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to understand “how and why sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social media can impact consumers’ behaviour?”.

The literature review was built on understanding the theoretical part of all the components of my research question. This part was based on academic sources and online sources such as websites. Firstly, I gathered information about the fashion industry. This helped me build the framework and history of this industry and understand its negative aspects such as social and environmental. As I learned more about this topic, more literature arose regarding sustainability and its impacts on fashion brands. Second, the attitude-behaviour gap was analysed and helped me understand all its components and its negative effects on consumers. Finally, to analyse the social media part, it was important to understand the background of social media, where it comes from, and knowing the most relevant social media platforms that can influence the fashion consumer.

15 interviews were conducted to understand the interviewee’s behaviour while facing sustainable content. The interviews were composed of open questions and offered detailed answers. The interviews were divided into four sub-questions to understand consumers’ thoughts on fast fashion brands, sustainability in fashion, the role of social media and what kind of content attract their attention. Afterwards, an analysis was made to compare the results with the literature review.

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that, first, sustainable content is well perceived by the consumers. On the one hand, it can teach and increase awareness of a critical subject nowadays: sustainability. On the other hand, sustainable content of fast fashion brands received mixed perception. The fact that those brands are increasing their products in a sustainable way is raising doubts in the consumers’ minds. They do not know if it is only an economic purpose or because it is a trend or a genuine willingness to change.

Moreover, the sustainable content of fast fashion brands is often heavily promoted. The results showed that half of the respondents are not following brands because of their promotional content. Their message is perceived as stressful and increases the feeling of fear by the interviewees. The Theory of Planned Behaviour of Ajzen (2011) explains that it can be link to the attitudes and the subjective norms.

On the one hand, we have seen that when consumers face green products, their decisions can be influenced by their attitudes. If they are impacted negatively by those sustainable attributes, it can impact the effort to engage sustainably. This concludes that even though sustainable brands are heavily promoting their sustainable content, it can impact the consumers' behaviour, but only for a short period.

On the other hand, even though consumers have a bad perception of sustainable content in fast fashion due to the sustainable content on social media, it does not mean that they are not consuming it. The results showed that even though consumers are aware of fast fashion brands' negative environmental and societal impact, they are still consuming fast fashion. Family and friends can influence their behaviour. This concludes that even though the sustainable content of fast fashion brands can impact the attitudes of the consumers, it can be influenced by the family of the consumers.

In addition, according to the interviewees, having a good visual is key. This is the first step of making an impact on the consumer. The results showed that if the visual is appealing and relatable, there is more chance that the consumers will take more time on the brands' social media account and search for more products. Therefore, it is useless to communicate about sustainability if the visual is not appropriate because most consumers will not pay attention to the brands' message.

Finally, fast fashion brands are communicating their sustainable attributes through overwhelming content. The interviewees shared that advertising their sustainable characteristics while over-producing is not well perceived by the consumer. It has been linked to greenwashing. Therefore, consumers do not put their trust in fast fashion brands. The results showed that they are demanding consistency and transparency in their communication.

Managerial Recommendations

This study showed that sustainable content is important for consumers because it can increase awareness of the need to consume less. However, it is not necessary the sustainable content of fast fashion brands that are changing the consumers' behaviour. Moreover, it is sometimes not well perceived by the consumers. Therefore, it was important to give recommendations to those brands.

Fast fashion brands who are willing to act more sustainably need first to pay attention to stay truthful to their brand's DNA. The results showed that even though people are aware that they are trying to change, which is often perceived as a good thing, the heavy communication around those sustainable products makes it hard to believe for the consumers. The message used by the brand is often too emotional and evokes fear and stress. Simplicity seems to be key for consumers. They prefer that the brand is willing to change and show the small step by being transparent rather than putting pressure on the consumers by saying they are already changing, and they are not. One step could be the reduction of the number of collections. If they reduce their collections, consumers will be more likely to believe them.

In addition, half of them is not following brands for their promotional content. The rest is following brands for the story behind it. If the brand is more transparent by detailing the raw material used with the source of where it comes from and the labour condition of people who made the product, people have a story to look for. The brand has therefore the possibility to teach and transmit a message that is more powerful to the consumers. Finally, by being truthful and transparent, they have the possibility to increase their followers.

Limitations and future research

This thesis presents some limitations and suggestions regarding future research.

First, regarding my interviews, most of the interviewees were from Belgium. One of the recommendations is to take people from other countries and compare their answers. Conducting interviews in different countries could help see if there is a difference in thoughts depending on the culture.

Secondly, 15 interviews were conducted, which can be seen as a small sample. It could be interesting to conduct further interviews with a larger sample. Furthermore, in the literature, we have seen that age and sustainability could be correlated. It could be interesting to have a more diverse target of respondents in the future. In addition, 12 interviews were conducted in French and 3 in English. Therefore, the transcription of the French interviews and the quote resulting from them could have been lost in translations.

The fashion sector constitutes another limitation as well because it can become subjective. Listing the brands in the stimuli presented to the interviewee was not easy, and its selection could have been diverse. I tried to choose a diverse selection of brands, but it was not possible to mention all of them. In addition, in the results, some interviewees mentioned traditional brands such as Bash or The Kooples. Those brands are not considered fast fashion according to them. However, this could be interesting to conduct future research based on that.

Finally, the results showed that it is also the responsibility of the consumers to consume less and better. In addition, it is also the main reason that led to the expansion of fast fashion brands. Understanding their responsibility could be an interesting topic for other research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide

Introduction

Hello, first thank you for accepting this interview. I am a student at the Louvain School of Management and as part of my dissertation in order to complete my last year of a master's degree in management sciences. This interview will last more or less 45 minutes to 1 hour. The purpose of this interview is for you to speak freely and without taboos about some subjects. This interview and the results will be completely anonymous, however would you agree to be recorded? the recording will allow me to transcribe this interview more easily and will in no case be revealed to a third party.

1. General questions: understanding the consumer profile
 - Can you introduce yourself in a few words?
 - What do you do in your free time?
2. Specific questions: understanding how the sustainable content of fast fashion brands on social networks impacts consumer behavior

Fast-fashion

- Description: What type of consumer do you think you are when it comes to fashion? Describe it
- Unfinished Sentences: Please complete the following sentence: “In the past month, I have purchased...”
 - How often do you buy clothes?
- What are your buying habits?
 - Do you buy second-hand clothes?
- What are your buying motivations? (Example: an event for which you have to attend, because you like the garment, because it is the latest fashion trend, etc.).
- Where do you buy your clothes?
 - What factors influenced this choice?
 - What do you think of these brands?
 - Why are you buying from this brand?
 - Is this brand easily accessible?
 - For which reason do you think this brand is easily accessible?
- Why do you buy clothes from these brands? what do you like about this brand?
- Who do you shop with? Do you prefer to be alone?
 - Why?
 - What types of clothing brands do your entourage consume?
 - Do you seek advice from other people when buying a garment?
- According to you, what is fast fashion?
 - Can you give me an example of a fast fashion brand?
 - explain what fast fashion is
- What do you think of fast-fashion brands?
 - If not, why?

- Describe the fast fashion planet.

Sustainability

- Association of words: When I say sustainability, what do you think of? Quote whatever comes to mind.
 - what does sustainability in fashion mean to you?
- What do you think of the constant communication on the need to consume more locally, to buy less, to recycle etc?
- Association of images: show several types of images (sustainable clothing or fast fashion clothing and they must link them to words)
 - Explanation: In front of you, you will find 2 small piles, one of them contains images of brands and the other pile contains words. Can you combine the pictures that you think match the words? There are no right or wrong answers. Then describe why you made the connection between the pictures and the words.
 - Photos: fast fashion clothing / slow fashion clothing, fast fashion / slow fashion brand names, thrift stores or second-hand stores, “conscious” fast fashion clothing
 - Words: expensive/cheap price, high quality/low quality, respect for workers, transparency, produced in Europe/abroad, trust
 - Among these photos, show me the brands you know.
 - How did you know them?
 - Among his photos, differentiate the brands that you could consume.
 - Why?
 - What are the motivations and obstacles to this choice?

Social media

- Now tell me about your relationship with social networks?
 - Expect responses such as:
 - What network are you on?
 - Which social network is your favorite?
 - What do you like about this social network?
- How much time do you think you spend on social media per day on average?
- What do you think is the best social media for finding fashion inspiration and why?
- In your opinion, why do brands advertise on social media?
- What brands do you follow on social media? and why?
 - Do you think that social media influenced your choice when you purchase your clothes?

Understanding consumer behavior through the sustainable content of fast fashion brands

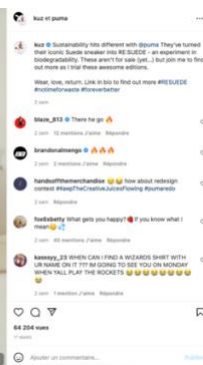
- Imagine, you are on social networks (show photos in appendix), and you see this type of content.
 - What will you do?
 - What image appeals to you the most? Why?
 - What do you think of these brands?

- Now you are on YouTube, you are in the middle of your video and this ad appears, you have to watch it:
 - H&M: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zY3atcmLBag>
 - Levi's: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7ZBIcUz-IE>
 - Nike: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sm9r_Zs2z6s
 - Massimo Dutti: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BmGhUyRUHOQ>
 - What is your first reaction?
 - If you had to describe this type of content in one word, what would it be?
 - Complete this sentence: after seeing this ad I feel...
 - What attracted you to the ad? or on the contrary what do you not like?
 - If you had to tell a friend about this ad, what would you say?
 - What type of arguments are put forward by the brand on this new collection?
 - What do you think?
 - Does this change anything in your relationship with the brand? At what level?
 - Based on this content, did you understand all the terms mentioned by the brand?
 - Do you believe the brand in its ecological approach, or do you feel the need to check if this is true?
 - How do you check? By what means?
- What do you think of fast fashion brands trying to become more sustainable?
- Does this kind of content make you think about your current consumption?
- What part of the content promoted by the brand makes you think about your consumption?
- Will you be ready to change your clothing consumption because your favorite brand communicates on ecology?
 - If yes, do you think you consume more or less of this brand?
 - If not, do you think you consume more or less of this brand?
- What would change for you if the brand communicated elsewhere than on the social media
- Do you think that brands that communicate on social media are more credible than others that do not communicate on social media?
- Now put yourself in the place of the brand, you have to promote your new collection on the social media, how will you proceed?

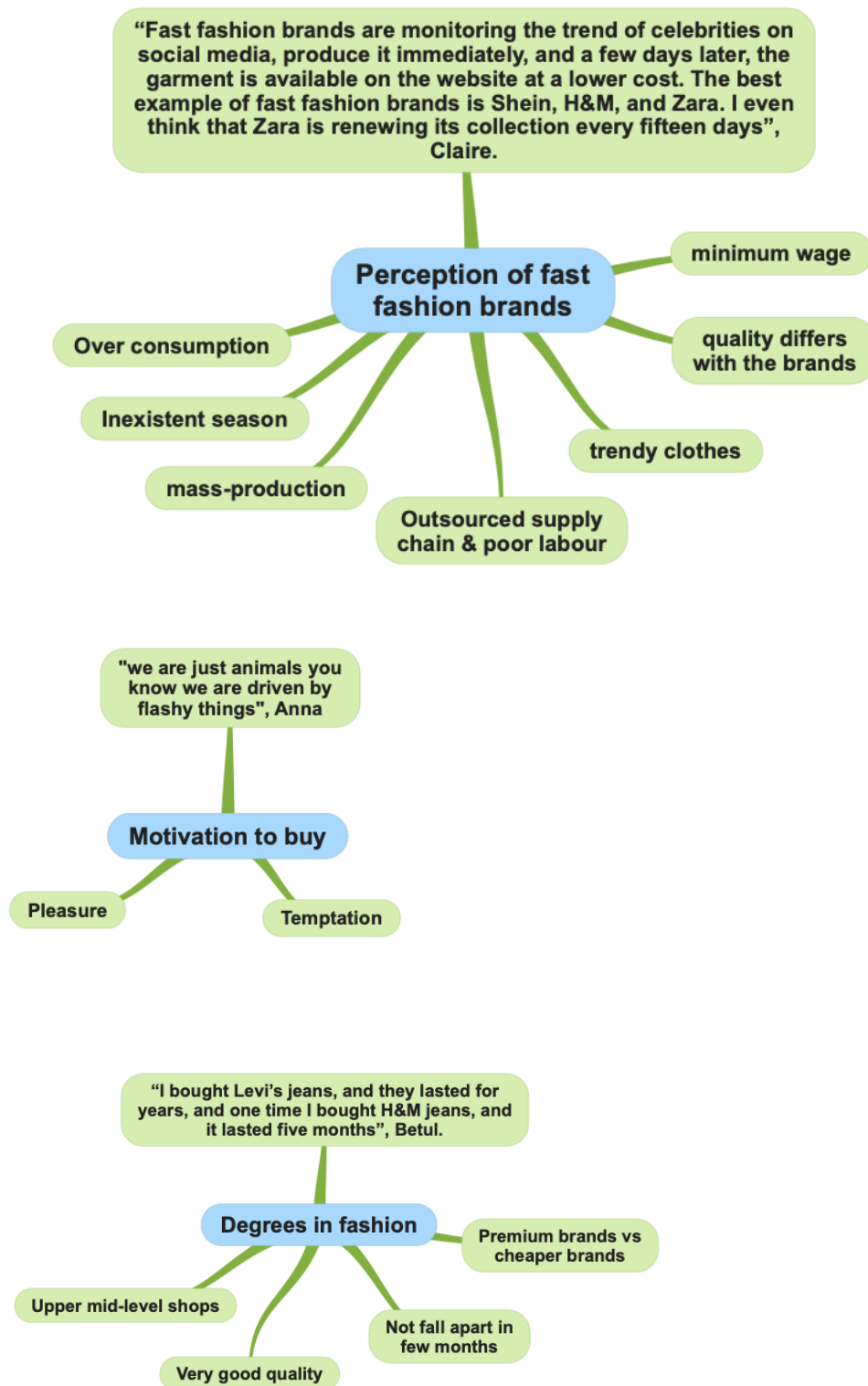
3. Conclusion

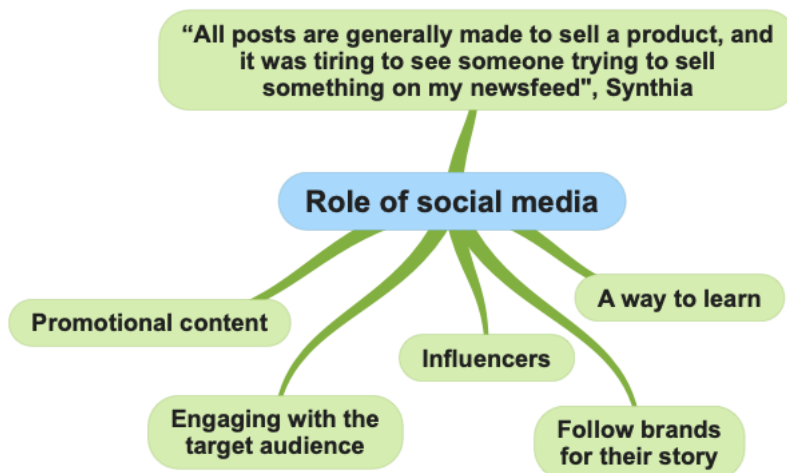
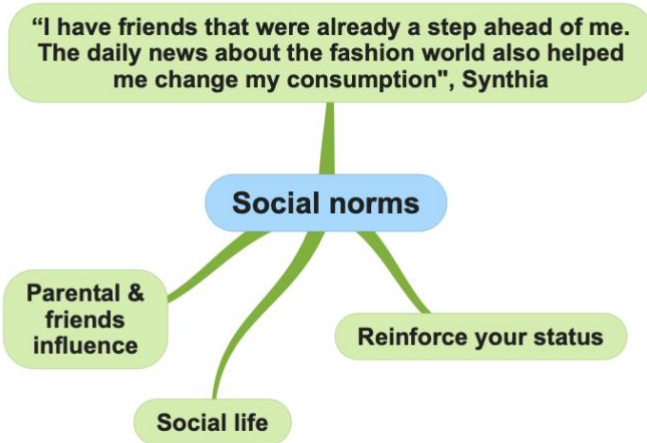
Thank you for participating in the interview.

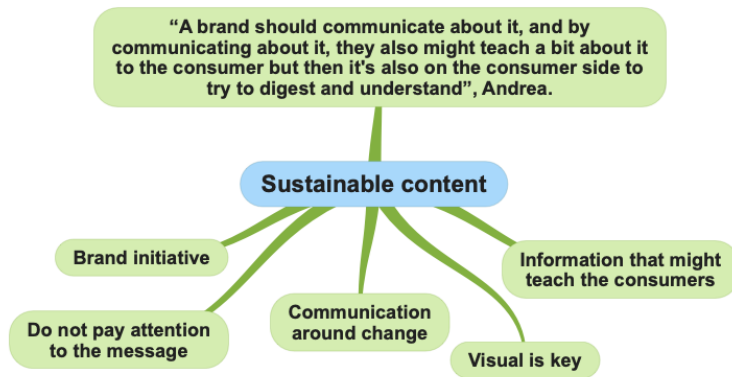
Appendix:



Appendix 2: Coding Tree







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