

Effect of Greenwashing on Brand Image and Buying Behaviour in Fast Fashion: A Consumer Perspective

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<p>This research-oriented bachelor's thesis aimed to gather knowledge about young consumers', aged 18 to 35, reactions and perceptions of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements. The research objective was to bring insight into how young consumers' reactions affect brand image and consumer buying behaviour.</p> <p>The thesis consists of a theoretical and an empirical section. The theory section focuses on different consumer behaviour theories, such as the buying decision process, the environmental impact of fast fashion, theories on brand equity and brand image as well as the definition of greenwashing and the use greenwashing in advertisements. The empirical section focuses on the data gathered to answer the research objective.</p> <p>The study involved a quantitative online survey, which also included some open-ended qualitative questions. The survey was distributed on social media with the help of a social media influencer. The conducted survey gathered altogether 936 answers, of which 747 were used for the final analysis. The data was analysed with the SPSS statistics software.</p> <p>The collected data suggested that greenwashing had a negative impact on how the respondents viewed the fast fashion brand. It also had an impact on their buying behaviour. The respondents rated the overall perception of the brand to be highly negative. Additionally, although there was an impact on the buying behaviour, many of the respondents indicated that whether they would continue to purchase from a brand or not was more due to other factors than greenwashing.</p> <p>The key findings and recommendations of this study could be utilised by fashion companies and marketing professionals to understand the impact of greenwashing when designing a sustainable marketing strategy.</p>	
Keywords Greenwashing, fast fashion advertisements, consumer buying behaviour, brand image	

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1 Introduction

This is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the International Business degree programme, with the specialisation on customer relationship management and communication. The aim of this introductory chapter is to explain the research problem and objectives. The chapter also provides the reader with the necessary background information to assimilate the aim and results of this study.

1.1 Background

Sustainability has been one of the biggest trends in the past decade due to the major changes in the climate and growing population. According to SustainAbility (2020) sustainable consumption is one of the trends that will grow in 2020. One of the reasons for the growth is that especially the younger generations have been growing more and more concerned with the current and future state of the planet. Younger generations are notably the group of consumers that invest in brands and products that follow the increasingly sustainable values (SustainAbility 2020).

According to a study conducted by NYU Stern's Centre for Sustainable Business, the consumption of sustainably marketed packaged consumer goods grew 5 times faster than similar non-sustainably marketed products (Whelan & Kronthal-Sacco 2019). This illustrates how the buying habits are changing towards more sustainable consumption. Furthermore, this means that brands need to start to fundamentally change their design and production, but also how they will appeal to the changed values of their customer base with their marketing tactics.

Modern brands have the need to find ways to appeal to their customers other than promoting the economic friendliness of the products. For example, one of the industries that is heavily criticized for unsustainable practises is the fashion industry, and especially fast fashion. Fast fashion is a trend that focuses on the production of cheap clothing on a fast pace, with very little or no regard of the environmental impacts. According to McFall-Johnsen (2019), fast fashion has a higher environmental impact than both aviation and maritime shipping. As the number of clothing collections rise yearly, the environmental impact of the industry rises as well. According to Sustain Your Style (2020), the production of clothing has increased by 400% within the last 20 years. This is heavily related to the decreased production costs, increased marketing efforts due to the rise of social media, as well as the fast-paced change in fashion trends. Fast fashion marketing is reliant on the rapid change in trends as it helps them promote increased consumption, which in turn is

made possible by the low prices of the products. Hence, many fast fashion brands, for example H&M and Zara, market their clothing based on the socio-economic factors, such as price and easy access, as well as the current trends in fashion. (Maguire 2019.)

Greenwashing is one of the challenges marketing departments face due to the growing demand for sustainable marketing strategies. Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practises of a company or the environmental benefits of products and services. Many brands are accused of greenwashing their advertisements to appeal to a larger audience. As example, one of the biggest and most recent greenwashing scandals was related to the Volkswagen vehicles. Volkswagen advertised their vehicles to contain clean diesel engines, which were supposed to minimize the emissions the vehicles produced. This turned out to be a false claim, as the vehicle emitted significantly more than the allowed amount of nitrogen oxides. (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2020.) Besides notable greenwashing cases such as the Volkswagen case, greenwashing often flies under the radar of consumers. As greenwashing is relatively hard to detect, it is important to increase consumer knowledge about its existence.

1.2 Research Problem and Investigative Questions

The research objective of this study is to gain insight on how young consumers perceive and react to greenwashing on fast fashion advertisements. The study aims to increase the knowledge about the effects of unsustainable marketing phenomena, in this case greenwashing, on the consumer buying behaviour and brand perception.

The outcome of this study could be applied by companies to develop their marketing strategies towards a more sustainability centred approach. The results are especially useful for companies in the fashion industry.

The study aims to answer a research question (RQ), which is how do 18-35-year-old consumers react to fast fashion advertising, which they perceive to contain greenwashing?

There are four identified investigative questions (IQ), which will help gather information to answer the RQ. These IQs are as follows:

1. How **aware** are young consumers of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements?
2. How does the perception of greenwashing **affect the young consumers' perception of the brand?**
3. How does greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements **affect the buying** behaviour of 18-35-year olds?
4. What are the **negative effects of greenwashing** on brand image?

The below table 1 illustrates the theoretical framework of the thesis along with the research methods and the results chapters for each of the investigative questions.

Table 1. Overlay matrix

Investigative Question	Knowledge base	Research Methods	Measurement questions	Results
IQ1. How aware are young consumers of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements?	Consumer behaviour and fast fashion Greenwashing in advertisements	Quantitative survey analysed with statistical analysis	Survey questions 7-11	4.2
IQ2. How does the perception of greenwashing affect the young consumers' perception of the brand?	Consumer behaviour and fast fashion Brand equity and image Greenwashing in advertisements	Quantitative survey analysed with statistical analysis	Survey questions 12-13	4.3
IQ3. How does greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements affect the buying behaviour of 18-35-year olds?	Consumer behaviour and fast fashion Brand equity and image Greenwashing in advertisements	Quantitative survey analysed with statistical analysis	Survey questions 14-16	4.4
IQ4. What are the negative effects of greenwashing on brand image?	Brand equity and image Greenwashing in advertisements	Inferred from the results of the survey		4.5

1.3 Demarcation

The demarcation of this research is centred around three different aspects: phenomenon, target population and part of an industry.

The researched phenomenon is greenwashing, which is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practises of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or a service (Delmas & Colgan 2018, 21).

Target population for this research is young consumers between the ages of 18-35. This age range was selected to be the target population for two reasons. Young consumers are more conscious about the environment and they are also more likely to purchase goods produced by companies that have similar values to their own (SustainAbility 2020).

The focus in this thesis is on fast fashion, which is a part of the fashion industry. The industry was narrowed down, because the fashion industry is very vast and covers many different genres. The reason to choose fast fashion is that the environmental effects of fast fashion are higher than, for example, both aviation and maritime shipping (McFall-Johnsen 2019).

1.4 International Aspect

The topic of the thesis fulfils the criteria of internationality, because of two reasons. The topic of the thesis is not demarcated based on a specific geographical area. The data collected for analysis is gathered from young consumers around the globe. The survey respondents were asked in the beginning of the survey to indicate their nationality, to ensure that the international aspect of the thesis is fulfilled. Additionally, as the greenwashing phenomenon is internationally known and observed, it is possible to include all geographic areas into the research.

1.5 Definition of Key Concepts

There are seven different key concepts that are important in understanding the research question and objective. These seven concepts are defined below:

1. **Greenwashing** is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practises of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or a service (Delmas & Colgan 2018, 21).
2. **Fast fashion** means clothing and accessories that are mass produced with low price and quality, the sales volumes are large, and the selection of styles changes constantly (European Parliament 2019, 2).
3. **Advertising** means any paid form of presentation or promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 452).
4. **Consumer buying behaviour** refers to the buying behaviour of the final consumer, individuals and households that buy goods and services for personal consumption (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 158).
5. **Perception** is the process of selecting, organizing and interpreting information inputs to create a meaningful overall image of the world surrounding us (Kotler & Keller 2016, 189).
6. **Buying decision process** is a psychological process that consists of five stages, which help the consumer decide of whether to purchase a product or a service (Kotler & Keller 2016, 195).

7. **Brand image** means the way the brand is portrayed in the public eye that affects the customers opinions of the brand. Brand image is often created by associations of the attributes of the products and services as well as the perceived personal values to the consumer (Keller 2013, 75.)

1.6 Benefits

This part of the introductory chapter will focus on the benefits that the thesis aims to provide for three different stakeholders. The stakeholders this thesis will provide value for are fashion businesses, other marketing professionals and my own academic and career aspirations.

As sustainability is becoming increasingly important for the consumers, companies need to find ways to appeal to their consumers with other values than economic convenience. Especially fashion businesses often focus on marketing their clothing based on the socio-economic factors, such as price and easy access. While trying to find ways to appeal to their consumers, many brands face greenwashing accusations from their consumer base. The aim of this thesis is to explain why young consumers react this way and what steps brands can take to decrease this reaction.

Other marketing professionals will benefit from this thesis, as it gives them an insight into consumer behaviour regarding reactions and perceptions of greenwashing. This thesis decreases marketing professionals' needs to conduct marketing research regarding the topic, when designing their sustainable marketing approach.

For me, the subject area is highly fascinating. Sustainability has always been an important aspect of my life. As I became aware of greenwashing a few years ago, I have been intrigued to research the topic ever since. This thesis has other benefits for me as well besides the overall interest in the topic. After graduating from the bachelor's program, I am hoping to continue academic education with a master's degree. Currently, I have applied to a master's degree that has a heavy focus on sustainable development and marketing. Doing the bachelor's thesis within this subject area solidifies the idea of a future career in the field of sustainable marketing and business development.

1.7 Risks and Risk Management

This subchapter discusses possible risks involved with the thesis process as well as how the risks were mitigated. The risks were related to data collection, analysis, and presentation.

Firstly, the main risks of this research were related to the research itself. One of the biggest risks was not getting enough answers during the data collection phase. According to an article by SurveyMonkey (2020), the average survey response rate can be around 20-30% but is often lower than that. To mitigate the risk of not getting enough answers, the survey was published in different online platforms to gather as many respondents as possible. The survey was also distributed by a social media influencer to gather a wider audience. Further information on the data collection can be found in section 3.4.

Second risk to be mitigated was the misinterpretation of the collected data during analysis. The risk was mitigated through multiple different methods. The main methods were using standardised analysis programs, such as SPSS, as well as performing multiple checks during the data analysis. This was done to ensure that the correct data was analysed for each investigative question. This risk was also mitigated during the design of the data collection tool. To gather relevant and appropriate data, the survey used for data collection was planned in careful detail. More of the design of the data collection tool can be found in section 3.3.

The final risk was related to the presentation of the data. The aim was to present the data in a clear manner so that no misinterpretations of the graphical presentations occur. All the data presentations were made with Excel and follow the guidelines provided in the Marketing Research Methods (MAR3LF102) course.

2 Consumer Behaviour and Greenwashing in Fast Fashion Advertisements

This chapter introduces the different concepts and theories that are utilised within this research. The aim of this chapter is to lay a foundation for the empirical section presented later in this thesis.

As presented in figure 1, this chapter is divided into three different categories, which are consumer behaviour and fast fashion, brand image and equity, and greenwashing in advertisements. All the different categories link with each other to develop a comprehensive picture of the entire knowledge base (figure 1).

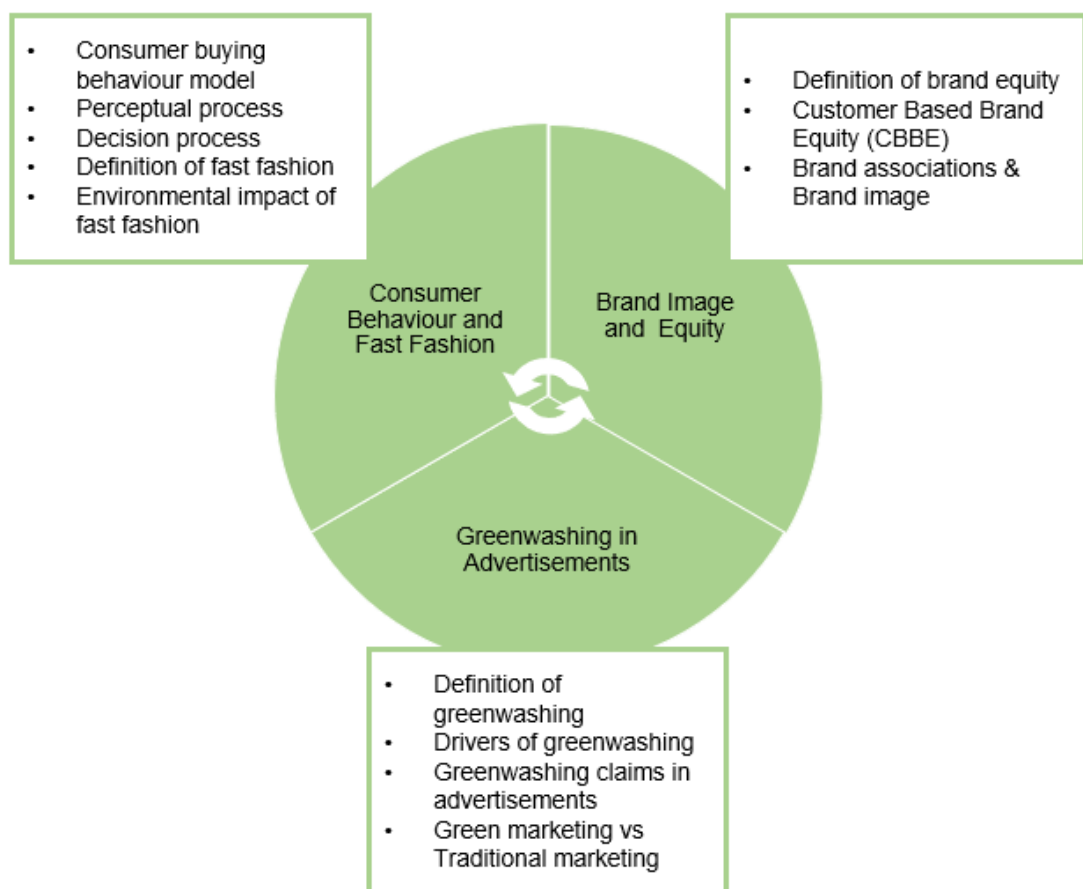


Figure 1. Structure of the theoretical framework

2.1 Consumer Behaviour and Fast Fashion

Consumer buying behaviour is a highly complex process, which refers to the purchasing behaviours of the final consumer when they are buying goods or services for personal

consumption (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 158). In this thesis three different consumer behaviour theories are utilised. These theories are the model of consumer behaviour, the perceptual process, as well as the buying decision process.

The model of consumer behaviour, showcased by Philip Kotler and Gary Armstrong (2018, 158), tries to explain what affects the buying behaviour of consumers. The model focuses on the idea that different external stimuli, for example advertising, are used to influence an individual. The effects of the stimulus are highly dependent on the characteristics of the individual, which then in turn affect the decision process of said individual. All these aspects then combine into the behaviour that leads to a purchase and after purchase interactions with a company. The characteristics that affect consumers' behaviour are highly individual. These characteristics connect to different social factors, such as culture and social class, as well as demographical factors, such as occupation, age, economic situation, and lifestyle. Additionally, psychological factors, motivation, perception, learning, as well as beliefs and attitudes, affect the individual's behaviour. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 158-173.)

The perceptual process refers to the selection and transformation of external stimuli to internal sensations that have a meaning and can be interpreted. The meaning for the sensations caused by the external stimuli are derived from pre-existing experiences and general disposition of the individual. (Jansson-Boyd 2010, 39.) The formation of the perception usually happens according to three different perceptual processes, which are selective attention, distortion, and retention. People are subjected to a substantial number of stimuli every day, which causes consumers to block out most of the stimuli they are exposed to. This process is called selective attention. Selective distortion refers to the tendency to interpret stimuli based on pre-existing factors, such as beliefs and their own or their peers' experiences. Selective retention causes people to prefer brands they have had favourable experiences of in the past, as well as overlook possible negative aspects of these brands. Due to these three perceptual processes, the same stimuli can be perceived differently by different people. (Kotler & Armstrong 2018, 172).

According to Kotler and Keller (2016, 194), consumers go through a buying decision process before every purchase. The model, developed to illustrate this process, has five stages, which are problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post purchase behaviour. Not every consumer goes through all these five stages, depending on if the goods and services were previously familiar to the consumer. Problem recognition is the stage where the consumer becomes aware of a need triggered by an internal or external stimulus. Advertising is a great way for corporations to

influence their consumers to recognise needs. For example, a fashion advertisement that showcases a new winter coat, can trigger a realisation in a consumer that they need a new coat for the winter season. The key for marketing professionals is to identify the different subjects and circumstances that trigger needs for their consumers. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 195.)

Depending on whether the consumer was previously familiar with a brand or a product they might skip the information search phase. However, in this thesis highlighting this phase is important, because there is a need to understand how young consumers invest time in researching brands and products before making the purchase decision. The information search phase usually consists of the consumer gathering information from four different sources, which are personal, commercial, public, and experimental. Most commonly consumers rely on the information gathered from experiences of their peers, as well as the commercially available information, such as advertisements and the corporation's website. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 196.) Relying on corporations to provide information can sometimes be misleading, as the corporation might leave out details and present information that is only partly factual. This happens because most corporations' main goal is to make a sale, hence the information they choose to present only shows the company and products in a good light.

When making a purchase, the consumers are affected by preferences they have developed throughout the entire buying decision process. These preferences are based on the expected value and benefits for the consumer. Besides the benefits, most brands and products have negative aspects to them, such as environmental or ethical impacts. During the buying decision process, the consumer evaluates and weights whether the positive aspects outweigh the negative based on the information they have. (Kotler & Keller 2016, 201.)

As the consumer behaviour has changed throughout the decades, many trends have evolved to support and increase consumers' consumption habits. One of these trends is fast fashion. Described as the mass production of cheap clothing made of low-quality materials at a high production pace, fast fashion has led to clothing being viewed as disposable goods. Multinational and gigantic retail brands, such as Zara and H&M, have started to produce increasing number of collections through the years. (European Parliament 2019, 2).

According to data collected by the European Parliament (2019, 2), about 5% of all household expenditure within the EU is used on clothing and footwear. The parliament also estimated that EU citizens bought around 12,66 kilograms of clothing per person in 2015, which was around 6,4 million tonnes in total (European Parliament 2019, 2). A research by a non-profit organisation Sustain Your Style shows that around 80 billion pieces of clothing is produced each year, which is 400% more than was produced 20 years ago (Sustain Your Style 2020). Both the European Parliament (2019, 2) and Sustain Your Style (2020) point out that on average one piece of clothing is only worn around 7-8 times before it is discarded.

Fast fashion is a highly problematic trend for many reasons. The main issues are related to sustainability and unethical labour conditions. As this thesis is more focused on the environmental aspect, the labour conditions will only be briefly mentioned.

The fashion industry itself has many issues with being environmentally friendly. According to a report published by Global Fashion Agenda and The Boston Consulting Group in 2017, the fashion industry is responsible for the consumption of 79 million cubic meters of water and the production of around 1715 million tons of CO₂ emissions as well as 92 million tons of waste. These numbers are estimated to double by year 2030 due to population growth and increasing additional income in middle class families. (Global Fashion Agenda & The Boston Consulting Group 2017, 11.) The water consumed by the fashion industry is used both in the production of clothing as well as in the cultivation of the raw materials that are utilised in the final products. For example, the cultivation of 1 kilogram of organic cotton uses around 20 000 litres of water (Sustain Your Style 2020). Water is a precious resource especially in countries such as China and India, which produce high quantities of cotton and are suffering from the depletion of their drinking water sources. The amount of CO₂ emissions produced by the fashion industry is highly concerning, as the levels of CO₂ within the atmosphere is already around 20% higher than the safe limit. By 2030 the emissions of the fashion industry are equivalent to the emissions produced by 230 million vehicles within a year. (Global Fashion Agenda & The Boston Consulting Group 2017, 11.) As the clothing is thrown away at the end of its lifecycle, most of the clothing within the EU is being tossed to the landfills, which leads to the creation of waste, or are incinerated, which creates even more emissions (European Parliament 2019, 5).

In addition to the environmental issues, the fashion industry is highly criticized for their unethical labour conditions. These issues are especially highlighted regarding fast fashion brands, as the goal is to produce the garments as cheaply as possible. Most of the garments (70%) used by EU consumers are produced in Asian countries, which have lower

standards for working conditions. The working conditions in garment factories were raised to the public awareness due to a deadly accident in 2013, where a garment factory building collapsed, killing 1138, and injuring over 2500. Many of the workers in these types of factories work long days with minimal wage. The working conditions are unsafe as the factories are often converted from residential buildings. Quite often there is not enough safety equipment, and the number of workers and machines are increased beyond the safe capacity. (European Parliament 2014, 2).

2.2 Brand Equity and Image

Branding is a very old concept, which is utilised to enhance consumers' associations related to a product. A brand is a design element, such as a name, symbol, or mark, that is used to give products more value beyond the functional purpose of the product. (Farquhar 1989, 24.) The value added by brands is called brand equity, which can be discussed from many different perspectives. For example, investors are often interested in the financial value added by the branding while the company itself is also interested in the competitive advantage created by brand equity. (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble & Donthu 1995, 28; Farquhar 1989, 25.)

Measuring brand equity is a highly debated topic, as many of the studies conducted have concluded that defining "added value" is difficult. Measuring brand equity is usually done either by focusing on the financially added value, for example through stock prices, or the consumer-related added value. (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995, 26.) The next paragraph will focus on a theory from the latter category.

Customer-based brand equity is a concept that looks at brand equity from the customer's perspective. Customer-based brand equity is defined as the effects of brand knowledge on the customer's reaction to different marketing efforts of that brand. Creating a link between the customer's desired feelings, perceptions and experiences with the brand is the key for creating customer-based brand equity. In conclusion, the customers of a brand, that has a positive customer-based brand equity, react better to the marketing efforts of products relating to that brand. On the other hand, if a brand has negative customer-based equity, consumers react negatively to the marketing activity of the brand compared to another similar brand or unbranded product. (Keller 2013, 69.)

Customer-based brand equity can be measured indirectly or directly. The indirect approach measures brand knowledge of consumers to evaluate the brand equity. Brand knowledge consists of two main areas, which are brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness refers to the customer's ability to remember the brand on cue as well as

associate it with the right product or service category. Once the brand reaches a stage of awareness where the brand is familiar to the consumer, the company can start to develop the brand image. Brand image is defined as the perceptions of the brand according to the different pre-existing associations that the consumer has. Creating a positive brand image requires marketing programs to connect the brand to strong and positive associations within the consumers' minds. (Keller 2013, 73-77; Keller 1993, 17.) Brand associations can be formed in many ways. Associations can be formed traditionally through marketing efforts, or through means that have no direct influence from the company. Associations formed purely based on the information provided by the company, such as advertising, have the weakest associations and thus are easily changeable. Direct experiences with the brand create the strongest associations, both positive and negative. Associations are also formed through, for example, other commercial or unbiased sources (such as non-profit organisations), word of mouth, as well as traditional and social media. Whether the association is negative or positive depends on various aspects. Creating favourable associations is done by convincing the consumer that the brand offers benefits and value for them. Associations are dependent on the context and often vary according to what the consumer is purchasing. (Keller 2013, 78.)

2.3 Greenwashing in Advertisements

Due to the current situation with the changes in the climate and our living conditions, consumers have started to become more aware of the environmental effects of their consumption. The sustainability trend has become mainstream as more people have knowledge about the negative effects caused by their consumption habits. (Ottman 2011, 3.)

Keeping up with the trends, marketing and advertising professionals are increasingly encouraged to develop a "greener" and more sustainable marketing agenda. According to Jacquelyn Ottman (2011, 44-46) and Philip Kotler (2011, 132), companies are required to develop both their market offering, as well as their marketing methods to be more sustainable in order to stay competitive on the ever-changing market. Consumers are more likely to purchase products and services from companies that they feel care for the consumers' and the planet's wellbeing. Appealing to a more sustainable audience requires the companies to shift from conventional marketing tactics to green marketing tactics (Kotler 2011, 133). In the below table 2, adapted from Ottman (2011, 46), the differences between conventional marketing and green marketing tactics are showcased. The main difference is that the corporation's acts are transparent and proactive, along with the marketing efforts focusing on the values of the consumers as well as the creation of two-way communication between the consumers and the corporation (Ottman 2011, 46).

Table 2. Conventional Marketing versus Green Marketing (adapted from Ottman 2011, 46)

Viewpoint	Conventional Marketing	Green Marketing
Consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers with lifestyles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with lives
Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Cradle to grave” • Products • Globally sourced • One size fits all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Cradle to cradle” • Services • Locally sourced • Regionally tailored
Marketing and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product end-benefits • Selling • One-way communication • Paid advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values • Educating and empowering • Creating community • Word of mouth
Corporate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretive • Reactive • Independent and autonomous • Competitive • Departmentalized • Short term-oriented/ profit maximizing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparent • Proactive • Interdepend/ allied with stakeholders • Cooperative • Holistic • Long term-oriented/ triple bottom line

As great as green marketing sounds in theory, there are still issues in the application of these tactics by many companies. One of the main issues, stemming from companies wanting to appear more sustainable to their consumers, is greenwashing.

Greenwashing is defined as a corporation’s act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practises of the corporation or the environmental impact of their products (Delmas & Colgan 2018, 21). There are two levels of greenwashing. Firstly, there is corporate-level greenwashing in which the corporation claims that their supply chain is more environmentally friendly than it is. Secondly, a corporation can falsely claim that a product or a service is environmentally friendly, which is called product-level greenwashing. A corporation that is practising greenwashing is inherently performing poorly in their environmental practises while highlighting their favourable environmental actions to their consumers and the public. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 66-67.)

Corporations have many different reasons to practice greenwashing. According to Delmas and Burbano (2011, 68), the drivers of corporate greenwashing can be divided into four categories, which are presented in the adapted figure 2 below.

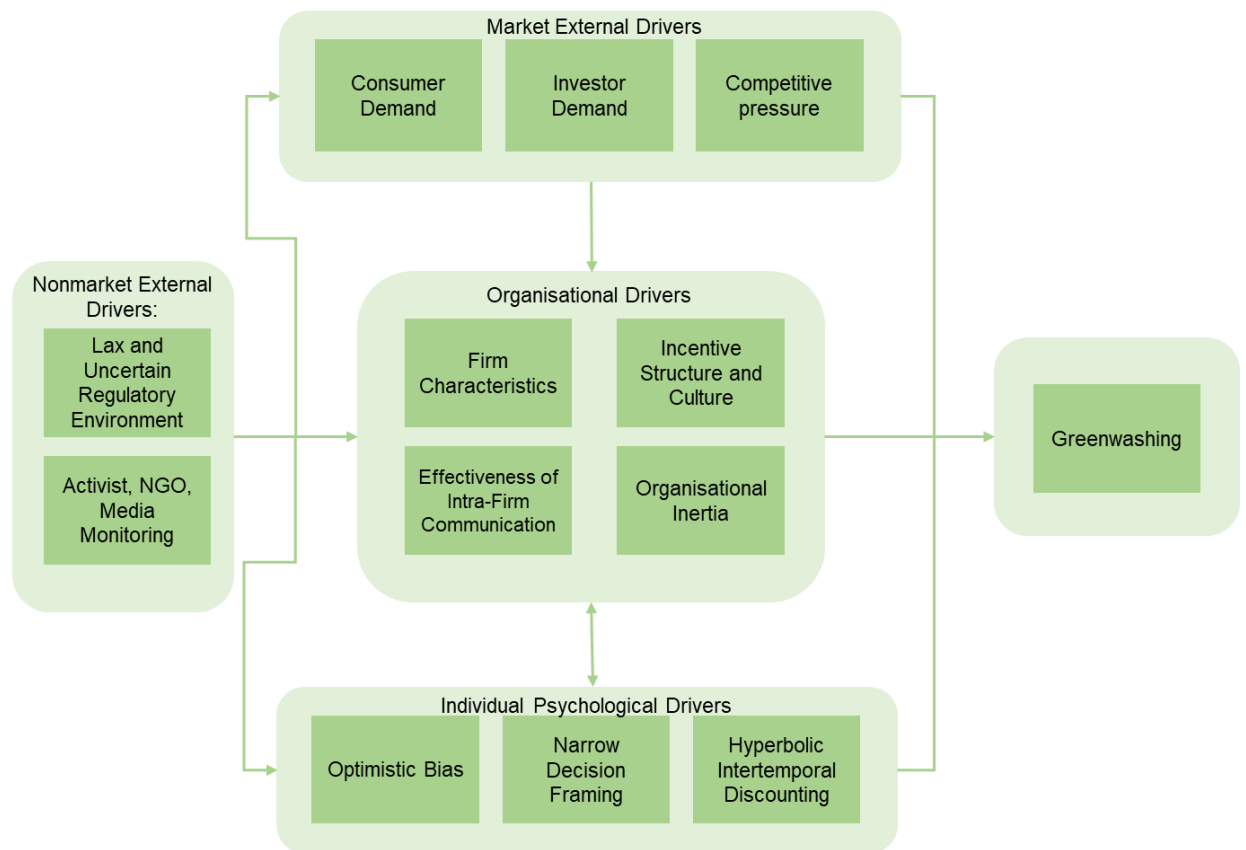


Figure 2. Drivers of Greenwashing (adapted from Delmas & Burbano 2011, 68)

Most commonly corporations are driven to greenwashing by external market factors, such as consumer demand, investor demand and competitive pressure, as well as internal organisational factors. As consumers and investors are increasingly requiring corporations to be more sustainable, the corporations have more pressure to appear environmentally friendly in their communications. Besides the demand from consumers and investors, corporations are often pressured into appearing green due to the fear of lagging behind their competitors. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 69-72.)

Additionally, the corporation's internal environment, especially the ethical climate and the organisational structure, affect the greenwashing practices. The ethical climate in the corporation refers to the notion of the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of the organisations employees regarding the ethical decision making within the organisation. Corporations that have a tighter ethical code of conduct, especially regarding environmental actions, are less likely to practice greenwashing. The other internal factor is the organisational structure, more importantly size and industry. Especially larger corporations that function in industries with high environmental impact, such as the textile industry, have higher likelihood of practising greenwashing than smaller corporations in other fields. (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 72-75.)

In the past, corporations often chose to practise greenwashing to appeal to their customers and investors, because there were not many ramifications for greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 77). European Union has had very minimal restrictions regarding greenwashing within the consumer protection law, but that is about to change due to the European Commission's new "EU Green Deal" action plan (European Commission 2020, 8). According to the EU Commission (2020, 8), the new action plan aims to give consumers better and more reliable information about products, including the expected lifespan as well as the environmental footprint. Additionally, this plan proposes stricter guidelines to reduce greenwashing, such as the utilisation of Environmental Footprint methodologies that corporations are required to include to vindicate their environmental claims.

One of the ways corporations practice greenwashing is through advertising. Corporations use advertising to reach their potential customers, promote a brand or a specific product, as well as communicate their agenda and values to the consumers. Consumers often rely on corporate advertising to make purchasing decisions, which causes phenomena like greenwashing to decrease consumer trust in advertisements. Greenwashing as a phenomenon is hard to detect from advertisements, as the claims are often left vague and ambiguous. For this reason, researchers use the term perceived greenwashing, which is defined as consumer's ability to uncover greenwashing intentions within advertisements. Consumer perceptions of greenwashing can be extremely damaging to not only companies and their brands but entire industries, because consumers might grow suspicious of green products. (Chen & Chang 2013, 489-497.)

According to a study by Schmuck, Matthes and Naderer (2018, 128-129), there are two types of claims commonly presented in greenwashed advertisements, which are false appeals and vague appeals. False appeals mean presenting claims about the environmental impact of a product that can be proven to be incorrect based on evidence. Vague appeals refer to corporations presenting claims that can be interpreted incorrectly, hence giving the consumers a wrong impression about the environmental impact of a product. Out of these two types, vague claims are much harder to identify than false claims. In an advertisement that contains vague claims the information is much harder to verify, which requires the consumers to compare other available information and their own perceptions against the advertising message. (Schmuck et al. 2018, 129-130.)

As this thesis focuses on the greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements, it is important to understand which greenwashing methods fast fashion brands utilise in their advertisements. Often, fast fashion brands utilise the vague claims method explained above. Most

commonly, the advertisements include phrases and words such as “made from natural materials”, “sustainably made”, “made from recycled materials” or “eco-friendly”. For example, products labelled as containing natural materials are often promoted to be environmentally friendly. This claim is highly dependent on how the material was sourced. Natural materials such as viscose and bamboo can be highly polluting. To make viscose, around 150 million trees are cut down every year, while the cultivated bamboo is often treated with pesticides and environmentally harmful chemicals. The key to understanding if these claims are greenwashing or not is to look at statistics provided by the brands or third-party non-profit organisations. (Chan 2020.)

One brand that is easy to use as an example for greenwashing is H&M. Most notably their “Conscious” collection is heavily criticized for being an attempt for H&M to appear more sustainable than they are. The critique stems from the lack of information regarding the manufacturing provided by the company. Another issue that the advertising campaign was criticized for was the lack of information on the materials and how they are better for the environment. The figure 3 is an advertising image used by H&M (H&M 2020) within the campaign, which states that the garment is manufactured with a recycled polyester blend. The big issue with the image is that the advertisement does not include how much of the product is made of recycled materials. (Wicker 2020.)



Figure 3. H&M advertisement image (H&M 2020)

2.4 Conclusion

Greenwashing has become a marketing tactic used by corporations to influence the perceptions of their consumers through presenting a false image of sustainable practices. Especially, the fast fashion industry utilises greenwashing tactics to increase their consumers' consumption of their products. Fast fashion brands are highly unsustainable and have a large negative impact on the environment and their workers' labour conditions. These aspects are often hidden from the consumers or overlooked by the brands when creating advertisement campaigns that utilise environmental claims.

As explained before, it is quite hard for consumers to pinpoint which advertisements contain greenwashing. This means that consumers' perceptions of the brand and buying decisions are falsely impacted by greenwashed advertisements. This can also mean that brands that are not greenwashing are affected as consumers lose trust in brand advertisements as a source of information.

3 Research Methods

This chapter introduces the research design and explains which research methods are used to conduct this study. The chapter also justifies the overall research design, as well as the usage of specific data collection and analysis methods.

3.1 Research Design

This research utilises a mono method quantitative research design. The below figure 4 illustrates the research design of this thesis, which is a cross-sectional descriptive design. Descriptive research is used to answer questions such as what, how, who, where and when, hence the main research question and the investigative questions fit these criteria (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2019, 187). This research is cross-sectional, as the study measures units from a sample population from one specific point in time and not over a long period of time (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2017, 99).

As presented in the research design in figure 4, the research is comprised of one quantitative phase. An online survey was chosen to be the data collection method and the collected data was analysed with statistical and thematic analysis methods depending on the question format. The respondents of the research were young consumers between the ages 18-35.

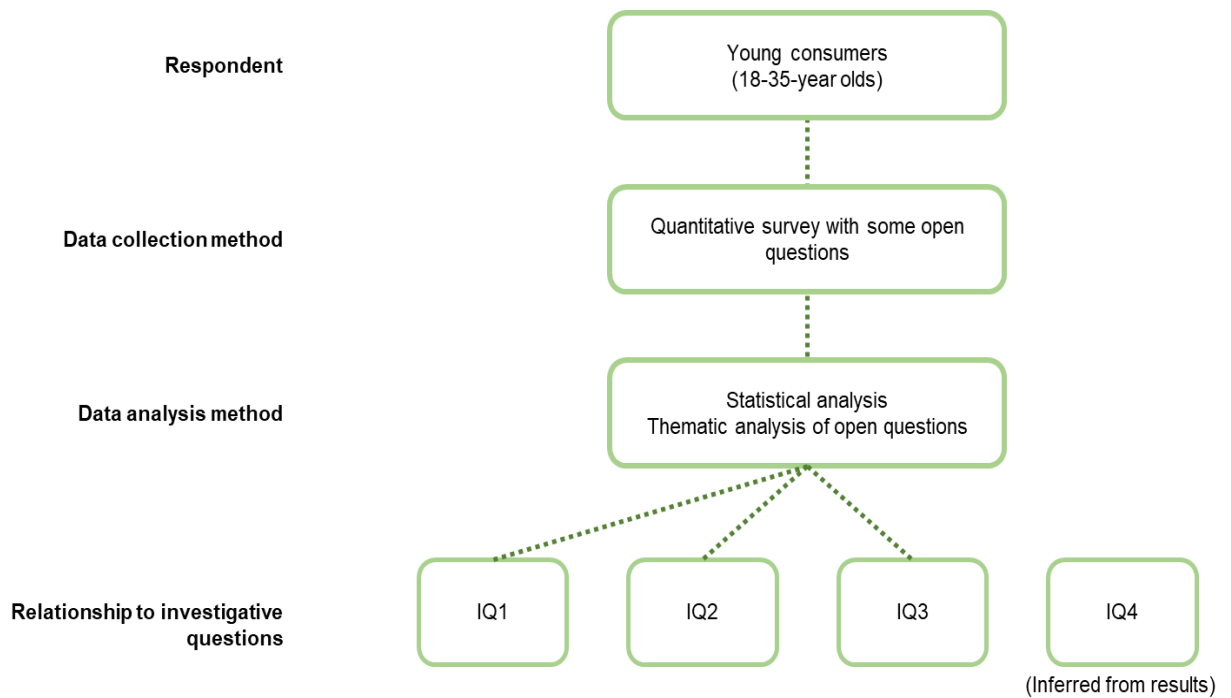


Figure 4. Research design

The aim of the research, as well as the research question and investigative questions were further explained in the introductory chapter. Next, the following subchapters will present the population and sampling, the development of the data collection tool, distribution of the survey and the data analysis methods.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population that this research studies is the young consumers, aged 18 to 35. Therefore, a sample unit is a consumer belonging to the above-mentioned category. The sampling of this research was done through self-selection sampling.

Self-selection sampling relies on individuals to identify their own desire to participate in the research. These individuals can be found through publicizing the need for respondents. (Saunders et al. 2019, 323.) Self-selection sampling is often used to gather many responses in a smaller timeframe and lower financial costs. Self-selection sampling is a part of nonprobability sampling, which comes with its possible errors. As the respondents can select whether they participate into the survey or not, there is high possibility for a self-selection bias, which means that the sample might not represent the entire population. Due to the research utilising nonprobability sampling method, the results of this research cannot be generalised to the entire population. However, the sample within this research gives a good indication of the reactions of 18-35-year-old consumers even though it cannot be applied to the whole population in absolute certainty.

There is no proper formulae to calculate how many sample units should be included in a research that utilises nonprobability sampling, hence every case should be evaluated based on time and costs constraints (Burns et al. 2017, 283). In this research, the minimum number of sample units should be around 400. Taken into consideration the timeframe and available resources, this number of responses is an adequate amount.

3.3 Design of Data Collection Tool

The data utilised in this research is primary data collected via an online survey. The survey is a data collection method that is often associated with the deductive approach. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019, 193), gathering data via a survey allow the standardisation of the data when collected from many respondents in an economical way as well as allowing easy comparison between the variables. (Saunders et al. 2019, 193.)

The survey consisted of quantitative questions, with an open-ended qualitative “other”-option. The usage of qualitative answer options along with the quantitative questions helped produce a deeper understanding of the young consumers’ thought process. The survey was created with the help of Webropol survey tool and distributed in social media using the self-selection sampling method. Further information on the sampling can be found in the previous subchapter 3.2.

The measurement questions and their relation to the investigative questions are illustrated in the table 3 below. The survey questions were designed to be simple and focused to avoid the respondents misreading and misunderstanding the questions. The questions also aimed to be unbiased, so that the questions do not give privilege to a certain answer option. (Saunders et al. 2019, 529.) In the beginning of the survey, the participants were asked for introductory and demographic questions, to establish that they fulfil the demarcation criteria of the thesis as well as guide them to the topic of greenwashing.

Table 3. Investigative questions’ relation to the survey measurement questions

Investigative question	Measurement questions
No significance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your age? 2. What is your nationality? 3. How concerned are you about the current and future state of the environment? 4. Does your concern for the environment impact your everyday purchases? 5. If you selected yes, please pick the category(ies) in which you are most environmentally conscious. 6. In general, how important is fashion for you?
IQ1. How aware are young consumers of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Where have you seen fast fashion advertisements you thought were greenwashed? 8. Do you research more about the brand if you think a fast fashion advertisement contains greenwashing? 9. If you selected yes, where do you find more information? 10. If you selected no, please pick the reason(s) why. 11. How common do you think greenwashing is in fast fashion advertisements

<p>IQ2. How does the perception of greenwashing affect the young consumers' perception of the brand?</p>	<p>12. How would you rate a fast fashion brand you think is greenwashing on the following: 13. How would you describe the overall perception of the brand?</p>
<p>IQ3. How does greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements affect the buying behaviour of 18-35-year olds?</p>	<p>14. Would you continue to purchase from a fast fashion brand if you think they are greenwashing? 15. If you selected yes, please pick the reason(s) why. 16. How likely would you recommend a fast fashion brand and its products to your friends, family or on social media if you thought the brand was greenwashing?</p>

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection started on the 31st of August 2020 and closed on the 10th of September 2020. The data collection was closed due to fulfilling the requirement of minimum amount of answers detailed in section 3.2. The data was collected using self-selection sampling through social media platforms and with the help of a social media influencer Tiffany Ferguson.

As mentioned in the part 3.2, self-selection sampling requires the sample unit to identify their own desire to participate to the study. To gather answers to the survey, the need for participants were published on different social media channels, such as Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Additionally, the survey was sent to a social media influencer Tiffany Ferguson, who has a large platform on both YouTube and Instagram. The link to the survey was shared for 24 hours on Ms. Ferguson's Instagram story with a message requesting her followers to respond to the survey.

In total, the survey reached 1366 people of which the survey was answered by 936 respondents. This makes the response rate 68,5%, which is calculated by the instructions provided by an article from SurveyAnyplace (2019). In the final analysis, 747 of the answers were taken into consideration. The other 216 answers did not fulfil the demarcation criteria from subchapter 1.3, in which the target population was narrowed to 18-35-year-old consumers. The respondents outside of this category are not relevant to the study, as the overall interest of the study is on young adults.

3.5 Data Analysis Methods

The data was collected through a Webropol-survey, from which the survey data was transferred to the SPSS statistics software. The quantitative data presented in the results chapters was analysed with SPSS and the graphical presentations were done with Microsoft Excel.

Some of the questions, more specifically 5, 9, 10 and 15, were dependant on the answers given by the respondents in the previous questions. The results of these questions will be analysed and presented after the relevant previous questions.

The survey questions 5, 7, 9, 10 and 15 included open-ended answer option "Other". As these answers provide non-numerical data, they cannot be analysed with SPSS. These answers were analysed through thematic content analysis, in which the answers were grouped based on similarities on the answer patterns. The most common answers from the "Other"- option are presented after the numerical data in relevant results chapters.

4 Results

This chapter presents the results of the survey conducted between the 31st of August and the 10th of September 2020. The results are divided into subchapters based on the four investigative questions. The subchapter 4.1 introduces the sample units through some introductory questions. The rest of the results in the subchapters 4.2- 4.5 are presented according to the overlay matrix, from chapter 1, which ensures that all the investigative questions are answered with the corresponding survey data.

4.1 Introductory questions

To start the survey the respondents were asked introductory questions. The respondents were asked for their age, but as explained in the previous chapter the analysis will only focus on the responses that fulfil the age criteria between 18-35. After the age question respondents were asked for their nationality.

The survey was answered by respondents with 64 different nationalities. The full list of nationalities can be found in appendix two at the end of the report (Appendix 2). The table 4 below presents the ten most common nationalities based on number of respondents. Over 30% of the respondents were from United States of America. This was the only nationality that gathered over 100 respondents, as the second highest number of respondents were Finnish, at 65 respondents. The ten most common nationalities make up 72% of the total number of respondents.

Table 4. Most common nationalities

Nationality	Number of respondents	Percent
United States of America	249	33,3 %
Finland	65	8,7 %
Canada	43	5,8 %
Germany	35	4,7 %
United Kingdom	42	5,6 %
Australia	25	3,4 %
Italy	25	3,4 %
France	23	3,1 %
Spain	21	2,8 %
Netherlands	19	1,2 %

The respondents were asked for their concern for the current and future state of the environment. As presented within the figure 5, over 70% of the respondents were very concerned about the state of the environment. Only 0,1% of the respondents were not concerned at all.

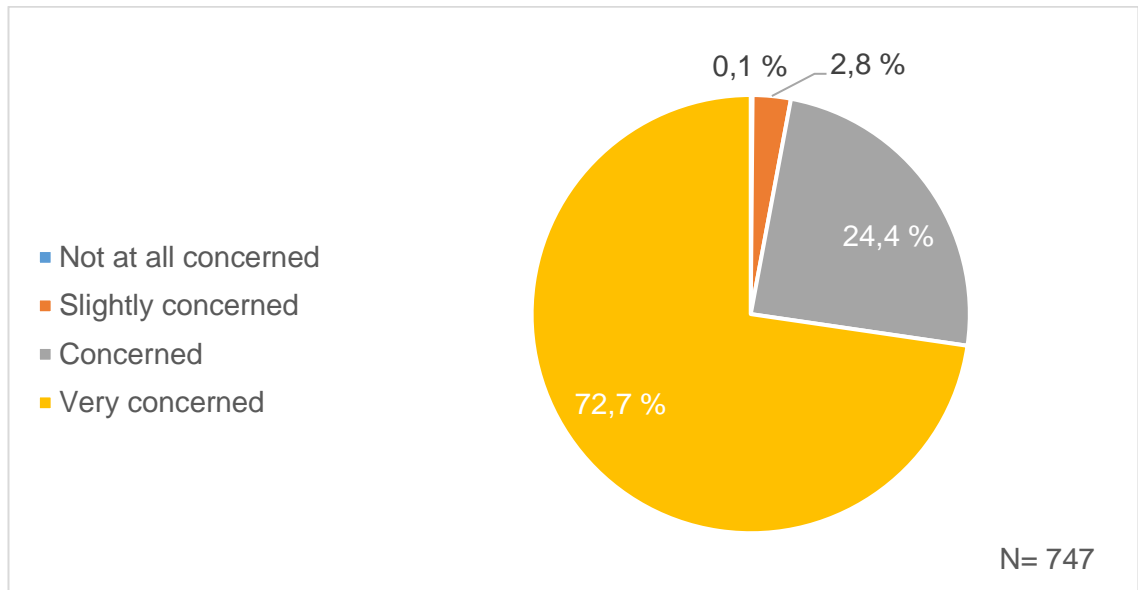


Figure 5. Concern for the environment

The respondents were asked if their concern for the environment affects their everyday purchases. Over 85% of the respondents felt that their concern for the environment impacts their purchases (figure 6).

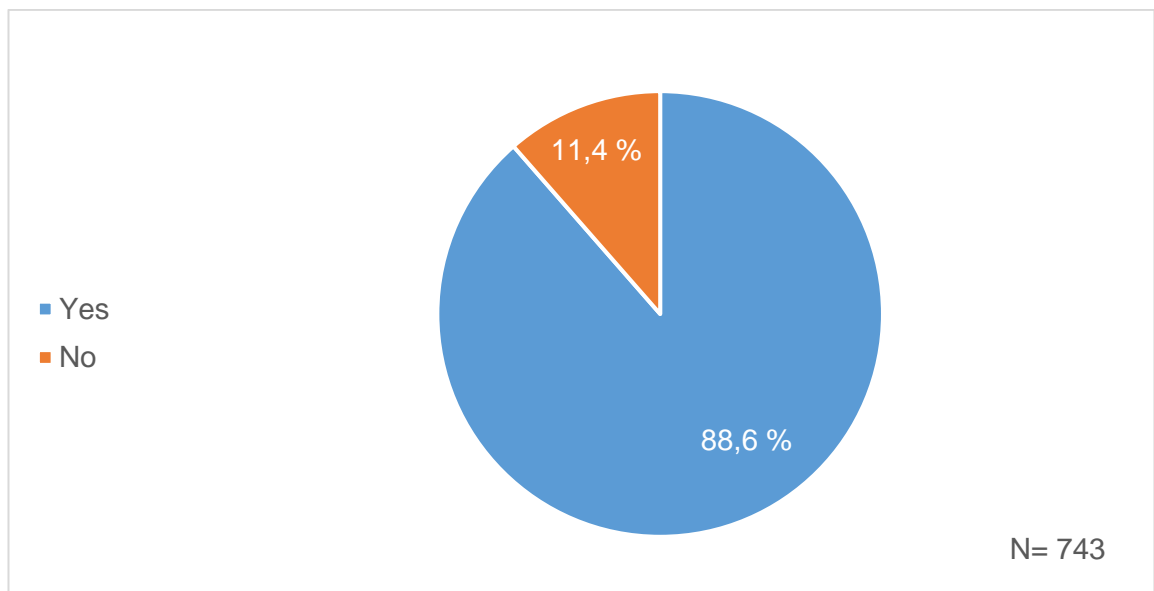


Figure 6. Impact of environmental concern on purchases

If the respondents answered yes to the previous question about whether their environmental concern impacts their purchases, the respondents were asked to select the pre-

determined categories that they were most environmentally conscious in. The respondents could pick multiple categories, and on average one person chose 3,2 different categories. As seen in figure 7 below, almost 80% of the respondents chose clothing and apparel, as well as almost 80% chose food and beverage. Only 15% of the respondents chose the category electronics. The respondents were given the answer option “Other”, which 1,5% of the respondents chose. Most commonly, the respondents said that their environmental concern does not affect generally one category, but that they are environmentally conscious in all categories related to the amount of waste they produce or how the products are packaged. For example, one respondent said that they try to avoid single use plastics while another said they try to avoid over consumption in general.

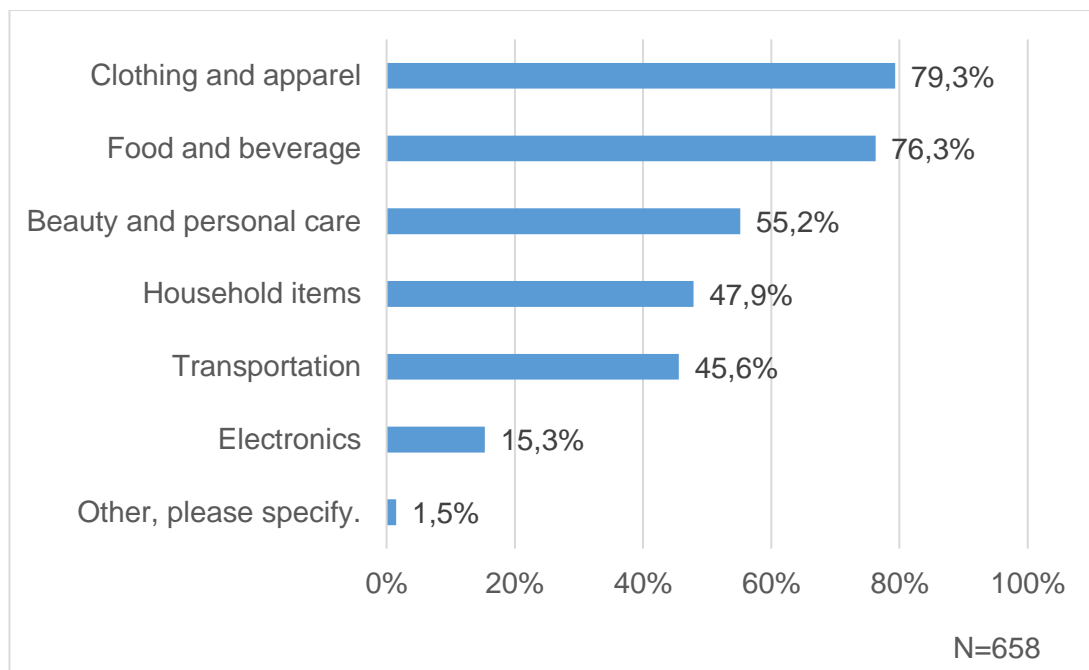


Figure 7. Daily purchase category impacted by environmental concern

The final introductory question, which the respondents were asked, was about how important they view fashion to be in general. The figure 8 presents that around 40% of the respondents found fashion to be important for them on the general level. Only around 5% of the respondents said that fashion is not at all important for them.

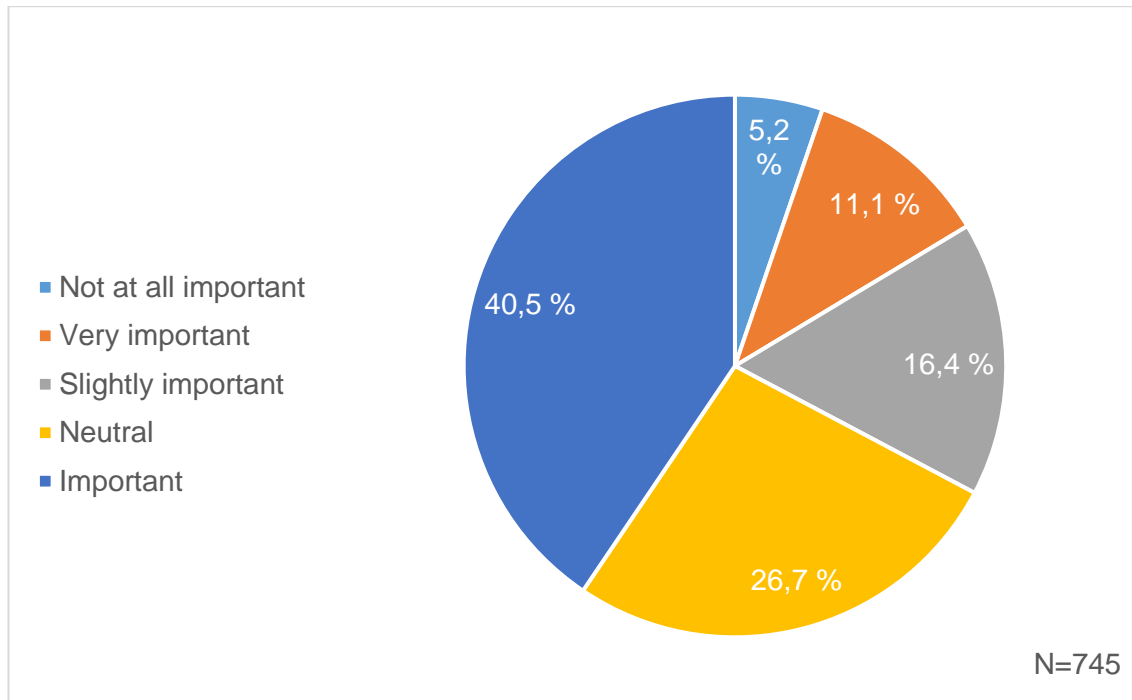


Figure 8. General importance of fashion

4.2 Awareness of Greenwashing

This subchapter contains data that answers to the first investigative question regarding the young consumers' awareness of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements. The survey respondents were asked to choose the platforms they have seen greenwashed fast fashion advertisements in. As illustrated in the below figure 9, over 90% of the respondents selected that they had seen greenwashed advertisements on Instagram. Other platforms that were often selected by the respondents were YouTube (72,9%), television (54,8%) and Facebook (51,8%). The platforms that were selected less were LinkedIn (1,3%) and radio (4,0%). Only slightly over 2% of the respondents had selected the option that they had not seen greenwashed fast fashion advertisements on any platform. (Figure 9.)

The respondents that had selected the answer option "Other" listed TikTok, Snapchat and Reddit as platforms where they have seen greenwashed advertisements. Besides social and traditional media platforms, 16 of the respondents that chose the option "Other" listed physical stores as a place where they have seen greenwashed advertisements.

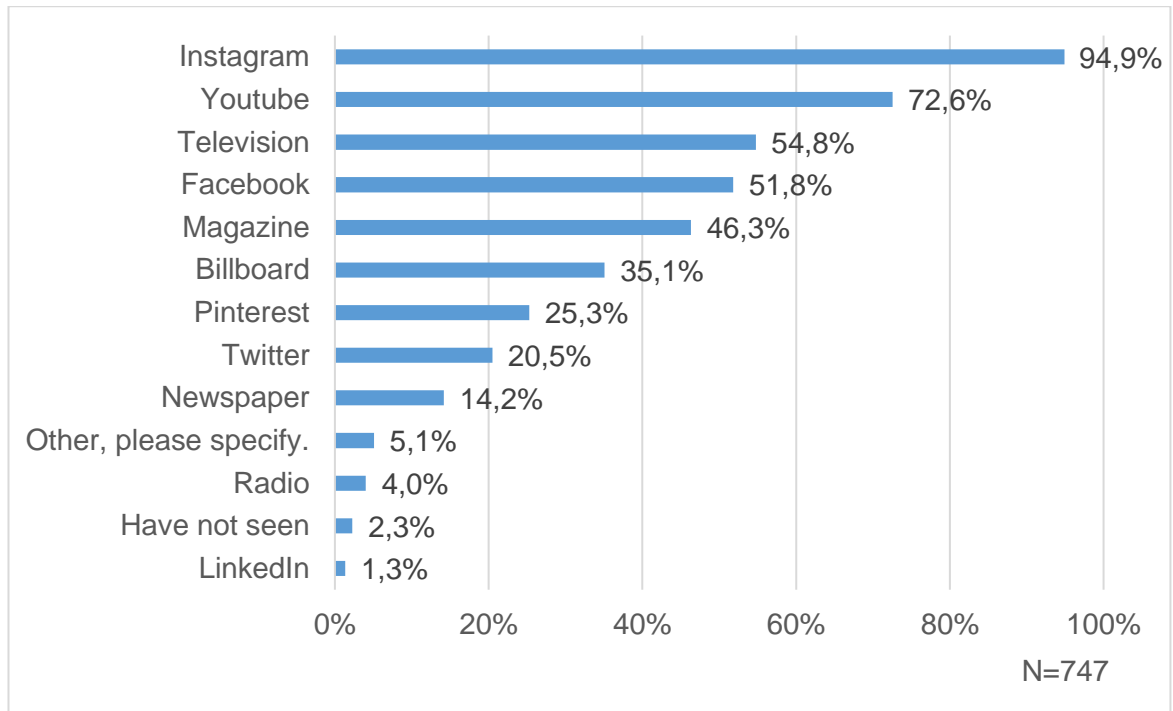


Figure 9. Platforms where consumers have seen greenwashed advertisements

The respondents were asked whether they research more about the brand after seeing an advertisement they believe to be greenwashed. Around 60% of the respondents answered that they do research more about the brand, while the rest 40% do not conduct any research. Depending on the answer the respondents gave, they were either asked to select where they find more information on the brand or why they do not conduct any research. If the respondent answered yes, they were asked to choose where they find information from a list of predetermined sources. The figure 10 below presents that almost 70% of the respondents that answered the question chose that they find more information from news publications and articles. Only 22,4% of the respondents said that they look at the CSR report (figure 10).

Of the respondents that chose the answer option “Other”, large majority, 30 out of 70 respondents, mentioned they find information on brands and their sustainability from an app called “Good on You”. Besides the application, many of the respondents said they find information through social media influencers on platforms, such as YouTube. One respondent specifically said:

“I honestly usually look to see if one of the influencers I follow on YouTube has ever reviewed or recommended the brand. If not, then I would do more research on the website/online forums etc. If I cannot find any information, I would usually avoid the purchase.”

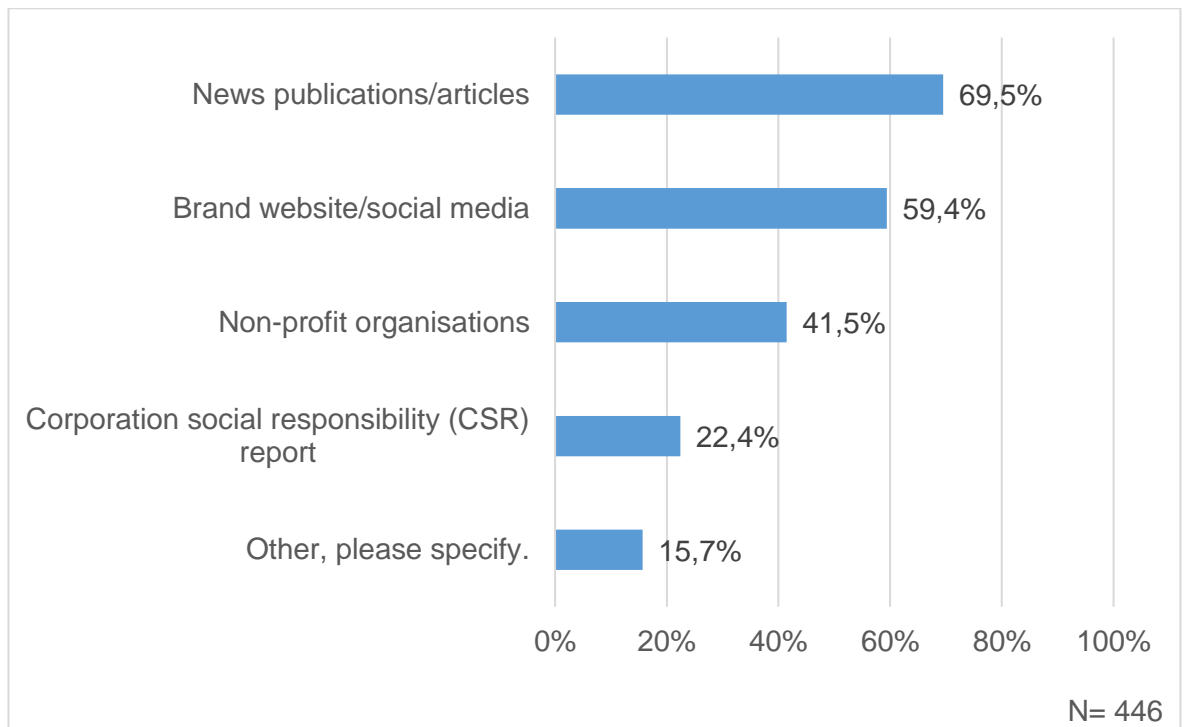


Figure 10. Sources of information

If the respondent answered that they do not look for further information, they were asked to select the reason why from a list of predetermined factors. Almost 60% of the respondents selected that finding more information would be too time consuming. Only 9,3% of the respondents indicated that they do not research more due to the brand seeming credible to them (figure 11).

The majority, 65 out of 97 responses, of respondents that chose the option “Other” said that they don’t research more about the brands as they already have enough information and try to avoid all fast fashion brands in general. One respondent said:

“The advertisements that I see are usually from big brands (like H&M, Zara, Zalando) and I already know or have read about their greenwashing. It doesn’t feel necessary or worth my time because I know (at least to some extent) what the brands are doing and try to keep that in mind while buying clothing”.

Additionally, some of the respondents (7 out of 97) said that they had no previous knowledge of greenwashing and how fast fashion brands use it in advertisements, which is why they never thought to research the brands before. One respondent stated that “I didn’t know about greenwashing before this survey. I will definitely research more about certain brands I thought were good for the environment but show signs of greenwashing”, while another stated that they “didn’t realize that the company could be lying”.

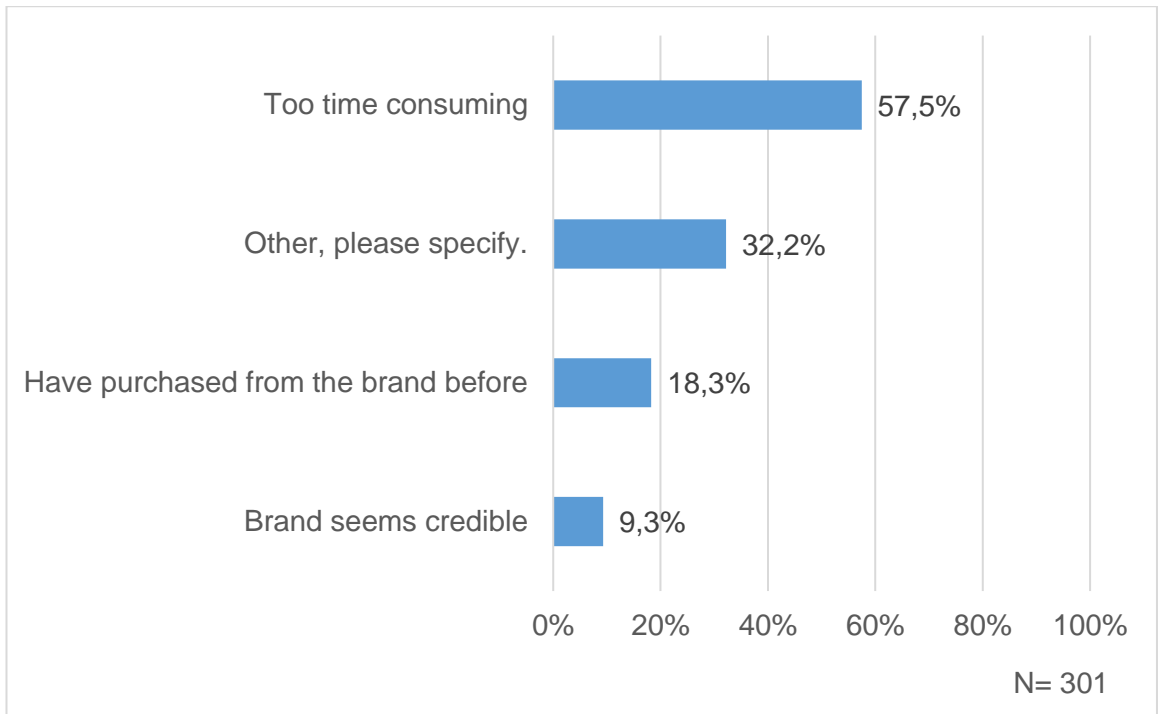


Figure 11. Reasons not to research more about the brand

The respondents were asked how common they think greenwashing is in fast fashion advertisements. The results were almost identical between the options common (47,4%) and very common (47,1%). Only 0,5% of all the respondents thought that greenwashing is very uncommon in fast fashion advertisements (figure 12).

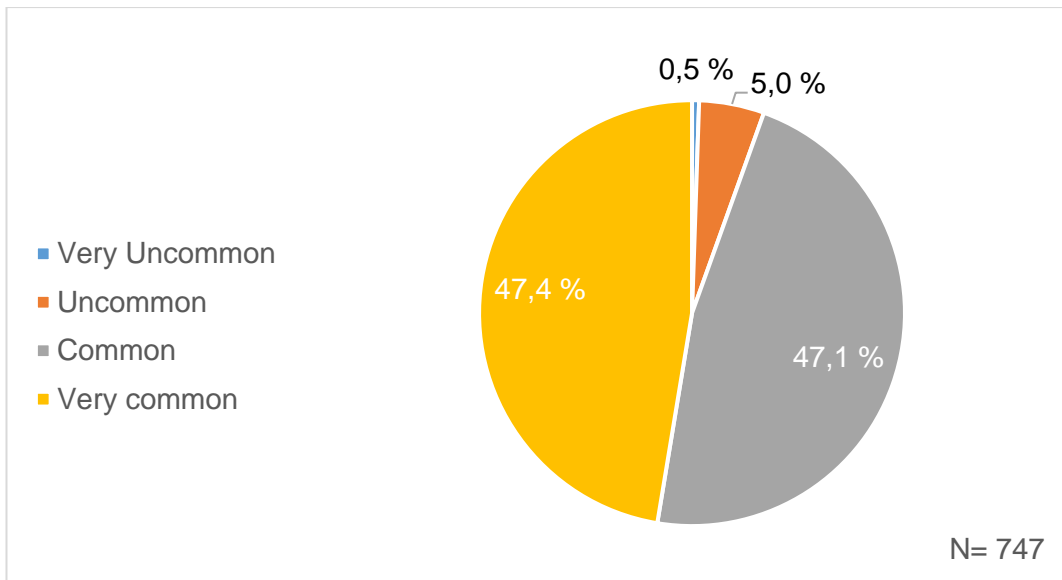


Figure 12. How common the respondents think greenwashing is in fast fashion advertisements

To summarize, the respondents of the survey were relatively aware of the greenwashing phenomenon, with only a small percentage of the overall respondents stating they had little to no previous knowledge of greenwashing. The respondents were also able to indicate

which platforms they believe they have seen greenwashing in. This further supports the conclusion that the respondents are aware enough of the phenomenon to be able to pinpoint greenwashing from a mass of other advertising material.

4.3 Effects of Greenwashing on Brand Perception

This subchapter will focus on the survey results related to investigative question two, which inquires the young consumers' perception of the fast fashion brand they believe is greenwashing.

The respondents were asked to rate a fast fashion brand they believe to be greenwashing on a scale of 1 to 5 on five different predetermined attributes, which were quality, consistency, credibility, sustainability, and ethicality. The results presented in the below figure 13 are taken as the mean of each answer. The respondents rated quality (mean= 2,10) and consistency (mean= 2,08) as the only attributes that reached above two on the rating scale. The respondents rated the brand's ethicality as the lowest of the attributes, reaching only the mean of 1,41. None of the attributes were rated three or above. (Figure 13.)

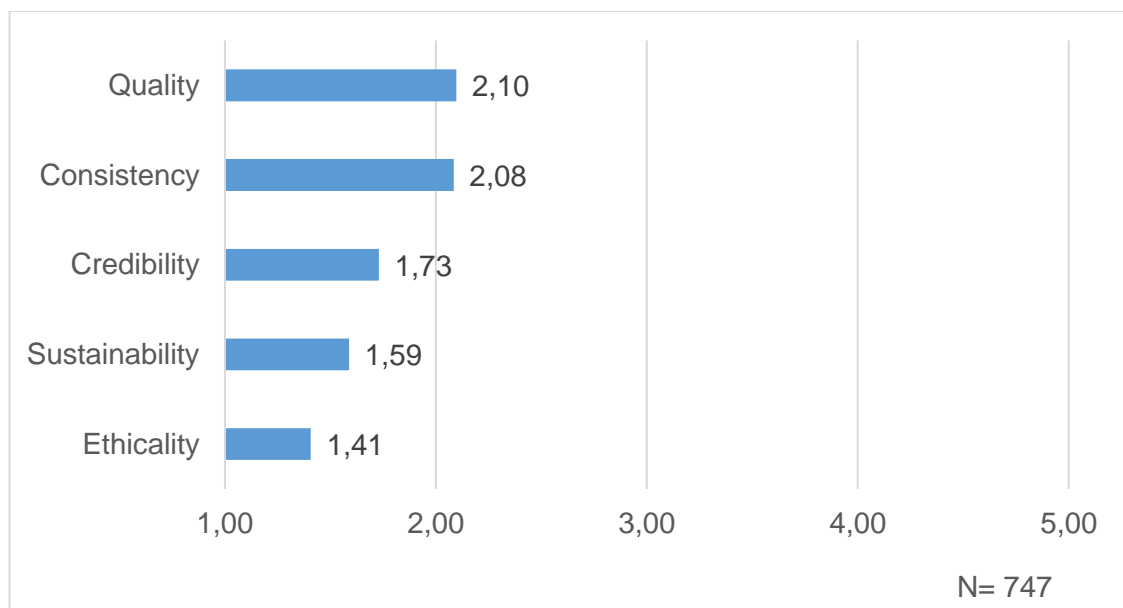


Figure 13. Mean of consumers' perception of brand attributes

The consumers were asked to rate their overall perception of a fast fashion brand that they believe is greenwashing. The results presented in the figure 14, show that around 45% of the respondents overall viewed the brand to be unfavourable, while only 0,5% of the respondents viewed the brand to be very favourable. However, 20,2% of the respondents overall viewed the brand to be neutral (figure 14).

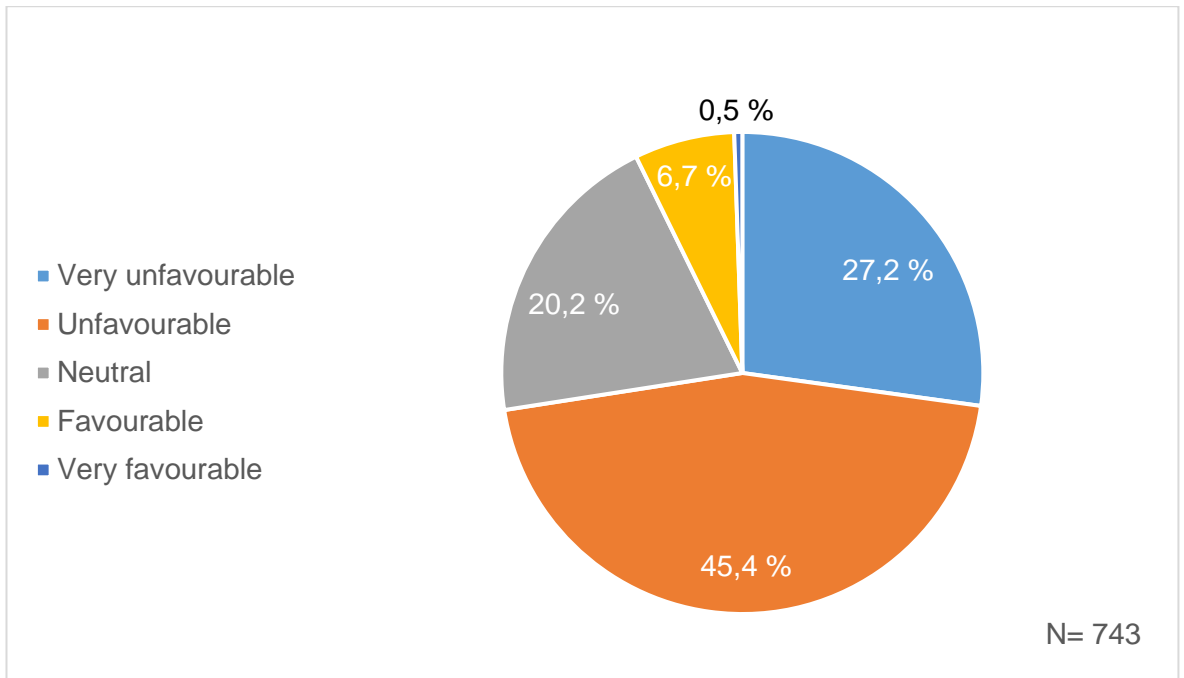


Figure 14. Overall perception of the brand

As a conclusion, the low ratings of the different attributes and the fact that over 70% of the respondents rated the overall brand perception as unfavourable or very unfavourable, indicates that the perceived greenwashing has impacted the brand perception of the respondents. The impact in this case is negative, as is expected as the phenomenon itself has a negative association.

4.4 Effects of Greenwashing on Buying Behaviour

The survey also examined how the perceived greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements affected the buying behaviour of the respondents. The respondents were asked if they would continue to purchase from a fast fashion brand they believe to be greenwashing. Around 65% of the respondents said they would not continue to purchase from a brand they believed to be greenwashing, while the rest, almost 35%, said they would continue to purchase from the brand (figure 15).

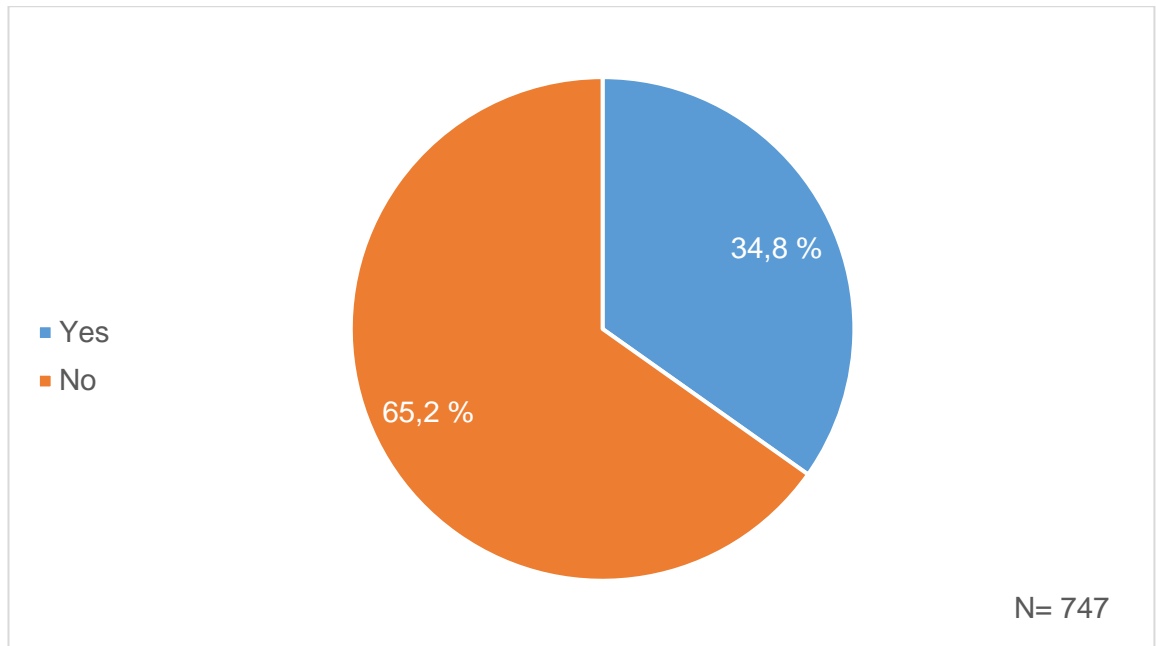


Figure 15. Would the respondents continue to purchase from the brand

If the respondents selected yes in the previous question relating to whether they would purchase from the brand again, the respondents were asked to indicate the reasons why they would continue to purchase. The respondents were given a predetermined list of reasons they were instructed to choose from, as well as possibility to select the open answer option “other”. The respondents were able to choose more than one reason.

The results presented in figure 16 show that over 90% of the respondents selected that the price of the products is an affecting factor in their choice to continue to purchase from a fast fashion brand that they believe is greenwashing. Additionally, the easy availability of the products was selected by 65% of the respondents. Only 6,5% of the respondents indicated that their family’s and friends’ usage of the products affected their decision to continue to purchase products from the brand.

Around 15% of the respondents chose the option “Other”. There were three most common comments made by respondents from this answer option. First, 8 out of 40 of the respondents indicated that they would continue to purchase due to the inclusion of plus sizes on an affordable price. One of the respondents stated that “I’m on a budget and I’m plus size, it’s very hard to find a sustainable combination of the two. I buy fast fashion when necessary”. Other respondents also indicated that they would continue to purchase from a fast fashion brand even if they were greenwashing, due to the affordable prices as well as the lack of sustainable clothing stores within their proximity. One respondent commented that there are “limited number of sustainable options within my country”.

Besides the sizing, affordable prices and lack of sustainable options, 12 out of 40 respondents commented on the fact that they rarely purchase new clothing and that the impact of purchasing 1 or 2 pieces from a fast fashion brand is minimal. As an example, one respondent stated, “I think buying clothes rarely, even if it’s fast fashion, is better than buying sustainable and eco-friendly but more often”. A few respondents also commented that ethical consumption in a capitalist society is not possible, and that purchasing a more sustainable product from a fast fashion brand would condition the brand to change their production methods. As an example of this, one respondent said that:

“As a fashion student who learns the complexity of fashion production and supply chain, I believe brands are stuck in their own system. They know there is a problem and want to do better, but due to the world being used to their low prices and high production they just can’t change it right away. I still buy products from them if I really love something and usually from the premium or sustainable collections to show the brand what products and attitudes should be a bigger percentage of their production, with me buying one 100% merino wool item from H&M instead of 5 acrylic sweaters”.

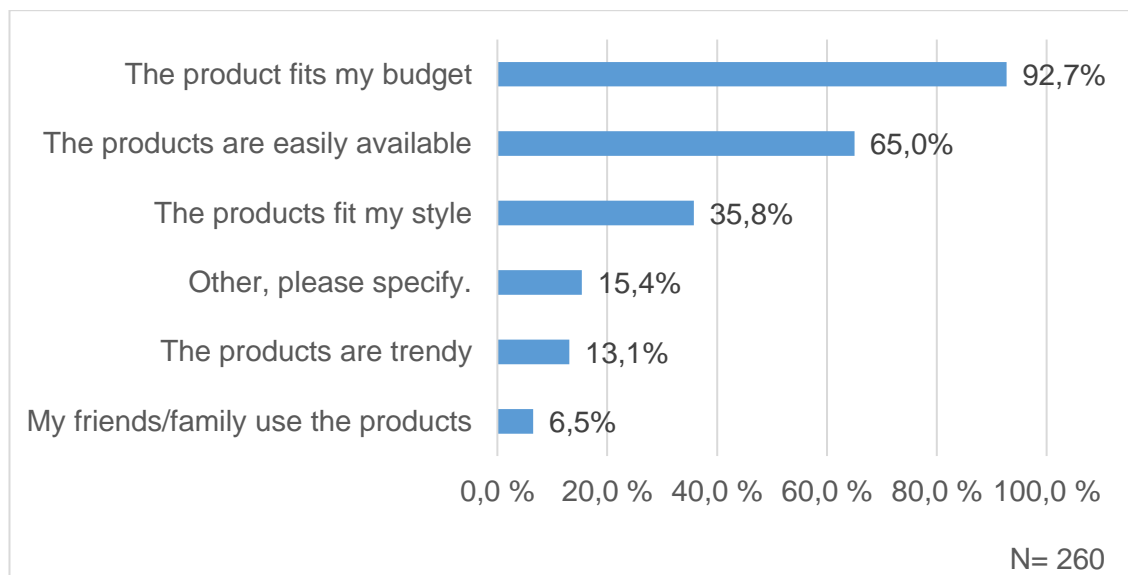


Figure 16. Reasons to continue to purchase

The respondents were asked how likely they would recommend a fast fashion brand they thought was greenwashing to their family, friends or on social media. The options were very unlikely, unlikely, likely, or very likely. As seen in figure 17, around 92% of the respondents would very unlikely or unlikely recommend the brand. Only 1,2% would very likely recommend the brand.

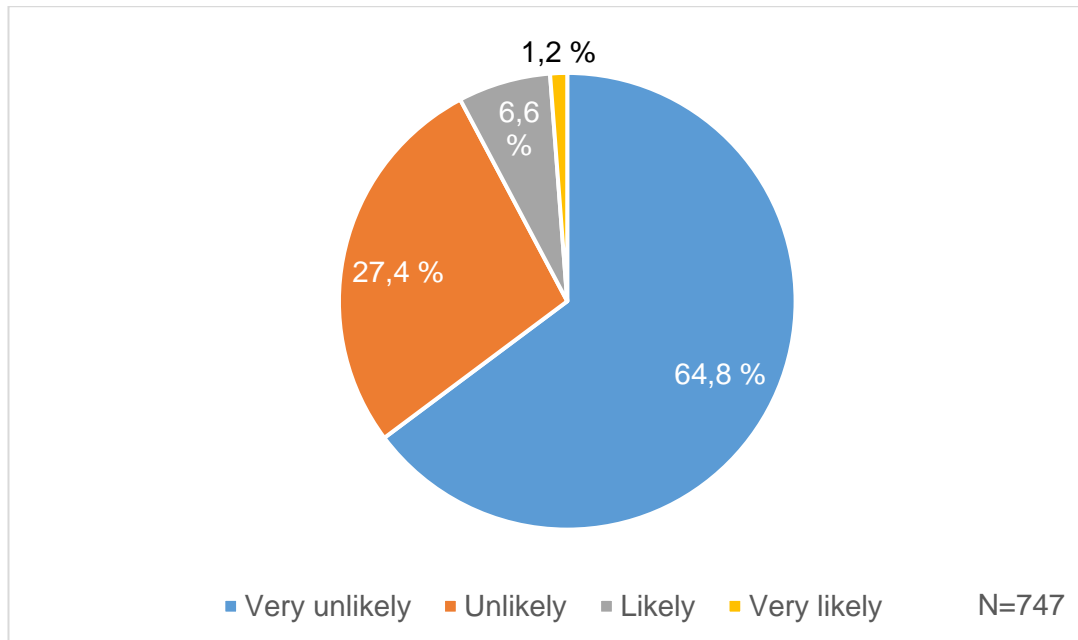


Figure 17. How likely would the respondents recommend the brand to friends and family or on social media

To summarize, it seems whether greenwashing has an effect or not on the buying behaviours of the respondents is often combined with other factors. Even though most of the respondents indicated that they would cease to purchase from the brand, a significant portion of the respondents indicated they would continue to purchase from the brand. The most common reasons for the continuing purchases were affordability and lack of access to more sustainable brands.

4.5 Negative Effects of Greenwashing on Brand Image

This subchapter will focus on the investigative question four, which is about the negative effects of greenwashing on brand image. The results within this subchapter are inferred from the data of the survey and interpreted according to the theory presented in the knowledge base subchapter 2.2.

As previously presented in the knowledge base, brand image is defined as how the brand is portrayed in the public eye and how this is perceived by the consumers. Whether the brand image is positive or negative is highly dependent on the associations of the consumers. The consumer associations are either indirect or direct based on whether the association is formed because of brand behaviour or external factors, such as information from a non-profit organisation. (Keller 2013, 78.)

Based on the results of the survey, it is possible to see a pattern of negative connotations that the respondents associate with the brands that greenwash. The respondents were

asked to rate the greenwashing brand on a scale of 1 to 5 in five different brand attributes (figure 13) as well as rate the overall perception of the brand from very unfavourable to very favourable (figure 14). Results from both questions indicated that the respondents have a negative overall view of the brand. The attributes that the respondents were asked to rate, quality, consistency, credibility, sustainability, and ethicality, were chosen as they represent an integral part of a brand. The respondents rated the above-mentioned attributes on average between 1,41-2,10 on a scale of 1 to 5. As the rating 3 is considered neutral within the scale, the results present a negative rating for the brand. Besides rating the attributes negatively, the respondents' overall perception of the brand was rated to be unfavourable or very unfavourable by over 70% of the respondents.

The above-mentioned results indicate that greenwashing has a direct link to how the consumers perceive the brand, and consequentially it has a direct effect on the brand image. The brands that use greenwashing in their advertisements might develop a negative brand image if the consumers find out about the greenwashing. As seen from the results, the brands credibility is lowered in the eyes of the consumers if caught greenwashing. This has long term effects on the brand image, as credibility is an important factor for a brand to develop their relationship with their consumers. One of the respondents stated, "If I see a brand that is greenwashing I wouldn't trust that brand anymore regardless of if they would change their habits", while another said "I don't purchase from brands I think to be greenwashing because they just don't seem credible to me".

Additionally, the negative effects of greenwashing on the brand image lead to negative effects on the buying behaviour. This is seen in figure 15 where over 65% of the respondents stated they would not purchase from the brand again, as well as in the figure 17 where over 90% of the respondents stated they would not recommend the brand to their family and friends or on social media.

To summarize, based on the survey results it can be interpreted that if a brand is greenwashing and they are caught in doing so by the consumers, the brand's image will be negatively affected. To which extend the brand image is negatively affected is determined case by case and depends on the consumers' individual associations with the brand. As for fast fashion brands, many of the respondents from the survey had already otherwise negative associations with the brands. This might cause fast fashion brands to be more affected by greenwashing than other brands. There is an underlying negative connotation between greenwashing and consumer perception of the brand image, which should be taken into consideration by the brands when performing marketing activities.

5 Discussion

This chapter includes the discussion on the results of the research related to the research objectives. The key findings subchapter presents the most interesting findings that answer the research question. Then the reliability and validity will be discussed before recommendations for companies and future research are given. At the end of this chapter, I will reflect on my own learning during the research process.

5.1 Key Findings

The objective of this research was to find out how young consumers, between the ages 18 to 35, react to fast fashion advertisements they believe are greenwashed. The research question was approached through the following aspects: awareness of greenwashing, its impact on brand perception and consumer buying behaviour as well as negative effects on brand image. This subchapter will follow the same order as the content of the results chapter 4.

The overall awareness of greenwashing within fast fashion advertisements was high amongst the survey respondents. Surprisingly, a large portion of the respondents were able to indicate precisely which platforms they had seen greenwashed fast fashion advertisements in. The ability to pinpoint exact platforms indicate that the respondents were previously familiar with the concept of greenwashing and were able to recollect fast fashion advertisements that they believed to be greenwashed. Only a small portion of the respondents were not able to point out any platforms, and cited lack of knowledge of the phenomenon as a reason. Additionally, majority of the respondents agreed that greenwashing is a common or very common phenomenon in the fast fashion advertisements, which further supports the conclusion that the respondents were highly aware of the greenwashing practises.

As greenwashing is a negative phenomenon, it was expected that it would have an impact on the overall perception of the brand. This was confirmed as majority of the respondents stated that their view of the brand is either unfavourable or very unfavourable. However, a significant portion of the respondents indicated that they have a neutral view of the greenwashing brand. This can be due to number of reasons, for example the lack of interest in fashion brands. This assumption is supported by the results that almost 50% of the respondents answered that fashion is either not important, slightly important, or neutral for them within the introductory questions.

Based on the research it seems that greenwashing's impact on the buying behaviour is highly dependent on accompanying factors, such as price and inaccessibility to more sustainable alternatives. A majority of the respondents indicated that greenwashing had an impact on their choice to cease purchasing from a brand, but there was also a portion of respondents that indicated that greenwashing would not deter them from purchasing from a brand in the future. When asked the reason for continuing purchasing, the respondents indicated that they cannot afford more sustainable alternatives, which are known to be significantly more expensive than fast fashion products. Another common reason was that there are no sustainable alternatives in their proximity and buying from online is not an option due to, for example, exclusive sizing. Most of the respondents that indicated they would continue to purchase from a greenwashing fast fashion brand, stated that their continued purchasing would be out of necessity rather than enjoyment.

As for the negative effects of greenwashing on brand image, the research seemed to confirm that there are some. The respondents indicated that greenwashing affects how they view the credibility of the brand. As credibility is highly important for brands in establishing a relationship with their consumers, the effects of greenwashing on credibility affect the entire brand. The consumers are likely to view the brand in a negative light if they cannot trust the brand, which increases the difficulty for the brand to restore a good brand image in the eyes of their consumers.

5.2 Reliability and Validity

This subchapter discusses the different actions taken by the researcher to ensure the reliability and validity of the research. According to Burns et al. (2017, 266) there are two types of common errors regarding survey-based research, which are sampling and non-sampling errors.

Using a nonprobability self-selection sampling has a risk of self-selection bias and cannot be applied to the full population with absolute certainty. This has been taken into consideration when doing the analysis to mitigate errors caused by this. The sampling method has been discussed more in detail in chapter 3.

The possible non-sampling errors are regarding aspects such as misunderstanding of the questions and incorrect analysis of the data. The survey's measurement questions are supported by the framework of investigative questions and justified with the help of the theoretical literature provided in chapter 2. The survey questions were worded concisely during the question development and design, to avoid possible misinterpretations or misunderstandings of the questions by the respondents.

While the analysis of data has some possibility for errors, they were mitigated through using standardised analysis tools, such as SPSS for the analysis and Excel for graphical presentation. The data and its analysis methods were rechecked multiple times during the entire analysis process, to avoid any miscalculations or misrepresentations.

5.3 Recommendations for Companies

This subchapter focuses on providing recommendations to companies interested in the topic based on the findings of the research. The recommendations are made based on the results of the survey and the interpretation of the key findings.

The first recommendation is for companies to re-evaluate whether to present environmental claims in their advertisement campaigns. Most of the respondents thought that companies that greenwash their advertisements lack credibility. The consumers are likely to scrutinize advertisements more if they include environmental claims than if they do not. As it might be hard for the consumers to separate actual truthful environmental claims from greenwashing, the consumers might perceive even the truthful claims as greenwashing in certain cases. This can cause the consumer to cease purchasing from the company.

The second recommendation is for the companies to be transparent with their environmental activities. Related to the previous recommendation, the companies should provide easily accessible information to verify the environmental claims they make in their advertisements. If the companies want the environmental claims to be as effective as possible, they should provide the information to verify the claims within the advertisement itself. This is due to two reasons. As presented in the research, consumers are likely not going to believe environmental claims if not given proof, and they are also likely not going to search the information by themselves. Therefore, providing the data to back up the environmental claims within the advertisements would be most effective for the company. If this is not possible, the companies should refer from presenting environmental claims at all.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

To continue from the previous subchapter's recommendations, this subchapter focuses on different aspects that could be researched further in the future.

Firstly, the future research could utilise more qualitative data collection methods. As the subject area of this research is quite subjective and relies a lot on the individual participants' perceptions, it could be useful to gather qualitative information to further develop the results presented in this research. Having participants give more in-depth answers and justify why they feel a certain way about the topic, could give additional value for the results presented in this research.

Besides conducting the future research using more qualitative data collection methods, the sampling method could also be different. Due to the time constraints and available resources, the results of this survey cannot be applied to the entire population with certainty. Using a random probability sampling could provide results that can be applied to the entire population.

Another very interesting aspect would be to include a large age demographic of consumers. As the focus was on young consumers, the results of this research cannot be applied to other age groups. It would be highly interesting to include older consumers to see if there are any differences between the younger and older consumers regarding their reactions to greenwashing. Additionally, other demographics such as gender, occupation and nationality could be included to see if they have any correlation to the reactions to greenwashing.

5.5 Reflection on Learning

This thesis process was highly educational and interesting for me. Conducting this research gave me an opportunity to explore an area of interest, which is sustainable marketing and development. The research further solidified and clarified that I want to focus on this topic area in my future academic, as well as professional career.

Doing the research was an opportunity to further develop and expand already existing theoretical knowledge and utilising said knowledge in practise. While doing the research, I noticed that the source material for the theory in this topic was quite scarce. As the greenwashing phenomenon is not yet highly researched, the number of source material was limited and often not available for free. Also, utilising library sources was certainly more difficult due to the current Covid-19 pandemic. I could not use some of the sources I had originally planned as no E-book copy of the materials were available. This taught me to adapt to situations that might not be as originally planned.

Another aspect that I learned during this research was scheduling, as I had to attend classes while conducting the research. While balancing healthy writing schedule was difficult

at times, in the end the whole process taught me perseverance and how to step out of my comfort zone. Additionally, the thesis topic was in my area of interest, which proved to give me the extra motivation to finish the research.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey

Consumer Perception of Greenwashing in Fast Fashion Advertisements

This study aims to gather knowledge about young consumers' perception of greenwashing in fast fashion advertisements. The survey should only take about 5 minutes to complete, and your answers are completely anonymous. The results of this survey are utilised in my bachelor's thesis from Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

If you have any questions about the survey, please email me at camilla.sinisalo@myy.haaga-helia.fi.

Thank you for your participation!

What is your age? *

- 17 or younger
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66 or older

What is your nationality? In case of multiple nationalities, choose primary one. *

How concerned are you about the current and future state of the environment? *

1= Not at all concerned, 2= Slightly concerned, 3= Concerned, 4= Very concerned

1	2	3	4
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Does your concern for the environment impact your everyday purchases?

- Yes
- No

If you selected yes, please pick the category(ies) in which you are most environmentally conscious.

- Clothing and apparel
- Beauty and personal care
- Food and beverage
- Household items
- Electronics
- Transportation
- Other, please specify.

In general, how important is fashion for you?

1= Not at all important, 2= Slightly important, 3= Neutral, 4= Important, 5= Very important

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The questions in the next section focus on greenwashing on fast fashion advertisements. Based on the examples given below, think about all the fast fashion advertisements you have seen and answer the questions based on your own experiences.

Below you can see the definitions of the terms used within the survey. Additionally, you can find examples of phrases used in greenwashed advertisements as well as an advertisement image that was criticized for being greenwashed.

Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers about the environmental practises of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or a service.

Fast fashion means clothing and accessories that are mass produced with low price and quality, the sales volumes are large, and the selection of styles changes constantly. Brands such as H&M and Zara are categorised as fast fashion brands.

Common phrases used in greenwashed fast fashion advertisements:

- Made of natural materials
- Made of recycled materials
- Sustainable option
- Sustainably made
- Eco-friendly



Where have you seen fast fashion advertisements you thought were greenwashed? *

- Television
- Radio
- Newspaper
- Magazine
- Billboard
- Instagram
- Facebook
- Pinterest
- Twitter
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Other, please specify.
- Have not seen

Do you research more about the brand if you think a fast fashion advertisement contains greenwashing? *

- Yes
- No

If you selected yes, where do you find more information? *

- Corporation social responsibility (CSR) report
- Brand website/social media
- Non-profit organisations
- News publications/articles
- Other, please specify.

If you selected no, please pick the reason(s) why. *

- Brand seems credible
- Have purchased from the brand before
- Too time consuming
- Other, please specify.

How common do you think greenwashing is in fast fashion advertisements? *

*

1= Very Uncommon, 2= Uncommon, 3= Common 4= Very common

1	2	3	4
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate a fast fashion brand you think is greenwashing on the following:

	1	2	3	4	5
Credibility *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Consistency *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Quality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sustainability *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethicality *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you describe the overall perception of the brand?

1=Very unfavourable, 2=Unfavourable, 3=Neutral, 4= Favourable, 5=Very favourable

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Would you continue to purchase from a fast fashion brand if you think they are greenwashing? *

Yes

No

If you selected yes, please pick the reason(s) why. *

The product fits my budget

The products are easily available

The products fit my style

The products are trendy

My friends/family use the products

My favourite influencer uses the products

Other, please specify.

How likely would you recommend a fast fashion brand and its products to your friends, family or on social media if you thought the brand was greenwashing? *

1= Very unlikely, 2= Unlikely, 3= Likely, 4= Very likely

1 2 3 4

Appendix 2. List of nationalities

Nationality	Frequency	Percent
Argentina	4	0,54 %
Australia	25	3,35 %
Austria	8	1,07 %
Barbados	1	0,13 %
Belgium	9	1,20 %
Brazil	4	0,54 %
Bulgaria	3	0,40 %
Cambodia	1	0,13 %
Canada	43	5,76 %
Chile	3	0,40 %
China	1	0,13 %
Colombia	7	0,94 %
Croatia	2	0,27 %
Czech Republic	6	0,80 %
Denmark	5	0,67 %
Dominican Republic	1	0,13 %
Ecuador	3	0,40 %
Egypt	2	0,27 %

El Salvador	2	0,27 %
Estonia	1	0,13 %
Ethiopia	2	0,27 %
Finland	65	8,70 %
France	23	3,08 %
Germany	35	4,69 %
Greece	11	1,47 %
Guatemala	1	0,13 %
Honduras	1	0,13 %
Hungary	4	0,54 %
India	9	1,20 %
Ireland	7	0,94 %
Israel	1	0,13 %
Italy	25	3,35 %
Jordan	2	0,27 %
Lithuania	1	0,13 %
Mexico	12	1,61 %
Myanmar (Burma)	1	0,13 %
Nepal	1	0,13 %
Netherlands	19	2,54 %
New Zealand	9	1,20 %
Nigeria	1	0,13 %
Norway	2	0,27 %
Peru	1	0,13 %
Philippines	4	0,54 %
Poland	7	0,94 %
Portugal	9	1,20 %
Romania	3	0,40 %
Russia	7	0,94 %
Saudi Arabia	2	0,27 %
Serbia	2	0,27 %
Singapore	3	0,40 %
Slovakia	4	0,54 %
Slovenia	1	0,13 %
South Africa	3	0,40 %
Spain	21	2,81 %
Sweden	10	1,34 %
Switzerland	7	0,94 %
Tunisia	2	0,27 %
Turkey	4	0,54 %
United Kingdom	42	5,62 %
United States of America	249	33,33 %
Vietnam	2	0,27 %
Zimbabwe	1	0,13 %
Total	747	100,00 %