Consumer Awareness on Sustainable Fashion

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Abstract

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Title of the thesis

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Abstract

The thesis work studied the factors influencing the decision-making process of the consumers for purchasing sustainable fashion products. Consequently, the research aim was to evaluate the customer opinion of sustainable fashion products in order to close the gap between consumer environmental awareness and buying behavior.

The study is based on the three theoretical concepts: Sustainable fashion industry, consumer buying behavior, and the gap between awareness and action. The first concept provides the answers to the questions of what sustainability is within the fashion industry, how sustainable fashion products are promoted, and what threats to sustainable fashion exist. The second concept introduces the factors that influence consumer buying behavior. The third concept evaluates the consumer awareness of sustainable fashion.

The thesis work employs a qualitative research method and a deductive approach. The qualitative approach was selected to gain a better understanding of consumer behavior. Data is gathered from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary data include books, journals, research papers, and other trustworthy online sources. The interview gathered primary data.

The study found out that the high price of sustainable fashion products is the first barrier for the adaptation by the consumers. Another issue is the unavailability of sustainable clothes in the trusted stores where the consumers are usually purchasing their clothes.

Keywords

Sustainable consumer behaviour, Green marketing, Greenwashing, Sustainable fashion products
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Appendix 1. Interview questions
1 Introduction

1.1 Thesis background

Nowadays, the fashion industry is reported as the fourth-highest consumer of primary raw materials and water after food, housing, and transportation (European Commission 2020, 13). The reason for high consumption lies in the way how textiles are produced. Another important factor that should be considered is the consumer perspective, where the lifestyle changes caused by the sociological and cultural factors are forcing the retailers to constantly adapt to the consumers’ demand (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst 2009, 166.) Therefore, fast fashion became the main business model for a whole industry where the retailers are in high competition with each other to deliver low cost and high flexible design products to the market, describe Doyle & Moore (2006) (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst 2009, 165). As a result, Fast fashion encourages consumers to make their purchases frequently and dispose of them immediately. Therefore, 20 % of all textiles end as waste, with less than 1 % of all textiles in the world are recycled into new textiles (Armstrong et al. 2014, 1; Ellen McArthur Foundation 2017, 21). As an outcome, 10% of global carbon emissions are produced by the textile industry, highlights the European Commission (2020). Moreover, by 2050 the carbon emission will increase its global share up to 26% by remaining the Fast fashion as the primary business model by the fashion industry, describes Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017).

Thus, due to environmental deterioration, the companies were forced by the publicity to change their business sustainable, explain Govender, J. & Govender, T. (2016). As a result, green marketing has emerged as a tool to educate consumers and influence buying behavior. According to Koca & Koc (2016), consumers decide what clothing to buy; they are influenced to a significant degree as much by the information they have been given by fashion, branding, and marketing activities as they are by individual psychological and social factors. Therefore, to influence the customers, the products should be considered from the customer point of view.

Already since 2009 sustainability has become so important that more than 75% of S&P companies had publicized their social and environmental performance on their own web pages (Alves 2009, according to Delmas & Burbano 2013, 64). Thus, the forced being sustainable fast fashion industry (companies) used greenwashing to succeed on the green markets. According to Aragón-Correa (1998), greenwashing behavior identifies two patterns: poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance (Delmas & Burbano 2013, 65).
1.2 Thesis objectives, research questions and limitations

The objective of this thesis is to examine the consumer behaviors and also the factors influencing the decision-making process of the consumers for purchasing sustainable fashion products. As a result, this thesis will identify why sustainable fashion is mostly not the first choice by the consumers. The main research question is defined as:

What factors influence the consumer decision in purchasing sustainable fashion products?

In order to answer the main question, there were determined a sub-question, which are:

- What are internal and external factors, and how influence consumer’s buying behavior?
- What is the customer opinion about sustainable fashion?

This research does not cover the deep analysis of the development of the sustainable fashion industry and just gives a basic understanding of the concepts such as sustainability, green marketing, and greenwashing to understand the consumer opinion about sustainable fashion. In addition to that, the education level as the personal factor which is influencing the buying behavior will not be analyzed deeply because the research will be only conducted among university students with the same education level. The empirical part of the study is limited by the small number of interviewees, approximately eight students in the age of 18-25. This age group was chosen since they are less concerned about purchasing sustainable products than other age groups, describes Kafkava (2019). For this reason, the result of the thesis will not represent the whole student group in Europe.

1.3 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework aims to describe the theoretical part of the study connected to the topic of the study. The research introduces the concepts such as sustainability, green marketing and consumer buying behavior.

The thesis aim is to provide the understanding of the theoretical background which is built on the previous research outcomes, academic journals, and books.

1.4 Research methodology and data collection

The qualitative research method should be chosen as an appropriate one as outlined by Stake (2010) when the goal of the research is to explain a phenomenon by relying on the
understanding of consumer’s perception of a person’s experience a given situation (Stake 2010). Otherwise, is the quantitative research method which is used when the variables relationships examining is required, describes Creswell (2003). This study aims to analyze buying behavior by purchasing sustainable textile the qualitative approach is the most appropriate choice. Moreover, according to the qualitative research method, the data will be acquired through the interview with a small sample size of eight students while the literature review provides a foundation for the research question, defines Levy & Ellis (2006) (Azungah 2018, 11). The reason to interview the LAB students is that the students are in the suitable age group 18-25 that will be researched, and they were easier to reach compared to other groups. For appropriate answering of the “how” and “why” questions, the semi-structured interview should be taken (Azungah 2018, 11). As a result, the collected data will be analyzed through the deductive approach, where the analysis is based on pre-existing theory (Azungah 2018, 11). Therefore, the analysis is based on secondary data such as academic journals, books, and other thesis with a combination of collected primary data (interviews).

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis is divided into six parts which are:

• Introduction
• Theoretical Part
• Methodology
• Analysis and results
• Conclusion
• Summary

The introduction aims to present the research background in order to broaden readers’ understanding of the topic. Therefore, it explains why the topic is important to research. Besides this, the introduction includes parts such as thesis objectives, research questions, limitations, theoretical framework, research methodology, and data collection.

The theoretical part of the thesis is divided into three main parts.

First, the sustainable fashion industry includes sustainability within the fashion industry, green marketing, greenwashing, green marketing, and greenwashing.
Second, consumer buying behavior includes sustainable buying behavior and factors that affect sustainable consumer behavior.

Third, the gap between awareness and action introduces topics such as the attitude–behavior gap in sustainable consumption and consumer awareness on sustainable fashion.

The methodological part describes implemented research method for acquiring and procuring secondary and primary data.

The fourth chapter analysis and results are focusing on collecting and analyzing the primary data.

Conclusion introduces the answers to the research questions, the research's validity and reliability, shortcomings, and recommendations for future research.

The summary part concludes all the relevant details from the entire thesis.
2 Sustainable fashion industry

2.1 Sustainability within the fashion industry

The principles of sustainable fashion are based on the concept of sustainable development summarized in the Brundtland report and Rio summit (Muthu 2019, 2). Sustainable development can be described as the development of the current generation without compromising the future generation (Muthu 2019, 2). Therefore, sustainable development is addressed to three pillars which are the economic pillar (providing sustainable economic development), the social pillar (decrease of differences among the people), and the environmental pillar (environmental protection), describes Muthu (2019, 3-4.) Moreover, according to Paehike (2000) the central values in environmentalism that is the first step to sustainable developments are explained by the protection of the environment, consideration of negative impacts on human health, and finally, the sustainable use of resources (Niinimäki 2015, 1).

As a result, sustainable fashion as a part of a slow fashion movement is identifying fair working conditions as the main business model (Joergens 2006, 361), where the fashion products are produced with environmentally friendly materials that are traceable for consumers explains Henninger (2015) (Panayiota & Oates 2016, 1). Therefore, Niinimäki (2015) supports the factors mentioned earlier by highlighting the values and ethics crucial for the sustainable fashion.

Hence, sustainable fashion aims to reduce the number of fashion products while increasing its quality, describe Fletcher (2010); Ertekin & Atik (2014) (Panayiota & Oates 2016, 2). For this reason, methods of utilizing upcycling, recycling, and traditional production techniques and incorporating renewable and organic raw materials are applied (Johnston 2012, according to Panayiota & Oates 2016, 2). Moreover, according to sustainable developments, Walker (2007, 70) states that an additional value to the sustainable fashion products can be added (Niinimäki 2015, 2). Consequently, by applying sustainable value by eco-materials, leftover materials, recycled products, and parts, and a ‘classical’ appearance renting, leasing, or other actions aimed at dematerializing consumption can be viewed as sustainable value actions describes Niinimäki (2015).

According to Brisma (2019), sustainable fashion relies on sustainable development (ethical and social), and sustainable production and distribution can be divided into seven forms.
Figure 1. Seven forms of sustainable fashion (Brismar 2019)

As a result, the Figure 1 depicts seven types of sustainable fashion from both the customer and manufacturer perspectives. While clothes and other fashion items should ideally be manufactured and consumed in the manner mentioned above, this is not yet the situation. (Brismar 2019).
2.2 Green marketing

A sustainable future cannot be achieved when the manufacturing, processing, and marketing are causing damage on a large scale to the environment, explain Saha & Darnton (2005) and Bandura (2007) (Gordon et al. 2011, 144).

Therefore, for a long time, the marketing was seen as a significant contributor to an unsustainable demand and a high consumption level of consumers, describes Peattie (2001). As a result, sustainable fashion was created as a part of the slow fashion concept (Aakko & Sivonen 2013, 13-14.) Moreover, the sustainability approach relies on the framework mentioned above of the Brundtland report (1987) where the consumption and production method are not fulfilled on expenses of future generations (Peattie 2001, 131). Therefore, Shen & Richards and Liu (2013) highlight that the term sustainable fashion is requiring a combining of two concepts (green and ethical fashion) with the same shared goal (Shen et al. 2013, 135). According to Fletcher (2008) & Joergens (2006) the criterion of ethnic fashion is defined by the principles of fair trade where the production is relying on the sweatshop-free labor condition that does not harm the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton. In contrast, green fashion's goal is to ensure the use of recycled materials and biodegradable fibers by the production (Shen et al. 2013, 135.)

Govender & Govender (2016) described the main goal of marketing as influencing the buying behavior, educating, and communicating process. Therefore, the objective of green marketing is almost identical to traditional marketing, but the only difference is that the promoted good is environmentally safe and can satisfy consumers’ environmental needs, explains Ansar (2013) (Govender & Govender 2016, 77). Besides this, green marketing is focused on developing the green product and its promotion, implementing the green price and green place (Govender & Govender 2016, 77). The green consumers are identified by green marketing as the main target group for the green business, describes Boztepe (2012). For this reason, the socio-demographic profiles (age, education) are considered as commonly used by identification of the green consumer explain Akehurst, Afonso & Goncalves (2012) and Choi & Kim (2012) (Govender & Govender 2016, 78).

The green product is described by Diglel & Yazdanifard (2014) as a good, and its package is made of recycled material with a minimum negative impact on the environment (Govender & Govender 2016, 77). To possess the green product, the green consumer must pay a green price refers Burrow (2008) (Govender & Govender 2016, 78). Therefore, the price is highlighted as a major element for the green marketing mix due the price is a crucial indicator for the purchase intentions of a green product by consumers. Visual communication such as packaging is used as a strong marketing tool when the consumer
has a lack of previous knowledge about the product. As a result, the package provides identification, protection to the product and makes it more competitive, describes Agyeman (2014) (Govender & Govender 2016, 78). In consideration of the concept of the green marketing mix, the green place (product placing) is ensuring that the target group (green consumer) by applying the marketing activities acts in purchasing the green product (Govender & Govender 2016, 78.)

2.3 Greenwashing

The term greenwashing is explained by Delmas & Burbano (2011) as misleading the consumers about the company’s performance or benefits by using their product or service. The phenomenon of greenwashing has appeared as the companies have started to use green marketing activities in order to gain a competitive advantage in the market, describe Szabo & Webster (2020) & Delmas & Burbano (2011). As a result, the companies that focused on positive communication by a poor environmental performance were identified as “brown,” describes Delmas & Burbano (2011). Therefore, the two main reasons for greenwashing were classified as the lack of penalties for the greenwash and the customer and investor demand for green products or services (Delmas & Burbano 2011, 67.) Additionally, the company TerraChoice Group has grouped companies’ greenwash behavior into “seven sins” where these range from a hidden tradeoff (the green product is produced without consideration of several other environmental attributes), the sin of fibbing (not fulfilling environmental promises), sin of no proof, the sin of vagueness the sin of irrelevance, the sin of lesser of two evils, and the sin of worshiping false labels, explain Delmas & Burbano (2011).

2.4 Greenwashing and Green marketing

Greenwashing is considered as one of the challenges for green marketing in the market (Choudhary & Gakarn 2013, 28.) The signals (false promises etc.) send by the greenwashing practices undermine consumer confidence in green products and make green marketing methods less efficient. Multiple studies have found that it is difficult for consumers to identify the advertisement as greenwashed (Newel et al. 1998; Krafft 2014, according to Urbanski & Haque 2020, 2). However, numerous researchers found out that the products that are greenwashed are likely purchased more, describes Krafft (2014) (Urbanski & Haque 2020, 20). Hence, the consumers who develop a skepticism for green marketing will negatively affect the purchase volume of green products (Albayrak et al. 2011, according to Szabo & Webster 2020, 5). For this reason, skepticism is following to low confidence and a high perceived risk that impacts the consumer’s buying behavior.
describe Horiuchi & Schuchard (2009) (Chen & Chang 2012, 490). Moreover, the perceived risk is described as

“the expectation negative environmental consequences associated with purchase behavior” (Chen & Chang 2012, 494).

To sum up greenwashing can destroy the green market by making consumers distrustful of green products (Polonsky et al. 2010 according to Chen & Chang 2012, 490).
3 Consumer buying behavior

3.1 Sustainable buying behavior

Understanding consumer requirements is a difficult task for any company. For this reason, many researchers have used different definitions to explain consumer behavior (Muthu 2019, 6). The widely accepted definition of consumer behavior is described accordingly by Perner (2010) as the study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select and use products, services, experiences in order to satisfy needs and the impacts of these activities on consumer and society (Muthu 2019, 5). As a result, the consumer buying process is described through the five purchase decision stages (problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, decision and purchase and post-purchase evaluation), where the consumer’s purchase is a reaction to the problem (Solomon et al. 2006, 258.)
The first stage of the buying process is problem recognition which occurs when the consumer identifies a significant difference between their own current state and desired state. Therefore, the consumers could have two different kinds of problems (need and opportunity recognition) whereby the need recognition is aiming to fulfill the consumer’s basic needs otherwise are the opportunity recognition by which the consumers are striving for different or better-quality products. (Solomon et al. 2006, 263.)

The second stage of the buying process is described as the information search process in which the consumer explores his or her environment for appropriate data in order to make the right buying decision. The researchers identify two different search models, such as Pre-purchase search and ongoing search on the market. On the one hand, the pre-purchase search is aiming for collecting the knowledge about the product for a better purchase decision on other hand is an ongoing type of search which is made for pleasure and fun with the outcome of a personal influence describe Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg (2006).

The third stage of the buying decision process is identifying the alternatives where the consumer is going through several criteria such as brand, price, etc., in order to have the ability to find the benefit that was sought (Solomon et al. 2006, 272-273.) According to Munthiu (2009) the complexity of the evaluation process depends on the consumer’s experience, the importance of the product, and a high cost of making false decisions. An evaluating process should consider the consumer’s beliefs and attitudes (Munthiu 2009, 28.)

The fourth element of the buying process is purchase decision, where the consumer is usually purchasing the preferred product. Nevertheless, the purchase decision can be disrupted by two factors (attitudes of others and unexpected situational factors) (Munthiu 2009, 30.)

In the post-purchase process, the consumer is evaluating his satisfaction level with the purchased product and own expectation. Therefore, product satisfaction will lead to the repeated purchase decision, explains Munthiu (2009). As a result, a permanent high repurchase rate of the product in the market ends with a disposal issue in which the consumer disposes of the product with no or little attention to the environment.
For this reason, sustainable consumer behavior is aiming to protect the environment and society. The concept of sustainable buying behavior is relying on two principles of sustainable developing formulated in the Brundtland report (1987) and by Norwegian Ministry of the Environment (1994) where sustainable development is described as:

“The use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” (Kostadinova 2016, 225).

Additionally, to the methods above for clarifying sustainable consumer behavior, the United Nations Environmental Programme UNEP (2002) has grouped the buying behavior based on the human`s central life functions such as nutrition, mobility, housing, clothing, education, health, and leisure with the aim of sustainability (Kostadinova 2016, 225).

According to Kostadinova (2016) the sustainable consumer behavior is based on theories of Reasoned Action (1980) and Planned Behavior (1988) developed by Ajzen and Fishbein. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) is considered as widely used by the pre-diction of pro-environmental Behavior, especially by identifying behavior intention to purchase a green product describe Paul, Modi & Patel (2016); Wang, Zhang, Yin & Zhang (2011) (Kostadinova 2016, 225). Therefore, the planned behavior is based on the components of attitudes and norms (Moser 2015, 168.)

3.2 Factors that affect sustainable consumer behavior

Consumer behavior is being influenced by numerous factors, such as internal and external factors. According to Muthu (2019); Boztepe (2012) the internal factors are attributed to psychological and personal factors, and external ones to referred to sociological factors such as culture, subcultures, demographics, social status, reference groups, family, and marketing activities and etc.

3.2.1 Individual-related factors

The consumer buying decisions are affected, according to Joshi & Rahman (2015), by several individual-related factors such as 1) knowledge 2) perceived consumer
effectiveness, 3) values, 4) age, 5) trust, 6) economic conditions 7) environmental concern 9) lifestyle 10) gender.

First, sustainable knowledge, also known as environmental knowledge, is based on the rules of sustainability as follow: the consumers understand the environmental and social impact of products or services, and the chose products are produced in an unsustainable way (D’Souza, Taghian, & Lamb 2006, according to Kong et al. 2016, 107). The consumer knowledge was identified by Bettman & Park (1980) as a crucial factor for all phases of the consumer decision-making process (Kang et al. 2013, 443). In the previous studies, environmental knowledge was identified as a contributor to the development of environmental concern (Ellen et al. 1991; Kim & Damhorst 1998; Chan 2001; Lee, 2011; Tan, 2011, according to Kang et al. 2013, 443). As a result, the consumers with a higher environmental knowledge display relativity to consumers with a lower environmental knowledge more environmental concern by choosing and purchasing products explain Kim & Damhorst (1998) (Kang et al. 2013,443). For this reason, the research conducted by Stern & Ander (2008) has shown that 59% of respondents with sustainable knowledge will consider the green product as the alternative to the common product while 12% of respondents will actively go for green products (Lin & Lin 2015, 15.) The information used by consumers for the decision-making process is sourced from education, peer influence, and corporate marketing information (Mu et al. 2012 according to Kong et al. 2016, 106). Public education as one sources for sustainable knowledge aims to develop the pro-environmental behavior pattern of consumers by describing them ecological and social consequences of products or services explain Arbuthnot (2009) and Haron, Paim, & Yahaya (2005). Despite the influence of education on sustainable behavior, education alone cannot be responsible for all other behavioral affecting factors, indicating UNESCO (1997) (Kong et al. 2016, 106.)

The consumers are receiving the companies´ information via companies’ messages, logos, and spokespersons (Schlegelmilch & Pollach 2005, according to Kong et al. 2016, 106).

Second, despite a high environmental concern, the consumers do not always convert their green attention into the purchase process, describe Vermeir & Verbeke (2008) (Kang et al. 2013,442). Thus, the perceived consumer effectiveness aims to close the gap between environmental concern and environmentally sustainable behavior by measuring the consumers´ effort to solve environmental problems (Roberts 1996 according to Kang et al. 2013, 444). The term perceived consumer effectiveness is regarding Hanss & Doran (2020, 536) is explained as “a consumer’s level of confidence in being able to bring about outcomes
that he or she values and wants to achieve”. Therefore, the consumers show an increased consumption of the sustainable products resulting directly from a high level of the perceived consumer effusiveness explain Vermeir & Verbeke (2008) (Kang et al. 2013, 442).

Third, to the factors mentioned above, the values play a crucial role in developing sustainable behavior and attitudes (Olson & Zanna 1994 according to Tan 2011, 1767). Schwartz (1992) describes the term values as the guiding principles of the individual that impact evaluating the environment (Tan 2011, 1767). Therefore, the values were identified by many researchers as a tool for the prediction of green/pro-environmental consumption behavior describe Jan, Ji & Yeo (2019, 3). The differences in values were described by the value typology of 57 values defined by Schwartz (1992), which can be grouped into ten-value clusters where the clusters of conformity, tradition, universalism, benevolence are attributed to social values, and the clusters of power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, and security are described as individualistic values (Collins et al. 2007, 558). The attitudes, also known as beliefs, are more specific than the values since they can be quickly adopted due to the new information in the presence (Collins et al. 2007, 559.) As a result, according to the ten value clusters of Schwartz the universalism was found as a positive for pro-environmental behavior in correlation with the values and beliefs (Collins et al. 2007.) Therefore, the attributes of universalism values are described as follows: equality, a world at peace, unity with nature, wisdom, a beautiful world, social justice, broad-mindedness, and protecting the environment describes Schwartz (1992) (Collins et al. 2007, 559). Nevertheless, the correlation of power and traditions was identified as negative for environmentalism since the consumers with the values for humans, and the environment (universalism) show a pro-environmental behavioral patterns by benefiting the thing they value describe Collins, Steg & Koning (2007). For this reason, the power motivated consumers are described as less environmentally concerned due to the own advancement, e.g., economic interest or the conservative point of view as a result of the traditional values (Collins et al. 2007, 559).

Fourth, age as a part of the sociodemographic factor was found as a strong contributor to an environmental attitude describe Buttel (1979); Fransson & Gärling (1999); Mohai & Twight (1987); Wright, Caserta& Lund (2003) (Kafková 2019, 201). According to the survey conducted by Special Eurobarometer 416 (2017) the 41% of the respondent of age between 15 and 24 have replied that they behaved environmentally friendly in everyday life in the last six months, while the elder respondents age 40 to 54 showed with 54% a greater environmental awareness (Kafková 2019, 202.) As a result, the younger respondents infrequently show the attributes of pro-environmental behavior such as waste-reducing and decreasing of own consumption (Kafková 2019, 203.) Nevertheless, as described by
Special Eurobarometer 416 (2014), the younger consumers are showing a greater environmental awareness than the elder age group by choosing an environmentally friendly means of transport (Kafková 2019, 203).

Fifth, due to a high environmental concern, the trust in green products among consumers is still lacking. Chen & Chang (2012) describe the greenwash as one of the reasons for it. The green trust is described regarding Chen & Chang (2012)

“a willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance”.

Therefore, in general, trust in the context of buying behavior is showing a positive influence on consumers' purchases since its decline the uncertainty level of the consumers by choosing a product describes Luhmann (2000) (Kenning 2008,466). Besides this, Mitchell (1999) states that the trust aims to decline the perceived risk, which is negatively affecting the purchase intentions (Chen & Chang 2012, 69).

Sixth, personal income as a part of economic conditions has been found as a decisive factor for the buying behavior where the level of income is a predictor for environmental awareness in correlation with the person’s attitudes (Junaedi 2012, 374; Ramya & Ali 2016, 79). Therefore, the willingness to pay a marginally higher price due to social responsibility depends on the consumers’ income level (Junaedi 2012, 374). As a result, the price sensitivity decreases as the consumers' income and consumer education increase (Hoch et al. 1996 according to Mehmet & Gül 2014, 74). However, according to Bloom & Sevilla (2004), countries with a low-income level per capita show no willingness to purchase an eco-friendly product (Junaedi 2012, 375).

Seventh, the environmental concern is considered by researchers as one of the most influencing factors of sustainable consumer behavior (Kostadinova 2016, 228). The term environmental concern is described by Ajzen (1989) as

“an individual’s assessment or attitude towards the facts, their behavior or the behavior of other people, that have an impact on the environment”.

Thus, many researchers usually see environmental concern as a significant predictive factor of sustainable behavior that directly influences consumers' purchase intention (Bamberg 2003; White et al. 2013; Pagiaslis et al. 2014; McDonald et al 2015; Felix et al. 2018,
according to Yue et al. 2020, 4). As a result, it has been found that consumers with a high level of environmental concerns tend to show a willingness to respond to an environmental problem (McDonald et al. 2015 according to Yue et al. 2020, 13). Mostafa (2009) and Suki (2016) highlighted different consumption patterns between green consumers and non-green consumers where the environmentally concerned consumers are willing to purchase a green product (Yue et al. 2020, 15).

Ninth, the consumer lifestyle is described as a unique living pattern, and expression of habits which are based on a combination of the buying behavioral affecting factors such as: interest, choices, preferences, values, and opinions describe Yakup & Jablonsk (2012) and Rani (2014) (Rehman et al. 2017, 2). The differences between the individuals in the same culture, social class, and occupation make the lifestyle of each consumer unique where the buying behavior process is affected by the thoughts and opinion of each person (Khaniwale 2015 according to Rehman et al. 2017, 2). As a result, the lifestyle in the context of sustainability depends on green perceptions and consumption styles which can be interpreted as a lifestyle-based interpretation of an individual consumer’s concern about the environmental issues; thus, various lifestyle-based factors are expected to influence consumers’ green attitudes and consumer behavior (Haanpää 2007, 1-3.)

The ninth internal factor is the consumer’s gender, in which the males’ and females’ clothing purchase behavior is different describe Workman and Studak (2006) (Muthu et al. 2019, 13). Lin & Lin (2015) confirm the differences by conducting the survey where the female participants were identified as more environmentally conscious whilst the male participants are interested in a personal benefit. As an outcome, the women are, on average better communicators and more likely to share knowledge about their personal interests and hobbies than men. Moreover, female customers are more likely to express or impart their personal shopping experiences and opinions on different product use describes Barletta (2007) (Lin & Lin 2015, 30). Besides this, Workman & Studak (2006) explain the differences due to a different approach where the female is mostly relying on want-based approach while male on need-based approach by purchasing the products (Muthu 2019, 12).

3.2.2 Contextual/situational factors

The individual-related factors are constantly in change due to a different contexts and situations therefore it is necessary to consider situational factors affecting consumer behavior describes Biel (2004) (Kostadinova 2016, 229). According to Kostadinova (2016) the situation factors are described as follows: product value and quality, price, social class, brand image, product availability.
First, a situational factor that influences consumer behavior is product value and quality. The product value, also known as the perceived value, is based on the equity theory in which the consumers ratio of value (outcome/income) is equal to the value provided product describe Oliver & DeSarbo (1988) (Cheung et al. 2015, 235.) The value in the context of sustainable fashion is perceived by the product’s benefits such as healthier, longer-lasting, unique designs, timeless cuts, and higher-quality textiles and psychological benefits of accomplishment, individuality, feeling good and improved self-esteem describe Lundblad & Davies (2015). Product quality is identified as a crucial element not only for companies in building long-term relationships with the customers but also by affecting purchase intention and influencing consumer trust (Zeithaml, 1988; Zhuang, Cumiskey, Xiao, & Alford, 2010, according to Cheung et al. 2015, 235). Chen & Chang (2012) explain the definition the green perceived value as the contrast between what is received and what is given in a product or service based on the consumer's environmental desires, sustainable expectations, and green needs (Cheung et al. 2015, 235). The product quality in context the consumer behavior is describing the difference between the actual product and the alternative which can be provided by the industry where the consumers consider the products’ traits describe Zeithaml (1988) and Hardie & Walsh (1994) (Cheung et al. 2015, 235). Therefore, the consumers’ judgment is relying on the own experience compared with other alternatives (Cheung et al. 2015, 235). Due to the high price and poor quality of the green products, consumers are often not considered environmentally friendly products as an alternative to the traditional products with affordable prices and excellent functionality (Kostadinova 2016, 229). For this reason, the research conducted by Lundblad & Davies (2015) has revealed that the attributes of quality are strong linked to the durability of the product, which is expected by the consumers. Therefore, long-lasting clothes are expressed as better-quality clothes.

Second, price is considered as one of the barriers to adopting sustainable fashion. Most customers continue to prioritize price and quality in their purchasing decisions, in which the purchase of non-eco-friendly goods is resulting (Ginsberg & Bloom 2004 according to Lin & Lin 2015, 25). According to Lundblad & Davies (2015) the poor quality of sustainable clothes hinders the consumers from obtaining the value for money. Moreover, several other studies have proven that a higher price could surpass ethical concerns (e.g., Vermeir & Verbeke 2006, 170; Gleim et al. 2013, 45-47). Consumers who are skeptical of green product promotions are unwilling to pay for green products (Crane,2000; Laroche et al., 2001 according to Lin & Lin 2015,25). The reason for unwillingness is the high green perceived risk caused by the undermined trust caused by the greenwash (Chen & Chang 2012).
Therefore, also the environmentally concerned consumers are, according to Miller (1990) and D’Souza, Taghian, Lamb, & Peretiatkos (2006) are willing to pay up to 5% extra higher price for a green product while having a higher expectation from the product. Third, subjective norm/social norm and reference groups. Social norms are one of the external factors that have a strong influence on consumers’ buying decisions. According to Trudel (2018) the social norms are described as unwritten rules formed as a result of a social group’s shared interactions that regulate social behavior. Social norms aim to reflect social acceptance and disapproval by defining what should and should not be done according to the situation (Cialdini 2004; Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Sunstein, 1996, according to Trudel 2018, 91). Moreover, it has been found that the government regulations are playing a significant role in promoting sustainable consumption by encouraging certain behavior describes Kostadinova (2016). Another important factor is the reference groups are the peers and family. The peers are common reference points for learning the youth and adolescence age group, explains Berndt (1982). According to Salazar, Oerlemans & Stroe-Biezen (2012), the peers, due to the close social factor to the families and friends, positively influence sustainable buying behavior. Therefore, according to the research, social influence, especially social norms, have a strong, predictable, and pervasive influence on sustainable behaviors (Trudel 2018, 91). However, subjective norms were identified as indirectly affect consumers.

Third, social class has been found as an important indicator of consumer behavior where the consumers are differentiated by internal factors such as wage, training, and occupation (Muthu 2019, 10.) According to Carey & Markus (2016); Grossmann & Huynh (2013); Kraus & Bennett (2012); Stephens, Markus & Phillips (2014) the social class aims to impact on mental person's foundation by interpretation of the consumer, how he acts, and what he does (Yan et al. 2020, 915). The concept of social class is described as a group of people who are on the same level as positions in public describes Muthu (2019). According to the aforementioned factors, it is common to classify the consumer into three categories: upper class, middle class, and lower class explain Diamond & Diamond (2013) (Muthu 2019, 10). Based on the different income levels these the consumption behavior of these social classes is different. As follows, a high-income consumer is referred to as a higher social class. Therefore, the buying behavior is described according to Muthu (2019) as conservative and qualitative. However, Piff & Robinson (2017) have found that the up-per-class consumers tend to use green consumptions as a reflection of their privileged position in society. Therefore, due to the individualistic self-concept of the upper class, the consumers are prioritizing their own needs upon others, describe Yan, Keh & Chen (2020). Middle-class consumers are defined by Chattopadhyay, Tluchowska & George (2004) as
more socially mobile individuals than low-class consumers (Yan et al. 2020, 917). For this reason, middle-class consumers are tending to be more adopted by the adaptation of green consumption (Yan et al. 2020,917). Meanwhile, the lower-class consumers, due to the scarcity of resources, are representing the most disadvantaged position in society. However, the research conducted by Haws, Winterich, & Naylor (2014) has been found that the low-class consumers, despite the limitations, show a greater willingness to consume green products than the upper-class consumers due to their individualistic commitment (Yan et al. 2020, 917). For these reasons, Yun, Keh & Chen (2020) have been indicated that the middle class has a greater importance for green consumption than the low- and upper-class consumers. Therefore, the importance of the middle-class is based on the largest size in the societies in which two-thirds spending worldwide are made by of middle-class consumers (Kharas 2017; Lopez & Weinstein 2012 according to Yan et al. 2020, 915).

Fourth, the brand image as a part of the consumers’ evaluation process has a strong influence on the buying behavioral process. The brand image is regarding to the green marketing is described as the “green brand image” which is a group of expectations in the mind of consumers that are related to environmental concern and environmental commitments. (Chen 2009, 307.) Moreover, numerous studies have found that brand image is a crucial determent of consumers satisfaction where the satisfaction is a result of a positive post-consumer evaluation of product (Chang & Tu 2005; Martenson 2007; Oliver 1996; Paulssen & Birk 2007; Ruyter & Bloemer 1999, according to Chen 2009, 309). As follows, the strong green image has been identified by the consumers as trustworthy. Meanwhile, numerous studies have shown that a low trust for green products among the consumers can be decreased by a positive influence of the image (Flavia´netal 2005, according to Chen 2009). Therefore, Glegg, Richards, Heard & Dawson (2005) have demonstrated that the green products that are produced by unknown brands are less purchased by consumers (Kostadinova 2016, 229). The reason for this, are referred to by Kalafatis & Pollard (1999) as a low green trust caused by the misleading behavior of companies by promoting their new products (Chen 2009, 309).

Fifth, the product availability plays, in some cases, a significant role in decreasing of green consumption where despite a strong, sustainable purchase intention, the consumers are unable to buy a green product due to its low availability; describe Vermeir &Verbeke (2004) (Kostadinova 2016, 229). In the interview conducted by Wiederhold & Martinez (2017) the respondents have proved that it is impossible to purchase sustainable fashion products in their cities. As a result, it can be said that insufficient presence leads to an increased consumer´ negative impression about sustainable apparel. Hence, the consumers will buy
usual products rather than invest an extra time for searching for ethical alternatives (Wiederhold & Martinez 2017, 419-420.)
4 The gap between awareness and action

4.1 The attitude–behavior gap in sustainable consumption

Nowadays, sustainable products and incredibly sustainable fashion has arisen as the solution to environmental issues (Park & Lin 2017, 624). Therefore, consumers have highlighted an increased concern about sustainable fashion products and own consumption (Park & Lin 2017, 625). However, according to Gupta & Ogden (2009); Kollmuss & Agyeman (2002); Pickett-Baker & Ozaki (2008), the consumer’s pro-environmental attitudes are often not translated into actual behavior (Kostadinova 2016, 229). Therefore, multiple studies have identified the major reasons that contribute to the discrepancy.

According to Young, Hwang, McDonald, and Oates (2009), the first barrier is a lack of knowledge about the environmental and social performance of products and producers, which distinguishes green consumers from their green consumption (Nguyen et al. 2018, 2). According to Shen, Richards & Liu (2013) the consumer knowledge is crucial for making any decision in order to evaluate competing alternatives. The failure to choose a specific alternative could be demonstrated due to a lack of awareness and knowledge (Shen et al. 2013, 137). Another reason for this is the customers’ lack of adequate personal familiarity with the issues like, pollution, environmental vulnerability, etc., describes Muthu (2019). Especially, the university students have replied that a lack of understanding of how an individual’s actions contribute to climate change describes Kollmus and Agyeman (2002) (Wyton 2014). Therefore, the internet was identified as an important source of information for them, and although for some people who have some background knowledge about ethical goods and confusion describes Carrigan & Attalla (2001) (Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 421). However, because of the abundance and accessibility of knowledge, consumers are often confused and overwhelmed by existing information (Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 421). But nevertheless, the sustainable messages send by companies’ sustainable messages are identified by the consumers as Customers also believe that companies use ethical claims solely for promotional purposes, to justify higher prices, increase profits, and stay ahead of the competition describes Bray’s et al. (2010) (Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 422).

The second barrier for adaptation is too high price of sustainable fashion products. Consequently, the price is explained by Bray et al. (2010) as a crucial factor when making a purchase decision (Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 424). As a result, because individuals behave solely in terms of the greatest value to themselves, at the point of purchase, they
set aside their concern for environmental conservation and choose lower rates that suit their limited budgets. (Balderjahn, 2013, according to Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 420).

The third factor is the motivation. The buying ethical alternatives describe one's willingness to improve one's consumption habits. Consumers who are brand loyal are less likely to switch to an ethical brand due to their loyalty to particular brands and the resulting laziness to switch to ethical alternatives (Bray et al., 2010; Papaoikonomou et al., 2010, according to Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 420). As a result, the level of brand loyalty is a critical factor in the buying decision. Therefore, the customers who are extremely loyal to a company tend to disregard negative messages about it or do not perceive bad practices, such as sweatshop conditions, to be as bad as they might be. As a result, the committed customers, on the other hand, are more likely to believe positive facts and positive organizational behavior. As a consequence, knowledge selection leads to a biased interpretation, resulting in a greater flexibility of what is ethical. (Papaoikonomou et al., 2010, according to Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 420).

The fourth factor that contributes to the attitude–behavior gap as referred by Wiederhold & Martinez (2017) are the consumers value and attitudes. The attitudes are closely linked to emotions, which are characterized by positive or negative impressions about a problem or an object (Wiederhold & Martinez 2017, 4). The reasons, for a gap can be explained by applying a low-cost/high-cost mode where the reasons for discrepancy between the consumers’ environmental attitude behavior are described. According to the chart below the consumers are tending to choose the lowest cost when they behave pro-environmental (Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 420). However, the costs in this model are not interpreted by an economic means but by the psychological factors such as the time to develop an environmental-friendly behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002, according to Wiederhold & Martinez 2018, 420).
Figure 3. Low-cost high-cost model of pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman)

As a result, the consumers are choosing the products produced by familiar brands instead of investing own time into new products. Moreover, consumers are often not considering the green products as an alternative due a time pressure and the information overload provided by several products in the market describe Carrigan & Attalla (2001) (Wiederhold & Martinez 2017, 420). The consequence is resignation and a stronger focus on few attributes such as price while ignoring ethical aspects.

4.2 Consumer awareness on sustainable fashion

The interest in sustainability has emerged as the first frames of sustainability were defined by the policymakers in the early 1980s (Hilton 2003, according to Shen et al. 2013, 136). Therefore, the first movements such as green, socially responsible, and fair trade has started to appear in the market in the late 1980s, describes Valor (2007) (Shen et al. 2013, 136). Consequently, the consumers have started steadily to adopt the sustainability by purchasing decisions (Shen et al. 2013, 136). Moreover, the sustainable purchase decision is characterized by Fraj & Martin (2006) when the consumers are choosing the items that are environmentally friendly and socially conscious (Shen et al. 2013, 136). Hansen & Schrader (1997) assume that it is expected that rising consumer consciousness is a
required condition for a shift toward responsible consumption and sustainable growth (Buerke et al. 2016, 966).

However, positive consumer attitudes are often an insufficient indicator for a sustainable behavior. Therefore, the consumers who show a positive attitude toward a green product often fail to purchase them describes Carrigan & Attalla (2001); McDonald, Oates, & Thyne (2009); Nicholls & Lee (2006) (Shen et al. 2013, 136). For this reason, the aim of this thesis is to identify the reasons why the gap exists and how to close it. According to Bray, Johns, and Kilburn’s study (2011), internal factors such as gender and age, and price sensitivity, and personal experience, are contributing to the discrepancy (Shen et al. 2013, 136).

In contrast, consumers' perceived ability to influence environmental outcomes is a powerful psychological motivator for many pro-environmental activities (e.g., green consumption, recycling, and resource conservation; (Cleveland et al. 2012, according to Buerke et al. 2016, 967). For example, Gupta & Ogden (2009) discovered that buyers of environmentally friendly products have significantly higher expectations that their decisions would make a difference than non-green buyers (Buerke et al. 2016, 967).
5 Methodology

After the theoretical part about the sustainable fashion products and its impact on the consumer buying behavior is organized. The second part of the thesis is empirical study where the theoretical data is refuted or supported. The aim of the empirical part is to obtain the primary data in order to understanding the reasons for an attitude behavioral gap and how to respond to it by answering the main research question and sub-questions. This thesis is using the qualitative research method to acquire the primary data. In the next chapters the research methodology and data collection method will be explained.

5.1 Research methods

Firstly, a research approach should be identified qualitative or quantitative that a suitable for a research approach (Creswell 2003, 18). In this thesis a qualitative research method was identified as suitable. The qualitative research is gives perspectives and comprehension into the problems. Moreover, the qualitative research is described by Ahmad, Wasim, Irfan, Srivastava & Farheen (2019) as an unstructured, exploratory research approach that explores highly complex phenomena that quantitative research cannot explain. Therefore, the aim of the qualitative research is to obtain an in-depth understanding of human behavior, knowledge, behaviors, intentions, and motives (Ahmad et al. 2019, 2829). While the quantitative research is creating numerical data and hard facts. Therefore, the quantitative attempts to develop a cause-and-effect relationship between two variables by using mathematical, computational, and statistical methods (Ahmad et al. 2019, 2829).

According to the objective of the study the qualitative research method was chosen as the most suitable since the impressions and the opinions are required.
Figure 4. Research process model (Flinkman 2019, 42)

According to the chart above the research process is based on the four stages (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2001, 14.) The first stage is known as primary research problem where the research is narrowed by giving forms of information (secondary) that is relevant for research problem. In the second stage of the model is the research problem and the research questions are defined. Moreover, the second stage is used for gathering the secondary data (academic papers & books). Consequently, after the theoretical background about sustainable fashion products and its impact on the consumer buying behavior is gathered, the third step is the collection of the primary data by conducting the interview. After the secondary and primary data is collected the data analysis the last step occurs in which the answers to the main and sub-question and the suggestions for an implication are given.
5.2 Data collection

The term data collection is described by Kabir (2016, 202) as:

“the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, in an established systematic fashion that enables one to answer stated research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate outcomes”.

Therefore, accordingly to the qualitative approach the interview was chosen as a tool for acquiring a primary data. Thus, the objective of the research is to examine the person’s experience and opinions the semi-structured interview was chosen as the most suitable type of interview due its multitude of research positions of structured and unstructured interview describe Qu & Dumay (2011). For this reason, the interview questions were developed according to the nature of the study.

The interviews were conducted April 2021 and lasted about forty minutes. The theme of the interview is relying on the theoretical part and the research questions. The interviewees were the Russian students who are studying in Finland. During the interview the interviewees have revealed that they want to stay unidentified. Therefore, the interviewees were alphabetically named A-H.

The reasons to choose the students as the research group is that since the students are future main consumers of sustainable fashion products. Therefore, in a multiple previous studies the main research groups were the elder group. Moreover, when attempting to represent and understand ethics-related topics, it is common to research students’ ideas and opinions (e.g.; Auger et al. 2008, 186 & McManus & Subramaniam 2009, 619.)
<table>
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<th>Place</th>
<th>Sex</th>
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<td>10.04.2021</td>
<td>Interviewee H</td>
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Table 1. List of Interviewee
6 Analysis and result

In this chapter, the empirical research based on eight interviews will be summarized and analyzed. All the interviews have started with the opening question where each interviewee was asked about the factors, which they are paying attention for by purchasing the fashion products. During the interviews, the similarities between the answers were identified and later analyzed.

6.1 The price of sustainable fashion

The majority of interviewees have replied that the price is the first factor that they look at by choosing any clothes. Therefore, the price that lies above the respondents' frequent clothes is revealed as unattractive for them. The reason for this is the insufficient credit availability among the respondents due to nor or unstable job during study time. But Nevertheless, all interviewees have responded that they are willing to prefer environmentally friendly products when they have an opportunity to choose.

“All the sustainable clothes are sold in a designer boutique where the fashion products cost almost triple compared to the brand I usually wear” (Interviewee B)

According to interviewee H, it is problematic that the low-cost chains are offering a fashion product at a lower price. However, interviewees have responded that they will take sustainable products, especially the fashion products, into consideration in the future when the own income level will rise.

For this reason, the interviewee B has responded that he is aware of environmental and social protection, but too high prices of the sustainable fashion products force him to consume unstable products:

“All I am unable to buy sustainable fashion products right now due its price but after I find a job, I will prefer a sustainable alternative over usual one”

Therefore, it is noticeable that the high price is creating a barrier for purchasing by the students with a low income. Only few interviewees with a higher income have respond that they are willing to pay an extra cost for sustainability.
“The price doesn’t really matter for me, so I will buy a sustainable fashion product if I have the choice between the sustainable and unsustainable fashion product” (Interviewee C)

However, the higher price should be justified describes Interviewee C. The companies that charge a higher price for sustainability should proof that they are really act sustainable. Interviewee C has mentioned that trustworthy eco-labels can increase the transparency and increase her trust level.

6.2 The quality of the sustainable fashion products

Besides the price the interviewees perceive the quality of product as an important indicator for purchasing clothes. Therefore, most of the interviewees have replied that they are willing to pay more for the sustainability if the quality will be equal for the price. As a result, interviewees have responded that:

“The quality should be higher than the products that I buy usually”. (Interviewee B)

“Higher price demands higher quality” (Interviewee H)

During the interview the respondents were asked about the expectation of the qualitative fashion product. Consequently, the majority of interviewees are expecting that the sustainable fashion products are high quality products that last longer. For instance, according to the interviewees, the jeans that were purchased last year are still in good shape. Besides this, the interviewees have replied that the materials and hap-tic attributes of fashion products are crucial when the decision between several alternatives are made. For this reason, the interviewee B has mentioned that he likes the quality of jeans that he purchased in H&M.

“Two years ago, I bought a budget H&M jeans but the materials felt and looked like an expansive jeans. This was a reason why I purchased it. And I am not regretting till now” (Interviewee B)
Therefore, it can be concluded that the younger consumers are seeking for a long-lasting fashion product made of high-quality materials.

Besides this, according to the majority of interviewee the sustainable fashion products should have a number of advantages over the competitors such as a high-quality material that feel as a premium product. Since, the sustainable products are charging a premium price for their products.

Moreover, several interviewees have replied that they do not really have an experience with any sustainable fashion products, or they did not recognize them as sustainable. Thus, during the shopping the respondents when did not usually pay attention to sustainability when they purchase any clothes.

However, the interviewees who had previous experience with sustainable fashion products were satisfied with their purchase. For instance, interviewee C has explained that she had a bag made of eco-friendly materials.

“I am satisfied with my shopper-bag. I owe this bag already for a year and it looks like a quality shopper. If I find another bag from this brand, I will purchase it again” (Interviewee C)

“I have a couple of sustainable T-shirts which I bought a month ago. Till now I am satisfied with quality (Interviewee A)

As a result, both interviewees states that they will further pay attention to the sustainable fashion since the quality traits are as good as the products they had before.

6.3 The Interviewees’ environmental knowledge

It is crucial to have a basic knowledge about the sustainability to support the environment protection. The Interviewee E has assumed that an insufficient education provided in schools and universities about the importance of sustainable products is the reason for a poor sustainable behavior.

“I think that the sustainable education in the schools and universities is one of the factors that helps to develop opinion about certain things. So, if I have had more
education about how important it is for environment to choose the sustainable products then I have had started to consider them earlier” (Interviewee E).

The result of the lack knowledges can been seen as most interviewees do not understand the impact of own (decisions) purchases. The interviewees D and H support the argument by replying that they are throwing away the old clothes without recycle it. Moreover, the interviewees have replied that they are choosing the clothes according to situational occasion. For this reason, the interviewee A answered that:

“Usually, I purchase the clothes that are suitable for a preferred situation. [...] After the clothes get old, I throw them away”

Consequently, the interviewee A does not consider the recycling as the disposal method. As a result, the limited consumer sustainable knowledge leads to the disposal problem.

Furthermore, the interviewer asked the interviewees on which information the interviewees are relying on. The most interviewees have responded that the advertisement on the internet, especially the social media, is the primary source of information that is considered for future purchases. But still, most products that are promoted are unsustainable fashion products describe interviewees C and G. Thus, the sustainable messages send by the fashion companies described by interviewee C as untrustworthy.

“I think it became a trend to be sustainable nowadays. Most companies are using the prefix sustainability as a marketing tool to sell the products” (Interviewee C).

Accordingly, during the interview most interviewees have admitted that they do not trust the big companies with green attention.

However, some Russian students have revealed that spend time in Finland they have learned by doing principle a basic attribute of sustainability for instance, the waste separation.
“After I spend a year in Finland, I could learn a lot what the sustainable behavior is. For instance, the waste separation or how the energy is produced by wind turbine. This applied type of behavior I will adopt and behave this way further” (Interviewee G).

As a result, the many interviewees have learned the basic principles of the sustainability by learning-by-doing process.

6.4 The Interviewees’ values and environmental concern

Despite being a trend for many years the consumer’s environmental concern is still on the low level. Therefore, during the interview some respondents have mentioned two other sustainable alternatives, such a secondhand or swapping during the interview. However, these forms of sustainable fashion are described by the interviewees as unacceptable for them. Therefore, the interviewee B have replied that:

“I don’t consider the secondhand fashion products as an alternative to that what I am wearing. I would feel myself uncomfortable by knowing the piece was wore by someone else before. Even though the clothes are cleaned. This inner barrier is a reason why I am not considering these alternatives “

Consequently, the interviewees do not want to consider these two alternatives since the sense of belongingness is missing. Therefore, the interviewees D and H have highlighted that the sense of possess is crucial when they purchase a fashion product.

Hence, the other five sustainable alternatives are unknown to the respondents due to a lack of sustainable knowledge. For this reason, the rest of alternatives are not considered by the respondents. Addition to that, the respondents have replied that other sustainable alternatives are non-existent in the hometowns.

“I cannot remember any the sustainable stores in my city. But I heard recently about the online store that produce the swimsuit made of plastic found in the ocean” (Interviewee C).
Therefore, the scarcity of presented stores in respective cities is identified as a barrier for a sustainable product adoption. Since, the interviewee C who is ready to pay an extra price for sustainability is hindered by limitation of offered clothes assortment in a specific city. According to the respondents they are willing to consider sustainable fashion products when the choice between two and more alternatives is presented in a single store. Accordingly, it can be concluded that the majority of interviewees are not willing to invest own time into the company’s research rather they will go to the shop that they trust and will purchase the fashion products related to the current need. Therefore, the most interviewees have named the brand H&M as preferred. Hence, the H&M provides a quality product for a moderate price and in the latest trends describes interviewee B.

Another issue that occurs by choosing the sustainable fashion products is the different consumer’s values. Therefore, the interviewee C explains that:

“Me and my friends have different point of view what the sustainability is. For me it is to support the producers by purchasing an eco-wool sweater from a sustainable company. But it is opposite for my vegan friend because, in her opinion, sustainability does not include animal exploitation”

Thus, this could be understood as a trait of greenwashing where to on the one hand the local producers are supported but on the other hand the sustainable development forbid animal ill treatment. As a result, the companies greenwashing behavior confuse the interviewees by promoting “false” sustainable promises. Consequently, the interviewee C and G agree that by purchasing the sustainable fashion products that were greenwashed decrease the trust in sustainable fashion products. For this reason, according to the interviewee C the sustainable fashion companies should increase its transparency by applying eco-labels or another indicator that helps to increase the trust for sustainable fashion products.
7 Conclusion

7.1 Key findings

Based on the primary and secondary research the promotion and adaptation of sustainable fashion products by the consumers depend on the various factors that affect the sustainable buying behavior products.

As a result, the main reason for the students not purchasing sustainable fashion product is the high price of it. Therefore, the affordable price can increase the consumer's demand in sustainable fashion products. However, the considering of eco-friendly materials by a production and labor support demand a higher price as the regular clothes usually purchased by the students. Consequently, it is impossible to enable the competitive pricing of sustainable clothes with unsustainable fashion products. Therefore, the sustainable fashion products need to convince the consumers for example with the design of products.

Another issue that occurs by the purchasing sustainable fashion products is an unavailability of sustainable fashion products in the stores where the students are purchasing their clothes. As a result, the consumers do not want to invest time in searching for the sustainable fashion stores in their cities due the low environmental concern among students. Thus, according to the primary research the consumers require the sustainable alternatives in the shops where the respondents are usually purchasing.

Thus, the trusted shops like clothing-retail companies H&M or others where most of the students are purchasing their products are playing a significant role by promoting of sustainable fashion products. Hence, it could be proved that the students are not motivated to purchase brands that are unknown for them. As a result, the trusted brand by consumers like H&M should educate them by replacing the unsustainable fashion products through sustainable products. However, the shifting to sustainable fashion products should be supported by governance by the passing the laws which forbid the greenwash practices. Additionally, the sustainable education should be started in the schools to help the consumers in developing of sustainable buying behavior.

Besides this, it has been confirmed that the gender differences between men and women have an indirect correlation between the purchases and sustainability. Therefore, the female interviewees have revealed that they are willing to try different products when it is suitable for them while male participants are more open to purchase the products that are well known for them. As a result, females are more openly for changes than the males.
7.2 Answers to research questions

This research was performed to understand the factors that influence the students’ decision in purchasing sustainable fashion products. The sub-questions were answered first, after this the main research question.

Sub-questions:

What are internal and external factors, and how do they influence the consumer’s buying behavior?

For proper answering this question, the similarities between the theoretical and empirical study were analyzed and explained. As a result, four external and two internal factors were identified.

The consumers buying behavior in the age group of 18-25 is strongly affected by the price of sustainable fashion products due to own limited credit availability. Therefore, only two interviewees out of eight students can afford the sustainable fashion products right now. The rest six interviewees due to nor or unstable job during study time are unable to purchase sustainable fashion products. Despite this, the positive correlation between the internal factor income level and the consumer’s demand was found.

Second, the quality traits of sustainable fashion product were identified as crucial during the empirical and theoretical study. The quality differences mentioned during the theoretical research cannot be approved or disapproved due the limited empirical participants. However, the interviewees who possess a piece of sustainable clothes are delighted with the quality. Moreover, it can be confirmed that the demanded quality standards are higher than to regular clothes.

Third, the direct effect of product availability on sustainable behavior was identified during the theoretical study and later confirmed by the interviewees during the empirical study. Therefore, the unavailability of sustainable fashion products in the cities where the consumers are living decline the attention for sustainable fashion.

Fourth, the brand image plays an important role in effecting the buying behavior. The consumers are tending to purchase the products from the brands that they trust. According to the empirical data the satisfied consumers with the quality and price are unlikely to persuade to purchase unknown brand.
First, the green buying behavior is affected by the consumer’s green knowledge. The identified lack of sustainable knowledges of the respondents has a negative impact on their decision and on the sustainable development as whole.

Second, the environmental concern has a direct correlation with sustainable behavior. Due to a low consumer’s environmental knowledge, the consumers´ concern for sustainability is lacking. Therefore, during the empirical research, it has been revealed that the consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable clothes when the sustainable fashion products are located in the stores where they usually purchase the clothes.

**What is the customer opinion about sustainable fashion?**

According to the empirical and theoretical study the consumers are supporting the sustainable movement that occurs nowadays. Consumers are evaluating sustainable fashion products as expensive products that aim is to help the environment. However, the consumers behave indifferently for sustainable fashion products when it comes to the actual purchase. The reasons for this are already mentioned above.

Besides the economic factors the consumer opinion is affected by the trust for the respective industry. Therefore, the greenwashed products are decreasing the consumer’s trust in the companies that made a real sustainable affords. As a result, the consumers think that “sustainability” is a marketing tool to promote the fashion products. However, according to respondents the consumer opinion can be positively changed when the companies add more transparency into the own production and promotion by giving consumers trustworthy examples of the succeeded affords.

The main question:

**What factors influence the consumer decision in purchasing sustainable fashion products?**

The consumers´ decision are affected by the price and quality of sustainable fashion products. The marginal price differences in range of 10-15% by the equal or higher quality are seen as acceptable for many consumers.

Further research has revealed that the brand loyalty plays an important role in purchasing fashion products. Therefore, the consumers are usually purchasing the products from the brand that they trust. For persuading the consumers for purchasing an unknown brand an added value should be presented. Moreover, the decisions to purchase sustainable fashion product are supported by the consumers´ values and their environmental concern.
Consequently, the low environmental concern is resulting in low purchases of sustainable fashion products.

7.3 Reliability and validity

Reliability and validity are parameters that are used to evaluate the success of a research. These parameters determine the effectiveness of which a procedure, technique, or typically composed things. The quality of a measurement is referred to as its reliability, while the accuracy of a measurement is referred to as its validity. As a consequence, particularly in qualitative research, it is important to consider reliability and validity when planning your report, developing your methodology, and compiling your results.

The aim of this study was to respond to the primary research questions as well as the secondary study questions. The secondary information was collected by the reviewing the academic paper along with eBooks.

The primary data was collected by obtaining the interview. The interview consisted of eight interviewees. Therefore, the research is valid and reliable.

7.4 Suggestions for further research

Nowadays, online marketing through TikToc and Instagram has become an influential marketing tool for many companies. Therefore, it is suitable that the further research will analyze this phenomenon, since the products that are promoted by the influencers are mostly unsustainable.

But nevertheless, the influencers can become a key for the sustainable development in the future. Thus, the younger generation are more aware of the information that they receive from the individuals whom they trust.
8 Summary

The objective of this thesis was to analyze the factors that influence the consumer behavior by purchasing of sustainable fashion products. Moreover, the primary goal was to evaluate the customer opinion of sustainable fashion products. The research was finalized by using methodologies such as secondary literature, the data analysis obtained from the interviews to answer the main research question and sub-questions. The students who are studying in Finland were chosen as a research group in this thesis.

The author introduced the concepts (sustainable development, green marketing, greenwash, consumer awareness on sustainable clothes and buyer decision-making process) that helped to develop research theories and research questions.

In the next part in this thesis applied methods for data analysis and empirical research in were described. Moreover, this part justified the chosen methods for acquiring the primary data. The data collection was obtained to answer the main and sub-questions.

The conclusion introduces the key findings, answers to research questions, further suggestions and reliability and validity. The key finding presents the result based on the secondary and primary research. Therefore, the answers to research questions gave the answers to the research and sub-questions. The further suggestions initiate the topic which could be researched in the future. The reliability and validity describe that the primary research in adequate way.


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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview questions

1) **In your opinion, how does the fashion industry impact the environment?**
   - Will the knowledge of it change your purchasing behavior?

2) **What does the term “sustainability” bring to mind?**
   - How do you think the sustainability has influenced your buying process?

3) **Have you ever had purchased a sustainable fashion product?**
   - If yes, were your experiences positive or negative?
     - (1) Why?
   - What were the reasons to buy it?
     - If not, why?
     - (2) What factors should change in order to convince you?

4) **Tell me about the criteria you consider when you are purchasing clothes?**
   - Price?
   - Quality?
   - Brand?
   - Previous experiences

5) **Are you familiar with the term “greenwashing”?**
   - If yes, do you consider purchasing such products?
   - Can you name some differences between the green products and the greenwashing product?
6) Where are you getting your information from?

- Are you relying on this information?