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The Business Potential of Sustainable Development in the Fashion Industry

Studying Consumers' Purchasing Behavior towards an Awareness of Sustainable Development and Labels in the Fashion Industry

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The Business Potential of Sustainable Development in Brands

Studying consumers' behavior towards an awareness of sustainable development and labels in the fashion industry

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Abstract

The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry. It releases 1.2 billion tons of greenhouse gases each year, while in our society, sustainable development has become a major economic and social issue. The studies concerning sustainable development for the fashion industry started only belatedly, after 2010. This study aims to evaluate the potential impact of sustainable development in the fashion industry in investigating the evolution of consumers' purchasing behavior due to a higher concern of sustainable development and emergence of green labels in this industry. The author applied a deductive approach and mixed methods through a survey questionnaire for collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. Results unveiled those respondents are aware about the important role of sustainability. More than 50% of the respondents already tend to turn towards more ecological purchases while 29% of them remain on emotional purchases. Results show also that there is still a lack of sustainability information from businesses towards consumers despite the evolution of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) into Environmental and Social Responsibility (ESR). Furthermore, the respondents appear increasingly inclined to be more environment friendly; nonetheless, sustainable development impact on the fashion industry will grow concurrently with the evolution of consumers purchasing behavior.

Keywords/tags (subjects)

Fashion Industry, Sustainable Development, Consumers' Behavior, Consumers' Purchasing Behavior, Labels and Certifications, Survey Questionnaire

Miscellaneous (Confidential information)

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background, Motivation and Purpose

Nowadays, ecology is a major issue in our society. The fashion industry is the second most pollutant sector after the oil's one with 1.2 billion of tones of greenhouse gases emitted each year. Since 2017, we can find on Google Scholars 11,200 articles or papers about the Fashion Industry and sustainability. In the meantime, companies of the fashion industry tried to have a better footprint towards sustainability. Moreover, customers have shown their interest towards the place of production and the quality of raw materials.

The author has done an internship in one company of the sector named "The Kooples". Then, she has worked for Balibaris, a French brand for men for 10 months, as a student part-time job. These two brands have a high-end positioning and tend to be more and more respectful towards their garments the production, the environment, and their customers. The author has learned a lot about the location of the factory, the different manufacturing process as for example the garment dye process, few ecological labels as ones used with wools. So, she feels more concern by the ecology and the different issues encountered in this field.

More and more numerous are the companies that take care of their places of production, the quality of the raw materials and the way to manufacture. The industry is slowly changing towards a better way of consumption, but the concept of fast fashion is still well anchored in people habits. Moreover, sustainability in the fashion world it is still "unknown" for a big majority of the population. They didn't feel as concern as they should be because it's not very common at the moment even if it tends to change in this industry.

The purpose of this study is to find out what customers are thinking about the fashion industry and to know how much people are willing to change their habits towards sustainable development.

1.2 Research Objectives, Questions, and Approach

This study relies on the following research objectives and questions: (i) gathering knowledge about existing theories and previous empirical studies concerning sustainable development in the fashion industry; (ii) customer purchasing behavior; (iii) and level of awareness about certification labels for sustainability.

RQ1: What are the customers' purchasing behavior towards sustainable development in the fashion industry?

RQ1.1: To what degree customers are aware about existing ecology certification labels?

RQ1.2: What are the factors that impact consumers' purchasing behavior regarding the sustainable development in the fashion industry?

The author applies in this empirical study a deductive approach where qualitative and quantitative data are collected through a survey questionnaire with a mixed research methods.

1.3 Thesis Structure

In this thesis, the author begins, in the introduction chapter, to show that there is a lot of concern about sustainable development in the fashion industry and people get more interested about it than a few years ago because it became a worldwide issue; however, since it is a new concern, the author starts discusses how the fashion industry works, its benefits, drawbacks and why it is an issue for the environment. In the literature review chapter, the author lists the different means put in place towards sustainable development, the different commitment companies tried to follow. Then, the author has studied the consumer's behaviors to understand their habits towards fashion. Finally, the author discusses what are the labels and certification in this sector, how it works and why it is a guarantee of respectfulness of the environment.

After the literature review, the next chapter introduce the methodology containing the research context, approach and design used to conduct the survey. Then, the author analyzed the collected data and presents the research results. Afterward, the author draws a conclusion of the research;

in the discussion chapter, the author discusses about the limitations, reliability, and validity of this study; how it has answered the research questions as well as foreseen the potential extension that could be conducted in the future.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Existing Theories and Previous Work

The fashion industry is more and more studied, and a huge number of publications is available. However, only since a few years ago the concept of sustainability in this field has been really taking into account. On Google Scholar you can find the number of publications by keywords per years. Below, there is a graph (Fig.1) presenting the number of publications about four different research.

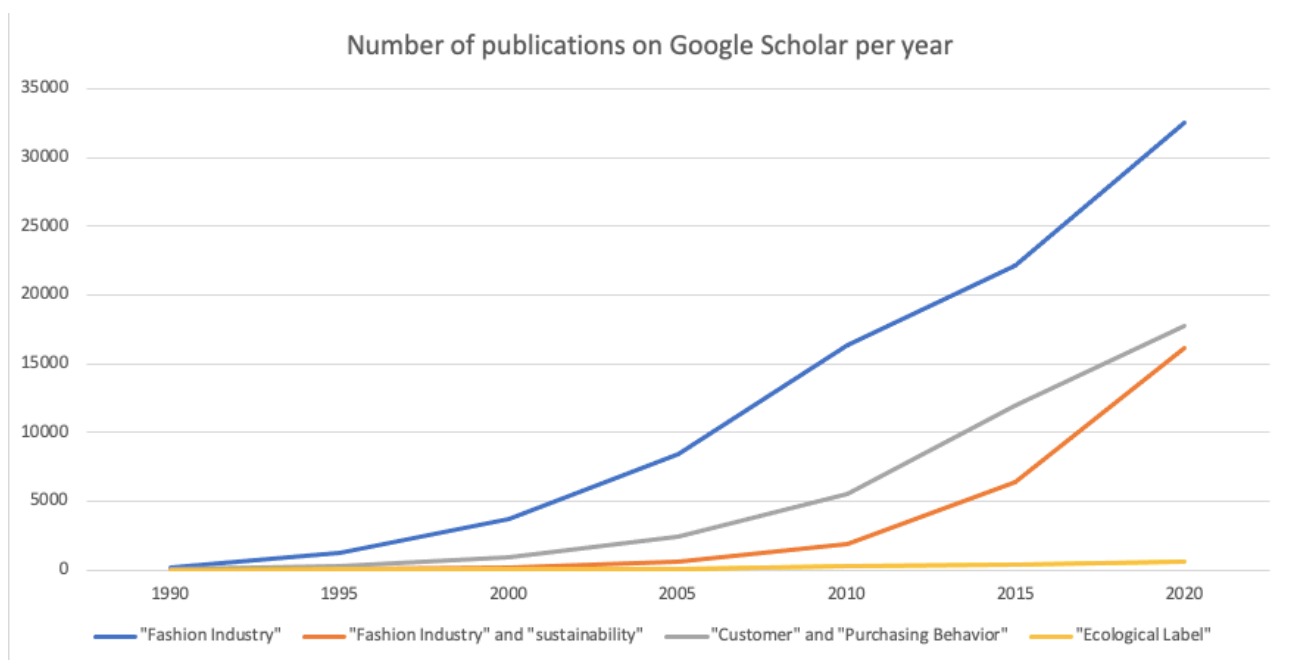


Figure 1. Number of publications on Google Scholar through years when searching “fashion industry”; “fashion industry” and “sustainability”; “Customer” and Purchasing behavior”; “Ecological Label”

The graph shows that the term fashion industry has been more studied since 2000 while studies about sustainability in the fashion industry have increased only since 2010. A lot of studies have

been done about fast fashion and its damage on the environment and more articles in general are written about sustainable development since the arrival of internet.

This thesis research is based on several main concepts. First of all, sustainability in the fashion industry sector. As we already know, the fashion industry is the second most pollutant sector on Earth and became one of the major concerns in terms of environment after the oil. Then, after the companies, the second actor that can make things change is the customer. Are they willing to change their habits? Even if companies tried to care about their manufacture and become environmentally friendly, customers have a role to play. The author will carry out a qualitative and quantitative survey about consumer's sustainable development behavior in order to see if they are well aware of what already exist and to judge what are their habits at the moment. Nowadays, more and more numerous compagnies tend to develop their commitment towards sustainable development through labels and certifications. The problem could be that it is not enough develop and they need to raise awareness among the customers.

2.2 Sustainable Development in the Fashion Industry

According to Forsman and Madsen (2017), for years and years, the fashion industry has been one of the most polluting sectors for the planet. Trends change quickly and collections need to be renewed regularly. The design and production of clothing around the world over a short period of time causes almost irreversible damage to the environment and the world.

This sector is considered to be one of the most damaging to the environment because it requires huge amounts of resources, such as water, energy and harmful chemicals. In addition, the industry is driven by consumerism, trends and fast fashion which lead consumers to buy more than they need and therefore instead of renewing, wasting. The workings of this industry are complex due to the current consumer society, environmental issues as well as long supply chains (Johansson, 2010).

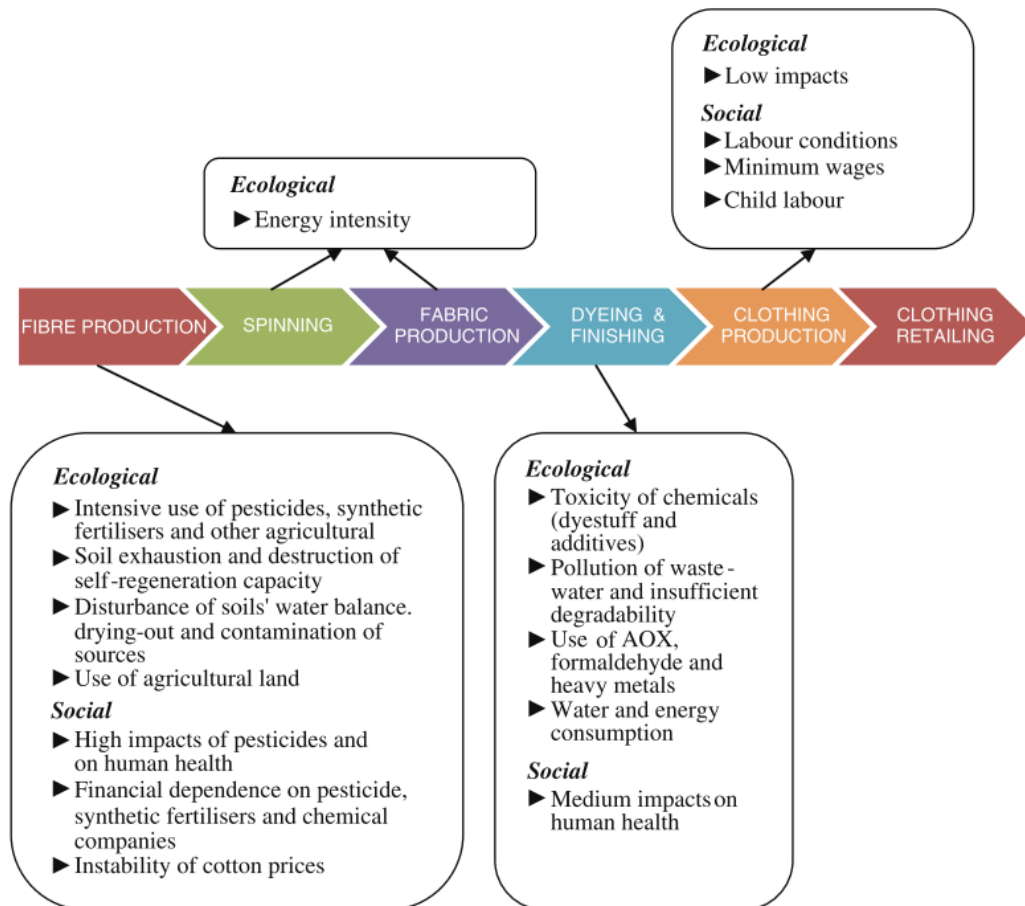


Figure 2. *Environmental and social impact of textile manufacturing processes* (Karthik & Gopalakrishnan, 2014)

About 26.5 million people are employed by this industry. However, in some countries, these people do not receive a sufficient salary to live or are in contact with toxic and dangerous products for their health. In addition, in order to support extreme consumption, they deplete the limited reserves of fossil fuels. At the same time, some companies have instituted more sustainable design and social responsibility practices (Johansson, 2010).

Within the fashion industry, production processes use a lot of chemicals that can be toxic as well as natural resources like water, which has a disastrous impact on the environment. In addition to a bad environmental impact, companies are increasingly looking to produce at a lower cost which has caused a strong delocalization of production plants to the Extreme Orient. This mass relocation has led to the loss of traditional know-how in Europe and more particularly in Western Europe. Moreover, by relocating their factories, companies have created a social gap with the loss

of many jobs, which has increased unemployment rates in Europe. Between 1999 and 2002, the fashion industry in the European Union experienced a sharp decline in employability with -10% for textiles and -18% for clothing. This drop in employment has created strong social inequalities. For example, these jobs in Europe were mainly occupied by low-skilled women, who, having lost their jobs, found it difficult to find another stable job in another sector afterwards. This led to higher unemployment and greater social inequality. In the Far Eastern countries where factories have been relocated, workers have had no trouble getting jobs. However, the working conditions are not necessarily good and they are mostly underpaid. After this period, there was a new dynamic in Europe to try to get companies to relocate their factories there. Let's take France as an example. As indicated on the website competitivite.gouv.fr, France has adopted manufacturing competitiveness as a national strategy by creating competitiveness clusters for technical textiles. The goal is for companies to be able to take advantage of the high qualifications of their employees who, thanks to their experience, are able to adapt easily and to put into practice their capacity for innovation. Now, in order to develop and enrich themselves, companies seek to increase the training of their employees so that they develop other skills. The goal is for them to acquire transversal skills. This is why companies are investing more and more in the training of both technical and managerial skills of their employees. This whole process is included in a sustainable and ethical human resources management approach. All this is part of the many aspects of the social pillar of sustainability with good working conditions, more ethical contracts, etc... and not only a long-term benefit for the companies (de Brito, Carbone, & Blanquart, 2008).

In recent years according to Forsman and Madsen (2017), many companies have taken an approach in favor of better production which is more responsible. The fashion industry tends to take a commitment and show greater responsibility towards sustainable development. Nowadays, several stakeholders such as governments, the media, NGOs and certain consumers associations are putting pressure on the fashion industry so that their production cycles incorporate more sustainable processes (Henninger, 2015).

Environmental sustainability is defined as the capability of something to endure without disrupting the ecological stability of the Earth. As Karthik and Gopalakrishnan (2014) stated, "sustainable clothing products may already be part of the design philosophy and the trend towards sustainabil-

ity, the aim of which is to create a system that can be sustained indefinitely in terms of environmentalism and social responsibility." Up to 20% of the industrial pollution of the rivers and soils are caused by the fashion industry according to the World Bank. Sustainable clothes are issued from recycled materials and eco-friendly resources as sustainably grown fiber cultivations. It also makes reference to the manner these clothing are made. Moreover, the use of recycled or ecological materials to manufacture clothes has created new economic benefits to exploit. These sustainable garments then offer a new market with new jobs, a steady net flow of money to the economy, as well as reduce the use of raw materials and natural resources. In order to evaluate the impact of the life cycle of a product in different key areas such as materials, packaging, manufacturing, assembly, transportation, distribution as well as the use of the service and its end of life, we use a standardized tool to measure the environmental impact which is the Eco Index.

The High Index 1.0 is an instrument based on indicators for apparel that allows firms to gain savings on materials, products, plants, and process types based on a variety of environmentally friendly and product design preferences. The range of expected outputs from the SAC High Index 1.0 tool involves improvements to decrease water usage and enhance quality, lower energy, and emissions, reduce waste, lower chemicals and toxicity, and greater transparency in employment and social affairs. Fair trade sourcing can be achieved by choosing suppliers that are recognized as operating in a socially responsible way. The goal is for customers to ensure that socially responsible practices have been followed in the development of the goods. Local manufacture is a precious commodity to enhance the sustainability of the goods. It also increases the social and economic eco-friendliness of the product (Karthik & Gopalakrishnan, 2014).

2.3 Customer Purchasing Behavior

Customer behavior is the study of the process in which individuals utilize products or services to meet their needs and / or wants. This process is a major part of marketing. Thanks to more sustainable labeling implemented by the fashion industry, the purchasing behavior of consumers has shown a positive development. Customers show more their desire to buy sustainable products and with more environmentally friendly manufacturing. Thus, companies are offering more and more products with "ecological" materials such as organic cotton and have more "green" collections. In addition, during the purchase and on the clothing label, consumers have information on how to care for the clothing to increase its durability (Forsman & Madsen, 2017).

According to Forsman and Madsen (2017), “knowledge of consumer behavior is essential for influencing decisions not only about which product to buy, but also what type of people buy different products based on demographics and behavioral variables, etc.”. The needs of consumers are not limited only to the practicality of the products, it goes further such as: basic information of the product, its origin, where it can be obtained, the image conveyed by the company as well as the product and its price. In customer behavior, there are two types of dimensions: internal (psychological) and external (sociological) that can influence customers' decision making. Psychological factors can arise from a practical need, or from an experiential need, induced by their emotions or fantasies. In addition, rational purchasing motivations are based on a selective choice of good quality product at low prices, for example. In the fashion industry, it is important that designers, producers and retailers listen to and respond to the needs of customers in order to be able to cope with possible changes in the industry (Forsman & Madsen, 2017).

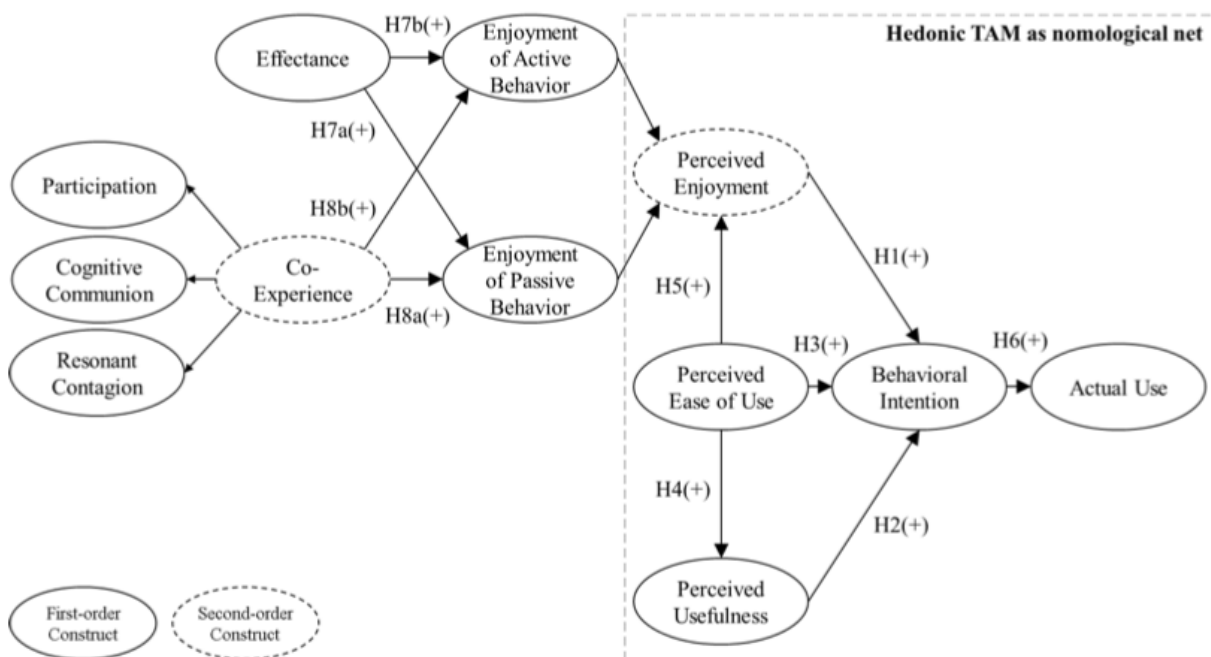


Figure 3. Research Model about consumers' usage intentions and behavior (Bründl, Matt, & Hess, 2017)

According to Forsman and Madsen (2017, p. 7), "the contemporary society is complex and therefore culture does not provide specific descriptions for appropriate behavior, therefore, culture is described as how the majority of people act and think". This explains why consumers are fully part of the processes put in place. Other than external factors, social status is a major aspects that has an impact on purchasing power. Social class is made up of several categories: upper class, middle class and lower class. This is why consumers, because of their difference in income, consume differently (Forsman & Madsen, 2017).

According to Strähle (2017), "fashion consumers often buy clothing due to the emotional need." Nowadays, fashion is a way to speak out, to show our differences and to assert oneself in front of others (McNeill & Moore, 2015). This explains why consumer behavior is so important within this industry. No standard is defined in advance by consumers, which is why it is so difficult to develop a more sustainable fashion industry.

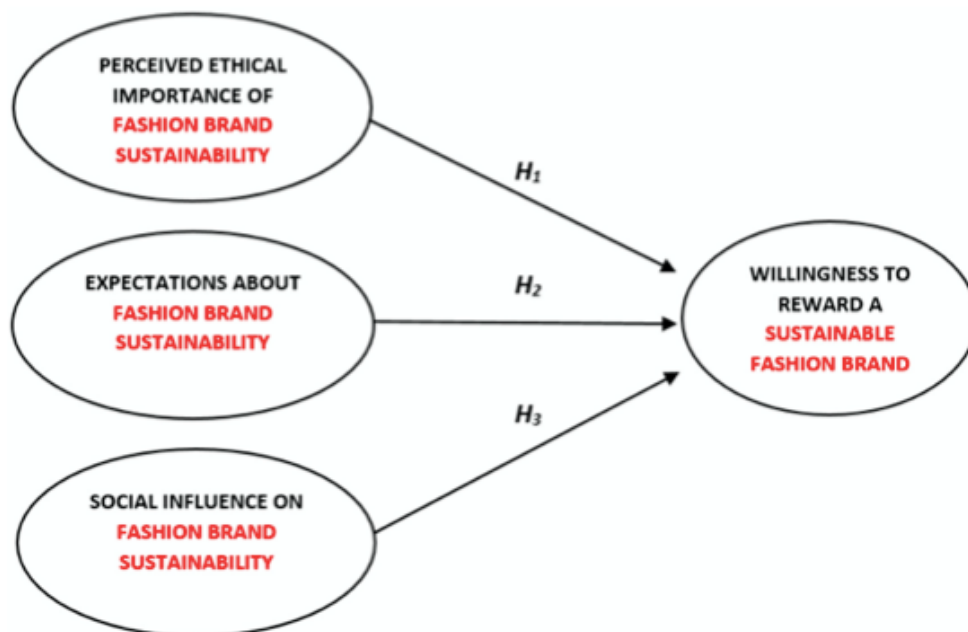


Figure 4. Theoretical model concerning fashion consumers' purchasing behavior (Ciasullo, Maione, Torre, & Troisi 2017)

Ciasullo et al. (2017), confirmed in their study two of the hypotheses of their theoretical model:(i) consumers' expectancies of brands in terms of sustainability affect their readiness to reward them

when they behave in a sustainable way; (ii) social influence seems to be the factor with the most impact on consumers' buying decisions.

The concept of sustainable fashion has several facets, such as biological, green, eco, equitable trade, etc. All of these factors include broader political and ethical issues like animal rights, workers' rights, as well as the environment. Moreover, in order to understand the different purchasing behavior, more respectful consumption and environmentally friendly clothing, it is necessary to conduct more in-depth research than for other industries in order to really understand them. This is due to the fact that the fashion industry, more than other industries, is in constant change with sometimes atypical products. However, despite the desire of companies to change to more sustainable fashion, it is consumers who really have the power to make a difference by deciding whether or not to buy more environmentally friendly products. It is only by changing their lifestyle that it becomes constant with planned purchases that the average consumer will gradually become more ethical. In addition, using durable and more visible labels increases the sales of this type of product as well as the transparency of the company. Increasing product transparency to customers is more likely to change their minds about their purchasing behavior.

2.4 Labels and Certifications

In our consumer society, today we can see many logos, labels, certifications appearing on everyday products. The very first label, the Blue Angel label, appeared in 1978 at the request of the German Ministry of the Interior and by decision of the Ministry of the Environment. Its purpose was to clarify information about the ecological properties of products. In the 1980s, the EU member states saw environmental labels as a tool to encourage more ecological consumption. After that, in different countries many labels with their own characteristics appeared, creating a deep confusion for both consumers and companies. In 1993, the ISO or International Standard Organization created a technical committee to establish eco-labeling standards to promote uniformity and accuracy on the one hand, and fair competition on the other (Wallez, 2015).

According to the International Organization for Standardization (2019), there are three “types” of labels: Type I, Type II and Type III.

Type I labels (official, national or supranational) are multi-criteria labels addressing the whole life cycle of the good, from resource collection through its manufacture, delivery and usage, to its disposal at the end of its life. This is called eco-labeling. Adopted by the Global Ecolabelling Network (GEN), the ISO 14024:1999 standard defines the product categories concerned, the environmental criteria, the functional characteristics of the product, the methods of evaluation, proof of conformity and certification for the award of the label. The environmental criteria are based on proven scientific and technical principles and are based on measurable indicators. Transparency is required at all stages and all stakeholders must have access to all information to be able to check it. After a predefined period of validity, the environmental criteria and functional characteristics of the product are reassessed. Obtaining a Type I label is a voluntary process undertaken by a manufacturer. A product can only be awarded the label if it complies with environmental legislation and other applicable legal requirements. The label does not affect a brand or a whole range of products of a manufacturer but only one product at a time. For example, a brand of hygiene products may have only one shampoo bearing the European Ecolabel, even though the range includes ten different products (Wallez, 2015).

Type II or self-declared environmental labels are deliberate claims, not certified by an independent third source, that are placed on a product, packaging, communication support, etc., by anyone likely to benefit from them (manufacturer, distributor, importer, advertiser, etc.). They are the exclusive responsibility of those who conceive them. These reports may be in the format of text, pictures, logos, or pictograms conveying a statement about the environmental credentials of a product. Not all self-declared environmental claims are equal, the worst can be found alongside the best, and it is in this category that many examples of greenwashing can be found. To control self-declarations, promote transparency, inform the consumer, and encourage a fair positioning of manufacturers on the market, ISO has developed the ISO 14021:1999 standard. It provides a guide to environmental self-declaration that avoids the pitfalls of greenwashing by recalling the general principles of relevance, honesty, and accuracy that any environmental self-declaration is supposed to respect (Wallez, 2015).

To implement the green branding strategy within the fashion industry, companies are implementing various labels such as "fair trade", "eco-friendly" or "ethical". (Yang, Song, & Tong 2017)

Type III labels or eco-profiles are trademarks that identify the performance of a product in terms of its environmental impact (CO₂, water consumption, etc.) based on a life cycle analysis. These are quantitative data presented in the form of a graph, sometimes accompanied by qualitative information (Wallez, 2015).

Despite the fact that these labels encourage more ecological consumption, they are subject to many criticisms for several factors:

First of all, the classification of type I, II and III labels made by the ISO is not wide enough and cannot encompass all the existing standards. Secondly, the labels are quite complex and governed by numerous clauses, creating confusion and even suspicion among consumers with the example of greenwashing. This negative aspect is strengthened by the fact that there are nowadays 445 labels in 197 countries in 25 industries (Henninger, 2015). According to Karthik and Gopalakrishnan (2014), ecolabels guarantee consumers that the products manufactured by the company are environmentally friendly and make it easier for companies to export their products.

2.5 Identified Gaps

The literature review confirms that the fashion industry is characterized by its constant renewal of collections, its overproduction and its manufacturing processes that are not always eco-responsible or even socially questionable. This is why this industry is one of the most polluting for the environment. In order to remedy this, several actors have been defined: the companies (with their manufacturing process, the decentralization of their firm, etc.), the consumers with their established habits and the fashion industry itself with its various pre-established codes. Each of these different actors has a role to play to decrease the impact of this industry on the environment. Although firms are initiating several changes, especially by relocating their production factories and using more ecological raw materials. There is more work to be done to raise awareness of these changes among consumers, who have well-established habits, such as over-consumption, for example.

The author was able to identify through her study that attitudes are changing. However, this interest in sustainable development and the ecological impact that industry has on the environment is pretty recent. The new processes put in place with this desire that companies have to produce

better and sell in a more responsible way will take more time to reach consumers and change their habits related to fast fashion.

Therefore, the desire for sustainability and more ethical practices should also come from consumers. The fashion industry should find ways to arouse the curiosity and interest of consumers who are mostly guided by their emotions when it comes to their purchases.

The literature review has also allowed to identify a lack of publications regarding purchasing behavior within ethics and sustainability in the fashion industry and on ecological labels in the fashion industry.

2.6 Research Framework

The author realized that before 2010, there was very little research on sustainability in the fashion industry (see Figure 1). Companies and the industry itself have been implementing new processes in recent years to address this. Sustainability is increasingly affecting consumers, but they are not sufficiently informed. In order to change the consumption trends established for decades by this industry, the author sees a parallel between (i) consumer behavior; (ii) eco-labels and (iii) sustainable development. These three notions can influence purchasing behavior. Based on the models in the literature review in the section 2.3 Consumers' Purchasing Behavior, three hypotheses have been set up and the author thinks that there is a connection between them. Figure 2 represents the theoretical model on which the author based her research from these designs (see Figures 2 and 3).

Sustainable development is one of the factors in the theoretical model that is growing in importance in the fashion industry. The first hypothesis is that the current environmental impact of consumers compared to the new "green" approaches of the industry influence their future purchasing behavior.

The second factor in this model is consumer behavior. As seen in section 2.3, consumer behavior can change depending on several factors: psychological and sociological. The second assumption made by the author is that consumer behavior can be influenced by external factors such as the fashion industry, which tries to change their fast fashion practices, on their purchasing behavior.

The last factor in this model concerns the ecological labels that are appearing more frequently on the products of the brands. The third hypothesis is that the fact a product has an ecological label, "a tag" in addition to a product of the same range, influences the consumer's purchasing behavior by pushing him to consume in a way that reduces his environmental impact.

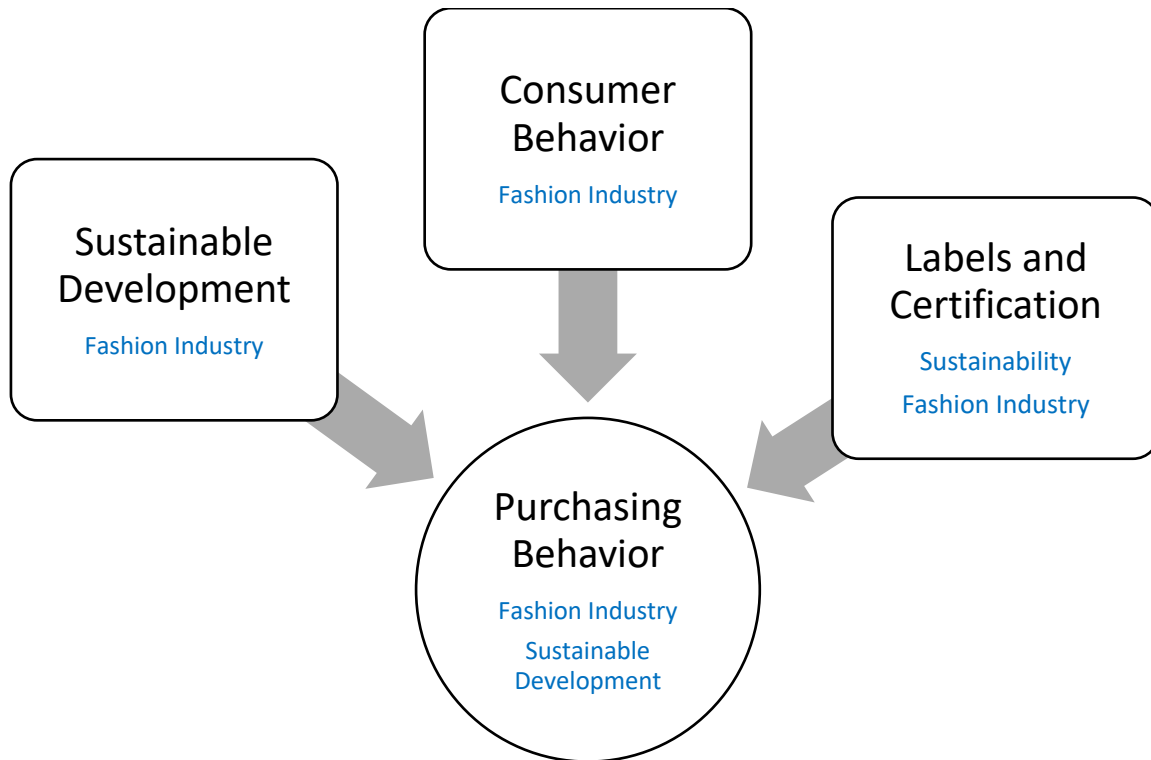


Figure 5. Proposed research model

Previous researches have been conducted about the sustainable development in the fashion industry. Several factors: (i) sustainable development; (ii) customer's behavior; (iii) labels and certification, have an impact on customers' purchasing behavior (see section 2.3). This is what allowed the author to build the survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1) based on this model (see Figure 5). First, by trying to find out what the purchasing behavior of the consumers in this sample is, to know their opinions regarding sustainable development in this industry and whether this has an influence on their purchasing decision. Then, according to their interest, their level of knowledge regarding ecological labels.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Context

The fashion industry, with its manufacturing processes and its constant renewal of fashions collections, is one of the most polluting sectors. After having demonstrated that there is a desire and even a need for environmental change on the part of both companies and consumers, the author is interested in studying the attitude of consumers towards sustainable development and in their awareness of labels in the fashion industry. The study focuses on the perception of consumers regarding these key aspects: (i) whether it is the industry itself; (ii) sustainable development; (iii) the implementation of labels; (iv) certifications. In recent years (see section 2.1 Existing Theories and Previous Work), there has been an increasing number of research articles on sustainability in the fashion industry. However, these articles are more focused on companies than on the consumption habits of consumers, who are among the major actors that can make a difference in the industry. The author therefore believes that the topic of consumer attitudes and awareness is a legitimate one for this industry. Currently, companies are already looking to improve their environmental impact with more responsible production (see section 2.2.1 Fashion Industry) and the implementation of various labels on their products to attract consumers. Therefore, the author analyzes the data collected in the survey questionnaire in order to verify if the notion of sustainable development when purchasing clothing is already part of consumers' habits and to what extent they are aware of the production processes implemented by companies.

The main goal of this empirical study concerns the attitude of consumers towards sustainable development through the investigation of their consumption habits and to determine their knowledge of existing eco-friendly labels. To answer the research questions, listed in the introduction chapter, the author first collected secondary data and then conducted an online survey.

These research questions show what type of data the survey questionnaire provides. However, the first research question answers through the collection of secondary data.

3.2 Research Approach

The author uses in this research abductive approach where mixed method is used and collected qualitative and quantitative data with a survey questionnaire.

3.3 Research Design

The research design refers to the whole strategy you adopt to add the various study components in a relevant and coherent manner, thus ensuring that you effectively address the research problem; it is the model for collecting, measuring and analyzing data (Trochim, & William M.K., 2006; Vaus, 2006).

The author based her research on The Saunders Research Onion which illustrates the different stages in development of the research work. It gives further detailed about the research process.

Philosophical Stance: **Pragmatism**

A position that asserts that the most important factor of the research philosophy taken is the research question, claiming that it is feasible to work within both positivist and interpretivist perspectives. It applies a practical approach, integrating different perspectives to help collect and interpret data. It will allow the author to get existing facts and to analyze collected data in order to interpret them together.

Research Purpose: **Descripto-Explanatory**

Study in which the aims is to create a precise and clear representation of persons, events or situations.

The author would like to get data from people that work in the industry or who consume it.

Approach: **Deductive**

Research approach (see figure 6) in which you start with an existing theory that will be tested with a collection of data. You start from a general level to a more specific one supported or not by the analysis of the data gathered. The author wants to collect data to make a parallel between an existing social theory and her hypothesis.

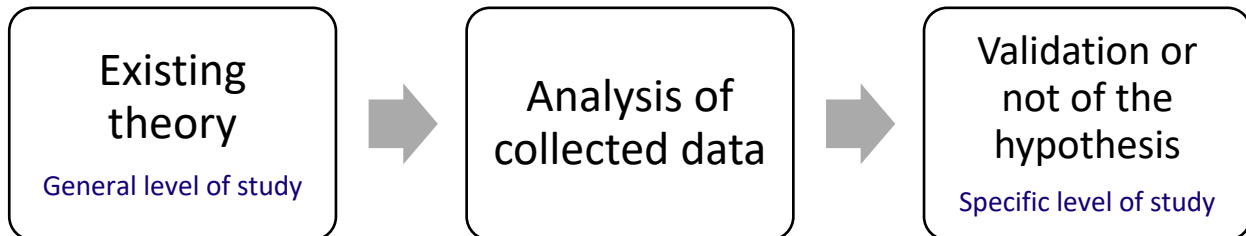


Figure 6. Deductive Research Approach

Research Strategy: **Questionnaire**

General expression encompassing all data collection methods in which each person is asked to answer to the same set of questions in a predefined order. See also delivery and collection questionnaire, interviewer-administered questionnaire, online questionnaire, postal questionnaire, self-administered questionnaire. The author will administrate a questionnaire by email to the people that work in Shopping centers, such as Printemps-Haussmann, and to random customers from Y generation.

Mixed-Methods

Use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection method and analysis process either as concurrent, at the same time, or one after the other. In the survey questionnaire, the author used mixed method where qualitative and quantitative questions are interrelated.

Cross Sectional

The study of a particular phenomenon at a specific time.

Qualitative and Quantitative

Non-numerical data or data that have not been quantified in order to have consumer behaviors.

Numerical data or data that have been quantified in order to obtain facts. (Thesis proposal, resources' glossary).

3.4 Data Collection

For the research, the author used primary data. Primary data represents original data gathered for a particular research purpose (Hox & Boeijs, 2004). The author has released a quantitative and qualitative questionnaire to study customers' consumption in general and regarding clothes. For the quantitative questions, there are binary questions, number scale questions and bipolar questions. About the qualitative part of the questionnaire, there are some open-ended questions that are linked to some of the quantitative ones. Moreover, the qualitative part is embedded in the quantitative part. The main objective is to know if customers are nowadays interested in buying in a more sustainable way.

The online questionnaire has been created in January 2021 through Google Forms which allows the author to have some leeway and use mixed method by doing both quantitative and qualitative questions. Moreover, this platform enabled the author to share the questionnaire in an easiest way through a sharable link for the respondents. The link has been first shared on LinkedIn, a professional social media in which the majority of the author's networks is from the fashion industry and in a business field who understand well the issues of the topic at stake. Then, to obtain more responses, the link has been shared with external persons to have more neutral and objective opinions from all types of consumers. The author considers the panel of respondents to be relevant because, coming from the fashion industry or not, they are all consumers with different opinions about their consumption in relation to sustainable development issues. The questionnaire remained open to new answers until it reached a minimum of 80 in order to have a sufficient sample for both quantitative and qualitative response analysis. Normally, for the sample to be relevant for a quantitative study it must reach a minimum of 100 responses. However, since the author decided to mix a quantitative and qualitative study, too many responses would not have allowed for an accurate and precise analysis. Quantitative questions enable data to be collected more easily

and analyzed thanks graphs that provide an overview. Qualitative questions allow us to go deeper into the subject and to have a more precise opinion on the respondents' answers.

The questionnaire has been answered by 111 respondents and contains 23 questions and is divided into four parts. The questionnaire begins with 8 demographic questions to study the profile of the respondents. Then, there is the study of the consumers' purchasing behavior in general, their purchasing behavior towards clothing and finally their knowledge of sustainable development and labels in the fashion industry.

4 Results

4.1 Respondents' profile

To begin, the 8 demographics questions enable establishing the profile of the respondents. The questionnaire has been answered by 111 people. The data reveals that almost 68% of the respondents are women and 32% are men (Figure 7). The difference may have a relationship with the fact that women are often more interested in the fashion field than men.

111 answers

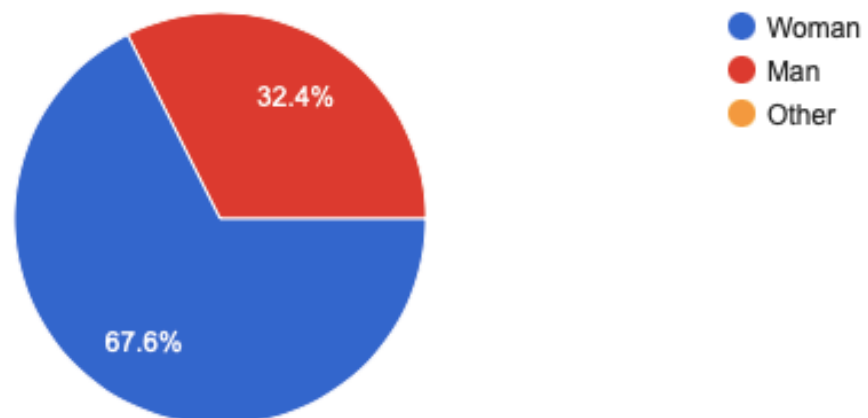


Figure 7. Respondents' gender

The respondents are mostly between 18 and 25 years old (55%) against 18% between 26 and 40 years of age, followed by 20% between 41 and 55 years of age (Figure 8). Considering that the author is between 18 and 25 years old, and that her network is mostly made up of people between 18 and 40 years old, it is normal that the majority of respondents are in this age group.

111 answers

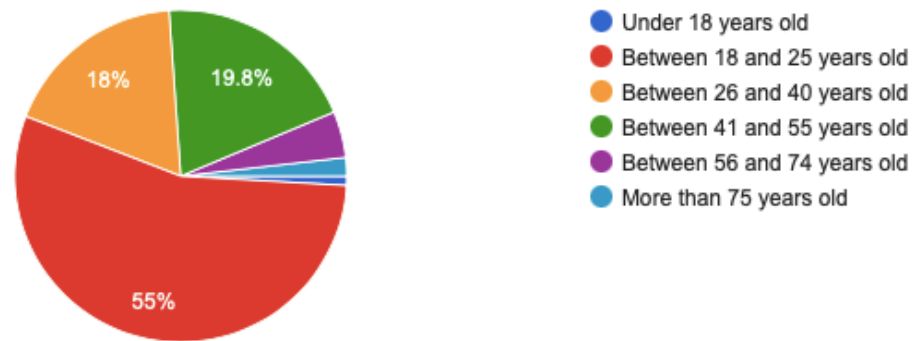


Figure 8. Respondents' age

The majority of respondents live near a large city (71%) and 52% are students (figure 9) with little or no income (59%).

111 answers



Figure 9. Respondents' socio-professional category

The majority of the respondents buy clothes once a month and for 34% of them it's occasionally like once or twice a year. (Figure 10)

111 answers

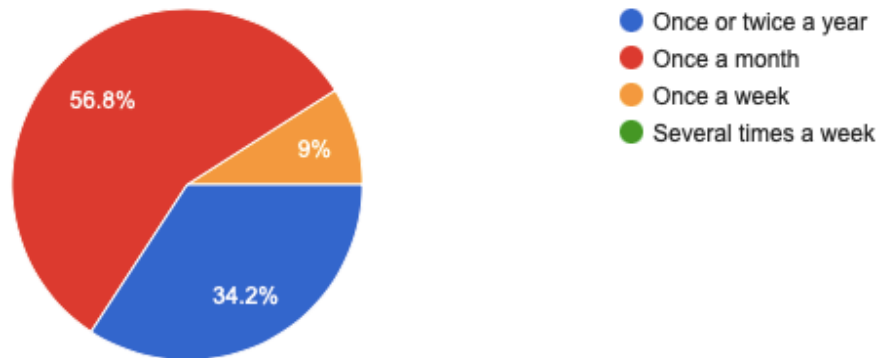


Figure 10. Consumers' frequency of purchase

For 55% of the respondents their budget allocated to clothes purchased is between 50€ and 200€ and for 40% of them it is less than 50€. (Figure 11)

111 answers

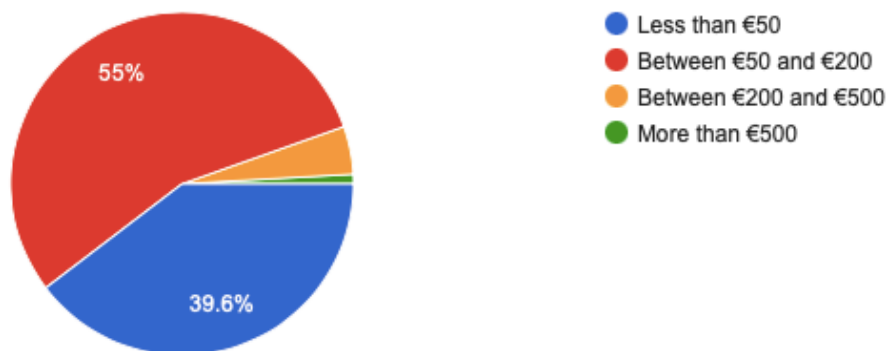


Figure 11. Monthly purchase budget for clothing

4.2 Purchasing Behavior in General

The author asked the respondents which factors are the most important for them while they make a purchase. It appears that quality is the first factors that matters the most followed by the function and the price of the product and then its ecological impact. (Figure 12)

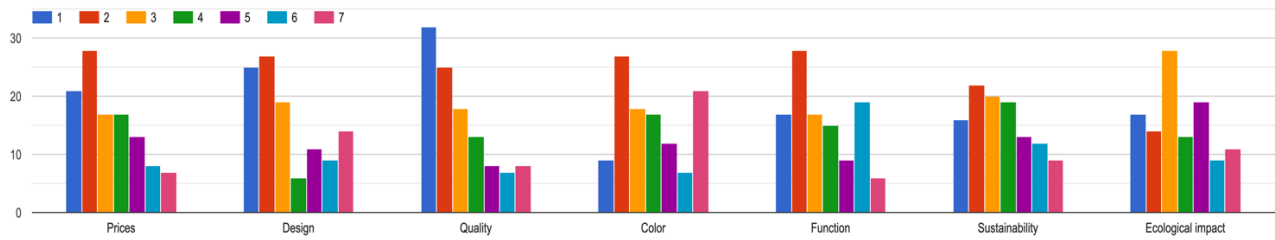


Figure 12. The most important factors for respondents in their purchase decision

A qualitative analysis with descriptive statistics (see Table 1) shows that, on average, the factors that matter most to consumers are quality, price, and design (see Figure 13).

| | Mean | Standard error | Median | Mode | Standard deviation | Sample variance | Kurtosis | Skewness | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | Count |
|-------------------|-------|----------------|--------|------|--------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|-------|---------|---------|-----|-------|
| Price | 0,775 | 0,172 | 1 | 2 | 1,807 | 3,267 | -0,737 | -0,541 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 86 | 111 |
| Design | 0,694 | 0,197 | 1 | 2 | 2,071 | 4,287 | -1,016 | -0,594 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 77 | 111 |
| Quality | 1,063 | 0,178 | 2 | 3 | 1,879 | 3,532 | -0,446 | -0,796 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 118 | 111 |
| Color | 0,090 | 0,189 | 0 | 2 | 1,989 | 3,955 | -1,192 | -0,324 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 10 | 111 |
| Function | 0,532 | 0,179 | 1 | 2 | 1,882 | 3,542 | -1,150 | -0,362 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 59 | 111 |
| Sustainability | 0,432 | 0,175 | 1 | 2 | 1,842 | 3,393 | -0,953 | -0,322 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 48 | 111 |
| Ecological Impact | 0,333 | 0,176 | 1 | 1 | 1,855 | 3,442 | -0,930 | -0,249 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 37 | 111 |

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics 1

For each factor under study, on a scale of -3 to +3, the minimum values are -3 and the maximum values are +3. Sustainability and ecological impact are not among the criteria that purchasers take into consideration at first sight.

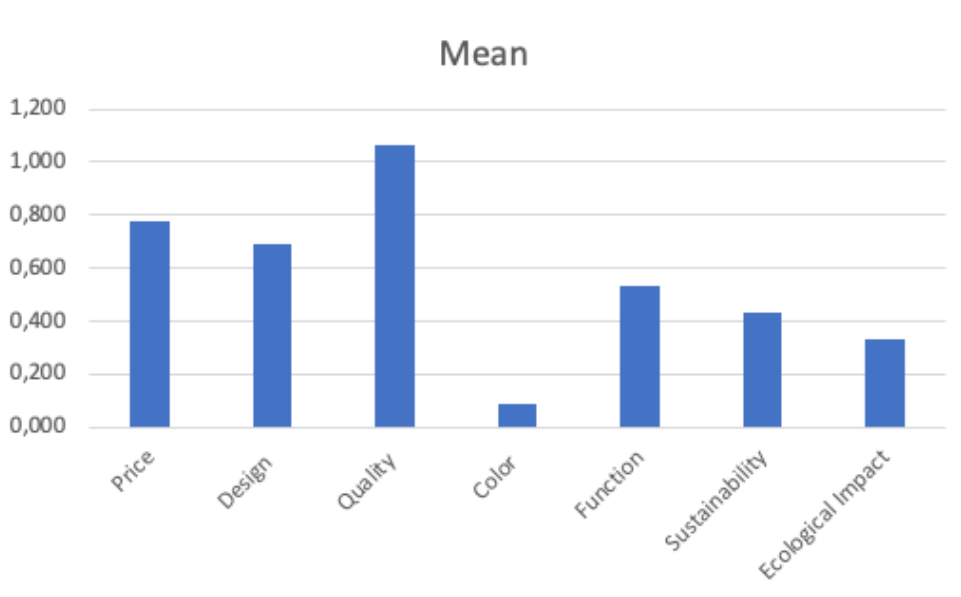


Figure 13. The most important factors for respondents in their purchase decision

To go further, the author asked them about their motivation when they make a purchase decision. Majority of the respondents answered quit the same thing, for them buying is synonym of desire, to please oneself by buying or simply a need. One of the respondents wrote: "The crush and the need for the article". For other respndents it's more about "Do I like the garment and will I have an interest in wearing it in longterm" or "It depends on the purchase. For the clothes it can be the purchase pleasure, for the furniture it is the purchase need with quality that's lasts". However, some of them are interesting and take care about the environment and their ecological impact. For exemple, two of the respondents quoted: "The quality of the product mainly, and its durability in order not to have to repurchase it quickly, can be also in a logic to avoid the overconsumption and thus the ecological impact" and "The most important thing for the moment is the price and the quality of the product even if I pay more and more attention to the ecological impact for certain purchases (second hand clothes for exemple)".

Only 5,4% of the respondents make their purchase by impulse against 13,5% for those who planned their purchase. The majority of them, i.e., 50,4%, are in the middle between the two types of purchase. (Figure 14)

111 answers

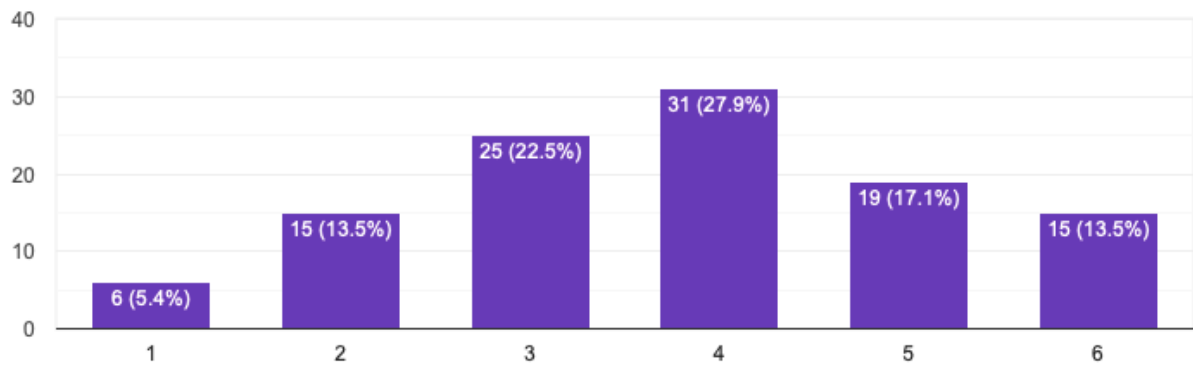


Figure 14. Are purchases planned or made on impulse?

4.3 Purchasing Behavior Regarding Clothes

For 90 of the respondents, they first look at the prices of the clothes. Then, for 82 of them they look at the design and finally the third most important factors, for 79 people, is the quality. (Figure 15)

111 answers

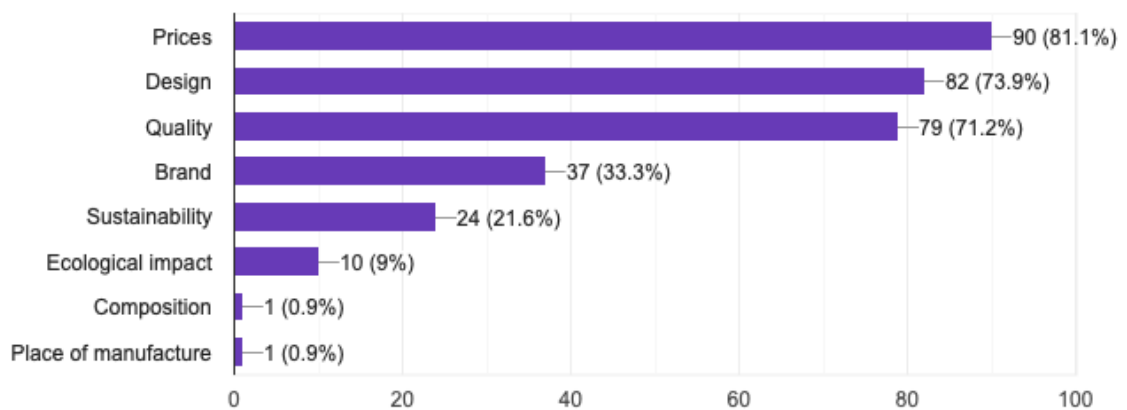


Figure 15. First look factors in purchasing clothing

The respondents are moderated in term of their motivations purchased. However, 11,7% of them make emotional purchased against 9% for the rational ones. 1 being emotional and 6 rational. (Figure 16)

111 answers

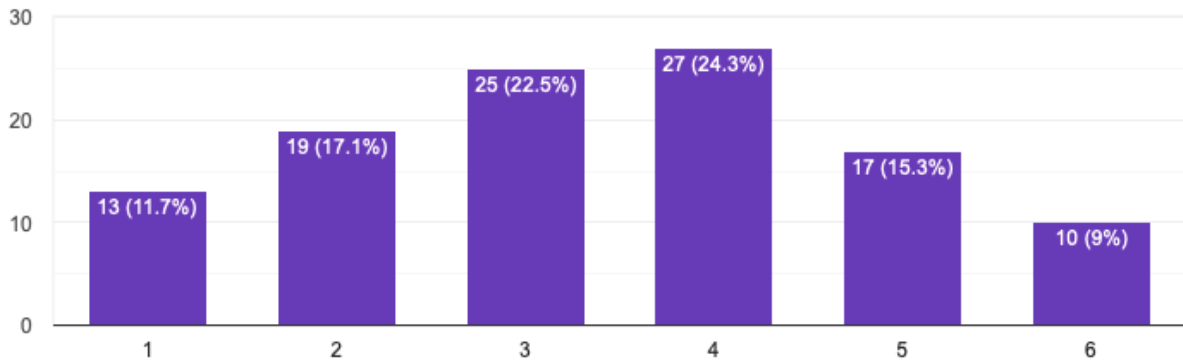


Figure 16. Are clothes purchases planned or made on impulse?

To differentiate between general purchases and clothing purchases, the author analyzed the bipolar questions using descriptive statistics (see Table 2). Consumers are more likely to buy emotionally, on a "whim" when it comes to clothing than other purchases in general. Moreover, buying clothes with more ecological raw materials is not yet a priority for them, as shown by the rather low average results for question SQ10 (see figure 21).

| | Mean | Standard error | Median | Mode | Standard deviation | Sample variance | Kurtosis | Skewness | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | Count |
|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|------|--------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|-------|---------|---------|-----|-------|
| <i>Rational (general purchase)</i> | 0,369 | 0,173 | 1 | 1 | 1,824 | 3,326 | -1,182 | -0,198 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 41 | 111 |
| <i>Rational (clothes purchase)</i> | -0,099 | 0,181 | -1 | 1 | 1,911 | 3,654 | -1,302 | 0,033 | 6 | -3 | 3 | -11 | 111 |
| <i>Raw Materials</i> | 0,423 | 0,160 | 1 | 1 | 1,687 | 2,846 | -0,873 | -0,438 | 6 | -3 | 3 | 47 | 111 |

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics 2

71 of the respondents buy their clothes in the stores of brands, 63 on internet and 11 in thrift store. (Figure 17)

111 answers

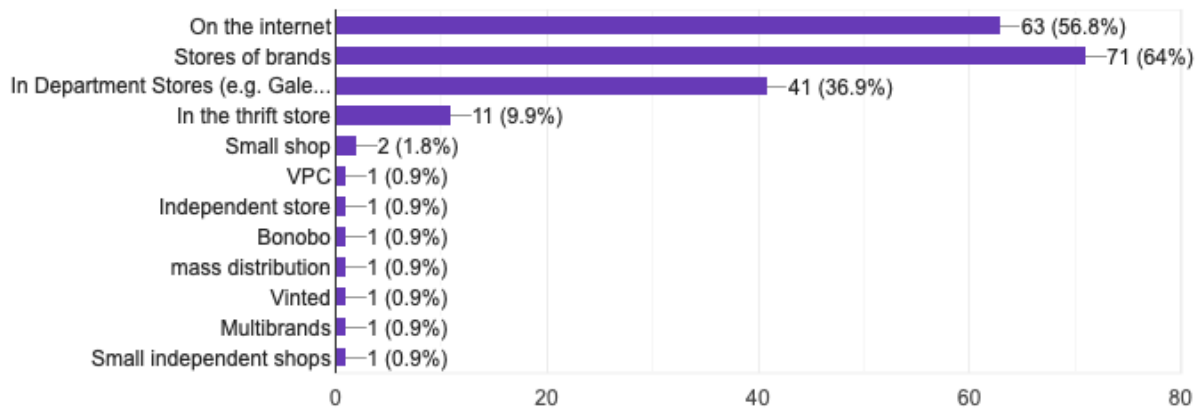


Figure 17. Location of purchase

The author asked the respondents if it is important for them to buy ecological product and 50,5% answered yes. (Figure 18)

111 answers

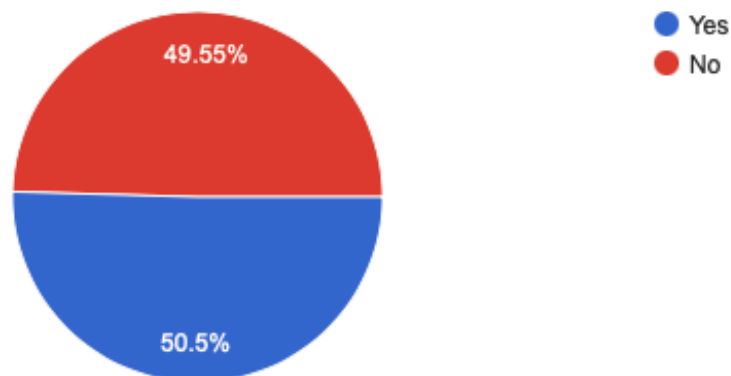


Figure 18. Buying an ecological product?

Respondents were quite mixed in their responses. For some, they are unequivocal, and it is not an aspect they consider at all. According to a few of them: "I look for design and an attractive price, I don't consider the ecological impact"; "I don't look at where the product comes from, as long as the quality is good, I don't go further". Some find that it is not yet developed enough, that there is

very little information on the subject and that it is difficult to know if it is an ecological product. Here is the answer of one of the people: "Buying eco-friendly clothes would be much better but I don't really see how to know the ecological impact of a garment. At least the information is not very visible (in the stores I usually go to) and most importantly I find it hard to compare the ecological impact between two garments". However, many try to be careful with their purchases even though they have trouble finding eco-friendly clothing near them. Therefore, some respondents said that they prefer French or European manufacturing at first: "I try to find sensible brands. I favor made in France or made in Europe more than the material of the clothes."

For 92 of the respondents, they first look at the prices of the clothes. Then, for 89 of them they look at the design and finally the third most important factors, for 92 people, is the quality. However, only 36 and 24 look at respectively the sustainability and the environmental impact when they buy clothes. (Figure 19)

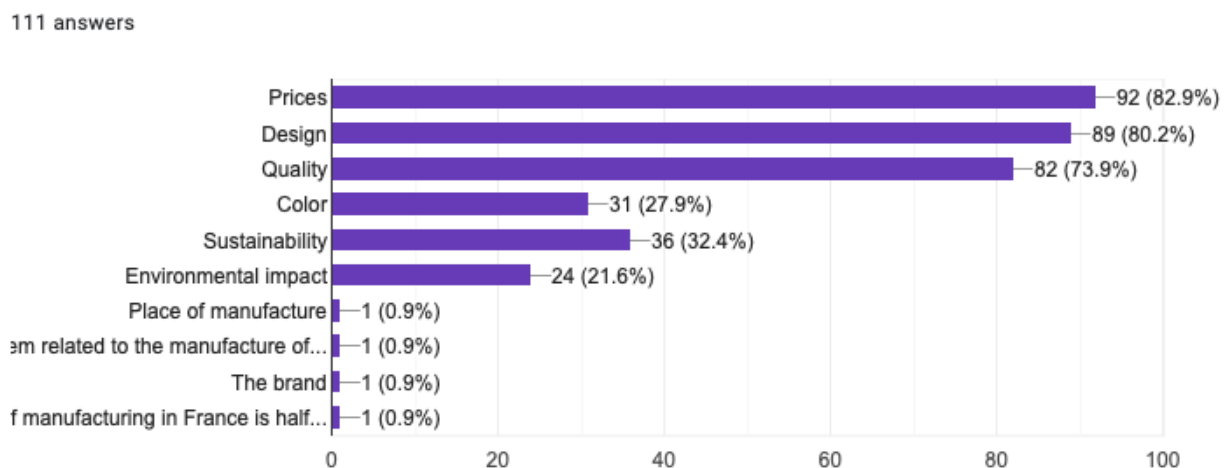


Figure 19. Important factors when buying clothes

4.4 Sustainable Development and Labels in the Fashion Industry

According to the Larousse Encyclopedia (www.Larousse.fr), the definition of sustainable development is as follows: "To satisfy the needs of present generations without burdening the possibilities of future generations to satisfy theirs, and therefore to consider the ecological heritage (air, water, raw materials) as a stock of resources whose withdrawals should not exceed their natural renewal capacity. ". Most of the respondents have similar answers that are close to reality and are aware

of the importance of the notion with as an example of one of the respondents: "the ability to preserve the environment in the future by making sure not to compromise these new generations when we consume. ". However, for some, it is a more general notion having to do with ecology, or on the contrary in a more general way with social, economic, and ecological development. For example, one of the respondents said: "For me, sustainable development is synonymous with the long term and by considering the ecology but also the social and economical aspects, these 3 factors are part of sustainable development. ". In general, sustainable development is perceived as a notion linked to ecology, implying to produce in a more respectful way and to adopt a more responsible consumption.

Finally, the author was interested to better know customers' knowledge about ecological labels dedicated to the fashion industry. Only 17,1% of the respondents know at least one ecological label. (Figure 20) Here is the list of the one they cited: PETA, Oeko-Tex, GOTS, Global recycling standard, RWS, Ecocert, AB, Demeter, Conscious (H&M eco-label), Join Life by Zara.

111 answers

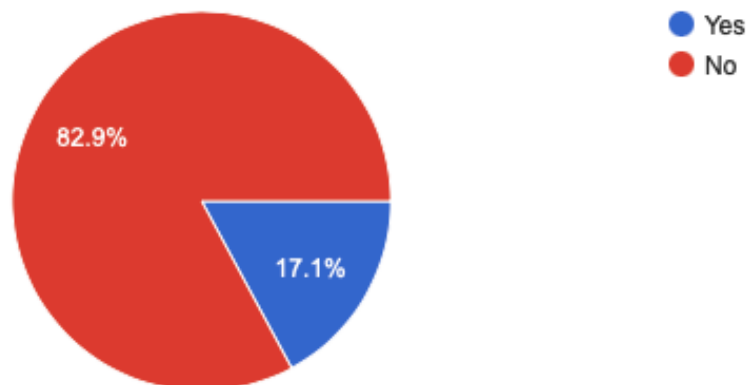


Figure 20. Respondents' knowledge about Eco-labels

For 36% of the respondents, it is a little bit important that the raw materials of clothing are ecological and only 5,4% think that it is not important. 1 is not important and 6 is very important. (Figure 21)

111 answers

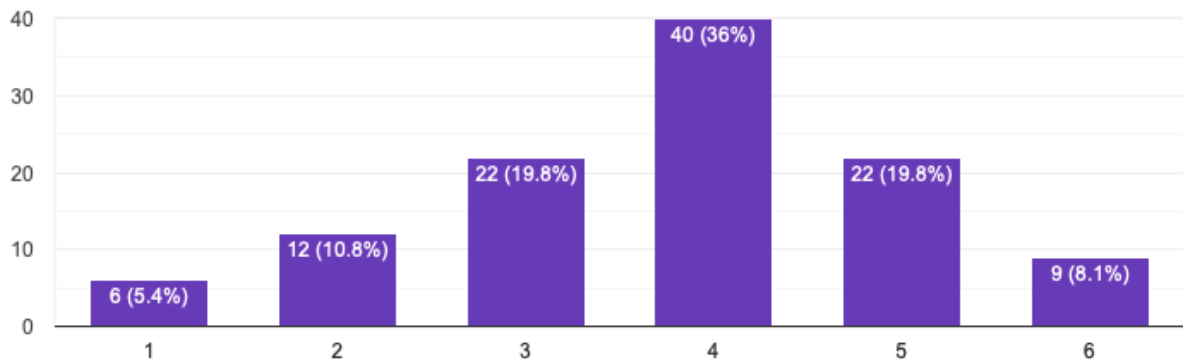


Figure 21. Interest in the origin of raw materials

Majority of the respondents prefer to receive information about the origin of the garment directly in the store during the purchase. The information can come directly from the seller who is supposed to know perfectly his products and the consumer has the possibility to ask more precise questions. (Figure 22)

111 answers

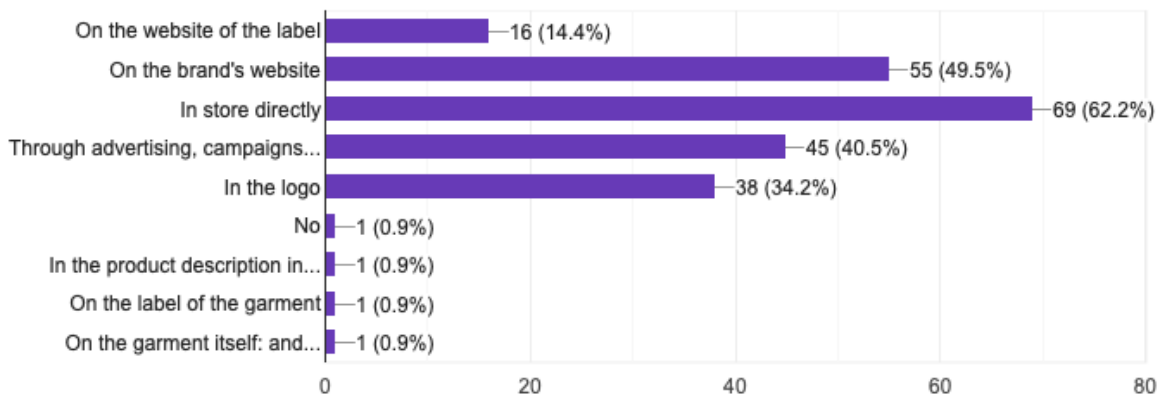


Figure 22. Respondents' preference for obtaining information on the origin of garments

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to study consumers' purchasing behavior towards an awareness of sustainable development and labels in the fashion industry. The author wanted to study the

current consumption habits of consumers and the factors that could most easily change their purchasing behavior. In addition, the study aims to present and highlight the different processes already existing within the industry in support of sustainable development.

Initially, the author looked at existing theories about (i) sustainability in the fashion industry; (ii) consumer behavior, and more specifically (iii) their fashion purchasing behavior. The author found that the number of studies for the first keywords was only significant since 2010. However, the author was able to find enough data to establish how the fashion industry works.

In a second step, the author conducted a literature review to deepen the understanding of the working of this industry and its level of commitment to sustainable development. Some problems were identified, notably regarding consumer purchasing behavior and the level of companies that are both still very much linked to fast fashion.

To better understand and expand on existing theories, the author used a deductive approach, drawing on various established models to create her research model and outline her hypotheses (see section 2.6) based on it.

Finally, to test her research framework, the author conducted a survey using a mixed-methods methodology that combined both quantitative and qualitative questions. This was done to collect useful data for the study and with the intention of answering three research questions presented in the section 1.2, the major one RQ1: What are the customers' purchasing behavior towards sustainable development in the fashion industry? Based on the participants' responses, the results showed that respondents do not look at the ecological impact of products for fashion-related purchases first because they do not feel informed enough. However, the respondents are increasingly inclined to be more environmentally friendly but due to this lack of information between the industry, the brands and themselves, this is not enough developed.

6 Discussion

6.1 Limitations, Reliability and Validity

This study involves a survey questionnaire using a mixed method with both quantitative and qualitative questions. To be relevant, a qualitative questionnaire must have a response rate of over 100 or more. The author collected 111 responses for this survey. However, one of the limitations of this study is that the target audience is mainly composed of the author's network, i.e. students between 18 and 25 years old. It would have been more interesting to have a more homogeneous sample both in terms of the age range of the respondents and their gender, since 68% are women. Furthermore, another limitation of this study is that the author used a deductive research method that allows her to rely only on existing theories to validate new hypotheses.

With regard to the reliability and validity of this study, the author began by conducting a literature review in order to have a good overview of the subject studied. However, concerning the survey questionnaire, the answers were mainly from students who did not necessarily have the experience or the budget to make sustainable development their first purchase factor in terms of clothing. Even though the sample studied is quite large, it has limitations that may raise questions about the reliability of the results. This is why in her conclusion the author cannot completely validate her theoretical model but asserts that there is a potential for change in consumer purchasing behavior due to the different factors studied.

Finally, concerning the validity of the research, the proposed theoretical model (see figure 5) is based on several already existing and validated models (see figures 3 and 4). Moreover, concerning the creation of the survey questionnaire, it is also based on these two models.

6.2 Answering the Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer one main research question RQ1 and two sub-questions RQ1.1 and RQ1.2 for feeding the main one. By looking at the results of the survey questionnaire and the study done during the literature review, all three research questions were investigated.

First of all, the literature review allowed for the establishment of a theoretical model and its verification through the survey questionnaire. In relation to the first sub-question RQ1.1 (see section 1.2), very few respondents were aware of the existence of eco-labels, let alone their meaning. The survey questionnaire showed that only 17% of respondents were aware of one or more eco-labels. The label system is complex and not yet sufficiently known by the public to affect their consumption behavior. When a product has a label, it encourages consumers to buy even if they do not know the overall meaning of the label.

The second research sub-question RQ1.2 was related to the factors that influence consumer purchasing behavior with respect to sustainability in the fashion industry. This research question could be solved through the survey questionnaire. Respondents are increasingly paying attention to their ecological impact, where the products are made and what type of production it is linked to. However, the price and design of a product are still important factors for them and sometimes make them choose a non-ecological product. Moreover, when it comes to clothing purchases, consumers buy a lot through their emotions and do not yet feel sufficiently knowledgeable and involved about sustainable development in this industry.

Now that the two research sub-questions feeding the main research question have been answered, the main research question, i.e. the purchasing behavior of customers towards sustainability in the fashion industry, can be examined. Sustainability is becoming more and more important in most industries, however, in the fashion industry it has only been an issue for a few years (see figure 1). According to the survey questionnaire, within the fashion industry consumers are initially looking for quality and cost-effectiveness. However, more and more are looking to reduce their ecological impact by buying less or better quality or by paying attention to the origin of the product. Nevertheless, the author noted that the main issue for consumers was the lack of information about the ecological impact of a product and the difficulty to compare them.

6.3 Future Work

According to the literature review, companies are implementing new processes every day to produce better, both environmentally and socially. However, the ecological impact of this industry is still very negative. Future research should focus on this impact, whether it is the companies or the consumers that could have the most influence.

Furthermore, an extension of this study, by using a larger survey sample, would obtain a more complete statistical analysis in order to refine and validate the theoretical model proposed in this study. This study has proposed a research model with factors influencing consumer purchasing behavior in the fashion industry. Now, it would be interesting to know how to ensure that each of these factors (see Figure 5) is best used by companies in this industry.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Questionnaire : La mode et le développement durable ?

Cher participant,

Je vous invite à participer à une étude de recherche intitulée : Le potentiel commercial du développement durable des marques. Je suis étudiante en double diplôme à l'ICD Business School de Paris et à l'Université JAMK des Sciences Appliquées en Finlande. Pour ma thèse de licence, j'examine le comportement des consommateurs envers le développement durable et les labels dans l'industrie de la mode. Le questionnaire ci-joint a été conçu pour collecter des informations sur : La manière dont le développement durable influe sur la décision du client d'acheter des produits / marques de mode.

Votre participation est strictement volontaire et vous pouvez refuser de participer à tout moment. Il n'y a aucun risque connu à participer à votre vie quotidienne. Vos réponses resteront confidentielles et anonymes. Les données de cette recherche seront traitées comme confidentielles et rapportées uniquement comme un total combiné collectif. Vos réponses individuelles à ce questionnaire ne seront pas rendues publiques. Si vous choisissez de participer à ce projet, veuillez répondre à toutes les questions aussi précisément que possible. Il n'y a pas de bonnes ou de mauvaises réponses.

Le questionnaire nécessitera entre 5 et 10 minutes à remplir.

Si vous avez des questions sur ce projet, n'hésitez pas à me contacter à camille.paolozzi@gmail.com.

Merci d'avoir pris le temps de m'aider dans mon projet.

Cordialement,

Camille Paolozzi

DQ1 : Quel âge avez-vous ?

Moins de 18 ans

Entre 18 et 25 ans

Entre 26 et 40 ans

Entre 41 et 55 ans

Entre 56 et 74 ans

Plus de 75 ans

DQ2 : Habitez-vous près d'une grande ville ? (Entre 0 et 50 Km)

Oui

Non

DQ2.2 : Si oui, laquelle ?

DQ3 : Quelle est votre catégorie socio-professionnelle ?

Agriculteurs exploitants

Artisans, commerçants et chefs d'entreprise

Cadres et professions intellectuelles supérieures

Professions intermédiaires

Employés

Ouvriers

Étudiants

Retraités

Autres personnes sans activité professionnelle

DQ4 : Quel est votre niveau de revenu annuel ?

Entre 0 et 15 000€

Entre 15 000 et 30 000€

Entre 30 000 et 50 000€

Entre 50 000 et 100 000€

Plus de 100 000€

DQ5 : Quel est votre sexe ?

Femme

Homme

Autre

DQ 6 : À quelle fréquence achetez-vous des vêtements ?

Une ou deux fois par an

Une fois par mois

Une fois par semaine

Plusieurs fois par semaine

DQ 7 : Quel est votre budget mensuel pour l'achat de vêtements ?

Moins de 50€

Entre 50€ et 200€

Entre 200€ et 500€

Plus de 500€

1. Votre comportement d'achat en général.

SQ1 : Quels sont les facteurs les plus importants pour vous lorsque vous prenez une décision d'achat ? (1 étant le plus important et 7 le moins important)

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Prix | | | | | | | |
| Design | | | | | | | |
| Qualité | | | | | | | |
| Couleur | | | | | | | |
| Fonction | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Durabilité | | | | | | | |
| Impact Écologique | | | | | | | |

SQ1.1 : Qu'est-ce qui vous motive lorsque vous prenez une décision d'achat ? (En quelques mots)

SQ2 : Comment achetez-vous ?

Par impulsion 1 2 3 4 5 6 L'achat était planifié et soigneusement pensé

2. Votre comportement d'achat concernant les vêtements

SQ3 : Que regardez-vous en premier lorsque vous achetez des vêtements ? (Les 3 plus important)

Prix

Design

Qualité

Marque

Durabilité

Impact écologique

SQ4 : Qu'est-ce qui vous motive lors de l'achat de vêtements ?

Achat émotionnel 1 2 3 4 5 6 Achat rationnel

SQ5 : Où achetez-vous habituellement vos vêtements ? (Plusieurs réponses possibles)

Sur internet

Les magasins des marques

En Grands Magasins (ex. Galeries Lafayette)

En friperie

Autres (écrivez votre réponse)

SQ6 : Est-ce important pour vous d'acheter un produit écologique ?

Oui

Non

SQ6.6 : Veuillez justifier brièvement votre réponse :

SQ7 : Quels sont les facteurs qui comptent lors de l'achat de vêtements ?

Prix

Design

Qualité

Couleur

Durabilité

Impact environnemental

Autres

3. Développement durable et labels dans l'industrie de la mode

SQ8 : Qu'est-ce que le développement durable pour vous ? (en quelques mots)

SQ9 : Connaissez-vous des labels écologiques dans le domaine de la mode ?

Oui

Non

SQ9.9 : Si oui, pouvez-vous les citer ?

SQ10 : Vous souciez-vous que les matières premières des vêtements soient plus écologiques ?

Pas important 1 2 3 4 5 6 Très important

SQ11 : Comment souhaitez-vous recevoir les informations relatives à l'origine d'un vêtement ?

Sur le site du label

Sur le site de la marque

En boutique directement

Par la publicité, les campagnes, les médias sociaux, les influenceurs

Dans le logo

Autres