



# **Sustainability communication in clothing stores**

– Exploring the interplay between attitudes, behaviour and the context of in-store apparel shopping

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Environmental Communication and Management – Master's programme

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## Abstract

It is acknowledged nowadays that people's attitudes cannot serve as valid predictors of their behaviour since our growing environmental awareness and concern do not appear to be translated into more conscious consumer behaviour. It is argued that one of the reasons for this discrepancy may be that human behaviour is not determined by motivations alone and the context in which it is performed may substantially affect it. Hence, this thesis attempts to enrich the understanding of the complexity of the attitude-behaviour gap's phenomenon by paying special attention to the context of apparel consumption, i.e. a physical clothing store and its sustainability communication. This is achieved by exploring the interplay between consumers' attitudes, behaviour and shopping experiences with their interpretations of sustainability communication in clothing stores. To do this, goal-framing theory developed within environmental psychology is complemented by qualitative methodology widely used in environmental communication but largely ignored in environmental psychology. This combination is intended to demonstrate that the exchange between these disciplines can be balanced and mutually beneficial. As a result, three patterns of the interplay between attitudes, behaviour and context are identified. The first pattern ("extreme and sceptical") is distinguished among people who either intensely dislike or enjoy shopping and tend to negatively view sustainability communication in clothing stores. The second pattern ("ambivalent and favourably disposed") comprises those who are more ambivalent about shopping may more positively respond to sustainability communication in stores. Lastly, the third pattern ("susceptible and concerned") is discovered among individuals who strive to reduce their apparel consumption and therefore are more prone to associate shopping for new garments with the feelings of guilt. They may welcome more sustainability communication in stores but can also be suspicious of the brands' motives behind it. Based on the findings, implications and suggestions for future research, policy and clothing brands' communication practice are discussed.

*Keywords:* sustainability communication, apparel shopping, context, attitude-behaviour gap, goal-framing theory, consumption

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## Abbreviations

EC	Environmental communication
EP	Environmental psychology
NAM	Norm Activation Model
TPB	Theory of planned behaviour
VBN	Value-Belief-Norm theory



# 1. Introduction

It is argued that since changes in buying behaviour by and large have more profound environmental consequences than recycling or reusing, research on the former has to be prioritised in academia (Steg and Vlek, 2009). On that premise, it seems reasonable to study apparel<sup>1</sup> consumption – which is the focus of this thesis – given its massive scale and alarming footprint. The emergence and rapid expansion of the fast fashion business model is believed to have given rise to premature product obsolescence and replacement by continuously cutting prices and shortening trend cycles (Kozłowski, Bardecki and Searcy, 2012). This was achieved by outsourcing production to developing countries with the low-cost workforce and more lenient environmental and labour regulations (*ibid.*) Unsurprisingly, it resulted in a dramatic surge in global consumption of clothes (both in terms of its turnover and volume) while causing a host of serious social and environmental issues: poor working conditions, health and safety issues, extremely small wages and long hours, suppression of workers' right to form unions, forced and child labour; dependence on fossil fuels, use of toxic chemicals, contribution to water scarcity, the vast waste generation that is, for the most part, landfilled or incinerated, etc. (Kozłowski, Bardecki and Searcy, 2012; Allwood et al., 2006; Sandin et al., 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020). Although it is evident that most of these adverse impacts are created within the production stage (Sandin et al., 2019), consumers' pivotal role in reducing the detrimental ramifications of the garment sector is also stressed (Kozłowski, Bardecki and Searcy, 2012) as the estimates of total emissions produced by the industry are typically based on the number of items purchased in the population reflecting the levels of consumer demand (Quantis, 2018). Furthermore, individuals themselves are cognisant of their excessive consumption seeing that nearly half of the participants in the survey commissioned by Greenpeace admitted that they were buying more clothes than they needed and, in some instances, even than they could afford (Wahnbaeck and Roloff, 2017).

However, such realisations and environmental awareness, albeit progressively increasing (GfK, 2019), do not appear to be translated into more conscious consumer behaviour. Global per capita textile production has more than doubled

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the word “apparel” and its synonyms in this paper encompass footwear and accessories, yet it will not be explicitly mentioned elsewhere in the text for the sake of brevity.

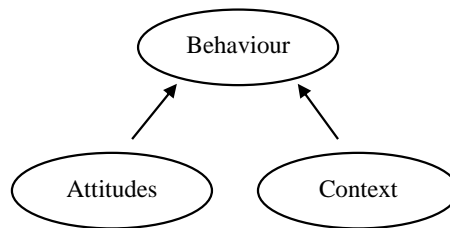
since 1975 and is projected to continue rising in the coming years (Niinimäki et al., 2020) whereas the market share of green products remains quite modest (Bernardes et al., 2018). This suggests that our growing knowledge and concern about environmental and social problems are not radically transforming modern unsustainable consumption patterns. In other words, people's attitudes and intentions cannot serve as valid predictors of their behaviour since they are not always acted upon (Sheeran, 2002). This discrepancy is commonly referred to as the attitude-behaviour gap and nowadays it is widely discussed not only among scholars and especially psychologists but also among policy-makers and practitioners (Caruana, Carrington and Chatzidakis, 2015).

Extant publications on the subject of sustainable apparel consumption have chiefly concentrated on its intra-personal dimensions such as knowledge, values, norms, attitudes (see Kang, Liu and Kim, 2013; Kozar and Hiller Connell, 2013) and the effects of media and advertisements on the buying intentions (see de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Kim and Jin, 2019). The same can be said about research that specifically addresses attitude-behaviour gap in the realm of sustainable clothing consumption by examining its psychological drivers and barriers (see Jung, Choi and Oh, 2020; Perry and Chung, 2016). Nevertheless, it is contended that human behaviour is not determined by motivations alone and the context in which behaviour is performed may substantially affect the behaviour itself together with motivations shaping it (Steg and Vlek, 2009). It is even claimed that while attitude-behaviour association holds the most predictive value when characteristics of context are neutral, it almost completely loses it when contextual forces are strongly negative or positive (Stern, 2000). On these grounds, it becomes necessary to take context into account when trying to explain behaviours in real-life settings (Moser and Uzzell, 2003). This argument was formalised in the ABC theory originally proposed by Guagnano, Stern and Dietz (1995) and subsequently elaborated by Stern (2000) which postulates that "behaviour (B) is an interactive product of personal-sphere attitudinal variables (A) and contextual factors (C)" (Stern, 2000, p. 415). Hence, the major contribution of this study is expected to be in its emphasis on the often-neglected aspect of the context in which apparel consumption occurs, i.e. a physical clothing store<sup>2</sup>. It has to be clarified that in much of the literature on this topic context is generally conceptualised as objective external inputs. This conception has been criticised for reinforcing "a somewhat linear and atomistic understanding of behavior" (Nye and Hargreaves, 2009, p. 139) where individuals will behave pro-environmentally if they know how and are exposed to appropriate cues. By contrast, in this paper, guided by the constructionist paradigm which will

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<sup>2</sup> Online apparel shopping was deemed too broad and therefore challenging to adequately cover within the limited space of a master's thesis because it is not attached to a certain context and can be practised virtually anywhere and at any time which implies that individuals may hold drastically different notions of it.

be expanded on later, context is approached as people's constructions of such external inputs. To be exact, the context of clothing shopping is treated here not as the material infrastructure and facilities themselves but rather as consumers' perceptions of them. Moreover, this work is written within the field of environmental communication which is why it places particular importance on sustainability communication carried out inside clothing shops.



*Figure 1. ABC theory*

Simultaneously, Stern (2000) advised against single-variable research since he reasoned that a thorough comprehension of any environmentally significant behaviour can be gained only by considering multiple factors that exert influence on it taken together. Accordingly, in addition to the primary focus on the context, attitudes and behavior will also be included in the analysis as other core components of the ABC model. Here these key elements are defined as follows:

- Behaviour is the buying decisions taken by consumers when shopping in clothing stores;
- Attitudes are consumers' opinions about apparel brands and their overall sustainability communication as well as their views on how the sector's transition to sustainability should be attained and who should be responsible for it;
- Context is represented firstly through consumers' shopping experiences in clothing stores and secondly through stores' communication about sustainability and consumers' perceptions of it.

Thus, this thesis attempts to enrich the understanding of the complexity of the attitude-behaviour gap's phenomenon by paying special attention to the context of apparel consumption. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the interplay between consumers' attitudes, behaviour and shopping experiences with their interpretations of sustainability communication in clothing stores. To fulfil this aim, the research questions are formulated as listed below:

- 1) How do consumers describe their shopping experiences in clothing stores?
- 2) How do consumers make sense of their purchasing decisions?

- 3) To whom do consumers attribute responsibility for the fashion industry's transition to sustainability and how do they assess apparel brands' communication about it?
- 4) What do clothing brands communicate regarding sustainability in their stores and how do consumers interpret this communication?

The conceptual framework based on goal-framing theory and the rationale behind it will be introduced in the next chapter. It will be prefixed by a brief outline of the theoretical background which will specify within which disciplines this study is positioned and what aspects from them it incorporates. Next, the overview of the methodology will demonstrate how the constructionist approach informed the choice of methods, namely interviewing and observation, and recount how these methods were employed, what difficulties were encountered in the process and what adjustments they necessitated. The chapter will end with a short description of the analytical procedure that will lead up to the analysis itself divided into five sections. The first four of them will consecutively answer each research question while the last section will summarise their findings. Two final chapters will present the conclusions drawn from the analysis along with the theoretical and practical implications of this work.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Links between communication and psychology

This research is conducted at the intersection between the fields of environmental communication (EC) and environmental psychology (EP). As was underlined above, the principal interest of the paper lies in the sustainability communication of clothing shops which indicates that the matters it attends to are within the scope of EC. At the same time, its theoretical underpinnings are largely derived from EP as the notion that the context is one of the crucial determinants of behaviour, which is central to this work, laid the foundation of EP as an independent branch of knowledge (Steg and de Groot, 2019). This is, in fact, a unique feature of EP because other psychological sub-disciplines tend to minimise the role of environmental contingencies by treating them as a mere backdrop of human activity or entirely eliminating them with the artificiality of experiments (Moser and Uzzell, 2003). What is more, EP initially dealt mainly with the effects of the built environment on psychological processes but due to the rapidly spreading awareness of deteriorating environmental conditions, it embraced the so-called shift from ‘architectural’ to ‘green’ psychology (Steg and de Groot, 2019). As a result, now it predominantly concerns itself with sustainability issues and the antecedents of conservation behaviours (some of which are consumption-related) along with the factors that inhibit or foster them (*ibid.*)

Since EP as a subject area is quite interdisciplinary (active collaboration with geography, architecture, environmental science, social and cognitive psychology is a common occurrence) and problem-oriented (studies within it are often aimed at identifying practical and concrete solutions) (Steg and de Groot, 2019), many of its insights are put forward to be and are applied in environmental policy and communication (Klößner, 2015; Shove, 2010). It has to be pointed out in this respect that communication as a distinct academic discipline originated in social psychology which suggests that it historically has close ties with psychological research (Craig and Muller, 2007). Nonetheless, so far, they mostly have been limited to transferring findings from various psychological branches to communication practice in order to more effectively accomplish pursued

objectives. This thesis aspires to make a contribution to the existing corpus of literature at the interface of EC and EP striving to demonstrate that the exchange between these domains can be more balanced. Here it is done by bringing together theories and concepts from EP and the methodological approach frequently used in EC scholarship but broadly ignored in EP. This will be further elucidated after discussing the conceptual framework.

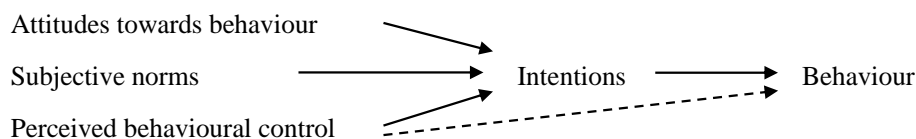
## 2.2. Conceptual framework

The basis of the framework is formed by the goal-framing theory which is advanced as a meta-theory encompassing several key behaviour models in EP under its umbrella (Klößner, 2015). Consequently, it integrates their ideas and inferences which makes its explanations and arguments more intricate and exhaustive. This is one of the important merits of goal-framing theory favouring its choice but the major reason why it was selected is that, unlike the models it comprises, it explicitly addresses the context of behaviour and its implications. To begin with, the theory is built on the premise that goals govern how a person views a given situation, i.e. what is noticed about it and what knowledge and attitudes become cognitively most accessible (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007). Hence, a goal is defined as “a combination of a motive and an activated knowledge structure” (ibid., p. 118) while a goal-frame refers to a focal goal with its framing effects that dictate how information about the situation is processed and acted upon (ibid.) Goal-framing theory explicates how motives interact in producing behaviour as it hypothesises that goals are heterogeneous and hierarchically ordered, i.e. focal goals steer one’s decision-making, while background goals strengthen or hinder them (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007; Klößner, 2015). Goals are also dynamic and can compete with each other for prioritisation, especially when they are divergent or conflicting (Onel and Mukherjee, 2015). Numerous factors can be involved in this process, contextual aspects being one of them, which is where the theory recognises the role of context (Klößner, 2015).

There are three types of goal-frames distinguished in the theory: hedonic, gain and normative. The hedonic goal-frame is associated with avoiding effort, negative thoughts or uncertainty, and with seeking gratification, joy, elation and affirmation (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007). It is labelled as “feeling good right now” which means that its time horizon is fairly short and it makes people sensitive to changes in their mood and what causes them. The hedonic goal-frame is assumed to be intrinsically the strongest and least reliant on support from the surroundings as it stems from the innate human drive for satisfaction. This goal-frame is connected to the theories on affect conceived to establish the influence of emotions on behaviour (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007), yet research in this domain still remains less developed than in

other spheres (Klößner, 2015). This might be the case because even though it is claimed that people are more inclined to engage in environmentally sound behaviour when they gain pleasure from it as opposed to when they solely conform to accepted environmental norms (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007), pro-environmental behaviour is rarely seen as serving hedonistic motivations (Klößner, 2015).

Next, the gain goal-frame entails accumulation or enhancement of personal resources (e.g. time, money, social approval) and prevention of their loss which is why people with the gain goal-frame are highly attentive to information about incentives and sanctions (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007). The time horizon of the gain goal-frame is medium- to long-term as it demands acting on behalf of a future self. This goal-frame is linked to rational choice theories, particularly to the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) because they both presume that behaviour is normally guided by one's self-interests. TPB is acclaimed as one of the most renowned social psychological theories and it is most suitable for elucidating deliberate behaviours (in contrast to more automated habits and routines) since it is founded on the presupposition that behaviour is, as a rule, preceded by the intention to perform it (Klößner, 2015). Intentions, in their turn, are composed of three components weighed against each other: attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control (ibid.) Attitudes are characterised as evaluations of possible costs and benefits of a certain behaviour and their probability (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007; Klößner, 2015). Subjective norms consist of beliefs about the expectations of reference groups and the willingness to comply with them (ibid.) Perceived behavioural control reflects the judgements about the ease or difficulty of executing the target behaviour (Onel and Mukherjee, 2015). It is believed that perceived behavioural control can also affect behaviour directly as a low degree of perceived control has been shown to weaken the relationship between intentions and behaviour (Klößner, 2015).



*Figure 2. Theory of planned behaviour, adapted from Ajzen (1991, p. 182)*

Lastly, the normative goal-frame is described as exemplary conduct, “doing the right thing”, “behaving properly” or “acting appropriately” (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007; Klößner, 2015; Onel and Mukherjee, 2015). This goal-frame is the most dependent on external reinforcement since it usually implies disregarding selfish motives (i.e. gain and hedonic goals) to the advantage of other species, future generations or the environment itself (Lindenberg and Steg, 2007). For this reason, it can be easily overridden by other goal-frames if behaviour is exceptionally costly

or rewarding or if there is ambiguous or insufficient information on how to enact it (ibid.) Normative goal-frame is grounded in the norm-activation model (NAM) and its subsequent extension, the value-belief-norm theory (VBN), as they were designed to expound altruistic behaviour and thus are more capable of probing into the ethical background of environmental actions than TPB (Klöckner, 2015). NAM posits that in situations where individuals are faced with moral choices, behaviour is regulated by the sense of moral obligation that is termed a “personal norm” (ibid.) Personal norms can have an impact on behaviour only after being activated which requires awareness of adverse consequences (awareness that something or someone valuable is in danger) and ascription of responsibility to self (the degree to which responsibility for averting or eradicating those consequences is ascribed to oneself) (Klöckner, 2015; Stern, 2000). As for VBN, it adds more stable fundamental elements of personality to the norm-activation chain by proposing that more peculiar beliefs, i.e. awareness of consequences and ascription of responsibility (which is called the “ability to reduce threat” in the theory) are anteceded and shaped by basic value orientations and overall views on human-environment relations (Stern, 2000; Lindenberg and Steg, 2007). In other words, the likelihood of activating the norm and ultimately taking a pro-environmental action is contingent on the extent to which ecological worldview, as well as biospheric and altruistic values, are embraced (Klöckner, 2015).

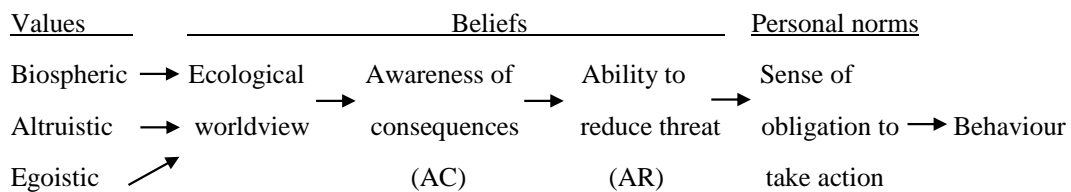


Figure 3. The value-belief-norm theory of environmentalism, adapted from Stern (2000, p. 412)

Additionally, within this framework, goal-framing theory is complemented by a range of relevant concepts to enrich the analysis. One of them is cognitive dissonance which was included due to its pertinence to the discussion on pro-environmental behaviour and its mechanisms outlined in the previous paragraph. In general, cognitive dissonance emerges when one holds contradictory cognitions or when there is perceived incongruence between one’s thoughts and actions, yet its threshold varies from individual to individual (George and Yaoyuneyong, 2010; Schultz, 2014). Moreover, not all discrepancies trigger cognitive dissonance but only those that can jeopardise crucial aspects of one’s self-concept (Thøgersen, 2011). With respect to pro-environmental behaviour, cognitive dissonance may arise if a perceived mismatch between beliefs or attitudes and actual behaviour threatens one’s self-concept as a virtuous and conscious person. Seeing that people tend to subdue cognitive dissonance by modifying their unsustainable behaviour, interventions aimed at promoting environmentally responsible practices sometimes



utilise cognitive dissonance as a behaviour change instrument by challenging the target audience's self- identities (Schultz, 2014; Vining and Ebreo, 2002). However, if the adoption of a conservation behaviour is deemed too difficult, inconvenient or demanding, people may alternatively either reassess their attitudes and convictions or simply decide to endure the psychological discomfort of cognitive inconsistency (Thøgersen, 2004).

Other concepts that will be introduced below were added to the framework because they were developed specifically for elucidating consumer and/or shopping behaviour and are compatible with the goal-framing theory which is why they can direct its insights more towards the interest area of this study. First, the notion of *shopping motivation* examines how individuals react to various stimuli coming from the store environment based on what they seek from shopping (George and Yaoyuneyong, 2010). Shopping motivation is categorised into *hedonic* and *utilitarian*, where the former is analogous to the hedonic goal-frame, as its name suggests, whereas the latter corresponds to the gain goal-frame. Another distinction drawn on in the analysis is made between *impulsive* (unplanned, spontaneous) and *involved* (thought-out, deliberate) purchasing decisions (ibid.) Impulse decisions are more typical of people with a hedonic goal-frame since it prioritises quick or instant fulfilment of desires. Gain and normative goal-frames, on the other hand, are more long-term oriented and their decisions need more time and careful contemplation, that is, they are more involved. Finally, the framework incorporates the theory of material possessions which postulates that goods perform three main functions: instrumental, affective and symbolic (Steg, 2005). *Affective function* represents the emotional dimension of consumption and can be linked to the hedonic goal-frame due to their mutual focus on feelings. *Instrumental function* expresses the essential utilitarian value of products and is primarily foregrounded in the gain goal-frame as it pursues the most efficient allocation of resources. *Symbolic function*, in its turn, is twofold, i.e. it is used to communicate firstly one's self-identity and secondly one's social status or group membership. While gain goal-frame deals solely with the second facet of symbolic function by making individuals attentive to their social capital, normative goal-frame can accommodate both of them (e.g. one can have an identity of a green consumer and be part of the conservationist movement).

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Approach

Constructionism was chosen as a paradigmatic approach in this thesis because it most accurately reflects my worldview as a researcher. This choice evidently entails certain ontological, epistemological and methodological implications. First and foremost, from the constructionist perspective, there is no single objective reality but rather multiple realities are subjectively and socially constructed through language that operates constitutively and performatively (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Moisander and Pesonen, 2002). This implies that people conceive meaningful constructs with a limited set of underlying assumptions and interpretative procedures available to them within their culture and act upon them (*ibid.*) Hence, our knowledge about the world will always be imperfect and incomplete just as our theories and methodologies will inevitably be laden with our biases. Thus, constructionism advances the production of knowledge that instead of aspiring to be universal and purely objective embraces its localised and partial nature. Furthermore, the core constructionist premise that individuals are constantly constructing and co-constructing reality guides analysis towards exploring what meanings they are creating and in what ways. This is why studies adopting constructionism demonstrate a clear preference for qualitative methods due to their hermeneutical capacity allowing to acquire a richer understanding of social phenomena and meaning-making processes shaping them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; de Vaus, 2001). Correspondingly, the constructionist paradigm directs the focus of this research to the meanings that consumers construct from their shopping experiences, perceptions of the shopping environment and interpretations of brands' communication and that they enact in their purchasing decisions. Likewise, the task of accessing these meanings that collectively constitute consumers' realities determines the selection of qualitative methods in this work.

The psychological field, on the contrary, exhibits more positivistic inclinations that predispose it to correlational investigations accompanied by quantitative methods and statistical techniques. Although qualitative methodology is gradually gaining recognition and approval in other disciplines and psychological branches, it is yet

to be thoroughly acknowledged and accepted in EP (Vining and Ebreo, 2002; Steg and de Groot, 2019). Nonetheless, this thesis endeavours to show how theories and concepts derived from quantitative research can be applied in qualitative studies to add new dimensions or nuances to prior findings. They can also question or corroborate established explanations thereby broadening and deepening existing knowledge and detecting overlooked lacunas. This approach is common within EC given the vast range of theories with diverse epistemological and methodological orientations underpinning its scholarship (Milstein, 2009) and a balanced split between qualitative and quantitative studies in the field (Comfort and Park, 2018). A move away from association with any particular theoretical and methodological traditions seems to be deliberately taken in its academic community (Anderson, 2015) and is advocated as a strength of the discipline (Comfort and Park, 2018). Therefore, it can be assumed that EP too can benefit from the diversification of the methods and techniques it uses. What is more, EC and EP alike deal with pressing environmental issues that demand profound societal transformation for a more sustainable future. This is why both disciplines are characterised as problem-driven and change-oriented (Joosse et al., 2020; Steg and de Groot, 2019) which is what this study also hopes to be. Simultaneously, EC scholars strive to be more critical and reflexive in their research practice by recognising that knowledge production is an inherently political activity and by contemplating whose interests will be promoted with the change they advocate for and whose will be marginalised (Joosse et al., 2020). Environmental psychologists, in their turn, have been previously criticised for not taking these matters into account (Shove, 2010) which indicates that EP can draw inspiration from EC's engagement in these methodological deliberations.

## 3.2. Methods

As was previously mentioned, two qualitative methods are employed in this thesis – interviewing and observation. Interviews are used as a data collection method when it is necessary to learn more about people's opinions, motives and feelings formulated in their own words (Jupp, 2006). Since this work is aimed at examining consumers' understandings of their shopping experiences and buying decisions as well as their views on fashion retailers' sustainability communication, interviewing was deemed the most suitable method to obtain this kind of information. Moreover, observations in several clothing shops were made to see which elements of sustainability communication present in the outlets appeared remarkable and prominent to interviewees and which of them were reckoned less worthy of attention or left totally unnoticed. For this reason, data gathered from observations were treated as complementing the main source, that is, interviews.

The initial plan was to randomly approach and interview consumers (upon their consent) in one of the shopping centres in Stockholm where I was doing observations. This way, interviews would be held in the same context that would be discussed in them, i.e. in the shopping environment. Such an interview setting was presumed to be more favourable as it would allow interviewees to refer to and reflect on their immediate experiences. Yet, soon after I commenced my fieldwork in the shopping centre in March 2020, the coronavirus began to spread in Sweden which prompted the authorities to introduce social distancing rules. I managed to carry out only two interviews before the guidelines were issued. As a consequence, I had to prioritise observations for fear of a pandemic lockdown and closure of non-essential businesses if the situation with COVID-19 deteriorated.

On the whole, observations were made in six shops representing six different brands, they are (in alphabetical order): Bik Bok, Filippa K, Gina Tricot, H&M, Lindex, Zara<sup>3</sup>. These brands were selected according to two criteria. First of all, they needed to have their own branded physical stores in the shopping centres meaning that other clothing brands were not being sold in the same retail outlet. Secondly, all these brands were included in the Sustainable Brand Index ranking 2019 in the “Clothes & Shoes” section (SB Insight, 2019). Three of the brands hold positions in the first half of the ranking (Lindex, H&M and Filippa K take the 7th, 13th and 17th places respectively) while three other brands are distributed within the second half of it (Zara, Gina Tricot and Bik Bok are the 35th, 40th and 45th respectively with the last one being the lowest position in the rating). This sample was chosen to ensure representation of apparel retailers across the entire spectrum, i.e. from those that are considered to be more sustainable and making more efforts in this area to those that are believed to be lacking these qualities<sup>4</sup>.

Observations were conducted in a semi-structured manner since they specifically concentrated on sustainability communication and its channels in stores, yet they did not systematically follow any observation schedules or checklists (O’Leary, 2017). During the observations, I was making notes and taking photographs of communication materials related to sustainability. As a result, two major categories were identified, namely tags and signs (placards, posters, etc.) In addition to that, I asked sales assistants whether there were any green collections or items in the shop, where they could be found and how they were distinguished from other garments. These questions served two purposes. First, employees’ answers were expected to help in locating more sustainably produced apparel and, more importantly, they signified how much information about this type of clothing personnel could or were

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<sup>3</sup> It was decided to disclose the names of the selected brands for the sake of transparency, i.e. to ensure that the researcher’s claims can be put to the test.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this ranking is based on the evaluation of how sustainable brands are perceived by consumers, i.e. respondents in the study (see SB Insight, 2019).

willing to provide. All data captured through observations were subsequently combined, organized and compared with interviewees' responses.

As far as interviewing is concerned, 15 semi-structured interviews were carried out in March and April 2020 and lasted between 7 and 40 minutes with an average length of around 20 minutes. In light of the unfortunate events recounted above, I had to resort to convenience sampling which is normally not advisable to implement (O'Leary, 2017). I contacted several acquaintances some of whom, to my knowledge, had an interest in fashion and some of whom, vice versa, explicitly disregarded it. In the meantime, lecturers from the educational department of my master's programme agreed to send out an email to their students inviting them to do an interview with me about their apparel shopping. I was aware that those students were likely to have a substantial level of environmental consciousness given the courses they were taking. This implies that the perspectives of those who are concerned about the environmental problems could be more dominant in the analysis which could influence the results and conclusions drawn from them. All in all, I conducted two face-to-face interviews with the shoppers, five online interviews with the acquaintances and eight online interviews with the students. The table below contains the list of interviewees with their demographic characteristics and fictive names.

*Table 1. List of interviewees:*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Recruitment</b>
Adrianna	27	Female	Working	Europe	Shopping centre
Amber	36	Female	Working	Africa	Shopping centre
Anna	25	Female	Student	Europe	Email
Camilla	24	Female	Student	Europe	Email
Cristian	36	Male	Student	South America	Email
Emily	22	Female	Working	Europe	Acquaintance
Felix	26	Male	Student	Europe	Email
Helga	25	Female	Working	Europe	Acquaintance
Jacob	24	Male	Student	Europe	Email
Jana	28	Female	Working	Europe	Acquaintance
Jared	23	Male	Working	North America	Acquaintance
Louise	38	Female	Student	North America	Email
Samir	30	Male	Student	Asia	Email
Stefan	25	Male	Student	Europe	Acquaintance
Yvonne	24	Female	Student	Asia	Email

The single criterion for the selection of informants was their age. The focus was placed on younger consumers, more precisely on the age group that is commonly called Millennials or Generation Y, i.e. individuals born from 1980 to 2000

(Bernardes et al., 2018). This particular group was chosen because at the moment they constitute more than 25% of the global population and are reckoned to be the most influential consumer segment in the world (ibid.) Notwithstanding, none of the people who were willing to do an interview with me were excluded as per this criterion since they all fulfilled it. Aside from that, it was preferable to maintain an equal split in respondents' gender and occupation, though it was not actively pursued (i.e. volunteers would not be rejected even if they could cause disproportion) and no inferences were intended to be made around these attributes. Coincidentally, the interviewees in this study came from a variety of regions which suggests that it incorporates diverse standpoints and ways of thinking.

At the beginning of each interview, I guaranteed informants total anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were also informed that they could decline to answer any question or stop the interview altogether at any point if they wished to do so. Recording of an interview would only be started after receiving the respondent's consent for it. All these measures were taken to make sure that the interviews adhered to the ethical principles (Given, 2008). However, the biggest ethical concern in this respect lies in the partial disclosure of the interview's topic. To be exact, when introducing my research to prospective interviewees, I did not fully reveal its subject by presenting it simply as "apparel shopping" and thus omitting other key aspects of it (i.e. sustainability, communication, attitude-behaviour gap). This was done because this information could affect respondents' responses by making these matters more salient before specific questions related to them were posed. The moral dilemma was resolved by offering informants the opportunity to ask any questions they had about my thesis at the end of the interview. Judging from my replies, they could decide if they would want to withdraw from the research. However, no one among the participants chose to do so.

Interviews were designed to be semi-structured due to the flexibility they offer that resides in the balance between full standardisation and improvisation (O'Leary, 2017). In other words, this type of interviewing, on the one hand, involves the formulation of an interview guide that assists in navigating the interviewing process and ensuring that all key aspects are covered in interviews (ibid.) On the other hand, semi-structured interviewing enables researchers to further probe responses by asking follow-up questions to provide the room for spontaneous narratives that go beyond the interviewer's agenda and may uncover new and unexpected issues (Given, 2008). In this study the interview guide (Appendix 1) comprised the following series of predefined themes: past shopping experiences and post-purchase reactions, thoughts on environmental and social problems in the clothing industry and views on communication about these issues by apparel brands, especially in their stores.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim using a smartphone application. Next, transcriptions were carefully read twice and during the second reading, significant parts were highlighted and commented on. After that, I went back to the reviewed literature and applied pertinent concepts to the marked fragments. When developing each section of the analysis, I extracted and combined relevant quotes from the interviews accompanied by my remarks with references to the literature to establish connections between theory and empirical data. Simultaneously, the conceptual framework was finalized during these iterations. The analytical procedure reported above uses the abductive logic otherwise known as systematic combining (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). The abductive approach involves a constant movement between the theoretical and empirical dimensions of the analysis (Alrajeh, Fearfull and Monk, 2012). The conceptual framework can often be modified in this process due to unanticipated empirical findings or new theoretical insights (Dubois and Gadde, 2002).

To conclude, it has to be admitted that the validity of this study has been undermined by the extraordinary circumstances dictating recourse to controversial strategies and tactics (e.g. convenience sampling, recruitment of acquaintances, online interviews that tend to be less conducive to building rapport and can suffer from additional communication noise caused by technical difficulties). Yet, it is argued that by being transparent about our struggles and failures as researchers, we can make valuable contributions to collective methodological advancements (Joosse et al., 2020). Furthermore, to partially counteract the disruption of validity, multiple extended quotations are cited in the analysis to provide corroborative evidence that is supposed to exemplify how the interview data were handled and interpreted. It is worth noting, though, that many of the quotes were edited to make them easier to understand but all corrections were enclosed in square brackets to leave the original wording still accessible to the reader.

## 4. Analysis

The analysis is divided into five sections, the first four of which are intended to answer the corresponding research question. In the first section interviewees' shopping experiences are made sense of by applying the concept of shopping motivation, exploring what bodily sensations they comprise and what ensuing reactions they provoke. The sub-section on the effects of the coronavirus crisis on respondents' apparel shopping is added at the end. The second section discusses how informants reach buying decisions by examining the factors they are based upon, their character and, more broadly, the functions that clothing fulfils for them. The third section presents how interviewees view clothing brands' overall sustainability communication and to whom they assign responsibility for the fashion industry's transition to sustainability. The fourth section combines the observations of clothing stores with informants' impressions and interpretations of their sustainability communication. Goal-framing theory is employed in the final section of the analysis to structure inferences and summarise findings.

### 4.1. Shopping experiences

Although it is believed that today's shopping represents both a leisure pursuit and an economic activity (George and Yaoyuneyong, 2010), some individuals tend to prioritise one of these facets. For example, the interviewees with the primary hedonic shopping motivation, i.e. those who derive pleasure from the stimulation provided by the shopping environment, emphasise the positive feelings associated with apparel shopping. Helga confessed that shopping made her happy while Jana looks forward to her planned visits to stores, Amber simply loves shopping for clothes and Stefan views it as a "philosophy". Interviewees with the strong utilitarian motivation, on the other hand, are wary of the arousal that the shopping environment entails and strive to stay away from it as much as possible. They do not enjoy the shopping experience because it makes them uncomfortable, e.g. Jared regards it as a "chore" while Anna hates it and tries to avoid it whenever she can.

However, many informants demonstrate a mix of two motivational orientations with the activation of either of them being dependent on the context and dominant goal-frame. The broader context of apparel shopping can be divided into different



subcontexts which are exemplified in Camilla's case when she exhibits hedonic motivation while shopping for clothes with her friends ("a social activity") and utilitarian motivation when doing it alone ("a mission"). For others, the context may stay the same whereas the prevailing goal-frame will determine their behaviour and experiences. For instance, hedonic goal-frame and, accordingly, hedonic motivation are activated when they go shopping to lighten the melancholic mood or when they spontaneously visit stores to examine what they have to offer. Interestingly, some of them do not even have the intention of buying something in such situations but rather they are doing this purely for "fun" as they claim. The respondents describe this kind of shopping as "relaxing", "stress relieving", "energising" and "creative". Simultaneously, more deliberate and planned shopping which is accompanied by gain goal-frame and utilitarian motivation is characterised by them as "stressful" and "frustrating" because they frequently cannot find what they are looking for, and sometimes they would instead end up purchasing something they did not plan to buy. Despite initial excitement, these interviewees get quickly overwhelmed by the abundance of shops and clothes in them driving them to physical and emotional exhaustion. Yvonne put it this way: "There are so many choices, and if you just try on like three [pieces of] clothes... it still makes you feel very dizzy... It's very exciting when you look at that new clothes but if you put on every [one] of them, then [you] feel very tired, actually." For the aforementioned reasons, some of them turn to online shopping as the shopping space where they can enact utilitarian motivation and gain goal-frame, especially due to its convenience and lower prices or appealing bargains.

What is more, given that sensory engagement and evaluations play a crucial role in our common practices (Pink, 2005), they also constitute a substantial part of our shopping experiences. Vision appears to be the dominant sense as the majority of informants consider visual appearance as one of the most salient sensations. Some of them added that their attention could be easily attracted by windows and exterior design of shops or by bright colours and big patterns. Another important sense is touch which was mentioned by a third of interviewees. While respondents' accounts of visual and tactile experiences were neutral, their perceptions of smells and sounds in stores tended to be negative. Most of those who talked about music in clothing shops commented that sometimes it was so loud that they could get annoyed by it. Similarly, Jana and Adrianna pointed out that scents in certain stores can be very pungent and intense, in some cases even preventing them from shopping there. Yet, Emily and Stefan gave more neutral responses in this respect with the latter stressing that smells in stores should be subtle and harmonious – "not too sweet, not too industrial".

Notably, several interviewees reported using a sense that goes beyond the traditional Western sensorium, encompassing the categories of hearing, sight,

smell, taste and touch (Pink, 2012) – namely the kinaesthetic sense that is defined as the ability to navigate space and the awareness of how one moves the body in it. Cristian lamented the lack of free space in clothing stores: “you always find something like clothes around you... I don’t like that you cannot move easily in the place.” Emily takes note of the layout of shops because she does not want to “go round and round and round” when she searches for items she came for. Anna and Stefan revealed that they often felt manipulated in stores, particularly by their spatial organisation designed to force customers to pass certain products. Stefan also enthusiastically advocated for freedom of movement for consumers in shopping spaces. Moreover, he consciously refuses to be encouraged by such manipulations whenever he recognises them and he appreciates when stores are not resorting to spatial and other marketing ploys.

Another essential element of the overall shopping experience is the post-purchase review of acquired goods as it is a natural response to this occurrence (George and Yaoyuneyong, 2010). Remarkably, even though many respondents have ambivalent or negative attitudes to the shopping process, only few of them expressed mixed feelings towards its results, i.e. their purchases, while the majority is normally content with them. This observation is succinctly encapsulated in a quote from Emily: “I don't like the whole shopping thing but I like having new clothes”. Those who do not always remain pleased with their choices experience anxiety or frustration when they become aware soon after buying something that it is “unnecessary” or “stupid”. As for positive post-purchase feelings, they vary widely among informants ranging from mild satisfaction to fierce joy, happiness and even pride. Nonetheless, some respondents noticed that momentary euphoria was subsequently replaced with the overpowering realisation of their excessive accumulation of items. Louise vividly recounted such a sequence of emotions and thoughts:

“...what's so hard to get over consumption is that it almost feels like a sense of accomplishment... when I buy something it feels like I'm adding something to my life... then you become confronted with all of the things that you accumulate over time, then I start to feel a little bit more oppressed by it, that I've got too much. And I have to find places to hide it and I have to figure out what to do with it... I think that also gives people a sense of accomplishment as well, that they can clean up their closet and get ready to buy new things”.

Louise evidently constructs it as a cycle that begins with shopping as a challenge that is supposed to be successfully surmounted by procuring new items thus giving “a sense of accomplishment” and even evoking feelings of pride as was seen above. Shortly after that another challenge arises as buyers have to sort their recently obtained possessions and find space to store them which may as well entail disposing of older and no longer desirable or useful garments. The achievement ensuing from this challenge prepares individuals for the next cycle with freed up

room in their closets for further arrivals. Based on this fragment, it can be assumed that the endless alternation of challenges and triumphs over them is what fuels apparel consumption by constantly stimulating the human reward system (Hartston, 2012).

#### 4.1.1. Coronavirus pandemic

Coronavirus and widespread lockdowns to contain its spread have tremendously affected the lives of millions. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine how consumption patterns of interviewees have been influenced by the current unusual circumstances. Half of the respondents have not noticed any drastic changes at the time the interviews were conducted (end of March – beginning of April 2020) since they already had everything they needed and did not have to buy anything in the near future. Others had to cancel their plans but despite being able to shop online they chose to stop buying new clothes until the situation stabilises. Some even saw this as an opportunity to reflect on their consumption and lifestyle like Yvonne: “...because coronavirus is keeping me home, then I can quietly think a lot more. And I think I would buy less clothes in the future... So I think, I’ll try to live a more sustainable lifestyle...”

### 4.2. Buying decisions

In order to understand how individuals arrive at and interpret their purchase decisions, it is reasonable to first explore considerations and factors that guide them. Price occurs to be the most significant among them as the majority of respondents indicated that it could affect their decision to buy a garment. Furthermore, some of them underscored that price could serve as a critical barrier to opt for more sustainable alternatives: “But I also do think that some sustainable brands are really expensive and sometimes it's really hard to make that conscious choice ... because other brands just offer such convenient deals” (Camilla). This obstacle is repeatedly reported in the extant literature (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis, 2010) signalling that this issue has not been adequately addressed by the apparel industry, for instance, by more clearly and convincingly substantiating high costs to consumers or by lowering them when it is possible.

The second key factor is quality followed by a number of subjective judgements, e.g. how a piece of clothing fits and feels, whether it is to their liking or whether they find it beautiful, etc. Other more pragmatic concerns include how necessary they think an item is and how much they will be able to use it in everyday life. Some interviewees also assess how long a garment can last. Adrianna deploys this argument to justify her purchases from fast fashion brands: “I take very good care

of my clothes, even if they are from a chain store... I just take care of them a lot and I have clothes from chain stores that are 10-12 years old in good shape". In addition, Camilla and Felix usually check articles' country of origin because they prefer to buy clothes that are produced locally, i.e. in Europe, or at least not in low-wage countries whose working practices they do not want to support which is a sign of normative goal-frame. Finally, Emily revealed that she rarely made purchases in stores she had not been to before mainly shopping at familiar places. Such behaviour can be attributed to a high level of brand loyalty which is believed to have a moderating effect on ethical consumer choices (Papaoikonomou, Ryan and Ginieis, 2010). Alternatively, this behaviour can stem from an inclination to simplify a demanding shopping endeavour and more efficiently spend one's time on it which is typical of individuals with focal gain goal-frame.

Another major aspect of purchasing decisions is their character, that is whether they are impulsive or involved (George and Yaoyuneyong, 2010). Almost all respondents do not seem to be predisposed to impulse buying, according to their answers, and several of them exhibit a specific form of involvement which manifests itself in contemplating the implications of their choices, encompassing the entire lifecycle of garments from resource extraction to the disposal stage. Felix goes even a step further by thinking about how all of these impacts contribute to climate change. On the whole, this signifies a normative goal-frame which is embodied in attempts to make the "right" choice that would bear the least burden on society and the environment. Those interviewees also show their deep involvement by pondering over their potential purchases for days or even months before actually making them. Apart from that, these respondents and some others talked about asking a nearly identical question when reaching buying decisions – "Do I really need this?", which is indicative of a certain degree of involvement, too.

Moreover, George and Yaoyuneyong (2010) found out, contrary to the theoretically anticipated outcomes, that cognitive dissonance resulting from impulse purchases was substantially lower than it was in the aftermath of planned purchases. Accounts of some informants confirm these seemingly counter-intuitive findings. For example, Camilla experiences slight feelings of guilt when she buys something she deems "unnecessary" or "extra" and at the same time she acknowledges: "the guilt is also a very temporary feeling". It implies that her impulse purchases cause fairly minor and brief cognitive dissonance. Meanwhile, Cristian despite putting considerable effort into his purchasing decisions deeply regrets them when they do not meet his expectations heightened by increased confidence in his choices. Hence, it can be argued that the desire to make the best or most rational choice places consumers under intense pressure that is likely to engender acute cognitive dissonance. To expound their data, George and Yaoyuneyong (2010) hypothesised that the degree of cognitive dissonance depends on the ascription of responsibility

for the post-purchase discrepancy, e.g. in case of impulse buying the responsibility for an unsuccessful purchase falls on one's own thoughtlessness, yet the natural psychological tendency to protect one's self prevents cognitive dissonance from arising or gaining strength. Conversely, the chances of developing more severe cognitive dissonance are much higher when responsibility is shifted to an external agent whose function is commonly performed by stores since consumers are apt to blame retailers' marketing interventions for compromising their cognitive consistency (ibid.). By way of illustration, this is how Cristian narrated the purchases he was regretful about: "...in the store, you feel like it is better and when you come home, you feel like 'Oh no, it's not as [good] as I thought' ... maybe they have special lights or something".

Next, buying decisions are also affected by the functions that people want their clothes to fulfil. As was discussed earlier, three functions of personal belongings are distinguished in the theory of material possessions, namely instrumental, affective and symbolic (Steg, 2005). Although items typically combine all three functions for their owners, some of them can be foregrounded or downplayed. For instance, several informants insisted that they intentionally did not use their clothes as a statement or invariably put function before form thereby prioritising instrumental function and completely disregarding others, especially symbolic one. This is how Felix articulated it: "I don't really have a message for that. I buy things I like. I don't buy them to get a reputation." Admittedly, affective function did not appear to be salient among the respondents with just Yvonne revealing that clothes can make her feel better, more energetic and neat.

The same cannot be said about symbolic function which seems to be quite important for many informants. Adrianna demonstrates her passion for ballet dancing by buying leotards to forge her identity as a ballerina. Cristian aspires to convey his worldview and convictions through the colours of his clothes. It is also remarkable that a few respondents either directly mentioned their identity as responsible or anti-consumers or indirectly indicated it (e.g. by talking about their efforts to minimise apparel consumption which denotes normative goal-frame) but only Louise explicitly stated the ambition to express such beliefs and values through clothing. The paradoxical fact that among those with the strong normative goal-frame solely one person had this aspiration may be explained by referring to exchange theory. It proposes that due to the generally inferior utilitarian qualities of green products compared to mainstream goods, their consumption is primarily driven by a symbolic meaning that they carry (Zabkar and Hosta, 2013). Consequently, their ownership has become connected with a particular identity and social position. However, not every individual who develops the identity of a conscious consumer can afford to buy products exclusively from ethical and ecological brands. This can be the reason why some of those respondents who still have to occasionally

purchase new garments from retailers that charge cheaper prices but are less concerned about sustainability may be less inclined to speak about the identity their clothes convey and instead focus more on their instrumental function.

The social-categorical facet of symbolic function was also brought up by some informants. Jacob and Stefan always try to take into account the context in which they will be wearing their new garments to create an image of a knowledgeable and sensible consumer who is cognisant of social norms and tacit rules. The latter described it as follows:

“There are shirts I will wear for work, for free time, for going out to the beach, for going to a restaurant. And I would like people like my chef in the office think ‘Okay, he knows what he's doing. That's a shirt for the office.’ That's not like a bowling shirt or a beach shirt. You know? Like I take the occasion seriously.”

Aside from that, he often purchases new clothing items for various events like dinners, parties, etc. to show his appreciation of the occasion and inviter. By contrast, Anna shuns certain styles because, in her opinion, they are closely associated with the social groups she does not want to be identified with. She is convinced that membership in such groups is what fuels excessive production and consumption.

### 4.3. Sustainability communication and ascription of responsibility

Consumers' interpretations of apparel retailers' communication can substantially influence their buying decisions and even prompt them to boycott the stores with whose policies and standards they sharply disagree. Several interviewees affirmed that they completely avoided certain fast fashion brands or at least strived to do so and, unsurprisingly, they shared fiercely critical views on their sustainability efforts and portrayals of them. Felix called their communication “greenwashing” and “a form of profit-making under the disguise of sustainability” while Helga criticised recycling programmes implemented by some chain stores as she was convinced that they were actually introduced to increase the sales by giving money-off vouchers to customers “to buy more cheap stuff “ and gave her verdict: “They're doing these small things, which seem very good, like the general public, they're like ‘Okay, well, this is a good step’, but I don't think that they're doing enough, they're just making it look good.” Adrianna voiced a similar sentiment regarding the burgeoning sustainability trend among those retailers:

“...I think it's a very devious method of marketing [when] you go in and... notice now this trend with ecological or sustainable in stores that are not sustainable at all. It's just everywhere

and I get very angry at that... that they use this narrative that they're being sustainable while like hiding all the other stuff.”

Nevertheless, not everyone was extremely sceptical of fast fashion brands and some respondents presented more balanced opinions by highlighting not only the weaknesses of their endeavours but also their strengths. Despite seeing H&M's sustainability report as “a good educational source”, Yvonne questioned its depiction of the company's role in boosting Asian economies since, in her understanding, it could, in fact, be turning local residents into physical labourers specifically trained to work untiringly for a Western enterprise owning intellectual property. Likewise, although Louise positively assessed the aforementioned recycling initiatives unlike Helga, she acknowledged that they still might be “just another way to get people into [the] store”. Louise also termed the current situation “chicken and egg thing” when she was speculating as to who would be the first to provide a powerful impetus for the radical transformation of the industry – consumers or businesses. Many others, including some of those who are highly suspicious of retailers' motives and solutions, recognise the accountability of individuals by referring to (over)consumption and consumer culture as the chief culprits for the aggravating social and environmental problems.

This point brings us to the debate over who should be held responsible for these problems and their resolution. On the one hand, ascription of responsibility that captures the extent to which responsibility is accepted at the personal level is one of the core components in NAM and VBN<sup>5</sup> (Klöckner, 2015). It suggests that without attributing responsibility to oneself as a consumer, a person is less likely to engage in environmentally conscious actions since pro-environmental norms and normative goal-frame will not be activated. Simultaneously, this can pose a risk of cognitive dissonance if a discrepancy between cognitions related to individual responsibility and actual behaviour occurs (Schultz, 2014) and if this inconsistency endangers one's self-concept of a moral and mindful consumer (Thøgersen, 2011). In this event cognitive dissonance has to be overcome either by altering behaviour to reconcile it with the idea of personal responsibility or by changing this cognition to disclaim responsibility and shift it to others.

On the other hand, many scholars problematise the expanding individualisation of responsibility advanced by policy-makers, NGOs and companies which, they conclude, results in the depoliticisation and privatisation of social and environmental issues and an unjustified focus on consumer choices that are largely shaped and constrained by structural factors controlled by economic and political forces (Boström and Klintman, 2019; Soneryd and Ugglå, 2015; Maniates, 2001;

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<sup>5</sup> As was previously noted, in VBN this concept was renamed “ability to reduce threat” without any major changes to its meaning.

Shove, 2010). They contend that institutional problems cannot be solved by individual consumer behaviour (as opposed to collective citizen action) and attempts to tackle them in this manner will merely encourage more consumption insofar as it is reckoned to be green (Maniates, 2001). However, what Maniates discusses there is a matter of alternatives adopting the terminology of Boström and Klintman (2019) which, according to them, is the prevailing liberal approach to green consumerism. In the case of the apparel industry, it would imply mainly buying garments labelled as sustainably produced while maintaining or even increasing the rate of consumption. However, the interviewees in this study were primarily referring to a matter of volumes when talking about individual responsibility, i.e. simply reducing consumption:

“...the radical transformation [of the fashion industry], I guess, it's always about how to prevent people [from] expanding the desire of consumption. And how can we persuade people to be settled on the clothes, not [to] think about the trend, the fashion, the style, those things? Just to be settled with the clothes you have, and wear them until they can't be used anymore...”  
(Yvonne)

What is more, Soneryd and Ugglå (2015) maintain that individualisation of responsibility is currently the dominant discourse, yet only Jacob exclusively spoke about consumer responsibility whereas many other respondents concurred that multiple actors should be held accountable and take necessary steps. Stefan argues that consumers' efforts to refrain from purchasing clothes made in low-income nations have to be coupled with new legislation against exploitative working conditions and meagre wages enforced there. At the same time, Cristian surmises that the root of the problems lies in “the way the world is working” with enterprises accumulating most of the profits and sharing merely 1% or 2% of them with their suppliers but he also recognises responsibility of each and every one of us: “...[in] the end everything is like responsibility of people: people who are the owners of the enterprises, people who buy...” Additionally, three interviewees completely denied personal responsibility for the adverse social and environmental impacts of the fashion industry, instead attributing the blame to corporations (Amber), “those [who] we vote into power” (Jared) or “globalism and capitalism that build their success on inequality” (Adrianna). This position is characterised by Soneryd and Ugglå (2015) as resistance to the dominant discourse of individualised responsibility.

#### 4.4. Communication in stores





Figure 4. Examples of tags (photo by author)

#### 4.4.1. Tags

Through the observations in the selected stores, tags and labels on displayed apparel were identified as the main source of information about sustainability signifying that this kind of information there is mostly item-specific. It was also generally rather basic (e.g. “produced with water and energy saving processes”, “Tencel Lyocell”, “at least 50% recycled polyester” or “100% organic cotton”, etc. – see Figure 4) and any additional facts about the production processes or origin of materials are rarely presented thus leaving consumers to accept these claims without any basis for checking and validating them. Yet, there were exceptions such as Gina Tricot where some garments had tags offering laundry advice to make them last longer or explaining that organic cotton is grown with more efficient use of water and less harmful chemicals, and Lindex where promotional placards on the racks had concise definitions of the materials used in the new green collection, namely Tencel and EcoVero. Several informants confirmed that they were noticing and reading such labels but they would like to see even more information in stores about different clothing materials. Jacob wants it to be more visible and encompass all types of clothes:

“It will make it easier for me to choose like the most ethical and the most environmentally friendly product when I’m in a store if there is more information... Some of them have this like organic cotton mark and the rest, you don’t really know, like if I buy a raincoat or something, I don’t know if it has been coated with these additives... you can look inside but it could be even easier to know what materials something is made of and how it has been produced.”

Camilla, too, demands more widespread and accessible information and customer education because she assumes that many shoppers are not sure what to pay attention to and how certain materials are sourced (e.g. polyester is derived from oil and it is technically a form of plastic). This is proven by Jana who admits that she does not know what materials her garments are comprised of and what effects

they exert on the environment. The name of fabric alone (she also cites polyester as an example) will not tell her anything about its footprint and she will not become cognisant of it unless she suffers an allergic reaction that will compel her to learn more about it. Therefore, it could be more beneficial to provide more information clarifying why labelled items are deemed more sustainable and, more broadly, how textiles are produced and what can make them more sustainable. Lindenberg and Steg (2007) point out that the lack of knowledge on how to act appropriately (or in this context how to make more pro-environmental and ethical choices) can cause the displacement of normative goal-frame by gain or hedonic. Likewise, Jacob believes that this will give more agency to consumers as they will be empowered to make more informed choices. A similar idea was expressed by Boström and Klintman (2019) who posit that eco-labels have the potential to diminish the information asymmetry between consumers and producers or retailers in terms of products' impacts. Nonetheless, they warn that low transparency of the labelling schemes may prevent individuals from ascertaining what criteria and principles underlie them thereby impeding the curtailment of asymmetry.

#### 4.4.2. Links to websites

Moreover, it is noteworthy that shoppers are typically redirected to the company's websites for more information indicating that the physical stores are not the primary space for communication regarding sustainability between brands and their customers. Such references can be somewhat confusing when they lead to the homepages of retailers (e.g. Bik Bok, Gina Tricot, Lindex) where any links to the more relevant information are usually located at the bottom of the page impelling a user to scroll down through various promotions and images. Further still, tags from the Lindex's new collection suggested visiting the web page [lindex.com/sustainability](https://lindex.com/sustainability) to find out more about its sustainable materials that apparently did not exist<sup>6</sup>. H&M turned out to be the only brand whose labels were referring to the page on its website specifically dedicated to its green line Conscious. Despite retailers' attempts to establish a connection between their sustainability communication on websites and in stores, it does not appear to be peculiarly clear and strong given the findings above. It would be more reasonable if tags and signs marking eco-friendly options included solely those web pages that are functioning and contain pertinent information about the company's sustainability efforts.

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<sup>6</sup> Multiple attempts to visit the web page were made in April 2020 but the access was always denied due to error 404 (page not found).

#### 4.4.3. Interactions with staff

Although clothing brands nowadays rely heavily on their online presence, more personal and immediate contact between brand representatives, i.e. employees, and consumers remains one of the key advantages of physical stores. Notwithstanding, assistants in many shops did not seem to be instructed to inform customers about the footprint of the retailer's products or its environmental and social endeavours. The staff in all outlets except Filippa K tended to give fairly brief and straightforward answers and sometimes were not completely confident in their accuracy. The most extreme case was in Zara's store where a sales assistant first had to consult with a colleague and then the latter erroneously asserted that merely business and denim garments belonged to a brand's more sustainable clothing line whereas in reality many other items across all departments were labelled as a sustainable choice too. On the contrary, each member of Filippa K's staff has to receive internal training in order to be able to educate shoppers about the brand's vision, sustainability initiatives and impacts of its clothes. A sales representative revealed that even when their customers were not explicitly looking for socially and environmentally sound alternatives, employees could still make recommendations in that regard. For instance, they could tell their clients that organic cotton, despite being a more sustainable fabric than its conventional counterpart, still requires much more water in its production in comparison with Tencel textiles. Judging from the interviewees' replies, interactions with personnel can be an intricate issue. Camilla and Samir prefer staff to be responsive and helpful but Cristian dislikes when their assistance becomes intrusive. This should be taken into account in training schemes and instructions for employees on customer education about sustainability.

#### 4.4.4. Placement

Next, none of the stores had their more sustainable items arranged together in one place, let alone accentuated somehow, which may signal that marketing of such products is not a priority for these brands. The only exception was Lindex that was advertising its green collection, yet this collection was temporary and would be replaced with a new assortment in due time. It was not specified by a salesperson as to how frequent such collections were and what was the reasoning behind them (e.g. why exactly that season was chosen, whether there were any links or similarities between these green collections, etc.) This aspect can be quite crucial for customers like Emily who are attentive to diverse cues such as signs and layout of stores in order to navigate shopping space more efficiently. Therefore, even if clothing shops cannot significantly change their physical arrangement, they can allot separate shelves or corners within existing departments to more sustainable garments and highlight them with placards and posters or other decorations. By doing so, they will make it easier for shoppers to notice and distinguish such

products which perhaps will generate more interest in them that, in turn, can be translated into an increase in their sales. This argument is corroborated by the insights from the project in Seattle aimed at fostering the purchase of clothes with recycled content (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000). A set of barriers was identified and two of them – low awareness of what garments contained recycled materials and the difficulty of locating them in shops – were addressed by the project with in-store advertisements and shelf prompts. As a result, a substantial rise in purchases of articles with recycled content was reported during this campaign.

#### 4.4.5. Reminders and suggestions

Interviewees were also asked whether they would want to be reminded in any way about social and environmental issues associated with the apparel industry while shopping in clothing stores. Amber and Jared adamantly opposed it since they do not attribute the responsibility for these problems to themselves as consumers. Anna affirmed that it would make it impossible for her to go to fast fashion stores because she already feels judged by other people there. It implies that her cognitive dissonance will be amplified to such an extent that she will not be able to enter those stores anymore. In other words, now she can still subdue her discomfort most of the time which allows her to shop there. Yet, with some sort of reminders, her cognitive dissonance will be persistently reinforced causing severe distress and forcing her to forgo previous behaviour. Notably, it has been shown that reputational costs of one's choices become more salient when shopping in public rather than in private (e.g. online at home) since one's behaviour can be observed and evaluated by others (Griskevicius, Tybur and Van den Bergh, 2010). It appears from Anna's response that the state of being in public exacerbates her cognitive dissonance as shopping in fast fashion stores undermines not only her identity but also reputation as a conscious consumer. Stefan vehemently rejected the idea of being reminded in stores as well:

“These are political problems and political problems should not be reflected in every aspect of life... every human needs [an] aspect in life where they can just be themselves... These spaces are where you are in public but spending time in private, you know what I mean? That's your thing what you do there. So if I want a reminder for political issues considering clothes and consumption and stuff; it would be okay in places that are meant to be political from the beginning. In neutral places. But, as I mentioned before, shopping is not neutral. It's something positively connected to the shopper... and it should stay positive.”

He makes a distinction between neutral spaces that are exclusively intended for deliberations about political issues and spaces to which individuals are emotionally attached. These can be activities meant for relaxation and entertainment whose political nature should be pondered over and debated in those neutral settings where people are more capable of critically reflecting on their current practices and more

open to reconsidering them. Any techniques deployed to affect consumers' decisions both in a positive (advertising, labels, etc.) or negative (proposed reminders) manner he views as disturbing and manipulative ostensibly because he presumes that in the emotionally charged places individuals are more vulnerable and susceptible to influence.

Three respondents (Adrianna, Camilla and Louise) did not talk about their potential reactions due to dismissing this possibility as implausible. They concurred in the opinion that companies would be reluctant to incur financial losses likely to occur after the introduction of reminders in their outlets or they would try to turn this measure into another marketing trick. Many others, however, expressed willingness to be reminded about the problems in stores and Emily even added in that respect: "...with enough reminders you'd start to feel bad buying not eco-friendly clothes, right? You'll start doing it because you feel guilty." That is, she predicts that persistent reminders will induce cognitive dissonance and, consequently, activate normative goal-frame.

What is more, several interviewees, mostly among those who did not voice objections against reminders, came up with suggestions how it can be executed. Camilla came up with the guides for consumers on how to shop consciously which would categorise fashion companies depending on the adopted regulations, commonly used materials, suppliers, etc. Jana would prefer to see this communicated in the form of appealing and eye-catching infographics that should not provoke aversion and intimidation since this would enhance the chances of people actually reading them and becoming more aware of the problems. Yvonne complained that the information about social and environmental issues in stores is not actively provided and conjectured that this gap could be filled by employees who would educate shoppers "more naturally and frequently". Lastly, Felix wants fashion companies to disclose the carbon emissions of all products on their tags which would enable consumers to be cognisant of their monetary and environmental price alike. Nevertheless, it is contended that carbon auditing is an onerous and costly procedure that on a bigger scale can lead to "paralysis by analysis" (Boström and Klintman, 2019), particularly in the clothing industry where supply chains are immensely complex and fragmented and the variety of products and materials is tremendous (Kozłowski, Bardecki and Searcy, 2012). While imperfections, simplifications and compromises will be inevitable, high precision of CO<sub>2</sub> figures will create a misleading impression of "pure science" and act as a "wasteful distraction" (Boström and Klintman, 2019). A traffic light system is put forward as an alternative and less deceitful information tool since instead of unerring accuracy it will convey inexactness of calculations and relativity of impacts (ibid.)

## 4.5. Goal-frames

Goal-framing theory assumes that people can be more disposed to draw on one of the three goal-frames irrespective of other factors (Klöckner, 2015). Building on this proposition, it was attempted to discern patterns that would integrate different aspects discussed in the preceding sections of the analysis under each dominant goal-frame. Yet, it soon became apparent that such patterns could not be constructed within the confines of every single goal-frame. This reaffirms the theory's postulation that goal-frames are never static and constantly interact with each other which is why the theory is praised for adequately representing variability and complexity of behaviour (Klöckner, 2015). Accordingly, three identified patterns do not precisely correspond to the three goal-frames but they demonstrate how attitudes, behaviour and perceptions of the context of physical apparel shopping (including sustainability communication) are combined within certain goal-frames. It has to be admitted that these patterns are rather precursory and evidently not exhaustive since there were some exceptions and minor inconsistencies among the interviewees that were not fitting into them. Overall, the patterns can be seen as the overarching trends distinguished among the participants in this study to conceptually encapsulate and make sense of its findings and serve as a point of departure for future research in this area that could elaborate and expand them.

The first two patterns were noticed among the respondents with the repeatedly more powerful gain and/or hedonic goal-frames while the third pattern was found among those with the focal normative goal-frame. Perhaps more similarities were shared between hedonic and gain goal-frames because they both arise from the selfish motives in contrast to the normative goal-frame that relies on altruistic tendencies. The first pattern (which can be provisionally named "extreme and sceptical") is prevalent among individuals who either loathe and avoid apparel shopping since it necessarily involves a reduction in available time and money (gain frame) or fancy and relish it since it brings them satisfaction and exhilaration (hedonic frame). Regardless of this difference, they coincide in their scepticism towards any kind of sustainability communication in clothing stores and in their disapproval of information that, from their perspective, above all else connotes their accountability as consumers. Even though this information most certainly will not be able to trigger attitude-behaviour gap in them owing to their firm denial of consumer responsibility for the problems related to the fashion industry, they still do not want to be exposed to it because it is in sharp conflict with their understanding of the present situation. If the contribution of unsustainable consumption patterns is conceded, it becomes imperative for these individuals to avert feelings of guilt and negative thoughts during shopping. For instance, Stefan avoids the stores where he expects this to happen to him because he strives to ensure that his shopping

experiences remain positive and pleasurable indicating that this condition pertains more to people with a powerful hedonic goal-frame.

The second pattern – “ambivalent and favourably disposed” – comprises those whose feelings towards shopping are more contradictory. They can sometimes eagerly await and enjoy it (hedonic side) but when they do not achieve the aim of purchasing something they planned to acquire or when this process uses more personal resources (time, energy, etc.) than was initially allocated to it, physical shopping can exasperate and upset them (gain side). They also tend not to ascribe responsibility to themselves or they think that they are already doing enough for the environment, e.g. Emily admits that she tries to help in easier ways which signifies that the dominant gain goal-frame guides her to choose more convenient and advantageous options. Simultaneously, these individuals do not explicitly place responsibility on other actors either and do not condemn clothing companies for the lack of action; quite the contrary, they may, similar to Jana, appreciate the measures introduced by the fashion brands and the new sustainability trend gaining popularity among them. Since they do not hold themselves accountable for the industry’s problems, they are normally not faced with attitude-behavior gap while doing their apparel shopping in retail outlets. However, unlike the previous group, they have no objections to being educated about these issues in stores and can even be willing to learn more about them, especially if the provided information is easily accessible and comprehensible as hedonic and gain goal-frames prioritise minimising effort. Moreover, they suppose that this information can nudge them to buy more sustainably produced garments and they favourably assess this influence. One of the reasons why this group is not so hostile to sustainability communication in shops can be that they do not construe it as retailers’ evasion of responsibility attained by imposing it on consumers.

Next, individuals whose focal goal-frame is normative (who constitute the third pattern “susceptible and concerned”) are often suspicious of the sensory overstimulation embedded in the conventional shopping environment. For example, Louise described it this way:

“I don't go to a lot of big stores anymore but when I do... I'm overwhelmed by how nice and shiny and new everything is and how many options there are, and it feels exciting for one moment and then I just realise ‘Oh, this is why I don't do this’... and then it becomes kind of oppressive and overwhelming to think of the consequences of having so much access to shop”.

As the quote illustrates, when shopping for clothes in mainstream stores, people with potent normative goal-frame are quickly confronted with incipient cognitive dissonance emerging from the recognition of the potential mismatch between their values and actions (i.e. attitude-behavior gap) if they eventually purchase something. In order to prevent this undesirable outcome, some of them, specifically

those who have a fairly strong background hedonic goal-frame, turn to second-hand shopping which allows them to indulge their hedonic motivation without any adverse implications. Thus, second-hand stores become a much safer shopping space that is not associated with anxiety and regret since they know that it is more sustainable to buy used products instead of brand new. Another distinct feature of second-hand shopping pointed out by Jacob is the unpredictability of stock which may complicate the planning of purchases but at the same time can fuel hedonic motivation. Camilla and Louise mentioned other drawbacks of second-hand shopping such as unappealing ambiance and more time needed to find sought items, yet none of these stop them from continuing to do it arguably because they readily accept their and others' responsibility as consumers. It does not mean that they lay the full burden of responsibility solely on the consumers' shoulders – they do acknowledge the accountability of other actors as well, mostly that of businesses. This is why, despite harsh criticism voiced by some of them, the interviewees want their sustainability communication to be more widespread and detailed as they believe it will help them and other customers make better choices.

On a last note, several informants with the primary normative goal-frame emphasised that their perception of environmental and social issues and subsequently their consumption behaviour have drastically changed in the light of insightful personal experiences. Samir, coming from one of the manufacturing nations in Asia, on a daily basis had to observe grave repercussions of the industry's operations in the form of polluted water and devastated natural habitats. Cristian was involved in the social projects working with the local communities in his home country that supply producers with materials for garments where he could witness inequality and power imbalances deeply rooted in the system. Felix is convinced that his higher education and interactions with people from different parts of the world put those problems into perspective for him thereby making them more tangible and apprehensible. Cristian shared a corresponding sentiment:

“You don't understand what's happening on the other side of the work, it is very complicated to have access to that information. And maybe people can know about that but they cannot relate, because it's complicated to relate to the problem that is not something that you have seen. Then it's like to find a connection with a different culture... and to understand what's happening there.”

Importantly, it has been established that not the factual knowledge itself but how these facts are interpreted is highly correlated with pro-environmental behaviour (Grob, 1995). It seems that when individuals get more familiar with the social and environmental issues through personally significant events and encounters, they take them more seriously and are more inclined to do something about them since they empathise more closely with those impacted by them.



## 5. Discussion

This chapter reports the major findings of this study and suggests trajectories for their application. First and foremost, it has shown that individuals with the dominant normative goal-frame (pattern “susceptible and concerned”) are more prone to the attitude-behaviour gap, realisation thereof and ensuing cognitive dissonance apparently because they have stronger environmentally sensitive attitudes and values which is in line with the reviewed theories and concepts. Yet, one of the consequences of these psychological processes rarely commented on in the literature is that some leisure pursuits such as shopping can become less enjoyable or even emotionally draining for those individuals. Hence, future research can investigate how normative goal-frame and conformity to pro-environmental norms influence people’s perception of certain (recreational) activities and how people negotiate the abandonment of environmentally harmful interests compelled by such norms and motives. Furthermore, building on George and Yaoyuneyong’s (2010) distinction between involved and impulse purchases, decision-making described by several participants with focal normative goal-frame can be characterised as hyperinvolvement. While involved buying decisions are defined by intensive collection and analysis of relevant information (*ibid.*), these respondents appear to go beyond that by contemplating their prospective purchases for days or months and doubting them with questions like “Do I really need this?” This increased level of involvement, likely associated with the normative goal-frame, can be further explored and possibly incorporated in the classification separately or as a subtype. Another remarkable insight obtained from the interviews with the respondents following the pattern “susceptible and concerned” is that many of them began to pay more attention to environmental (and social) problems after some enlightening personal experiences. Future works can examine what kind of experiences can produce this profound effect and lead to sustained activation of normative goal-frame, how people interpret them and what role they assign to these experiences in their lives.

One more inference can be made from two other patterns based on gain and hedonic goal-frames. To be exact, it can be proposed that consumer behaviour can be affected not only by the extent to which responsibility is ascribed to oneself (which is what is posited in NAM and VBN and denoted by the elements of “ascription of responsibility to self” and “ability to reduce threat respectively”) but also by the

extent to which responsibility ascribed to others (which is not considered in these models). To illustrate this, the majority of respondents who attributed responsibility for the environmental and social issues in the fashion industry mostly to apparel companies and completely denied it on their end asserted that they would not be influenced by sustainability communication in clothing shops and would not positively respond to it (pattern “extreme and sceptical”). On the other hand, those who did not explicitly place responsibility for the problems on themselves or retailers did not object to being prompted by sustainability communication in stores to shop more consciously (pattern “ambivalent and favourably disposed”). This tentative inference can be hypothesised and tested in subsequent studies revisiting the models to add more nuances to them.

What is more, the findings from this work may contribute to wider debates in the social sciences arena that have implications for policy-making. As was previously discussed, environmental problems are commonly framed in policy as that of consumer behaviour which is sharply criticised by scholars for burdening individuals with a disproportionate amount of responsibility and unrealistic hopes (Shove, 2010; Boström and Klintman, 2019). They contend that it is unreasonable to expect consumers to possess all information about the impacts of products and deploy it in multi-factor comparisons between available alternatives every time they need to buy something (Boström and Klintman, 2019). Policy-makers, in their opinion, have a tendency to conveniently ignore the uncertainty, ambivalence and dilemmas that people are constantly confronted with when making consumer choices (Boström and Klintman, 2009; Soneryd and Ugglå, 2015). Interviewees echoed the sentiments expressed in academia in their complaints about an unfair transfer of responsibility to them as consumers which obscures the fact that other more powerful actors are much better equipped to tackle complex global issues. Thus, although the discourse of individualised environmental responsibility popularised in policy is argued to be dominant now (Soneryd and Ugglå, 2015), it has clearly not been internalised by the majority of interviewees and this fact signals the potential for resistance and disruption. Therefore, policy-makers should contemplate how the excessive pressure can diminish people’s willingness to make adjustments to their lives when they do not see enough action from others. They could also ponder the political implications of their undue emphasis on individual responsibility, one of them being structural and institutional inertia that perpetuates the status quo (i.e. sustains the “unsustainable”) and reinforces the position and narratives of those who profit from it (Shove, 2010; Whitmarsh, O’Neill and Lorenzoni, 2011). This is why policy-makers can be advised to include state and business actors in their considerations and be more open to opposing perspectives such as the one voiced in social science scholarship. However, it does not mean that individuals should not be involved in societal decision-making and transition to sustainability (Whitmarsh, O’Neill and Lorenzoni, 2011). As research in EP shows,

in order to participate in the processes of change, people should assume a certain degree of personal responsibility – ideally, as consumers and citizens alike (Stern, 2000; Boström and Klintman, 2019). It would be preferable if policy-makers could cultivate this sense of responsibility among individuals without focusing too narrowly on it. Finally, pertinent results of this paper were translated into a series of recommendations for practitioners managing communication of apparel brands presented in Appendix 2.

## 6. Conclusion

Overall, this thesis explored the interplay between consumers' attitudes, behaviour and shopping experiences with their interpretations of sustainability communication in clothing stores. This was accomplished by examining how consumers make sense of their shopping experiences and buying decisions, to whom they attribute responsibility for the apparel industry's transition to sustainability and how they assess clothing brands' communication about it, particularly in their stores. As a result of the analysis drawing on goal-framing theory, three possible configurations or patterns of the aforementioned interplay were identified and labelled as "extreme and sceptical" (hedonic or gain goal-frame), "ambivalent and favourably disposed" (hedonic and gain goal-frames) and "susceptible and concerned" (normative goal-frame). It has to be clarified that this list is by no means intended to be exhaustive – quite the contrary, it may serve as a starting point for research more closely and thoroughly scrutinising the interaction between attitudes, context and behaviour. To briefly summarise the findings and contextualise them within the main subject matter of the study, it has been revealed that people who intensely dislike or enjoy shopping tend to negatively view sustainability communication in clothing stores while those who are more ambivalent about shopping may more positively respond to it. Simultaneously, individuals who earnestly strive to reduce their apparel consumption and therefore are more prone to associate shopping for new garments with the feelings of guilt and regret may welcome more sustainability communication in stores but can be suspicious of the brands' motives behind it.

The theoretical value of this work can be attached to its contribution to the growing body of literature that conceptualises the context of behaviour not as pre-existing and extrinsic but rather as constructed and negotiated, i.e. as a subjective representation of external conditions (Nye and Hargreaves, 2009; Klöckner, 2015). The methodological significance of this paper lies in its endeavour to show that the exchange between EC and EP can be fruitful for the both fields. The application of the theories and concepts advanced in EP can be advantageous for EC scholarship as they can generate new illuminating insights. EP, in its turn, can benefit from broadening its methodological orientations which would necessarily entail more extensive adoption of mixed and qualitative methods. It could also be more

receptive to methodological discussions on reflexivity and positionality held within EC and other social science disciplines.

Despite these strengths, it has to be admitted that conclusions made here are preliminary and have to be further elaborated and confirmed or disproved due to their strictly limited generalisability determined by a relatively small convenience sample which can be deemed the biggest weakness of this study. Additional input is provided by mapping out promising avenues for future research that were outlined above. Apart from them, a number of ideas can be put forward for the enquiries that will specifically focus on the context of clothing consumption. They can explore what motives and goal-frames are more salient in the context of physical and online apparel shopping. Based on the insights from this paper, it can be anticipated that physical shopping will be more linked to the hedonic goal-frame whereas online shopping will correlate more with the gain goal-frame. Moreover, since online shopping can be done in multiple settings, they could also be compared in terms of primary motives and goal-frames. Lastly, as was pointed out before, individuals can be more predisposed to activation of a particular goal-frame regardless of the circumstances they are in. Hence, it can be investigated how people with dominant gain, hedonic or normative goal-frame react to different settings.

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## Appendix 1 - Interview guide

### General questions regarding apparel shopping

- How often do you shop for clothes in the malls (or more generally in stores)?
- Do you plan your visits to the stores? If yes – How much in advance?; If no – What are the circumstances in which you come to clothing stores?
- Is it your preferred way of shopping for clothes? Why/why not?

### Experiences and decisions in the store

- How does shopping for clothing in the store make you feel?
- What do you think about when you shop?
- What do you pay attention to the most? (e.g. in the store, in clothes or labels, etc.)
- What factors or considerations usually affect your decision to buy a clothing item?

### Thoughts and feelings after making purchases

- What do you feel when you come home and go through your purchases?
- What thoughts do you have when you do it?

### Sustainability issues

- Do you know about social and environmental problems caused by the fashion industry? In what situations do you usually think about them?
- How do these thoughts make you feel about apparel shopping in general and your own consumption habits?
- Would you want to be reminded about these issues while shopping in the store? In what way?

Do you think this information could have an influence on your choices when buying clothes in the store? If yes – How? If no – Why?

## Appendix 2 - Recommendations for clothing brands

To begin with, clothing retailers should strive to find a balance between the interests of shoppers who approve of increasing in-store sustainability communication and those who oppose it. They can begin the search for this balance by reviewing the profiles of their target groups (which could be complemented with the insights from goal-framing theory) to align them with their brand image and positioning as well as company's mission, vision and core values. Retailers also need to be aware, as has been discovered in this study, that some customers may construe the sheer presence of any kind of sustainability communication in their outlets as their attempt to shift responsibility for environmental and social issues to consumers or as unnecessary politicisation of an emotionally laden recreational activity, i.e. shopping. Hence, it appears imperative for apparel brands to clearly communicate how much responsibility for these problems they attribute to themselves and how they see their role in tackling those and achieving sustainable development of the industry. In this case, a company may decide to take on, among others, the role of the educator which could be justified in the light of the information asymmetry discussed earlier. In this role, it will have to inform consumers about the distribution of impacts throughout the garments' lifecycle. For example, it was estimated that in the Swedish market around 80% of clothing's footprint came from the production stage (Sandin et al., 2019) and the mere disclosure of these statistics could convey acceptance of primary responsibility. Along with this information, a retailer could present the measures that had been and would be implemented to reach its sustainability goals. Consumers, then, could be invited to support the brand in its journey to sustainability by making some changes that they might have not thought about but that could produce substantial effects without being too difficult or undesirable to introduce into their lifestyles. (On a side note, this way a brand could portray itself as the ambassador of sustainability promoting it among its customers but communicators should make sure that the brand lives up to this title with its actions, especially in the eyes of consumers). For instance, two key factors largely determining the overall impact of a garment are the number of its uses per service life and frequency of laundering (Sandin et al., 2019). This is why detailed laundry advice and guidance on product care and maintenance can be proposed by companies as a step towards extended producer responsibility that implies

monitoring and managing of impacts occurring at every stage of the apparel's lifecycle (Kozłowski, Bardecki and Searcy, 2012).

Another area where more information and consumer education seem to be crucial is the rationale behind labelling. Retailers are apt to fairly briefly, if at all, explain why certain items are labelled as more sustainable, and from those descriptions it can be inferred that for the most part, the origin of the materials serves as the defining feature. In other words, garments with green tags usually contain either recycled, organic or branded fibers like Tencel or EcoVero. As a consequence, shoppers may start to automatically associate these materials with being more sustainable despite evidence that popular distinctions between intrinsically "sustainable" and "unsustainable" fiber types are too simplistic because the differences between them can oftentimes be less profound than between textile suppliers (Sandin, Roos and Johansson, 2019). In order to prevent the emergence and spread of such misconceptions, retailers should provide more information about principles and standards underpinning their labelling systems which is supposed, for the above-stated reasons, to include assessment of suppliers' performance. By being more transparent about production processes and supply chains, fashion companies will also attend to the serious lack of trust among some consumers that was unambiguously expressed by several respondents. Finally, it might be tempting and perhaps intuitive for brands to neglect and under-represent the intricacy of sustainability issues in pursuit of an easily comprehensible depiction of them seeing that stores offer little opportunity for lengthy and thorough deliberations. Aside from that, it can be presumed that shoppers may favour straightforward and uncomplicated explanations due to the limited time and difficulty to concentrate in such overstimulating environment. One of the possible solutions can be information that, instead of satiating curiosity, provokes it even more, i.e. instead of giving clear-cut answers, it encourages people to ask more questions thereby sparking interest and desire to learn more. It is claimed that this approach is needed for inspiring self-learning and reflection that will ultimately enhance consumer understanding of sustainability matters critical for dealing with unsustainable consumption (Boström and Klintman, 2019).

Admittedly, it might be quite challenging to enact these ideas within the spatial and temporal limits of a clothing store given that people do not normally come there with the intention to learn new information about sustainability issues and are not willing to spend there more time than they need to meet their objectives. Therefore, apparel brands may opt for holding a broader and more inclusive dialogue with consumers in other communication channels that by their nature have a more adequate capacity for it, e.g. social media. Yet, this does not mean that a store should be treated as a trivial sales point rather than as an important communication space as it offers several crucial interfaces for the contact with consumers such as

interactions with staff and communication materials (signs, tags, posters, decorations, etc.) Thus, retailers can promote their more sustainably produced garments with those materials, more staff training in consumer education and brand's sustainability strategy and more conducive placement of these items in their outlets. What is more, they can view and communicate these interventions aimed at directing shoppers' attention to more sustainable clothing as a way to incentivise themselves to invest more in its production and increase their share in the product range which should motivate brands to progressively become more sustainable.