



Lisbon School
of Economics
& Management
Universidade de Lisboa

MASTERS IN MANAGEMENT (MIM)

MASTERS FINAL WORK

DISSERTATION

**HOW SHOULD FASHION BRANDS COMMUNICATE THEIR
SUSTAINABILITY?**

MARIA FREDERICA VICENTE TOJAL VALSASSINA

MARCH - 2022



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SUPERVISOR:

PROF. LUIS MAH

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Writing this dissertation has been a challenge for me, I have spent many hours discussing issues, making decisions, and developing lines of thoughts. It has been a journey that has made me grow not only as a student but also as a person. Therefore, I feel happy and fulfilled to complete this stage of my life.

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RESUMO

A urgência das marcas de moda em se tornarem mais sustentáveis, provocada pela crescente preocupação dos consumidores com esta questão, está a criar um sentimento de desconfiança e confusão entre os consumidores. Neste contexto, de forma a assegurar que a informação que as marcas querem transmitir chegue aos consumidores da forma pretendida, é necessário o desenvolvimento de uma boa estratégia de comunicação. Esta dissertação visa compreender de que forma as marcas de moda devem comunicar a sua sustentabilidade, tendo em conta as necessidades dos consumidores.

A fim de chegar às conclusões pretendidas, foi realizado um estudo exploratório que consistiu em entrevistas a um conjunto de consumidores que foram posteriormente analisadas a partir de um software de análise qualitativa. Os resultados desta análise mostraram que, apesar do interesse geral no tema da sustentabilidade no sector da moda, os consumidores consideram que a comunicação praticada pelas marcas deste sector é pouco clara, ambígua e pouco transparente, o que se traduz em confusão e falta de confiança por parte dos consumidores. Estes resultados expressam que é necessária uma nova abordagem da comunicação da sustentabilidade das marcas de moda. Neste sentido, serão discutidas e consideradas estratégias de comunicação para determinar quais as que melhor se adequam ao que os consumidores procuram.

Palavras-Chave: Sustentabilidade, Indústria da Moda, Comunicação, Comportamento do Consumidor.

ABSTRACT

The urgency of fashion brands to become more sustainable, brought by the growing consumer concern about the issue, is creating a sense of mistrust and confusion among consumers. In this context, to ensure that the information that brands want to convey reaches consumers in the intended way it is crucial to develop an effective communication strategy. This dissertation aims to understand how fashion brands should communicate their sustainability, according to the consumers' needs. In order to reach the intended conclusions, an exploratory study was conducted, consisting of interviews to consumers that were afterwards analyzed using a qualitative analysis software. The results of this analysis showed that, despite the general interest in the topic of sustainability in the fashion sector, consumers believe that the communication practised by brands in this sector is unclear, ambiguous and not very transparent, which translates into confusion and lack of trust on the part of consumers. These results express that a new approach to fashion brands' sustainability communication is needed. On this basis, communication strategies will be discussed and considered to determine which ones best fit what consumers are looking for.

Keywords: Sustainability, Fashion industry, Communication, Consumer Behavior.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

Sustainability has been a trending topic for many years, but recently it has become even more important. As Paixão et al. (2020) state, we live in a time where fashion is described as renewal and speed, trying to meet new trends, resulting in new clothes being constantly offered at a reduced price. According to Melek et al. (2021), consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of their consumption choices on the environment and people. However, Weiss et al. (2014) state that sustainability has essentially become a branding element for consumers. They feel politically and socially correct when they make sustainable purchasing decisions. This sustainable fashion englobes mainly four SDGS: firstly, to end poverty, by providing fair wages (SDG 1); secondly to guarantee clean water and sanitation, by revising their water management systems (SDG 6); thirdly to encourage climate action, by improving their energy efficiency (SDG 13); and finally to support a good life on land, by sourcing materials in a sustainable way (SDG 15) (Jessy Humann, 2021).

Given this growing concern and awareness of the fashion industry's impact on the planet (McKeown & Shearer, 2019), each company is developing its own approach to a sustainable vision. Some join sustainable initiatives (Weiss et al., 2014) or create "sustainable" collections / sub-brands (Turunen & Halme, 2021), while others adopt third-party standards or certifications (Weiss et al., 2014). They do so not only because of the associated environmental and social risks and governance challenges, but also because of the benefits of increasing consumer satisfaction and developing new market segments (Strähle & Müller, 2017).

However, this movement leads to one big problem: companies are increasingly advertising their products with "green" claims (Testa et al., 2015) and consumers are finding it increasingly difficult to trust companies' information about their sustainability

and end up not choosing "greener" products (Banerjee & Solomon, 2003). Hence, communication is crucial for promoting sustainable consumption (Fischer et al., 2021). However, the authors note that little is yet known about how communication and sustainable consumption are related. The real challenge is not so much in the efforts companies make to become sustainable, but rather in the communication techniques they use to gain consumer trust (Weiss et al., 2014). From this literature review, it can be concluded that fashion brands are increasingly concerned with gaining a "green" reputation in the eyes of consumers as they become more aware and concerned about the issue of sustainability in the fashion industry. However, there is a gap between what brands want to show with their green claims and what is actually perceived by consumers. And it is precisely this gap that this dissertation aims to close.

The goal of this dissertation is to understand what communication strategies fashion companies should use to build a good reputation in the eyes of consumers and strengthen their trust and relationship with the brand. The results of this dissertation will be important for a deep understanding of current consumer behavior regarding sustainability in the fashion industry. They will allow to predict future behaviors and thus enable companies to develop a strategic communication plan with respect to consumers' needs. The structure of this dissertation is divided into four main chapters: 1) literature review; 2) methodology; 3) data analysis; 4) discussion and results.

The literature review provides an overview of the three main topics relevant to further developments: Sustainability in the Fashion Industry, Communication of Sustainability and Sustainability Communication of Fashion Brands. For the methodology, a qualitative analysis is conducted in the form of interviews with a heterogeneous sample that includes people from within an age range, but also both genders, as well as a wide range of social classes and educational abilities. In more detail,

it is an exploratory study, aimed at consumers who are expected to be attentive and concerned with the issue of sustainability in the fashion industry, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the behavior of the typical "green" consumer in relation to the communication techniques practiced by brands in this sector. All these data will be considered in the data analysis and discussed in the Discussion and Results chapter.

CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand in a deeper way the subject under investigation, the literature review was developed around three major topics: sustainability in the fashion industry, sustainability communication and sustainability communication of fashion brands. The knowledge drawn from the studies done around these topics allowed the extraction of conclusions and the identification of gaps and flaws, which are discussed in the Critical Analysis.

2.1 Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

The concept of sustainability emerged in 1968 and was defined in the Brundtland Report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Cocklin & Moon, 2020). Consequently, three pillars of sustainable development ("Triple Bottom Line") are seen as interconnected, interdependent, and often contradictory, namely economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity (Marmier et al., 2021). Conradie (2018) describes the Triple Bottom Line as a relevant approach to strategic communication in the age of sustainability and shows how theories and concepts from different areas of communication can enhance the process of integrated reporting. As for the concept of sustainable fashion, it also encompasses an environmental, economic and social aspect and can therefore involve fair working conditions as well as the use of environmentally friendly organic materials (McKeown & Shearer, 2019).

Currently, we live in a time where fashion is described as renewal and speed, trying to meet new trends, resulting in new clothes constantly being offered at a reduced price (Paixão et al., 2020). Paixão et al. (2020) emphasize that this movement, known as fast fashion, has numerous environmental and social impacts in the world. Textile production is responsible for about 20% of the world's water pollution from dyeing and finishing

products and 10% of the world's carbon emissions, which is more than international air and sea travel combined. Moreover, 86% of clothing is incinerated or sent to landfill and only 1% is recycled. (European Parliament, 2021). But it's not just the planet that is being harmed, people are also targeted by this trend. Poor working conditions, long hours, low wages, exploitation of children, and health and safety issues are also on the list of consequences of fast fashion (Kozlowski et al., 2014).

Paixão et al. (2020) contends that in order to halt this tendency, the industry must rely on a slow movement, recommending that we live at a “reasonable pace and present ourselves as an alternative to mass production in current fashion.” (P.14) The authors defend the implementation of the slow fashion movement, which advocates a circular economy that focuses on recycling and reusing materials, buying secondhand clothes and producing durable clothing, following a model of ethical and responsible consumption. It also affirms the need for more transparent communication that promotes the design of more humane products and respect for workers, consumers and the planet.

Faced with growing concern and awareness of the fashion industry's impact on the environment and people (McKeown & Shearer, 2019), each company is developing its own approach to a sustainable vision, some by joining sustainable initiatives (Weiss et al., 2014) or creating "sustainable" collections or sub-brands (Turunen & Halme, 2021), others by adopting third-party standards or certificates (Weiss et al., 2014). They do so not only because of the associated environmental and social risks and governance challenges, but also because of the benefits of increasing consumer satisfaction and reaching new market segments (Strähle & Müller, 2017). As Melek et al. (2021) state, by adopting sustainable practices on both environmental and social levels, and by properly communicating these practices, companies add value to the company, increase its financial benefits, and at the same time improve its reputation in the eyes of society.

According to Gazzola et al. (2020), this revolution in the fashion industry requires a holistic approach and a concerted effort by all stakeholders. The government and international organisations have the opportunity to promote positive change in the industry by enacting laws that require companies to adopt a more sustainable, ethical, and crawlable supply chain (Melek et al., 2021). However, according to the authors, consumers have the ability to influence the fashion industry with their choices and are central to transforming the fashion industry into a more sustainable industry. Although there is no clear data to confirm this statement, there is a growing perception that consumers are the major drivers of pattern changes in the fashion industry, in fact, according to Musova et al. (2021) “Consumer interest in sustainability and circularity can stimulate businesses to become more responsible and to offer circular solutions, and thus create a significant competitive advantage for these firms in a globalized market”.

2.1.1 Consumer Behavior

Although sustainability has been a trendy subject for many years, it has recently become even more important. This can be explained by the fact that consumers are much more aware of the impact of their consumption choices on the environment and on people (Melek et al., 2021). According to Weiss et al. (2014), sustainability has essentially become a branding element for consumers. Consumers feel politically and socially correct when they make a sustainable purchasing decision. While one should not expect drastic changes in the industry, increasing consumer acceptance could lead to this process of operational change being started in the industry (Weiss et al., 2014). As mentioned earlier, consumers play a key role in changing patterns in the fashion industry and therefore their commitment to sustainable fashion could lead to a significant change in the sustainable growth of companies in the sector (McKeown & Shearer, 2019).

However, despite growing consumer interest and awareness of sustainable fashion, no significant changes in consumer behavior have been observed (Kong et al., 2016). McNeill & Moore (2015) refer this discrepancy as the "attitude - behavior" gap. This discrepancy suggests that consumers who display strong environmental and ethical values do not always translate these values into the purchase of sustainable products. This suggests that sustainable goods alone are not enough to compete with "regular" clothing due to aspects such as price, design and ease of purchase that sustainable products lack (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). McKeown & Shearer (2019) state that additional elements are required for consumers to choose a sustainable product rather than a mainstream product. These include the quality, comfort, and durability of the product, as well as the guarantee of good working conditions, the use of environmentally friendly materials, and other aspects of the production process.

2.2 Communication Of Sustainability

Communication is crucial in promoting sustainable consumption (Fischer et al., 2021). However, the authors note that there is still little evidence on how communication and sustainable consumption are related. According to the authors, most articles focus on consumer behavior and interpret communication without any theoretical or scientific basis. Communication, as Negrete & López (2020) state, is critical in getting the actors in the industry concerned to cooperate. It also allows consumers to become more aware of the impact of their consumption habits. The results of the study conducted by Testa et al. (2015) underline the importance of ecolabels in improving consumer behavioral control. The authors state that the loyalty that a brand conveys is not enough. It must be certified for consumers to really trust it. In contrast, as a source of sustainability communication, there is also "green marketing", which, according to Peattie & Crane (2005), is not being supported by a marketing model or an environmental philosophy.

2..3 Sustainability Communication of Fashion Brands

2.3.1 Practices of Sustainability Communication

Ecolabelling

The eco-label has become a global differentiator in the fashion industry and is considered a primary marketing tool aimed at a well-informed customer with sustainability in mind and thus relevant to the development of a sustainable and credible industry (Roy Choudhury, 2015). The Blue Angel, which was developed in Germany, and the Nordic White Swan, are some of the best-known ecolabels in the world (Roy Choudhury, 2015). It is also worth mentioning the Ecolabel, developed by the European Union, whose criteria provide demanding guidelines for companies that want to reduce their environmental impact and ensure the efficiency of their environmental actions (European Commission, 2021). In terms of social sustainability, Fairtrade is the world's most recognized ethical label, focusing on better prices, decent working conditions and fairer treatment of farmers and workers in developing countries (Fairtrade International, 2021).

In the eyes of consumers, this is a method of communication that gives them confidence and is easily accessible (Weiss et al., 2014). According to the authors, the benefits of labels are not questioned, but the regulation, cost, and management of the process of their standardization make them complicated to obtain. Therefore, what is the downside behind the ecolabels? Consumers feel "at the mercy" of the ecolabels because they are simple and make decision-making easier for them. However, according to Horne (2009), this simplicity is because ecolabels do not cover all the information about a product's sustainability, resulting in ineffective sustainability claims.

Turunen & Halme (2021) argue that there is no single label that addresses all the concerns of a consumer who is interested in both the working conditions and the

environmental footprint of a product. In other words, most labels do not provide a scale that differentiates the relative sustainability of products and allows consumers to distinguish a very sustainable offering from one that barely meets the label's criteria.

Green Marketing

On the other side of the sustainability communication prism are the unregulated communication and marketing practices used by companies to freely communicate their sustainability (Turunen & Halme, 2021), also known by Peattie & Crane (2005) as green marketing. The authors claim the concept is similar to environmental advertising, which also aims to appeal to the emotional side in the consumer decision-making process. An example of green marketing are the sustainable collections or sub-brands developed by brands such as Zara ("Join Life"), H&M ("Conscious Collection") and Cos ("Restored"). Nevertheless, Zara has already started to communicate its sustainability with a product sheet detailing the sustainable practices developed in its production process and highlighting what type of certification/assessment has been used (ZARA, 2022). H&M, on the other hand, has opted for a section in its sustainability menu where it addresses in general terms issues such as recycling, organic materials in production, transparency in product manufacturing and cleaner living (H&M, 2022). Comparative to Cos, there is also a product sheet, but it is much simpler than Zara's and only states the materials used to make the product (COS, 2022).

Another example of this type of communication is the involvement of brands in international sustainability initiatives such as the Global Fashion Agenda. The Global Fashion Agenda is the main leadership forum for industry collaboration on fashion sustainability and is behind the leading event on fashion sustainability, the Copenhagen Fashion Summit, which has led the movement for over a decade (Global Fashion Agenda, 2021). With the use of green marketing, the concept of sustainability is becoming more

confusing and ambiguous, leading to a sense of confusion and ignorance on the part of consumers (Turunen & Halme, 2021).

2.3.2 *Greenwashing*

As mentioned earlier, communication plays a key role in building a sustainable industry. When consumers receive objective and reliable information, they are willing to change their behavior (Negrete & López, 2020). However, the growing interest in sustainable fashion has led to companies engaging in false communication, known as *greenwashing*, where they superficially portray the work processes and materials used, claiming to be “green” without actually making a deep investment or commitment that would actually make them sustainable (Weiss et al., 2014). This movement leads to one big problem: companies are increasingly advertising their products with "green" claims (Testa et al., 2015), and consumers are finding it increasingly difficult to trust the information companies provide about their sustainability, and they end up not choosing “greener” products (Banerjee & Solomon, 2003).

In other words, corporate sustainability is split between reality and perception. Reality, i.e., well-implemented sustainability, increases costs while promoting product innovation and consumer appeal. However, consumers are guided by what they perceive about a particular product, and their loyalty is built at the moment when perception matches reality. In a world where transparency is an increasingly important element of communication, it will be easier for companies that are truly committed to sustainability to attract consumers (Weiss et al., 2014).

Therefore, the real challenge is not what efforts companies make to become sustainable, but rather what communication techniques they use to gain the trust of consumers (Weiss et al., 2014). However, companies that do not make a real commitment to their sustainability and opt for superficial "green" communication strategies will have

a harder time gaining consumer attention (Peattie & Crane, 2005). According to Bittner-Fesseler (2020), communication that is not backed by a solid sustainable model is less credible. However, this commitment to sustainability comes with many costs. Companies that want to be truly rigorous about their sustainability must adhere to very strict standards and costly legislative processes (Weiss et al., 2014), and adopting these practices means an increase in the cost of raw materials and subsidiaries (Negrete & López, 2020).

2.4 Critical Analysis

According to Turunen & Halme (2021), none of the communication practices presented is perfect. Ecolabels do provide reliable and concrete information for consumers, but this information is fragmented, does not cover all areas of a product's sustainability and is therefore not always actionable. On the other hand, free-form sustainability communication, i.e., green marketing, lacks trust and is inaccurate. As said by Hansen (2021), one of the biggest difficulties consumers face when deciding whether or not to buy a “green” product is the lack of information about the sustainability aspects of the product. There is a clear lack of global sustainability standards and regulations, which leads to a lack of standardization and transparency of sustainability reports (Negrete & López, 2020).

Therefore, in order to achieve a sustainable industry, consumer participation is essential (Negrete & López, 2020). The authors state that it is important for brands that develop sustainable practices to communicate with consumers in an accessible and objective manner in order to engage them in this type of value proposition. Furthermore, according to the authors' study, it is crucial for a sustainable fashion industry to develop a complete business strategy that includes review, planning, implementation and impact assessment of the transition from an unsustainable to an environmentally friendly industry. The message that the company wants to convey to consumers must have real

meaning and not just be 'green', i.e., it must contain a business commitment and not empty promises. As mentioned earlier, sustainable practices add value to the product and increase the ethical value of the brand. Brands that truly invest in sustainable practices and communicate them well have greater value in the form of greater consumer recognition and consumer loyalty (Turunen & Halme, 2021).

Along with accessibility and objectivity, transparency is one of the elements of communication that most attracts consumers and motivates them in their decision making (Egels-Zandén & Hansson, 2016). According to the study conducted by the authors, transparency increases consumers' desire to buy. In contrast to the statements made by the remaining authors, he claims that companies may employ transparency in their communication without it meaning more pressure from consumers. In short, there is a need for a new approach to sustainability communication that is clearer, more reliable, and more complete (Turunen & Halme, 2021) and that allows companies to improve their relationship with consumers and ensure that they are acting in accordance with their sustainability ideals. From this literature review, we could observe the authors are in line with their theories and complement each other. A gap arises from the lack of information on how sustainability should be communicated by fashion companies to consumers, as they are crucial to the shift towards a “greener” industry. There is a need to listen to consumers and understand what kind of communication makes them prefer one brand or product over another and what difficulties they face in their purchasing decision.

CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

In order to guide this dissertation to its conclusions, the questions from the literature are transformed into research questions associated with specific research objectives. The starting point is the research questions identified by various authors in the literature that are fundamental to the implementation of the strategy. The research questions, as well as the resulting research objectives, allow for a narrowing and consistent focus of the topics that this research will cover. The following table provides a clear overview of the research questions and objectives.

Table 1: Research questions and objectives

Key Research Question: How should fashion firms communicate their sustainability?		
Main Issues (Author, Year)	Research Question	Research Objective
Consumers are much more aware of the impact of their consumption choices on the environment and on people. (Melek et al., 2021)	RQ1: What is the impact of sustainability on consumer behavior in the fashion industry?	Understand in what extent sustainability is relevant to fashion consumers.
It is important for brands that develop sustainable practices to communicate with consumers in an accessible and objective manner. (Negrete & López, 2020)	RQ2: Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?	Understand which sustainability communication strategies are more successful.
The concept of sustainability is becoming more confusing and ambiguous, leading to a sense of confusion and ignorance on the part of consumers. (Turunen & Halme, 2021)	RQ3: What obstacles do consumers face when trying to understand the sustainability of fashion brands?	Identify the gaps in fashion companies' sustainability communication and draw possible solutions.

Source: thesis'author

For the methodology of this research, a qualitative research was chosen in order to translate reality through statements about the subject under analysis. More specifically, "text mining" was chosen as an analytical tool. Text mining can be defined as a process of extraction from large collections of documents that, by transforming data into easily

understandable information (graphs, maps, frequency lists), makes it possible to synthesise all the information obtained in order to draw conclusions and answer research questions. Through the analysis of the interviews, it is possible to draw many conclusions about how fashion brands should communicate their sustainability in order to obtain a better response from the consumer. This allows an analysis of concrete aspects listed by consumers in a representation of reality in which facts and evidence are presented. It also allows a clear idea of how consumers respond to the communication currently practiced by brands in the sector and suggestions for more successful communication.

To define the Target of this investigation, a study conducted by PwC entitled "The global consumer: changed for good" and subtitled "Millennials are most likely to be thinking about sustainability while shopping" (see Table 2) was used as a basis. This study presents a chart of the different generations that are exposed to sustainability issues and shows how engaged they are with each of these issues. The results show that while younger generations, particularly Millennials, are not yet considered 100% sustainable, they are showing a growing interest in environmentally friendly behaviors. Within this generation, there are three broad groups: the young, the middle, and the mature Millennials, ages 23 to 26, 27 to 32, and 33 to 36, respectively (PwC, 2021).

Table 2: Generations most likely to be thinking about sustainability while shopping

	Generation Z	Young Millennials	Core Millennials	Mature Millennials	Generation X	Baby Boomers
I choose products with a traceable and transparent origin	47%	59%	60%	62%	56%	48%
I buy from companies that are conscious and supportive of protecting the environment	49%	60%	61%	58%	53%	47%
I intentionally buy items with eco-friendly packaging or less packaging	48%	55%	60%	55%	55%	51%
I am buying more biodegradable/eco-friendly products	48%	56%	59%	58%	52%	47%
When shopping for products, I check the labelling/packaging for sustainability certification(s)	47%	57%	58%	53%	51%	43%

Source: PwC’s June 2021 Global Consumer Insights Pulse Survey

These results can be explained by the fact that the price factor is no longer an obstacle at the time of purchase, unlike Generation Z, which is younger than 23 and, despite its interest in sustainability issues, does not yet have sufficient financial resources to opt for sustainable behaviors. For the more adult generations, Generation X and Baby Boomers, who are over 36 years old, the price factor is no longer a priority when making purchases. However, these generations show some anxiety about changing their consumption habits and are skeptical about trusting social media. In contrast, younger generations are more attentive to future issues, both environmental, social and economic, and are more willing to take risks on new products and support innovative brands (Beaumont, 2021).

The sample of this exploratory study consists of 30 participants who met the requirements of the defined target group, i.e., between 23 and 36 years old. To conduct the interviews, friends and family members were first selected, who then suggested other people who matched the specified profile and were also interviewed. Since the focus is on consumer behavior, it was important to create a diverse and heterogeneous sample in terms of gender, education and professional field or study. All interviews were conducted

online and took place in January 2022. They were recorded in audio format, transcribed into text format, and translated for discourse where necessary to allow for further content analysis and conclusions. Interviews lasted an average of 15 minutes. The following table relates the interview questions to the objectives and nature of the research question.

Table 3: Interview Prototype

Research Objective	Question	Type of Question
Understand in what extent sustainability is relevant to fashion consumers.	Are you concerned about sustainability in the fashion industry? (RQ1: What is the impact of sustainability on consumer behavior in the fashion industry?)	Exploratory Question
Understand in what extent sustainability is relevant to fashion consumers.	What makes you aware of this “new” trend? (RQ1: What is the impact of sustainability on consumer behavior in the fashion industry?)	Exploratory Question
Identify the gaps in fashion companies' sustainability communication and draw possible solutions.	Do you usually choose sustainable brands/products? If not, what makes you hesitate? (RQ3: What obstacles do consumers face when trying to understand the sustainability of fashion brands?)	Exploratory Question
Understand in what extent sustainability is relevant to fashion consumers.	Does the fact that a brand calls itself sustainable make you more interested in buying from that brand? (RQ1: What is the impact of sustainability on consumer behavior in the fashion industry?)	Exploratory Question
Understand which sustainability communication strategies are more successful.	What brands come to mind when you talk about sustainable fashion? (RQ2: Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?)	Exploratory Question
Understand which sustainability communication strategies are more successful.	Which of the brands: Zara, H&M and Patagonia do you think is the most sustainable?	Exploratory Question

How Should Fashion Brands Communicate Their Sustainability?

	(RQ2: Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?)	
Understand which sustainability communication strategies are more successful.	Do you know any of these eco-labels: Blue Angel, Nordic White Swan, EU Ecolabel and Fairtrade. (RQ2: Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?)	Exploratory Question
Understand which sustainability communication strategies are more successful.	Do you think it is important for companies to use eco-labels to prove that they are really sustainable? (RQ2: Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?)	Exploratory Question
Identify the gaps in fashion companies' sustainability communication and draw possible solutions.	What are the biggest difficulties for you when trying to define whether a product/brand is truly sustainable? (RQ3: What obstacles do consumers face when trying to understand the sustainability of fashion brands?)	Exploratory Question
Understand which sustainability communication strategies are more successful.	The sustainability of a product covers different areas: Environmental, Economic and Social. Order the following information from the less to most relevant to know about a product, in your opinion: where it was made; by whom it was made; materials used to produce it; description of costs incurred from making the product to selling it. (RQ2: Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?)	Exploratory Question

Source: thesis' author

CHAPTER IV - DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter it will be analyzed the information collected through the interviews with consumers. It is through this data analysis that conclusions are later drawn to support decision making.

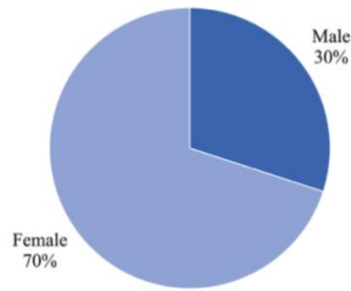
4.1 Sample Characterization

The characterisation of the sample was the first data analysis to be performed as it allows understanding whether the sample is complete, fair and adequate to the intended analysis. The following main indicators were used to characterize the sample: gender, academic qualifications and professional or study area. The age indicator was excluded since it was previously established a target age range.

4.1.1 Gender:

According to (Chea, 2011), although fashion is still associated with a more feminine consumption, with social changes, this stigma has been changing, observing an increase in fashion consumption by men. Therefore, it was created a sample that included both genders, being, however, mostly female (70%), which means a total of 21 women and 9 men.

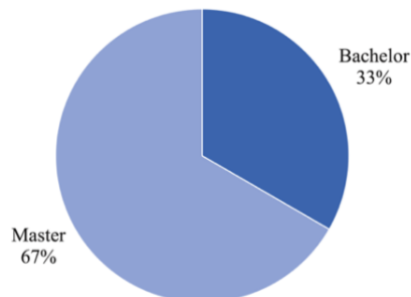
Figure 1: Gender



4.1.2 Academic qualifications:

The chart below shows the breakdown of respondents by academic qualification, with the majority holding a Master's degree, representing 67% of respondents, and the remaining 33% held a Bachelor's degree.

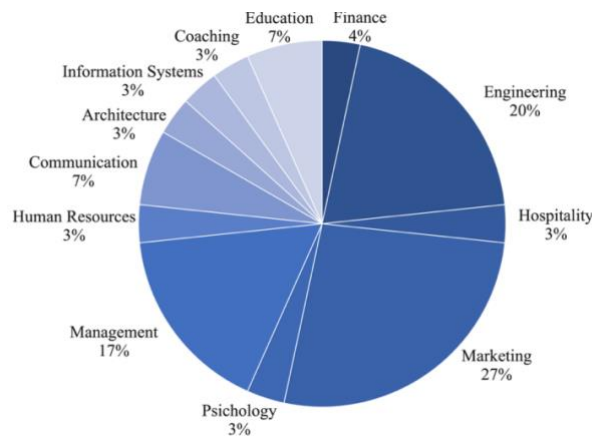
Figure 2: Level of education



4.1.3 Professional/ Study Area:

Regarding the professional or study area, 27% of the interviewees have studied or work in marketing, then 20% in engineering, 17% in management, 7% in communication, 7% in education, 4% in finance and finally 3% both in coaching, psychological, information systems and also architecture.

Figure 3: Professional / Study area



4.2 Text Mining

Through the 30 interviews, it was possible to observe a similar mindset among all respondents. In general, it was found that the issue of sustainability in the fashion industry still causes many confusions and conflicts in the minds of consumers, with communication playing a crucial role in consumer behavior. In order to understand consumer needs and thus draw conclusions about the most successful communication strategies, an in-depth data analysis was conducted, which will later be related to the literature to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the dissertation.

4.2.1 Word frequency

By displaying the words most frequently said during the interviews, the frequency list tool allows to draw conclusions, highlighting the most important themes and grouping them together, creating a line of thought that will be used for further data analysis.

Table 4: Word Frequency List

	Word	POS/Conj.	Frequency
1	Sustainable	Adj	129
2	Brand	Noun	114
3	Material	Noun	49
4	Product	Noun	48
5	Label	Noun	42

6	Cost	Noun	36
7	Information	Noun	34
8	More	Adj	30
9	Sustainability	Noun	30
10	People	Noun	29
11	Company	Noun	28
12	Important	Adj	28
13	Issue	Noun	27
14	Lot	Noun	27
15	Price	Noun	26
16	Thing	Noun	26
17	Fashion	Noun	23
18	Example	Noun	21
19	Part	Noun	21
20	Impact	Noun	21

Source: Self-elaborated based on KH Coder 3

As expected, the two most frequently mentioned words are "sustainable" and "brand," since the topic of this dissertation revolves around the sustainability of fashion brands. Next, the words "material" and "product" were mentioned most frequently, mainly due to the fact that interviewees present "reading" materials as one of the biggest difficulties when trying to understand whether a product is sustainable or not. Lack of information is the indicator most often cited by respondents as the main reason for not having more sustainable habits and not being a relevant aspect at the time of purchase. This can be seen in the words "more" and "information" and "a lot" and "things," which refer to the amount of "things" related to a product's sustainability that are difficult to access. Given this lack of information, interviewees find it difficult to trust these sustainable claims made fashion brands. Therefore, they present eco-labels as a tool that gives brands more credibility, often emphasizing the word "label." Next, most interviewees mentioned the human "part" as the most "important" "issue" related to a company's sustainability, with the word "people" being mentioned most often in the interviews. This theme, related to the social side of sustainability, was frequently mentioned in relation to fast fashion and the working conditions associated with it, being

the word "fashion" mentioned several times in this context. When asked about the elements they think companies should communicate, most interviewees mentioned the "example" of describing "costs" as a relevant tool, as it shows in a transparent way if people are paid well, and the material costs it quality and thus they understand if they are paying a fair value for the product, and whether the higher price associated with sustainable products is justified. In short, the price of the product, associated with the lack of information and trust, appear as the biggest barrier felt by the interviewees when it comes to buying sustainable products.

4.2.2 Words Association

To perform a deeper analysis, the word association tool was used to observe which words were said most frequently in relation to a single word. This tool allows to link concepts and ideas and to draw some relevant conclusions. Since the focus of this dissertation is on communication, the following key words were used: "Information" and "Concern". The first one was chosen to understand how information is communicated and where the main gaps are. In contrast, the word "concern" is used to highlight the issues that consumers consider most important to communicate. The column named "unconditional" indicates how often the word was used in the interviews and the column labelled "conditional" indicates how many times the word was associated with the searched word.

Table 5: Information Word Association

Information				
N	Word	POS	Unconditional	Conditional
1	Lack	Noun	14 (0.045)	12 (0.480)
2	Difficult	Adj	8 (0.026)	4 (0.160)
3	Something	Noun	11 (0.035)	4 (0.160)
4	Material	Noun	41 (0.131)	7 (0.280)
5	Many	Adj	13 (0.042)	4 (0.160)
6	Label	Noun	33 (0.015)	6 (0.240)

How Should Fashion Brands Communicate Their Sustainability?

7	Access	Noun	5 (0.016)	3 (0.120)
8	Research	Noun	5 (0.016)	3 (0.120)
9	Area	Noun	6 (0.019)	3 (0.120)
10	Transparent	Adj	6 (0.019)	3 (0.120)
11	Much	Adj	17 (0.054)	4 (0.160)
12	Sustainable	Adj	92 (0.294)	11 (0.440)
13	Knowledge	Noun	7 (0.22)	7 (0.022)
14	Time	Noun	7 (0.22)	3 (0.120)
15	Lot	Adj	19 (0.061)	4 (0.160)
16	Thing	Noun	20 (0.064)	4 (0.160)
17	Product	Noun	34 (0.109)	5 (0.080)
18	Truth	Noun	2 (0.006)	2 (0.080)
19	Brand	Noun	84 (0.286)	8 (0.320)
20	Internet	Noun	3 (0.010)	2 (0.080)

Source: Self-elaborated based on KH Coder 3

When asked about fashion brands' communication about their sustainability, the first thing most respondents mentioned was the "lack" of information available, which leads to a "knowledge" deficit among consumers, pointing out that not "much" information is communicated by these companies (see table 5). Related to this is the difficulty in obtaining this information, as a lot of time has to be spent searching ("researching") on the "Internet" if they want to obtain the information they want.

In addition, respondents stated that they have great difficulty ("difficult") in understanding the information communicated by the brands, especially in relation to the materials ("material"). They stated that they do not have enough knowledge to understand what the materials mean and whether the percentage they use is good or bad. They also emphasize that the information is often confusing and contradictory, especially when companies in the same group claim they are sustainable while "many" others are not. They also emphasize that nowadays it seems like every fashion brand has to do "something" sustainable in order to be called sustainable.

In addition, it is often mentioned that it is difficult to confirm that all claims of sustainable brands are true ("truth"). Therefore, respondents indicate that they value companies that are transparent and cite eco-labels ("label") as an example as a way to

convey more trust and attract attention. Since, as mentioned earlier, the topic of sustainability encompasses a "lot" of "things," respondents believe it is important for brands to have clear, complete, and accessible communications.

Table 6: Concern Word Association

Concern				
N	Word	POS	Unconditional	Conditional
1	Issue	Noun	22 (0.070)	5 (0.263)
2	Sustainability	Noun	28 (0.089)	5 (0.263)
3	More	Adj	23 (0.073)	4 (0.211)
4	Environment	Noun	13 (0.042)	3 (0.158)
5	Biggest	Adj	4 (0.013)	2 (0.105)
6	General	Adj	4 (0.013)	2 (0.105)
7	Person	Noun	4 (0.013)	2 (0.105)
8	Topic	Noun	6 (0.019)	2 (0.105)
9	Industry	Noun	7 (0.022)	2 (0.105)
10	Fashion	Noun	21 (0.067)	3 (0.158)
11	World	Noun	8 (0.026)	2 (0.105)
12	Year	Noun	9 (0.029)	2 (0.105)
13	Aware	Adj	12 (0.038)	2 (0.105)
14	Many	Adj	13 (0.042)	2 (0.105)
15	Exploitation	Noun	14 (0.045)	2 (0.105)
16	Human	Adj	14 (0.045)	2 (0.105)
17	Child	Noun	15 (0.048)	2 (0.105)
18	Impact	Noun	15 (0.048)	2 (0.105)
19	Brand	Noun	84 (0.268)	6 (0.316)
20	Active	Adj	1 (0.003)	1 (0.053)

Source: Self-elaborated based on KH Coder 3

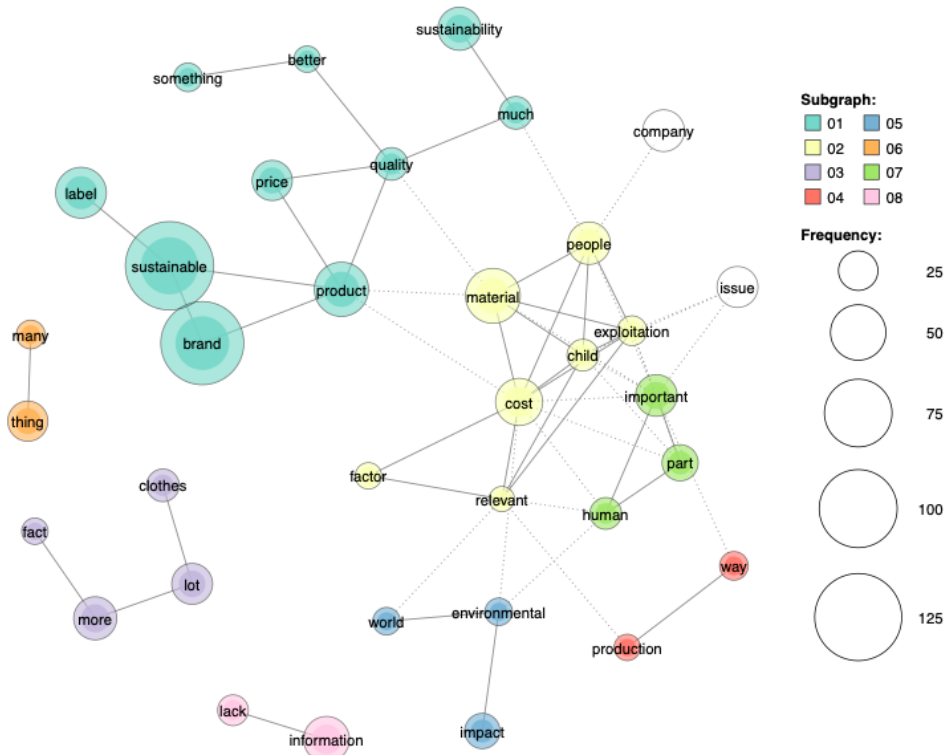
In “general”, the aspect (“issue”) of "sustainability" that worries respondents the most (“more”) is the social and “human” part, related to the “child” “exploitation” (see table 6). They consider it important that brands communicate in a transparent way the "person" who makes the products. In addition to the social aspect, the environmental aspect is also frequently mentioned by respondents as an issue of concern. In this case, most of them consider that the “fashion” “industry” has a brutal “impact” on the “environment”, being one of the “biggest” industries in the “world” and also the one with the worst magnitudes (Paixão et al., 2020). Despite their lack of knowledge on this theme, the interviewees believe that the fact that sustainability became a much-discussed “topic”

in the pandemic “year” has led “many” “brands” to be more “active” in addressing this issue, which has led to greater “awareness” among all consumers.

4.2.3 Text Correlation and Mind Mapping

To obtain a visual picture of the main concepts and ideas expressed in the interviews, the mind mapping tool developed in the KH Coder 3 was used as an analysis source. Mind mapping provides a visual picture of how words are connected and allows words to be divided into groups (“subgraphs”) that are interconnected and represent the major themes of the interviews. This tool contributes to a more visual, objective and complete analysis.

Figure 4: Text Correlation and Mining Mapping



Source: Self-elaborated based on KH Coder 3

Subgraph 1 is the most comprehensive and symbolizes issues related to the product. In this context, the words "price" and "quality" are related to "product", and the issue of the high price of sustainable products was one of the aspects that make respondents most hesitant to buy. It is assumed that the high price is due to the higher quality of the product ("something", "better"), although some respondents question whether this quality is actually proven ("much", "sustainability") and whether it is not just a marketing strategy. In other words: In the interviews, the impression was often expressed that fashion brands use the "sustainable" strategy to achieve higher prices. This claim is related to the lack of consumer trust in the brands' communication. In this sense, the eco "label" is mentioned as a way to increase trust in the brand, but this is not considered sufficient.

As for subgraph 2, it focuses on the human aspect of sustainability. When asked what aspects they consider relevant for companies to communicate about a product, the majority answered "by whom it was made" and commented on their concern about the "issue" of "child" "exploitation". They also stressed the importance of knowing the costs ("cost") associated with production and seeing if the "people" are paid well by the "company". On the other hand, it was also identified as a key element ("relevant", "factor") to describe the materials ("material"), what impact they have on the environment and whether they are of good quality or not. The description of the costs was also mentioned as a good tool to analyse if the product is really of good quality based on the material costs. Related to this subgraph, there is subgraph 7 which also highlights the human side as being the most relevant for consumers.

Subgraph 3 highlights the issue of fast fashion. When asked about sustainable brands, there was a lot of talk about the fact that "more" and more big fashion brands that produce mass-produced goods ("lot", "clothes") are claiming to be sustainable, which

upsets many of the respondents. These often state that fast fashion is a "fact" and that the sustainable claims made by the brands that practice this fashion make them contradictory. Subgraph 4 consists only of the two words "production" and "way" that were frequently mentioned by respondents when asked what made them hesitate to buy a sustainable product. Most respondents said that they doubted claims about a product's sustainability if they did not know exactly how and what it was made, i.e., everything involved in making a product.

In contrast to subgraph 2, subgraph 5 revolves around the environmental aspect of sustainability and refers to respondents' observations regarding the impact that the fashion industry has on the environment worldwide. In this context, aspects such as global warming, pollution, water consumption and waste of clothing are frequently mentioned.

As mentioned earlier, sub-graph 6, which consists of the words "many" and "thing", symbolizes the amount of information about the sustainability of a product and all the aspects that might be relevant to know about it. Related to this statement, there is subgraph 8 which highlights the problem of lack of information felt by consumers regarding the brands' communication.

CHAPTER V - DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the results and relates them to the findings obtained from the literature review in order to draw conclusions and highlight key findings.

4.1 Discussion and Findings

In this dissertation, three research questions were investigated, analyzed, and answered.

Based on the first research question, "What is the impact of sustainability on consumer behavior in the fashion industry?", it was possible to confirm the statement of Melek et al. (2021) that consumers are increasingly concerned about the issue of sustainability in the fashion industry. As expected by the study conducted by PwC, the younger generations (between 23 and 36 years old) pay more attention to this topic. Therefore, all 30 respondents indicated that they are concerned about the issue and are aware of the consequences that the fashion industry has on the world. However, as mentioned by Kong et al. (2016), the situation is different when it comes to actual practices. Only 23% say they actually do something about it, which means that only a small part considers the aspect of sustainability when buying (see Appendix L). This behavior, referred by McNeill & Moore (2015) as the "attitude-behavior" gap, is explained by respondents as a lack of information and a lack of trust in fashion brands. This discrepancy leads us to conclude that fashion brands need a better communication strategy.

Regarding the second research question "Which communication strategies have the greatest impact on fashion consumers?" it was possible to conclude, as mentioned by Negrete & López (2020), that "it is important for brands that develop sustainable practices to communicate with consumers in an accessible and objective manner." In order to

increase consumer trust in fashion brands that make "green" claims, the majority of respondents cited that it was critical for brands to communicate as transparently as possible. As an example, they cited "description of costs" as a good way to understand the entire production process of a product and build credibility in the brand. Still talking about trust, the use of ecolabels was mentioned as a good way of drawing the consumers' attention and attributing greater credibility to the brand. Besides the lack of trust, the lack of information felt by consumers was often mentioned. Therefore, interviewees showed great interest in brands providing information of the general context of the sustainability topics they refer to in their claims. In this way, communication would be more complete, clear and transparent (Turunen & Halme, 2021). Regarding the topics that consumers show the most interest in knowing about the sustainability of the product, the "materials used" and "by whom it was made" were the aspects most mentioned by the interviewees, followed by the "description of the costs incurred throughout the production process", and most frequently as the less relevant the "where it was produced".

Finally, regarding the third and last question "What obstacles do consumers face when trying to understand the sustainability of fashion brands?" as already mentioned, respondents feel that the communication practiced by fashion brands is difficult to access, unclear, and incomplete. As stated by Turunen & Halme (2021), "the confusing and ambiguous concept of 'sustainability' is reflected in the associated communication and may therefore add to the sense of confusion and ambiguity among consumers." In addition to the unclear information, and as already mentioned, respondents feel that it is difficult to trust the information. They feel that the great movement towards sustainability in recent years has led many companies to feel the need to "become" sustainable in order to be well seen in the eyes of society, and sometimes to increase prices without a major structural change. And they say that the only way to combat this stigma is to become more

transparent about their claims, otherwise they will not have the desired effect on consumers, who are becoming increasingly aware (Melek et al., 2021). One of the difficulties most presented by the interviewees was related to knowing how to read the materials of a product, not having an overall context of its impact on the world, coming back to the issue of the need for a more complete communication.

4.2 Key Findings

- Despite being a topic of increasing awareness, most consumers feel that they do not consider sustainability as a relevant factor when making a purchase, mainly due to a lack of information of the subject and lack of trust on fashion brands.
- In general, consumers find it difficult to trust the “green” claims made by fashion brands, especially multinational mass production brands. They feel that they could exploit this "green" movement to attract consumers and position themselves well in the market.
- Consumers feel that fashion brands' communications are generally unclear, inaccessible, unreliable, and incomplete.
- Given the lack of information perceived by consumers, they believe that brands should provide information about the overall context in relation to sustainability in addition to product information.
- Consumers value mostly brands that transparently communicate who makes the products and under what conditions, as well as which materials were used to produce them.
- The use of eco-labels, while not enough, is seen by consumers as an important tool to build brand credibility and, therefore, consumer trust.

- If fashion brands offer clear, transparent and complete communication, it is expected that consumers will feel better informed and therefore more willing to trust and buy from these brands.

CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSION

This dissertation enabled to establish that consumers are increasingly concerned with the issue of sustainability in the fashion industry, due to the awareness created and promoted by brands in the sector. However, it was also found that despite this concern, only a small proportion of consumers actually consider this concern when making purchases. This behavior is explained by consumers due to having difficulty understanding and trusting the claims made by brands regarding their sustainability in this sector. Therefore, to gain consumers' trust and preference, it is imperative that brands adopt a more effective and appealing communication strategy.

This dissertation has allowed us to get a clear idea of consumers' needs in terms of the sustainability communication of fashion brands. It was possible to conclude that consumers want clearer, and more accessible, transparent, complete and credible communication. Clear communication is stated by consumers in terms of objective information and well explained in a few words. For example, by breaking down the sustainability of a product by sector and topics, e.g., within the area of "environment" include the topics of "water waste," "transportation," "materials," or within the "social" sector include the topic "working conditions."

Accessible communication is mentioned by consumers when it comes to finding information about the product's sustainability in a practical way. For example, clicking on a product displays a list of the various sustainability indicators of that product. Transparent communication is suggested by consumers as a way for brands to present their claims in a transparent way. For example, show how much employees are paid on the "Working Conditions" tab, or provide the name of the transportation company and transportation routes on the "Transportation" tab.

Complete communication is mentioned by consumers in terms of the brand showing the different areas of sustainability, especially the environmental and social areas. In this sense, it would be recommended that the brand assigns a general context to each topic. For example, "This T-shirt used 500 liters of water. On average, a T-shirt produced by clothing brands consumes 2000 liters of water." This communication makes the consumer feel informed and attached to the brand. Finally, consumers state that brands communicate credibly when they use globally recognized eco-labels to demonstrate some aspect of their sustainability. The Fairtrade label was mentioned most often by consumers and is the most important from their perspective.

Overall, consumers show an ongoing interest in becoming more sustainable and more informed about this topic. This is a behavior that cannot be ignored. It is essential for fashion brands to strategically position themselves and adapt their communications to remain competitive in the market and attract consumers who are becoming more aware and demanding when it comes to sustainability in the fashion industry.

This thesis provides an overall review of the literature on how consumers respond to the communication practised by fashion brands and which strategies are most attractive in their eyes. As for the contribution for fashion companies, this thesis shows in a practical and structured way how their communication strategies could be applied to respond to the increasing interests of consumers in buying sustainable clothes.

In conducting this dissertation, several limitations were noted. Firstly, it is important to highlight the complexity of the issue of sustainability in the fashion industry. In addition to the numerous theories, sustainability is a concept that is constantly evolving, which makes its analysis even more difficult. Therefore, considering the importance and relevance of this topic, it was difficult not to lose focus on the aspect studied, specifically "sustainability communication of fashion brands".

Another limitation is the fact that the sample collected is not very large and consists only of Portuguese people, which could be misleading for some of the conclusions drawn, specifically in terms of geography. However, according to a study done by (Creswell, 2013), to be considered adequate and relevant, a qualitative analysis has to consist in a sample of 20 to 30 interviews.

Finally, the KH Coder system represents a limitation to the data analysis, since it analyses only the most frequently mentioned words, leaving out some words that, although less frequently mentioned, would be relevant to the analysis. Moreover, the tables it produces are not detailed enough, focusing only on the frequency of the words and their association with each other, and little on the context in which they were mentioned. Nevertheless, this software is recognized worldwide for its ease of use and wide range of analysis tools and has been used in over 3500 academic research articles.

For future research, a more comprehensive analysis would be advisable, focusing not only on the analysis of the frequency of words and their associations, but also on the context in which they were mentioned. In this context, it would be advisable to create a table of some of the responses in which these words were said, in order to understand their context and obtain more concrete conclusions. Also, to make the collected sample more accurate and complete, it would be interesting to interview consumers from different countries.

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ANNEXES AND APPENDIXES

A - Interview Script

1. Are you concerned about sustainability in the fashion industry?
2. What makes you aware of this “new” trend?
3. Do you usually choose sustainable brands/products? If not, what makes you hesitate?
4. Does the fact that a brand calls itself sustainable make you more interested in buying from that brand?
5. What brands come to mind when you talk about sustainable fashion?
6. Which of the brands: Zara, H&M and Patagonia do you think is the most sustainable?
7. Do you know any of these eco-labels: Blue Angel, Nordic White Swan, EU Ecolabel and Fairtrade
8. Do you think it is important for companies to use eco-labels to prove that they are really sustainable?
9. What are the biggest difficulties for you when trying to define whether a product/brand is truly sustainable?
10. The sustainability of a product covers different areas: Environmental, Economic and Social. Order the following information from the less to most relevant to know about a product, in your opinion: where it was made; by whom it was made; materials used to produce it; description of costs incurred from making the product to selling it.

B - Anonymous excerpt from question number 1

“Yes, it surely does.”

C - Anonymous excerpts from question number 2

"All the news we have access to right now in terms of environmental disasters and the world we live in seems increasingly to be a world and an industry that does not care about sustainability, and because this has a lot of negative consequences and several news stories address this issue, it's ultimately not a forgotten issue, meaning the media is active on this issue and that makes me more aware."

"Negative news from companies, for example, some news from ZARA about the exploitation and the collapse of factories in Indonesia. What worries me the most is when news like this comes up.”

D - Anonymous excerpts from question number 3

"No. It is difficult to understand which brands are sustainable and which are not, it is not clear. I do not buy them because it would take me a long time to know if they are really sustainable or not. I want to buy something that I know is sustainable. The brand has to make sure I know it is sustainable."

"Not always. I think there's an important problem in terms of fashion sustainability: the fact that there's a lack of knowledge about sustainability issues and brands like Patagonia, because they are not well known and there's not a lot of communication associated with them. Either you are interested and you are looking for it, or you have had the opportunity to come across these issues, or it's not that easy to learn about them."

E - Anonymous excerpts from question number 4

"Yes and no, because there is the problem of greenwashing. I see that something is sustainable and I think "ok, I like the clothes and on top of that I'm doing something good for the world", but at the same time I think "is it really sustainable? Am I paying more because it's sustainable or are they using these words and then it's not", so yes, it makes me want to buy, but at the same time I don't feel like spending too much time doing such a big research on the brand."

"I think that might have influenced me two years ago, but not anymore, because I see brands like H&M that claim to be sustainable, and deep down they are anything but. I think I stopped believing in that label."

F - Anonymous excerpts from question number 5

"Patagonia, for example. There are smaller brands that are also starting to invest in this area, like, for example, Scalpers, which has a whole line of sustainable collections called HOPE. But Patagonia in my opinion is a big sustainability buzzword."

"H&M, I know they have created a sustainable collection. I know there are big fast fashion brands that have created some collections."

"C&A, H&M, for their conscious collection, and the Portuguese brand ISTO."

"Mango and H&M, I have noticed it has it on its labels, Zara I see some things but I don't associate it as much."

G - Anonmous excerpts from question number 6

"Patagonia, without a doubt. First, either through the marketing strategy, they advertise a lot with the do not buy, they recommend arranging purchases rather than new purchases."

"Patagonia, without a doubt. I exclude the others because Inditex is the biggest fashion company in the world and one of the richest companies in the world. That suggests they care more about the cash factor than sustainability, because we are talking about large-scale production, production is probably decentralized, the factories are all in eastern countries where prices are much more competitive, and I doubt they care much about environmental policy."

H - Anonymous excerpts from question number 7

"Yes, Fairtrade, because of the Ben&Jerrys."

"Yes, the EU ecolabel and Fairtrade."

"Fairtrade I remember hearing, the others I don't."

I - Anonymous excerpts from question number 8

"Yes, I think it's very important for companies to review their overall sustainability policies, not only because it's a fashion trend, but also because of the impact that big fashion companies have on the planet and on people. Using these labels would increase my trust in the brand, especially in a time when the media has a huge influence on people's opinions. It is becoming more and more normal for companies to make and communicate promises without confirming them through external analysis. In other words, I think we used to be able to trust companies' statements more, but today false marketing is the order of the day. Since there is no single label, they have to adhere to multiple labels."

"I think so too, but I think there should be more than just these labels. I think there should be a universal standardization, like there is for grain, where there is a classification from A to F, covering all areas of sustainability, because the company can put a label on it, for example, and say it's very sustainable, and maybe it can create awareness in the person who buys it, but maybe it's very good in the water factor, but in the human factor it's terrible. One thing is to present the data in a group, another thing is to make a statement about one part and people take it away from the rest."

J - Anonymous excerpts from question number 9

"Find detailed and transparent information. Otherwise, for me, it is misleading advertising. It is very difficult to confirm the veracity of a brand if it is not verified by a third party: Sometimes I look at websites that report it, but it's very difficult to get that information. Often it's companies from the same group, some of which say they are sustainable in certain areas and some of which are not. For me, the biggest difficulty is

verifying the information that is given to us by these companies. The information is not transparent and is confusing."

"It's hard for me to imagine the manufacturing process, it's all very abstract, we can not understand where they get the resources from, and also, to what extent is the transportation sustainable, these big stretchers that are produced who knows where, there's always going to be transportation, to what extent is that sustainable. I also do not understand what the materials mean, it is like reading food labels, I can not tell if they are organic, if they are processed or not, you have to learn to read labels."

"I can usually tell from the labels or the name of a collection or even the symbols if they are "supposedly" sustainable products, but it's hard for me to trust these brands, mainly because I feel like the issue has already become fashionable. To draw a parallel: A label was created to rate tuna, which is one of the least sustainable fisheries in the world, and the packaging that carries it supposedly signifies that sustainable fishing was practiced, but these symbols are lobbies. The big players in the market buy these symbols because they pay them to raise consumer awareness, but in reality it's just a front to disguise a fishery that is very extensive and destructive of resources. So when I look at these symbols or collection names, I sometimes think, "To what extent is this not just a symbol to make an impact or to try to make a positive impact on the customer, and to what extent is this true? The same is true for fashion brands. Sometimes I feel that they use these symbols to disguise other sustainability issues and to have an effect on the customer, and sometimes they even manage to make much more profit by setting much higher prices for something that may not be that much better or even sustainable."

K - Anonymous excerpts from question number 10

"I think the "by whom" is the most important, but which brands reveal it? And how true is it? But anyway, I put the "by whom" first because the impact on people is the most important part of sustainability for me. Secondly, I put the "where" since it's related to working conditions. If it is produced in Portugal, I am sure those conditions are guaranteed. Then the materials, because if it is wool, for example, I am a little scared because I know that the whole process of making wool has an impact on the animals. And finally the "description of costs" to understand why the value is so expensive and if they pay fair wages to the people, but that comes last because I think the human factor is the most important."

"By whom", first of all, but the data can not be edited to show what the brand wants to show. Regardless of where is produced, human rights must be guaranteed, but it must be explicit data, it is not enough to say "the average age is 25 years". Then the "description of costs", not to understand what the profitability of the company is, but to know if the distribution of costs for the production part and the "who" is done fairly. But the environmental impact of a brand that produces in a decentralized way in China, where it makes much more money because there is cheaper labour, is going to be brutal because it has to deliver its products all over the world, and I think it's very important to know that because it's important for the economy of a country that we have a national production."

Finally, I would like to mention the "materials" because I think the other information about a product is more important.”

Appendix A – Statistics of the answers to direct questions

Direct Questions	Answer: “Yes”	%	Answer: “No”	%
Are you concerned about sustainability in the fashion industry?	30	100%	0	0%
Do you usually choose sustainable brands/products?	7	23%	23	77%
Does the fact that a brand calls itself sustainable make you more interested in buying from that brand?	17	56%	13	44%
Do you think it is important for companies to use eco-labels to prove that they are really sustainable?	28	93%	2	7%