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# **The Influence of Clothing Brands in Shaping Sustainable Fashion: An Examination of Consumer and Brand Perspectives**

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A Qualitative Multicase Study

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## **Abstract**

The clothing industry's potential for achieving sustainability has been extensively discussed due to its severe environmental and socio-economical consequences. Existing literature has examined the prevailing fast fashion paradigm, characterised by the production of cheap, low-quality clothing and the constant introduction of new trends to drive consumption and economic growth. This model poses significant challenges to addressing sustainability concerns.

This thesis examines the role of clothing brands in driving systemic change towards sustainable fashion, focusing on consumer perspectives. It challenges the perception of clothing as superficial and highlights its influence on identities, aesthetics, and interactions. Through scholarly insights and interviews, the study explores diverse consumer approaches to clothing shaped by education, social environment, media, and an trends. The research also explores clothing brands approaches to clothing and sustainability.

The study emphasizes the influential power of clothing brands in shaping trends, social norms, and consumption. It recognizes their valuable position within the industry, with extensive knowledge of advanced sustainable practices. By shedding light on the complex relationship between consumers, clothing, and sustainability, it advocates for open discussions and nuanced understandings of clothing and consumption, calling for a shift towards a more sustainable and conscious consumption culture. Clothing brands have the potential to play a positive role in effecting systemic change.

Keywords: sustainable fashion, clothing brands, consumer perspectives, systemic change, consumption habits.

# Preface

I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Andrei Marin Florin, for his invaluable guidance and support throughout this project. His continuously helpful feedback has significantly contributed to shaping the final result of this thesis, and I deeply appreciate his assistance.

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# 1 Introduction

Up until the 1980s, the clothing industry was focused on low-cost mass production of standardized styles that rarely changed due to manufacturing constraints. By the end of the 1980s however, fashion shows and runways had become more accessible to the general public, causing a shift in demand. Fashion-conscious consumers were exposed to exclusive styles, prompting retailers to quickly adopt these designs in order to attract customers and introduce runway styles to their stores in a matter of weeks. The clothing industry moved from predicting future trends, to using real-time data to meet the needs and desires of consumers (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). To fulfill the latest catwalk styles to the high street in a short time, the clothing industry revolutionized rapid production methods, creating so-called ‘fast fashion’. This instant supply to increased demand has a significant carbon footprint and substantial social concerns (Brewer, 2019). In pursuit of low production costs, the clothing industry has taken advantage of developing countries with lower environmental and social regulatory systems (Shen, 2014). The textile industry moved with increasing speed and size into low-cost Asian countries during the last decades. With low-cost and high-production rates, the rapid growth of consumption has been inevitable. This over-consumption, primarily by the global North, causes severe environmental problems and significant socio-economic consequences for the manufacturing countries, where the fibers are cultivated, fabrics are woven, dyed, and finished with strong chemicals and made into clothing (Brooks, 2019; Niinimäki, 2015; Thomas, 2019).

With the evolution of fast fashion in the last decades, cheap clothes inspired

directly from high-end fashion and catwalks have become very accessible for most people. With easy access to cheap clothing, consumers have made a habit of extensive over-consumption. Inevitably, the negative impacts of the clothing industry came to light and were no longer unavoidable. The increased awareness of the environmental and social impacts of the clothing industry marked an increased interest in sustainable fashion (Henninger et al., 2016; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

With sustainability emerging as a trend, the clothing industry has changed or perhaps was forced to change dramatically. Consequently, sustainability has gained mainstream recognition and is now a prominent concept within the fashion industry and among consumers. As an opposition to the fast fashion paradigm, a new movement with a more sustainable approach to fashion grew, the *slow fashion* movement. This movement is not about stopping the production and consumption of clothes. Instead, it presents alternative approaches to fashion (Henninger et al., 2016). *Slow fashion* is a more sustainable approach that emphasizes the importance of appreciating and understanding the clothing item itself. It involves recognizing the journey of the raw materials to the final product as an integral part of the consumption experience. This type of ethical consumption is rooted in a consumer value system that prioritizes experience values and satisfaction beyond buying a new fashion item. (McNeill & Moore, 2015) (Niinimäki, 2013). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential misinterpretation of sustainable fashion and the risk of brands using sustainability as a form of *greenwashing* to serve their economic interests. Despite this concern, many fashion brands have undertaken substantial measures and adopted a different mindset in order to genuinely embrace sustainability (Niinimäki, 2013).

However, sustainability is a complex and highly debated concept, and the commonly accepted definitions may not always be practical or feasible to implement, particularly in the clothing industry that is deeply rooted in unsustainable practices (Fletcher, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Therefore, it becomes imperative to examine the approach of sustainability within the clothing



industry.

### **1.1 Aim and Research Question**

The primary objective of my thesis is to investigate and reflect upon the concept of sustainability within the clothing industry and examine how various conceptualizations and approaches influence sustainable development. The research aims to assess the extent to which clothing brands' and consumers' understanding of sustainability contribute to a more sustainable approach to clothing. To achieve this, I analyze clothing brands that have prioritized sustainability as a core element in their philosophy and actively promote it in their branding. By studying different brands with a strong focus on sustainability, I intend to identify their interpretations and implementation of the concept through sustainable principles presented in the literature, and assess how their perspectives can potentially influence consumer approach to clothing.

Additionally, I will explore consumers' understanding and perceptions of sustainability in relation to clothing. Understanding society's reflections on sustainability is crucial, as both clothing brands and consumers have the power to shape how sustainability is portrayed and develop a more sustainable approach to clothing. By investigating the interpretation and the approaches to the sustainability concept within the clothing industry and society, I hope to gain insights into how these factors impact the development of sustainable fashion. The findings of my research will be examined and discussed in the context of existing academic literature on consumption and sustainability. Overall, my thesis aims to shed light on the complexities of sustainability within the clothing industry, examine the perspectives of both brands and consumers, and analyze how these perspectives can potentially contribute to the advancement of sustainable fashion.

Based on the aim of my thesis, the central research question is:

*Can clothing brands contribute to achieving sustainable fashion,*

*considering the challenges posed by the prevailing fast fashion paradigm?*

To address this research question, several sub-questions will be explored:

**1. What are the key challenges for achieving sustainability in the clothing industry?**

To answer this, the thesis will provide a comprehensive review of the fast fashion paradigm, examining its environmental and socio-economic consequences. It will also delve into the broader debate surrounding sustainability within an industry that has been shown to be inherently unsustainable. Additionally, to answer this question the section will review the discourse on sustainable fashion and its underlying principles. This question is explored through related literature in section 3.1 and 3.2 and discussed in section 4.1.

**2. How do clothing brands that demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability, approach the concept in their practices, and do these practices align with genuine sustainable principles?**

To answer this question, the thesis will analyze brands that have incorporated sustainability as a core element of their strategies and actively promote it. These brands will be assessed using theoretical frameworks that outline the values and principles of sustainable thinking. The analysis will aim to determine whether their approaches contribute to a new paradigm in sustainability and clothing, considering trends, norms, and societal impact. This problem is examined in section 3.3 of the literature review and further deliberated upon in section 4.2.

**3. What is consumers' approach to sustainability related to clothing?**

To investigate consumers' approach to sustainability in fashion, the dissertation will analyze their overall attitudes towards clothing. This analysis will consider factors like purchasing habits, personal style, and confidence in clothing brands.

## 1.1. Aim and Research Question

By examining these aspects, the dissertation aims to gain insight into how sustainability claims influence consumers' approach to clothing. Ultimately, this research will contribute to a broader understanding of how consumers and their approaches, along with clothing brands, can shape the landscape of sustainable fashion. This question is further discussed in section 4.3.

## 2 Research Methodology

In this chapter, the research methodology employed in this thesis is outlined, encompassing the techniques utilized for data collection and data analysis.

### 2.1 Qualitative multicase study

The chosen research methodology for this master thesis is a qualitative multicase study as presented by Stake, 2013. The decision to utilize a multicase study came from the aim of gaining a thorough and intricate comprehension of the various approaches to sustainability in the clothing industry through the lens of multiple clothing brands and consumers.

In a multicase study, the cases are linked by a shared characteristics or a common thread. This research design is qualitative in nature, aiming to delve into the intricacies, complexities, and unique circumstances of each individual case. Therefore, the focus is on conducting an in-depth exploration of each case to gain a comprehensive understanding of its specific context and dynamics (Stake, 2013). However, it's important to note that multicase studies are not intended for statistical generalization, but rather for obtaining an in-depth understanding within a specific context (Yin, 2018, p. 91).

#### 2.1.1 An interpretative perspective

This thesis is based on an analysis of several clothing brands and consumers. It targets a discussion of the different approaches that are used by clothing brands to implement sustainability, and consumers approach towards sustainability

and clothing. The study is not a comparative study, although concepts and approaches may overlap as well as differ. Rather, the research was undertaken from an interpretive perspective, emphasizing the subjective understanding and interpretation of a social phenomena and is commonly employed in qualitative research methods and social sciences.

An interpretative perspective recognizes that individuals and groups construct meaning and interpret their experiences based on their unique social, cultural, and historical contexts. It assumes that reality is subjective and socially constructed, and that multiple interpretations can coexist. The interpretative perspective allowed for an inductive approach, where theories and concepts emerged from the data and participants' perspectives, rather than imposing pre-existing theories or hypotheses (Bryman, 2016, p. 26).

## **2.2 Data Collection**

The collected data consist of a number of interviews with clothing brands emphasizing a strong focus on sustainability and with a group of consumers with diverse levels of interest in both fashion and sustainability. Furthermore, the research materials include the analysis of three brand websites, namely Pierre Robert, Holzweiler, and Livid, which prominently emphasize sustainability in their practices. As this thesis aims to explore perspectives on sustainability, examining the approaches of both brands and consumers, data were gathered through a series of interviews conducted with representatives from three brands as well as six individuals representing the consumer segment.

### **2.2.1 Semi-structured interviews**

Employing a semi-structured interview approach facilitated the collection of comprehensive and nuanced information while ensuring a certain level of structure and guidance during the conversations. The ability to adjust the line of questioning based on the response of the interviewee lead to the discovery of new and

unexpected insights that are integral for this thesis, and that may not have been uncovered through a more structured approach (Bryman, 2016, p. 469). A total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted, three with different clothing brands and six with consumers. The interviews lasted for about one hour and were conducted during the months of April and May.

### **Consent form**

Prior to their participation, a consent form was administered to the participants to ensure their comprehensive understanding of the study's nature, objectives, and procedures. Through this form, the interviewees were provided with relevant information concerning the main themes of the thesis, the purpose of their involvement, and details regarding data privacy. The online form was distributed to the participants one day prior to the scheduled interviews, allowing them sufficient time to review and provide their voluntary and informed consent.

### **Interviewing clothing brands**

The selection of clothing brands for the interviews was based on their notable emphasis on sustainability, which was predominantly conveyed through their websites. The brands were chosen not solely for their sustainable initiatives but also for their incorporation of clothing concepts derived from sustainable principles. To maintain anonymity, the interviewed brands will hereafter be referred to as Brand A, Brand B, and Brand C. Brand A is a large Norwegian brand that strongly emphasize sustainability in their core values. Brand B is a higher-end Norwegian brand that has experienced tremendous growth and popularity in the last five years and Brand C is a Danish brand specializing in socks, stockings and headwear with control over their production by owning their own factory in a Baltic country. Table 2.1 gives an overview of the interview subjects, their respective roles at their respective companies and how long they have been with the company. Being aware of the length of time interview subjects have spent in their respective roles may give context in the form of established credibility and can offer insights into their perspectives and differentiating viewpoints. The interview

guide used for the clothing brands can be found in Appendix A (Norwegian).

Table 2.1: Overview of interviews with brand employees

Brand	Role	Years at brand
Brand A	Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability	3
Brand B	Social Compliance Manager	2
Brand C	Regional Agent	1

### Interviewing consumers

The sample of interviewed consumers comprised six individuals residing in Oslo, each possessing varying degrees of interest and knowledge in fashion and clothing. Participant 1 (P1) exhibited a strong passion for clothing and style, despite not currently being employed in the clothing industry, but holding the experience of studying fashion, thereby earning the designation of a fashion consultant. Participant 2 (P2) also demonstrated a profound interest in clothing and style while actively pursuing studies in culture and communication. Participant 3 (P3), a master's student specializing in chemistry, exhibited a moderate level of interest in clothing. Participant 4 (P4) was employed in an environmental organization and displayed a notable interest in clothing and style. Similarly, Participant 5 (P5) also worked in an environmental organization and expressed significant enthusiasm for fashion and style. Lastly, Participant 6 (P6) was an architecture student with an average level of interest in clothing. The interview guide used for the clothing brands can be found in Appendix B (Norwegian).

The purposeful selection of participants as consumers aimed to encompass a range of perspectives. By including individuals with backgrounds in environmental work, fashion, and those without specific related backgrounds, the study sought to capture a diverse array of viewpoints. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the sample's representativeness. The narrow age range (22-26 years), geographic concentration (Oslo), and educational attainment (higher education) of the participants limit the generalizability of the findings beyond

this specific group. Therefore, caution must be exercised when interpreting the data, as potential biases associated with the sample's characteristics may be present. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010 argue that the perception of disposable fashion varies among generations, with Generation Z preferring a larger quantity of inexpensive, trendy clothing compared to baby boomers, who prefer fewer, high-quality items.

## **2.3 Data analysis**

The sampling method utilized in this thesis is purposive sampling, which involves the deliberate selection of units based on their direct relevance to the research question (Bryman, 2016, p. 407). Within the framework of purposive sampling, the most suitable approach for this research is typical case sampling, as described by Bryman, 2016 as the process of selecting a case that exemplifies a particular dimension of interest. This sampling technique is commonly employed in extensive and intricate research projects to highlight and exemplify specific dimensions of interest (Bryman, 2016, p. 409), making it particularly relevant to this analysis.

### **2.3.1 Interview analysis**

The analysis of interview data, from both the clothing brands and the consumers, was conducted using the six-step framework proposed by Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003. These steps guided the understanding and interpretation of the data gathered.

Step 1 involved handling the raw interview data, which initially presented as a voluminous amount of information.

In Step 2, the relevant text was identified by condensing and managing the data to a more manageable size. This selected text was then examined while keeping the research concerns in focus.

Step 3 consisted of identifying repeated ideas within the text, specifically seeking



out recurring words and phrases used by different participants to express similar concepts or thoughts.

Once repeated ideas were identified, Step 4 involved the classification of these ideas into themes. Themes represented implicit topics that encompassed groups of recurring ideas, providing an organizational framework for the data.

In Step 5, the themes were further organized and grouped into larger, more abstract ideas known as theoretical constructs. These constructs formed a higher-level conceptual framework for understanding the data.

Step 6 involved the development of a theoretical narrative, which synthesized the theoretical constructs into a cohesive narrative. This step facilitated the integration of the researchers' concerns with the subjective experiences of the participants. The theoretical narrative allowed the participants' stories to be presented in their own words, supplemented with the researchers' theoretical framework. This was achieved by incorporating the theoretical constructs and themes in parentheses throughout the discussion.

These six steps provided a systematic approach to analyze and interpret the interview data, enabling insights into the research concerns and the participants' subjective experiences.

### **2.3.2 Website analysis**

The website analysis focused on three brand websites, namely Holzweiler, Pierre Robert, and Livid. The websites examined in this study, along with their subsequent analysis, are distinct from the clothing brands that were interviewed but preferred to remain anonymous. Therefore, any findings or insights derived from the website analysis does not relate to findings derived from the anonymous interviewed brands.

The rationale for selecting websites as the primary source of investigation was rooted in their pivotal role as the primary platform through which consumers obtain information about a brand. Consequently, a consumer-centric analysis was

deemed necessary. The objective of this study was to examine these brands' websites to discern how their sustainability claims manifested in their online presence.

Attention was directed towards analyzing the linguistic choices, visual cues, and overall messaging conveyed through the websites. The aim was to evaluate the effectiveness with which the brands communicated their dedication to sustainability. Through this analysis, insights would be gained into the strategies employed by these brands to promote sustainable fashion and influence consumer perceptions.

## **2.4 Limitations**

This section discusses the limitations encountered in the research process, highlighting potential constraints that may have influenced the outcomes and interpretation of the study. The limitations include difficulties in obtaining interviews with clothing brands and my personal connection to the industry.

### **2.4.1 Difficulties in obtaining interviews**

One significant limitation of this study was the difficulty in securing interviews with clothing brands. Despite efforts to reach out to a wide range of brands, it was challenging to obtain their participation. This limitation may have resulted in a non-random selection of participating brands, potentially biasing the findings. As a consequence, the brands that agreed to participate in the study may have been more inclined to align their sustainability practices with the existing literature, leading to an over-representation of ideal practices compared to the industry as a whole. It is important to acknowledge this potential bias when interpreting the results and generalizing the findings to the broader population of clothing brands.

### **2.4.2 Personal connection to the clothing industry**

Another limitation arises from the my personal connection to the clothing industry. Having worked in the industry for a significant portion of my adult life, I may have developed certain biases or preconceived notions about sustainability in the clothing industry. While I have tried to counter such potential biases by reflection on the current literature, these biases may still have influenced the data collection, analysis, and my interpretation of the findings.

## 3 Related Literature

This chapter introduces the general debate on sustainability in the clothing industry, offering insights from various perspectives. To understand the concept of sustainable fashion, it is essential to investigate the existing fashion system and its impact on the environment, consumerism, and society's perception of fashion and clothing.

The first section focuses on the phenomenon of fast fashion and its profound connections to the broader discourse of sustainable development. This section serves as a theoretical foundation, playing a crucial role in examining the approaches of both brands and consumers toward sustainability. Understanding the implications of fast fashion is vital in assessing how sustainability is addressed within the industry and by various stakeholders. By exploring the current fashion system, its environmental and societal consequences, and the influence of fast fashion, the chapter aims to set the stage for the subsequent analyses of brand and consumer approaches to sustainability. The second section builds on this literature and introduces academic debates on the subject. This comprehensive understanding of the context and challenges surrounding sustainable fashion will provide a solid basis for the research and enhance the insights gained from the data analysis process.

### 3.1 The rise of consumerism

Fast fashion is currently the main model practiced in the clothing industry today and is defined as producing low-cost, trendy clothing based on runway ideas,

### 3.1. The rise of consumerism

mass-produced in large quantities to meet consumer demand. It is distinguished by high impulse purchasing, a shorter lifespan, a lack of predictability, and high market volatility (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Brewer, 2019; Shen, 2014). The fast fashion phenomenon was introduced in the 1980s when the clothing industry witnessed a shift from standardized and basic apparel to more fashion-oriented consumer preferences choices. Retailers in the clothing industry realized that consumers were becoming more fashion-oriented, and therefore mass production alone was not sufficient for success anymore. Because of this shift in consumer preferences, the clothing industry was forced to change its production method and find a new way to satisfy consumer demand and stay competitive (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Since the 1980s, the life cycle of fashion apparel has been relatively short, consisting of four stages: the introduction and adoption of new trends by fashion leaders, growth and increased public acceptance, mass conformity, and eventual decline and obsolescence of fashion. The fashion calendar during this time revolved around seasonal ranges, with Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter collections being the norm. However, in the early 1990s, retailers shifted their focus toward expanding product ranges with updated styles and faster responses to new fashion trends (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Their aim was to provide refreshing products and cost-efficient manufacturing. To increase the variety of fashion apparel available, they added 3 to 5 mid-seasons to the existing seasons. These changes were driven by shifts in consumer lifestyles and the need to meet consumer demand for fashion clothing tailored to specific occasions. With this new model, fast fashion emerged.

This model placed significant pressure on suppliers to quickly deliver fashionable clothing in smaller batches. To meet the industry's demand for fast and cost-effective responsiveness, a popular strategy emerged: outsourcing manufacturing and processes to offshore locations with low labor costs. Consequently, this approach yielded a considerable cost advantage, enabling the clothing industry to achieve its objectives while maintaining competitive market positioning. (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; McNeill & Moore, 2015). The outsourcing of garment production to developing countries has contributed to a surge in

consumption, resulting in an increased rate of low-cost clothing manufacturing known as fast fashion. This trend has significantly favored companies and consumers in the Northern countries, allowing them to reap immediate benefits in the form of affordable access to the latest fashion trends. However, the consequences of this excessive production and consumption have significant negative impacts on both the environment and the socio-economic development of manufacturing nations, particularly those situated in the global south. Less academic (Bick et al., 2018; Brooks, 2019; Claudio, 2007).

#### **3.1.1 Consequences of fast fashion**

##### **Environmental consequences**

The clothing industry is one of the most environmentally damaging industries, as it necessitates large quantities of raw materials, generates large levels of pollution, leaves a significant carbon footprint, and produces enormous amounts of waste (Brewer, 2019; Brooks, 2019). Most clothing is made from cotton and synthetic fiber, polyester, both associated with health impacts from the manufacturing and production process. Growing cotton requires large amounts of water and pesticides (Bick et al., 2018). The large amount of water that is needed to grow is especially an issue for the locals because cotton often grows where water is already scarce—using all this water for cotton growing leaves scarce water sources for the local society. A large amount of pesticide severely impacts the soil it is also hazardous to the farmer's health. Since cotton is not digested and does not threaten consumers' health, growing cotton often uses more chemical input than most food. Although this does not pose a threat to the consumers, this can have a catastrophic impact on the workers' health (Brooks, 2019).

Plastic is one of today's most pressing and harmful environmental problems. Fast fashion is responsible for large amounts of plastic waste from the synthetic fibers from which most of its clothing is made. First, most clothing from fast fashion is made out of synthetic fiber because it is much cheaper to produce. Secondly, there is not enough raw material or natural fibers in the world to match the

enormous number of garments fast fashion produces. Therefore, producing more plastic through the overproduction of new clothing is critical. However, there is also invisible harm derived from the synthetic fibers in clothing. When these garments are washed at the mills or at home, it releases micro-fibers into the oceans, polluting the whole ecosystem (Brewer, 2019; Brooks, 2019; Thomas, 2019). This means that buying a new garment made out of synthetic fibers is not just harmful because of the production of new plastic, but it is also harmful to use and wash the garment.

Furthermore, the industrial wastewater generated by the clothing industry also harms the environment and humans. The wastewater often contains high levels of harmful dyes and other chemicals used to produce the garments. As a result, it can be hazardous to aquatic life and human health, primarily affecting the manufacturer's health (Bick et al., 2018; Brewer, 2019; Brooks, 2019).

#### **The socio-economic impact on cheap clothing**

In the book "Clothing Poverty, the hidden world of fast fashion and second-hand clothing" Brooks, 2019 states that:

Western consumers have a huge amount of choice over what they wear, because poor people across the developing world grow cotton, dye materials and sew fabric, and are paid low wages, which keep clothes cheap for those consumers to buy (Brooks, 2019, p. 10)

Western consumers, the primary consumers of fast fashion, have the luxury of buying cheap clothes at someone else's expense. Brooks, 2019 argues that this leads to a global division in consumption. Due to the worker's low wages, they cannot buy these clothes. As stated in Brooks, 2019 citation, western consumers have a vast amount of cheap clothing choices because poor people in developing countries are paid low wages. A cheap garment comes at a high cost, just not for the consumer. As previously mentioned, many harmful chemicals are used in the production, as well as a large number of pesticides used in growing cotton. Pesticides and chemicals are very harmful to the environment but can also be

### 3.1. The rise of consumerism

hazardous for manufacturers and farmers. Brooks, 2019 states that the large amount of pesticide used to grow cotton can have a catastrophic impact on the farmer's health. However, since cotton is not digested and does not pose a threat to consumers' health, growing cotton often uses extensively more chemical input than most food (Brooks, 2019). The exploitation of cheap labor results in low wages for the manufacturers and affects their working conditions.

The fast fashion downward pressure on prices usually leads to a simultaneous decline in production standards, resulting in a "race to the bottom" phenomenon. As mills and factories compete on price to secure contracts, the consequences heavily impact the workers, the production facilities, the surrounding environments, and communities. One notable illustration of the severe social impact of this race to the bottom is the tragic collapse of the Rana Plaza factory in Bangladesh back in 2013. The devastating loss of life and injuries caused by the incident had far-reaching repercussions on families and communities (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). It was especially after the collapse of the Rana Plaza the world started to realize the actual cost of their clothes. The collapse killed more than 1100 garment workers inside the building and injured more than 2500 and was the worst incident of human labor neglect in modern times. The collapse happened after the building was declared unsafe, and yet workers were forced by their employees into working there under threat of loss of wages. Unfortunately, this was far from the first incident of poor labor conditions that resulted in many deaths and injuries in the clothing industry. Five months before the Rana Plaza building collapsed, more than 100 workers lost their lives trapped inside the burning Tazreen Fashions factory outside of Dhaka (Seabrook, 2015). Unfortunately, these are far from the only incidents, but stories like these rarely receive much attention and are quickly forgotten (Brooks, 2019). Many tradeoffs have been made to keep this fast clothing industry up and running. Besides the environment, the manufacturers have cruelly suffered the consequences.

Although the clothing industry is known for its negative impacts, it also plays a crucial role in supporting livelihoods and communities. With a vast workforce



of approximately 25 million employees worldwide, of which most are women, the clothing industry provides employment opportunities that contribute to their independence and support infrastructure development in poorer countries. Despite its destructive production practices, fashion simultaneously serves as a dynamic and innovative economic and socio-cultural domain, offering a range of values at the individual, community, corporate, and national levels (Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

The direct impacts the clothing industry has on the environment and the manufacturers are the most “obvious” and often what consumers refer to when reflecting on this issue. However, it is often neglected that overproduction and over-consumption is the main problem from which all other problems derive.

#### **Textile waste**

Cheap garments are often poorly made from low-quality materials, leading to much waste and pollution (Brooks, 2019). Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s report from 2017 showed that clothing production in the last 15 years had doubled. While clothing utilization, the average number of times a garment is worn, had decreased by 36% worldwide (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Thomas, 2019 states that we dispose of 2.1 billion tons of fashion annually worldwide. Much of it is sent to African countries, with our rationalization that the developing countries need free clothing. Thomas, 2019 also reports that Kenya accepts 100 000 tons of used clothes each year, reflecting the enormous amount of clothing that the global North dispose of. Second-hand merchants resell some of these clothes very cheaply, and the rest is sent to landfills (Thomas, 2019). Consumers use this excuse of sending free clothes to developing countries as a good deed to free themselves from the responsibility and guilt of their over-consumption and disposal of clothing when in reality, it is doing more harm than good.

Brooks, 2019 discusses the knock-on effects of the disposal of old garments that set the international second-hand clothing trade in motion. He states that the second-hand clothing trade contributes to putting local production out of business. Local

businesses have no chance to survive when their competitors are an enormous amount of free clothing, now sold by merchants at a very cheap price. The rest of the clothing, not resold as second-hand, is sent to landfills. Unfortunately, only a small portion of the clothes are resold, meaning that the global North ultimately sends them their waste and leaves them with the problem of disposing of it and all the related issues. Most of the garments from fast fashion are synthetic; consequently, the garments we dispose of are primarily synthetic and non-biodegradable. This creates a huge disposal issue because synthetic materials contaminate the soil and water (Brooks, 2019; Thomas, 2019). These significant issues of over-consumption and disposal of clothing are harmful not only to the environment but also have socio-economic consequences for the developing countries in the global South. Although the industrialized countries from the global North are the primary consumers of fast fashion and the main reason for this overproduction, the global South is left with many consequences and negative effects.

The clothing industry has faced significant scrutiny and criticism due to its severe environmental and social consequences resulting from overproduction and over-consumption. This has led many clothing brands to recognize the need for increased responsibility towards the environment and manufacturers. However, based on the current fast fashion model, it is controversial to directly associate the clothing industry with the concept of sustainability. Nonetheless, incorporating sustainability has become essential for many brands as they face pressure from customers, the media, trends, NGOs, and state regulations (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Henninger et al., 2016).

#### **3.1.2 Sustainability in a fast fashion world**

The global clothing industry is currently facing numerous challenges in meeting the modern requirements for sustainability, traceability, and transparency. The industry's practices have led to significant environmental impacts during production, including the use of hazardous substances in garments, mass

### 3.1. The rise of consumerism

consumption, and the generation of large amounts of textile waste. Most fiber production today is unsustainable, with conventional cotton requiring high amounts of pesticides and water in regions where water is scarce, and synthetic fibers like polyester relying on fossil resources (Wennberg, 2019). As a result of the increased knowledge of the clothing industry's severe consequences, there has been a growing interest in sustainable fashion. The word "sustainable fashion" is sometimes used interchangeably with terms such as "Eco-fashion," "green fashion," and "ethical fashion." It is an important aspect of the slow fashion movement that emerged in recent decades (Henninger et al., 2016). The slow fashion movement originated in the 1960s when customers became aware of the environmental impact of clothing manufacturing. Although initially met with suspicion, ethical fashion gained traction in the late 1990s as interest grew in clothing production techniques that prioritized fair working conditions, sustainable business models, the use of organic and environmentally friendly materials, and the implementation of certifications and traceability systems (Henninger et al., 2016). This shift in consumer awareness and demand has compelled clothing brands to pay attention to various aspects of their production, including quality, environmental impact, working conditions, and human rights (Sudolska et al., 2020).

The pressing issues caused by the clothing industry have prompted many brands to focus on more than just the quality of the goods and services but also on sustainability and as a means to affect positive, social, and environmental change (Haigh & Hoffman, 2011). The original concept of slow fashion emphasizes sustainability and ethical practices. However, the media often portrays sustainable fashion as simply being "less fast," reinforced by the fact that slow fashion companies typically release collections only twice a year. Despite efforts to change the clothing industry, by introducing organic materials and promoting sustainable collections, creating a sustainable fashion system remains complex and challenging (Henninger et al., 2016). Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010 state that the fast clothing industry is driven by a "speed to market" approach to capitalize on fashion trends before their competitors and ensure profitability in the clothing industry. By embracing rapid responsiveness and incorporating consumer preferences swiftly,

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retailers can stay ahead of the competition and maximize their success. This model operates on fundamentally unsustainable principles. Despite this contradiction, a significant portion of the clothing industry, including fast fashion brands, incorporates sustainability in their branding efforts, prompting inquiries regarding their underlying motives. Henninger et al., 2016 argue that several barriers hinder the advancement of sustainable fashion, suggesting that the first barrier is the difficulty of achieving transparency in a globalized supply chain, as manufacturers often face pressure to lower prices and compromise ethical standards. The second barrier is the endless fashion options for consumers, which fuels a "fashion appetite" and widens the gap between consumers' attitudes and behaviors. Consumers may desire sustainable fashion but struggle to consistently act upon it due to a lack of knowledge, awareness, and never-ending options. Thirdly, Henninger et al., 2016 argue that in a competitive industry like fashion, companies strive to differentiate themselves, leading to the phenomenon of "greenwashing."

The Mistra Future Fashion research program presented "the outlook report 2011-2019" (Wennberg, 2019). The report mentions that one major issue is the need to provide high volumes of clothing, a challenge that will worsen with the continued growth of the global population. It is estimated that by 2020, an annual volume of 100 million metric tons will be required, and very few emerging sustainable alternatives can meet this demand. However, simply finding new alternative fiber sources is not enough, as 80% of a garment's climate impact comes from the overall production phase, including fiber production, yarn production, weaving, dyeing, finishing, sewing, surface treatments, and more. This phase consumes significant amounts of energy, water, and chemicals.

Introducing new sustainable fibers into existing production processes presents challenges in creating truly sustainable products. The main issue that needs to be addressed is the imbalance between the efforts required for production and those for usage. Generally, there is a high environmental impact associated with the short lifespan of a garment during its user phase. Furthermore, modern consumption habits have resulted in an overwhelming amount of textiles in the market, leading

to waste problems. This is a consequence of the linear economy model, which follows a "take, make, waste" approach, and is fundamentally flawed from the beginning (Wennberg, 2019).

#### **Greenwashing**

The concept of sustainability is often vague and subject to different interpretations, particularly within the clothing industry. This ambiguity has allowed many fashion brands to engage in greenwashing, presenting themselves as sustainable while disregarding the true meaning of sustainability. This has enabled the industry to benefit from sustainability's marketing and economic advantages without fully embracing its responsibilities (Boström, 2012; Hopwood et al., 2005; Niinimäki, 2013).

According to Magali A. Delmas and Vanessa Cuerel Burbano, 2011, greenwashing refers to the deceptive practices of companies that have poor environmental performance but misleadingly present positive information regarding their actual environmental impact. This phenomenon can occur at two levels: firm level and product level. Firm-level greenwashing occurs when a company misleads consumers about its environmental practices, such as falsely claiming that its supply chain is more environmentally friendly than it truly is. Product-level greenwashing occurs when companies mislead consumers about the environmental impact of their products, such as labeling a product as environmentally friendly when it is not. Essentially, companies with inadequate environmental performance, referred to as 'brown' companies, engage in greenwashing by broadcasting positive messages about their environmental performance, even if it is misleading or false (Magali A. Delmas & Vanessa Cuerel Burbano, 2011). Many organizations use sustainability buzzwords in their marketing communications, but their actual environmental performance may not align with their claims. This leads to consumer mistrust and skepticism towards sustainability initiatives. Greenwashing undermines the credibility of companies promoting social and environmental credentials, creating initial suspicion among consumers. Building trust takes time and requires consistent efforts to establish, nurture, and maintain relationships

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(Henninger et al., 2016).

## **3.2 Can a fundamentally unsustainable industry turn into sustainable fashion?**

The rise of sustainable development marked a significant departure from the mainstream view of capitalism, the traditional development focused solely on economic growth. In the past, environmental problems were viewed as external factors, factors that could be exploited by humans. They were viewed as local problems rather than global socio-economic challenges (Hopwood et al., 2005; Pawłowski, 2008). During the Industrial Revolution, it was believed that modern knowledge and technological progress could overcome any obstacle, including environmental issues, and viewed economic growth driven by production flow above as a solution to poverty reduction and human welfare. The assumption was that if everyone's standard of living improved, those at the bottom would also rise out of poverty (Hopwood et al., 2005). While fast fashion was not a direct result of this growth-focused paradigm, the clothing model is equivalent to the idea of constant economic expansion, and new technology from the industrial revolution made it possible to produce at this rate.

In recent decades, there has become growing awareness that increasing environmental problems and socio-economic issues are interconnected and strongly linked to poverty and inequality. Concerns about the future of humanity are now strongly connecting environmental and socio-economic issues. The concept of sustainable development arose from a growing awareness of the global connections between increasing environmental problems, socio-economic issues such as poverty and inequality, and concerns about a healthy future for humanity. It established a strong link between environmental and socio-economic issues (Boström, 2012; Hopwood et al., 2005; Littig & Griessler, 2005).

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### 3.2.1 Sustainable fashion, a capitalistic excuse?

The term sustainability gained significant attention with the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. The United Nations Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainability as "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN). The most common way of conceptualizing sustainability is through the three pillars or the Triple Bottom Line approach, which emphasizes social equity (people), environmental quality (planet), and economic benefits (profit) as key dimensions of sustainable development (Boström, 2012; Correia, 2019; Hopwood et al., 2005). However, although this definition is straightforward, it remains vague, leading to extensive debates and various interpretations of the concept. Debates surrounding environmental and socio-economic issues have laid the foundation for sustainable development. The Brundtland Report attempted to reconcile some of these debates but left room for ambiguity by simultaneously addressing the priorities of developing countries needs, environmental protection, and economic growth. The ambiguity in the concept led to debates on whether the lack of a clear definition can lead to new opportunities in a changing environment or be used as an excuse to continue "business as usual" without the consequences (Boström, 2012; Henninger et al., 2016; Hopwood et al., 2005).

According to Hopwood et al., 2005 the vagueness and theoretical underpinnings of sustainability have allowed politicians and businesses to use the concept as a catchword to justify their interests without fundamentally changing the existing system. This perpetuates capitalism, economic growth, social inequalities, and environmental degradation—essentially sustaining the unsustainable (Boström, 2012; Hopwood et al., 2005). The clothing industry perfectly exemplifies this with the fashion paradox, suggesting that the inherent nature of the clothing industry to constantly need to evolve to satisfy consumers' greedy demand for the latest trends conflicts directly with the principles of sustainability. In other words, the very reason for the clothing industry's existence conflicts with its ability to be sustainable (Brewer, 2019; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

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#### **A consumer-centric approach**

Fletcher and Tham, 2019 argue that the fashion sector has widely embraced the circular economy concept as the preferred approach to addressing its challenges in recent years. The circular economy aims to close material loops, promote fiber recycling, and reduce waste generation. By monetizing resource efficiency and integrating existing reuse and recycling practices into the market, they give the impression that they challenge their existing fashion model and that businesses can continue as usual in a more sustainable way. The industry, reliant on a model of extreme production and consumption, sees circularity as necessary. Although the circular economy offers the potential for more efficient use of resources in the industry, it has certain limitations to achieving the scale and urgency of change required. The concept of the circular economy is primarily rooted in economics, particularly the idea of growth economics. This means that it focuses on the flow of materials without fully considering broader system improvements or recognizing our planet's ecological constraints and limits (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

Brooks, 2019 states that the concept of sustainable fashion is rooted in a capitalistic mindset. He suggests that proponents of globalization often view ethical businesses as a solution to criticisms, but these initiatives typically have limited impact, allowing business as usual to continue. According to Brooks, the fetishization of ethical consumption is problematic because it gives consumers the false belief that they are addressing social issues or curing a problem when they are not. He asserts that ethical trade, while seen as socially progressive, can also reinforce inequality and overlook radical alternatives. This superficial revolution in shopping fails to bring a corresponding revolution in society. Fairtrade and ethical consumption address specific demands while international inequality persists. While Fairtrade goods symbolize ethics, they still rely on market dynamics and consumer stimulation. Additionally, Brooks argues that ethical consumption often serves as a way to alleviate guilt rather than addressing the root issue of over-consumption in the clothing industry. Fletcher and Tham, 2019 suggest that the



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current model cannot be sustainable due to its intrinsic nature and suggest that a new fashion model is necessary.

Niinimäki, 2015 argues although there is a need for a new fashion model, the sustainability discussion is complex and often constrained in the industrial context of the current growth model. Although designers and producers within the clothing industry strive to make ecological and ethical choices, these brands encounter many constraints and disadvantages when they have to work within a system based on economic growth. Unfortunately, this narrow approach dominates the clothing industry today. The challenges brands with an opposing approach encounter, create challenges and lead brands to have to settle with a realistic and value-based approach to sustainable fashion. This means that some brands have to settle for less sustainable solutions than what they would prefer to succeed financially in the market (Niinimäki, 2013, 2015). Small- and medium-sized companies, in particular, have limited options and can encounter challenges such as sourcing suitable eco-materials in small quantities. They must work with the available resources and knowledge base, which is not always easy when their competition is big fast fashion brands. The actions and choices of sustainable-oriented designers and brands are defined by their resources and possibilities. Niinimäki, 2013, 2015 describes this as “realistic thinking,” which involves choosing the best environmental and social solutions that exist. Larger fashion companies have more power and influence to shape sustainable practices in the industry (Niinimäki, 2013, 2015). However, if the larger fashion companies are the primary drivers of the current growth-centric fashion system, sustainable practices will remain within its paradigm.

Brooks, 2019 states that the clothing industry issues are being addressed through various initiatives by retailers in the global North, such as H&M’s garment collection scheme. These schemes aim to change the mindset of consumers by encouraging them to see their old clothes as a resource rather than garbage. Customers can exchange their old clothes for vouchers, promoting more shopping. The collected clothes are processed by textile recycling and may be sold in second-

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hand markets or recycled into new materials. Brooks, 2019 states that these efforts may seem positive; however, they fail to address the second-hand clothing trade's broader social and economic impacts. Also, he states that closed-loop recycling is still underdeveloped and not economically viable on a large scale. Fletcher and Tham, 2019 argues that by operating within the same paradigm that created the problems, the circular economy risks perpetuating harmful norms and worldviews that undermine ecological well-being. The majority of environmental issues in the fashion sector are not accidental but deeply rooted in the current model's structure.

The concept of sustainability has sparked debates and controversy within academic literature. While some critics argue that it can serve as a capitalistic excuse for continued exploitation, others view it as a valuable framework for making better choices and progressing toward a more sustainable future (Hopwood et al., 2005; Pawłowski, 2008). The concept's ambiguity and diverse interpretations highlight its definition's subjective nature. Littig and Griessler, 2005 suggest that sustainability is used in favor of individuals, allowing for different approaches and the potential for further development. Ultimately, the concept of sustainability can be seen as a useful tool for guiding decision-making and promoting positive change.

#### **3.2.2 The role of clothing brands in shaping social norms**

Fletcher and Tham, 2019 argue that a new fashion model based on a new paradigm is needed to change how we view fashion. However, in order to achieve a shift in consumption, it is vital to address the drivers of consumption.

The emergence of the fast fashion paradigm can be attributed to a combination of consumer preferences and the industrial revolution. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010 argue that fast fashion is foremost a consumer-driven approach, in addition to a supplier-driven approach. Consumers' increasing demands and fashion awareness have compelled fashion retailers to adopt fast fashion practices. They state that the increasing demands and fashion awareness among consumers are driving fashion

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retailers to adopt fast fashion. The rapid flow of information and trends worldwide has given consumers more options and the ability to shop more frequently. Socio-cultural factors and the desire for uniqueness have also motivated fashion retailers to constantly refresh their merchandise to stay competitive.

Brooks, 2019 highlights that American consumers typically spend an average of \$35 on a pair of jeans and own around 6.7 pairs. However, jeans ownership in the USA has decreased since 2006, when it was 8.2 pairs per individual. This decline can be attributed to economic pressures and the fast fashion phenomenon, which has led clothing retailers to reduce their products' quality and cotton content. It is also due to the high rate of discard, as people get rid of old jeans. Brooks, 2019 states that impulsive shopping has become normalized and part of a routine and un-reflected part of life going as normal. Consumption has gained increasing importance in defining one's identity, leading to significant financial and psychological pressures, particularly among young people. Brooks, 2019 emphasizes that the value of a garment is no longer solely derived from its usefulness but is socially determined, influenced by factors such as advertising, fashion trends, and cultural influences.

According to Fletcher and Tham, 2019, clothing brands play a crucial role in the dominant growth logic and consumerism-centered view of fashion. This approach fosters a narrow perspective of fashion centered around consumerism and market dependency, hindering the exploration of alternative ideas and actions. Brands often encourage consumers to participate by purchasing more fashion goods, despite evidence suggesting the need for different behaviors. Consequently, brands are implicated in the depletion of ecological resources and the limitation of alternative fashion practices (Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

Fletcher and Tham, 2019 argue that the most passionate fashion enthusiasts do not necessarily exhibit the highest levels of unsustainable consumption. Instead, individuals who are somewhat interested in fashion but feel insecure or pressured to conform to specific looks or lifestyles are the main drivers of unsustainable consumption patterns. Those who possess a strong sense of community belonging

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and prioritize personal style over following fashion trends display higher levels of resilience and well-being while embracing less materialistic values (Fletcher & Tham, 2019). This underscores the significant influence that the industry has on consumers, as more insecure individuals often conform to the pressures created by the clothing industry.

#### **The green label**

Brooks, 2019 suggests that ethical garments, with their associated material culture, serve as a means of social distinction and class positioning. However, their expensive pricing renders them unaffordable for lower-income consumers, potentially turning ethical clothing into a privileged indulgence. Shopping for clothes in the global North involves more than just purchasing a product; it encompasses choosing a fashion and lifestyle (Brooks, 2019). In a study conducted by Griskevicius et al., 2010, the findings indicated that activating status motives can lead individuals to choose green products to signal prosocial behavior and high status. This effect is more pronounced in public settings and also when green products are relatively more expensive. The study highlights the interplay between altruism, reputation, and consumer behavior, shedding light on the success of green products in the marketplace. Their findings support Brooks, 2019 claim that ethical consumption has become a privileged indulgence. Through a series of experiments, the researchers found that activating status motives influenced people to choose prosocial green products over more luxurious, equally priced non-green products. This effect was stronger when individuals were shopping in public rather than in private. In public settings, status motives increased the desire for less luxurious green products, indicating a willingness to make self-sacrifices for environmental causes. The findings also revealed that status motives increased the desirability of green products, particularly when they were more expensive compared to non-green alternatives. The premium price tag of green products, such as the Toyota Prius, may contribute to their success by providing individuals with a reputational benefit for displaying their pro-environmental stance. Furthermore, Griskevicius et al., 2010 demonstrated that the effect of

status motives on preferences for green products extended beyond cars to other products as well. However, the visibility of the product influenced the strength of this effect, as actions performed in public had a greater impact on reputation compared to those performed in private. The research by Griskevicius et al., 2010 and Brooks, 2019 suggests that consumers are driven by social norms and perceptions of what is considered good rather than intrinsic or environmental values.

## **3.3 A new approach to fashion**

Sustainable fashion has often been controversial as the fundamental nature of fashion clashes with the long-term principles of sustainability. Nevertheless, many scholars like Fletcher and Tham, 2019; Niinimäki, 2013, 2015 and Henninger et al., 2016 argue that Fashion can blend with sustainability principles if proper changes are made to the current approach to clothing centered around consumption. According to Henninger et al., 2016, fashion as an art form can seamlessly integrate with the principles of sustainability. By emphasizing craftsmanship and artistry and transcending seasonal trends, clothing can transcend its role as a mere wearable item and transform into a unique creation that embodies creativity, character, and personal identity. Suggesting that sustainable fashion can elevate the value and meaning of clothing through thoughtful design and the preservation of traditional skills.

### **3.3.1 Principles of Sustainable Fashion Consumption**

In the context of sustainable development in the clothing industry, Niinimäki, 2015 emphasizes the importance of extending the lifespan of garments as a fundamental aspect of sustainability. This can be achieved by prioritizing the use of durable, high-quality materials and timeless styles that withstand the test of time. Niinimäki, 2015 suggests several points to consider for ethical and sustainable consumption, such as purchasing fewer garments, investing in meaningful and durable pieces, opting for eco-materials and labels, extending garment ownership

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and usage, minimizing washing frequency, and maintaining and repairing garments. Fletcher, 2012 further explores the concept of durability in relation to sustainability in fashion. She challenges the traditional notion of durability solely as a product-based characteristic and highlights the significance of user-ship and personal engagement in extending garment lifespan. Fletcher suggests two sustainability design approaches: durability at the level of the materials, focusing on long-lasting materials, and emotionally durable design, which emphasizes the psychological and emotional connection between individuals and their possessions. She emphasizes the role of user behavior and social practices in fostering durability and calls for a shift from a product-centric approach to a focus on user-ship and the craft of use, promoting a more sustainable and resourceful clothing industry.

Niinimäki, 2015 suggests three key considerations for sustainable fashion: system-level change for environmental and social benefit, addressing human health issues in production and product use, and promoting sustainable resource use through renewable materials and closed-loop systems. To achieve sustainability, she argues for creating alternative systems that provide emotional experiences and satisfaction beyond buying new fashion items. While ethical considerations can be challenging for companies, Niinimäki, 2015 argues that they can also present new business opportunities as consumers are increasingly interested in environmental values. Understanding consumers' deeper needs can lead to innovative sustainable fashion businesses, such as offering services for appearance change instead of new products or providing emotional experiences without the need for purchases. She envisions a future sustainable economy where producers and consumers co-create value within a closed-loop industrial system, valuing all materials, including old clothes, as valuable resources.

Pawłowski, 2008 highlights the moral dimension as a crucial aspect of sustainability. He emphasizes the need for moral reflection on humanity's responsibility towards nature and argues for the inclusion of additional dimensions beyond the traditional three dimensions of sustainable development. Niinimäki, 2015 echoes this sentiment, stating that within sustainability, it is crucial to

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examine our values, as this encompasses our beliefs of what is good, bad, right, or wrong and serves as our guiding principles for our moral conduct addressing sustainability challenges requires a critical assessment of our values and guiding principles. She argues that environmental values alone are insufficient and that sustainability must be examined holistically, encompassing societal organization, personal lifestyles, consumption patterns, and waste management practices. Both Pawłowski, 2008 and Niinimäki, 2015 emphasize the significance of individual power in effecting transformation towards sustainability. Pawłowski, 2008 emphasizes the importance of conscious choices and individual actions in daily life and consumption patterns. Environmental education plays a crucial role in fostering mindfulness and empowering individuals to make informed decisions. By critically examining our values and taking personal responsibility, we can contribute to the overall mission of achieving sustainability.

Wennberg, 2019 provides a few “solutions” to sustainable fashion. First they introduce Design for Circularity: It highlights the importance of considering the entire life-cycle of garments during the design phase and explores different concepts and approaches to enhance their value and sustainability. “Always design for extended use and beyond” (Wennberg, 2019, p. 10). It is mentioned that by extending the product longevity by two, the climate impact can be reduced by half. Another path is to reduce production impacts and retain the value of materials after use, emphasizing material longevity. The report highlights the "Eternal Trench Coat" as an example of a durable product designed for efficient recyclability. The use of polyester in this case challenges the association of the material with fast fashion, as it can be considered slow due to its long lifetime. The "Eternal Trench Coat" has been successfully commercialized and included in the permanent collection of the V&A museum in London.

### **3.3.2 Fostering a new meaning to clothing - why clothing is not Superficial**

In his book “Acknowledging Consumption”, Miller, 2005 discusses the lack of sustained attempts to characterize consumption and its nature. He argues that academic analysis has been filled with beliefs and clichés about consumption that do not accord with scholarly information. Among these myths and clichés associated with consumption, Miller, 2005 identifies five as the most important:

#### **1. Homogenization**

One myth is that mass consumption leads to global homogenization, where all societies and cultures become the same. This myth assumes that consumerism erases cultural differences and replaces them with a standardized global culture. He argues that this view oversimplifies the complexity of consumption practices and fails to recognize the coexistence of global and local cultural expressions.

#### **2. Heterogenization**

Another myth is the idea that consumption leads to increased heterogeneity, with individuals expressing their unique identities through their consumption choices. According to this myth, consumerism promotes diversity and individuality. He challenges this assumption by highlighting how social norms, marketing strategies, and prevailing trends often influence consumer choices, which can limit true individual expression.

#### **3. Sociality**

This myth suggests that consumption is opposed to sociality, meaning that consumption replaces concern for people, diminishing our humanity. It suggests that consumer societies are characterized by isolated individuals driven by self-interest. Miller, 2005 argues against this notion by emphasizing that consumption practices are often embedded in social interactions, relationships, and shared



experiences. It highlights the ways in which consumption can serve as a means of social bonding and communication. Additionally, many individuals are “forced” to consume certain goods or services due to social and economic circumstances, undermining the notion of pure choice in consumption.

#### **4. Authenticity**

The myth of authenticity assumes that consumption is adverse to genuine or authentic experiences. It suggests that consumerism promotes superficiality and irrational desires. However, Miller, 2005 challenges this view by arguing that authenticity is a complex and contested concept and that it is subjective and culturally constructed. He asserts that consumption practices can be meaningful and authentic to individuals, even if they involve commercial transactions. Throughout history, people have had diverse and multifaceted relationships with material culture beyond mere functionality. The notion that mass consumption leads to a decline in utilitarian relationships is misleading.

#### **5. Consumption**

Consumption creates particular kinds of social beings: This myth challenges the notion that consumption universally creates certain social characteristics. Miller, 2005 suggests that different societies have different consumption patterns and that consumerism does not necessarily lead to emulation, competition over status, individualism, conspicuous consumption, hedonism, or inherent inequality.

Consumption is bad: Miller, 2005 criticizes the perspective that consumption is bad because it associates it with negative moral implications and portrays consumers as passive and manipulated by producers. He emphasizes that the morality of consumption is subjective and depends on individual perspectives and cultural contexts.

Consumption is good: Miller, 2005 argues that this perspective portrays consumers as creative individuals who shape popular culture and resist capitalism. It emphasizes the positive aspects of consumption and its potential for empowerment.

While recognizing the positive aspects and empowerment of consumption, he also acknowledges the negative impacts consumption may have (Miller, 2005).

In the book "Stuff," Miller, 2010 authored a chapter titled "Why Clothing is not Superficial," which builds upon the idea presented in "Acknowledging Consumption" Miller, 2005 to emphasize that consumption holds substantial significance and is integral to the formation of our individual identities. Miller, 2010 suggests a reevaluation of the significance of clothing and challenges the traditional understanding of its role. He argues against the notion that clothing is merely a superficial representation or symbol of the self and instead emphasizes that clothing plays a more active and essential role in constructing our identity and sense of self. According to Miller, 2010, clothing should be seen as an integral part of our identity rather than a mere reflection of it. It suggests that clothing and personal style are key elements in expressing individualism and constructing aesthetics. The focus shifts from adhering to fashion trends or societal expectations to embracing personal creativity and uniqueness in the way we dress. He highlights the importance of style over fashion, encouraging individuals to engage in creative combinations and interpretations of clothing elements. Suggesting that personal style is a means of self-expression and a way to assert one's individuality. Furthermore, he explores the role of clothing in shaping the experiences and relationships of individuals. In this chapter, he examines how wearing specific garments, such as the sari in the context of India, can influence a woman's sense of self, identity, and connections with others.

#### **3.3.3 Systemic change: Introducing a new fashion model**

Fletcher and Tham, 2019 propose a comprehensive plan called "Earth Logic" as a new fashion model to address the unsustainable growth logic driving the fashion sector. They argue that systemic change is necessary to achieve sustainability in the clothing industry, going beyond focusing solely on the environmental aspects of fashion production and instead involves reevaluating the psychology of fashion consumption, economic systems, trade practices, and infrastructure

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surrounding clothing. Fletcher and Tham, 2019 argue that the Earth Logic plan offers a transformative vision for the clothing industry, a holistic approach that prioritize Earth, promote inclusivity, empower local communities, foster learning, redefine language, and establish new governance models. By addressing these aspects, meaningful change can be achieved to counter the negative impacts of fashion on the planet and human well-being. The plan envisions a paradigm shift where power is redistributed from multinational corporations to organizations, communities, and individuals. Paradigms are unseen but influential models that shape our understanding, actions, and results. They emphasize the need to move away from the dominant economic growth paradigm and prioritize values that promote sustainability and well-being. The Earth Logic plan consists of six holistic landscapes, each offering pathways for collaboration among different actors and disciplines and providing ideas for reformulating the industry toward care, maintenance, and away from consumerism.

The first landscape, "**Less: Grow out of growth,**" emphasizes the importance of decreasing production as a crucial step toward a sustainable clothing industry. The idea of "less" challenges the dependence on the market and calls for reducing material use, caring for existing clothing, and mobilizing communities to shift away from consumerism. The goal is to challenge the dependence on continuous growth and focus on quality, resourcefulness, and sustainability.

The second landscape, "**Local: Scaling, re-centering,**" highlights the significance of localism in creating a sustainable clothing industry. It advocates for aligning industrial ambition with environmental and community priorities, utilizing local resources, and incorporating place-specific knowledge. The aim of localism is to move away from a single, global economy for fashion and instead create multiple, smaller, and environmentally sustainable systems that meet the needs for identity, creativity, and protection. The action involves establishing platforms for sharing knowledge and building pride in local distinctiveness.

The third landscape, "**Plural: New centers for fashion,**" aims to challenge the dominant economic growth logic by embracing diverse perspectives. It calls for

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making fashion inclusive, inspired by nature, crafted from sustainable materials, and rooted in non-Western geographies. By placing fashion outside the market, this landscape fosters interdependency, humility, and new forms of action. It seeks to create multiple sustainable fashion systems that reflect the values of inclusivity and sustainability. It mainly involves setting fashion free from consumerism ideals and making fashion open to all voices that have initially been marginalized by the dominant contemporary fashion activity.

The fourth landscape, "**Learning: New knowledge, skills, mindset for fashion,**" emphasizes the importance of learning and unlearning unsustainable habits and perspectives associated with fashion. It is about learning how to view our clothes in a new manner, such as how to care for and repair clothing, share clothing, and want the clothing we already have. It is about distancing ourselves from the ideal of what fashion is and instead exploring what fashion is to the individual. It encourages community connections, personal style, and resilience with less materialistic values. It promotes strong community connections and a focus on personal style rather than fleeting fashion trends.

The fifth landscape, "**Language: New Communication for Fashion,**" underscores the role of language in shaping our thoughts and actions, making them visible, thinkable, and doable. They highlight the power of language to drive change and challenge the traditional language in the clothing industry that reinforces problematic notions and divides production from consumption. It advocates for redefining the language used in the clothing industry to foster a shift towards Earth Logic. Using precise and purposeful language aims to create change, challenge traditional notions, and ensure accurate and transparent communication about sustainability.

The sixth landscape, "**Governance: New ways of organizing fashion,**" highlights the importance of governance and decision-making processes in the clothing industry. It calls for a new governance model that prioritizes caring relationships, decentralization, and commitment strategies. This model aims to foster a sustainable and responsive approach to environmental and social

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challenges, with diverse and decentralized governance systems that distribute power and democratize fashion practices.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

The potential for achieving sustainability within the clothing industry has been a subject of extensive discussion and debate. The related literature; Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010; Brewer, 2019; McNeill and Moore, 2015; Shen, 2014, has thus far examined the repercussions of the prevailing fast fashion paradigm, which is characterized by the production of cheap, low-quality clothing that drives increased consumption through the constant introduction of new clothing and trends, thereby supporting economic growth. This model, rooted in the production of inexpensive garments, necessitates high sales volume, which in turn necessitates frequent changes in clothing offerings and fashion trends.

Historically, the rise of capitalism and the industrial revolution spurred the prominence of consumption in developed regions. Capitalism, as an economic model, hinges on the premise of economic growth, with the belief that expanding production and consumption will alleviate poverty and enhance human well-being (Boström, 2012; Hopwood et al., 2005; Littig & Griessler, 2005). However, Fletcher and Tham, 2019 and Niinimäki, 2015 states that it is possible to achieve sustainable fashion if there is a shift in the current model that values clothing differently. This thesis will forward discuss the empirical findings from clothing brands and consumers, to see if and potentially how, they can contribute in shifting the paradigm through a new approach to clothing. The central question that arises is how to successfully accomplish this shift.

## **Sustainability discussions: An inherent paradox**

The focus on clothing brands in discussions on sustainability is a topic of controversy due to the inherent paradox within their business model. However, it is imperative to acknowledge the significant influence that clothing brands wield over consumer behavior, thus underscoring the importance of examining their role in sustainability discourse. Notably, certain clothing brands have adopted sustainability as a fundamental value in their branding. The three clothing brands that were interviewed for this research seek to foster an alternative perspective on clothing consumption predicated on principles of longevity, durability, and personal attachment to garments. These brands seek to promote certain values that aim to reshape consumer attitudes and behaviors towards clothing. Their focus lies in emphasizing the importance of making enduring fashion choices that prioritize quality and longevity. This shift towards sustainability-oriented branding within the clothing industry signifies a significant development in the ongoing endeavors to address the environmental and social impacts linked to clothing production and consumption.

However, the interviews conducted with consumers revealed several concerns and challenges related to clothing brands and their adoption of sustainable business models within the clothing industry. These concerns align with the existing literature and highlight various barriers that impede the progress of sustainability in the clothing industry. In the following section, I present these challenges as potential barriers to the implementation of sustainable practices in the clothing industry.

This chapter comprises three primary sections. The initial section aims to explore the paradoxical nature inherent in establishing a relationship between sustainability and the clothing industry, and address the common barriers to sustainable fashion mentioned by related literature, and most importantly, by the consumers and the clothing brands that were interviewed. The second section explores the potential for clothing brands with a core emphasis on sustainability to influence a paradigm shift through promoting a new approach to clothing.

Finally the third section is about acknowledging the challenges that hinder the achievement of sustainable fashion and the need to address them in order to effectuate meaningful change in the clothing industry.

### **4.1 Barriers to sustainability**

The participants in the study identified several barriers to sustainable consumption in the clothing industry. All the consumer participants from the interviews stated that consumers have a lot of responsibility in changing how we consume, however they emphasized that clothing brands have even greater responsibility in changing this. Various factors were highlighted that contributed to these barriers, including the issues of skepticism, lack of transparency and information, high prices of sustainable clothing, as well as limited knowledge. These barriers were also central when speaking to the clothing brands and relates to several concepts from the related literature.

#### **4.1.1 Fashions inherent relation to consumption**

The study conducted interviews with six consumers (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6) in an attempt to gain insights into their awareness and knowledge regarding the environmental and socio-economic impacts of the clothing industry. The participants demonstrated varying levels of concern regarding these issues. Participants P3, P4, and P5 expressed a high level of concern and actively sought to consume second-hand clothing as a response. Notably, P4 and P5 were affiliated with environmental organizations in Norway, while P3 had a background in chemistry, which likely contributed to their heightened awareness. P1 and P2 also expressed concerns, although their decision to consume second-hand clothing was not solely driven by sustainable considerations. In contrast, P6 exhibited a limited understanding of the consequences associated with the clothing industry and did not prioritize sustainability in their consumption choices.

Regardless of the extent to which they prioritize sustainability in their consumption



practices, all participants demonstrated a thoughtful contemplation of the issue. When the participants were asked what constitutes a sustainable garment, all participants highlighted the importance of materials, quality, production methods, and the socio-economic and environmental impacts . Most of the participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5) emphasized the main issue of clothing as the problem of overproduction, and highlighted the importance of using garments for an extended period, repairing them, and fostering a personal connection with clothing. Second-hand clothing was frequently mentioned as a sustainable option since it utilizes existing resources. P1 stated that:

You can be sustainable in various ways, by using what we already have, rather than producing something completely new... There is so much of our clothing that can be fixed, or re-sewn, and things like that. We can buy used instead of new. Use what we have and not produce anything new (P1, 2023).

P5 emphasized the significance of shopping less and considering second-hand alternatives, highlighting the resources already in circulation stating:

For me, the easiest way to act sustainably is to not purchase new products. On average, I think we have five or so items in our closet that we have never worn. It's quite simply over-consumption. We buy things we don't need, so it should be easy to reduce that quantity. If you want something, look for second-hand clothing, borrow from family, or exchange clothing with friends. If you need something, buy used because there are so many clothes that are already in circulation (P5, 2023).

The participants' reflection on sustainability, aligned with many of the principles listed by Henninger et al., 2016, Fletcher and Tham, 2019 and Niinimäki, 2013, 2015, encompassing re-use, care for garments and to use what we have. They reflect considerable knowledge on sustainability and what it means. However, although P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 were clear about the way consumers can decrease their consumption through second-hand, fixing their clothing, borrowing from

friends etc. P2, P3, P4 and P5 specifically stated that the biggest barrier to sustainable consumption is the current system and approach we have to clothing and fashion:

I feel that the discussion around interest in fashion needs to change. Today, interest in fashion means consuming and buying the latest trends, and I feel that this notion as a key element of the whole fashion world is very harmful. Because there is so much more you can learn about clothes... Much of this can be learned without buying, but I feel that the discussion has shifted to; to learn about clothes, you have to buy the clothes (P2, 2023).

This predicament highlights the difficulties encountered in engaging with fashion and expressing one's interest without succumbing to the pressures of following the latest trends.

P5 expressed concerns about trends stemming from a capitalistic perspective and the pressure to conform to external validation. P5 observed that consumers were deeply entrenched in a capitalist society, where having the latest products was equated with being accepted and adequate. Participant 5 further stated that our society is deeply rooted in the notion that consumption is inherently positive. These reflections from the participants align with existing literature on the subject, including the works of Fletcher and Tham, 2019; Hopwood et al., 2005, and Brooks, 2019. These studies highlight the prevailing notion in society that consumption is deeply ingrained, largely due to the dominant economic growth model, which has fostered a belief that increased consumption equates to societal well-being. This underscores the need for a transformative shift in our perception of fashion, moving away from its association with consumption.

Although most of the participants that were interviewed expressed that they were not influenced by trends or gave in on the pressure of consumption in society, they acknowledged that trends might have an impact on them. P4 admits that her interest in clothing is primarily driven by social media, through constant advertisements from brands, influencers and focus on trends. P4 stated that

clothing brands have a big responsibility in how they portray on social media:

Social media is where I derive my interest in fashion and discover what appeals to me. Therefore, it is important for brands to acknowledge the significant influence their marketing strategies wield, particularly in how they promote their clothing (P4, 2023).

This shows the significant influence clothing brands with their strategic marketing has on consumer's desire to buy new clothing and how harmful this is the issue of over-consumption. This is also discussed by Fletcher and Tham, 2019 and Brooks, 2019, arguing that clothing brands within the dominant growth model, fosters a narrow view of fashion centered around consumerism which leads to consumer's market dependency. The way they portray fashion is surrounded by trends and advertisement that fosters the idea that fashion is about consumption. Brooks, 2019 argues that clothing brands hold significant power in shaping trends and societal norms by creating symbolic value through carefully curating the shopping experience and influencing consumer desires through sophisticated marketing strategies. The clothing industry's inherent reliance on consumption, driven by fast fashion and constant trends, raises consumer skepticism towards brands' sustainability claims.

#### **4.1.2 Skepticism towards brands' sustainability claims**

The participants from the interviews express skepticism towards brands' claims of sustainability. They perceive many brands as engaging in greenwashing, using sustainable terminology for marketing purposes without genuinely following sustainable practices. This skepticism arises from doubts about the authenticity of such claims. P3 specifically mentions skepticism towards H&M's claim of using 100% recycled materials. The participants feel that brands' sustainability claims must be scrutinized and question whether brands truly stand behind their stated commitments. P5 mentions a general skepticism towards fast fashion brands like H&M and Zara when it comes to sustainability, highlighting the need for an overall change in their business models to be genuinely sustainable, stating:

The level of trust I have towards a company or store regarding sustainability depends on their identity. When it comes to brands like H&M or Zara, I tend to be naturally skeptical if they attempt to promote their sustainability efforts. Given their foundation in fast fashion, claiming sustainability would necessitate a fundamental transformation of their entire business model (P5, 2023).

The participants, including P3, P4 and P5, express difficulty in distinguishing between genuine sustainable brands and the brands they state engages in greenwashing, making it challenging to identify truly sustainable options. This lack of information and transparency leads to suspicion and confusion among consumers, hindering their ability to make sustainable choices. All the participants emphasize the importance of transparency and information on products for consumers to make informed choices. P1, P3, P4 and P5 stated that providing more details about the product, such as certifications and the description of where, how, and by whom it is made, is crucial. P5 also talks about certifications and information that can ensure the the consumer that it is a good product, stating:

The system must facilitate for people to be able to make better choices. There must be certifications and information on the garment, in order to be able to show in a safe way that this garment is of good quality (P5, 2023).

The presence of skepticism within the discourse on sustainability in the clothing industry is both inevitable and crucial to address, as it raises important concerns that can hinder progress in this field. This skepticism is rooted in the fundamental nature of the clothing industry, which operates within a model driven by economic growth. Such a model inherently raises doubts about the genuine commitment of clothing brands to sustainability, as the pursuit of economic gain often takes precedence over the principles underlying sustainable practices. Scholarly literature, such as the work by Hopwood et al., 2005 and Brooks, 2019, has addressed this concern by highlighting instances where businesses adopt

sustainability as a strategic tool for economic advantage, without truly embracing the core principles of sustainability.

This strategic use of sustainability as a marketing ploy is exemplified by the case of H&M, a major fast fashion brand, as discussed by Brooks, 2019. H&M introduced a program encouraging customers to return their used garments for recycling, offering vouchers for future purchases as an incentive. However, Brooks argues that this approach fails to address the root issue of over-consumption and inadvertently reinforces further consumption by providing incentives for future purchases. Furthermore, the research conducted by Fletcher and Tham, 2019 emphasizes the inherent unsustainability of a fast fashion business model. Their findings, corroborated by insights from participant P5, 2023, suggest that a system based on fast fashion principles inherently contradicts the principles of sustainability. Given these scholarly perspectives, it is unsurprising that participants in this study express skepticism towards clothing brands' sudden emphasis on sustainability, as the industry's historical practices and business models have not aligned with sustainable principles.

The skepticism and questioning surrounding the true motivations of clothing brands in relation to sustainability were also acknowledged and discussed by the interviewed clothing brands. The Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 recognized that consumers bear skepticism towards brands' claims of sustainability, acknowledging it as a common issue. The brand aims to address skepticism by improving their communication and providing detailed information about their sustainability efforts and clothing to consumers.

The Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 noted that certifications play a role in building credibility and fostering trust among certain consumers. However, they also observed that consumers are skeptical and disillusioned with sustainability, partly due to instances of greenwashing and the perceived complexity of sustainability messaging. The Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 stated its intention to

shift focus away from technical and complicated discourse and instead prioritize communicating the quality of their products and how consumers can extend their garment's lifespan.

The Regional Agent (Brand C), 2023 also acknowledged that consumers are often confused due to the overwhelming amount of different information and discussions surrounding sustainability, the widespread use of greenwashing by brands, and the negative perceptions associated with brands making claims of sustainability. The Regional Agent (Brand C), 2023, aligning with the Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023's perspective, emphasizing that the focus should be placed on promoting mindful consumption through the purchase of durable and high-quality garments, rather than solely relying on certifications or labels.

The Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 further recognized the skepticism surrounding certifications, as some brands may exploit them by using them to discuss their entire collection, while only a small percentage of their products are actually certified. This lack of transparency and inconsistency among brands makes it challenging for consumers to navigate and make informed decisions.

All the interviewed brands emphasized their commitment to transparency in their operations. The Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 and the Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 acknowledged the challenges of sustainability within an inherently unsustainable industry and were transparent about their limitations in achieving full sustainability. However, they expressed their dedication to incorporating sustainable practices to the best of their abilities.

The Regional Agent (Brand C), 2023 demonstrated its dedication to transparency through its in-house manufacturing facility located in Europe. The brands smaller size and limited production capacity provided them with increased control over their supply chain, enabling them to effectively manage and oversee the different stages of production in line with their commitment to transparency and

sustainability practices.

The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 recognized the skepticism of consumers towards brands and made significant efforts to enhance transparency throughout the production phases. They recently introduced a digital product passport, utilizing QR codes on each garment to provide extensive information to consumers. This passport includes details about manufacturing locations and material sources. The brand did however acknowledge that despite their effort to be sustainable and transparent they can never have full control, noting:

Achieving full control over the value chain, particularly in the clothing industry, presents a significant challenge due to the complex and multi-stage process involved, from sourcing raw materials to the finished garment (Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023).

### 4.1.3 Affordability challenges

While all participants in the interviews acknowledged that some brands were more sustainable, and these should provide greater transparency through more information in order to separate them from brands greenwashing, they also expressed limited accessibility of sustainable clothing due to significantly higher prices of these garments. P3, P4, and P5 expressed the challenge of affordability, noting that sustainable clothing often comes with a higher price tag. They state that this financial constraint makes it difficult for individuals with limited means to purchase sustainable options. P6 states that they do not see the point in buying a garment that is more expensive because it is more sustainable, when they can get the same looking garment for half the price. P3 highlights the dilemma of choosing the more sustainable option between two similar-looking garments at significantly different prices, stating:

I want to buy from sustainable brands, but they're often way more expensive. Being a student on a tight budget, it's much easier to just go to a chain store and get a t-shirt for 49kr if I need one (P3, 2023).

Furthermore, P3, P5 and P6 also expressed skepticism regarding the correlation between higher prices of clothing and their perceived quality or sustainability. Some participants questioned whether higher-priced garments were genuinely superior or more sustainable, or if brands simply increased prices as a means to generate greater profits and foster an aura of exclusivity. This skepticism highlights the need for greater transparency and clarity from fashion brands regarding their pricing strategies and the value proposition behind their higher-priced offerings. This again relates to consumer's skepticism towards brands that promote sustainability.

P2 and P4 emphasize that the elevated prices of sustainable clothing can contribute to its exclusivity and hinder accessibility. P5 underscores the economic constraints faced by individuals from lower-income backgrounds, making it difficult for them to invest in expensive sustainable clothing, even if it may be cost-effective in the long run. P4 and P5 argue that addressing the affordability issue and making sustainable options more accessible is a social responsibility. P2 further highlights the need to combat the elitism associated with sustainable clothing and shift the focus to more affordable and inclusive sustainable production. P2 suggests that the dialogue should center around making sustainable production cheaper and removing the luxury aspect often associated with sustainable garments. They argue that prioritizing sustainability should not create shame for those who cannot afford it. P2 emphasizes the need to address the elitism associated with sustainable clothing and shift the focus to more affordable, sustainable production that caters to a broader audience. Moreover, P2 acknowledges that the higher price of sustainable garments can be justified when considering factors such as better quality, materials, and working conditions that contribute to the higher production costs.

All three brands, A, B, and C, acknowledge the affordability challenges associated with their sustainable products compared to fast fashion brands and large retail stores. They recognize that not everyone can afford their higher-priced items. However, they also highlight the costly nature of sustainable practices. The



Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 specifically mentions the challenges of working with expensive certifications. They observe that consumers are generally unwilling to pay more for products with costly certifications compared to those without. Nevertheless, as part of their core philosophy to democratize sustainability, Brand A lowers the prices of their products and absorbs the economic burden of these certifications.

We work a lot with certifications, which are extremely expensive, but we see that customers do not want to pay more for our products with expensive certifications than for those who do not have expensive certifications. we don't really think that expensive certifications leads consumers to choose us over the others, of course some, but not many. One of our philosophies is that we want to democratize sustainability, that everyone should have access, and this way we make those choices for the customers, by being sustainable. That's why we believe that it is important to keep prices at the level that is acceptable for everyday goods. So we actually take a lot of that economical burden ourselves (Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023).

While this may impact the prices of other products, they strive to maintain their core collection at a more affordable level, ensuring accessibility for all. The Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 acknowledges the difficulties of balancing profitability and sustainability, as sustainable practices are inherently expensive. They view their investment in costly certifications as important for the environment and the future. However, they express hope for future economic incentives that would make sustainability more affordable and advantageous for them. They believe that for a shift towards sustainable fashion to occur, sustainable garments must be more affordable and accessible to all.

The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 also acknowledges the challenges of balancing profitability and sustainable practices. However, unlike Brand A, they do not prioritize lowering prices. The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 recognizes that their prices may not be affordable for many individuals. Balancing

economic interests and sustainability remains an ongoing dilemma for the company. They emphasize their commitment to using certified raw materials, such as Responsible Down Standard and Responsible Mohair Standard. However, they note that certified materials often come at a higher cost due to strict requirements and limited availability. The company faces challenges when their order volume does not meet the minimum requirements set by manufacturers, making it difficult to prioritize sustainability. Nonetheless, they believe that their price segment allows for more favorable choices compared to cheap fast fashion brands that cannot afford sustainable practices. While Brand B acknowledges the disadvantage for individuals who cannot afford their products, they also recognize the necessity of charging higher prices to sustain their sustainable practices. Similar to Brand A, Brand B hopes for incentives or support from the government to alleviate some of the financial burden and reward their commitment to sustainability.

Although both brands state that there is not a direct economic advantage to their sustainable practices, they anticipate that sustainability will eventually become mandatory for all clothing brands in the industry. They have voluntarily adopted more sustainable practices than required because they recognize the environmental and socio-economic impacts associated with the industry. The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 states:

We are actually working ahead of the requirements, which contributes to driving the industry forward. Some companies prefer not to have any regulations, It depends on the company. But I believe that everyone has a responsibility. Until regulations are in place, it is ultimately the industry itself that must take responsibility for improvement. But when regulations are implemented, you have no choice... The advantage of being an early adopter of Digital Product Passport is that we can test and see what it brings us. How can we optimize? How can we best tailor it for users and for us? That's where being an early adopter comes in. It can be a bit demanding and challenging, but at the same time, it gives us a good reputation (Social Compliance

Manager (Brand B), 2023).

The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 goes further to claim that any brand not adopting sustainable practices has no place in the industry today. They believe that the strong reaction to prices is more a result of a lack of knowledge and the abundance of confusing and potentially misleading information, including greenwashing practices, further complicates consumer decision-making. The company recognizes the challenge consumers face in navigating through this complex landscape. They propose that digital product passports can help address this issue by providing reliable and transparent information to guide consumers in their purchasing choices.

They acknowledge that this perspective does not apply to everyone, as some individuals lack the economic means. However, they contend that many people do have the means but still opt for numerous cheap clothing items. The Regional Agent (Brand C), 2023 echoes The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 belief and suggests that people's perception of clothing as cheap and affordable plays a significant role.

The challenges posed by high prices for sustainable fashion brands give rise to skepticism and contribute to the problematic division of consumers into those who have the economic means and those who do not. Consumers do also express skepticism to around the high prices of these brands and question whether these prices are really related to their sustainable practices. However, considering the clothing brands that were interviewed, sustainable practices are indeed very costly. Even to the point that it puts them in an economical disadvantageous position. As brand B suggests, people are skeptical to our prices and to our practices due to the abundance of conflicting information, the industry's reputation as unsustainable, and the prevalence of greenwashing. The clothing industry faces significant challenges in its pursuit of sustainable practices, as it confronts persistent skepticism and distrust from the public. Despite concerted efforts to adopt sustainable measures, the industry is often met with immediate suspicion, impeding its ability to actively engage in meaningful discussions and contribute to

the broader sustainability discourse.

Brooks, 2019 contend that clothing brands operating within the traditional economic model cannot truly achieve sustainability because of their dependency to the market. Consequently, the adoption of sustainability by some fashion brands may be perceived as a "superficial revolution," because after all they continue to produce and sell clothing. Wherein he argues that sustainability is exploited as a marketing strategy to create an exclusive image or to capitalize on the increasing demand for sustainable fashion. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Griskevicius et al., 2010, suggesting that products labeled as green sells more due to the popularity of sustainability, leading to the green label being embraced as a status symbol.

Moreover, this division leads to the emergence of two distinct groups, referred to as "privileged indulgence," as noted by Brooks, 2019. This division creates a distinct separation between those who can afford the higher prices and those who cannot. This division not only perpetuates socio-economic inequalities but also perpetuates a notion of exclusivity within sustainable fashion, potentially undermining its broader goal of inclusivity and accessibility.

### **4.1.4 Knowledge barriers**

The participants in the study recognized a lack of knowledge and awareness regarding sustainable clothing. P3 suggests that there should be more information about this even at school and within the education system. The participant stated that there should be political measures set in place to increase the overall knowledge of how individuals can consume more sustainably:

The one thing I know for sure is that, as a 14-year-old, I had no idea what separated a sustainable from a non-sustainable garment (P3, 2023).

The participants agree on the significance of knowledge and awareness in promoting sustainable clothing choices. P1 emphasized the importance of

increasing knowledge about both the consequences of the clothing industry and alternative approaches to clothing usage. P5 adds that barriers to sustainable thinking can be overcome through knowledge sharing, inspiration from others, and heightened awareness of the environmental impact. They stressed the importance of individuals having a genuine desire to change and make efforts towards sustainability rather than feeling pressured by external forces.

Both the Director of Product Assortment and Sustainability (Brand A), 2023 and the Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 also emphasized the lack of knowledge among consumers. They believed this to be one of the primary reasons that consumers rather choose fast fashion brands. Although they underlined that the clothing industry had the greater responsibility, they also stated that consumers have a lot of responsibilities, but that they, as a part of the industry, have a responsibility to educate consumers.

#### **4.1.5 Challenges of proving genuine sustainability**

The consumers had several reflections around sustainable fashion and clothing brands that work towards a sustainable model. While some participants recognized the existence of brands genuinely committed to sustainability, it is evident that prejudices within the clothing industry, instances of greenwashing and lack of transparency, and the fundamentally unsustainable nature of the industry pose significant challenges and barriers for both clothing brands and consumers striving for positive change.

The literature, as represented by Brooks, 2019 and Fletcher and Tham, 2019, adopts a critical stance towards clothing brands claiming sustainability. Brooks, 2019 argues that ethical consumption, while socially progressive, may overlook radical alternatives as it still promotes consumption. This perspective suggests a narrow view of clothing brands claiming to be sustainable, and are failing to explore alternative approaches to clothing and sustainability. The use of sustainability as a marketing tool for economic gain is a significant concern within sustainable fashion. This marketing approach can be considered superficial because it doesn't

address the underlying problems of unsustainable production and consumption in the industry. Consequently, consumer skepticism persists, maintained by the industry's association with a model based on economic growth. Suggesting that it hinders the recognition of the need for systemic change and promotes a superficial understanding of sustainability (Brooks, 2019; Fletcher & Tham, 2019).

However, crucial aspects related to the motivation of clothing brands are often overlooked in the discussion. The literature predominantly portrays brands that emphasize sustainability as mere marketing tools for economic growth, assuming their motivations are solely economic because of the current model that dominates the clothing industry. Griskevicius et al., 2010 further support this view, suggesting that consumers purchase products labeled as "green" due to the associated status, rather than a genuine commitment to sustainability. Brooks, 2019 also argues that Fairtrade goods, symbolizing ethical consumption, still rely on market dynamics and consumer stimulation, often serving as a means to alleviate guilt rather than addressing the root issue of over-consumption. Consequently, this one-sided discussion stifles the inclusion of brands and businesses in the sustainability dialogue, categorizing them as inherently unsustainable due to the prevailing system. However, the interview with the brands suggests that it is not necessarily an economic advantage due to the costly practices. Brand A even stated that they are taking the economical burden of these costly certifications because they want to increase the accessibility to these products. Challenging the notion that their motivations are solely based on economic gain.

Niinimäki, 2015 and Fletcher and Tham, 2019 contend that the current clothing industry, built on the growth model, cannot achieve sustainability. However, they propose the possibility of a sustainable fashion business model through alternative approaches. Nonetheless, if clothing brands are immediately dismissed as unsustainable due to their association with the "unsustainable clothing industry", they are not afforded the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to change. The dominant discussion on "sustainability within an unsustainable clothing

industry” has limited the exploration of alternative mindsets and approaches.

Similarly, Griskevicius et al., 2010 focus on the symbolic value of "green" as a status symbol, and thereby focusing on the harm of the green label as a trend. Although this is an important area for discussion, it also overlooks the interesting finding that people buy green because it is trendy, which encourages environmentally friendly options. By directly dismissing clothing brands because they are still reliant on consumption seems to neglect the consideration that the picture is more nuanced and complex, leading to a very limited and narrow discussion. Miller, 2005 offers a relevant perspective on this issue by emphasizing the harmful consequences of dismissing the entire debate on sustainability in the clothing industry based on the notion that "all consumption is bad." Such a viewpoint oversimplifies the complexity of the situation and fails to recognize the efforts made by certain brands to improve their environmental and social impact. While acknowledging the negative impacts consumption can have, Miller, 2005 highlights its potential for empowerment and positive aspects. This perspective suggests that consumption should not be universally condemned. However, when the debate becomes one-sided and lacks nuance, portraying consumption as the primary enemy, it can undermine discussions centered on the values and significance of clothing items. This aligns with the consumers' reflections on the detrimental effects of using shame to discourage consumption, which can divert attention from the core issues that should be addressed.

It is important to acknowledge that this does not suggest that all brands promoting sustainability are good, as there are clear instances of misleading claims and practices within the clothing industry, such as the example of H&M provided by Brooks, 2019.

Miller, 2005 viewpoints are reflected in the participants' reservations about using shame as a strategy extend beyond consumers to the clothing industry. P2 suggests viewing the initiatives of the clothing industry as a positive influence rather than solely focusing on negative conceptions. P2 recognizes the importance of brands with genuine sustainable principles in driving the discussion on clothing. While

## 4.2. Promoting new ways of viewing fashion

acknowledging that these brands are not flawless, P2 appreciates their sustainable initiatives, transparency regarding issues within the clothing industry, and their potential different approach to clothing. P2 argues that these brands play a crucial role in initiating dialogue and broadening the understanding of sustainable practices in the industry.

Numerous barriers pertaining to sustainability in the clothing industry have been identified and discussed in this chapter. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the examination of these barriers within the context of clothing brands has not yet been fully explored. The subsequent chapter of this thesis will delve into a comprehensive analysis of clothing brands with a specific emphasis on sustainability. Consequently, the subsequent chapter will shed light on the barriers that have not yet been addressed, providing a more comprehensive exploration of the challenges of shifting the current model.

## **4.2 Promoting new ways of viewing fashion**

The debate surrounding sustainable fashion has evolved from a narrow perspective that assumes clothing brands originating from an inherently unsustainable industry cannot be sustainable. Instead, this thesis argues that it is important to open this claim up for discussion and rather shift the focus towards examining whether clothing brands with a core emphasis on sustainability within their philosophy can contribute to a paradigm shift and a new approach to clothing. This broader and intriguing discussion explores the potential for these brands to drive change. The question remains: Can these brands contribute to shifting the existing fashion model and foster a new perspective on clothing? Scholarly viewpoints from Fletcher and Tham, 2019 and Niinimäki, 2015 propose that sustainable fashion can be achieved through businesses built on alternative systems that value all materials, including recycled garments, as valuable resources. They emphasize the importance of emotional experiences and satisfaction derived from fashion items beyond new purchases. Additionally, Fletcher, 2012 highlights the concept of durability and underscores the significance of user-ship and personal engagement



in extending the lifespan of clothing.

However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the criteria that differentiate brands within this model and those outside of it. While Fletcher and Tham, 2019 propose a framework outlining various landscapes with sustainable principles to facilitate systemic transformation, it does not specify which types of businesses can effectively utilize this framework, apart from asserting that the current growth model is unsustainable. It is evident that clothing brands need to generate revenue to sustain their operations, making it challenging to categorize them as separate from the existing system. Moreover, Brooks, 2019 argues that even sustainable brands are reliant on the market for profitability, which further obscures the target audience for the proposed framework. As a result, there appears to be a gap in the framework as it first dismisses clothing brands operating within the growth model and subsequently promotes a new model for the industry. The issue arises from the omission of acknowledging that society as a whole is constructed upon a capitalist growth model, making it difficult to assert that clothing brands within this model are inherently unsustainable.

This is the issue within the discussion of sustainability in the clothing industry. There are no clear definition of what a sustainable brand is, since as discussed, the debate is rather focused on how the clothing industry is inherently unsustainable, rather than what can actually help them be sustainable. This section will analyze three brands websites that have sustainable principles as a core value of their brand, and interpret the findings to investigate whether the brands' approaches to clothing align with sustainable principles reflected by Fletcher and Tham, 2019; Niinimäki, 2013, 2015 and Miller, 2005, 2010 and potentially how. This research is crucial for the sake of investigating whether brands that promote sustainable fashion align with genuine sustainable principles.

### **4.2.1 Brands Perspective of sustainability**

Based on the participants from the interviews combined with the related literature, it is clear that the discourse surrounding fashion needs to undergo a fundamental

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shift, redirecting its focus away from the perception that consumption is inherently intertwined with fashion. Despite the controversy surrounding sustainable approaches within the clothing industry, it is important to recognize the influential role of clothing brands in shaping consumption patterns. While some fast fashion brands may falsely advertise sustainability as a means to sell more products, Niinimäki, 2015 argues that ethical considerations can provide new business opportunities when approached through sustainable principles and values. Fletcher, 2012 also emphasizes the significance of cultivating satisfaction beyond the act of purchasing new fashion items.

Since clothing brands have so much power in influencing consumption, it is crucial to investigate how brands that have sustainability as a core philosophy in their brand, portray clothing and sustainability. In order to do so, this thesis has analyzed the website of three clothing brands, namely Pierre Robert, Holzweiler and Livid. These brands were chosen due to their emphasis on sustainable principles presented in the literature of sustainable fashion such as; valuing each garment, incorporating longevity, utilization of durable materials, repair, and garment care (Fletcher & Tham, 2019; Henninger et al., 2016; Niinimäki, 2013, 2015).

The selection process focused on the language employed by these brands and how they portrayed clothing in relation to sustainable principles outlined in the literature. It is important to acknowledge that this selection process does not inherently imply the overall sustainability of these brands; rather, the analysis will explore the extent to which they adhere to sustainable practices. Additionally, it is important to emphasize that the point of the analysis is not to see if they do a good or bad job. Furthermore, the analysis will not delve into the technical aspects of sustainability, such as materials quality or the accuracy of the brand's claims to be sustainable. Rather, this section will do an analysis of three brands to see how their approach to clothing as a brand with a strong focus on sustainability, aligns with the sustainable principles discussed in scholarly literature and how it may contribute to a paradigm shift in the clothing industry. The websites of

Pierre Robert, Holzweiler, and Livid present a mixture of stories, histories, values, advice and information. The analysis will analyze brands' philosophy and values and how they are expressed through their clothing, different initiatives and advice and information on their websites.

### 4.2.2 Pierre Robert

Founded in Oslo in 2006, Pierre Robert is a clothing brand that initially focused on underwear, socks, and tights. However, the brand has since expanded its product range and now offers a variety of basic and key garments with a strong emphasis on comfort, quality, and design, all while maintaining a significant focus on sustainability. The brand's undergarments are widely available in grocery stores throughout Norway, while their other garments are primarily sold through their online platform. Pierre Robert recognizes their influence as one of Norway's largest underwear manufacturers and aims to drive positive change in dressing habits and industry practices. They have a strong focus on sustainability and offer a range of basic garments made from environmentally certified materials such as Swan-certified wool, organic cotton, and recycled synthetics (Pierre Robert, n.d.-a). The brand's website reflects its commitment to simplicity and functionality, providing users with access to the brand's sustainability initiatives, their story, material information and environmental labeling, and advice on how to care for garments and clothing.

#### Philosophy

Pierre Robert's philosophy emphasizes timeless basic clothing through simplicity, comfort and quality with strong focus on sustainable principles in mind. Timeless basic clothing is a central cornerstone of the brand and is reflected directly through the aesthetic and the area of use behind their clothing collections based on basic garments. Pierre Robert maintains a selection of basic garments, primarily consisting of underwear and undergarments. This core collection is available year-round in every Norwegian grocery store on the principle that everyone should have the opportunity to dress comfortably, nicely and with a smaller environmental

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footprint (Pierre Robert, n.d.-a). Pierre Robert also introduces small seasonal collections twice a year featuring enduring styles and materials suitable for each season, introduced as a *capsule wardrobe*:

The capsule Wardrobe, is a new way of thinking about clothes. With quality materials, timeless design, and usability, Capsule offers key garments that you can use season after season (Pierre Robert, n.d.-c).

Quality is also a central value of the brand clearly reflected in the basic garments that promote longevity and timeless style. Pierre Robert's introduction of basic pieces that aim to build a wardrobe around pieces, which are not only long lasting in quality but also in style, communicate to the consumers that they can dress stylishly, with a few high quality pieces in a simple way. These values are also reflected through written articles provided by Pierre Robert on their website to educate consumers on garment care, aiming to prolong the lifespan of clothing: "Washing tips that preserve your clothes" and "First aid kit for wool that has been shrunk or eaten by moths" (Pierre Robert, n.d.-b). Pierre Robert also provides articles aiming to educate consumers on how to consume smarter: "Advice for those who want to learn how to start a capsule wardrobe or simply want to own fewer clothes - but at the same time dress better." and "The 10 shopping amendments - This is how you can think more sustainably when shopping for clothes" (Pierre Robert, n.d.-d). By offering practical advice and solutions for maintaining and salvaging clothing, it suggests that Pierre Robert encourages consumers to extend the lifespan of their garments and reduce waste, and consume less, which is reflected in their sustainable values.

Additionally, their focus on materials also reflects the concept of quality and longevity. The two collections introduced each year feature repeated styles from previous assortments but incorporate different materials based on the season, such as wool for winter and cotton and tencel for spring. Reflecting their focus on Norwegian consumers' needs, based on the weather and season, indicates a clear function and idea behind the clothes suggesting longevity.

### **Sustainability**

Taking responsibility for humans and the environment is a significant parameter of Pierre Robert: “It is a prerequisite for our business operations that we influence people, animals and the environment in a positive direction” (Pierre Robert, n.d.-a). Pierre Robert acknowledges the harmful impacts the clothing industry has on people and the planet, and acknowledges that “... the most sustainable clothing is the clothing we already own, inherit or buy used.” (Pierre Robert, n.d.-f). However, they recognize that some clothes are difficult to buy second hand such as underwear, and therefore they strive to make clothes in the most sustainable way possible. The manner in which Pierre Robert work with this is expressed on their website under *Our Sustainability work*, stating:

To address this, we must make conscious choices regarding raw materials and production processes that minimize environmental impact. Simultaneously, we need to design garments that are durable, encouraging prolonged usage over an extended period. Additionally, we should facilitate easy recycling of these garments at the end of their life cycle, promoting circularity and reducing waste. By adopting these practices, we can strive to strike a balance between sustainability and the production of clothing (Pierre Robert, n.d.-a).

Under a subsection *Transparency, The transparency Act and Supplier Lists* they state:

A prerequisite for being able to contribute to improvement is to gain an overview of what the challenges are. Openness and transparency are therefore necessary to push the clothing industry in a positive direction. At Pierre Robert, we are committed to being open about our production (Pierre Robert, n.d.-e).

Pierre Robert’s website encompasses various sections and articles dedicated to different aspects of their production, retailers, laborers, working conditions, and material guide with certifications. Notably, the brand demonstrates a

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commendable commitment to transparency in their production processes by offering detailed reports, accompanied by visual aids such as photographs and videos showcasing their factory and the manufacturing procedures.

Conclusively, Pierre Robert states clearly its core values emphasizing timeless basic clothing through simplicity, comfort and quality, both verbally and visually on their website through their clothing, their story and through their information and advice aimed at educating consumers on how to care for garments and gain a sustainable approach to consumption. Their section on their sustainability work is transparent and informative and provides the reader with a lot of information on their production, their factories, their manufacturers and official documents. However, although the information was easily accessible, it was a little bit complicated to find specific information due to the blog-style layout of the sections.

### 4.2.3 Holzweiler

Holzweiler is a Norwegian fashion house founded in 2012 by siblings Susanne and Andreas Holzweiler. Initially gaining recognition for their scarf collections made from silk, lambswool, and cashmere, the brand expanded into ready-to-wear fashion in 2014 for both men and women (Holzweiler.no, 1). Holzweiler also dedicates a section of their website to sustainability, and includes elements such as their Sustainability Statement, The Transparency Act, Sustainability Report 2021, and their own second-hand resale platform called Re;Vive. Additionally, there are subsections under Guides and Reports, encompassing areas such as Material Guide, Care & Repair, Transparency, Policies and Guidelines, Diversity Reports, and Our suppliers. In contrast to Pierre Robert's blog-style presentation, Holzweiler's website adopts a more structured and easily navigable format, allowing for greater clarity and accessibility of information.

### Philosophy

Holzweiler's brand philosophy is articulated through a set of core principles as outlined in the *Our story* section of their website. The brand characterizes their style as *fusion of seamless design and effortless functionality*. Drawing inspiration from various sources such as “.art, architecture, nature, and contemporary culture”, Holzweiler seeks to create garments that embody a *sense of purpose*. The hanger logo, which is an integral part of the brand's identity, symbolizes their commitment to “meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail” (Holzweiler, n.d.-a).

Central to Holzweiler's philosophy is the use of premium materials and a focus on intricate craftsmanship. Their designs reflect “timeless ideals, curiosity, and a pursuit of quality” (Holzweiler, n.d.-a). The brand also places a strong emphasis on sustainability, considering it as the foundation of everything they do. This commitment to sustainability is manifested through the principles of Reducing, Reusing, and Repairing, which are integrated throughout their practices.

Holzweiler's values and principles are reflected throughout their website, evident in various aspects such as the design of their clothing, the detailed information provided about their collections and materials, and their sustainability initiatives, including the *Re:vive* second-hand resale platform. By integrating these values into their entire brand experience, Holzweiler creates a cohesive story that aligns with their philosophy.

Holzweiler's brand philosophy embraces the concept of clothing as an art form, emphasizing the notion that each garment carries a unique story. This perspective is conveyed through their "Community" section, which features artistic blog-like posts showcasing the brand's campaigns, lookbooks, collaborations, and runways. These posts adopt an artistic approach, presenting creative visuals that highlight the brand's collections alongside descriptive stories. For instance, one post describes their Spring/Summer 2023 collection with evocative language, illustrating their imaginative exploration of “movement and dance through

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voluminous and relaxed silhouettes inspired by parachutes” (Conradi, 2023). These descriptions highlight the brand’s inspiration and creative process, which draws upon various artistic influences.

While Holzweiler’s design approach reflects their philosophy of artistic sensibility, their style and garment design maintain simplicity in line with their philosophy of “seamless design fused with effortless functionality” (Holzweiler, n.d.-a). Despite the artistic style of their presentation, the brand consistently prioritizes a seamless, functional aesthetic with neutral colors and relaxed silhouettes. The manner in which Holzweiler presents their collection and clothing extends beyond showcasing just a garment or a trend; it communicates the story behind each piece as an expression of art. By integrating storytelling and artistry into their brand, it suggests Holzweiler creates a deeper connection between their clothing and the audience, transforming fashion into a form of artistic expression.

### **Sustainability**

Under the section “Sustainability Statement” Holzweiler demonstrates a strong awareness of the negative environmental impact associated with the clothing industry and acknowledges their own responsibility in addressing it. While recognizing the challenges of achieving flawless sustainability in a globalized retail industry, the brand is committed to taking meaningful action within their sphere of influence. Their sustainability statement emphasizes their commitment to measuring and reducing their impact on the planet, stating:

At Holzweiler, we’re future-ready. This means we are committed to measuring our impact on the planet, and reducing it. And we have to do the first, before we can successfully do the second. Taking action means that we are: Tracing supply chains, Employing circular processes, Increasing the lifespan of products, Involving our customers (Holzweiler, n.d.-d).

Holzweiler upholds their principles of employing circular processes, Increasing the lifespan of products and Involving Customers through *Re;vive*, their own platform



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for selling and buying used Holzweiler clothing. The platform aims to extend the life cycle of their garments. The brand emphasizes the importance of breathing new life into their products by providing a space for resale, recycling, and ultimately reviving well-loved Holzweiler items (Holzweiler, n.d.-c).

Furthermore, Holzweiler's website features a dedicated section called *Holzweiler Future: Care & Repair*, where they actively encourage their community to adopt a practice of caring for and repairing their garments. This section provides informative videos demonstrating repair techniques for various types of garments, such as down-wear and wool (Holzweiler, n.d.-b).

In addition, Holzweiler offers a comprehensive section called *Holzweiler Material Guide*, which provides detailed information about the origins, environmental impact, and durability of each individual material used in their products (Conradi, 2021). These initiatives reflect their core values of Reduce, Reuse, and Repair, and are directly manifested in their brand's efforts to promote sustainability.

Holzweiler's Material Guide is an important reflection of their transparency as it aims to empower customers to make informed decisions regarding the materials used in their garments. They provide detailed information on each material's origins, environmental impact, and durability. They encourage their customers to look for certified materials, recycled materials, and durable options when considering their purchase (Conradi, 2021).

The brand's sustainability efforts are transparently presented on their website, with comprehensive descriptions of their approach and their Sustainability Report for the year 2021. They adhere to the Transparency Act, ensuring transparency in their sustainability initiatives and supply chains. By providing detailed information on suppliers and materials, Holzweiler promotes accountability and traceability throughout their production processes. These sustainability initiatives highlight Holzweiler's commitment to reducing waste, promoting reuse, and encouraging responsible consumer practices. By facilitating the resale and repair of their clothing, as well as providing transparency regarding material sourcing, it suggests that the brand actively seeks to engage with the principles of sustainability

and foster a more sustainable approach to fashion consumption.

In conclusion, Holzweiler effectively embodies their philosophy of seamless design merged with effortless functionality by integrating artistic expression with sustainable principles throughout their website. Their clothing, brand story, and information on sustainable initiatives all convey their commitment to a more thoughtful and connected approach to fashion. The website's Sustainability section is transparent and informative, offering extensive details on each garment, the materials used, the production process, as well as information about their manufacturers and official documents. In comparison to Pierre Robert's website layout, Holzweiler's website is more user-friendly, making it easier to navigate and locate the various aspects of their sustainability efforts.

### 4.2.4 Livid

Livid Jeans is a Norwegian clothing brand that had its official launch of the brand in 2012. Livid combines Japanese fabric finesse with modern Scandinavian design. Their focus is on preserving traditional craftsmanship and producing high-quality garments. The company values the importance of supporting local trade and taking care of one's own clothing. Their aesthetics as a brand and their collections are defined by this commitment to quality and tradition. The website is constructed in a story telling-manner, and tells the story of the founder and the hard work behind constructing the brand. They make clothing for both men and women, mainly focused on jeans (Dankertsen, n.d.).

#### Philosophy

Their website and the foundation of the brand is very much constructed around their personal story of how Livid came to be. The brand's values are not clearly stated, but they come across clearly through the *Our story* section and throughout the website. The brand was founded on the personal journey of its founder, who developed a deep fascination for denim and jeans while working part-time at a retail chain. Inspired by the Swedish denim brand Nudie Jeans, the founder's passion

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for denim grew, leading him to embark on a challenging path to establish Livid Jeans. The founder's philosophy was to create a manufacturing company rooted in strong sustainable values and dedicated to crafting high-quality products using traditional methods. With no prior experience, he started making jeans by hand in a small space in Trondheim, taking weeks to complete each pair. This commitment to traditional craftsmanship became the defining aspect of Livid Jeans' identity. While larger retail clothing companies relied on mass production and machinery, Livid Jeans stand out by adhering to traditional manufacturing techniques. The founder writes:

My strategy had just grown organically out of learning how to make jeans; trying to establish a manufacturing company built on strong sustainable values, aiming to utilize the craft of making high quality products the conventional way. That was - in my mind - the innovative aspect of Livid Jeans. What we made and how we made it, was what sat us apart as a clothing brand (Dankertsen, n.d.).

Livid's philosophy of traditional craftsmanship through strong sustainable values is reflected throughout their website. They have production in Norway and have expanded their production to Portugal as well. They tell the story of how and why they decided to expand the area of production to Portugal and tell a story of how important the manufacturing and the workers are for the brands identity. Additionally the brand's philosophy aims to illuminate customers about the demanding work involved in manufacturing a single garment and to convey the complexity of the value chain behind each product.

I think people generally thought of the small venture that was Livid, as something very short termed, expensive and elusive. In my mind, Livid wasn't just a pair of jeans made of high quality materials. It was made in a very specific way at a very specific location. That was the cutting edge. A contemporary designed product made from ancient, but traditional production methods. The factory also simultaneously enlightened customers to understand the hard work

behind one single garment, that there is actually people involved in product manufacturing and that the chain of value of any product most likely is much more complex than one might think (Dankertsen, n.d.).

Livid Jeans strives to emphasize the human element and the dedication required to produce their garments.

### **Sustainability**

Livid Jeans demonstrates its commitment to sustainability in their production practices, specifically through their hand-crafted garments and various initiatives outlined in the "Do Better" section of their website. Under the subsection of transparency, Livid Jeans provides detailed information about their production countries, the rationale behind producing in both Norway and Portugal, and a narrative description of their supply chain, encompassing steps from cotton farming to the final retailer (Livid, n.d.-a).

As a small brand we greatly treasure how close we get to production and the people who make our products. The 'where' and 'how' gives a special meaning to each and every product. By making our chain of value as transparent as we can, we want to pass this feeling on to you (**livid\_our\_nodate**).

Despite being a small brand with limited influence in the textile industry, Livid Jeans emphasizes the importance of knowing the origins of their materials, striving to make their supply chain open and integral to their brand identity.

The "Saved-Deposit" initiative aims to extend the lifespan of their garments. Livid Jeans prioritizes producing as little as possible, utilizing high-quality fabrics and constructions. They offer free first-time repairs on all their products, encouraging customers to make their jeans last longer (Livid, n.d.-b). Additionally, Livid Jeans introduced *Livid SAVED*, where customers can return their old Livid jeans in any condition and receive store credit. The jeans are then evaluated and handled accordingly:

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Those pairs in good shape are repaired and sold at reduced rates in vintage departments. While jeans in less favorable condition provide fabric for repairing other Livid jeans. Jeans beyond repair and leftover denim are delivered to Fretex for various reuse purposes, such as creating isolation mats or assembly lines, with only a small portion being used for energy recovery (Livid, n.d.-b).

Furthermore, Livid Jeans operates its own vintage shop, not limited to their own brand, but open to accepting garments from various brands (Livid, n.d.-c). In summary, Livid Jeans demonstrates sustainability in their production through hand-crafted garments, transparent supply chain practices, repair initiatives, recycling and reuse programs, and the establishment of a vintage shop. By prioritizing these practices, Livid Jeans actively works towards minimizing waste and fostering a more sustainable and circular clothing industry.

Livid Jeans' website conveys a story that embodies their dedication to craftsmanship, sustainability, and the preservation of traditional production methods amidst the prevalence of mass manufacturing. Their underlying philosophy centers around the creation of superior-quality products while fostering an appreciation for the labor-intensive and intricate aspects of the manufacturing process. In contrast to Holzweiler's well-structured sections on sustainability, Livid Jeans adopts a more narrative-oriented layout. Although this does not hinder information accessibility, apart from their initiatives aimed at reducing consumption through reuse, re-sale, and repair, the garment-specific information provided is not as detailed as Holzweiler's. It is important to consider, however, that Livid Jeans is a smaller company with limited resources to gather more comprehensive information, as acknowledged by the brand itself.

### 4.2.5 Slowing down the pace of fashion

One of the major challenges confronting the clothing industry today is overproduction, which is perpetuated by the constant promotion of increased consumption through the introduction of new trends and collections. This

prevailing mindset, which equates fashion with consumption, makes it crucial to prioritize the analysis of brands that advocate sustainability by addressing this central issue. While it may initially appear paradoxical to examine how clothing brands, which inherently involve production and sales, promote the concept of "less", it is through their messaging and language that they have the potential to reshape the prevailing approach to clothing and challenge its association with excessive consumption. In order to make it easy to follow, the next part will discuss the brand's analysis chronically.

### **Message through their clothing**

Pierre Robert's philosophy centered around timeless, basic clothing conveyed through a relatively small selection of basic garments and seasonal capsule collections, encourages building a wardrobe around every piece. Since they have basic clothing centered around neutral colors, functional materials and comfort they express a message of simplicity, conveying that "less is enough", steering away from trend-focused and excessive consumption patterns. By focusing on enduring pieces and encouraging consumers to build functional wardrobes based on their existing clothing, the brand promotes a shift towards a more considered and intentional approach to dressing, which highlights the significance of user-ship as reflected by Fletcher, 2012 and durability through timeless designs suggested by Niinimäki, 2015.

Moreover, the brand's garments exhibit a simplistic aesthetic that transcends specific styles, focusing instead on versatility and integration into various wardrobes. By designing garments that can be easily incorporated with other clothing items, the brand promotes inclusivity and welcomes diverse perspectives. This approach aligns with Fletcher and Tham, 2019 third landscape, referred to as Plural: new centers for fashion, which advocates for the creation of fashion spaces that accommodate a multitude of voices and expressions. This relates to the next part, centered around Pierre Robert's attempt to democratize fashion.

While Pierre Robert reflects the principles of less through simple, basic garments

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and small collections, Holzweiler rather reflects this through their artistic expression of each garment, giving them a symbol of exclusivity. Although this limits the accessibility for everyone and may give their clothing a status symbol (Griskevicius et al., 2010), they try to create a special bond between their clothing and the consumers through telling a story behind each piece. They do this through showing how every piece is created through inspiration from different elements in nature and society, conveying the message that each clothing is a *work of art*. This relates to Miller, 2010 perception of clothing as something more than just superficial. Trying to create a bond between the consumer and the garment. Miller, 2010 states that the focus should shift to embrace personal creativity and uniqueness through the clothing we wear, and away from fashion trends and societal expectations. With Holzweiler philosophy of creating pieces based on creativity and carefully chosen materials and artistic inspiration and story, they create unique pieces that connect to different individuals, and in this way embraces inclusivity as it shifts the focus away from trends and following the crowd, but rather tries to create something different.

Livid's philosophy and values revolve around their brand story. Similar to Holzweiler, they create an appealing narrative around their clothing to evoke a sense of uniqueness and exclusivity in each piece. However, Livid takes a different approach. They emphasize the exclusivity of their garments by highlighting the demanding work involved in manufacturing each item and the complex value chain behind their products. Since the garments are handmade, this message is effectively conveyed.

This reflects several of Fletcher and Tham, 2019 landscapes of creating new centers for fashion through embracing diverse perspectives, encouraging new knowledge and mindset for fashion through a new communication of fashion, focused on setting fashion free from consumerism ideals. They also open for a new discussion and view of fashion, through distancing themselves from fashion based on trends and consumption.

### **Fashion for all**

Pierre Robert's narrative revolves around creating clothes for everyone, focusing on timeless, simple, and label-free garments.

Democratizing sustainability is highlighted as a key objective for the brand. Pierre Robert offers a range of undergarments in grocery stores, which are intended to be more accessible to a wider consumer base. The price for a single pair of panties in their collection sold at the grocery store ranges from 99 NOK to 199 NOK. Additionally, their pricing strategy for white plain t-shirts, a product available across all the brands, varies between 249 NOK and 549 NOK. To enhance the availability of sustainable clothing, Pierre Robert strategically distributes several products in all grocery stores across Norway. By aligning their price levels with other grocery store products, the brand aims to facilitate greater accessibility to sustainable clothing among a broader range of consumers. This approach addresses the concern raised by consumers from the interviews and is echoed in the literature about the exclusivity and high cost of sustainable fashion (Brooks, 2019; Griskevicius et al., 2010).

By attempting to remove the status label often associated with sustainable clothing, Pierre Robert strives to democratize access to sustainable fashion and make it accessible to a broader range of individuals. The brand's philosophy of democratizing sustainable fashion aligns with Fletcher and Tham, 2019 approach to establishing an inclusive and accessible sustainable system, as demonstrated in the second landscape, known as the Plural landscape, and the third landscape. The brand's efforts also resonate with the sixth landscape, referred to as Governance, which emphasizes the adoption of novel organizational structures to democratize sustainable fashion practices.

Furthermore, the brand's emphasis on the utilization of wool aligns with the climatic conditions of Norway, catering to the specific needs and preferences of the local population. This strategic approach resonates with the concept of localism, as proposed by Fletcher and Tham, 2019, and highlights Pierre Robert's ability to



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establish a more personal connection with consumers. By addressing the unique requirements of the Norwegian market, the brand fosters a sense of personalized engagement and consumer loyalty. This localized focus allows Pierre Robert to establish a deeper connection with consumers, showcasing their attentiveness to the specific needs of the Norwegian society.

### **New language for fashion**

Holzweiler's approach to clothing fosters a new communication for fashion as introduced in Fletcher and Tham, 2019 fifth landscape. This perspective also contributes to the diversification of fashion discourse by highlighting it as a distinct form of expression and emphasizing its inherent uniqueness. While this approach may limit accessibility to their clothing, it underscores the value of each garment, conveying a message of exclusivity. One could contend that this exclusivity fosters a heightened sense of responsibility towards garment care, aligning with the fundamental tenets of sustainable fashion as elucidated by Fletcher, 2012 and Niinimäki, 2015. Furthermore, by intricately articulating their philosophy concerning the distinctive attributes of their clothing, which cultivates a perception of exclusivity, it engenders a profound personal resonance among individuals. This, in turn, fosters the vital principle of establishing an emotional connection with garments.

Interestingly, despite creating a narrative around artistic expression and individuality, the brand's clothing maintains a focus on simplicity and functional ease, evident in their uncomplicated aesthetics. Consequently, the appearance of the pieces do not possess an extravagant look that restricts their appeal to a particular demographic. Nonetheless, the brand's portrayal of clothing as a means of personal expression resonates with individuals who identify with fashion as a form of self-representation. Holzweiler's approach, which transcends the mere materiality of garments and positions them as unique expressions, is compelling. While it may not appeal to a universal audience, it presents an intriguing attitude and approach to clothing. This relates to Fletcher and Tham, 2019 different landscapes of using a different language for fashion, new approach

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to fashion centered around exclusivity in each piece and away from trends and consumption.

Although different from Pierre Robert, this idea aligns with Fletcher and Tham, 2019 landscape of new fashion centers and a shift in mindset within the clothing industry. It aims to move away from the perception of fashion as mere consumption, and instead places emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual piece. While Pierre Robert focus on democratizing sustainable fashion and thereby making fashion open to all, Holzweiler's approach involves deviating from the conventional notion of fashion trends and establishing a distinctive clothing brand that resonates with individuals who fall outside the realm of the prevalent fashion norms. By doing so, they seek to attract a broader audience that does not conform to the conventional expectations of fashion. However, it is not specifically through the aesthetic appearance of the garment, but rather through their image. Additionally, their garments are substantially more expensive than Pierre Robert's, as the price for a white T-shirt in cotton varied between 800-1200 NOK, again limiting their products to a specific group. It can be argued that a higher price, can foster a more personal connection to a garment, based on the notion that it is not purchased in a hurry, and in this way, it can foster people to take better care of it. This resonates with Holzweiler's philosophy though, that their clothing are exclusive because it is more than just a garment. However, this brings up the question of elitism, brought up by Brooks, 2019 and Griskevicius et al., 2010. This will be further discussed later.

By showcasing the story of hard work behind each garment, Livid effectively expresses its uniqueness and exclusivity through the labor-intensive process. They also bring attention to the fact that clothing doesn't magically appear in stores; it involves people, hard work, and passion. In this way, they promote a message of "less" and a new perspective on clothing that goes beyond trends and constant consumption. Instead, they focus on the people involved, the environment, and hard work, making their garments a statement of sustainability. Similarly to Holzweiler, this exclusivity notion they brand conveys, can limit its accessibility to

consumers. The average price for a white T-shirt in cotton varied between 899-1299 NOK for Livid. The steep price also reflects their perception of exclusivity.

### **Extending garment lifespan**

The concept of durability is a central focus in sustainable fashion, as highlighted by Fletcher, 2012, 2015; Fletcher and Tham, 2019; Niinimäki, 2015 and Wennberg, 2019. It encompasses various principles, including personal connection, high-quality materials, and timeless styles, which are central to the three brands. Additionally, durability involves promoting repair, resale, and recycling to extend the lifespan of garments.

Pierre Robert achieves this by offering advice and information on garment care, repair, and responsible purchasing. By promoting the understanding of prolonging the life of clothing, the brand challenges the prevailing consumer-centric approach and encourages a shift away from excessive consumption. This resonates with the principles advocated by Niinimäki, 2015 and Fletcher, 2015, emphasizing the importance of care and repair for sustainable fashion. By promoting such practices, Pierre Robert fosters a deeper personal connection to garments.

Pierre Robert encourages extending garment's lifespan as mentioned by Fletcher, 2012 and Niinimäki, 2015, through informative articles that educate consumers on building fully equipped wardrobes with fewer items. They provide advice on choosing basic pieces, extending the lifespan of garments, and repairing clothing. By promoting these practices, Pierre Robert aims to change consumers' perception of clothing as disposable and emphasizes the intrinsic value of each garment. The brand's platform extends beyond promoting sustainability; it serves as a space for knowledge sharing and discussion through informative articles. By offering resources on clothing care, repair, and responsible consumption, Pierre Robert encourages consumers to unlearn old habits and adopt new perspectives on clothing. This approach aligns with Fletcher and Tham, 2019 landscape of creating new centers for fashion that challenge prevailing consumerist narratives and promotes Fletcher and Tham, 2019 the landscape of sharing knowledge and

learning how to care for clothing.

Pierre Robert's language and communication approach play a pivotal role in fostering consumer appreciation for each garment and cultivating personal connections with clothing. The brand challenges the perception of clothing as superficial, as suggested by Miller, 2010, by providing an alternative engagement that emphasizes the value of clothing and encourages personal attachment. This approach aligns with the views of Niinimäki, 2015 and Fletcher, 2012, as well as Fletcher and Tham, 2019 fifth landscape, New communication for fashion.

Holzweiler and Livid have embraced the concept of durability and extended its implementation in their practices. Apart from embodying the principle of "less" through their garments, both brands actively promote the care and maintenance of each garment through dedicated platforms on their websites. This aligns with the importance of fostering a personal connection to clothing, as advocated by Niinimäki, 2015 and Fletcher, 2015.

Furthermore, Holzweiler and Livid have established platforms for the resale of second-hand clothing, showcasing the quality and longevity of their garments. Holzweiler's platform, Re;Vive, exclusively sells their own brand, while Livid's platform allows customers to sell garments from various brands. These initiatives communicate that their garments are of superior quality and encourage customers to resell them after use. This message underscores the significance of garment quality in cultivating a meaningful connection. It also emphasizes the brands' focus on timeless styles rather than trend-based clothing, as trend-based items would be more challenging to resell. By discouraging trends and consumption and emphasizing garment care, the brands align with Fletcher and Tham, 2019 perspective on knowledge sharing and a different approach to clothing based on care rather than consumption.

Both Holzweiler and Livid provide informative materials on their production processes, with Holzweiler offering educational videos on clothing repair and the option to recycle old clothes that can no longer be used. Livid offers free repair services for jeans that have ripped and encourages customers to send in their old

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clothes for recycling, providing a store credit in return. These initiatives reinforce the brands' commitment to good materials, quality, reuse, and timelessness. They also convey a message that the brands prioritize selling durable, high-quality garments rather than constantly pushing new products. These practices are in line with several sustainable principles outlined by Fletcher and Tham, 2019 and Niinimäki, 2015.

### **Emotional sustainability - A personal connection to garments**

The significance of personal engagement and emotional connection between individuals and their garments is a central principle emphasized by several scholars in the field of sustainable fashion (Fletcher, 2012; Fletcher & Tham, 2019; Miller, 2010; Niinimäki, 2015). This principle highlights the role of user behavior and social practices in fostering durability. When individuals have a strong personal connection to their clothing, it enhances their comfort and increases their commitment to using and caring for the garments. According to a study conducted by Wennberg, 2019, doubling the user-ship and durability of a garment can halve the environmental impact associated with its production. Thus, emotional sustainability holds significant importance in the realm of sustainable fashion.

This perspective is echoed by Miller, 2010, who emphasizes the significance of clothing beyond its superficial aspects. By challenging the notion that clothing is primarily about consumption, trends, and constant style changes, we can shift our focus to viewing consumption as a means for individuals to express themselves. Instead, the emphasis should be on fostering a new meaning to our garments, moving away from consumption-centric approaches, and cultivating personal connections with our clothing.

The importance of creating a personal connection to clothing in order to reduce consumption and shift the approach to clothing away from consumption, is something the three brands effectively encourage. Holzweiler and Livid place a strong emphasis on creating narratives around their products, actively fostering a

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sense of personal connection. They have taken this approach to such an extent that the garments themselves carry a statement or story, which some consumers may resonate with or aspire to embody. This focus on exclusivity presents certain challenges, which will be explored in the subsequent section. However, when individuals feel personally connected to a garment, they tend to wear it for longer periods. If Holzweiler and Livid's narrative and philosophy, which aim to cultivate an appreciation for the value and uniqueness of each clothing item, appeal to consumers, it has the potential to contribute to a shift in the approach to fashion.

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Based on the analysis of Pierre Robert, Holzweiler, and Livid's websites, it can be interpreted that these brands align with sustainable principles. However, there are still several barriers to achieving sustainable fashion that have not been fully addressed, both from the perspective of consumers and the existing literature. The challenge of pricing can potentially lead to the association of sustainable clothing with status and trends. Additionally, the financial aspect poses challenges for clothing brands that need to sell products and generate revenue. It is essential to address these barriers in order to effectuate a meaningful shift in the clothing industry. The current discussion has opened up an avenue to explore the barriers hindering the progress of sustainable fashion. By addressing these challenges, we can foster a comprehensive understanding of the obstacles impeding change and develop effective strategies to overcome them. This approach will contribute to the overall goal of achieving a sustainable and transformative clothing industry. Despite the evident emphasis on sustainability by these three brands, there exist certain concerns pertaining to their self-presentation. Such concerns can potentially impede the process of overcoming barriers in adopting a sustainable approach to clothing.

Regarding pricing, Livid and Holzweiler are situated in the same region, whereas Pierre Robert offers notably lower prices. These price differentials align with the

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respective brand philosophies. While the reasons behind the significantly higher costs of Holzweiler and Livid compared to Pierre Robert are speculative, it could be attributed to factors such as perceived quality and a desire for exclusivity. It is noteworthy that Pierre Robert, being owned by the large wholesaler Orkla Norway, enjoys stronger economic stability in comparison to the relatively small and new ventures of the other two brands in the clothing industry. Furthermore, Holzweiler and Livid offer additional services such as free repairs and a product-selling platform. Holzweiler also exhibits comprehensive supply chain transparency, which incurs additional expenses. However, the speculation of price differences is not significant to this discussion.

However, affordability was a major concern expressed by consumers in interviews, posing a barrier to accessing and purchasing sustainable clothing. Expensive prices associated with sustainable practices create challenges for wider accessibility. While the issue of limited accessibility and affordability for sustainable clothing is acknowledged, clothing brands find it challenging to reduce prices due to the substantial costs associated with producing garments using sustainable practices, as emphasized by the insights shared by the interviewed brands. However, it is crucial to address this issue despite the previous chapter's argument against solely considering its negative impact. As Brooks, 2019 suggests, neglecting this matter may harm the important discourse on overproduction. Griskevicius et al., 2010's study reveals that individuals are motivated to purchase green products for personal status, aligning with the growing sustainability trend. This effect is particularly pronounced when shopping in public and when green products are more expensive compared to non-green alternatives. Such purchases provide individuals with a positive reputation for displaying their pro-environmental stance. The visibility of the product also influences the strength of this effect. These findings, combined with Brooks, 2019 arguments, indicate that consumption is predominantly driven by clothing industry trends, advertisements, and marketing, shaping societal norms.

The primary concern to address is the potential impact of the high price tags

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associated with Livid and Holzweiler on the perception that being environmentally conscious necessitates significant financial resources. This notion can be detrimental as it perpetuates social divisions, contrasting individuals who can afford sustainable products with those who cannot. Such a narrative contradicts the underlying principles of sustainability in the clothing industry, as advocated by Fletcher and Tham, 2019, who call for an inclusive fashion system that amplifies marginalized voices. Associating sustainable clothing solely with status and affluence shifts the focus away from its essential aspect, namely making sustainable choices. This societal division has far-reaching consequences, symbolizing sustainability as an attribute of an elite, upper-class group. It also poses challenges for brands genuinely aspiring to embrace sustainability and hinders sustainable development. The interviews with consumers and related literature indicate the detrimental effects of greenwashing, a phenomenon that emerged when sustainability gained attention in the clothing industry. This has led to negative repercussions, including individuals disengaging from sustainability, undermining the real issues at hand, and enabling business-as-usual practices that harm both people and the planet. The interviewed clothing brands also highlighted this challenge. Such effects are hazardous, as they can result in counterproductive trends, as suggested by Brooks, 2019, where the focus shifts towards purchasing more products under the guise of being environmentally friendly rather than embracing the intended message behind sustainable fashion. It is crucial to note that this discussion does not involve speculating on the authenticity of the brands' intentions, as it is irrelevant to this discussion.

An intriguing aspect to consider is how Pierre Robert differentiates itself from Holzweiler and Livid in terms of brand positioning. While Holzweiler and Livid have developed a strong brand narrative centered around sustainable principles, Pierre Robert adopts a more discreet strategy. Nonetheless, it can be argued that Pierre Robert has created a statement and label for its brand by positioning itself as environmentally friendly through the sale of its products. However, Pierre Robert's clothing does not possess distinct characteristics beyond simplicity and basic design, making it less visibly identifiable as a sustainable brand. This



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observation aligns with the findings of Griskevicius et al., 2010, which suggest that the status symbol associated with green products is more apparent when the product is more visible. Furthermore, Pierre Robert operates within a different price segment compared to the other two brands. According to Griskevicius et al., 2010, more expensive green products tend to be more popular as they diminish the status symbol associated with affordability. Notably, Pierre Robert's decision to sell its products in grocery stores aims to remove any specific label and increase accessibility for a diverse range of consumers. This deliberate approach challenges the conventional practice of targeting specific consumer groups.

This aspect holds significance as many brands often target specific consumer groups, catering to their unique preferences and values. For instance, Holzweiler appeals to individuals who value self-expression through clothing, emphasizing artistic symbols, creativity, and uniqueness. On the other hand, Livid targets those intrigued by the narrative and craftsmanship behind garments. In contrast, Pierre Robert adopts a broader approach by selling its products in grocery stores, thereby appealing to a diverse range of consumers. This departure from specific targeting can be considered an important statement by Pierre Robert. Their portrayal and promotion of sustainable principles, combined with a strategy that fosters accessibility and inclusivity, can when reflected through Griskevicius et al., 2010 findings as well as sustainable principles of making fashion open to all voices, be interpreted as a manifestation of a more sustainable approach compared to Holzweiler and Livid. However, it is important to note that relying solely on the notion that expensive and sustainability-promoting brands may inadvertently cause harm would be an oversimplification.

#### 4.3.1 Green to appeal

According to Griskevicius et al., 2010 study, the absence of an exclusivity label attached to Pierre Robert suggests that it may not appeal to the specific consumer group seeking status symbols. However, this does not necessarily indicate that consumers who purchase clothing from Pierre Robert are inherently concerned

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about sustainability or influenced by Pierre Robert's messaging to adopt a different approach to clothing. Consequently, their choice to buy from Pierre Robert cannot be solely attributed to their environmental consciousness or the influence of Pierre Robert's sustainability efforts.

Nevertheless, the entire collection of Pierre Robert reflects a more sustainable stance due to its basic and minimalist approach, as it offers practical and durable clothing. The brand's affordability is aligned with its appeal to consumers who prioritize practicality and may not engage in excessive consumption. In contrast, Holzweiler heavily integrates sustainability into their brand image, leveraging it as a status symbol. On the other hand, Pierre Robert takes a more discreet approach, where sustainability is not positioned as a status symbol or prominently emphasized in their branding, particularly given the simplicity of their clothing offerings. As a result, Pierre Robert can maintain lower prices without significantly impacting high consumption patterns.

While the exact consumer profile cannot be determined with certainty, it can be speculated that Pierre Robert may attract individuals in need of quality, practical clothing without a focus on status considerations, all available at an affordable price point. Pierre Robert aims to appeal to this particular customer segment by selling their products in grocery stores and offering clothing that caters to a wide range of wardrobes.

However, the presence of consumers who purchase green products primarily to display their status is a noteworthy aspect to consider. Griskevicius et al., 2010 findings indicate that these consumers prioritize status over genuine concerns for sustainability. However, it is still important to acknowledge the value in their choice to opt for a sustainable product, because of sustainability as a trend, even if their motivations are primarily driven by status-seeking. In addition to, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of consumers who prioritize status to choose brands such as Holzweiler and Livid that reflect a more genuinely understanding of sustainable principles.

Miller, 2005 challenges the prevailing assumption that consumption has solely

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negative implications and universally leads to specific social characteristics. He contests the notion that consumerism inevitably fosters emulation, status competition, conspicuous consumption, and inherent inequality. Miller's argument serves as a critique of both Brooks, 2019 assertion that consumption is inherently detrimental and exacerbates inequality, as well as Griskevicius et al., 2010 findings that consumerism revolves around status competition. He contends that such a perspective oversimplifies the complex nature of consumerism and presents a misleading portrayal of its dynamics.

In this context, it is crucial to examine the messaging conveyed by these brands to their customers. If consumers purchase products for status reasons, perceiving sustainability as a status symbol and recognizing the brand as fashionable and trendy within society, it implies that the brand's sustainable image is what is currently trending. Griskevicius et al., 2010 argues that individuals purchase status-related items because they care about their appearance. Moreover, Brooks, 2019 suggests that consumption in the global North entails more than merely acquiring a product; it encompasses the selection of a fashion and lifestyle, often portraying this as negative. Miller, 2005 asserts this rather as a positive thing and asserts that consumption holds significant meaning beyond superficiality for individuals.

Brooks, 2019 and Griskevicius et al., 2010 arguments, based on their study, propose that consumption detracts from genuine or authentic experiences and contend that it fosters individualistic and self-interested behavior. Miller, 2005 challenges this notion and posits that consumption practices can be meaningful and authentic for individuals, even when they involve commercial transactions. This implies that if consumers relate to brands like Holzweiler and L'Oréal, even for status reasons, it does not necessarily mean their motivations are superficial. Instead, their engagement with these brands can still hold personal significance and authenticity. Miller further suggests that consumption practices are often embedded in social interactions, relationships, and shared experiences. This indicates that the perception of what is considered "cool" within one's social

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group, for example, can influence their consumption patterns and preferences. Therefore, it becomes essential for brands like Holzweiler and Livid to become the vanguards of the "new cool" to shape consumer behavior. It is important to note that, although consumption is at the core of these interactions, which Fletcher and Tham, 2019 and Brooks, 2019 heavily criticize, Holzweiler and Livid do not focus on excessive consumption or constant trend-chasing. Instead, they prioritize the value and uniqueness of each garment and emphasize the messages conveyed through their clothing. Additionally, they actively promote second-hand clothing as being fashionable.

Miller, 2005, 2010 theoretical framework challenges the prevailing narrative that frames consumption as inherently negative, highlighting the existence of false assumptions and overlooking important facets associated with consumption. Similarly, the discourse surrounding clothing brands' sustainability solely based on their association with the clothing industry oversimplifies the issue and neglects crucial aspects that warrant examination. It is harmful to exclusively portray consumption as intrinsically negative. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of consumption is essential since it can transcend the mere act of acquiring numerous clothes, as unfortunately portrayed by the fast clothing industry. Instead, consumption can serve as an expression of individuality, aligning with Miller, 2010 perspective, which precisely reflects the approach and values promoted by brands like Holzweiler and Livid.

Although this does not negate the presence of privileged indulgence surrounding sustainable brands, it emphasizes the value of adopting a different perspective on consumption. The skepticism towards pricing in relation to sustainable brands often focuses solely on the negative consequences of higher prices. However, it is crucial to recognize that one of the key drivers of over-consumption is the affordability of clothing, wherein excessively cheap prices incentivize increased consumption. In this context, expecting sustainable brands to lower their prices becomes somewhat controversial, as it may potentially perpetuate patterns of over-consumption.

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Examining the literature on sustainable fashion, it suggests that when consumers pay a higher price for a product, they are more likely to value and take better care of it. The steep price tag serves as a deterrent, making individuals think twice before making a purchase and subsequently motivating them to utilize the product for a longer duration. Conversely, the fast fashion literature Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010 highlights that the combination of low prices, low product quality, and the constant influx of new trends leads to a significant disposal rate of garments.

This perspective is echoed by Brooks, 2019. Thus, supporting the notion of higher-priced clothing as a means to address this issue. Additionally, the interviewed clothing brands expressed that adhering to sustainable practices incurs significant costs. Thus, the higher price tags on their garments are not merely a reflection of their desire for profitability but are necessitated by the expenses associated with sustainable practices. The Social Compliance Manager (Brand B), 2023 mentioned that despite the costs, the higher prices of their clothing enable them to pursue these practices. In contrast, fast fashion brands are unable to adopt sustainable practices due to the need to maintain low prices. Implementing such practices would require them to increase prices, which is not feasible within their business model. The discussion surrounding clothing prices is complex, and there is no singular definitive answer regarding what is correct. It is crucial to address all the aspects related to both cheap and expensive clothing when engaging in this discourse.

#### **4.3.2 Clothing as a form of individual expression**

Miller, 2010 invites a reconsideration of clothing as a significant and active agent in our lives, shaping our identities, aesthetics, and interpersonal interactions. It encourages a shift from viewing clothing as a superficial aspect to recognizing its profound influence on our self-expression and personal narratives. In light of this, an examination of consumers' statements on their relationship with clothing presents different reflections of the importance of clothing to their identity.

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While all the interviewed consumers shared the belief that feeling good and comfortable in their clothing, as well as finding items that suit their body and identity, were important, each participant had their own unique approach to clothing.

As previously mentioned, P1 exhibited a strong passion for clothing and adopted an individualistic approach. They enjoyed experimenting with diverse styles and combinations, prioritizing self-expression through distinct pieces rather than conforming to trends. Similarly, P2 embraced a conscious and personal outlook on clothing, placing emphasis on comprehending materials, the story associated with garments, and the values they embody. P2 believed that clothing should surpass external validation, instead focusing on personal thoughts and unique styles. Additionally, P2 underscored the significance of appreciating textiles and the messages they convey, consciously selecting each garment and fostering a personal connection with their clothes. Both P1 and P2 rarely purchased new clothing, as they preferred exploring their existing wardrobe, discovering new styles, and creating innovative combinations. P1 and P2 express a passionate relation to clothing, although rarely purchases new clothing. This aligns with Fletcher and Tham, 2019 noting that the most unsustainable consumption patterns are rarely driven by the most passionate fashion enthusiasts, but by individuals who feel insecure or pressured to conform to specific looks or lifestyles.

P3, P4, and P5 emphasis on sustainability when making clothing purchases. Their understanding of the environmental impact, coupled with their educational backgrounds in related fields and involvement in environmental organizations, influenced their consumption decisions. While personal preference remained a priority in their selection of garments, they consistently considered sustainable factors.

Despite sharing similarities in age, geographic location, and higher education backgrounds, the group of consumers had distinctly different approaches to clothing, thereby illustrating Miller, 2005, 2010 argument that clothing serves as an expression of one's identity. This observation also aligns with Miller, 2005 proposed

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myth that consumerism erases cultural disparities and fosters a standardized global culture, as evidenced by the diverse relationships the six consumers have with clothing. While P1 and P2 display a profound and personalized connection to their garments, it is evident that clothing holds great significance for their self-expression.

Conversely, P3, P4, and P5, while similarly valuing clothing as a means of self-expression, place significant emphasis on sustainability within their style and clothing choices. P1 and P2 also express a preference for second-hand clothing, primarily driven by the allure of finding unique pieces, with sustainability considerations serving as an additional factor, but not a primary one. This underscores Miller, 2005, 2010 assertion that clothing should not be perceived as superficial, as it remains a critical aspect of self-expression. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of not looking at clothing and consumption as inherently bad, as the consumers' emphasis on clothing indicates a more sustainable approach.

The participants acknowledged that their views on clothing had been shaped by various factors. P3, P4, and P5's emphasis on sustainability in clothing stemmed from their exposure to documentaries, media coverage, and their educational or professional backgrounds. These factors increased their awareness of the negative impacts of the clothing industry, leading them to reconsider their consumption habits and prioritize sustainability in their choices. P1 and P3 mentioned the influence of their social environment, with P3 specifically highlighting the sustainable focus within her student community through arrangements like second-hand clothing exchange nights and information sharing. P1 noticed a distinction between herself and her classmates while studying fashion, noting that she exhibited more consumerist tendencies compared to her peers, who predominantly favored second-hand and vintage items, stating:

Most of the people in my class didn't spend a lot of money on clothes and things like that. If they bought clothes, they bought second hand and vintage. I noticed a bit of a difference between me and them, that

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I was perhaps a bit more of a consumer. I purchased more clothing than what they did, because their focus wasn't on buying something new all the time. They had their own style, and it was very cool (P1, 2023).

The exposure to alternative consumption practices had a profound impact on P1's perspective on clothing, prompting a shift in their approach. P2 also noted that their increased knowledge of the history, significance, and personal connection with garments had transformed their consumption patterns and overall outlook on clothing and fashion.

The majority of participants indicated a shift towards consuming less clothing compared to previous years. P3, P4, and P5 attributed this shift in their consumption patterns to an increased understanding of the importance of reducing consumption. P1 and P2 expressed a transition from purchasing a larger quantity of clothes to adopting a more selective approach. P3, P4, and P5 attributed this shift in their consumption patterns to an increased understanding of the importance of reducing consumption. P1 and P2 expressed a transition from purchasing a larger quantity of clothes to adopting a more selective approach. P2 provided the following statement to illustrate their changed approach:

I have filtered down the purchasing very much. When I started my interest in fashion, I thought that I had buy a lot to show off my interest in fashion, because it is a large part of what is considered to be interested in fashion... Now I rather look at the story of the brand, why the garment appeals to me, and the message of the garment. Everything has a message behind it. I can probably give a long story about all the clothes I wear and why (P2, 2023).

The changes in consumers' consumption habits influenced by various factors highlight the importance of initiating an open discussion about clothing and consumption. These transformations also underscore the significant role of trends, media, and social norms within a social group in shaping individuals' consciousness regarding their consumption behaviors. This further emphasizes Miller, 2005 that



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consumption practices are often embedded in social interactions, relationships and shared experiences. This is interesting, as it emphasizes the power trends and social norms has on consumers consumption habits and approaches to clothing. This aligns with existing literature and resonates with the experiences shared by the interviewees, highlighting the influential power that clothing brands possess, as demonstrated in this context through positive influence.

The notion that clothing is merely superficial is, therefore, a harmful oversimplification. Instead, it is essential to recognize the valuable platform that clothing brands offer in fostering a creative and meaningful approach to clothing. By acknowledging the significant impact of trends and social norms, discussions surrounding clothing and consumption can be enriched, promoting a more nuanced understanding of individuals' relationships with their garments and encouraging positive transformations in consumption practices.

## 5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of consumers' perspectives on their relationship with clothing, shedding light on its profound influence on self-expression and personal narratives. The findings challenge the prevailing perception of clothing as a superficial aspect and underscore its active role in shaping identities, aesthetics, and interpersonal interactions, aligning with the arguments put forth by Miller (2005, 2010). By emphasising the significance of consumption in shaping consumers' views on clothing, this study calls for a reevaluation of the notion that consumption is inherently negative or driven solely by superficial social norms imposed by a consumerist society.

The diverse approaches to clothing expressed by the participants reveal the multifaceted nature of this relationship, ranging from passionate and individualistic to sustainability-focused orientations. While acknowledging that the limited dataset of consumers interviewed cannot be fully representative, the study provides valuable insights into the complexity of consumer perspectives and highlights the need for further research to capture a broader range of viewpoints. The participants' backgrounds, including education and social environment, have emerged as influential factors in shaping their heightened awareness of the clothing industry and their subsequent shift towards reduced consumption and more selective choices. This underscores the importance of considering the role of societal influences in promoting sustainable approaches to clothing. Notably, the study reveals the impact of trends propagated through social media, advertising, and engagement with like-minded social groups, suggesting that trends can act as catalysts for positive changes in social norms.

Importantly, this study emphasises clothing brands' contributions and argues that their central role within the clothing industry can potentially play a significant role in effecting systemic change towards sustainable fashion. By leveraging their extensive industry knowledge, trend-setting capabilities, and influence over consumer behaviour, clothing brands have the potential to drive the development of sustainable materials and advanced, energy-efficient recycling technologies. The findings highlight the collaborative efforts and material research undertaken by the interviewed brands, reinforcing their position as key contributors to sustainable practices within the industry.

The study underscores the need for open discussions and a nuanced understanding of clothing and consumption. It challenges the prevailing notion that clothing is merely a superficial aspect and encourages a reevaluation of clothing brands as valuable platforms for fostering creative and meaningful approaches to clothing. By promoting a shift towards a more sustainable and conscious consumption culture, these brands can effectively address the environmental and social challenges associated with the clothing industry.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations, including the small sample size and the potential for participant bias. Future research should aim to incorporate a more diverse and representative sample to further explore consumers' perspectives on clothing and consumption.

In conclusion, this master's thesis contributes to the existing literature by offering an in-depth analysis of consumers' views on clothing, challenging traditional perceptions, and highlighting the influential role of clothing brands in fostering sustainable practices. It underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationship between individuals and clothing, and advocates for a shift towards a more sustainable and conscious approach to consumption.

## 5.1 Limitations and future research

In this section, I will outline the constraints imposed on my research as a result of limited time and the methods employed in my study. Additionally, I will provide suggestions for future research.

Firstly, the limited scope of this 30-credit thesis imposed a constraint on the duration of the study, restricting it to one semester. This restricted time frame influenced the depth and breadth of the research, limiting the ability to explore certain aspects in greater detail. Secondly, an unforeseen challenge arose during the data collection process. The initial phase of getting in contact with clothing brands proved to be challenging as I struggled to get responses. As a result, it became imperative to adapt the research approach accordingly which resulted in the need to modify the research approach. As a consequence, further rounds of data collection with consumers were necessary, thereby extending the overall timeline and introducing a new set of complexities.

Despite these challenges, the extended data collection process yielded a substantial dataset. This larger dataset, comprising diverse information, helped compensate for the limitations of the initial sample selection. Upon reflection, I acknowledge that by pursuing larger datasets for my analysis in a 30-credit master thesis was overly ambitious, potentially introducing unnecessary complexity and burden to the project. It is important to acknowledge that the selection bias inherent in the recruitment process can have influenced the generalizability of the findings.

To address these limitations and encourage future research in this area, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, allocating a longer timeframe for data collection and analysis would allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the research topic. This would enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Additionally, conducting a larger-scale study with a more diverse and representative sample would improve the generalizability of the results. Incorporating multiple research methods, such as surveys or experimental designs, could provide a broader understanding.

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# Appendices

# A Interview protocol - Clothing brands

## **Rolle og bakgrunn**

Kan du kort beskrive hvem du er og din rolle i selskapet?

## **Bærekraft i klesindustrien og i selskapet**

1. Hva vil du si er den eller de største utfordringene i klesindustrien i dag?
2. Hvordan ville du som jobber i selskapet definert bærekraft i klesindustrien?
  - a. Hvordan ville du definert et bærekraftig klesplagg?
  - b. (Når du sier kvalitet/holdbarhet, hva legger du det? (materialbruk?))
3. Hvordan er selskapet mer bærekraftig?
4. Er det noen faktorer og elementer innenfor bærekraft selskapet tenker er viktigst eller som dere vektlegger? (Da tenker jeg litt i banene, produksjon, kvalitet, de sosiale aspekter som for eks arbeidsforhold, direkte miljøskader som kjemikalier osv.)
  - a. Sosiale aspekter som arbeidsforhold har de senere årene blitt en sentral del av bærekraftsbegrepet. Hva tenker selskapet om det?
5. Hvordan er det selskapet klarer å balansere bærekraft og økonomisk interesse? (hensyn til miljø og gode arbeidsforhold med økonomisk overskudd. Vinne kunder,

tjene penger samtidig som å ta hensyn til bærekraft)

- a. Hva slags type utfordringer fører dette eventuelt til?
- b. Er bærekraft en konkurransemessig bekostning eller et fortrinn?

### **Forbruker fokus og ansvar**

6. Hvordan forholder dere dere til at forbrukere er mer opplyste om bærekraft nå enn før med tanke på for eksempel grønnvasking?

- a. Finnes det konkrete ønsker eller behov knyttet til bærekraft som blir etterspurt hos kundene?

7. Hvordan bidrar dere til at forbrukerne kan ta mer bærekraftige valg? (med tanke på at forbrukere er mer opplyste)

- a. Hvordan tenker du at forbrukere kan handle mer bærekraftig?

8. Tenker du at alle har muligheten til å handle mer bærekraftig? (Med tanke på inntekt, økonomi og kjøpekraft)

9. Hvem tenker du er ansvarlig for bærekraft i klesindustrien? (da tenker jeg på bransjen, forbrukere og politikere)

- a. Hvilket ansvar ligger hos hvem?

- b. (Er det noe noen av disse kan gjøre annerledes?)

10. Hva slags posisjon ønsker selskapet å ha i fremtiden når det kommer til bærekraft? Har dere noen konkrete mål?

11. Er det noen andre ting du tenker på som er relevant for dette som vi ikke har snakket om?

# B Interview protocol - Consumers

## **Bakgrunn**

- Hvilken bakgrunn har du?
- Hvor stor interesse vil du si at du har for mote og klær?

## **Forbruker handlemønster**

1. Hvor ofte kjøper du nye klær?
2. I hvilken anledning er det du kjøper nye klær? (Hvorfor kjøper du noe nytt?)
3. Hvilke butikker er det du som oftest handler på?
4. Hva er viktig for deg når du kjøper et plagg? Hva vektlegger du i kjøpet? (billig, kvalitet, materiale, fargene, siste moten og sesong)

## **Bærekraft**

5. Tenker du på bærekraft når du kjøper klær?

- Hvis ja:

Vil du si at du handler mer bærekraftig og hvordan?

Hvorfor syns du det er viktig?

Har du noen bærekrafts kriterier du handler etter, eller kriterier du vektlegger?

- Hvis nei:

Hvorfor tenker du ikke på det når du handler klær?

Er det noe du gjerne skulle blitt bedre på?

Hva skal til for at du skal ta hensyn til bærekraft når du handler klær?

6. Hva tenker du er et bærekraftig plagg?

7. Synes du det er vanskelig å handle mer bærekraftig?

8. Har du noen tanker om hvordan eller hva som skal til for at det kan bli lettere for forbrukere som deg å handle mer bærekraftig?

9. Har du tiltro til bransjens kommunikasjon om bærekraft?

10. Har du noen tanker om hvem som har ansvar for at klesindustrien skal bli mer bærekraftig? (da tenker jeg på bransjen, forbrukere og politikere)

11. Snakker du ofte om bærekraft med venner og familie?

12. Hvordan tenker du klesindustrien kan bli mer bærekraftig?