



## **Finnish Consumers' Attitudes Towards Sustainable Fashion**

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## Abstract

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The objective of the thesis is to learn about the attitudes of Finnish people towards sustainable fashion. The aim is to find out through research if consumers in Finland are interested in sustainable fashion consumption and if they are aware of the negative impacts fashion has on the environment and society. The research questions were: "Are people in Finland interested in consuming sustainable fashion?" and "Are people in Finland aware of the harmful impacts fashion has on the environment and society?"

The theoretical framework was built using data obtained from academic studies, books, articles, and reports. The theory consists of the following topics: definition of fashion and sustainability, sustainable fashion and its other form ethical fashion, impacts fashion has on the environment and society as well as attitudes and behaviours of consumers in sustainable fashion consumption.

A quantitative method was used to answer the research questions. An online questionnaire was conducted for two weeks and it consisted of twelve different questions regarding Finnish consumer attitudes, interests, and awareness of sustainable fashion. The survey also included questions about Finnish consumers' current clothing consumption and disposal habits to determine whether they practice sustainability.

The research found that the majority of the Finnish people were interested in sustainable fashion consumption and are aware of the negative impacts fashion has on society and the environment. Some even expressed willingness to pay more for sustainable fashion. However, despite their positive attitudes, their current clothing consumption habits revealed that ethical and environmental factors do not influence their clothing purchasing decisions.

In conclusion, the study reveals that Finnish people support sustainable fashion. However, to make actual sustainable fashion purchases, they must have the necessary and sufficient knowledge of the consequences of unethical fashion consumption and production.

**Keywords**

Sustainable Fashion, Finnish Consumers, Sustainable Consumption

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## 1 Introduction

Sustainable fashion has become a trending topic today. Fashion brands are starting to re-think their business models and are shifting to more sustainable production and operation. Meanwhile, consumers have become educated about the materials and manufacturing processes, which has resulted in a growing interest in making socially responsible purchases when it comes to their clothing. (Khandual & Pradhan, 2018, 38.) Consumer preferences for ethical products have forced businesses to implement ethical strategies in their businesses. This increased consumer awareness of the impacts of fashion has resulted in the rise of ethical fashion. (Liu et al., 2020, 2.)

The fashion industry has a significant amount of negative impact on the environment and society (Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021, 2). The industry is responsible for environmental pollution, toxic chemicals, low wages, violations of workers' rights, and child labour (Bly, Gwozdz & Reisch 2015, 2). Fashion production consumes an excessive number of natural resources and makes extensive use of chemicals used in fibre production and dyeing, which harms the environment and society daily. The greenhouse gas emissions from the apparel industry account for a significant portion of global carbon emissions, due to the energy used during the production, manufacturing, and transportation of the millions of garments purchased globally each year, forming a complex supply chain. (Pereira, Carvalho, Dias, Costa & António, 2021, 1.)

The fashion industry is currently led by fast-changing trends (Liu et al., 2020, 2). Continuous changes in the fashion industry encourage new designs and sales of fashion products, which drive consumption and, as a result, contribute to the underuse and waste of clothing (Claxton & Kent, 2020, 2). Widespread adoption of fast fashion as a major trend, the increasingly fast-paced cycles and consumer habits, in general, have shifted toward a massive amount of garment acquisition. The rise in the number of apparels purchased yearly by the average consumer has almost doubled fashion production in just two decades. This is due to low prices and the number of clothing collections available to consumers each year due to the fast fashion trend. (Jacometti, 2019, 1.) As a result, over 100 billion articles of clothing are produced each year, with more than half ending up in landfills within a year (Mohr, Fuxman & Mahmoud, 2021, 1).

Consumers can have a significant impact on clothing's long-term sustainability (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2015, 3). Their attitudes are slowly changing due to the poor reputation of cheap textile and clothing production in low-cost countries (Koskela & Vinnari, 2009, 125). According to consumer surveys, many people are aware of the negative environmental impact of the fashion industry, but only a small percentage of them act on it. One reason

for this is that the selection of sustainable clothing is still limited. (Federation, 2020.) Consumers are growing interest towards sustainable products (Todeschini, Cortimiglia & Callargo-de-Menezes, 2017, 760). Although their understanding of the impact fashion consumption has on the world, as well as the meaning of sustainability in general is still limited (La Rosa & Johnson Jorgensen, 2021, 2). However, they have an important role in the implementation of sustainability and are an essential component of it, as they are the force that drives businesses to act a certain way (Pereira et al., 2021, 2). For change to occur, consumers must understand the impact of apparel product care and disposal on environmental sustainability (La Rosa & Johnson Jorgensen, 2021, 2).

### **1.1 Research objective and questions**

The objective of the thesis is to learn about Finish consumers attitudes towards sustainable fashion in Finland. Specifically, if they are interested in sustainable fashion consumption and if they are aware of how fashion impacts the environment and society. Thus, the research focuses on the following questions: 1) Are people in Finland interested in consuming sustainable fashion? 2) Are people in Finland aware of the harmful impacts fashion has on the environment and society?

As stated in the introduction, sustainability is still a growing trend in the Fashion industry, and the offering of sustainably and ethically made clothes is still limited. The author chose this topic because of her interest in sustainable fashion and her plan to start a sustainable fashion brand in Finland. Therefore, this research also serves as market research, and it can be beneficial for others interested in the topic.

### **1.2 Limitations and delimitations**

Limitations are potential weaknesses in research that are beyond the researcher's control. They are linked to the research design, statistical model constraints, funding constraints, or other factors. Delimitations on the other hand are the boundaries researchers establish for themselves regarding the scope of the research. They are related to the research's theoretical background, objectives, research questions, study variables, and study sample. (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018, 156-157.)

The research has a few limitations that must be taken into consideration. First, sustainable fashion and consumer behaviour are broad topics with many dimensions. Due to time and length constraints, the research will focus on data found to be most relevant and accurate to support the research questions. Rather than discussing consumer behaviour theory in general, the research focuses on finding data regarding consumer behaviour and attitudes

in sustainable fashion consumption, as well as the factors that influence them. The second limiting factor is that the research relies on existing data which in this case include academic studies, books, reports, and articles. When using existing data in a study, the researcher must consider factors such as data fitness, which refers to the data's relevance to the research and the quality of the data (Whiteside, Mills & Mccalman, 2012, 506-507). The third limitation is that the survey only focuses on consumers in Finland. As a result, the research's findings may only be relevant to the Finnish market since the survey includes only those living in Finland.

## 2 Introduction to Fashion

Fashion is defined as a social phenomenon that influences how members of a culture or society behave (Tortora, 2014, 1). In everyday life and the social sciences, fashion refers to clothes and accessories worn by people. Fashion is understood to be right in a specific time and context. What is right is determined by a group of people and fashion leaders who people view as having the status to determine what is in fashion. Fashion used to be a limited phenomenon, with only a small percentage of a society able to participate. However, in modern societies, economic well-being has enabled the vast majority of people in many countries around the world to participate in the fashion culture. (Sellerberg & Aspers, 2015, 1.)

The way people dress in society is a nonverbal way of communicating their social status, values, and way of life. Fashion allows people to communicate in a variety of ways, ranging from projecting a basic image of how they look and feel to expressing emotional experiences through interactive elements in their clothing. Everyday fashion is an active process in which people in society consciously distinctively project themselves through their clothing style. Attitudes that serve a value-expressive function assist people in communicating their central beliefs, attitudes, and values to others through their possessions. Fashionable garments and accessories are examples of possessions that help people express who and what they are. (Venkatasamy, 2015, 1-3.)

### 2.1 Sustainable fashion

The term “sustainability” was invented by a German forester, Hans Carl von Carlowitz, several hundred years ago in his 1712 text *Sylvicultura Oeconomica* which was a prescription on how forests should be managed on a long-term basis. However, it was until the 1980 that the term gained widespread adaptation and recognition. With the birth of the modern environmental movement in the late 1960s and 1970s and debates about the limits to growth, environmentalists were eager to demonstrate how environmental issues could be linked to mainstream development issues. (Scoones, 2007, 590.)

Today sustainability is defined by the United Nations’ World Commission on Environment and Development, as an economic development activity that “meets the needs of the present without compromising future generations” (Portney, 2015, 2). Sustainability refers to not only maintaining, renewing, or restoring something specific, but also to the ethical dimension of fairness of trade-off between current economic pressures and future environmental needs (Wilkinson, Hill & Gollan, 2001, 1492). The World Commission on Environment and Development described sustainability as having three co-equal parts. Each of

the parts starts with the letter e: environment, economy, and equity. (Portney, 2015, 6.) It's also known as the triple bottom line, which is based on the idea that business performance should be measured from three perspectives: economic, environmental, and social (Caniato, Caridi, Crippa, & Moretto 2012, 660).

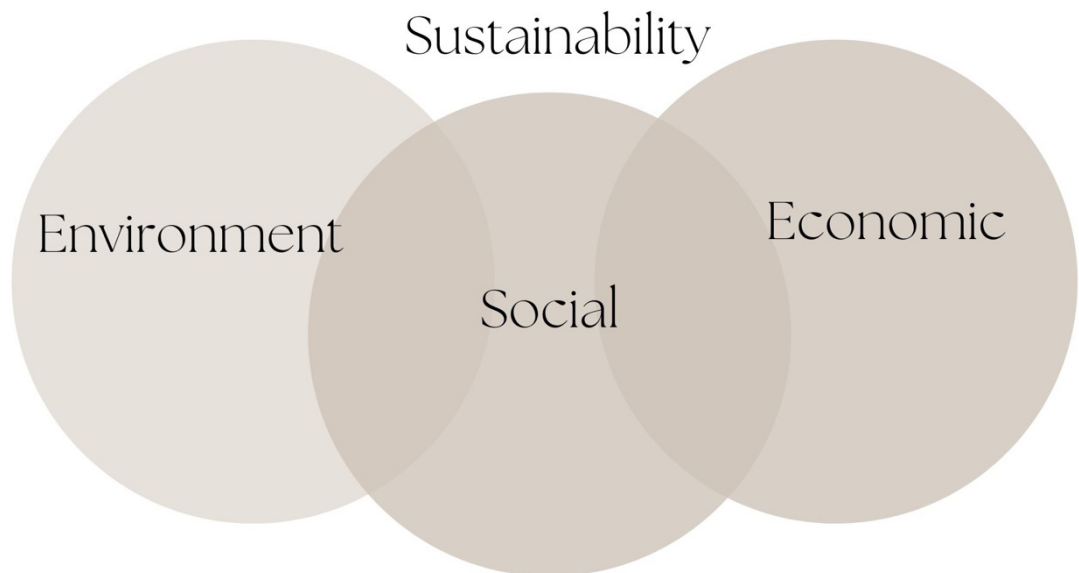


Figure 1. Three circles presenting the three different aspects of sustainability (adapted from Lehtikoinen 2018)

According to the model only by simultaneously protecting the environment, preserving economic growth and development, and promoting equity can sustainability be achieved (Portney, 2015, 7). Therefore, to achieve sustainable development and address the impact on future generations' wealth, companies have to implement a long-term vision and let economic growth sustain social progress and the environment (Caniato et al., 2012, 660).

The environmental dimension of sustainability requires long-term resource viability and emphasizes the problem of environmental degradation and resource shortages. The economic principle refers to a diverse economy that is maintained for a long time while also emphasizing the importance of providing secure, long-term employment. The social aspect of sustainability is concerned with the well-being of people and the community, as well as issues of equity and equality. (Park & Kim, 2016, 3.)

Sustainability in the fashion industry first emerged in the 1960s, when consumers became aware of the environmental impact of clothing manufacturing and demanded that the industry change its practices. Sustainable fashion is part of the slow fashion movement that



has emerged in recent years in response to today's rapidly changing fashion trends and rapid production of clothes. The term sustainable fashion is used synonymously with the terms eco-, green-, and ethical fashion. Although sustainable fashion was initially viewed negatively, this changed with the emergence of anti-fur campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by an interest in ethical clothing in the late 1990s. Sustainable fashion has been referred to as an oxymoron as fashion assumes that something comes in and out of style, which contradicts the long-term perspective of sustainability. (Henninger, Alevisou & Oates, 2016, 1-5.)

Sustainable fashion consists of clothing and accessories that are either reused, recycled, made with low use of resources such as electricity and water, or made from sustainable fabrics (Akdeniz University, 2012, 48). Reusability, reconditioning, and reselling before disposing of the garment are important elements of sustainable fashion. Furthermore, sustainable fashion takes into account several stages where sustainable practices must be implemented. Firstly, the apparel production-chain that includes raw material, textile production, manufacturing, and distribution. Secondly, how the clothes are used by consumers, and lastly post-consumer life which is the disposal of the clothes. (Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021, 4.)

Despite research about the various aspects of sustainable fashion, current studies still lack an academic understanding of what sustainable fashion is in its entirety (Henninger et al., 2016, 2). However, there is a wide range of literature that identifies its' components. In 2017, Anna Brismar, created a Green Strategy diagram to clarify the meaning of sustainable fashion. She identified seven primary forms of sustainable fashion production and consumption from a consumer and producer point of view. These range from producing clothing in a more environmentally friendly manner, buying second-hand/vintage, swapping clothes, and renting, to borrowing clothes rather than purchasing new clothes. The Green Strategy incorporates all aspects of sustainable fashion production and consumption into each new fashion product manufactured. The aim is to combine all aspects of sustainable fashion production and consumption into every new fashion product manufactured. (Mohr et al., 2021, 5-6.)

Sustainable and ethical business practices have put pressure on businesses to comply with environmental, social, and governance principles such as diversity, inclusion, and transparency (Mohr et al., 2021, 5). This has resulted in various industries practicing sustainability misconceptions, including the fashion industry where environmental sustainability has frequently been promoted misleadingly. In the 1990s, environmentally friendly fashion was described in fashion magazines as "pure," "natural," and "recycled," regardless of its production ethics or material origins. Some fashion brands today continue to

promote sustainable commitments primarily through pro-environmental improvements such as resource circularity, recycling, and repair, whereas their pro-social business activities such as workers' rights, anti-discrimination, a living wage, child labour, and so on, particularly in their supply chain, are mostly unknown or less promoted. Likewise, some apparel products are labelled as eco-friendly, conscious, or sustainable even though they lack official certification, have a vague materials list, and lack information on the product's country of origin. (Jestratijevic & Rudd, 2018, 220.)

This phenomenon is known as greenwashing, which is defined as misrepresenting one's commitment to the environment. It indicates that the business is aware of its poor environmental performance but communicates positively about it. (Henninger et al., 2016, 4.) Since environmental and sustainability issues are complex, it is easy to mislead consumers, and businesses can use sustainability as a marketing tool (Niinimäki, 2013, 7).

## **2.2 Ethical fashion**

Since the 1980s, there has been a rise in ethical fashion awareness among both producers and consumers, particularly in terms of ethical sourcing and apparel production (Gordart & Seong, 2017, 12). Consumers today are concerned not only about high-quality products, but also about corporate social responsibility and sustainability, and their preference for ethical products has become a driving factor for businesses to use ethical strategies in their business (Liu et al., 2020, 5). The term "ethical" is a relatively new addition to the fashion vocabulary, and it's frequently applied to the environmental impacts and the well-being of those involved in producing the clothing. Fair working conditions, a sustainable business model, organic and environmentally friendly materials certifications, and traceability are all part of ethical fashion. (Henninger et al., 2016, 2.)

Ethical fashion integrates fair trade principles with fair labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton. In terms of the social dimension, ethical fashion, rather than supplying raw materials, allows developing countries to tap into their traditions and culture, deliver finished products, and harness the power of national branding. According to another definition, ethical fashion is an approach to clothing design, sourcing, and manufacturing that maximizes benefits to people and communities while minimizing environmental impact. (Haug & Busch, 2015, 4.) Thus, ethical fashion falls under the umbrella of sustainability in terms of fair working conditions, a sustainable business model, organic and environmentally friendly materials, transparency, and is considered to be an important part of fashion companies' Corporate Social Responsibility (Mohr et al., 2021, 6).

According to Mukherjee, (2015, 33), Ethical fashion refers to:

- Products made by using organic raw materials
- Fabric colouring process that doesn't include harmful chemicals or bleaches
- Textiles that have been recycled and reused
- Products that are designed to last so that people will keep them for a longer period of time
- Fair trade products that are produced by people who are paid fairly and have decent working conditions

### **3 Impacts of fashion**

Fashion has many negative effects on the environment and society, especially for those at the very bottom of the supply chain. Due to the low cost of labour and the lack of strict standards and regulations surrounding social and environmental issues, outsourcing production to developing countries has become a popular choice for fashion companies. In developing countries, social issues such as worker rights, poor working conditions, long hours, low wages, child labour, and health and safety issues continue to be a source of concern. The environmental impacts of fashion production and use of apparel throughout its lifespan include wastewater emissions, solid waste production, and significant resource depletion due to water, mineral, fossil fuel, and energy consumption. (Kozłowski, Bardecki & Searcy, 2012, 17.)

The rise in textile production and fashion consumption has resulted in the emergence of fast fashion, a business model that provides consumers with low-cost and trend-driven fashion at a fast pace (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 1). Fast fashion has led to an increase in the volume of products with shorter life cycles, as well as a deflation of retail prices, to attract customers into stores as frequently as possible to increase purchasing frequency. The time it takes to make these clothes is very short, often less than a month, and items are constantly replaced to keep up with the trends. Fashion trends change frequently, resulting in new designs and sales of fashion products, which drive consumption and, as a result, contribute to issues in the environment and society. (Pereira et al., 2021, 6.)

#### **3.1 Fashion impact on environment**

The textile industry has had significant environmental issues related to its manufacturing process, which is caused by the extensive use of chemical products and natural resources, resulting in a high environmental impact (Caniato et al., 2012, 661). It's estimated that the textile industry uses more than 15,000 different chemicals during the manufacturing process beginning during fibre production. Many of the chemicals used in textile manufacturing are linked to spinning and weaving lubricants, accelerators, and solvents, as well as wet processing of bleaches, surfactants, softeners, dyestuffs, antifoaming agents, and durable water repellents, including others. (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 5.) The use of petrochemicals, which are non-renewable resources are used to make polyester and nylon, two of the most commonly used synthetics in the apparel industry (Mukherjee, 2015, 25).

The production of these synthetics consumes a large amount of energy which has extensive environmental implications, including the release of greenhouse gasses. For example, synthetic fibre rayon, a cellulose raw material, is made using a chemical-intensive process from bamboo or wood pulp and contributes to deforestation and pollution in developing countries. The viscose rayon process uses carbon disulphide, a toxic chemical that is known to be harmful to human reproduction, posing risks to factory workers, nearby communities, and the environment through air emissions and wastewater. (Mukherjee, 2015, 26.)

Throughout its operations, the textile industry consumes a large amount of water. Wet processing produces the most wastewater of all the steps involved in textile processing. (Mukherjee, 2015, 27.) Bleaching, dyeing, printing, and washing clothes are all part of wet processing (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 3). Most of the fashion's global water consumption is the result of cotton cultivation. Cotton is one of the most widely used and adaptable fibres in the clothing industry (Claudio, 2007, 450). It also has the highest water footprint compared to any fashion fibre (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 3).

Over half of the world's cotton plantations require irrigation and most of these farms are grown in regions where water is deficient. These cotton farms produce over 70% of the total cotton in the world. The Aral Sea is a well-known example of the consequences of water depletion. During the period between 1960 and 2000, the Aral Sea in Central Asia lost nearly 70% of its quantity as a result of diverting water from rivers that flowed to the sea to grow cotton in the desert. (Mukherjee, 2015, 25.) It was estimated from trade relations that 20% of the water loss in the Aral Sea was due to cotton consumption in Europe. Textiles and fashion are linked to 7% of global groundwater and drinking water losses due to water use, particularly in China and India's water-deficient manufacturing regions. The fashion industry also has an impact on local water supplies since it generates wastewater. As some chemicals used in manufacturing are toxic, improperly treated wastewater that enters local groundwater potentially degrades the entire ecosystem. In Cambodia, for example, the fashion industry has caused a significant amount of water pollution and chemical pollution. (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 3.)

The majority of textile manufacturing processes produce pollutants into the atmosphere. The textile industry's second-largest pollution problem has been identified as gaseous emissions (Mukherjee, 2015, 26). The fashion industry's high carbon footprint is the result of its high energy consumption, which is influenced by the energy source. Textile manufacturing in China, for example, relies on coal-based energy and has a 40% higher carbon footprint compared to textiles made in Turkey or Europe. High energy demands and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are associated with textile manufacturing and consumer use, along with air

shipments. According to an estimate of the life-cycle emissions of a cotton T-shirt based on 50 washes, textile manufacturing is responsible for 35% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, whereas 52% is generated during the use phase. However, energy consumption and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are highest during the beginning of the fibre extraction stage of the clothing life cycle, especially for synthetic fibres as natural fibres have a smaller carbon footprint compared to synthetic fibres. To reduce the greenhouse gases caused by the fashion industry, production volumes and non-renewable energy use are to be replaced with renewable plant-based textiles, and sustainable shipping and garment usage should be considered. (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 5.)

From the sourcing of raw materials to textile production, garment manufacturing, and distribution to retail stores, textile production generates a large amount of waste. Textile waste can be categorized into production waste, pre-consumer waste, and post-consumer waste. Production waste includes fibres, yarns, fabric scraps, and apparel cuttings generated by fibre producers, textile factories, and fabric and apparel manufacturers. Waste can be different depending on the manufacturing method used and where the waste is generated. Fabric cut-offs and fabric roll ends are a significant source of waste, particularly in the manufacturing industry. (Yalcin-Enis, Kucukali-Ozturk & Sezgin, 2019, 33.) Fabric waste is created during the cutting phase of clothing construction. It's influenced by how well flat patterns are designed to fit on the fabric, as well as the overall design of the clothing. Furthermore, mistakes in the assembly of the clothing result in waste. (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 7.) Production waste can be disposed of in three ways. It can end up in landfills or waste incinerators. It can also be either transformed into energy to power the manufacturing process or sold to a textile waste recycler, who can process it into fibres that can be used to make new recycled fabrics, apparel, or non-apparel items. (Yalcin-Enis et al., 2019, 33.)

Pre-consumer waste in the fashion industry is created during the manufacturing of textiles and clothes (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 7). It's made of products that have been manufactured with design mistakes, fabric faults, or improper colour combinations for sale and consumption. Thus, pre-consumer waste is unsold and damaged products. Pre-consumer waste can be disposed of in a variety of ways. For instance, it can be sent directly to the company's outlets or sold to other outlets. Retailers can also send it directly to non-profit organizations or landfills. However, the latter option is the least common option since pre-consumer waste still has resale value. Fashion retailers are using these options in a variety of ways. Swedish fashion brand H&M, for instance, sells these items in its stores, whereas Marks & Spencer donates them to charities. (Yalcin-Enis et al., 2019, 33.)

Recently there has been a rise in a new type of pre-consumer waste known as deadstock. Deadstock is labelled as waste, and it consists of clothes that are new, unworn, unsold, or returned especially after being purchased online. Many fashion companies store unsold stock in warehouses or burn them at waste-to-energy plants. Even though the burning of unsold clothes recovers some energy from the products, it produces more emissions and air pollutants than reuse or recycling. However, the environmental impact of energy, materials, water, and chemicals used in the production of unsold apparel, which presents a large amount of resource waste, continues to be a source of concern. (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 7.)

Post-consumer waste is clothing that has been discarded because it is no longer wanted or needed by the consumer. Consumers can discard these clothes when they become worn out, damaged, outgrown or out of fashion. The amount of post-consumer waste is extremely large, and it's equal to the rate at which fibre is consumed. Despite some of this post-consumer waste is donated to charities or given to friends and family, the majority of it is thrown away and ends up in landfills. (Yalcin-Enis et al., 2019, 34.) In order to create an effective recycling system for all textile waste, recycling clothes should become common among consumers, as well as slowing down the apparel production and consumption (Niinimäki et al., 2020, 7).

### **3.2 Fashion impact on society**

Fashion impacts the social environment in many ways. Sweatshops, child labour, and worker rights have all become permanent issues in the fashion industry as a result of the global shift of production to countries with lower labour costs. (Dimitrova, 2020, 29.) In the 1990s the industry was faced with a public backlash due to the lack of social responsibility and accountability of factories in developing countries (Kozlowski et al., 2012, 16). Low wages, modern slavery, migrant exploitation, gender discrimination, and inequality (as the majority of workers are young females), verbal, sexual, and physical abuse, and forced overtime are all common practices in outsourced manufacturing locations around the world (Dimitrova, 2020, 29).

The use of sweatshop labour prompted the industry to reevaluate and implement codes of conduct, sourcing policies, and corporate social responsibility policies and practices (Kozlowski et al., 2012, 16). Sweatshops refer to production facilities that lack basic safety and comfort features, such as air ventilation, space between workstations, storage space, and accessible fire exits (Skov, 2008, 12). The sweatshop free concept on the other hand refers to transparency regarding working conditions as well as opposition to the practice of outsourcing production to developing countries in search of low wage labor (Todeschini et

al., 2017, 763). Sweatshop practices have a number of negative consequences, including labour law violations, severe safety and health effects on workers, labour abuses. Many brands, including H&M, Nike, and Adidas, have been accused of using sweatshops to produce their clothing. (Dimitrova, 2020, 29.)

Workshops in developing countries can have less strict regulations compared to those in developed countries. Workers' health suffers as a result of poor working conditions. (Mukherjee, 2015, 31.) This is due to the extensive use of chemicals, pesticides, and other toxins in the process (Dimitrova, 2020, 30). These toxic chemicals can cause headaches, coughs, backache, skin diseases, asthma, miscarriage, acidity, eyestrain, burns, and other injuries (Mukherjee, 2015, 31). To meet deadlines, many workers are forced to work long hours with little to no rest. In addition, low wages keep the majority of workers and their families trapped in a poverty cycle. (Dimitrova, 2020, 30.)

Furthermore, factory fires and building collapses in recent years have brought a new focus on the health and safety of apparel workers around the world. For example, in 2013 Rana Plaza, an apparel factory building in Bangladesh collapsed claiming 1134 Lives. In 2012 Ali Enterprises factory in Pakistan caught fire killing more than 250 workers, and a leather factory fire in 2016 caused the death of 13 people. Both are also cases of the dangerous conditions in supply chains across South Asia and how the neglect of the workplace endangers human lives. (Prentice, De Neve, Mezzadri & Ruwanpura, 2018, 3.)

Child labour is a significant issue in the fashion industry fashion as most of the supply chain requires low-skilled labour. Some tasks are better suited to children than adults which is why employers prefer to hire children for their small fingers, which do not damage the crop, or for beading, sequins, and assembling jewellery. (Dimitrova, 2020, 30.) Children are employed at all stages of the supply chain, including cottonseed production, cotton harvesting, and yarn spinning mills, as well as all phases of the cut-make-trim stage. In addition to working in fields, children also work in large formal factories, small informal factories, subcontracted workshops, and their own homes. In apparel factories, children work on a variety of tasks which include sewing buttons, dyeing, cutting and trimming threads, folding, moving, and packing garments. Many countries practice child labour such as India, Uzbekistan, China, Bangladesh, Egypt, Thailand, and Pakistan. Child labour is rarely detected by corporate social routine inspections as illegal workers and child workers are many times hidden. Many workers also do not have official proof of age and identification papers. (Overeem & Theuws, 2014, 2.)

There has been evidence that workers can be taught how to answer auditors' questions and that false records can be presented as evidence to hide labour violations (Prentice et



al., 2018, 6). According to The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which has been adopted by almost all countries around the world, all work done by children under the age of fifteen and all potentially dangerous work done by children under the age of eighteen is illegal. (Overeem & Theuws, 2014, 3.) The International Labour Organization has also made it one of its goals to eliminate child labour. However, it still remains a challenge in the apparel and textiles industry, due to the difficulty of monitoring subcontractors, indirect workers, and home workers. (Mukherjee, 2015.) Furthermore, most child labour happens in the informal sector, agriculture, services, and small-scale production. These locations are typically not fully covered by national legislation making it difficult to implement and comply with international child labour legislation. (Dimitrova, 2020, 30.)

Animals are also used in fashion production as they are an important part of the process due to materials like wool, leather, and fur (Mukherjee, 2015, 31). Animal rights refer to the idea that nonhuman animals' basic needs, such as the avoidance of suffering, should be treated equally to human needs. Animal rights activists argue that animals should not be treated as property or as resources for human use but rather as legal individuals and members of society. (Skov, 2008, 14.)

Animals may be neglected or mistreated as a result of poor farming practices, with possible symptoms such as malnutrition, infections, and illness (Mukherjee, 2015, 31). Other issues relating to animal rights include large-scale industrial production and the associated livestock farming, which causes ethical issues due to the living conditions of animals (Dimitrova, 2020, 29). A series of laws have been approved at the international level (EU) that limit the use of animals to meet human needs and desires (Planthin, 2016, 56).

## 4 Fashion consumption

Fashion means different things to different people, and some people value it more than others. For example, people with materialistic values are more involved in fashion consumption and rely on external factors to portray themselves. (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, 4.) Consumption is defined as the act of satisfying one's needs. Needs are defined as desires that arise from an individual's physiological and social circumstances. Desires are specific ways of meeting needs and they are influenced by psychological and social factors. (Nerurkar, 2016, 2.) In today's society, consumers are not only meeting their basic needs but also their wants and desires through constant consumption. Freedom, individuality, and uniqueness are achieved through consumption and possessing, and consumers form their identities, social appearances, and individual lifestyles through these actions. (Niinimäki, 2011, 34-36.)

Fashion clothing is considered a high-involvement product in which consumers buy items to project the desired image. After acquiring one item, they will be on the lookout for another to achieve the lifestyle they desire. (Nerurkar, 2016, 2.) Consumer choices in the clothing industry are led by fashion and trends. Consumers do not consider sustainability when shopping for clothing. Price and style are more important. (Niinimäki, 2010, 5.) As trends in fashion are constantly changing, it results in consumers wanting to keep up with the latest trends to be in style, and once the consumer has obtained the product that he or she desires, there will be a need for a newer product. This consumer habit toward fast fashion is often in conflict with sustainability. (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, 4.)

While clothing is considered a basic human need, many people's clothing decisions are driven by their desire for identity and self-esteem. Among all ages of people, clothing has been reported to be an important lifestyle product that plays a significant role in self-expression. (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2015, 4.) The majority of people consume fashion to feel accepted, to improve their appearance, to flaunt their social status, and to gain acceptance from others. In essence, people form opinions about others based on the brands they wear. (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, 5).

### 4.1 Consumer behaviour in sustainable fashion consumption

In sustainable fashion consumption, consumers have expressed growingly that they are concerned about the social consequences of their purchases, particularly when human rights in factories are violated. Sweatshop labour has been identified as the most significant ethical concern when making clothing decisions. (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, 6.) Furthermore, consumers are expressing a desire to buy green products and are even willing

to pay more for them (Pereira et al., 2021, 8). Ethical values such as social justice, equality, as well as the desire to support the environment have been identified as key factors in sustainable fashion consumption (Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021, 6). Previous studies show that both internal and external factors influence sustainable consumption behaviour (Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021, 7). Internal factors such as knowledge are often cited as prerequisites for environmentally conscious behaviour and many social campaigns have attempted to change consumer behaviour by raising consumer awareness (Bly, Gwozdz & Reisch, 2015, 6). Other internal factors can include lack of concern for the environment, distrust of fashion companies, lack of financial resources, or demographic characteristics. External factors on the other hand can be high prices of sustainable clothes, a limited selection of sustainable options, social expectations, and cultural norms. (Bianchi & Gonzalez, 2021, 7.)

Ethical consumers are individuals who consider the impact of their purchases on other people, animals, and the environment. Even so, some consumers are only concerned with acquiring their wants and needs, while others believe that personal desires should always come second to humanity's well-being and that consumers should only be driven by necessity. (Pereira et al., 2021, 8.) According to a study conducted in Finland on eco-fashion consumption and consumer buying decisions, consumers consider aspects related to ethics and the environmental impact of products during the purchase journey however these thoughts, decrease at the time of purchase. This can be related to personality traits, as well as ethical commitment. (Domingos, Vale & Faria 2022, 2.)

Those who feel positively about sustainable consumption will have positive values, emotions, intentions, and knowledge of sustainability issues (McKeown & Shearer, 2019, 5). Therefore, consumers who have a higher level of ethical commitment and stronger values, put more importance on their values rather than on attributes related to their appearance. This makes them more likely to engage in sustainable fashion consumption. (Domingos et al., 2022, 2.) In turn, a lack of understanding of ethical issues in fashion will lead to non-purchasing behaviour in the consumption of sustainable fashion (McKeown & Shearer, 2019, 5). However, regardless of environmental concerns, consumers are more likely to donate, recycle, or hand down clothing if the facilities for doing so are widely available and easy to use (Bly et al., 2015, 6).

There is a model known as the theory of planned behaviour that is commonly used in understanding sustainable consumption behaviour. According to this model, three factors determine behavioural intention, which then leads to actual behaviour. These are attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Although the theory of planned behaviour is a good predictor of purchase intentions and consumer behaviour, it's

based on the assumption that people act rationally. (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, 420.) An individual's attitude toward a specific behaviour is defined as how positively they view the behaviour in question. The subjective norm refers to whether or not an individual will consider social pressure when deciding whether or not to act on a particular behaviour. (Liu et al., 2020, 5.) It has been stated that social motivators are more powerful than personal motivators in influencing ethical behaviour (Niinimäki, 2010, 3). In fashion, consumers are more likely to adopt ethical fashion behaviours if they believe that other people close to them, such as family members, close friends, or colleagues, are doing so. Perceived behavioural control on the other hand refers to an individual's view of how easy or difficult it is to perform a specific behaviour, and it depends on previous experiences and expected obstacles. (Liu et al., 2020, 6.) Intentions are motivating factors that have an impact on one's behaviour. When the intention is powerful, the behaviour is more likely to be implemented. Non-motivational factors such as opportunities and resources, impact behaviour as well. (Niinimäki, 2011, 3.)

Studies show an incompatibility between consumer-perceived sustainable behaviours and those suggested as sustainable by scientific studies (Bly et al., 2015, 5). Even reports from those who claim to be committed to sustainable practices show a lack of understanding of how to care for clothing in a sustainable manner (Harris et al., 2015, 2). For example, some consumers try to be environmentally conscious by purchasing items that can be worn for a long time such as those made with natural fibres or recycled fibres. However, lifecycle assessments show that, depending on the resource and impact being measured, natural fibres such as wool and cotton often have a higher environmental impact compared to synthetic fibres. Other consumer-perceived sustainable actions can be through attempting to extend the aesthetic and physical durability of clothing by repairing or repurposing. Consumers can also limit their washing and drying habits, although that is usually done for the sake of maintaining clothing or saving money rather than for environmental reasons. Consumers can also dispose of their clothes by throwing them away, giving or selling them to another person or a second-hand shop, donating them to charity, or lending it to another person. (Bly et al., 2015, 5.) Although, according to research, consumer motivation for disposing of fashion items is commonly associated with making wardrobe space and the possibility of purchasing new fashion items, either second-hand or new (Swain & Sweet, 2020).

Research has found that consumers use wilful ignorance to avoid stress when purchasing products that may have been produced under unethical conditions such as child labour or poor working conditions. Although some consumers do not want to consume products that harm or distress the producer or worker, knowledge of these ethical issues could encour-

age consumers to reject a brand that is found to practice activities that are considered unjustified. Thus, it leads to a conflict of morals and beliefs, or rejection of ethical knowledge, to avoid dissatisfaction with an otherwise desirable product. This happens particularly when ethical products require a level of sacrifice on the part of the consumer. As a result, consumers avoid learning about unethical practices to protect themselves emotionally, which prevents them from learning about the manufacturing process. However, if ethical information is available, consumers will consider it alongside other relevant attributes. (Ritch & Schröder, 2012, 203- 205.)

Consumers can also justify or neutralize the consequences of unethical behaviour by denying responsibility, denying the injury, denying the victim, condemning the condemners, and appealing to higher loyalties (Haug & Busch, 2015, 8). Trust can also affect consumers ethically purchasing decisions. Previous research has shown that trust is essential for most economic interactions when there is uncertainty. Most consumers lack the technical expertise and other resources to verify ethical claims, therefore trust in ethical fashion consumption is essential for consumers to buy it. In addition, many consumers fear being deceived when purchasing products that make ethical claims. Especially since ethical fashion is usually more expensive than fast fashion, due to labour, materials, and certification are all expensive. (Liu et al., 2020, 7.)

#### **4.2 Consumer attitudes in sustainable fashion consumption**

Consumers are generally supportive of sustainability (Liu et al., 2020, 2). As a result of their increased awareness of the effects of their purchasing behaviour, consumers have developed a new form of buying behaviour that involves responsible consumption. They use boycotting companies or brands as well as ethical purchasing to express their values. (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, 420.)

However, to make ethical purchases, they must have the necessary information. In consumer behavioural studies, knowledge is perceived as a way to establish trust and thus reduce uncertainty in economic interactions. Positive attitudes toward sustainable or ethical consumption would be improved if people were more informed about environmental issues. (Liu et al., 2020, 2.) According to the hypothesis, consumers will wisely choose products with less environmental impact if they have information about the life cycles of different products and their environmental impact. This approach to sustainability also emphasizes consumer responsibility, and it is presumed that by sharing more information, the number of ethical products on the market will increase. (Koskela & Vinnari 2009, 3.) Therefore, it can be said that consumer engagement in sustainable fashion consumption

is depended on their awareness and understanding of the issues that affect sustainability, as well as availability (Ritch & Schröder, 2012, 203).

Media coverage can also influence consumer awareness of environmental and social issues in fashion production leading to more positive consumer behaviour. Although some consumers are aware of the issues, confusion, and scepticism about whether their purchase will make a difference are common when they are considering ethical options. They are often confused and overwhelmed by a large amount of existing information concerning ethical issues in fashion. (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, 420-421.)

Consumer knowledge has been linked to information overload, in which too much information, often contradictory, can overwhelm consumers and make them feel powerless to act (Bly et al., 2015, 6). Consumers are unsure whether the information they obtain is reliable, and they tend to avoid companies that have been criticized for unethical behaviour because it appears to be easier than actively seeking out ethical alternatives. Consumers also believe that businesses make ethical claims primarily for marketing purposes, to justify higher prices, increase profits, and gain a competitive advantage. This is a sceptical way of thinking that demonstrates the consumer's lack of knowledge, and as a result, it creates stereotypes of ethical and unethical businesses. (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, 422.)

### **4.3 The gap between attitude and behaviour in sustainable fashion consumption**

There is often a gap between what consumers say and what they do when it comes to ethical consumption (Haug & Busch, 2015, 7). In 2009 a survey was conducted in Finland regarding consumer interest, attitudes, and expectations in ethical fashion consumption. Most people were interested and felt positive about ethical consumption and products. In terms of actual ethical consumer behaviour, 20.8% agreed that they do so, while 57.1% agreed only slightly. (Koskela & Vinnari, 2009, 126.) This shows that despite their positive attitude toward environmental protection, fashion consumers do not always purchase eco-fashion (Chan & Wong, 2012, 195). This is a finding that has been attributed to a variety of factors, including cost, interest, availability, and lack of knowledge (Bly et al., 2015, 5). Even if they are interested in ethical consumption, consumers do not want to make ethical choices if it causes them inconvenience in the form of higher prices, lower quality, or shopping discomfort (Niinimäki, 2011, 38). It's also known as the attitude-behaviour gap between fashion consumers' environmental protection interests and ethical consumption.

When it comes to ethical consumption, fashion consumers differ from those in other industries. Consumers in the food industry, for example, are more committed to ethical consumption because food directly affects their health, and their choice reflects a benefit to them. Consumers in the fashion industry, on the other hand, are less committed to sustainable consumption because unethical choices have no direct impact on their health and well-being. (Chan & Wong, 2012, 195.) This is further explained by the fact that consumers may be hesitant to adopt more ethical practices because of feeling too physically and culturally separated from the issues (Haug & Busch, 2015, 8). Furthermore, consumers can find sustainable fashion unappealing and unsuitable for their wardrobe needs (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, 6). This is because eco-clothing is a niche market since it does not reflect the wide range of consumer lifestyles (Niinimäki, 2010, 5).

Consumers have stated that factors such as price, quality, and appearance of clothing would surpass ethics when making clothing decisions, implying that it is not enough for clothing to be environmentally friendly, but it must also appeal to the consumer's aesthetic needs. (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, 6.) Therefore, to produce more desirable eco-clothing, environmental factors must be combined with good design and fashion (Niinimäki, 2010, 5). Another explanation for the inconsistency between consumers' attitudes and behaviours is time pressures and information overload as mentioned earlier. Consumers often don't have time and they don't want to waste time when shopping, which leads to decreased searching activity for ethical alternatives, as a result, a consumer's disregard for ethical aspects. In terms of information overload, consumers nowadays have access to a wide range of products and are overwhelmed with comparing competing brands. As a result, there is withdrawal and a stronger focus on factors such as price, while ethical issues get ignored. (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, 422.)

While fashion consumers are aware of the issues in the fashion industry, the different sociological, conceptual, and motivational barriers that they experience prevent them from engaging in sustainable fashion consumption. Despite the various explanations for the attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable fashion consumption, it still lacks a compelling theoretical basis, which is needed to understand and overcome the barriers. (Han, Seo & Ko, 2017, 2.)

## 5 Methodology

The research uses a quantitative method to collect and analyse data. Quantitative research method can be used to learn about the demographics of a population, examine attitudes and behaviours, document trends, or explain what is already known (Goertzen, 2017, 12). Quantitative research focuses on surveying and experimentation and builds on existing theories. The goal is to establish, confirm, or validate relationships, as well as to develop generalizations that will help to advance theory. (Williams, 2011, 66.)

This given, the data in this research is collected through a survey questionnaire. Survey research is defined as a method to collect data from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. A survey allows the researcher to obtain data that represents the characteristics of a large sample of individuals of interest in a short time period. (Ponto, 2015, 168.) The goal of survey research is to understand or predict some aspects of the behaviour of the population of interest by gathering data from respondents (Sukamolson, 2007, 12). Survey research uses scientific sampling and questionnaire design to measure population characteristics with statistical precision. It aims to answer questions such as "How many people feel this way?" and "How often do they engage in this behaviour?" (Sukamolson, 2007, 4.)

In addition, the research can be categorized as a descriptive since it focuses on describing specific aspects of a group of people (Swanson & Holton, 2005, 39). The research theory covers the topics related to sustainable fashion, ethical fashion, sustainable fashion consumption, and the negative effects of fashion on society and the environment.

### 5.1 Survey design and data collection

The survey questionnaire was chosen as the method for data collection to reach as many people as possible and obtain accurate results on Finnish consumers' attitudes toward sustainable fashion in Finland. The survey questions were formed based on the theoretical framework findings. The data was gathered in April for two weeks and the questions were divided into four different categories based on the subject matter. The first category of questions was basic information relating to age and gender. The second category is related to knowledge of sustainable fashion and awareness of the harmful impacts of fashion. The third category is related to interest in purchasing sustainable fashion as well as concerns about global environmental and social issues. The last category of questions related to consumers' current clothing consumption and disposal habits to evaluate if they implement sustainable practices in their clothing consumption.



The survey was conducted on an online survey platform Google Forms. The survey was kept brief with clear topic matter questions in order to keep the participant engaged. This is because respondents are less motivated to answer later questions in a questionnaire when the questionnaire is lengthy which can lead to a survey's lack of validity (Stratton, 2015, 225).

The link to the survey was shared across different social media platforms. These social media platforms were LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Snapchat. The author informed the potential participants of the survey purpose and how the data would be used. The survey was kept anonymous to protect the privacy of the participants.

## **5.2 Validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability are essential parts of any research (Brink, 1993, 35). Validity in research has two components: internal and external. Internal validity refers to whether the study's findings are reliable because of the way the participants were chosen, data was collected, and analysis was implemented. External validity, also known as "generalizability," is related to whether the research's findings can be applied to other groups of interest for example a specific population. (Lakshmi & Mohideen, 2013, 2752.) In a quantitative study, reliability is the second requirement for quality (Heale & Twycross, 2015, 66). Reliability refers to the consistency, stability, and repeatability of the research findings. A research method can produce consistent results over time. (Brink, 1993, 35.) In other words, the extent to which a research method consistently produces the same results when applied to the same situation repetitively (Heale & Twycross, 2015, 66).

The thesis aimed to learn about people's attitudes toward sustainable fashion in Finland. For a survey to be accurate, the individuals who participate in it must represent the entire study population in all ways that are relevant to the study's goal (Stratton, 2015, 225). To avoid sampling error and ensure the validity and reliability of the survey results, the author informed potential participants of the survey purpose and it was also mentioned in the survey description that it was considering only those living in Finland. Sampling can occur when the sample of participants chosen to represent the study population does not represent the target population (Stratton, 2015, 225).

Furthermore, sampling error will occur if the sample size is too small and does not include all potential representatives of the target population in an appropriate proportion (Stratton, 2015, 225). One of the disadvantages of questionnaires is that they typically have a low response rate. This is problematic because it reduces the accuracy of survey results and prevents the sample population from being generalized. (Snow & Thomas, 1994, 462.) It

is impossible to say that the findings accurately reflect the attitudes of the entire Finnish consumer population toward sustainable fashion because only 68 people responded to the survey and the demographics of age and gender were not representative of a sufficient portion of the Finnish consumer population.

## 6 Data analysis

The survey consisted of 12 questions, each receiving 68 responses, equalling the total number of participants. The first two questions focused on age and gender to learn more about the participants' backgrounds. Figure 2 shows that the majority of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 25 years old (75%). People between the ages of 26 and 41 made up the second largest age group (19.1%), and people between the ages of 42 and 57 made up the final age group (5.9%).

Your age?  
68 responses

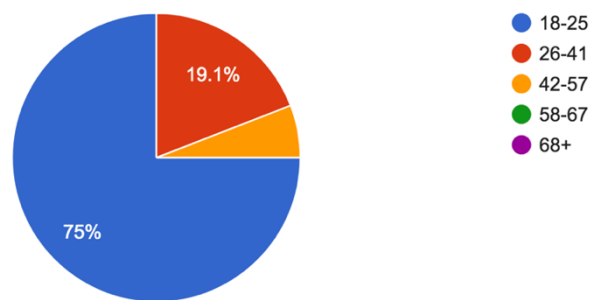


Figure 2. Age of respondents

In terms of gender, figure 3 shows that 51.5% were males. Females accounted for 48.5%. Although age and gender were not the focus of the study, they are essential in understanding the backgrounds of the participants and can support further research.

Your gender?  
68 responses

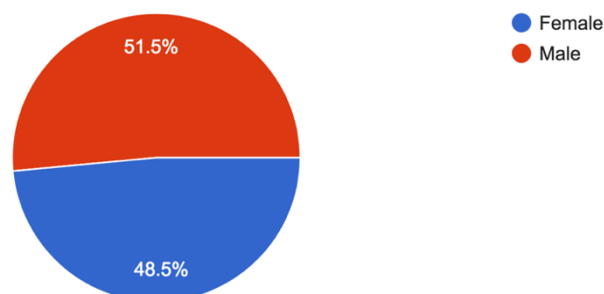


Figure 3. Gender of respondents

### Knowledge and awareness of sustainable fashion

After gathering information about the participant's age and gender, the next set of questions focused on their knowledge of sustainable fashion and their awareness of the negative impacts of fashion.

Do you know about environmentally friendly and ethical fashion?

68 responses

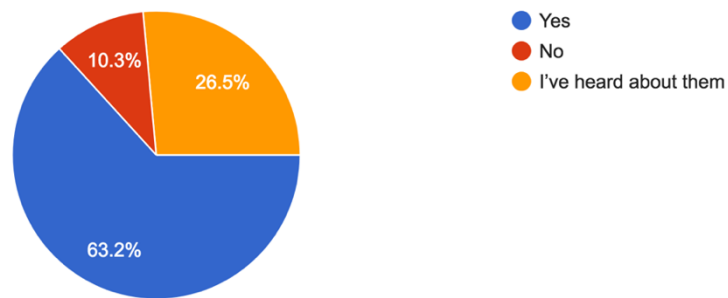


Figure 4. Knowledge of sustainable fashion

The first question asked if the customers were aware of environmentally friendly and ethical fashion. Figure 4 shows that 63.2% of respondents said they know about environmentally friendly and ethical fashion. The next group consisted of 26.6% of respondents stating that they had never heard of these terms before. Only 10.3% of the responders said they were unfamiliar with environmentally friendly and ethical fashion.

Are you aware of fashion's negative social and environmental impacts?

68 responses

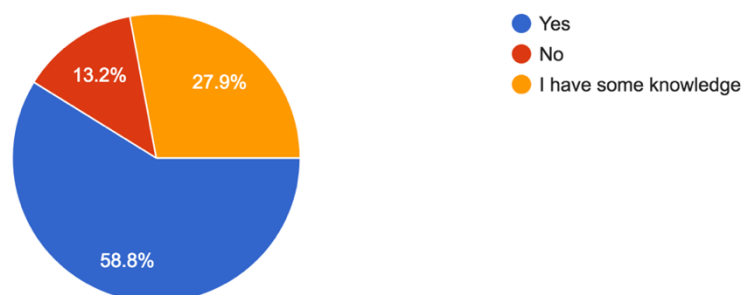


Figure 5. Awareness of the issues in fashion

Participants were then asked if they were aware of the negative impacts of fashion on society and the environment. The results show in figure 5 that majority 58.8% of the respondents are aware of the harmful impacts of fashion, while 27.9% said they have some knowledge, and 13.2% said they are not aware of the issues.

Do you believe that you have enough knowledge about environmentally friendly and ethical fashion and the negative impact fashion has in the world?

68 responses

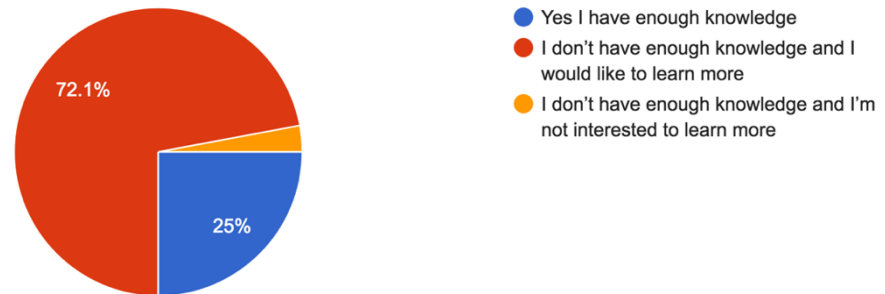


Figure 6. Sufficient knowledge of sustainable fashion

In Figure 6, participants were asked if they believe they have enough knowledge of sustainable fashion and how fashion impacts the world. The question also intended to see if they were interested in learning more about these issues. The majority of respondents 72.1%, felt they lacked knowledge, but they also expressed a desire to learn more. The second group of responders, which accounted for 25% of the participants, believed they have sufficient amount of knowledge, implying that they are satisfied with their level of knowledge on the issues. The final group, which accounted for 2.9% of all respondents, admitted that they did not know enough about the issues, but they also stated that they were not interested in learning more.

As can be seen from the awareness and knowledge results, most Finnish people know about sustainable fashion and the negative impact fashion has on the world, or at least have some knowledge of the issues. However, their level of knowledge and awareness is still to a certain extent. This can be seen in figure 6, which shows that the majority of responders admit that they lack sufficient knowledge. Despite this, they show positive attitudes by expressing their desire to learn more about sustainable fashion and how fashion impacts the world. This further supports the theory finding that overall consumers are aware of issues caused by unethical fashion production and are generally supportive of sustainability.

Furthermore, Ritch and Schröder (2012, 205) state that if consumers are provided with the necessary information, they will consider it, which can be seen in the results as they show willingness and desire to learn more about the issues. The result also shows that some responders (2 out of 68), expressed that they had no interest in learning more, despite admitting that they lacked sufficient knowledge. In addition to lack of understanding of the matters, these people may also feel unaffected by the consequences of unethical fashion

production, which the theoretical discussion confirms to be one of the barriers to consumer engagement in sustainable fashion consumption.

### Interest in consuming sustainable fashion

These questions were designed to determine whether or not consumers were interested in purchasing sustainable fashion and if they were concerned about global social and environmental issues. The majority of respondents, 63.2%, stated that global social and environmental issues are important to them, as shown in figure 6. In addition, 30.9 % said they were unaware of global social and environmental issues. The final group, made up of 5.9% of respondents, do not consider global social and environmental issues important to them.

Are global environmental and social issues important to you?  
68 responses

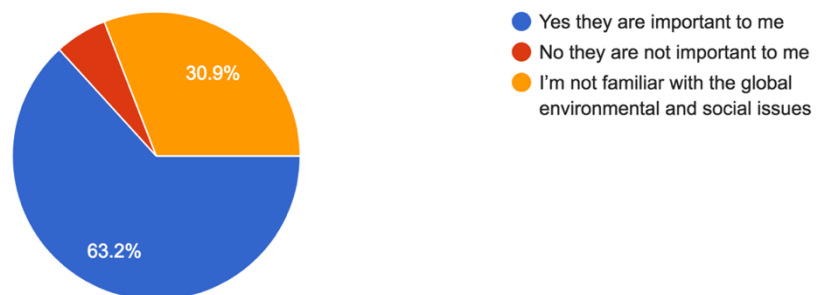


Figure 6. Importance of environmental and social issues

When asked if the participants were interested in purchasing environmentally friendly and ethical clothing, 72.1% said they were. The remaining respondents, who made up 26.4% of the participants, said they were either unsure or do not care about buying environmentally friendly and ethical clothing.

The majority of Finnish people show concern about environmental and social issues, and some even want to purchase sustainable clothing. Nonetheless, as the attitude-behaviour gap theory demonstrates, positive attitudes toward sustainability do not always translate into environmental and ethical purchasing decisions. Even if consumers are interested in ethical consumption, according to Niinimäki (2011, 38), they will not make ethical choices if it involves any discomfort, such as high prices. To put this theory to the test, participants were asked if they would be willing to pay more for environmentally friendly and ethical clothing.

Would you be willing to pay more for environmentally friendly and ethical clothes?  
68 responses

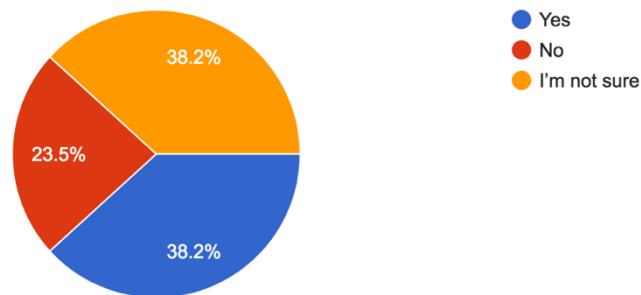


Figure 7. Willingness to pay more for sustainable fashion

Figure 7 shows that both "Yes" and "I'm not sure" options received equal responses of 38.2%. Only 23.5% said they are not willing to pay a higher price for sustainable fashion. The findings demonstrate consumers' positive attitudes toward social and environmental issues, as well as their willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly clothing.

However, as stated in the theory discussion, even if consumers feel positive about sustainable fashion and are concerned about social and environmental issues, they still may feel hesitant when it comes to making those purchasing decisions. According to Haug & Busch (2015, 7), there is often a disconnect between what consumers say and what they do in ethical consumption. As a result, even if they say yes to paying more, it's impossible to assume they would do so.

### **Clothing consumption and disposal habits**

The last category of questions was created to learn about how Finnish consumers consume clothing and how they dispose their clothes. This was to learn if they practice sustainability in their current clothing consumption and disposal habits.

Participants were asked how often they buy clothes. 50% said they buy clothes at least once every six months. The second-largest group, 45.6% of the respondents, stated that they buy new clothes at least once a month, while 2.9% said they shop for new clothes once a week. Only one person said that they do not purchase clothing. The finding that the majority of people do not buy clothes as frequently as one might expect based on the speed at which fast fashion trends and collections change was unexpected.

What matters the most to you when purchasing clothes?  
68 responses

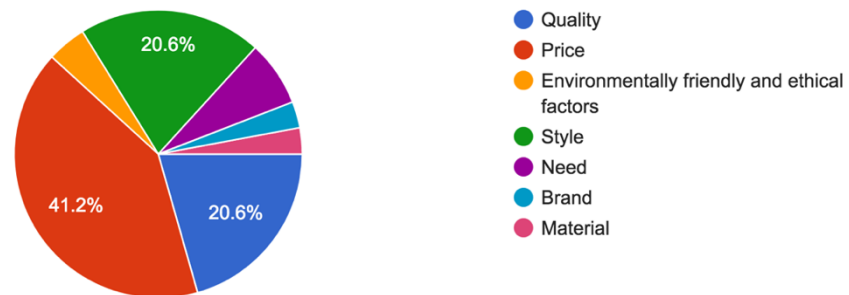


Figure 8. Most influencing factors for purchasing clothes

Figure 8 illustrates the participant's responses to a question about the most important factors they consider when shopping for clothing. The most influential factor, according to 41.2% of respondents, is price. Quality and style were the second most influencing factors, both had equally 20.6% of the responses. Need was chosen as an influencing factor by 7.4% of participants. Only 4.4% said environmental and ethical factors influenced their clothing purchases, while material and brand were equally important to 2.9% of respondents. These findings support the theory that for the vast majority of people, price is the most important factor in clothing purchases, with only a few people considering environmental and ethical factors.

In the next question participants were asked to choose which option described their shopping behaviour the best. The options were the following:

- I only purchase environmentally friendly and ethical clothes
- I sometimes try to purchase environmentally friendly and ethical clothes
- Environmentally friendly and ethical factors don't influence my purchasing decisions

Again, despite the positive attitudes and interest in purchasing sustainable fashion, most people, 54.4%, stated that environmental and ethical factors have no impact on their purchasing decisions. 33.8% said they sometimes try to purchase environmentally friendly and ethical clothing, while the third group, which accounted for 5.9% of the participants, stated that they only purchase environmentally friendly and ethical clothing. In addition, one person described their clothing purchase behaviour as quick and unplanned. As the barriers to sustainable fashion consumption theory state, many people don't have time and want to take care of their purchases quickly. Looking for sustainable options can take time and can also leave consumers feeling overwhelmed by the number of ethical options.



(Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018, 422). The number of people who said they only buy ethical and environmentally friendly clothing shows that they are ethically committed and prioritize these factors in their purchasing decisions. Out of a total of 68 participants, they consisted of 4 people.

What do you usually do with your old/unwanted clothes?  
68 responses

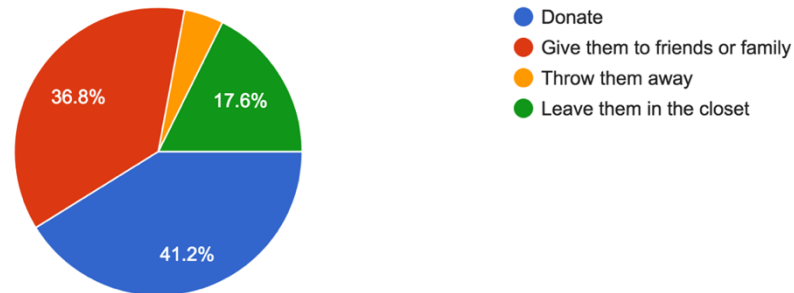


Figure 9. Clothing disposal habits

The final question asked respondents what they do with their old and unwanted clothes. The majority of respondents 41.2%, said they give them away. The second most common response was that they give their clothes to friends or family, which accounted for 36.8% of the total number of respondents. 17.6% of the respondent answered that they typically leave their old clothes in the closet, while 4.4% said they throw their clothes away.

The result here show that the majority of people practice sustainability through their clothing disposal habits. However, according to Harris et al. (2015, 4) consumer disposal habits are primarily influenced by habits and routines rather than ethical commitment. Furthermore, according to Bly et al. (2015, 6), regardless of consumer concerns about environmental and ethical issues, they will donate, recycle, or hand down clothing if the facilities are widely available. This could be one of the reasons why so many people choose to donate or give clothes to friends and family as it doesn't require much inconvenience. Only a few people said they throw their clothes away, while others said they leave their clothes in the closet. This could be again due to a lack of knowledge or concern for environmental issues.

## 7 Conclusion

Fashion production impacts the society and environment in many harmful ways. Some people are aware of these effects while others are less aware. For many people, fashion is a way of life, a form of self-expression, and a representation of identity. Sustainable fashion is more likely to be consumed by those who have a higher level of ethical commitment and values regarding social justice and equality, as well as concerns about the environmental.

Since price is one of the most significant barriers to sustainable consumption, sufficient knowledge is required to motivate consumers toward ethical and environmentally friendly fashion consumption. Consumer education will improve their understanding and knowledge of the issues, resulting in more sustainable consumption and a larger market for sustainable fashion products

The objective of the thesis was to learn about Finnish consumers' attitudes toward sustainable fashion and determine whether they are interested in consuming sustainable fashion and if they are aware of the effects fashion has on society and the environment. According to the survey findings, Finnish consumers are interested in purchasing sustainable clothing and are aware of how fashion impacts society and the environment. Some even claim that they are willing to pay more for environmentally friendly and ethical clothing.

The survey's findings also reveal that majority of consumers have positive attitudes toward sustainability and want to learn more about the issues regarding fashion production. Despite the theory's presentation of the attitude-behaviour gap and barriers to sustainable fashion consumption, the fact that the majority of consumers show interest and desire to consume ethically and environmentally friendly is a good start. It opens the door to more sustainable fashion business models, and sustainable fashion may eventually overtake fast fashion as the new standard.

The demographics of the survey participants regarding age and gender were not wide enough to generalize the attitudes and interests of Finnish consumers towards sustainable fashion. However, even with a small sample group, the accuracy of the results with the theory confirms consumer attitudes and interest in sustainable fashion consumption. It also indicates what the outcomes might be with a larger sample group.

The author found the thesis writing process challenging and teaching on a personal and academic level. The author gained insightful knowledge on a topic that she is passionate

about as a result of her topic selection. Even though sustainable fashion was always the main topic, choosing the research focus was the most challenging aspect of the thesis writing process. As a result, forming the research objective and questions was difficult. However, as the author developed the theoretical framework, it became evident to her which focus would be most beneficial to the research. In addition, finding the most relevant and appropriate data for the study proved to be difficult at times, which made the author realize the importance of thesis planning as well as having clear research objectives and questions.

Aside, from the learning outcomes, the author found the survey process fascinating. One of the most difficult aspects of conducting a survey, as previously stated, is the low participation rate, which was one of the issues with the research findings. If the survey duration had been longer, the author believes that the participation rate would have been higher, and therefore the results would have been generalizable. Nonetheless, the findings provide the author with a better understanding of some Finnish consumers' attitudes toward sustainable fashion, which she can use to continue her market research for starting a sustainable fashion brand in Finland.

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