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## Licensing effect on consumers in the ecofriendly fashion industry

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## Abstract

This paper studies moral licensing in ecofriendly fashion. The results show that ecofriendly fashion is fulfilling more than basic human needs: it fulfills psychological and moral needs as well. Some customers are therefore tempted, and sometime act on it, to buy more products that they wanted at first, because they do not feel guilty like when they buy regular clothes. It is even more true when people buy second-hand products, they have a good conscience and tend to buy more than necessary.

**Keywords:** ecofriendly fashion, consumer behavior, moral licensing

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## Introduction

The fashion industry is one of the biggest polluting one: according to the UN, by 2050 “*the equivalent of almost three planets could be required to provide the natural resources needed to sustain current lifestyles given the growth in global population*”. The phenomenon of **over consumption** and its impact on the environment **does not appear to be slowing or diminishing**. On the contrary, according to a report from the UK Parliament (2019), by “*2030 global apparel consumption is projected to rise by 63%, from 62 million tons today to 102 million tons - equivalent to more than 500 billion additional T-shirts*”.

In light of this, half of the fashion industry players want at least half of their products to be made with sustainable materials by 2025, according to a McKinsey study (Forbes, 2019). The fashion industry is changing, and **companies are making efforts toward sustainability**: they are investing in ethical alternatives to

traditional clothing. Sustainable apparel, or ecofriendly apparel, could be defined as *“the type of clothing that is designed and manufactured to maximize benefits to people and society while minimizing adverse environmental impacts”* (Chan and Wong, 2012). Existing brands are extending their lines, new brands have been created: there is a real increase of environmental awareness.

Consumer’s demand for radical transparency and sustainability is growing. In 2018, 44% of French **consumers** have bought less clothes, and for 40% of them it was a conscious choice (Deloitte Report, June 2019). However, even if over the last 15 years the clothes utilization rate decreased by 36%, during the same period, the **volume put on the market has doubled** (Deloitte Report, June 2019). Despite the efforts to consume less and better, sales are still growing.

Thus, consumers underlying personal interests (Belk, 1988) driving those purchases need to be understood to fight against those detrimental consequences on earth. Such interests have been examined for instance in a study performed by Cervellon and Carey in 2011, unveiling the existence of a **“license to sin”** for green cosmetic products, at least in European and North American countries. This “license to sin” phenomenon has a name - **moral licensing** - and has been disclosed in several fields but has never been studied in the fashion industry. People are more eco-conscious, but are still buying as much clothes as before: is moral licensing a reason behind this inconsistency?

Therefore, we studied: **could ecofriendly efforts of the fashion industry result in moral licensing in consumer behavior, leading them to more consumption?**

Through a **qualitative study**, interviewing both customers and managers from the fashion industry, we found out that although people have a real awareness of the fashion industry environmental problems and try to act responsibly, it is hard for them to put their words into actions and still buy too much clothes. Even further, some people admit that they buy ecofriendly clothes to be able to buy more without having a feeling of guilt. Moral licensing mostly occurs when buying second-hand products.

Therefore, the present paper is an important **contribution to the ecofriendly apparel industry**. It gives a new perspective to what drives ecofriendly apparel consumption. In fact, hidden psychological and moral mechanisms such as the

moral licensing effect and its impact on consumers ecofriendly apparel purchase have never been studied. Our research offers new insights on an aspect of ethical consumption, fashion, and how morality can influence it. As the fashion industry is one of the biggest polluters, emitting more carbon than international flights and maritime shipping combined (McFall-Johnsen, 2019), this study will help fashion brands to fight against apparel overconsumption and educate consumers the best way possible. The results of the experiments conducted will give marketers new and unique insights about consumers' path of thoughts and how they translate it into actions regarding ecofriendly apparel consumption. Thus, those findings will change the way marketers communicate with consumers about ecofriendly apparel, and will have direct consequences, raising awareness and educating consumers durably.

## Literature review

### 1. Definition of moral licensing

Being moral is important to a person's identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002) and it can play deeply on their next or past behaviors. Indeed, when individuals are “*under the threat that their next action might be (or appears to be) morally dubious, they can derive confidence from their past moral **behavior**, such that an impeccable track record increases their propensity, to engage in otherwise suspect actions*” (Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). Conway and Peetz (2012) found that **recalling moral actions** led to licensing: **doing something moral** gives one a license to do something immoral. This phenomenon has a name: **moral licensing**. It can occur after an action, when people recall an action or when they just imagine what an action could be.

The first moral licensing study was published in 2001 (Monin & Miller, 2001). They demonstrated **moral self-licensing** by showing that participants were more likely to make morally ambiguous decisions after first performing a non-prejudiced behavior. This phenomenon can also be seen the other way around: when people initially behave in a moral way, they are later more likely to display behaviors that are immoral and unethical (Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). A more recent definition states that the prior good deed provides a “license” that allows one to

perform morally questionable behavior later on (Blanken, Van de Ven, Zeelenberg 2015). A study on prospective moral licensing (Cascio & Plant 2015) showed that people can feel morally licensed even for actions they anticipate doing in the future, in other words, simply planning to do good later can allow them to be bad now.

Regarding **green consumption**, Mazar & Zhong (2010) study suggests that purchasing green products “*may license indulgence in self-interested and unethical behaviors*”. In their experiment, participants who bought ecofriendly products subsequently offered less money to another person in an ultimatum game.

Nevertheless, moral licensing has **never been applied to the fashion field**. The situation fashion is facing can be compared to what is occurring with recycling. Jesse R. Catlin & Yitong Wang (2012) showed that an addition of a recycling option can lead to increased resource usage. To explain that phenomenon, the authors found a strong link between recycling going bad and moral licensing. The same link may exist between moral licensing and fashion consumption: ecofriendly fashion may reduce consumers guilt and give them the license to buy new clothes and consume more.

Indeed, in fashion, consumer behavior is likely to be influenced by moral matters and the will to **be seen as someone “good”**, especially regarding ecofriendly fashion. “*Ethical fashion is regarded as surpassing its fundamental function of meeting basic human physiological needs by fulfilling consumers’ specifically psychological needs*” (Paulins and Hillery, 2009). Prosocial and ethical acts may contribute to a more **general sense of moral self** than previously thought, licensing socially undesirable behaviors (Mazar & Zhong 2010).

When buying an ecofriendly apparel product, consumers adopt pro-environmental behaviors because of **selfish motivations**. Driven by those selfish motivations, consumers are ready to pay the price if the ecofriendly product have some personal benefits for them. (Ottman et al., 2006). An eco-cloth therefore provides an answer to the consumer’s need to give meaning to his consumption (Canel-Depitre, 2003). A consumer buys a product for its capacity to illustrate materially his identity and personality, as an extension of himself (Belk, 1988). As “you are what you eat”, “**you are what you wear**”. Especially in fashion, the consumer has an irrepressible desire to have a style, a clothing identity, as it is the first part others perceive of

himself. When buying ecofriendly apparel, a consumer therefore answers a **psychological need of social building**, as it gives him the image of having a socially responsible lifestyle for who may see him (Niinimäki, 2010).

Moral licensing could therefore be one of the explanations for the lack of success of ecofriendly initiatives in the fashion industry.

## **2. The growing importance of ecofriendly initiatives in the fashion industry**

The shift to an ecofriendly fashion industry is now more than ever accurate. A growing number of initiatives such as encouraging clothing recycling/reuse, creation of eco-lines of clothing, and advertising campaigns encouraging more responsible clothing consumption are flourishing.

In fact, this awareness to environmental issues is reflected in the appearance of **new brands**. Veja for example extols fair trade and traceability, Le Slip Français wants to keep its production in France and Europe, and Maison Standards is basing its added value on a durable and functional offer. Even big fashion companies, from luxury to brands labelled as “**fast-fashion**”, are taking the sustainable apparel turn. Stella McCartney for instance has expanded the use of organic cotton and recycling materials and has forgone leathers, skins, fur, and PVC. H&M has developed the H&M Conscious collection, which uses recycled and organic materials and is ethically sourced and offers to give vouchers for recycling old clothes. Zara has also launched the Zara Join Life range, which uses recycled materials and ecologically grown cotton. Even big French companies try to experiment more virtuous models: C&A and Kiabi for instance have joined the Better Cotton Initiative. All the initiatives taken in France seem to be paying off, the country is even considered as pioneer in the field of sustainable cotton use (Mémento de la mode éthique, 2007).

## **3. The lack of success of those initiatives**

Nevertheless, ecofriendly apparel may be perceived by consumers poorly, with a vision full of prejudiced: “*Consumers often have negative associations with sustainable product options, viewing them as being of lower quality, less aesthetically pleasing, and more expensive*” (The Elusive Green Consumer, 2019). Many consumers consider ecofriendly clothes as not attractive, too much



expensive. It is also sometime the case for recycled or used materials: consumers have a negative perception of these products. This may lead consumers to feel they have to make **sacrifices to buy ecofriendly apparel**, which would morally justify buying more clothes.

This would explain why overall **sales of clothing continue to be as high as ever** (Deloitte Report, June 2019). The best example of this failure of reducing clothes consumption comes from the global outdoor clothing retailer **Patagonia**, well-known worldwide for its environmental practices (Chouinard and Stanley, 2012). The company not only encourages consumers to purchase environmentally friendly products and to recycle them but also to consume less (Patagonia, 2011).

In 2011, the brand published an ad designed to prevent people from buying with the message « Don't buy this jacket » and other explicit sentences discouraging purchase and encouraging reuse and recycling. This campaign had the reverse effect: it influenced consumers behavior as people bought the product and the sales jumped: nine months after the ad, the company's **sales jumped to \$543 million**, a more than thirty percent increase (Martin, 2012).

Hwang & al. (2016) analyzed this campaign and consumers' reactions towards it. All the participants of their study had positive attitudes towards buying the jacket. For them, it is likely because consumers **believed that purchasing this jacket was a sustainable and environmentally responsible decision**. Therefore, it seems very probable that this campaign gave to the consumers a "license to sin" and buy the jacket and other Patagonia items even if they did not need them, as the acquisition of product was perceived as an environmentally responsible action. **Moral licensing occurred** as people bought the product, knowing that buying a piece of clothes was bad for the environment, because they had the feeling to buy it from a "good" company and therefore had the feeling to do something good. This backfires Patagonia ecofriendly efforts due to moral licensing. In order to state that moral licensing plays a role, it is required to run a complete study and dig deeper into this subject.

Therefore, ecofriendly solutions used by the fashion industry might actually not have the expected results, on the contrary. They apparently can lead to over-consumption. Our interest is to investigate a possible reason explaining this

phenomenon, and it seems plausible that **customers use the ecofriendly aspect of a piece of cloth as a “license to sin” to buy more clothes.**

## **Method**

### **1. Choice of the method approach**

To address the research purpose, a **qualitative study** was conducted. This study took the form of a series of individual interviews, with both people working or having a job related to the fashion industry and consumers. As moral licensing has never been studied in the fashion industry, we decided to study both managers and consumers point of view in an exploratory way, to get different insights. Therefore, we have worked on **two different interviews**, one for each target.

### **2. First target: Fashion managers interviews**

Regarding managers, we decided to interview people from different companies' sizes: from startups to big fashion brands. Furthermore, we decided to interview companies with environment as an essence of their strategy and companies for which the heart of their initial market strategy is not the environment. We believed it was important to get different opinions and catch a large range of the market.

Our goal was to understand how and to what extent marketing strategies were used to influence consumers, and if moral licensing was a driver for those strategies. For this purpose, we conducted 7 detailed interviews with people who are employees in the fashion industry or that have a direct link with the fashion customers in their job (see appendix 1). We managed to interview:

- **Environment & marketing coordinator at Patagonia.** Patagonia is considered as “the” ecofriendly fashion brand and uses marketing campaign as “don’t buy this jacket” to influence customers.
- **Marketing acquisition manager at LePantalon.** The brand offers qualitative trousers at a fair price, with no sales or promotion. The conception of the product is European, and the company have launched in 2020 an ecofriendly line.

- **CEO at Saola Shoes.** The brand creates comfortable, stylish, and committed shoes, focusing on eco-design and will preservation.
- **Area export manager at Pictures.** Its ambition is to design ski and snowboard clothing made mainly from sustainable materials, organic cotton, and recycled PET, with affordable pricing.
- **Graduate Program Store manager at Uniqlo.** Uniqlo's clothes are simple, qualitative but still affordable and universal, and can be considered as fast fashion.
- **Product manager and buyer at Le Closet.** To fight against overconsumption, Le Closet offers ecofriendly clothes renting services, to replace possession by usage.
- **Purchasing group manager at Ekyog :** Ekyog's objective is to design ethical, durable clothing respectful of women, men, and nature.

Our interview questions could be divided into three parts. We first wanted to know more about the current **trends of the industry and the importance of environmental issues for the industry**. Then, we asked our interviewees about their company and their brand's position within the environmental trend: we wanted to know about their **environmental strategy, their objectives and how the market answered**. Finally, we focused our **questions on the consumers**: we asked them to describe the ecofriendly clothes buyer profile type. Also, we wanted their opinion about the possible **existence of moral licensing**. Therefore, we asked them if they identified, from the consumers, feelings of guilt or sacrifice while buying more clothes.

### **3. Second target: Consumers interviews**

For **consumers**, our objective was to assess how ecofriendly fashion companies' marketing strategies could lead those customers to feel guilt-free in buying clothes and the consequent purchase of more clothes. Thus, moral licensing would be demonstrated or not.

In order to do so, we chose 14 participants and interviewed them in-depth. We collected information such as participant's age, gender, college major, income, apparel expenditure, place of living (rural or urban) and familiarity with the brands presented. We interviewed women and men between 19 and 55 years old that have

bought at least one ecofriendly apparel product once, in order to **capture all the spectrum of ecofriendly apparel consumers** in France. We interviewed more women than men, as women are more likely to buy clothes: current trends in France show that women tend to spend an average 20% more than men when it comes to shopping. We also chose to interview mostly consumers in the 18-25 range, as studies revealed that they were becoming more aware of ecofriendly initiatives and claiming to take actions, while also buying more clothes than their elder (see appendix 2).

We have asked open questions, to get to know the interviewees and their ecofriendly apparel consumption behaviors, their mindset as well as their habits.

The first part of the questions was designed to know more about the fashion habits and knowledge of our interviewees. Our goal was to get some **context around their apparel purchases**. In a second part, we focused our questions on the **relation between their environment concerns and their purchase habits**, in order to understand to what extent environmental concerns and their knowledge would influence their purchase behaviors. Finally, we drove our questions to **detect moral licensing behaviors**. In fact, we asked them to put words on the feelings they would have when thinking about their purchase behaviors and their environmental beliefs. Thanks to those answers, it would be possible to state if the ecofriendly efforts in fashion would lead to moral licensing behaviors or not.

## **Study results**

### **1. Managers' responses**

#### **Managers profiles**

We managed to interview managers from **7 different companies**: Patagonia, LePantalon, Saola Shoes, Picture Organic Clothing, Le Closet, Ekyog and Uniqlo. The majority of the people we interviewed worked in the marketing department, but some of them were CEO of their own company or working in sales.

Through those interviews, managers gave their opinion about the importance of environmental issues for the industry and how their companies were responding to them. They analyzed whether those initiatives were successful or not, in term of

environmental outcomes and economics. Finally, they gave their point of view about consumers attitude toward ecofriendly apparel and explained to us if they considered consumers behaviors have changed.

### *1) Importance of environmental issues for the industry*

Environmental concerns have been identified by all the managers as an actual fashion trend. Le Closet manager expressed it clearly: "*As the fashion industry is one of the most polluting in the world, environmental issues are clearly key and must be an integral part of the strategy of companies in this industry in order to propose offers, services, models more relevant and in line with the environmental issues we are facing today*".

This **trend is driven by the consumers**, especially by their consumption changing behaviors. **Consumers now want information** about what they buy. Uniqlo manager explained it to us: "*customers want to know the origin and composition of products so that they can use less polluting and healthier materials*". Companies adapt themselves as it is important for the fashion companies to fit with customers' new type of demand: "*it's necessary to build an image where the consumer will identify himself and be in phase with "global" lifestyle*" (Ekyog manager). It is still **not the consumers' number one preoccupation regarding clothing**, but the movement is growing.

New ways of producing, consuming, have emerged, with the creation of new brands or ecofriendly lines in established brand collections. Actually, several practices have been identified by the managers: **use of sustainable materials, local production, stock and production limitations, recycling and fair price**. The **biggest trend** identified by those managers was **recycling, through thrift shopping** mostly: "*We see an increase in clothing sold in thrift shops, more initiatives on the internet to resell or even give away clothes and the big companies that make efforts to recycle used clothes*" (Uniqlo manager).

### *2) Companies' environmental strategies and objectives*

Most of the companies in the fashion industry has initiated environmental efforts. Durability and sustainability are now part of every fashion companies' marketing strategies. For Uniqlo's manager, "*we can see the efforts of companies that are*

*multiplying their activities in favor of the environment: products such as cotton, linen, wool is increasingly coming from sustainable and ecological agriculture; reducing water use, etc.”* The companies we have interviewed, from ecofriendly companies to fast retailing one, have detailed their environmental strategies:

<b>Companies initiatives and efforts evoked</b>	<b>Frequency of companies promoting it (/7)</b>
Promotion of quality	3
Reduction of overconsumption	2
Respectful circle of production	7
Educating consumers	3

The managers from ecofriendly brands we have interviewed had a common vision for the future: change the industry durably. For Le Closet manager, they have a mission: *"ecofriendly brands are part of a global trend that affects the entire industry. In this sense I think they are going to be more and more trendy/attractive, and I hope that in the long term, this will make it possible to impose eco-responsibility as a "standard" for all stakeholders in the fashion world"*. Therefore, **ecofriendly companies’ strategies and objectives are totally focused on environmental matters**. They all work on respectful circles of productions. Each of them focuses on different types of initiatives: promote quality, make the focus over the problem of over consumption, etc. Big brand such as Patagonia use their size to educate consumers: *“The issue goes beyond our company and our industry, we need systemic change, it's about working with other companies in other sectors, citizens, politicians to address the climate crisis we are in”*.

Big fast-fashion brands are also starting to change their way of producing and that is a good initiative. Yet, it is **not always sincere**, as explained by Picture Organic Clothing manager: *“we are happy, big brands such as H&M are starting to have sustainable initiatives, but the way they communicate may trick the consumer as they are playing a lot on this. There is a lot of greenwashing, especially when it comes to « bio cotton ». It is important to read the labels!”*. It is in line with Patagonia manager’s remark about the percentage of actual bio cotton produced (1%). It is actually difficult for established companies to enter this market:

according to Ekyog manager, *“It is a difficult market for a “fashion” brand to “persevere” because the creation of a collection is “fastidious” with regard to all the constraints to be respected.”*. Therefore, several brands are certainly shaming to communicate about ecological lines: **greenwashing** regarding ecofriendly clothes exist.

Uniqlo’s manager explained to us **big brands’ environmental strategies: the objective is still to make profit**: *“A company's objective remains first and foremost to make a profit. So finally, all means are good to push to buy and I think that the objective remains the same here. By proposing these eco-responsible lines, we are trying to promote an alternative to traditional products. The trend is even being felt in mass distribution with more vegetable products, organic etc.”*. Surfing on the ecofriendly wave may therefore be **strategic to make consumers buy more clothes**. For him, it depends on the type of clothes and the product offered but creating eco-line would attract new consumers that will want to discover more of the brand, and therefore buy from it. To illustrate his idea, he took the example of Nike: *“A brand like Nike, in addition to offering fashionable sneakers, is looking to create content to search for new customers. If the company were about to launch a recycled sneaker, tomorrow there would surely be **new customers** who would come and take an **interest in all the brand's products**”*.

### 3) *Market response to those strategies*

All the managers perceived the French market as a market where a **real environmental awareness** was perceivable. Consumers are much more aware of what it takes for the industry to produce clothes at a reduced price: *“Very concretely, for example, we are much more aware today of what buying a t-shirt for 3 euros implies in fast fashion”* (Picture Organic Clothing manager). The **movement of “buying less but better”** (Patagonia manager) is growing, and the amount of consumers wanting to stop over-consuming is rising and they are maybe ready, according to some managers, to pay higher prices: *“They will privilege the selection of purchases (buy less) to the disadvantage of quantity (disposable fashion) but they will be more demanding over the life of the product.”* (Ekyog manager).

There is also a **clear trend of giving clothes a second life**. Three managers talked about Vinted as an important actor in the industry: this application is specialized in

what is second life (clothes, bags, books etc.). According to Picture's manager, much more consumers clean first their closet on Vinted before buying more clothes.

Nevertheless, those efforts are not sufficient, and the ecofriendly segment is still small in the fashion market. Regarding the **amount of clothes purchased**, the change is still not enough perceivable: *"in general people are buying the same quantities at the moment, limiting purchases will surely come later. It is a slow process"* according to Saola Shoes' CEO.

This is possibly explained by the **lack of massive communication**. A study ran by Picture Organic Clothing revealed also that some consumers did not buy an ecofriendly piece of clothes because of the ecofriendly aspect. There is still **mistrust for ecofriendly initiatives**: companies have still an effort to make to educate the consumers. For the Picture manager, this is because it is difficult for the mass public to get information about ecofriendly brands. *"The attractiveness level of ecofriendly clothing is still a problem; it is super hard for eco-responsible fashion because big brands don't go there very much. To search for ecofriendly brands, you have to make some research. Big brands are starting to communicate about it, but it is still not generalized."*

#### 4) *Consumers behaviors perception from the companies' point of view*

According to the managers, all types of consumers were likely to change behaviors, beyond socio-demographics or classifications. What can be said is that **women** bought more ecofriendly clothes than men. Regarding age, the **25-35 was the core segment**. But this segment is broadening, as Picture Organic Clothing manager explained it: *"The consumer group is getting a bit older. The 30-40 are more and more sensitive to the message. The 18-20 age group is also evolving because the message is clearer and there is a real awareness growing in this age category"*.

Most of the consumers buying ecofriendly clothes are **driven by environmental values**. They are looking to identify themselves to the brand they are buying from, as Patagonia manager detailed: *"we have identified a will to be in touch with our values"*. It is generally not an isolated act as it takes part of a global change in consumer behaviors.



However, managers admitted that the **environment criteria is not the only one considered** when making a clothing purchase decision. According to LePantalon manager: *“for some, the environmental argument will not be taken into account they will buy it because they like the clothes, for others the price will be determinant”*.

Indeed, **style and design still have an important place**: for Saola Shoes CEO, style is the *“criterion number one of purchase, to reach everyone is the style above all, and not only ecofriendly people”*. In order to make profit and touch the mass public, the **design is key** as Picture Organic Clothing manager said: *“profit and success is possible by touching the mass public thanks to the design and not necessarily the eco speech of the retailer. It relies on pure communication”*.

**Price** has also an important role to play. LePantalon manager explained it: *“consumers are looking first at the price, then the origin and finally the ecofriendly aspect of the piece of cloth”*. Ecofriendly clothes are more expensive than traditional clothes and, depending on the brand the clothes, are more or less affordable. Therefore, consumers with a low income would still be able to buy ecofriendly clothes, but less than someone with a higher income: *“some (customers) have a high purchasing power, others don't, but they buy second-hand, or they buy a single garment that they keep for a very long time”* (Patagonia manager) However, for some managers **price can be a barrier to buy ecofriendly products**: consumers are aware of environmental issues but cannot necessarily access sustainable fashion. A lot of **consumers are also just not ready to put more money in clothing purchase**, especially compared to fast fashion apparel prices: *“Sustainable fashion is necessarily more expensive for the consumer who is not always ready to disburse for textile purchases, unlike food”* (Ekyog manager).

Despite those obstacles, most managers did not identify the action of buying ecofriendly as an act of sacrifice for the consumers. They considered that consumers were surely in a logic of responsible consumption, doing a responsible act to consume better. The idea of going a good deed for the environment, but also for themselves, has been evoked: *“it's not the feeling of sacrifice, it's rather the recognition, the self-esteem "I did a good deed". A Gift, for their self-esteem.”* (LePantalon manager). Yet, this search for doing a « good deed » may be also resulting from **green social pressure** created around the « **duty of becoming green** ». In fact, according to Uniqlo manager, *“there is also a sort of social pressure to*

*become green. People might feel less guilty by buying green and want to be able to say, "I consume better and more sustainable" (Uniqlo).*

### **5) Managers' vision of the future regarding the COVID context**

The **COVID-19** crisis the world is dealing with is, more than ever, **challenging the fashion industry and accelerating environmental changes**. All the managers agreed to say that the actual crisis would change durably the industry: "*There is now a real awareness coming from brands and consumers. Current period with COVID-19 speeds up the process. More and more initiatives to reduce pollution and consumption are necessary. The big brands do not want to go back to what they used to do anymore. Management of collections is also going to change, long cycle with too much production will be eliminated to reduce stocks and the use of eco responsible materials is going to grow.*" (Saola Shoes CEO).

## **2. Customers' responses**

### **Customer profile**

We have targeted customers that have bought, at least once in their life, an ecofriendly piece of cloth. All in all, we interviewed **14 customers**: 8 women and 6 men. The average age of the people interviewed is 29 years old, and the median is 23 years old. Regarding education level, 10 customers have a master's degree, 2 a baccalaureate (in the process of obtaining a master's degree) and 2 have a PhD. Regarding their income, 6 customers are above average, 5 in the average and 2 below the average. This coincides with customer profile buying ecofriendly apparel that fashion managers described.

The customers' responses are divided into **three major parts**: the context around apparel purchase, the relation between their environment concerns and their purchase habits and at last moral licensing behaviors.

### **1) Context around their apparel purchases**

Regarding the importance of clothing, the great majority of the people interviewed thought **clothing was important to their life**. Overall, women payed more attention to their style and felt that clothing was more important for them than men. The biggest trend we have seen regarding clothing is that people used to buy more

and stated that they were more careful about what they would buy now. We clearly see **the emergence of conscious buying**: *"Now I buy as much as everyone else, I used to buy more, and I'd like to buy less."* (Laura, 23). Regarding fashion expertise, people were more aware about fabrics, than about the fashion trends of the industry. Overall, women tend to be more experts about these subjects than men.

People **dress up and buy clothes for different reasons**: for themselves, for others or for both. Clothes can be a way to feel good about themselves *"I like to have an original style, that looks like me."* (Théo, 22), or to convey a certain image *"Some brands help bringing out our lifestyle, for example I know people wearing Adidas because they want to be combative, others Nike because they want to push themselves further"* (Yassine, 25). People are often excited to get new clothes, **shopping is at the end a moment of pleasure and relaxation** for some: *"it is a pleasure once in a while to go shopping for clothes"* (Amélie, 24). There are also therapeutic virtues of shopping, in times of a low mood: *"When I feel down, I can't resist to the shopping madness"* (Amélie, 24).

Some **interviewees felt guilty not of the amount bought but used**. *"I feel guilty when I see everything I have, because I have a lot"* (Nathalie, 52). Others admitted that they would feel guilty sometimes of having "compulsive" shopping episodic: *"buying cravings"*, *"cheap product I don't need"*.

## 2) *Relation between their environment concerns and their purchase habits*

All the people we interviewed declared to be **concerned by environmental issues**. They claimed to try to change things, starting with small gestures in their daily life. They all talked about the fact that they had, at a certain time, a **click**. There is apparently, according to their sayings, a complete change of mindset as they had a **wakeup call**: due to personal evolution, interviewees tend to *"attach less importance to material goods and have reached an awareness that I have "enough"* (Amélie, 24). They were aware that *"Fashion incites us to renew our wardrobe, but we already have everything we need"* (Nathalie, 52). The idea of being part of that machination created a **feeling of shame** for some of our interviewees. The idea also that it was specific to the "younger" generation who wanted in its majority to change things has come up. *"Workers younger than us are slaves in these factories"* (Camilia, 19). Some interviewees also told us that they were **proud** to buy from

thrift stores or ecofriendly stores. **New ways of buying** have indeed emerged and **new buying methods** that all interviewees know: second-hand shops, applications such as Vinted.

Fundamentally, the ecofriendly image was not perceived as very trendy, but things are evolving. Likewise, ecofriendly clothes cannot be found everywhere, but more and more brands are being created, and communication is increasing.

### **But what influences customers' purchases?**

**The environmental criteria** is becoming a factor of choice for many interviewees. The fabric is an important element to look at, people try also to look at the entire production cycle. They changed their way of shopping as sustainability is an important criterion for them. Some of them still buy in the same stores as before but purchase their ecofriendly lines: *"I always buy from the same stores, but I go to their sustainable corner"* (Laura, 23). Some others follow very closely all the innovation in this field: *"I like to get to know new brands and new eco-responsible initiatives"* (Théo, 22).

For some interviewees, the **style and their own taste** may be stronger than the sustainability aspect of clothing: *"I'm looking for quality, but if I have a style crush, I'll buy it even if it doesn't last very long."* (Solène R, 23). Style represents a large part of the purchase the decision, even for some before the price. Sacrificing style may be insurmountable: *"I'm willing to make the sacrifice of money and time for ecofriendly, but style comes first for me"* (Solène R, 23).

**Price** is also a key criterion. Some interviewees talked about the fact that they would **buy mostly in promotion**: *"It is frustrating when you buy 100% of the price and 2 weeks later you would find the same product with 50% off"* (Tayeb, 53).

Sustainability is not the first argument that comes into the decision of purchase. It is seen by some interviewees as a bonus: *"I'm not looking for ecofriendly brands, but if the brand has an eco-responsible side, it will make the difference between two brands. I won't buy purely because it's ecofriendly"* (Edmond, 22). The people we interviewed believed they gave more importance to quality than others, it was an important criterion for them. All of the interviewees said that they **preferred quality over quantity**. Most of them bought items that last in time as they tend to

buy quality clothes: they were looking forward to having fewer items, most of them **basics**, and some originals pieces in their wardrobes.

Some interviewees evoked the **place of buying as an important factor of choice**: *“I don't buy online, I want to go to the store to touch the material”* (Nezha, 53).

	<b>Total /14 customers</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>Quality more important than for others</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Style more important than for others</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>

### 3) *Guilt and moral licensing behaviors*

All the interviewees were unanimous: their **feeling of guilt was diminished when buying ecofriendly clothes**: *“I enjoy myself without having too much effect on the environment/I impact the environment as little as possible negatively”* (Grégoire, 22). An ecofriendly clothing purchase is considered as a long-term investment, responding to the desire to dress up without hurting too much the environment: *“My guilt is reduced because it's a responsible purchase that I'm going to keep on the long term. It's the best option available to me”* (Edmond, 22). Buying ecofriendly clothes is considered as an **economical sacrifice** for some, but **at the end a way of feeling better** and at the same time **helping to save the planet** and small businesses.

Even if all our interviewees stated to have experienced a wake-up call, they struggle to stick to their new line of conduct. There is a **gap between their convictions and their actions**. We observed that interviewees in the beginning of their process of change of habits were more likely to buy as much as before, even more: *“I feel better buying five ecofriendly t-shirts than five Primark t-shirts.”* (Solène R, 23). *“It's eco-responsible, so it is okay if I have a crush for the piece of clothes.”* (Mathilde, 23). When finding a piece of clothes that they like, they would even buy different versions of the same product

We observed that **their consistency and commitment on buying less depended on their position in the “chronology” of change**. Most of the time, the change of clothing purchase and use comes after changing habits for food and they would still

buy still too much. People at the beginning of their transition still have a lot of misguided moments: *“There is a difference between what I would like to do and what I do in reality. I have the weakness to buy if I see a piece that I like, on sale etc.”* (Mathilde, 23).

What is interesting is that for some of them, **buying products that are second-handed eliminate the guilt of buying more products**: *“If it comes from thrift stores, no guilt, even if I buy more than I bargained for.”* (Solène P, 22). Therefore, because customers have a good conscience, the amount of clothes they buy will increase as **moral licensing exists**.

## Findings

After reporting the results from our interviews, we were able to find elements of response to our problematic. Specifically, by running interviews from two point of view, we have identified several inconsistencies that we have analyzed.

### **1. The relative importance of environmental issues in the ecofriendly apparel industry versus fast fashion**

The first noticeable inconsistency was about the relative importance of environmental issues in the apparel industry. In fact, some managers admitted it: even if ecofriendly apparel is booming, fast fashion brands are still delivering excellent results. **Ecofriendly brands and eco-materials are still representing a small share of the market**. There is a double problem. Firstly, regarding green production: the **production is not as green as it is communicated**, as for instance only 1% of the global cotton production is actually bio (Patagonia manager). Secondly regarding the **gap between consumers sayings and their actions**: consumers seem to continue buying the same amount of clothes as before. That information would indicate that ways of producing and consuming have not changed to follow an ecofriendly path.

One thing is undeniable: there is a change in France in consumers global lifestyle. All the consumers we have interviewed declared to have experienced a phenomenon of environmental click and has developed an awareness about

ecofriendly topics. The managers confirmed, “*consumers drive the supply*” (Saola Shoes). There is therefore a **real demand for ecofriendly lines**.

All the managers claimed to focus their brand strategy and efforts on environmental issues. It is logical: most of the brands we have interviewed are ecofriendly brands and sell products in that sense. Nevertheless, after discussing with them, we discovered that environmental trends were for a lot of brands, especially fast fashion ones, only trends. An important question was raised: **are brands’ ecofriendly efforts real?**

Patagonia manager communicated us a shattering percentage: according to Patagonia’s data, only 1% of the global cotton production is actually bio. It means that there is a **gap between actual ecofriendly production and the increase of ecofriendly lines**. The communication of most of the brands surfing on the ecofriendly wave has to be taken with tweezers. It is **up to the consumers, for now, to know how to distinguish the true and the false**. As Uniqlo manager reminded us, the first objective of most of the fashion brands (especially fast-fashion ones) is to make profit and make consumers buy as much as before (or more) clothes. According to a study run by Omnibus in 2019, only 8% of the textile companies consider sustainable development to be a priority.

The doubts that some of our consumers interviewed expressed regarding the possible greenwashing of some brands is therefore justified. Consumers need to acquire a certain ability to read the labels, to **get informed about ecofriendly fashion** in order to stick to their environmental values and their want of change.

While running our interviewees, the responses for our question regarding fashion expertise and knowledge about ecofriendly clothes have called to mind. In fact, some of our interviewees explained to us that they had no expertise about fashion and materials but claimed to know what ecofriendly fashion was. As knowing labels, fabrics, is important to tell the fact from the fiction, we asked ourselves the following question: **do consumers know what is ecofriendly clothing or do they pretend to know?** According to the interviewees we ran, it depends on where the consumers are in their process of change. Most of the consumers who were at the beginning of their change were having the same speech: they were trying to buy ecofriendly clothes, but they also admitted not having enough information about

labels, materials etc., and were not really looking for it by themselves. This finding makes an echo with Uniqlo manager' explanation of the pressure around the **duty of becoming green**.

Therefore, **are consumers buying less, or as much as before?** According to a Kantar TNS Study in 2018 for the French Trade Alliance, 33% of French people buy less often than before, especially the 35+ age group, causing volume sales in the clothing/shoe category to fall, but at the same time, an anticipated increase was expected in clothing spending among millennials, which should bring stability to the market in value terms. As Saola Shoes CEO stated, **French consumers buy as much as before, which is a lot**.

The consumers we interviewed felt that they **bought less than others**, that they would pay more attention to how much they buy now. Yet, **buying urges, some "little crushes", often happened to them**: it can be in times of a low mood, or for a certain type of clothing. At the end, most of them would still buy as much as before. However, some of interviewees were actually in a logical of global changes in their lives and were actually buying less than before. As they are not a majority in the French market, their efforts are not perceivable at a global scale.

## 2. **Relative weight of purchase criteria**

Despite the consumers' growing interest for ecofriendly clothes, overall clothes sales are still rising. This is explained by the relative weight of purchase criteria. In fact, quantity is often chosen over quality, as low-quality fast fashion brands continue their ascent. Our study revealed also that most of them admitted that price, style were more important purchase criteria.

### 1) *Quality versus quantity*

The great majority of customers we interviewed believed they **gave more importance to quality than others**, both women and men alike. *"I buy less than most people. On the short-term I can pay more, but on the long-term I pay less because I keep the clothes I bought longer"* (Yassine, 25). However, if that was true, people would buy less, and it is not actually the case. It might be true for some people, but for many others it may be hard to see the benefits at the moment of the purchase so they will choose to buy something less expensive, like for Mathilde 23



that admits *“It's a financial investment to buy organic etc. Commit to the planet is not within everyone's wallet's reach: on the long term I would like to get more involved but it's still not happening. I can't afford to buy organic every day, it's expensive.”*.

Moreover, the success of fast fashion brands shows that **quantity is still preferred**. A study was conducted about the clothing market by the Kantar TNS Study in 2018 for the French Trade Alliance and stated, *“Millennials are more hedonistic in their choices and purchasing patterns, giving a lot of importance to aesthetics, but little sensitivity to the composition or origin of the products”*. In fact, 45% of this age group favors **quantity over quality**.

Another inconsistency can be seen with the popularity of reselling clothes or the increase of the **second-hand clothes market**. This suggests that people do not keep their clothes long enough to wear them out and buy new ones frequently. Indeed, a great majority of customers talked about using Vinted, to sell their clothes and buy new ones, or going to thrift shop. France is actually the **first market** in the world for Vinted, as half of its business is done in the country (LSA article, 2019). Solène P, 22, told us *“In thrift stores even if I buy more than expected I don't feel guilty, I limit myself less in thrift stores.”*. An Ifop study states that *“Generation Z (15-25-year-old) favors sustainable products for 77% of their purchases, their need to renew their wardrobe is permanent and is used in particular to 'celebrate' themselves on social networks. The second-hand market, which is more accessible, is the best key to achieving this.”* As we can see, people do not really put quality first and buy second-hand clothes, and they tend to therefore buy more clothes and change frequently: **quantity comes first**.

## 2) *Price and style*

As we saw in the study, aesthetic is important for customers, especially millennials. It is also what we found when we did our interviews: overall, environmental issues are important in fashion but other factors like **price and style seem to be more important**, even if consumers do not say so, it is how they eventually act. A report by Traackr called “State of influence - Mode” showed that consumers wanted more eco-responsible fashion, but they also wanted access to affordable clothing and collections that are continually renewed.

**Price** is a key aspect for customers, as the Uniqlo manager said: "*Customers are looking for products they can keep for two or three years or more. But they also pay a lot of attention to promotions or price reductions, because the goal is also to get a good deal. All customers who have a budget to respect are looking for clothes that are looking good, durable but above all not too expensive*". Some interviewees talked about the fact that they would buy mostly in promotion: "*It is frustrating when you buy 100% of the price and 2 weeks later you would find the same product with 50% off*" (Tayeb, 53).

Regarding second-hand clothes, as we saw before with the emergence of thrift shop and Vinted, people tend to buy more products because it is cheap. In fact, according to a study ran by the IFM (French Fashion Institute) in 2019 about the future consumption trends in fashion in France, price was the main reason developed by the panel (75%) to explain their thrift shop purchases. In fact, it is possible to buy at a reduced price, until -80% of the original price.

Similarly, when it comes to choose a product, **style and design** are important for customers and usually come first: "*I'm willing to make the sacrifice of money and time for ecofriendly, but style comes first for me*" (Solène R, 23). Some brands believe this is the case like Picture Organic Clothing, "*Pure fashion look, design, look are still the asset number 1, then comes the environmental commitment*". Indeed, for some customers, the style and their own taste may be stronger than the sustainability aspect of clothing: "*I'm looking for quality, but if I have a style crush, I'll buy it even if it doesn't last very long.*" (Solène R, 23). A New York Times article showed that new generations purchasing choices are as much about how an outfit will look on social media as in the real world, style is essential.

For second handed clothes, the depth of choice and its accessibility is one of the most important reason leading to purchase. It is a "pure fashion" question: it is possible to find flagship models or pieces from old collections, especially if looking for specific models. Consumers has access, with thrift shop as Vestiaire Collective, even to luxury items, at a very lower price: for the Boston Consulting Group, in a study released at the end of 2019, the accessibility and the rarity of fashionable and trendy clothes is, beside price, the reason why the market is booming.

### 3. Consumers' attitude and guilt

Consumers are changing and trying to buy better. Yet, it is still hard for them to “walk the talk” and there is a gap between customers' attitude and actions. Eco friendly clothes is therefore a way for them to reduce their guilt and buy better at the same time.

First of all, most of the interviewees are now in a **conscious buying and quality buying approach**: some of them used to buy a lot and now have changed their way of buying, others have always been conscious. Ecofriendly clothes customers are most of the time in a logic of responsible consumption. “*Not a sacrifice but it's a duty*” (Nezha, 53). Here is the global state of mind of the persons interviewed: “*Now I buy as much as everyone else, I used to buy more, and I'd like to buy less.*” (Laura, 23). Some even have a feeling of not doing enough. This was even more true when putting them in front of a buying choice, nobody said they would buy a Patagonia jacket sold in an ecofriendly ad compulsively, but later if they needed that jacket for a specific need.

Some interviewees explained to us that the reducing guilt should not be the goal of the action of buying ecofriendly clothes: “*The basis of the reasoning is to buy only what I need and not to buy more than I need. There is of course a little bit of guilt, but this is not the purpose of the reflection*” (Solène P, 22). However, as we have observed during our interviews, guilt is indeed present.

**Guilt** is part of the buying process for a majority of consumers and buying ecofriendly can reduce their guilt. Interviewees often claimed to feel more **guilty of the quantity of clothes they own in their closet**, rather than the quantity they purchase. Yet, if people have that many clothes, it is because they have bought a lot and therefore do not do as they say. Furthermore, all of the interviewees admitted that their **guilt was reduced when buying ecofriendly** clothes: “*I enjoy myself without having too much effect on the environment*” (Grégoire, 22). An ecofriendly clothing purchase is considered as a long-term investment, responding to the desire to dress up without hurting too much the environment: “*My guilt is reduced because it's a responsible purchase that I'm going to keep on the long term. It's the best option available to me*” (Edmond, 22).

The guilt is also reduced when buying second-hand clothes as Solène P explained to us *“In thrift stores even if I buy more than expected I don't feel guilty”*. This is also one of the conclusions of a study ran by the agency Monet and associates in 2019: second-hand shopping is an *“empowering and guilt-free approach”*. In fact, according to the IFM study, 45% of the interrogated panel talked about ethical and environmental reasons to purchase second-hand clothes. It is described as **a way to treat oneself cheaply by being selfless.**

In addition, interviewees sometimes felt a feeling of sacrifice because of the price or the style with less choice with ecofriendly products, but above all had the impression of **“doing good”**. It is not a sacrifice at the end but a gift of self-esteem. There is an idea of doing a good deed, that was put forward by both managers and consumers: *“No, it's not the feeling of sacrifice, it's rather the recognition, the self-esteem “I did a good deed”. Gift of self, self-esteem.”* (LePantalon manager); *“Not a sacrifice on the contrary, it makes me happy, it makes me feel good to buy responsibly, I tell myself that I did a good deed”* (Théo, 22).

**Moral licensing can therefore be observed with some customers:** *“It's eco-responsible, so it's okay if I have a crush for the piece of clothes.”* (Mathilde, 23). Interviewees in the beginning of their process of change of habits were more likely to buy as much as before, even more: *“I feel better buying five ecofriendly t-shirts than five Primark t-shirts.”* (Solène R, 23). When finding a piece of clothes that they like, some of them would buy different versions of the same product. Nonetheless, we saw that the majority of the interviewees wouldn't buy more, but that buying ecofriendly clothes was a way for them to **clear their conscience**. It is a way to **do something good, and therefore to justify the amount of clothes bought that they know is still too important.**

## **Managerial implications and limitations**

### **1. Conclusion**

The **needs of the customers always come first**, so if customers would not want ecofriendly lines, it would be hard for the brands to sell them. There is an ecofriendly demand, but the mentalities and the consumption habits have not changed yet. That is probably why fast fashion is still growing. Ecofriendly shift is

in process, as we saw with the customers we have interviewed. However, even for them, who believe in conscious buying, it is sometime difficult to stick to their talk. Most of them would still buy compulsively punctually and would still go to the cheapest options.

As we saw in our findings, **moral licensing** may occur in certain cases and depends on the type of ecofriendly clothes. In fact, when buying ecofriendly clothes in certain cases, doing something moral (doing a gesture for the environment) gives on a license to do something immoral (buy as much clothes as before, or even more). Especially when buying second-hand clothes, customers have the feeling of making a good deal and at the same time to do good for the environment. It can be the same feeling when fast fashion brand has an ecofriendly corner, customers like cheap but styled clothes, that gives them good conscience because they are labelled “ecofriendly”. What Paulins and Hillery found in 2009, about consumer behavior influenced by moral matters and the will to be seen as someone good, is applicable, ten years later, for ecofriendly consumers in 2020. Ecofriendly fashion is fulfilling more than basic human needs: it fulfills psychological and moral needs. Some customers are therefore tempted, and sometime act on it, to buy more products that they wanted at first, because they do not feel guilty like when they buy regular clothes.

## **2. Managerial implications and recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, we make the following recommendations:

As our study revealed, some fashion brands’ ecofriendly efforts are only marketing strategies using consumers’ environment concern to encourage them in buying more clothes.

Some **fashion industry initiatives therefore support moral licensing to occur**. Concretely, this means for the industry that clothing sales are still high as ever, while the industry continue to be as polluting as before. Too many companies play with the ecofriendly trend, by doing greenwashing, only to make their sales jump, to attract new consumers, to hold back consumers, and to avoid losing them to “real” ecofriendly brands. Their strategy: create “ecofriendly” lines or brands with interesting prices, trying to be less expensive than “real” ecofriendly brands, with

stylish designs. Customers feel that their guilt of buying and polluting the environment is diminished: even if they do something bad (buying clothes), they have the impression of doing something good for the planet, that will be well perceived by the society. Thus, some companies use moral licensing as it allows them to state that they are green and ecofriendly, keeping customers buying while impacting positively their sales and profit.

Therefore, it is important to incent fashion companies to deliver **real ecofriendly efforts**. To do so, some regulations and restrictions should be implemented by relevant stakeholders (governments, regulation agencies ...) to control the eco-apparel market and denounce greenwashing. Several actions may be taken to implement internationally a stricter framework around eco-responsible designations, create more dedicated labels, regulation committees ...

In the meantime, it is important for brands with a real ecofriendly concern to **educate French consumers** representing the mass market. As proved in this study, French consumers are in majority more aware of environmental issues and a profound change is occurring in the society. In order to effectively transform their sayings into actions, consumers need to know more about ecofriendly production, labels, implications. Thus, companies must focus their communication strategies on educating campaigns. Patagonia's ad analysis had shown it, consumers, at every stage of their process of change, are sensitive to brands' transparency and welcome and assimilate efficiently the information. The goal is to reach as much consumers as possible, using social media, influencers, creating communities to develop dialogues and forums of discussions. It is also important for ecofriendly brands to develop physical stores: pop-up stores, permanent stores, corners ... the objective is get to be known by a population that is not going to make the effort to search for ecofriendly solutions on their own.

In order to attract more consumers, brands must **focus their efforts on the apparel products** in themselves. In fact, ecofriendly brands, lines, and products have to consider that consumers, when making an apparel purchase choice, still emphasize on the price, the style and the design of an item. Consumers are looking for affordable clothes that are to their taste. If they can make at the same time a "good action" for the environment, they considered it as a double advantage. Fashion

brands should therefore focus their efforts on those products' aspects while developing ecofriendly apparel.

In that sense, our study enlightened the growing importance of **second-hand apparel solution**. Thrifted clothes are, for consumers, affordable, stylish, trendy and at the same time considered as ecofriendly. It is a voluntary form of recycling and may be considered as a contemporary attitude of not owing, only using and re-injecting in the system. Therefore, it would be strategical for fashion brands to explore that side of the ecofriendly market.

### 3. Limitations

The present study contributes to a better understanding of ecofriendly apparel market and consumers' psychological behavior drivers to apparel consumption. Due to the choice of a qualitative methodological approach using in-depth interviews, this research has some limitations that can be divided into two key categories: **the choice of our interviewees** and the **difficulty to assess their honesty and veracity of responses**. **Moral licensing** is something **hard to capture** as it is linked with psychology and morality. There is a great part of judgment and the fear of what others may think.

First of all, as the qualitative approach appeared to be the best option to run our study, we interviewed customers and managers from the fashion industry.

Regarding customers, our sample of customers did not catch the entire French apparel market. In fact, it focused only on educated people. It would have been interesting to get insights from other subpopulations, to corroborate, contrast or add inputs to our analysis.

Our age range was mostly focused on people in their 20s or in their 50s. Interviewing customers in the 15-18 range or in their 30-40 might be insightful.

Regarding managers, considering the actual context, we did not have the possibility to interview more managers from fast-fashion brands. Our sample was composed mostly by managers from ecofriendly companies, and their judgements towards fast fashion brands might be biased. Fast fashion's managers opinion may add new information.

Regarding the market choice, we focused our study only on the French market. It could be educating to extend the studied area to over countries, in order to analyze and detect the similarities and the differences between countries and cultures.

Secondly, by choosing a qualitative approach, the difficulty resides in interpreting right interviewees' words. When talking about their own behaviors, especially environmental ones, we have noticed a gap between interviewees' actions and sayings. In fact, there may have been some politically correct behaviors and speeches. Therefore, it was difficult to assess interviewees' honesty: there might have been a space for misinterpretations. Detecting perfectly moral licensing was therefore hard.

#### **4. Directions for future research**

There are several directions for future research that may be taken. Our recommendations are first to study **moral licensing impact on apparel consumption, specifically on the second-hand market**. It is a growing market in the fashion industry that need to be studied, strategically, to understand new clothes consumption behaviors: just in France, it represented 1 billion euros in 2018. As one of our main research findings is that moral licensing occurred mostly with customers buying clothes in thrift shops, it is important to observe and describe moral licensing existence levers in this market.

Secondly, in the **COVID-19 context**, our subject is more than ever a hot topic and further studies should be done to analyze the **epidemic crisis consequences on brands' ecofriendly efforts and on consumers apparel consumption, through moral licensing**. In fact, the fashion industry has been heavily impacted by the crisis. Fast-fashion brands especially suffered from the situation, because of its big dependency to Asia. The fast fashion companies are facing supply, orders, transportation and stocks problems: the crisis has highlighted the weaknesses of the industry. On the contrary, according to Hakan Karaosman, fashion supply chain expert at the UN Economic Commission for Europe "*eco-responsible brands had already taken, before the crisis, concrete actions to create shorter, stronger and more transparent supply chains and they have seen that unexpected situations can be better controlled*". Nevertheless, with gradual return to work and stores, big



brands are starting to bet on lower prices, promotions at all costs to sell off their stock.

A change is also perceivable in French consumers' apparel behaviors. According a study run by the cash register software publisher Fastmag in 2020, 59% of French consumers evoked budget constraints for their apparel shopping because of the crisis. The lockdown has also allowed consumers to question their belongings (42%) and the necessity to buy. However, the lockdown situation also created compulsive desire to consume: 21% of consumers said they have developed an increased desire to buy because of significant frustration and 20% say they want to take advantage of the savings made during this period. In that context, **studying consumers' apparel behavior psychology, through moral licensing, is more than ever accurate.**

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## **Appendix**

### **1. Manager interview guide**

Our interview questions can be divided into three parts:

#### **First part : trends of the industry and the importance of environmental issues for the industry.**

*In your opinion, what are the most important trends in the fashion industry today? Are environmental issues (particularly related to clothing lines) something important in the fashion industry now? Why or why not?*

*To the extent that environmental issues are important in the fashion industry, do you feel this trend is driven by consumers, retailers, upper management, shareholders, government, environmentalists, or something else?*

#### **Second part : environmental strategy, their objectives and how the market answered.**

*Are these industry trends you mentioned also important for your company or are other issues of more importance? Are environmental issues something important for your company now?*

*What have been the main elements of your environmental strategies?*

*What have been your goals in relation to your environmental strategies ?*

*In general, what has been the market response to the environmental strategies of your firm?*

*Are they popular with your customers and retailers, have they increased or decreased your overall sales and profits? Overall, would you say they have been successful?*

#### **Third part : questions on the consumers and the possible existence of moral licensing.**

*What do you feel drives the consumer purchase of ecofriendly clothing lines? Feeling less guilty about clothing purchases, buying fewer but better clothes, social pressures to be green, retailer merchandising?*

*To the extent that consumers feel less guilty about buying ecofriendly clothing versus regular clothing lines, how does this affect their overall fashion consumption?*

*Does offering the ecofriendly lines lead consumers to buy more or fewer clothes overall than they would otherwise? Does offering the ecofriendly lines increase the sales of the regular (non-eco) lines?*

*Do you think that consumers who buy or consider ecofriendly lines feel they make a sacrifice by buying them? Are they more expensive, do they consider them to be as attractive/fashionable as regular (non-eco) clothing lines?*

## **2. Customer interview guide**

Our interview questions can be divided into three parts:

### **First part : context around their apparel purchases.**

*How would you characterize the importance of clothing to your life?*

*How would you characterize your clothing buying?*

*How would you characterize your clothing fashion expertise?*

### **Second part : relation between their environment concerns and their purchase habits.**

*How would you characterize your environmental feeling regarding clothing?*

*How concerned are you about environmental issues such as sustainability and climate change?*

*Do environmental concerns influence the amount or type of clothing that you buy and use?*

### **Third part : detect moral licensing behaviors.**

*Do you ever feel guilty about the amount of clothing your buy and use?*

*Does/would buying ecofriendly clothing increase or reduce the guilt you might feel about buying more clothing?*

*Does/would buying ecofriendly clothing make you feel like you are making some sort of environmental sacrifice?*

*When you see this Patagonia Ad, named “don’t buy this jacket”, how do you feel ? Do you want to purchase the product ?*

### 3. **Manager responses**

#### 1. *Trends of the fashion industry*

The first trend managers has evoked was **trend in itself**, what is fashionable, trendy at the moment : "*The trend, which is pure fashion, design, style*" (Picture Organic clothing).

Another important trend highlighted was the consumers' **search for quality at the best possible price**. In fact, quality was described as becoming more and more important when choosing a piece of clothes : for LePantalon manager, "*consumers are now looking for basics that will last longer. They favor quality products that are indeed more expensive at short term but less at long term than fast fashion. More and more sustainable French brands are flourishing in that sense*". Consumers are therefore ready to pay more for qualitative products, but they are mainly still looking for the best price possible. For the Uniqlo manager : "*Customers are looking for products they can keep for 2 or 3 years or more. But they also pay a lot of attention to promotions or price reductions, because the goal is also to get a good deal. All customers who have a budget to respect are looking for clothes that are looking good, durable but above all not too expensive*".

Regarding **environmental issues**, all the managers were unanimous to identify them as an actual fashion trend, as they all talked about it. Le Closet manager expressed it clearly: "*As the fashion industry is one of the most polluting in the world, environmental issues are clearly key and must be an integral part of the strategy of companies in this industry in order to propose offers / services / models more relevant and in line with the environmental issues we are facing today*" ... Similarly, the purchasing manager of Ekyog stated that "*Environmental issues are important to raise awareness about the "industrial damage of current fashion" (like dyeing, working conditions, wages, yields ...)*".

New ways of producing, consuming, have emerged, with the creation of new brands or ecofriendly lines in established brand collections. The "*use of sustainable products, recycling, the rise of French brands*" have been cited by LePantalon manager as part of this environmental trend. Brands such as Saola Shoes want to



sale at the “*fair price, limiting stocks and production*”. It is **still not the consumers’ number one preoccupation regarding clothing** but the movement is growing: “*committed and ecofriendly brands are therefore emerging, even if it is not the number one asset consumers in general are looking for*” (Picture Organic Clothing).

One of the biggest trend beneath the environment trend is **recycling**: “*We see an increase in clothing sold in thrift shops, more initiatives on the internet to resell or even give away clothes and the big companies that make efforts to recycle used clothes*” (Uniqlo manager). Some of the brands interviewed are working toward that objective and have focused their efforts on recycling: LePantalon has created “*collection points*” and is “*reusing plastic to make recycled products*”. LeCloset brand proposition is to help “*Reducing overproduction*” by offering a renting clothing system to the consumers. Saola Shoes CEO also talked about the luxury brands efforts to reduce their number of collection and clothes produced: “*Giorgio Armani is for example focusing his work on creating timeless products, he is not doing anymore collections every three months.*”.

From all of this stems new concerns from the consumers and their wants and behaviors have changed. **Consumers now want information** about what they buy. Uniqlo manager explained it to us: “*customers want to know the origin and composition of products so that they can use less polluting and healthier materials*”.

Therefore, companies have **changed the way to communicate with consumers**: for Uniqlo’s manager, “*we can see the efforts of companies that are multiplying their activities in favor of the environment: products such as cotton, linen, wool are increasingly coming from sustainable and ecological agriculture; reducing water use, etc.*”. Yet, all those **initiatives are not all sincere**. For Patagonia’s environmental and marketing manager, “*there is a lot of greenwashing. Today, less than 1% of the cultivated cotton is bio. This is not enough !*”.

Now, the **COVID-19** crisis the world is dealing with is more than ever, **challenging the fashion industry and accelerating environmental changes** : for LeCloset manager “*the fashion industry is facing many challenges, which are highlighted by the current health crisis: overproduction, pollution... it is therefore essential to take environmental issues into account*”. In fact, all the managers agreed to say that the

actual crisis would change durably the industry: *"There is now a real awareness coming from brands and consumers. Current period with COVID-19 speeds up the process. More and more initiatives to reduce pollution and consumption are necessary. The big brands do not want to go back to what they used to do anymore. Management of collections is also going to change, long cycle with too much production will be eliminated to reduce stocks and the use of eco responsible materials is going to grow."* (Saola Shoes CEO).

## 2. *Importance of these trends (especially environmental issues) in their companies' strategies*

The trend growing is clearly the one around environmental issues and is part of the all brands we have interviewed strategies. However, **style and design still have an important place** : for Picture Organic Clothing, *"Pure fashion look, design, look are still the asset number 1, then comes the environmental commitment"*. Saola CEO even stated *"The criterion number one of purchase, to reach everyone, is the style above all, and not only for consumers buying ecofriendly"*.

## 3. **Importance of environmental issues**

The importance of environmental issues is in the essence and the strategy of all the companies we have interviewed.

Patagonia's new statement is *"Patagonia is in business to save our home planet."*

Le Closet's ambition is to *"revolutionize consumption patterns in the fashion industry"*.

Ekyog motto is *"a world to change, clothes to keep"*. They uses environmental issues as a differentiation strength *"Communication is "essentially" based on these issues"*.

Picture Organic Clothing is trying to ally durability and style: *"we are trying to push the eco side, while keeping a design side of our brand. Our long-term objective is to get out of fossil fuels. We have one of the strongest eco labels, we are B-corp certified"*.

Ecofriendly concerns is also in Saola Shoes brand's blood: *“we sell eco-designed shoes made from recycled materials!”*.

LePantalon is also based on ecofriendly concerns: *“our products are made with respect for men/women and the environment in our European workshops, our trousers encourage more responsible consumption, far from fast fashion”*.

Uniqlo is also trying to promote durability, yet the manager admitted that it was not a sufficient effort: *“we are promoting durability with products that have a long longevity, with simple and “healthy” resources and finally industrial actions (less water, production of quantities more adapted to the demand). Yet, in reality, our clothes production is still too much polluting”*.

#### 4. Companies strategies and efforts

- Promote quality, reduce quantity, and adapt the demand to avoid overproduction and overconsumption.

Uniqlo manager explained to us that the company was trying to satisfy consumers. In order to do so, they had a defined strategy : *“Uniqlo promotes durability, longevity of product. We have also decided to produce quantities more adapted to the demand”*.

LePantalon strategy is also clear : *“We offer products that will be used often and for a long time. We try to sell at the right price all year round, we do not offer any sales, Black Friday or promotions. We do not have any overstock at our place, no unsold products that we have to get rid of”*.

LeCloset has also put the sustainable approach and environmental issues into account as the heart of their brand concept: *“We are looking forward to revolutionize consumption patterns, so our subscribers can enjoy unlimited dressing without over-consuming. We try as much as possible to repair damaged clothes and use environmentally friendly detergents. This avoids waste and considerably extends the life cycle of the clothes. In addition, our offer includes brands that highlight the eco-responsible aspect of their products, for example through Made in France productions or the use of eco-responsible materials.”*

- A respectful production

Brands are claiming to make a focus on the products in themselves and what is going on around them, transportation, and intermediaries.

The companies we have interviewed put a lot of effort in working on new resources and materials.

Uniqlo is claiming to *“reduce the consumption of polluting resources: less plastic (we favor cardboard), 99% less water in the production of jeans (they are now made by laser). Then, we use more sustainable resources: linen, wool, cashmere, cotton. We produce more and more 100% cotton or 100% cashmere products to avoid using polluting materials. Finally, we try to adjust production as much as possible to demand to avoid overproduction”*.

Picture Organic Clothing is also using "healthy" materials: *“We are using organic cotton, we have certificates to prove it; Polyester for ski clothing, We are looking for materials that require the least amount of oil resources and we no longer use plastic. For next winter, we are producing clothes made from organic source material... We are transforming agricultural waste from sugar cane sugar into alcohol to use it in our production”*.

Saola Shoes company’s objective is also to search for new solutions in terms of materials. *“Our project is to develop models in Europe. We are using recycled products to make entirely our shoes: plastic bottles, algae (soles), organic cotton (laces), cork (soles)”*.

At Ekyog, they want to be able to *“source "natural or organic" materials.”*

Concerning what is going on **around the products**, companies are also trying to reduce their impact. Uniqlo is taking *“industrial actions such as reducing the use of water”*. LePantalon is also dedicated to have the greenest cycle of production as possible : *“Our objective is to minimize our ecological impact on the world. we have eliminated unnecessary intermediaries, we control costs to get the right price and limit our CO2 emissions. In 2020 We start with our first range of responsible trousers, made from organic or recycled cotton fabrics. We also have a policy of pre-order, 0 packaging, collecting, recovering products. It is impossible technically to reduce by 100% our impact, but we try our best.”*. At Ekyog, the entire manufacturing line is taken into account : *“The aim is to carry out the*

*manufacturing process with certified actors and to ensure traceability to the end consumer of the entire production chain (proof of our commitment).”*

- Educate consumers

Some brands such as LePantalon and Pictures have also understood it: the stake is to educate consumers in order to change their behaviors. Picture Organic Clothing is trying to “*teach consumers*” and LePantalon’s objective is to “*encourage more responsible consumption, far, far away from disposable fashion. We communicate a lot on the fact that buying cheap and on sale make us produce too much. Brands must make what they sell at full price, brands such as Zara and H&M has an insane rhythm of production, it is not viable for our eco-systems*”.

Nevertheless, the questioning and the actions must go much more far beyond. For Patagonia manager, the entire system of our societies need to be changed : “*The issue goes beyond our company and our industry, we need systemic change, it's about working with other companies in other sectors, citizens, politicians to address the climate crisis we are in. For example: how to get out of our dependence on fossil fuels*”. Therefore, the company is supporting NGOs via 1% for the Planet, mobilizing their community to support these NGOS via Patagonia Action Works, giving them time and expertise, their networks. “*We support them through our storytelling: we create impactful films to highlight the struggle of the associations we support (cf Artificial against open salmon farms, Blue Heart against dams and for the protection of wild rivers).*”

## 5. *Drivers behind the environmental trend*

### 1. **It comes from the consumers.**

According to the managers, consumers are clearly driving the environmental trend in the fashion industry. In fact, for Saola Shoes CEO, “*consumers drive the supply*”. Picture Organic Clothing manager thinks the same : “*the consumer is the first player, so brands must follow*”. More specifically for Uniqlo manager, this trend is driven by consumers’ change in their consumption behaviors : “*consumers are generally more aware of their ecological impact and are changing their behavior*”. As Ekyog manager stated, it is important to fit customer’s image : “*it’s necessary*

*to build an image where the consumer will identify herself and be in phase with her "global" lifestyle".*

## **2. It's a whole, all concerned and involved:**

But consumers are not the only actors taking part in this trend. In fact, Picture Organic Clothing added that a global awareness had emerged, changing the game : *"the government, environmentalists are now pushing this trend. It is not about politics, but awareness."*

It is also clear for LePantalon manager, all the actors are playing a role : *"companies adapt because there is a demand coming from the consumers. It comes from the companies that want to adapt to the evolution of the market. It is even more profitable to make few products and little collection, produced in a better way, also for the retailers, shareholders etc."*.

## **3. It is a societal issue:**

More generally, the Patagonia's position is very clear: environmental issues must not only be a trend driven by some actors. It should be a global initiative : *"We talk about the stakes, but we forget about the system. It's not just a question of switching to organic cotton but of reviewing our capitalist system, our consumer society..."*.

## **6. Market response to environmental strategies, type of consumers and drivers behind their purchase**

All managers found it difficult to talk about a specific consumer profile. In fact, Patagonia manager explained it : *"It goes beyond socio-demographics or classifications like CSP. It's all about values, people that are reflected in the philosophy and actions of the brand"*.

The trend is growing and consumer profile may depend on the type of product and the brand, as LePantalon's manager explained to us : *"Consumers will depend on the product and the brand: for some, the environmental argument will not be taken into account they will buy it because they like the clothes, for others the price will be determinant"*.

Although a consumer profile type is difficult to generalize, different common characteristics were detailed by the manager :

**Women are buying more ecofriendly clothes than men.** LePantalon manager expressed it *“What I can say is that women are more attentive to these environmental criteria”*. **The 25-35 is the core segment.** But this segment is broadening, as Picture Organic Clothing manager explained it: *“The consumer group is getting a bit older. The 30-40 are more and more sensitive to the message. The 18-20 age group is also evolving because the message is clearer and there is a real awareness growing in this age category”*.

**High income is not necessarily a profile type characteristic.** Price is indeed important in the purchase decision, as LePantalon manager explained it: *“consumers are looking first at the price, then the origin and finally the ecofriendly aspect of the piece of cloth”*. Ecofriendly clothes are more expensive than traditional clothes, *“eco-designed products are necessarily more expensive”* (Saola Shoes CEO). Depending on the brand the clothes are more or less affordable . Picture Organic Clothing motto is for example to make ecofriendly clothes affordable : *“as we offer ski and snow clothing, our segment is composed of active outdoor people. For income, our customers income varies a lot”*. Patagonia manager’s sayings can summarize it : *“some (customers) have a high purchasing power, others don't, but they buy second-hand, or they buy a single garment that they keep for a very long time”*. Therefore, consumers with a low income would still buy ecofriendly clothes, but less than someone with a higher income.

However, for some managers **price and therefore people’s income can be an obstacle to buying ecofriendly products:** *“consumers are “aware” of these issues but cannot necessarily access “sustainable” fashion. Sustainable fashion is necessarily more expensive for the consumer who is not always ready to disburse for textile purchases (unlike food).”* (Purchase manager at Ekyog). At Ekyog, they don’t have one type of consumer, it’s about the customer’s means and needs at the moment *“it is necessary to propose a collection in line with market expectations and current trends”*.

**The style of the product is important** According to a Picture Organic Clothing internal study, consumers buy mainly first because they like the clothes’ style. Soala

Shoes' CEO insisted on this : *“the style of the products is very important, in addition to the ecofriendly aspect”*.

Regarding market response, the Picture's study revealed also that some consumers did not buy an ecofriendly piece of clothes because of the ecofriendly aspect. Yet, this cannot be generalized as the demand for ecofriendly clothes is growing in France : *“There is definitely a strong demand in France to favor French brands or brands that are involved at the environmental level. The example of the brand Sézanne shows it well. The client favors these brands and plays the game”* (LePantalon manager).

For « **fast-fashion** » **brands** such as Uniqlo, customers' market response is different : *“Customers come to Uniqlo first of all because they know they will find quality "basic" products, so from this point of view the operation is quite successful. However, we are still working on the sustainable side. But once again, the objective remains to satisfy the needs of our customers, most of whom are looking for quality, not necessarily the environmental impact of the product.”*. Those brands want to meet with the new wants and needs of the customers, but at the end **environment is still not their first priority**.

At last, Ekyog manager stated that **this market is hard to reach for an already established fashion brand** : *“It is a difficult market for a "fashion" brand to "persevere" because the creation of a collection is "fastidious" with regard to all the constraints to be respected.”*.

## 7. *Consumers feelings and attitude toward consumption*

### 1. **Consumer drivers**

According to the managers, **most of the consumers would buy ecofriendly clothes driven by environmental values**. Consumers are looking for a *“better consumption”* (LeCloset manager), a *“conscious purchase with an environmental approach”* (LePantalon manager). In most of the cases, it is a real gesture for the planet : *“consumers who buy ecofriendly have a sustainable fiber. Most of them are not following trends, it's not about fashion”* (Picture Organic Clothing).

Consumers buying ecofriendly clothes are also **looking to identify themselves to the brand they are buying from**. It is the case for Patagonia : *“we have identified*



*a will to be in touch with our values. They are interested by this capacity of action at our level, to change our systems, more globally this goes hand in hand with a vision of the world, a more sober and respectful way of living “.*

**Buying ecofriendly is generally not an isolated act.** It takes part of a global change in customers behaviors. *“These environmental concerns exist in other aspects of their lives: People will first start with food. They first look to change the way they eat before they throw themselves into clothes. It is a much more general approach”.* (LePantalon manager). Indeed, *“Everyone has their own convictions and the consumer is often part of a global approach (food, textiles, cosmetic products, recycling, healthy living, etc.).”* (Ekyog manager).

Finally, the **style/clothes design is an important consumers’ driver.** In order to make profit and touch the mass public, the **design is key** as Picture Organic Clothing : *“profit and success is possible by touching the mass public thanks to the design and not necessarily the eco speech of the retailer. It relies on pure communication”* (Picture). According to Saola Shoes CEO, style is the *“criterion number one of purchase, to reach everyone is the style above all, and not only ecofriendly people”.*

## 2. New consumer trends

In France, a real awareness is perceivable for Picture Organic Clothing manager. Le Closet manager thinks the same : *“I think people are becoming aware that the act of buying a garment involves many stakeholders. Very concretely, for example, we are much more aware today of what buying a t-shirt for 3 euros implies in fast fashion”.*

For some managers, there is therefore a movement of *“buying less but better”* (Patagonia manager). For LePantalon manager, *“consumers buy less and better ! It does not increase the sales of the traditional lines because people who buy these products are in a process that is, as I said before, more global”.* (LePantalon). Their consumers are apparently stopping to over consume : *“stop over-consuming, we see it more and more”* (Picture Organic Clothing manager) ; *“I think that people are now ready to consume less, but "better", it includes buying clothes from brands with eco-responsible approaches, with higher prices”* (Le Closet manager) ; *“They*

*will privilege the selection of purchases (buy less) to the disadvantage of quantity (disposable fashion) but they will be more demanding over the life of the product.”* (Ekyog manager).

Consumers also seems to care about their clothes utilization : *“there is a clear trend of keeping your clothes longer, giving them a second life, buy second hand, repair, give them away”* (Patagonia manager); Three managers talked about Vinted, as an important actor in the industry : this application is specialized in what is second life (clothes, bags, books etc.). According to Picture’s manager, much more consumers clean first their closet on Vinted before buying more.

### 3. Brakes exist

Despite the growing trend and the consumers changes of behaviors, a lot of efforts have to be done by the brands in order to change the majority of consumers mindset.

In fact, regarding the amount of clothes purchased, the change is still not enough perceivable : *“in general people are buying the same quantities at the moment, limiting purchases will surely come later. It is a slow process”* according to Saola Shoes’ CEO.

This is possibly explained by the **lack of massive communication**. For Picture Organic Clothing manager, this is because it is difficult for the mass public to get information about ecofriendly brands. *“The attractiveness level of ecofriendly clothing is still a problem; it is super hard for eco-responsible fashion because big brands don't go there very much. To search for ecofriendly brands, you have to make some research. Big brands are starting to communicate about it, but it is still not generalized. Ecofriendly products are not visible. If you look carefully, the offer is here, and very good creators exist. But as a consumer you have to put some efforts to search for those products to find them”*.

### 4. Consumer guilt

- Not a sacrifice, real convictions:

Ecofriendly clothes customers are most of the time in a logic of responsible consumption, as explained by Uniqlo manager : *“These customers are already*

*registered in this logic of responsible consumption and will therefore seek to reduce their ecological impact in all cases. Above all, we are looking for clothes that we will like. Consumers are not doing a sacrifice when buying an ecofriendly cloth : If consumers don't like eco-responsible clothing, there won't be any customers. As far as price is concerned, we can see that these consumers are ready to go one step further to buy organic, so why not buying eco-responsible clothing”.*

It is a responsible act : for Patagonia Manager, it not a feeling of sacrifice, but “*the feeling of acting as actors, responsible citizens, and in a way that they feel like they're voting. Every "responsible" purchase is like a way of expressing themselves and voting for the environment”*. Consumers “*do not see it as a sacrifice, but rather as a conscious act of "consuming better"”*. (Le Closet manager).

There is also an idea of doing a good deed : “*no, it's not the feeling of sacrifice, it's rather the recognition, the self-esteem "I did a good deed". A Gift, for their self-esteem.*” (LePantalon)

- A social pressure :

Yet, this search for doing a « good deed » may be also resulting from pressure created around the « **duty of becoming green** ». In fact, according to Uniqlo manager, “*there is also a sort of social pressure to become green. People might feel less guilty by buying green and want to be able to say, “I consume better and more sustainable””* (Uniqlo).

## 8. Managers' vision of the future

Ecofriendly brands have a common vision for the future : change the industry durably. For Le Closet manager, they have a mission : “*For me, ecofriendly brands are part of a global trend that affects the entire industry. In this sense I think they are going to be more and more trendy/attractive, and I hope that in the long term, this will make it possible to impose eco-responsibility as a "standard" for all stakeholders in the fashion world”*.

Big fast-fashion brands are starting to change their way of producing and that is a good initiative but is not always sincere, as explained by Picture Organic Clothing managers : “*we are happy, big brands such as H&M are starting to have*

*sustainable initiatives, but the way they communicate may trick the consumer as they are playing a lot on this. There is a lot of greenwashing, especially when it comes to « bio cotton ». It is important to read the labels !*". It is in line with Patagonia manager's remark about the percentage of actual bio cotton produced (1%): greenwashing regarding ecofriendly clothes exist. There is a **gap between the ecofriendly actual production and the increase of ecofriendly lines**.

Uniqlo's manager explained us **big brands' state of mind : the objective is still to make profit** : *"A company's objective remains first and foremost to make a profit. So finally, all means are good to push to buy and I think that the objective remains the same here. By proposing these eco-responsible lines, we are trying to promote an alternative to traditional products. The trend is even being felt in mass distribution with more vegetable products, organic etc."*.

Would offering eco-responsible lines increase sales of "traditional" (non-eco-responsible) lines? For him, *"as far as this question is concerned, it really depends on the clientele and the product offered. A brand like Nike, in addition to offering fashionable sneakers, is looking to create content to search for new customers. If the company were about to launch a recycled sneaker, tomorrow there would surely be **new customers** who would come and take an **interest in all the brand's products**"*.

#### **COVID 19 particular situation**

The particular situation the world is facing today with COVID-19 is accelerating this process. It is still in Premises. For LePantalon manager, *"not even 0.1% of production is ecofriendly. but with the Co vid it will become more important. The virus have highlighted the issues of dependency on other country, the made in France and made in Europe is clearly becoming a priority"*. Picture Organic Clothing manager agrees : *"Coronavirus will speed things up: I hope that coronavirus crisis will make people aware of the environmental aspect, way of consuming and travelling, buying eco resp products (fashion and other) beneficial awareness. There is a superior trigger thanks to the crisis"*.

#### **4. Customer responses**

1. *Importance of clothing to their life and personal perception about their own style and quantity bought.*

Summary :

Regarding the importance of clothing, the great majority of the people interviewed thought **clothing was important to their life**. A few did not think it was important at all and dressed up because it was “necessary”.

Importance of clothing regarding to others :

It is important to point out that when we talked about clothing in general, without being specific, some people directly thought about style, whereas others thought about quality. Therefore, we thought it was interesting to start with a general question about clothing, and then more specific questions about style and quality separately. Here are the numerical results of our interviewees answers :

**Overall importance regarding fashion:**

<b>Importance of clothing</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	4	1	3
<b>Equal</b>	6	2	4
<b>Less</b>	4	3	1

As we can see, the importance of clothing varied a lot depending on each person. However, we can see that women tend to pay more attention to clothing than men did (3 women said they felt it was more important for them than for others, whereas 3 men said it was less important for them than for others).

**Importance when it comes to quality:**

<b>Importance of quality</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	8	4	4
<b>Equal</b>	5	2	3
<b>Less</b>	1	0	1

The great majority of customers we interviewed believed they gave more importance to quality than others, both women and men alike.

**Importance when it comes to style:**

<b>Importance of style</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	7	1	6
<b>Equal</b>	3	1	2
<b>Less</b>	4	4	0

Customer’s perception of style was more controversial. Half of the interviewees think it was more important for them than for others, a few feel it was as important, and a third believed it was less important for them. Nonetheless, we can see a clear difference between men and women. Three quarters of the women interviewed saw style as more important to them than others, whereas two third of the men believe it was less important for them than others.

To put it in a nutshell, women payed more attention to their style and felt that clothing was more important for them than men.

Main ideas :

These are the main emerging ideas about clothing:

**A) People that dress only for themselves:**

Some people thought about clothes as something practical, to protect themselves, to cover up. As Thomas, 26 said : *“my clothes allow me to cover myself and protect me from the outside world, from the cold of the weather.”*

Some people felt clothes needed to be comfortable, with noble materials *“I take a close look to the material I am buying”* (Yassine, 25), *“I am looking for stylish comfy clothes”* (Amélie, 23).

Some people would use clothes to give themselves confidence, to **feel good about themselves**. Even if it is not trendy or people liking it, it is about how they would feel in the clothes: *“If I don't dress the way I like, I don't trust myself and I am not confident”* (Solène R, 23).

**B) People that dress for themselves but also for the others.**

Some people used their clothes to show their tastes, to **reflect their personality**, their mood of the day, their originality as Théo, 23, put forward: *“I like to have an original style, that looks like me.”* They associate colors and use accessories to do so most of the time (example: fun socks).

Clothes were also considered as an opinion, a way to **convey one's values**: to militate through the clothes one wears. *“Some brands help bringing out our lifestyle, for example I know people wearing Adidas because they want to be combative, others Nike because they want to push themselves further”* (Yassine, 25). *“I like to wear brands that convey a message, for example environmentally respectful brands like Picture to show to others what I believe and stand for”* (Grégoire, 20).

**C) People that dress mostly for the others.**

Others used clothes to **convey a positive image about themselves**, to reflect a certain position in the mind of others. For example, putting a suit to be taken seriously at work *“For work we have a responsibility, a posture, a role, we need to be following the codes”* (Tayeb, 53), or to avoid being harassed *“the way you dress may have an impact on your childhood because of the vision others have of your*

clothes”(Yassine, 25). It would show a place in the social hierarchy (based on the brand, type of clothing, quality), box people up, especially in the professional world: *“I like to be well dressed because it's the first impression given to others.”* (Nathalie, 52).

**2. Buying clothing habits.**

Summary:

The biggest trend we have seen regarding clothing is that people used to buy more, and stated that they were more careful about what they would buy now. We see clearly **the emergence of conscious buying.**

Buying regarding to others :

<b>Clothing buying</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	1	1	0
<b>Equal</b>	4	1	3
<b>Less</b>	9	4	5

As we can clearly see, the people we interviewed feel that they bought less than others, that they payed more attention to how much they buy now. There are no significant differences between men and women.

One quote from someone interviewed revealed clearly the global state of mind of the persons interviewed: *“Now I buy as much as everyone else, I used to buy more, and I'd like to buy less.”* (Laura, 23).

Main ideas :

First, we have perceived 3 categories of people:

- 1) People that admitted buying a lot:** Buying madness / compulsive buying. It is the case especially for one of the interviewee when it comes to sportswear if he has a crush for items : *“I pay attention to what and how much I buy, except*



*for sportswear, I shop compulsively rather than out of necessity.”* (Théo, 23). Another interviewee talked about the therapeutic virtues of shopping, in times of a low mood. *“When I feel down, I can’t resist to the shopping madness”* (Amélie, 24).

**2) People that did not think clothing is important:** they would buy maximum once or twice a year. *“I buy clothes every year, as I don't particularly enjoy shopping or taking too much time to think about how I am going to dress”* (Thomas, 26).

**3) People that bought according to their needs:** They would buy when they actually needed a certain item. *“I do according to my needs: if I have a piece of clothing that I need to replace I do so, but I don't buy more than I need.”* (Yassine, 25).

**Most of the interviewees stated to be now in a conscious buying and quality buying approach:** Some of them used to buy a lot and now have changed their way of buying, others had always been conscious. All are aware of what they buy and claim to be more or less informed.

#### **A) Quality over quantity**

All of the interviewee said that they prefer quality over quantity. Most of them bought items that last in time as they tend to buy quality clothes : they were looking forward to have fewer items, most of them **basics**, and some originals pieces in their wardrobes. *“Buying quality is more responsible and the clothes last longer, in the end it's more profitable so I now prefer quality to quantity.”* (Théo, 23).

In general, the interviewees **payed attention to the brands** where they would shop; they were looking for the place of production and the materials used. For example, they would be looking for the label “made in France”. *“I want to keep my clothes for a long time and that the clothes are made respectfully so I inquire about brands before buying”* (Solène P, 22).

A lot of them associate **quality with expensive price**. One interviewee admitted that she bought fast fashion because she was influenced by her friends and what they bought. Furthermore, she could not afford more expensive items. *“Now that*

*my income has increased, I buy the best quality which is more expensive” (Solène R, 23).*

Yet, buying quality clothes is finally seen as a **cost-effective strategy**: *“I buy less than most people. On the short-term I can pay more, but on the long-term I pay less because I keep the clothes I bought longer” (Yassine, 25).*

Interestingly, most people said that they **did not necessarily associate quality with luxury**. *“I’m looking for more luxurious brands, but beware, luxury is treacherous, not necessarily ethical. Brands like Sézanne, less luxurious, have a better ethical quality.” (Solène R, 23).*

### **B) Conscious buying.**

A large majority interviewee claimed to buy fewer purchases than before, for various reasons:

*“I’m not growing up so I buy less because of that” (Amélie, 24)*

*“Purchases that reflect my beliefs” (Solène P, 22)*

*“Purchase according to my needs, according to the seasons, the climate” (Nezha, 53)*

*“I buy according to the number of machines per week I am doing” (Yassine, 25)*

There is apparently, according to their sayings, a complete change of mindset as they had a wakeup call: Due to personal evolution, interviewees tend to *“attach less importance to material goods and have reached an awareness that I have “enough” (Amélie, 24).* They were aware that *“Fashion incites us to renew our wardrobe, but we already have everything we need” (Nathalie, 52).* They have realised that they could live without over-consumption: *“While being abroad I realized that I lived with few clothes without any problem, I have clothes everywhere, a lot, and I do not need all of it.” (Laura, 23).*

**New ways of buying** have therefore emerged and **new buying methods** that all interviewees know: second-hand shops, applications such as Vinted.

### **C) Other criteria to purchase**

Interestingly, some interviewees talked about other criteria that entered into account in their fashion buying routine. For Mathilde, 22, our **relationship with clothes may depend with our age** : *“When I was younger, I would go shopping with my mother, she chose for me. As a teenager everyone wants to express its own tastes, so I would go with my mother, but I would choose my clothes. Now that I am older I dress up myself”*.

Some interviewees evoked the **place of buying as an important factor**: *“I don't buy online, I want to go to the store to touch the material”* (Nezha, 53). Some interviewees also talked about the fact that they would **buy mostly in promotion**: *“It is frustrating when you buy 100% of the price and 2 weeks later you would find the same product with 50% off”* (Tayeb, 53).

Furthermore, we have perceived a **form of skepticism for some ecofriendly initiatives**: *“Some brands have this second-hand system, but it is greenwashing, like H&M recycling program. I do it, I get a voucher, but I don't use it because I don't need to buy H&M”* (Solène R, 23).

### ***3. Fashion knowledge and expertise.***

#### Summary:

Fashion is associated with trends, style, materials. Every individual have his **own vision of what fashion is**, it does not resonate the same way. It is a subjective knowledge and should be nuanced. In our pool of interviewed people, the fashion expertise was very wide, with people knowing nothing about it to people being well aware.

#### Expertise regarding others:

When we asked this question, we saw a clear distinction in people's mind about fashion as a trend, and fashion as fabrics. Therefore, we gathered information about this two expertise.

#### **Overall fashion expertise:**

<b>Fashion expertise</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	6	1	5
<b>Equal</b>	0	0	0
<b>Less</b>	8	5	3

Regarding fashion expertise overall, almost half felt to know more than others, and the other half thought they know less. Women claimed to be more aware about fashion than man did.

**Fabrics fashion expertise:**

<b>Fabrics expertise</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	8	2	6
<b>Equal</b>	3	2	1
<b>Less</b>	3	2	1

Regarding fabrics, people tended to be more aware. More than half of the people interviewed, and almost all the women, considered themselves more expert than others regarding fabrics.

To put it in a nutshell, people were more aware about fabrics, than about the fashion trends of the industry. Overall, women tend to be more experts about these subjects than men.

Main ideas:

We distinguish from our interviews four different levels of expertise regarding fashion.

### **A) Good level of clothing fashion expertise.**

A part of our interviewees stated that they had a good level of fashion expertise. To get inspiration or just to know the trends and be aware, different techniques are used. Some of the interviewees used social media to get updated on releases, current trends, colors, fabrics, cut by following the brands accounts but mostly by following influencers, sportsmen, designers : *“When it comes to fashion, I'm inspired by networks, by influencers' looks. Some of them have this ecofriendly side, like Coline.”* (Solène R,23). In fact, some interviewees noticed a shift in the communication on social media: *“even the fast fashion influencers are starting to have an ecofriendly side”* (Solène R, 23). An interviewee also told us that she liked to go the stores *“to see what is going on without buying most of the time, by curiosity”* (Laura, 21). *“I know what's trendy, maybe I don't apply them to my style, but I know what's going on now”* (Nezha, 53).

One of our interviewees had some experience in the fashion industry: *“I worked in sales in some luxury stores, also in fast fashion. I also worked in internships in ready-to-wear development, product development teams. We were working on the collections one year ahead, so I had a vision”* (Mathilde, 23).

### **B) A low level of clothing fashion expertise.**

Some of our interviewees stated clearly that they would not have any fashion expertise:

- *“I do not know anything about it”, “I do not care because I'm not interested in trends, I buy what suits me and I like”* (Yassine, 25).
- *“When I buy it's really because I like the product”* (Amélie, 24)
- *“I only know that big companies like H&M are not known for the quality of their products”* (Grégoire, 20).
- *“I buy trendy cloth only when the product and the trend is democratized. I am a follower”* (Tayeb, 53).

### **C) A personal clothing fashion expertise.**

Some people expressed the idea that they knew what was fitting them nicely: *“I know myself and the products that will fit me and that I will keep for a long time, so I have an expertise concerning “my own fashion””* (Solène P, 22). Others were passionate about a color ; *“I can fall for a top, not for the shape but the color (link with a passion for pastel, painting), it's the color that will push to the purchase.”* (Nathalie, 52).

#### **D) A targeted clothing fashion expertise.**

Some interviewees were having a targeted expertise. Some of them had an expertise for the materials: they had some knowledge of characteristics and properties and would look at labels before buying: *“I prefer to buy something synthetic rather than wool. I do not want clothes that have caused harm to animals. I have vegan convictions ”* (Solène R, 23). An interviewee had an expertise only for shoes, another in color combination; another one only for ethical products because *“it speaks to me and interests me”* (Amélie, 24). Finally, someone pointed out that he was interested only on the innovation part of trends *“I like to see innovations in terms of ecology, more for the innovation side than the fashion side”* (Théo, 22).

#### ***4. Environmental feeling regarding clothing***

##### Summary:

All the interviewees had a fairly **high level of knowledge of the impact of the fashion industry on the environment**. Most of them identified the industry as the first polluting industry in the world: they evoked chemicals for dyes, products manufactured far away - transport, carbon emission, all waste, materials used.

##### Environmental feeling compared to others:

<b>Environnemental feeling</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>More</b>	7	3	4
<b>Equal</b>	6	3	3
<b>Less</b>	1	0	1

Almost all (except one) of our interviewees considered that they cared as much or more about the environmental clothes characteristics than others: our interviewees seemed to become more and more sensitive to these issues.

Main ideas:

#### **A) A new mentality has emerged.**

It was unanimous: all of them talked about the fact that they had, at a certain time, a **click**. This click has different origins and it starts with sorting clothes: *“I realized I still had some clothes I never wore/ never put on when I was sorting through”* (Nathalie, 52). Documentaries on fast fashion and media coverage of scandals as the Rhana Plaza one has also influenced our interviewees. An interview talked about an eye-opening documentary, *“The world according to H&M”: the journalists went to see what was left of the Rhana Plaza building. No one wanted to pay to renovate and people died. You're an accomplice when you're a consumer... I felt ashamed.”* (Yassine, 25). The idea of being part of that machination created a **feeling of shame** for some of our interviewees. The idea also that it was specific to the "younger" generation who wanted in its majority to change things has come up. *“Workers younger than us are slaves in these factories”* (Camilia, 19). Some interviewees also told us that they were **proud** to buy from thrift stores or ecofriendly stores, as classy as buying Nike, a "must have" in their wardrobe: *“It's trendy to buy at Emmaus now, people are more and more proud to buy in thrift shops or ecofriendly stores : a must have.”*(Laura, 23). All those elements showed a change and a shift in mentality and can be illustrated by this verbatim: *“Before I didn't care, I used to buy at Primark, Zara. Then I realized that the quantity of*

*clothes produced was too much. I felt like I was fed by the number of clothes, which change all the time, new fashions all the time, zapping (...)*" (Solène R, 23).

### **B) A conscious shopping.**

Consumers stated to have changed apparently their ways of shopping : "*Now when I see all these racks in the shops, I'm shocked. I prefer to go to small shops with a few racks. In department stores I can't even choose anymore.*" (Nezha, 53). They would ask the help of friend more informed than them, or look to blogs on the internet, or go directly to specialized stores. The rise of purchase in second-hand shops (cheap and ecofriendly) has also been evoked several times.

The interviewees are most of the time aware of what information to look for to identify if a cloth is ecofriendly or not: "*I look at the label to know what material it is, where it was made*" (Yassine, 25) "*I look before buying: where and how it was produced (local for example), the history of the brand. For example: Nike is recycling but children are working behind. The made in France attracts me more.*" (Théo, 22). The fabric is an important element to look at: "*I'd rather buy things made with organic cotton and responsible synthetics than animal skin and hair.*" (Solène, 23). It was also important for most of them to get to know the brand and the entire circle of production: "*Not just the eco-responsible product itself, but everything around it: manufacturing, transport...*" (Edmond, 22). As it is a personal purchase that is for their personal uses, some interviewees would be more picky with clothes than with food for example: "*As my clothes only impact me, I am more demanding in my approach and I am careful. It is not easy to impose vegetarian meals to your family and friends for example*" (Solène P, 22).

When it comes to "traditional stores" (not ecofriendly branded), a lot of our interviewees were not against the idea of buying there, if it was ecofriendly: "*If it is brands where I normally buy from that make ecofriendly collections, it makes me think, I'm willing to buy a little more. I if have the choice between two T-shirts, one at 10 euros and the other at 15, produced in ecofriendly conditions, I'll buy the ecofriendly one.*" (Tayeb, 53).

### **C) Some progress still need to me made.**



All of them stated that they were buying less clothes than before this click. *“Even if I buy from fast-fashion stores, I buy three times less than I used to”* (Laura, 23). But it can be nuanced: *“As I already have a lot of clothes, it's easier and more pleasant for me to buy ecofriendly clothes because I already have a base”* (Amélie, 24).

Even if all our interviewees stated to have experienced a wake-up call, they struggle to stick to their new line of conduct. We observed that **their consistency and commitment on buying less depends on their position in the “chronology” of change**. Most of the time, the change of clothing purchase and use comes after changing habits for food and they would still buy as much still too much : *“Nowadays I am more interested in food products, my purchasing actions are not yet all driven by the origin of manufacture and by environmental factors. I now mostly buy clothes according to my needs, that's why I buy less than before.”*(Tayeb, 53).

People at the beginning of their transition still have a lot of misguided moments: *“There is a difference between what I would like to do and what I do in reality. I have the weakness to buy if I see a piece that I like, on sale etc.”* (Mathilde, 23). Some of them admitted that they had a **margin of progress** in their buying process, and are willing to do more: *“Once, I bought four sweaters once from H&M and on the way home I thought, 'You're crazy,' so I went to return them. Sometimes I let myself get tempted.”* (Solène R, 23).

One of the reason why some struggle to change radically their way for buying is that the **importance of style** may be still strong at the beginning of the transformation : *“You give me the choice between 2 clothes; I am able to choose the one that is more ecofriendly than the other one even if it is more expensive. But if it's not stylish enough, I'll go for the less ecofriendly choice.”* (Solène R, 23). The **expensive prices** have also been evoked: *“Buy better, local is ideal, but it's still expensive”* (Camilia, 19).

#### **D) Some breaks are identified.**

Even if interviewees claimed to want to change their habits, there are therefore for a lot of them a **gap between their convictions and their actions**. They have identified some barriers to push them to an ecofriendly purchase:

The problem is coming from the fact that a large part of the population **doesn't care, doesn't have the means for this kind of clothing** : *“I think that some people do not attach importance to these problems because ecology requires investment, and many do not have the resources to do so, or do not even know that there are climate problems because of a lack of education.”* (Amélie, 24).

It is a **problem of ecofriendly knowledge and education**: *“I don't follow trends at all, even when it comes to materials, I have difficulties knowing which materials are environmentally friendly or not”* (Yassine, 25).

For some of them, there is a **communication problem**: the brands (especially fast-fashion brands) did not communicate enough, but it is changing as they have no other choice than to adapt to the new trends : *“There's a communication problem. The big brands are forced to adapt to the needs of consumers. Brand communication is tending towards ecofriendly, even if it is rather slow at the moment.”* (Yassine, 25).

As ecofriendly brands in France were not especially present in commercial areas and not famous enough, some consumers have the feeling that **not enough “made in France” brands exist**. *“It's a shame we don't have more made in France.”* (Solène R, 23).

Some of the interviewees also **did not want to buy online**, for environmental reasons (delivery) or to have the possibility to touch, examine in store what they buy, like Solène P, 22 *“I don't like to buy on the internet, I need to see the product.”*

## **5. Environmental issues concerns**

### Summary:

All the people we interviewed declared to be **concerned by environmental issues**. They claimed to try to change things, starting with small gestures in their daily life.

### Main ideas:

#### **A) A global concern.**

All interviewees agree to say that they saw a visible change on nature and impact on their health, the planet and humanity in general: *“I don't want to die and see the*

*world burn, it's important not to forget that nature has its rights before us, we're occupiers, we're here as tourists" (Camilia, 19). They identified different consequences: poorer air quality; unbalanced diet, too much sugar and fat and not enough fruit and vegetables, too many ready meals; rising temperatures creating water shortages). "Inspired by Laudato Si on environmental issues (2015). Let's take care to note the nourishing earth that allows us to live, let's not use up all the resources too fast" (Nathalie, 52). They experienced this change personally: "The snorkeling in 5 years has totally different landscapes: we see the changes with our own eyes" (Laura, 23) "I was born on an island so I am sensitive to climate change with bigger storms for example" (Edmond, 22).*

### **B) Personal initiatives.**

It was apparently a constant learning: *"I learn a lot about what's going on and try to be responsible on all fronts: what I eat, what I buy, where I go/where I go/what's important in my daily life" (Théo, 22). It was also described as an ongoing process: "(...) perpetual questioning about how to change my habits to have a positive impact. I try to raise awareness around me. Part of myself that wants to become an activist: I have stopped eating meat, animal products, I eat organic" (Solène R, 23). Interviewees described some small-scale initiative: turning off lights, sorting waste, public transport, walking or cycling, using a water bottle/thermos, eating less meat, paying attention to the food you buy (bulk, seasonal vegetables), short showers, less industrial cosmetics, reusable razor, plastic-free soaps.*

But they admitted that it was difficult. Those same interviewees talked about the efforts they have made but **admitted that another selfish part of themselves was still there, showing strong inconsistencies in their behaviors**: *"I have trying hard on some aspects of my life to change my behaviors. But there are some things that I do not want to change, I am not ready to say goodbye to it : I love to travel for example, so I won't stop flying and taking the plane, even if I know that it is polluting the environment. I also want to stop buying real leather, but I buy leather shoes as I feel that they are more qualitative and more stylish than those made with synthetic leather" (Solène R, 23) ; "(...) Feeling that I can do more on a daily basis : buying eco responsible household products, carpooling" (Thomas, 26)...*

### **C) Some brakes persist.**

Interviewees felt like their personal initiatives were important but knew and admitted that they were not enough. Some brakes persists and need to be fixed.

Some of the interviewees accused the government of not helping consumers “*It is not possible to ask one part of the world to make efforts and let the other part continue what it is doing. Political involvement necessary but not easy (because economically unpopular at times)*” (Nezha, 53). All humans have their part of responsibility, but not enough is done because of **laziness to change our habits**: “*It is an emergency that is not politically urgent. We know we have to do something, but we are all lazy, unfortunately.*” (Yassine, 25).

It's a financial investment to buy organic etc. Commit to the planet is not within everyone's wallet's reach and some interviewees admitted that they could not afford those changes: “*On the long term I would like to get more involved but it's still not happening. I can't afford to buy organic every day, it's expensive.*” (Mathilde, 23).

Finally, interviewees pointed out the lack of information of the impact of our gesture: “*Feeling that we don't have enough information about pollution and how our actions can make a difference individually* (Thomas, 26). Some of them were very conscious of the fact that their efforts were not enough at all and that they should do more efforts that they do not want to do: “*Small gestures like recycling and turning off the light, it's not a solution. Those who really live in solution mode, it's pretty extreme and I'm not there yet.*” (Yassine, 25).

#### **6. Possible influence of environmental concerns over the amount or type of clothing bought or used.**

*Their intent to search for ecofriendly brands, to buy quality instead of quantity, to reduce the amount of clothing bought, ant to give a second life to clothes were probed.*

#### **Summary:**

It was a unanimous yes: **environmental concerns influenced the amount or type of clothing purchased and used**. They all give a second life to widely used clothes: to relatives or associations (Emmaus mentioned several times), they sell them on

Vinted, they give them a second life as a tea towel, a rag etc., they sell them at flea markets, they repair them (DIY).

Main ideas:

#### **A) New practices for buying less.**

Interviewees have come up with new ways of shopping and using their clothes after their click: *“I try to use all the clothes I own rather than buying/sorting out regular clothes”* (Nathalie, 52), *“When I buy one item of clothing I get rid of another”* (Théo, 22).

#### **B) The importance of sustainability.**

Interviewees are aware of the issues concerning the circle of life of clothes: *“It hurts me to have on my back clothes made by children and that hurts the habitat”* (Amélie, 24). Therefore, they changed their way of shopping as sustainability is an important criterion for them. Some of them still buy in the same stores as before but purchase their ecofriendly lines: *“I always buy from the same stores, but I go to their sustainable corner”* (Laura, 23). Some others follow very closely all the innovation in this field: *“I like to get to know new brands and new eco-responsible initiatives”* (Théo, 22).

Others are constrained by their budget and they still want to decrease overconsumption phenomenon: *“The economic motivations are that I can't buy a lot of pieces, I don't like to go to stores, and I want to participate in the decrease of overconsumption”* (Yassine, 25).

#### **C) Quality before quantity.**

The idea of age and evolution was also present in some responses: *“I used to buy a lot because I was growing up, and I didn't necessarily care about quality before, but I do now.”* (Thomas, 26). For some, they have already enough clothes to allow themselves to buy quality clothes *“I'm going to buy quality instead, because I already have a lot of clothes, it doesn't require a lot of effort, and it doesn't cost me a lot of money because I already feel like I have already a lot of clothes.”* (Amélie, 24).

Some of them even showed their commitment to some fast fashion brands that are creating ecofriendly lines: *“I try to find quality, with second-hand products, or as a more environmentally conscious H&M, with a clear commitment to the brands I already know”* (Laura, 23).

#### **D) The importance of taste.**

Yet, for some interviewees, the **style and their own taste may be stronger than the sustainability aspect of clothing**: *“I'm looking for quality, but if I have a style crush, I'll buy it even if it doesn't last very long.”* (Solène R, 23).

**Sustainability is not the first argument that comes into the decision of purchase.** It is seen by some interviewees as a bonus: *“I'm not looking for ecofriendly brands, but if the brand has an eco-responsible side, it will make the difference between two brands. I won't buy purely because it's ecofriendly”* (Edmond, 22).

**Interviewees are well aware of the fact that they should stop buying to stick with their conviction** *“The simplest thing is still not to buy”* (Grégoire, 20), **but they admitted not to be ready to stop consuming totally.** Shopping is at the end a moment of pleasure and relaxation for some: *“it is a pleasure once in a while to go shopping for clothes”* (Amélie, 24) and it is complicated for them to resist to the temptation: *“Sometimes it's hard to break away from our habits, trying not to go to Primark/Zara”* (Laura, 23).

#### **E) Barriers.**

Some barriers to buy ecofriendly clothes exist. One of the most important is **doubt**. Some interviewees did not believe brands and denounced greenwashing: *“I would like to buy from ecological brands, but I find it too expensive and not very fashionable. There are a lot of people who surf the wave without being really ecofriendly”* (Nezha, 53) ; *“Clothes are like organic food: there are a lot of lies. A consumer like me, I don't believe in it anymore”* (Camilia, 19); Yet, even if they did not believe that all the initiatives are sincere, some interviewees believed that it was pain for good: even if brands like Zara are doing all they can to be ecofriendly, a small breakthrough for them is a large step for the industry: *“I don't believe brands*

*like Zara that do ecofriendly lines. but they're so big so if they take a small step, it can have a positive impact" (Solène R, 23).*

The second barrier is **information**: according to the interviewees, ecological brands would not communicate enough. *"They encourage people to buy eco-responsible, but we don't have any information"* (Thomas, 26). *"If there are ecofriendly brands that meet my needs, I'd be willing to consider them. But it's up to the brands to communicate, because I don't know too many of them."* (Tayeb, 53). Whereas fast fashion brands that would communicate a lot: *"There is a problem with influencers paid by fast fashion companies that push kids to buy clothes, with hauls etc."* (Solene R, 23). Some fast-fashion companies or even companies that only want to surf on the trend are using, according to some interviewee, some materials that are at first sight described as ecofriendly, but are in reality anti-environmental: *"It depends on the way we take and use the raw materials we use : bamboo taken from endangered forests for example"* (Nezha, 53).

A lot of ecofriendly brands are only available for customers on **internet**, and it was cited as a barrier for some of our interviewees. *" I have a hard time buying on the internet so it's a brake with ecofriendly brands that are sometimes 100% online"* (Solène P, 22).

**Image** is also important. Some brands, even if they have eco-responsible initiatives, will be badly perceived because second-hand clothes are badly seen. The image in store is also important to attract customers: *"For the sustainable H&M range I think it's a pity that they don't differentiate it enough in store, on the e-commerce website they make the distinction"* (Solène R, 23).

Finally, the **product in itself** may be a problem. In fact, some ecofriendly product may not be seen as attractive: *"It is complicated for me for example to buy shoes totally ecofriendly, they have in my opinion no flow."*(Solène R, 23).

### ***7. Guilt feeling about the amount of clothing bought or used.***

#### **Summary:**

Interviewees are often feeling more **guilty of the quantity of clothes they have**, rather than the quantity they purchase.

Main ideas:**A) Guilt for the quantity possessed.**

The distinction between owning and using is important: “*owning doesn't mean using, in the end we often use the same pieces to dress*” (Amélie, 24). Some of them asked themselves why they needed to own so much clothes and at the end would use so little of it : “*When I go on a trip with 4 tee shirts it's enough, why do I need so much in everyday life?*” (Théo, 22). Therefore, some **interviewees feel guilty not of the amount bought but used**. “*I feel guilty when I see everything I have, because I have a lot*” (Nathalie, 52). Even if they had sorted out their closet, some of them are still thinking that they can do better “*Guilty when I see everything I have in my closets that I still can't totally get rid of*” (Nezha, 53). It is considered as a waste: “*It was a waste/unnecessary product, shopping for nothing*” (Edmond, 22).

**B) Guilt for the quantity purchased.**

Some of them admitted that they feel guilty sometimes of having "compulsive" episodic “*buying cravings*” “*cheap product I don't need*”: “*In the past I've bought a lot, guilty of buying too much. I feel guilty because I consumed without thinking, I bought when I had a bit of slack*” (Nathalie, 52). A lot of the interviewees made a distinction between their guilt before the click and their guilt nowadays. They stated that they were trying to do everything possible to resist temptation: “*I don't like to fall for futility, so I don't go shopping where I am bound to be tempted*” (Solène P, 22)...

**C) The feeling of shame.**

The feeling of guilt is also associated with shame to be an **accomplice of the industry**: “*I make the textile industry work, it is the first polluting industry because of me*” (Théo, 22). They see a **moral problem**: “*I give money to companies that pollute a lot, I cannot afford to say that I care about the environment and act that way, it's hypocritical*” (Amélie, 24). There is also a big concern for the growing inequalities “*I feel shame in regard to all those who have nothing*” (Grégoire, 20).

**D) Fashion, a perverse effect.**



Some interviewees **denounced the fashion system for pushing them to overconsumption**: “*Fashion changes too fast so it's not a good idea to buy this, you follow the system (what brands want, push consumption)*” (Thomas, 26). More interestingly, some of them felt to be **pressured by society**: “*socially I feel a bit obliged to change, I have a social pressure if I always wear the same outfit, it doesn't fit*” (Laura, 23) “*for my job I have to dress up a certain way, my responsibilities oblige me to pay attention*” (Tayeb, 53).

#### **E) No guilt.**

Finally, some of them felt no guilt because they felt as they were already far in their ecofriendly process and considered that they have already sustainable routines. “*No guilt because I don't have a lot of clothes. I even tend to keep using damaged clothes*” (Thomas, 26). They have even found advantages of reducing their shopping sessions: “*I'm going to do less shopping and spend my free time in a different way...*” (Nathalie, 52).

What is interesting is that for some of them, **buying products that are second-handed eliminate the guilt of buying more products**: “*If it comes from thrift stores, no guilt, even if I buy more than I bargained for.*” (Solène P, 22). Another interesting comments comes from another interviewee that feels **guilty for the quality of clothes that he still buys**: “*I don't have a lot of clothes so I don't feel guilty However, I do feel guilty for the quality of the clothes I still buy.*” (Thomas, 26).

#### **8. Effect of an ecofriendly clothing purchase on the guilt of buying clothes.**

Summary: All of the interviewees admitted that their guilt was reduced when buying ecofriendly clothes.

Main ideas:

##### **A) A feeling of guilt that would tarnish**

All the interviewees were unanimous: their **feeling of guilt was diminished when buying ecofriendly clothes**: “*I enjoy myself without having too much effect on the environment/I impact the environment as little as possible negatively*” (Grégoire, 22). A clothing ecofriendly purchase is considered as a long term investment,

responding to the desire to dress up without hurting too much the environment: “*My guilt is reduced because it's a responsible purchase that I'm going to keep on the long term. It's the best option available to me*” (Edmond, 22).

Buying ecofriendly clothes is considered as an **economical sacrifice** for some, but at the end a **way of feeling better and at the same time helping to save the planet and small businesses**: “*It's a matter of good collective and personal conscience. People buy ecofriendly products to save their planet, it's an action at our level. If everyone buys ecofriendly, it's a chain, we reduce pollution. It's not my case, but people tell themselves that they've done a good deed, it costs more but they do a good deed for small productions, better eating and better clothing.*” (Camilia, 19).

Interviewees at an advanced stage of the changing explained that buying ecofriendly pieces of clothes made them even reduce their quantity of purchase: “*One nice eco-responsible piece is worth five H&M T-shirts*” (Edmond, 22). Their guilt was reduced but apparently did not incite them to buy more: “*Reduced guilt, but it's not going to make me buy more because it's ecofriendly.*” (Thomas, 26).

It is even described as a virtuous circle: “*It reduces the guilt: since the products are of better quality, I will tend to buy less so I will have less clothing. Reduced guilt about how much I have in my closet*” (Amélie, 24), “*I even buy fewer clothes, which makes you feel better when you think it's good for the environment. When you do things and you tell yourself that they make sense, it comforts you in your choice*” (Nathalie, 52). One of the plausible explanations is that ecofriendly clothes are much more expensive: “*I also buy less because I buy ecofriendly clothes at a higher price.*” (Yassine, 25).

### **B) The lesser evil, or the feeling of doing something good justifying something bad.**

Nevertheless, most of the interviewees **questioned the very purpose of clothing purchase**, even ecofriendly: “*sometimes I say to myself 'is it better not to buy at all ?'*” (Grégoire, 20). “*The most of the most would be to be able to resurrect our clothes, to go back to the Middle Ages.*” (Yassine, 23), “*Stop buying at all can be the solution.*” (Camilia, 19). Another one even stated the question of the possible accomplishment of a personal desire: “*Is it really useful to buy this clothing or is it a whim to respond to moods or the desire to please?*” (Amélie, 24).

One of the interviewees even admitted that the objective should not be to feel less guilty, on the contrary, in order to stick to their “green values”: *“The basis of the reasoning is to buy only what I need and not to buy more than what I need. There is of course a little bit of guilt, but this should not be the purpose of the reflection”* (Solène, 22).

Interviewees were, most of the time, lucid about their own behaviors. They knew that it was **a blessing in disguise**, *“it is a lesser evil to buy eco-responsible”* (Théo, 22). In fact, some of them analyzed that there were always left asides in the equation: *“I feel less guilty because I am doing good for the environment, but I remain guilty because I am doing badly to a part of the poor people in the world who live off this industry”* (Solène R, 23).

One of the interviewee was even very farsighted about the **feeling of doing something good while still doing something bad, that would still harm the environment**: *“You think you're feeling good, you think you've made an affirmative action. But deep down, it's always the same thing. To stop hurting the earth, you have to stop buying and using the same clothes all your life”* (Camilia, 19).

It is perceivable in their speech about the quantity of clothes purchased . In fact, we observed that **interviewees in the beginning of their process of change of habits were more likely to buy as much as** before, even more: *“I feel better buying five ecofriendly t-shirts than five Primark t-shirts.”* (Solène R, 23). *“It's eco-responsible, so it is okay if I have a crush for the piece of clothes.”* (Mathilde, 23). When finding a piece of clothes that they like, they would even buy different versions of the same product: *“When I find a purchase I really like, a t-shirt, I buy it in many colors, simple.”* (Edmond, 22).

Some of them used an interesting argument to explain the quantity purchased. They linked it with the want to help positively local producers and not only buying for themselves: it may be considered as **a way to do something good, justifying the amount of clothes bought**: *“Buying local stuff, you're supporting local people, it helps them survive. So it reduces the guilt of running a local business that's not flourishing, but yes I always buy more than I need/help local producers by buying (fight the mistreatment of big groups like that)/make the craft industry live”* (Théo, 22).

## ***9. Link between ecofriendly clothes purchase and the feeling of sacrifice***

### **I - A feeling of sacrifice ?**

#### Summary:

Interviewees sometimes indeed felt a feeling of sacrifice, but above all have the impression of "**doing good**". Therefore, they considered their action more beneficial than sacrificing.

#### Main ideas:

#### **A) Not a sacrifice, it is a duty.**

For some interviewees, the feeling of sacrifice did not exist. They consider it as a duty to the planet: "*Not a sacrifice but it's a duty-it's not a sacrifice anymore because, that's how I work. It has become normal and obligatory for me*" (Nezha, 53). Another interviewee made an interesting remark: "*Given the price it costs, people who buy eco-responsible must believe in it, otherwise it makes their action bad*" (Camilia, 19).

#### **B) Not a sacrifice because it gives them pleasure, for them and for the planet.**

As said before, even if the price may be considered as a sacrifice at first sight, it is not on the long term, especially because the benefit is bigger than the price: "*It's not a sacrifice, my budget balances on the long term, I'm doing good for the environment and it's a benefit to me.*" (Nathalie, 52), or "*Not a sacrifice because I'm not just buying to be good for the environment, I like the clothes too*" (Edmond, 22)/ "*not a sacrifice because even though the cost is a little bit higher I know it's good quality*" (Amélie, 24) / "*I like recyclable stuff too much regardless of the environmental sacrifice*" (Grégoire, 20). Some interviewees even talked about **happiness**: "*Not a sacrifice on the contrary, it makes me happy, it makes me feel good to buy responsibly/I tell myself that I did a good deed/pleasure to buy well*" (Théo, 22).

#### **C) It is indeed a sacrifice.**

For some, the price is indeed a sacrifice: *“It is financial sacrifice. But I am willing to make that sacrifice / a few extra euros for a healthy, quality product”* (Théo, 22). *“Sacrifice if I buy a beautiful piece more expensive but there is a compensation: it's expensive but I do good to the environment, sacrifice for my wallet but conscious purchase. It is a small sacrifice”* (Solène R, 23).

Some of them found the solution: buy ecofriendly clothes in fast fashion shops: they can buy at a lower price, pieces in the style they like: *“Amazing if you can buy ecofriendly clothes in fast fashion brands, the price won't be too high”* (Laura, 23).

In fact, style represent a large part of the purchase the decision, even for some before the price. **Sacrificing style** may be insurmountable: *“I'm willing to make the sacrifice of money and time for ecofriendly, but style comes first for me”* (Solène R, 23).

## II - Ecofriendly market

### Summary:

Fundamentally, the ecofriendly image was not perceived as very trendy, but things are evolving. Likewise, ecofriendly clothes cannot be found everywhere, but more and more brands are being created, and communication is increasing.

### Main ideas:

#### A) Price

A majority of people felt that **ecofriendly brands were more expensive than regular ones**: *“Ecofriendly clothing lines are still too expensive.”* (Nezha, 53). However, it depends on where the cursor is and what is taken as a reference, as Amélie, 24, said *“Eco-responsible brands are indeed a little more expensive than pieces found in the big fast fashion brands, but much cheaper than luxury brands.”*

Others also stated that it was **normal that ecofriendly lines were more expensive**, due to the quality of the products and the respect of the workers : *“These lines should be more expensive : they have environmentally friendly raw materials, they're made with more advanced technology, materials, manufacturing processes, employees get paid more.”* (Théo, 22).

Oppositely, a small amount of interviewees thought **ecofriendly clothes were not much more expensive**, and saw that point as **an excuse for people to avoid buying ecofriendly** : *"I don't feel like ecofriendly lines are more expensive, for me that's the excuse people give themselves for not buying green."* (Grégoire, 20).

### B) Image

Regarding ecofriendly clothes **image**, there are still a few misperceptions. Overall, people felt there were not enough choice yet and that the brands were not visible enough. Indeed, ecofriendly lines globally lacked visibility for our interviewees. There is **less communication** and publicity around these brands, *"the marketing is less sales-intensive"* (Laura, 23). People felt that it was **hard to find ecofriendly brands** *"It's very difficult to find eco-responsible shops or sites, especially with clothes that I like."* (Solène P, 22). The number of points of sale of eco-responsible stores is also limited. *"I made a list of eco-responsible shops and websites, there are so few of them."* (Edmond, 22). Another obstacle was the fact that many ecofriendly brands did not have physical shops, *"I don't buy on the internet, because I like to know what I'm buying, to touch the material..."* (Solène P, 22).

Yet, the communication about ecofriendly products is considerably increasing, the **mass market is becoming more and more aware** of this market, *"magazines like Cosmopolitan are talking about it more and more"* (Laura, 23). There is a clear image associated with ecofriendly : *"The way they build their store: it's all wood, it's nature. It reminds me of organic food stores. It makes me want to buy because I'm in the process of respecting the environment."* (Nezha, 53).

### C) Product and style

The ecofriendly clothes attractivity can be tarnished by the image associated with them : *"There is a common idea that ecofriendly apparel is less attractive or comfortable: this is not true. It's a cognitive bias that tells us ecology isn't sexy. It's the image that was created."* (Yassine, 25).

A majority of the interviewees thought indeed, as Yassine stated, that the offer was not less comfortable or attractive than regular product : *"It's not less elegant, you don't look like a hick"* (Théo, 22) ; *"I am equally attracted to ecofriendly products and regular ones"* (Thomas, 26) ; *"There is an H&M quote that states "You can*

*be both conscious and trendy”, there are new fabrics, you work the fabrics differently” (Mathilde, 23).*

Someone mentioned that at first the ecofriendly clothing market was associated with sport, but it was evolving: *“at first I was under the impression that ecofriendly brands were just making sport-oriented clothes, but that's not the case anymore.” (Amélie, 24).*

However, some interviewees still had a **negative image of the products**, they felt that *“the lines are less elegant with often neutral tones. Just because it's eco doesn't mean it has to be less attractive.” (Nezha, 53).* People could have the impression that the ecofriendly clothes did not apply to their style *“When I got interested in what they were wearing, I figured it wasn't like me. I told myself that I didn't want to buy this, that I'd rather buy nothing than buy something ugly. It's rare to find a piece that suits me. It suits me when more "stylish" brands make eco-responsible lines.” (Solène R, 23).* Others stated that was not always trendy to wear ecofriendly, *“There are some very nice ecofriendly pieces but you can't follow the fashion trends and be an eco-fashion victim, at the moment it is not feasible with the offer” (Solène P, 22).*

Nevertheless, the mass market point of view is changing : *“The eco-responsible is often associated with a not very trendy image, but nowadays a lot of designers make ecofriendly clothes that cost a lot of money. The image is changing, and clothes are becoming more and more attractive and stylish.” (Laura, 23).*

### ***10. A concrete communication example***

Main ideas :

#### **A) Marketing strategy**

The great majority of the people interviewed directly linked this ad to a marketing strategy of the Patagonia brand. Some said it was a **good marketing tool** : *“A campaign to satisfy those who already have the jacket, and to encourage those who don't to buy it. It's very marketing to do that and good for their image.” (Laura, 23)* ; *“That's a great way to market: "You don't buy the jacket, you reuse it.” (Yassine, 25)* ; *“It's a good way to build customer loyalty: taking care of the entire life chain*

*of the garment.*” (Amélie, 24). Some felt that it was a good way to encourage people to buy “*When someone says, 'Don't go buy McDonalds,' you go buy it afterwards.*” *People are rebels, "don't do it, but deep down we want you to.*” (Camilia, 19).

Some felt it wasn't a great strategy, because there is a part of **incomprehension** as to the procedure to follow, the customer is lost “*I've never seen a brand that advocates not buying, should I buy it to support them or follow the message to the letter?*” (Mathilde, 23) ; “*I'm surprised by this conflicting approach.*” ( Edmond, 22) ; The message conveyed can be more meaningful for people who are already sensitive to these subjects, as stated Solène R, 23 “*It's aimed at an educated part of the population. It's 3rd degree marketing: the jacket or the recycling service that is put forward?*” “*The don't buy this jacket calls out. It's on backwards. You're ultimately given every argument to buy it. There's plenty of ifs and buts that will shut you off from buying it, so you can buy it, while remaining educational.*” (Tayeb, 53).

Others thought that other companies should encourage the same practices and convey these types of messages, “*If demand is green, supply is green! In the business world, companies want to make a profit, if the demand becomes green, the profit will be made in an eco-responsible way.*” (Grégoire, 20).

### **B) Buy or don't buy ?**

A great majority said that they would buy the jacket if they needed it at the time, but otherwise that they wouldn't. Nobody said they would buy it because of the ad.

The main reason under this decision not to buy it is because the ad makes them think about how and what they buy : “*It makes you think about your purchases, we live in a consumerist society quite monstrous, I think it's good to do ads like that...*” (Théo, 22), “*It helps you realize the impact you're having, and to ask yourself the right questions before doing a purchase*” (Amélie, 24) ; “*They encourage us to avoid buying in mass which seems to me an excellent initiative, for my future purchases I will think about this brand.*” (Thomas, 26).

There is a **moral restraint** to buy the product because of the message conveyed : “*I would not want to buy this product because after reading the information, I*



*become aware of the impact I have, one feels less morally good to make this purchase, is it a necessity and a guilty pleasure?” (Théo, 23).*

### **C) Importance of Patagonia’s image**

The people interviewed all agreed to say that **Patagonia has an ecofriendly image**, they are perceived as a conscious brand, transparent in its approach.

A majority of people said they would think about this brand for their **future purchase** : *“It doesn't make me want to buy it now, but I'll write down the name of the brand and come back to it later because I validate their approach.” (Solène P, 22) ; “When I see that they are eco-responsible it encourages me to buy from them, not when I see the publicity but later.” (Laura, 23) ; “On the spot I'm not going to buy it because the message conveyed speaks to me so I'm not going to do the opposite of the message. However, if I need a piece later, I will turn to this company because this communication proves their commitment to environmental responsibility.” (Amélie, 24).*

Patagonia tries to **educate the consumers** to ecofriendly practices and talk to consumers about things they consider important nowadays. *“Everything that is described will justify some of the very excessive value of clothes that are going to be thrown away in a closet. When you finish using a product, you don't have the reflex to get rid of it, you keep it. They have studied the trends carefully because they answer all the questions that consumers are asking themselves now, especially when it comes to changing the way they consume.” (Tayeb, 53) ; “They give us useful information with this ad” (Grégoire, 20).*