



Handelshøyskolen BI

GRA 19703 Master Thesis

Thesis Master of Science 100% - W

Predefinert informasjon

Startdato:	09-01-2023 09:00 CET	Termin:	202310
Sluttdato:	03-07-2023 12:00 CEST	Vurderingsform:	Norsk 6-trinns skala (A-F)
Eksamensform:	T		
Flowkode:	202310 11184 IN00 W T		
Intern sensor:	(Anonymisert)		

Deltaker

Navn:

Informasjon fra deltaker

Tittel *:

Navn på veileder *:

Inneholder besvarelsen Nei Kan besvarelsen Ja
konfidensielt offentliggjøres?:
materiale?:

Gruppe

Gruppenavn:

Gruppenummer:

Andre medlemmer i gruppen:

MASTER THESIS

GRA 19703

Consumer Perception and Trust in Sustainable Fashion: The role of NGOs and information sources

Hand-in date:

03.07.2023

Campus:

BI Oslo

Programme:

MSc in Business: Marketing

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ABSTRACT

The fast fashion sector is currently facing a unique and complicated situation due to the increased public awareness of environmental sustainability. Fast fashion companies have come under fire for their environmental practices and subsequent effects on consumer behavior as a result of the growing demand for sustainable products, which has brought attention to their business practices. In order to explore these viewpoints, this thesis looks first at how customers perceive environmentally friendly practices in the fast fashion sector and how it affects their purchasing habits. In order to understand how consumers evaluate the reliability of such sources, it also closely examines the role and reliability of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in disseminating claims of greenwashing against these firms. A key component of this research is the effect of information sources on consumers' perceptions of fashion brands and their ability to trust them. These interconnected research topics as a whole seek to provide a thorough understanding of consumer behaviour in the context of sustainable practices and greenwashing claims in the fast fashion business, as well as how these dynamics are influencing this industry's future.

INTRODUCTION

Fashion Sector and Environmental Issues

The global environmental pollution and damage that the fashion industry contributes to is enormous. Numerous fashion companies have implemented eco-friendly initiatives in response to rising consumer awareness and demand for sustainable products.

The use of resources, waste, and pollution caused by the fashion business are all serious. The industry's high energy use, excessive water use, pollution from dyeing and finishing processes, and the enormous amount of textile waste it produces are some of the environmental issues that are currently of the utmost importance. The creation, delivery, and disposal of garments all add to the industry's greenhouse gas emissions (Fashion Revolution, n.d.).

Numerous green initiatives have evolved in an effort to lessen the negative effects of the fashion industry on the environment as awareness of its effects on the

environment has grown. One of these groups, called Fashion Revolution, advocates for ethical behaviour, sustainability, and transparency in the fashion sector. They call on brands to be more open about their supply chains through their "Who Made My Clothes?" campaign, which encourages customers to consider the social and environmental effects of their clothing purchases (Fashion Revolution, n.d.).

Another group striving for a more sustainable fashion business is the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC). Brands, retailers, and manufacturers can measure and assess their environmental and social performance using the tools that SAC has created, including the Higg Index. The Higg Index gives businesses a standardised way to evaluate sustainability and enables them to track their progress, identify areas for development, and share their results with stakeholders and customers (Sustainable Apparel Coalition, n.d.).

Consumers and Brands Contributions

The demand for sustainable fashion is greatly influenced by consumers. Many people are choosing environmentally friendly products and are willing to pay extra for goods that are produced sustainably and ethically as they become more conscious of the ethical and environmental challenges that surround the sector. To meet this need, brands are adding eco-friendly practices into their operations, such as employing recycled and organic materials, applying energy-saving techniques, and assuring moral labour practices (Fashion Revolution, n.d.).

Even though many brands are genuinely committed to sustainability, the fashion business still confronts issues, such as greenwashing. Greenwashing happens when businesses make false or unsupported claims about the environmental advantages of their practices or products. Due to this deceptive advertising, customers may find it challenging to differentiate between firms that are sustainable and those who are only capitalising on the public's increased interest in green products (Fashion Revolution, n.d.).

The growth of green efforts like Fashion Revolution and the Sustainable Apparel Coalition is a result of the rising demand for sustainable fashion. Even though these efforts are bringing about significant change, issues like greenwashing continue to exist. It is crucial to promote true sustainability and encourage informed purchasing

decisions by knowing customer attitudes and behaviour in relation to environmentally friendly initiatives in the fashion sector.

Research Problem

The current business environment has seen a rise in sustainability with a motive of participating in the fight towards a better world, especially in the fashion industry. Consumer preferences are increasingly shifting towards sustainable purchasing which has become an important factor for the success of fast fashion firms in the industry. Due to which these firms have aligned their corporate strategy towards corporate social responsibility. However, greenwashing- where companies incorrectly advertise the environmental benefits or impacts have become a rising concern. This results in consumers' facing challenges in assessing the authenticity of sustainable initiatives made by fast fashion companies and hence become dependent on NGOs and other sources for information. Simultaneously, consumers trust in these fast fashion brands is compromised and hence impacting their purchasing decisions. Another thing brought into question is that do consumers assess the credibility of NGOs publicizing greenwashing against fast fashion brands? The question that arises is that are NGOs usually a credible source for consumers to trust when they tend to advertise greenwashing done by fast fashion brands, especially when the business model of these NGOs is based on fund raising. Will the NGOs ever be satisfied with the green efforts made by fast fashion brands, or will they always find something to target them and bring them down? Let us see how consumers perceive this.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to better understand:

- 1) How consumers view and validate environmentally friendly actions made in the fast fashion industry,
- 2) How reliable are NGOs as sources of information about greenwashing tactics, and
- 3) How consumers view and trust brands.

The Objectives of the study are:

- 1) To research consumer views and attitudes towards the green efforts of fast fashion brands.
- 2) To be aware of the elements that affect consumer choices when it comes to sustainable fashion.
- 3) To investigate how consumers evaluate the credibility of NGOs and their involvement in bringing attention to claims of greenwashing against fast fashion firms.
- 4) To make suggestions on how fast fashion firms can most effectively and clearly convey their environmental commitments in order to foster confidence and sway the purchase decisions of consumers.
- 5) To add to the already existing literature about consumer behaviour in relation to sustainable fashion and greenwashing.

Research Questions

There is a lot of existing literature of consumer perceptions on activities done by fashion brands. This study concentrates on understanding how consumers tend to react to environmentally friendly initiatives made by fast fashion brands. Factors of trust and brand love come into place which directly relates to the authenticity of the communications made by fast fashion organisations. This will help us to identify strategies for fast fashion companies to effectively communicate their green efforts and bridge the value- action gap in consumer behaviour. As there is limited understanding of how the reputation of companies, particularly regarding sustainability, will impact consumer choices in the fast fashion industry. Hence, this ideology brings us to our first research question:

Research Question 1:

How do consumers perceive environmentally friendly activities in the fast fashion industry, and how does it influence their purchase decisions?

Just as the previous research question concentrating on consumer perceptions on the brand, we also plan to research on knowing what consumers think and believe when it comes to how credible NGOs are when they try to publicise greenwashing done by fast fashion brands. Based on the business model of NGO's who depend on raising funds, are there any external factors or motivations behind specifically

targeting fast fashion brands, knowing that fast fashion itself is not sustainable? Do NGO's get influenced by competitors or in other words, investors having a motive to gain competitive edge over other brands in the industry? Or do they do it for the greater good and really care for sustainability. As consumers are slowly turning towards being sustainable in the current world, this research will help us to understand the reality of how fast fashion consumers place their trust in greenwashing claims made by NGO's. This ideology brings us to our second research question:

Research Question 2:

How do consumers assess the credibility of NGOs that publicize greenwashing allegations against fast fashion brands?

Information is more accessible than ever in the developing digital age. The source of the information does, however, have a considerable impact on how the content is viewed, particularly in the context of sustainability initiatives and claims of greenwashing in the fashion industry. This important topic will be investigated through this research question:

Research Question 3:

How does the source of information about environmentally friendly initiatives and greenwashing allegations affect consumers' trust and their perception of a fashion brand?

Understanding the relative value of various information sources to customers is crucial to answering this question. Consumers may place more faith in information from unbiased organisations, non-governmental organisations, or peer reviews than they do in business communications. Alternately, individuals can view authoritative information from the corporation or industry professionals as being more reliable. For businesses looking to effectively convey their sustainability activities, recognising these tendencies can offer insightful information. Regarding claims of greenwashing, it's crucial to comprehend how the information's source affects the information. Making false or unsupported claims about a product, service, or organization's environmental benefits is known as "greenwashing," and it is becoming more and more common in the fashion business. Customers are likely to react poorly to perceived greenwashing as they grow increasingly conscious of and concerned about sustainability. A fashion brand's reputation and customer trust may

suffer dramatically if specific sources are more likely to cause these responses. Furthermore, preserving, or regaining consumer trust may depend greatly on how businesses respond to claims of greenwashing. The source of the information may also have an impact on how well these responses work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Environmentally Friendly Initiatives of the Fashion Industry

When customers started to recognize and question the environmental impact of clothes manufacturing in the 1960s, sustainable fashion was born. This created a call for the industry to change its methods and place a stronger emphasis on moral and environmentally friendly practices. Sustainability later developed into a big movement that has been transforming the fashion industry, amplifying the cry for change made by the Rana Plaza factory catastrophe. As a result, eco-friendly clothing is gradually gaining popularity (Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016).

A key component of the slow fashion movement, often known as eco-fashion, green fashion, or ethical fashion, is sustainable fashion. Fair working conditions, ecologically friendly materials usage, sustainable business methods, and a dedication to openness and traceability in the manufacturing process are just a few examples of the different elements that make up ethical fashion.

Slow fashion challenges the rapid fashion paradigm by putting an emphasis on sustainability values, including respect for human rights and minimizing environmental damage. It seeks to slow down the production process, supports worker empowerment, and promotes a culture of quality over quantity. It's important to highlight the ambiguity around the term's meaning and the standards for creating sustainable clothing despite the growing interest in and awareness of sustainable fashion. This emphasizes the necessity of more research and analysis into the ethics of sustainable fashion and how it relates to social constructionism.

Sustainability is seen as both a physical and human relationship with the planet in the social constructionist perspective. It emphasises the idea of meeting existing demands while preserving the capacity of future generations to meet their own needs. Notably, sustainable fashion rejects the idea that fashion is transient and promotes a long-term outlook that prioritizes creativity, innovation, and character.

In the end, sustainable fashion turns a piece of clothing into a one-of-a-kind creation that conveys personal identity rather than merely a wearable object (Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016).

For its negative effects on the environment, fast fashion has regularly come under fire. Significant water use, pollution, trash production, and significant carbon emissions are examples of this. But a number of fast fashion companies have started to make substantial progress towards creating ecologically friendly supply chains in response to rising customer awareness of and demand for sustainability.

The creation of eco-materials is a cornerstone of these initiatives. In order to lessen their environmental impact, several fast fashion companies are now making investments in the development and use of materials that use less water and toxic chemicals during production. The development of biological farming practices, particularly in the production of cotton, exemplifies the movement towards more ethically and environmentally responsible material sourcing. Additionally, some manufacturers have been experimenting with cutting-edge materials made from recycled or biologically created fabrics, signalling a paradigm shift in the sector.

Along with environmental issues, the social effects of the fashion industry's supply chains are coming under closer examination. Brands are acting in response by promoting moral labour practices and offering safety training. Sustainable production in the fashion industry is growing increasingly dependent on this greater attention to environmental and human rights issues. Some companies have adopted well-known standards like ISO 14000 and sought third-party verification of their procedures to show their dedication to these ideals (Shen, 2014).

Another area where fast fashion companies aim to cut carbon emissions is throughout the distribution stage of the supply chain. Prioritising efficient shipping methods will reduce lead times, which is essential for the quick response needed in fast fashion. While the industry's global scope presents difficulties, attempts are being done to reduce the transportation-related carbon emissions.

Along with incorporating sustainable practices inside their supply chains, brands are also encouraging eco-fashion among their customer base. Brands are promoting a more receptive and ethical consumer base by informing customers about the social and environmental effects of their purchases. Recycling among consumers and the

use of recyclable materials in production have gained popularity and are now essential parts of a sustainable fashion supply chain.

A positive trend towards environmental responsibility and social ethics is the transition towards sustainability within the fast fashion sector. These programs are being pioneered by companies like H&M, Nike, Marks & Spencer, and Timberland, among others. These companies are fostering economic opportunity in underdeveloped nations, increasing the use of recyclable materials in manufacturing, and guiding consumers toward ethical behaviour. Despite ongoing difficulties, these initiatives imply that the business is moving towards greater economic, environmental, and social sustainability. Other companies looking to improve their sustainability may find the lessons learnt from these initiatives to be very insightful (Shen, 2014).

Consumer Decision Making and Greenwashing

We have seen a drastic change in purchasing behaviour of consumers in the fast fashion industry. It all began from the shorter life cycles and cost effectiveness of fashion trends, where we saw the new Gen Z consumers who are more inclined towards adapting themselves to changes on a day-to-day basis. Our experience during the covid pandemic, has made us understand how consumers have changed their purchasing behaviour in just a period of two years. These Gen Z customers are considered to be the segment which is likely to care most about sustainability and are completely focused towards making every purchase of theirs green but shockingly there is a clear value- action gap between the ideologies of this segment. Today, Gen Z and Millennials are the core targeted customers of fast fashion firms, majority of them repurchasing apparel on a weekly or monthly basis. The needs and wants of customers are going to transform how businesses operate in the present and in the future, hence, it is very important for firms to strategize their future operations based on this.

Due to overproduction or overconsumption, the fashion industry is mostly to blame for the detrimental effects on the environment. This production depletes water resources, pollutes rivers and streams and accounts for 10% of all carbon emissions produced by humans (Geneva environment network, 2021). Each year a lot of textiles are discarded and washing some types of clothing releases a sizeable amount of microplastics into the water. People have started thinking more

sustainably now than they used to in the past, and why not? Environmental catastrophes, glaciers melting, forest fires, water scarcity, etc have shown what happens when something is not sustainable.

The fashion industry now acts sustainably to uphold their reputation, keep their revenues rising, and morally justify their wrong doings against the environment. This is due to a shift in people's attitude towards the environment. We have seen several fashion organizations working towards the betterment of the environment, sometimes it is intentional and sometimes its not. The intent of engaging in corporate social responsibility is increasing day by day, and hence bifurcates the world in two types of firms: ones which are using CSR as a marketing gimmick while aiming at profit maximization and the others which are actually socially responsible (Wu et al., 2020). Looking at the worlds shift towards sustainability, if firms do not innovate in terms of sustainability, they will not only cause harm to the environment but will also lose their customer base.

The lack of knowledge and information, accessibility, communication, product quality, and increased prices are just a few of the problems consumers encounter when it comes to sustainability in the fashion sector. When information is difficult to get, consumers claim they have to do exhausting searches to learn about sustainability. From a consumer's standpoint, becoming more sustainable necessitates making numerous sacrifices. Consumption habits must be moderated, they must purchase more environmentally friendly goods, they must steer clear of rapid fashion trends, they must be more conscious of the place of production, and they must learn useful information about circularity concepts and material composition. Consumers are often willing to change their behaviours going forward and are open to changing their consumption habits for the better. Customers have the potential to embrace a sustainable lifestyle that encourages consuming less because they may alter their purchasing behaviours and speak through them. Through the proper information, knowledge, insight, and trends, it is crucial to influence their behaviour and thinking (Pereira et el., 2021).

Most brands tend to greenwash as they do not have the capability to initiate an environmental strategy or else do not have the necessary budget to fund it. This does not only catch the eyes of environmental activists but also makes consumers lose interest in the brand. Such greenwashing techniques result in brand avoidance and brand hate. It is very profitable when a brand is the most preferred for

consumers but can also be really harmful for it when it is avoided. Word of mouth being one of the most sustainable effects that consumers use that can lead to a downfall in the brand's image (Xiao et al., 2022). There is a hypocrisy level seen in consumers perceptions when they tend to claim their preference of Corporate Social Responsibility but hardly consider it when it comes to them actually consuming from the brand. This is a huge percentage of consumers do not tend to care for environment friendly products and believe that firms benefit from sustainable strategy by selling products on higher prices and eventually make it a needless expense for consumers. This is where the concept of the trade off between CSR and Corporate abilities arises, and consumers who believe in this trade off tend to forgive or involve themselves in greenwashing, mainly when greenwashing brand is cheaper (Xiao et al., 2022).

Understanding consumer perceptions of environmentally friendly efforts requires a paradigm that takes into account the casual explanations people make when faced with other people's behaviour. Attribution theory, which has its roots in psychology, has found application in the contexts of consumer behaviour and marketing, particularly when consumers use similar attributional mechanisms when they meet corporate behaviour (Folkes, 1988). Corporate social responsibility (CSR), a component of a company's "behavior," and green marketing have been successfully explained using the notion. Consumers may be influenced by a company's CSR and green initiatives since they frequently convey the values and character of the organisation. However, when consumers believe these activities are only driven by their own interests or egos, they tend to react unfavourably, which negatively impacts their perceptions of brands and their intent to make purchases (Walker et al., 2010). Consumer views are greatly influenced by the alignment of the company's primary business with its chosen cause or initiative. Additionally, perceptions of deceit can considerably lower organizational trust, attitudes towards the brand, and purchase intentions (Newell et al., 1998).

Positive consumer perceptions of businesses that uphold ethical standards serve to highlight the importance of authenticity in the implementation of environmental initiatives. However, a breach of ethics can have serious repercussions, especially for businesses that make their ethical standards known. These businesses may see more significant drops in consumer confidence as a result of ethical breaches than businesses that don't uphold ethical standards (Folkes and Kamins, 1999). The effects of these attribution processes also apply to crisis management.

Companies using CSR for a while can use it more successfully as a barrier against crisis. Conversely, those who are only beginning to practice CSR might raise questions about their intentions, which could hurt their reputation. As a result, the effect of a company's green initiatives on customer attitudes and intentions is considerably mediated through attributional processes. Understanding these procedures is crucial for businesses to properly explain their eco-friendly initiatives and positively impact consumer purchasing decisions.

The Role of NGOs in Publicizing Greenwashing Allegations

NGOs are essential for comprehending the causes of greenwashing. External drivers include pressures from nonmarket actors like regulators and NGOs and market actors like customers, investors, and rivals. Organizational drivers include organizational inertia, the effectiveness of intra-firm communication, and firm incentive structures. Businesses are able to manipulate investor and consumer desires for green products and services due to the weak regulatory environment, which has been highlighted as a crucial precursor of greenwash.

Although they are sometimes considered as antidotes to greenwashing, certifications and labels can also be utilised as fraud. Product-level ecolabels could be subject to deception by dishonest producers. When combined, certain labels that could be viewed as greenwash on their own could diminish the value of other, more reliable ecolabels. Environmental management certifications like ISO 14001 at the corporate level have a mixed record and, in certain cases, may be a kind of greenwashing. Examining co-opted NGO endorsements and relationships is crucial for NGOs as well. Cross-sectoral alliances are not new when it comes to achieving green goals, but there is concern about the possibility that environmental NGOs could be used in this process or to help greenwash corporate actions. Different NGOs have different perspectives on when such relationships are acceptable and when they amount to greenwash. In conclusion, NGOs are essential in raising awareness about accusations of greenwashing, holding individuals responsible, comprehending the motivations behind greenwashing, and verifying certifications and branding. Their contribution is crucial in fostering openness and truth in environmental performance (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Socially responsible firms who tend to have a sincere motive of being sustainable and not just for maximizing profit are always called into question when they tend

to invest in green activities. They are either criticised or investigated to find some loophole in the organization which is not sustainable or ethical (Wu et al., 2020). The urgent need of sustainability is understood however, it takes time for firms to transition itself completely into being green. However, NGOs do not understand this and criticize the firm's efforts as a marketing gimmick driving customers to reduce the commitment towards these firms.

Even though consumers reward firms who are socially responsible but still the level of transparency of these firms plays a strong role. Only some but not all activities are observed by consumers because they do not have full knowledge of the firm's motives (Wu et al., 2020). These unobservable motives are caught by NGOs and publicised leading to a downfall in the firm's activities. To trash socially responsible competitors, profit maximizing firms who have low transparency will engage in greenwashing to attract consumers. Hence firms who really wish to be ethical and sustainable have consumers, NGO's and competitors as challenges towards their ultimate success of reaching their sustainable development goals.

The negative aspect is that low transparency can lead the firm to deceive consumers through greenwashing tactics while the benefit is that inadequate information encourages a bad company to support social causes, which would not happen if customers could differentiate a bad company from a good one. Low levels of transparency can rise to greenwashing, while higher levels of transparency enhance its beneficial effects and improve societal welfare. However, greenwashing is stopped when transparency levels are sufficiently high (Wu et al., 2020). Hence, to negate the greenwashing claims made by NGO's or consumers, it will help firm to increase their transparency by making the unobservable activities more noticeable and also help in engaging consumers by developing brand affection. However, this has an inversely proportional effect, not only an increase in transparency can reduce greenwashing but it also reduces social welfare.

These socially responsible firms can lose their environmental legitimacy if they tend to deteriorate their environmental performance over time, send poor signals or fail to match the public's expectations can come under the scrutiny of non-governmental organisations. Environmental legitimacy can be referred to as the degree to which the broader public or various stakeholders regard an organization's green actions as both appropriate and useful (Scott 1995; Suchman 1995). As this can backfire anytime it is very important for firms to regularly innovate and invest in sustainable activities. They can achieve this by participating in voluntary

environmental programs, environmental innovations, environmental pay policies, the use of green labels and trademarks and the adoption of other environmental management systems (Berrone et al., 2017). And this notion of environmental legitimacy is very important for firms as it will help them thrive in the current and future world. By investing more towards observable sustainable activities, it will be costly for firms but can help them keep environmental legitimacy on track (Certo., 2003). This environmental legitimacy will be useful to firms as they can be more competitive in the market as it gains better access to resources, they can attract better employees and they can improve their relationships with existent and future partners.

As discussed before, it can be more difficult for the general public to evaluate a company's environmental impact because they are less likely to be aware of the true environmental impact of the production processes used by the company or how committed it is to enhance its environmental performance through the use of clean technologies or efficient environmental management practices. And as greenwashing can sometimes lead to health concerns, NGO's tend to heavily scrutinize the organization's environmental behaviour. This makes it really important for firms to keep their history clean when it comes to sustainability as NGO's tend to hold grudges and deeply investigate against firms who have engaged in harming the environment in the past. For example: Even though Canada Goose is trying to invest in observable and unobservable sustainable activities, they are still criticised of greenwashing as their jackets are made of coyote fur and goose feathers.

However, firms which are high on credibility and tend to do what they say, they are likely to not attract attention from NGO's. Hence, the influence of NGO's can be drastically reduced on firms which tend to do good on environmental performance unlike the firms which do bad on environmental performance. As a result, the impact of environmental activities on environmental legitimacy is diminished when changes in emissions do not correspond to companies' environmental claims. NGO's, on the other hand, are less inclined to take part in favourable news coverage or express gratitude for the good work of other organisations.

There has always been a problem on how consumers perceive the CSR communication made by firms. This brings in the thought in consumer's minds if the firm showcasing CSR claims is a responsible firm or not. The concept of sustainable ratings for firms might act as a strong decisive factor which can help

consumers make informed decisions on firms and can help deter greenwashing. As CSR communication or in other words the steps taken by firms to showcase their support to communities, natural environment, ethical values to consumers, has become the third largest expense in the budget for corporate communication in big companies. However, this creates a confusion in consumers to perceive the communication made by firms which are truly virtuous or are doing it just for financial and competitive advantage (Parguel et al., 2011).

This act of attracting consumers by falsely claiming CSR activities can be termed as greenwashing. In simpler terms, greenwashing can also be defined as the tactics that mislead consumers regarding the environmental practices of an organisation. The act of greenwashing can also be related to the concept of a prisoner's dilemma, in which responsible firms who stop their responsible activities, however, still continue to communicate them. The consumers might be fooled by this approach and hence rely on analysis made by organisations like NGO's who tend to catch companies in such acts.

The communication identity serves as a nexus between a company's identity and image which also reflects the immediate mental picture of an organisation in a consumer's mind. For instance, H&M portrayed its CSR initiatives of reuse and recycling of used clothes, while on the other side they were not ethical in their production process by using child labour and bad working conditions from third world countries where production and labour costs are cheaper as compared to the developed countries in the world. The communication of the CSR activities also depends on the congruency of the relationship between the company and the cause supported. The more the brand is congruent towards the cause, the more trustworthy and efficient is the communication. Greenwashing perceptions or strategies which are done deliberately can damage consumers impressions towards the brand which communicates its CSR engagements. This also brings into question, the potential benefits of CSR communication, if it is beneficial or damaging towards the brand. This might be answerable by how consumers decode the communication (Parguel et al., 2011).

Conceptual Framework

Consumer demographics (18–30 years old) are regarded in the conceptual framework as the target audience for analyzing numerous elements. Consumer

perception and trust in a brand are influenced by its attributes and previous interactions with consumers. The degree to which a consumer cares about the environment reflects their understanding of and sensitivity to environmental problems, which may influence how they see a brand's sustainability commitments. Consumers' skepticism of sustainability claims is a crucial element that might raise questions about the veracity of a brand's eco-friendly initiatives. The consumer's perception of the veracity of greenwashing claims can be strongly influenced by the sources of these claims and their trustworthiness. Additionally important in influencing consumer attitudes is consumer awareness of sustainability issues. These elements work together to create consumer perceptions of "greenwashing," which can affect the integrity of the sources of the charges and, in turn, the fashion brand's reputation (Please refer figure 1).

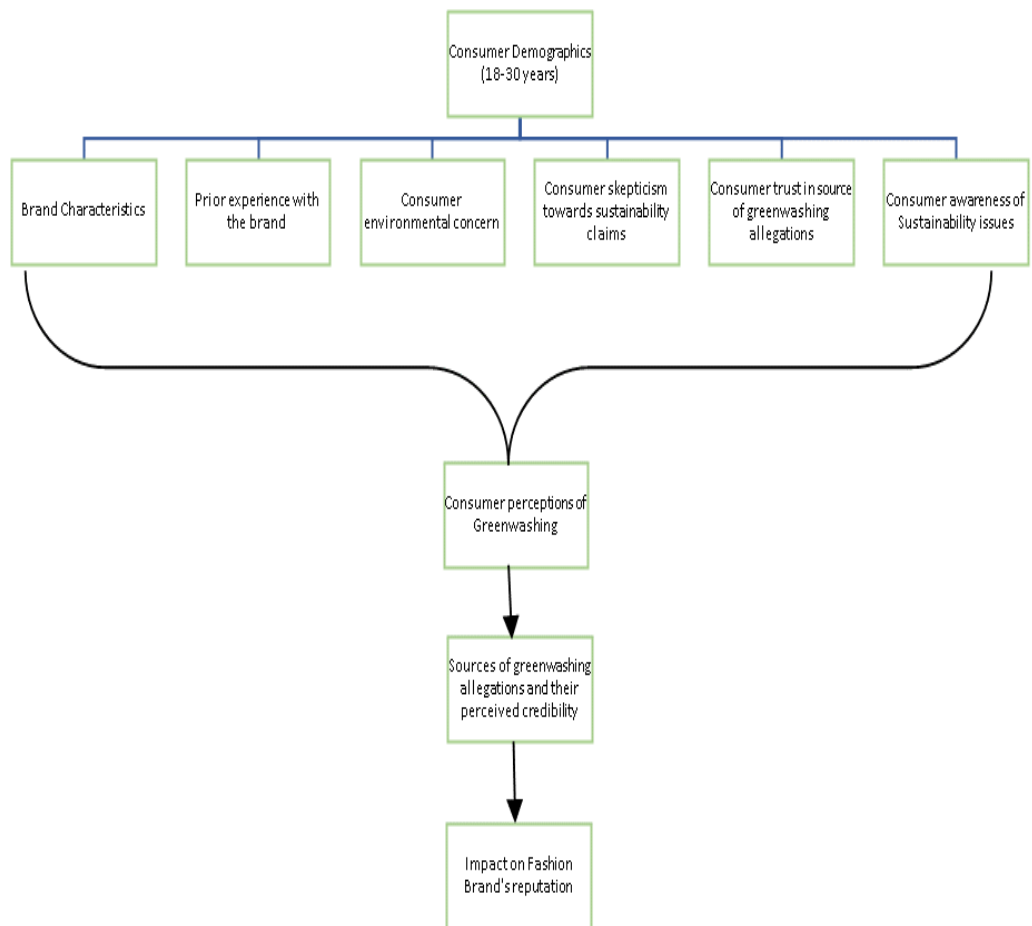


Figure 1

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Thematic analysis was chosen as the research method for this study. Thematic analysis is a versatile and practical research method that offers a rich and in-depth explanation of facts. It helps with finding, examining, and reporting the patterns (themes) in the data.

Thematic analysis was chosen because it enables the information to capture complex meanings and offers the opportunity to look at how consumers perceive, experience, and comprehend the environmental practices of fast fashion firms. I am able to accept the participants' subjective experiences and understandings through thematic analysis as opposed to imposing preconceived categories or academic ideas.

These open-ended, exploratory research questions seek to learn how participants view the environmental practices of fast fashion companies, how they define "greenwashing," and how much confidence they have in NGOs and the companies themselves. The study questions are appropriate for thematic analysis since it aids in discovering not only the participants' conscious thoughts and opinions but also the underlying concepts, presumptions, and conceptualizations that underlie their perspectives.

The examination of the various perspectives on environmental actions by fast fashion firms is particularly well suited to this method. It will make it possible to group responses into categories reflecting recurring themes and concepts in the data, enabling a more in-depth comprehension of the participants' viewpoints. This is significant for this study because it enables a thorough examination of how these viewpoints are moulded by and have an impact on consumers' decisions and actions in relation to environmentally friendly practices in the fashion sector.

Thematic analysis will also provide insights into the nuanced processes of consumer, fast fashion brand, and NGO trust. The dynamics of trust and skepticism in the context of environmental sustainability in the fashion business will be better understood, allowing participants to comprehend why they would trust one party more than the other.

Overall, the flexibility and depth of thematic analysis make it an excellent tool for examining the participants' varied and complex perspectives and experiences of the environmentally conscious practices of fast fashion companies.

Participants and Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling, a non-probability selection technique frequently employed in qualitative research, was utilised to choose the sample for this study. Participants were chosen based on their knowledge of and experiences with the phenomenon of interest. In this instance, participants were chosen based on their buying habits, particularly their use of fast fashion.

Eighteen buyers of fast fashion participated in this survey. Thematic analysis, which prioritizes depth over breadth in data collecting, calls for a sample size that is in line with these specifications. Although age and gender were not the main selection factors, the demographic information about the participants was gathered, including these two factors. Instead, their interaction with fast fashion brands as consumers was the main criterion for selection. The participants were selected with keeping the age demographic of 18 to 30 years and most of the participants were females as they are the major buyers of fast fashion products.

Data Collection: Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, a versatile and dynamic technique frequently used in qualitative research, were used for the data collection for this study. In order to ensure that the research topics are well covered, this technique aims to offer a framework which encourages open conversation.

The semi-structured interviews followed a prepared interview guide that included a set of open-ended questions with corresponding probes. In addition to giving respondents the option to elaborate on their responses or bring up related issues, this interview guide worked to keep the conversation on the main subject, which was customers' impressions of fast fashion manufacturers' environmental commitments and the credibility of NGOs.

Each interview started with an open-ended question that asked the respondent to give their full name and age. The interview then moved on to focus on more particular issues, such as the participants' familiarity with the environmentally

friendly practices of fast fashion companies, their opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of these practices, their knowledge and perception of "greenwashing," and their opinions on the roles that NGOs play in promoting greenwashing.

The interview guide's probes gave participants the chance to go deeper into individual comments, enabling the investigation of nuanced aspects of their opinions and experiences. A greater understanding of the participants' perspectives was facilitated by the use of probes, which were used to invite participants to elaborate on their responses or clarify particular issues.

To ensure the participants' comfort and privacy, the interviews were done one-on-one in a neutral setting. About 20 to 30 minutes were spent on each interview. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to guarantee proper data collection. In order to record the interviewer's impressions and background information, notes were also taken after each interview.

Since the research design is exploratory and inductive, the semi-structured interview style was ultimately chosen as the main method of data gathering. It aided in the collection of rich, comprehensive data, enabling a complete examination of the study issues and developing a nuanced comprehension of customers' impressions of environmentally friendly practices in the fast fashion sector.

Data Analysis

To ensure the accuracy of the source material, the data for this study was meticulously produced using a precise transcription process using Descript. Since confidentiality was a top priority, all identifiable information from the transcripts was deleted in order to protect participant anonymity.

With an emphasis on locating the most important remarks or thoughts made by the participants, the transcripts were carefully read and reread. A special focus was placed on the passages that offered clear insights into the study questions. The participants' varied perspectives on the environmental practices of fast fashion companies, their unique viewpoints on claims of "greenwashing," and their varied thoughts on the integrity of NGOs and other information sources were all brought to light during this process.

An intricate coding procedure was put into place after these crucial parts had been discovered. Each highlighted passage was identified with a "code" that summarised

the participant's main thought or feeling. These standards included statements of belief or disbelief in the environmental claims made by fast fashion companies as well as assessments of the function and dependability of NGOs.

After the data were coded, a review of the codes was conducted to find reoccurring subjects or trends. The creation of various broad "themes" was the result of this iterative procedure. These themes gave a broad overview of the coded data and presented a complete picture of the participants' perspectives. For example, if a large number of participants expressed confidence in the environmental actions of brands they loved, "Brand Trust" would emerge as a topic.

The themes were then identified, and each was summarised, using the related coded data to demonstrate its applicability to the study objectives. The summary included a brief overview of the theme's substance and revealed how frequently participants felt various emotions. By linking the specific codes to the more general themes, this stage allowed for a clear depiction of the raw data.

The following step was the interpretation of the results, which came after the data was represented. This required a careful examination of the themes and their alignment with the study questions. Comparisons with the body of literature already in existence that was evaluated earlier in the thesis were made as part of the interpretation step to give the results a deeper perspective.

The validity of the research was of utmost importance throughout this investigation. Extensive extracts from the interview transcripts were incorporated into the conclusions, rooting the analysis in the raw data to increase the study's reliability. It's important to note that these portions were meticulously anonymized to protect participant privacy while establishing a direct link between the unprocessed data and the interpreted results.

In conclusion, the data analysis process was comprehensive and systematic, moving from the careful processing of data through the discovery of significant concepts and the coding of these to the formation of overarching themes. Following a thorough analysis of the participant's opinions on the environmental practices of fast fashion brands, greenwashing allegations, and the legitimacy of NGOs, the representation and interpretation of these themes were then connected back to the research questions. For instance, analysis was done of each candidate based on the below.

Candidate 1 Analysis: 23-year-old female fast fashion consumer.

Key Ideas: Significant points raised in the Candidate's responses encompass their understanding of fast fashion brands' green initiatives, their opinion on the trustworthiness of NGOs, and their evaluation of the information sources that influence them.

The responses of the Candidate can yield the following important **codes**:

“Environmentally friendly initiatives are perceived differently”: The candidate exhibits an awareness of sustainability initiatives run by fast fashion companies like H&M and Zara as well as recycling.

“NGOs' Credibility in Candidate's Opinion”: The Candidate exhibits skepticism towards some NGOs, particularly smaller ones that they fear may be swayed by their funding dependencies.

“Influence of Information Sources”: The Candidate expresses greater faith in environmental information from NGOs than in that offered by fast fashion companies.

The interview led to development of certain **themes**:

Consumer Perception of Eco-Friendly Initiatives: As a customer, the Candidate is aware of numerous eco-friendly initiatives by fast fashion firms, though they are aware that greenwashing is a possibility.

Credibility of NGOs and their Impact: The candidate has a sophisticated grasp of NGOs, expressing confidence in bigger, more independent organisations like Greenpeace but skepticism towards smaller, perhaps biased ones.

Influence of Information Sources on Trust and Perception: The Candidate's preference for NGOs over fast-fashion retailers exemplifies the important role that information sources play in influencing consumer trust and brand perception.

Interpretation based on Research Questions: The analysis of the Candidate's interview shows a discerning and dubious customer viewpoint on the environmental initiatives of fast fashion businesses. Given their understanding of possible greenwashing techniques, brands must truly convey their environmental strategies in order to win consumers' trust. Further highlighting the crucial role that reliable information sources play in influencing consumer attitudes is the Candidate's

nuanced understanding and discernment of NGOs, which shows trust in bigger, more independent organizations while displaying skepticism towards smaller, potentially biased ones. Furthermore, their preference for information from reliable NGOs over information from brands directly highlights the enormous impact of these sources on fostering consumer trust and forming brand perception.

Candidate 2 Analysis: 24-year-old male fast fashion consumer.

Key Ideas: The candidate discusses his experience with environmental initiatives in fast fashion, his awareness of "greenwashing," and his opinion on the dependability of NGOs in the interview, which highlights a number of important points.

The responses of the Candidate can yield the following important **codes**:

“Familiarity with Green Activities”: Candidate brings up difficulties with child labour, sustainability initiatives, and the global supply chain. Additionally, he is aware of how unsold clothing finds its way to less developed nations.

“Understanding of Greenwashing”: Candidate exhibits a clear understanding of the term "greenwashing," identifying it as a strategy used by businesses to make their goods seem more environmentally friendly.

“NGOs Credibility”: Although he understands that NGOs may have biases or self-interest, including financial motivations, the candidate views them as generally trustworthy sources.

“Trust on NGOs versus Brands”: Candidate places more faith in NGOs' information than in fast fashion retailers.

The interview led to development of certain **themes**:

Awareness of Consumer: Candidate is aware of the environmental problems associated with fast fashion and is a representative of a subset of customers.

Skepticism of Fast Fashion's Environmental Efforts: The candidate questions the veracity of the environmental initiatives taken by fast fashion companies and is aware of greenwashing.

NGOs Credibility: NGOs are generally seen as trustworthy, but people are aware that they could be biased.

Trusting NGOs more as compared to Brands: When it comes to environmental concerns, there is more faith in NGOs than fast fashion retailers.

Interpretation based on Research Questions:

The consumer behaviour of the candidates was investigated in this study, indicating a nuanced relationship with the idea of sustainable fashion. Candidate has a profound understanding of how fast fashion affects the environment, but it doesn't seem that this information results in him choosing fast fashion labels over more environmentally friendly ones. Additionally, even though he gives non-governmental organisations (NGOs) a high level of credibility, he does admit the possibility of biases, indicating a nuanced understanding that NGOs might have additional goals in addition to simply telling the facts. Interestingly, he tends to trust NGOs more than fast fashion companies when it comes to knowledge about environmental issues, suggesting that the source of information is crucial in influencing customer perceptions and building trust.

Similar analysis was done for the remaining 16 participants which led to the findings below.

FINDINGS

Consumer Perceptions of Environmentally Friendly Initiatives and their Influence on Purchasing Decisions

This study suggests that consumers have a complex knowledge of and reaction to fast fashion's environmentally responsible initiatives. Consumer demand for sustainable fast fashion practices demonstrates that customers are aware of environmental issues. A guarded trust in such activities results from this consciousness's involvement with skepticism over apparent discrepancies in the brand's claims regarding their sustainable credentials.

Social proof and openness can lessen this skepticism. When a brand's green activities are supported by independent organisations, peer groups, or verifiable data, consumers are more likely to believe in them. Nevertheless, in the absence of such support, skepticism regarding environmental claims persists, creating a complex dynamic in the impact of such initiatives on purchasing decisions.

So, in essence, environmentally friendly initiatives do influence consumer buying decisions, even when the influence is tempered by skepticism towards green claims and the dependence on social proof. Consumers choose efforts that are supported by verifiable evidence of impact and prioritize transparency. As a result, environmental activities need to be genuine, open, supported, and ideally approved by reliable sources in order to have an impact on consumer purchasing decisions. To successfully sway environmentally conscious consumers, fast fashion businesses must make this commitment.

The study demonstrates a strong interaction between consumers' acceptance of fast fashion's environmental commitments and their skepticism towards these initiatives. This skepticism's primary motivator appears to be the perception of inconsistencies between the brand's statements and its sustainability credentials. One respondent, for instance, said, "I question whether brands are sincere about their environmental pledges or if they're simply riding on the green trend for marketing purposes." Consumers appear to evaluate green claims through this judgement, which then affects their purchasing decisions.

This doubt, though, is not intractable. As the respondents noted, transparency, substantial effects and independent research can all help to build confidence. "When I see the eco-label certified by a trustworthy source, I feel more confident about the brand's commitment to sustainability," a customer said. According to this remark, environmentally friendly activities need to be sincere, open, and verified in order to generate sales.

Credibility of NGOs and their Influence on Consumer Opinions

The transcripts suggest that, in the context of rapid fashion, NGOs are crucial in influencing customer sentiments. The transcripts indicate that NGOs are held in high regard as trustworthy, neutral arbiters in a sector that is typically characterised by marketing spin and profit-driven motivations. Customers think that NGOs offer trustworthy, unbiased information about an organization's environmental actions.

Importantly, NGO support or opposition significantly affects how consumers perceive products. When NGOs support a company's environmental initiatives, there is a noticeable rise in consumer confidence and trust in the brand. In contrast,

the brand's reputation in the eyes of the public suffers greatly when greenwashing practices are criticized or exposed by NGOs.

The degree of this trust can vary depending on the particular NGO in issue, their perceived objectivity, and their track record, despite the fact that NGOs are typically regarded as being more trustworthy than corporate enterprises. Some customers offered a complex viewpoint, saying that rather than trusting NGO claims at face value, they would carefully consider each organization's legitimacy.

In conclusion, because of their perceived trustworthiness, NGOs have a significant impact on consumer opinions. They have a big influence on consumer views and purchasing patterns within the fast fashion industry through their assessments of companies and business practices.

Data from the interviews highlight the important impact that NGOs have played in influencing consumers' perceptions regarding fast fashion. In an industry polluted by profit-driven motivations, NGOs are typically viewed as reliable and impartial providers. A participant went on to say, "I feel NGOs aren't biased. They care more about the environment and people than they do about making money."

The specific NGO and their track record will determine how deep this trust is. Not all NGOs have been established equal, a participant in the interview said. Some have been more conscientious and open than others. Despite the different levels of trust, the study found a recurrent theme: the considerable influence of NGOs on consumer perceptions. NGOs' endorsements or criticisms have reportedly had a significant impact on brand perception. This emphasises the critical function of NGOs in mediating interactions between consumers and fast fashion companies.

The Effect of Information Sources on Consumer Trust and Perception of Fashion Brands

The transcripts show that the kind and source of information have a significant impact on how consumers view fashion businesses and how trustworthy they are. Consumers rely extensively on a variety of channels to learn about a brand's environmental initiatives and business practices, including brand marketing, social media, third-party reviews, and endorsements or criticism from NGOs. The influence of each information source on consumers' perceptions and subsequent purchasing choices varies.

Consumers view brand communications, such as marketing messages and promotional materials, with skepticism. This skepticism is mostly caused by the idea that brands are primarily motivated by profits and may use greenwashing or other deceptive tactics to promote a positive image. Self-proclaimed environmental actions by brands may raise consumer awareness, but without outside confirmation, they do not always translate into higher levels of trust.

Social media is becoming a potent resource for customers to learn about brands in real time. Its influence, though, has two sides. Positive reviews and influencer endorsements, on the other hand, can assist develop brand trust and positively affect consumers' impressions. Consumers, on the other hand, are aware that social media material can be edited, which causes skepticism, particularly when influencers are thought of as paid brand ambassadors.

Consumers place a high importance on reviews from other customers or from third-party platforms because they perceive them to be fairly objective judgments. Negative reviews can harm a brand's reputation and undermine consumer trust, while positive reviews can increase consumers' faith in a brand's environmental claims.

Consumers use a variety of channels, such as brand marketing, social media, peer reviews, and NGOs, to evaluate a brand's environmental actions. Notably, there are large differences between these sources' perceived trustworthiness. Consumers' suspicion of narratives that are motivated by profit, for instance, is often reflected in their response to brand advertising. "Brands have their agenda," said one interviewee. "With elegant green labels, they may deceive us."

Social media, in comparison, has two sides to it. Positive reviews and endorsements can increase brand trust, but they can also raise concerns about possible content manipulation. "I enjoy influencer suggestions, but it's difficult to know whether they're sincere or just compensated", said one responder.

But out of all of these outlets, NGOs stand out as the most reliable information provider. The findings imply a hierarchical trust structure, with brand communications at the bottom and NGOs at the top.

In conclusion, despite the fact that a variety of information sources influence how consumers view fashion brands, these sources' trustworthiness differs significantly. While brand communications and social media are viewed with some skepticism,

NGOs are typically regarded as the most reliable sources. Consumer perceptions of fashion brands and their impact on consumer trust are greatly impacted by these differences in perceived trustworthiness among various information sources.

Unexpected Findings

Unexpectedly, the interviews exposed a new level of consumer consciousness. A number of respondents demonstrated an understanding of the complexities of the fast fashion supply chain, demonstrating a level of skepticism that went beyond firms' claims to be environmentally friendly and included aspects of their operational procedures. "It's not simply about using organic cotton", said one reply in further detail. "My worry is who created my garments and under what circumstances." These revelations open up intriguing new directions for research, highlighting the dynamic and multifaceted character of consumer consciousness in fast fashion sustainability.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The conclusions drawn from this study offer a comprehensive insight into consumer perception that fast fashion companies may use to improve their sustainability practices and strategies. One cannot overstate the value of openness and truthfulness in sustainability commitments. This illustrates significant companies' need to support their environmental activities with accurate, verifiable proof. This could entail thorough, understandable reporting of their sustainable practices and the results of their actions. An unbiased evaluation of their claims might be offered by external audits conducted by independent organisations. Businesses may use certified eco-labels to display their environmental credentials on their products, giving customers instant visual cues to believe them. Additionally, given the high level of legitimacy customers attach to NGOs, fast fashion companies may benefit from working with these groups. Strategic alliances with well-regarded NGOs would not only validate their environmental claims but also give a forum for fruitful discussion on sustainability. This two-way interaction can encourage learning and adaptation, enabling businesses to continuously hone and enhance their sustainable practices in accordance with industry best practices and new trends. Furthermore, supporting a reputable NGO can greatly improve a brand's image and reputation

while sending customers a strong message about the company's dedication to sustainability.

Fast fashion businesses must comprehend and take advantage of the potential of social proof in the context of sharing information and communication. Positive feedback from consumers about the brand's eco-friendly initiatives can have a big impact on how prospective consumers see it. Companies can provide forums for open conversation or review sections on their websites to enable this type of connection. They may also look into collaborations with celebrities, such as Leonardo Di Caprio, who are already known for their dedication to environmental sustainability instead of choosing influencers who are famous but never been involved in sustainability actions will help companies in being perceived as more reliable. The results also highlighted the significance of different information sources in influencing consumer perception. Companies must understand that people may be skeptical of the story they directly give because they believe it to be biased. Consequently, a multi-channel communication plan may be more successful. For instance, businesses can use third-party channels in addition to direct brand communication to share content. Collaborations with unbiased sustainability bloggers or opinion leaders might help them communicate objectively.

Last but not least, companies need to be cognizant of the growing consumer consciousness that goes beyond environmental sustainability to include broader social issues like labour rights. By showcasing their dedication to fair trade practices, workers' rights, and general ethical business practices, fast fashion companies should seek to put these worries to rest. Fast fashion businesses can effectively adapt to the increasing consumer needs for greater sustainability by incorporating these insights into their plans while showcasing them in their reports which are accessible by the public. In doing so, they will improve the perception of their brands, win over customers' trust, and encourage loyalty. This customer-focused strategy may ultimately help the businesses grow sustainably and have lasting success in the market.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

In this study, we explored how consumer behaviour is affected by evidence of legitimacy and how environmental awareness and skepticism about green initiatives interact. Investigating the truthfulness of environmental claims made by fast fashion companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) was intended to shed light on how customer perceptions affect purchasing decisions.

According to the report, customers often view the environmental claims made by fast fashion businesses with skepticism because they believe that they are an attempt at greenwashing. According to these results, despite brands' efforts to address environmental challenges, their credibility is weakened by perceived transparency problems and the nature of their business strategies. Respondents desired more transparency and accountability, and several said that concrete information on green activities would make these promises more credible.

The individuals interviewed revealed conflicting opinions regarding how trustworthy NGOs and fast fashion companies are. In spite of the fact that some respondents regarded NGOs in high regard for their independence and mission-driven activity, others questioned their objectivity due to potential political or prejudiced motives. Contrarily, fast fashion brands were frequently viewed with skepticism because their activities' negative environmental effects contradict their green marketing.

Our research on environmental consciousness found that the majority of participants care about environmental issues and take them into consideration when making shopping decisions. Participants claimed that they were unable to make completely informed decisions due to a lack of information and a feeling of overload caused by the difficulty of evaluating the environmental impact of products.

Finally, the study discovered that peer influences have a big impact on how customers behave in terms of the environment. This is known as social proof. Social proof could be an effective strategy for encouraging people to behave sustainably, according to respondents who said they were more likely to trust in a brand's green initiatives if they observed other individuals doing so.

The study's overall conclusions highlight the significance of credibility, openness, and the availability of trustworthy information in influencing consumers' views toward green efforts and consequent behaviour

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study shed light on how social proof influences consumer behaviour and how environmental knowledge and skepticism about green initiatives overlap. It has some limitations, though, which point to possible avenues for further study.

One drawback was the small sample size employed in the qualitative interviews, which might not have adequately represented the range of viewpoints. Future studies would benefit from a larger and more diverse sample to ensure the results are typical of the more significant population. The study was also restricted in terms of the geographic area it was conducted in, which may have limited the generalizability of its results. Future studies could examine similar events in various cultural or socioeconomic contexts to see if the patterns found here are consistent across diverse environments.

Another drawback was the study's heavy reliance on self-reported data, which was vulnerable to social desirability bias. Due to societal pressure, participants may have exaggerated or minimised their environmental awareness. To get around this restriction and create a more realistic depiction of customer behaviour, future studies might use experimental or observational techniques.

Additionally, the study mostly examined NGOs and fast fashion retailers. Other industries could contribute to a more thorough understanding of customer attitudes and actions related to environmental claims. Future studies can look into broadening the study's scope to incorporate other sectors with a history of making green claims. This study could only scratch the surface of the possible implications of social proof, given its relatively new role in influencing consumer behaviour. More study may be done to better understand how social proof might be used to encourage environmentally friendly behaviours, perhaps concentrating on the effects of digital platforms and social media influencers.

Finally, while the study did show that participants wanted fast fashion firms to be more accountable and transparent, the specifics of what that may include were not thoroughly addressed. Future research may go more into the types of metrics or

proof that would increase brands' credibility in the eyes of consumers as well as the best ways to communicate with the general public about their environmental activities.

The study has made tremendous progress in illuminating the relationship between environmental consciousness, skepticism, and social proof, but there is still much space for advancement in this crucial and interesting area of study. Because of the complexity of the topic, diverse and interdisciplinary methods are required to deepen our understanding and direct practical applications in influencing consumer behaviour in favour of sustainable practices.

CONCLUSION

Numerous vital insights into the complicated processes that affect consumer perceptions, trust, and purchase decisions are gained through the study of the fast fashion industry's relationship with environmental sustainability. The study shows that consumers are becoming more conscious of issues related to environmental sustainability. This understanding is, however, frequently accompanied by doubts about the truthfulness of the sustainability initiatives of fashion firms.

Consumer trust is a key finding of the study, and it suggests that it is a major factor in what motivates people to buy fast fashion. Customers show a sophisticated awareness of environmental issues and a willingness to query the legitimacy of fashion manufacturers' environmental claims. They are well aware of the dangers of "greenwashing," in which companies make exaggerated claims about their environmental friendliness. According to the report, consumers place a high value on authentic, verifiable sustainability measures. Brands with tangible evidence of their sustainability initiatives, ideally validated by reliable outside agencies, are more likely to win over skepticism from consumers. This demonstrates that transparency in the fashion sector is essential to building consumer trust and influencing consumer behaviour.

The study also offers insightful information about how the source of information can have a big impact on how consumers perceive and trust fashion businesses. Due to apparent business objectives, traditional brand communications like advertising and promotional materials are viewed with skepticism. Despite being a powerful source of knowledge, social media also encourages skepticism because of the

possibility of content manipulation. On the other hand, NGOs are often considered the most trustworthy sources of information on an organization's environmental initiatives. It's interesting to note that the research showed that customers' awareness of the fast fashion supply chain's complexity goes beyond how environmentally friendly clothing is. Many people are equally concerned with the moral sides of production, such as fair compensation and working conditions. This identifies possible areas for further study and emphasises how complex consumer awareness is in the fast fashion sector.

These results help us better understand consumer behaviour in the fast fashion sector, and they can also be used as a reference for companies trying to prove their commitment to sustainability. Future studies should go deeper into the ethical implications of consumer consciousness and look at the best ways for the fashion industry to handle the challenges posed by customer skepticism.

APPENDIX

Interview Questions and Probes: Please state your full name and your age.

1. Are you familiar with any environmentally friendly activities of fast fashion brands?

Probe: Consider old clothes collection bins in stores, use of organic or recycled materials in their clothing/packaging, eco-friendly fashion collections, attempts to reduce emissions in their factories and transport of goods, etc.

2. What are the positives and negatives of such activities/efforts?

Probe: Have you heard about the term "greenwashing"? What does it mean to you?

3. How can a consumer know whether the green claims and initiatives of fast fashion brands are actually environmentally friendly or not?

Probe: What about environmental NGOs as a source of information about fast fashion greenwashing, either directly or through media channels such as news stories?

4. What do you think about such environmental NGOs?

Probes:

a. What do you think the motivations of the NGO are in publicizing greenwashing?

b. Do you think the NGO has any bias or self-interest in reporting on greenwashing?

c. Do you think their status/influence and fund-raising are positively or negatively impacted when they publicize greenwashing?

d. Do you think they would ever be satisfied with the green efforts of fast fashion brands, or will they always find something that they consider greenwashing?

e. Do you think they are generally anti-business (capitalism) or just want to stop environmental cheating/greenwashing?

5. Who would you trust more: the green claims of a fast fashion brand you like/buy, or the greenwashing claims of an NGO that benefits from publicizing greenwashing? Please explain your answer.

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