# PERCEPTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE FASHION BY FINNISH 25–45-YEAR-OLD CONSUMERS

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**ABSTRACT**

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Abstract

The fashion industry plays a significant role on a global scale, contributing not only to greenhouse gas emissions but also to various other forms of pollution and environmental impacts. Production practices have accelerated in recent decades despite increasing attention towards more sustainable processes. The industry also disposes large quantities of garments annually, further exacerbating its environmental footprint. The lack of cohesive and unequivocal definition for environmentally sustainable fashion complicates efforts to understand the concept and hinders transparency within the industry, but also leaves a possibility for the actors within it to cover environmental sustainability only partly. This Master's Thesis explores the perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion among Finnish consumers, comparing them to definitions of environmental sustainability outlined in research.

Various options to increase the environmental sustainability of the fashion industry have been suggested, including improving transparency, sharing and circular economies, and alternative production and consumption methods. Sustainability in the fashion industry should be viewed as a multifaceted concept encompassing economic, social, and cultural dimensions in addition to the environmental aspect, presenting challenges in achieving comprehensive sustainability. Through a comprehensive literature review of sustainable fashion and consumer behavior, this study sheds light on the disparities between consumer perceptions and scientific definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion, identifies influencing factors, and proposes insights to enhance industry's sustainability. Finally, specification to the definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion and future prospects are summarized.

Key words
environmental sustainability, fashion industry, consumer perceptions, sustainable consumption

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**TIIVISTELMÄ**


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Tiivistelmä

Muotiteollisuudella on merkittävä rooli maailmanlaajuisesti, sillä kasvihuonekaasupäästöjen lisäksi se aiheuttaa monia muita saasteita sekä ympäristövaikutuksia. Tuotantokäytänteet ovat viime vuosikymmeninä nopeutuneet huolimatta siitä, että yhä kestävämpiin prosesseihin on pyritty kiinnittämään huomiota. Lisäksi alalla hävitetään suuria määriä vaatteita vuositasolla yhä kasvattaen sen ympäristöjalanjälkeä. Ympäristöllisesti kestävän muodin yhtenäisen ja yksiselitteisen määritelmän puuttuminen vaikeuttaa paitsi käsitteen ymmärtämistä ja alan läpinäkyvyyttä, jättää samalla alan toimijoille mahdollisuuden huomioida ympäristökestävyys vain osittaisella tasolla. Tässä pro gradu -tutkielmassa tutkitaan suomalaisten 25–45-vuotiaiden kuluttajien käsityksiä ympäristöllisesti kestävästä muodista ja verrataan niitä tieteessä esiintyviin määritelmiin.

Useita vaihtoehtoja alan ympäristöllisen kestävyyden kasvattamiseksi on esitetty, kuten läpinäkyvyyden lisääminen, jakamis- ja kiertotalous sekä muut vaihtoehtoiset tuotanto- ja kulutustavat. Kestävyys muotiteollisuudessa tulisi kuitenkin nähdä monitahoisena käsitteenä kattaen niin taloudellisen, sosiaalisen kuin kulttuurisenkin ulottuvuuden ympäristöllisen näkökohdan lisäksi. Tässä tutkielmassa syvennytään ympäristöllisesti kestävän muodin kuluttajakäsitysten ja tieteellisten määritelmien välisiin eroihin kattavan kestävää muotia ja kuluttajakäyttäytymistä painottavan kirjallisuuskatsauksen myötä. Siten pyritään tunnistamaan näiden välisiin eroihin vaikuttavia tekijöitä ja tarjoamaan näkemyksiä alan ympäristövastuullisuuden parantamiseksi. Lopuksi summataan tarkennuksia ympäristön kannalta kestävän muodin määritelmiin ja alan tulevaisuuden näkymiin.

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| Asiasanat<br>ympäristökestävyys, muotiteollisuus, kuluttajakäsitykset, kestävä kuluttaminen |
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, the fashion industry is responsible of a large share of global emissions. On annual level, it has been estimated that the industry covers for up to 10% of all global emissions (World Bank, 2019), but also other consequences, such as water pollution, in addition to various environmental impacts origin from the cultivation, pesticide use, processing, production, and transportation of the final products (i.e., Muñoz-Torres et al., 2021; Farhana et al., 2022; European Environment Agency (later referred as 'EEA'), 2024). Hence, the actions to mitigate the emissions and pollution can have potentially significant impact on a global scale. While the demand for more sustainable practices has gotten increasing attention during the latest years, simultaneously faster modes and phases of production have taken place leading to rapid changes within the industry and growing market share for fast and ultra-fast fashion. The current system in the fashion industry is exacerbating the problem by launching new collections more frequently, even on a weekly basis (World Bank, 2019). Current challenges in fashion industry are related to climate change and requirements for rapid changes in production processes and phase (European Commission, 2023; EEA, 2023a), shocks such as the COVID19-pandemic (Haukkala, Niinimäki & Turunen, 2023; EEA, 2023b), and economical fluctuation which affect consumers' willingness and possibilities to purchase.

Sustainable fashion can be defined and understood in multiple ways, such as by the triple bottom line (TBL) approach considering all three aspects of sustainability: social, environmental, and economic. Environmentally sustainable fashion covers the impacts and harm caused to the environment by fashion and aims to present solutions to reduce them. It can include various perspectives such as material choices of a garment (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008), durability and quality aspects (Papadopoulou et al., 2022), supply chain management (Valor, 2007; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013; Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019) and production country related issues (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008; Shen et al., 2014; Papadopoulou et al., 2022), and environmental impacts and emissions (i.e., Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; EEA, 2023b). Insights related to this are presented

firstly in the theory section of this study, for which relevant material has been systemically identified from existing research.

The relationship between fashion and environmental sustainability has also been explored in various contexts. Often environmental sustainability is defined as meeting the needs in present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs (Armstrong, Kotler & Opresnik, 2017). Busalim, Fox, and Lynn (2022) found that majority of the research in relation to fashion and sustainability is conducted through an environmental lens focusing on topics such as consumers' attitudes towards sustainable fashion, purchasing behaviours, their environmental concerns, and the impact of social media marketing on consumer decision-making indicating that other aspects of sustainability, such as economic, social, or cultural sustainability have received less attention. This also applies in the Finnish context (Haukkala et al., 2023). Pookulangara and Shepard (2013) highlighted the growing ethical behaviour in relation to fashion and the need to understand its variative implications while Virta and Räisänen's (2021) data underscored the necessity for a comprehensive change in sustainable fashion production and consumption. Mandarić et al. (2021) highlighted consumer awareness, attitudes, purchasing behaviour, and actions towards sustainable fashion revealing an existing gap among these factors.

Indeed, a discrepancy between consumers' environmental consciousness and their positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion compared to their actual purchasing behaviour has been highlighted in multiple studies (see, i.e., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Kamalanon, Chen & Le, 2022). This has been addressed similarly from various perspectives: Mandarić et al. (2021) emphasize the criticality of raising awareness on sustainable fashion and inspiring consumers to purchase less environmentally harmful products while Nguyen et al. (2019) propose that increasing the availability of eco-friendly products and enhancing consumers' perceived effectiveness could help convert green purchase intentions into actions. Additionally, as the fashion industry faces challenges such as environmental impacts, rapid production changes, and an intention-behaviour gap among consumers, prior research highlights the importance of raising awareness and educating consumers through transparent communication (Shen et al., 2014; Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022), effective marketing (Chou et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Papadopoulou, Papasolomou & Thrassou, 2022), and availability of more sustainable options in products (Grimmer, Kilburn & Miles, 2016; Nguyen, Nguyen & Hoang, 2019; Mandarić, Hunjet & Kozina, 2021). These variative viewpoints of fashion, environmental sustainability and their relationship are presented in more depth in sections 2.1 and 2.2.3.

To tackle the environmental challenges faced by the textile and fashion industry requires multiple, different actions from multiple actors or actor groups. Potential solutions to shift consumption towards more environmentally sustainable habits could include promoting local or regional production (Haukkala et al., 2023) or enhancing information sharing through eco-labelling of goods and services (Virta & Räisänen, 2021) covering more sustainable actions on the manufacturer actors, encouraging customers to reduce their consumption levels

(Haukkala et al., 2023) demanding awareness and change from consumers, or implementing stricter corporate responsibility legislation (Virta & Räisänen, 2021) demanding stricter regulations and control of them from the supervising actors. In the EU, multiple initiatives have been introduced to promote responsibility, circular production, and more environmentally sustainable practices. Current issues in the clothing industry in the EU cover topics such as low rate of use per clothing, lack of prioritizing quality and durability, and recyclability in the production and disposal. Additionally, textile consumption, including consumption of fashion, yields to significant impacts for water and land use and pollution, use of raw materials and emissions (European Commission, n.d.-a; EEA, 2023a).

Predominantly, sustainability in the Finnish fashion industry has focused on the social aspect of sustainability and been declining from the 1970s onwards (Haukkala et al., 2023). Despite that, majority of Finnish sustainable textile or clothing companies are somewhat new also indicating that newer brands within the industry tend to prioritize environmental sustainability more effectively compared to the older companies (Sjöblom, 2021). Current themes, in the Finnish context of environmentally sustainable fashion, are concepts such as slow fashion referring to fashion based on small-scale production, traditional craft techniques and local markets; zero waste referring to avoiding leftovers or waste and putting them back into production (in fashion this can mean utilizing leftovers from production or sales, returned goods or post-consumer waste, for example) and, similarly; upcycling which means reusing of materials or garments to reduce waste (Gurova & Morozova, 2018) emerging as key practices in the industry. However, progress towards greater sustainability within fashion industry in Finland, as in the EU, remains slow (European Commission, 2023). Advancing towards greater sustainability requires innovations, supportive education and policies, changes in business models and consumer behaviour, and constantly striving towards shifts aiming for more sustainable and circular practices. These include understanding of their benefits and weaknesses, of the current linear production system and consumption norms, including unsustainable resource use and environmental pollution (European Commission, 2023; EEA, 2023a). In addition to these actions and goals, stricter supervising is needed to guarantee the implementation and compliance of sustainability goals.

To understand the perceptions of the Finnish 25–45-year-old consumers thoroughly, theoretical foundation for environmentally sustainable fashion in the Finnish context and theories of consumer behaviour and theory of planned behaviour (TPB) are utilized. The theories are introduced in depth in sections 2.2 and 2.2.1 offering insights for multiple theories. First, sustainable fashion covering the main aspects (such as definition, development, issues) of it so far and onwards, highlighting the environmental aspect and the development of the topic in the European Union (EU) and Finnish context are presented. Then, consumer behaviour and the TPB are presented covering their sub-theories, and extensions. Consumer behaviour theory examines the intentions and actions of consumers in purchasing products or utilizing services, the processes related to this and determinants affecting the decisions (Solomon, 2016). This is a necessary part

of the study hence it aims to understand the participants perceptions, behaviour and factors affecting it in relation to environmentally sustainable fashion. TPB (Ajzen, 1991) covers aspects of forecasting and performing individual behaviour, thus, simultaneously offering valuable insights to understand participants answers and told behaviour thoroughly. Extended versions of these, such as theory of green purchase behaviour which includes environmental concern as an additional factor compared to the original TPB, studies the individual behaviour (Sharma & Foropon, 2019; Kamalanon et al., 2022) or marketing (Paul, Modi & Patel, 2016); Chou et al., 2020) perspectives of the theme additionally offering new perspectives and possibilities to further understand the findings of this study. These theories and their extensions, highlighting the complex interplay in consumer behaviour and action, and illustrating environmental concerns, attitudes, intentions, and actual behaviours, contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of sustainable consumer behaviour. However, a positive attitude or an intention to behave more sustainably when in purchase behaviour does not always translate into action. Some of the most recent findings in relation to the gap between intention and behaviour of sustainable consumption is studied by Nguyen et al. (2019) who found that the (un)availability of green products and perceived effectiveness of consumer behaviour, meaning that the consumers perceive their actions of using green products simultaneously making a positive impact on the environment, being the key factors in moderating the relationship between more sustainable behaviour intention and action. On the other hand, Hwand and Yeo (2022) present that the gap between an intention and actual behaviour are more likely to occur if a consumer is led by emotional values referring to one's emotional experiences and satisfaction, and altruistic values referring to one's interest in ethicality and even spirituality. These results offer not only differentiating, but also multi-dimensional and valuable perspectives to interpret the findings of this study. These gaps, studied from multiple perspectives, yet still forming inconsistencies and challenges between positive attitudes, purchasing intentions, and purchasing actions, are presented in section 2.2.2 in more detail. The findings of this study also offer suggestions for which factors affect the most in purchasing intentions turning into action, and how the gap could be overcome in the context of Finnish consumers.

This Master's Thesis is a qualitative study aiming to find out perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion among 25–45-year-old Finnish consumers (later referred as 'participants' or 'interviewees') by interviews and comparing the findings to various definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion outlined in scientific literature as well as for the theoretical foundation. The age group in question was selected for the research to serve a purpose for covering parts of more than only one generation assuming that the adult participants have formed and found their own style and external appearance pressures are not perhaps as dominant as in an earlier stage of life. The distribution covers participants from three different decades and, simultaneously, from three different generations (generation Z covering 25–26-year-old participants, generation Y covering 27–42-year-old participants with the main focus on this generation, and

generation X covering 43–45-year-old participants). Thus, it offers a broader perspective for studying perceptions than only for one decade, or generation. The qualitative approach serves the purpose when intending to understand subjective meaning or perceptions (Hair et al., 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019), as in this study and is chosen to provide in-depth insights and understanding of the perceptions of Finnish consumers in the study age group. The data was collected by interviews, for which the questions were formed based on definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion appearing in scientific research and, therefore, 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted in December 2023 and January 2024. These are addressed through the following research questions (RQs):

> RQ1. How do 25-45-year-old Finnish consumers perceive environmentally sustainable fashion?
> RQ2. Which factors influence the participants' purchasing decisions in relation to environmentally sustainable fashion?
> RQ3. What similarities and differences exist between the participants' perceptions compared to the scientific definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion?

Additionally, data and methodology utilized in this research including the chosen research approach, data collection procedures, and analysis methods and processes are presented. Conducted through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis (TA), this research adds a new perspective to existing literature by focusing on a specific age group and context, exploring factors influencing purchasing decisions and addressing gaps in understanding green or more sustainable consumer behaviour. It also aims to investigate the possibility of an intention-behaviour gap among the participants and to identify key factors contributing to it. Lastly, the study findings and discussion based on research results and theory, proposals for future research, and conclusions and provided. As noted earlier, sustainability in fashion, in the Finnish context, has most permanently focused on social sustainability. Thus, this study aims to offer new insights for environmentally sustainable fashion from the perspective of Finnish consumers. The outcomes can be utilized by multiple actors within the industry such as the producers, designers, retailers, marketers, and the consumers themselves. Therefore, this study offers valuable insights and knowledge about the environmental sustainability perspective which has not been studied in the Finnish context to this extent so far.

# 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 Sustainable Fashion

Clothing is a fundamental need for a human being, however, on a global scale the fashion industry is accountable for a large share environmental pollution and emissions (Muñoz-Torres et al., 2021; Farhana et al., 2022). While demand for more sustainable practices has gotten increasing attention during the latest years, simultaneously faster modes and phases of production have taken place leading to rapid changes within the industry (Dzhengiz, Haukkala & Sahimaa, 2023). Furthermore, the onset of fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion in the last decades, production in the fashion industry has grown rapidly leading to an abundance of garments available to consumers at a cheaper price and materials, and at a more rapid pace impacting fashion workers globally, particularly in the global South (Shen et al., 2014; EEA, 2024), and the environment through various effects such as water and air pollution, pesticide and chemicals use, land and water use, emissions from cultivation, processing, production, and transportation as well as waste treatment and landfills (Armstrong et al., 2015; Farhana et al., 2022; European Commission 2023; EEA, 2024).

Sustainable fashion can be defined in various ways and the discussion and definitions among the topic have evolved during time (Shen et al., 2014). One way to approach it is the TBL concept encompassing social, environmental, and economic aspects of sustainability. Sustainable fashion can also include multiple, occasionally overlapping, concepts, such as "ethical fashion" or "slow fashion". The principle in ethical fashion is to procure garments in socially responsible manner, ensuring favourable working conditions for employees, and promoting sustainable business models in the garment-producing country (Joergens, 2006). Thus, it can be characterized as stylish clothing that adheres to fair trade practices, guarantees sweatshop-free labour conditions, and avoids environmental harm by utilizing biodegradable and organic cotton (Joergens, 2006).

Slow fashion has similar aspects as ethical fashion but does not literally pertain to the aspect of time; rather, it embodies a philosophy of mindfulness towards the diverse needs of its stakeholders (encompassing designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers), emphasizes locality, timelessness and longer lifespan of garments, and the repercussions that fashion production may have on labourers, consumers, and ecosystems (Fletcher, 2008; Gurova & Morozova, 2018). From the slow fashion perspective, Pookulangara and Shephard (2013) investigated consumer perceptions of purchasing slow fashion and acknowledge the increasing ethical behaviour in fashion and the importance of understanding the consequences of such behaviour. Consumer awareness, attitudes, purchasing behaviour, and action towards sustainable fashion was studied by Mandarić et al. (2021), who highlight the existing gap between these factors. Virta and Räisänen's (2021) studied future scenarios of sustainable textiles and their data, on the other hand, emphasize a need for a comprehensive change in sustainable fashion production and consumption.

Sustainable fashion can also be defined as locally embedded, slow fashion production utilizing eco-friendly and qualitative materials, corresponding to demand without overproduction (Gurova & Morozova, 2018). Additionally, it can be seen as a component of the slow fashion movement and has undergone significant evolution in recent years encompassing various elements including social attitudes and values, strategic marketing and advertising practices, diverse industrial processes, and crucially, shifts in consumer behaviour (Mandarić et al., 2021). The most comprehensive definition, anyhow, is presented by Papadopoulou et al. (2022) who define sustainable fashion as a concept which aims to extend the lifespan of clothing by emphasizing quality and durability over quantity and transient trends; entails clothing that upholds fair trade principles and promotes sweatshop-free labour conditions; utilizes biodegradable and organic cotton and is designed for long-term use without causing harm to the environment or employees. Ideally, it is produced within an ethical production system, preferably locally, and aims to minimize environmental impacts by using eco-labelled or recycled materials (Papadopoulou et al., 2022). It is important to recognize that sustainable fashion encompasses both "green" aspects, which focus on environmental concerns like recycling and biodegradability, as well as "ethical" aspects, prioritizing fair trade principles and the elimination of sweatshop labour. This Master's Thesis studies sustainable fashion specifically from the environmental perspective, and it is presented more thoroughly in sub-section 2.1.1.

When measuring the different barriers affecting consumers' sustainable fashion consumption (SFC), Shen et al. (2014), and Brandão and Costa (2021) suggest that marketing could help brands in communicating their sustainability efforts to consumers online and in physical proximity to regular fashion stores, potentially increasing consumer knowledge and creating positive narratives around sustainability. Similar results have been found by Chou et al. (2020) who suggest that effective and strategic marketing could serve as one way to bridge the gap between consumer intention and actions. By targeting potential consumers and engaging them in more sustainable practices through marketing, brands

can encourage more sustainable fashion purchasing actions (Papadopoulou et al., 2022). As noted by Dzhengiz et al. (2023), also fast- and ultra-fast fashion corporations are adopting more sustainable fashion practices which increases the demand for smaller sustainable fashion entrepreneurs to actively establish their legitimacy and communicate about it as well. In more concrete terms, actions such as green marketing initiatives (including marketing of sustainable products and sustainable advertising) could be used to promote consumers' more sustainable behaviour and beliefs (Nguyen & Johnson, 2020).

The importance of communication has been studied in relation to sustainable fashion by Luo et al. (2023), who investigated the sustainability of luxury brands and suggested that effective sustainability communication on brands' websites could improve consumer awareness. Also, Shen et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of transparent communication for raising awareness and stimulating consumers' purchase decisions in sustainable fashion. Similar results were found by Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018) suggesting that clearer communication and the use of various communication channels to convey sustainability actions of brands could help in engaging the customers more effectively once examining the consumer perceptions of consumer-facing words used by fashion brands in Hong Kong context. They suggest that using transparent language and multiple communication channels can improve consumer knowledge and bridge the gap between intention and action in sustainable fashion purchasing. However, they found that the use of "green language terminology" in communication can be considered as a potential barrier, as unclear and frustrating terminology can hinder consumer understanding and affect the engagement and brand loyalty.

The importance for brands to engage more actively in educating consumers about their sustainability practices through online presence has similarly been emphasized by Brandão and Costa (2021), and Bennetta and Oeppen Hill (2022). While Brandão and Costa (2021) highlight differentiation from mainstream fashion via communication, Bennetta and Oeppen Hill (2022), stress the importance for brands to engage more actively in educating consumers about their sustainability practices through social media platforms, with a keen focus on transparency in their sustainability communication. They note that education about sustainable fashion is primarily acquired through mainstream social media channels and documentaries, influencing consumer perceptions and behaviour towards sustainable fashion. Nonetheless, gaps in knowledge around environmentally sustainable fashion still exist (Nguyen et al., 2019; Mandarić et al., 2021; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022). From a larger perspective, Dzhengiz et al. (2023) who studied fashion transitions, suggest that even if the industry is facing challenges and changes in moving towards more sustainable operations, adverse developments should be given similarly attention.

As noted earlier in this Master's Thesis, a cohesive, absolute definition to environmentally sustainable fashion doesn't exist. Similarly, consumers' perceptions of it differ. Reimers, Magnuson, and Chao (2016) found four dimensions affecting consumer perceptions of sustainable clothing: environmental responsibility employee welfare, animal welfare, and slow fashion attributes. In relation

to intending slow fashion purchases and willingness to purchase with higher prices, factors such as authenticity, locality, exclusivity, equity, functionality, but also locality and exclusivity, were found to affect positively (Şener, Bişkin & Kılınç, 2019). When studying sustainable product-service systems for clothing in Finland, it was found that the most powerful themes were perceived environmental benefit associated with decreased material consumption via product longevity followed by saving money through reduced purchasing, and ease of use (Armstrong et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, in addition to the sustainability change, the fashion industry is affected by the global crisis as any other industry. Only in the EU level, the COVID19-pandemis decreased turnover by 9% for textiles, and by 17% only for clothing (EEA, 2023b). Despite the challenges within fashion industry posed by climate change, the pandemic and other global challenges might also serve as drivers in pushing the fashion industry towards a more environmentally sustainable future (Haukkala et al., 2023). Anyhow, a shift towards considering both environmental and social aspects in fashion production more comprehensively is necessary for the industry to move towards more sustainable practices. In this Master's Thesis, the focus is on understanding the perceptions of Finnish consumers regarding environmentally sustainable fashion.

### 2.1.1 Environmentally Sustainable Fashion in European Union

Climate change as a current crisis affects the fashion industry, but the relationship also works in reverse. The negative aspects of the fashion industry stem from its linear economic and production model, which is often characterized by low rates of clothing per use, but also lack of prioritizing quality, durability, and recyclability of apparels (European Commission, 2023). From the 1980's onwards, fast fashion has occupied space in the fashion market and the development has not only changed towards more sustainable options (Dzhengiz et al., 2023). The industry's adverse impacts are exacerbated by microplastics from synthetic textiles at all stages of their life cycle (European Commission, 2023), as well as from the emissions for land, water and air during cultivating, processing, and producing apparels in global supply chains. Despite its negative impacts from the social and environmental sustainability perspective, global textile sector offers lot of jobs being the third largest employer globally (EEA, 2024).

Environmental sustainability in fashion industry is naturally linked to the environmental impacts it is causing. As noted, environmentally sustainable fashion lacks one, specific definition, and many of the definitions stressing different aspects of it. To address the lack of consensus on definitions, multiple perspectives highlighting different factors of environmentally sustainable fashion are presented. The relationship between fashion and environmental sustainability has been researched in various contexts. Busalim et al. (2022) found that majority of the research in relation to fashion and sustainability is conducted through an environmental lens focusing on topics such as consumers' environmental concerns, consumers' attitudes towards sustainable fashion and their purchasing behaviour, and, most recently, how social media marketing may affect the

consumers' decision-making processes. On the other hand, environmentally sustainable fashion can be defined as simply as "causing no harm to the environment" (Fletcher, 2008; Papadopoulou et al., 2022). It can also be contemplated by the material choices of a garment (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008) highlighting the use of recycled materials or eco-labels (Fletcher, 2008) or biodegradable materials and organic materials (Mandarić et al., 2021; Papadopoulou et al., 2022), or quality, durability and longevity of a garment while considering its lifespan (Papadopoulou et al., 2022). The environmental sustainability in fashion industry could also be improved by focusing on the supply chain management (Valor, 2007; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013; Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019), or local production (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008; Shen et al., 2014; Papadopoulou et al., 2022). However, transparency and traceability are required since the consumers are often far removed from the global fashion value chains making it difficult for them to be aware of the challenges (Dzhengiz et al., 2023).

Environmental sustainability of the industry can be surveyed via more specific environmental impacts it causes. Yet many definitions remain quite vague and lack a specific information of the avoidable environmental harm or impact, some studies offer more specific suggestions. Environmental impacts include multiple factors from multiple phases of a garment's lifetime, such as the use of environmentally harmful chemicals (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Farhana et al., 2022; EEA, 2023b), water use and water pollution (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Islam, Perry & Gill, 2021; EEA, 2023b), waste such as packaging waste (EEA, 2023b) or solid waste (Farhana et al., 2022), depletion of natural resources (Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021), high energy consumption (Farhana et al., 2022; EEA, 2023b), and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Farhana et al., 2022). Currently, textile consumption has the fourth highest environmental impact and contribution to climate change (after food, housing, and mobility) in the EU averagely, the third highest pressure for consumption of water and land use, and the fifth highest in use of primary raw materials and GHG emissions (European Commission, n.d.-a; EEA, 2023a). In 2020, the average EU citizen consumed 14.8 kg of textiles (around 6 kg of clothing), with 60–70% of these textiles being made from plastic-based materials such as polyester (EEA, 2024). This is leading to increase in water pollution, such as micro plastic flows, since half a million tons of micro fibres are dumped into the ocean every year yielding to equivalent of 50 million plastic bottles (World Bank, 2019). Micro plastic flows are estimated to have overcome the mass of 14 million tons in the oceans altogether and still increasing, deriving approximately 16–35% globally, and 8% on the European level from synthetic textiles (EEA, 2024).

In 2020, textile consumption in the EU, including household textiles and footwear in addition to clothing (comprising about 81% of total textile consumption in the EU), required 9 m3 of water, 400 m2 of land, and 391 kg of raw materials, resulting in a carbon footprint of approximately 270 kg within a year, most of the resource use and emissions taking place outside Europe (European Commission, 2023; EEA, 2024). To produce all textiles purchased by the EU citizens

within the EU in 2020 is estimated to use 175 million tonnes of primary raw materials and causing 121 million CO2e tons of emissions of which a half is attributable to garments (EEA, 2023b). Only a fifth of the primary raw materials needed for the production are produced or extracted in Europe leaving the majority of 80% of them, including a corresponding number of the environmental impacts caused, generated outside Europe (EEA, 2023b). Of the land used for the EU citizens' textile consumption, only 8% locates in Europe (EEA, 2023b). Similarly, most of the water consumption for textiles consumed in Europe take place outside of it (EEA, 2023b). These numbers represent well the ratio of the environmental impacts of the consumption of the European consumers compared to the environmental impacts it is causing.

Another issue in addition to most of the resource use and emissions taking place outside of Europe is that when they are produced outside of the EU, they are mostly produced outside EU's environmental laws and regulation as well. This also applies to the textiles discarded. As, on EU level, 5 million tons of clothing are discarded every year (around 11-12 kg per person), and it is estimated that only of 1% of the materials in clothing is recycled into new products (European Commission, n.d.-a; EEA, 2024). Additionally, approximately 4-9% of all textile products produced or imported to the European textile market are destroyed without being used for the intended purpose yielding for up to 5,6 million CO2 equivalent tons of GHG emission (EEA, 2024). The management of used textiles, which are to be collected separately in the EU by 2025 but are currently causing challenges due to reuse and recycling capacities in Europe (EEA, 2024), forms another issue. The current system mostly allows them to be exported and even if the goal is to offer reusable clothing from Europe to the third world countries, there is increasing number of non-reusable clothes included in the exports. In only two decades, the amount of exported used textiles form the EU has increased from 550 000 tons in 2000 to almost 1.7 million tons in 2019, of which 46% were exported in Africa and 41% ended up in Asia (EEA, 2024).

The unsustainability of the textile and clothing industry has prompted the EU to implement various strategies, voluntary schemes, and directives to address the issue. The European Green Deal aims to promote sustainable, climate-neutral growth based on a clean and circular economy (CE) (European Commission, 2023). Initiatives like the Circular Economy Action Plan in 2020 and the updated EU Industrial Strategy in 2021 highlight the urgent need for transitioning the textile industry to more sustainable and circular production, consumption, and business models (European Commission, 2023). To promote environmentally friendly practices in textiles, the EU has established criteria for the EU Ecolabel and the EU Green Public Procurement (GPP), which specify requirements for quality, durability, restricted use of hazardous chemicals, and environmentally sustainable sourcing of textile fibres (European Commission, 2023). EU Commission's Ecodesign for Sustainable Production Regulation aims to discourage the destruction of unsold or returned goods, such as clothing, but also to promote transparency in the treatment of discarded products and introduce sustainable practices in the industry (European Commission, 2023). Additionally, in 2023 a

campaign "Reset the Trend" (#ReFashionNow) was launched to raise awareness about sustainable fashion. The same year, EU Commission adopted a proposal for a Directive of Green Claims to increase reliability, comparability, and verifiability of the environmental claims of companies and, thus, "protect consumers and the environment" from greenwashing (European Commission, n.d.-b). According to the directive, companies must be able to cover their claims about environmental aspects and performance using robust, science-based methods (European Commission, n.d.-b).

To meet the goals of sustainability in the textile and clothing industry, the EU has implemented the Strategy for Sustainable and Circular textiles, which aims to make textiles in the EU durable, repairable, recyclable, and with a high content of recycled fibres by 2030 (European Commission, 2023; EEA, 2023a). The strategy includes measures to address microplastic pollution from synthetic textiles, reduce overproduction and overconsumption, provide clearer information of the product's life cycle and sustainability, combat greenwashing, discourage the destruction of unsold and returned textiles, and establish Extended Producer Responsibility rules for textiles in all Member States and incentivize producers to design products that are more sustainable, to restrict the export of textile waste, and promote sustainable textiles globally (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, n.d.-a). Achieving these goals requires promoting circularity in the textile industry, extending product life cycles through high-quality affordable textiles and widely available economically profitable re-use and repair services, increasing the use of recycled materials, and recycling and waste treatment aiming to minimize the number of garments ending up in incineration and landfilling (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, n.d.-a; EEA, 2023a). Nevertheless, a shift towards considering both environmental and social aspects in fashion production more comprehensively is necessary for the industry to move towards more sustainable practices.

### 2.1.2 Environmentally Sustainable Fashion in Finland

As a member of the European Union, Finland adheres to the guidelines and regulations set by the EU, which influence decision-making in the country's textile and fashion industry. To understand environmentally sustainable fashion in the Finnish context, it is necessary to understand the development and regulation of the EU in this regard. While businesses, consumers, and public authorities in the EU are beginning to focus on sustainability in the clothing and textile industry, progress is yet slow (European Commission, 2023). Advancing towards greater sustainability requires innovations, supportive education and policies, changes in business models and consumer behaviour, but also understanding of the benefits and challenges of more sustainable practices as well as a shift towards circular economy practices and a reduction in linear production and consumption norms, including unsustainable resource use and environmental pollution (European Commission, 2023; EEA, 2023a). In addition to these actions and goals, a supervision entity is needed to oversee the implementation of sustainability goals and ensure compliance.

Sustainability in the Finnish fashion industry has predominantly focused on the social aspect of sustainability rather than the environmental one: in the early 1800's, textile factories were established (in Turku, for instance) and they operated effectively until the 1930s (Haukkala et al., 2023). Subsequently, due to wars, there was a need for increased innovation in the industry. In the 1970's, the first regulations, such as wastewater laws, were implemented, and additionally the oil crisis during the same decade also had an impact on the fashion industry (Haukkala et al., 2023). From the 1970s onwards, Finnish fashion industry slowly declined, and the shift towards mass production in the early 2000s, driven by globalization, can be considered as the final phase of this decline (Haukkala et al., 2023). However, the change in consumption behaviour and growing interest in socially and environmentally more sustainable fashion in Finland have created new opportunities for the industry.

As Gurova and Morozova (2018) present, there is no certain definition or model of sustainable fashion in Finnish context, either. Instead, various concepts and practices have emerged, such as slow fashion, upcycling, trashion (meaning reusing fabrics and producing garments from used materials), and zero waste, (Gurova & Morozova, 2018). Additionally, the majority of Finnish sustainable textile or clothing companies are relatively new the oldest being established in 1917 and 74% of the 84 surveyed companies being incorporated between 2012 and 2019 (Sjöblom, 2021). The study by Sjöblom (2021) also implicates that newer brands tend to prioritize environmental concerns and sustainable development more effectively than older companies that are slower to adapt to the transition.

As noted by Sjöblom (2021), the EU Circular Economy Action Plan emphasizes the importance of businesses and private consumers having access to more sustainable textile options and easier reuse and repair services which could potentially reduce the environmental impacts of textiles. Consumers' environmental consciousness has led to a growing trend among consumers towards secondhand clothing and shared textile usage (Virta & Räisänen, 2021). Haukkala et al. (2023) note that the Green New Deal by the EU emphasizes lower environmental impacts and more CE approach, durability, and high quality of textiles, which also affects the Finnish brands and consumers. Furthermore, material innovations can contribute to making clothing industry more sustainable. For instance, Finnish innovation textiles Spinnova or Kuura are utilizing cellulose in fabric production. As suggested by Virta & Räisänen (2021), new textile innovations are actively being developed in Finland with the goal of reducing energy, water, and pesticide usage in textile production, thus contributing to decreasing environmental impacts.

In addition, potential solutions to shift consumption towards sustainability could include promoting local or regional production to reduce environmental impacts, encouraging customers to reduce their consumption levels (Haukkala et al., 2023), and enhancing information sharing through eco-labelling of goods and services, as well as implementing stricter corporate responsibility legislation (Virta & Räisänen, 2021) in relation to fashion industry in Finland. In this

Master's Thesis, the focus is on understanding the perceptions of Finnish consumers regarding environmentally sustainable fashion.

## 2.2 Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour is a commonly known theory in researching consumers' intentions and actions in relation to purchasing commodities or utilizing services. It is often understood as a process, or a combination of processes (Solomon, 2016). It studies processes that are associated when individuals or groups select, purchase, use or dispose products, services, or experiences to satisfy their needs, wishes and wants (Solomon, 2016). Consumer behaviour is often characterized by individuals' ever-changing needs, but simultaneously of the actions they must take when planning and implementing purchases (Goldbach, 2023). The process starts well before the actual purchase beginning from need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and continues long after the purchase via post-purchase behaviour (Armstrong et al., 2017). According to consumer behaviour theory, the motivation is to make (increasingly) better purchase decisions, resulting in increased knowledge of both the products and their markets, thus better purchase decisions and increased satisfaction with the final purchase decision (Solomon, 2016). According to Solomon (2016), it can be studied from micro (individual consumer) or macro (consumer as a member of groups or wider society) perspectives.

Usually, purchase behaviour starts by observing a need which often arises from the differences between one's ideal self and real self (Solomon, 2016). The need can be triggered by an internal stimulus, such as hunger, or external stimulus, such as an advertisement (Armstrong et al., 2017). The real self corresponds to the consumer's realistic perception of themselves: the authentic core identity which should not be influenced by external factors, such as social norms or expectations (Solomon, 2016; Mariana, 2023). The ideal self is the consumer's perception of themself as someone they would like to be or become (Solomon, 2016; Mariana, 2023). Buying a product or products is based on "supporting" the real self and habit, while consuming other products is based on the pursuit of the ideal self (Solomon, 2016). As Armstrong et al. (2017) add, after observing the need, consumer has a purchase intention. Intention means a conscious plan to engage in certain behaviour and are influenced by multiple factors, such as attitudes, beliefs, and social norms (Mariana, 2023). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), intention may vary by degrees and specificity in relation to four elements of intention: behaviour, target, situation, and time. They also suggest that two factors: beliefs concerning the likely outcomes of a given consumer behaviour, and the normative perception of others, influence the consumers' intention and actual behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Anyhow, intention may not always result in purchase: it may stay still or change due to turnovers, such as economic turn, price changes or hearsay (Armstrong et al., 2017), or social context (Reyes, 2020).

The second step in the process is gathering information. It is influenced by needs, motives, and desires a consumer seeks about the product (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), and the consumer's involvement in making the purchase, the market environment, and situational factors (Solomon, 2016). Also, Grimmer et al. (2016) found that multiple situational factors, such as time at the end of the day, the importance of price, willingness to drive a greater distance, and availability, may have an influence on purchasing situations. Similar results were found by Nguyen and Johnson (2020) in the context of environmentally sustainable consumer behaviour. The process can depend on the alternative or the purchasing situation: sometimes the consumer uses careful evaluation and logical thinking, while other times the purchasing can happen intuitively or impulsively (Armstrong et al., 2017). After gathering information, the third step in the buying process is the evaluation of alternatives. The search for information can start with processing the current information and continuing from a simple, quick search for information to extensive information search and analysis, depending on the consumer's need and involvement (Solomon, 2016). Nowadays, social media has a major role in this (Armstrong et al., 2017).

The fourth step is making the purchase decision, when the consumer moves from the purchase intention to the purchase decision. It can depend, for example, on the importance of the decision: if the decision is very important, the selection of products or services and their possibly different characteristics (Solomon, 2016), situational implications such as economic factors (Armstrong et al., 2017), or attitudes by oneself (Solomon, 2016) or others (Armstrong et al., 2017), or variety of motivations behind the decision (Goldbach, 2023). According to the research by Gierszewska and Seretny (2019), in the decision-making phase a corporate should also be able to offer to consumer an answer to questions related to production conditions and processes and its impacts on social and natural environment to engage the consumers. Consumer decision-making regarding products and services is also increasingly influenced by the digital era via online reviews, pricing, and social media (Armstrong et al., 2017; Olan et al., 2021).

Making a purchase decision can happen in different ways – the way a consumer evaluates and ultimately chooses a product or service among many similar ones depends a lot on involvement (Solomon, 2016). A typical decision-making process comprises several stages: identifying the issue or need, engaging in an information search, evaluating options and alternatives, and deciding (Solomon, 2016; Armstrong et al., 2017). Multiple decision-making rules can be utilized when choosing a product: non-substitutive rules involve eliminating options that do not meet the chosen criteria while compensation rules, which are more often used in situations with high involvement, allow for a more thorough evaluation of each option's pros and cons to make the best overall choice (Solomon, 2016). The amount of information searching required for commitment varies depending on the consumer's personal relevance and involvement: when involvement is high, the search for information is extensive, and correspondingly when involvement is low, the search for information is limited or even non-existent (Solomon, 2016). A connection has been observed between involvement and decision-

making such that high involvement is more often associated with products that require large investments rather than with everyday situations (Solomon, 2016). Similar results are presented by Dennis et al. (2009) and Grimmer et al. (2016), who argue that situational factors influence on consumers' behaviour. Additionally, it is argued that social context affects the consumers' mindset for purchase intention (Reyes, 2020). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), the best predictor for one's behaviour is the intention to perform the actual behaviour.

The fifth, final step in the consumer buying process is post-purchase behaviour. When the consumer has made a purchase decision in the previous stages of the process, the next step is to evaluate the purchase (Solomon, 2016). Instead of conducting thorough research, one often relies on "rules of thumb" to make routine decisions, and these mental shortcuts such as brand names, prices, or following the choices of others, also known as heuristics, help simplify decision-making processes (Solomon, 2016). Over time, various beliefs and biases are developed in the market: for example, many believe that price indicates quality, or trust well-known brands or the product's origin as indicators of quality (Solomon, 2016). The assessment affects the process also in the next purchase decision process, especially if challenges arise (Solomon, 2016). Armstrong et al. (2017) agree arguing that every purchase involves a compromise resulting in at least some post-purchase dissonance because of the drawbacks of the chosen brand or product while losing the benefits of the brand or product left unpurchased.

When observing the drivers of the purchasing process, it is often driven by attitude. Attitude is the tendency to evaluate an object or product positively or negatively (Solomon, 2016), and how individuals do approach and respond to different buying situations and products (Mariana, 2023). According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) attitude is related to the strengths of one's beliefs, and to the totality of one's intentions with respect to the object, but it may be unrelated to any given intention. They also suggest that attitude is determined by one's limited number of salient beliefs of the product attributes and one's evaluation of those attributes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

Marketing can be used to try to change consumer attitudes and behaviours (Solomon, 2016). Similar results were found by Chou et al. (2020) in the context of green marketing. However, Saari et al. (2021) add that to promote sustainable consumption via marketing, attitudes towards sustainable consumption behaviour should be understood thoroughly from the consumer perspective. According to the general understanding, attitude includes three components: an affective component, a cognitive component, and a behavioural component (Solomon, 2016). The affective component refers to the consumer's feelings and attitudes towards the object to be consumed, and it includes the intention to do something with the object (Solomon, 2016). The cognitive component, on the other hand, refers to object-related beliefs and information processing (Solomon, 2016). As the name suggests, the behavioural component refers to object-related behaviour and learning processes (Solomon, 2016). Over the years, different factors affecting attitude have been studied more specifically. Interestingly, Armstrong et al. (2017) argue that also attitudes of other affect one's purchasing behaviour: if someone

important suggests purchasing a certain type of product, the chances to purchase another kind of product are decreased. As confirmed by Mariana (2023), behavioural attitudes have a direct and positive influence on behavioural intentions. It was also found that one's self-esteem can affect behavioural attitudes.

Attitudes are driven by motivation which is linked to primary needs (such as nutrition) and, thus, originally starts on a psychological level (Goldbach, 2023). It can be defined as aiming to satisfy a primary need or higher needs to achieve a desired level of satisfaction, a need, or a certain goal (Goldbach, 2023). Usually, a motivation comes from a will to fulfil a need (Goldbach, 2023). More specifically, the need can be seen as utilitarian meaning fulfilling a rational need of functional or practical utility, or hedonistic meaning fulfilling a need of emotional reaction, feeling or fantasy (Solomon, 2016). Motivations can vary in intensity and impact the buying process, relationships, and interactions between behavioural elements in different ways (Goldbach, 2023) It may also be connected to socio-economic factors, experience, memories, or perceptions and attitudes towards consumption trends (Goldbach, 2023). Recently, also environmental concerns of consumers have been found to affect the motivation of the consumers, especially "the green consumers" (Reyes, 2020). Reasons for making the final purchase decision can vary a lot, thus, identifying the consumer's motives is important so the real need can be satisfied with the purchase decision (Solomon, 2016). Involvement is a motivation to process information. There are also different types of involvement, such as product involvement, message involvement and situational involvement (Solomon, 2016). The first of these is related to the consumer's interest in a certain product. Then, the most effective way to increase involvement is to involve the consumer in the design or personalization of the product (Solomon, 2016). Message involvement (or participation in advertising), on the other hand, means the consumer's interest in dealing with marketing communications while situational involvement refers to the differences that can appear when a consumer ends up buying the same product or service in a different situation (Solomon, 2016). Inertia can be seen as a counterweight to high involvement, where the consumer is not motivated to consider different options (Solomon, 2016). According to Solomon (2016), the way a consumer evaluates and ultimately chooses a product or service among many similar ones depends a lot on involvement.

Nowadays, since a lot of marketing and purchasing happens via social media, it also may affect to consumer's decision-making and purchasing behaviour (Reyes, 2020), while it has additionally increased consumer power and empowerment (Labrecque et al., 2013). In 2009, Dennis et al. (2009) argued that situational factors, especially attitudes, drive e-consumers' behavioural intentions which lead to actual purchasing. Even in 2013, the researchers still argued that multiple aspects of consumer behaviour, specifically consumer power, were not understood well enough in relation to continuously evolving digital media (Labrecque et al., 2013). The most recent addition to this is the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Online communities and cutting-edge innovations like AI are changing and advancing consumer attitudes towards specific products and services: AI can shape consumer attitudes and behaviours by providing information,

while online communities foster curiosity and encourage consumers to learn through shared experiences with products and services (Olan et al., 2021).

Furthermore, purchasing behaviour can be influenced by, for example, the characteristics or properties of the product(s) and the quantity, the importance (order) of the characteristics, or the recognition or popularity of the product or brand (Solomon, 2016). In addition to these, purchasing behaviour can be influenced by the consumer's varying mood and emotions (Solomon, 2016), attitudes by oneself or others (Armstrong et al., 2017). Additionally, factors such as socio-economic position and cultural aspects affect consumer behaviour, and a connection with it and the consumers' needs, values, and goals is recognized (Solomon, 2016).

Additionally, culture as the "personality of the whole society" affects one's individual identity – also as consumers (Solomon, 2016). Culture consists of common meanings and traditions that are shared among cultural actors, as well as beliefs, practices, values, thoughts, and concerns that are shared at least to some extent (Solomon, 2016; Domingos, Vale & Faria, 2022). Consumer culture determines the general priorities and values that people value in different activities and products (Solomon, 2016), but similarly to motivations and, later, actions via various factors (Domingos, Vale & Faria, 2022). It also affects which products and services succeed in which market: a product has a better chance of success if it offers something that is consistent with a certain consumer culture (Solomon, 2016).

Consumer culture shapes the general priorities and values that people hold in various activities and products, influencing the success of products and services in the market (Solomon, 2016). Thus, it should be also considered in marketing strategies (Domingos, Vale & Faria, 2022). Consumption, branding, and marketing act as important mirrors reflecting current cultural values, norms, and social roles (Solomon, 2016). Therefore, the economy and consumption cultures are closely intertwined. Conversely, as suggested by Do et al. (2024), effective marketing could also serve in increasing awareness of our consumption and its impacts on the planet, and even shift our values and culture.

Style and dressing are a part of consuming culture. Style and dressing can also reflect and shape society, its values, preferences, and trends (Solomon, 2016). Nowadays, it is increasingly difficult to distinguish between so-called high culture and low culture since the boundaries are blurring; for example, in fashion it is easy to see how trends based on street style and subcultures find their way from fashion shows ("high culture") to ordinary people's wardrobes ("low culture") (Solomon, 2016). With fashion, consumers can experience togetherness while they also want to stand out and differentiate themselves from others through the power of expression (Solomon, 2016). Overall, style and fashion are mirrors that reflect the surrounding culture and reconstruct it at the same time (Solomon, 2016). To transit towards more sustainable everyday living, it is crucial to aim towards structural and cultural shifts among marketing, production, and consumption (Do et al., 2024) including consumer culture and culture thoroughly.

It is worth considering further on how the current consumption speed and habits reflect our consuming culture.

### 2.2.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour and Its Extensions

Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is originally an extension of the theory of reasoned action (TRA) and proposes a concept of individual's intention to perform a given behaviour. Originally, Ajzen (1991) suggests that perceived behavioural control together with behavioural intention can be used directly to forecast behavioural achievement. Differing from the TRA, perceived behavioural control is additional, referring to one's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest (Ajzen, 1991). This addition plays an important role in TPB.

The TPB captures some central concepts of social and behavioural sciences defining these concepts from a perspective of understanding and predicting behavioural patterns (Ajzen, 1991). This is explained through attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). These factors are found to predict behavioural intention precisely, however, also a considerable proportion of variance in behaviour in relation to the intentions combined with perceived behavioural control is found (Ajzen, 1991). Normative beliefs are included in the perspective of individuals or groups performing a given behaviour and the prediction of behaviour can be forecasted with perceived behavioural control, which should improve to the extent that perceptions of behavioural control realistically reflect the actual control, as explained by Ajzen (1991). It was also found by Ajzen (1991), that perceived behavioural control also plays an important role since it can be used to predict the resources and opportunities available to a person, which should, to some extent, dictate the likelihood of behavioural achievement. Ajzen (1991) suggests that if intention is held constant, the effort expended to bring a course to successfully behave is likely to increase with perceived behavioural control. According to the study, generally the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour is, the more likely should be its performance.

The extended version of TPB also incorporates environmental concern as a factor. It often can be perceived as a critical variable in the field of green marketing aiming to achieve the TBL, as presented by Paul et al. (2016), and Chou et al. (2020). Paul et al. (2016) suggests, in Indian context, that TPB mediates the relationship between environmental concern and intention to purchase green products. The researchers suggest that with the extended theory it is possible to explain purchase intention with higher accuracy since the extended theory has higher utility over TPB and the TRA (Paul et al., 2016). They suggest that subjective norm does not predict purchase intentions for green products, while environmental concern has equal and, thus, significant effect on attitude and perceived behavioural control. Additionally, Brandão and Costa (2021) extended the TPB framework to test if environmental apparel knowledge, product attributes and variety have an impact in intentions towards SFC. They identified different main barriers to SFC: environmental apparel knowledge, perceived value, price

sensitivity, product attributes and variety, and availability and scepticism, of which product attributes and variety, and environmental apparel knowledge have the highest impact on TPB and in intentions to SFC.

Yadav and Pathak (2016) researched the attempt to include not only environmental concern but also environmental knowledge into the TPB model within young consumers in India. They similarly discovered that environmental concern significantly influences youth's attitudes and intentions towards purchasing green products, and that environmental knowledge also positively affects their intention to purchase green products. A solution to correspond to these results could be an effective communication from marketers', as well as eco-labelling "the greener options" (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). The researchers further expanded the TPB framework by introducing perceived value and willingness to pay premium and found that the inclusion of these factors improved the predictability of the framework. They determined that environmental concern is the most significant determinant of consumer's green purchase intention, and that perceived value has a positive and significant influence on consumers' intention to purchase green products (Yadav & Pathak, 2017).

Additionally, the theory of green purchase behaviour can be viewed as an extension of the TPB. It has been studied by various researchers, such as Sharma and Foropon (2019), and Kamalanon et al. (2022). Sharma and Foropon (2019) extend purchase behaviour into purchase patterns (unconditional purchase, conditional purchase and accidental purchase) while replacing subjective norms and perceived behavioural control with respectively perceived consumer effectiveness and environmental knowledge. Kamalanon et al. (2022) similarly incorporate environmental knowledge in their extension, also linking perceived image of the company, consumer innovativeness, and consumers' environmental concern with green product purchase behaviour. As presented in the extended version of TPB presented by Paul et al. (2016) and Chou et al. (2020), extension by Kamalanon et al. (2022) one also incorporates environmental concern as a factor.

In detail, by extending the TPB Sharma and Foropon (2019) examined the interaction effect of product attributes on the degree of environmental concern, and the intention of green purchase and a series of green purchase proposed patterns. They also studied different levels of consumer concern and concluded that environmental attitudes do not directly impact purchase intentions, aligning with earlier research findings. They established relationships between environmental knowledge and purchase intentions, as well as between perceived consumer effectiveness and purchase intentions. It was also proposed that consumers with higher concern of the product risks in greener products are more likely to make unconditional purchases, while those with lower concern may make intentional purchases based on perceived benefits and thus, will make intentional purchases only if the benefits are accrued (Sharma & Foropon, 2019). As revealed in the study, the consumers with lower concern are additionally influenced with product benefits and will indulge into accidental purchase because of benefits and parity with non-green products, which prove the authors' hypothesis of both, product attributes and degree of concern, influencing the type of purchase.

Kamalanon et al. (2022) extended the framework by linking consumers' environmental concerns, perceived image of the company, consumer innovativeness, and environmental knowledge with green purchase behaviour. They found that environmental concern has a significant positive influence on consumer's intention to purchase green products, while negative relationship between subjective norms and green purchase intention was revealed. This was contradictory to some of the previous findings referred in their study. They also found that the direct influence on green purchase intention on green purchase behaviour is higher in developing countries than in developed countries. Additionally, according to Kamalanon et al. (2022), consumer self-control plays a more crucial role in green purchase behaviour than social norms, and environmental knowledge may not necessarily moderate the relationship between environmental concerns and green purchase intention.

### 2.2.2 Gaps in (Sustainable) Purchasing Behaviour

Originally, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) studied attitude-behaviour relationships by creating a framework combining beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. Later, they introduced the attitude-behaviour gap stating that if one's attitude aligns closely with a specific behaviour one is considering, the more likely one is to act accordingly (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Since then, it has been confirmed by multiple studies from various perspectives that gaps between consumers' intentions of purchasing products and their corresponding actions or actual behaviour, as will be presented in this section.

In relation to sustainable consumption behaviour, the intention to purchase more "green" or sustainable products is present in consumer research and thus, has been studied from various perspectives. "The green attitude–behaviour gap" can be defined as the gap between consumers' desire and their actual actions in relation to green products or services (Kamalanon et al., 2022). Multiple factors (authenticity, locality, exclusivity, equity, and functionality) affecting positively to consumers purchasing intentions and willingness to pay a higher price of a more sustainable product is found by Şener et al. (2019). Anyhow, they suggest that attitudes in relation to slow fashion do not have direct impact on purchasing intention while, conversely, Chou et al. (2020) revealed that the intention to consume greener products is significantly driven by attitude to green products. As early as 1975, Fishbein and Ajzen found that changes in one's financial position, product or service price, or availability might affect consumers' purchasing intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Similar results were found in the context of pro-environmental behaviour by Grimmer et al. (2016) who found that time, price, willingness to drive long distances, availability, and ease of purchasing affect purchasing situations and intentions, and simultaneously explain why the pro-environmental intentions do not always translate into actual behaviour.

The gap between consumers' environmental awareness and their positive attitude for sustainable fashion compared to their purchasing actions has been studied by multiple researchers. In a study conducted by Mandarić et al. (2021), the gap is stressed highlighting the importance of raising awareness of

sustainable fashion among the consumers and motivating them to purchase less-environmentally-harmful products while Bennetta and Oeppen Hill (2022) similarly suggest that consumer knowledge, and more specifically gaps in it, could affect consumers' understanding and, thus, attitudes towards more highly priced but simultaneously more sustainable products. Busalim et al. (2022) suggest that consumer attitudes do not generally translate into consumer behaviour in the context of sustainable fashion. Despite the intention to support sustainable fashion choices, it often fails to translate into actual purchasing behaviour (Reimers et al., 2016). Additionally, Mandarić et al. (2021) suggest that high availability of fashion products could increase the appetite of consumers to consume, but simultaneously increases the gap between consumers' attitudes about sustainable fashion and actual consumer behaviour.

The gap between consumer purchasing intentions and actual behaviour creates inconsistency in sustainable or green consumer behaviour, which poses challenges. Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018) suggest that by increasing transparent language use in communication, it could be possible to bridge the gap between consumers' intention and actual behaviour in relation to sustainable fashion purchases. Conversely, the "green language use" can also be considered as a barrier if it is seen as unclear from the consumer perspective (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018). The findings of Hwang and Yeo (2022) suggest that a notable disparity between favourable attitudes or beliefs and actual behaviour regarding sustainable consumption is prevalent. Their results indicate that only half of the consumers who demonstrate a high subjective inclination towards greener products, such as recycled or eco-labelled items, actually proceed to make a purchase. While multiple studies (Chou et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Kamalanon et al., 2022; Papadopoulou et al., 2022) highlight the responsibility for marketers suggesting that encouraging purchase intentions to translate into action, positive attitude toward green product, perceived consumer effectiveness, and environmental concern should be promoted via effective, strategic green marketing while Hwang and Yeo (2022) propose that the necessity of promoting concrete actions towards sustainable consumption should be acknowledged by consumers themselves.

Two different variables could help to translate intention into actual behaviour as suggested by Nguyen et al. (2019): consumer perceived effectiveness, and green product availability meaning that the more the green products are available, the more consumers perceive that their purchasing actions can have a positive impact in relation to the environment. They also found that when the consumers believe that their green purchasing decisions contribute to achieving environmental the objectives, the stronger the relationship between the intention and behaviour is (Nguyen et al., 2019). However, it has been indicated that one of the challenges between intending and purchasing sustainable fashion is often the price (Brandão & Costa, 2021; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022). This perspective is also highlighted by Nguyen et al. (2019), and Virta and Räisänen (2021), who acknowledge that the challenges in environmentally sustainable fashion are often related to higher price of the sustainable alternatives which aren't as

profitable or easily available as the current, less sustainable, options. These findings are contradictory to the study by Şener et al. (2019) who suggest that the consumers are willing to face higher prices in the context of slow fashion if other factors, such as authenticity, exclusivity, and locality, are fulfilled.

Sustainable consumption behaviour involves making purchasing decisions that aims to mitigate the impacts of raw material extraction, production, distribution, use, and disposal of a product from both social and environmental perspectives, as presented by Gierszewska and Seretny (2019). It also entails a shift in purchasing behaviour. Saari et al. (2021) found that environmental knowledge is the most important factor in predicting sustainable consumption behaviour. Additionally, they emphasize that environmental concern, which is influenced by increased levels of both environmental knowledge and risk perception, strongly influences behavioural intention. Similar results were found by Chou et al. (2020) addressing that environmental concern positively affects to green consumption. Yet, the growing significance of consumption in politics and ethics has led to emergence of political and ethical consumers who "vote with their Shopping Cart" in effort to encourage companies to prioritize both environmental and social concerns, such as human rights, in their operations (Solomon, 2016). A new segment of consumers, “green consumers”, has been formed within the past years and for them, the environment also affects as a part of decision-making process in addition to values, knowledge, and motivation (Reyes, 2020). For the green consumers, interventions intended to influence habits and encourage environmentally sustainable behaviours should be customized even further (Nguyen & Johnson, 2020).

Recently, the relationship between consumer behaviour and climate change has also been studied by Thøgersen (2021) exploring consumers' willingness to transition towards less carbon-intensive alternatives, cutting back on luxurious or wasteful activities, or consumers' readiness to embrace products that emit lower levels of carbon during use, and concluded that consumers need considerable assistance in shifting to more climate-friendly products and lifestyles. Furthermore, in the rapidly expanding sharing economy, consumers are increasingly renting or sharing services and goods with each other which has been advanced due to technological improvement and, thus, accessibility (Solomon, 2016). As concluded by Do et al. (2024), viable actions towards more sustainable consumption includes embracing alternative consumption patterns. On a macro perspective, Lorek and Spangenberg (2014) note that to maintain sustainable economies, they have to be based on sustainable consumption forms in the first place, including consumption opportunities contributing to well-being, re-allocating resources to those whose basic needs are yet not met, and re-valuing the contribution of non-market activities such as sharing or voluntary work in order to tackle the issue of growth not yielding to sustainability either from social or environmental perspectives (Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014).

By considering these findings, it may be possible to elucidate and address the gap between green purchasing intentions and behaviours. According to Hwang and Yeo (2022), sustainable consumption has been shown to be

significant when a consumer holds positive attitudes towards it, but only if the attitudes translate from intention into actual behaviour. The results in research conducted by Papadopoulou et al. (2022) implicate that when considering consumers in generation X and Y, the consumers are environmentally conscious and ethical values drive both their purchase intentions and behaviour. Conclusively, as Nguyen et al. (2019) note, there will likely always persist a gap between intention and the actual behaviour in the realm of green consumption.

# 3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

## 3.1 Research Design and Approach

As qualitative research often aims to study fields and systems through numerical data and analysis and form patterns supported by a theoretical background (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; Lichtman, 2017), qualitative research is frequently used method intended to understand subjective meanings, perceptions, human behaviour, or relationships between those (Hair et al., 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). Quantitative research often relies on statistical data, hypothesis testing and experimental studies (Lichtman, 2017) focusing on indicators, measurement validity and error seeking (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). While qualitative data is often richer in expression, it can also be more multi-levelled, diverse, and complex to analyse than quantitative data due to the lack of as systemic approaches as in quantitative data analysis (Gibbs, 2007; Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). While quantitative research may provide more trustworthy but superficial information, qualitative research offers more in-depth but less generalizable information (Gibbs, 2007; Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). The aim in qualitative research is to provide rigorous and methodologically relevant results (Nowell et al., 2017). Given that, the trustworthiness and conciseness of data analysis may be more challenging in qualitative research, and, thus, it is crucial that the analysis method is chosen and demonstrated thoroughly.

Research design is an indispensable part of successful research. It refers to the general plan of answering the RQs, plans on data collection and analysis, and, overall, covering all the important elements of conducting a reliable, relevant research (Saunders et al., 2019). This study was conducted as a qualitative study, designed to answer the RQs presented in the introductory part by utilizing interviews as a data collection method. In interviews, the researcher is never fully independent from the participants (Saunders et al., 2019), thus highlighting the researcher's crucial role in interpreting and ensuring the trustworthiness of the

results. The researcher may try to affect the interviewing atmosphere in such way that it would be as natural and safe as possible for the participants to share their insights, so the interviews could be conducted without presumptions. However, Alasuutari & Alasuutari (2012) suggest that researchers inevitably influence interviewees, hence potentially impacting the nature and trustworthiness of the collected information. Especially when the interview questions are related to issues that the interviewee might feel sensitive, the answers might be embellished, thus, the responses of the interviewees' answers cannot be considered as the definitive outcome of the study (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). When conducting interviews, the questions should be carefully chosen to provide data that aligns with and contributes to the research question(s) through thorough analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). For this research, interviews were chosen for their benefits in enabling open-ended questions, interpreting non-verbal communication, and obtaining feedback (Hair et al, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). The interview questions (IQs) were selected based on theory and set carefully to support the RQs, but without providing predetermined answers to them.

Furthermore, the primary data was collected in the interviews with a semi-structured approach. In semi-structured interviews the participants are asked to answer questions related to a particular topic or theme (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Hair et al., 2015). Semi-structured approach offers an opportunity to prepare some of the interview questions in advance, but also enhances the possibility for the researcher to exercise their own initiative and ask additional, theme-related questions while remaining the comprehensiveness and systematic approach to the materials (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Hair et al., 2015). Even if semi-structured approach may lose the overall structure and direction once including unstructured questions, it also provides an opportunity in leading to unforeseen insights (Hair et al., 2015).

After reviewing existing literature and pinpointing appropriate theories, a more focused search for definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion was conducted for this study. It is noted that environmentally sustainable fashion lacks clear, specific definitions. While sustainable fashion in general may be widely understood, environmentally sustainable fashion seems to remain a somewhat niche concept. To address the issue of specific definitions, multiple definitions highlighting various factors of environmentally sustainable fashion were selected for comparison with the participants' perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion. These definitions were chosen prior to the interviews and served as the basis for formulating the RQs.

## 3.2 Data Collection (Interviews)

The most prevalent methods for qualitative data collection are observation or interviews (Hair et al., 2015), which are often characterized by meanings which can be studied of spoken or written words and visual imagery (Saunders et al., 2019). Given that, this study specifically examines the perceptions of

environmentally sustainable fashion among 25-45-year-old Finnish consumers, interviews were deemed a suitable approach for investigating these perspectives.

Interviews, and therefore, forming IQs, were based on previous research, which often highlights differentiating aspects of environmentally sustainable fashion. To address the lack of consensus on definitions, multiple perspectives highlighting different factors of environmentally sustainable fashion were chosen to form a foundation to the IQs. The participants were recruited through a LinkedIn post and collective email from the University of Jyväskylä. For this study, 21 individual interviews were conducted, with the participants being in the age range of 25 to 45 years, consisting of a vast majority of women (n=19, 90,48%). The average age of the participants settled in the middle of the age distribution being 34,19 years. Apart from the age criteria, there were no other specific requirements for participation in the interviews. Additionally, the participants were asked about their academic or professional background in the field of environmental sustainability before the IQs: nine of them (42,19%) did not have previous experience while twelve (57,14%) had previous background either from studies, work, or both. The interviews were conducted between the 6th of December 2023, and the 26th of January 2024. The interviews followed a semi-structured format and consisted of six pre-determined questions based on the definitions studied in advance. Each participant was presented with the identically same pre-determined questions (IQ1-IQ6) and provided with an equal opportunity to respond. Additional or specifying questions were also asked to gain specified insights of the participant's perspectives and perceptions, if necessary. The pre-determined questions are:

> IQ1. What are the three most important factors that influence your purchase decisions when it comes to clothing?
> IQ2. What are the three most important factors for you in environmentally sustainable fashion?
> IQ3. What are the three most important factors influencing your purchase decisions in relation to environmentally sustainable fashion?
> IQ4. Imagine buying a garment that meets the three most important factors in environmentally sustainable fashion which you mentioned earlier. What could be 1–3 main reasons for not buying the garment in question?
> IQ5. Do you pay attention to environmental impacts of a garment in the potential purchasing situation and how does that affect your purchasing behaviour?
> IQ6. How does environmental sustainability affect your purchasing intentions and purchasing decisions in fashion purchases?

Environmentally sustainable fashion is defined through selected definitions. Environmental impacts of a garment refer to the overall impacts that arise during the garment's lifetime, such as water use or water pollution, GHG emissions, chemicals used, and energy consumption, as determined by the definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion chosen for this study.

The researcher summarized the participants' answers and conclusions during the interviews, and after either three or all six questions depending on the flow of the interview, the researcher proofread the notes of the participant's responses to the participant allowing them to provide further comments, edits, or clarifications to those. The interviews were conducted in Finnish via Zoom to accommodate participants from across Finland. The interviews were recorded with the participant's permission and took 24:23 min on average. Following the recorded interviews, they were transcribed utilizing the automatic transcription from the recordings in Word, then proofread and corrected to make the transcription correspond to the audio recording thoroughly. To increase the reliability and ethicality of the study findings and their evaluation (Varantola, 2013), the mentioned actions were conducted. The aim was to explore the participants' perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion and later to compare them with established scientific definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion, aiming to address the RQs. Thus, semi-structured interviews fulfilled the requirements for the approach.

## 3.3 Data Analysis

### 3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is considered as one of the pertinent methods for qualitative research analysis, and it was applied to the present study. It provides a systemic, accessible, and flexible approach to qualitative data analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). TA can be utilized in various ways for qualitative analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2017), however, due to its versatile nature, it can also be viewed as a generic approach rather than a specific technique (Saunders et al., 2019). The purpose of TA is to offer an overview of the emerging themes in the data including information on confusing or contradictory data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012), and to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process contribute to advancing the elusive research method (Nowell et al., 2017).

As qualitative research often yields non-standardized data, it is typically classified into categories (Saunders et al., 2019). In TA, themes provide an adaptable framework for, first, organizing, and, later, reporting the observations and patterns derived from the data, and a tool to interpret the key features of the data guided by the research questions while remaining responsive to emergent aspects of the process (Guest et al., 2012; Clarke & Braun, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). These practices aim to ensure high-quality analysis and comprehensive results in qualitative research (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

TA provides systemic and accessible procedures for highlighting codes and themes from qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Codes are the smallest analytical units capturing important features of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019), and they can be effectively fragmented and regrouped from the original data items and factors based on similar meanings (Saunders et

al., 2019). Codes are crucial for managing the data, and rearranging and retrieving relevant factors and from the data (Saunders et al., 2019), as well as serving as the base for forming themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Themes represent broader categories incorporating several codes searched by repeated key concepts, larger patterns of meanings, trends and relations sharing a similar core idea, but they may also consist of a single code indicating an idea and emphasizing importance to the research (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Saunders et al., 2019). As noted by Saunders et al. (2019), identifying themes involves an overall process of condensing the raw data firstly by coding and then grouping the codes into themes by searching for repeated key concepts, patterns, trends, and relationships among them, and requires judgmental view to support the analysis.

### 3.3.2 Process of Analysis

In qualitative research, the analysis usually aims to enhance the data (Gibbs, 2007). Data analysis in qualitative research involves the following steps presented by Hair et al. (2015). Initially, the conceptual framework and relationships are examined. Subsequently, the data is prepared for analysis. Then, descriptive analysis is conducted, followed by the actual analysis. The final step involves assessing the findings to determine their significance. Analysing the data with a certain method may enhance the credibility and evaluation of the research by offering a clear view of how the data is processed and identifying assumptions or other information that should be considered in it (Nowell et al., 2017). The analysis should be conducted in a systemic manner. The utilization of a structured method in analysis serves to ensure a concise, repeatable, and, thus, trustworthy process and outcomes (Guest et al., 2012; Varantola, 2013), while also facilitating the exploration, explanation, and comparison of the emerging themes and factors in the study (Guest et al., 2012).

In this study, interviews, including the recordings and the transcriptions, served as the primary data. Additionally, the scientific definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion serve a crucial role in the conclusions drawn from the data. In inductive approach, the process is more data-driven, and reasonable when patterns are identified from a larger amount of data to reach conclusions, and it moves in several cycles aiming to utilize the literature and specify the research questions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Hair et al., 2015; Clarke & Braun, 2017), although pure induction is rarely possible (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Based on these principles, an inductive approach was chosen for this study.

Once each interview was completed, it was transcribed with the Word automatic transcription feature, proofread, and corrected to accurately correspond to the audio recording. Transcriptions are a common method for collecting and analysing data in qualitative research, capturing all words spoken and pauses during the interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The analysing process began after conducting all 21 interviews to avoid unintentional pre-conceptions or biases during the interviews. The data analysing process involved identifying the main codes of each participant's interview by proofreading the transcriptions, tabulating the codes, and color-coding similar key concepts to form an overall

picture of the participants' answers. Tabulating is common way to present qualitative data enhancing the systematic approach in analysing rather than referring to only intuitive interpretations (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). The number (n) of factors (codes) named during the interviews varied: IQ1, n=63; IQ2, n=62; IQ3, n=68; IQ4, n=62; IQ5, n=50; IQ6 n=52. Even if the question setting aimed for a similar number of answers, the number of the codes named during the interviews varied. This is due to some participants naming more factors than asked, while some naming the exact number of factors asked, and some naming less factors than asked.

The final codes were formed through multiple rounds: on the first round, all the possible codes were separated and tabulated. On the second round, some of the codes sharing a similar key idea were combined, and this was repeated on the final round. Codes from IQ1-IQ3 & IQ5-IQ6 were combined into six themes (T) from the audio recordings and transcriptions by linking key concepts and contexts sharing a similar core idea. This is typical for TA as a method since its intention is to search and define implied and explicit concepts and patterns within the data (Guest et al., 2012; Saunders et al., 2019). The themes identified are: T1 factors related to the brand and the appearance of the garment (IQ1-IQ6), T2 factors related to purchasing behaviour (IQ1-IQ6), T3 factors related to environmental sustainability (IQ1-IQ3, IQ5-IQ6), T4 factors related to quality and durability of a garment (IQ1-IQ6), T5 factors related to production and social sustainability in the fashion industry (IQ1-IQ6), and T6 factors focusing on a larger scale effects (IQ5-IQ6). Each theme includes multiple factors (codes) as presented in Appendix 2.

The themes identified are often strongly linked to the data but might have only limited relation to the specific questions the participants were asked (Nowell et al., 2017). However, Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2012) refer to codes and themes from a vaguer perspective. They explain that rules should be formed from single observations, and these rules should apply to the qualitative data. By combining raw observations from the data, it is possible to get "a meta observation" that is based on the variations of the observations, their common features, denominators, or rules (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). The combining is supporting the aim to generalize the observations, or themes, which arise from the data (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). Thus, at its best, it increases the inductivity. Furthermore, as Varantola (2013) and Nowell et al. (2017) point out, data analysis must be demonstrated precisely and consistently (i.e. through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis) to be accepted, credible and ethically conducted.

### 3.3.3 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics refer to all the ethical perspectives and evaluations associated with research and science, or on a narrower definition, responsible and ethical actions and procedures that are necessary in all scientific research endeavours (Varantola, 2013). The importance of research ethics lies in ensuring the reliability of scientific research, which can only be achieved through conducting it ethically,

and by aiming to remain neutral and remove the researcher's possible bias in knowledge production (Varantola, 2013). Additionally, it includes aspects such as reporting, acknowledging research biases, and proper quoting procedures related to the research (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

Ethical questions often arise in scientific research and can be viewed from various perspectives: research questions, practices, processes, the overall research field, or the relationship between the researcher and the topic (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Ethical issues in research are also tied to the ways in which knowledge and actions are legitimized and justified in societies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), in other words, the ethical norms are also modifying our everyday lives and affecting societal norms. The ethical norms in research can be achieved by following the modes of operations, such as honestly, trustworthiness, and accuracy, which are generally recognized by the scientific community (Varantola, 2013). Research ethics continue to evolve as written and unwritten rules and instructions in societies need periodic re-evaluation and adjustments (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Ethical issues in research may change or arise further as a result. Furthermore, it plays a critical role in upholding the reliability, comparability, and general acceptance of research and its outcomes.

Ethical considerations are essential to consider in research design to fulfil the requirements of clear objective deriving from the research questions, sources of data collection, and analysis methods (Saunders et al., 2019). Qualitative research includes ethical considerations hence the data is often more expressive, but it can also be more diverse and complex than quantitative data – thus, it might be more challenging to analyse systemically (Gibbs, 2007; Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). Additionally, the researcher plays a critical role in choosing the research and interview questions since the researcher is never entirely independent from the participants and might inevitably influence interviewees and, thus, the information collected (Saunders et al., 2019; Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). However, the researcher may also enhance the natural and safe atmosphere in the interviewing occasion to encourage participants to share their authentic insights (Saunders et al., 2019). To meet these issues, the data collection and analysis has been conducted on a neutral and systemic manner and are thoroughly presented in the data and methods sub-section.

Relatively new but very relevant ethical considerations are related to the use of Artificial Intelligence in the scientific research. TalkAI-program was used in this Master's Thesis in language matters by using commands such as "Revise the following text enclosed in quotation marks for spelling" or for suggestions to make the written text more fluent. In this case, the text inside the quotation marks was text written by the author, either referring to the sources, or completely own reflection. AI was only used to give suggestions for modifications for author's written text, never directly to create text, thus, it should be emphasized that all the content is generated by the author based on own research and evaluation. The practices implemented are in line with the artificial intelligence guidelines of the University of Jyväskylä (see University of Jyväskylä, n.d.). In that respect, scientifically and ethically appropriate practices are guaranteed.

In this Master's Thesis ethical considerations arise particularly in concerning the inequality present in the fashion industry context. Majority of the extracted and utilized natural resources, starting with the cultivating of the raw materials, ending to assembling the garment, origin from the third world countries leaving the environmental impacts and social issues out of sight for the Western world, where the end products are often transported to be consumed. Issues in environmental sustainability are central to this study which focuses on the Finnish context. It explores perceptions of the Finnish consumers and understanding of environmental sustainability within the textile and fashion industry, shedding light on overlooked environmental impacts that may not be readily visible in Finland. Since the perceptions and purchasing behaviour might appear to be somewhat delicate topics among the interview participants, the answers might be more embellished in sensitive issues like this, as noted by Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2012). Additionally, the issues and impacts in the overall process emphasizing the inequality of the fashion industry might easily be unnoticed or forgotten to Finnish consumers. This is something to consider when evaluating the responses of the interview participants.

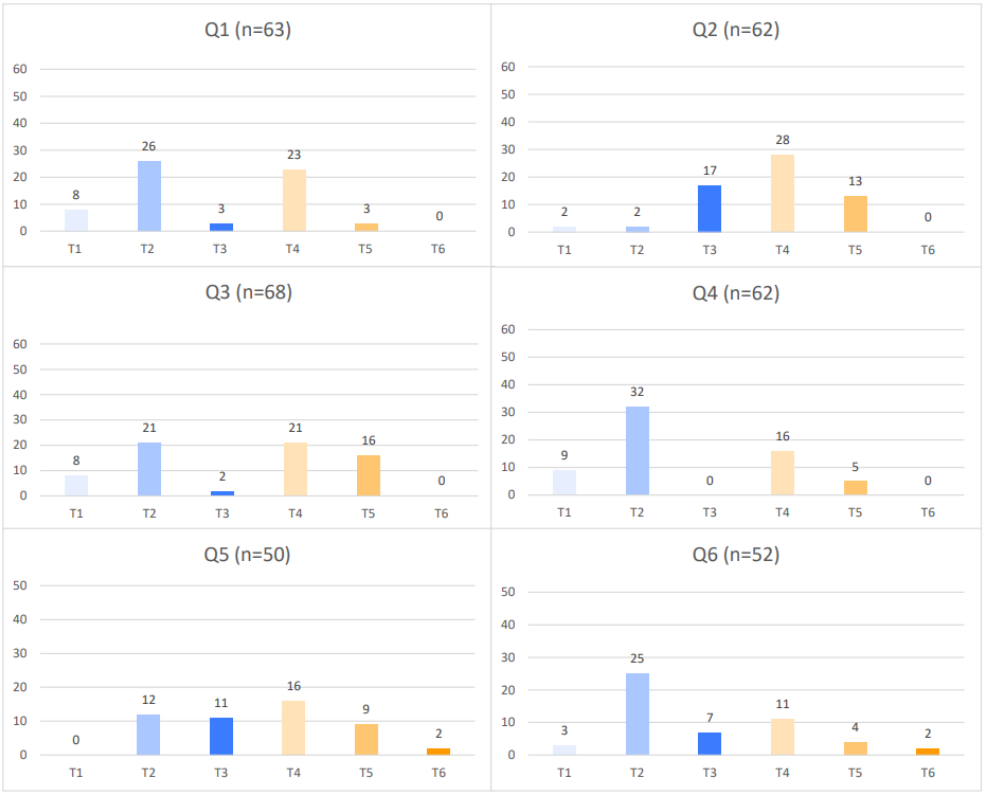
Acknowledging potential biases and perceptions is crucial in setting neutral research questions and interpreting results objectively. Consideration should also be given to how the attitudes, interests, and opinions of the researcher, mentors, and opponents may influence the research process and outcomes. Addressing possible conflicts of interest, ensuring voluntary participation, acknowledging the possible previous knowledge of the topic among the participants, and maximizing impact and resource efficiency are vital aspects of maintaining ethical integrity in research. Furthermore, considerations of reliability in research and factors that may impact it must be considered. By addressing various ethical issues throughout the research process, the resulting research should maintain relevance and reliability as a scientific Master's Thesis study.

# 4 FINDINGS

This section presents the results of this study, first emphasizing the interview results and then comparing them with the scientific definitions of environmentally responsible fashion chosen before the interviews, thus comparing and deepening understanding of them. The study aimed to map the perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion among Finnish consumers aged 25-45, based on 21 semi-structured interviews. The factors influencing participants' purchasing decisions for environmentally sustainable fashion were analysed and compared to a variation of definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion. These definitions encompassed various aspects such as environmental impacts, material choices, specific environmental impacts, fibre choices, durability, production country, and supply chain management. These are presented in the theory sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2. The definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion as such were not provided for the participants to gather as authentic responses as possible without influencing their presuppositions or perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion. Each participant was asked a series of six IQs, and additional questions if needed, to understand their perceptions thoroughly and how they aligned with the scientific definitions.

Conclusively, altogether 357 answers for the IQs were given covering 54 different codes (see Appendix 2) and six different themes. Number of responses and their distribution by themes per question are presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Number of responses and their distribution by themes per question.




When examining the interview responses in relation to the RQs pertaining to the primary objective of the interviews, the main research question (RQ1) seeks to understand how 25-45-year-old Finnish consumers perceive environmentally sustainable fashion. Based on the interviews, Finnish consumers in the age group predominantly view environmentally sustainable fashion as being characterized by suitable materials (n=32), physical durability (n=31), and purchasing based on need (n=24). Participants particularly valued material choices in a sense of durability, comfortability and naturality, and durability of a garment appreciating last in use. The concept of purchasing based on need was repeatedly emphasized, indicating a preference for acquiring clothing only, when necessary, rather than out of mere desire. Interviewees also mentioned additional codes (see Appendix 2) influencing on their perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion, such as production country, with a preference for domestically produced or locally sourced (Nordic/European) garments as well as a preference for second-hand items over new ones. The participants highlighted also determinants related to the suitability of a garment and quality of it, highlighting similar aspects of long-lastingness and comfortability than in codes mentioned above. Additionally, the challenges of obtaining information about the production processes of garments that can be manufactured and processed in multiple countries were repeatedly emphasized, as well as the lack of transparency and clarity in communication from corporations, including instances of greenwashing within the industry. Also, the aspect of timely

resources and effort in relation to information search was noted. As the participants summarize:

*"I buy quite a few clothes bought these days, so it is even further emphasized that I have more time to focus on what to buy, who to buy from."* (participant 6)

*"The information [about environmental impacts] is poorly available. There basically reads "green" which doesn't really say anything. If the information was somehow easily available, it would definitely help in purchasing."* (participant 10)

*"There is a lot of greenwashing in the market, and it makes it difficult to observe the real effects and conditions. --- The more you know, the more you realize that you only know a little. --- The more important question is whether people have enough interest and time to familiarize themselves with the information."* (participant 7)

Divergent perceptions emerged, particularly with regards to the second-hand market. While some of the participants appreciated second-hand over new garments believing it to be the best option for consumers in terms of garment longevity, sustainability, and reduction of fashion over-production and natural resource use, some participants found it challenging to find appropriate second-hand garments or struggled with "shopping a clear conscience" especially when consuming excessively through second-hand purchases.

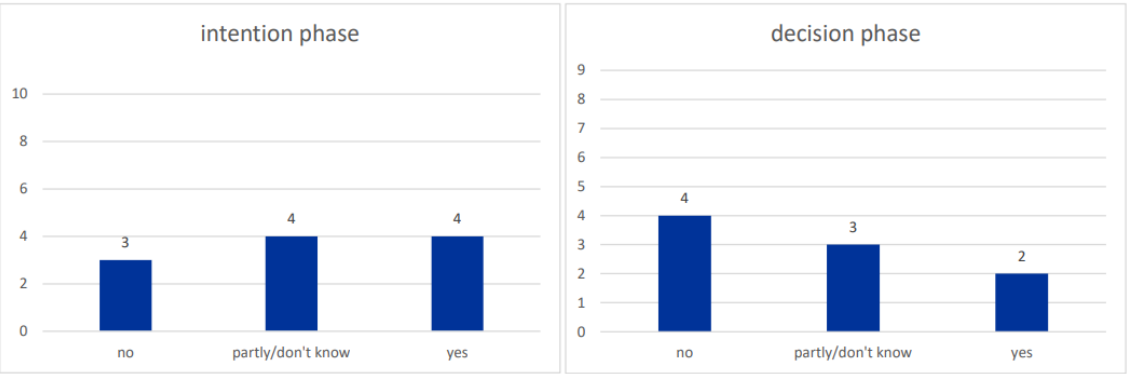
Along with specific IQs (see Appendix 1), RQ1 delved into participants' awareness of and concerns about the environmental impacts or fashion industry and its consequences to the environment. Directly environment-related topics (such as production and transportation effects on nature, depletion of natural resources, use of chemicals and environmental toxins, and overall emissions) were often brought up in answers for IQ5 asking especially of the environmental factors related to reducing and emissions. However, some participants experienced difficulties in answering certain questions, particularly IQ5, prompting assistance that encouraged them to consider the entire lifespan of a garment and the potential environmental impacts associated with each phase. Additional clarifying questions were posed, if needed, to enhance the perspectives from the participants' responses.

Investigating the factors that impact participants' purchasing decisions in relation to environmentally sustainable fashion is the focus on the second research question (RQ2). The influencing codes on participants' purchasing decisions showed slight variations, although the clearly most influential factors were price, consistent with findings from previous research (Nguyen et al., 2019; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022). Price-related codes were mentioned altogether 40 times in the interviews indicating the perceptions of more environmentally sustainable garments being often higher by price. Additionally, one's personal circumstances and budget were found to influence purchasing possibilities and decisions. The participants were also asked to define a suitable price, if the if the personal requirements asked in IQ2 and IQ3 for environmentally responsible fashion were met considering two different

garments: a t-shirt which can be considered as "smaller", easy-to-purchase everyday garment, and a jacket, bigger, often more technical and perhaps longer consideration needing purchase. The price distribution varied a lot for a t-shirt between 10 euros to 300 euros, the average price settling for 49,86 euros. For a jacket, the distribution was from 100–600 euros the average price being 313,61 euros. Participants were generally unwilling to pay significantly more for sustainability unless the garment or brand could guarantee sustainability, better working conditions, or equality. These issues – lack of information or justification for higher price or sustainability – are, again, related to the information search and communication of the fashion companies.

Beyond price, durability and factors related to need (weighting need especially in the decision-making phase but covering multiple aspects such as keeping a list of needs, and purchasing mostly/only for need), production country (preferring domestic production or Nordic/European production, or avoiding far-East countries), and materials (covering a wide range of related factors, such as natural materials, recycled materials, origin country of the materials, and material choices from the reuse and recycling point of view) were also identified. Some of the participants noted that the absence of environmental sustainability-related factors may limit their purchasing decisions, while others viewed it as adding value if clearly and truly stated. Altogether, when the participants were asked whether the environmental sustainability affects their purchasing intentions or decisions, in the intention phase, the participants answered that it affects either clearly (36,36%) or partly (36,36%) while 27,27% the respondents said that it has no effect on their purchasing intentions. In the decision-making phase only 22,22% of the participants stated that it affects clearly on their purchasing decisions, a third said that it partly affects those while majority (44,44%) answered that it does not affect their purchasing decisions (see Figure 2). The number of direct answers varies since the participants either did not directly answer the question or provided more complex responses related to other factors from which the direct answer cannot be clearly interpreted into any category.

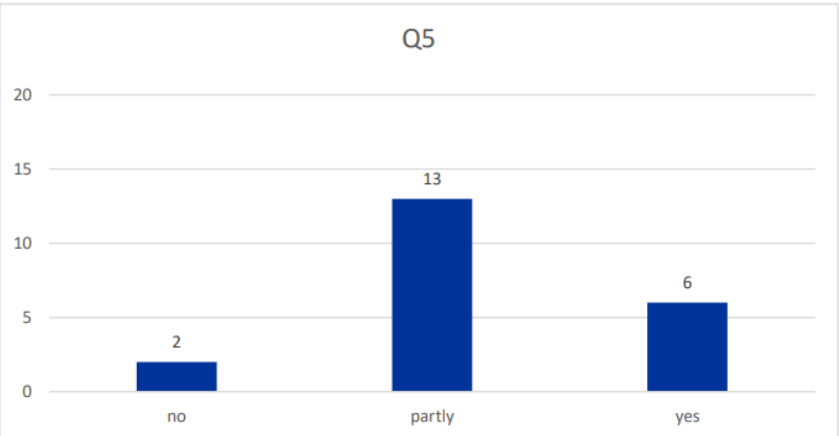
**Figure 2.** Distribution in responses of environmental sustainability in relation to the participants' purchasing intentions and purchasing decisions.



Furthermore, criteria between the intention and the decision-making processes varies, with many participants emphasizing the importance of purchasing based solely on need. Some participants highlighted the significance of environmental sustainability in the intention phase, citing better information resources and search options, while others did not consider it a decisive factor. However, for some participants, (lack of) environmental sustainability was the limiting factor in the decision phase, especially in terms of material choices and country of manufacture, while others were pleased if they found at least some suitable and pleasing choices for their need despite the sustainability aspect of a garment. Often, in the decision-making phase, price was mentioned to be the ultimate decisive.

The third research question (RQ3) explores the similarities and differences between scientifically defined environmentally sustainable fashion and the participants' perceptions of it. According to Fletcher (2008), environmentally sustainable fashion aims to minimize environmental impact by using recycled materials and eco-labels. Participants in this study identified reducing production volume and natural resource use as key elements of environmentally sustainable fashion. The issue of fast fashion leading to over production and consumption of garments was also highlighted. In the interviews, similar codes to Fletcher's (2008) definition arise in the interviews in the answers for IQ2 (n=17) and IQ5 (n=11), and T3: factors related to environmental sustainability (covering multiple codes) supports the definition emphasizing the garment's impacts on nature throughout its lifespan. This is especially interesting when considering IQ5 which specifically asks about the considerations of environmental impacts of a garment in a purchasing situation to understand not only the participants' perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion but also the level of their understanding of it. The results varied: 28,57% of the participants answered directly "yes", while a majority of 57,14% answered that they try or do take environmental impacts partly into consideration, and 9,52% of the participants answered "no" (see Figure 3) to taking environmental impacts into account in their purchasing situations.

**Figure 3.** Distribution in responses of the affection of environmental impacts in relation to the participants' purchasing decisions.



However, since environmental impacts are the very consequence of environmental harm and damage caused by fashion, understanding the environmental impact of fashion is crucial for grasping the concept of environmentally sustainable fashion and promoting environmentally responsible choices.

Second-hand garments were perceived as a more favourable option due to the potential for extended lifespan, as opposed to newly purchased garments which were deemed to require greater attention in terms of timely and financial investment resources than second-hand garments. Preference for second-hand purchases over new garments was the sixth most popular code altogether (n=21). Responses indicated a preference for second-hand purchases over new ones, particularly in consideration of the environmental implications, as presented by the quotes:

"*--- if I buy a second-hand garment, or if I find a garment at a thrift store, --- at that point there will be less research about those [environmental impacts]. --- the first user or earlier users have paid off the [environmental] debt when the garment is purchased or used. If there is only a useful lifespan left for the garment, then it seems a sensible purchase.*" (participant 9)

"*When I'm buying second-hand, I don't think about the brand that much, for example, from the point of view of social or environmental sustainability, or financial sustainability, or any sort of sustainability.*" (participant 17)

"*I make the purchasing decision more carefully with a new garment and try to find out the most environmentally friendly option to implement it. --- I'm often ready to put quite a lot of money into it, because there's the idea in the background of products that last as long as possible.*" (participant 12)

Additionally, the environmental impact of a garment appeared to be of greater concern when purchasing new items compared to second-hand ones: they were considered more when purchasing new garments, and less or with different criteria when purchasing second-hand garments.

According to Papadopoulou et al. (2022), environmentally sustainable fashion encompasses practices that minimize harm to the environment, emphasizing the use of biodegradable materials and organic cotton. This perspective was mostly noted, similarly with the previous one, in answering IQ2 and IQ5. The durability of a garment was mentioned as the main determinant in environmentally sustainable fashion, and it is seen as an increasing factor for a garment's sustainability with an emphasis on prolonging the lifespan of clothing through proper care and maintenance.

Additionally, more specific factors such as water use, dyeing chemicals, environmental toxins, the impact of production conditions on the environment, transporting emissions, and carbon footprint are integral to the discussion on environmental sustainability in fashion, as highlighted in both scientific

definitions (i.e., Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Islam et al., 2021) and interview responses. These factors are strongly related to T3: factors related to environmental sustainability. Additionally, reductions in energy consumption and use of natural resources could improve the state of sustainability in fashion industry stated by Niinimäki et al. (2020) and Brandão and Costa (2021). From these weightings, the use of natural resources and related factors were mentioned multiple times in the responses.

The choice of materials in garment production may have a great importance in relation to environmental sustainability in the fashion industry (Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008). This definition is highly supported by T4: factors related to quality and durability of a garment, the focus being spread on multiple codes, such as preferences for natural fibres and organic materials, and concerns regarding the impact of recycled materials on the environment, durability of the materials, the origin country of the material, and material choices from the reuse and recycling point of view. This was also shown in the participants' interview responses material-related codes being the second popular altogether (n=32). Ultimately, the importance of selecting materials that align with sustainable practices while considering factors such as naturality, comfort and ecological impact. As the participants highlight:

"*I would prefer natural materials and fibres and try to avoid synthetic fibres. I see the material being mostly related to the lifespan of the product, that the material may have a lot of influence on whether it [the garment] can still be passed on to the next consumer. --- it has also become familiar for "the ordinary people" that cotton consumes a lot of natural resources ---.*" (participant 12)

*"It's very difficult for an ordinary consumer to find out whether the recycled material is really a better option or not. --- The fact that when it [plastic] goes into a garment, its lifecycle does end there. It is always a bit absurd to talk about the need to move to a circular economy-based society and use recycled materials --- if that material ends up like that [recycled into a garment] it only gets one more step and then [the lifespan] ends like that, so it's not circular economy at all."* (participant 19)

Suggested by Papadopoulou et al. (2022), enhancing the quality of clothing and exploring ways to prolong their lifespan and design for longevity could contribute to improved environmental sustainability within the fashion industry. Additionally, a shift towards more localized production could also have a positive impact. The themes associated with this concept are T4: factors related to quality and durability of a garment, and T5: factors related to production and social sustainability in the fashion industry which were prominently reflected in responses to questions IQ2 and IQ3. Codes related to production country, whether it covers preference for domestic, Nordic or European production, or equivalently avoiding garments made in far East or Asian countries, especially China, were mentioned 23 times altogether. Several participants expressed a preference for purchasing products made in Finland. Furthermore, the

incorporation of CE principles and utilization of repair services were highlighted as strategies to extend the lifespan of garments, as evidenced by the quote:

"*--- I see that it is really worth paying for certain repairing services when you yourself don't have the skills or patience for it. --- even if the seamstress [services] cost a bit, too, but that if can then breathe new life into that product --- it will make you feel good.*" (participant 21)

The improvement of environmental sustainability within the fashion industry through supply chain management reorganization has been suggested by Valor (2007). This particular definition garnered most attention in responses to questions IQ2 and IQ3, with a focus on issues surrounding production conditions, preference for domestic production, and the significance of transparent communication. These aspects are closely linked to T3: factors pertaining to environmental sustainability, and T5: factors related to production and social sustainability within the fashion industry. Nonetheless, both supply chain management and production conditions were regarded as complex matters to address, with a recurring theme of lacking transparency in the participants' responses, as quoted:

"*--- very high-quality products under reasonably good conditions can be manufactured in Asia, as long as the quality is just right, and the production conditions are --- monitored and audited.*" (participant 21)

"*It's a shame it doesn't read [in the garment] that "this might contain child labour".*" (participant 15)

In relation to the provided definition, it should be noted that the interviews primarily addressed environmental sustainability and not social sustainability. Nevertheless, the participants raised points regarding ethics and social responsibility in their responses covering codes such as "ethical production" (n=13), and surprises in corporate's values or actions (n=3). This suggests that the participants may have deviated from the intended focus of the questions, emphasized the social dimensions despite the interview focus, or viewed sustainability as a holistic concept encompassing various facets, as stated by one interviewee:

*"Talking about sustainability should always include all the perspectives: social, cultural, economic, ecological. We can't only talk about one [aspect], because then we cause something negative to some of the others.*" (participant 11)

Anyhow, social sustainability issues cannot be completely separated from environmental (or other) sustainability issues, and, thus, are also incorporated into the data as a distinct factor.

When considering the larger scale effects or impacts the concept of reduction was frequently mentioned, either in terms of reducing production

volumes being more linked to the corporations' than consumers' actions, or from the individual perspective focusing on reducing consumption of fashion. Additionally, aspiration to identify the overall impacts of a garment or sustainability of fashion industry more thoroughly were found challenging. Particularly fast fashion and its manufacturing processes were identified as problematic.

*"I guess the most important thing is the quantity, the more they [garments] are produced, the more destructive it is for the environment. --- when it's fast fashion, the quantity makes it so unsustainable."* (participant 16)

*"--- fashion should not be over consumed, fast fashion is the biggest problem for sure. --- it wastes much natural resources --- it's also the way people think about fashion, how it's sold: it's so easy and cheap."* (participant 18)

Overall, the findings of this study show that participants identified various factors influencing their perceptions and purchase decisions in environmentally sustainable fashion. The most often mentioned factors were price and materials, while also durability, need, and production country stood out. Moreover, the participants expressed a willingness to consider environmental sustainability and impacts in their purchasing decisions with varying levels of attention and understanding of these aspects. Additionally, the findings underscored the preference for second-hand items over new ones, and the emphasis on ethicality or responsibility in a broader sense as key factors in promoting sustainability within the fashion industry.

# 5 DISCUSSION

## 5.1 Discussion in Relation to Sustainable Fashion

Suggested by Shen et al. (2014), fashion companies should prioritize producing sustainable fashion to improve their societal image and appeal to fashion leaders, ultimately increasing consumer demand for sustainable products. Nowadays, that would not be sufficient enough. Even if the purpose was to create more demand for more sustainable fashion products, increasing production cannot be the answer, when it is largely part of the core problem. Still, the focus remains on economic profit, overshadowing social and environmental aspects. On the other hand, simply enhancing the image of being socially or environmentally responsible may not be sufficient, thus, actions must be backed by scientific evidence to combat issues like greenwashing. Efforts are being made to address problems of this kind, for example, by means of adopted directive of Green Claims by the EU which emphasises science-based, verified information to back up the claims of sustainability by the corporations (European Commission, n.d.-b).

Fast fashion is often deemed negative, yet durable and sustainable items can still be found. This creates contradictions in the industry, and a part of the problem is that the consumer cannot know beforehand whether the product will last in use because of the differing quality. On the other hand, even more expensive, more responsibly produced garment might as well turn out to be non-durable. It also increases the difficulty in discerning the overall impact of consumers' purchases, while the lack of transparent communication increases the difficulty. This is well-reflected in the price distributions resulting of the views of the participants in relation to environmentally sustainable t-shirt or jacket. The average price for a t-shirt was 49,86 euros (varying between 10 to 300 euros), and 313,61 euros for the jacket (distributing from 100 to 600 euros). The distributions reflect not only the personal preferences of each participant, but also give an idea

of which kind of prices are expected for environmentally responsible fashion in general. The lower ends of the distributions are somewhat in line with the prices of fast fashion chains, which shows the habit of low prices in the clothing industry, but also reflect the impossibility to meet those with more sustainable production practises with the currently available manufacturing methods. However, in addition to each participant's requirements for the realization of environmentally responsible fashion varying, price as such is a relative concept and was not, for example, studied in relation to income here and thus, thus, does not necessarily indicate an unequivocal understanding of it.

Four dimensions influencing consumer perceptions of sustainable fashion have been identified by Reimers et al. (2016): environmental responsibility, employee welfare, animal welfare, and slow fashion attributes. These have some commons with the findings of this study, such as environmental responsibility and employee welfare. Additionally, slow fashion attributes were also somewhat considered. However, animal welfare did not get attention in this study. This might be due to the lack of animal-based materials discussed, or it might not be seen as much of an environmental issue.

In RQ1 it is asked how the participants of the study perceive environmentally sustainable fashion. The study's participants mainly perceive environmentally sustainable fashion as made of suitable materials, durable, and purchased out of necessity, echoing previous research (i.e., Gurova & Morozova, 2018; Papadopoulou et al., 2022) pointing towards longer garment lifespans and need-based consumption. If consumers prioritize durability and necessity in their fashion choices, production levels could decrease, leading to a more sustainable industry. If the requirements – purchasing durable garments aiming to increase the lifespan for as long as possible, and purchasing only when a garment is needed – would actually be met in the consumer behaviour within fashion, much less garments should be produced, and it could, indeed, be more sustainable in that sense.

Responses to the study's main research question revealed additional factors such as garment production location, transparency in information, and the preference for second-hand items. The popularity of second-hand garments appealing from the participants' answers was somewhat surprising. Previous studies have also emphasized the benefits of local production (i.e., Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008; Shen et al., 2014; Şener et al., 2019; Haukkala et al., 2023), and social responsibility and employee well-being (Joergens, 2006; Papadopoulou et al., 2022) which were echoed by the participants highlighting the importance of domestic or near production. In Finland, the challenges arise from the decrease in the Finnish textile production (Haukkala et al., 2023). On one hand, challenges in the Finnish textile industry, including a global shift towards ultra-fast fashion, and the adverse developments in fashion industry, such as remaining in linear economic model and increase in ultra-fast fashion concepts, increase difficulty in competing and hinder efforts towards sustainability. On the other hand, if the Finnish garment manufacturing were to be increased, the costs in employment, for instance, could limit the demand as it could be assumed that the production

is more expensive in Finland than in the current most popular production countries in far East, for example, and price was mentioned as the main determinant out of all in the interview responses.

In terms of second-hand fashion, participants showed varying opinions and perceptions on its sustainability benefits: while others appreciated second-hand over new garments and felt that it was clearly the best option one can made as a consumer from the perspective of over-production and use of natural resources, others felt the difficulty in shopping sustainably even if purchasing second-hand, or even to "shop a clear conscience", thus, second-hand fashion can be a step towards sustainability but it may also perpetuate current consumption patterns in terms of cheaper prices, for example, if not accompanied by reduced overall consumption. While the durability of a garment and intention to increase the lifespan of them can be connected to second-hand market and its initiatives, a connection between sustainability and second-hand market seems to be only studied in recent years relatively little. Anyhow, second-hand was seen as (at least partly) a solution to more environmentally sustainable fashion among the participants. This is also suggested by some entities, such as World Bank (2019). Still, as an average EU-citizen consumes approximately 6 kg of clothing each year yielding in a carbon footprint of approximately 216 kg (European Commission, 2023; EEA, 2024), it seems that reducing our consumption is crucial from the environmental perspective. Even if second-hand might partly be a solution to that, it might also justify and allow "consuming as usual", and, thus, cannot be the only answer.

Another issue related is the management of used textiles in the second-hand market. Currently, the fast-growing challenge in the EU market, where used textiles are allowed to be transported to third-world countries (EEA, 2024) externalizes the issues arising from overconsumption. Issues related to the end of a garment's lifespan were relatively overlooked in the interviews. The lack of focus might be due to the focus of the study, anyhow, if it were so, it should be considered why would second-hand at first be seen as more environmentally sustainable fashion. Secondly, it may be attributed to the "out of sight, out of mind" mentality, where little attention is paid to the end of a garment's lifespan once it is discarded.

Many participants weighted the importance for purchasing only for need. However, the criteria between the intention and the decision-making processes vary. In terms of purchasing intentions, the study found that a relatively small proportion of intentions ultimately translate into actual purchasing decisions. This is in line with previous studies about the intention-behaviour gap (i.e. Reimers et al., 2016; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022; Kamalanon et al., 2022). However, the reasons behind the gap may somewhat vary compared to previous studies, as in this study the intentions did not end up in practice, for example, specifically for reasons related to need (or rather lack thereof). Additionally, the availability of timely resources appeared to play a greater role in the intention phase than in the actual decision-making process.

When considering purchase decisions, which were studied in RQ2, the most significant factors mentioned in the study were price related. It was noted that environmentally sustainable garments are often perceived as being more expensive, leading participants to hesitate in paying a premium for sustainability or a certain brand without clear guarantees or proof of sustainability This, on the other hand, aligns with previous studies, such as Şener et al. (2019) who found that factors like authenticity, exclusivity, and functionality can justify higher prices in slow fashion, while, in the Finnish context, Armstrong et al. (2015) found that the most powerful themes were perceived environmental benefit associated with decreased material consumption and saving money through reduced purchasing when studying sustainable product-service systems for fashion. However, communications and marketing could be also used to spread the awareness of corporations' sustainability actions and even justifying the higher prices for more sustainable options (Shen et al, 2014; Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018). Local production can be seen to be in relation to the traceability and employee welfare in the fashion industry. These are issues related to social sustainability, which prompted, without asking, in the interview answers multiple times even though the focus of the study is on environmental sustainability. Blasi et al. (2020) present that consumers are more sensitive to fashion brands' environmental business practices rather than ethical ones, which can be understood to focus more on social sustainability. These results are contradictory to the findings based on the interviews. However, both perspectives lead to a problem whether focusing only on one aspect of the sustainability is enough to tackle the major issues from multiple perspectives that the fashion industry is facing globally.

Additionally, a need for transparency in information and communication was mentioned in relation to timely resources. The participants noted that it is difficult to gain information about the product, especially when a garment can be made in multiple countries, and the product itself often lacks the information. Additionally, they mentioned that information seeking takes a lot of timely resources and effort, and once one lacks them or must focus those on some other issues, the interest for these topics similarly decreases. Anyhow, communication seems to be a double-edged sword: on one hand, the background and foundation for sustainability must be valid so the corporation can communicate about those. In other words, those topics or issues cannot be communicated sustainably if real actions or goals behind them lack. On the other hand, sustainability actions must be communicated transparently and clearly even if they are unfinished because no actor is perfect or ready in this matter, and consumers have a right to receive open, reliable information. Transparency is the key word in sustainability, whether it is about the actions already taken, the actions that are currently being implemented or improved, or the goals and future actions. Also, the corporations could benefit by marketing transparently (Shen et al., 2014; Nguyen & Johnson, 2020; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022; Dzhengiz et al., 2023) or strategically (Chou et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2023) about their sustainability initiatives, goals, and even issues and plans to tackle those.

Anyhow, all kinds of fashion brands seem to utilize sustainability in their marketing efforts, thus, truthfulness and trustworthiness of the claims often remains unclear. The lack of transparency is also aimed to be tackled, at least partly, by the EU due to the Green Claims directly aiming to increase reliability, comparability, and verifiability of environmental claims of the companies (European Commission, n.d.-b) which will benefit the consumers but also offers equal starting point for companies in this regard, in other words, unsustainable operating methods and the lack of communication of those cannot benefit the company as easily compared to the more sustainable competitors as earlier. However, there still exists and likely will remain gaps in knowledge regarding environmentally sustainable fashion practices (Nguyen et al., 2019; Mandarić et al., 2021; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022), highlighting the importance of improving transparency and accountability in the industry. These aspects are also supported by the results in the interviews related to this Master's Thesis since there exists differentiating perceptions and difficulties in understanding the overall picture, especially about the environmental impacts of garments and the fashion industry.

Furthermore, disparities exist between participants' perceptions and scientific definitions of environmentally sustainable fashion. Most of the differences are related to differentiating perspectives in research. Research tends to focus more on material-related factors, however, similar aspects – such as biodegradable and organic materials (Joergens, 2006; Mandarić et al., 2021; Papadopoulou et al., 2022), and recycled materials or eco-labels (Fletcher, 2008; Papadopoulou et al., 2022) – for those are highlighted than among the participants. This implicates that the participants are aware of the issues related to clothing materials, such as cultivation and production of them, and durability in use. Moreover, differences in perspectives can be observed in marketing and communication regarding environmentally sustainable fashion. While participants stress the need for transparent and accessible information, research tends to approach it more from the corporate perspective. Strategic marketing is emphasizing the benefits of sustainable fashion (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018; Mandarić et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2023), increasing awareness (Luo et al., 2023), engaging consumers (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018) and from the aspect of strategic efficiency (Mandarić et al., 2021).

While some definitions of environmental harm remain vague and lack specificity, certain studies provide more detailed insights. Environmental impacts encompass a range of factors, including the use of environmentally harmful chemicals (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Farhana et al., 2022; EEA, 2023b), water use and water pollution (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Islam et al., 2021; EEA, 2023b), waste such as packaging waste (EEA, 2023b) or solid waste (Farhana et al., 2022), depletion of natural resources (Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019; Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021), high energy consumption (Farhana et al., 2022; EEA, 2023b) and, consequently, GHG emissions (Niinimäki et al., 2020; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Farhana et al., 2022). Similarly, the responses to IQ5 by the participants regarding environmental impacts largely focused on

directly environment-related topics, in particular, the impact of production or transport on nature, the use of natural resources, the use of chemical and environmental toxins, and overall emissions were commonly discussed. However, especially the aspect of energy consumption remained received less attention among the responses.

When discussing the environmental impacts in relation to the purchasing process, some participants highlighted the importance of environmental sustainability especially in the intention phase based on better timely resources for information search and search for the most suitable options, or adding value, while others did not see it as a decisive criterion. However, some participants found (the lack of) it to be the ultimately limiting factor in the decision phase highlighting especially the meaning of material choices and manufacturing country, while others were pleased if they found at least some suitable and pleasing choices for their need. Often, however, in the decision-making phase price of the garment was mentioned to be the ultimate decisive.

The design perspective, particularly in the context of slow fashion (Fletcher, 2008; Gurova & Morozova, 2018) and long-term use (Papadopoulou et al., 2022), is another aspect highlighted in research but less so in the participants' views. Obviously, it was neither in the main focus of the interviews since they focused on the consumer behaviour of the participants, but as presented in the research, it is one aspect to consider when discussed about environmentally sustainable fashion. It is also highlighted in the regulation by the EU by, for instance, extended Producer Responsibility rules for textiles aim to guide producers in designing more sustainable products from material and waste perspectives (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, n.d.-a).

Overall, the study reveals the complexities and nuances in consumer perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion, emphasizing the need for ongoing research and transparent communication in the fashion industry to address environmental concerns effectively. Additionally, both similarities and differences between the perceptions and definitions are found, as well as in the responses compared to the existing scientific literature among the themes. Despite varying perspectives, the importance of environmental sustainability in the fashion industry remains a paramount concern that requires collective action and awareness from all researchers, consumers, and corporations. Conclusively, addressing the multifaceted issues within the fashion industry requires a holistic approach that considers environmental, social, and economic factors. By leveraging consumer perceptions, companies can enhance their sustainability practices and contribute positively towards a more responsible fashion ecosystem.

## 5.2 Discussion in Relation to Consumer Behaviour and Theory of Planned Behaviour

When examining the theoretical foundation of this study in relation to its empirical findings, it is imperative to first evaluate consumer behaviour within the context. The purchasing process is a multi-phased endeavour aimed at meeting individuals' "ever-changing needs" (Goldbach, 2023), thereby necessitating timely resource allocation. In the findings of this study, certain participants underscored the significance of environmental sustainability, particularly during the intention phase based on efficient resource utilization for information retrieval and selection of suitable options or value addition. Conversely, some participants did not see it as a decisive criterion. However, for some participants, it emerged as the pivotal limiting factor during the decision phase, with specific emphasis on material choices and manufacturing origins, while others expressed contentment upon finding even marginally suitable and appealing options for their needs.

Finding a suitable option requires timely resources which are intricately linked to information search, communication, and marketing. As noted by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), the process of information search is intertwined with needs, motivations, and desires. In the context of transparency, the study findings highlight the negative impact of a lack of timely resources for transparent and comprehensible information retrieval, accentuating ambiguous terms and definitions in corporate communications, which demand substantial time and effort. Moreover, it is associated to motivation, which seeks to enhance increasingly better purchase decisions as per consumer behaviour theory (Solomon, 2016): consumers must be incentivized to invest time in information retrieval, while corporations need to ensure the accuracy of the information they provide for consumer.

The concept of need-based purchasing emerged prominently in the interviews as one of the most frequently cited codes, emphasizing the practice of acquiring garments only when a genuine need arises. Nevertheless, need can be construed in varied ways: as utilitarian, satisfying a rational need for functional or pragmatic utility, or hedonistic, fulfilling an emotional or fantastical need (Solomon, 2016). Based on the interviews, participants predominantly referenced utilitarian needs, although they acknowledged the difficulty in discerning a "real" need, as one's desire (hedonistic need) can sometimes be misconstrued as a genuine need (utilitarian need). Following the identification of a need, consumers formulate a purchase intention, a subject also explored in the interviews. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), intention can exhibit degrees and specificity concerning four elements: behaviour, target, situation, and time. They posit that consumers' intentions and subsequent actions are influenced by two factors: beliefs regarding the anticipated outcomes of a particular consumer behaviour and normative perceptions of others (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Intention denotes a conscious decision to engage in specific behaviour and is

influenced by various factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and societal norms (Mariana, 2023). When discussing the purchase intention phase, some participants highlighted the importance of environmental sustainability based on better timely resources (than in the decision-making phase), or value addition. Conversely, other participants did not regard it as a definitive criterion. Nevertheless, a large proportion of respondents highlighted the infrequency with which intentions translate into actual purchases, aligning with prior research (Armstrong et al., 2017; Reyes, 2020). The purchasing process is frequently driven by attitudes (Solomon, 2016), which stem from motivations and often emanate from a desire to fulfil a need (Goldbach, 2023). This aspect is prominently emphasized in the Master's Thesis, where need-based consumption emerged as a crucial consideration in perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion.

During the decision-making phase of the purchasing process, marketing could yield in significant role: it can be leveraged to alter consumers' attitudes and, ultimately, behaviours (Solomon, 2016; Chou et al., 2020), while ensuring that corporations can provide consumers with satisfactory responses regarding production conditions, processes, and their environmental and social repercussions to foster engagement (Gierszewska & Seretny, 2019). The decision-making process may vary depending on the purchasing context: consumers may engage in diligent evaluation and logical decision-making, whereas at other times, purchases may occur intuitively or impulsively (Armstrong et al., 2017). Consumer engagement or interest in the purchasing process depends on message involvement, which emphasizes consumers' interest in engaging with marketing and communications: the evaluation and selection of a product or service among similar alternatives are depends a lot on involvement (Solomon, 2016). This aspect was also stressed by the participants, who emphasize the scarcity and consequent value of timely resources in a society that continuously emphasizes efficiency. Question of whether the primary role of marketing or communication is solely to stimulate increased consumption, possibly to encourage towards more sustainable consumption, or to share information on a broader scale (e.g., regarding the product's manufacturing background, usage, potential repair options, and various disposal methods) need to be considered. Additionally, an aspect to consider is how marketing could be redirected to serve a common good (specifically enhancing sustainability), when it is conventional application predominantly aims at fostering continuous, even increased, consumption. According to Saari et al. (2021), to promote sustainable consumption through marketing necessitates a thorough understanding of attitudes toward sustainable consumption behaviour from the consumer's perspective, touching upon the objective of this Master's Thesis.

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) found that changes in financial position, product or service price, or availability might affect consumers' purchasing intentions. Similar results were found in the context of pro-environmental behaviour by Grimmer et al. (2016) who suggest that time, price, willingness to drive long distances, availability, and ease of purchasing affect purchasing situations and

intentions, and simultaneously explain why the pro-environmental intentions do not always translate into actual behaviour. However, it has been indicated that one of the challenges between intending and purchasing sustainable fashion is often the price (Nguyen et al., 2019; Brandão & Costa, 2021; Virta & Räisänen, 2021; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022) acknowledging that the challenges in environmentally sustainable fashion are often related to higher price of the sustainable alternatives which aren't as profitable or easily available as the other options. This was also supported by the interviews since price was the most mentioned factor indicating that sustainability efforts do matter, but the decisive criteria will be price depending various factors such as on one's life situation, or brand's ability to communicate clearly and trustfully about its sustainability (and, possibly, create additional value for the consumer out of sustainability). Thus, it could be assumed that price is one the factors contributing to the gap between positive attitude on intention to consume more sustainable options, but which does not, however, often translate into action.

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) present that if attitude closely aligns with a specific behaviour one is considering, the more likely one is to act accordingly. More recently, it has been specified stating that consumers' desire and actual behaviour often do not necessarily meet despite the attitude or intention in relation to sustainable consumption (Hwang & Yeo, 2022; Kamalanon et al., 2022). This gap can also be identified in the study results: only approximately a third of the participants take environmental impacts of their fashion purchases into consideration while simultaneously a bit more than a half aims to do so. The difficulty in interpreting the results is to determine what does it mean for each participant to aim to do so. However, Şener et al. (2019) found that factors such as authenticity, locality, and exclusivity positively affect consumers' willingness to pay a higher price for more sustainable products. Some of the factors (locality, functionality) were also mentioned in the interviews but not on the same intensity as in their findings. Anyhow, by addressing these factors, it may be possible promote more sustainable consumer behaviour. Nguyen et al. (2019) suggest that with increased consumer perceived effectiveness, and green product availability meaning that the more the green products are available, the more consumers perceive that their purchasing actions can have a positive impact in relation to the environment, could be solutions for narrowing the gap. As good as it sounds, a problem of how, for example, the positive impact on the environment would be measured, communicated, and proven to the customers remains.

To bridge the gap between intention and behaviour, it is crucial to consider perceived behavioural control, as suggested by Ajzen (1991), which refers to one's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest. According to Ajzen's study (1991), generally the stronger the intention to engage in a behaviour is, the more likely should be its performance. However, in the study results based on the interviews, the participants mentioned lack of suitable materials and lack of durability affecting the most on purchasing behaviour even if one's requirements for environmentally sustainable fashion (often including

proper pricing) would be met. The actual purchasing behaviour was seen as an easy act, but all the different aspects in relation to it form the difficulty for implementing it accordingly. If one has a proper need for a new garment, it should also be taken into account that how can one find a suitable options for covering all the different aspects: the ones containing enough proven and transparent information, produced in humane conditions, of the right material, that suits well, and lasts in use. When considering this list while knowing the current state of the fashion industry, the task seems almost impossible.

Despite the difficulties in implementing sustainable fashion purchasing behaviour, it is important to strive towards lower, thus, more sustainable consumption levels, as advocated by the Hot or Cool Institute (2022). According to their report "Unfit, Unfair, Unfashionable: Resizing Fashion for a Fair Consumption Space", a sustainable level of cloth consumption is approximately five new garments a year if intended to stay within the 1.5°C lifestyle. If should be considered whether the consumption could be sustained and, therefore, the environmental burden decreased if everyone, especially in the Western world where usually more options to choose from are available, and the consumption levels are averagely higher than in the developing countries, would take notice on this. However, addressing various factors such as reasonable price, consumer perceptions, and product availability can potentially lead to a more sustainable fashion industry and decrease environmental impact of it in the long run. Efforts to provide transparent information, humane production conditions, and durable options to consumers are essential steps towards achieving a more sustainable fashion consumption pattern on a broader scale.

The extended versions of TPB include environmental concern as a factor suggesting that subjective norm does not predict purchase intentions for green products, while environmental concern has a significant effect on attitudes and perceived behavioural control (Paul et al., 2016). If this would completely apply to this study, it could be assumed that codes directly related to environmental factors would be mentioned more often. Even if some participants did show a concern of what are the consequences and impacts of producing and consuming fashion at the phase that it is currently produced and consumed, it was not the main concern for most of the participants. Additionally, Brandão and Costa (2021) extended the TPB framework to test if environmental apparel knowledge, product attributes and variety have an impact in intentions towards SFC. They identified multiple different main barriers to SFC: environmental apparel knowledge, perceived value, price sensitivity, product attributes and variety, and availability and scepticism, with product attributes and variety, and environmental apparel knowledge having the highest impacts on TPB and in intentions to SFC. Some similarities can be found in relation to this study: lack of knowledge and transparent information was mentioned multiple times, as justified earlier, similarly as price and product attributes. These findings reflect the complexities of consumer behaviour related to green purchases, emphasizing the importance of attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control in predicting behavioural patterns as suggested by Ajzen (1991). However,

aspects related to the environmental concern were also aimed to be clarified in the IQs (environmentally sustainable fashion, environmental impacts of fashion), but the success within those was weaker than expected. This might have been improved by explaining all the definitions and terms in depth for the participants already in the interview phase, but that, on the other hand, could have affected on the true perceptions behind the answers which were indeed the ones that were wanted to find out in this study.

Moreover, research by Sharma and Foropon (2019), and Kamalanon et al. (2022) further extend the TPB framework to include factors such as environmental knowledge, perceived company image, consumer innovativeness, and consumer effectiveness in relation to green purchase behaviour. Even if consumers' environmental concerns were not in the focus of this study, hints of it transpired throughout the interviews especially regarding the giant production amounts of (fast) fashion and their impacts on nature. Brand image, however, got relatively little attention (n=7) yielding to the conclusion of whether the companies are failing in their efforts in creating a public image in relation to sustainability, or the consumers not trusting the information available which might stem from, for instance, lack of access to information or attempts at greenwashing.

Attitudes towards the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control play key roles in predicting behavioural patterns according to TPB, and to enhance the accuracy of predicting behaviours related to green purchases, normative beliefs and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991), environmental concern (Paul et al., 2016; Sharma & Foropon, 2019; Chou et al., 2020; Kamalanon et al., 2022), and environmental knowledge (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Yadav & Pathak, 2017; Kamalanon et al., 2022) also integrated into the framework. These extensions, illustrating the complex interplay between the factors, contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of green purchase behaviour. Furthermore, this study continues to explain these factors in the Finnish context by studying how the Finnish 25–45-year-old consumers perceive environmentally sustainable fashion, which factors affect their purchasing intentions and decisions, and what are the possible reasons for not to purchase products even if they were suitable by requirement. Thus, it adds value to the current field of research and offers further possibilities to study these in even more thoroughly. However, by studying consumers' actual behaviour in more depth instead of only perceptions in relation to environmentally sustainable fashion could offer even more valuable insights for the different stakeholders who operate in the industry or in relation to it. This could be achieved by focusing more holistically on environmental concerns of the consumers, as suggested by multiple studies (see, i.e., Paul et al., 2016; Sharma & Foropon, 2019; Kamalanon et al., 2022) or by especially focusing on the environmental knowledge of the consumers, as highlighted by Yadav and Pathak (2016; 2017) and Kamalanon et al. (2022) hence the lack of knowledge was, similarly as emphasized in the studies, mentioned in the interview answers as well.

Lastly, when observing the consumer culture which effects on the products and services that succeed in a certain market and entail current cultural values and norms (Solomon, 2016), it must be mentioned that the current consuming culture in the Western world, including Finland, is very abundant and encourages fast consumption by both marketing, the environment and regulation (or lack thereof), abundance being the norm, especially compared to the third world countries on a global scale. The challenge remains in how to effectively support sustainable consumption practices in a consumer culture dominated by fast-paced consumption norms, and, additionally, how the current norms and the system could be shifted towards less-consuming, less-resource intensive model. Lorek and Spangenberg (2014) suggest that sustainable economies must be based on sustainable consumption forms presenting a problem of how sustainable consumption forms could be supported. Regulation, which EU for example is emphasizing, could be a potential solution. However, it should be contemplated whether it is reactive and efficient enough.

Similarly, Do et al. (2024) emphasize that viable actions towards more sustainable consumption includes embracing alternative consumption patterns. Sharing economy as a concept or an alternative model was suggested (at least partly) as the answer. It emphasizes renting or sharing instead of owning services and goods from consumer to consumer (Solomon, 2016). This approach has the potential to reduce the demand for excessive production of commodities. Additionally, CE rose in the interviews. It emphasizes increasing products' lifespan and to circulate the materials for as long as possible (Hot or Cool, 2022). Additionally, reducing is one element in CE (Ghisellini et al., 2016), which seems inevitable for the consumer behaviour in the Western world. Thøgersen (2021) explored the relationship between consumer behaviour and climate change emphasizing consumers' willingness to transition towards less carbon-intensive alternatives, cutting back on luxurious or wasteful activities, or their readiness to embrace products that emit lower levels of carbon during use. The study underscores the need of providing consumers with the necessary support to embrace climate-friendly products and lifestyles. Thus, the key question of to what extent are consumers willing to sacrifice their standard of living and immediate benefits in favour of long-term sustainability goals, especially when the benefits may not be immediately evident, needs to be asked. Additionally, to what extent can more sustainable options be provided and how should the responsibility be shared between producers, who are expected to provide more sustainable options and more transparent information, and consumers, who are expected to choose more sustainable options and rationalize their consumption, should be considered.

## 5.3 Limitations and Further Research

Regarding the limitations and suggestions for future research, it is important to note that this study has certain constraints related to the research methodology.

The first ones are related to the research methodology as qualitative research is more complex as a method than quantitative research. Qualitative research entails complexities that differ from quantitative research methodologies, which may impact the depth and breadth of the findings. Additionally, qualitative research may offer more in-depth insights but limited generalizability, unlike quantitative research which provides more reliable but superficial information (Gibbs, 2007; Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). These might also be considered as limitations for qualitative study such as this Master's Thesis is. When it comes to interviews, it can be suggested that an individual never answers a question without striving to, even sketchy, understand of what the question is aiming for, or what the research studies – thus, the interviewee can decide what to tell and what not to tell (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2012). In other words, the possibility to "self-report" whichever the participant feel introduces limitations in accurately capturing actual behaviour. Thus, the use of interviews in this study poses limitations, particularly in semi-structured formats, as the results may not fully represent the entire target population (Hair et al., 2015), thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings.

As this Master's Thesis studies consumers' perceptions, the sensitivity of the topic which involves consumers' perceptions and behaviours towards environmentally sustainable fashion, can influence the participants' responses. Even if the interviewees participated voluntarily, the topic might feel uncomfortable or difficult hence the participants might feel pressured to present themselves in a certain way. Thus, the topic can be thought of as sensitive and, as Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2012) point out, that might potentially lead to embellishments in the answers due to the sensitive nature of the topic.

A factor that could influence the findings of the research is the pre-existing knowledge possessed by the researcher on the topic. It is possible that personal biases and assumptions may unconsciously shape the formulation of interview or research questions, and interpretation of results. These potential biases must be acknowledged to approach the research in a neutral manner and interpret the results objectively. Furthermore, it is important to consider how not only the researcher's own attitudes and beliefs, but also those of their mentor and potential opponents, may impact the research process. It is essential to be mindful of these influences to ensure a thorough and unbiased research process. Additionally, participants' prior knowledge about the topic might vary and, thus, affect the findings. Although it does not necessarily have great importance for the research per se, it does affect the findings. In the future, it could be possible to focus the research more precisely on those who have no previous connection to environmental sustainability and thus understand the challenges from that perspective even more thoroughly, or alternatively, to focus the research on those who have a prior background in environmental sustainability and observe their perceptions, alternatives, and possible development ideas more precisely.

Even if theory and previous research gave instructions for the chosen definitions which were compiled prior to the interviews and served as a basis for the research question formulation. While comprehending the overarching

framework and the diverse spectrum of definitions is essential for shaping the interview inquiries, it is also important to be cautious of potential limitations in aligning the questions too closely with preconceived definitions, and of an open possibility that certain aspects may not have been considered. On the other hand, forming the interview questions based on the existing literature offers a solid foundation for examining the topic regarding current perceptions, phenomena, and challenges.

When it comes to the research and its methodology, some limitations can be found as well. The first one is related to the setting of the research, as only age, city of living, and possible earlier background in relation to environmental sustainability were considered. The setting of the research also impacts the findings, as certain demographic factors such as income were not considered, which could influence purchasing intentions and decisions, particularly in economically challenging times. Additionally, this study only focuses on environmental perspective on sustainability even if it could, and should, be considered as an entirety formed of all the factors of it: environmental, social, cultural, and economical. This leads to the opportunities this study offers for future studies. More comprehensive research considering all the aspects of sustainability could be appropriate in the future. Therefore, it would be possible to get an overall picture on a larger scale of consumers' perceptions of sustainable fashion. Additionally, the study is limited to Finnish context. By studying multiple nationalities, larger understanding of SFC could be achieved whether the focus would be in environmentally sustainable fashion or sustainable fashion on a broader perspective.

Additionally, investigating consumer behaviour based on income distribution, gender differences in perceptions of sustainable fashion, or discourses in public discussions on environmentally sustainable fashion practices could provide valuable insights for enhancing sustainability efforts for the future of fashion industry. Additionally, as the study focuses on 25–45-year-old Finnish consumers, more comprehensive understanding could be achieved by studying further the consumer behaviour of Finnish generation Z, generation X or baby boomer generation consumers. Differences between the sexes regarding the perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion could additionally offer valuable insights for the topic thus only two out of total 21 participants were men in this study. Anyhow, as majority of the participants were women, it was not meaningful to implement such a comparison in this research. To include a wider range of stakeholders to capture diverse perspectives as suggested by Gurova and Morozova (2018), in future studies it would be beneficial to explore the perceptions of businesses towards sustainable fashion. Additionally, the perceptions of designers could be studied.

The participants were also asked how much they would be willing to pay for more responsibly produced clothes that fulfil the factors that are important to them. The question prompted in the interviews intuitively and can be considered as quite sensitive. There was a lot of dispersion in the answers, however, it also offers a suitable topic for further research in the field of more environmentally

sustainable fashion. Because the price is often seen as a barrier to purchasing more sustainable products (Brandão & Costa, 2021; Bennetta & Oeppen Hill, 2022), but on the other hand, for the mere brand (even if it is more responsible) or sustainability as such, one is not ready to pay too much extra (Nguyen et al., 2019; Virta & Räisänen, 2021), the topic should be studied more thoroughly. More insights should be gained of what would be such a price for certain garments that would reflect the environmental impacts caused by the production of it, take into consideration the social aspect and a living wage for the workers throughout the supply chain, ensure a proper margin for the manufacturer to guarantee the profitability of business operations, but not be too expensive for the consumer to purchase it. It can be assumed that when the price of a garment rises, fewer consumers can afford it. In the worst case, this could lead to a very undesirable outcome: increased consumption of fast fashion and ultra-fast fashion due to its affordability. The risk is that garments produced in a more environmentally responsible manner will become so-called luxury goods, in other words, that only wealthier people could afford them. This is, by no means, intended outcome, and despite challenging the current model and pace of production and, thus, forming a huge challenge to the fashion industry, it should be carefully considered in more sustainable clothing production.

Moreover, the attributes of garments and perceptions of those could also be studied in more depth from various perspectives such as their durability and lifespan, or material choices and their environmental impacts. This could provide valuable information for the consumers information about their opportunities to increase the lifespan of the garment, for example by proper washing, maintenance, and repair, either by themselves or with the help of a purchased service. It would also be good to try to increase information about the end use, disposal options, and effects of the garment. In addition, it would be beneficial to increase information sharing about the environmental impacts of clothing material choices and their variation for the consumer, so they would have a genuine opportunity to choose the options that suit their needs, purpose of use, and desire the best. As it turned out in this study, the environmental impacts of fashion can be unfamiliar to consumers both as a concept and on a concrete level, which lead to necessity of increased information and knowledge sharing about them and thus, guarantee consumers more transparent information about the overall impacts of clothing consumption on the environment. Preferring second-hand over purchasing new garment came up a lot in the interview responses, also in relation to choosing more environmentally sustainable garment option. Thus, the sustainability and consumption behaviour in relation to it should be studied more closely. At best, second-hand can offer a more sustainable option for purchasing clothes and for increasing their lifespan (Hot or Cool, 2022), while at worst it can be only another way or excuse to continue the unsustainable rate of consumption.

# 6 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusively, this study offers valuable information about Finnish consumers' perceptions of environmentally sustainable fashion among the age group studied. Since pricing of environmentally sustainable garments and consumer willingness to pay for them is seen as a significant factor influencing especially on the decision-making phase of purchasing process, further research is needed to avoid potential negative outcomes. Attributes of garments, such as durability and material choices, and promotion of second-hand clothing as a sustainable option should also be explored to enhance consumer knowledge and choice. Future research should consider all different dimensions of sustainability, explore consumer behaviour based on demographic factors, gender differences, and public discourse, and involve diverse stakeholders like businesses and designers to get a unified and comprehensive understanding of environmental sustainability which would serve multiple different stakeholders but, most importantly, would offer information to serve as driver to decrease the environmental impacts of the fashion industry.

To offer a summarizing overview of environmentally sustainable fashion formed by the perceptions of the participants, it can be concluded that environmentally sustainable garments are reasonably priced, made of more sustainable, preferably natural or organic materials, last in use and are repairable, are produced ethically guaranteeing humane production conditions and living wage, and, most importantly, are only purchased for need preferring second-hand options as often as possible. To offer a cohesive definition for environmentally sustainable fashion from a researcher point of view, all the aspects mentioned by the participants can be agreed. However, to tackle the major issues of over production and consumption, reducing should be the ultimate determinant. As large numbers of garments are demolished and disposed every year (Hot or Cool, 2022), the supply and demand seem not to meet to the best possible extent. Examining practices such as garment reusing, resource reduction, and investment in sustainable resources can contribute to mitigating the environmental impacts of the textile industry (Papadopoulou et al., 2022). However, the suggestions leave out potentially one of the most

influential factors: reducing. Considering the effects of the fashion industry on a global and, for example, EU scale, additionally to regulation, reduction seems to be one of the most impressive and significant ways to curb the environmental impact of the textile industry (European Commission, 2023; European Commission, n.d.-a). As the over consumption seems to frequently continue, it is essential to learn how to live with less. This is closely combined with marketing, consumer behaviour, and how the consumers see themselves as contributing factors or creating solutions to increase environmental sustainability, but most importantly, how to settle for sufficient instead of continuously wanting more. By taking these factors into consideration, the gap between consumers' intentions and actual purchasing could potentially be mitigated and, thus, more sustainable consumption practises enhanced. This emphasizes an issue of defining how much is sufficient.

However, it is essential to also consider the potential negative consequences of certain sustainability measures, such as the economic or social implications of reducing consumption. Considering these challenges, the textile industry should embrace a more responsible and sustainable approach to address all concerns effectively. Nevertheless, in some cases, it can turn against itself, for instance by weakening the opportunities for greener investments, or job opportunities in the global south which might, despite all its cons, be vital to some of the employees and their families. Despite, and because of these, the actors in the textile industry should take responsibility for the damage it causes to the environment and bear its share of social responsibility better than it currently does.

Often, improving circularity is suggested as an alternative to the current linear economic system (Do et al., 2024). Anyhow, reducing is a noteworthy part of it in addition to reusing and recycling (Ghisellini et al., 2016). As defined, the ultimate goal in CE is to decouple environmental pressure from economic growth (Ghisellini et al., 2016). This should be emphasized more, whether the discussion is about CE particularly or some other alternative to the current economic system, especially when previous experience shows that neither reduction of environmental impacts nor substantial reductions in poverty can be achieved by continuous growth (Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014). It is necessary that fashion industry shifts to producing less while respecting both nature and human rights.

As the fashion industry is responsible for up to a tithe of the global emissions (World Bank, 2019), actions within the field can yield to significant impacts on the environment on a global scale. So far, the impacts for the environment of the industry have been mostly negative, but by utilizing scientific information and expert advisory, the negative effects could at least be mitigated if not turned into positive. This study contributes insights on how Finnish consumers perceive environmentally sustainable fashion, factors influencing their perceptions, purchasing intentions and decisions, and barriers to actual purchases and, therefore, can serve its part in offering information for environmentally more sustainable fashion industry. A sustainable life does not have to mean giving up of things, but it can also be valuable, comfortable, and meaningful. As the discussion about sustainability-related issues has been ongoing for decades, it is about time to

involve every part of the system to improve sustainability, whether it means an individual consumer, marketer, company manager, or decision-maker – everyone has a role and should guarantee that decisions lead to more sustainable and more reasonable forms of consumption and production and, thus, to a more sustainable society.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1: Interview Questions and Structure

Introduction
- Permission for recording
- Aim of the study
- Background questions (age, city of living, background of environmental sustainability)
- Use of results

First set of questions:
- What are the three most important factors that influence your purchase decisions when it comes to clothing?
- What are the three most important factors for you in environmentally sustainable fashion?
- What are the three most important factors influencing your purchase decisions in relation to environmentally sustainable fashion?
- Summary of the answers based on notes
- Are there any additions to the answers or questions

Second set of questions:
- Imagine buying a garment that meets the three most important factors in environmentally sustainable fashion which you mentioned earlier. What could be 1–3 main reasons for not buying the garment in question?
- Do you pay attention to environmental impacts of a garment in the potential purchasing situation and how does that affect your purchasing behaviour?
- How does environmental sustainability affect your purchasing intentions and purchasing decisions in fashion purchases?
- Summary of the answers based on notes
- Are there any additions to the answers or questions

Ending the interview
- Is there any questions
- Thanks
- Next steps of the research
- Ending the recording

## APPENDIX 2: Codes and the Distribution per Interview Question

| *code* | Σ | *IQ1* | *IQ2* | *IQ3* | *IQ4* | *IQ5* | *IQ6* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| brand image | **7** | **2** | **1** | **4** | | | |
| surprises in corporate's values or actions | **3** | | | | **3** | | |
| comfortability | **2** | **2** | | | | | |
| hearsay about quality, product, company, friends' experiences | **3** | | | | **3** | | |
| looks | **10** | **4** | | **3** | **2** | | **1** |
| "more sustainable" clothing is not available for one's dressing style | **2** | | | | | | **2** |
| similarity to already owned garment | **1** | | | | **1** | | |
| simplicity | **1** | | **1** | | | | |
| trends | **1** | | | **1** | | | |
| *T1* | *30* | | | | | | |
| aiming for less impulses | **1** | | | | | | **1** |
| anxiety for purchasing anything new | **1** | | | | **1** | | |
| customer service | **3** | | | | **3** | | |
| differing criteria: taking env. sustainability more into consideration when buying new, less when buying second-hand | **5** | | | | **1** | **3** | **1** |
| difficulty [notifying env. sustainability] makes purchasing more difficult | **2** | | | | | | **2** |
| ease of purchasing | **5** | **2** | | **2** | | **1** | |
| preferring brick-and-mortar stores: easy availability, possibility to try the garment on | **5** | **1** | | **1** | **1** | **1** | **1** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| preferring online stores | **1** | | | | **1** | | |
| pressure to purchase in brick-and-mortar stores | **1** | | | | **1** | | |
| need | **24** | **3** | **1** | **4** | **9** | **1** | **6** |
| will the garment come to actual use | **1** | | | | **1** | | |
| preferring second-hand | **21** | **4** | **1** | **5** | | **4** | **7** |
| price | **40** | **14** | | **8** | **12** | **2** | **4** |
| price-quality ratio | **5** | **2** | | **1** | **2** | | |
| timely recourses | **3** | | | | | | **3** |
| *T2* | *118* | | | | | | |
| environmental certificates, classifications or labels | **5** | | **1** | **1** | | **2** | **1** |
| emissions / carbon footprint | **3** | | **2** | | | **1** | |
| environmental toxins | **1** | | | | | **1** | |
| environmental sustainability and responsibility | **8** | **2** | **2** | **1** | | | **3** |
| circular economy suitability: would someone else use the garment after me | **1** | | | | | | **1** |
| impact of processes and working phases: avoiding frills and sequins | **2** | | **1** | | | **1** | |
| impact of production conditions on nature | **1** | | **1** | | | | |
| use of natural resources or raw materials | **5** | **1** | **3** | | | **1** | |
| water use | **2** | | | | | **2** | |
| reducing (consumption) | **7** | | **3** | | | **2** | **2** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| reducing (production volumes) | **5** | | **4** | | | **1** | |
| *T3* | *40* | | | | | | |
| materials | **32** | **2** | **12** | **6** | **3** | **6** | **3** |
| durability | **31** | **5** | **11** | **6** | **2** | **5** | **2** |
| purposefulness and multifunctionality | **6** | | | **1** | **2** | **3** | |
| combinability | **3** | **1** | | | | | **2** |
| practicality | **2** | **1** | | | | **1** | |
| usability | **3** | **1** | | | | **1** | **1** |
| quality | **14** | **6** | **2** | **2** | **2** | | **2** |
| recyclability | **3** | **1** | **2** | | | | |
| repairability and ease of care | **2** | **1** | | | **1** | | |
| suitability | **15** | **5** | | **3** | **6** | | **1** |
| timelessness | **4** | | **1** | **3** | | | |
| *T4* | *115* | | | | | | |
| production country | **23** | **2** | **7** | **7** | **2** | **4** | **1** |
| supporting small entrepreneurs | **1** | | | **1** | | | |
| ethical production (conditions, materials, transparency) | **13** | **1** | **5** | **2** | **2** | **2** | **1** |
| transparency in communication | **13** | | **1** | **6** | **1** | **3** | **2** |
| *T5* | *50* | | | | | | |
| aspiration to identify the overall impact | **1** | | | | | **1** | |
| choosing overall as sustainable garments as possible | **1** | | | | | **1** | |
| the overall picture is decisive (including nice garment, need, ethics, price) | **1** | | | | | | **1** |
| dismantling social norms | **1** | | | | | | **1** |
| *T6* | *4* | | | | | | |
| Σ | | **63** | **62** | **68** | **62** | **50** | **52** |