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**The impact of fast fashion on the environment:
Perspectives from Consumers and Retailers in
Ireland**

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National College of Ireland

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Abstract

The emergence of the fast fashion business model has increased the introduction of trends leading to premature product replacement and fashion obsolescence. This business model also has an extensively negative impact on the environment and society. This research paper seeks to fill some gaps in the study of the environmental sustainability of major retailers and consumption practices particularly in Ireland. Semi-structured interviews with 10 participants were carried out to gather primary research data. The investigation revealed that there is a somewhat growing awareness among consumers on the issue of fast fashion and sustainability, however there is a pervasive gap between attitude and behaviour in this regard. It also revealed that there are some retailers in Ireland that maintain environmentally friendly practices at the top of their agenda. It may be recommended for consumers to take action in environmentally friendly practices by the means of recycling textiles and gaining interest in the sources of the products they consume. Retailers may be suggested to incorporate environmentally friendly business practices and governments may be advised to implement programmes that encourage citizens to increase environmentally friendly behaviours.

Keywords: Consumption Behaviours, Environment, Environmentally Friendly Business Practices, Fast Fashion, Sustainability.

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1. CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This introduction introduces the reader to the topic of the impact of fast fashion on the environment. It highlights the main research question and also provides a brief overview of each chapter.

Background of the Study

On the 9th of May 2019, Ireland became the second country in the world to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. This move came after the Extinction Rebellion climate change protest that was held in London in April 2019 and a landmark UN report published earlier that week, which concluded that nature is currently more in danger now than it ever has been at any other time in human history. It has been estimated that over one million animal and plant species are in danger of extinction.

Research Problem and Aims of Research

A literature review on this topic shows some gaps in the research on environmental sustainability of major retailers and consumption practices particularly in Ireland. This research paper seeks to fill some of these gaps. Given the high complexity and heterogeneity of this industry, the analysis will focus on specific and narrow segments. As mentioned earlier, environmental sustainability is of growing importance within the clothing industry. Two sets of six research questions have been chosen, based on the reviewed literature in existence, to analyse the level of commitment towards sustainability by certain fashion retailers and consumers based in Ireland. One set of questions is geared towards consumers and the other towards business operators. The present study will explore this issue through data collection involving participation from consumers and retailers to compare and contrast their perspectives for similarities and differences.

Some research has focused on what certain companies are doing to contribute to a mitigating effect on the damage that is being caused by the fashion retail industry. As mentioned earlier, materials should be selected based upon if the textile is biodegradable after being discarded (Wang and Wang, 2013). Another big concern in developing a sustainable clothing production is to create a strategy to reuse and recycle, which would be more environmentally sound, rather than to dispose used clothing and other textiles. Clothing manufacturing and retail companies should be the organisations leading the practices that would help solve this issue (Ekström and Salomonson, 2014).

Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation is presented in 6 chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the background of the study and provides an overview of chapters. Chapter 2 presents an up-to-date review of the literature, which considers the definition of fast fashion and literature related to Fast Fashion. This consists mainly of scholarly writings related to Fast Fashion and its impact on the environment. Chapter 3 presents the main research questions and outlines the objectives. This is followed by Chapter 4, which presents the findings. Chapter 5 offers a discussion and Chapter 6 presents the Conclusions and Recommendations along with the Limitations to the research.

2. CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The fashion industry has gone through the impact of pivotal tendencies during the last two to three decades. The industry has turned into a complex and fragmented global system, which at its very core is founded on the idea of continual consumption of the ‘new’ and the discard of the ‘old’. The emergence of the ‘fast fashion’ business model has increased the introduction of trends leading to premature product replacement and fashion obsolescence. This business model also has an extensively negative impact on the environment and society, particularly on everyone at the bottom of the supply chain (Allwood *et al.* 2006; Lee 2007; Hethorn and Ulasewicz 2008 In: Kozlowski *et al.* 2012).

Reductions in the prices of clothing pieces along with faster trend cycles that also happen to involve low quality and deliberate obsolescence have led to higher volumes of clothes consumed worldwide. There are significant issues with apparel waste given that the majority of clothing and textile waste ends up in landfills instead of being recycled or re-used (Allwood *et al.* 2006; Madsen *et al.* 2007; Fletcher 2008 In: Kozlowski *et al.* 2012).

The Fashion Industry and Fast Fashion

Fashion retail and manufacture has developed over the years into what is currently a multitrillion-dollar industry. According to McKinsey and Company (2017) the global fashion industry was worth a staggering \$2.4 trillion in 2017 and has been growing at 5.5 percent annually. Fashion United (2016) claims that 2.5 billion euros were spent in Ireland alone on clothing in 2016.

Understandably, the recession of 2008 made many Irish shoppers migrate to high-street stores for cheaper and disposable clothes. These stores also deliver a ‘quick fix’ for those who require some instant retail therapy (O’Callaghan, 2017).

Like fast food, clothing has become a consumer good that needs to be produced quickly in order to be purchased and used at the same speed (Ekström and Salomonson, 2014). However, this type of mass consumption has been taking a toll on the environment in several different ways and with evidence shown of this negative impact in many different countries around the world. Fast fashion, as it is known now, has called for the production of materials such as cotton at rates never seen before in history.

There are social and environmental impacts in every stage in the life of a textile product, where at certain points of the supply chain, what may seem positive can in later stages turn out to have negative consequences (Koszewska, 2015).

Cotton is one of the most water-intensive and pesticide-dependent crops (Claudio, 2007). The production processes, specifically, the phases of dyeing, drying and finishing, make intensive use of chemical products and natural resources that create a high environmental impact (De Brito, et al., 2008). For example, in Central Asia, as in many other areas of the world, a lack of water is a main cause of human suffering. Irrigation, particularly in cotton production, consumes large volumes of water, and it is associated to the decrease in size of the Aral Sea in Central Asia as an example of anthropogenic modification of a natural system in recent history caused mainly by cotton production (Strickman and Porkka, 2008).

Bamboo is a naturally renewable material used to produce rayon, but the process is chemically intense (Koszewska, 2015). Additionally, the use of fibres that include cotton, wool and synthetics, has a significant environmental impact because large quantities of water and pesticides are required in cotton and wool production. At the same time, synthetic fibres are extracted from non-renewable resources and need considerable amounts of energy to be produced and transported (Myers and Stolton, 1999; Borghesi and Vercelli, 2003).

Every individual consumes and disposes of a large number of products on a daily basis so the environmental impact increases with population growth. When it

comes to a single group of products such as textiles, the problem becomes more acute Ekström and Salomonson (2014). Though other products are also responsible for damaging the environment, textiles are particularly significant because of their wide range of use (Muthu, 2014).

From the production of fibres to the disposal of the product after its use, there is a large amount of resources used, as well as waste and toxic emissions that are generated. All of these factors cause an impact on a local, regional and global level.

Ethical and Sustainable Fashion

Moore (2018) states that there are several new Irish designers who are contributing to a new wave of sustainable fashion. Their approach is to make fashion low impact by design.

Justification for Research: Research Gap - The response of retailers and consumers

Humanity is facing at the moment a crisis on a global scale concerning the current state of ecosystems around the world. Harmful effects of human activities of all kinds can be seen affecting climates and resources in every region on the planet. At the rate in which this damage continues, the fate of mankind is currently jeopardised and uncertain until current consumption habits are changed to be more in accordance with the environment. The fashion industry is one that is causing a major impact on ecosystems with negative effects, so much so that it is being considered the second largest polluter in the world (Sustain Your Style, 2017).

The Response from Retailers

Before the 1960s, goods competed on the market based on their price. Around the mid-60s, quality became the main player. In the 1980s, logistics and speed of production was the third tool for competition in the goods market, and this was due to the geographical spread of manufacturers and retail chains and the use of

computer techniques to create virtual enterprises. In the 1990s, various irregularities originated by excessive production and consumption created the fourth competition tool: ecology. Nowadays, another step forward has been given by consumers themselves, who tend to view goods in terms of their social impacts and ethics (Koszewska, 2010). Due to this new trend, corporate social responsibility has become a topic discussed for many organisations including the modern textile and clothing industry.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an area that can be defined and interpreted in different ways. According to the European Commission “CSR requires companies to voluntarily pursue strategies respecting public interests, environmental protection, as well as relationships with stakeholders.” Therefore, in order for a company to be considered in touch with its responsibilities, a company must go above and beyond the criteria formally required and invest in human resources, environmental protection and in its relationships with its stakeholders in the form of, for example, voluntary involvement in activities that benefit the community the company is found in (Koszewska, 2010).

Ethical issues in business have increasingly become more complex, to the point where there is a growing concern over the environment and how business practices may be affecting this (White, 2001). One of the industries that have recently been put under the microscope on this matter is clothing manufacturing. Clothing production has become a truly globalised operation in the last two decades, which has been due to dramatic changes in the global political and economic context in which the industry operates (Cepolina, 2012). Clothing manufacturing processes are less transparent when compared with the production of food, for instance (Koszewska, 2015). Companies have been facing the need to stay competitive, and in order to do so, they have been undergoing continuous modernisation and restructuring processes. These companies have had to invest heavily in new technologies, research, product development and innovation capabilities, adoption of new business concepts and entering new higher added-value markets, which has resulted in continuous and recently accelerated productivity growth (Cepolina, 2012).

One concept that needs to be understood is sustainability, since in textile and clothing products this is ambiguous and fairly problematic. People associate sustainability with the environment, however two aspects of it – economy and society – are equally important (Koszewska, 2015).

For a production to be sustainable it should be manufactured, marketed and used taking into account environmental and socioeconomic aspects. This implies the improvement of all stages of the product life cycle, from design to final sale and the use, reuse, repair and recycle of the product and its components. When considering the environmental perspective, the aim is to minimise any undesirable environmental impact on water, energy, soil, animals, plants, ecosystems, etc. Also required is the use of renewable energy sources at every stage of the life cycle and maximised repair, remake, reuse and recycling of the product and its components. From a socioeconomic point of view, enterprises should improve working conditions for workers on the field, factories, transportation chain and stores in accordance with good ethics, best practice and international codes of conduct. Additionally, companies should encourage more sustainable consumption patterns, such as caring and washing advice aimed at consumers in order to ensure a longer life of the product (Green Strategy, 2014).

Many corporations including clothing manufacturing companies are committed to the sustainable development of their products applying policies of environmental protection (Ramus, 2002). Sustainable development looks to ensure that we meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations in meeting their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Environmental sustainability has recently become a key managerial issue. Researchers and practitioners are dedicating their increased attention to the topic as they are faced with the challenge of balancing environmental and business needs (Caniato, et al., 2012). High pressure is put on these issues within industries that have a significant environmental impact and a high visibility in the public eye, such as the fashion industry, which has been accused of the use of transgenic cotton obtained by imparting insecticidal and herbicidal properties to the cotton plant (Caniato, et

al., 2012). Clothing companies are responsible for the environmental problems caused by them directly and their suppliers (Koplin, 2005).

One initiative that is totally aligned with sustainable development and the eco-efficiency concept is lean production, model of organisation focused on waste elimination to reduce costs, delivering on time products, materials and information and respecting people and the environment, as has been developed in the Portuguese textile and clothing industry (Maia, et al., 2013).

The most fundamental solution for clothing textiles to satisfy the requirements of environmental protection is to choose materials, which are harmless to the human body, friendly to both the environment and humans, and its discard is pollution-free. Additionally, the materials can be recycled and regenerated and the textile is biodegradable after being discarded (Wang and Wang, 2013).

Another big concern in developing a sustainable clothing production is to create a strategy to reuse and recycle, which would be more environmentally sound, rather than to dispose used clothing and other textiles. This is a major environmental problem since the production of textiles requires significant natural resources. Clothing manufacturing companies should be the organisations leading the practices that would help solve this issue (Ekström and Salomonson, 2014). Becherer and Helms (2014) offer a perspective on how the size of a business influences the decision-making processes of acquiring environmentally friendly practices. Schuler, et al. (2017) explore the approaches that companies have towards their corporate sustainability management and environmental ethics. An interesting observation is given by Hoogendoorn, et al. (2015) who discuss what drives small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to set up environmentally friendly practices within their companies. On this matter, Søndergård, et al. (2004) examine the transformation of environmental regulation, institutional settings and practices, and the corporate thought pattern and behaviour in the Danish textile industry. Later, Jørgensen and Jensen (2012) analyse the environmental impacts caused by production and consumption of clothing in Denmark, finding that environmental strategies and impacts in the Danish clothing sector are shaped by the businesses' on-going strategic

interpretation of external pressures and opportunities, which increases transnational outsourcing of clothing production, changes in fashion strategies towards 'fast fashion', and low-price retail strategies.

Green Strategy (2014) proposes, from a producer and consumer point of view, that fashion companies have the responsibility to change their production, distribution and marketing strategies towards reaching a better sustainability, but they also may contribute to more sustainable consumption patterns. Some Swedish fashion companies provide second hand fashion and some others have started a sort of rental system for clothes. Other clothing companies create fashion of long-lasting style and durability.

Another strategy that is becoming more popular among clothing companies is to manufacture clothes with certified textiles using environmental, ecological and social labels and thus ensuring a fair trade (Phau and Ong, 2007; Green Strategy, 2014; Koszewska, 2015).

After all of these considerations, the questions are if fashion retailers and consumers are involved in mitigating the harm that this industry is causing to the environment. And if they are involved, then what are they doing on this matter?

A number of articles on the matter have been reviewed to offer some guidance as to the research that has already been done on this topic, as well as the possible research that could be done based on data that has been collected. However, there is insufficient information in the literature on what variety of activities or practices retailers and consumers are doing to address this issue.

The Response from Consumers

Global textile consumption is estimated to be more than 30 million tons a year, which causes a serious social and environmental impact within supply chains. Sustainability issues are crucial to the fashion industry. In the pursuit of lower production costs, apparel firms have taken advantage of lower environmental awareness and looser environmental regulatory systems in developing countries.

Fashion-oriented consumers have heightened exposure to clothing information, and they are more likely to enjoy shopping for clothes (Sproles, 1979). Consumers who enjoy shopping have specific lifestyles, motivations, and opinions related to shopping (Lee and Kim, 2008; Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1993). They participate in more shopping-related activities, such as attending promotional events and recreational shopping (Moye and Kincade, 2003). Their shopping motivations are reflective of their social and recreational identities (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1993), they are interested in appearing well put together, and they rarely hesitate to purchase styles they like (Moye and Kincade, 2003).

Most of the garments bought in the high street retailers turn into rags after a few spins in the washing machine and tumble dryer. These can be handy for washing the floor or sink, but are more likely to become rubbish for landfills. Many consumers are starting to realise that spending a bit more and buying a bit less can guarantee something more special that is eco-friendly and fair to workers as well (O'Callaghan, 2017).

McNeill and Moore (2015) look at how there is a dilemma between sustainability in fashion consumption and keeping up with the trends that consumers are after. They categorise consumers into three groups: "Self" consumers, "Social" consumers and "Sacrifice" consumers. These different types of consumers with conflicting views play a key role in this issue. Joy, *et al.* (2012) observe the relationship between consumer behaviour and perceptions of sustainability, luxury brands and fast fashion.

A 2011 interview of Ahearn (2011) to Luz Claudio, author of the article *Waste Couture: Environmental Impact of the Clothing Industry*, offers a follow up to the 2007 article and explains how consumers should consider durability and quality when it comes to choosing which items of clothing to buy. Also, there is mention of how the 2007 article impacted positively on not just consumers but also certain companies, which started to make changes in their production processes to conform to more environmentally friendly ideals.

The Fashion Product Life Cycle

Apparel has a long and complicated life cycle, which would include the supply chain and the ‘down-stream’ processes that are carried out after manufacturing. This life cycle consists of many phases including resource production and extraction, fibre and yarn manufacturing, textile manufacturing, apparel assembly, packaging, transportation and distribution, consumer use, recycling and ultimate disposal (Kozlowski *et al.* 2012).

The impacts to the environment linked to the production and use of clothing throughout its lifespan include wastewater emissions, solid waste production and significant depletion of resources from the consumption of water, land, minerals, fossil fuels and energy (Allwood *et al.* 2006 In: Kozlowski *et al.* 2012).

Life-cycle assessment (LCA) is an evaluative tool that considers the environmental impacts of a product or process from ‘cradle to grave’ taking into account the production and acquisition of raw materials, production and assembly, transportation, use and disposal. It is possible through LCA to take appropriate environmental indicators: to identify the most important aspects related to environmental performance; to assess the absolute and relative performance of alternative approaches to production and processes, to support decision-making and provide the basis for the ‘greening’ of business practices. To obtain a better understanding of where the largest environmental impacts occur during a garment’s life cycle, an LCA can provide a measurement of the environmental profile. An LCA can help demonstrate how environmental, social and financial aspects can be interrelated and how they interact (Kozlowski *et al.* 2012).

The fast fashion phenomenon has revolutionised the clothing industry over the past decade. The next section discusses consumers and fast fashion.

Consumers and Fast Fashion

Those with an interest in fashion and shopping are likely to seek new knowledge regarding clothing products, which leads to greater curiosity about eco-apparel

and ultimately a greater propensity to purchase environmentally friendly clothing (EFC) (Gam, 2009). Impulse buying in the fashion industry, where new styles of clothing are available to the average consumer every week has been caused by changing consumer attitudes to apparel consumption, which is linked with low-cost production and sourcing of materials from overseas industrial markets (Mintel, 2007). Research suggests that this phenomenon is especially acute among younger consumers, who do not have much awareness of the social impact of their fashion consumption, but who present the highest levels of demand for new fashion items (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). Retailers are aware of the importance to the industry of this segment of fast fashion followers. Major chain stores are cited to be offering garments designed to be worn fewer than 10 times (McAfee *et al.* 2004) and one in five young consumers in Morgan and Birtwistle's (2009) study of clothing behaviour acknowledge that they purchase a new garment every week (McNeill and Moore, 2015).

Fast fashion caters to the consumer's 'insatiable demand for newness' (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 269) and an increase in the number of recognised 'fashion seasons' (up from the traditional four). An enhancement of an environment where design, sourcing and manufacture decisions are made with a special importance on speed instead of on sustainability (Bruce and Daily, 2006) has become the norm. Changes to the sourcing of raw materials in the industry support predictions of growth in demand for ethical clothing choices. Minney (2007) cites a growth rate of approximately 40% per year for organic cotton fashion products. However, recent research highlights continued barriers to engagement in ethical apparel acquisition, including limitations in availability and relative expense of these products (Connell, 2010). This is referred to as the 'Fashion Paradox' termed by some researchers, where fast fashion has been protected by its economic importance from criticisms of its inherent obsolescence and waste (Black and Ekert, 2010). This causes a slowing down of an industry-wide movement toward ethical practice and the legitimisation of the role of unethical fast fashion in the marketplace (MacNeill and Moore, 2015).

Ethical and Sustainable Consumer Behaviour

Publications devoted to the discussion of consumer ethics has increased significantly in recent years. Definitions of what is an ethical consumer remain broad however, with the notion of what is actual ethical consumption continuing to be applied to numerous contexts and belief systems (Shaw and Connolly, 2006). If these diverse perspectives were to be taken into account, ethical consumers could generally be termed as those who consider the wider impact of their consumption on the physical environment, animals and other humans (Barnett *et al.*, 2005). With the increase in the discussion of ‘ethical consumers’ in academia, industry and the general public, research suggests that despite a shift towards more sustainable practices in many industries, buyers have yet to fully embrace the purchase of sustainable goods and an interest in environmentally friendly practices among a number of categories (Butler and Francis, 1997; Carrigan and Attalla, 2001). These studies suggest that while increasing numbers of consumers have strong convictions towards the consumption of sustainable goods, these convictions do not always translate into action (MacNeill and Moore, 2015).

Researchers propose that a core issue linked to involvement in ethical or sustainable consumption is that of the power dynamics engrained in the social practice norms of the specific market in which the consumption takes place (Shaw and Riach, 2011). They apply this to ethical consumption behaviour, and they note the difficulty of individuals to exclusively inhabit ethical spaces. Consumers are considered to struggle in setting parameters around their ethical practices and an anti-consumption stance is not always feasible culturally or politically. Bourdieu (1984, 2000) suggested the concept of ‘field autonomy’ to explain the apparent conflict of actions of individuals in different contexts. This is especially relevant to the context of fast fashion, in which consumer awareness of sustainable options is said to be particularly low (Butler and Francis, 1997; Birtwistle and Moore, 2007) and the ubiquity of fast fashion providing a constant array of new and more desirable goods (Bruce and Daly, 2006). Even when consumers purposely search for products that are made under ethical conditions or from sustainable fabric sources, the constant expectation for updated fashion

increases waste and the disposal of goods that are deemed ‘unfashionable’ after only limited use (MacNeill and Moore, 2005; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009).

Along with the topic of consumer ethics in relation to fashion consumption, there has also been a discussion on the ‘slow culture’ approach to systems changes. Just like that of the ‘slow food’ movement, the ‘slow fashion’ movement asks buyers to question the current practices and worldviews, and also to question the economic models at present that underpin fashion production and consumption (Fletcher, 2010). With slow fashion being a sustainable approach to fashion production and consumption, the focus is on greater attention on ‘valuing and knowing the object’ (Clark, 2008). This would mean to understand the process that goes from raw materials to finished product as part of the consumption experience. This form of ethical consumption centres on a consumer value system together with experience values that go over self-enhancement values (Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014).

According to Shen, Wang, Lo and Shum (2012) consumers are becoming more aware of the material content of the apparel they buy. Some consumers are even going to the lengths of investigating material sources and suppliers, and they demand that the fashion supply chain be transparent and ethical. Clothing manufacturers are commonly accused of discharging toxic chemicals such as carbon monoxide volatile organic compounds into the atmosphere, rivers, lakes, streams, oceans and land. These chemicals are indeed being released at increasing rates due to the rising demand for synthetic fibres used in apparel production processes. On top of this, chemical fertilizers and pesticides employed in the cultivation of cotton also pollute ecosystems, which eventually also harm all living beings including humans. Since the 1980s, the increasing awareness by consumers on this matter and criticisms of issues such as sweatshop labour employed by companies have led to the emergence of ‘ethical fashion’.

Ethical Fashion: Fashion Retailers/Producers and Sustainability

Encouraged by these consumer concerns, corporations are increasingly aware of the need to be eco-friendly and socially conscious (Brown, 2010). The trend towards ethical fashion is also stimulating retailers to get involved and take action. An example of this is how it is more common now from both small boutiques to large chains to find shopping bags that are made of organic cotton or recycled synthetic materials.

Consumers' concerns and beliefs about knowledge of, and support for, ethical issues can effectively enhance their receptiveness of ethical fashion and modify their purchase behaviour (Hill, 1981). Shen *et al.* (2012) investigated and analysed how the previously mentioned factors could influence consumers' ethical purchase decisions. 'Ethical business' was divided into two categories: socially responsible business (SRB) and environmentally responsible business (ERB). They specifically defined SRB as a business that involves effort put into improving practices that are related to such issues as sweatshop labour and fair trade (Dickson, 2000). ERB was defined as a business that involves effort put into improving practices related to environmental issues, which include the production of eco-fashion, pollution prevention and the use of organic fibres, etc. (Cetindamar and Husoy, 2007).

Joergens (2006) defines 'ethical fashion' as fashion clothing that is produced under fair trade principles in sweatshop-free labour conditions, with efforts made to decrease the negative environmental impact of the process. It is also often described as 'fashion with a conscience' given that it deals with labour conditions and the environment. Such fashion has become a means by which fashion companies can fulfil their corporate social and environmental responsibilities and thus, match the ever-growing consumer desire for sustainability (Hawken, 1993). In this era of globalisation, when there are people around the world who are fighting for equality and sustainability in many aspects of their lives, ethical fashion is regarded as surpassing its fundamental function of meeting basic human physiological needs by fulfilling consumers' specifically psychological needs (Paulins and Hillery, 2009).

Chan and Wong (2012) state that because of the adverse environmental impacts of the clothing consumption behaviour at present, there is a rising concern regarding sustainability issues on the consumption side of the fashion supply chain (FSC) (Fineman, 2001; Jackson, 2004; Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Carter and Rogers, 2008; Niinimäki, 2010). Fashion corporations that include manufacturers and retailers are increasingly developing and advertising eco-fashion to promote sustainable consumption (Joergens, 2006; Fletcher, 2008). Although fashion consumers have positive attitudes towards environmental protection, they rarely, however, apply such attitudes into eco-fashion consumption (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004; Niinimäki, 2010).

The Attitude-Behaviour Gap

Yee and Hassan (2016) explain that the attitude-behaviour gap is where most people hold pro-sustainability attitudes, but these rarely translate into sustainable actions. The attitude-behaviour gap in fashion consumers' environmental protection interest and eco-fashion consumption is cause for general disappointment (Weller, 2008), and this motivates fashion companies' green marketing and eco-fashion consumption decisions (ECD) (Tanner and Kast, 2003; Jalas, 2004; Solomon and Rabolt, 2004; Sener and Hazer, 2008; Niinimäki, 2010). Among other factors, product related attributes (PRA) of eco-fashion, such as product design, quality and price, and store related attributes of eco-fashion.

Cotton

The World Wildlife Fund (2019) states that it takes 20,000 litres of water to produce one kilogram of cotton. This is the equivalent to a single t-shirt and a pair of jeans. The global extent of cotton is wide. Current cotton production methods are not environmentally sustainable. This ultimately undermines the industry's ability to continue with future production. Bringing cotton production to harmonise with even minimally acceptable environmental standards is a challenging task. The most prominent impacts of cotton result from the use of agrochemicals, pesticides in particular, the consumption of water, and the

conversion of habitats into agricultural land. The diversion of water and pollution by cotton growing has had severe impacts on major ecosystems such as the Aral Sea in Central Asia, the Indus Delta in Pakistan and the Murray Darling River in Australia. Large amounts of water are used in the production and processing of cotton. Some experts even argue that cotton is the largest user of water among all agricultural commodities. Soil quality can be severely degraded by cotton cultivation. The global area used for cotton cultivation has remained constant for the past 70 years, yet the production of this crop has depleted and degraded the soil in many areas. Cotton is mostly grown on well-established fields, however the exhaustion of these fields leads to expansion into new areas and the imminent destruction of habitat. Conventional cotton production practices require the application of substantial fertilizers and pesticides. Pesticides threaten the quality of soil and water. They also threaten the health of biodiversity in and downstream from the cultivation fields. Concern is also raised for the heavy use of pesticides and how this affects the health of farm workers and populations nearby. Cotton's contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) in many countries has also been significant (Baffes, 2005).

Young (2002) states that environmental trends, green and value marketing, and the organic movement have influenced the fashion industry through 'eco-fashion'. The organic market, not just being an altruistic cause, also represents an interesting opportunity for enterprises specialising in organic clothing. Although organic cotton production only accounted for 0.03 percent of global cotton production in 2001 (Organic Cotton Facts, 2006), it is a market that is rapidly growing and reached a 0.76 percent of worldwide cotton production by 2008 (Organic Cotton Facts 2010).

Organic clothing can be a term for apparel made with natural materials that are produced using methods and components that cause a low impact on the environment, and which offers undisputable benefits not just to the environment but also to the health and wellbeing of those involved in production (Ferrigno, 2005). The main characteristic of organic cotton is that pesticides are not used in its production. This 'organic' quality to cotton clothing is often, although not necessarily, linked with a 'fair trade' certification.

The case of Uzbekistan, the second largest cotton exporter in the world, can be used as an example of a country that has suffered an environmental catastrophe because of the misuse of pesticides (White Gold Uzbekistan, cotton and crushing of a nation; the true cost of cotton, 2005).

Organic Cotton (2019) states that cotton is grown mostly in monoculture and is a very pesticide-intensive crop. Even if it is only grown on 2.5% of the world's agricultural land, this crop consumes 16% of all the insecticides and 6.8% of all the herbicides used around the world. These harmful chemicals are washed out of soils and end up polluting rivers and underground bodies of water. Along with that, pests often develop resistance to pesticides that are used on a continuous basis. Moreover, these chemicals not only eliminate pests but also their natural enemies. Interfering with ecosystems in this way can result in considerable reductions of biodiversity and also the appearance of pests that were not so important, also known as secondary pests, as ones becoming a major problem.

Cotton production also contributes to climate change. Considerable amounts of non-renewable energy sources are used to produce industrial fertilisers with an estimate of 1.5% of the world's annual energy consumption. This releases large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂). Also, the application of nitrates in excessive amounts to agricultural land causes them to change into nitrous oxide, otherwise known as 'laughing gas'. Laughing gas is a greenhouse gas that is 300 times more destructive than CO₂ in the issue of global warming. Soils are known to be important carbon sinks. Soil being degraded seriously impairs its carbon absorption capacity, which thereby contributes to the greenhouse effect.

Aakko and Koskennurmi-Sivonen (2013) state that sustainable fashion is an endeavour that brings together sustainable development and fashion. These two concepts were an oxymoron until recently. Today, it is of vital importance that this pair is made into a promise for the future (Clark, 2008). Sustainable development can be defined as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.

This definition was offered in *Our Common Future*, also known as the Brundtland Report, 1987.

There can be an abstract definition for fashion. An example is offered by Kawamura (2005) who argues that fashion and clothing are distinct concepts, where fashion is immaterial and clothing is material. This seems to make sense, on the one hand, particularly in current times when fashion imagery can present a fantasy world. This perception of fashion does not seem like a problem within the context of sustainability. But on the other hand, it must be agreed that fashion can drive changes in clothing itself. The moment that fashion is defined as a process and a product (Sproles *et al.*, 1994) or as a cultural industry that sets the aesthetic and practical dimensions of our clothing habits (Craik, 2009), then the material of the product and the pace of change become vital. It matters whether the change is slow (Clark, 2008) or ephemeral (Lipovetsky, 1987).

Saicheua, Cooper and Knox (2011) affirm that there is evident contradiction between fashion culture and sustainability, and this raises critical issues for the clothing industry. Public understanding will be important for the success of strategies that will help the industry evolve in a more sustainable direction. Shen *et al.* (2012) found that ethical consumerism and corporate social and environmental responsibility will play important roles in achieving a sustainable fashion industry. It may be good to conduct future research that explores the impacts of ethical fashion supply chains (FSC) on consumer behaviour.

Implications for fashion companies

Chan and Wong (2015) state that eco-fashion consumption is a key contributor of the sustainable development of FSC by driving demand of eco-fashion (Niinimäki, 2010). It is important for fashion companies to conceive marketing plans that promote eco-fashion consumption, and in this way, facilitate the development of sustainable FSC (Gurau and Ranchhod, 2005).

The possibility of fashion companies influencing fashion consumers' purchase behaviour depends on their ability to fulfil the needs of their consumers (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004). In fact, what motivate fashion consumers are the

specific characteristics of product and retail store that benefit them, such as expressing fashion trends (Beard, 2008; Niinimäki, 2010; Ochoa, 2010). The findings of Chan and Wong (2015) reveal that store-related attributes (SRA) has a positive effect on ECD, which suggests that fashion companies can motivate fashion consumers to purchase eco-fashion by the use of SRA to fulfil the needs of fashion consumers and to provide benefits to them. There is also the suggestion that it is not enough for companies to manufacture their apparel in a production system that is ethical and to develop and design apparel with sustainable and recyclable materials, but to also improve SRA so that it can better satisfy the needs of fashion consumers. Fashion consumers have three different needs in general. These include physical, emotional and psychological needs (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004; Niinimäki, 2010). It is suggested that fashion companies should use or improve SRA to better satisfy the physical, emotional and psychological needs of their consumers as marketing strategy in order to promote eco-fashion consumption, and therefore, facilitating their development of sustainable FSC (Lai, *et al.*, 2012).

Joung (2014) expresses that fashion refers to a style, such as clothing, shoes and handbags among other accessories, that is widely accepted by a group of consumers at a given time. The acceptance of a style follows a life cycle that comprises three stages: introduction, acceptance and regression (Sproles, 1979; Kaiser, 1990). In the introduction stage, a style is accepted by a small number of consumers, and then becomes popularly accepted by larger numbers of the population in the acceptance stage. In the regression stage, the style gradually disappears and becomes obsolete. The longevity of a fashion may span from a few weeks to even decades. A style may stay for a long time or disappear very quickly for the market.

In recent years, the fashion industry has shortened the life cycle of a style by adopting a fast fashion business strategy (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2010; Cachon and Swinney, 2011). Doeringer and Crean (2006) talk about a life cycle of fast fashion that is a month or less. Globalisation and technology development has made it possible for the fashion industry to use low-cost resources, namely materials and labour, anywhere in the world. Moreover, this industry is able to

minimise the time cycles from production to consumption. A goal of this business strategy is to get garments into stores within the shortest amount of time possible (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006). This allows consumers to take advantage of the newest styles at the lowest prices available.

Fast fashion houses produce inexpensive knockoffs of the most up-to-date high-end styles and deliver them to their consumers every few weeks instead of every fashion season (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst, 2010; Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010; Byun and Sternquist, 2011). Due to trendiness and lower prices, consumers buy fast fashion pieces impulsively and buy more than ever before. According to Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010), at present, due to easy availability of media outlets and magazines that cover fashion news, catwalk styles, and celebrity looks, there has been a growing interest from consumers in fashion and personal appearance. These consumers desire newness and variety, and therefore shop frequently. Despite the economic downturn, fast fashion retailing has grown significantly (Hansen, 2012). An example of this is Inditex (Zara), which is based in Spain, and which has recorded a 47 percent sales growth in 2013 and thus became the world's largest fashion retailer. According to American Apparel and Footwear Association (AAFA, 2012), 19.4 billion items of clothing with a total retail value of 283.7 billion dollars were sold in 2011 in the USA alone. On average, an individual consumer spent \$910 and purchased more than 62 pieces of clothing in 2011.

Although there is no data available for how long a consumer keeps clothing, in general terms consumers stop wearing cheap garments due to low quality or new fashion trends, or because garments were bought for a one-time event (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). Goworek *et al.* (2012) conducted a study of the sustainable clothing market, where participants in a focus group interview noted that when clothing is cheap and made of poor quality, they discard used clothing. According to Chau (2012), fast fashion creates a wasteful culture. Given that such apparel is made of inexpensive materials, it is not uncommon for consumers to wear them once or twice before throwing them away. On occasion, this might not even be by choice, since the garments are made so poorly that they fall apart after only a single wearing. Fast

fashion products are sold and manufactured so that they can be worn fewer than ten times (McAfee *et al.*, 2004), and are even called disposable fashions by some. In the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the term 'throwaway market' was used for high fashion with a low price (Tokatli *et al.*, 2008). This same market is now referred to as 'fast fashion'. Between 2003 and 2008, a 330 percent textile waste growth was seen in the UK due to fast fashion (Santi, 2008), and similarly, a report indicated that individual American consumers on average dispose of more than 68 pounds of clothing each year (Claudio, 2007).

According to Joung (2014) consumers discard unwanted garments in many ways, among them donations, drop-offs, resales, swaps, pass-ons, reuses, and throwaway. Researchers have determined factors related to the behaviours of clothing disposal and found that consumers resell unwanted garments for monetary gains, make donations to help others, reuse to save materials, and discard for convenience and due to the unavailability of recycling information (Jacobs and Bailey, 1982; Shim, 1995; Koch and Domina, 1999; Domina and Koch, 2002; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013).

Garment disposal is related to the environment. Despite the fact that almost 100 percent of textiles are recyclable, 13.1 million tons of textiles got thrown away in the United States in 2010, of which more than 11 million tons were dumped in landfills (Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). Environmental concerns have made researchers pay attention to the environmental attitudes, concerns and awareness of consumers, and have examined the effects of these on clothing disposal behavioural patterns. Studies have revealed that consumers who have positive attitudes towards the environment participate in garment recycling of the likes of resale, donation or reuse (Shim, 1995; Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013) and passing on to family and friends (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2011). Discarding behaviour, on the other hand, was negatively related to environmental attitudes (Shim, 1995).

Consumers also keep unwanted clothing, in addition to disposing of them. Most consumers wear 20-30 percent of the clothing in a closet. The rest are either disposed of or stay in the closet. Treasures (2012) suggests that any clothing that

is not worn for a year or over should leave the house. However, Claudio (2007) mentions that an estimate of 21 percent of annual garment purchases stay in the home.

Joung (2014) mentions that consumers may keep clothing even though they do not wear or use them because of hoarding tendencies. Frost and Gross (1993) define hoarding as the ‘acquisition of, and failure to discard possessions which appear to be useless or of limited value’. Hoarders have a likeliness of being compulsive and frequent shoppers (Frost *et al.*, 1998). Studies have shown that compulsive shoppers are interested in fashion and frequently purchase fashion items (Johnson and Attmann, 2009). However, not much is known about fast fashion consumers’ post-purchase behaviours in relation to garment hoarding and disposal.

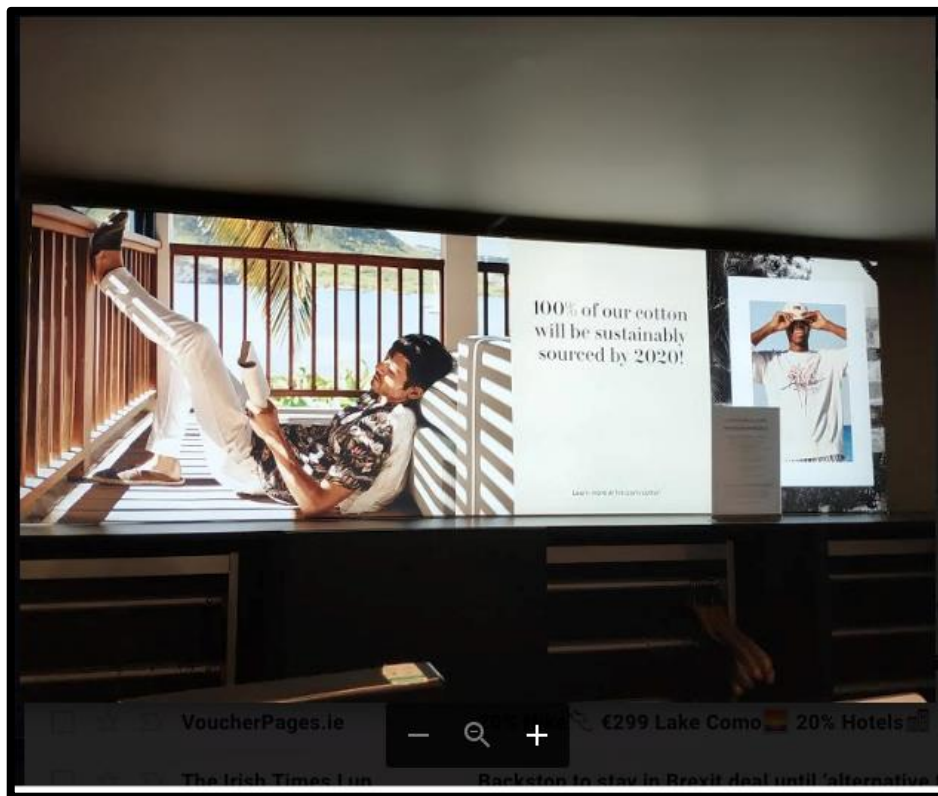


Figure 2.1: A retailer’s pledge to source sustainable materials.

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Ethical perspective

An ethical viewpoint sees that corporate entities, like individuals, have an obligation to act for the benefit of society as a whole, contributing to society while doing no harm to others. A wide range of laws and guidelines to steer and control corporate behaviour already exist at national and global levels on health and safety, human rights, environmental issues and sustainability. But ethical CSR activity needs to go well beyond what is required by such basic standards. The board needs to be the conscience of the company – responsible for establishing its corporate values. Ethical codes may be needed that are understood throughout the organisation and reflected in the directors' own behaviour. An ethical standpoint is likely to produce voluntary CSR policies that go well beyond the requirements of laws and guidelines (Tricker, 2012). Where possible preventative action should be taken, environmental damage should be restored as a matter of priority and the principle rule is that the 'polluter should pay'. (Warren, 2000). Not much is understood unfortunately about how, in the fast fashion sector, companies effectively manage the integrated principles of CSR and what managers are doing to successfully set and interlace environmental, social and financial goals (Arrigo, 2013).

Greenwashing

According to Frost (2019) the concept of 'greenwashing' is literally and figuratively in vogue at the moment. This concept involves press releases sent out by high street and luxury brands explaining to the general public their commitment to solving the problems that have been highlighted by a greater awareness of the unethical polluting and damaging processes of the fashion industry. Frost (2019) goes on to state that the world consumes around 80 billion new pieces of clothing each year, which is four times what was consumed only 20 years ago. This would mean that each person on the planet is now producing more textile waste than ever before. An item of clothing may only stay in the average woman's closet for around 5 weeks (Frost, 2019). The only way to fight against this massive amount of consumption is for the fashion industry to steer

away from quickly changing trends towards slower fashion cycles that can focus on longer lasting styles and better quality.

Whitewashing has been defined as the glossing over or cover up of scandalous information by the means of biased presentations of facts. But greenwashing, on the other hand is not that well known. It occurs when an organisation spends extra time and money claiming to be 'green' or environmentally friendly through advertising and marketing campaigns than actually implementing business practices that reduce an environmental impact. This term was introduced in 1986 by environmentalist Jay Westerveld in a critical essay inspired by the irony of the 'save the towel' movement displayed in hotels (Edwards, 2018).

The next chapter will describe the methodology used for the research. Chapter 4 will present the findings, chapter 5 will offer a discussion, and chapter 6 provides the conclusion, recommendations and limitations to the study.

3. CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology adopted and outlines the exact steps that were followed to address the research questions. Furthermore, this study adopted the “Research Onion” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) to serve as guidance through the research process.

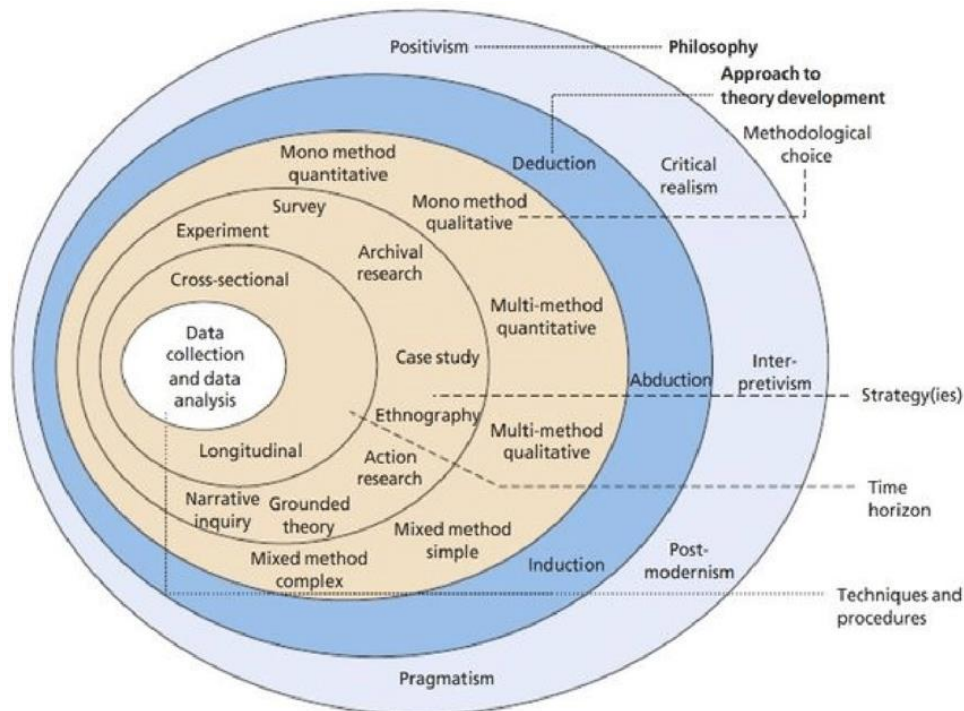


Figure 3.1 Research Onion. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016).

Research Philosophy

Saunders, et al. (2016) tell us that research philosophy can be referred to as a system of beliefs and assumptions regarding the development of knowledge. In order to understand the philosophy that forms the basis for this research, it is important to have a look at how the world can be viewed. For that purpose, research was done on the possible ways the natural world could be viewed. This serves as a guideline for how the research could be conducted.

Epistemology

Saunders, et al. (2016) explain that epistemology has to do with assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how we can communicate knowledge to others. Similarly, Quinlan, Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin (2019) mention that epistemology relates to knowledge, to what constitutes knowledge and to the process through which knowledge is created. The following sections discuss the main approaches: interpretivism and positivism.

Interpretivism

Saunders et al. (2016) offer a definition of interpretivism as a philosophical stance that advocates humans are different from physical phenomena because humans create meanings. It is argued that human beings and their social worlds cannot be studied in the same way as physical phenomena due to the need to take complexity into consideration. There is a focus on narratives, stories, perceptions and interpretations. Complementing this, Quinlan et al. (2019) state that interpretivism sustains that all knowledge is a matter of interpretation. Due to the fact that narrative data through the means of informal interviews was used to gain insights into the relationship between consumer behaviour and fast fashion in Ireland, this study follows the interpretivist approach.

Positivism

Saunders et al. (2016) describe positivism as the philosophical stance of the natural scientist and entails working with an observable social reality to produce law-like generalisations. There is the promise of unambiguous and accurate knowledge. It is typically deductive, highly structured, makes use of large samples, measurement, and perhaps the most important characteristic of all is that it is most suited for use in quantitative investigations. Since this study follows an inductive approach to exploring the relationship between consumer habits and fast fashion in Ireland, the most appropriate approach considered for this research was the interpretivist approach.

Research Approach

3.1.1. Inductive Approach

The inductive approach was used for this study where data collection was used to explore a phenomenon, identify themes and patterns and create a conceptual framework (Saunders et al., 2016). Alternatively, the deductive approach involves the development of a theory that is then subjected to a rigorous test through a series of propositions. This is the dominant research approach in the natural sciences, where laws present the basis of explanation, allow the anticipation of phenomena, predict their occurrence and thus, permit them to be controlled (Saunders, et al., 2016). Therefore, the deductive approach would not have suited this study. According to Merriam (2002) qualitative data analysis is essentially inductive, where the researcher begins with a unit of data, such as any meaningful word, phrase, narrative, etc., and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns across the data. It was considered that the inductive approach was the most suitable for this study, since the phenomenon under investigation was subject to a qualitative research and since it has not yet been thoroughly explored.

Philosophical Stance

The beliefs, concerns and understandings brought into this study, coupled with informed assumptions and observations regarding the impacts of fast fashion on the environment, led to the generation of the research questions and design. Additionally, it was decided that an interpretivist approach would be especially suitable for this study, since interpretive research deals with all aspects of human behaviour in relation to its impact on the environment. Therefore, this approach allowed the researcher to understand the consumption patterns of the participants with regards to fast fashion and the environment.

Research Methods

3.1.2. Methodological Paradigm

Methodological paradigms are the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project to determine the

research methods that will be used and how the data will be analysed (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017).

Qualitative Research Method

Qualitative research is research that produces non-numeric data. It focuses on words instead of numbers in the collection of data. This type of research as a strategy is inductive, subjective and interpretivist (Quinlan, et al., 2019). These authors also mention that qualitative data is non-numerical, textual, visual or oral data, which focuses on stories, visual portrayals, meaningful characterisations, interpretations and other expressive descriptions. Qualitative business research addresses business objectives through techniques that allow the researcher to provide elaborate interpretations of phenomena without depending on numerical measurement. Its focus is on discovering true inner meanings and new insights. Considering the nature of the present research questions, a qualitative research approach was considered to be the most appropriate for collecting data.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) state that qualitative research focuses on an understanding of the way in which humans view their social world. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as ‘a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible, which turn the world into a series of representations that include field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. Qualitative researchers, therefore, study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’.

Qualitative research was carried out in order to answer the question brought forth for this topic. Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. Quinlan et al.

(2019) explain that quantitative research focuses on the gathering of numeric data or data in numerical form, such as data in the form of numbers. Quantitative research is deductive.

Mixed Methods Research Approach

Saunders et al. (2016) explain that mixed methods research is the branch of multiple methods research that combines the use of quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques and analytical procedures. Although some academics argue that this research method can enhance the data collection process and provide even deeper insights into the topic of study, Quinlan et al. (2019) warn that quantitative and qualitative research methodologies have different philosophical foundations and different epistemological and ontological assumptions, and therefore, arguments against the use of mixed methods usually hold that these distinctions are not, or perhaps cannot, be observed in mixed methods research. Despite a mixed methods design being useful for this type of study, due to time constraints, a mono method was proposed as a more suitable alternative.

Methodological Choice: Exploratory Study

Saunders et al. (2016) express that an exploratory study is an excellent means to ask open questions in order to gain a better understanding of the topic of interest. This type of study is particularly useful when it is desired to obtain a clarification of an issue, problem or phenomenon when there is uncertainty of its precise nature. Given that studies of fast fashion, how this impacting the environment, and how consumers and businesses are at the heart of this issue, it was determined that a study that was exploratory in nature would be of particular benefit. Saunders et al. (2016) continue to say that exploratory studies have the advantage of being flexible and adaptable to change, and that they can be conducted through a number of ways that include literature reviews and interviewing experts in the subject, individuals and focus groups. An exploratory research design was determined to be appropriate for this dissertation, given that it began with a literature review and it was proposed for semi-structured interviews to be conducted in order to gain knowledge and uncover key themes.

Time Horizon

Saunders et al. (2016) describe cross-sectional studies as the study of a particular phenomenon or phenomena at a particular time, whereas longitudinal studies take longer for the reason that change and development is studied. This research was cross-sectional instead of longitudinal because it was sought to identify the views and habits of consumers and business owners and operators in regards to fast fashion and its impact on the environment over a short period of time. In this particular case, and due to time limitations, it was considered that a cross-sectional study would be most suitable.

Data Collection

An exploratory research design was chosen for this study. At the beginning of the investigation, not much was known about the relationship between fast fashion and consumers and business owners/operators in Ireland and its impact on the environment, therefore, it was important to explore this relatively new topic of study. The data collection methods used to obtain primary and secondary research data are explained below.

Primary Research Data

Quinlan (2011) describes primary research data as data directly observed or gathered by the researcher engaged in a research project. This can be considered new knowledge. This type of data comes from primary sources, which are sources that provide new insight into any phenomenon. These are sometimes called original sources. Given that it was proposed for this to be an exploratory study, semi-structured interviews were determined to be the most appropriate form of primary data collection. Semi-structured interviews allow for an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences and habits in relation to fast fashion and its impact on the environment. One disadvantage of this type of primary data collection was the time consumption experienced to transcribe and analyse comprehensive data after each interview. However, the flexibility it offers makes it especially attractive and suitable for exploratory research (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Secondary Data

Secondary data is data that already exists and was not created by the researcher. This data originates from secondary sources, which can include places, organisations, libraries, websites, books, reports, and so on, that contain data and/or commentary and discussion on data. Secondary data that was used for this study was gathered from peer-reviewed academic journals, textbooks and websites.

Validity and Reliability

Quinlan et al. (2019) explain that validity relates to how logical, truthful, robust, sound, reasonable, meaningful and useful is the research. Reliability is an indicator of the dependability of the research, to the degree to which the research can be repeated while obtaining consistent results. Some writers, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide an alternative to reliability and validity. They propose: trustworthiness and authenticity. Whether using validity and reliability or trustworthiness. Whether it is validity and reliability or trustworthiness and authenticity that are being used, it must be ensured that reporting is accurate and reliable (Saunders et al., 2016). Reiter (2013) recommends that exploratory studies should be conducted in a transparent and honest manner, whereby the researcher follows guidelines to ensure reliability of the research findings.

Interviews

For this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen. Saunders et al. (2016) describe how unstructured interviews are typically informal and used mainly to explore topics of interest. For this research, two sets of six questions were prepared that emerged from the literature review. There was the option for additional questions to develop throughout the interviews, and the order of the questions could vary depending on the flow of the conversations. Some questions were even merged. Each participant was given a participant information sheet

with a consent form stapled to it. This ensured that written, informed and explicit consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interviews. Each participant signed two copies of the consent form, one for their records, and one for the researcher's records. The interviews began once both copies of the form had been signed and audio recording was used only if the participant had given both written and verbal consent. All participants consented to the interviews, as well as these being audio recorded. The interviews were of an informal, leisurely nature and participants were encouraged to speak freely about their habits and experiences, for which anonymity and confidentiality was kept at all times. This included the storing and retaining of data being kept private in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016).

- Questions for consumers
1. Have you ever heard of fast fashion? What does this mean to you?
 2. Do you know about the impacts of fast fashion on the environment?
 3. Do you buy clothes having in mind sustainability, price or both?
 4. Do you wonder about the sourcing of the materials used to make the clothes you buy?
 5. What do you do with your clothes when you no longer use them?
 6. Do you think about about what happens to your clothes after you discard them?

Figure 3.2: Questions asked to Consumers

Questions for Business owners

1. What motivated you to start a sustainable fashion business?
2. What year was your business established?
3. What are your views on the current state of the fashion industry in terms of sustainability?
4. What impact does fast fashion have on the environment that you know of?
5. How has the response been from consumers towards your business?
6. Where do you see your business going in the future?

Figure 3.3: Questions asked to Business Operators

Research Sample

The sample size was relatively small, since the researcher interviewed ten people, eight of them were consumers of which four were male and four were female. The participants in the category were all in the 22 to 37 year-old age range, commonly categorised as 'millennials'. The remaining two interviewees were business owners/operators who are in charge of small boutiques that claim to sell sustainable apparel. All of the participants were based in Dublin, Ireland.

Convenience and Purposive Non-Probability Sampling

Convenience and purposive sampling were the non-sampling techniques used for the research conducted in this study. Bryman and Bell (2011) indicate that a non-probability sample is a sample that has not been selected using a random sampling method. This implies that some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others. Etikan, Musa, Alkassim (2015) explain that convenience sampling and purposive sampling are non-probability sampling techniques that a researcher uses to choose a sample of subjects/units from a

population. Although, non-probability sampling has a lot of limitations due to the subjective nature in choosing the sample and thus it is not good representative of the population, it is useful when the researcher has limited resources, time and workforce. It can also be used when the research does not aim to generate results that will be used to create generalisations pertaining to the entire population. Therefore, there was a need to use convenience and purposive non-probability sampling techniques for this study.

Access

Access, as defined by Saunders et al. (2016) is the situation where a research participant is willing to share data with a researcher. Access to data was requested by means of face-to-face conversations, both with consumers and with the shop operators. Access was never declined, although some participants requested that the interviews be carried out by email or instant messaging apps due to limited time on their part. To protect their anonymity, the participants of the interviews were assigned pseudonyms and are referred to by their pseudonyms.

Pseudonym	Type
Chad	Consumer
Chuck	Consumer
Diane	Consumer
Jane	Consumer
Nadine	Consumer
PJ	Consumer
Rosie Mason	Business Operator
Santos	Business Operator
Stan	Consumer
Vivian	Consumer

Table 3.1: Profile of Interview Participants

Data Analysis

3.1.3. Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Research Data

Padgett (2017) describes how a revolutionary move towards clarifying and codifying qualitative research methods started in the 1980s and was influenced mainly by grounded theory (GT) (Strauss and Corbin, 1994; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). One common form of data analysis in qualitative research is thematic analysis (TA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Smith and Firth (2011) describe TA as an interpretative process, where the researcher systematically searches through data to identify patterns with the aim to describe the phenomenon under investigation. This study adopted the interpretivist approach, therefore a thematic analysis was determined to be suitable in identifying key themes and address the research questions. Transcription of data and reading the data repeatedly, followed by coding, searching and reviewing themes, then providing definitions, and finally naming the themes, with the aim to generate a report of the analysis. Transcribing audio recordings to text was done with Watson Speech-To-Text online software and text analysis was done with Nvivo 12 and handwritten.



Figure 3.4: Word cloud generated by NVivo 12.

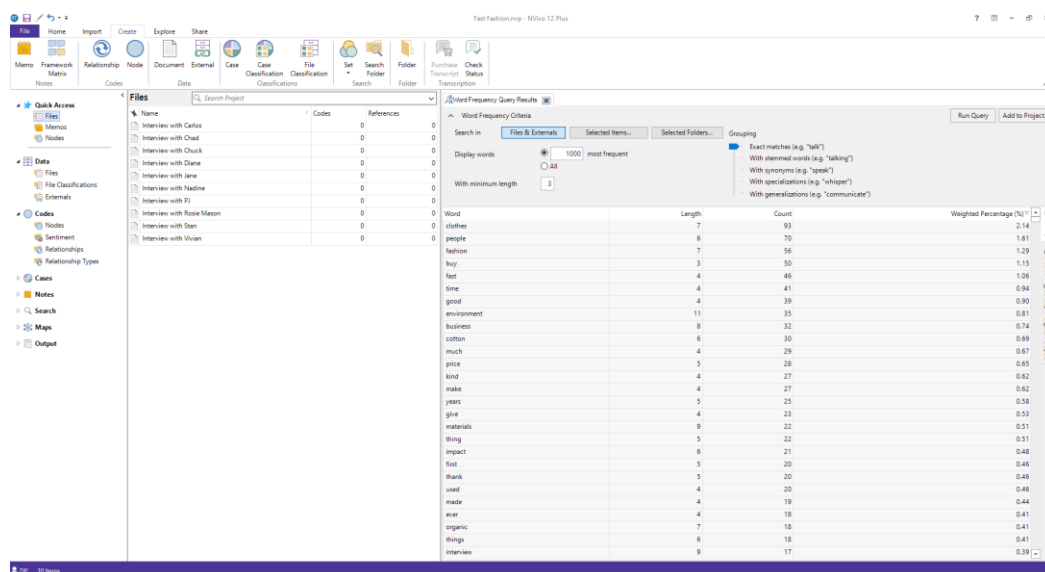


Figure 3.5: Data Analysis with NVivo 12.

Ethical Considerations

The National College of Ireland’s (2013) Ethical Guidelines and Procedures for Research involving Human Participants were read, understood and adhered to. Research was conducted in an ethical manner, e.g. respecting all persons; safeguarding the wellbeing of all participants; employing fairness as much as possible during the selection of participants. On the matter of ethical risk, this research posed no ethical risk to the individuals involved and thus, fell under Research Category A of the Ethical Guidelines of the National College of Ireland 2013.

General Data Protection Regulation

Conducting research under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) means that:

Consent should be given by a clear affirmative act establishing a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous indication of the data subject’s agreement to the processing of personal data relating to him or her, such as by a written

statement, including by electronic means, or an oral statement (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016, p.6).

A detailed participant information sheet was created to ensure that the research participants had all the required information, including the identity and contact details of the data controller. This information, together with a consent form, can be found in Appendices A, B and C. Additionally, to ensure data security and privacy, all data obtained has been anonymised and stored in a password-protected computer and added to a password-protected folder.

Study Design and Data Collection

Phenomenological interviews were carried out among business owners/managers as well as consumers. The interviews lasted from anywhere between 2 minutes to 45 minutes, and the interviews to business operators were conducted in the premises of the shops, while the interviews to individual consumers were conducted in their homes or city centre restaurants.

It was decided that the best philosophical approach to this study is that of interpretivism. This philosophical approach involves interpreting how people participate in the social and cultural aspects of life, which effectively allows the researcher to learn what people understand about their own and others' actions.

Other perspectives, such as positivism for example, do not offer the best philosophical approaches to answering the research questions of this study. Positivism is an approach that deals with already established hypotheses that are ready to be tested. Explanations can be found measuring the accepted knowledge of the world.

Summary of Primary Research Methodology

This research proposes to identify what key projects or activities certain fashion retailers and consumers may be carrying out to mitigate the damage this industry

is causing to the environment. The present study also involves interviewing consumers regarding fast fashion and sustainable fashion issues. This research may also provide useful information for other non-involved retailers in how they can participate in greener production practices. Ten interviews were carried out, eight with consumers and two with business operators.

4. CHAPTER 4: Findings

Qualitative thematic research coding was used to analyse the data collected from the interviews that were conducted. A variety of themes and sub-themes were detected during the coding process.

Findings - Consumers

A variety of findings were obtained from the data collection process. These findings were coded and grouped into themes. Robson (2011) suggests basing codes on ‘specific acts, behaviours, events, activities, strategies, practices or tactics, meanings, etc. He also suggests techniques for identifying themes that include repetition, indigenous categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data and theory-related material.

4.1.1. Fast Fashion and it's meaning

Most of the participants had a strong idea of the concept of fast fashion. Some quotes taken from the interviews can support this notion. Diane mentioned, *“It means that these big industries, they just produce fashion and change it like every two or three weeks...”* Vivian said, *“For me it would be something clothing that is relatively cheap...”* Jane provided a comment saying, *“People usually use this term when they talk about fast fashion brands that imitate the style of high-end brands but using cheaper materials and fabric...”* On the topic, Chad mentioned, *“It means for me... cheap clothes, and they don't last long.”*

A recurrent theme that emerged from the interviews was, on the other hand, an uncertainty on the topic of fast fashion. Some participants had an idea of this topic, but they were not too clear about what it entailed. Quoting PJ: *‘I'm not sure what it means...’* Chuck said, *“I have vaguely heard it mentioned, but I have also not done any research on it...”* Nadine tied the meaning of fast fashion with the products sold by a high street retailer.

4.1.2. Impacts of fast fashion on the environment

When participants were asked about what they knew on the impacts that fast fashion has on the environment, a variety of answers were given. Vivian, for example, said that, *“The production of it is using a lot of, for example, and we are producing a lot of it... and then people are not, uhm, using it for the long term.”* Within Diane’s answer to this question, it was noticeable that she was aware of the fact that one of the impacts is how this business model is taking away from natural resources. PJ mentioned that, *“It’s bad on the environment, as it uses a lot of things to do with the environment, like water and waste, it causes a lot of waste to the environment and so on...”* Jane expressed that she had heard how some apparel production companies are responsible for using toxic chemicals in their supply chains. She also mentioned about having heard of *“concerns about synthetic fabrics that can release plastic and harm waters/oceans. In recent years, there were many documentaries that revealed the real price of fast fashion, showing that to reduce costs brands are ready to turn a blind eye on laws and human rights.”*

Contrary to those participants who had a notion of what impacts fast fashion has on the environment, some of the interviewees expressed not having too much knowledge on the matter. Nadine simply said that she didn’t know about this. Similarly, Chuck commented that he had never looked into it.

4.1.3. Purchasing with sustainability, price or both in mind

The majority of the interviewees admitted that when they looked to buy clothes, their attention was put primarily on the price of the item they would consider buying. Chad mentioned that it was a good question for him. It seemed to make him think about his habits on this matter. He admitted that he thought about price and not really sustainability. Chuck stated that he would consider price, the brand, the quality and nothing else. Jane commented that although she did think of both factors, it was definitely price that made a greater impact on her choices.

Diane explained that for her, price was most important to consider because of the fact that she is a student, and students generally not having a steady income are faced with the issue of affordability. However, she did mention that something that she looks forward to, in the future, is to be able to afford buying her clothes in shops that sell sustainable attire. Some participants did mention that both price and sustainability were factors considered in the process of buying clothes. PJ commented, *“Well, price anyway, but I think both because I try to have clothes that last...”*

4.1.4. Sourcing of the materials

An overwhelming majority of the interview participants did mention that they did not think about the sources of the materials used to make their clothes. However some of the participants did offer diverse comments to follow their affirmations of lack of thought on the matter. Chuch said that he might go as far as reading the label to see where it was made, but he would not be concerned about the materials. Jane mentioned that, *“I always take into account what clothes are made of...”* and that, *“Fabric determines the quality of the clothing item, and it is important to opt for natural fibre: wool, viscose, cotton, flax. I try to avoid synthetic fabrics, especially when it comes to boots or shoes.”*

Interestingly, Diane expressed that she never really thinks about the sourcing of the materials, but that she has wondered about how the employees that made the clothes were treated. She went on to mention that it was not something that had ever occurred to her to query about, but that she was aware of news and other types of broadcast media discussing scandals on this matter, that normally spark concerns for this among the general public. She mentioned brought up the topic of CSR and how companies should be show more responsibility for the effects they cause on communities and the environment. Diane also expressed that she thinks the effects are not visible now, but that in future there will be a direct impact on everyone. Vivian mentioned, *“I... do actually, well not all the time when I buy, I have to say, but I do wonder when I watch documentaries...”*

4.1.5. When clothes are no longer used

It was very interesting to observe how the majority of the candidates presented similar answers to this question. Most of the interviewees responded that they give their clothes away either to relatives or friends or that they donate their clothes to charitable organisations. Some admitted to selling or thinking about selling their clothes. It was rare for anyone to answer that they disposed of their textiles in bins. Examples of these answers are as follows.

PJ affirmed that he gives his clothes to charity usually. Chuck said that he would give them to relatives, such as cousins, but would otherwise also give them to charity. Diane mentioned that it depends on the state of the clothes, but she usually gives it to charities. She also explained her donating habits, *“I live with another two girls, and at least once a month, we have this bag and we just keep throwing all of our clothes in there that we don’t wear them anymore, and we just give to a charity shop because it’s not nice, like just throw the clothes in the bin, so it really depends on the state of the clothes so, most of the time.”*

Nadine’s answer to this was, although expressing a bit of hesitation *“Uhm, I actually give them out to charity or the homeless or if I see that the clothes are too not in a good condition to give to the homeless or charity, I will actually give it to H&M because I know they accept clothes and they would also give a voucher in return...”* It was very interesting that Nadine mentioned the recycling programmes that some major fashion retailers have launched. These programmes are meant to represent their way of showing CSR with regard to the environment. However, there are some researchers that have argued that this could be a form of greenwashing on behalf on these companies. Other participants also mentioned these programmes within their answers.

Jane admitted to selling her clothes online when the quality is okay, but when they are unfit for use, she throws them away. She mentioned thinking about giving them to charity or taking them to shops that take recyclable textiles in

exchange for discounts, but that she had never engaged in these practices before and these were just in her plans. Similarly, Chad also admitted to throwing away his unused clothes, but that he is considering giving or donating to people and recognises that he would like to change his behaviour a bit in this sense. These are a clear representation of the attitude behaviour gap among these participants.

Vivian confessed that she stacks her unused clothes in her wardrobe, but that has considered donating or selling these clothes. She continued saying, *“I still haven’t had the time to go through my wardrobe yet, and... I lost a ton of weight recently, in the last two years, so a lot of my clothes, I cannot wear anymore, so they are still in my wardrobe and I need to get rid of them, but if I do get rid of them it will be to, uhm, usually I give it to someone...”*

4.1.6. Thoughts about clothes after being discarded

The last in the list of questions asked during the interviews, *Do you think about about what happens to your clothes after you discard them?*, offered similar answers amongst most of the participants. The majority confessed that they do not really give much thought to this.

Chuck responded that he doesn’t think about it, but that he trusts that they end up with people who need them. Chad also mentioned that he doesn’t think about this, but he brought up an issue about clothes banks. He mentioned that there are not that many in the city and that as far as he knows, people are not too aware of the possibility of recycling their clothes in these forms of recycling bins.

PJ’s response was, *“I don’t, I know they go to landfills, which is terrible, but I’m hoping that when they’re passed on to the next as steps of them being discarded and disposed of, that they’re being recycled.”* He also said, *“But I don’t think about it. Once they leave my hands, I move on.”*

Diane’s response was, *“Well I can’t say that I do, so I think that the charity is a kind of excuse that we all try to use to, you know, avoid this because like, okay,*

“I give to the charity shop, so it’s not my problem any longer, so they have to deal with that...” It is interesting to note that Diane mentioned her concern for greenwashing. This is supported by her comment *“I suspect they just, most of the shops, I suspect they only just throw them in the bin, you know, like they just discard them without even thinking about the consequences...”*

Vivian expressed that, *“People wear them, hopefully, hopefully that person wears it, and hopefully, ah, that person wears it and keeps it in good condition.* Nadine also expressed not pondering on what happens to the clothes, *“Uhm, well in terms of if I give them to H&M, I actually don’t know what happens, but I hope that they actually will do something and recycle the clothes.”*

Jane’s response was, *“Yes. I know that the parts of some synthetic fabrics do not degrade in the environment, that is why it is better to recycle old clothes.”* It is also very interesting that similar to Chad, Jane also mentioned that if there were some kind of government plan to enhance the recycling of clothes, she would be encouraged as well to increase her clothes recycling habits. She supports this by saying, *“But I am not a very conscious person but if they will be any common standards concerning the disposal of clothes, I would follow them.”*

Findings – Business Operators

4.1.7. Motivation to start a sustainable fashion business

Rosie Mason from Merry-Go-Round expressed that, *“well we sort of moved with the times I suppose...”* Santos from Yosemite told the very interesting story of how the founder of the company that he works for started the business out a hobby and love for mountain climbing. He developed a product that was used specifically for this activity, which led to the development of further product lines. Given the admiration of the founder for the great outdoors, he became concerned about the effect his favourite activity was causing the environment. Therefore, he decided to take his company on a route that would focus on

products that try not to harm the environment and that would come from sustainable sources.

4.1.8. Year of establishment

Rosie Mason's responded that the business was established twenty years ago, but was rebranded in 2007 to the name it has at present. She feels it has been around for a long time. It was her intention since then to make public that the products offered in the shop are ethically made. She went on to say, *"So what I decided to do was get it out there that we were ethically made, I had put on the window and people do come in and have conversations with us about it, which is good as well, because it is, it's such a hot topic at the moment, em, it's very, very important, so it's great to able to talk to people about what we do..."*

Yosemite, as Santos continued to tell the story, was founded in the 1950s and went through a very interesting and colourful journey to reach the success that it enjoys today as a sustainable company. This company went through many ups and downs and turning points that led the directors to have to make some very important decisions that shaped the image and reputation of Yosemite as it is today.

4.1.9. Views on the current state of the fashion industry in terms of sustainability

Rosie Mason commented that she keeps herself informed as to the latest developments on this matter. She stated, *"I was having a conversation, a lot of conversations with people, I was at a trade show last week, so you know, you get talking to people, and I noticed in H&M at the moment they say that they're gonna have sustainable cotton by, completely by 2020, and, like that's great, but I suppose the flipside of that is all the water that they used to make that sustainable cotton..."* She went on to describe how it would be ideal for products to be made locally from recycled materials by very well paid workers and that

these products were 100% sustainable and ethically made, however, she feels that at the moment it is not possible to get to that point.

Interestingly, Santos explained on this, *“You might not know this, but the consumerist culture that we live in, yeah, it is really something that somebody actually thought about and came up with as a design because in the recession after the Second World War, um, when in the United States and in other countries all business was geared toward making bombs and guns and so on, to change the production lines they had to create demand, it was a good thing, you know, you needed to get income, so they started this idea that you buy stuff to throw it away, that you buy stuff and the next you’re gonna get the newest model...”*

4.1.10. Knowledge of impact of fast fashion have on the environment

Besides mentioning insights gained from attendance to a trade show, Rosie Mason mentioned some of her views on how fast fashion impacts the environment. She talked about how other companies are making some changes, but that these changes might not be enough to mitigate the damages caused to environment. She also suggested that, *“Maybe we just go back to the, you know, the way that our grandparents were, you know, you had a small capsule wardrobe with your good stuff and then that was it, you know, so I don’t know, maybe we will go back to that.”* This suggestion was made in regards to a possible way that everyone could contribute to the mitigation of the harm caused to the environment.

Santos mentioned that he’s a blind optimist on the impact of fast fashion, but that the figures that he has seen seem quite worrying, and that he knows what we might all be facing with global warming and the impact this could have on future generations. But he say, on the other hand, that it is never too late to start making changes, and that if, by the end of next year there are some major adjustments, that things could perhaps turn around.

4.1.11. Response from consumers towards the business

Rosie Mason mentioned as part of answer to a previous question that since putting a sign in front of the store advertising that the products offered ethically made, that people come in to ask about that.

Santos explained how the company has a good customer base and that they also work with NGOs in community events and campaigns. He mentioned that they advertise mostly by word of mouth and that generations after generations of same families have returned to buy their products confirming the reputation of good quality of the company's products.

4.1.12. Future of the business

To this question, Rosie Mason's answer was that now that they have rearranged their business practices to treat their workers properly and fairly, the next goal would be to obtain their materials from sustainable sources. She highlighted that since they are a small business it will take some time, but that they do intend to reach that goal. She talked about a method of printing that they have introduced called *rotary*, which involves less plastic ending up as waste. She mentioned as a matter of light humour that it will take 'baby steps'.

Santos said how the owner of the company is now 80 years old, and that the company is taking its business model and promotional campaigns to new heights by incorporating the concept of *B Corporations*, which are Beneficial Corporations. This was even included in California Law. It is a type of support for companies who have mission statements that focus on promoting environmental awareness and sustainability.



Figure 4.1: Mission Statement of an Environmentally Friendly Retailer.

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5. CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

It was found that some of the participants have an awareness of the importance of recycling clothes, yet they do not recycle. Shaw and Riach, 2011). They apply this to ethical consumption behaviour, and they note the difficulty of individuals to exclusively inhabit ethical spaces.

Participants, such as Chuck and Jane expressed their interest in finding out about the materials used to make the clothes they buy. According to Shen, Wang, Lo and Shum (2012) consumers are becoming more aware of the material content of the apparel they buy. Some consumers are even going to the lengths of investigating material sources and suppliers, and they demand that the fashion supply chain be transparent and ethical.

According to Joung (2014) consumers discard unwanted garments in many ways, among them donations, drop-offs, resales, swaps, pass-ons, reuses, and

throwaway. Most of the participants revealed that they give away or donate their unused clothes to relatives or charities. Researchers have determined factors related to the behaviours of clothing disposal and found that consumers resell unwanted garments for monetary gains, make donations to help others, reuse to save materials, and discard for convenience and due to the unavailability of recycling information (Jacobs and Bailey, 1982; Shim, 1995; Koch and Domina, 1999; Domina and Koch, 2002; Joung and Park-Poaps, 2013). Some of the participants mentioned selling their unused clothes.

MacNeill and Moore's (2015) study suggests that fashion consumers' attitudes towards sustainability in their apparel purchasing is determined by their level in general of concern for environmental and social wellbeing, their preconceptions regarding sustainable fashion and their previous behaviour in terms of ethical consumption actions. Consumers are still hesitant to support innovations in greener practices or see barriers to the acceptance of sustainably manufactured products.

MacNeill and Moore (2015) found that when linking attitudes to behaviour, their study revealed an important relationship between perceptions of fashion as being functional or self-representing, the influence of peer groups and levels of consumer knowledge about fashion products. However, there are many other consumers who are beginning to show an ever-growing concern around environmental issues and social wellbeing, and as a result they develop favourable views towards sustainable fashion products. Many of the participants revealed their increasing awareness on the topic of fast fashion and the importance of recycling unwanted clothes

According to Joung (2014) although consumers of fast fashion are interested in the environment, they do not participate in recycling.

5. CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Conclusions

The findings reveal a generally positive attitude towards environmentally friendly consumption and business practices. However, some gaps have been revealed among consumers in the matter of positive attitudes but no action taken. The retailers interviewed present trailblazing environmentally friendly practices that other similar or larger retailers could adopt.

Joung (2014) indicates that the conclusions from these studies have implications for the clothing industry, for fast fashion suppliers in particular. It is better to produce fast fashion products in long-lasting high quality, keeping up with latest styles at the same time. World Wear Project (2013) published that 100 percent of household textiles and clothing can be recycled disregarding quality and condition.

Fast fashion suppliers should work on their education-based marketing communications and support the development of a culture of sustainable consumption (Joung, 2014). A study done on consumer education to reduce solid waste, Stall-Meadows and Goudeau (2012) concluded that education favoured consumer awareness and the perception of the importance of recycling. After the educational activities, consumers preferred donating instead of discarding when they got rid of clothing they no longer wanted. Marketing media like advertisements should address the benefits of recycling, which include funds to charitable programmes, reduction in solid waste, and also converting these materials into new products. These benefits should be made visible at the selling points to consumers.

Recommendations

5.1.1. Retailers in the Fashion Sector

Among certain recommendations that could be made for retailers in the fashion sector, it can be said that these business operators can inform themselves as to the current trends in environmental awareness and possible strategies that can be used to mitigate the effects of the harm fast fashion can cause. Alternatives can be looked into in the forms of sustainable sources of materials and business practices. Retailers can also contribute to the awareness of the public on the topic of better practices that contribute to the conservation of the environment.



Figure 6.1: A Retailer's invitation for consumers to recycle.

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6.2.2 Public Policy Makers (Government)

As some of the participants of the interviews mentioned, if there were more standards for recycling clothes, for example, these participants would feel more aware and encouraged to recycle and donate. One of the participants mentioned better access to recycling bins for clothes. This could also be considered by policy makers as something that can be done to help mitigate the damage caused by textile waste.

6.2.3 Consumers

Consumers should consider their duty to help preserve the environment by making better consumption and post-consumption choices. It can be recommended for consumers that, if within possibility, to consume products that are from sustainable sources and that are sold by companies who keep the environment in utmost regard. Consumers should also be aware of the importance of what they do with their textiles after they no longer use them. They can inform themselves more on the subject and also help to raise awareness among others. Consumers may also demand that environmentally friendly practices are implemented by businesses and the government.

6.3 Limitations

6.3.1 Research Limitations

This research faced several limitations. As fast fashion is a relatively new concept, there is a limited amount of scientific literature available on this topic. The need for further research became evident after an extensive search of peer-reviewed research papers. Lack of time was another important limitation as this research could only be conducted in the summer months of 2019. Finally, since this research only captures a moment in time, reports on changes and developments in consumption behavioural patterns and the relationship of this with the environment cannot be made, which results in the loss of important research data.

The present study aimed to gain an in-depth picture of the opinions of the subjects who were interviewed. It would be beneficial to conduct future studies to assess at a deeper level the current degree of knowledge, attitudes and concern for the environment. It would be beneficial to conduct these studies in other geographical regions, perhaps within Ireland or in other countries, and among other demographic segments. The attitudes and perceptions of consumers outside the groups studied and even potential groups studied should be considered, as sustainability moves towards targeting more mainstream markets. The position of mainstream consumers could be further specified by investigating systematic relationships between consumers' concerns and attitudes based on their specific knowledge. Identifying the sources of consumer knowledge and information acquisition would also be beneficial in directing educational campaigns.

6.3.2 Small Scale Nature of Primary Research

The primary research conducted for this study was of a small scale nature due to time and resource constraints. This may have inhibited the generalizability of the findings. Future studies may provide different findings considering larger scale primary research.

6.3.3 Limitations of Time/Money

Due to the lack of the necessary resources and time that would have been needed to conduct a larger scale research, the findings are limited to a small and specific population and geographical region. A much more in-depth study may have been achieved with more time and better resources.

6.3.4 Other Research Methods

Other research methods could be used to locate new or more findings. Quantitative and mixed research methods could be used to possibly obtain different perspectives or more generalised findings and conclusions regarding this topic.

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List of Abbreviations

CO ₂	Carbon Dioxide
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
ECD	Eco-Fashion Consumption Decisions
EFC	Environmentally Friendly Clothing
ERB	Environmentally Responsible Business
EU	European Union
FSC	Fashion Supply Chain
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
LCA	Life-Cycle Assessment
PAN	Pesticide Action Network
PRA	Product-Related Attributes
SRA	Store-Related Attributes
SRB	Socially Responsible Business
TA	Thematic Analysis
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Glossary

Environment: The natural world, as a whole or in a particular geographical area, especially as affected by human activity.

Fast fashion: Inexpensive clothing produced rapidly by mass-market retailers in response to the latest trends.

Greenwashing: Occurs when a company or organisation spends more time and money claiming to be 'green' through advertising and marketing than actually implementing business practices that minimise environmental impact.

Sustainability: Avoidance of the depletion of natural resources in order to maintain an ecological balance (from google).

Whitewashing: The glossing over or covering up of scandalous information through a biased presentation of facts.

Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form for Research Topic:


An Analysis of environmentally friendly practices in fashion retailers operating in Ireland: Perspectives from Consumers and Retailers

Consent to take part in research

- I, ~~XX~~, voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that participation involves answering some brief questions about my clothing consumption habits.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview, which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation and all other forms of publication of this research topic.
- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained until the exam board confirms the results of the dissertation.
- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years (for students) from the date of the exam board.
- I understand that under freedom of information legislation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant ~~XX~~ Date 10/Aug/2019

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study 

Date 10/Aug/2019

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information sheet

TITLE OF THE STUDY:

An Analysis of environmentally friendly practices in fashion retailers operating in Ireland: Perspectives from Consumers and Retailers

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

WHO I AM AND WHAT THIS STUDY IS ABOUT

My name is Daniel Emmen, current Master of Science student at National College of Ireland. I am conducting a study on the impact fast fashion on the environment and the behaviours of both consumers and retailers. The title of the research is as shown above.

WHAT WILL TAKING PART INVOLVE?

Taking part will involve answering six (6) questions regarding the topic of behaviours that have to do with the consumption of clothes. For retailers, the questions will be about how their company is contributing to the sustainability of the fashion industry. The location of the interview will be at the interviewee's convenience and should last no more than 30 minutes. Audio recording will be used during the interview.

WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO TAKE PART?

You have been chosen to take part because you are either: a consumer that fits into the millennial age range who lives in Ireland, or, because you are the owner/operator of a business that sells sustainable/ethically sourced and produced apparel.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART?

Participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse participation or to refuse any question and withdraw at any time without any consequence whatsoever.

WILL TAKING PART BE CONFIDENTIAL?

The information provided during the interview will remain confidential and will only be used for the purpose of this study. You can choose to remain anonymous if it is your preference or you have the options to be referred to by your first name only, or full name, and/or to be included within the acknowledgements of the publication. Non-anonymised data in the form of signed consent forms and audio recordings are collected and retained as part of the research process.

(Continues overleaf)

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet (Continued)

HOW WILL INFORMATION YOU PROVIDE BE RECORDED, STORED AND PROTECTED?

Signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained on computer, which can only be accessed by the researcher, until after my degree has been conferred. A transcript of interviews in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for a further two years after this. Under freedom of information legislation you are entitled to access the information you have provided at any time.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results of this study will be published in a dissertation with the title as shown above. Results may also be presented within other forms of publication such as journal articles, conferences and for teaching use.

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

Daniel Emmen, researcher
Email: x18165851@student.ncirl.ie

THANK YOU

Appendix D: Example of Handwritten Coding

Interview with "PJ"

Interviewer: Thank you for taking part in this interview, as a consumer the topic of the interview is on the impact of fast fashion on the environment. The questions that I'm going to ask you are mostly about consumer habits. So the first one I have for you is have you ever heard of fast fashion and what does this mean to you?

PJ: Fast fashion. I'm not sure what it means. It means something like different trends, different types of clothes, different trends, different everything like that.

DOUBT IN THE MEANING OF TERM "FAST FASHION"

Interviewer: Okay, so at the moment the term fast fashion means: a higher turnover of production and sales of clothing, pretty much in a few words that's what it means, so what it is, it's the manufacture, it's the sourcing of materials, manufacture and sales of items to be used as clothing in a matter of just a couple of weeks, where before it used to be the seasons of fashion, being the same as the seasons of the year, four seasons, now it is pretty much due to mainly one company that has spearheaded this trend which is Zara. They have developed their methods in a way that they can put out new seasons every fourteen days. So that speed is what has been termed fast fashion, that speed of putting out new clothes each time. Do you know about the impacts of fast fashion on the environment?

PJ: It's bad on the environment, as it uses a lot of things to do with the environment, like water and waste, it causes a lot of waste to the environment and so on...

CERTAINTY THAT IT HARMS THE ENVIRONMENT.

Interviewer: Well fast fashion can have many impacts, for example, the massive scale of cotton production is something that's very water intensive and at the same time requires a lot of harmful chemicals like pesticides and fertilizers that damage soil and also run off into bodies of water and pollute water. That's one harm. Another way that it damages the environment is that the waste that's produced ends up in landfills, so a lot of people, instead of finding out about ways of recycling and all that, what happens is they just throw the clothes away and they end up in landfills or they end up getting burned, which then, the fumes pollute the air. So the next question is do you buy clothes having in mind sustainability, price or both?

PJ: Well, price anyway, but I think both because I try to have clothes that last...

ATTENTION IS PAID TO PRICE FIRST, THEN TO SUSTAINABILITY/QUALITY.

Appendix E: Example of Handwritten Coding (Continued)

Interviewer: Okay, that's very good.

PJ: And I try to have clothes that I like, and being affordable is good, as well rather than going over my budget or... Just to have clothes that I need and not buy too much. ^{FOCUS ON AFFORDABILITY.}
^{AWARENESS OF AVOIDING OVER-CONSUMPTION.}

Interviewer: Do you wonder about the sourcing of the materials used to make the clothes you buy?

PJ: I'm afraid not. ^{NO THOUGHT PUT INTO MATERIAL SOURCING.}

Interviewer: You don't, okay, what do you do with your clothes when you no longer use them?

PJ: I give them to charity usually. ^{DISPOSAL IN ETHICAL MANNER.}

Interviewer: Okay

PJ: Or I pass them on to somebody else who wants them. ^{DISPOSAL IN ETHICAL MANNER.}

Interviewer: Do you think about what happens to your clothes after you discard them?

PJ: I don't, I know they go to landfills, which is terrible, but I'm hoping that when they're passed on to the next as steps of them being discarded and disposed of, that they're being recycled. ^{NO THOUGHT INTO AFTER CLOTHES DISPOSAL.}
^{A DESIRE OF RECYCLING.}

Interviewer: Okay.

PJ: But I don't think about it. Once they leave my hands, I move on. ^{NO THOUGHT PUT INTO WHERE CLOTHES WILL}

Interviewer: Okay, perfect, thank you very much for your time. ^{END UP}