Sustainability in Fast Fashion using Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives

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Abstract

Global warming is a time pressing issue that needs to be curbed and many countries are working towards reducing their carbon emissions because of the Paris Accord (UNCC, 2016). The fast fashion industry is the second largest and most evident source of greenhouse gas emission and pollution in the world (Bick, et al., 2018). Therefore, the extent of contributions made by these industries for social welfare will be assessed by considering their level of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Moreover, the claims made by the fast fashion industry leaders in the world will be assessed in terms of their authenticity. This research would be quantitative in nature, as 40 questionnaires would be administered to industry experts working for the fast fashion industry in Dublin. SPSS would be used to analyze the data trends and to understand whether these fast fashion companies are fulfilling their responsibilities or not. The findings can help to regulate the industry and reduce carbon emissions from the same. It can have managerial implications for fast fashion industry operating in Dublin, Ireland.

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Contents

1.0 Introduction

The world is moving towards sustainability because of the rise in global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer. The significance of this movement can be seen by the fact that 188 states and the EU are part of the Paris Accord (UNCC, 2016). This agreement aims to augment the global response to climate change. It urges all member states to maintain or reduce the rise in global temperature below 2 degree Celsius. Unanimously, these countries have decided to work towards addressing the consequences that stem from global change as well as to direct resources for this cause and develop technologies to deal with these problems (Bick, et al., 2018). Therefore, based on the terms of the accord many countries are forcing their industries to opt for a leaner method of production. So far countries like Germany and Canada have taken several initiatives to curb carbon emissions that stem from different industries (Perryer, 2019)

This is one of the many drivers for industries to move towards sustainable resources and methods of operations because they are being provoked by their respective governments. This matter is being handled urgently because global warming is a time-pressing situation (Joy et al., 2012). Increased global warming is the reason for the drastic climate change and calamities in many areas around the world. This is why industries are being urged to revamp their processes such that carbon foot print can be reduced or even made zero. One such industry that particularly needs to be regulated is the fast fashion industry. The fast fashion industry has been critiqued because of its unethical ways and operation methods. An example of this can be seen by the fact that garments worth $800 billion are produced every year around the world in order to emulate the demand for fast fashion, out of which 80% is disposed as fashion runs out (Perryer, 2019). To meet this accelerating demand, Fast Fashion Firms (FFF) have the tendency to cross a line in terms of the labor exploitation. Cheap labor from developing countries are hired and made to work for long

hours because of the constant and growing demand which contradicts labor laws. Moreover, the garments produced are quickly disposed or taken off racks as soon as trends change which is detrimental for the environment. The responsibility of such damage should however not only be borne by the producers as the consumers are equally responsible for this. The demand for the consumer and compulsive shopping habits are in fact the driving force for the creation of such fashion articles and their disposal as well (Li et al., 2014). That also seems to be the main problem with the industry as clothes are made for a limited period, they become disposable and end up in landfills. Moreover, in the case of fast fashion, the consumers should be held accountable as well because washing these articles and pieces releases synthetic fibres in the water which are also damaging for the marine life. A study revealed that these fibres were found from inside fishes and could be directly linked to the fast fashion industry thus revealing the long-term implications of this industry on the environment (Thompson, 2019).

According to McNeil and Moore (2015), these compulsive consumption and production habits are unhealthy as fashion disposal seems to be a looming threat and a contributor to water pollution (Eifler & Diekamp, 2013). This is also one of the reasons for holding both consumers and producers accountable for these habits. Suppliers in a quest to meet the on-going demand are likely to forgo their obligations to the environment by dumping wastewaters in the river. Moreover, basic ethics and human laws can also be violated s mentioned above. It is important for both parties to realize that resources are scarce and many countries in the world are facing a dearth therefore water should be carefully utilized and wastewater should be dumped through a proposal waste disposal system (Carrigan & McEachern, 2013). This is important because the industry is flourishing and growing each year more than the last. The pressure on the fast fashion industry can merely be seen by the fact that the consumption of fast fashion has increased by 40% per person over the past ten years in the European Union (Davis, 2020). Moreover, out of the all of the clothes produced, only one percent is 99% contributes to landfills.

This was also the case with the production of fast fashion articles in the USA during 2018 as 84% of them went into landfills (Schlossberg, 2020)It is also important to note that the people living in the United States of America consume more fast fashion clothing as compared to any other nation in the world. Based on this statistic, the Environmental Protection Agency (2017) proposed that if merely the consumption of textile in USA was recycled it would be the equivalent of taking 7.3

million cars and their emissions off the road. Similarly, the consumption rates for the United Kingdom are also substantially high. As of 2019, the clothes bought in the UK per minute were equivalent to six times the carbon emissions of the cars that are being driven around the world (EPA, 2017). Moreover predictions regarding the carbon emissions produced by every country reveal that if the United Kingdom does not curb its consumption of fast fashion or does not opt for more sustainable methods of production then it would be responsible for quarter of the carbon emission in the world by 2050 (Schlossberg, 2020).

Despite these statistics, fast fashion retailers argue that they are investing time, efforts and resources in order to fulfil their corporate social responsibility. One such example is that of Zara the largest FF retailer that agreed to use only sustainable fabric in the production during the future (Conlon, 2019). The company has vowed to use 100% sustainable fabric by the end of 2025 as the cotton, polyester and linen that will be used will be produced in an organic manner. Moreover, the brand also talked about the elimination of plastic bags with their purchases as they would opt for more eco-friendly solutions and build their business on a model that is long-standing (Conlon, 2019). Zara further went on to claim that even contemporarily, only 18% of the bags are made out of plastic as the company is working towards reducing the consumption of the same. However, this pledge is questionable because large companies often make these claims as marketing antics however these claims are not backed by any facts or concrete evidence. Moreover, it is important to understand that fast fashion retail brands like Zara would require huge capital, skills and investment in order to turn around their entire line of operation (Park, and Kim, 2016). Moreover, shifting a business to a completely different line of production and operation in merely fifteen years can be a challenging task. Especially since Zara has been operating for decades and is accustomed to its current production process.

Similarly, H&M claims that they have a conscious collection but has not provided a concrete basis for these claims which can make the stakeholders question their claims (Farmbrough, 2018). The only option that consumers have currently is to trust the word of H&M without any proof of the same therefore this too could be categorized as a marketing gimmick. This notion was supported by the US Consumer Protection Bureau which asked H&M to provide details regarding their CSR activities and how they actually resulting in decreased carbon emission (Farmbrough, 2018). According to a research by the Guardian, it would take H&M at least 12 years to only recycle

clothes as much as 1000 tonnes (Farmbrough, 2018). Thus, the efforts that these fast fashion retailers claim to make should be questioned and should be understood in-depth. It is important to verify the authenticity and value of the claims made by these retailers. Since the fast fashion industry is worth a billion dollars, the regulations on this industry should be imposed accordingly. Countries like Germany and Canada have introduced a number of regulations to ensure that the fast fashion retailers pay for the environmental degradation that is caused by them (Eifler & Diekamp, 2013). Since 2017, the fashion industries operating in Berlin have resorted to creating awareness regarding sustainability and opted for the same (Jung, 2014). The German Federal Ministry is also funding brands to improve the stance of the textile industry. So far, 332 brands in Germany have been certified by the Global Organic Textile Standards (Eifler & Diekamp, 2013). These metrics taken by Germany can be quantified upon analysis therefore the research aims to understand if the same can be done for the brands of the UK and US. The efforts of these leading fast fashion retailers will be identified and assessed in terms of their credibility in this research (Childs, et al., 2019).

Therefore, this research aims to ascertain the extent to which the existing fast fashion industry is embracing sustainability and whether it matches with the negative externalities they produce or not. In order to do this, trends and practices of leading fast fashion brands in the world will be critiqued and facts will be assessed to verify their claims (Carrigan & McEachern, 2013). Since global warming is a time pressing issue, this research needs to be done currently in order to mitigate the production of greenhouse gases from the production of textile industries from around the world (Chang and Jai, 2015).

1.1 Rational for Research

The fast fashion industry is the second largest contributor of pollution in the world followed by the oil and gas industries (Farmbrough, 2018). Given the looming threat of global warming, it is important to single out the industries that are actively contributing towards environmental degradation. By singling out the industries and measuring their carbon foot print, they can be held accountable and be taxed or regulated such that greenhouse gas emissions can be reduced (Jung, 2014). The first step towards creating a more sustainable environment is to identify causes of greenhouse gases and then draft plans in detail in order to mitigate the same. Therefore, the fast

fashion industry has been identified. It causes water pollution primarily because untreated toxic waste water from the production of textiles is directly dumped in the river (Carrigan & McEachern, 2013). These waste waters contain arsenic material that can endanger life of sea animals because of contamination. Moreover, the cotton that is required by the fast fashion industry uses fertilizers that pollutes run off waters. In fact, the water consumption for this industry is so high that individuals in rural areas of developing countries lack access to clean water (Pavlovich, et al., 2020). According to The Guardian, "5% of the daily needs in water of the entire population of India would be covered by the water used to grow cotton in the country. 100 million people in India do not have access to drinking water" (Leahy, 2015). Despite these statistics the fact that the fast fashion industry is worth a billion dollars cannot be denied. Moreover, despite the fact that fast fashion industrialists as the second largest contributors of pollution in the world, these market leaders in the industry like Inditex, Primark and H&M claim that they have worked towards sustainability and are undergoing change (Farmbrough, 2018). Therefore, it is important to determine whether the industry is actually moving towards sustainability or not. Moreover, the authenticity of these claims needs to be verified so that timely action can be taken. Global warming is a time pressing issue that needs to be addressed urgently given it consequences on humans and the environment around the globe (Księżak, 2017). Therefore, this research aims to identify and assess the CSR initiatives and sustainability measures taken by fast fashion retailers in Dublin, Ireland. It would help understand whether the negative externalities of such production are being taken into account by the fast fashion industry and whether they are giving back to society or not.

1.2 Research Questions

- What is the extent to which fast fashion industry in Ireland is embracing/considering CSR sustainability initiatives?
- What CSR measures best define sustainable fashion in the Irish Fast Fashion Industry?

1.3 Research Objectives

- To investigate the extent to which fast fashion industry in Ireland adopts CSR sustainability initiatives
- To assess CSR measures that best define sustainable fashion in the Irish Fast Fashion Industry

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter of the research at hand begins to explain the significance and importance of the fast fashion industry because of the looming threat from global warming and mentions in detail the rationale for research.

The second chapter, discusses in detail the impact of the fast fashion industry on the environment as well as the implications of the same. It discusses in detail the importance of the environment and the urgency with which the issue should be addressed. It summarizes the findings from several credible journal articles whilst shedding light on how the fast fashion industry around the world is currently working towards incorporating sustainability.

The third chapter mentions the methodology through which the research will be conducted. Based on the theory of positivism, a quantitative research would be done. Data would be collected by administering questionnaires to 40 individuals working for the fast fashion industry in Dublin, Ireland. Judgement sampling would be done and data would then be statistically analysed.

The fourth chapter will present the findings from the data that was collected.

The fifth chapter would investigate in detail the reasons for the findings and would map the same with the literature in order to make relevant connections and find implications for the fast fashion industry in Ireland.

The sixth and final chapter would present summarize the findings and provide recommendations to the fast fashion retailers operating in Ireland with regards to incorporating sustainability.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Impact of Fast Fashion on the Environment

According to Garcia-Torres et al (2017), the fast fashion industry makes clothes that are relatively more affordable however this involves a high environmental cost. In fact, it is important to note that fast fashion industry contributes 10% to all the carbon emission produced in the entire world. The production of articles in this industry requires scarce resources like water. Moreover, the demand and trends are constantly changing based on seasons summer, spring, autumn and winter which means water consumption and pollution is at an all-time high (Chang and Jai, 2015). Balch

(2013) further mentions that 85% of all textile produced by the fast fashion industry goes to waste every year. As soon as the stock is updated according to seasons, the previous stock is often burnt by fast fashion giants which contributes substantially to the emission of greenhouse gases and ends up being a waste of key energy resources like water, fuel and coal which is used for power generation (Bick, et al., 2018).

In fact, a qualitative study conducted by Turkera and Altuntsab (2014) analyzed the supply chain management in the fast fashion industry by assessing corporate reports for 9 fast fashion retailers. The results revealed that the companies focused on compliance and codes of conduct, however, they were struggling to meet their sustainability criteria. This view was supported by Bick et al (2018) that conducted a study to determine the negative externalities that arise from the fast fashion industry. The study sheds light on how fast fashion offers consumers with variety but the benefits of these operations outweigh the cons. The environmental burden from these transactions is immense because workers located near these factories or working for these factories would be a subject to health hazards. Moreover, during the production process huge quantities of water would be required and would be wasted because of the constant production in the industry. Another substantial short-coming of the fashion industry highlighted by Bick et al (2018), is that it would eventually leads to wastage and landfills because as the fashion runs out, individuals are unlikely to consume the articles of clothing. Moreover, the study highlighted that the production often takes place in low-income countries therefore the environmental damage in these countries is likely to be substantial because of fast fashion industries. Since these countries are already developing, they lack the resources to create proper waste disposal systems, incorporate lean management or even follow the standard protocols and occupational hazards (Bick et al,. 2018). These studies shed light on the apparent consequences from fast fashion production. Based on literature, these industries should be regulated and held accountable for their contribution towards carbon emissions and the rise of negative externalities. In order to do so, it is important to assess the existing fast fashion industry practices to assess whether sustainability is contemporarily being taken into account or not.

2.2 Existing Fast Fashion Industry CSR Practices around the Globe

Joy et al (2012), mentions how fast fashion retailers are gradually shifting towards a more sustainable approach of production in order to combat the environmental concerns. Zara, one of

the prime fast fashion retailers had pledged to make its collection from 100% sustainable fabric up until 2025. Moreover, the company also claims that 80% of the energy used for fast fashion production by Zara would be renewable by 2023 (Conlon, 2019). The parent brand of Zara, Inditex has also seriously considered their corporate social responsibility and has collected 34,000 tonnes of used stock and recycled it since 2015 (Conlon, 2019). Inditex is providing a service to its customers that pick-up clothes from their homes in Spain, Bejing and Shanghai that are later recycled in order to prevent wastage and landfills. A study conducted by Mejias et al (2015) highlights how Inditex has partnered with charities like Red Cross and MIT and is working on ways through which fibre can be recycled for fast fashion production. The study reveals that Inditex is working towards a sustainable approach but it is also what the consumers are likely to demand mostly in the next 5-10 years which means that profit maximization is also one of the underlying motivators for fast fashion producers to become sustainable (Mejías, et al., 2015).

Similarly, H&M another fast fashion retailer in their sustainability report of 2018 claims that it would use only recycled material by the end of 2030 (Samaha, 2018). Primark is an UK based fast fashion brand has joined the sustainability clothing action plan which would focus on using waste material for the production of clothes so that the depleting of resources could be minimized (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014). Primark has vowed to train 160,0000 cotton farmers to grow cotton through sustainable means which would then be used as a raw material by the company. By using sustainable cotton, the company would be able to improve its entire supply chain process. Moreover, women farmers would also be trained and empowered through this sustainability program (Conlon, 2019). Now the claims made by Primark can be assessed because the company provides statistics, details and a complete plan through which it intends on implementing the sustainability program. That is not the case for the rest of the big players in the fast fashion industry (Księżak, 2017).

Gowerk (2011), argues that these claims are vague and simply to trick customers into thinking that brands are philanthropic and working towards fulfilling their corporate social responsibility. However, that is not the case as companies like H&M do have a conscious collection but no statistics or details are provided regarding how the collection is sustainable or even created for that matter. Consumers merely have to trust H&M with regard to their claims because these are not substantiated with facts and could simply be a marketing ploy. In this regard, the US Consumer

Protection Bureau also called out H&M for providing little or no details regarding how their clothing is producing less carbon emissions (Farmbrough, 2018). Similarly, Inditex and by extension Zara has claimed to use only cotton and polyester that is organic and more sustainable. The company provides no statistics or implementation plans and only 'claims' to make these efforts (Conlon, 2019).

Childs et al (2019) suggests that companies' that are looking to become more sustainable should educate their customers and provide them with detail regarding their sustainability program and how it is being implemented. A sneaker brand called 'Allbirds' provides its consumers with sourcing information for its raw materials like wool and fibres in order to prove that the resources used in the production process are sustainable. Moreover, the carbon foot print of each shoe is also provided by the fashion retailer thus making the system transparent and believable (Pavlovich, et al., 2020). Therefore, brands like H&M and Zara should also be more transparent while incorporating CSR and with their sustainability targets so that accountability can increase. Given the increase competition in the fast fashion industry, sustainability targets can be marketing ploys or even efforts by brands simply to deceive the customers. Therefore, in order to ensure the adverse impact on the environment is mitigated, it is important to have insight and details regarding the plans fashion retailers claim to implement (Farmbrough, 2018).

According to Kopia (2018) just like firms are financially audited by third party evaluators, sustainability steps or campaigns should also be audited so that their extent can be measured and assessed. This model can be adopted in the fast fashion industry as well. Keeping a check and balance is important because often the sustainability steps taken by an organization do not equate with the environmental damage that happens through their production processes. In order to balance the negative externalities that arise from the fast fashion industry, a third party and unbiased audit needs to be done (Bick, et al., 2018). A statistic revealed by the Guardian was that it would take H&M around 12 years merely to recycle 1000 tonnes of clothing because it requires state of the art technology and a huge amount of money (Farmbrough, 2018). Based on these predictions by analyst it may be difficult for fast fashion retailers to actually implement the goals that they have set for ensuring sustainability. Therefore in order to regulate these industries and fashion giants, it is important that routine external checks are being conducted and the process is

transparent so that the stakeholders are aware of how and where their investments or resources are being utilized (Kopia, 2018).

2.3 Fast Fashion Industry CSR Practices in Ireland

According to the Irish Times (2019), consumers in Ireland are starting to question the practices of the fast fashion industry in the region. Many environmental campaigners are urging brands in Ireland to move towards 'Blue Planet Moment'. The article mentions how reducing the number of clothes produced every year is the key to reducing environmental degradation and landfills. Moreover, it stresses on how the industry has excessive water consumption which would in the long run affect the availability of clean drinking water for the Irish (Thompson, 2019). Moreover, it is estimated that £443 billion is wasted every year on articles of clothing that are not even worn and simply discarded by the fast fashion industry. Carrie Ann Morran, national coordinator for Fashion Revolution in Ireland mentions how 70% of material used in Irish industries is made from synthetic materials and therefore is difficult to recycle (Mejías, et al., 2015).

These statistics reveal the urgent need to curb or hold the fast fashion industry accountable because if these trends continue, then the fast fashion industry would contribute 80% to the world's carbon emission by 2025 (Bick, et al., 2018). In the light of these events, companies operating in Ireland like Patagonia are encouraging customers to buy products that have a greater life and aren't disposable forms of fashion. Patagonia also now sells bags and uses mannequins that are organic and handmade instead of using plastic (Thompson, 2019). Moreover, Dorothy Maxwell, sustainability advisor for the Rediscovery centre in Dublin mentions how the concept of pre-loved fashion and pre-owned fashion needs to be introduced wherein individuals repeat the articles purchased a while ago or also sell them to increase the use and worth of a product. H&M operating in Ireland has taken these considerations into account and has started recollecting items that it sold since 2013 to recycle and resell (Thompson, 2019).

3.0 Methodology

The current research project intends to extend the research on sustainable initiatives taken by the market leaders of the fast fashion industry in Ireland in order to meet Corporate Social Responsibility. Knowing that fast fashion industry generates revenue from unsustainable consumer buying behaviour of compulsive shopping habits and discouraging the re-use of previous

clothing articles, the companies are often questioned many times for the carbon footprint they leave in the world. The study, therefore, investigates the measures that companies associated with fast fashion retail industry adopt to be more socially responsible. Consistent with the aim of the study, this chapter of the dissertation discusses the methodological approach used to examine and search for alternate solutions of the aforementioned research problems. Besides, the chapter outlines the rationale for choosing the selected approach and justifies it in accordance with its preferred applicability.

Along with the methodological research approach, the chapter also covers a number of sections which relates to its adjoining research philosophy, and design of the study. Predetermining and outlining research philosophy, approach, and design helps the study to address the research problem and underlying research questions in a correct manner . Similarly, to ensure clarity on the methodological approach, the chapter also identifies relevant data sources, a sample size of the study and techniques to analyse the collected data.

3.1. Research Approach

According to the leading thought of school in the domain of research strategy, Saunders et al. (2007) have always pioneered and influenced the plans to carry out the action plan with their research onion. The research onion depicts the elements underlying the choice of data collection techniques. The first step in research onion is outlining an applied research approach. The research approach is chosen with respect to the use of theory motivating the researcher's methodology. For example, in the case of the current study, the selected research approach is quantitative research based on the positivist philosophy. The selection of positivist research philosophy is deemed appropriate as it believes in single reality and is objective in nature, relying on empirical evidence to test the hypotheses (Creswell, 2013) Moreover, to come to a conclusion, the positivist philosophy undertakes credible facts and observable data with an intention to fill the knowledge gap. In the context of the current study, the positivist philosophy aims to fill the research gap by identifying initiatives taken by large companies in the fast fashion retail industry to be more socially responsible.

Following the positivist approach, the researcher takes into account quantifiable observations that lend the study statistical analysis based on numerical data; thereby adopting a quantitative approach which goes hand in hand with a positivist philosophical stance of research. Although

quantitative research approach is regarded as highly useful and considered valuable as it involves complex use of statistics and analysis, however, it does not address the research problem in-depth and therefore lacks analysis (Cohen et al., 2013). For this reason, many researchers and practitioners consider using a qualitative research approach based on interpretivist philosophical stance. The advantage of using qualitative research comes from its descriptive and narrative nature which enables the researcher for in-depth and rich data analysis.

Regardless of the benefits obtained from using qualitative research methods, the most preferred research approach is based on quantitative methods to investigate sustainable initiative of companies in fast fashion retail since qualitative methods are time-consuming and due to the extensive data, it is hard to generalise the results of qualitative analysis (Saunders et al., 2009). Whereas, quantitative research approach enables precision and reliable measurement through controlled research design and sample. Additionally, the quantitative research approach is replicable, enabling sophisticated analysis which adds value to the current research work in fast fashion retail industry (Hughes, 2006).

3.2. Research Design

The research design of a study plays a vital role in its overall strategy. Bryman and Bell (2015) referred to research design as a research plan or procedure through which the objectives and aim of the study are achieved including the appropriate data collection techniques, data sources and analysis techniques can be inferred. Subsequently, the research design is significant to gather reliable and credible data (Saunders et al., 2009). Similarly, there are a number of different forms of research designs which have been introduced by philosophers. Conversely to make the selection of appropriate research design easier different research designs have been classified according to the selected research approach. For example, research designs like descriptive, correlational, experimental are characterised under the quantitative research approach. At the same time, Meta-analytic, discourse content analysis and review based studies are often classified under qualitative research methods.

Considering the current study adopts a quantitative research approach, the most appropriate research design is descriptive. A descriptive research design is helpful for data collection and measurement purposes in survey strategies (Yin, 2013). It includes observing and describing the data under consideration without influencing it and is generally considered as a predecessor to

quantitative analysis (Shuttleworth, 2008). When it comes to the current study, the descriptive design is adopted to allow data collection through surveys, including questionnaires. Majority of the previous studies relating to the domain of sustainability and fast fashion retail industry has used descriptive survey strategy (Hill and Lee, 2015; Chang and Jai, 2015; Jang et al., 2012) thus showing its appropriateness within the same field.

Surveys, in this case, are referred to as a significant form of descriptive research design. They are also less time consuming as discussed by De Vaus (2013) and therefore go a long way to generate extensive data that is suitable for statistical analysis. As per the current study, survey strategy is beneficial to enable a large set of data collection through different companies enabling quantitative analysis through descriptive statistics. Furthermore, in this case, the survey strategy allows the researcher to undertake examples of brands to determine new ways which can help the fast fashion retail industry be more sustainable and environmentally friendly.

3.3. Data Sources

Saunders et al., (2009) research onion have divided data sources into two forms; primary and secondary. A secondary data source refers to information available in or collected from official regulatory databases, bulletins, research articles, organisational records, etc. On the other hand, a primary data source is considered as a first-hand data source from where the researcher directly comes into contact with the respondents for data collection purposes (Hair, 2015). Therefore, information from primary sources is regarded as original materials which include direct evidence or testimony from the subject's point of view while evaluating information in its original form (Bryman, 2015).

As for the current study, it relies on primary data source whereby the data collection includes direct contact with the respondents (i.e., individuals working in the fast fashion retail industry, irrespective of their link to a specific organisation). As for this research, primary data is suitable since it offers greater control to the researcher over the data collected. Furthermore, for quantitative research, secondary data regarding the constructs of the research (such as different kinds of CSR initiatives and the extent of their usage) is hardly available, especially on the underlying fast fashion retail industry.

According to Saunders et al., (2009) Primary data, accompanied by the descriptive research, can be collected through multiple methods such as interviews, questionnaires, experiments and other techniques. In the present study, for the collection of statistical data and analysis, the primary data is gathered using questionnaires.

3.4. Research Instrument

As discussed previously, the primary data is collected through a questionnaire survey. Considering that surveys are effective when collecting data from a large number of people and provide flexibility to the researcher to use information in a descriptive and explanatory form, the most suitable research instrument is questionnaire survey for the current study. Surveys are suggested to be a suitable method to measure a phenomenon or a problem relating to different behaviours in the industry (Fowler, 2013). Besides, surveys are also beneficial to the researcher as they are easy to administer and control while giving statistical results in a timely manner.

As for the current study, the research instrument of the survey questionnaire is used online due to the prevailing conditions of COVID-19. It has further helped the data collection to be cost-effective and safe. Keeping the research objectives in mind, the survey encompasses three sections:

1. Section 1 measures the demographics of the respondents, which include age, gender and experience of the participants.
2. Section 2 determines the extent to which the fast fashion industry is considering/embracing CSR and sustainability initiatives.
3. Section 3 assesses the CSR measures that best define sustainable fashion.

This instrument helped the researcher to measure the data and address the research problem of the study.

3.5. Sample Size and Strategy

Sampling is a significant step in the overall data collection process and evaluation technique. Due to the inaccessibility of large size of the population, along with financial and time constraints, it is important for researchers to develop an appropriate sampling strategy which adds value to the data collection and helps to gather relevant information from the representative of the population (Creswell, 2013). Robinson (2014) explains that sampling strategy is useful in selecting the participants from a large population in order to generalise the collected data. Thus, through a

sampling strategy, the researcher can choose an appropriate subgroup and then ensure that it is the closest reflection of the population. Sampling strategy in this manner is held a significant position in the quantitative research.

Generally speaking, the sampling strategies are categorized under probability and non-probability sampling. Where techniques of probability sampling include simple sampling, stratified and systematic sampling etc., these methods allow random sampling of the population group by allocating equal probability to each member for getting selected (Marshall, 1996). While on the other hand non-probability sampling requires researchers' own judgment, including quota sampling, convenience sampling, purposive sampling, etc., (Lee and Liangs, 2008). Here the researcher uses a convenience sampling strategy because of its ease and very few rules governing the data collection. According to Bornstein, Jager and Putnick (2013), convenience sampling is effective in gathering data that may, otherwise, would not have been collected under the requirements of more formal access to the population. More specifically, the study relies on personnel associated with the fast fashion industry (based on their knowledge of sustainability measures) in the region for data collection. The researcher targets 40 individuals. In addition to convenience, judgement (purposive) sampling is also used because particular types of respondent are required to assess the level of sustainability in the fast fashion industry (Weber et al., 1988). Although such sampling lacks equal representation, it ensures accessibility and timely data collection.

3.6. Data Analysis

Data analysis is one of the most important parts of a research study that helps a researcher to present the findings of the study. This section relies on the selected approach and design of a study. For instance, in quantitative research, the focus of data analysis techniques is towards numerical assessment and statistical evidence. On the other hand, a qualitative methodology leads to an in-depth but narrative analysis of a problem (Creswell, 2013). The current research study considers a quantitative methodology; therefore, it is based on certain descriptive statistical tools.

The study first performs frequency analysis, which measures the frequency and percentages of the given responses. It is followed by descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation and other tools) to the CSR measures that best define sustainable fashion. The study also establishes relationships

between the given constructs of sustainable fashion and fast fashion industry's current sustainability performance using non-parametric testing.

3.7. Ethical Consideration

It is important for researchers to ensure compliance with ethical principles of research. Specifically, in primary research, where human participants are involved, the researcher needs to consider the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, right to withdraw, right to information, and confidentiality of information (Resnik, 2015). This study, as mentioned in the questionnaire, takes fee consent from the respondents and provides them with a right to withdraw at any time during or after the survey. Moreover, the researcher guarantees the privacy and safety of information. All information is kept in a password-protected system. Moreover, the researcher considers the principles of honesty, clarity, objectivity and truthfulness.

3.8. Methodological Validation and Limitation

It is important in research to ensure validity, specifically of the applied research methodology. It reflects the accuracy of the methods with respect to data measurement and analysis. In this case, the selected methodology is valid since it is based on the given problem and the underlying philosophy. Moreover, measurement and results are in accordance with the previous literature, providing evidence of a valid methodology. However, there are certain limitations, such as detail and in-depth analysis, which could have been possible via a qualitative method of analysis. Moreover, the lack of inferential statistics also serves as a limitation for the results of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The current chapter of the study exhibits the results of statistical analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire survey distributed among 40 individuals who are related to the fast fashion industry (i.e., employees working a fast-fashion company or industry experts). The chapter, therefore, covers responses of the participants measured through descriptive and frequency analysis.

4.1. Frequency Analysis

Frequency Analysis helps to determine the range within which the responses lie while using corrective measures to identify outliers and noise disturbance being generated by the respondents'

answers. Thus, the study uses the software of SPSS to perform frequency analysis on the demographic factors of the 40 participants, along with the other variables of the study.

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	28	70.0	70.0	70.0
	Female	12	30.0	30.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 1 – Demographic Variables

Table 1 exhibits the first demographic factor of gender taken into account. It can be observed that out of 40 respondent's majority were male accounting for 70% of the overall proportion, while only 30% were female (see figure below)
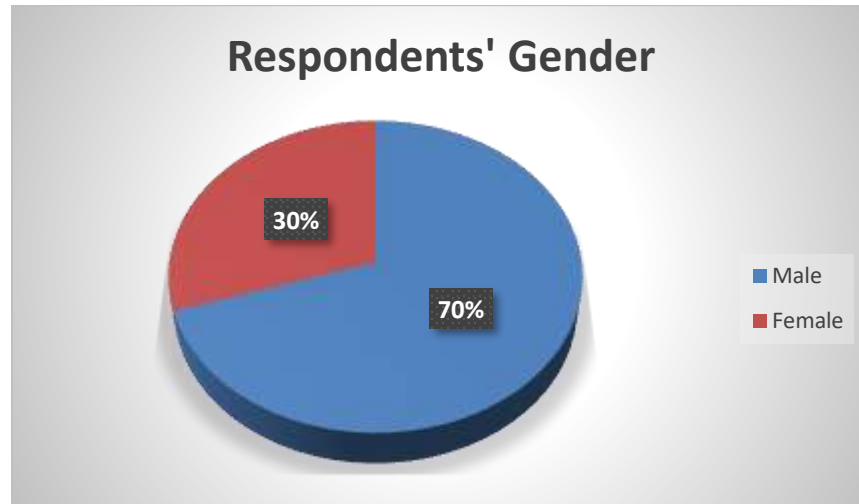
Age		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-27 years	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
	28-37 years	16	40.0	40.0	60.0
	38-47 years	10	25.0	25.0	85.0
	48-57 years	4	10.0	10.0	95.0
	58 years and above	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 – Demographic Variables

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents have ages between 28 to 37-year-olds equalling to about 40% of the total 40 participants, followed by the proportion of 25% who lie within the age bracket of 38 to 47 years.

Age
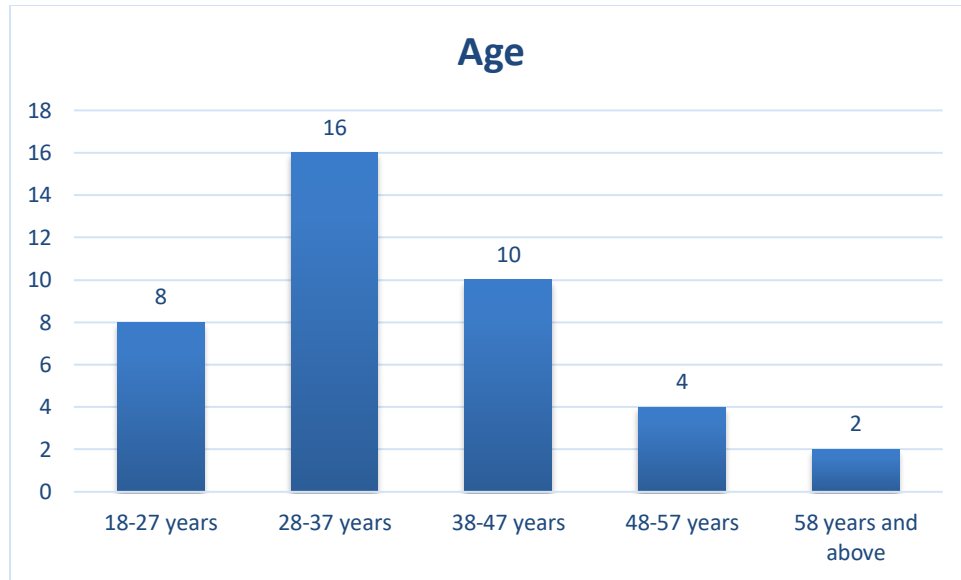
Only 10% are those who have ages ranging from 48 years to 57, while only 5% of the participants are 58 years and above.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Experience					
Valid	Less than 1 year	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
	1-5 years	18	45.0	45.0	60.0
	6-10 years	10	25.0	25.0	85.0
	Greater than 10 years	6	15.0	15.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 – Demographic Variables

Table 3 demonstrates that the majority of the participants have 1 to 5 years of experience in the fast fashion industry, while 25% of them possess a 6 to 10 years' experience. Only 15% of the respondents account for individuals with less than 1-year experience of greater than 10 years.
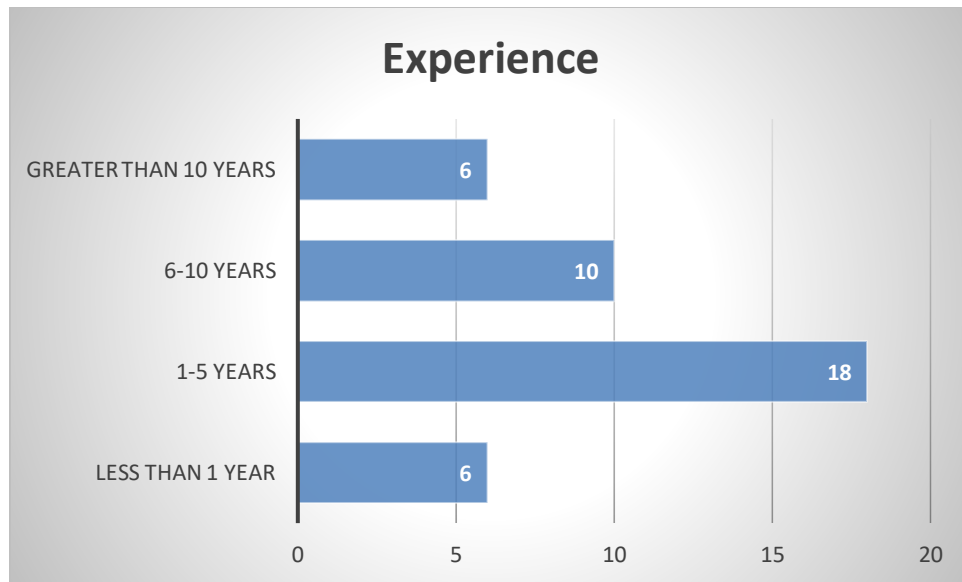
In order to investigate the extent to which fast fashion industry in Ireland is embracing CSR sustainability initiative, the respondents were asked whether they are aware or concerned regarding the pollution/wastage on the environment. The results of this notion are demonstrated in Table 4.

To what extent you are concerned regarding the pollution/wastage/environment?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not concerned	2	5.0	5.0	5.0
	To a limited extent	8	20.0	20.0	25.0
	To a certain extent	14	35.0	35.0	60.0
	To a large extent	16	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 – Concern

Evidently, the results exhibit that 40% of the individuals are concerned to a larger extent, followed by 3% of them who express that they are concerned to a certain extent. Individuals that are not concerned belong to the minority group of 5% participants while 20% of them are concerned to a limited extent. The results, therefore, imply that majority of them are well aware and concerned about the impact that fast fashion industry has on the environment.

To what extent do you support sustainable fashion?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	To a limited extent	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
	To a certain extent	16	40.0	40.0	60.0
	To a large extent	16	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 5 – Supporting Sustainable Fashion

Furthermore, the questionnaire also included questions regarding the support provided to sustainable fashion. To this notion, 16 individuals showed that they support sustainable fashion to a large extent. In contrast, another group of 16 showed that they do support sustainable fashion but to a certain extent (see Table 5). Only 8 out of 40 respondents were those who support sustainable fashion in a limited manner.

Moving on, in order to investigate whether the individuals as a combined society believe in sustainable fashion; the questionnaire asked a similar question to the previous one but concerning Irish society.

Do you believe that Irish society supports sustainable fashion?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Neutral	8	20.0	20.0	30.0
	Agree	20	50.0	50.0	80.0
	Strongly Agree	8	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 6 – Irish Society Supporting Sustainable Fashion

The results of the question are structured in Table 6. The reactions of the respondents resulted in 50% agreeing to the notion, and 20% strongly agreeing to Irish Society supporting sustainable fashion. Whereas, only 10% disagreed to the belief, of supporting sustainable fashion within Irish society; however, 20% of them indicated their neutral stance. The results of this question indicate that majority of the people from Irish society are positive about supporting sustainable fashion trends.

Do you believe that the fast fashion industry lacks sufficient recycling, contributing to waste?		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
	Disagree	6	15.0	15.0	17.5
	Neutral	7	17.5	17.5	35.0
	Agree	22	55.0	55.0	90.0
	Strongly Agree	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 – Fast Fashion Lacks Recycling

Moreover, upon asking the participants whether they believe that the fast fashion industry lacks sufficient recycling, which contributes to waste, the majority of the participants responded positively. The 55% of respondents agreeing and 10% of them strong agreeing to the statement exhibits that people working for fast fashion companies or working in fast fashion companies have considerable awareness regarding the negative impact it leaves on the environment. However, even though comparatively low; but there are a group of individuals who strongly disagree and disagree to the aforementioned statement, equating to 15% and 2.5% of the sample size. Finally, 17.5% of the respondents have a neutral stance about the notion.

Finally, the last question asked to measure the awareness of the impacts of the fast fashion industry, related to the lack of compliance towards industry regulations and standards related to sustainability. The following table demonstrates how respondents reacted to this statement.

Is there a lack of compliance towards industry regulations and standards related to sustainability?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Neutral	6	15.0	15.0	35.0
	Agree	25	62.5	62.5	97.5
	Strongly Agree	1	2.5	2.5	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Table 8 – Fast Fashion Lacks Recycling

It can be observed that a total of 65% of the respondents agree that indeed fast fashion industry lacks compliance; however, only 20% of them disagree to indicate that this is not the case. Whereas, 15% of them are neutral about the notion of lacking compliance towards industry regulations and sustainable standards.

4.2. Descriptive Statistics

Moving ahead, the study also performs descriptive analysis using SPSS. It helps to indicate the relationship between two categorical variables. For example, Table 9 analyses, the views of respondents related to the extent to which Fast Fashion considers/embraces CSR activities within their operations with respect to their gender. Accordingly, the table illustrates that there are no differing views of the respondents relating to their gender. For instance, there are a majority of the females who agree that there is a lack of compliance towards industry regulation and standards

relating to sustainability while also showing a lot of concern towards pollution and environment management. Similarly, the male group of respondents exhibit a similar trend.

| | | Gender | | |
| | | Male | Female | Other |
		Count	Count	Count
To what extent you are concerned regarding the pollution/wastage/environment?	Not concerned	0	2	0
	To a limited extent	4	4	0
	To a certain extent	8	6	0
	To a large extent	16	0	0
To what extent do you support sustainable fashion?	Not concerned	0	0	0
	To a limited extent	2	6	0
	To a certain extent	10	6	0
	To a large extent	16	0	0
Do you believe that Irish society supports sustainable fashion?	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	2	0
	Neutral	4	4	0
	Agree	16	4	0
	Strongly Agree	6	2	0
Do you believe that the fast fashion industry lacks sufficient recycling, contributing to waste?	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0
	Disagree	2	4	0
	Neutral	5	2	0
	Agree	17	5	0
	Strongly Agree	3	1	0
Is there a lack of compliance towards industry regulations and standards related to sustainability?	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0
	Disagree	5	3	0
	Neutral	3	3	0
	Agree	20	5	0
	Strongly Agree	0	1	0

Table 9 – Descriptive Analysis concerning Gender

Correspondingly, a similar analysis is performed with respect to Age and Experience. It helps to determine that if not gender, whether the differing views of respondents can be segmented by their age range or the years of experience, they have gained over time.

When it comes to age, Table 10 exhibits that majorly people from the age brackets of 28 to 37, 38 to 47 and 48 to 57 are more concerned about pollution, waste management and environment and these are same people who show support to a large or certain extent for sustainable fashion. While individuals from the age range of 18 to 27 are least concerned about it and do not exhibit as much support for sustainable fashion as the group of adult respondents do. For example, if observed the question whereby the sample size is asked to what extent they are concerned regarding pollution

and waste, 18-27 years have shown that they are not at all concerned. Comparing this to 28 to 37, and 38 to 47, who exhibit that they are greatly concerned about it.

		Age				
		18-27 years	28-37 years	38-47 years	48-57 years	58 years and above
		Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
To what extent you are concerned regarding pollution/wastage/environment?	Not concerned	2	0	0	0	0
	To a limited extent	4	2	2	0	0
	To a certain extent	2	8	2	0	2
	To a large extent	0	6	6	4	0
To what extent do you support sustainable fashion?	Not concerned	0	0	0	0	0
	To a limited extent	5	2	1	0	0
	To a certain extent	3	7	4	0	2
	To a large extent	0	7	5	4	0
Do you believe that Irish society supports sustainable fashion?	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	2	0	0	0
	Neutral	4	2	2	0	0
	Agree	0	12	2	4	2
	Strongly Agree	2	0	6	0	0
Do you believe that the fast fashion industry lacks sufficient recycling, contributing to waste?	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	3	0	0	0
	Neutral	2	3	2	0	0
	Agree	1	10	5	4	2
	Strongly Agree	1	0	3	0	0
Is there a lack of compliance towards industry regulations and standards related to sustainability?	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	4	3	1	0	0
	Neutral	2	2	1	1	0
	Agree	1	11	8	3	2
	Strongly Agree	1	0	0	0	0

Table 10 – Descriptive Analysis with Respect to Age

Furthermore, this trend is also observed in the later questions showing that as the respondents' age increases, they show more support towards sustainable and firmly disregards the current operations of the fast fashion industry which lack compliance and sufficient recycling activities. As compared to younger respondents from age 18 to 27-year-olds; who are not as much aware of the consequences of the fast fashion industry on the environment.

As far as experience is concerned, Table 11 shows that individuals who have more experience than 1 year are said to be more aware of the impact fast fashion industry has on the sustainability of the society, along with more concern towards environment and greater support for sustainable fashion trends. However, comparing this to an individual with experience of less than a year shows

contrasting views, whereby they are not as much concerned about pollution or environment, fashion trends have their limited support, and they do not believe that fast fashion industry is contributing to waste.

		Experience			
		Less than 1 year	1-5 years	6-10 years	Greater than 10 years
		Count	Count	Count	Count
To what extent you are concerned regarding pollution/wastage/environment?	Not concerned	2	0	0	0
	To a limited extent	4	4	0	0
	To a certain extent	0	6	6	2
	To a large extent	0	8	4	4
To what extent do you support sustainable fashion?	Not concerned	0	0	0	0
	To a limited extent	5	2	1	0
	To a certain extent	1	7	6	2
	To a large extent	0	9	3	4
Do you believe that Irish society supports sustainable fashion?	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	0	2	0
	Neutral	4	2	2	0
	Agree	0	10	4	6
	Strongly Agree	0	6	2	0
Do you believe that the fast fashion industry lacks sufficient recycling, contributing to waste?	Strongly Disagree	1	0	0	0
	Disagree	2	1	3	0
	Neutral	2	3	2	0
	Agree	1	11	4	6
	Strongly Agree	0	3	1	0
Is there a lack of compliance towards industry regulations and standards related to sustainability?	Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
	Disagree	3	2	3	0
	Neutral	2	1	2	1
	Agree	1	14	5	5
	Strongly Agree	0	1	0	0

Table 11 – Descriptive Analysis concerning Experience

Results, therefore, infer that the differing views exist due to the demographic factor of age and experience, whereby adults working in the same industry might have considerable more experience within the fast fashion industry and thus are more aware of the inside operations which harm the environment. However, the differing views concerning sustainability are not gender-specific.

## 4.3. Descriptive Analysis - CSR Initiatives defining Sustainable Fashion

Finally, Descriptive Analysis is performed using SPSS to evaluate which of the CSR methods according to the fast fashion industry experts define sustainable fashion practices. The descriptive analysis subsequently is useful in covering the measure of central tendency, mean median and mode while also showing the variations within the average through standard deviation. In order to assess which methods, do Irish Industry experts support more, the questionnaire included a list of CSR methods from Used Recycled Material to using Organic Material which the respondents had to rank from a scale of 1 to 5. The results of the responses are shown in the descriptive table below.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Use of Recycled Materials	40	2.00	5.00	4.1000	0.77790
High durability/Quality	40	2.00	5.00	3.8750	0.93883
Fair and ethical labour/trade practice	40	2.00	5.00	3.8500	0.86380
Pollution free production	40	3.00	5.00	4.4000	0.59052
No chemicals used	40	3.00	5.00	4.3250	0.52563
Sustainable packaging	40	3.00	5.00	3.8250	0.74722
Biodegradable materials use	40	2.00	5.00	3.7000	0.85335
Use of technology in production	40	2.00	5.00	3.9000	0.92819
Reuse/reduce packaging	40	2.00	5.00	3.7250	0.71567
Organic materials use	40	2.00	5.00	3.9750	0.80024
Take-back programme	40	2.00	5.00	3.6500	0.92126
Good supply chain practice	40	2.00	5.00	3.8250	0.71208
Minimised logistics	40	2.00	5.00	3.6500	0.73554
Engage with local communities	40	2.00	5.00	3.7250	0.75064
Low-impact Care	40	2.00	5.00	3.8250	0.87376
Valid N (listwise)	40				

Table 12 – CSR Initiatives defining Sustainable Fashion

According to descriptive statistics, majorly the most appropriate CSR methods are Pollution Free Products and No Use of Chemicals within the production process with the mean levels above 4.3 out 5.0. Moreover, the minimum and maximum range is given to these two methods is also 3 to 5, showing that these two CSR methods are highly regarded as the best practices that define sustainable fashion in the Irish Fast Fashion Industry. Following this, the Use of Recycled Materials has been given an average of 4.10 with a standard deviation of 0.77 and a maximum and minimum range from 2 to 5. Thus, it can be affirmed that the use of recycled materials is ranked as a third best CSR practice for sustainability. Other than that, Use of Technology within the

Production Process and Use of Organic Materials, are given an average of more than 3.90 out 5.0 with a range of 2 to 5.

CSR Initiatives defining Sustainable Fashion

Initiative	Value
Low-impact Care	3.8
Engage with local communities	3.7
Minimised logistics	3.7
Good supply chain practice	3.8
Take-back programme	3.7
Organic materials use	4.0
Reuse/reduce packaging	3.7
Use of technology in production	3.9
Biodegradable materials use	3.7
Sustainable packaging	3.8
No chemicals used	4.3
Pollution free production	4.4
Fair and ethical labour/trade practice	3.9
High durability/Quality	3.9
Use of Recycled Materials	4.1

Additionally, CSR methods like keeping the quality or durability of the product high, engaging in fair and ethical labour and trade practices, use of Sustainable Packaging, Ethical Supply Chain Practices, and Low-Impact care are also seen as adequate methods which can be used to describe sustainability in Irish Fast Fashion Industry. The least selected methods are Use of Biodegradable materials, Reutilization or Reduction of Packaging, and Engaging with Local Communities, which are given an average of less than 3.80 but more than 3.60. However, if seen collectively, all of these activities are certainly a good representation of sustainable practices in Irish Fast Fashion Industry as all of them are given a mean average of more than 3.0 with the majority of them having a minimum to a maximum range of 2 to 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The current chapter of the study discusses the findings extracted from statistical analysis to examine their integration with existing literature. The section, therefore, includes a comparison of whether the CSR practices of Irish Fast Fashion industry are different from the CSR practices of the fast fashion industry across the globe. Furthermore, it also includes discussion regarding the extent to which the fast fashion industry in Ireland is considering CSR initiatives as compared to the view of existing theories and literature about it.

Drawing conclusions on the findings extracted from the statistical analysis, it can be inferred that the industry of Fast Fashion in Irish community holds significant importance in contributing to pollution, and waste. It is mainly because demand and trends within the fast fashion industry require constant change, as the name goes, thus based on different seasons, the consumption trend keeps increasing making the majority of the textile in the waste every year as trends become obsolete that quickly (Chang and Jai, 2015; Balch, 2013). Not only the clothes, and articles bought by consumers are thrown out, but the majority of the waste comes from companies in fast fashion industries like Zara, and H&M, burning their stock which has gone out of season. It substantially contributes to the emission of greenhouse gasses, and this is how the waste of such companies from the fast fashion industries end up contributing to pollution of water, land and air as explained in the literature by Bick et al., (2018). Fast Fashion Companies in Ireland burning off stock in order to make room for a new one might be one of the major reasons why industry experts of the same companies are indeed greatly concerned about their practices contributing to pollution and waste (See Table 4).

However, there are still a proportion of respondents who do not exhibit an anxious behaviour towards the practices of fast fashion companies contributing to the environmental problems as seen in the results of descriptive statistics (See Table 10 and 11). This difference of behaviour mostly exists concerning age and experience of working in the industry, such as more aged people and people who have had more experience in the fast fashion industry place more value over sustainable fashion practices and concern over the environment. However, as individuals' age and experience decrease, their view regarding the fast fashion industry of Ireland, contributing to pollution and waste start to reduce as well. Aligning this trend with literature, it might be due to the fact that supply chain management in the fast fashion industry, as evidenced by Turkers and

Altuntsab (2014), is compliant and follows the ethical code of conduct to be seen as companies with best practices. It might be the reason, those individuals who are less experienced perceive fast fashion companies as compliant to regulatory standards, and sustainable.

The study of Bick et al. (2016) also rationalizes the contrasting view of a smaller proportion of the study's sample size, who highlight that fast fashion offers consumers with variety. Still, the benefits of these operations outweigh the cons, and thus many people end up supporting them. However, adults of over 27-year-olds and relatively higher experience understand and have better insights that companies belonging to fast fashion industries often have production processes which possess high chances of health hazards. Further, during production processes, huge quantities of water is utilized and wasted as it is not always recycled. Thus, literature supports the findings of the study through providing justification for the reaction of the respondents.

Keeping in mind that the use of recyclable material is one of the top three CSR initiatives that has been ranked as the best definition of sustainability in the fast fashion industry of Ireland, the literature citing the CSR practices around the globe also exhibits a similar inclination of companies towards this practice. For example, Joy et al., (2012) shed light upon some of the CSR practices that Zara (i.e., one of the leading fast-fashion companies) has adopted such as the use of renewable energy into the production of its textile, using 100% sustainable fabric and recycling 34,000 tonnes of used stock since 2015 (Cohen, 2015). It also shows that Zara gives significant weightage to the Use of Technology and Pollution Free Production Techniques to reduce their carbon footprint. Likewise, these practices are also given high ranking among the respondents as discussed earlier, showing that in fact, these practices are good, practical examples of maintaining sustainability in business. It serves as an indicator that as compared to the global CSR practices; the sustainable initiative of Irish society is similar.

Furthermore, according to the literature, one of the significant global CSR initiatives has also been carried out by the company Primark, by training approximately 16000 farmers to exercise sustainable agricultural practices to grow cotton (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014). According to the claims of the company, it hopes to improve its entire supply chain process by using sustainable products. Other than that Conlon (2019) also explained that the company aims to train women farmers to empower them for a better life. It implies that practices like Fair and ethical labour/trade practice, and Good supply chain practice is also one of the substantial ways to improve a business'

sustainability practice and enhance its CSR initiatives. Even the respondents of the current study highlight a similar view; however, places considerably less significance on the initiative of Good supply chain practice by giving it an average ranking of 3.82.

Despite these initiatives being taken by the leaders of fast fashion companies like Primark, H&M and Zara (Samaha, 2018; Conlon, 2019; Cohen, 2015) being present, there are still several respondents who have claimed that they are greatly concerned about the carbon footprint of the fast fashion industry. It might be because the claims made by such companies are still considered to be very vague, and most of the times are publicized to trick customers into supporting their brands as discussed by Gowerk (2011) in the prior sections. For example, the author explained that consumers or even employees do not have substantiated facts against which they could testify these claims. Even US Consumer Protection Bureau has evidenced that called out on companies like H&M for providing lack of transparency regarding their waste management processes (Farmbrough, 2018).

Even though there is a lot of confusion involved when it comes to noticing the results of these CSR initiatives, Fast Fashion companies have an underlying motivation of profit maximization generations to adopt sustainable practices (Mejias et al., 2015). It makes many of the respondents among the Irish industry believe that perhaps even if the claims are vague, some changes might be brought up by the fast fashion companies at the backhand.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

To sum up, the fast fashion industry around the world is becoming increasingly toxic because of the misuse of resources like water and fossil fuels (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014). Moreover, the industry is the second largest contributor of pollution in the world further signifying the issue and how it needs to be addressed urgently. Many fast fashion companies around the world have started taking initiatives to reduce their carbon-footprint. Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand the steps taken by the Ireland Fast Fashion industry and the extent to which the industry was contributing to pollution (Thompson, 2019). The research at hand is significant because global warming is a time-pressing issue that needs to be addressed to avoid further harm. The industry is famous for producing articles that eventually end up in landfills or are burnt. Literature by Turkera and Altuntsab (2014) that intended to determine the supply chain management in the

fast fashion industry by assessing corporate reports for 9 fast fashion retailer revealed that the companies focused on compliance and codes of conduct, however, they were struggling to meet their sustainability criteria. Sustainability is, therefore, a key issue that global organizations are also struggling to incorporate. Even though claims are being made by huge FF companies like Zara regarding the use of only sustainable fabric in the production towards 2025 (Conlon, 2019). The brand has also mentioned how it would curb the usage of plastic bags and opt for more eco-friendly solutions in an attempt to become sustainable. However, this pledge is questionable because large companies often make these claims as marketing antics. These claims are not backed by any facts or concrete evidence. Moreover, it is important to understand that fast fashion retail brands like Zara would require huge capital, skills and investment in order to turn around their entire line of operation (Park, and Kim, 2016). Moreover, shifting a business to a completely different line of production and operation in merely five years can be a challenging task. Especially since Zara has been operating for decades and is accustomed to its current production process.

Similarly, H&M claims that they have a conscious collection but has not provided a concrete basis for these claims which can make the stakeholders question their claims (Farmbrough, 2018). The only option that consumers have currently is to trust the word of H&M without any proof of the same therefore this too could be categorized as a marketing gimmick. This notion was supported by the US Consumer Protection Bureau which asked H&M to provide details regarding their CSR activities and how they actually resulting in decreased carbon emission (Farmbrough, 2018). According to a research by the Guardian, it would take H&M at least 12 years to only recycle clothes as much as 1000 tonnes (Farmbrough, 2018). Thus, the efforts that these fast fashion retailers claim to make should be questioned and should be understood in-depth. It is important to verify the authenticity and value of the claims made by these retailers. Since the fast fashion industry is worth a billion dollars, the regulations on this industry should be imposed accordingly.

So far, only a handful of fast fashion retailers have been able to successfully implement sustainabile measures as well as provide facts for these claims. Primark is one of UK's leading fast fashion retailer that has vowed to train 160,0000 cotton farmers to grow cotton through sustainable means which would then be used as a raw material by the company (Conlon, 2019). By using sustainable cotton, the company would be able to improve its entire supply chain process. Moreover, women farmers would also be trained and empowered through this sustainability

program (Conlon, 2019). Now the claims made by Primark can be assessed because the company provides statistics, details and a complete plan through which it intends on implementing the sustainability program. That is not the case for the rest of the big players in the fast fashion industry (Carrigan & McEachern, 2013).

Based on the trends and patterns of global fast fashion retailers, the study intended to determine the contribution of Ireland's fast fashion industry towards pollution as well as to understand the CSR initiatives taken so far to fulfil their responsibility of being sustainable. Research revealed that the Ireland fast fashion industry contributes substantially towards pollution because of the nature of the business. The name 'fast' fashion suggests that articles are to be created quickly, worn and disposed of in the same manner. Textile wasted every year thus results in landfills and uses resources like water and fossil fuels that are non-renewable and scarce which is alarming (Chang and Jai, 2015; Balch, 2013). Consumers and retailers should both be held accountable for disposing and burning stock respectively. This entire wastage process results in the emission of greenhouse gasses, and this is how the waste of such companies from the fast fashion industries end up contributing to pollution of water, land and air as explained in the literature by Bick et al., (2018). It was also revealed that industry experts in Ireland were greatly concerned about the practices contributing to pollution. Even the Irish times was concerned regarding these issues and has repeatedly stressed on how the industry has excessive water consumption which would in the long run affect the availability of clean drinking water for the Irish (Thompson, 2019). Literature also revealed that it is estimated that £443 billion is wasted every year on articles of clothing that are not even worn and simply discarded by the fast fashion industry in Ireland and adjoining areas. This happens primarily because 70% of material used in Irish industries is made from synthetic materials and therefore is difficult to recycle (Mejías, et al., 2015).

The findings of the study supported the literature as it was revealed that experts and individuals that were associated with the fast fashion industry for more than a decade were concerned about its future (Childs, et al., 2019). These individuals have witnessed technological changes and the rapid increase in demand for FF goods and thus have authority over the subject matter thus concerns should be taken into account. It is important to note that in a competitive market place, complying only with regulations is not enough (Bick, et al., 2018). Firms need to give back to the environment they are operating in by becoming sustainable. Even consumers in the Ireland are

starting to realise the importance of sustainable consumption and are demanding industries to move towards such a trend (Thompson, 2019).

It was also revealed that these firms can incorporate sustainability by use of recyclable material as it is one of the top three CSR initiatives. It has also been ranked as the best definition of sustainability in the fast fashion industry of Ireland. Literature reveals how these trends have been adopted by Zara as it uses renewable energy into the production of its textile and has been recycling 34,000 tonnes of fabric since 2015 (Cohen, 2015). Even though the proportion of sustainability efforts compared to production is minimal, the effort should still be appreciated and encouraged. Zara has vowed to use technology and pollution free production techniques to reduce their carbon footprint by 2025 (Conlon, 2019). The Ireland industry experts also felt that these practices can be sustained and introduced in the region. Based on literature some other recommendations that the Irish fast fashion industry could consider would be the steps taken by Primark. As mentioned above, the company is training 16,000 farmers to grow cotton sustainably and it also aims to train female farmers to empower them for a better life (Cohen, 2015).

However, at the same time it was also revealed by respondents that the initiatives being taken by the leaders of fast fashion companies like Primark, H&M and Zara (Samaha, 2018; Conlon, 2019; Cohen, 2015) should be carefully considered. This is because claims might be made by such companies can be intended to deceive the consumers and could merely be marketing antics. This argument is countered by the fact that even though the claims may be vague, it is still an attempt to change the way in which the fast fashion industry operates and should not be discouraged (Mejias et al., 2015). The Irish industry has also made its fair share of claims and is to some extent gradually moving towards sustainability. An Ireland based company, Patagonia is encouraging customers to buy products that have a greater life and aren't disposable forms of fashion. Patagonia also now sells bags and uses mannequins that are organic and handmade instead of using plastic (Thompson, 2019). Moreover, Dorothy Maxwell, sustainability advisor for the Rediscovery centre in Dublin mentions how the concept of pre-loved fashion and pre-owned fashion needs to be introduced wherein individuals repeat the articles purchased a while ago or also sell them to increase the use and worth of a product. H&M operating in Ireland has taken these considerations into account and has started recollecting items that it sold since 2013 to recycle and resell (Thompson, 2019). The findings from the research at hand also revealed that 70% respondents

believed that the Irish Fast Fashion industry supports sustainability or is at least gradually heading towards it. However, 65% also believe that there is lack of compliance with regards to sustainability measures. This reveals that even though industries support the notion, they are still unwilling to comply because of various reasons like additional costs, efforts and difficult to find skilled labor. Moreover, it is important to note that fast fashion industry's model is such that is requires 'fast' outputs and thereafter wastage. Changing an entire model may not be possible for retailers that are looking to maximize profits (Davis, 2020). This is particularly why the Irish government as well as the governments around the world also need to work towards regulating the fast fashion industry. Just like firms are financially audited by third party evaluators, sustainability steps or campaigns should also be audited so that their extent can be measured and assessed. This model can be adopted in the fast fashion industry as well (Farmbrough, 2018). Keeping a check and balance is important because often the sustainability steps taken by an organization do not equate with the environmental damage that happens through their production processes. In order to balance the negative externalities that arise from the fast fashion industry, a third party and unbiased audit needs to be done (Bick, et al., 2018). All these aforementioned steps need to be considered by consumers, the fast fashion industry as well as the government. The fast fashion industry would continue to produce disposable articles until they are being demanded by the consumers because businesses operate with the objective of profit maximization (Carrigan & McEachern, 2013). Therefore, consumers need to also be aware of the impact their fashion choices have on the environment and need to make informed decisions. Similarly, if governments decide to levy taxes on the production of fast fashion articles then industries would be forced to reconsider their production model or switch towards sustainability (Dach & Allmendinger, 2014). These efforts coupled with sustainability audits could really have an impact on the amount of carbon emissions in the environment as well as the carbon foot-print of the fast fashion industry. This US Consumer Protection Bureau has already started working on this strategy and has questioned H&M (Fast fashion retailer) regarding its CSR activities and its impact on the environment (Farmbrough, 2018). Other governments can also follow these steps and create regulatory bodies to monitor such industries. The attempt to increase sustainability measures and prevent environment degradation can also be successful if all stakeholders are equally invested in the cause. Moreover, global warming has an impact on every individual and, therefore, its managerial implications should be

considered by all entities and actions should be taken immediately in order to reduce the impact of global warming in the years to come.

7.0 References

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Appendix
Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form

The fast fashion industry is involved in designing and manufacturing clothes that are considered relatively more affordable; however, at the same time, it involves a higher environmental cost, in the form of carbon emission, for instance.

The research study aims to determine the extent to which the current fast fashion industry is embracing sustainability and incorporating its measures. It also evaluates whether the fast fashion industry's CSR efforts address the negative externalities it produces. It would help us understand the contribution of the industry for the societal well-being.

Considering the above research problem, I request you to participate in the study and contribute your opinion. If you agree to take part in the research work, we can use this form/sheet to record you consent.

If you are willing to participate, you can move on to the questionnaire survey; it will be considered as your implied consent. However, you can withdraw your participation at any time during or after the survey. In this research, your participation is completely voluntary. Moreover, your data will be protected and kept confidential.

If you are under 18, you are not eligible to participate.

Questionnaire

Section 1

This section of the questionnaire measures responses related to participants' gender, age, and experience in the industry. Please select the most appropriate option.

1. Gender

   1. Male
   2. Female
   3. Other

2. Age

   1. 18-27 years
   2. 28-37 years
   3. 38-47 years
   4. 48-57 years
   5. 58 years and above

4. Experience

   1. Less than 1 year
   2. 1-5 years
   3. 6-10 years
   4. Greater than 10 years

Section 2

The following questions determine the extent to which fast fashion industry is considering/embracing CSR and sustainability initiatives:

1. To what extent you are concerned regarding pollution/wastage/environment?

   1. Not concerned
   2. To a limited extent
   3. To a certain extent
   4. To a large extent

2. To what extent do you support sustainable fashion?

   1. Not concerned
   2. To a limited extent
   3. To a certain extent
   4. To a large extent

3. Do you believe that the Irish society supports sustainable fashion?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

4. Do you believe that the fast fashion industry lacks sufficient recycling, and is contributing to waste

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

5. Is there lack of compliance towards industry regulations and standards related to sustainability?

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Neutral
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

Section 3

This section of survey assesses the CSR measures that best define sustainable fashion. Please rate the following features from 1-5, where 5 represents the highest agreement level:

Use of Recycled Materials	1	2	3	4	5
High durability/Quality	1	2	3	4	5
Fair and ethical labour/trade practice	1	2	3	4	5
Pollution free production	1	2	3	4	5
No chemicals used	1	2	3	4	5
Sustainable packaging	1	2	3	4	5
Biodegradable materials use	1	2	3	4	5
Use of technology in production	1	2	3	4	5

Reuse/reduce packaging	1	2	3	4	5
Organic materials use	1	2	3	4	5
Take-back programme	1	2	3	4	5
Good supply chain practice	1	2	3	4	5
Minimized logistics	1	2	3	4	5
Engage with local communities	1	2	3	4	5
Low-impact Care	1	2	3	4	5