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What do Female Consumers Think about Sustainable Packaging?

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Abstract

This study explores the level of knowledge among Spanish consumers regarding sustainability and their opinions on new sustainable packaging options, such as bio-based materials or bagasse. We conducted an online questionnaire at a national level, followed by multivariate analysis to derive conclusive results. Our findings, based on 254 participants, indicate that only 44% of consumers integrate sustainability into their daily lives. Key characteristics deemed important for sustainable packaging include environmental friendliness (85%), use of clean energy (72.5%), ease of reuse (85.8%), and recyclable materials (80.8%). Factor analysis reveals three categories: manufacturing characteristics, security, and price. Cluster analysis identifies two groups: one concerned with container safety and another seeking achievable sustainability.

Keywords: Sustainability, food consumption trends, packaging, bio-based, bio-plastic.

JEL classification: M30, M31.

Introduction

A shift in food demand is underway, precipitating changes in purchasing behaviors toward healthier and more environmentally and animal-friendly options (Martínez-Alvarez et al., 2021). FAOSTAT data over the last 30 years show a steady global increase in average daily dietary energy intake in kcal per day (Vasileska & Rechkoska, 2012). Presently, there's a low intake of fruits and vegetables and a high consumption of fatty, salty products, leading to cardiovascular and cancer risks (Vasileska & Rechkoska, 2012). These factors drive a trend towards healthier consumption and eating habits.

Societal evolution towards more developed societies and changes in family structures and lifestyles are catalysts for these new food consumption trends (Martínez-Alvarez et al., 2021). These shifts directly impact the food industry, leading to the creation of more ready-to-eat products and an increase in fresh and seasonal offerings.

Moreover, increased citizen and governmental awareness of environmental issues and animal welfare has spiked demand for environmentally-friendly products like organic items, sustainable packaging materials, and animal-friendly products such as vegan diets. These factors contribute to a societal shift towards more sustainable, healthy consumption practices that respect both animals and the environment.

Our objective is to assess Spanish consumers' knowledge of sustainability and their opinions on new sustainable packaging options, such as bio-based materials or bagasse. We

conducted a national-level online questionnaire in Spain, with 254 participants. Only 44% of consumers incorporate sustainability into their daily lives. The study identified characteristics that consumers prioritize in sustainable packaging, including environmental friendliness (85%), clean energy usage (72.5%). Cluster analysis revealed two clusters: safety-conscious consumers and those seeking achievable sustainability. The study structure comprises a theoretical framework discussing sustainability and new trends in food packaging, followed by a methodology section, discussion of survey results, and concluding with recommendations.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. Concept of Sustainability

The term "sustainability" originated in the 1987 United Nations report titled "Our Common Future." It defines sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations, 1987).

Over time, sustainability has evolved to integrate environmental health, social equity, and economic vitality, aiming to create thriving, diverse, and resilient communities for current and future generations (UCLA University, n.d.).

1.2. Dimensions of Sustainability

According to a 1997 UN report, sustainability encompasses three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental. The economic dimension ensures that agricultural production systems meet current consumption levels without jeopardizing future needs (Choi & Ng, 2011; Fernández García, 2011).

The social dimension focuses on aspects of equity, accessibility, participation, security and institutional stability (Kim, 2018). Finally, the environmental dimension refers to the natural environment and how it remains productive and resilient to sustain human life; that is, it requires that the resources be used at a rate no greater than that of regeneration, and that the waste it receives be emitted no faster than it can be assimilated (Choi & Ng, 2011; ONU, 1997).

Figure 1. Dimensions of sustainability



Source: Own elaboration.

1.3. The New Era of Sustainability

The societal shift towards heightened environmental awareness has spurred new consumption patterns towards sustainability (Martínez-Alvarez et al., 2021). Consequently, there's been a surge in the consumption of eco-friendly products such as organics and sustainable food packaging utilizing novel materials. Traditional packaging, discarded after use, includes materials like paper, plastic, glass, and aluminium, posing environmental challenges despite recycling efforts (Jeevahan & Chandrasekaran, 2019). Hence, the food industry seeks sustainable alternatives.

Some of these alternatives for a more sustainable packaging are sustainable materials like bioplastics and bagasse have gained traction.

- Bioplastics are polymers derived from natural or renewable sources like sugar cane or corn, some being biodegradable and compostable (Jain & Tiwari, 2015; Rudin & Choi, 2013).
- Bagasse comprises plant residues from crushing or macerating crops, offering a compostable and renewable alternative to plastics and foam in packaging applications.

2. Methods

In an investigation, when it is required to obtain information from a certain population on a specific subject, the survey is usually used as a method to obtain this data and later analyze it (Rocco & Oliari, 2007). In research investigations requiring data collection from specific populations, surveys are commonly utilized (Rocco & Oliari, 2007) this method offers several advantages, including the ability to gather responses quickly and cost-effectively, especially when employing online questionnaires.

For our study, data collection was facilitated through an online questionnaire created using Google Forms, targeting Spanish consumers. The survey has 31 questions divided into 4 blocks; each block designed for the respondents to answer on a topic of the research that is being carried out. The questionnaire begins with an introduction where we explain to those surveyed the topic and the approximate time it will take them to answer the entire questionnaire. The first block deals with consumer knowledge about sustainability. The second block deals with new consumer trends. The third block focuses on packaging trends. And finally, the last block inquiries about the purchasing and sociodemographic profile of the respondents.

The target population is the group of individuals that the study intends to conduct research in and draw conclusions from (Gregory et al., 2017), our target group are consumers over 18 years and Spanish nationality. We followed a non-probabilistic method, the non-probabilistic demonstrated is a proven method that uses non-random criteria such as geographic proximity or knowledge of the people to be investigated to answer a research question, or in this case, a questionnaire (Yin, 2011). This type of sample is normally used when the population parameters are unknown or it is not possible to identify them individually.

The questionnaire was distributed via email and various social media platforms (WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram) over a month-long period from April 10th to May 16th, 2023. To enhance result generalization and minimize sample bias, the questionnaire was sent at different times, to different groups of populations, and to different Spanish regions. Detailed sampling information is available in Table 1 of the technical data sheet.

Table 1. Technical details of the survey

Characteristics	Details
Population	Consumers of Spain, over 18 years old
Area	Spain
Sample type	Non-probabilistic sampling
Sample size	254
Confidence level	95%
Method of collecting data	Online survey (Google Forms) Self-administered
Realization date	April 2023

Source: Own elaboration.

To analyze the results of the survey we used the SPSS Statistics 26 program, where we will be performed univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses. Univariate analysis involves the examination of each studied variable separately, focusing on a single variable. It employs basic statistical measures such as mean, median, mode, variance, and percentages to assess a variable (Orange, 2011). Bivariate data analysis is a form of statistical analysis in which the

level of covariance between two variables is quantified at a descriptive and inferential level, thus realizing the relationship between two variables (Sulbarán, 2012). Multivariate analysis refers to a set of statistical techniques used to analyze multiple variables simultaneously, typically involving more than two variables (Hair et al., 1979). For multivariate analysis, two tests were conducted: factor analysis and cluster analysis.

- **Factor analysis** is utilized to condense a large number of variables into fewer factors or groups. It aims to extract the maximum common variance of all variables and allocate them to a common score (Ness, 2021b). The SPSS program was used to perform the factor analysis, the analysis used is "reduction of dimensions; factor".
- **Cluster analysis**, also known as segmentation or taxonomy analysis, identifies structures within the data to detect homogeneous groups of cases. It is exploratory in nature and does not distinguish between dependent and independent variables (Ness, 2021a). The Spss program was used to perform the cluster analysis, the analysis used is "bipolar cluster".

3. Results

The survey received 254 complete responses, with no exclusions, resulting in the analysis of all 254 responses. Demographically, the majority of respondents were women (71%) from various regions of Spain, primarily from Catalonia, Castilla y León, and the Community of Madrid, with high levels of education and/or training.

3.1. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis serves as a method to condense numerous variables into fewer factors or groups. In our survey, we applied factor analysis to streamline sustainable packaging characteristics into a smaller set of summary factors. This approach was suitable given the metric nature of our data, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (totally agree). By employing factor analysis, we aimed to enhance the interpretability of the data while retaining its essential insights.

We assessed the correlation of the data using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index and the Bartlett test. The null hypothesis (H0) states that the data is not correlated, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) suggests the data is correlated. To reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, the significance level must be less than 5% (0.050). With our value at 0.001, which is less than 0.050, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative, indicating correlated data. Additionally, the KMO index of 0.902 suggests excellent results. Table 2 displays the results of the KMO and Bartlett test.

Table 2. KMO and Bartlett's Test applied to sustainable packaging characteristics

KMO and Bartlett test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		0,902
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	2290,627
	gl	105
	Sig.	0,001

Source: Own elaboration.

After conducting the KMO and Bartlett test, we proceeded with Component Analysis and Varimax rotation. Table 3 illustrates the selected factors ordered by their eigenvalues. Employing the variance criterion, a 3-factor solution emerged, elucidating 66.488% of the variance in the original data. These results are deemed acceptable as they surpass the minimum threshold of 60%. Table 4 indicates that all variables possess communalities exceeding 50%, signifying acceptable outcomes.

Table 3. Factor Analysis: Selection of components based on eigen-value and total variance explained

Comp onent	Total explained variance								
	Initial eigenvalues			Sums of Squared Extraction Charges			Sums of squared charges of rotation		
	Total	% of variance	% accumulated	Total	% of variance	% accumulated	Total	% of variance	%
1	7,092	47,280	47,280	7,092	47,280	47,280	5,744	38,291	38,291
2	1,660	11,070	58,350	1,660	11,070	58,350	2,784	18,561	56,853
3	1,221	8,138	66,488	1,221	8,138	66,488	1,445	9,635	66,488
4	,754	5,024	71,511						
5	,699	4,662	76,173						
6	,672	4,477	80,650						
7	,529	3,524	84,174						
8	,469	3,125	87,299						
9	,423	2,821	90,120						
10	,351	2,343	92,463						
11	,292	1,944	94,407						
12	,269	1,792	96,199						
13	,236	1,575	97,775						
14	,193	1,284	99,058						
15	,141	,942	100,000						

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 4. Communalities in the Factor Analysis applied to sustainable packaging characteristics

Communalities		
	Initial	Extraction
Produced with clean energy (eg. solar, wind energy)	1,000	0,593
Produced with recyclable materials	1,000	0,667
Manufactured with reduced costs	1,000	0,631
That extends its expiration	1,000	0,709
That they do not use toxic substances in their preparation	1,000	0,659
That satisfies the needs of the consumer (that is comfortable, useful and safe)	1,000	0,559
Made from vegetable matter (eg. corn, cellulose)	1,000	0,623
Easy to break down and reuse in making new products	1,000	0,772
Decomposes in the environment (biodegradable)	1,000	0,673
What can be made into fertilizer (compostable)	1,000	0,716
Less safe for the product than a plastic or petroleum-derived container	1,000	0,654
Environmentally friendly	1,000	0,774
Composed with recycled materials	1,000	0,670
More expensive than a plastic or petroleum-derived container	1,000	0,698
That consumes less energy and generates less waste in its production	1,000	0,576

Source: Own elaboration.

Lastly, Table 5 delineates the composition of each component. The first component correlates with characteristics related to the production process, while the second component pertains to the pricing of sustainable packaging. The third and final component addresses the safety considerations associated with sustainable packaging. Consequently, we infer the presence of three components, namely "Characteristics of Production," "Safety of Sustainable Packaging," and "Price of Sustainable Packaging".

Table 5. Rotated Component Matrix

Component matrix			
	Component		
	1	2	3
Produced with clean energy (e.g., solar, wind energy)	,729	,010	-,247
Produced with recyclable materials	,802	-,150	-,041
Manufactured with reduced costs	,591	,488	-,210
That extends its expiration	,554	,534	-,342
That they do not use toxic substances in their preparation	,760	,057	-,280
That satisfies the needs of the consumer (that is comfortable, useful and safe)	,504	,473	-,284
Made from vegetable matter (e.g., corn, cellulose)	,738	-,173	,221
Easy to break down and reuse in making new products	,844	-,245	,022
Decomposes in the environment (biodegradable)	,783	-,159	,186
What can be made into fertilizer (compostable)	,744	-,197	,350
Less safe for the product than a plastic or petroleum-derived container	,139	,669	,432
Environmentally friendly	,846	-,222	,093
Composed with recycled materials	,811	-,101	,047
More expensive than a plastic or petroleum-derived container	,219	,466	,657
That consumes less energy and generates less waste in its production	,752	-,097	-,034

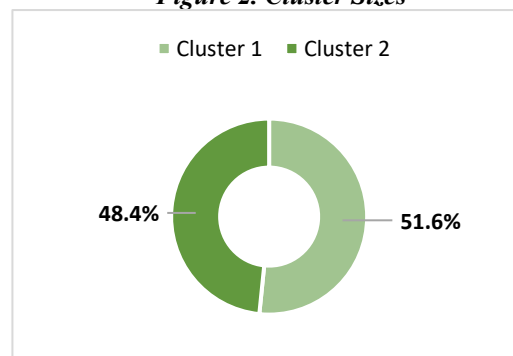
Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. Cluster analysis

Cluster analysis was conducted to profile consumers, aiming to group Spanish consumers based on their characteristics. This analysis amalgamates respondents' lifestyle, demographics, and perspectives on sustainable packaging characteristics. Factors derived from the factorial analysis and variables from the dataset were utilized in the cluster analysis.

Initially, the two-step clustering method was implemented on the SPSS software dataset utilized in the study. This method was selected due to its ability to accommodate both continuous and categorical variables in determining clusters. Through this approach, it was determined that the most suitable number of clusters for the survey dataset was 2.

In the analysis, 51.6% of consumers were classified into the first cluster, while 48.8% were allocated to the second cluster.

Figure 2. Cluster Sizes

Source: Own elaboration.

Upon examining the demographic characteristics of the clusters, the first group, on average, falls within the age range of 18 to 24 years. Furthermore, this cluster predominantly comprises women, with most being university students holding bachelor's, diploma, or degree qualifications.

In contrast, Cluster 2 primarily consists of women with an average age ranging from 45 to 54 years. The majority of consumers in this cluster are employed, either in private companies or the public sector, and also possess university degrees (Bachelor, Diploma, or Degree).

Table 7. Cluster centres to identify the membership in each group

	Cluster 1	Cluster 2
Characteristics	-0,02	0,02
Price	0,20	-0,21
Safety	-0,07	0,07

Source: Own elaboration.

When examining the demographic characteristics of the first group, it becomes evident that consumers within this cluster have a lower perception of sustainable packaging characteristics, particularly in terms of its manufacturing process and safety. Notably, the safety factor yields the lowest negative value, indicating that consumers in this group harbor concerns regarding the safety of sustainable packaging compared to conventional alternatives. Furthermore, consumers in this cluster exhibit a heightened perception of pricing, believing that sustainable packaging is more expensive than conventional options.

In contrast, consumers in the second cluster demonstrate a lower price perception. Unlike their counterparts in the first group, they do not agree that sustainable packaging commands a higher price. Regarding the "characteristics of its manufacture" and the "safety of the container," consumers in this group exhibit a positive perception. Notably, safety of the container emerges as the most significant factor for consumers in the second cluster.

Consequently, the first cluster, comprised of young women with university education, demonstrates an understanding of the intricacies involved in sustainable packaging development. They acknowledge the necessity for sustainable packaging to command a higher price but express concerns about its safety. Therefore, this cluster is labeled as "consumers concerned about the safety of the container".

Conversely, the second cluster, consisting of adult women with university degrees, exhibits a heightened awareness of sustainable packaging manufacturing characteristics. Unlike the first cluster, they believe that sustainable packaging is as safe as conventional options and do not perceive a need for a higher price. Consequently, this group is labeled as "consumers seeking achievable sustainability".

Conclusions, limitations and future directions

The factorial analysis conducted aimed to condense the characteristics of sustainable packaging into three main factors: manufacturing characteristics, security provided, and pricing. This suggests that the packaging industry should prioritize the manufacturing process, pricing, and safety of sustainable containers.

Furthermore, cluster analysis successfully categorized sociodemographic data into two groups based on the aforementioned factors. The analysis revealed two distinct consumer groups: one, labeled as "consumers concerned about the safety of the container," comprises women aged 18-24, primarily students, who acknowledge the higher cost of sustainable packaging compared to conventional options. The other group, termed "consumers seeking achievable sustainability," consists of women aged 45-54, predominantly employed, who prioritize packaging safety and its production characteristics.

The findings highlight that young women prioritize the safety provided by sustainable packaging and are willing to pay a premium for it, reflecting their heightened awareness and access to information, aided by technological advancements and educational initiatives like the 2030 agenda. In contrast, older women perceive sustainable packaging as equally safe as

conventional options but are reluctant to pay extra, prioritizing economic stability amid crises, as observed in previous studies (Carrasco, 2009; Perkins, 2017).

These insights underscore the nuanced consumer perceptions of sustainable packaging and underscore the importance of tailoring marketing strategies and product offerings to different demographic segments to promote sustainable consumption patterns.

This study's limitations include its specific sample profile and the use of a questionnaire to gather information on Spanish consumers' perceptions of sustainable packaging, which inherently reflects subjective opinions. Additionally, while online questionnaires offer expediency, they also present limitations, particularly in predicting the sample composition. Notably, our study received more responses from women than men, indicating a potential gender bias.

Another limitation that is seen is that the factor we have made has given 3 components, 1 with 13 elements and the other two 2 with 1 element each. For future studies it would be necessary not only to expand the number of characteristics to study and also to make them more varied, so that more elements can appear in each component, or even more have more than 3 components in the study. These results would also help us to perform the cluster analysis.

Future research endeavors should aim to address these limitations by striving for a more representative sample and focusing on specific regions within Spain to ascertain localized insights.

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Middle-Class Customer's Attribute Impacts on Purchasing Eco-Friendly Products Decision

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Abstract

This study aims to determine how much attitude affects middle-class consumers' purchase intentions and behavior when it comes to eco-friendly goods. Rising customer demand for eco-friendly products is encouraged by growing environmental awareness. When factors of attitude like knowledge, education, and financial situation are no longer barriers to customers' intentions, whether customers can transfer their intention into actual purchase behavior, is the motivation of this study. The planned behavior theory strongly emphasizes how an individual's attitude affects their ability to act on their intention to buy. To analyze these characteristics that affect middle-class customers in South Tangerang Indonesia, a quantitative study employing a survey is chosen as the research method. Partial Least Squares (PLS) are used to examine the relationship between attitude, customers' purchase intention, and behavior. This study shows that although attitude may not be able to act or convert into actual behavior, it can still be a driving factor for purchasing intention. This study contributes to the development of planned behavior theory and the fields of customer research.

Keywords: Attitude, purchase intention, purchase behavior, eco-friendly products, middle-class customers.

JEL classification: M30, M31.

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which attitude affects middle-class customers' intentions to present their behaviors to buy when it comes to eco-friendly products. This study is motivated by a previous study regarding customer behavior towards eco-friendly products in Malaysia and the increasing consumer knowledge of environmental issues and their desire to buy environmentally friendly items (Govender and Govender, 2016). The impacts of global warming have encouraged customers and marketers to be more sensitive to eco-friendly products. In practice, this early study failed to reveal several situational issues such as customers' economic situation or educational background in their decision to buy these green products. These economic and educational factors are part of the customer's attributes that determine the decision since environmentally friendly or eco-friendly products are still too expensive for the average customer, particularly lower-income customers, to afford. When qualities are present, lower-class customers are less likely to buy eco-friendly items, according to a previous study of average and lower-income customers (Al Mamun et al., 2018). The planned behavior theory, on the other hand, places focus on how attitude can affect a customer's purchasing intention, which ultimately results in purchase behavior. Attitude appears from behavioral belief due to their knowledge, education, economic situation, and personal traits become determining factors for intention and behavior. Focusing on eco-friendly products, these factors are essential for determining whether a buyer plans to exhibit real purchasing behaviors. This is because these components such as knowledge, education, and

financial circumstances are no longer barriers to middle-class buyers. To disclose their true purchasing behavior given that eco-friendly products are still less popular among these customers, for eco-friendly producers, this scenario is critical. By comprehending these factors that influence consumer behavior, eco-friendly businesses can design their strategies to reach the targeted consumers. It is also critical to conduct a study to ascertain how variables like knowledge, education, and financial situation influence consumers' intention to display their actual buying behavior, particularly for specific products like eco-friendly products. To determine the extent to which these characteristics of middle-class customers affect their intentions and purchasing behaviors, this study uses middle-class customers in South Tangerang, Indonesia.

The Theory of Planned Behavior focuses on the factors that influence consumer decisions. Planned behavior theory investigates the factors influencing consumer decisions, particularly when the customer plans on buying eco-friendly products. The strategy focuses on the customer's capacity for self-motivation, particularly about their purchasing intents and attitudes. Focusing exclusively on attitude, it is thought that attitudes are formed based on behavioral beliefs and their constituent parts, such as contextual elements from a person's educational background (Witek and Kuźniar, 2020); understanding of behavior (Rajendran and Wahab, 2017); and economic or financial circumstances (Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018). According to Al Mamun et al (2018), these mentality variables have a significant impact on how lower-class consumers behave while purchasing eco-friendly goods (Al Mamun et al., 2018). When buying intention mediates the impacts of attribute qualities on a consumer's purchasing decisions, these mindset elements demonstrate their capacity to interfere with the customer's intention and behavior. According to this previous study's finding, the relationship between a customer's behavior during the buying process and their intention to make a purchase may change when attribute elements are included (Al Mamun et al., 2018). This demonstrates that customers' decisions on how to depict their purchasing behavior for lower-class customers are largely influenced by this mental variable, which is included in the attribute elements.

As the impacts of global warming, customers and marketers have become more sensitive to eco-friendly products. Customers' increasing awareness of environmental issues and their worries about eco-friendly items serve as evidence of these issues (Govender and Govender, 2016). According to Govender and Govender (2016) and Mahmoud (2018), a product is considered environmentally friendly or eco-friendly if it is manufactured with safe raw materials, follows environmentally friendly production processes, and is packaged with recycled materials (Govender and Govender, 2016; Mahmoud, 2018). Referring to this definition and environmental issues, customers are encouraged to address environmental problems by using eco-friendly products. The next step is a change in their regular consumption that concentrates on greener goods, which may minimize their negative environmental effects (Prakash and Pathak, 2017). From this, it appears that the use of eco-friendly products is not only encouraged by their knowledge and awareness, but this becomes the basis for behavioral changes. Based on this situation, the company must pay special attention to the growing awareness that is being followed by the rise in the purchase of eco-friendly products to properly understand client behavior. Understanding this problem helps the business establish its objectives. The company must pay special attention to the growing awareness that is being followed by the rise in the purchase of eco-friendly items to properly understand customer behavior.

Despite these mentality variables, education and knowledge have significant impacts on behavior. Early study reveals the impacts of the attitude of low-income society on green product behavior (Al Mamun et al., 2018). The study reveals how these attributes affect the

consumer's decision. In practice, the study of Mamun et al. (2018) fails to present specifically the customer's situation attribute which may affect their decision such as economic and educational background. Economic factors are an indicator of consumer purchasing decisions. High prices can discourage purchases, especially if consumers do not have sufficient funds. As a result, financial capabilities will also influence purchasing behavior. From this condition, it appears that education, knowledge and awareness are no longer determining factors in deciding to purchase a product if the price offered is not affordable. Early studies on low-income communities in Malaysia revealed a lack of knowledge, and information and high prices cause low use of environmentally friendly products (Al Mamun et al., 2018). Based on these conditions, a gap of knowledge emerges whether these mindset variables also apply to higher-class consumers who have better or higher levels of education and familiarity with environmental issues, as well as financial position. Due to this situation, it is yet uncertain how much the attribute element affects the customer's intention and behavior to purchase eco-friendly products. The current study contributes to the development of the planned behavior theory, customer behavior, and green product areas.

1. Literature review and hypothesis development

1.1. Planned behavior theory

To understand and assess the customer's behavior in light of their intended behavior, the planned behavior theory is widely used. The objective or goal has an impact **on** the decision-making process, which results in behavior. Referring to this result, intention is the primary predictor of customer behavior, and the theory emphasizes the critical significance that this component plays (Ajzen, 2015). As a result, this theory is frequently applied to forecast client behavior in terms of intent. In practice, other factors, such as an attitude resulting from the behavioral belief, could also affect the intention. A behavioral belief stems from an attitude and affects behavior (Humaira and Hudrasyah, 2016). This conviction will become an attitude when factors like circumstance and costs are taken into account. Attributes like knowledge, education, and financial situation are thought to have a significant impact in determining attitude. By assessing these characteristics either individually or collectively, one can determine another's attitude about a behavior. The results of the appraisal whether they have positive or negative impacts, drive the choice of behavior (Ajzen, 2020). Therefore, the goal of this study is to determine how much an attribute influences intention to become a determinant of behavior.

1.2. Purchase intention

Customers can use the intention as a framework to take action or display their behavior. Their attitude toward behavior, subjective norms, and control all affect how they intend to depict the actual behavior. The theory of planned behavior states that an individual's intention motivates their behavior (Ajzen, 2020). Intention, which works in conjunction with control, is one of the defining factors that influence a person's behavior (Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018). Control entails determining the course of action or behavior clients will exhibit. Whether a person attempts to engage in a particular behavior or has planned to take one, intention becomes a determining or motivating factor that influences the individual's behavior in this scenario (Ajzen, 2020). One of the main reasons why customers display their behavior is their intention. When control is involved, this factor is more powerful to present their behavior. Control and intention are therefore typically employed as part of the business's marketing plan to predict client behavior while promoting its goods or services. The behavior, which focuses solely on the intention, is typically seen in commercial settings where the customer's choice is significantly influenced by their intention. Hassan, et al. (2015) defined a buy intention as a

customer-implemented strategy that affects the decision of whether or not to make a purchase (Hassan, Yee and Ray, 2015). Customer behavior, including the choice to take action, is determined by intention. This role of intention is well demonstrated by the action taken during the purchasing activities (Jacob, Putri and Sihombing, 2020). When customers have sufficient knowledge of the environment that supports it, the intention is influenced by attitude-related factors including product features, pricing, and comforts (Joshi and Rahman, 2015). This emphasizes how important knowledge is in positively affecting customers' intentions and behavior. How long a business will thrive depends in large part on the possibility that a customer will make a purchase. Based on the customer's buying intention, decisions are made throughout purchasing activities. In the meantime, customers' intentions are greatly influenced by the aspects of their attitude that motivate their actions or behaviors. Companies must understand how attitude impacts customer intentions if they want to stay in business. Businesses must comprehend whether the influence of attitude on intention is permanent or only temporary. The company's strategy, course of action, and future will be impacted by this.

1.3. Purchase behavior

The actions or behaviors a customer takes during the purchasing process are those that are driven by their objectives. An early investigation of planned behavior theory reveals the connection between intention and behavior (Ajzen, 2015). Positive buying intentions encourage the customer to complete the transaction. In the interim, if the customer has a bad purchase intention, they are likely to refrain from acting or behaving in a certain way. As a result, if buying intention rises, the likelihood of actual purchase behavior will rise as well (Mahmoud, 2018). In practice, purchase behavior and intention cannot always match. Purchase purpose and behavior may diverge, which could lead to incongruent relations. This occurs when other circumstances affect the purchasing intention. According to a new meta-analysis research, even with the best of intentions, very little can be done to change behavior (Sheeran and Webb, 2016). This occurs as a result of the fact that intention is only one of many elements that affect behavior. Additionally, attitude elements including circumstance and economics (Syarifuddin and Alamsyah, 2017; Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018; Ghali-Zinoubi, 2020; Witek and Kuźniar, 2020), knowledge (Rajendran and Wahab, 2017), and educational background (Maichum, Parichatnon and Peng, 2016 in and Ahmad, 2018; Yahaya, Samsuri and Aziz, 2018; Witek and Kuźniar, 2020) may affect the behavior. According to Webb and Sheran (2006 cited in Montano & Kasprzyk, 2015), when a person has control over their actual behavior, a change in intention has little to no effect on the behavior (Montano and Kasprzyk, 2015). As a result, purpose does not naturally affect behavior. An attitude can become an intention or behavior factor with the assistance of a few supporting factors. The possibility of intention to act as a mediator between attitude and purchasing behavior can be recognized even though it is still needed to be studied. How attitude influences purchasing behavior when purchase intention acts as a mediator is the main topic of this study. Based on this review, the following hypotheses have been proposed for deeper investigation in light of this research gap:

H₁: Intention has a positive impact on purchase behavior;

H₂: Attitude has a positive influence on purchase behavior;

H₃: Attitude has a positive influence on purchase behavior mediated by purchase intention.

2. Methods

A survey is used as a quantitative tool in this study. Three variables are measured during this investigation. The dependent variable measured during this study is consumer behavior, while attitude is the independent variable. The mediating or intervening variable in the meantime is purchase intention. The data are acquired using a survey. Both a non-probability sampling approach and a purposive sampling methodology are used to collect data. Non-

probability sampling is employed because several samples are taken from the entire population that meet the requirements for this investigation. To gather information for this inquiry based on the selection, purposive sampling is also used. The people who are middle-class residents of South Tangerang, Indonesia are selected as respondents. For the analyze, a sample of 399 respondents was used. The software Smart PLS 3 is used to code and analyze the data. Meanwhile, the operational variables are developed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurement Instruments of Variables

Variable	Operational Definition	Indicator	Scale
Attitude (X1)	Attitude is a development of belief that emerges from certain conditions that influence the intention	Six measurement items adapted from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mamun et al (2008) one item regarding the selection, • Ha and Janda (2012) two items regarding protection and attitude, • Maichum et al (2016) three indicators regarding benefits, ideas, and safety. 	5-points Likert Scale
Purchase Intention (X2)	Purchase intention is the key factor that influences someone to present purchase behavior	Seven measurement items adapted from Mamun et al (2018) regarding performance, design, possibility, planning, interest, and presenting the behavior	5-points Likert Scale
Purchase Behavior (Y)	Purchase behavior is the actual behavior of purchasing a product	Six measurement items adapted from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mamun et al (2018) one item regarding product avoidance. • Walton and Austin (2011) two items regarding product • Sanchez, Mosquera and Lopez (2015) three items regarding label, reusable and utility 	5-points Likert Scale

3. Results and discussions

This part consists of two subsections, results and discussions. The results are a description of statistical analysis results based on the data collected through a survey. Meanwhile, the discussion section examines the statistical results referred to as planned behavior theory.

3.1. Results

According to the survey, 399 people in the South Tangerang region who are categorized as middle-class respondents submitted the information. The respondents were considered middle-class society by the World Bank since their monthly expenses varied from IDR 1,200,000 to IDR 6,000,000 per month (Bank, 2019) or around US\$ 75 to 374 per month using the Bank Indonesia's official foreign exchange rate in 2024 (Indonesia, 2024) Referring to the instrument's convergent validity, the variables AAT1 (willingness to buy the eco-friendly product), PI2 (attractiveness of product's design) and PB5 (reusable packaging) must be disregarded because their loading factor values are less than 0.70 points. The further tests are conducted. From these tests, it is shown that the data is normally distributed, with skewness of 0.612 for attribute, 0.248 for purchase behavior and 0.762 for purchase intention. Meanwhile, the Gaussian Copula test as shown on Table 2 reveals the correlation among the variables are statistically significant.

Table 2: Gaussian Copula Result

Indicators	Path Coefficient	Sample mean	P values	T-Stat	Confidence interval	
					2.5 %	97.5%
Attitude -> Purchase Behavior	0.293	0.294	0.001	4.731	0.173	0.414
Purchase Intention -> Attitude	0.780	0.781	0.001	36.607	0.730	0.816
Purchase Intention -> Purchase Behavior	0.435	0.435	0.001	6.778	0.301	0.550

These test results also show that the level of variable reliability is acceptable based on the composite reliability Cronbach's alpha. The results of this study show that each variable's Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability are all greater than or equal to 0.70 points. Furthermore, the variable PI3 (preference plan to buy eco-friendly products) and PB 4 (purchase product with eco-friendly label) represent the highest point of 0.821. This shows that PI 3 and PB 4 have the strongest impact on customer regarding eco-friendly products. The customer is likely to present their intention when their plan to buy eco-friendly products, and then present its through purchasing the products with the eco-friendly label. Next, purchase intention variables present stronger impacts than attitude on encouraging customers to present their behavior through the purchase behavior. Meanwhile, the average variance extracted (AVE) results show that the rest indicators are valid, as shown in Table 3. The attitude receives a score of 0.591 on the AVE scale while the buying intention receives a score of 0.611. The purchasing behavior's 0.518 AVE points are visible. Thus, all variables are legitimate. These parameters are therefore trustworthy for this research.

Table3: Instrument Tests

	Indicators	Outer Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
ATT1	Importance of protecting environment	0.708	0.826	0.827	0.591
ATT2	Buying eco-friendly products is profitable	0.787			
ATT3	Buying eco-friendly products is a good idea	0.820			
ATT4	Buying eco-friendly product is a safe choice	0.765			
ATT5	Having an attitude toward purchasing eco-friendly products	0.759			
PI1	Benefits and performance comparison to conventional products	0.725	0.841	0.849	0.611
PI2	The chance of purchasing	0.763			
PI3	Preference of eco-friendly products when planning to buy products	0.820			
PI4	Interested in purchasing eco-friendly products	0.800			
PI5	Plan to buy more eco-friendly than conventional products	0.796			
PI6	Intend to practice pro eco-friendly consumption	0.808			
PB1	Deliberately avoid non-eco-friendly products	0.728	0.876	0.878	0.618
PB2	Deliberately avoid purchasing products with unnecessary packaging	0.767			
PB3	Deliberately buy products that are produced in an eco-friendly treatment	0.806			
PB4	Purchase products with eco-friendly labels	0.821			
PB5	Use eco-friendly products	0.785			

A discriminant validity test is conducted to test whether there are differences between constructs that may affect the results. Based on Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) and Fornell-Larker criterion on Table 4, the intention and attitude are not correlated. There are presented through the HTMT result which are bigger than 0.90, while the Fornell Larcker criterion also presents similar result for these variables. For these two variables, the discriminant validity is not achieved.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity

Indicators	HTMT			Fornell Larcker		
	Attitude	Behavior	Intention	Attitude	Behavior	Intention
Attitude				0.749		
Behavior	0.753			0.633	0.782	
Intention	0.901	0.764		0.768	0.663	0.786

Based on previous tests, this study also conducts some model structure evaluation. The inner model evaluation is used to examine the model structure. The structure of the model for this study is deemed to be acceptable based on this test, according to the Normed Fix Index (NFI) value of 0.846 points. The coefficient of the determinant test indicates that attitude can influence buying behavior by 47.6 % and purchase intention by 47,7 %, while the SRMR presents it result for 0.066 points. This SRMR result indicates that the model is not fully fit for these variables. The collinearity statistics (VIF) for inner model present less than 5; therefore, the parameter estimation results are robust or unbiased. Meanwhile, the direct effect of each variable is also calculated. The f2 effect size reveals that customer's attitude can strongly affect their intention to purchase. Attribute also present its low to moderate impacts on behavior. Meanwhile, the customer's intention has moderate impacts on behavior. As a result, when it tries to transfer this intention to the purchasing behaviors, attribute can present its strong impacts on the intention, while the intention is less likely to present its impact on the real purchase action or behavior as shown through the f2 result on Table 5.

Table 5: F-square result

Indicators	Attitude	Purchase Behavior	Purchase Intention
Attitude		0.071	
Purchase behavior			
Purchase intention	1.439	0.145	

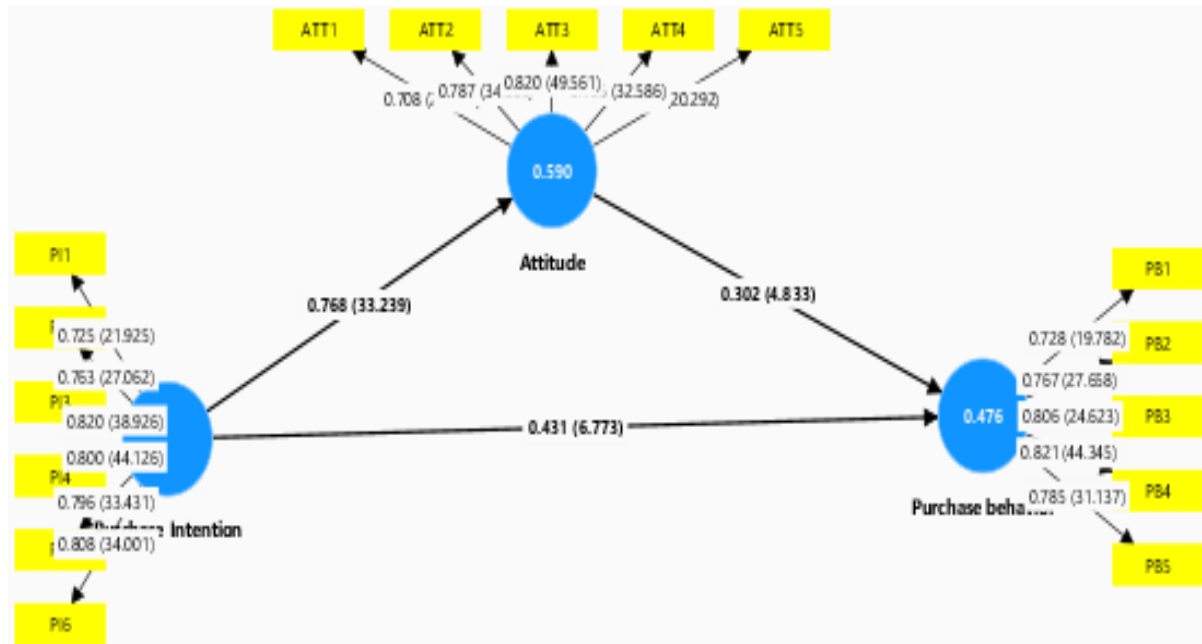
Next, the hypotheses are examined using bootstrapping or resampling. The primary focus of this method is the route coefficient, which may be used to indicate how strongly two entities are related. The results of Table 6 and Figure 1 show that each relationship has a positive significance. It is proven that attitude has positive, significant effects on purchasing intention and behavior. Meanwhile, a specific indirect test is conducted to evaluate when purchase intention acts as a mediator. The test shows that attitude also demonstrates its positive, considerable influence on consumer behavior for 6.495 points. The mediiasi effect result (v) is 0.054 points which means purchase intention has medium to weak impacts on mediating the customer's attitude to encourage the purchase behavior.

Focusing exclusively on hypotheses testing, statistical test indicate that the three hypotheses can be accepted. The appearance of purchasing behavior can be positively impacted by purchase intention, as statistical tests reveal a t-statistic of 6.773 points. As a result, the first hypothesis is accepted as a result of this requirement. In the meantime, a statistical test for the t-value of 4.833 indicates that attitude has a positive and significant impact on purchasing behavior. Thus, the second hypothesis is accepted. Using a specific indirect test, the result of the third hypothesis test demonstrates that, when purchase intention acts as a mediating factor, attitude can significantly and positively influence consumer behavior at 4.786 points. Thus, the t-statistic results show positive and significant even if the mediation effect test result (v) indicates a moderate to weak influence. This condition explains why variables often have a small influence at the structural level, yet they might exhibit a strong positive link in direct relationships.

Table 6. Hypothesis Testing Results

Indicators	Path Coefficient	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	Confidence Interval	
					2.5%	97.5%
Purchase Intention -> Purchase Behavior	0.431	0.062	6.773	0.001	0.304	0.550
Attitude -> Purchase Behavior	0.302	0.062	4.833	0.001	0.182	0.425
Purchase Intention -> Attitude	0.768	0.023	33.239	0.001	0.721	0.812
Purchase Intention- Attitude- Purchase Behavior	0.232	0.049	4.786	0.001	0.140	0.330

Figure 1. Model Structural Test



3.2. Discussion

This study demonstrates that attitude influences customers' purchasing decisions significantly and favorably when buying intention mediates their interaction. The theory of planned behavior emphasizes how purpose shapes behavior. A customer's motivation drives their real behavior when they have a goal. This may be seen in the decision-making process, which is motivated by the need to predict and influence customer behavior (Ajzen, 2015). The aim is essential when determining whether to portray an action or not. This makes it very clear that behavior is determined by intention, which is mostly seen throughout the purchasing process (Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018). It is assumed that a customer has a positive buying intention when they have a compelling purpose for acting in a purchase-related way (Ajzen, 2015). This is supported by statistical evidence that indicates that purchasing intention has a favorable 0.431 path coefficient toward purchasing behavior, where the initial hypothesis is accepted. The planned behavior theory, which emphasizes the impact of purchase intention on behavior (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2017; Al Mamun *et al.*, 2018; Rausch and Kopplin, 2021) is also supported by these findings. As a result, a customer's purpose or intention is what drives them to act in a certain way.

When concentrating just on the relationship between attitude and behavior, a customer's attitude is also observed to have an impact on their behavior. A preliminary study on planned behavior theory found that a customer's attitude significantly affects their intention to buy (Al Mamun *et al.*, 2018; Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018). When the attitude is reinforced by additional traits like a strong financial, intellectual, and educational foundation, it eventually turns into a

behavior. Early studies suggest that these factors have a significant impact on people's behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Humaira and Hudrasyah, 2016). Education and knowledge affect how perceptive and conscious one becomes of the challenges associated with objects, which is how their consequences are displayed. For instance, the growth of sensitivity and comprehension of environmental concerns is substantially driven by the educational foundation and knowledge made available by this study's results. The economic or money component is also observed to be substantially linked with intention and behavior in the interim. The effect of economic or financial consideration can more powerfully affect a customer's purpose and behavior when they have the financial resources to do so (Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018). The socioeconomic status and wealth of the client also have an impact (Syarifuddin and Alamsyah, 2017). This study's survey shows that respondents, who are typical of middle-class communities, are more likely to buy eco-friendly products. The majority of respondents are seen as oriented performers with the capacity and desire to act realistically. The respondents' consistency in reporting the impact of attitude on purchasing intention and behavior is well illustrated by this study where the statistical study's results show that the attitude has a 0.768-point path coefficient on intention and 0.302-point path coefficient on behavior. This suggests that a customer's decision to purchase is significantly influenced by attitude.

Even though intention affects behavior, it is possible that the customer's intention is not what caused the behavior. According to preliminary research, there is a distinction between intention and actual behavior, which raises the possibility that intention may not always convert into behavior (Webb and Sheeran, 2006 cited in Montano & Kasprzyk, 2015). The intention may not affect the behavior on its own when another factor is involved. There is a mismatch between intended behavior and actual behavior when the other components demonstrate their dominant and strong influence on their relations. When attitudes like knowledge and economic variables are involved, the intention may not be able to show its influence on actual behavior in the connection between behavior and intention. The involvement of belief may also hinder the intention of the presentation of actual behavior. This belief obtained from the attitude toward behavior in this situation is referred to as the behavior belief (Humaira and Hudrasyah, 2016)). The customer's attitude toward a behavior is determined by their intention and behavior belief taken together. Focusing exclusively on the belief, behavior belief determines attitude influence, which determines intention (Ajzen, 2015). Apart from belief, economic, knowledge, and educational background are some other factors that contribute to the development of a gap between intention and actual behaviors (Syarifuddin and Alamsyah, 2017; Chaudhary and Bisai, 2018; Ghali-Zinoubi, 2020; Witek and Kuźniar, 2020). The current study quantifies how education, economic welfare and scientific knowledge affect the customer's decision and intent, which may prevent the action or real behavior taken by the customer. This study reveals that through it is very weak, the association between purchase intention, attitude, and purchase behavior might still exist, as evidence by the specific indirect test and f^2 results above.

Understanding the connection between attitude, buying attention, and purchase behavior is necessary to comprehend the concept of planned behavior. Attributes and beliefs, which are attitude elements, are connected to intention and behavior. This study illustrates the interaction between attitude, purchase intention, and behavior in two ways. The f^2 result of 1,439 shows that attitude strongly affects purchase intention. This illustrates how a customer's purpose can be affected by attitude. Meanwhile, the correlations between attitudes toward purchasing behavior and purchase intention toward purchasing behavior are only 0.071 and 0.145 points, respectively. These suggest that the effects of these two connections are moderate. Therefore, according to this study, a consumer who has a strong intention to acquire something because of attitude traits like knowledge, economics, or money, may not be able to act or convert that

intention into actual behavior. Customers must therefore possess more than just a strong intention and attitude to demonstrate their purchasing behavior.

Conclusions

This study investigates how a customer's attitude affects their purchasing decisions, as influenced by their purchase intention. The study was inspired by the shifts in customer behavior brought about by increased consumer knowledge of eco-friendly items. In practice, the desire might not be able to translate into actual behavior. The results of the analyze shows that when attribute elements like knowledge, educational background, and economic or financial status are present, the customer's intention may not be transformed into actual behavior. These variables significantly influence the intention of the customer. A strong attitude and intention might not be able to act or convert into real behavior. For eco-friendly products, according to this research, a strong attitude has a greater influence on customer's purchasing intention than purchasing behavior. This finding suggests that the behavior might only last temporarily rather than becoming a new habit. This is because purchase intention can be driven by attitude elements, consequently, attitude and intention may not be able to act or convert into actual behavior. Therefore, customers need more than just a positive intention and attitude to demonstrate their purchasing behavior.

The analyze contributes to the body of knowledge regarding planned behavior theory and customer research. The significance of motivational variables that might help them convert their intention into actual purchasing behavior was put into evidence. Businesses should develop a marketing plan that emphasizes the target market's attitude and encourages the intention to turn into behavior. This study has several restrictions. First, the sample is relatively small which opens up possibilities for future research using larger samples for various class levels. More samples from various levels should be used to better understand the relationship between intention and behavior for eco-friendly products. Second, this study shows that customers need more than a strong intention and attitude to demonstrate their purchase behavior. This research suggests that the practice of purchasing eco-friendly products is a passing inclination rather than a permanent one. The determinant element that influences consumers' actual purchase behavior for particular products, such as eco-friendly products, may be examined in future studies. It is advised to do a quantitative analysis to comprehend these motives more deeply.

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Sustainable Fashion Consumer Behavior – a Qualitative Research on the Romanian Market

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Abstract

This qualitative research explored sustainable fashion behavior among consumers in the Romanian market. The importance of clothing sustainability lies in addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges associated with the fast fashion industry. Through in-depth interviews with 15 respondents interested in sustainable clothing, the research explored their awareness of recycling/reusing clothes, motivations behind sustainable behavior, perceived barriers, knowledge of recycling business models, and potential strategies to promote sustainability. The findings revealed that most respondents were familiar with the concept of recycling clothes and engaged in practices like donating unwanted garments. Environmental protection emerged as a primary motivation, though economic factors like minimizing waste and social influences also played a role. Key barriers included emotional attachment to clothing, lack of convenient recycling options, and societal stigma around wearing second-hand items. Social norms and peer influences were identified as significant determinants of sustainable behavior. Rewards like discounts, knowing the destination of donated clothes, and receiving recycled material products were seen as potential incentives to increase recycling frequency. However, respondents demonstrated limited knowledge of existing business models that recycle garments. The study highlighted the need for sustained education campaigns to raise awareness about the environmental impact of clothing waste and the importance of recycling. Fostering innovative business models that facilitate collaborative consumption and efficient recycling processes could also drive sustainable fashion practices. Greater availability and accessibility of sustainable clothing options at various price points were recommended to encourage wider adoption. Overall, the qualitative insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing sustainable clothing behavior in Romania and offer strategies to overcome barriers and promote responsible consumption patterns in the fashion industry.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, sustainable clothing, qualitative research, in-depth interviews, recycling.

JEL classification: M31.

Introduction

Sustainability is an important issue that has attracted a lot of attention in the fashion business lately. The potential of sustainable clothing to address numerous environmental, social, and economic issues related to the fast fashion industry makes it significant (Henninger et al., 2016). Sustainable fashion aims to minimize the negative impacts of clothing production and consumption on the planet and its people. Some important factors when talking about sustainability are quality, followed by price and thirdly convenience (Nilssen et al., 2019). Along with these, other aspects important for the consumer, in terms of clothing sustainability, are the production place and also the desire for environmentally and socially compliant clothing (Kleinhüchelkotten and Neitzke, 2019). In this article, we will look at the main arguments for the importance of clothing sustainability as well as its advantages. When it comes to choosing and utilizing clothing in an environmentally and socially conscious manner, consumers are

exhibiting sustainable clothing behavior (Daukantienė, 2023). This behavior is influenced by various factors that encompass individual beliefs, social norms, economic considerations, and access to sustainable options. Understanding these factors is crucial for promoting and fostering sustainable clothing behavior. In the following sections, we will delve into the key factors that impact sustainable clothing behavior and explore strategies to encourage and support sustainable choices in the fashion industry (Yavari, 2019).

Choices about sustainable fashion is greatly influenced by consumer education and awareness. When customers understand the detrimental impact of the fashion industry on the environment and society, they are more inclined to make sustainable choices. (Pereira *et al.*, 2021). Consumers can get an understanding of the value of ethical production practices, sustainable resources, and the overall lifecycle of clothing (Goworek *et al.*, 2012). As a result, they become more conscious of their purchasing decisions and engage in behaviors that support sustainable clothing practices.

The availability and accessibility of sustainable clothing options also greatly influence consumer behavior. When eco-friendly and ethically produced clothing is readily available and easily accessible, consumers are more inclined to choose these options. This highlights the importance of expanding the availability of sustainable fashion in retail stores, online platforms, and other purchasing channels (Alfauzy & Nita, 2021).

Affordability is a significant factor in sustainable clothing behavior. Consumers may be deterred from purchasing sustainable clothing if it comes with a hefty price tag. Therefore, addressing the affordability of sustainable options and offering a range of price points is crucial in encouraging more widespread adoption of sustainable fashion (Leary *et al.*, 2014).

Social and cultural factors, including peer influence, media representations, and cultural norms, have a profound impact on sustainable clothing behavior. By promoting positive social and cultural narratives around sustainable fashion, it is possible to shift consumer preferences and norms towards more sustainable choices. Moreover, peer recommendations and social influence can play a pivotal role in encouraging individuals to embrace sustainable clothing practices (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

The understanding of sustainable clothing behavior is a pivotal aspect in contemporary consumer behavior research, particularly in the context of promoting environmentally responsible practices in the clothing industry. Post-purchase habits and practices play a significant role in shaping the longevity and sustainability of clothing consumption. A comprehensive review of existing literature indicates that sustainable clothing use practices encompass dimensions such as wear, care, and repair, highlighting the need to explore the interplay between consumer behaviors and domestic management within the clothing use phase (Gwozdz *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, empirical studies have identified key factors influencing different types of clothing consumption behaviors, emphasizing the significance of demographics, purchase priorities, disposal channels, repair experience, and clothing types in shaping sustainable clothing consumption patterns among consumers, as evidenced by research focused on Chinese consumers (Guo & Kim, 2023). In elucidating these factors, researchers can develop targeted interventions to foster sustainable clothing behavior changes and address the challenges posed by current consumption patterns in the industry.

To encourage sustainable clothing behavior and overcome the barriers and perceived risks, a number of strategies need to be implemented (Gifford *et al.*, 2011). The first and foremost strategy is to create educational campaigns that raise awareness about the importance of sustainable clothing practices. These campaigns should aim to provide accurate information about the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion to parents, young adults, and providers, to encourage sustainable clothing choices. By sustained efforts to educate people,

we can all contribute to promoting and adopting sustainable clothing behavior (Atik & Ozdamar Ertekin, 2023).

Innovative business models are essential to drive the recycling and reusing of clothing as part of sustainable fashion practices. As the fashion industry grapples with intense resource use and environmental impacts, collaborative consumption emerges as a promising alternative to conventional mass consumption (Wu, 2015). The urgency to address the environmental impact of the textile industry has spurred a shift towards circular production lines and recycling strategies to reduce waste and preserve resources (Yavari, 2019). Textile recycling, despite facing uncertainties in material quality and quantity, can be optimized through innovative business strategies. By integrating concepts of collaborative consumption with efficient textile recycling processes, such as utilizing discrete event simulation models, businesses can enhance the efficiency and sustainability of clothing reuse practices. Consequently, this integration not only contributes to reducing resource flows and environmental impacts but also fosters a more circular and responsible approach to fashion consumption.

On the Romanian market as far as clothes are concerned, about 80% go into donations, in the absence of an important network of specialized centers in this field (Economica.net, 2020). Such facilities do exist, however, not only in specially dedicated spaces but also in stores owned by major retailers such as H&M or Zara. Zara have this program available, but it is not-promoted enough, they have a collaboration with non-profit organizations in Romania such as the Red Cross and Caritas to which the donated clothes go (Zara, nd). Fashion Days also had a similar campaign in Romania, which ran for a period of 15 months, starting in November 2020, where they placed several containers to collect clothes in several large cities in the country, this campaign resulted in 142,811 kg of collected clothes, Bucharest being in first place with 99,285 kg. Containers were placed for 2-3 months in each city (Fashion Days, 2022). This kind of campaign would encourage to stop fashion waste. The main cause faced by those who want to recycle their used clothes is the lack of special containers for selective collection, indicated by 8 out of 10 respondents, as well as the fact that they lack information on where and how to collect, said World Vision Romania (World Vision Romania, 2020). Although actions in the realm of apparel sustainable behavior can be found in Romania, such preoccupations are still not as spread as they are in other countries. This study aims to explore the understanding of the concept of recycling clothes among Romanians, how they recycle, in case such a behavior exists, and the possible drivers behind such a behavior.

1. Research methodology

Qualitative research methods offer unique advantages and valuable insights that cannot be obtained through quantitative approaches. Qualitative research allows for in-depth exploration of complex phenomena and the ability to capture rich, detailed data. By using methods such as interviews, observations, and open-ended surveys, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of people's experiences, perspectives, and behaviors (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

This research endeavor favors qualitative methodologies due to their inherent adaptability. In contradistinction to quantitative approaches, which necessitate predetermined metrics and standardized instruments, qualitative methods offer the capacity for ongoing refinement and the exploration of emergent themes (Jovanovic, 2018). This flexibility is particularly advantageous when investigating nascent areas of inquiry or phenomena demanding a more comprehensive understanding (Mehrad & Tahriri, 2019). The case study aimed to conduct marketing research to analyze the sustainable consumer behavior of clothing on the Romanian market. The purpose of the investigation was to find out the level of

knowledge of the concept of recycling clothes, how the population recycles and the reason why people recycle.

Data was gathered through in-depth interviews using a structured interview guide. The sample was constructed using a sample size of 15 respondents, consisting of people that have shown an interest in sustainable clothing. The sample size is considered to be sufficient for a qualitative research approach (Ta *et al.*, 2022).

Respondents who fit the sought profile were invited to participate to in-depth interviews which were applied face to face through video conferencing software applications (de Villiers *et al.*, 2022) or online thru email, with guidance from the interviewers previous to the completion of the interview and also followed by a discussion at the end on the interview - at the moment qualitative research mainly uses the online method (Archibald *et al.*, 2019) due to the advantages that refer to the control and means of verification that it offers.

The interviews took place between January and February 2024, the responses were entered on the form to facilitate the real time transcript of the interview. The interview was addressed individually to each respondent. The advantage of this method is that we can analyze in detail the opinions of the interviewed people without them being influenced by external sources.

The interviewing of the subjects began with the identification of the researcher and the reasons for conducting the research. During data collection, interview participants are assured of confidentiality, and all information is anonymized to ensure accuracy in research results. Participants have the right to decline to answer any questions they find uncomfortable or irrelevant. There are no correct or incorrect answers. By participating, individuals consent to data collection and interpretation. Any personal data collected will be deleted after processing and will not be used or transmitted further. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews. Since this is marketing research based on self-reported behavior, informed consent is considered implicit in their participation.

2. Data Analysis

To the question: **“Can you tell us if you have heard of the concept of recycling/reusing clothes? If so how do you approach this concept in your life?”** most of the answers were affirmative such as **“I have heard of this concept, I mostly donate clothes that I no longer use and I refuse to throw them away”** or **“Yes, children's clothes have a well-established circuit, from the older ones in the gang to the growing ones, as the former no longer need them”**. These answers show that respondents are aware of this concept, and they apply it in their daily life. The answer **“I find it a very good idea to be able to wear clothes that other people don't want anymore. Personally, I have some second-hand clothes in my wardrobe”**, shows that there is a balance between new and used clothes, broadening horizons and trying different approaches. *“I've heard of the concept of recycling or reusing clothes, but I don't really use it”* There are also people who are aware of the concept of recycling/reusing clothes but do not apply it in their lives and this may be a common behavior as about 1/3 of responses were in this sphere. There are also people who have not heard of this concept or are not sure what to think about it, which means that those campaigns promoting sustainable behavior have not really reached everyone. Lately, this kind of campaign has not been promoted very intensively.

“What are the reasons that could lead/influence you to have a sustainable behavior with regard to clothes purchases? (economic/social nature/environmental protection etc.)”. To this question we received various answers where more than half of the answers were related to environmental protection. *“One reason would be the environment, that is clear. Another would be waste, me being a person who tends to be more minimalist, I try not to waste*

good things, especially clothes. I don't own thousands of items, I don't feel the need to, and if I don't wear certain clothes, I feel I should give them away and they are not thrown away. If to buy new clothes, I prefer to get them from the shop directly, although I don't refuse if I get strictly from close people" in this answer we can see the approach of the economic perspective stems from the desire not to have an extremely large number of clothes that may not be worn very often. Also donating clothes saves space and helps the environment. We also received responses like this: *"The determination to adopt the practice of recycling clothes would be purely financial, the planet will be fine whether we all adopt this trend or not"*.

The Environmental Protection Agency issued a report that stated over 17 million tons of textile waste (Murphy, 2022), or 5.8% of the total MSW generated in 2018, were disposed of in landfills (Roadrunner, 2021).

From the previous answer it appears that the planet is affected by our indifference regarding the recycling of clothes. Worldwide, the textile industry is of the most polluting. Statements like this show us the importance of pollution awareness campaigns in the world's biggest industries and our footprint on this planet. Also, I consider it extremely necessary to implement these consumer awareness and education campaigns (through statements like, for this t-shirt, 2000 l of water were used in the factory).

Respondents also gave answers like: ***"Protecting the environment, stopping consumerism"*** a short definition on What Is Consumerism? Consumerism is the concept that growing the intake of products and offerings bought withinside the marketplace is constantly a perfect goal, and that a person's well-being and happiness rely essentially on acquiring customer items and material possessions (Figueres, 2017). This answer is the only one that relates to consumerism that shows how much we buy and don't use those products. Another relevant answer that addresses sustainability in a good way is *"Sustainability in general, avoidance of waste, more conscious existence"* which brings us back to the topic of protecting the environment. The rest of the respondents are also in environmental protection, we can say that most of them are more concerned about environmental protection and also the economic part.

The next question asks, ***"How important do you think social norms/knowledge/friends are in determining sustainable clothing behavior?"*** Where the answers were divided into 2 categories *"From my perspective, society has no impact on my sustainable behavior. If I like an item of clothing I buy it, whether it is branded or not, new or second hand"*, here we can see that the respondent is not influenced by society in terms of his sustainable behavior, of course the opinions are their own and personal, at the opposite pole there is another type of response such as: *"Very important, because the people we surround ourselves with always define us as people, even if we feel that this may not be the case"*. Here it can be seen that the respondent states that we are very much influenced in our behavior by those around us. Society plays a very important role in our behavior, because if the recycling of clothes was promoted more, there would definitely be more recycling, especially if this has a bonus. More than half of the respondents said that the circle of friends is important in influencing sustainable clothing behavior.

"Have you seen campaigns that involve recycling clothes? Have they made you "clean out your wardrobe". If these were donated to charity, would you reconsider the volume of the donated items?" I received a variety of responses to this question such as "I have seen campaigns, but the voucher for a 10% discount was not that attractive for me to recycle my clothes. *If they were donated to charity, I would really increase the volume of clothes"*, the respondent have seen campaigns involving recycling clothes but due to the low value of the voucher was not attracted to give away old clothes, ¼ of the respondents were in this situation. Informing people about the destination of the donated items would reconsider and increase the

volume of donated clothes. *"Yes, I have seen campaigns and I have also participated in them, cleaning my wardrobe of clothes that I no longer wear, one of them being the one from Fashion Days"* there is a frequency in the answers mentioning the campaign of Fashion Days that carried out a clothing recycling campaign in the period November 2020- February 2022 in about 26 cities in Romania where about 142,811 kg of donated items were collected, and clothes were used for humanitarian purposes. There were also answers like: *"I haven't seen this kind of campaign before."* Which is quite possible because recycling campaigns take place in big cities and their promotion can easily be overlooked. There were also respondents to the questionnaire who would not reconsider the volume of clothes donated even if they were for charity, was constant regardless of the circumstances. Another answer *"I would definitely reconsider generously the volume of clothing items. I support and congratulate the involvement in recycling campaigns."* Affirmations and actions like these, help to combat clothing waste globally.

"Are there any barriers you perceive in being sustainable about purchasing clothing products or giving up clothes you no longer wear? If so, what would they be?" For this question the opinions are quite divided especially regarding the barriers perceived by the respondents. We will start the analysis with the following answer: *"I do not encounter any barriers in giving up and/or donating clothes I no longer use; however, I cannot say at the moment about wearing secondhand clothes"*. Here we can see that there is no barrier in donating clothes, but wearing already used clothes enters a different discussion as ¼ of the respondents are reluctant to wear 2nd hand clothes for both social and hygienic reasons. Another response with a psychological impact is: *"Of course there is. Most likely people can't part with clothes they don't wear for both personal and social reasons. From the society point of view, wearing secondhand clothes it's not a well seen thing, because it means that „you can't afford what is new and expensive. Regarding the personal reasons, I even met someone who wore his older brothers' clothes all his life until he became an adult and now, he uses 2 large wardrobes for one person, clearly out of a need to have everything he didn't have. This is a real example."* Here we see a barrier through the attachment to clothes, which refers to the emotions with which those clothing items are associated. What we experienced as children can also influence our adult lives, influencing sustainable or unsustainable behavior.

When we talk about how other people see us, we can link their opinions to social circles, because it is not good to judge a person by the clothes they wear, because that is not the only thing we have to do as human beings. I'll give another example of an answer where the emotional barrier comes into play *"Emotional barriers first. for example- I don't throw away that skirt that doesn't fit me anymore because I want to lose weight and it's my favorite color;*

- I don't throw away that jacket because it was a gift from my husband when we were young" Keeping clothes that no longer fit us in the hope that we will lose the extra kilos is often a postponement of an inevitable moment and that is that the clothes can deteriorate over time and then they can't be donated either. There are also respondents who say: *"There is no impediment, I support this behavior"* and there are also people who easily give up clothes they no longer wear and for them there is no barrier to sustainable behavior. There are also answers: *"There are some barriers due to the fact that there are no permanent recycling campaigns"* This one is reported by 1/3 of respondents and this is largely true, not necessarily that there are no campaigns but because is too little promotion, and these campaigns are only carried out in physical stores. For shoppers who have moved exclusively online in purchasing clothing, there is no method of recycling old clothes. The fact that there are no constant promotions for recycling clothes affects in a negative way people's desire for sustainable behavior.

"Do you know any business models that recycle/reuse garments? If so, can you give examples?" This question challenged respondents as they failed to recognize business models

that recycle, only $\frac{1}{4}$ were able to identify. One answer is: *"Recently Zara has implemented recycling boxes offering a 10% discount"* as we have previously seen above, respondents also failed to identify these business models as they are very rarely promoted, especially by large Fast-Fashion retailers as they want to market products from current collections. In Romania, recycling/reuse campaigns are hardly promoted at all, as there are already so few of them. The rest of the respondents said they were not aware of this business model.

To the question: **"when you buy new clothes, do you look at the labels to see the materials they are made of? What do you think about clothes made from recycled materials?"** Here we have many answers stating that the label is an important factor in the buying decision: *"I really pay attention to the materials they are made of, even the recycled ones are quite good quality"* or *"Personally yes. I try to aim for as high a percentage of good materials as possible like wool, linen, cotton etc."*

It can be seen that respondents tend towards materials made of natural fibers, which are more durable over time, while those made of artificial materials harm us on several levels, Textiles made of plastics can launch microfibers for the duration of their lifecycle, including immensely to the more and more traumatic global microplastics pollutants levels (Gaylarde, Baptista-Neto & da Fonseca 2021) including when we wash clothes will release quantities of microplastics into the environment.

Among the answers received, there are also respondents who do not pay attention to the label when making a purchasing decision.

"No, I don't necessarily care about the material of the clothes. I wear clothes made from recycled materials and I have no problem with this." This happens quite often because nowadays some clothing items made of synthetic fibers can imitate natural fibers very well and can mislead the buyer because of this similarity.

"Yes, I always look for as little plastic as possible. Recycled materials are a plus for me, because I feel I am part of the sustainability movement, more concretely, supporting such business models". Recently, clothing items made from recycled materials prominently display this information on their labels, potentially influencing purchasing decisions. Buyers of these products feel they are acting more sustainably, while skeptics question the quality of such items.

"If you were rewarded in some form for donating clothes, would you be motivated to do so more often? Would you also inform friends about the reward for donating? What types of rewards would incentivize you?" We received a variety of responses from respondents, *"Probably yes, I would be more motivated and at the same time I would inform other friends. Probably discounts, offers, instant prizes would help"* in this answer it is observed that the respondent would have more motivation to donate items and would also inform acquaintances about this fact. *"I would be extra motivated, and I would always find an item to donate, and I would certainly encourage my acquaintances to do the same. It would even motivate me a t-shirt made of recycled material"* Here the idea of an item made of recycled material is a very good one because it encourages even a more sustainable behavior when you are rewarded with a product made of sustainable materials. Another response *"I do it without being motivated. I think that keeping clothes that we no longer wear is not beneficial especially as they can be worn by people who really don't have the financial means to buy them at full price, plus they take up unnecessary space."* *Personally, I don't consider that a reward would stimulate me, I would do it only for state of it"*. Here the respondent state that he would donate even if he was not remunerated, but only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the respondents gave such an answer also the reward can be an emotional one, the fact that you do a good deed for some people is enough, this fact encourage donation whether these persons are remunerated or not. This type of action is useful for people who do not donate clothes, it is more convenient for them to throw them

away, but for some remuneration they can be attracted to recycle. Even if this does not happen on a regular basis it is a start for a cleaner environment for us and for future generations. *"I don't think it would change whether I donate or not. Maybe it would change the place where I donate, like somewhere where I get a reward versus somewhere where I don't. The reward can also be emotional, not necessarily monetary."* With this response we can see a change in the place of recycling, if these they will shortly gain more customers. Another answer also on rewards: *"I would really donate more and more often. I would also inform friends about donating and rewarding. Rewards that would attract me would be detergent, considerable vouchers, etc."* for this response we can see that the volume would be reconsidered by the customer and organic promotion to acquaintances would also be done, which could increase the volume of donated clothes.

"Are you think that old clothes deserve a second chance? Do you have clothes purchased from second hand shops/sales sites/sales groups for used clothes? What determined you to do so?" Here the answers were divided into several categories because it is a slightly sensitive topic in Romanian society *"yes, I think that clothes deserve a second chance. I buy clothes from SH"*. Here the respondent is very open to secondhand clothes, prices that are advantageous attract me to buy them. To this question we can say that the answer given in the first part of the question is "Yes", the clothes deserve another chance, the purchase was made both from physical stores and from platforms such as Facebook groups and apps like Vinted. These platforms also have the option of selling and this is just as common as buying, as people see an opportunity to clear out their wardrobe and value clothes they no longer wear. *"I didn't purchase and I don't intend to. In our society, people categorize shoppers who purchase items from shops that sell second hand clothes as they feel they can't afford new clothes"* (Hur 2020) and this can reduce sustainable behavior. The pieces and these shops are often in very good condition and of high quality, it really is a bargain to buy clothes made of natural materials such as cashmere at very good prices. When buying from secondhand shops we bring a small contribution to sustainability and a decrease in demand for new clothing products.

And we come to the last question **"What would make you recycle more clothes? Can you give examples?"** Here the answers can easily be repeated with the previous questions: *"Higher vouchers, know who gets clothes donated"* Here we come back to reward methods where higher discounts would lead to more clothes being recycled. Here also a new concept comes up said by a respondent *"More events where to sell them."* Concepts of events to sell clothes, such as fairs organized for such think. *"I can't think of a specific reason if I already do it. I think we should not throw away as much as possible."* Similar answers were given by respondents who already recycle clothes.

"Nothing, we already do that at an optimal level. We only buy what is strictly necessary, we buy good quality clothes, not designer clothes, we don't change them because 'we are bored'".

3. Results and Conclusions

As a conclusion, people are aware of recycling concepts but in Romania there are no permanent campaigns to support sustainability. People are not informed about how harmful it is for the environment to throw clothes. One possible solution is to also promote clothing donation campaigns and to attract more people who don't recycle already, vouchers, prizes and places where clothes go can be offered. It can also show how the clothes are produced and how many resources are used for them and show how the fibers from the donated clothes are recycled and reused and all the work behind the process. Romania needs more recycling, on all levels, also consumer education. Most respondents are aware of the concept of recycling and

reusing clothes, actively integrating practices like donating clothes, passing children's clothes among peers, and balancing new and second-hand clothing into their daily lives. This reflects significant awareness and a positive attitude toward sustainable clothing practices. Environmental protection is the primary motivator, with economic reasons and personal values like minimalism also playing crucial roles. However, a segment of respondents is driven mainly by financial considerations rather than environmental concerns. In the Romanian market there are not many studies done on sustainable behavior in the textile industry. The research reveals mixed attitudes towards second-hand clothes, with some appreciating their affordability and sustainability, while others are deterred by societal stigma and hygiene concerns. Overall, there is substantial awareness and a positive attitude towards recycling and reusing clothes, driven primarily by environmental and economic factors.

As for managerial implications, this type of research on recycling and reusing clothes provides managers with valuable insights into consumer awareness, motivations, and barriers, enabling them to design more effective sustainability campaigns, develop targeted marketing strategies, enhance product offerings, and strengthen brand loyalty by aligning with consumer preferences for environmentally friendly practices.

The research, although it provides valuable information on the sustainable behavior of consumers in the Romanian clothing market, is subject to several limitations. The small sample size of 15 respondents, selected based on their interest in sustainable clothing consumption, may limit the generalizability of the results. The method of data collection can also generate subjectivity problems, limiting the generation of real information, due to the subjects' need to generate an image of social desirability. Also, the short response time of data collection only provides a snapshot of consumer behavior that may not capture long-term trends. As recommendations for future research directions, the need to validate the results through quantitative research that provides statistical robustness to the findings generated by the qualitative study must be considered. Addressing these limitations in future research could improve the comprehensiveness and applicability of the information obtained.

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Using CSR to Create the Employer Identity: Case Study of Romanian Companies

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Abstract

In the current economic and social landscape, businesses are becoming more and more competitive in terms of talents attraction and employer branding can be considered the source for creating attractiveness for companies. What most of the organizations do when it comes to shaping their employer image is integrating the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their strategy. The present paper's aim is to determine what are the approaches used by Romanian companies and how they integrate CSR. Also, we analyzed to what extent that information are available on the companies' web pages. To reach this goal, we started from analyzing 21 companies from Romanian market. These companies are the winners of Employer Branding Awards in 2022, one big event in the employer branding area. The manner in which they communicate about employer branding on their websites, career pages especially was studied to determine their commitment in one of the following categories: environment, community, diversity & inclusion and health. Thus, diversity and inclusion seems to be the area utilized by the most of the winner companies addressing their CSR strategies. Conversely, their involvement in the environmental protection and community is not so frequent mentioned in CSR communication.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, employer branding, sustainability, employer attractiveness.

JEL classification: M14, M31, M5.

Introduction

The labor market has changed dramatically in the last years. A report from 2021 shown that almost 70% of employers have met challenges when it comes to attracting, recruiting and retaining top talents in companies and this leads to an intensification of competition for employees (Wtw, 2021). In this challenging context, organizations need to be competitive, building communication and strategies that help in creating a strong employer branding (Kargas & Tsoko, 2020). The employer branding concept (EB) was mentioned for the first time in 1996 when it has been defined as a functional, economic and psychological benefits package offered by a company (Monteiro et. Al., 2020) and the most important role should be to differentiate the company in the dynamic business environment (Vinayak, Khan and Jain, 2017).

Corporate social responsibility, as defined by European Commission in 2011, represents "the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society" and it includes "social, environmental, ethical, human rights, and consumer concerns into their core operations and strategy, in close collaboration with stakeholders". Companies with a focus on CSR both inside and outside the organization are securing competitive advantages. CSR has the power to create a positive impact for the well-being of the existing employees and to influence the way in which the company is seen by external stakeholders (Lindholm, 2018).

1. Problem statement

Employer branding is a frequent used management strategy that aims to create and communicate a favorable employer brand, in order to attract qualified talents and retain remarkable employees (Auer, Edlinger and Molk, 2021). Previous research (Buchelt et al.,

2021) shed light on several benefits of a strong employer brand, including supporting employee engagement, attracting and retaining talented staff, and promoting higher levels of engagement.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has gained significance as a new way that can increase company value and ensures its sustainability (Hosseini et al., 2021). It is crucial to create a competitive advantage among competitors for organizations to maintain their position in the market and industry. The long-term success and prosperity of companies depends on their ability to attract and keep top talents (Kumar et al., 2021).

The integration of CSR into employer branding communication represents one of the strategies for attracting potential talents and this is not a new aspect. Even more than 20 years ago, more than 90% of MBA students from European and American Business Schools declared that they are more interested to work for an employer with a better reputation in CSR and ethics than only for financial benefits (Montgomery and Ramus, 2003).

2. Research Questions

The present direct research was starting from the winner companies of one employer branding dedicated event in Romania – Employer Branding Awards Conference. This event identifies Romanian companies that are creative and engaged in human resources, human resource marketing and employer branding in Romania.

In 2022, 21 companies from various sections of the conference were awarded and every company's website was analyzed, where possible. The objective of the analyses was to determine the way in which companies communicate about environment, community, diversity & inclusion and health and to identify whether and how these winners integrate CSR principles in their strategic approaches.

3. Research Methods

Firstly, we conducted a literature review to delineate the role that corporate social responsibility (CSR) has within employer branding strategy. In a later stage, it was carried out direct research on the winner companies' websites, focusing on Employer Branding, CSR, or career pages. This leads to a robust database which contains available information from this companies, related to employer branding and their commitment to the following categories: environmental context, community involvement, diversity and inclusion and health.

Therefore, based on this analysis and results, we determined whether CSR activities are taken into account by successful companies in Romania when it comes to employer image building.

4. Findings

Career pages content analyses for the following winner companies for Employer. The 21 winners of the Employer Branding Conference were involved in a robust analysis of their career pages content related to Employer Brand. Through this analysis, a database that captured all relevant information on employee involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities in four key areas was compiled. The interest areas are: environment, community, diversity & inclusion, and health.

Out of a total of 21 organizations, only 14 of them provide sustainability-related information on their career webpages. The rest of 7 companies were excluded from the analysis either because they did not provide enough information for potential candidates to understand their social commitment, or because they do not have a dedicated career page anymore.

The webpage content analysis shed light on four interest areas for companies. At a glance, the organizations seem too keen on diversity & inclusion – out of 14 companies, 8 declared

that they meet all the criteria in this direction. Also, another significant interest field is the involvement in the community, which 8 companies mentioning effort in this regard.

Table 1. Branding Awards in Romania in 2022

1.	BAT
2.	Bosch
3.	Cognizant Software
4.	Continental Sibiu
5.	Decathlon
6.	eMAG
7.	Farmacia Richter
8.	Fortech
9.	Huawei
10.	Kaufland
11.	Lidl
12.	Mavericks the agency
13.	McDonalds's
14.	Mega Image
15.	Michelin
16.	mindit.io
17.	Nagarro
18.	Penny
19.	Profi
20.	Publicis Groupe Romania
21.	REGINA MARIA

Source: Authors' own research results

Conversely, commitment for environment and health seem to be less highlighted in their communication about CSR, as these two areas are mentioned only a few times on their websites.

Diversity & inclusion

Diversity is increasingly present in corporate values. This concept is related, as Griffin and Moorhead mention, to likeliness and differences between employees' age, gender, ethnicity, physical abilities and disabilities, race and sexual orientation (O'Donovan, 2017). Over a half of the organizations analyzed in the present paper include diversity in their CSR statements. At first glance, the most important directions in which companies are conducting activities are diversity for people with disabilities, followed by cultural diversity.

While diversity focuses primarily on the demographic composition of groups and organizations, inclusion emphasizes employee engagement and ways to increase the participation of all employees and harness the effects of diversity within the organization (Nair & Vohra, 2015). Out of 8 companies that declare they are focused on the diversity & inclusion topic, 4 do not mention what are the specific initiatives they have in this sense. The remaining 4 companies, 2 usually conduct permanent or occasional campaign with the goal of hiring people with disabilities. These 2 companies activate in retail and they declare that people with disabilities are well accepted and integrated in company, and the workplace meet all the conditions required for this.

The other 2 companies are focused on cultural diversity and a non-discriminatory wage system.

Community

Community-oriented corporate programs plays an important role in approaching the main challenges that human resources specialist are facing, leading at the same time to direct benefits for the companies (Tuffrey, 2003). Out of 14 companies that could be analyzed, more than a half integrate community-dedicated initiatives in their activity.

The actions for the benefit of the community in which employees are involved cover sensitive topics such as children at risk of social exclusion, children with terminal or special illnesses; inclusion of persons with disabilities; women victims of domestic violence, animal protection and environmental protection. These actions have been identified especially within the large retailers in Romania. The same companies are dedicated to causes such as supporting local partners or NGOs.

The way in which the employees are involved is different from company to company – from proposing ideas for decision makers, to visits in community, to the daily count of the number of steps taken to achieve a final common goal or blood donation. Campaign which aims the benefits offered for employees or their families include scholarships to the children with good results in education or the setting up of a telephone line for psychological counseling, dedicated only to the employees.

Environment

Climate changes are one of the most difficult issues companies are facing today, with pressure coming from consumers, government and stakeholders to commit to and take action against global warming. Employees need to be given the strength, courage, confidence, and knowledge to take action and inspire others to take action. By involving employees, they make an essential contribution to achieving organizations' environmental goals. (Salter, 2009).

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions at the micro level within a company are important interaction points for shaping self-perception and environmental perception in the context of employees' workplace behavior. These CSR initiatives help to create awareness among employees and lead them to revise their environmental perspective. Therefore, they become more motivated to act in line with this perspective, contributing to the protection of the environment as individuals and thus reducing the impact of pollution. Hence, sustainability can be considered as a "new norm" which has influence in personal behavior of employees in relation to the environment (Kong et al., 2021).

Out of 14 companies, only 3 point out their commitment regarding environment on the career page. For example, one of the actions taken by these companies is planting trees in disadvantaged areas – here, the employees were volunteers. Also, a retail company highlight that, in the sense of protecting the environment, their new stores are designed to be energy efficient.

However, another company mention that they are sustainability concerned, but without many more details. The other 11 companies involved in analysis choose to create a dedicated-section on their websites for this kind of information. Their career pages is only populated with benefits & compensations details or open positions.

Health

In terms of health sector, only one of the large retailers in Romania among the companies analyzed, manages to stand out. It clearly and concisely presents, on the employees and potential candidates dedicated pages, their initiatives and events designed with employees or

for them. Social and employment policy is geared towards supporting social rights, paying particular attention to the legal and human rights of employees. In this context, principles related to corporate social responsibility are integrated. This approach aims to take into account the interests of employees, including ensuring their health and safety. As such, employers are in charge of ensuring that employees well-being concerns are integrated in CSR strategies, including aspects such as work-related stress, flexible working hours, work-life balance, and the overall well-being of employees – all of which have a significant impact on the health of the population (Macassa, Cruz Francisco and McGrath, 2017).

Through actions like blood donation, organizing charity fairs in support of NGOs with medical activities and providing a specialized telephone line for psychological counseling for employees, this company manages to highlight its commitment to health in the section dedicated to career. Also, a technologic company mentions the support provided to the Romanian authorities in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of regulation on consumer behavior

Potential talents, especially those who have social and environmental concerns, are attracted to companies that are involved in corporate social responsibility (CSR). CSR is perceived as a way to incorporate their personal values into their future workplace, communicating the details related to its offer a positive impact about the expected work environment within the company. Through these signals, candidates can make inferences about their potential employer' attitude, as CSR suggests fair treatment of stakeholders (Jakob et. al., 2021).

From this point of view, the integration of details about the company's social responsibility commitments on the career page becomes more and more important. This idea is also strengthened by other previous research (Micik and Micudova, 2018) where it is highlighted that employers increase their likelihood of shaping a favorable image as an employer once they integrate information on the company's core values, social responsibility and long-term prospects into their career opportunities page.

The companies analyzed before demonstrate a remarkable potential when it comes to their commitment for social responsibility. Some of them are well-known for this on the Romanian market, especially when we talk about the retail industry. Despite all of their different project and commitments in different social responsibility areas, only one minor part of these analyzed companies manage to reflect their concern also on their career page. By neglecting this important communication opportunity with their potential talents, these companies risk to lose a significant number of potential candidates, especially those who share the same values as the company.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this paper highlight the crucial importance of building a strong employer branding in the current context in Romania, where companies need to face the transformation of the labor market – from an employers' market to an employees' market. In this regard, a CSR strategy represents an often strategy to follow by employers. The aim of this research is to discover the way in which Romanian companies integrate CSR in their strategies for building the employer image and to what extent this information are reflected on their career pages on their websites.

This study has analyzed in details the EB communications from 21 winners of the Employer Branding Awards from 2022. The aim was to identify their involvement in terms of environment, community, diversity & inclusion, and health as well. The results obtained shed light on the fact that out of 21 companies, only 14 provide relevant information about CSR on

their career pages. Diversity & inclusion topic are approached by almost all of them in their CSR strategies, highlighting the importance of hiring diverse demographic groups and the promoting of an inclusive workplace.

Conversely, involvement in community and environment are rare approached – topics in their CSR communication, suggesting possible development of this areas. Additionally, some of the companies manifest an interest for building a healthy work environment by creating health-related activities and supporting their employees, especially in the COVID-19 context. This study highlight the importance of integrating CSR related information on companies' webpages, focusing on the opportunity to find right candidates who share the same values and attitudes as the company. This can spread a positive signal about company's work environment, organizational culture and social commitment, influencing also the candidates' decision.

In conclusion, Romanian companies can gain a great competitive advantage by developing a powerful CSR strategy and by transparent communication about their commitment on their website pages. By attracting candidates who share the same values, these companies have the opportunity to build a positive and healthy workplace, increasing their reputation and positive influencing their relations with employees and stakeholders.

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Trend Analysis: How Consumer Demand is Changing Marketing Practices

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Abstract

While the contemporary period is increasingly marked by innovation and we see this especially in the market, the consumer-company relationship is forced to constantly adapt to these changes. But what does this innovation bring, how does consumer demand change marketing practices and what are the implications of the circular economy? Analyzing the concept of trend and its influence over time from a circular and cyclical perspective, this paper examines how market demand transforms long-term marketing strategies to meet current and future market expectations, bringing to the forefront the importance of ethical, green and future-oriented marketing practices. Basically, from a cyclical, ethical and sustainable perspective, we can say that market demand constantly returns in another, innovative form. The present study focuses primarily on analyzing marketing trends through exploratory research, with a focus on transparency and ethics, fast fashion and consumerism, and how these changes influence consumer behavior and perceptions. The key findings suggest that by understanding and responding to market trends, brands can develop more effective, sustainable and innovative marketing strategies that keep pace with the ever-changing expectations of consumers, but also with the evolution of the modern world.

Keywords: Circular Economy, Marketing Strategy, Consumer Behavior, Sustainability, Ethical practices.

JEL classification: Q01, M31, D16, Q56, O33.

Introduction

In today's modern world, we frequently hear discussions about trends, we naturally observe them, and we are increasingly inclined to purchase new products, especially in terms of fashion, even if we do not immediately realize it. In this way, in addition to the concept of

trend, the concept of consumer behavior in response to market changes appears, both from a psychological point of view and cyclical, repetitive. Regarding repetitive behavior, it is said that trends are cyclical, and they return to the market at a certain interval of time, in an innovative form, which is proven by remarkable periods of time, trends in fashion, design or music, or even marketing. But is this innovative form also ethical and sustainable?

To understand how consumer demand changes marketing practices in a circular economy, some authors have reported in most of the statistical literature that a trend is conceived as that part of a series that changes relatively slowly over time (Harvey, Andrew, 2014), an aspect that is highlighted in the paper through the key notions: consumer behavior and market adaptation. In the context of marketing, trends are more than patterns over time; they reflect the evolving behaviors, preferences, and societal values of consumers that shape the strategies and operations of businesses (Rathore, 2018). Starting from this premise, this paper aims to reflect how the current landscape of consumer influence shapes the marketing practices of brands. In this sense, the marketing practices used must not only respond to the demands and needs of the current market, but also adapt to a circular economy, have an ethical component, and be on trend.

We speak of such trends as a concept in their own right, which stands out in all industries, but especially in fashion. First, between 1946 and 1975, trends gained an understanding similar to their current meaning (Campos & Wolf, 2018), and since then, trend has been mostly associated with the idea of fashion and novelty, in relation to uncertainty and anticipation (Bacrie, 2012). Also, the trend is considered to be a social process in which style and tastes change (Gomes, de Mendonça Cohen & Flores, 2018), and this is reinforced by the statements according to which trends are also defined as directions and have an effect and impact on culture (Vejlgaard & Henrik, 2008).

Starting from the main question of the paper: how consumer demand is changing marketing practices? - a series of studies were considered which show that, as marketing moves towards greater personalization and ethical considerations, understanding and capitalizing on these trends is essential for the success of brands in the future. Thus, by prioritizing the highlighted ones, the present study intends to answer to the main question and aims to achieve 4 general objectives, such as highlighting consumer-centric marketing, exploring strategic adaptation, encouraging sustainable practices, and guiding future marketing innovations.

Objective 1: highlighting consumer-centric marketing – this objective highlights the shift from a product-centric to a consumer-centric marketing approach (Niininen, Buhalis, & March, 2007), where major fashion brands, in our case, are increasingly responding to consumers' values, preferences, and demands for transparency, ethics, and sustainability.

Objective 2: exploring strategic adaptations – this objective provides insights into how brands are adapting their marketing practices to keep up with trends such as fast fashion, ethical consumerism, and sustainability, presenting the strategic changes needed to remain relevant in a dynamic, ever-changing marketplace (Andersen, 2015).

Objective 3: encouraging sustainable practices – through this objective, the paper also aims to adopt a direction of encouraging brands to adopt sustainable and responsible practices that resonate with consumers aware of climate and economic changes (Goetz, 2010), and also to present the relevance of the brand concept in the market, through the notion of consumerism and the ethical approach from a sustainable perspective.

Objective 4: guiding future marketing innovations – through this objective, the theme aims to provide a research framework for brands, related to anticipating future trends, while encouraging innovation in marketing approaches that align with both present and future expectations and also facilitating a framework for consumer education (Rust, 2020).

Based on the premises marked above, this paper presents the research contributions structured in an academic way, as follows: in the Introduction the main and key elements of the theme are presented, in the Literature review section the studies that formed the basis of the research are highlighted, in the State of the art the case study is framed, in the Research methodology section the methodology for carrying out this article is practically framed, in the Findings and discussions section the main directions noted based on the case study in relation to the specialized literature are found, in the Conclusions we find the answer to the basic question, the objections and the references obtained, and the References section encompasses the sources that formed the basis of the research.

On this structure, the paper seeks to support the idea that marketing trends can be understood as dynamic signals that not only indicate changes in consumer preferences but also provide a roadmap for businesses to align their strategies with societal, environmental and economic imperatives. In this sense, it can be seen that these trends emerge from complex interactions between technological advances, cultural shifts and global challenges, such as climate change and economic uncertainty.

In the context of a circular economy of the future, these trends thus become increasingly evident in any marketing strategy, because as brands seek to maintain relevance and foster meaningful connections with consumers, the ability to identify, interpret and respond to these trends becomes a competitive advantage (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). In other words, today's effective marketing practices are not just reactive, but proactive (Baah, Opoku-Agyeman, Acquah, Issau, & Moro Abdoulaye, 2021), positioning brands as leaders in innovation, ethics, and sustainability, while addressing the evolving needs and expectations of an increasingly conscious global consumer base. In this case, we notice a direction through which consumer demand influences marketing practices in an organic way.

1. Literature review

Recent studies indicate that consumer awareness around environmental issues have grown substantially, leading to a shift in purchasing behaviors toward brands that demonstrate a commitment to sustainability. The specialized literature shows us that consumer backlash against unsustainable practices in the fast fashion industry has catalyzed demand for more ethical and environmentally friendly alternatives (Holt, 2012). Similarly, some specialists (McNeill & Moore, 2015) argue that this shift reflects a broader societal trend in which consumers seek to align their purchasing decisions with their personal values, particularly in areas related to sustainability and corporate responsibility.

Research further suggests that consumers are increasingly supportive of brands that actively engage in sustainable practices and demonstrate social responsibility (Mandarić, Hunjet, & Vuković, 2022). Nielsen's global survey (SO-CORE, 2015) on corporate social responsibility revealed that 66% of respondents were willing to pay more for sustainable goods, indicating a clear consumer preference for brands that prioritize environmental and social well-being. Some authors expand on this, saying that noting that such preferences not only influence purchasing decisions but also enhance long-term brand loyalty by fostering trust and a sense of shared values between consumers and companies (Fournier & Yao, 1997).

As consumer values continue to evolve, fast fashion companies that prioritize sustainability and ethical practices are poised to experience enhanced brand appeal and loyalty. Some specialists (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007) highlight that this paradigm shift is a direct response to growing consumer discontent with the environmental and social consequences of fast fashion. In this sense, consumer education on sustainability plays an extremely important role in choosing environmentally friendly products or services, an aspect that marketing

practices and strategies must increasingly highlight in relation to brands' strategies to adapt to a circular economy and, of course, avoiding greenwashing.

Moreover, McKinsey & Company's (2020) report on the fashion industry's transformation underscores that integrating sustainability into business models is no longer optional but essential for staying competitive in the market. This evolution marks a significant departure from traditional marketing approaches, establishing a new framework where ethical and sustainable practices are integral to brand identity and consumer engagement. This mention confirms to us that consumer behavior will migrate more and more in a direction supporting the evolution of green marketing, influencing market demand.

The main concepts and theories underlying the research are highlighted by the keywords: Circular Economy, Marketing Strategy, Consumer Behavior, Sustainability, Ethical practices. This approach is structured around a theoretical approach combined with an empirical research through a case study analysis, which denotes a better understanding of consumer-centered marketing, consumer behavior in relation to ethical practices, as well as marketing strategy for adapting brands to a market with cyclical trends, constantly evolving and a circular economy. Regarding research gaps or limitations, these are highlighted by the relatively new topic addressed in the paper, as well as by key elements, such as: green marketing, cyclical trend or innovation and consumer education. In this sense, subtle nuances of inconsistency can be noticed in the literature at this time, these topics being still under research.

Summarizing the above aspects regarding the literature review, we argue that this research is closely related to specialized theories of consumer behavior, marketing strategy and circular economy, all of which contribute academically to the perspective of the paper: Trend Analysis: How Consumer Demand Is Changing Marketing Practices.

2. State of the art

The dynamic interplay between consumer expectations and brand strategies has become a defining feature of modern marketing. As businesses adapt to shifting societal values, environmental challenges, and evolving consumer behaviors, the need to align brand initiatives with these emerging demands is more critical than ever. This section explores key developments in sustainability, design, and consumer behavior, highlighting their impact on marketing practices and strategies. Through case studies and theoretical insights, the analysis emphasizes the importance of innovation, collaboration, and a multidisciplinary approach in addressing the challenges and opportunities of the contemporary marketplace.

By examining the fast fashion industry's sustainability initiatives, the role of design in fostering a circular economy, and the interdisciplinary study of consumer behavior, this section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of the art. These insights not only showcase the strategies employed by leading brands but also underscore the broader implications for marketing as a driver of ethical, sustainable, and consumer-focused business practices.

Starting from the question: how consumer demand changes marketing practices, and considering the concept of trend analysis, the paper is based on a case study from the fashion textile industry, to be able to follow the key aspects of the mentioned approach. With a focus on the Inditex group, a group that includes the brands Zara, Zara Home, Bershka, Massimo Dutti, Oysho, Pull&Bear, Stradivarius, Uterqüe and Lefties, we suggest the sustainable and responsible approach towards the environment and society of the group: *"Inditex began with an ambition to make fashionable, quality and life-enhancing clothes for people, at the right price. Many of the social, economic and environmental challenges we all face are now more urgent than ever."* (Inditex, 2024)

In the following subsections, we will explore the relationship between sustainable fashion-trend-consumer behavior, identifying how a marketing strategy responds to market demand through ethical and future-oriented practices. As a theoretical framework, we emphasize that the Inditex group is a Spanish multinational clothing company, the largest fast fashion group in the world, operating over 7,200 stores in 93 markets worldwide. The main brand in the group is Zara, a brand whose notoriety has grown in recent years, especially based on display marketing. With its modern strategy aimed especially at the millennial generation, this brand stands out for its rapid response to market trends, being seen as a trendsetter, which translates into a huge flow of items in stores.

In terms of marketing strategy, the 4Ps (price, product, promotion and placement) that define the Zara brand play an essential role in shaping the company's reputation in the market (Zara's Marketing Strategy: A Deep Dive into Fast Fashion Dominance, 2023). While from a product point of view, Zara is known as an instant and fast fashion brand, from a customer point of view, it is also a fashion promoter, constantly adapting to market demands and trends given by large companies or institutions of color. In terms of receiving emerging trends, this brand is a leader in this regard, this being reflected in the dynamics of nature that it represents. With a balanced quality-price ratio, the brand is taking steps towards a type of sustainable products, made from eco, recycled or recyclable materials, promoting the circular economy and its principles increasingly visible through the measures it takes at international level.

In terms of location, Zara's global footprint includes nearly 3,000 stores, which are usually located in large cities and tourist attractions. The principles on which the brand bases its location arguments are based on accessibility, visibility and attraction. Thus, the brand identity is carefully combined with the experience it offers and how it is positioned in the minds and preferences of consumers. In terms of green marketing, Zara has started to promote in more and more stores the concept of clothing collection centers, self-purchase and re-wearing of clothes in various outfits or the reintroduction of products from past collections.

While the image strategy keeps up with the trends, the price strategy focuses on the concept of brand loyalty, so that regardless of growth, customers will remain loyal along the way. Justified from both an economic and environmental point of view, the brand strives to remain accessible and offer superior product quality. In order to delimit products by price category, the brand has gradually introduced superior quality products that have a considerably higher price. Likewise, the brand's commitment to a sustainable environment is also reflected in the mention of the quality of the items.

The brand's promotion strategy is easily visible in society, as it is a clothing brand that emphasizes the customer experience more than classic and visible promotion methods, such as out of home solutions. Aspects like organic growth through word of mouth advertising, aesthetic promotion of the physical space and online image serve as a powerful promotional tool in the current period. Cultivating a community of loyal customers, offering remarkable in-store experiences and promoting an increasingly sustainability-oriented approach, the brand clearly emphasizes consumer-centric marketing, adopting an innovative, transparent and forward-thinking strategy.

This holistic marketing approach reflects a fast fashion business model, which, although in contrast to the concept of sustainability, demonstrates an attitude inclined towards ethical, sustainable and adapted marketing techniques and practices to the current and future needs of the market based on a circular trend. The sustainable model of Zara described as a very specific business model, it is practically based of the ability of the brand to act in a flexible way to the market demand and its changes (Sitara & Destiny, 2020). The brand's appeal to consumers most often derives from novelty, fashion, topicality, quality, price and innovation, aspects that are part of the company's list of key values. Also on the brand's list of values is sustainability,

the measures that Zara takes in this regard being increasingly visible and even announced by the brand, as follows: in 2022, Zara promised to use 100% renewable energy in their own operations; in 2023 they promise to eliminate single-use plastics for customers; by 2025 they plan to introduce more sustainable 100% linen and sustainable or recycled polyester; by 2040 they promise to have zero net emissions (How sustainable is Zara and can I shop there with a clean conscience?, 2024).

In other words, the development of marketing practices by the Inditex group and especially the Zara brand, to meet constant, dynamic and detailed demand, as well as to maintain trends, quality standards and sustainability norms, involves a broad and continuously evolving process, highlighted by 3 main aspects, extracted from the specialized literature reported in this case study:

- aligning brand values with consumer expectations for a sustainable and innovative future;
- the strategic role of design in the new textile economy;
- a multidisciplinary perspective on consumer behavior and marketing strategies.

With a focus on people, environment and profit, the Inditex group must not only align itself with economic, social and environmental impact, but also constantly analyze production and consumption factors, in order to make the transition from a fast-fashion company to a green-fashion one. And in this case, as in the case of small brands, the need for education regarding sustainable consumer behavior makes its presence felt, so this is a factor that dictates production and market supply (Esbeih, Molina-Moreno, Núñez-Cacho, & Silva-Santos, 2021). At the same time, through selective waste recycling measures and by offering customers the option to donate clothing items in take back containers installed in many of its stores, Zara actively contributes to promoting a circular economy in the textile industry. We note in this case an association between concepts from the specialized literature, such as: ethical practices, consumer behavior, circular economy, sustainability and marketing strategy, and those present in the case study, such as: trend, fast fashion and circularity.

2.1. Aligning brand values with consumer expectations for a sustainable and innovative future

The fast fashion industry's response to consumer demand for sustainability is reshaping marketing strategies, demonstrating the critical role that environmental responsibility plays in enhancing brand reputation and fostering long-term consumer relationships (Koszewska, 2018). For instance, brands like Zara are investing in innovative marketing campaigns that highlight their commitments to sustainability. Zara's Closing the Loop initiative emphasizes the importance of garment recycling and waste reduction. Such initiatives resonate with environmentally conscious consumers, reinforcing also brand loyalty, trust and adaptability to the market.

In terms of the marketing mix related to the promotion side, Zara's method of promoting itself is holistic, largely choosing to focus on the customer experience, whether online or in-store. Also, in any medium, the brand emphasizes aesthetics, which is proven by the affinity that younger generations have for the trends displayed by Zara, either through the way the decor is presented in stores or through the way the brand's image is displayed on social media.

The brand's orientation towards innovation, design and environmental protection represents a realignment of the brand's values with the current and future expectations of the market, especially when we talk about the context of a circular economy. Aligning the brand with the strategy, culture and trends of a market ultimately involves a business remodeling and

a flexibility towards the new, practically adopting a strategic vision for the company's future (Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

In the case of Zara, but also of the other brands in the group, aligning brand values with consumer expectations is a key aspect that practically dictates the policy of the Inditex group. In this way, the brands claim a top position in the market, reflected in the sales they have achieved. At the same time, Zara's perspective on the concept of trend can be observed in digital marketing. The leading global fashion retailer, even if it prioritizes organic marketing, uses a balanced range of digital marketing techniques to place the brand in the eyes of consumers according to the current market trend. Thus, strategies such as social media management, email marketing, Search Engine Optimization, Pay per Click campaigns or content marketing are on the list of practices regularly used by the brand (Purawat, 2024).

Therefore, based on the above, we can say that aligning brand values with consumer expectations for a sustainable and innovative future is based on a marketing strategy adapted to the market, in accordance with the supply-demand relationship. To support this with concrete examples, we highlight the fact that the fashion store Zara, which is known as a fast-fashion giant, has included sustainability and green fashion in its marketing and sales strategy, so that, through various techniques, it encourages both sustainable consumption behavior and an environmentally friendly image. Innovation and sustainability, although they are 2 terms that define something new and future-oriented, they are essential to be integrated into current marketing strategies, with perspectives on the circular economy and the adaptation of brands to market requirements, as it is also about an alignment and reconfiguration of brand values. Therefore, we note that in marketing terms, we are talking about aligning brand values with consumer expectations as a basic strategy, which needs to be re-adapted to the market according to the cyclicity and circularity of trends. In the case of the fashion industry, because trends are much more visible and require constant readjustment in relation to consumer behavior, brands are forced to become increasingly dynamic, sustainable and innovative.

2.2. The strategic role of design and technological influence in the new textile economy

The concept of the new textile economy (Snoek, 2017), namely the concept that refers to the fashion industry, emphasizes the strategic role of design in the transition to a circular textile industry, i.e. adapted to the green economy. In this case, the creation of high-quality clothing products in relation to the development of new business models of brands, can significantly contribute to changing the perception of clothes, by making these products sustainable products, not simple disposable items, as in the case of fast fashion. For this reason, sustainable design, as well as access to sustainable products, can encourage consumers to see clothing as a long-term investment and a reusable resource, thus supporting the objectives of the circular economy in the fashion sector: recycling, reuse, reduction (Purawat, 2024).

Regarding the challenges, the production of sustainable fashion, on the one hand, and the consumption of sustainable fashion, on the other hand, is a systemic problem, because in this case we are talking about the demand-supply relationship and the concept of overproduction. The Zara case is an example of overproduction, especially since this brand makes considerable efforts to align itself with fashion design trends that are constantly changing. From this perspective, sustainability also has an educational component, and it represents a future direction. The technological influence on design also has a contribution in terms of innovation. Although trends change according to certain circular tendencies, there is still an influence that differentiates them, namely: technology. In the case of the Zara brand, it has adopted strategic technological measures to reduce waste, such as: online orders that save on carbon footprint, recycling of used clothes in stores to reduce waste or self-checkout counters through which the purchase process is intended to be innovated. In this way, we are talking about a readjustment

of consumer behavior in accordance with new technologies, but also an adaptation of fashion design to market trends, developing vegan fashion concepts, selling eco-friendly items and using recycled materials.

A unique approach to fast fashion by the large brand Zara was debated in the specialized literature by authors Mishra and Dodke in their work: *Technological Influence on Becoming the Fashion Industry's Market Leader*, which presents an overview of the concepts of technological influence on vertically integrated supply chain, rapid design-to-sale cycles, and customer-centric retail approach. In the research, the authors state that, in today's rapidly evolving fashion retail landscape, large companies face the challenge of meeting consumer demands adapted to increasingly rapidly changing trends, while maintaining operational efficiency and customer satisfaction (Mishra & Dodke, 2024), aspects that are ultimately revolutionizing the fashion market and business models in this industry.

We thus highlight 3 major aspects that constitute key issues that could jeopardize the leading position of the Zara brand, as highlighted by the authors Misha and Dodke in their research paper:

Increased competition: it is well known that the fast fashion industry is competitive and constantly changing, with major brands trying to constantly maintain a trendy image. In the case of Zara, this, combined with market demand and the circularity of trends, can be seen as a strategy to adapt to the market in accordance with design and consumption trends.

Leveraging technology for competitive advantage: in today's landscape, technology is increasingly making its presence felt in every industry and activity, so in the case of Zara, the brand must remain a leader, adopting an innovation-based strategy to maintain its competitive advantage, incorporating solutions such as Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things and Augmented Reality.

Sustainability concerns: over time, and especially as more and more companies strive to meet the goals of a circular economy, Zara has been heavily criticized for its fast fashion practices, because, by trying to constantly adapt to trends and the volume of market demand, it produces industrial quantities of clothes that often end up unused, polluting the environment. In order to gradually become sustainable, the brand has begun to adopt sustainability practices that are positive for both the environment and society.

2.3. An overview of consumer behavior and marketing strategies

In recent decades, a main problem for manufacturing companies has been how consumers respond to various factors used to achieve their main goal: obtaining the highest possible profit. Starting from this target, many brands still aim to obtain profit while respecting sustainability norms and the concept of quality. In this context, it becomes essential to notice the consumer behavior, which is essential for brands, because the way a person chooses a product to satisfy a certain need can represent a sales strategy adapted to the market.

As research in the field of consumer behavior has evolved, it has become increasingly evident that approaching this field requires a multidisciplinary perspective, in which behavioral sciences, especially psychology and sociology, have an essential role, which have provided fundamental concepts and ideas. In this sense, brands can much more easily observe the transition and influence of trends in relation to consumer news and expectations, as well as anticipate future directions. The concepts of green marketing practices and green consumer purchasing behavior are key elements for trend analysis and, respectively, how consumer demand influences the change in marketing practices.

Over time, consumer behavior has changed radically, and this is since the global market has undergone changes in terms of economy, society and environment. Increasingly consumer-oriented, this behavior has given rise to the concept of overproduction, as a response of

companies to the growing market demand. In the case of the textile industry, here too we have as an example the Inditex group, with a focus on the fashion store Zara, which has become a market leader precisely by adapting very quickly to market trends, offering a wide range of products and a volume to match. A study in the textile sector analyzed consumer behavior towards green products in relation to education on environmental protection, reporting that in general consumers show an increasing intention to purchase green products (Saeed et al., 2013). Thus, we can say that this does not only involve the correct promotion of sustainable products through green marketing, but also the implementation of a business strategy that involves a radical change in the vision of the concept of consumption, so green marketing is becoming increasingly important for brands (Peattie & Crane, 2005).

Green marketing is a concept that has gained increasing momentum in the present, generally in the context of brands that work on developing a sustainability strategy, although basically, this is a concept that emerged in the late 1980s as a competitive trend for companies and brands that wanted to differentiate themselves by going green (García-Salirrosas & Rondon-Eusebio, 2022). Over time, companies have adopted green marketing as a solution to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals proposed by the United Nations (United Nations), while realizing a trend of customer loyalty towards sustainable brands. Thus, green marketing began to encompass aspects such as green labeling, sustainability certifications, recyclable packaging or packaging made from recycled materials, ecological management and sustainable logistics, eco-advertising, resource efficiency, innovation and technology to reduce the carbon footprint (Kang & Hur, 2012). In response to these practices, purchasing behavior has constantly readjusted from a sustainability perspective, highlighting on the one hand, consumers' preference for green products, meaning that the product must respect a production, distribution, consumption and recycling process (Chan, 2013), and on the other hand, highlighting the ethics of purchasing, because of an awareness of social, environmental and economic responsibility (Lai & Cheng, 2016).

3. Research methodology

This research analytically combines the analysis of the specialized literature with the presentation of a case study, in order to carry out an analysis on the concept of trend and how consumer demand changes marketing practices.

Specialized literature: an analytical and exploratory review of the specialized literature on keywords such as circular economy, marketing strategy, consumer behavior, sustainability, ethical practices, established a theoretical basis for this work. This review included academic journals, industry reports and case studies focused on brands from the Inditex group, such as Zara.

Case study: an analysis was carried out on the Inditex group, specifically for the Zara brand. This case study examined specific sustainability and marketing initiatives for a clothing brand, evaluating their impact on brand perception, consumer loyalty and overall business strategy.

Therefore, this approach provides valuable results on consumer preferences and expectations, especially regarding sustainable choices amid changing trends, by analyzing ethical marketing practices within a circular economy framework.

4. Findings & discussion

The analysis of the state of the art highlights the evolving nature of marketing strategies in response to sustainability, design innovation, and consumer behavior. These findings underscore the transformative impact of aligning brand values with consumer expectations,

integrating sustainable design principles (Vallero, 2008), and adopting multidisciplinary approaches to understanding the present and the future consumer behavior.

a) The impact of education on the concept of sustainability for shaping consumer behavior: education regarding consumer behavior is a key factor in today's economy. This approach is particularly marked by the awareness of choosing sustainable products over less sustainable ones, especially when it comes to clothes and their recycling. In other words, an educated customer is a customer who chooses for a cleaner, greener and more civilized future, and in response to this type of behavior, brands will increasingly have to respond to the market by adapting their sales and marketing strategies in an ethical, green and innovative way. Thus, the present research based on the Inditex Group clearly highlights that educating consumers about sustainable fashion can be a green marketing strategy to align and match brand values with consumer expectations in relation to market trends. Zara's sustainability initiatives are an example of how strategic, environmentally responsible, and educational marketing efforts resonate with modern consumers who have increasingly high expectations for sustainable and ethical products and services (Shove & Spurling, 2013).

b) The role of green marketing in supporting the circular economy: by promoting a high-quality product design, combined with innovative business models, can reshape consumer perceptions of clothing, transforming them from disposable items into durable, reusable investments. In this sense, we are talking about the implications of the circular economy in the fashion industry through green marketing. The research highlights that sustainable fashion design not only supports environmental goals but also educates consumers on the value of sustainable consumption. As consumers are now becoming more aware of environmental issues, as a result of education on sustainability, they are increasingly receptive to the messages they receive from brands and more selective in their choice. Therefore, we see the impact that green marketing has on the purchase decision, being also a strategy that involves a long-term competitive advantage (Dabija & Pop, 2013). Practically, green marketing thus becomes a promoter of the circular economy and a tool for strategic brand development.

Conclusions

The analysis of how consumer demand is transforming marketing practices reveals a shift towards innovation, the adoption of circular economy principles, and a strong emphasis on market adaptation. By integrating these elements, brands can create effective marketing strategies that resonate with consumers, foster loyalty, and contribute to a more sustainable future. Summarizing these concepts, opinions, and premises, we can conclude based on the results derived from our research methodology, which includes an analysis of specialized literature and a case study, that indeed, consumer demand is changing marketing practices.

Beginning with foundational concepts like marketing strategy (Fifield, 2012) and circular economy (Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017) and connecting to the modern notion of trends, this research offers a perspective on consumer demand grounded in key pillars such as cyclicity, ethics, and sustainability. In this context, all future marketing strategies should be aligned with these concepts in some way. The essential objective of the circular economy must remain a priority for organizations, not only as a strategy for their own success but also for its profound positive impact on the environment (Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, & Hultink, 2017). Transitioning to a circular model brings significant benefits, including the protection of natural resources, the reduction of pollution, and enhanced organizational, societal, and economic well-being.

Furthermore, the strategic incorporation of sustainable practices (Shove, Elizabeth, & Nicola Spurling, 2013) aligns with the evolving expectations of consumers, creating a framework for ethical responsibility and fostering a sustainable market ecosystem. By exceeding the expectations of environmentally conscious consumers of the textile industry, brands can foster a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement and innovation in the industry. This alignment not only enhances brand reputation and consumer trust but also establishes a foundation for long-term success that benefits all stakeholders, from organizations to the broader global community.

However, this paper acknowledges certain limitations in previous published studies. While the concepts of green marketing, cyclical trend or innovation and consumer education are widely discussed in the existing literature, they are often treated in isolation, rather than as interconnected components of a holistic framework. Also, the approach of consumer behavior in relation to the fashion industry and the circular economy represents a research direction open to discussions and case studies. Thus, we argue that this fragmented approach limits the ability to fully understand the interaction between these elements in shaping modern marketing strategies. By addressing this gap, the paper aims to contribute to a more integrated perspective on these critical issues.

The analysis of the specialized literature showed that the concept of trend is a circular one and it is reflected mainly in the evolution of consumer preferences and societal values, being in direct relation with market dynamics and consumer-centered marketing. From the previous discussions resulting from the study, we identified the important aspects of the fast fashion industry in relation to consumer behavior and the measures that brands such as Zara take in response to market demand and need. In this sense, a tendency of large brands in the textile industry to constantly adapt their marketing strategy to align with market trends, consumer preferences and the circular economy is noticed.

In conclusion, the integration of circular economy principles (Velenturf & Purnell, 2021), ethical marketing strategies, and sustainability-driven innovations represents a transformative opportunity for businesses to meet contemporary challenges and contribute to a more sustainable future. By prioritizing these principles, brands can achieve meaningful growth, strengthen consumer relationships, and play a pivotal role in shaping an environmentally and socially responsible marketplace.

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