

What is meaningful for responsible shoppers in online fashion retail?

Tiina Kemppainen,¹ Lauri Frank,² and Veera Luhtanen²

¹ University of Jyväskylä, School of Business and Economics, PO Box 35, FI-40014, Jyväskylä, Finland

² University of Jyväskylä, Faculty of Information Technology, PO Box 35, FI-40014, Jyväskylä, Finland

Abstract

This qualitative study investigates what is meaningful for responsible shoppers in online fashion retail. The study aims to identify and describe these essential themes from the customers' perspective. The data were collected by interviewing nine self-proclaimed responsible shoppers aged 26–51 years. All participants were female. The findings highlight six meaningful themes for responsible shoppers. These include 1) comprehensive and versatile information; 2) familiar brands and retailers; 3) domesticity; 4) pricing; 5) justification of purchase; and 6) the durability of fashion wear. The study indicates that these meaningful themes are related to the online store characteristics and brands sold in them, as well as to the shopper. Online fashion retailers create the conditions for a responsible purchase by the information the retailers present, their selection of brands, and pricing. However, favorable purchasing conditions alone do not guarantee purchases, as responsible shoppers avoid clothing purchases, and their purchases must be well justified. Future studies should examine how online retailers and service providers can appeal to these careful and reluctant shoppers.

Keywords

Responsible consumption, online shopping, fashion retail, qualitative study

1. Introduction

With the spread of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and improvements in consumers' access to technology, the popularity of online shopping has grown enormously. Such popularity can partly be explained by online retail's ease and breadth of selection. Online shopping is widespread, especially in the context of fashion retail. Indeed, fashion is the largest business-to-consumer e-commerce market segment, and its global size was estimated at US\$752.5 billion in 2020 [1]. Furthermore, according to Statista's Fashion E-commerce Report 2021 [1], the e-commerce fashion market is expected to grow at 9.1% per year.

The importance of online shopping has also increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this time, online shopping has become more familiar to many consumers. In Finland in 2020, for instance, 42% of adult Finnish Internet users estimated that their shopping would be done mainly or solely online in the coming years. In contrast, only 35% thought so before the pandemic [2].

However, while fashion retail e-commerce has become mundane for today's consumers, it has also contributed to negative changes from an ecological perspective. For instance, the negative effects of the clothing industry include greenhouse gas emissions, water pollution and usage, and landfill. According to European Parliament [3], the fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions, and textile production is responsible for about 20% of global clean water pollution. Large areas of cultivated

8th International Workshop on Socio-Technical Perspective in IS development (STPIS 2022), 19-21 August, 2022, Reykjavík, Iceland
EMAIL: tikemppa@jyu.fi (A. 1); lauri.frank@jyu.fi (A. 2); venla.luhtanen@student.jyu.fi (A. 3) ORCID: 0000-0002-4623-1918 (A. 1);
0000-0002-3003-3300 (A. 2)



© 2022 Copyright for this paper by its authors.
Use permitted under Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).
CEUR Workshop Proceedings (CEUR-WS.org)

land and much water are needed to grow textile fibers (e.g., cotton), and in the EU, used clothes are mostly (87%) landfilled or incinerated.

The environmental consequences of e-commerce have also been widely discussed. For instance, the negative impacts of online shopping are linked to packaging materials, delivery methods, unsold products, and product returns. Online shopping typically involves individual deliveries and small one-off purchases that require special packaging and many packaging materials such as plastic and cardboard. Also, consumers' inability to try goods creates risks, which are often resolved by ordering several options and then returning unsuitable items. Due to high return rates, online shopping for clothing and shoes, in particular, is a burden on the environment [4, 5]. Whereas consumers return only 5 to 10% of their in-store purchases, the number rises to 15 to 40% in online shopping. Clothing and shoes have the highest return rates, with 30 to 40% of online purchases returned [6]. What happens to the returned items is also a problematic ecological question. Many returned or unsold items end up in landfills or are destroyed. For instance, upmarket fashion brand Burberry has admitted that it burns unsold clothes, bags, and perfume worth millions per year [7].

In short, the negative repercussions of fashion retail and e-commerce have become important topics of discussion in business and academia. As consumers are becoming more environmentally conscious, responsible products are increasingly available in the market [8]. However, despite many papers investigating sustainable consumption from different perspectives, a specific understanding of the online context is missing. Most studies approach sustainable consumption at a general level without shopping channel (online/offline) specifications. However, one can assume that online and offline channels provide different opportunities and challenges for responsible consumers and should be studied independently. Focusing on online channels is of particular relevance to online retailers and service providers. Furthermore, as the importance of responsible consumption continues to increase, as online shopping continues to grow, and as consumer behavior shifts towards virtual environments [9], it is vital to understand the sensemaking of responsible consumers regarding online platforms.

Although the quantitative approach dominates the majority of studies on sustainability, it has been suggested that qualitative methods can act as essential instruments to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' perspectives [10]. Consumer and user viewpoints provide descriptive information that can be particularly useful in service design for online solutions. This is because nowadays companies must consider both technical and sociomaterial aspects when producing value for customers. A technically perfect online store is unlikely to be successful if it fails to provide the customers with other value—such as the right kind of information in the proper format.

This qualitative study investigates what is meaningful for responsible shoppers in online fashion retail. The interview data were collected from nine self-proclaimed responsible consumers aged from 26 to 51 years old. The study aims to increase our understanding of the essential issues from the customers' perspective.

This study continues by discussing responsible consumption in Section 2 below. Section 3 introduces the data collection and analysis methods of the study. Section 4 reports the empirical findings. Finally, Section 5 discusses the findings and gives managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

2. Responsible consumption

Responsible consumption has become a common research topic among different disciplines, especially in the 21st century. The topic has been investigated in relation to various concepts, including sustainable consumption [10, 11], green consumption [12, 13], and eco-friendly consumption [14, 15]. Sustainable and responsible consumption concepts are intrinsically linked, as sustainability can be seen as an objective pursued through responsible action. The study fields have become deeply blurred, and similar issues are discussed in both research areas [16]. The same diversity applies to the concept of sustainable fashion, which has been addressed in connection to concepts of eco-fashion, ethical fashion, organic fashion, and green clothing [17], among others.

Broadly, sustainability themes can be addressed through social, economic, and environmental aspects [18]. According to Sesini, Castiglioni, and Lozza's review of the literature [10], most research

articles deal with environmental sustainability, whereas social and economic dimensions have received less attention. In this study, responsible consumption is defined as consumption that has a less negative impact on the environment than consumption that does not consider the foundations of sustainable development.

Consumers concerned about sustainability issues are often referred to as green consumers (e.g., 17,18) or responsible consumers [21, 22]. Responsible consumers consider the consequences of their consumption and try to use their purchasing power to bring about change. The behaviors of responsible consumers include, for instance, considering the environmental impact of purchasing [23]; consuming goods that neither damage the natural environment nor cause pollution; and avoiding excessive consumption or reducing consumption [20]. Factors contributing to and limiting sustainable consumption have been examined in several different contexts. These include, among others, food and beverages [24, 25, 26], energy [27, 28], and tourism [29, 30]. According to previous research, factors that encourage sustainable consumption include knowledge [19, 23]; a positive attitude towards responsibility [5, 31, 32]; and consumer sentiment, primarily in relation to environmental concerns.

Joshi and Rahman [33] found that the predictors of customers' sustainable purchasing behavior are as follows: supportive behaviors for environmental organizations; subjective norms; attitudes towards sustainable purchasing; perceived marketplace influence; perceived knowledge regarding sustainability issues; and environmental concern. Joshi and Rahman explain that when customers engage in sustainable actions, they may get emotionally attached and experience being part of a change process. These positive emotions may in turn encourage further devotion to the sustainability issue. It is also suggested that social surroundings and norms impact sustainable consumption: namely, a group effect may promote an individual's sustainable behaviors. On the other hand, consumers who believe an individual's effort can affect the other marketplace actors' behavior (perceived marketplace influence) can be more favorable toward sustainable consumption.

The fashion industry is often emphasized in the debate on responsibility because its enormous environmental challenges are increasingly being recognized. Specifically, the fashion industry has been associated with significant negative social and ecological impacts, such as employee exploitation, excessive use of renewable materials, and waste generation [34]. However, the literature regarding sustainable fashion consumption is limited. For example, Bly, Gwozdz, and Reisch [11] note that sustainable consumption patterns of fashion shoppers and how consumers create meanings regarding sustainable fashion have attracted limited research. Similarly, Lundblad and Davies [35] conclude that the motivations of sustainable fashion consumers have been poorly investigated. They argue that most studies have focused on production, but explorations of consumers have been neglected.

3. Data collection and analysis

As this study aimed to identify and better understand what is meaningful for responsible shoppers in online shopping for clothing, a qualitative research approach was chosen. The data of this study include nine interviews with self-proclaimed responsible consumers aged 26–51 years. All participants were female and well educated. Well-educated female consumers were chosen, as it has been suggested that responsible consumption is more common and important for females and educated individuals [36]. The background information about the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Participants' background information

Participant	Age	Education
1	26	Bachelor level
2	27	Master level
3	29	Master level
4	48	Bachelor level
5	31	Bachelor level
6	46	Bachelor level
7	31	Master level

8	26	Bachelor level
9	51	Master level

The data collection was carried out with semi-structured interviews at the end of 2020. The number of interviewees was determined on the basis of saturation: that is, interviews were conducted until they no longer produced additional insights relevant to the study. The participants were recruited through a social media platform. The interviews were conducted via an online video call service, and they lasted 33 minutes on average. The participants were rewarded with a gift card to a responsible online fashion store.

All the interviewees defined themselves as responsible consumers who had recently bought clothes from an online store. The participants were asked about their thoughts on responsibility and sustainability-related issues in online shopping. The discussed themes included what responsibility means to the participant; why she purchases responsible products; and what factors are important to her in the context of responsible online shopping.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed data were analyzed with NVivo qualitative analysis software. When analyzing the data, all the mentioned issues that the participants regarded as important in terms of responsible online fashion shopping were collected from the material. Finally, as the result of several classification rounds, the identified issues were formed into primary groups. The findings are discussed more closely in the next section.

4. Findings

The findings highlight six important themes for responsible shoppers in online fashion retail. These include the following:

1. Comprehensive and versatile information
2. Familiar brands and retailers
3. Domesticity
4. Pricing
5. Justification of purchase
6. The durability of fashion wear.

As the above list indicates, the meaningful themes included factors related to the online store and the brands sold, as well as to the shopper. The identified themes are introduced and discussed in detail in the next section.

4.1. Comprehensive and versatile information

The findings show that information is essential when making responsible shopping decisions in online stores. The information is used to determine the responsibility level of the store and the products that are sold. It is also essential for deducing the rationality of the purchase and whether it is “responsible enough” for one’s standards. The retailer’s webpage was identified as the preferred source of sustainability- and responsibility-related information. It was concluded that it is the retailer’s responsibility to provide all the necessary information for customers. However, the role of the customer was also noted: namely, it is the customer’s responsibility to be a conscious consumer and seek information.

“I mainly use the brands’ websites because I think it’s their job to make it easy for me. If the company has not told me the information I am looking for on the website, I will not look elsewhere for that information. Sometimes I might send an email and ask about different things, and I think that, in a way, is the duty of

consumers. But I am lazy to do it because I think that information should be publicly and easily available if they want to sell me something.” (P9)

It was evident that the participants looked for a different kind of information. The main themes included information on ethical and ecological issues. The ethical issues were related to human and animal rights, whereas the ecological issues were linked to the state of the planet, such as climate change. Facts about the firm, its values, the materials in its products, and the production chain were, for instance, required.

“On a general level, the material is the essential issue for me. But also the firm: what kind of firm has produced it, and are their values okay?” (P8)

As the following quote demonstrates, small and big companies were evaluated based on different criteria. The expectations for big corporations such as H&M were higher than for smaller firms.

“In the case of small independent brands, I may be more gracious in this matter and perhaps more reluctant to ask them because new brands may not know all things. But then, if I go to the H&M page and there isn’t the information that I’m looking for, as the case often is, I won’t try to search for it. I just think, ‘I don’t want your clothes when you don’t want to tell me this simple information.’” (P9)

As the previous quote shows, small firms could be forgiven for shortcomings, but large firms were not given the same leniency.

Information provided by online retailers was doubted because sustainability and responsibility themes are trendy. It was suspected that retailers commit greenwashing in order to meet the consumers’ standards for responsibility.

“I cannot trust that products are genuinely ethically and responsibly produced from start to finish. There is so much greenwashing these days that I do not fully trust the website, how the company strives to be responsible, and how they follow certain practices and measures to be responsible.” (P3)

“It is good that companies pay attention to these things. But then, on the other hand, I’m a little hesitant about it for some, especially big companies. Because nowadays, it feels like all clothes or most clothes are made of some kind of recycled material. Or their existence has already been credited by some means. There is a suspicion that it is not 100% true.” (P1)

An active search for responsibility-related information outside the companies’ own pages was reported.

“I follow the Ethical ecological fashion group on Facebook, and I also have this Good on you app, from which I usually check the listings of brands according to sustainability. I also follow influencers. I am actively seeking to increase my awareness so that I can make better choices.” (P3)

Participant 3’s comments suggest that peer reviews are vital and can be considered more trustworthy than the information provided by retailers.

4.2. Familiar brands and retailers

Familiar brands and retailers were also highlighted in the participants’ descriptions. It was explained that familiarity brings convenience to the shopping process because the customer can trust the brand or company to be responsible. When the brand or company is initially identified as responsible, there is

no need to spend time investigating the company and its background, which is the case with new, unfamiliar companies and brands.

“If I get to know a brand, I will find out how they realize responsibility. It is easy to buy from a brand you are already familiar with. But whenever you find a new brand, it takes quite a bit of work to figure out how responsible things are.”
(P7)

A search for a new clothing item was started from familiar stores that were known to be responsible. Irresponsible trades were not taken into account as the first options.

“If I need a new product, I first go through the online stores that are profiled for responsibility.” (P5)

However, purchasing new clothing from familiar responsible brands was not unproblematic, since it raised the question of whether it is acceptable to purchase any new items.

“On the one hand, it feels good to support these responsible producers, responsible manufacturers, but on the other hand, from the Earth’s perspective, it feels more responsible to buy everything used.” (P7)

Based on the previous comment, it can be concluded that a familiar responsible brand bought from a second-hand outlet can offer a good option for a responsible fashion shopper.

4.3. Domesticity

The home country of the online retailer, brand, and fashion wear were also important themes from a responsibility perspective. In principle, domestic brands were considered more responsible than foreign brands. It was also noted that consumers themselves could be responsible by supporting local businesses.

“If possible, I buy clothes that are Finnish or produced by Finnish small businesses.” (P6)

“I am more familiar with brands made in Finland, and then I buy them whenever I feel like I have enough money.” (P7)

“I purchase clothes because I want to support domestic entrepreneurs and domestic brands.” (P9)

It was explained that sometimes crucial needs require purchases that need to be done outside one’s favorite shopping outlets and against one’s values. Situational factors and other people’s shopping decisions may cause unwanted missteps. In such situations, feelings of guilt and contradiction can be experienced.

“If there is a very urgent need for something like gloves or new shoes, or something you can’t prepare for, then I might buy clothes for the children from chain stores. Then I felt the contradiction that I didn’t want to support those chain stores. I also don’t want to teach my children to buy clothes from these places.”
(P5)

“The last purchase is from a store where I wouldn’t do anything by myself. But my daughter wanted to, so I made a mistake of buying one product for myself there. I’m regretting it.” (P6)

4.4. Pricing

Price was one important indicator of responsibility. It was noted that responsible products or brands could not be cheap, and thus, low-priced brands were avoided.

“I always avoid cheap brands.” (P7)

A low price was considered a signal that something was wrong and unethical in the production chain. Interviewees explained that there is no desire to buy products that someone else paid for, for example, in the form of poor working conditions.

“I do not buy products that the manufacturing workers have paid for me.” (P6)

Low prices and using them as a competitive asset made participants have negative thoughts. It was concluded that low pricing is not as acceptable as it might have been in earlier times.

*“I think that advertising with insanely cheap prices is not okay nowadays.”
(P2)*

However, the same logic did not apply in the case of recycled or second-hand products, in which a low price was expected and also well explained. Indeed, low prices led to impulse purchases at flea markets. Buying from flea markets was not considered as reprehensible as buying new products.

“I buy about 90% of my clothing used. I am definitely a big consumer of used clothing and second-hand online stores. [...] The purchases may not always be super essential, but buying a new product would always mean producing more goods for the world. [...] I buy second-hand because I feel it is a responsible way to spend right now.” (P3)

As the previous quote demonstrates, second-hand purchases were deemed a responsible option despite the price. The logic was that one could more easily forgive oneself a purchase if it were bought from an online retailer of second-hand goods.

4.5. Justification of purchase

As the end of the previous section suggests, it is important for responsible customers to explain and justify their purchases for themselves. The findings show that participants considered a wide variety of issues when pondering the responsibility of a purchase. When putting all the requirements together, justifying one’s purchase can be a challenging task.

“Responsibility means to me that every purchase is carefully considered. Nothing is bought because of desire but on demand. If new products are purchased, it is carefully considered under what conditions the product is made, from what materials it is made, whether human rights, workers’ rights, are realized there and what the environmental effects are (for example, the production of that material). And then whether the material is durable and whether the design is durable.” (P7)

The participants included shoppers who were either in favor of clothes or shoppers who did not care much about clothing. For those who expressed that they liked clothes, buying clothes was a means of self-expression. In this case, the purchase of apparel often involved a struggle against the buyers’ own desires. That is, buying clothes can be a pleasure because it enhances one’s self-esteem and desire to look nice, but based on common sense and ecological issues, new purchases were inhibited. The interviewees’ purchase decisions were carefully pondered by calculating and reflecting on the items that are already in one’s wardrobe, for instance.

“That final decision is based on me wondering if I really need the product now and whether it makes sense for me to spend my money on it. A person like me—working, born in Finland—rarely needs anything new at my age. So, the decision

is based on whether I can justify to myself why this item should be in my wardrobe or shoe rack. [...] I don't finish a purchase because I note that, damn, I don't need this: I already have enough black dresses. Even though this black dress is lovely, I don't need a seventh black summer dress anymore.” (P9)

“If you look at your wardrobe, a true need is quite seldom the reason. It's more aesthetic.” (P5)

Interviewees explained that having a responsible mindset makes the purchase processes longer than before. That is, purchases are considered longer, and more time is spent on selection. At the same time, a responsible mindset results in fewer impulsive purchases.

“In the past, when I had an interest in something, I tried to fill that need quickly and buy that product. But the more I have started thinking about this responsibility perspective, the slower the garment buying process has become.” (P7)

“If I didn't have responsible values, I would make more impulsive purchases.” (P5)

On the other hand, online shopping was perceived to be cumbersome, as it is generally slower than in-store shopping. Moreover, e-commerce shopping involves risks, for example, in terms of product suitability and returns.

“I find it (online shopping) a bit difficult. I go around online stores, compare prices and add items to my cart, and then go away. Then I go back the next day, do some more research, and ponder if I can get it from a brick-and-mortar store. I'm rarely inspired by anything in online stores; it feels more troublesome. [...] I can't wait for it to come to me. And if I don't like it, I need to return it.” (P8)

For those who did not appreciate clothes or like purchasing them, it seemed to be easier to act as a responsible consumer. For these participants, clothing purchases were seen as an obligation due to social norms: one needs to purchase clothing whether clothes are liked or not.

“I buy clothes because I can't go naked—people wear clothes. I consider purchases carefully. When I was younger, I went shopping when I was bored. It's no longer the case: I don't buy because of the joy of buying.” (P6)

“There has to be something to put on: you can't walk around naked. [...] I buy on demand and prefer second-hand if possible. I try not to buy anything new.” (P8)

As the previous quote shows, actual needs were highlighted when justifying a purchase for oneself. A participant also stated that ads or other marketing communications do not inspire purchases.

“I think ads don't have any effect on me. There is no need to buy something because of ads.” (P6)

The previous quote shows that participant 6 considered herself strong-minded and immune to seductive advertising messages.

4.6. Durability of fashion wear

The participants also highlighted the durability of clothing and accessories. Fashion wear was expected to be long-lasting in order to be responsible. However, deciding on the best and most ethical and responsible option can be a tricky task, as the following quote demonstrates. Customers can encounter dilemmas, whereby the positive and negative characteristics of different materials, for instance, have to be pondered.

“I prefer to buy leather shoes, for example, because I know they will last longer than faux leather, although it might be more ethical if no animal material was used. But for me, it is so important that the garment lasts for years and can be worn out to be responsible. [...] If it doesn't last, I don't feel it's responsible.”
(P8)

As the quote shows, participant 8 appreciated durability over animal rights, even though she faced an ethical problem when using leather. In addition to materials, durability was considered from recycling and reselling perspectives.

“I wonder if there will be any proper use for that garment. Also durability. I also consider every time I buy: How do I get rid of it later?” (P3)

Durable and responsible clothing was understood as long-lasting and worth reselling or recycling later. In that sense, a responsible choice was also considered a safe economic choice.

5. Discussion

This study has investigated what is meaningful for responsible fashion shoppers in the context of online fashion retail. The study contributes to the literature by providing insights into responsible customers' sensemaking regarding online shopping. The findings indicate that the meaningful issues include comprehensive and versatile information, familiar brands and retailers, domesticity, pricing, justification of purchase, and durability of fashion wear. The identified themes show that meaningful issues are related to the online store and the brands that are sold in them but also to the shoppers themselves.

Online retailers create the conditions for responsible purchases through the information the retailers present, their selection of brands, and pricing. The findings suggest that familiarity with the store and brand are essential issues when making responsible purchases. Previous studies indicate that consumers evaluate their purchase based on whether it has an effect on nature and society or not [37]. The findings of this study suggest that familiar online stores and brands are preferred because they make this evaluation easier. Customers investigate material suppliers and demand that the fashion supply chain must be transparent and ethical [38]. However, once the information search is complete and the company or brand meets the customer's responsibility criteria, the customer can trust that she is working with a responsible partner. Hence, becoming one of the familiar operators on the customer's list of companies and brands is an essential goal for online retailers. Once the customer's trust is earned, it is easier to convince the customer to return to the store.

The findings indicate that for responsible shoppers, pricing is also an important indicator of sustainable and responsible businesses. This is particularly the case with new clothing items, whereby customers can perceive low-priced items as evidence of irresponsible and unsustainable business practices. In turn, second-hand purchases can be low priced, as responsibility is evaluated by the shopping context (recycling), rather than price. When purchasing recycled and second-hand items, customers' responsibility is built-in within the purchase regardless of price. Responsible fashion is regarded as more expensive than normal, irresponsible fashionwear. Correct pricing—neither too high nor too low—is thus essential. Particularly low prices can make online shoppers suspicious about the business's actual level of responsibility, as the buyers are aware of the ethical sourcing, fair wages, small-patch production, and craftsmanship [39] that explain the higher prices of responsible fashion wear. The findings suggest that online retailers should explain and justify their pricing in an open-ended manner by breaking down what the price consists of.

The domesticity of the company and products is also highlighted. In principle, domestic products and companies are considered more responsible than foreign companies or products. It has been stated that European countries are leaders when it comes to sustainable consumption and sustainable practices in production [40]. On the other hand, responsible consumers also want to support domestic products and companies because doing so is considered a responsible act. Therefore, it is important for retailers

to think about how the aspects of domesticity can be emphasized and communicated in an online store or on social media and how the degree of domesticity can be increased in the store.

However, the findings show that favorable conditions created by online retailers are not enough for responsible shoppers. Purchases must also be well justified by the shoppers themselves. The findings of this study show that responsible consumers think carefully about their purchases and typically avoid making purchases. The justification of purchase is highly linked to the durability of fashion wear. That is, durability is used to infer the rationality of purchases but also to justify purchasing decisions. Responsible clothing is expected to be durable and of good quality; it is also expected to be resold or recycled. How to guarantee customers the quality they desire is an essential question from the online retailers' perspective. How to inform customers about the reselling and recycling opportunities is another important consideration. By telling customers about the life cycle of a product and its possible future, a store can increase its transparency and consumers' confidence in the store's products and services. Today, some online stores already offer recycling opportunities for their products.

Overall, the findings indicate that it can be difficult for an online retailer to convince responsible shoppers to purchase, especially if shoppers do not have a justified and rational need to make a purchase. Furthermore, the temptations created by the vendor, such as low prices or advertising, often do not convince responsible shoppers. A low price or ad can even work against its original purpose and prevent buying. The reluctance to purchase raises some critical questions for online retailers and researchers. The most important question involves how responsible consumers can be motivated to purchase, especially if a well-functioning online store interface or traditional marketing communication tools (such as online ads and newsletters or cheap pricing) do not appeal to them. As the findings of this study highlight the importance of comprehensive and versatile information, those themes could provide some answers. Namely, online retailers can try to appeal to responsible shoppers by providing them with abundant information, through which customers can make judgments about responsibility. Previous studies have noted that customers lack clarity about firms' sustainability claims and definitions of green fashion [17]. It has been suggested that customers doubt the existence of sustainable production processes, especially in the context of fashion, as production is often located in developing countries [17]. Customers can be skeptical toward companies' sustainability actions, especially if the provided information is deemed to be superficial. The participants of this study presented similar thoughts. Hence, in line with previous studies, this study highlights the quality and transparency of information. Online retailers should provide potential customers with details about the company's operations and responsible values but also about the products that they sell. Reducing distrust is a major issue. However, this is easier said than done. Previous research has noted that it is challenging for companies to convincingly explain the benefits of sustainable fashion to consumers and to encourage them to make informed purchases [41].

From a practical standpoint, online retailers should provide their customers with solutions that make sustainable shopping more straightforward and less time-consuming. There is a need for studies and solutions that consider how product backgrounds, material choices, and manufacturing information, for instance, can be better informed and communicated to consumers. Responsibility-related applications and calculators could provide responsible consumers valid information when choosing an online or offline retailer.

References

- [1] Statista, Fashion eCommerce report 2021, Statista, 2021. URL: <https://www.statista.com/study/38340/ecommerce-report-fashion/#:~:text=Fashion%20is%20the%20largest%20B2C,by%20the%20end%20of%202025>.
- [2] Finnish Commerce Federation, Online shopping grew by over twenty per cent in Finland – market share of domestic e-commerce is increasing, 2021. URL: <https://kauppa.fi/en/uutishuone/2021/03/18/online-shopping-grew-by-over-twenty-per-cent-in-finland-market-share-of-domestic-e-commerce-is-increasing/>.
- [3] European Parliament, The impact of textile production and waste on the environment, 2020. URL: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20201208STO93327/the-impact-of-textile-production-and-waste-on-the-environment-infographic>.
- [4] Chen, T.B., and L.T. Chai, "Attitude towards the environment and green products: Consumers' perspective", *Management science and engineering* 4(2), 2010, pp. 27–39.
- [5] Demarque, C., L. Charalambides, D.J. Hilton, and L. Waroquier, "Nudging sustainable consumption: The use of descriptive norms to promote a minority behavior in a realistic online shopping environment", *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 43, 2015, pp. 166–174.
- [6] Reagan, C., That sweater you don't like is a trillion-dollar problem for retailers. These companies want to fix it, *CNBC*, 2019. URL: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/10/growing-online-sales-means-more-returns-and-trash-for-landfills.html>.
- [7] BBC News, Burberry burns bags, clothes and perfume worth millions, 2018. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-44885983>
- [8] Jin Gam, H., "Are fashion-conscious consumers more likely to adopt eco-friendly clothing?", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal* 15(2), 2011, pp. 178–193.
- [9] Rausch, T.M., D. Baier, and S. Wening, "Does sustainability really matter to consumers? Assessing the importance of online shop and apparel product attributes", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 63, 2021.
- [10] Sesini, G., C. Castiglioni, and E. Lozza, "New Trends and Patterns in Sustainable Consumption: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda", *Sustainability* 12(15), 2020.
- [11] Bly, S., W. Gwozdz, and L.A. Reisch, "Exit from the high street: an exploratory study of sustainable fashion consumption pioneers", *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 39(2), 2015, pp. 125–135.
- [12] Peattie, K., "Green Consumption: Behavior and Norms", *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 35(1), 2010, pp. 195–228.
- [13] Connolly, J., and A. Prothero, "Green Consumption: Life-politics, risk and contradictions", *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8(1), 2008, pp. 117–145.
- [14] Osburg, V.-S., V. Yoganathan, S. Brueckner, and W. Toporowski, "How detailed product information strengthens eco-friendly consumption", *Management Decision* 58(6), 2019, pp. 1084–1099.
- [15] Vlaeminck, P., T. Jiang, and L. Vranken, "Food labeling and eco-friendly consumption: Experimental evidence from a Belgian supermarket", *Ecological Economics* 108, 2014, pp. 180–190.
- [16] Bansal, P., and H.-C. Song, "Similar but not the same: Differentiating corporate sustainability from corporate responsibility", *Academy of Management Annals* 11(1), 2017, pp. 105–149.
- [17] Cervellon, M., and A. Wernerfelt, "Knowledge sharing among green fashion communities online: Lessons for the sustainable supply chain", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal* 16(2), 2012, pp. 176–192.
- [18] Elkington, J., "Partnerships from cannibals with forks: The triple bottom line of 21st-century business", *Environmental Quality Management* 8(1), 1998, pp. 37–51.
- [19] Young, W., K. Hwang, S. McDonald, and C.J. Oates, "Sustainable consumption: green consumer behaviour when purchasing products", *Sustainable Development* 18(1), 2010, pp. 20–31.
- [20] Paço, A. do, C. Shiel, and H. Alves, "A new model for testing green consumer behaviour", *Journal of Cleaner Production* 207, 2019, pp. 998–1006.

- [21] Giesler, M., and E. Veresiu, "Creating the Responsible Consumer: Moralistic Governance Regimes and Consumer Subjectivity", *Journal of Consumer Research* 41(3), pp. 840–857.
- [22] Lubowiecki-Vikuk, A., A. Dabrowska, and A. Machnik, "Responsible consumer and lifestyle: Sustainability insights", *Sustainable Production and Consumption* 25, pp. 91–101.
- [23] Joshi, Y., and Z. Rahman, "Predictors of young consumer's green purchase behaviour", *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal* 27(4), 2016, pp. 452–472.
- [24] Tarkiainen, A., and S. Sundqvist, "Subjective norms, attitudes and intentions of Finnish consumers in buying organic food", *British Food Journal* 107(11), 2005, pp. 808–822.
- [25] Vermeir, I., and W. Verbeke, "Sustainable Food Consumption: Exploring the Consumer' Attitude – Behavioral Intention' Gap", *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 19, 2006, pp. 169–194.
- [26] Lehner, M., "Retail store influence on sustainable consumption behaviour", *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences* 7(4), 2015, pp. 404–423.
- [27] Gossling, S., T. Kunkel, K. Schumacher, et al., "A target group-specific approach to 'green' power retailing: students as consumers of renewable energy", *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 9(1), 2005, pp. 69–83.
- [28] Wolsink, M., "Wind power implementation: The nature of public attitudes: Equity and fairness instead of 'backyard motives'", *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews* 11(6), 2007, pp. 1188–1207.
- [29] Miller, G., K. Rathouse, C. Scarles, K. Holmes, and J. Tribe, "Public Understanding of Sustainable Tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research* 37(3), 2010, pp. 627–645.
- [30] Juvan, E., and S. Dolnicar, "The attitude–behaviour gap in sustainable tourism", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 48, 2014, pp. 76–95.
- [31] Straughan, R.D., and J.A. Roberts, "Environmental segmentation alternatives: a look at green consumer behavior in the new millennium", *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 16(6), 1999, pp. 558–575.
- [32] Kumar, B., A.K. Manrai, and L.A. Manrai, "Purchasing behaviour for environmentally sustainable products: A conceptual framework and empirical study", *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 34, 2017, pp. 1–9.
- [33] Ghasemaghahi, M., S. Ebrahimi, and K. Hassanein, "Data analytics competency for improving firm decision making performance", *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems* 27(1), 2018, pp. 101–113.
- [34] Wang, H., H. Liu, S.J. Kim, and K.H. Kim, "Sustainable fashion index model and its implication", *Journal of Business Research*, 2019, pp. 430–437.
- [35] Lundblad, L., and I.A. Davies, "The values and motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption", *Journal of Consumer Behaviour* 15(2), 2016, pp. 149–162.
- [36] Hunt, E., "The eco gender gap: why is saving the planet seen as women's work?", *The Guardian*, 2020. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/feb/06/eco-gender-gap-why-saving-planet-seen-womens-work>.
- [37] Puspita, H., and H. Chae, "An explorative study and comparison between companies' and customers' perspectives in the sustainable fashion industry", *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing* 12(2), 2021, pp. 133–145.
- [38] Shen, B., Y. Wang, C.K.Y. Lo, and M. Shum, "The impact of ethical fashion on consumer purchase behavior", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal* 16(2), 2012, pp. 234–245.
- [39] Nast, C., "What goes into the pricing of sustainable fashion?", *Vogue India*, 2021. URL: <https://www.vogue.in/fashion/content/why-is-sustainable-fashion-expensive-the-cost-of-ethically-produced-garments>.
- [40] Wang, C., P. Ghadimi, M.K. Lim, and M.-L. Tseng, "A literature review of sustainable consumption and production: A comparative analysis in developed and developing economies", *Journal of Cleaner Production* 206, 2019, pp. 741–754.
- [41] Henninger, C.E., P.J. Alevizou, and C.J. Oates, "What is sustainable fashion?", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal* 20(4), 2016, pp. 400–416.