



EUROPEAN MASTER IN BUSINESS STUDIES

# THE IMPACT OF THE WEBSITES ON CONSUMERS IN SUSTAINABLE FASHION

EMBS12 Master Thesis  
Thi Lien Francesca Le



UNIVERSITÀ  
DI TRENTO



UNIVERSITÉ  
SAVOIE  
MONT BLANC

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## ABSTRACT

**Title:** the impact of websites on consumers in sustainable fashion.

**Purpose:** with a huge eco-system crisis and the rising of waste problems, society is thinking of new ways to redesign the system to be sustainable and feasible in all the fields that are possible. The consumers tend to be more concerned about the environmental impact by supporting, for example, local or recycled products. However, even though consumers are aware of social and environmental impact, they are still purchasing products that are not sustainable. In order to reduce the behavioral gap, the study tries to discover whether the consumer will change their behavior after the exposure to education about slow fashion.

**Theoretical Framing of the Study:** sustainable fashion emerged for the first time in the 1960s when society became aware of the negative impact that the clothing manufacturing had on the environment. This research defines, in general, the sustainability concept in order then to apply it in the fashion context. As regards the website, the study describes generally the communication process and integrated marketing communication as the base of the whole research. After then, it analyzes in deep the website concept and its effectiveness on consumer behavior. The S-O-R model is taken into consideration as the structure for the interviews.

**Design/methodology/approach:** the study will analyze the consumer perspective. An experimental will be designed in which the respondent will interact with written information and pictures and then they will be asked to explicit in words their actions. A face-to-face interview with consumers will be conducted. The only specification for the sample concern the age that goes from 20 to 60 because it will be relevant for the research that the consumer is aware and responsible for his/her decision making. The research will start with an exposure of a mix of garments to understand the general idea of shopping behavior, thereafter, the consumer will be tested by using companies' website already existent. By the direct contact of the website, the analysis will proceed to understand their reaction and decision making. Every steps of the experiments will be analyzed by incentive the interviewers to explain their thought behind their action.

**Implications for practitioners:** Brands are conscious that consumers' environmental concerns are increased. This study can be useful and fruitful to understand what can be done to transform sustainable consumption to a monetary added value for companies. The research

might be useful for fashion companies that can use the findings to improve their website and increase their value by applying the sustainable concept in their communication. Furthermore, the labels might use the research to understand what consumers think nowadays about sustainability in the fashion industry.

**Originality/value** The originality comes from the analysis of consumers' perception by applying the website as a tool for communicating sustainability practice. Sustainability in the fashion industry has already been studied and so the impact of the website, but none of the previous researches had focused on the website as a potential communication tool for sustainability.

**key words** sustainability, slow fashion, communication, website, awareness, consumer behavior



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	I
<hr/>	
ABSTRACT	I
<hr/>	
LIST OF TABLES	V
<hr/>	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 BACKGROUND	1
1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT	2
1.3 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY	2
1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION	3
<hr/>	
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	3
2.1 SUSTAINABILITY AND SLOW FASHION	4
2.2 COMMUNICATION & SUSTAINABILITY	5
2.2B CORPORATE WEBSITE & SUSTAINABILITY	6
2.4 THE STIMULI- ORGANISM- RESPONSE (SOR) MODEL APPLIED TO WEBSITES	8
2.5 PROPOSITIONS	9
2.5.1 THE ROLE OF THE INFORMATION ON CONSUMERS' SUSTAINABLE GARMENTS PURCHASE INTENTION	9
2.5.2 THE ONLINE STORE LAYOUT	11
<hr/>	
3. LITERATURE REVIEW	13
<hr/>	
4. METHODOLOGY	20
4.1 PARTICIPANTS	20
4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE	20
4.4 THE MANIPULATION EXPERIMENT	21
4.5 ANALYSIS PROCEDURES	22
4.6 LIMITATIONS	23
<hr/>	
5.WORK PLAN	24
<hr/>	
REFERENCES	25
<hr/>	

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1 COMMUNICATION PROCESS, GENÇ, 2017)	5
FIGURE 2 S-O-R FRAMEWORK BY MEHRABIAN AND RUSSELL, (1974). SOURCE: PENG, CHEN KIM, YEONG GUG	9

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1 RECAP THEORY USED AND JUSTIFICATION OF THEIR USE FOR THE RESEARCH. OWN ELABORATION	12
TABLE 2 LITERATURE REVIEW TABLE	19
TABLE 3 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO WEBSITE. OWN ELABORATION	22
TABLE 4 WORK PLAN	24



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 BACKGROUND

In recent years, consumers have increased their concerns on the social and environmental impact of their purchases and have stimulated the eco-friendly apparel market growth (Tung, Koenig, & Chen, 2017). This phenomenon is expected to increase as the society continues to find solutions for the problems of natural resources reduction and the growing population (Preuit, Rachel; Yan, 2017).

Fashion businesses, indeed, are beginning to understand the benefits of sustainability as a potential market and are stimulated to take action towards it (Lundblad & Davies, 2016), however, they are still facing difficulties to sell sustainable products or, even, they are facing falling in sales in the market. Even though fashion firms are becoming more concerned about sustainability and green products are available in the retail shelves, consumers' purchases are not linked to sustainable clothes but instead on "fast fashion" apparel (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017). Consumer are aware of environmental issues, but the demand for these products and service are still low (Will & Freise, 2015). Indeed, the awareness of the damages that the unsustainable apparel would perform in the social environment is not enough to affect the consumer's individuality. As such, customers are not always willing to pay a premium price for clothes that don't respect their requirement. The gap that exists between consumers and companies can be identified as "higher price range," "lack of knowledge", "uncertainty of quality", "trust of the company", and "availability of products" (Tung et al., 2017). In substance, consumers lack knowledge about sustainable apparel (Hill and Lee, 2012; Ritch and Schröder, 2012) and find it hard to recognize truly sustainable brands (Mcneill & Moore, 2015).

From previous researches, it was proved that meeting consumer expectation and communication was determinant to evolve consumer awareness and increase the consumption of sustainable garments (Henninger, Alevizou, & Oates, 2016). Hence, consumers may be encouraged to purchase sustainable fashion if the determinants of the communication are successful in informing the sustainability practice (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017) and they might be willing to pay a price premium for the increased value of their product (Preuit, Rachel; Yan, 2017).

Substantially, with the growing use of the internet (Kitchen; & Inga, 2007) and stakeholder demands to enhance their economic and social performance (Preuit, Rachel; Yan, 2017), the consumers might increase the perception of the firms' value if the label company communicate their operations' social and environmental procedures and supply chain more



clearly.

The probability that the consumer would increase the buy-in within the mainstream fashion landscape may increase if the labels company persuade with communication the benefit of sustainable fashion. Although the two realities described show similarities, consumers are not aware that sustainable fashion can be more affordable than what they think (Choi & Ng, 2011). Thus far, a key implication concerns what consumers think regarding sustainable fashion when they are facing a communication of sustainable collection (Choi & Ng, 2011). Previous researches demonstrated that consumers favor sustainability instead of price and, besides, it was found that consumer responds more negatively to poor company sustainability than the ones that are practicing it (Choi & Ng, 2011).

In "Sustainability practices and web-based communication", Da Giau et al., (2016) explain that the final consumer would support and enhance the company's corporate image when the company's sustainability communication efforts to spread the information about an organization's environmental and social behaviors are visible in the consumers' eyes. According to them, websites are the main communication channels for sustainable initiatives because the companies can reach the public by publishing directly through their website their commitment towards sustainable practice.

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Slow fashion belongs to the broad approach towards sustainability which tries to change the human's consumption patterns from quantity to quality (Jung & Jin, 2016). The brands are working to incorporate more renewable materials and recycle old clothes into new items (Jung & Jin, 2016). Considering the consumer intention gap that explains why people are aware of the sustainability but they still buy fast fashion, the study seeks to answer what are the consequences for the consumer after marketing programs awareness that regards sustainable clothes. In other words, the analysis tries to go in depth researching the consumer behaviors towards sustainability and whether they are intended to consume more after their awareness of sustainable fashion. The promotion of slow fashion to consumers should actively disclose the novelty and accelerate the costumers' acceptance of the new way of consumption. The key is to define whether consumers are moved to the campaign by acquiring sustainable fashion.

## 1.3 PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The scope of fashion companies concerns not only the strategy used to implement sustainability, but also the methodology to communicate the novelty (Will & Freise, 2015).

In a contest of high competition, understanding what moves the consumers' choice is determinant in order to push on advertising to increase sales and acquire a new target. A previous study focuses on Chinese target and the results show that consumers in that area are influenced by the social media, in particular, we chat (Zhao, Lee, & Copeland, 2019). This study, instead, will focus on the impact of the corporate website concerning sustainability on human's consumption. The corporate website had already been broadly studied in previous papers, in particular, it was tested the impact of the website on consumer perception (Kim & Lennon, 2013).

The purpose is to analyze the consumers' perceptions of slow fashion after marketing campaign on sustainable fashion. This study will provide an explorative analysis of the consumers' thoughts after facing a website advertisement regarding sustainability. The research might be fruitful for retailer's sustainable companies that can use the findings to improve their website and increase their value by applying the sustainable concept in their communication. Furthermore, the labels might use the research to understand what consumers think nowadays about sustainability in the fashion industry.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The theory lacks in defining whether the corporate website can improve the purchasing behavior towards sustainable garments. The research contributes to the previous studies by investigating the effectiveness of the website as a tool for sustainability's communication. The investigation will try to answer to one main research question:

Q1: how consumers describe their behavior following a website communication regarding sustainability?

The main purpose of the research consists in discovering the facts and get the deep exploration of the human behavior nature towards website concerning the sustainability concept.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The following pages will explain the literature that the research considers relevant for the study. As the study focuses on the communication of sustainability and the effects on consumers, the paper chooses to introduce the concept of sustainability and then define its application in the communication contexts, in particular in the website framework. It is relevant, therefore, introduce also the literature regarding the interaction between website and consumers in order to understand how the interview will proceed.

## 2.1 SUSTAINABILITY AND SLOW FASHION

The concept of sustainability can't be synthesized in one definition. The three most common notions define sustainability as: "an activity that can be continued indefinitely without causing harm; doing unto others as you would have them do unto you; and meeting a current generation's needs without compromising those of future generations" (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012).

Sustainability in the fashion industry incorporates all the definitions stated and adds also the sustainability into their clothing lines, the movement created is called slow fashion. Sustainable fashion incorporates fair trade principle, that reduces the threat for the environment or for workers by using biodegradable, organic cotton, eco-labeled or recycled materials, and arrange in such a way that the garment would be used for a longer time (Shen, Richards, & Liu, 2013).

Label companies are not only becoming more attentive to sustainability by developing sustainable business practice (Preuit, Rachel; Yan, 2017) throughout the supply chain like utilizing recycling/upcycling techniques or by incorporating renewable and organic raw material (Henninger et al., 2016), but their interest concerns also on how to announce the message. Consumers have increased their awareness of sustainable fashion but still mistrust sustainability and green claims, as they are not certain of the credibility of the organization's allegation (Henninger et al., 2016).

The communication, therefore, is divided into three main categories: social aspects, environmental aspects, and consumer involvement (Will & Freise, 2015). In respect to the social aspect, sustainable companies are concerned with the labor condition and become transparent in their financial report. As regarding environmental condition, apparel industries communicate their commitment towards sustainability such as the usage of Eco-friendly fibers. The consumers' involvement instead, concerns how people perceive the communication that includes the durability of the clothes, the material, the disposal of the clothes and the recycling opportunities.

Since the study focuses on the communication of sustainability, it was important to define what sustainability concept means and its application on sustainable fashion. As it is possible to notice, the concept of sustainable fashion encompasses different aspects. The literature provides diverse ways to define what sustainable fashion is. The only common aspect that all the papers concern, are the changing processes in the fashion industry in

order to reduce the current fashion cycle by being more aware of the raw material (Henninger et al., 2016).

For the purpose of the study, the concept was analyzed in the broadest view, in order to define in the research methodology who is the consumer and what the consumer thinks about sustainable fashion.

Further, being sustainability the main subject of the study, it is determinant to develop it in a specific case, which is the website communication field and the impact on consumers' behavior. Consequently, after the application of the sustainability concept on the websites, it is possible to understand whether they would consume more sustainable or not.

## 2.2 COMMUNICATION & SUSTAINABILITY

Communication can be defined as the process of transformation of information that conveys feelings, thoughts, needs, and observations. The exchange of messages and level of the individual – divided in meaning and expectation- influence each other in the process. Additionally, the meaning at the individual level affects the organizational intelligence, meanwhile, expectations affect the organizational integration (Genç, 2017). For a better understanding the following structure is presented below:

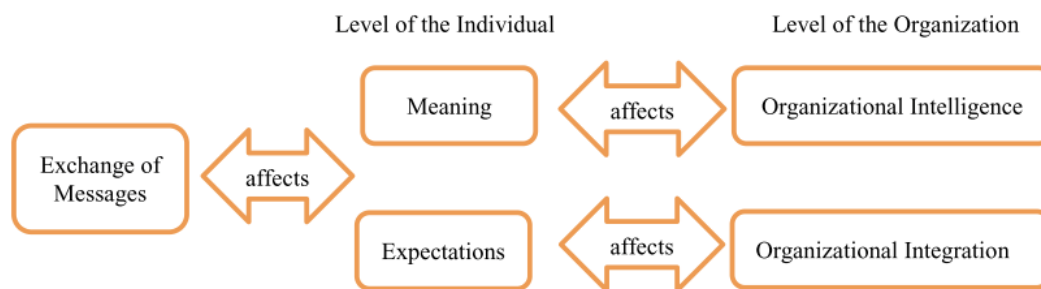


Figure 1 communication process, (Genç, 2017)

In a global marketplace which becomes more focused on the Internet, the technology used for communication can not only connect with each other but also act as a facilitator in establishing a relationship between individuals and companies.

The consumer of today makes an informed purchase decision based on the information of perceived value (Kitchen; & Inga, 2007), hence, companies must create a consistent group to future and existing consumers' groups in order to become successful in the highly competitive market.

The main point of communication is to affect the others' feelings, thoughts or even behaviors people are communicating with. Sustainability, on the other hand, has emerged as an influential corporate strategy, implying the meeting today's needs with special care for financial, human, or natural resources of tomorrow.

Communication is determinant for the sustainability strategy because it first connects all the organization to orient in one direction and implements the changes according to the strategy (Genç, 2017). Secondly, the communication needs to reach the customers, partners and the communities to reduce the risk of drop sales, hence, increase the trends towards sustainability. Communication acts as an important role in sustainable development since the topic of sustainability involves high levels of complexity and uncertainty, consequently, a high level of communication and involvement of stakeholders for broadening the information basis becomes essential for developing a common understanding about societal values on sustainability (Genç, 2017).

The study doesn't aim to develop a deep knowledge of communication, however, it was important to introduce it briefly in the literature in order to understand why the communication is important as a marketing tool for the transmission of sustainable value. All the papers reviewed up to now were focusing on the company prospective and not on the consumers' perspective. The current research will fill the gap by studying the customers' point of view and see the impact that the website has on them.

## 2.2B CORPORATE WEBSITE & SUSTAINABILITY

Corporate websites are constructed spaces that can be assessed by stakeholders to external scrutiny. The website represents officially the brand on the internet and it is used to facilitate the development of good impression among stakeholders, which is supposed to lead to a favorable organization identity (Guimarães-Costa & Pina E Cunha, 2008). One of the primary benefits of implementing web-based communication is that it allows a business to post data about sustainability directly on its website communication and thus makes it immediately accessible to the clients of the business (Da Giau et al., 2016). By using internet technology, retailers have the possibility to sell their products and services online but also customize online stores atmosphere for specific customers (Wu, Lee, Fu, & Wang, 2013). In the case of the website, the term atmospheric refers to an internet store's space and design. Wu et al. (2013) mentioned how generally the scheme for website design should be developed: the virtual design such as layout and color gives the first impression to customers; the content design

provides information about the label on the website; and social cue design, which is integrated in the web interface and allows people to interact using different media (Wu et al., 2013).

In “developing a framework for measuring the effectiveness of sustainability communication through the corporate website”, the authors proposed a framework that aims to improve the efficiency of corporate communication for sustainability. The model is based on a specific objective which is defining a correct corporate orientation, promoting stakeholder instruments, disseminating corporate sustainability content, redefining stakeholder interactions and website structure. In particular, the framework is divided into four dimensions (Adams & Frost, 2006). First, the orientation which defines the corporate identity such as value, mission, and vision towards sustainability. Mission and vision, indeed, establish the basis for a clear corporate approach that is the activity and motivation of the commitment to sustainability. In particular, the vision explains how the industries imagine the future of the environment and the following action the fashion brand would evaluate and anticipate. The second dimension concerns the organization of activities and tasks to set the tools that would help to understand the needs of stakeholders, in a sustainable manner, with regard to their relationship with the organization. In regards to this structure, the governance of sustainability plays a key role because it considers both the organizational model and the instruments. More specifically, the structure determines the whole communication of sustainability in all the department of the organization. The third is the transition from structural relations to systemic interaction meanwhile the fourth dimension involves with the content of the message which must convey the corporate sustainability vision. In this situation, the focus refers to sustainability-related initiatives, project, and operation carried out by organizations with an effect on the key company, the value chain or generic initiatives. This dimension also considers values that guarantee adequate sustainability communication execution, basic to stakeholder relationship success and reputational capital creation (Siano et al., 2015).

Since the research’s aim concerns the impact of the website in the sustainable fashion, which means to prove if the use of the website as a marketing communication tool can stimulate to consume more sustainable fashion, the literature about the website will be determinant for the research. In particular, all the characteristic listed –such as color, design, content- will be relevant for the interview. The adoption of the website as a tool for discovering the behavioral buying intention was intentional because none of the literature has studied the website as a tool for communication of sustainable garments. A number of papers in sustainable fashion literature pointed out already the importance of the social media to broadcast the value of sustainability (Zhao et al., 2019), that is why the study will focus on corporate website that is a

new field of research to discover whether they also impact on consumers' purchasing intentions.

The website is the tool used for the communication of sustainability that will test in real-time the consumer perception when he is interacting with sustainability's message after the website campaign. As such, the message must mix communication of sustainability with other stimuli that the company provides in order to reach the consumer.

To sum up, website communication must provide:

- value, mission, and vision towards sustainability
- information about sustainable practice and activities
- the content of the message that must convey the corporate sustainability vision.

## 2.4 THE STIMULI- ORGANISM- RESPONSE (SOR) MODEL APPLIED TO WEBSITES

The stimuli-organism-response (S-O-R) framework (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974) provides a structure that identifies the relationships between stimuli and environment, organism and response. The model presupposes that the environmental signal produces stimuli that effects on the individual's cognitive and affective reaction, which then determines a certain consumer behavior such as an intention to purchase (Peng & Kim, 2014).

Previous researches have studied the framework providing an understanding relationship among the website atmospheric cues and the purchasing behaviors of the consumers (Kim & Lennon, 2013). These studies explained that the website features were crucial for the online shopping environment and they were influencing the psychological process leading to purchase. In particular, most of the studies have used the S-O-R model as the main framework to express the correlation between the feature effects of the website and the web consumers and their behaviors (Jiang & Chan, 2009).

The first stage, stimulus (S), is concerned with the website atmospheric cues that may be the product display the store environment, the availability of a salesperson (Jiang & Chan, 2009) that may influence the consumer emotional arousal. In the organism (O) stage, the theory refers to the individual's cognitive and emotive systems, which include feelings, perception and emotion and so forth (Jiang & Chan, 2009). In the final stage, the responses vary from a range of conscious to unconscious and internal to external reactions (Jiang & Chan, 2009).

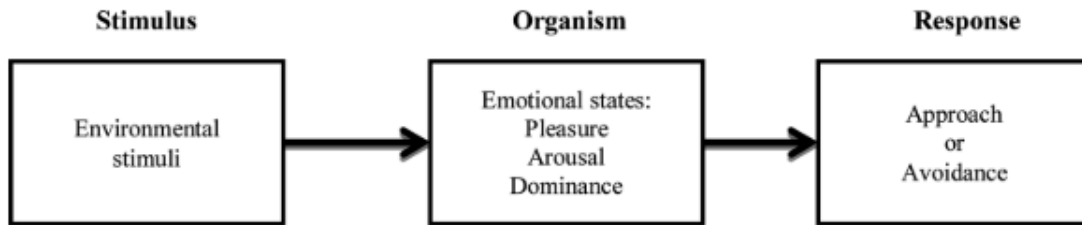


Figure 2 S-O-R framework by Mehrabian and Russell, (1974). Source: Peng, Chen Kim, Yeong Gug

The model has been already used in different literatures for assessing the stimuli that effects on consumers' decision making. In particular, the model has been used in websites context to evaluate the website atmospheric cues on shopper's emotional reactions (Wu et al., 2013). The researches pointed out the relevance of using the S-O-R framework because it has other advantages: first, is a theoretically justified method to analyze the website interactivity features as environmental stimuli and, second, the model provides the permission for the analyst to examine the function of cognitive and affective interactivity responses in buying intention (Peng & Kim, 2014).

For the purpose of the study, the stimulus organism model is used as a conceptual schema that explains the steps of the experiments. The SOR reveals the course of the interview from how consumers react and behave in response to the website stimuli regarding sustainability after a website visit.

## 2.5 PROPOSITIONS

The research method aims to gather a deep introspection of the consumer's perception towards sustainable clothing. In particular, the analysis focuses on the tools' communication in sustainable fashion and their effectiveness to drive the consumer to be more conscious. The main idea is to understand whether the marketing tools are able to encourage people to be more responsible as regards to sustainable garments. As declared before, the research will provide an exploratory analysis of consumer decision-process towards sustainable garments. Before defining the research question, this study must explain the reasoning behind each proposition.

### 2.5.1 THE *ROLE* OF THE INFORMATION ON CONSUMERS' SUSTAINABLE GARMENTS PERCEPTION

As the theory had mentioned before, the role of communication is determinant for the dissemination of information. Indeed, consumers required more information about the product,



from the sources to the manufacturers (Preuit, Rachel; Yan, 2017). The change implicates that the consumer demands to the label company to communicate the benefit of sustainable fashion. Hence, it is determinant to understand the relationship between the ethical markets and the consumer markets (Joy et al., 2012) meaning that the consumer expectation must coincide with the value of the company products (Henninger et al., 2016).

The key fact in the sustainable fashion is the clear communication of what the companies are offering. Many studies have tested the positive effects of social media to drive the consumer to purchase sustainable fashion. Zhao et al., (2019) discovered that Chinese consumers had a possible purchasing intention after the information of sustainability provided by WeChat, the most important social media in China. The implication reveals that the information in the channels plays a role in increase the awareness of slow fashion and the environmental issues (Henninger et al., 2016). As mentioned in different researches, social media is considered a tool that can help educate and reach the consumer to improve their commitment to social and environmental aspects by leverage the intention to buy sustainable apparel (de Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017).

The educational programs regarding sustainable fashion paper of Preuit Rachel et al., (2017) prove that participants were positively influenced after the exposure to education regarding sustainability. Although purchase intention towards slow fashion did not change after the educational mode, the result displays that there is a general positive impact on consumers who show a positive attitude towards slow fashion, meaning that education had influenced the consumer attitude towards the label's product. All the considerations described arise the following proposition:

P1: the consumer's perception is influenced by the sustainability campaign on the website. Consumers are influenced by the website sustainable advertisement, hence, they act according to the information that they can gather on the channels (Wu et al., 2013).

The following propositions will be tested in the experiment case. By employing the corporate website as the independent variable, the study will trigger the respondent (dependent variable) to act.

The research will analyze whether there are positive effects on the consumer decision making and will explore what is changed after the marketing campaign program. The study is intended to testify that the consumer perceptions are changed by the role of website.

By doing so, this study tries to discover the effects of communication in the website on consumers and will explore the perception after the experiment.

## 2.5.2 THE ONLINE STORE LAYOUT

Previous researches indicated that the atmosphere in the online stores can be considered as the key success factors for influencing the consumer shopping intention (Wu et al., 2013). With the application of S-O-R stimuli, the precedent studies stated that the online shopping atmosphere, together with the layout and the information presented in the corporate website, arise positive or negative emotions that will affect the behaviors and the purchasing intention (Wu et al., 2013). In fact, depending on how the shopping environment evokes emotional responses, the web surfers are motivated to shopping online due to the stimulation of interesting website (Peng & Kim, 2014). In addition, Wu et al. (2013) claimed that there is a positive correlation between the information displayed on a website and the consumers' emotion in that particular environment. The authors also stated that: "pleasure and arousal can adequately represent the range of emotion exhibited in response to environmental stimuli".

The site content such as the layout design and the atmosphere viewed as store environment generates positive attitude among users. The layout concerns the information content and the images on the website meanwhile the atmosphere considers the colors used for the website. The results in these researches confirmed that the effects of the online store environments on consumers' willingness to purchase are significant, meaning that a good layout and atmosphere leads to higher level of pleasure on the consumer. Indeed, internet retailers might consider to increase their efforts into making consumer recognize their positive attributes and characteristics. The website environment leads to the following propositions:

P3: the consumers are influenced by the website communication that concerns sustainability thanks to its cues.

P4: the consumer's internal conditions are awakened due to the website sustainable cues that makes him take actions.

The following study tries to understand whether the emotional and environmental atmosphere might provide a positive outcome also for websites that are concerned with sustainable garments. The research is testing that a good website, which is used as a tool for the communication strategy, might increase the awareness and positive consumer reaction. The website stimuli are going to be discovered during the experiment and the consumers' responses.

The proposition might change in accordance of the result provided by the experiment. Since the study uses face-to-face interviews that provide an introspective analysis of the respondent behavior, the result might be different from the research expectation and may come up with further theory explanation.

For the time being, the following table will provide a general understanding of the main theories and the reason for each theory adopted:

Theories	Explanation	Application in the research
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Activity that can be continued indefinitely without causing harm and meeting a current generation's needs without compromising those of future generations</li> <li>- Sustainable fashion idea includes a range of terms such as organic, green, fair trade, sustainable slow, environmental</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The concept leaves rooms for different interpretation to understand the current consumer perception towards it</li> </ul>
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The website represents officially the brand on the internet and it is used to facilitate the development of good impression among stakeholders, which is supposed to lead to a favorable organization identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tool used as a marketing strategy in the research to communicate the concept of sustainability</li> <li>- Website as a tool for discovering the consumers' decision processes</li> </ul>
S-O-R	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Structure that identify the relationships between stimuli and environment, organism and response. The model presupposes that the environmental signal produce stimuli that effects on the individual's cognitive and affective reaction, which then determine a certain consumer behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The structure of the interviews, in particular when the website will be tested in the face-to-face interview</li> <li>- The framework will be the structure of the process and will provide further answer from the consumer</li> </ul>

Table 1 recap theory used and justification of their use for the research. Own elaboration

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review shows a summary of the main papers taken as references for the present research study. The theories studied in the theoretical framework, research question and methodology in this research paper are taken from the literature listed in the table above.

The table is divided into different sections in order to organize the concept and provide a clear understanding of the resources. The first and second columns display the general information of the paper; the third refers the central topic that the authors analyzed and the main research gap they try to answer; the fourth refers to methodology used to gather the data, and the fifth the main contribution of their study.

The literature review has both quantitative, qualitative researches and literature review, hence, it will provide in the methodology the technique used and, if there are any, the described sample.

Topic	Title	Author	Research gap	Methodology	Main contribution
Sustainability	Effects of Green Self-Identity and Cognitive and Affective Involvement on Patronage Intention in Eco-Friendly Apparel Consumption: A Gender Comparison	Tung, Tracie Koenig, Harold F. Chen, Hsiou Lien	<b>Research gap:</b> By differentiating women and man factors, the communication of sustainability is improved	Online survey	The paper provides some directions to improve the marketing communication of eco-friendly apparel using the involvement as a variable.
	Sustainable Development of Slow Fashion Businesses: Customer Value Approach	Jung, Sojin Jin, Byoungho	<b>Research gap:</b> consumers will buy sustainable fashion if the garments reflect their personality	Online survey company <b>Sample:</b> 221 US respondent	Consumers are interested in sustainable fashion if they can purchase garments that reflect their personality. That is why is important to build a communication strategy that can attract

					consumer's attention
Sustainability	What is sustainable fashion?	Henninger, Claudia E. Alevizou, Panayiota J. Oates, Caroline J.	<b>Research gap:</b> define what are the principles of sustainable fashion from the point of view of stakeholder	Multi-methods case study approach (semi-structured interviews, semiotics, questionnaires )  <b>qualitative interviews:</b> 34 UK respondents  <b>quantitative surveys:</b> 300 UK responses	A majority of participants strongly believe that slow fashion not only exists, but also is currently produced. At the same time the participant groups stress different aspects of what makes sustainable fashion. The paper provides a first analysis of consumer perception towards sustainability.
	Consumers' awareness of sustainable fashion	Dong Shen, Josphe Richards Feng Liu	<b>Research gap:</b> analysis of consumers' awareness of sustainable fashion and the methodology to reduce the attitude-behavior-gap	Quantitative survey  <b>sample:</b> 306 student population of California state university, Sacramento	The paper contributes to get a deep analysis of consumers' awareness, the impact of consumers' demographics on their awareness, to explore the appropriate strategies of how to close the attitude-behavior gap, and to segment

					consumers based on their awareness of sustainable fashion.
	The values and motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption	Lundblad, Louise Davies, Iain A.	<b>Research gap:</b> : The research of the values that are related with motivations to purchase and the consequences of purchasing actual sustainable fashion for frequent consumers	<b>Participants:</b> 39 in-depth interviews	Understanding the underlying motivation and value that can incentive the consumer to change their behavior towards sustainable clothes
Communication, integrated marketing tool, website	Developing a Framework for Measuring Effectiveness of Sustainability Communications through Corporate Websites	Siano, Alfonso Piciocchi, Paolo Vollero, Agostino Volpe, Maddalena Della Palazzo, Maria Conte, Francesca De Luca, Danilo Amabile, Sara	<b>Research gap:</b> identification of the links between a business approach and the contribution of service science	Literature review  <b>Sample:</b> none	The paper identifies the main connection between a business approach based on corporate sustainability and the contribution of service science in terms of opportunities and developments.
	The Importance of Communication in Sustainability & Sustainable Strategies	Genç, Ruhet	<b>Research gap:</b> Identification of the relationship between communication and	Literature review  <b>Sample:</b> none	Define the relationship between communication and sustainability in detail. The

			sustainability. The paper justify why communication is important for sustainability		paper justifies why communication is important for sustainability strategy by classifying communication for sustainability, communication about sustainability, and communication of sustainability. the classification is important to define the website that communicate sustainability for the website sample
Answering allegations: the use of the corporate website for restorative ethical and social disclosure	Campbell, David Cornelia Beck, A.	<b>Research gap:</b> the companies uses the websites as a communication tool to increase their value	Secondary data analysis.  qualitative and quantitative aspects of content analysis methods relevant to web site interrogation.  <b>sample:</b> 8 large organization	The companies may use the website as an important marketing communication tool for increasing their value by delivering messages of their responsibility towards sustainability.	
Sustainability practices and web-based	Da Giau, Alessandro, Macchion Laura,	<b>Research gap:</b> the web-based communication	Case studies of 12 Italian fashion companies	The research considers the web-based	

	communication: An analysis of the Italian fashion industry	Caniato Federico, Caridi Maria, Danese Pamela, Rinaldi Rinaldo, Vinelli Andrea	n are supporting their sustainability programs		communication that fashion companies are implementing to support their sustainability programs.
	Consumer attitudes and communication in circular fashion	Vehmas, Kaisa, Raudaskoski, Anne; Heikkilä, Pirjo; Harlin, Ali; Mensonen, Aino	<b>Research gap:</b> the companies uses the websites as a communication tool to increase the knowledge of circular economy in the fashion industry	Qualitative semi-structured interviews  <b>sample:</b> 55 Finnish 5-10 partners for internal workshop 18 external stakeholder for external workshop	Communication is the key point in the management of a full corporate responsibility programs. Many companies are actually considering whether they should communicate their sustainability-related actions to consumers and other stakeholders (such as investors), and how to do so.



SOR website	Effects of reputation and website quality on online consumers' emotion, perceived risk and purchase intention: Based on the stimulus-organism-response model	Kim Jiyong, Lennon Sharron J.	<b>Research gap:</b> Test the S-O-R framework with reputation and website quality as a stimuli,, perceived risk and emotion as organism and purchase intention as the response.	Online survey <b>Sample:</b> 219 questionnaires obtained at a large Midwestern university, the consumers are the generation Y	This study extends the S-O-R framework of stimulus, organismic reaction, and behavioral responses by adding an external source of information (i.e. reputation) as a critical factor in the online shopping situation. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to test a more comprehensive model consisting of reputation and web site quality (stimuli), perceived risk and emotion (organism) and purchase intention (response).
	Application of the Stimuli-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Framework to Online Shopping Behavior	Peng Chen, Kim Yeong Gug	<b>Research gap:</b> the purchase intention is positively affected by hedonic, utilitarian shopping value and	Quantitative survey <b>sample:</b> 416 questionnaires , The main survey was conducted in the Chinese metropolitan	The hedonic shopping value has a positive effect on consumers' attitudes toward online shopping and emotional

			environmental stimuli	areas of Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Zhengzhou	purchases, the utilitarian shopping value has a significant effect on consumers' attitudes toward online shopping, environmental stimuli positively influence consumers' attitudes toward online shopping and emotional purchases, and consumers' attitudes toward online shopping positively affect their repurchase intention.
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*Table 2 Literature review table*

The table provides the general information of the literature used as references for the research, for further explanations the excel file will furnish all the details of the papers selected. The excel sheet adds the contribution for the research, contribution for the assumptions and key results that are not mentioned in this review table. In addition, the excel paper provides further papers that are not cited in this table because they are considered to support the literature referred to herein.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

The chapter provides an overview of the research method and the design of the experiment that will be applied for the study. It will describe briefly the participant selection, the research design and the analysis methodology. The methodology design represents only a draft of the future methodology; hence, there might be a series of modification later on.

### 4.1 PARTICIPANTS

This study will focus on consumers of different ages without considering the country of origin. The interview will be administered to a selected target aged from 20 to 60. It is necessary that the target buys its own garments, aware of their consumption and have a certain budget to spend. The individuals will be approached directly in person.

The study will consider also people that are not to be particularly interested in recycling clothes but they

Apart from the age requirement, the participants will be differentiated as much as possible to reach heterogeneous perspective, in this way it will be possible to understand the differences from consumer to consumer and reach a profound understanding of human behavior that in the end can possibly be generalized for the population.

### 4.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURE

The aim of the study is to discover how an individual reacts to the website sustainability advertisement and grasp consumers' responses that are triggered by the perception of the website cues. In order to reach these purposes, the study employs the experiment approach which proposes that the consumer uses some factors (the website information and cue) to achieve a particular result (consumers' states of being) and semi-structured interview which allows flexibility and ability of asking question outside of the interview guide (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). The experiment will help to see what are the respondents' actions when they are using the website. With the use of the notes, the researcher will report the participant's movement, precisely, where they surf, whether they take time to see the information on the website, what are they searching for and where the focus remains when they interact with the website. This part of research will explore the facts thanks to the directly observation of what the consumer is doing and discover what is the flow of the consumer decision process, what are the influences in the process and how it changes between the experimental group and the control group.

In this study the use of the semi-structured interview seems reasonable because it allows to understand the relationship between variables (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) giving

more insight of the event, but at the same time varying the questions from interview to interview in the base of what the respondent will answer to the questions. With the application of the interview, the research gains more value because the respondents will then explain the reasons of their action and the research will interpret what exactly moves the consumers' decision when they interact with different sustainable websites. By organizing the semi-structured analysis, the research can omit or modify some questions depending on the flow of the conversation. According to B. Wagoner (2015), the qualitative experimental methodology can enhance both the external condition and the inner condition of a consumer's response. In addition, the author stated that by applying the experimental methodology, it is possible to carefully observe the subjects as they performing the experimental task. Considering also that most of the sense is expressed in a non-verbal way ((Magnier & Crié, 2015) the use of the website allows to reveal underlying motivation or thoughts that wouldn't appear by only using the interview. The employment of the qualitative experiment, hence, seems suitable in this context because it seeks insights of consumers' perception that reacts to the website cues and then they will reply about the reasoning behind their decision-process. By using simultaneously these two techniques the research can strength the validity of the result (Magnier & Crié, 2015). In fact, the experiment will observe the consumer actions towards the website sustainability advertisement, meanwhile the interview contributes with explaining orally the behaviors of consumers.

### 4.3 THE MANIPULATION EXPERIMENT

The online experiment will allow to understand consumer reaction towards sustainability. In order to control the experimental variables, two fictitious websites focused on sustainable fashion are created through a commercial platform called Wix.

The experiment will be divided into two groups, the experimental group will interact with a website sustainable manifesto and the control group will interact with a website which has hidden information about sustainability. Each group will interact with a different website. The experimental group will interact with a company website that is fully declaring its sustainability commitments where all the stimuli of the website will try to lead the consumer to choose sustainable garments. The control group, instead, will be directed partially to sustainable garments because the company website is not fully sustainable and is not communicating properly their commitment. However, all the respondents will individually be interviewed during

all the experiment because, in this way, the participant will not be influenced by the other replies and actions.

The following table will provide a clear differentiation presents in the two website.

experimental	control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manifesto of sustainability</li> <li>• Detailed product description of sustainability</li> <li>• Information on the hand on the first page</li> <li>• catchy sentences about how sustainability is cool</li> <li>• Let the people discover the website</li> <li>• connection of sustainability with attribute/value of the product</li> <li>• Only click on the buy clothes, the pages show more the “buy click” than the “learn more”</li> <li>• The colors of the first page are green, powder pink and all soft colors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mix of non-sustainable product and sustainable product</li> <li>• Basic product sustainability description and basic product description of the non-sustainable product</li> <li>• sustainability information are partially hidden in the first page</li> <li>• information will be revealed only when the consumer will click on the slide of sustainability</li> <li>• There will be one more click to arrive the buy button for the sustainable product</li> <li>• Mix of color</li> <li>• No catchy sentences of sustainability</li> </ul>

*Table 3 differences between the two website. Own elaboration*

The experiment will last around 20-35 minutes depending on the respondent’s availability and answers he provides. The research will be translated in Italian to make the Italian respondent more confident of the language and more comfortable to speak in the dialogue. The other interviews will be conducted in English.

Before the experiment starts, there will be a pre-test to see whether the experiment works and will fill all the field of the research. For collecting the data records, the study will use recordings and notes. The recording will be transcribed and translate in English in case the interviews are Italians.

The analysis procedure will use the Maxqua program.

**4.4 ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

The procedure will use 3 phases:

Phase 1: The interviewer will simply ask whether the respondent purchases sustainable clothes and the reasons why they don’t. It will be only an introductory question that help to see the difference and the development of the respondents processing.

phase 2: The interviewer will divide randomly the respondents in two groups: the experimental group will see a sustainable manifesto of a big sustainable brands, meanwhile, the control group will be provided with a website with little cues about sustainability. Each participant the

research will proceed by using the website as the principal tool. The in-filed experimental part will give the website evaluation due the interaction between the interviewee and the website. By using the website, it will investigate the psychological effects that occur to consumers while they visit it. The respondent will express their impression and provide their perceptions about the website with the use of the interview. In this phase there will be an inquiry on what are the determinants that captures the attention of the consumer and the internal emotion or effect that could make consumer involved. Then the research will focus on the reaction and the actions of the respondent.

Phase 3: the consumer will be analyzed after the process of awareness of sustainability, the research will discover what are the behaviors after this process and see whether the consumptions are changed due the analysis provided.

#### 4.5 LIMITATIONS

The present research has undoubtedly certain limitations. As regards for the qualitative measurement, the researcher's presence during data gathering can affect the subjects' responses the use of semi-structured interviews may lead the conversation and force the respondent to behave in a certain manner. In the beginning, the answer may be incomplete or superficial for the research. The assessment of the replies may be affected by the researcher bias that may also misinterpret the interviewee responses. Since the interview will start dealing with sustainable practice, in the third phase of the interview, the responded may answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably. Indeed, the structure of the interview might already influence respondents' decisions. The inquiry method encourages respondents to reason for their actions, therefore, they might over-rationalize their choices when subjected.

As regards sustainability, these limitations need to be considered: the topic is too broad and cannot judge that a consumer is more or less sustainable than another consumer. Indeed, the research can't define whether a person is sustainable or not, also because from his/her perspective, he/she might consider himself/herself sustainable by purchasing, for example, vegan garments or second-hand products. Besides, the target selected might be desirably biased by the fact that they can respond "yes" to the answer "are you sustainable?", hence, the interview will try to avoid to ask these type of questions and will try to inquire indirectly.

Many companies are sustainable in various way, hence, it is not possible to define that a company is more sustainable than the other one. In fact, one company such as "CasaGIN" may use vegan as their sustainable policy and use all the material that are "cruelty-free", meanwhile another label may adapt their sustainable strategy by applying the circular

economy in their supply chain or even use only produce material that reduce the environmental issues. In addition, companies might be sustainable and implementing the practices, however, they are not advertising it due the attack of the NGOs and public opinion for the lack of the commitment in the whole company's activity. For example, the company may be committed to sustainable practice and are investing many resources into sustainability, they aren't developing extended supply chain solution due the high complexity concerning also of their suppliers' activity.

Another limitation concerns the choice of the website. In fact, the sample may be too small for the research and can generalize the other companies' strategy. Also, the website can be a greenwash even though the research will try to analyze the appropriate website for the interview.

## 5.WORK PLAN

ACTIVITIES		2019																2020			
		September				October				November				December				January			
		36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	1	2	3	4
READING	topic definition																				
	literature research																				
	literature reading																				
EXPOSÉ	work																				
	expose deadline																				
INTERVIEW	design																				
	approval																				
DATA COLLECTION	contacting interviewees																				
DATA ANALYSIS	transcription & analysis results																				
	literature development																				
FINALIZING	finalizing the thesis																				
	review																				
DEADLINES	topic proposal																				
	delivery																				
	presentation																				
	defence																				
buffer time	buffer times during the work																				

Table 4 work plan

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