



The struggle of sustainable clothing

A qualitative study of the consumer practice of shopping sustainable clothes



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Abstract

Sustainable products are highly discussed in the modern society. However, a product that has yet to have a breakthrough is sustainable clothing. Previous research has shown that the consumer practice concerning shopping is very rooted and the consumer value aspects such as style, price and design higher than sustainability when shopping. This research discuss the consumer practice of shopping sustainable clothes, and looks at why sustainable clothing has had such a struggling start. Lastly, it compares the practice to another sustainable product and practice, organic food, that has had a more successful establishment on the market. The qualitative research conducted and the analysis made aims to provide an explanation of the practice of shopping sustainable clothes, ask the question of whether or not shopping sustainable fashion is a practice, and discusses what challenges sustainable clothing faces. The qualitative research conducted contains three interviews; one company representative from Gina Tricot and two customer representatives. The research further contains one focus group interview and three observations in stores to get a fair view of the consumer practice from different perspectives. Our findings show that shopping sustainable fashion is not an established practice by the common consumer by itself, but is a sub-practice of the general practice of shopping. Moreover, the results show that the consumer lacks in understanding the meaning, and is rather negative to change her practices. She does not see the meaning of changing, which can be due to the degree that her existing practices are routinized, and believes that the companies are the ones who are responsible for making a change towards a more sustainable environment. Furthermore, the customer is rather lazy and do not want to change if she has to put too much effort in it. However, an interesting question that arises is whether this sub-practice is a beginning to a configuration of the old shopping practice.

Key words

Fast fashion, Sustainable shopping, Sustainable labeling, Practice theory

Sammanfattning

Hållbara produkter är ett högaktuellt ämne i det moderna samhället. En produkt som däremot inte haft ett större genomslag än är hållbara kläder. Tidigare forskning har visat att konsumentpraktiken gällande shopping är väldigt rotad och konsumenten värderar faktorer som stil, pris och design högre än hållbarhet när de shoppar. Denna studie diskuterar konsumentens praktik av att handla hållbara kläder, och undersöker varför hållbara kläder har haft en sådan trög start på marknaden. Slutligen jämför studien praktiken i en annan hållbar produktgrupp, ekologisk mat, som har blivit betydligt mer etablerat på marknaden. Den kvalitativa studien som genomförts tillsammans med analysen syftar till att erbjuda en förklaring av praktiken att handla hållbara kläder, diskutera om hållbar klädhandel kan klassas som en praktik i sig eller inte, samt diskutera vilka vidare utmaningar hållbara kläder står inför. Denna kvalitativa studie innehåller tre intervjuer; en företagsrepresentant från Gina Tricot och två konsumentrepresentanter. Dessutom innehåller studien en fokusgrupp samt tre observationer i butiker för att få en rättvis bild av konsumentens praktik från olika synvinklar. Vårt resultat visar att shoppa hållbara kläder ej är en praktik i sig hos gemene man, däremot är det en underpraktik till den generella praktiken att handla kläder. Vårt resultat visar vidare att konsumenten ej fullt förstår meningen, och är förhållandevis negativ till att ändra sina praktiker. Hon ser inte meningen med att ändra sig, vilket kan bero på att hennes shoppingpraktiker är så rotade, och tror att företagen är de som måste styra en förändring mot ett mer hållbart samhälle. Fortsättningsvis är konsumenten förhållandevis lat och vill inte ändra sig om hon måste lägga ner för mycket ansträngning på det. Dock är det en intressant fråga om denna underpraktik kan ses som början på en omvandling av den gamla shoppingpraktiken.

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1 Introduction

In the modern, western society, sustainable products have been given huge attention. A product that has had a struggling start is sustainable clothing, and compared to i.e. ecological food, sustainable clothing is still on the sideline. Regarding food and the food industry, many consumers seem to be aware of some of the largest effects their consumption have on the environment. Today, it is well known that, for example, the meat industry is one of the industries that has the biggest, negative environmental impact in the world. A practice that has developed from this is that some consumers have decided to only consume a vegetarian diet, to reduce their own environmental impact. Unfortunately, the sustainable fashion industry has not yet had this kind of effect.

Background and discussion of the problem

Environmental impact is currently a vital discussion in the modern society, and the awareness of the impact of one's consumption on the environment has grown rapidly the last thirty years (Beard, 2008). The textile industry has long been criticized for its polluting production and waste, and for its use of non-renewable resources (D'Souza et al., 2015). The Western clothing consumption is known to be unsustainable, due to the mass-consumption and the constant purchasing of new garments (Niinimäki, 2010). The fashion industry is fast-changing, and what is in style today might not be the same as what is in style tomorrow (Joy et al., 2012). Companies have the possibility to influence consumers (Arvidsson, 2005; D'Souza et al., 2015), and therefore, marketers can try to push sustainable fashion to be trendy and create a new life-style by advertisements (D'Souza et al., 2015). However, this is something that has yet to happen, and sustainable labeled clothing is still in the shadow of regular clothing.

The unsustainable contemporary consumption

Consumers are constantly presented with new information about products and their sustainable impact. However, consumers do not only need a strong environmental engagement in order to consume more sustainably, but also need knowledge and understanding of the impact of their consumption (Moisander, 2007). Even though many consumers do reflect about their own consumption, and the known negative environmental impact it has, the majority of consumers still consume huge quantities of environmentally unfriendly clothes (D'Souza et al., 2015). Consumers care too much about fashion and design (Moisander, 2007) and the increase of cheap Asian-made clothes have created an unsustainable consumption behaviour, and further a confusion in how to act sustainably (Niinimäki, 2010). Today, a lot of clothing companies offer sustainable collections, which can be made from i.e. organic cotton or recycled materials. However, considering that the amount of clothes purchased that are made from a non-environmentally friendly material is

still huge, the consumer for some reason views sustainable clothing in a different way than other sustainable products. Why does it differ? How come many other sustainable products are in the spotlight, while sustainable fashion is still in the shadows?

Reasons behind this consumption

It can be argued that one of the reasons behind sustainable fashions slow progress is that of direct- and indirect effects. Consumers are more willing to i.e. purchase organic food than sustainable clothing because of the food's direct effect on people's health. Sustainable clothing is more complicated because of the more indirect effect on the human body, and therefore, consumers do not see the direct benefit of changing their practice (Joergens, 2006; Gam, 2010; Kim & Damhorst, 1998; Beard, 2008). Therefore, as long as the chemicals in the garment does not create unhealthy reactions to the skin etc., the consumer will not care about the bad environmental impact (Joergens, 2006). Beard (2008) argues that the slow development can partly be explained by the lack in the consumer's willingness to change their rooted practice, and that most clothing companies have not seen it necessary to have a transparent value chain. The struggle for sustainable clothing can also be related to how the consumer view environmentally friendly garments. Niinimäki (2010) states that "*...the design and appearance of eco-clothing are unfashionable and unattractive or do not suit the consumer's wardrobe needs or his/her personal style*" which is based on Joergens (2006) article. It has been shown that the consumer values factors such as price, quality and style as more important when shopping (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Moisaner, 2007; Joergens, 2006), meaning that sustainability is not the consumer's priority when shopping.

A further reason could be that of the communication between the company and the consumer. Beard (2008) discusses the challenge companies faces, when they both need to position themselves as sustainable, but also, mainly as fashionable and updated with the latest trends. Mason (2012) discuss the implication of asymmetric information. He explains the problem that the consumer is not given the full disclosure on how the product is produced, and therefore will have a difficult time understanding which of the products are sustainable, can be solved by sustainable labeling. However, since companies can create their own labels, he also states that sustainable labeling is not perfect, and that a third party needs to be involved when certifying the products in order to make the labeling reliable. However, green certifications and ecological labels are costly (Aguilar & Vlosky, 2007), and Hadjimichael and Troels (2015) further discuss that some small businesses cannot afford the certification. Moreover, they mention the complication with that sustainable labels, over all, rarely explain what they do *not* cover. An interesting contradiction to this is, however, that although companies put a clear and informative label on a garment, very few consumers will actually read it (Joergens, 2006). Many sustainable labels appear as positive to the consumer, but it is questioned how much knowledge the consumer actually possesses about the different labels. Some firms even avoid certifications, such as ecological and fair trade, because they are not sure that the clothes live up to the expected quality, and therefore, the companies create their own labels (Beard, 2008). Thogersen et al. (2002) comment on this by stressing that the label

has to be recognizable to the consumer, or the label will only lead to confusion. If the consumer does not recognize the label, the label will lose its effect. Lastly, another problem is that of greenwashing. Mulvaney and Robbins (2011) argues that companies involve themselves in sustainable initiatives by minimal standards, only to appear sustainable and green towards the consumers and the public. This can be problematic in creating a trustworthy relationship between the label and the consumers. (More *earlier research* will be presented in the next coming chapter, theoretical framework).

However, these arguments do not fully explain the lack of interest from the consumer towards sustainable fashion, considering that greenwashing etc. can be a problem for other industries too, such as the organic food industry. The literature that has been used in this thesis has brought forward many pros and cons about sustainable labeling on products. However, Niinimäki (2010) means that, although many studies have been done about sustainable clothes, companies and designers still have a lack of knowledge regarding what is desired and expected by the consumers. Earlier research has not focused on this specific area, and therefore, we consider it to be a research gap in the area of sustainable clothing shopping as a practice. We want to contribute to closing this gap with our research by providing an understanding of why sustainable fashion struggles with establishing on the market. We will analyze shopping sustainable fashion as a practice, and we will focus on the areas of meaning, material, and competence. More precisely, we will research which of the “meanings” involved, the “material” incorporated, and the “knowledge” needed, are the least reconfigured in the practice and thereby, provide a potential for increasing the sustainability of fashion shopping. We chose the perspective of practice because we consider it to be a perspective that has not yet been applied to the extent that it should on this area of research.

Aim

Our thesis aims to contribute to a greater knowledge of the role of sustainability in consumers’ clothing shopping practices. We believe that companies and customers have a different view of the sustainability issue, and that there is a lack in the communication between these two parts. This could be of importance to marketers and companies to understand how the consumer reflects around the matter of environmentally friendly clothes, and through this be able to better understand the consumer’s opinion and knowledge on the matter. Why does the sustainable reflection not transfer into the shopping practices? How come the practice of shopping clothes and fast fashion has not changed to a more sustainable practice? Why are other sustainable products, for example organic food, so much more successful in the market, compared to sustainable clothing? This thesis will apply practice perspective on how the sustainable label transforms the practice of the shopping, in terms of the adjustments in materials, meanings and competences (Shove & Pantzar, 2005).

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to research in what way sustainability have entered into the practice of mainstream fashion shopping. More precisely, we want to research where the power of configuration is lacking (in the practice elements of meaning, competence and/ or material), in order to understand why the practice of shopping sustainable clothing is not yet an established practice. The practice perspective will be applied to understand consumers shopping strategies and how the practice of shopping sustainable fashion is today performed, in order to understand in which area of competence, meaning and material the practice is lacking and why. To be able to research this, we have created research questions in order to answer our main thesis questions. We will also analyze the result from our research about sustainable clothing compared to organic food.

More specifically, we will answer the following research questions:

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- In what ways does new *material*, in terms of sustainable clothes, transform the shopping practice?
 - In what ways does the *meaning* in the practice of shopping sustainable clothing configure the general practice of shopping clothes?
 - In what ways does the consumer's *competence*, in the area of sustainable clothes, contribute to the shopping practice?
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Delimiting

This thesis is delimited to research the practice of shopping environmentally friendly/ friendlier clothing. Further, we will focus on what happens in the practice of shopping sustainable clothing. The analysis and research is delimited to focus on a certain clothing company, Gina Tricot. Since Gina Tricot only sell women clothing, we have delimited our conducted research to a focus on only women. Women are usually more into fashion (D'Souza et al., 2015), although we are aware that men too can shop in these stores for different reasons. In age, we have focused on Gina Tricot's main consumer group, between 17-30 years old. Furthermore, we have limited our research to focus on Gina Tricot on the Swedish market. It is, however, noted that Gina Tricot is available in other countries. When discussing the physical Gina Tricot stores in our case, we have delimited ourselves to a focus on three stores in the center of Gothenburg. This because, the consumer is most likely to be similar to each other no matter which town the store is located in, since Gina Tricot is a clothing chain which have the same concepts and products in all of their stores. It is noted that the setups and the displays of the stores might differ depending on which city the store is located in. However, these differences was not seen as important differences, since the concept, design and products still remain the same no matter which stores it is or where it is located.

Key Concepts

To shed a light on our research, we have used certain concepts. Here are some definitions to show what we assume when we discuss these non-theoretical concepts.

Sustainable Fashion

Clothing with sustainable attributes. It is designed for longtime use, and it has little impact on the environment (Niinimäki, 2010). A sustainable garment is a garment that is “more sustainable” than “common” clothing, yet does not have to be fully sustainable.

Sustainable labeling

A label attached to the garment which provides information on its sustainable benefit and qualities. It can both include known certifications from a third part (Mulvaney & Robbins, 2011), but it can also be the stores’ own sustainable labels.

Fast fashion

Fast fashion is a term used for clothes that are based on the latest fashion trends, they are usually in store for a short time and are updated very often. Fast fashion are usually sold to a low price which results in a large quantity sold (Zamani, 2016).

Common/ regular clothes

Clothing that does not categorize as sustainable through labeling or qualities. This incorporates most garments available today in stores.

Common consumer

A customer who does not categorize under a specific “type”, but is a part of the big mass. She shops in a mainstream style and does not have any specific values or opinions about sustainable clothing. Here, the majority of the population is categorized.

Greenwashing

A negative term that describes a company who portrays themselves as more sustainable than they actually are (Rahman et al., 2015). This can be done through, for example, performing actions because it “looks good” towards the community, or exaggerating once sustainable work through marketing.

2 Theoretical framework

This chapter starts with an overview of earlier research about sustainability and shopping as a whole. Thereafter, we will discuss the practice perspective on shopping sustainable clothing, and the theoretical point of view will be explained.

Earlier research: Shopping sustainable fashion

The Western society has a big focus on consumption, and most people are today satisfied with their economic standards (Beard, 2008). However, although people are getting wealthier, sustainable shopping, in general, is not very widely spread in the European Union and the market share is very low (Vringer et al., 2017). Furthermore, it has been noticed that the meaning of sustainability differs. Most research are focusing on the discussion of the efficiency of consumption, and Lorek and Fuchs (2011) further argues that sustainable consumption also include to not over-consume. However, the mass-consumption is at large in the Western world, and young people today get very inspired by brands, the prices and the latest trends (Joergens, 2006). Furthermore, it can be discussed who should push the environmental question forward; the consumers or the companies? Vringer et al. (2017) argues that consumers tend to “free-ride” on other institutions sustainable investments and actions, rather than act sustainably themselves. This means that consumers are lazy and prefer that companies and governments drive the sustainable question. However, some people believe that it is the consumers that must take their responsibility and push companies for an environmental change (Joergens, 2006).

Research has been made of the shopping practice in other industries than the clothing industry too, and it is clear that the practice can differ due to what type of product it concerns. A study made in a grocery store (Vanclay et al., 2010) showed the result that consumers tend to purchase more sustainably if they get clear information or a label that informs about the environmental impact the product has. In the study, the store put labels on the products, that informed about the sustainable impact each of the products had. The study showed that the customer got very engaged in the meaning of the labels and asked lots of questions, and many customers ended up purchasing more sustainably. However, this is probably because they see the direct effect on the human body of ecological food (Joergens, 2006; Beard, 2008). The food industry has also shown that consumers tend to support labels they can relate to, for example that they are willing to support a label that says “locally produced”. However, that does not mean that they are willing to support just *any* small farmer (Onozaka & McFadden, 2011). The sustainable clothing industry has not got the same response. Although there is a demand of sustainable clothes, it is at the moment not high enough to be profitable in the clothing market (D’Souza et al., 2015). Beard (2008) argues that a sustainable production is not enough to get the consumer to purchase, the clothes also must be nice in appearance to be of the customer’s interest. D’Souza et al. (2015) further argues that the information on the

sustainable labels on clothes do not have enough power on the consumer, and that it must contain more direct information on what the customer contributes to when purchasing sustainably. Furthermore, Dörnyei and Gyulavari (2016) argues that the customer need a clear and simple label, preferable an image, otherwise they will not put effort to it.

Sustainable shopping: A practice perspective

A practice is an action that a person does, for example to shop for groceries or to clean ones house (Røpke, 2009). Reckwitz (2002) describes practices in detail as *“routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge”*. Put simply, a practice is a routinized behaviour which incorporates different elements, and is an action usually rooted in the individual to such an extent, that she does not necessarily have to reflect when performing it. According to Warde (2005), the majority of practices incorporate some kind of consumption, but that consumption itself is not a practice. Røpke (2009) describe consumers as “practitioners” who indirectly consume resources. According to the practice perspective, a practice creates consumption. To perform a practice, the individual needs objects to perform the practice, which in turn creates consumption of objects. Furthermore, necessary knowledge of how to perform the practice is needed, as is the physical, bodily function required (Reckwitz, 2002). Fuentes (2015) describes a practice as *“complex units of analysis involving and depending on understandings, know-how, feelings, and material artefacts”*. These are incorporated into the different hoops of meaning, competence and material. Fuentes (2015) further states, based on a discussion by Shove et al. (2012) and Hand et al. (2015), that no practice can work without these three components: *“Anyone practice is thus dependent on a specific configuration of meanings, competences, and materials – a configuration that can, and often does, change over time, as old links are broken and new ones are made”*. Shove and Pantzar (2005) stress that practices involves a combination of materials, meanings and competences. Material includes all physical things that is needed to perform, and is involved, (Røpke, 2009) in the practice. In this thesis, it will include the sustainable clothes, labels and signs, and everything inside the stores.

However, products alone have no value, but have to be combined with meaning and competence. The area of meaning includes the understanding of why we do things (Shove & Pantzar, 2005) and it is the component that make sense of the activities (Røpke, 2009). In the practice of shopping sustainable clothing, the meaning can for example lie in ethical or environmental reasons. Lastly, competence is the knowledge and skills that is needed to perform a practice (Røpke, 2009) and it can include both embodied and learned skills (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). When shopping sustainably, competences can include the knowledge of sustainable materials and what impact the textile industry has on the environment. It can also include the knowledge of fashion and textile materials, or knowledge of where to shop in the best way.

Warde (2005) states that (social) practices differ in what they contain and how they are performed, based on the person who is performing the practice. Customers' social practices creates social relations with others (Røpke, 2009). People have different knowledge, experience, resources etc., which is why the practice will be different between individuals. Moreover, practices have their own history of development and of how they came to be, and the question "*why people do what they do*" can, according to Warde (2005), be answered by these histories. This means that a practice is often done by routine (Shove et al., 2012), and that a person who performs the practice rarely reflects on the actions she is performing (Warde, 2005).

Fuentes (2014) discuss the value of acknowledging other perspectives on the matter of sustainable shopping. However, he states that there is a difference in the practice perspective compared to many other research areas, in that it does not view the consumer as "*a rational actor nor a socio-cultural identity seeker*". Instead, the practice perspective views the performer of the practice, as a practitioner. Fuentes (2014) further argues that people go shopping because of desires and pleasure, but also because of the shopping experience and purchasing the wanted product. According to the practice perspective, the consumer is not fully rational, nor fully an identity seeker as the psychology and cultural perspective states. However, the practice perspective agrees with that these factors can intertwine with the practice of shopping (Fuentes, 2014). Furthermore, he states that there are different tactiques consumers use when practicing sustainable shopping. The first, evident one, is when the consumer actively searches for sustainably labeled products. However, the consumer does not necessarily have to purchase a sustainable labeled product in order to practice sustainable shopping (Fuentes, 2014). For example, another tactique observed from green shopping practices, is that some consumers try to perform the practice without purchasing the sustainably labeled products. Instead, they focus on not over-consuming, or try to acquire products made out of a lasting material which will eliminate the need for buying a new product in the near future (Lorek & Fuchs, 2011; Fuentes, 2014). However, the practice of green shopping therefore require prior knowledge in order for the consumer to be able to value which material is "long lasting" and not (Fuentes, 2014). Fredriksson and Fuentes (2014) also comments on the value of the stores. A well informed and inspiring staff is important and will create trust in products and brands. The staff can be seen as a tool for inner and outer marketing. The stores also have the possibility to create a customer value in products and form the customers. Stores are usually organized to create needs and desires, and contributes to the customers constantly craving for new products. However, Fuentes (2014) mentions how a large part of the sustainable shopping practice incorporates resisting to shop, which is contradicting the general shopping practice where the purpose is to acquire new products.

Moreover, Rex and Baumann (2007) argues that sustainable labels only attract already green consumers, and the strategies mentioned by Fuentes (2014) require previous knowledge and know-how, and are more likely used by a consumer who already is trying to become a

greener consumer. In order to make the practice of sustainable shopping an established practice, the common shopper needs, to some extent, practice sustainable shopping. Therefore, the challenge lies in attracting this consumer, who might not yet have the competence needed, see the meaning of it, or understand the material given in order to perform the sustainable shopping practice.

However, practices can also adapt and change over time (Røpke, 2009), and Warde (2005) means that a change in behaviour, often comes from a change or renewal of a practice: *“the concept of practice inherently combines a capacity to account for both reproduction and innovation”* (Warde, 2005). On one hand, a practice always has certain rituals and actions which the person who performs the practice understands, and the knowledge on how to perform the practice is rooted both in body and in mind. This means that a practice often is deeply rooted into rituals and routines, and that change and development will most likely happen over a longer period of time (Warde, 2005). On the other hand, practices are in some ways under constant change because of societal factors and development pushing people to adapt (Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005). The way a practice is performed, however, will most often be questioned by some individuals. This can be, for example, because of different knowledge and experiences that individuals have. Warde (2005) uses the example of the younger generation, and that generation gaps can be a reason for wanting to do things differently.

Ingram et al. (2007) argues that the design process, the product development, and the consumer practice relate to each other. Figure 1 shows where producers start with the design, usually under time-pressure. Here, the goal is to solve a specific problem. When the product enter the market the product development is over. Another product development process comes out of consumption, as shown in Figure 2. Materials and components will be developed over time. The design will be adjusted to the developed product and will be developed from previous problems. Lastly, Figure 3 shows how these two models can be mixed together. In this model, it is argued that there is a relationship between practices, new products and design. Ingram et al. (2007) argues that practices make the design of products evolve, and that the introduction of new products on the market creates a new need and therefore, new practices.

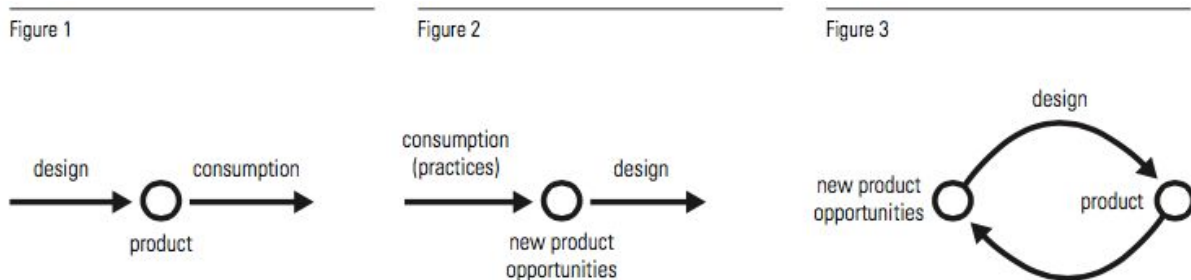


Figure 1, 2 and 3. The relationship between design, products and practices. Ingram et al. (2007)

Ingram et al. (2007) discuss why consumers acquire goods at all, and two reasons mentioned is social comparison and self-identity creation. Social comparison means that the consumer always aspire to climb higher on the social status ladder, and that we continuously want what the people in the “upper class wants”, which leads to a constant consumption and acquisition of new items. Self-identity creation means that we consume and purchase certain brands and products, to convey a message about ourselves to our surrounding: *“Objects, and the meanings associated with them, constitute resources used in definition of self”* (Ingram et al., 2007).

3 Methodology

We made a qualitative research, including individual interviews, a focus group, observations and discussion of previous research from articles. First, we have a detailed description of the implementation of the different research parts, where we go through what happened and how it turned out. Lastly, we will summarize how we will analyze the conducted data.

We started our methodology by mapping the goal of the study and asked ourselves what we wanted to get answers about, as recommended by Flick (2014). We wanted to get an understanding of the shopping practice concerning sustainable fashion, why there is a struggle in establishing sustainable clothing as a natural consumption phenomenon and why consumer's practices are recalcitrant in changing to a more sustainable consumption. A qualitative research focus on what people say, interpret and their understanding of the social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Flick (2014) states that a qualitative research is to be preferred when making a study of social relations, and as our study discuss how the consumer practice is intertwined with the meaning of sustainable labels, we thought our results would be more fair viewed with a qualitative research. The decision to make a qualitative research was based on the fact that we wanted an honest picture of the consumer practice surrounding the matter. The consumer often have a tendency to portray herself in a way that she wants to be perceived (Cronin et al., 2014), which is not necessarily the most honest way. Therefore, conducting a quantitative research felt risky, since the individual can mark whichever answer she wants to, based on the way she wants to portray herself. The qualitative method therefore seemed more accurate for our research topic. By conducting observations, we were able to further research the consumer practice in action, and view what actually happens in the shopping process. By having personal interviews and a focus group, we could see the physical responses the interviewees had. Also, there were less time for thoughtful answers. In an interview, the responses come more spontaneously, leaving less time for reflection on what would be the politically correct answer than it would when conducting a survey.

However, we are also aware that it can be difficult to get a fair view from studies regarding environmental and ethical questions. Niinimäki (2010, p.156) refers to Lea-Greenwood's (1999) arguments that people tend to have a positive attitude and give more positive answers than what actually corresponds to their consumption, and people usually answer what is acceptable by the social standards. We have taken this into consideration when doing our research, and tried to create studies that do not promote politically correct responses. Flick (2014) states that people tend to give a more correct answer when being interviewed, than they are in questionnaires, and therefore we decided to focus on interviews.

A complication we noticed rather early in our research was that we had delimited ourselves too much. Our first idea was to study the consumer practice concerning shopping of *ecological* labeled clothing. This because the label "ecological" is one of the most

well-known labels, and it would therefore be more interesting to see how important it was in the practice of purchasing sustainable clothing. However, the matter of ecological labeling on clothes turned out to be too narrow. Even though the label is common and well-known in the food industry, it is not nearly as used in the clothing industry. The ecological label concerns products that are made from grown material, meaning that it almost only applicable to cotton when talking about the clothing industry. However, only focusing on cotton was not useful since a lot of clothes are made from other material, which in turn also can be environmentally beneficial, in turns of recycled, even though they are not ecologically labeled. Because of this, we decided to refocus our thesis on a broader perspective, and decided to research environmentally sustainable, or *more* environmentally sustainable clothes, instead of ecological.

The case

Gina Tricot have been successful in providing sustainable clothes to the common customer, and in 2017, almost half (46.6 per cent) of their assortment consist of more sustainable alternatives. Their sustainable collection has grown rapidly: as late as 2014 they only had 11.3 per cent. Gina Tricot labels all their sustainable clothes with an earth colored label that contains all information about the garment, to easily reach the customer. Also, the laundry label clearly states that the garment is sustainable. They provide clothes for the everyday girl and young woman, and is a medium sized, Swedish clothing company. Their business model is based on price worthy fashion, which makes them attractive for a broad customer group. Gina Tricot have a customer group that, as Gina Tricot say themselves, is not mainly searching for sustainable fashion. The customer want fashion garments to a fair price, and if it is sustainable that is a plus, but it is not the reason for the purchase. As Gina Tricot constantly set up new goals, they plan to reach a fully sustainable production no later than 2028, and they have surpassed previous interim goals many years in a row. Furthermore, Gina Tricot has the same profitability requirements on sustainable clothes as for other clothes, which also can affect the final price. Gina Tricot means that there are three pillars in sustainability. One is for sustainable materials, one for ethical trading and a sustainable social production. The last pillar is the company's turnover: the company must make ends meet to be sustainable. And all those pillars are crucial for a sustainable company. We found Gina Tricot to be an interesting company in the middle of a sustainable development. They have a great assortment of sustainable clothes, and their customers represent the common woman. Therefore, we chose them to be the focus of our case. Mainly, we want to understand how they view the consumer practice from their customers in relation to sustainably labeled clothing.

The process of collecting information

Our research began with reading articles and earlier research about the matter, to get an understanding of prior results and conclusions (Flick, 2014). Furthermore, we wanted to get an understanding of how prior research was conducted, and get inspiration on how to conduct

a qualitative research study. Lastly, we used several articles as a base for our research methods and our theoretical perspective.

We made our first personal interview with the Quality Manager of Gina Tricot (interview questions can be found in Appendix 1). From there, we proceeded to our second and third personal interview with Karolina and Hedvig. The two customer interviews were with two women, who both shops occasionally at Gina Tricot. Thereafter, we created a focus group of four women, Joline, Camilla, Fatima and Vendela, all who either currently shops or have shopped at Gina Tricot (interview questions can be found in Appendix 2). In Table 1, some interesting information about all our participants are shown in both the individual interviews and the focus group interview.

	Age	Occupation	Favorite store	Shopping behaviour	Other interesting facts
Karolina	25	Student	Zara, Mango, Lindex, H&M	1 time/ month	Usually very aware of the environmental aspects
Hedvig	23	Working	Tradera, Odd Molly, Muji, H&M	4-6 times/ month	Big interest in textiles and materials
Joline	23	Working	NA-KD, NK, Design Only, Zara, Mango	1 time/ 2 months	Searching for quality
Camilla	22	Student	H&M, Ahlens, Mango, Gina Tricot	1 time/ month	Very thoughtful consumer
Fatima	25	Student	Weekday, H&M, Monki	2 times/ month	Hipster
Vendela	25	Working	Zara, Mango, H&M, Gina Tricot	3 times/ month	Fashion seaker and a big shopping interest

Table 1. Information about our interviewees from individual interviews and our focus group.

Lastly, we conducted our own observations. We went to three different Gina Tricot stores, where we tried to observe the consumer practice and the shopping pattern in the stores. More specifically, we looked at what the consumer looked at: products, offers, signs etc. We also observed how the stores had displayed and marketed their environmentally friendly clothes, and how these were labeled.

Articles

Many articles have been read about the area of study, both of sustainable fashion, but also about sustainable consumption and the shopping practice in general. This to get an overview of what previous research has shown that can be interesting in our analysis (Flick, 2014).

It was noticeable that the most common subject regarding sustainable consumption was concerning the food industry. Furthermore, there was a lot of articles regarding sustainable

clothing, only with a focus on the already green consumers. But there were little or no research on the shopping practice of sustainable clothes of the common consumer. Second, we wanted to see which consumer perspectives were used (Flick, 2014). We could see that most articles about the research of the consumer's shopping process did not have a practice perspective, and therefore, we considered the practice perspective to be interesting to use in our thesis. Third, we wanted to see what research methodology they used (Flick, 2014). We noticed that it was most common to use a quantitative research in this area. But as we wanted to implement a research of the consumer practice, we thought it was better suited with a qualitative research. Therefore, we have a bigger focus on articles with a qualitative research to better establish the data on our qualitative study.

Interviews

Three interviews were conducted to get a broader understanding of the consumer practice and people's thoughts concerning the area (Flick, 2014).

Interviews is the most common way of collecting qualitative data (Bryman & Bell, 2014). We conducted three personal interviews; two customer interviews and one company interview. Our questions were very open to get the interview subject answer more freely (Flick, 2014). The aim of our interview was to get an understanding of the consumer practice from different perspectives. Therefore, we chose to interview two different consumers about their shopping practices and also, we chose to make an expert interview (Flick, 2014) with Gina Tricot to get the company view of their consumers practices in store. The interview questions were created as recommended by Bryman & Bell (2014). We took turns in taking notes and asking questions, and the whole interview was recorded, as recommended by Bryman and Bell (2014). The first interview made was with the Quality Manager at Gina Tricot. We went to the headquarters of Gina Tricot, where we had a personal interview lasting for an hour. We felt like the responses we got were somewhat corporate responses, meaning that it was clear that the person being interviewed represented the company. However, this was as expected, and the answers we received were perceived as honest and helpful. The result of the interview was positive in the way that the information given helped us in our research, because it provided the company perspective of the consumer behaviour, which we considered necessary in order to reach a conclusion on the consumer behaviour concerning the practice of purchasing environmentally friendly clothing. This interview gave us very good information and an understanding of the customer practice from a company point of view.

The second and third interview were made individually with two customers. The interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes. The result from our both interviewees turned out very similar and their approach towards sustainable clothing were pretty much the same. The responses we got from Karolina felt honest, however influenced from prior knowledge. The interviewee has previously studied a bachelor within environmental economics, which translated into the interview in the way that it was noticeable that she had prior knowledge about sustainability. Even though the fact that the interviewee would use prior knowledge and

opinion was assumed, it felt noteworthy to mention that this interviewee had a lot of knowledge concerning the matter. This because prior knowledge influence the consumer behaviour and the way we perform a practice (Fuentes, 2014). Hedvig was rather neutral towards the subject concerning prior knowledge, meaning that she knows general facts about sustainability but is not overly familiar with the subject. The responses we got from the consumer felt honest, this because she had spontaneous answers, and sometimes admitted to not knowing or not having reflected on particular questions earlier. It was noticeable that there were a big lack of knowledge in this area of sustainable clothing and that both of them had other interest than sustainability when shopping. It was noticeable that what they thought of when discussing sustainable behaviours was related to food or recycling, but sustainable clothing was something they have not thought so much about, not even Karolina that is a very green consumer in most other things she consume. None of them were looking for sustainable clothes when shopping, but they both owned one or a few sustainable garments, but unconsciously, or because of other factors than the sustainably issue. It also turned out during the interviews that some of Karolina's clothes that she uses very often were sustainably made, but she did not know about it.

All three interviews were considered as successful. To begin with, we received three different perspectives on the topics. The company perspective viewed the consumer behaviour and the practice from a strategic point of view, and tried to understand the wants and needs of the consumer mixed with the wants and needs of the company. The second interview gave us a perspective from a consumer who was knowledgeable about the matter, and a deeper understanding of what concerns her in the purchasing process and why. Furthermore, it could be said that she gave us a perspective with nuances from a more green consumer perspective. The last interview gave us a perspective from a consumer point of view, where the consumer had general knowledge but still was neutral on the matter, which gave us an understanding of how the common consumer reflects in the purchasing process. However, an interesting point was that Gina Tricot's picture of how the common consumer act sustainably could rather be confirmed after listening to the customer interviews.

However, we consider it to be week to only trust individual interviews because people tend to position themselves as more sustainable as they might actually be. Also, we notices that the interviewees in and individual interview tend to feel that they are "under pressure" and they are not always comfortable of what they dare to say. Therefore we wanted to complete our research with a focus group and observations.

Focus group interview

We conducted one focus group interview with four different participants, to identify patterns in the shopping practice (Flick, 2014), and to encourage discussion.

A focus group is a small group that is interviewed about a specific topic (Flick, 2014). The aim of the focus group was to see how the interviewees work in relation to other members.

Focus groups, compared to individual interviews, is a very effective way of collecting data due to the groups discussions, stance and questions (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Furthermore, focus groups are a great way to determine and perceive feelings and thoughts of products and issues. However, it is of importance that the interviewer are well prepared and are guiding the focus group in the right direction successfully, otherwise the focus group will get confused and will not be as productive as it could be (Krueger & Casey, 2009). We had created similar questions as to the other interviews and we told them that we encourage discussion around the questions. The group interview lasted for a bit over an hour. When creating a focus group it is important that all members can relate to the topic but do still have some different perspectives on it (Bryman & Bell, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Therefore, the representatives were carefully selected and they all can be noted as the common woman, but they do also have some differences in their shopping practices. Also, they have different economic situation, due to some being students, and some being employed. Our focus group interview were made with four young women with different shopping practices and different approach towards sustainability. Some of them had met before, but none of them knew each other well, as recommended by Flick (2014).

We started with a “warm up” as recommended by Flick (2014), and all of them introduced themselves and we briefly explained what our study was about. Questions were asked about their shopping patterns in general, their relationship to sustainable products and how they view labels. The four of them discussed the questions and it was noticeable that they got influenced by each other, and sometimes changed their answer after they have heard someone else’s opinion. Flick (2014) stress that it is easier to make a group interview in a research about people's opinions and attitudes towards taboo topics, which the subject of sustainability could be seen as. We also showed some pictures of different sustainable labels and asked the interviewees if they recognized them and if they could say what they stood for. It was a successful way of getting an understanding of how much the interviewees actually know about sustainable clothing labels. Unlike the personal interviews, when the topic got discussed, people had time to think through their answers a bit longer and more arguments came up because the influence of each other. Some representatives were more active than other, but all of them were part of the discussion. It was noticeable that some interviewees were more reflective before answering, when others were more spontaneous. We had one difficulty in that the interviewees sometimes tended to discuss too much and move away from the topic and into the food industry. This was interpreted as that their sustainable focus does not lie in the clothing industry. Although the four women had different occupation and hobbies, it turned out that they had very similar shopping practices. It was very clear that there was a big lack of knowledge in the area of sustainable clothing. They had some assumptions of what it meant but it was not close to as much knowledge as they had of i.e. organic food.

The focus group was a good complement to individual interviews due to its encouragement to discussion, and we felt that the interviewees dared to be more honest than in the individual

interviews. However, as the interviewees tended to be affected of what the other participants thought, focus groups are not enough to get the information needed to describe the customer shopping practice as a whole. Therefore, we made some observations to see how the customers act and practice their shopping in store.

Observations

Three hidden observations were made in three stores at different times, to get an understanding of the everyday-practice (Flick, 2014).

Observations include most everyday skills as seeing, hearing and feeling (Flick, 2014). An observation is a way to be a part of the field, and observe from a customer point of view. The focus is not of the customers, it is more of the situation and the activities around her (Flick, 2014). Observations, compared to individual interviews, are a better way to understand the social reality, and the observer will observe the actions of the people (Bryman & Bell, 2014). We chose to make three observations in three different Gina Tricot stores at different times and days. We did this due to the difficulties of including all situations and customers in the store (Flick, 2014; Bryman & Bell, 2014), and we wanted to get a wider understanding on the company's different customers in different situations. Bryman and Bell (2014) brings up the pros and cons with an open or hidden observation and an active or passive observation. We chose the hidden and passive observation, which resulted in that the workers and the customers in store did not know about our observation. This because we wanted them to act naturally as they do in their everyday practice, and we wanted to see the relationship between workers and consumers. All stores are located in the Gothenburg city center and are not too far from each other, but they are different in size and assortment. We only chose stores in the city center because we wanted to see as many customers as possible, and in the city center all types of people meet. We observed where they had placed the sustainable clothes in store and tactically stood close to see how the customers were looking and discussing about the clothes they were looking at. We also took some photos in store. We were mainly focusing on the consumer's shopping practices; what are they searching for? What catches the customer's attention? In what way do they prioritize the different aspects, such as price, design and material? How does the store market the sustainable alternatives to attract the customers?

Our observations turned out very similar in all stores. It was mostly young women, but also some middle aged women and younger teenagers that were shopping. The customers clearly showed a red thread in how they were practicing their shopping and what they were searching for. The customer stereotype started with a general scanning of the store and when they saw a garment they thought looked nice they went there to pick it up and look at it closer. If they still thought it was interesting they looked at the price tag. It was obvious that the consumers are very price conscious and that the design was very important. People only look at signs if they include a low price or if it shows that garments are for sale.

Data analysis

We will analyze the data from a customer practice perspective, and therefore, the interviews with the customers will be a vital part of our research. However, the company point of view is rather important to get a fair understanding of the actual practice. The observations will also be interesting to analyze to get a broader understanding of the social reality and the practice in action.

The previous research will be taken into account when analyzing our research due to the broad view of our topic (Flick, 2014). The previous research gave us a very good understanding of the industry and of the consumer practice towards labels and the fashion industry. But as explained before, most research focused on already green consumer or other industries than the fashion industry, and therefore, it is not necessarily the same practice of the customer and the industry we are analyzing. Flick (2014) further discuss that the researcher should compare statements etc. in her own research in context to the earlier research.

Observations is not easy to analyze due to its difficulties in diversity and situations (Bryman & Bell, 2014), and this will be taken into account when analyzing the research. The three observations that were made do not necessarily reflect the reality. However, as we made the observations at different times and days we assume it is as close as possible to reality. When we analyzed the conducted observations, we first went over our notes and the pictures we had taken. Also, we compared the different observations to each other, and how the different times and days affected the results. Observations cannot give answers to all questions (Bryman & Bell, 2014), and therefore, we also made interviews to better analyze the two methods as a combination.

We recorded all interviews to easily be able to go back and analyze the collected data. But a recorded interview is not the same as the actual interview due to the lack of seeing the body language and movements during the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Therefore, we wrote down and started to analyze the interviews straight after they were completed. We noticed that it was very important to see how the interviewees answered and discussed the questions we asked. We compared the different interviews with each other, and analyzed how they were different and similar.

Focus groups can be difficult to analyze due to the huge amount of data collected, and it must also be taken into account both what the interviewees say and how they cooperate (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Krueger and Casey (2009) further mention that the participants in a focus group tend to act very thoughtful, and when they do not know the answer, they sometimes come up with a story because of the embarrassment of saying "I don't know". The different shopping practices and economic situations will also be taken into account when analyzing the focus group interview. We further noticed that some of our interviewees changed their opinions the

more we discussed, and it seemed to be more honest answers in the end of the interview. This must be taken into account when analyzing the interview, that our interviewees tend to be a bit more positive in the beginning. Flick (2014) mentions that the analysis probably will be comparative, meaning that the statements, opinions etc. will be compared between the individuals: how do they differ, and how are they similar? First, when we analyzed the material, we aimed to first have a view of them as a group, and not as individuals. Here, we focused on the discussion, how the flow went and what the dynamic was like. Secondly, we tried to see the individuals of the group. Here, it was interesting to compare the answers and statements of the participants to each other.

In general, as stated before, it is difficult to do research of sustainability because people tend to answer more positive and generously than what is actually true. Therefore, our research have been focused much on *how* people answer and how they seem to react to our questions. This is also a reason why we put a lot of attention to the hidden and passive observations and the customer perspective of the consumer practice.

Ethical aspects

When conducting our research, we were aware that there are some ethical aspects that must be taken into consideration (Flick, 2014). All interviews were conducted in Swedish because it was the first language of all parts, and therefore we considered it to be more natural and casual. Thereafter, we transcribed and translated the interviews to English so we could be able to use some quotes in this thesis. When translate and transcribe interviews the quotes can sometimes be interpreted differently when reading. Also, people tend to phrase and formulate words and sentences differently when talking and therefore, it can be misunderstood when reading. For this reason, we wanted to get an informed consent (Flick, 2014), and before the interview we asked the interviewees if they consented with being translated, which everyone agreed to. We also sent the thesis to Gina Tricot before publishing to confirm that we had understood the interview correctly. Furthermore, we decided to make the customer interviews anonymously to care for the interviewees privacy (Flick, 2014). Therefore, the names we have used in this thesis are made up and only used to help the reader understand the case of each individual.

Criticism of the theory and methodology

When conducting a research, the researcher continuously creates more knowledge about the area of research. The researcher must relate the new information with the knowledge she already has, which is discussed by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) and Flick (2014) as “reflexivity”. Reflexivity means that the researcher reflects on how to create knowledge and what kind of knowledge it is, and further how new knowledge can be added to previous knowledge. Moreover, ontology explains “*the ideas about the existence of and relationship between people, society and the world in general*” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). They further discuss that ontology assume the reality as subjective due to peoples’ different

experiences. Epistemology, on the other hand, discuss what knowledge is and what the background and limits are towards the knowledge. Moreover, when researching an area of interest the researchers already have knowledge and engagement of the topic and do often search for specific outcomes, and therefore, it is difficult to view the result in a objective way (Flick, 2014), which we kept in mind.

We only used scientific articles, who have been published, in our thesis because we believed that to be a contributing factor to the credibility of the information in it. However, regarding the selection, we chose articles based on how well the topics and findings correlated with our thesis, and not based on the author that wrote it. The lack of knowledge concerning the author behind the articles, might lower the credibility of the sources. However, this fact is something we, as researchers, have tried our best to take into account when analyzing the data.

4 Findings

In our empirical analysis we will discuss the result from our study with support from the theoretical framework and previous research. We start by presenting our research findings in the four categories we found were the main areas that influence the consumer practice when shopping clothes. Furthermore, we will discuss how these themes are related to the practice elements of material, meaning and competence. Lastly, we will discuss our research findings about the relationship between the customer and practicing sustainable food shopping.

How the elements relate to our themes

According to our research, we found out that shopping priority, price sensitivity, thoughts of greenwashing, and low influence that sustainable labels have are the most important reasons to why sustainable shopping is struggling on the market. As shown in Table 2, all these themes are not fully developed in at least two of the practice elements, in the area of shopping sustainable clothes, and all of them needs to be enhanced in the area of meaning.

	Meaning	Material	Competence
1 Shopping priority	X	X	
2 Price sensitivity	X		X
3 Greenwashing	X		X
4 Labels	X	X	X

Table 2. Where the themes' need to be enhanced in relation to the practice elements.

To make shopping sustainable clothes more established the marked elements in the table need to increase. The consumer's shopping priority must increase in value of meaning and material, and the customer's price sensitivity makes it insufficient in the areas of meaning and competence. Furthermore, the customer's thoughts of greenwashing make the practice underdeveloped concerning meaning and competence and the importance of the label must be increased in all the practice elements to make shopping sustainable clothing more established. This will be further discussed in the following numbered paragraphs.

1. How the customer prioritize shopping aspects in store

One of the issues that the practice of sustainable shopping faces, is that of the priorities consumers have when they shop for clothes. Based on our findings, the main quality the consumer looks for in a garment is style and design. This means that it is the design of the garment which is most valued, even when considering a sustainable garment. Karolina stated:

“I choose the garment that I think looks better, even though it is made out of unsustainable material. I look at the lifespan of the garment, if I buy a sustainable top that doesn't look nice I will not use it, and then it's more waste than if I buy an unsustainable top that I will use plenty of times... I know I bought a skirt one time because it was sustainable, and that was the reason I bought it. But I have never used it, because I don't like it”.

Furthermore, the representative from Gina Tricot had a similar view on the matter:

“Is there a sustainable label on the garment, we feel that our customers would value it higher and it would be a plus, but it is not the reason that will make them buy it. They buy a product because they think it is nice and because they want it, and then the sustainable aspect is a plus”.

From a materialistic aspect, it seems that the consumer prioritizes garments made out of materials that she considers to be nice looking. If they look cheap or unappealing in any way, they are immediately excluded as an option of purchase. When listening to our focus group, it was evident that most of them considered both the style and the materials of most sustainable clothes to be unappealing. When asked about their opinion on sustainable clothing, Vendela responded following:

“I think that it's usually not what I want to wear, I mean, it's not really my style... It's most basic garments, and as I am the consumer that want more trendy garments and buy stuff because I want it for like six months. I mean, they don't provide the sustainable products for me...”

This was a statement that generally everyone in the focus group agreed with. Mainly, the meaning of shopping was, according to them, to find clothing they felt comfortable and nice in. Moreover, it seems that they all agreed on that most sustainable fashion does not meet the requirements the consumer has when she goes shopping. However, it was clear that most of our participants had general knowledge of sustainability, and considered the idea of sustainable fashion to be good. Moreover, they discussed other sustainable products like ecological food. They all stated that they sometimes bought ecological food, and Fatima mentioned that there are some products she always buys the ecological version of as a principle. When comparing the participants view on sustainable fashion and ecological food, it was evident that they all had enough knowledge about sustainability over all to appreciate the idea of both product groups. However, the biggest difference was that of the meaning of the different products. When discussing ecological food, all the participants discussed that the meaning of it was that it was better for the environment, but also for the personal health, as also discussed by Joergens (2006). However, the design of the products did not matter, since what was considered important about the product was inside the packaging. Clearly, the meaning of these two product groups differed. The meaning of the ecological food was to eat healthy food and at the same time contribute to a public good and the environment, while the design did not matter at all. A reason for this can be that other people will not necessarily see

what food packaging we own, and therefore, it will not matter, but other people will clearly see what clothes we wear. However, regarding the meaning of purchasing clothes, it was to find a garment that looks nice in design. Furthermore, most of our interviewees meant that it was not easy to buy sustainable clothes due to the little assortment in store, and that they could not see any sustainable clothes. But as Gina Tricot provide 46.6 per cent of their clothes in more sustainable materials, it is not a fair argument that it is hard to find sustainable alternatives. It can rather be because the common consumer does not notice the green labels, as discussed by Rex and Baumann (2007). All of the participants stated that sustainable materials were a good idea, and that it would not be a negative aspect if they could find a nice looking garment which was made out of sustainable materials. Furthermore, the representative from Gina Tricot stated that:

“We cannot see that customers avoid sustainable clothes just because it is sustainable, so it is not an obstacle to produce sustainable materials. It is more about, I mean, if we provide only sustainable material, our customers will buy it. And if we produce nice clothes, which is also sustainable, it is not a fashion failure”.

Moreover, according to our finding, most of our participants seem to have enough knowledge to understand that a garment made out of sustainable material was a positive contribution to, and development in, the fashion industry. Even though the consumer may not recognize what each label stands for precisely, she does know that the overall idea of products with sustainable attributes is good. Interestingly, when viewing meaning, material and competence, it seems that meaning is the one area where the consumer is lacking the most. She does not seem to understand the meaning of why she should purchase a garment, simply because it has sustainable attributes, when it does not fulfill her other requirements. As understandable as this reasoning is, we believe that the main problem lies in how the consumer views the meaning of shopping. Røpke (2009) writes; *“The emergence of a new practice requires a process of innovation where agents configure a set of bodily-mental activities by integrating elements of meaning, material and competence”*. If sustainable fashion is to become an established practice, the consumer needs to change her priorities from finding a garment with a nice design, or at least incorporate other values to her meaning of shopping. She can still look for a nice design on the garment, but she also needs to value the attributes of the materials, and the reason behind why the garment is designed in the way that it is. However, this seems to be a complicated request, since the practice of shopping today is rooted to such an extent in our society. Our research showed that the meaning of design and looks is so deeply embedded in the practice that the consumer would rather not purchase anything at all, if she cannot find something that she considers to have a nice design. Karolina commented on the matter:

“Companies must make the sustainable clothes more attractive, I mean, as nice as the other clothes. If they are just a little bit uglier, they will not be bought and people will have a negative approach towards sustainable clothes, and people will believe that sustainable clothes are ugly”.

Furthermore, this reasoning seems to be accurate even when she is shopping for something that she needs. As an example, if the consumer is in need of a new t-shirt, she would rather wait until the day she can find the one with the right design than buy something that day which is sustainable, but does not incorporate a design of her liking.

2. The customer's awareness of the price tag

A result from our study is that the customer is aware of the price tag and that the price is very important when shopping clothes, as discussed by Joergens (2006) and Beard (2008). The price sensitivity was mainly due to a lack of understanding the meaning of paying a higher price and therefore, they chose to continue to purchase unsustainable alternatives. As Karolina states:

“Is the sustainable garment much more expensive, I will not choose it. Then, I will choose the unsustainable garment and hide from the problem”.

and Vendela further stated:

“No I am not really willing to pay extra for that. But I mean, you are not conscious of the meaning of sustainable clothes. It is not advertised as much as for example food... They don't push it as much as they should. Or they probably do for those who are inserted, but it doesn't reach me, and I constantly receive newspapers from most brands and go shopping a lot”.

This also means that there is a lack of competence because the consumer do not have the knowledge of what sustainable clothing is. It was also clear that most of our interviewees tend to say they were willing to pay more for environmentally friendly clothes, but the more we discussed, they confessed that they actually were not. This practice has also been noticed by Gina Tricot:

“We communicate a lot with our customers and discuss whether they are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable clothes or not, and many customers say that they are. But in practice, and when we see what is selling, we cannot see a relationship between these... We can clearly see that if it is the right product, the customer is absolutely more willing to pay a higher price. But it is more about the right product than sustainability”.

Naturally, the price cannot be too high, since the consumer will not pay more money than she deems the product worth. Gina Tricot further means that the price is the most challenging factor in producing more sustainable clothes because of some materials rarity on the market which leads to higher prices, and this leads to a lack in material provided to the consumer. As they stated themselves:

“In some departments, for example in Denim, where we are very successful. Over 90 per cent of our denim is sustainable, or more sustainable. But when it comes to party clothes, it is very difficult to find the right qualities that is sustainable. Recycled polyester is good, but it is not even close to as widely spread on the market as organic cotton for example”.

This makes it very difficult in providing some sustainable clothes to a price sensitive consumer.

Many customers go to Gina Tricot to buy trendy clothes for a good price, and people tend to be more price sensitive when shopping trendy clothes, as Vendela states:

“It is more fashion clothes, you don’t want to pay so much for them, because they will not be trendy for so long”.

But as Gina Tricot stress themselves, it will be better prices on the market if the demand of sustainable materials increases, therefore, all companies must cooperate in increasing the demand to the suppliers. It was also noticeable that some of our interviewees did not look at sustainable garment because they always think they are more expensive. This means that sometimes the consumer does not even give the sustainable garments a chance because the lack of competence and they have preconceptions about the price. The price sensitive consumer therefore, mainly have a lack in understanding the meaning, since she does not see the meaning of paying more for a sustainable garment, than a normal one. This lack in meaning can be rooted in the lack of knowledge, because if the consumer do not have the knowledge of what sustainable clothes implies, the consumer will not see the meaning in purchasing them.

3. The lack in reliability towards companies’ green actions

Another problem sustainable fashion faces is that of greenwashing. When discussing greenwashing, we first have to mention that the consumer believes the reason for ecological food’s success is because of the marketing around it, and that lack of marketing concerning sustainable clothing is part of the reason why sustainable fashion has not yet gained momentum. Joline stated that, in order for sustainable clothing to be more than a temporary news, it has to receive a bigger hype:

“I mean, food for example, there is a very big hype that you must buy organic food and then I start to think that I have to and it has become an obvious mindset. So it must be a combination if it should last for longer than a trend”.

However, Gina Tricot mentions how difficult it is for a fast fashion company to promote themselves as working towards being more sustainable, without being accused of greenwashing:

“It is very very difficult, because you do not want to stick your neck out too far. If you do, you will only get to know what you do wrong in medias and social medias today. So it is a balance, how much we dare”.

When conducting our interview with Gina Tricot, the representative stated that them, as a fast fashion company, are doing the best they can at the moment. However, most fast fashion chains receive a lot of negative feedback regarding the sustainability issue. The representative continued by saying:

“We know that we work in an industry that must develop and get better, because it has an environmental impact. But also, it is an industry that tries to take responsibility and make it better, so how can we communicate this in the best way?”

When asking our interviewees about the matter, most responses were that they felt that the sustainable collections that fast fashion companies do have was a positive contribution. Moreover, most participants said that they reacted positively if they saw a sustainable label on a garment, but that they were skeptical to it if it was the company's own label. However, as Karolina stated:

“But we also are a bit naive so we still believe in the companies’ own sustainable labels. If it says eco people will trust it is”.

When discussing the sustainable labeling in the fast fashion stores, most of the participants were very skeptical, and Hedvig stated that it even annoyed her when she saw sustainable collections in those types of stores:

“I can be a bit annoyed in some cases. Like in H&M, and they have one shelf with sustainable things, and then the rest is shit and not sustainable at all, then I can be a bit mad. That shelf is probably okay, but it is just the company culture that makes me mad, and that shelf is just such a small part... For me it is very much Greenwashing when it comes to H&M or Lindex and so on”.

This skepticism can be based in that the consumer does not recognize the labels and therefore does not trust them, as discussed by Thøgersen et al. (2002). What was interesting was that the consumers seem to have a very strong opinion of what it means to be sustainable. Vendela mentioned, when asked about what sustainability means to her:

“I trust that it is sustainable through the whole chain when the label says it is sustainable. I don’t look it up by myself, I trust them. But I know that it sometimes shows that it is the same shit”.

When analyzing these results, it became evident that the consumer and the companies have different opinions on what the *meaning* of a sustainable garment is. Gina Tricot mentioned how they have different scales of sustainability, and that the garments can have different amounts of sustainable attributes. Here, the focus is on doing as much as they can in the sustainability aspect. But for the consumer, the meaning of a sustainable garment is that it has

to “close the loop”, meaning that it has to be sustainable all the way through the value chain, to when it is sold, to when the consumer cannot use it anymore. These differences in meaning can be one of the reason why many consumers interprets most fast fashion companies attempts to be more sustainable as greenwashing. This can also be based in the consumers lack in knowledge. Many of our participants stated that they do believe most fast fashion companies do greenwashing, as Fredriksson and Fuentes (2014) stated in their article. However, since the consumer do not know what the companies mean with the term “sustainable”, it will obviously result in a misunderstanding. Most companies explain their green collection as *more* sustainable, while the consumer expects them to be fully sustainable. This relates to the material aspect of the matter. The consumer does not think that the material is sustainable enough, since it is not fully sustainable. However, this creates a problematic since the garment does contain some sustainable material which is more positive towards the environment than regular clothing, but is still regarded from the consumer side as “fake marketing” or greenwashing. To conclude, instead of viewing it as a step in the right direction, the consumer rejects it.

4. The customers only look on the labels of their interest

Our empirical study showed that people see what they want to see, and everything else they tend to ignore. Labels and information that is out of the consumers interest will not be noticed. This means that although there is no lack in material, it will not matter in the way the consumer purchase. None of our interviewees said that they were actively searching for sustainable labels and signs when shopping. However, it turned out during the interviews that all of them owned at least one sustainable garment, but unconsciously. This means that many consumers do look at sustainable clothes, probably try them on, and look at the price tag, but they still miss the sustainable label on the garment. It was further noticeable that many of the participants in our study never had seen any sustainable labels, and as stated by Fatima:

“But I also think that it doesn’t really exist sustainable clothes, because you never see them”.

This means that although companies have labels on the garments, the consumers are not attentive enough to notice them. This means that it is not necessarily a lack of material that is the problem, but the lack in understanding of the meaning of the labels. Furthermore, Gina Tricot has not seen a big change in consumer practice when changing materials into more sustainable alternatives. If it suddenly is a sustainable label on the garment, it will *not* be crucial for most customers’ purchase, as they are more often looking at the appearance of clothes, so the sustainable label is just a plus:

“I mean, we do not sell less Molly-jeans because they now are sustainable, we sell more, but the reason for that is probably more because of the quality and not because of the sustainable material”.

However, we also noticed during our observations that there were a limited amount of signs in store that informed the customer that the clothes were sustainable, as Fredriksson and Fuentes (2014) mentions in their research. Gina Tricot mostly communicate with the customer with a sustainable label on the actual garment, but with little further information in store. This means that the consumers buy the clothes for other reasons than sustainability as previous research also have shown (Joergens, 2006), and perhaps they will not even know they buy sustainable garments.

However, it was clear that all signs and labels were not ignored by the consumers, and pretty much everyone confessed that they always look at sales signs. As Karolina stated:

“Sale do catch everyone's attention, doesn't it, haha? I always pass the sales area. However, it's only when it's sale that I am looking at the signs in a store”.

This means that some labels and signs actually influence consumers, but only if they are of the customers interest. It could be because the consumer does not recognize the sustainable label (Thogersen et al., 2002), and therefore, she will not understand it. But it can also be because sustainability is not what the consumer is searching for when shopping, and therefore, she will miss it. The lack of knowledge in what the label stands for will lead to a lack in understanding the meaning of purchasing it. Gina Tricot further believes that the consumer somewhat lacks knowledge about sustainable materials. Ecological labels is usually well recognized due to its popularity in the food industry, but the other sustainable labels as recycled polyester and better cotton (initiative) is not that well recognized. As Gina Tricot explains it themselves:

“I would say that organic cotton has been seen the most, it has got stuck on people's mind. Better cotton is difficult, people don't really know what it is, I think many of our customers think that way. And the recycled qualities is not recognized by the consumers. So it is probably the ecological that has most impact, but that is my thought”.

A result from this lack of knowledge can lead to the lack in understanding the meaning of the sustainable shopping practice. This means that the customer actually pay attention to signs that is of their interest. They also started the discussion in how influencers pay their attention, as discussed by Freberg et al. (2010). As Vendela stated:

“You see so much on Instagram and so on, I mean, when people show clothes on their “story”. Then I'm getting like “Oh I want to go and check that blouse in store”. For example if a blogger have bought a new blouse, it make me curious. It's been a thing, it happened just a few days ago”.

And two of our interviewees were constantly following brands and influencers on social media to get inspired. This means that customers are looking at advertisement that catches

their interest, and as style and design is what catches the customers attention the most, they feel the need of following inspiring social media channels.

The the consumer's understanding of *meaning*

All the elements are important in a practice (Shove & Pantzar, 2005), and as discussed earlier, there is some lack in all of them. However, it seems meaning is the most problematic element, and therefore, the least configuring of the shopping practice. The lack of meaning in the practice of shopping sustainable clothes, can be seen in both material and competence, in the way that the consumer does not understand the meaning of the material, or have enough knowledge to understand in what way the garments are sustainable. However, it is important to state that all areas are needed to make a practice, and that they all have an influence on each other (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Therefore, the lack of material and competence will lead to lack of meaning. Examples of this is when companies do provide too little sustainable clothes and if they do not show them with labels or signs, the customers will not see the *meaning* of buying them. Or if the customers do not have enough knowledge of environmentally friendly clothes it will lead to the lack of understanding of the *meaning* of purchasing too. If sustainability is not what the common consumer is looking for, it is not a part of the shopping practice. Then it will not matter if the material and competence is fulfilled, if the consumer do not see the meaning of buying sustainably, it will not be a complete practice (Shove & Pantzar, 2005). Most people today have the knowledge that sustainable products, in general, often are better for the environment than the unsustainable products, although they might not know the exact meaning of each specific label.

When looking both from a company point of view and a customer point of view, it is noticeable that companies like Gina Tricot have some lack in knowledge of what the customer is actually searching for, and what meaning the consumer is trying to fulfill, when shopping sustainable clothes as discussed by Niinimäki (2010). Furthermore, as earlier mentioned, there seems to be a misunderstanding between the consumer and the fast fashion companies in what “sustainable” actually means, how it is interpreted, and what attributes a sustainable garment should contain. It is also important for the companies to take into consideration that many customers do not even notice the sustainable label, and therefore, as discussed by Fraj and Martinez (2006), the labels should not *only* include sustainable information, but also something else that could catch the customers’ attention. Because of this, a complement to the labels, could be to further use the workers in store. If the workers have much knowledge of the materials in store they can influence the customers and act like “walking signs” (Fredriksson & Fuentes, 2014).

Moreover, the majority of the communication between consumers, and between consumers and companies, takes place online. This implies that most of the marketing taking place outside of social medias does not have the same value to the consumer. In order to fully reach the consumer, to increase the aspect of meaning, companies can work with influencers, for example bloggers and different types of celebrities. By doing this, companies can widen the

meaning of sustainable garments. Gina Tricot today work alot with influencers on their social media channels, but they miss the chance to influence customers to buy sustainable clothes consciously since most of their posts do not contain sustainability information. In our studies, the participants admitted to knowing that sustainable labeled products are usually better towards the environment than ordinary clothing. However, since this was not enough reason for the consumer to see the meaning with it, factors like trends and status should be incorporated. As influencers are humans that often share their luxury living standards, and that consumers tend to constantly search for thing that is consumed by the upper class (Ingram et al., 2007), influencers is a successful way of inspiring people. Influencers have an impact on the general public, and fashion influencers do often start/ enhance fashion trends (Freberg et al., 2010). If a company promotes their sustainable collections and garments with the help of an influencer, the meaning of sustainable garments can be widen. The influencer could help to show the consumer how the garment can be used, styled, matched with other details and so on. This, in turn, would lead to that the meaning of sustainable garments would go from simply “good for sustainable reasons” to “trendy” and “cool”, which are two factors our participants admitted as part of what they are looking for when practicing shopping. Furthermore, Gina Tricot could provide a wider selection of sustainable garments, like party clothes. However, since this is a matter of money and whether or not the materials are available or not, this is something the industry and companies has to work together on developing.

The practice of shopping sustainable clothes is not well established on the market due to how the elements are insufficient, especially the element of meaning. The consumer is too busy with analyzing what she thinks is the most important, the style and price, and although she has the knowledge of that sustainable garments are a better alternative, she will probably not reflect about it when in store. Therefore, as long as companies provide regular clothing, and when sustainable alternatives are a little bit more “boring”, the customers will not see the meaning of purchasing them.

The practice elements in other sustainable shopping practices

According to our research, the practice elements do not seem to lack as much in other areas of sustainable shopping. For example, as previous research also have shown, sustainable food has had a great impact on the consumer, and today many consumers shop food with sustainable labels. Our interviewees, during our research, often started to discuss the area of shopping organic food compared to sustainable clothing by themselves. This was an interesting finding, providing valuable insight about how the consumer’s meaning varies between different sustainable products. Whether or not the practice of shopping sustainable food is an established practice will not be discussed in this thesis. However, an interesting question is, why has the shopping of sustainable food become a *more* established practice than the practice of shopping sustainable clothing? According to our study, we noticed that

the way of *labeling* and the *health concern*, are the two major reasons why sustainable food has become a more natural shopping practice than sustainable clothing.

The visibility of the labels

When comparing the materialistic aspect of the two products, there is one distinct difference. On sustainable food, the label is printed on the front of the packaging, while it on sustainable clothing usually is located on the laundry label inside of the garment and/or with an external tag. Vendela commented:

“In the grocery store it’s very obvious, I mean, you see seven products and three of them have a label. But when it comes to clothes, I feel that it doesn’t really appear that it is sustainable. And also, what is a sustainable sweater? In food you usually know that it is locally produced and no pesticides. But with the sweater, I don’t know what makes it sustainable”.

Simply, the sustainable logo is much more noticeable and eye-catching on the food packages. The consumer clearly sees which type of label the product has without putting any effort into looking for it, while sustainable clothing almost hides the sustainable label. Furthermore, the logo has to be recognizable in order for it to have an impact on the consumer (Thogersen et al., 2002). However, many clothing stores use their own label on their sustainable product, as also discussed by Mason (2012). This in turn, could be confusing for the consumer since she does not know what the label stands for, and therefore might not see the meaning of it. The ecological label, as the representative from Gina Tricot discussed, is probably one of the labels that is most recognized by the common consumer. However, she continues with saying that most clothing that is made from ecological material is cotton, which limits the amount of products that can be ecological. For a product to be ecological, it first of all has to be made out of “naturally grown materials”, which while most clothes are made out of unnatural materials, is rather common among different food products. The fact that the label is more visible, and often more recognizable, to the consumer of food products could help explain why the consumer practices sustainable grocery shopping more than sustainable fashion shopping. The material used in food packaging allows the consumer to clearly see the label, while she has to actively look for it on sustainable clothing. Moreover, the labels like ecological labeling, is recognizable to the consumer and even though she might not know exactly what ecological labels stand for, most consumers have knowledge about that the ecological label is a positive, sustainability label. This, for example, was noticeable in our study, where all of our participants knew to some extent, about the positive aspects of ecological products.

The direct effect on the human body

Lastly, as mentioned earlier, many consumers consider the direct health effect on when buying ecological food products (Joergens, 2006; Gam, 2010; Kim & Damhorst, 1998; Beard, 2008). For example, many consumers, as seen in our research, know that ecological food does not for example contain pesticides, which are believed to have a negative health impact. Vendela stated:

“I mean, it is also the fact that you *eat* the food, it is your body. But if it is something you were outside on you body you don't care as much. But if it is something that goes inside your body it might affect your health. It becomes more of a direct effect when it is regarding nutrition”.

Clothing, on the other hand, does not have the same type of direct health effect. When considering the direct effect of fashion, consumers often look at how the garment feels, or how she feels she looks in it. The direct effects of ecological food gives meaning to ecological food products, while the direct effects on garments are related more to quality and design rather than sustainability.

According to us, the reason why the practice of shopping sustainable fashion, compared to sustainable food, lies in two major components: labels and the health issues. While food has many well-known labels, and many replacements for non-sustainable food, sustainable clothing does not offer the same quantity of products or the same type of recognizable labels. Furthermore, clothing does not have a direct effect on the human body, while ecological food is considered to be more healthy than regular food.

5 Sustainable fashion shopping as a practice

In our theoretical analysis we will discuss the most interesting outcomes from our research compared to different themes and theories of practice. Furthermore, we will argue how sustainable clothing shopping can be increased due to a change in the practice elements.

Is shopping sustainable clothes a practice itself?

Our findings regarding that sustainable shopping as a practice lacks in the areas of competence, material and most of all, in the area of meaning, has given rise to an interesting question: is shopping sustainable fashion a practice by itself? According to our research, shopping sustainable fashion is somewhat an existing practice. However, we would like to state that it is only established among those who categorizes as *green consumers*, but not among the common consumers. Furthermore, we do not consider it as a fully established practice on its own. Røpke (2009) comments on how a practice can be a sub-branch from a larger, more general practice. This would mean, that shopping sustainable fashion is a sub-practice, evolved from the practice of shopping fashion, and is now a sub-branch. We believe that this can be part of the explanation of why shopping sustainable fashion is still something that consumers have yet to grasp.

A practice, as mentioned earlier, is in its most common form a routinized behaviour which incorporates different elements of meaning, competence and material. Since the practice usually is performed in routine, the consumer rarely reflects over what effect the resources that are consumed in her practice have on the environment and the public good (Røpke, 2009). Since shopping fashion is a practice well established in our community to such an extent, most consumers do therefore not consider the resources consumed when practicing shopping. An interesting observation from our research, however, is that most consumers *do* in some manner reflect on their consumption behaviour: many of our participants stated that they do care about the environmental impact their consumption has. Though, as Røpke (2009) states, this thought process does not happen when the consumer is actually shopping, but is more an underlying opinion she has about the matter in general. The practice of shopping is still performed without much thought process. Røpke (2009) discusses how a practice can have different meanings, depending on in which social context it is performed. Therefore, we believe that shopping sustainable fashion is an established practice among some social groups, but not in general when looking at the overall consumption in the society. This does not mean, however, that the common consumer completely rejects the idea of shopping sustainable fashion, even though it is not an established practice among most of them. As mentioned, many of our research participants confessed to feeling concerned with sustainability, and they all agreed on that sustainable fashion is a good concept. Furthermore, many of them practice other sustainable practices, like recycling. Also, many of the participants used one of the techniques discussed by Fuentes (2014): they stressed that they

were willing to pay more for a garment that would last, even if it is not containing specific sustainable attributes.

However, an interesting discussion arising from the statement that sustainable shopping is a sub-practice, is that practices are always changing, developing and disappearing. Røpke (2009) mentioned how a practice tends to “die” when it no longer has any practitioners. Could the development of sustainable shopping be the beginning of the end of shopping unsustainable fashion? Considering that unsustainable fashion is still sold in a much larger quantity than sustainable fashion, it is evident that shopping fashion as a general practice has not yet “died”. However, as already stated, many of our research participants considered sustainability to be an important matter, and even though sustainable fashion shopping was not an established practice among them, other sustainable practices were. Recycling, as an example, was one of the practices the majority of our participants were practicing. However, recycling from the beginning can be seen as a development of the practice of throwing garbage, which began because of a discussion about social concern. Even though not everyone does it, recycling is still viewed by the society as established in the practice of throwing garbage, considering how many possibilities the consumer has to recycle. Everything from public bins to large garbage stations to personal trash cans have developed, and do now offer a version where the consumer is able to choose a way to recycle. Could this be what is in the process of happening with the practice of shopping fashion? Could the so called green consumers who have sustainable fashion shopping as an established practice, instead be seen as the early adopters of a new, emerging practice?

Sustainable clothing shopping is, today, only a practice by green consumers, and not by the common customer. Shopping sustainable clothes is not a routinized practice or what the customers are searching for when shopping, and therefore it cannot be described as a practice by itself, by merely a sub-practice of the general practice of shopping fashion. If understanding of the meaning of shopping sustainable clothes increase it can be a future practice by the common man, but then all the basic practice elements needs to be fulfilled.

The links between the practice elements

Practices are under continuous development, and humans change their daily practice all the time. Shove et al. (2012) discuss the fact of making and breaking links between the practice elements when changing. They state that material components change purpose, while knowledge does not necessarily have to change or disappear, but can be stored in the back of the mind. Most interesting for our analysis is what happens with the aspect of meaning. As the practice evolves or disappears, the meaning of it transfers partly into the new practice and develops with the new practice into a new meaning. Shove et al. (2012) brings up the theory that when links are broken, and when a practice evolve, materials, meanings and some competence will disappear or be transformed. Practices are developing all the time which means that the links must be either broken or created to make new practices (see detailed example about car driving in Shove et al., 2012). The practice of shopping clothes has been

under rapid change the last decades, especially in the Western countries. From the beginning clothes were something only to wear and the meaning of clothes was mainly to cover your body and to get warm. Style and design was only valuable, and available, for wealthy people. But today, consumers shop new clothes based on style in order to look good, and practice shopping spontaneously rather than based on what they actually need. Furthermore, trendy fashion is available to anyone considering the wide range of prices offered. This in turn, has given rise to the market of fast fashion, considering that the consumer shops to satisfy a need of desire, rather than to satisfy a practical need. A new meaning of clothes have been made to a way of identification and status. The old meaning does still exist, but it has been complemented by the modern meaning of “looking good” and design, which leads to that the customer also have to take those into consideration when shopping. The amount of material offered has grown rapidly and developed, and much new material has been made. This due to both a higher requested levels because of the amount of clothes stores want to be able to offer, the displays they want to have in stores etc., but also because of advertisement and modern shopping channels such as apps and social media, which is an example of a technological, material development. The previous competence of shopping has been breaking and a new knowledge has grown. Consumers today have many different options and need knowledge of fashion, quality, style and price.

To make *sustainable clothing* shopping to a more established practice, some links in the current shopping practice must break and some new parts of the elements must be created. The *meaning* of shopping today is, as discussed before, identification and status. This meaning seems to be difficult to break, but it must be updated, and a new meaning must be created which include the understanding of the environmental impact of clothes. Today, buying the clothes marketed as sustainable is not meaningful for most customers, and therefore, this practice cannot be further developed. This element must be increased to make sustainable shopping to a natural practice. Furthermore, the link of *material* must break to help the customer understand the meaning. If companies stop providing unsustainable clothes, customers will buy only sustainable alternatives. Also, if companies can provide sustainable fashion clothes that the customer think looks nice, the customer will further see the meaning of buying them. This means that a break of the current assortment of unsustainable clothes will increase the meaning of the practice. Also, the *competence* and the current disrupted thoughts of what sustainable products mean must be clear and companies and customers must create a same way of viewing sustainable objects. If the definition is not clear, and if the customers and companies continues to misunderstand each other, shopping sustainable clothing will not be increased. The thoughts of greenwashing and untruthfulness towards companies must break and companies must get a better understanding of what the customers are searching for.

Today only green consumers have a large understanding of the meaning of buying sustainably, and as mentioned, they can be seen as “early adopters” to this practice. However, it is not easy to influence the common customer to buy more sustainably, because the desire

of mass consumption is still strong. The customer is now used to cheap fashion and it will therefore be some difficulties in expecting the customer to change in practice. It could be argued that the shops should only provide sustainable clothing, and by doing so, minimizing the environmental effect of the actual garment. However, today, this may be a too big step to expect the common customer to be okay with, considering the lack of understanding of the meaning with sustainable clothing. Consumers are not willing to change if they do not see the meaning of changing, and they do not see the meaning if it does not have a direct effect on the human body. Sustainability does not have a direct impact. Many people have been consuming in the same way their whole life because they have not seen any rapid direct change in the society, and therefore, they do not see the meaning of changing. Although they have got the information about the environmental impact, and although they are provided by sustainable materials, it will not be a practice if the consumer do not understand the meaning.

6 Conclusion

To answer our research questions, we have found that material, competence and meaning to different extents transform the shopping practice. Also, it does not always have to translate into a higher consumption of sustainable clothes. Material mostly concerns the consumer if she considers it to be “good or bad”, but if it is sustainable or not is generally something that does not concern the common consumer. The fact that the garment is sustainable is a positive attribute, but if a sustainable garment does not feel good or look nice, that will outweigh the sustainable factors and the consumer will not buy it. Moreover, the competence does transform the practice in the way that the consumer does think that sustainable clothing in general is a good idea, and most consumers are positive towards the concept. The fact that a garment is sustainable will, in general, never be the reason for a consumer *not* to purchase it. However, the factors of price and style are still more important to the consumer, which means that even if she has the knowledge about the positive aspects of the garments, she will still value price and style as more important. Lastly, meaning is the least transforming factor. The consumer does not see the meaning of buying sustainable clothing, if the garment does not live up to her other standards. Even though, in general, the consumer think that sustainable clothing is a good concept, she still does not see the value of buying it if it is not equivalent to her other standards.

Furthermore, according to our findings and earlier research, shopping sustainable clothing is not yet an established practice itself, and is currently only a practice performed by green consumers. Furthermore, it can be seen as a sub-practice of the more general practice of shopping fashion. The reason why the practice of shopping sustainable clothing cannot fully be classified as a practice is that it lacks in the areas of meaning, competence and material, but mostly in meaning. This expresses itself through the fact that the consumer more often than not, does not see the meaning with purchasing sustainable clothing, instead of regular clothing. Tradeoffs are usually made between price and design, but the quality of sustainability is rarely taken into consideration. Therefore, the sustainable garment is not seen as valuable or meaningful to the consumer since it can be lacking the qualities she desires. Therefore, it is clear that meaning is not strong enough to be a configuration power on the practice of shopping sustainably. However, an interesting observation is whether or not the evolution of the practice shopping sustainably is developing in to a whole new practice, or if it is a beginning to a development of the already existing practice of shopping. Practices constantly change and evolve, but for the practice of general fashion shopping to transform, more links will have to be broken. To conclude, the practice of sustainable clothing is not yet fully established, due to the lack of meaning. However, practices are continuously under change, and the practice elements develop all the time. To make a practice out of sustainable clothing shopping, the meaning must be complemented with the understanding of the environmental impact clothing have. The trend of unsustainable material must break, and sustainable clothing must become the large majority, if not the only type of clothing,

provided on the market. Furthermore, the knowledge of the area must increase to create a deeper understanding in the area of meaning of the practice.

We have suggested certain recommendations to the fast fashion companies, which could help strengthen the area of meaning. Since Gina Tricot was used in our case, our recommendations to companies is based on our research conducted about them. First, companies could give more information in the stores, in forms of signs for example, about which garments contain sustainable materials. To prevent from being accused of greenwashing, the signs do not have to state that the clothes are fully sustainable, but how much of the percentage in the garment is made out of sustainable materials would be enough. Furthermore, they could also inform which materials are more sustainable, and what environmental effects these sustainable materials have in the long run. Secondly, companies can work with influencers on social medias. Today, a large amount of communication is conducted online, and influencers have a lot of power over what is trendy and not. If an influencer is seen in a sustainable garment and make it clear that it is sustainable, it will create a bigger hype around the matter and increase its degree of “coolness and trendiness”, which are qualities most consumers view as positive. By doing this, companies can increase the areas of competence, material and through these, the area of meaning.

As a consumer, she can try to open her eyes and inform herself about the qualities of sustainable garments and the meaning of sustainable labels. Since there is a lot of information available online and on the physical labels, she could easily inform herself, and trough this, increase her understanding of the meaning of sustainable clothing. However, we believe that it is difficult shaping the customer without encouragement and pushes from the companies. Furthermore, we would like to state that this change will probably not occur on its own, simply because we believe, based on our findings, the consumer to be rather lazy. If change is to complicated or require too much effort for the consumer, she will not change without help from society.

Further research

For further research, it would be interesting to compare the results of this study, with research of motivation from a psychological perspective. An example of a research area could be to view how the perceived meaning of the garment is compared to the motivation of the consumer, and if practice of sustainability actually is lacking in meaning because of that the consumer is lacking in motivation in learning and performing new practices. Another interesting area to research is why the consumer often views herself as too lacking in knowledge about a matter, when there is a vast quantity of information available. Relating to the area of sustainable clothing, this could be research done about why the consumer often states that she does not have enough knowledge about sustainable clothing to shop it, while at

the same time claiming that she is concerned about sustainability and views sustainability as a positive thing.

It would be interesting to go more in depth with our interviews and also make individual interviews with the participants in our focus group and see if the answer they are giving are different compared to what they said in the focus group. Also, it would have been interesting to observe our interviewees when shopping, and see and discuss their actual shopping process in practice. Furthermore, we are aware that although our interviewees were different in practice, they were still in the same group of gender and age. Therefore, for further research it would be interesting to make interviews with people in a broader age span and include males shopping practice as well. It would also have been interesting to include other fast fashion companies in our research to see if they view the customer practice in the same way as Gina Tricot do. Doing this could give a broader understanding of the consumer practice in this area of research.

7 References

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8 Appendix

Appendix 1 - Interview questions Gina Tricot

- **In general**

- What type of customers are shopping at Gina Tricot?
- What are the customer searching for when they shop at Gina Tricot?
- How often do you do customer surveys in general?
- How do you communicate with your customers in the best way? In store and with advertisement.
- How do you define “sustainable”?
- What labels do you use? Your own or well-known certifications?
- How do you think your customers perceive sustainable clothes?

- **Sales**

- How big is your sustainable sale and assortment in per cent?
- When did you start produce sustainable clothes?
- Have the sale turned out as planned with your sustainable clothes?

- **The customer**

How do you examine the customers purchase and interest towards sustainable clothes?

- How do you to keep updated with the customer’s preferences and wishes?
- Why do you think the customer purchases sustainably?
- What knowledge do you think your customers have about sustainable clothes?
- What is you customer response on your sustainable clothes?
- What are you doing to “educate” the customers about sustainable clothes?
- Do you get much questions from the customers about the sustainability of your clothes?

- **The products**

- What is your strategy when working with product development in sustainable clothes?
- What are the biggest challenges in producing sustainable clothes?
- How do you guarantee that the sustainable clothes actually are sustainable?
- How do you price you sustainable clothes?

- **Marketing**

- How do you market your sustainable clothes, and why? Do you see any difference?
- How do you show your sustainable clothes in store, and why? Clear signs?
- Do you use any specific color when market you sustainable clothes?
- How do you catch consumers that not usually purchase sustainably?

- **Customer response of your labels**

- What is the customer response of your sustainable clothes?
- Do you experience that the customer “care” about if the garment is sustainable or not?
- Can you see that it is a demand for sustainable clothes?
- What is the biggest challenge in selling sustainable clothes?
- How can we get sustainable clothes more established on the market?
- What are you future plans for the sustainable clothes?

Appendix 2 - Interview questions focus group and individual interviews

- **Shopping in general**

- How often do you shop clothes?
- Do you shop much spontaneously?
- What stores and brands do you shop in?
- What are you looking at when shopping? Signs? Colors? Outfits?
- What catches your interest in a store?
- What are your thoughts around the price? What is price worthy, and what do you spend/ not spend money on?

- **Sustainability**

- How do you define “sustainable”?
- Do you purchase much sustainably, in general?
- What sustainable labels do you recognize?
- What do you think when you see a sustainable labeled product?
- How important are the price for you?
- If you choose between two similar products, and one is sustainable and the other is not, what factors are decisive and which one had you truly chosen?

- **Sustainable clothes**

- Do you know what it means with sustainable clothes?
- What do you think when you see sustainable clothes in the stores?
- Do you look for where and how sustainable clothes are produced?
- What is your impression of sustainable clothes?
- What are your spontaneous thoughts of sustainable clothes? (*Materials? Trustworthy? Locally produced? etc.*)
- Do you own any sustainable clothes?

- **Labels**

- How do you react when you see a sustainable label?
- Does a sustainable label affect your choice of clothes?
- Are you searching for sustainable labels?
- Are you willing to pay more for a sustainable garment?

- **Gina Tricot**

- Have you/ how often do you shop at Gina Tricot?
- Why do you shop at Gina Tricot?
- What are your general opinion about Gina Tricot?
- What are your general opinion about Gina Tricots sustainable assortment?
- Have you ever purchased anything from their sustainable assortment?

- **Future**

- How do you think companies can make you buy more sustainably?

Sustainable certifications shown during the interview



Description of our interview participants

Individual interviews

- **Karolina** is 25 years old and does soon take her double degree in environmental economics. She is very environmentally friendly, mostly she is against today's mass-consumption. Also, she is very healthy and are very aware on what she is eating, due to sprinkled food and so on. As Karolina is still a student, she therefore has a limited monthly budget. The reason why we wanted to interview Karolina was because of her environmental awareness but also her limited budget. It was interesting that Karolina did not notice the sustainable labels very much, although she consumer very green in other shopping practices. However, she act sustainable in the way that she does not over-consume and only purchase when she actually need something.
- **Hedvig** works as an accountant and has previously studied a bachelor in business and economics. She is 23 years old and loves to shop. She also has a very big interest in knitting, crochet and sewing, which leads to a great knowledge in different materials. Hedvig also purchase much on second hand and does sometimes sew her own clothes. However, her big shopping interest makes her purchase very much new clothes as well. The reason we chose Hedvig as one of our interviewees was because we believes her environmental interest reflect the common consumers awareness. She think sustainable alternatives are better, but it is not a priority when shopping.

Focus groups participants

- **Joline** is much into quality and value of the clothes. She is working on a bank and is not shopping very often, but when she does she shops a lot and in a higher price range. She is environmentally friendly in the way that she does what is expected by the society, in terms of recycling and some organic food shopping, but otherwise she can not be seen as a green consumer.
- **Camilla** is a very thoughtful person and does not shop spontaneously. She is currently a student and care about fashion but it is not her biggest hobby, and cares more about the quality of the garments. She grew up on a farm and therefore, she sometimes have a different view of what is sustainable and not compared to those who has grown up in the city center. She promote locally produced and long lasting products.
- **Fatima** is more into the hipster style and care much about the environment. She is currently a student and has a shopping interest but it is not her hobby. She try her best to act sustainably in most practices. She care very much about style and design.
- **Vendela** is very into fashion and the latest trends. She is working as an Event Manager and love to go shopping, however she is very price sensitive. She mostly shop on sale and can sometimes see it as a game to find the best price. She spends a lot of money and lives for the motto "you only live once". She do not care very much of the environment in anything she consume.

Appendix 3 - Observations in Gina Tricot stores

The reason of doing observations was to get the answers we could not get from the interviews; how customers shop in action and how they act in store. Therefore, we put much focus in analyzing the customers way of shopping, what did they look at, what did they discuss, did they touch the garments, and how did they walk around? We wanted to see if there was a shopping pattern by the consumers and, if so, in what way, and why?

Fredsgatan, Göteborg

November, Monday 12.30

Duration of observation: 30 minutes.

Comments: New and large store in the city center. Located in the middle of the most popular shopping areas in Gothenburg. The store has two floors and cashiers on both floors, and the store has a very big assortment.

Kungsgatan, Göteborg

November, Tuesday 17.20

Duration of observation: 20 minutes.

Comments: A small store located on a big shopping street. But the street is not only for shoppers, due to the many working offices around, therefore, many people pass everyday for different reasons. The store is limited in assortment.

Nordstan Femman, Göteborg

November, Saturday 13.45

Duration of observation: 30 minutes.

Comments: Right in the middle of the biggest shopping mall in Gothenburg is this newly build store located. It is large and big in assortment, but not as big as the one at Fredsgatan.