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Contextualizing slow fashion

*– disentangling meanings of sustainable clothing
consumption among young professionals*

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Abstract: Research on the slow fashion consumer and their identity formation through clothing consumption is scarce. This qualitative study aim to contribute with insights into slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption from a consumer perspective. This study has been informed by theories of consumer identity and status within the Consumer Culture Theory framework. The following research question guided the study; *How do young professionals make sense of slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption?* To answer the research question phenomenological interviews, along with a diary approach, were conducted. The data was analyzed with an interpretive hermeneutic approach and the results show that the consumers are engaged in tensions between their sustainable identity and their fashion interest. The findings show that young professionals are pursuing a professional identity, whilst pursuing and illustrating their sustainable clothing consumption to others. The findings indicate that sustainable clothing offers status to the consumers, and their consumption was guided from their pursuit of an ego-ideal; being sustainable in all matters of life.

Keywords: Sustainability, Slow fashion, CCT, Identity, Status, Slow fashion consumer, Young Professionals

Introduction

The clothing industry is one of the world's largest industries and the second worst polluting industry in the world. During the last two decades the average consumption has increased with 60 percent, with half of the clothing items never even being worn (Kell, 2019). The global apparel consumption is estimated to increase another 60 percent, from 62 million tons to 102 million tons by 2030 (Environmental Audit Committee, 2019). In Sweden the average consumer purchases 14 kilo of clothes annually (Rosengren, 2018). In contrast to this development the interest in sustainable clothing has been on the rise during the last few years (Pinnock, 2018).

Sustainability is increasingly discussed as unsustainable business behaviors are highlighted and consumers are expressing a willingness to purchase sustainable items (Stein, 2019). This has put pressure on fast fashion retailers that are starting to offer their consumers self-proclaimed

sustainable options at their stores. For instance, H&M have introduced a "conscious" line and Lindex offers "sustainable choices". Moreover, H&M addressed sustainability head on in their 2019 campaign "Take Care". The campaign focus was that of keeping clothes fresh longer and thus minimizing the number of washes. H&M highlights mending clothes instead of throwing it away, thus prolonging the wear of the item (H&M, 2019). Nonetheless, Swedish consumers' willingness to purchase sustainable options is the increasing consumption of second hand clothing and the 2018 Christmas gift was the reused sweater (SVT, 2018). This is illustrated even at higher levels in Swedish society as the Swedish Crown Princess wore her mother's old dress at the Nobel Prize Ceremony in 2018 (Nyhetsmorgon, 2018).

Fast fashion retailers can not to be considered sustainable, as their short fashion production cycles and up to 20 collections a year is contributing to the

heavily polluted industry (Fletcher, 2010). As an option to the fast fashion industry, consumers can engage in a more sustainable form of fashion consumption such as slow fashion. The slow fashion movement originates from the Slow Food Movement which was a direct protest against fast food chains coming to Italy in the 60's (Fletcher, 2008). The philosophy of slow fashion is to design, produce, consume and live better, by having ethical and sustainable products made and purchased. A precise slow fashion definition is missing, although, it can be regarded as a philosophy in which sustainability is highlighted during the production and consumption of the item, taking into account all of the stakeholders from farmers to consumers (Fletcher, 2008). This fairly new and sustainable form of consumption has gained a growing interest both in the fashion industry, with more slow fashion retailers, and among consumers (Clark, 2008). A slow fashion consumer is someone who "chooses to purchase high quality, versatile clothing that allows them to build a wardrobe based on the concept of clothing created out of care and consideration" (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013, p.155).

From this definition of a slow fashion consumer, the consumption takes place in slow fashion retailers such as Nudie Jeans or at second hand stores, and old items are being altered or reused to something else (Clark, 2008; Pal, 2016). The slow fashion philosophy is discussed at a national and local level in Sweden, with Johanna Nilsson as the main ambassador (Ehlin, 2019; Nyhetsmorgon, 2018). Nilsson's main message being that the most sustainable item is the one that is being worn the most (Ehlin, 2019). Furthermore, slow fashion is about the mentality of taking care of already owned items, and purchasing items that will endure time, are statement pieces, versatile, and have a long lasting quality. Thus, the pieces are considered to be non-trendy items (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013; Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). Trends have a short life time as trends are temporary. As a contrast slow fashion appeal to the style and uniqueness of a person, connecting style to the individual's personal identity. Shopping less and

according to their inner style is said to give consumers a longer satisfaction as the consumer is purchasing less items, and items that are timeless, meant to be worn for a long time (Cho, Gupta & Kim, 2015; Fletcher, 2008). Additionally, style is considered to be an expressions of uniqueness for an individual, and this desire to be unique and different is the motive behind disregarding trends and favoring style (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016).

Seemingly an individual's personal identity can be considered to be playing a role in the slow fashion consumption, as there is a desire to express the inner-self (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016). Fashion and identity creation is not a new research topic, rather Thompson and Haytko (1997) concluded that fashion is used for an individual to create a narrative of oneself, and is used as an expression of identity. As such the fashion consumption creates the identity, in order words rather than consuming products, the consumer is purchasing an identity (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). This creates an ongoing narrative and constant negotiation of who one is and who one is not. It is said that the uniqueness, individuality, constant change and materialistic values are affecting identity formation through clothes (Niinimäki, 2010). As a result the consumers are constantly purchasing new items as their older objects are getting outdated and common, resulting in the new objects being the latest representative of the self (Schiermer, 2010).

The slow fashion consumer is focused on sustainability, and previous research in sustainable clothing consumption has yet approached slow fashion consumption and identity formation. Alternately the design and production aspects of slow fashion have been highlighted, with the supply chain being co-producers (Fletcher, 2008). Another well documented research topic is that of the attitude-behavior gap of consumers, were consumers' are stating that they want to shop more sustainable but in reality they are not (Niinimäki, 2010). The consumers lack of knowledge in sustainable clothing is another research topics, which concludes that education is crucial to influence consumers to purchase sustainable

clothing (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016). As well as the connection between self-expression and motivations of purchasing sustainable fashion (Lundblad & Davis, 2016; Kang, Liu & Kim, 2013). However, there is a paucity of studies providing in-depth understandings of the slow fashion consumer (Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Jung & Jin, 2016). A study with emphasis on sustainable clothing consumption and the role of self-identity has been called for as it would contribute to the understanding of the consumers behavior (McNeill & Moore, 2015). This is especially important, considering the suggestion that if the main driver is to pursue an identity, it can override all other motives in regards to shopping sustainable (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

To contribute to this field of sustainability, slow fashion, and self-identity, the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers understand the tension between sustainability and fashion. This is achieved with the theoretical framework of Consumer Culture Theory in which the theory of Consumer Identity Projects is presented. This theoretical framework offers an important perspective as it builds on the understanding of what items mean for the consumer (Belk, 1988). Consumers are increasingly looking for sustainable options, the new insights into sustainable, and slow fashion, consumption can be valuable for designing more sustainable business models. An increased understanding of this consumer is therefore necessary. This study focuses on Swedish female young professionals with an interest in clothing. According to Steensen Nielsen and Gwozdz (2018) young female consumers are engaging with new sustainable solutions, are more prone than others to purchase and test these solutions. Moreover, as female young professionals are selecting clothing to match their professional identities the aspect of slow fashion and sustainability is interesting. Connell (2010) states that sustainability and some professions does not correspond due to prejudice towards materials, however these consumers are actively pursuing a career whilst selecting sustainable choices.

To achieve the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of how consumers understand the tension between sustainability and fashion, the following research question is therefore utilized; *How do young professionals make sense of slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption?*

In order to answer this question a qualitative study have been conducted with in-depth phenomenological interviews as the main data collection. From the findings in this study it is possible to understand how young professionals consume slow fashion. This study does not attempt to provide a definition of slow fashion or the slow fashion consumer, rather the focus is at understanding how the consumers make sense of their clothing consumption. From this understanding it is possible to discuss how consumers retail experiences can be enhanced by new business models.

Theoretical Framework

As a starting point the main fashion concepts at presented. Further, the slow fashion concept, its consumption practices and current research is discussed. Thereafter, the theory of Consumer identity projects and Status are presented as the main theoretical framework. The theories are a part of the Consumer Culture Theory perspective, and provides an understanding of consumer identity in a marketing context.

Fashion concepts

Fashion, clothing, style and trends are frequently used words within the clothing industry albeit distinctive from each other. Fletcher (2008) makes a clear distinction of clothing and fashion. Clothes are a material product that are being used to the functionality of the item, whereas fashion concerns the symbolic product and connects humans with time, emotions and our social identity (Fletcher, 2008). Furthermore, fashion is defined as a cultural form of expression “which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system or group of associated individuals” (King &

Ring, 1980 p.13). Fashion and clothes together creates a never ending need of fashion clothes that never could satisfy the consumers psychological needs (Fletcher, 2008). The concept of style is seen as an expression of the uniqueness of a person and can last for a long period of time, whereas trends fluctuates and are only relevant in a specific time frame (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016). Taste is the preferences of a specific style, hence style is an expression of taste (King & Ring, 1980). Consequently, style can be considered to be more sustainable as it transcends through time and is meant to be worn for a long period of time. Cho, Gupta and Kim (2015) argue that the likelihood of consumers to purchase sustainable items increases when purchasing according to style, and as a result the consumer will shop less items that are considered to be timeless. Additionally, style is considered to be an expression of uniqueness for an individual, and this desire to be unique and different are the motive behind disregarding trends and favoring style (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016). Thus, there is a complexity between style and trends, as trends makes it possible to take part of the now and being included in the now, whereas style is an expression of uniqueness. In addition, King and Ring (1980) states that fashion is the connector of style and taste, and states that when a group of individuals accept and prefer a certain style it becomes fashion.

Slow fashion consumption

Slow fashion as a concept has not been explicitly defined, however there is a common agreement of it originating from a sustainable perspective to address a sustainable form of fashion consumption (Fletcher, 2008). The common understanding is the social, environmental and economic aspect of sustainability starting from the production of the garment to purchase, consumption and disuse. As such slow fashion is a holistic perspective and thoughtful process of fashion and sustainability that concerns everyone in the fashion cycle, starting with farmers, by cultivating organic cotton or using less toxic chemicals, to the consumer that purchase sustainable items (Fletcher, 2010). From

a designer perspective slow fashion refers to ensure that the design and production of the item is sustainable, and in addition educating consumers on sustainability (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). From a retailer perspective it refers to offering smaller lines of high quality clothing, that are made with satisfying labor condition (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013). These are the common assumptions of slow fashion, however there are no established definition of slow fashion (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). Nonetheless, the overall philosophy of slow fashion is to slow down the fashion cycle, from production to consumption, to make fashion consumption more sustainable (Fletcher, 2008). As there are no true definition of slow fashion there is no true slow fashion retail store, instead slow fashion can be identified by the clothing (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013).

Similarly, Tran (2008) argue that slow fashion is the items that are lasting through times, a classic cardigan, vintage clothing, Levi's 501. Consequently, purchasing an organic shirt does not constitute as slow fashion if it is in the garbage after only a few months (Tran, 2008). Thus, as slow fashion attempts to slow down the consumption of clothing there are multiple ways of engaging in slow fashion, as research shows. The consumer might only purchase specific products in the slow fashion range, or it can be predominating in the consumer's clothing consumption (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013). Furthermore, slow fashion consumption are said to be when the consumers purchase high quality items that are intended to be worn for a long time. Additionally slow fashion consumption occur when the consumer is recycling, reusing and shopping second hand (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013). Similarly, non-consumption or second hand shopping is also considered to be slow fashion consumption. This is addressed by Clark (2008) and Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2015) who states that reusing and recycling are an essential part of the slow fashion concept, as well as shopping second hand, and from local, smaller businesses. Consequently slow fashion consumption refers to consuming less, and foremost it is about using the items in the wardrobe

(Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). To take care of these items in order for them to last a long time, thus mending broken items (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Tran, 2008). The most sustainable item a consumer can have is the items that are worn the most (Ehlin, 2019).

Although there are no true slow fashion brands according to Zarley Watson and Yan (2013) some have tried to identify potential retailers. Commonly slow fashion brands are considered to be luxury fashion brands, such as Stella McCartney or Vivienne Westwood. By the premise that these brands are operating from a sustainable perspective and creates pieces that are timeless (Joy *et al.* 2012). However, in the role of clothing being the indicator (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013) there are a variety of affordable brands that can be considered to be slow fashion brands. Highlighting Boomerang and Nudie Jeans, which are argued to be a slow fashion brand due their desire to ensure that the consumers will take care of their jeans, and encourage consumers to view their jeans as a signature piece in their wardrobe (Pal, 2016). This is done through a free repair service towards consumers. In addition, Nudie Jeans focus at making sustainable and ethical decisions throughout their production are well in line with the slow fashion principle (Pal, 2016). Thus, the idea that slow fashion brands are only luxury brands are false, and there are possibilities to find slow fashion brands that are affordable.

Reasons for consuming sustainable clothing

Previous research discusses reasons for the current change in fashion, and it is said to be due to digitalization (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Digitalization is changing how consumers look at trends. Internet provides so much images and trends that it is said trends are losing its influence on consumers, and consumers are getting more empowered and believing in their own capabilities of putting together aesthetics styles. As such the bad quality of fashion is getting tiresome for the consumer, who instead want long lasting pieces (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Another possible

reason for slow fashion interest are due to the stress and negative pressure from consuming in large scale. Consuming in a fast pace is not only bad for the environment, but causes economical disadvantages. As consumers are purchasing many items, most of them are not even being worn, the change towards slow fashion means to shop less and shop items that are loved. This decreases the stress from shopping (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Other motives for slow fashion consumer decisions are their high level of environmental concern, and these consumers are willing to purchase sustainable if it is believed that their purchase makes a difference for the environment (Gam 2011; Gilg, Barr & Ford, 2004).

Similarly, Chan and Wong (2012) found that consumers are less interested in traditional product attributes when deciding to purchase sustainable fashion, as their research was looking at consumers' willingness to spend money on sustainable clothing (Chan & Wong, 2012). However, this is argued to be a simplification of the motives as Jägel, Keeling, Reppel and Gruber (2012) argue that the motivations to purchase ethical clothing are twofold. Consumers are considering traditional attributes such as price, quality, style and comfort, whilst having ethical considerations and wondering about recycling, material, fair working conditions and environmentally friendly production techniques (Jägel *et al.* 2012). This duality of motivations are said to be the cause of an inner conflict, as the consumer wants to look good but the consumer also wants to consume in a way that benefit future generations. As a consequence the consumer has to negotiate between their egoistic or altruistic values (Jägel *et al.* 2012). Nonetheless, this research illustrates the complex consumption process and the underlying motives when shopping sustainable.

Moreover, even though there is an interest in purchasing sustainable, it can be difficult to find and social norms has a perception of sustainable clothing being unattractive (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013). This makes it difficult for some individuals to purchase the items as it would go

against this social norm (Pookulangara & Shepard, 2013). This prejudice towards sustainable clothing is a double-edge sword because if more consumers would shop sustainable, it would be socially acceptable to purchase this kind of clothing, although some customer groups would lose its appeal if it became mainstream (Connell, 2010).

Still, Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2015) believes that the aesthetics of slow fashion can influence more consumers to shop less. As slow fashion differs from mass produced items, the items are rare, high quality, and thus the items becomes almost as a piece of art (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Similarly to the research by Zarley Watson and Yan (2013) and Tran (2008) that states that slow fashion consumers are emotionally connected to their items and consider them to be a form of art. Consequently, based on the fashion theory and slow fashion philosophy, slow fashion can be argued to be a cultural phenomenon that is purchased due to the symbolism of the items, and are used to display a certain type of taste, i.e. style.

To build on the existing theories of slow fashion consumers, the concept of identity and status is used to contribute to a deeper understanding of the connection between slow fashion consumers and identity formation.

Consumer Identity Projects

Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) is a theoretical framework that examines consumption practices from a social and cultural perspective. Within the CCT theoretical framework is the theory of consumer identity projects. Central in CCT is the concept of connection between market made commodities that are marketed by symbolism which inflicts a consumer desire (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). In this perspective there are symbolic market made commodities which inflicts a consumer desire, and consumer identity projects concern how the consumer creates the perception of self by using these commodities (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). CCT is not an explicit theory, it is a family of theoretical perspectives that provides

an understanding of consumer identity in a marketing context.

Consumer identity projects are the research concerning how consumers purchase marketing symbols to create a sense of the self, with initial research made by McCracken (1986) and Belk (1988). Their research contributed to the understanding of how individuals assign cultural meanings to consumption products, and use these products in their identity creation. McCracken (1986) argued that individuals are using culturally market made goods as a tool for self-communication, and he created a comprehensive analysis of the meaning from the cultural constituted good onto the consumer. Moreover, the fashion system find meanings in the cultural world, in which the consumer lives in, and transform these meanings into consumer goods. After the acquisition of these consumer goods, the consumer transfer the meaning of the good through consumption rituals and thus it becomes a part of the consumer's identity (McCracken, 1986). In this process of meaning transfers the consumer is argued to legitimize their consumption according to McCracken (1986) and Belk (1988). This is further explained by Belk (1988) who state that the symbolic meanings from brands are used to create an individual and collective identity. From their research consumers are considered to be identity seekers, as the consumer legitimizes their consumption by these meaning transfers (Belk, 1988; McCracken, 1986). By maintaining this purchase of symbolic meanings the consumer is constructing their identity.

The role of fashion in identity construction

The initial research of the symbolic meanings from consumption products and the sense of self is still relevant as much research builds on this ideas, and contemporary consumption is seen as a tool to form an identity based on the inevitable symbolic meanings from consumption products (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Gabriel & Lang, 2006), similar to the discussions by McCracken (1986)

and Belk (1988). Hence, the consumer is selecting a desirable identity by the consumption of products, products that are fueled with cultural meanings, and to maintain the desired identity there is an ongoing consumption process in which the consumer is defining and re-evaluating oneself (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). In other words, the consumer is trapped in an ongoing consumption of products that are used to maintain a desired identity. By associating consumption meaning to products the consumer is encouraging an ongoing consumption. In this process, fashion and clothing is especially relevant, as clothing is highly associated with symbolic value and assigned meanings whilst being highly visible to others. Thus fashion becomes a part of the consumers narrative of the self (Belk, 1988; Thompson & Haytko, 1997).

In the research of fashion discourses by Thompson and Haytko (1997) it was found that various factors influence consumers in symbolic fashion consumption, and the consumers countervailing beliefs made the consumers engage in fashion narratives that promotes an ongoing consumption that suits their everyday life. This research showed that the consumer is negotiation between their perceived fashion uniqueness, whilst conforming to cultural, social norms. As such the individual believed oneself to be a creator of fashion, that resisted fashion conformity and had created their own personal style. In this process the positive aspects of fashion was used as in the trajectory of a future desired self (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Similarly, Schiermer (2010) argue that consumers are unaware of themselves being fashion imitators of others, and goes as far as stating that consumers does not have an opinion of their own instead consumers are unknowingly following the socially acceptable fashion trends.

Accordingly, Gabriel and Lang (2006) builds on the idea that consumption and clothes are an extensive part of culture and identity creation. Especially the Western consumer is consider to be an identity-seeker, shopping goods for the fulfilment of a self-identity and for the positive

feelings of self-esteem and a positive self-image. In this search the authors state that the individual wants to be unique, and having a unique object offers status to the beholder (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Additionally, if the item is closely connected the holders identity, the holder creates a strong emotional connection to it. However, Gabriel and Lang (2006) discusses that due to the mass-production of fashion the holder does not create this emotional connection because the item is an image that can be easily replaced by new trends. Thus not the carrier of meaning that was intended (Gabriel & Lang, 2006).

An identity is defined as the self in context and it is argued that only in a social construct is it possible for the individual to form the self (Wilska, 2002). Therefore, it is argued that the self is created in an individual process and in a social experience (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Correspondingly, Banister and Hogg (2012) explain the three components of the self, namely the current self, the ideal self and the social self. The current being the currently perspective of oneself, ideal self being the desired self and the social self being the perception of how the individual believes others to hold (Banister & Hogg, 2012). Similarly, the ego-ideal is discussed by Gabriel and Lang (2006) which is the ideal self that the consumers have built a narrative around. By purchasing products the consumer comes closer to the ideal, and by this ongoing consumption the consumer believes to become happier and more connected to the closer self (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). The self can thus be argued to be created through consumption, namely through the acquisition of symbolic products that are communicating self-identity (Thompson, 1995). Depending on the social surroundings the individual's self-identity changes (Banister & Hogg, 2012). Moreover, individuals define themselves from what is similar but also what is different from others as such there is a dualism as identity is being defined as sameness and distinctiveness (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). As such the consumption items becomes an expression of who the individual wishes to be, as well as a

representation of who the individual wishes not to be as suggested by Giddens (1991).

The role of status in consumption

The research by Arsel and Thompson (2011) stated that status plays an important part in consumption, as status is a sociocultural aspect that is a part of consumer identity projects. Their research on indie culture suggests that consumption practices were based on the aesthetic pleasure stemming from the culture, which contributed to new friendships and social connections whilst gaining status (Arsel & Thompson, 2011). Seeing that identity is impossible to achieve without a social construct, the concept of status is closely related since status is a social condition (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012). Historically status has been assigned based on the family one is born into, however nowadays status can be created with consumption; being the tool that creates and cultivates status over others (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012). As such fashion becomes interesting since fashion is seen as a distinctiveness of social status (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Moreover, an individual's status varies depending on which social group he or she are part of (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012).

The concept of status has been researched for a long time, and Veblen created the term Conspicuous Consumption in 1899 (Veblen, 2008). Veblen discussed how consumption was no longer due to the functional value of a product, rather the focus was at prestige and the aim was to showcase wealth. As such fashion is highly symbolic, since clothing are demonstrating symbolic meanings rather than functional value. Further Veblen (2008) explains that Conspicuous Consumption occurs due to three intentions, namely displaying wealth and power, signaling high status and wearing fashion in accordance to the present time. Even though Veblen's research is from the 1899 his research is still relevant, which is illustrated by Griskevicius, Tybur, Van den Bergh and Simpson (2010) suggestion that status motives can influence consumers behavior in preferable purchasing a prosocial green product than a luxurious product. Their findings indicated

that when shopping amongst others, consumer's purchase products that results in some form of self-sacrifice, and when shopping alone the consumer is more prone to self-indulgence. This is explained by the reasoning of green products indicating that the consumer care about something more than oneself, consequently it will enhance status (Griskevicius *et al.* 2010). In order for this to be achieved Fletcher (2008) and Griskevicius *et al.* (2010) argue that the environmental claims needs to be easily seen.

The social comparison theory, is the idea that individuals compare themselves to others with status as the driving force. The perceived risk of falling behind in the social status hierarchy shapes the way individuals see others, themselves and their desires. This social comparison theory puts emphasis in the wellbeing of individuals and happiness comes from who the individual compare themselves with, and according to the theory individuals comparing themselves to those low in the status hierarchy are happier than those who compare themselves to those at the top. As a result the individual might feel envy of others status, which nowadays occur on a global level due to digitalization (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012). Brands, especially, are used by consumers to signal status and demonstrate a certain social standard (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Moreover, Ulver-Sneistrup (2012) discusses the duality between wanting to fit in whilst standing out, and uses social gatherings to exemplify this as she states that fashion is used to gain either social adaptation and/or differentiations. The need for fitting in and standing out is being satisfied with imitation and limitations. Those with a low status want to purchase as those with high status, which causes the boundaries to shift and makes a change in the culture (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012).

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers understand the tension between sustainability and fashion. Consequently, a qualitative research approach has been selected based on Bryman and Bell (2003) argument that a qualitative research approach put emphasis on individuals perception and interpretation of their social reality. The main data collection has been in-depth phenomenological interviews, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) argue that phenomenology refers to the interest in understanding a social phenomenon from the actors own perspective, and thereafter to describe the world as it is being experienced. As such, the phenomenological interviews with respondents having lived the experience makes it possible for the researcher to enter the mind of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). In this study the lived experience is expressed by an interest of clothing and sustainability in fashion, illustrated by slow fashion. In addition a diary method was utilized as a complementary to the interviews. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the consumer (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Pilot study

Prior to the collection of the main data, interviews, a pilot study in the form of researching Internet sites and contacting sustainable fashion businesses. The reason for this was to get insights on the slow fashion consumer in order to move on to select a sample. Facebook and Instagram was utilized, and the author became a member of the Facebook groups “Hållbart Mode” (2293 members), “Sustainable Fashion” (1851 members) and “Sustainable Fashionistas” (676 members). In addition to the online research two slow fashion businesses were contacted to gain further insights into the slow fashion consumer. Correspondingly the two interviews were considered to be of importance, mainly to contribute with insight from a retailer perspective but also in creating a deeper understanding of the consumers.

Consequently, the information from the pilot study gave an enlarged pre-understanding of the consumer group to be researched and influenced the interview questions. Moreover, prior to interviewing the participants the interview questions were tested in a pilot study interview. The aim was to test how the questions captured the essence of the topics. The pilot interviews aided the process by making the author reflect upon the formulations of the questions and the follow-up questions. In phenomenological interviews the formulation of questions are important (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), as such the pilot interviews were helpful in reflecting and changing the formulations. The pilot study included two interviews, one in person and one through Skype. These interviews were a crucial step as changes to the questions were made, and the pilot study was considered valuable as the nature of the conversations during the following interviews were considered better as it allowed for a natural flow, more similar to a conversation than an interview. Thus achieving the objective of phenomenological interviews being similar to a conversation, instead of merely having questions and answers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

Data collection and sampling

The participants were selected with purposeful sampling, with the requirement that the respondent purchase clothing items that are considered to be under the category of “*slow fashion*”. This criteria is especially critical in phenomenological interview approaches as the participants have to have lived the experience, thus a purposeful sample is required with participants that have experienced the phenomena that is being researched (Goulding, 2005). Initially a post was made in the Facebook group “Hållbart Mode” with the incentive to recruit individuals to be interviewed, however due to a low response rate, prospective participants were approached. Individuals who had written about sustainability on their page or liked sustainability pages were contacted. In order to ensure the sample would be within the scope of slow fashion the explanation of slow fashion by Pookulangara and

Shepard (2013) was used along with a similar sample criteria as Zarley Watson and Yan (2013) used in their research. Their sampling criteria was that of shopping at slow fashion retailers, and/or purchase items that could be worn through several seasons, and not conforming to fast fashion where items are replaced on a seasonal basis (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). Consequently, the individuals were asked if quality and sustainability was of importance when purchasing clothing, and from which retailers their main purchases were made. In addition, second hand stores was considered to be satisfactory to slow fashion as several researchers states it is part of slow fashion (Clark, 2008; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). When the first participants had been identified with the sustainability criteria they were found to be young professionals. A young professional is identified as a college graduate with less than 10 years of a full-time position (Smith, 2013). Considering the complexity of being into slow fashion, whilst having to conform to a business style and outfit in order to dress in accordance to their workplace this group is interesting to investigate. Thus, the individuals who fulfilled these criteria's, sustainable and young professionals, were selected to be part of the sample.

Thereupon 11 participants were purposefully selected and interviewed, although only 10 participants are part of the final sample. The reason for this is that one participant could not be considered a slow fashion consumer, due to the lack of exhibited slow fashion practices. This participant consumed clothes on a weekly basis, and did not consider sustainability to be an issue in the fashion industry. However, the rest of the sample consumed according to slow fashion and were positive towards this form of consumption. During the interviews it was apparent that the consumption range of slow fashion varied as the participants occasionally purchased items that are considered non-slow. This can be considered a sample limitation, however the definition never states that the consumer have to fully engage in slow fashion, rather the mindset of purchasing

longevity and wearing items through seasons are most important in slow fashion (Ehlin, 2019). Additional, since the aim is not to define slow fashion the perceived sample limitation is outside the scope of this study.

The participants were voluntary participating and were informed of the possibility to withdraw at any time as part of ethical consideration suggested by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015). The interviews were semi-structured since this approach offer a more conversational and informal conversation which was important because the goal of phenomenological interviews is a first-person description where the respondent sets the dialogue (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The emphasis lies in making the interview similar to a conversation rather than just having questions and answers, as the participant should be given the opportunity to describe their experiences without restrictions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

The interview guide was used during the interviews to ensure that the pre-decided topics, style, trends and sustainability, would be discussed (*see Appendix A*). The interviews mostly consisted of open-ended questions, correspondingly to Flick (2014) argument that semi-structured interviews should be filled with open-ended questions. Additionally, the researcher should ask the participant follow up questions that offers for further reflections and a dialogue about their experience, rather than asking questions that makes the respondent rationalize their previous statements (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). To minimize the risk to be intrusive the researcher can follow a few steps, namely not asking "why", having the questions following up on the participants discourse, and offer the participant support by having short descriptive questions (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). In order to ascertain that these criteria's were met, the approach of semi-structured interviews, with pre decided topics (style, trends and sustainability, *see Appendix A*) and descriptions, were considered the most appropriate data collection method. This

approach allowed for a natural flow and depending on the conversation new topics and questions arose.

Table 1. Distribution of Interviewees

<i>IR NO./Name*</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Time</i>
1 Alice	24	Recruiter	1h 28 min. <i>Skype</i>
2 Sofie	24	Accountant	55 min.
3 Elin	24	Consultant	1h 18 min.
4 Julia	24	Marketing Coordinator	53 min. <i>Skype</i>
5 Hanna	29	Accountant	1h 18 min. <i>Skype</i>
6 Olivia	24	Service/sales	1h 05 min. <i>Skype</i>
7 Emma	24	Service Manager	1h 15 min.
8 Sara	30	Accountant	44 min. <i>Skype</i>
9 Stina	28	Geologist	1h. <i>Skype</i>
10 Maja	25	Student/HR Assistant	1h 35 min.

**All names are fabricated*

The participants were told that the purpose of the interview was to understand clothing consumption. Prior to the interview the participants were asked to bring one piece of clothing that they have had for a long period of time, however a specific time frame was never suggested to the participants. The idea was to understand the participants own perception of a long period of time in relation to clothing. The participants were also asked to bring their favorite clothing item. Considering this research aims at getting a first-person description of how the participants makes sense of their consumption of sustainable clothing, the clothing items were an important insights into the mind of the participant.

At the beginning of the interviews it was stated that there were no right answers, rather their perspective and experiences was of interest. Having the mindset of being more aware of the subject than the participant is not acceptable considering the participants are experts of their own experiences, consequently the research and participant should be seen as equals (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The participants have been granted anonymity and to protect the integrity of the interviewee's each participant has been assigned a fictitious name. This was done on the ethical consideration which state that all participant should be protected and all data should be respectfully handled (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015).

Of the 10 interviews, 6 of the interviews were performed through Skype and 4 interviews were done in person. The interviews varied from 44 minutes to 95 minutes (see table 1). From the approval of the participants the interviews, that were held in Swedish, were audio-taped, to be transcribed in verbatim and quotes were translated to English. During the interviews the researcher took notes. After each interview a short description of the interview, interpretations and ideas was written down in order to remember line of thoughts that came up during the interview.

Diary method

As a complementary to the interviews a diary method was utilized. In this approach the participant had time to reflect and write their feelings and thoughts instead of giving an immediate response, thus enriching the material (Hyers, 2017). Considering the purpose of getting a deeper understanding of the consumers, diaries was seen as a good complement as it focuses on the daily lived experience after a specific event (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Solicited diaries gives the researcher control in what the participants should document in the diaries (Hyers, 2017). The aim of the diary method was to get insights into the participants selection of clothes during a typical

work day. It was found during the interviews that their work life persona guided their selection of clothes. Thus the diary approach allowed the participants to elaborate on their feelings and experience of putting an ensemble together for a workday and reflect on this process at the of the day. The participators of the diary were the same group of individuals from the interviews, the diary was anonymous and contained seven questions about their choice of clothing during a workday (see Appendix B). The participants had to complete the diary no longer than 24 hours after the lived experience, because if longer than 24 hours the participants would not remember the events correctly (Jones & Woolley, 2015). Moreover, an email diary was used in this study, since it benefited the participants by not being as time consuming and offered a degree of flexibility as the individual could write with their smartphone directly after the event (Jones & Woolley, 2015), which increases the chances of the participants actually filling it out. Consequently, all of the 10 participants filled out their e-dairies.

Data analysis method

The interviews were transcribed in full, and the analysis started with becoming familiar with the material by reading and re-reading it carefully (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Thereafter, the process of open coding followed by an iterative process. The open coding offers an initial understanding of the data, as the researchers goes line by line looking for sentences or phrases (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). This process was conducted on all interviews, in a Word document with comments and colors making it easy to distinguish the coding. Thereafter the processes moved on by finding events that are related to each other in non-evident ways. In this process of interpretation it is important for the researcher to understand, and acknowledge, that interviewee's might have the same experience but expresses it in different manners. Or the other way around, having similar expressions but different experiences, consequently the researcher needs to identify situations where the intentions were the same

(Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). The comparison between the interviews and their meanings are aiming to find explanatory categories, and this process aim at conceptualizing latent patterns, and not the accuracy of speech (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). From this process common patterns in the interviews are to be identified, and commonalities are referred to as global themes (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989). To aid this process an excel sheet was created in order to identify the meanings. In this research the common patterns, i.e. global themes were found to be meanings of slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption, negotiating fashion, trends and style, dealing with unsustainability, and the contrasting consumer journeys.

Trustworthiness

To assess the 'goodness' of a qualitative research the concept of trustworthiness is a common used method and includes the following four criteria's; dependability, transferability, credibility and conformability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The degree of trustworthiness in this study is considered to be fulfilled. This is based on the comprehensive methodological section that provides information which makes it possible for the reader to follow the research process, which is in accordance with the dependability criteria (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). For instance, the interview guide can be found as Appendix A, and this methodological section describes the interviewee's, the sampling process, and provides a discussion of the data collection method. Moreover, considering transferability is referring to the possibility to find similarities in a different research context, this criterion is met as information about the participants, the number of interviews and the lengths of the interviews as well as the data collection techniques can be found and thus makes it possible to replicate the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The credibility criterion is fulfilled if the researcher has enough data to support claims and arguments, as such the logic of observations and categories should be

evident (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). This criterion has been fulfilled as an initial research on the internet was done to understand the concepts that slow fashion consumers are talking about. In addition, the literature review gave insights into the slow fashion philosophy and guided the interview questions. Thus, supporting the claims. Lastly, the conformability criterion is argued to be fulfilled due to this methodological section as the process has been documented. Hence the reader can follow the logic of the arguments as suggested by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015).

Findings

The following section present the findings, which responds to the purpose of this study, to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers understand the tension between sustainability and fashion. Thus the findings are divided into four specific sections. First the consumer meanings of slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption is presented. Thereafter the negotiation between fashion, trends and style is discussed. How the consumers deal with unsustainability is thereafter analyzed and highlighted. To illustrate the different consumer journeys of the participants in this study, the findings end in a typology of two varying consumer journeys.

Meanings of slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption

All of the participants were at the start of their careers, some had recently gotten a job within their field of studies and the longest since being in school was 6 years. Consequently all of the participants had the aim of advancing in their careers, some wanted to grow within their current employer/field and some had plans on eventually going back to school to pursue a master's degree. Furthermore, two of the participants mentioned their future goals being an owner of a sustainable fashion business.

The participants found purchasing slow fashion to be about more than merely thinking of where to

purchase, it was also about purchasing items that there was an evident need of. As such items that was simply being desired, but not needed was not purchased. Slow fashion was thought of as to think critical of one's clothing consumption, and instead of an ongoing consumption the treatment of owned clothes were important. The items in their wardrobes were purchased with the intent to be worn through several years. Thus, slow fashion was to consume longevity and be solicitous in clothing decisions. Then, the item would be worth the time effort of taking care of it, and the money of repairing it.

“It's to purchase better clothing, more expensive clothes with good quality that if and when it breaks you can spend the extra money to repair it [...]. Also, using the items a lot and not purchase something that is never even worn. Purchase something that you know you will use many many times” - Julia

In order to achieve this lasting wardrobe it demanded to carefully selecting items. The items were required to be used along with other clothes and through several occasions.

“As an example if I purchase a jacket it should last years. Take one my favorite jackets that I've had for a long time, probably more than 10 years. That is slow fashion, you think thoroughly of what you need and then you don't buy everything all the time. Instead, when you buy something you find multiple ways of using it so that it's possible to wear it on multiple occasions” - Hanna

From the participants explanations, slow fashion consumption is to purchase items with the intent of wearing them for years. Newly acquired clothing need to be able to be worn together with other pieces in their wardrobe, and when finding the clothing valuable enough the participants spend money to repair them. Which goes in line with the slow fashion philosophy (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013).

A circular process

In addition to this perspective several participants mentioned slow fashion as a circular process, that started with the producers and finally the consumer could contribute the cycle by donate clothes to be recycled.

“It is about clothes that you mend, and if it’s impossible donate it so it can be recycled, or use the fabric for something else. You have a different mindset than the throwaway culture, you think sustainable and circular” - Maja

The participants concluded that the clothing journey, and especially the end-phase of the item was an important part of slow fashion. After having served its purpose the clothing should be handled in a particular manner. It was expressed that slow fashion was not only about how, what and where to purchase but also about the care, and consideration of the item. Especially what would happened when the item was beyond repairing. In line with this perspective it was important to purchase items that were made with recycled materials, as it contributes to the holistic process of slow fashion.

“I think it’s mostly about shopping recycled materials, and that the companies have sustainable politics and it is also about shopping second hand” - Sofie

In this quote Sofie mentions recycled materials, and the participants expressed their responsibilities as consumers. Retailers would be unable to provide recycled materials to their consumers if consumers are not giving the retailers their old clothes. Additionally, to be a slow fashion retailer, and maybe selling recycled products, the retailer needs to have a sustainable perspective of their business. Lastly, second hand was perceived by the participants as a form of slow fashion. It is a place where consumers can hand in their old clothes, and other consumers can bring these items to life again by acquiring them. In conclusion the consumer held a responsibility in their consumption process,

from selecting retailers, materials to the discarding the clothing.

Retail and second hand consumption

Furthermore, several of the participants talked about the responsibilities from a retailers perspective. Slow fashion was to a great extent up to the consumer, as the consumer had the possibility to make choices that would benefit themselves and others. However, retailers also had a responsibility in becoming more sustainable or inform their consumers about their sustainability. For instance, Alice talked about slow fashion retailers.

“If you’re making clothes that’s expensive, that’s because it cost a lot of money to make the clothes in a fair way and with materials that are better for people. And also the environment. I think that good materials, that are good for the environment, and has not been shipped as long are things I look for. And that’s what I would like to do if I would go into the fashion industry” - Alice

Moreover, purchasing from these retailers also meant to not purchase that often.

“Like Filippa K, I know that they are trying to be sustainable, and when purchasing better quality the items lasts longer and are, generally, timeless so that you don’t have to purchase clothes very often” - Emma

Additionally, other than slow fashion retailers, second hand consumption was explained as something that was not only good for the environment but also for the personal financial situations thus being good for both egoistic and altruistic motives. Similar to the discussions by Jägel *et al.* (2012).

“I bought a jeans jacket second hand, and instead of spending a lot of money I bought someone else’s for 40 crowns. It saves money, but it also saves the environment and that is a mindset worth having” - Elin

Furthermore, it was mentioned that most of the second hand purchases were made through Facebook sites, namely the Facebook Marketplace. The participants felt that this form of shopping was easier, as they could get an overview of all the clothing and meeting up to exchange money for item was a convenient form of shopping.

“I have shopped at Facebook many times, it’s like online shopping. You see exactly what you want, write, and then meet the person. Especially here there is so many people in these groups that you see new stuff every day. It’s easy to find pretty things”
- Sara

Purchasing at Facebook instead of second hand was said to be effortless, as second hand stores were perceived as being unsorted and something that only a few people were good at.

“Some really have an eye for that [second hand shopping] and I envy those people. I know one person I worked with, she was so good at picking out, and find gems in second hand stores. Every time I asked ‘oh where did you get that sweater?’ or those shoes, and it was always second hand”
- Emma

Even though all of the participants engaged in second hand shopping and visited second hand retailers occasionally, the consumption through Facebook was easier and more accessible. Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2015) argued that digitalization has changed the way consumer shop, and aided the slow fashion consumption. This is found to be true in this study as well. This new form of consumption has aided the consumers in their pursuit for a sustainable wardrobe. Consequently, slow fashion occurred both through slow fashion retailers, and sustainable retailers, but also from second hand consumption.

Additionally, the participants stated that when wanting an item that was not a significant piece to purchase, the alternative was to borrow the item from friends or family instead. This notion was evident through all of the participants who had

borrowed clothing from friends or family several times. Thus, slow fashion was about extending their wardrobes to friends and family, and expecting the same in return. Moreover, all of the participants were mending their clothing in some form. Although some altering were outside their sewing knowledge, in these cases the participants turned to their immediate family for help. Occasionally items could be handed in to a seamstress for minor changes, such as changing zipper.

The findings support Jägel *et al.* (2012) discussion of traditional attributes and ethical considerations. As the participants did consider traditional attributes when selecting items, such as price and quality, but also the ethical consideration, fair trade, length of transportation, and so forth. Jägel *et al.* (2012) research showed that the consumer engaged in a negotiation between the altruistic and egoistic values when shopping. This can be argued to be true in this study as well, nonetheless the participants seemed to have found strategies to minimize this inner conflict, i.e. by shopping second hand, carefully select retailers, and consider the clothing to be part of the wardrobe.

Negotiating fashion, trends and style

The findings implied that the participants in this study had a strong connection to their clothing. This can be explained with findings showcasing the consumers inner negotiation process, with the aim to rationalize their purchases. The process of identifying a need and the actual purchase was lengthy, and lasted several weeks. As a consequence occasional purchases were said to have been decreased or eliminated. Seemingly the participants had identified their occasional purchases as unsustainable and had strategies in order to minimize the risk of purchasing something unnecessary. This process was evident in all the participants, and it started with the identification of an item that is needed. Thereafter the participants went on a search, finding the best item for the best price, as purchase were made within a budget. All of the participants have been students at a higher

level, and after their studies their budget had gone up, making it possible to expand the budget. After having found the best item, and acknowledged that the item can be paired with the rest of the wardrobe, the participants assessed their emotional connection to the item. The purpose of which was to assess how much the item would be worn, and the amount of “love” towards the item. During this process, it was evident that having a need for an item became an unwanted desire that often caused anxiety or a bad conscience. As an illustration, the example of Julia will be presented, which adequately describes the anxiety in the consumption process. In the following quote Julia talked about the T-shirt she was wearing during the interview.

“Right now I’m wearing a T-shirt from Patagonia, it’s made of recycled plastic I think, like PET bottles. And that is the kind of things I’m looking for, because I feel like it can mend my conscious when purchasing something. Like you feel that ‘yeah, I bought something I needed but it wasn’t as bad as a T-shirt from H&M made in Bangladesh with 100 percent viscose” - Julia

However, in order to relieve this anxiety the assessment of the emotional connection seemed to be significant. As the feeling of having an item that would be greatly appreciated seemed to ease the anxiety. After the assessment of emotional connection to the item, the clothing was purchased or discarded. Moreover, after purchasing the item it was seen as an essential part of the wardrobe. As an example Julia, after having gone through the consumption process, talked about a shirt that she often wears at work.

“It is a standard Julia shirt. I don’t even think people see that I’m wearing it anymore, since I always wear it. I feel, like, this is me” - Julia

The following process illustrates the slow fashion consumption, with the sole aim of minimizing their fashion consumption. The participants aimed at having long lasting, quality pieces similar to what is being described as the desire of a slow fashion consumer (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). The

process of purchasing items that were loved and that was seen as an essential part of oneself is true to the findings of Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2015), and this finding indicates the true nature of the slow fashion consumer. Arguably this form of consumption, in the perspective of the consumer being an identity-seeker (Gabriel & Lang, 2006), can be seen as a wanting to purchase item carried with meaning rather than image. The unique items are a contrast to mass-produced clothing, and the items connects the consumer with meaning rather than image.

Fashion

From the interviews it was evident that the time between the consumption of one clothing item to the next could take several months due to the lack of consumption need. For instance, Sofie talked about the need of an item and said that it often goes months before purchasing anything.

“It has happened that I haven’t purchased anything for six months, I just didn’t need anything. When I do shop, I need something and then I go and buy it. But it has happened that I haven’t shopped for months, like six months or even more” - Sofie

This is interesting since it is a resistance towards fashion. The findings showed that the participants collected items were strongly connected to their personality and it can be argued that this made them keep the items longer, taking care of them and when it cannot be used any longer it would be reused for something else. For instance, the average age of the items that the participant was asked to present during the interviews was 7 years. However some of the items were second hand, and the age of the item in someone else’s possession is not included. For instance Stina’s raincoat was from the 1970’s and had belonged to her aunt before Stina got it in 2013.

“It’s from Fjällräven. My mom gave it to me, or I found it in mom’s basement. And I think my aunt had it when she was young. I think it’s a kid’s jacket, but I wear it all the time. It’s one of my favorite items [...] I got in when I moved to

Uppsala, so it was 2013 I think. It has lasted very well” - Stina

During a visit at a Fjällräven the workers had approached her about the jacket, and Stina said the following about their conversation.

“I had it on once when I visited Fjällräven and they thought it was cool that it was so old” - Stina

The coat has a twofold symbolic meaning; one being the family heirloom and the connection towards the item comes from it being passed from aunt, to mom to child. Second the coat is a vintage piece, a unique item that is impossible to find elsewhere, and having these items creates a symbolic meaning that cannot be replaced by trends (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). If sustainability is an indicator of status, as previously suggested, then the possession of this coat offers the holder status.

Moreover, another key finding first occurred during the interview with Julia, it was clear that she thought of herself as a fashionista, and tried to be an influencer towards others. Although she had a hard time being this fashionista whilst slowing down her consumption.

“I try to be fashionista as much as I can but it’s hard because I am not a big consumer of clothes” – Julia

Similar to Julia’s view of herself as a fashionista, Alice considered herself to be a trendsetter and she also faced issues in her fashion interest and her desire for sustainability.

“Clothes is about expressing my creativity, I am not good at anything else, not music, not painting, so this is my way to express it. [...] I bought a jumpsuit in jeans, and that was one of those things that I felt ‘Oh My God, I cannot live without this. And I that’s one of these things where I have to give myself some cred, cause I am a founder of the jeans trend”- Alice

Later when discussing sustainability Alice said that it is important to always think of new ways to be sustainable, and to challenge habits. Additionally, she did not believe it is possible to trade one sustainable act to another.

“I don’t think you should pat yourself on the shoulder for being sustainable, it’s just normal behavior. But I’m happy that even though I have a huge fashion interest that I am responsible, and that I reuse, and shop second hand and that I don’t consume as much” - Alice

This desire for fashion was a conflict towards their desire to be sustainable, and even though the participants took certain measures to ensure sustainability the ongoing consumption of items were necessary in order to keep up with this persona of being a fashionista or trendsetter. As when Julia was in need of a T-shirt or Alice need of a jumpsuit, the slow fashion retailers (Patagonia) offered a relief of anxiety. In this consumption process the acceptance and acknowledgement from others were important in order to keep this persona going, and purchasing from slow fashion brands became important in order for others to accept their choice. This was especially evident from the diaries, as the findings indicated that the participants were in need of positive reinforcements from others of their outfits. The idea of being a trendsetter, fashionista and in need of compliments can be argued to be a part of the participants social self. As the social self refers to how the individuals believes others are perceiving them (Banister & Hogg, 2012). In this narrative the participants believes others are seeing them as trendsetters of fashionistas, and thus consumption is necessary in maintaining this identity.

Putting together aesthetics styles, displaying creativity whilst maintaining sustainability were as previously suggested central themes. The participants wanted to express their creativity and show others their capability of putting together aesthetic outfits. Their desire was to be well-dressed and have a style that is unique from others by distinguished features on the items. Purchasing

items that would be an essential piece lasting through time, whilst being a unique. The idea to have an aesthetic outfit and look better than others goes in line with the social comparison theory (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012). These signature pieces offered status and acceptance from others. Addressing oneself as a trendsetter is a way of putting oneself on top of the fashion social hierarchy, and the risk of falling behind this status hierarchy made the consumption of clothing an ongoing process, albeit at second hand or slow fashion retailers. Additionally, this fashion narrative influences the cultural rooted consumption society, even though the participant is trying to minimize their consumption. It creates a narrative of being sustainable and fashionable, as the questions begs: is it even possible?

Consequently, the consumer is involved in a conflicting tensions of the basic needs of shopping clothes and the ongoing creation of a fashion identity. To prolong this consumption practice the consumer shops items that cannot be lived without and were an extensions of self-image. However as the items are consumed from a more sustainable form of retailer, the fashion consumption creates a narrative of being sustainable whilst being a trendsetter. In this narrative the participants believes others are seeing them as trendsetters of fashionistas, and thus consumption is necessary in maintaining this identity. Seemingly it was important that others knew that even though fashion is a great interest, sustainability was a central theme fundamentally sustainability became one of their communicating self-identities along with trendsetter/fashionista.

Trends

In the juxtaposition of trends and style, trends was understood as unnecessary and as a technique for fashion companies to convey impressionable fashion conscious consumers to purchase an enormous amount of clothes. Trends were simultaneously being perceived as enjoyable and something more than merely a clothing item. Additionally, trends were recognized as a catalyst for new perspectives, thoughts and building

inspiration. Having clothes that were considered trendy was a way to take part of the present and represent our current time, which was deemed important. Trends were perceived as something for them to interpret, thus even though everyone are wearing the same trend their own interpretation of that trend is different from others. While the participants had the perspective of trends being almost forced upon by fashion companies, it was something they enjoyed as it was seen as an expression of creativity rather than simply a consumption of products.

“Trends offer a new perspective in everyday life. [...] And it can give a positive effect on your wardrobe because you try new things and it opens your perspective. Like, I have an old blazer that my grandma used to wear. It’s very broad shouldered and special, and got some criticism for it, people didn’t understand why I wore such a big blazer. But now it’s popular again. And I think it’s fun that my grandma’s blazer, that she had in the 80’s got, like a new life. That’s the cool thing with trends, old stuff get life again” - Elin

The consumers then are in a constant negotiation of wanting to be sustainable and wanting to express their inner self. The consumer is trying to be trendy whilst conforming to the ego-ideal (Gabriel & Lang, 2006), the sustainable consumer.

“Not too long ago it was a trend to have short pants, you know to the ankle. So, I took some old pants and a scissor and cut them. Also, the t-shirt trend, when it was a trend to have short t-shirts, I took some old t-shirts I wasn’t using and made them short” - Emma

Thus when possible the consumer engaged in non-consumption behavior in a quest to be sustainable and trendy. Which goes well in line with slow fashion (Clark, 2008; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Instead of purchasing new items the participants were borrowing or obtained clothes from friends or family, alter old clothes to match current trends as Emma did with the pants and T-shirt.

Furthermore, the findings also indicated that when a current trend was difficult to achieve by tailoring items at home, there was a demand to purchase the item. These purchases were rationalized of being important, as there was a ‘love’ of the item or the item had to be something smaller like sunglasses or ear rings that the participants did not have at home. If so, the item had to be according to their personal style, and thus even though it being a trend the intention was to wear it for a long period of time.

“You see trends and get influenced, but I only buy things I’m comfortable in and fits me [...] The most important part is that the items lasts a long time so I don’t have to purchase new one’s” - Olivia

Trends had the narrative of being a creative outlet, however, trends, and the interpretation of them, are probably more connected to the uniqueness and sameness theory rather than being an expression of an identity of being creative (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). The pursuit of trends, either by altering old clothes or purchasing signature pieces, connects the participants to the sameness of others, simultaneously their interpretations of the trends makes them same albeit unique from others. Similar to the discussion by Gabriel and Lang (2006), who suggest that having a unique fashion item not only bring the uniqueness and the identity to the holder, but also status. In this situation, the participants get status from being sustainable, as it is considered to be important for them and those around them. Thus, the altered clothes becomes a status barrier for the participant, as sustainability is getting an increased awareness in the Swedish society. Moreover, the need to take part of trends as a form of engaging in the social reality in which the participants are living in, is a form of status consumption. Veblen (2008) discussed in Conspicuous consumption that wearing fashion that illustrates the current time is a form of status. In consideration of trends being highly valued by the participants it can be argued that it is a technique to not be deprived of status, rather taking part of trends. whilst being sustainable, is a method to maintain status.

Style

From the interviews it was evident that the participants desired style was that of a business woman. Considering the participants were graduates and belonged to the young professionals group this finding is perhaps not that surprising. However, similar to the discussion in meanings of fashion the participants had a strong emotional connection to their work style and wardrobe. Several years had been spent on building a wardrobe that would be appropriate for work. Especially one of the participants adequately illustrated the desire to belong to a certain identity and style, as she described being 10 years old and visiting her father at a finance company. At his job she explained that everyone were well-dressed, the men in suits with pocket squares, and women in pencil skirts, blouses and heels. Her strong desire to belong to this world made her purchase her first pencil skirt at 14 years old, however never having an opportunity to wear it she stored it in her wardrobe for 10 years until she finally had her degree and a matching job where she was able to wear this business style.

“I saw them walking around in heels, pencil skirts and blouses. And I felt like I wanted to do that too, and it feels crazy to be wearing that now after thinking about it since I was 8 years old” - Elin

Interviewer: How does that make you feel?

“It makes me feel wonderful! At first I was nervous that my wardrobe wasn’t enough, but I quickly noticed that it was” - Elin

The quotes illustrate the process of identifying a desired identity, purchasing according to the identity and finally belonging to the identity whilst signaling status. One possible reason for this finding could be based on the participants being young professionals, as such the participants had aspired for a life within the business sector for several years. Additionally, several participants aspired to have their own business in the future preferably working with sustainability. Consequently, the identity of a ‘business woman’ have been negotiated for a long time and their own

style was described as ‘modern’, ‘chic’, ‘timeless’ and ‘business’. In the process of pursuing this identity the aim was to build a timeless and classic wardrobe, suitable for every event. As such each piece in their wardrobe was carefully selected to ensure it would last through time and that it would match the clothes currently in the wardrobe. Thus, for these participants style has been a process in the trajectory of a future desired self as suggested by Thompson and Haytko (1997).

Furthermore, the participants had a difficult time in knowing which brands were sustainable or not. Perhaps unsurprisingly as researchers are stating that there are no slow fashion retailers (Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013).

“Fast fashion is terrible for the environment, and it feels like every business is fast fashion. It is very hard to know which ones are good” - Stina

However, there seemed to be a common assumption that expensive brands were high-priced due to their sustainable production. As a recurring example Ralph Lauren was mentioned for their sustainability work, and especially the cotton. This is problematic because if these participants believe that a premium price automatically means a sustainable brand the participants can forget to be critical. Lack of knowledge is an issue well documented in the field of sustainable clothing consumption research. However for the participants to ensure sustainability they had a long consumption process, presented in meanings of fashion. Additionally, when the participants were in doubt about a certain brand, like Ralph Lauren, the consensus was to shop second hand and wear the brand for years which is according to the slow fashion philosophy (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). As an illustration Elin talked about the brand.

“What makes a Ralph Lauren special is the logo, it enhances the shirt and you can wear it with jeans and you will still be very nicely dressed. If you would have a basic white shirt without the logo it

wouldn't be the same, you won't make the same impression. It's something about the brand” - Elin

Even though the issue is lack of information, the brand is filled with symbolic meanings. It could be so that the participants are not willing to research the Ralph Lauren brand due to the possibility of them being unsustainable. This argument is based on the participants perception of Ralph Lauren as a brand, illustrating the importance of the logo, the brand Ralph Lauren. The participants who discuss Ralph Lauren also stated that most of their Ralph Lauren items were second hand items.

“Shopping second hand makes me feel good, I get a good conscience” – Sara

Second hand shopping is seen as a form of slow fashion consumption (Clark, 2008; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Consequently, shopping Ralph Lauren at second hand indicates that the brand is desired in their creation of a professional identity, and by utilizing different outlets than retail shops, the participants are minimizing their anxiety. Thus, even though having the need to dress in a certain style these participants had the desire to be sustainable. Furthermore the brand Ralph Lauren is being used to signal status and set a social standard similar to the discussion by Moisander and Valtonen (2006). Purchasing these items, in a sustainable fashion, the narrative of being sustainable and professional are combined. In this situation the participants are granted status by having the “correct” ensemble whilst being sustainable.

A common assumption that was found was that each clothing item should be purchased with the intent to be used for a long time and should be appropriate for different circumstances. Having the right outfit for the right functions was important, as representing an attended function in an appropriate manner was imperative. Additionally their clothing had to be comfortable as the customer never wanted to be at risk of feeling misplaced and could solely focus at the event and/or task at hand, no matter which were the circumstances. To minimize

the risk of not having the right outfit it was important that clothes were versatile, and preferably interchangeably by the removal or addition of jewelry. This perspective is also considered to be a form of creativity as the participants spent time on putting together different outfits, and use the same clothing for different events albeit varied in shoes and accessories. The participants had a wardrobe with matching items that could be worn for a long time, whilst never being unfashionable or go out of style. Having clothing that could be worn for a workday but that could also be used at home or other places ensured the protection of their style.

“When I see something I like I try to think, is this appropriate for work, leisure time or only at a fancy christening? If it only suitable for the christening I won’t buy it, I want to wear it at work or home too so I can get a lot of use of it” - Hanna

This strategy, can be viewed from the perspective of being a sustainable form of clothing consumption, having items that fit at all events would consequently minimize clothing consumption. However, it can also be regarded as a strategy to keep status, as having clothes that are versatile also offers a wardrobe that is acceptable anytime, anywhere. This illustrates the discussion of Ulver-Sneistrup (2012) that fashion is used in social adaptations or differentiations, especially in this circumstance the participants wanted to fit in during events. The participants wanted to imitate others to fit in and thus minimizes the risk of losing status among others (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012).

Considering the participants had spent time and effort to select their style and select their items, the participants found it burdensome to discard old clothes. Their perception was that the every item in the wardrobe should be used, and if the current item is shredded or if the item did not fit it was remade into something new. If the fabric and the material were still looking good, the items were made into something completely new or it was altered. As an example, Maja had a favorite pair of jeans, when the jeans ripped to the point of them not being

possible to save, she made the jeans into a bag. It was explained that the love the item made it hard for her to throw it away, along with the desire to be sustainable, as such she sewed it. Another example of this is Oliva, who had several pieces in her wardrobe that had been altered from a dress into a blouse. Olivia had worn the dresses when she was younger, but as she grew older she felt the dresses were too short to wear.

“I ask my grandma for help, I had a dress that I liked but it got too short, so she helped me making the dress into a blouse” - Olivia

The common perception was that the every item in the wardrobe should be used, preferable as clothing but if the items were shredded then it became reused as something else. For instance, several of the participants used old clothes for household purpose, like a cloth, and to use in the garage. Additionally, items that were in good shape was either donated or sold, depending on the price of the items. The participants gave it to friends or family, handed it in at second hand stores/sold it on Facebook or gave it to charity in bin’s that can be found in the cities. As such the participants took care of their items, albeit to the hands of someone else. Slow fashion refers to using clothes for a long time and taking care of them and so forth (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). The need to find another owner to old clothing can be regarded as a form of taking care, as the participants wanted the items to be used instead of being unworn, sitting in the wardrobe.

Dealing with unsustainability

All of the participants talked about how sustainability came to be important when purchasing clothing items. The common ground were the insights on how their personal actions and behavior impacted others, and the Swedish drought during the last 2 years was mentioned as a wakeup call as they had been personally affected by the lack of water. The seriousness in environmental issues had been awakened, in addition to their personal situations the discussions from media, school and

work had made them more aware of environmental deterioration. Moreover, the discussions of fast fashion and especially the social unsustainability in terms of child labor and work environment had made a negative impact. Which had made them think twice before purchasing at fast fashion outlets. The participants expressed an understanding of their impact on this issue and had thus made a conscious decision to change consumption patterns. In order to minimize their negative impact these consumers tried to evaluate businesses prior to purchasing, and said that when spending money at a business, purchasing a shirt for example, the purchase symbolizes an acceptance of the way the retail company is conducting their business. Thus if the retail business is concerned with social responsibility, so are the consumer when spending money at the business, i.e. every dollar spent is an endorsement of that business. Wearing these brands that are communicating their values, and are equal to the individual's own values, it enhances their identity and creates an image. Through this image the participant have the possibility to enhance their status, as Griskevicius *et al.* (2010) findings indicated that prosocial behavior enhances status. On the other hand, if purchasing from fast fashion retailers and wearing these brands status might be diverted. Which can explain why these participants were involved in a process of evaluating businesses before making a purchase, to ensure the maintenance of status.

Some of the participants acknowledge that after gaining this awareness they had purchased from fast fashion retailers. These purchases caused anxiety, and these participants expressed an acknowledgement of selfishness. The participants had the intention of being sustainable but found it difficult to fulfill at times. Sofie revealed that she had purchased an item at a fast fashion retailer recently, even though she does not like these retailers due to their unsustainable nature. She expressed that she does not feel good after but had a tactic in how to deal with her feelings.

“My anxiety gets so bad. But, then I try not to think about it” - Sofie

Sofie was not the only participant that expressed the feeling of anxiety when failing to purchase sustainable. The anxiety several of the participants felt can be interpreted to be due to the quest for the ego-ideal and failing in this quest to reach the ego-ideal (Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Several of the participants expressed that in the future they would only eat organic, be vegans, not drive a car, and know exactly where to consume sustainable items; as of now some purchased intimates, basic tank tops and shoes at non-sustainable retailers due to a lack of slow fashion retailers. The ego-ideal is thus to be truly slow fashion, in all aspects of consumption, however when failing to meet this desire it creates an inner conflict. It can be argued that even though these participants are actively thinking about sustainability they are grown up in a consumer culture, in a consumption society, with a constant pressure to consume. Thus, allowing oneself to be tempted can cause a consumption of items. These participants acknowledged their flaws as sustainable fashion consumers, but are striving at becoming truly sustainable.

Seemingly, the previous discussed strategies to minimize consumption, by assessing the emotional connection to the item, caring for the clothes or altering clothes, are methods to ensure that sustainable fashion consumption would occur. It also seems that these strategies grew in conjunction to the increased environmental awareness. Thus, the participants ego-ideal, discussed by Gabriel and Lang (2006), grew in alignment with the success of these strategies making the participants realize it is possible to be sustainable whilst consuming. However when failing to meet this the participants felt remorseful, as they knew that there are alternatives towards this form of unsustainable consumption. This unsustainable consumption did not correspond to their sustainable identity.

Contrasting consumer journeys – the fashionista and the sustainable shopper

The participants had different consumption stories, and their interviews have been summarized into these meanings of. From the interviews it is possible to determine two types of consumption stories, some of these have been identified in consumer story 1 and others in consumer type 2. In the following section a narrative of their slow fashion consumption, and the meanings, will be presented.

Consumer story 1: The critical fashionista

This was a proclaimed trendsetter, and in the past she had been a big consumer of clothes. However, her mindset started to shift after having been personally impacted by unsustainable effects, such as the Swedish drought. Consequently, this consumer had not been a sustainable fashion consumer very long. There was a conflict between the desired self and the anxiety from purchasing clothing due to the stigma surrounding mass consumption and environmental pollution from purchasing clothing items.

“I find that shopping is something negative nowadays, especially during the last 2 years as there has been a lot of focus on sustainability and the environment. And I think the society, and especially me, have been informed about the impact from consumption, on nature and how much crap we make in this world and how much crap we consume and produce that we don’t really need. And it is sick that we live in this society that encourage and, like, spur it on. Shopping used to be something that I found cozy, to go and shop, getting something new and I used to feel fresh and pretty and all that. And now, I get anxiety every time I feel like I need something. Shopping is very bittersweet” - Julia

There were an inner conflict between her interest in clothing and the awareness of the clothing industry

being highly unsustainable. For this consumer clothes served as a marker, as it was a way for her to be different from others and she enjoyed looking at, purchasing and styling different clothes and outfits. As a result this interest was also the cause for a great deal of anxiety and guilt as her desire to be updated and having new clothes were difficult to manage in their pursuit for a sustainable wardrobe. Which directly correspond with Jägel *et al.* (2012) argument about the inner conflict between looking good and benefiting future generations. In line with this the consumers’ stated when spending money at a business, purchasing a shirt for example, the purchase symbolizes an acceptance of the way the retail company is doing their business. This means that if the retailer is concerned about sustainable cotton as an example, then when spending money you are endorsing their business. As a result if the retailer is sustainable so is the consumer, because when giving someone your money you also give them the possibility to do what they want with those money. This consumer was very critical to her own consumption and viewed her consumption as the most unsustainable habit that she had.

“I think that considering I don’t travel, eat meat and all that my biggest problem is shopping. All other things is just ridiculous to say, like I use paper towels instead of a dish rag [...] I would say that my clothing consumption is my biggest anxiety” - Alice

However, shopping did not necessarily have to be a transaction of money and product, shopping was said to give inspiration, thoughts and new perspectives and outlooks on life. If the issue would be to simply have clothes to wear, disregard to what this clothing would be, they would never have to purchase anything else again. As such the clothes are used for self-image rather than utilitarian need (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Johanna Nilsson states that the most sustainable clothing items are those that are worn the most (Ehlin, 2019), however as this consumer is interested in the internal and external acceptance from others there is an ongoing consumption on slow fashion items (Lundblad &

Davies, 2016). The status coming from wearing these clothes are important, as the desire is to be on top of the status hierarchy (Ulver-Sneistrup, 2012). This goes in line with their own perceptions of being a trendsetter, mainly because when setting the trends and especially interpreting a trend it serve as a form of creative outlet that expresses something about them as an individual that others can imitate. In this instance, the clothes are sustainable and if sustainability is an increasing trend it fits their perception of being a trendsetter.

Consumer story 2: The sustainable shopper

As a contrast to the first consumer type, who had never acted on sustainability before she personally had been affected by environmental issues. This type of consumer had a sustainable mindset from her upbringing, this had made her times unaware of her behavior being sustainable.

“Someone is using old clothes and it becomes like a second life for them [about shopping second hand] or to give clothes to charity. Like to cousins or so. I have inherited clothes from my older cousins, and yes that is sustainable. I’ve never had any problem with it. Some of my clothes have often been used by my friends, and I’ve used theirs. Because you like each other’s clothes and it is possible to exchange clothes with very close friends. That is probably sustainable as well. But I don’t really think about it while I am doing it. That it’s sustainable. I do it, and then I understand ‘oh, this is something good’. I think that process can be a bit backwards for me” - Sofie

Moreover, as this consumer had a different perspective they had purchased from fast fashion retailer even after their decision to minimize fashion consumption. There was an acknowledgment of selfishness in knowing the unsustainable nature of fast fashion but occasionally purchasing from them. However, if purchasing from these retailer the item were under scrutiny, as it had to last for a long time even though it being of worse quality. This type of

consumer did not have a problem with wearing it even though it had holes. Instead she expressed that clothes does not have to be pretty at all times, and as long as one is aware of it is not a problem. As an example sweatpants was said to be best if they had been worn in, almost being ripped.

“I got a sweater that got holes under the arms, but I wear it anyways because it’s so cozy. And I love wearing sweatpants that are so worn to the point that they are almost see through, that’s when they are the most comfortable. I don’t even fix them, I stop wearing it when it’s completely ragged” - Stina

The idea of wearing clothes until it is impossible to wear them anymore goes in line with the slow fashion idea of the most sustainable clothing to be worn are those that are worn the most. However, these items were never worn at work rather at home. Being comfortable was important, and the practices of them wearing the items this way makes them slow fashion. As Zarley Watson and Yan (2013) states, the clothing makes the slow fashion.

While the other narrative was of a proclaimed fashionista, this consumer was said not to pay attention to trends. However during conversations it was evident that trends did play a huge part in their life, even though not aware of it. For instance, when Olivia was talking about trends she said that she did not follow them.

“I think it was mostly when I was young and wanted to fit in. I don’t know if I have purchased any trends recently, like the 80’s are in now and I don’t like that” – Oliva

Later in the conversation we talked about her headband currently being in trend.

“Oh yes it is. I have it because I couldn’t manage doing my hair. But I never got a yellow one before this, but this was one of the one’s I found, and a black one” - Olivia

In this scenario, Olivia was wearing a yellow headband, and currently yellow and head accessories are trending. So even though Olivia had the perception of not following trends, her clothing made it apparent that she was. Thus, the need of fitting in and following trends are bigger than the participants were aware of. Similar to the findings of Schiermer (2010), as these participants were not aware of them imitating others.

Summary of findings

The findings has shown that slow fashion was seen as a holistic consumption, a circular process from where to purchase to the disposal of clothing, where the participants consumed clothing through slow fashion retailers or second hand. The participants had a long consumption process in order to ensure the longevity of the item, with a long-term aim to minimize clothing consumption. To take part of trends the participants altered existing items, borrowed clothes or, if necessary, purchased. A desired style had been identified long before their pursuit of sustainable clothing, which created tensions as it at times became difficult to align them both. Furthermore, the findings has shown that consumers experience different consumer journeys, illustrated as the critical fashionista and sustainable shopper. The critical fashionista was critical of her fashion consumption and sought new methods to increase sustainability in their consumption, whereas the sustainable shopper was sustainable most of the time, sometimes unknowingly.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how consumers understand the tension between sustainability and fashion, with the aim to contribute with insights into slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption from a consumer perspective. The study has been guided by the following research question: *How do young professionals make sense of slow fashion and sustainable clothing consumption?*

This study found that in the navigation through career, fashion and sustainability, slow fashion consumers minimizes their anxiety and conscience through a more sustainable form of fashion consumption. As these consumers attempt to build their professional identities and advance in their careers, fashion and clothing are a part of their identity construction. The findings indicated that status was a central theme in their consumption of slow fashion. Simultaneously, it was found that the creation of a sustainable identity whilst consuming clothes eased their anxiety and conscience. Their consumption were guided by their ego-ideal; to be sustainable in all matters of life.

Additionally, trends were a significant way of taking part of the social world thus the consumer did partake in trends, although efforts were made in order to ensure sustainability while consuming trends. It was found that these consumers selected their items carefully, with a long consumption process which turned the items into a part of their identity. Clothing was not purchased on a monthly, or weekly basis, rather clothing was purchased based on needs. If purchasing unique items were preferred, and the approval from others of their fashion choices were found important. Once again highlighting that status was indeed significant in their consumption of clothing.

In conclusion this study shows that the consumers' are involved in tensions when constructing meanings of their consumption. The symbolic meaning of slow fashion, in a time where sustainability is widely discussed at both national and local level in Swedish, seem to offer the consumer status. As being sustainable, by shopping slow fashion, and displaying this sustainability indicates that the consumer is engaging in a prosocial behavior. Thus this conclusion support Griskevicius *et al.* (2010) findings in consumers being prosocial as it benefits their status. This also offers an explanation to the consumers self-proclaimed trendsetter status whilst being a slow fashion consumer, by being one of the first on the slow fashion wagon. Thus the trendsetter status could be considered fairly sustainable, especially in

connection to trends as the consumers altered existing items before making any purchase. If these consumers further communicate their slow fashion consumption perhaps more will follow.

The following study offers a perspective on the young professional and their sustainable fashion consumption meanings, this study is addressing the gap between identity formation and slow fashion consumption.

Future research

A suggestion for future research is making a comparison between fast fashion and slow fashion consumers in order to identify differences and similarities. Such research would offer important insights into how these two consumers make sense of their consumption, and would contribute to the slow fashion field as well as identity theory. A third suggestion would be to investigate slow fashion from the perspective of a slow fashion retailer, in such research the focus could be at their perceived barriers for marketing their products. As a result this research could offer further suggestions for slow fashion retailers, and sustainable businesses, on how to engage more consumers to engage in slow fashion practices. Lastly, a research looking at slow fashion from a practice theory approach would benefit current research and further narrow the slow fashion practices and theories. As of now, slow fashion is a broad concept and such research could further help with a slow fashion definition.

Managerial implications

The following section contains managerial implications for sustainable, and slow fashion, businesses. The implications are relevant for slow

fashion retailers, but also for others looking for sustainable business models. By using this study, consumption meanings are present that can be used as a tool to create a sustainable business.

First, considering slow fashion should put emphasis on educating consumers, slow fashion retailers should communicate their sustainable nature more than what is done today. Consumers are demanding more information by retailers and wants them to be transparent, retailers that meets these needs have the possibility to gain credibility. This based on the current lack of information, and the thirst for more knowledge of and from sustainable retailers. Second, offering consumers tailor services for “ordinary” clothing is something the slow fashion consumers are positive towards. The author acknowledges that current tailor business models are available, however a change towards a new form of tailor is needed. Making it possible for all types of consumers to alter their existing clothes, as one does when going to a shoemaker to change the sole of a shoe. Consumers are interested although it has to be a new form of tailor as consumers are interested but currently not hiring tailors. Third, building on the previous idea, having sewing classes to teach consumers how to remake, alter, or mend their clothing can be a future trend. The findings indicated that the consumers already does this in some form, however there was an identified gap in knowledge of bigger remakes. Fourth, offering the consumers limited selections in offline stores would make it easier for consumers to find their favorite items. However the author acknowledge that this is not possible in smaller cities, although the findings indicated that the consumer prefer smaller stores.

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Appendix A: Interview guide

Introduction

- Age, residence, degree, career goals, interests, future plans, vacations, hobbies
- Normal day and weekend in their life
- Holidays

Style

- Description of wardrobe and style
- What shopping and clothes mean to them
- Where and how often they shop for clothes
- Procedure of shopping: important things to look for etc.

Trends

- Thoughts about trends
- Trends followed: which ones, why etc.

Items they brought

- How old the item is, why they have kept it etc.
- When they used it last
- Feelings towards the item
- What makes it their favorite item etc.

Sustainability and clothes

- Take care of items: laundry, mending, dry-cleaning, steaming etc.
- What happens to old clothes
- Shopping ban: their experience with shopping bans

Retail stores

- Favorite store
- Last visit
- Feelings
- Second hand experiences: feelings, visits etc.

Lifestyle and sustainability

- Sustainability in everyday life
- Non-sustainability in everyday life
- Fast fashion
- Slow fashion
- Sustainability
- Sustainable clothing

Final questions

- If you could wish for an item that you could use for a long time, preferable several years, what would it be?
- If you had the opportunity to start over with your wardrobe, what clothing items would be there?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Diary method

Introduction: *information about the diary. Ex. They were told to describe in own words as elaborate as possible. Them being anonymous etc.*

Topic 1: The items worn; brands, colors etc.

Topic 2: More of the items: age, purchased etc.

Topic 3: Decision process behind selecting the items

Topic 4: Other times having worn the outfit

Topic 5: Comments from others

Topic 6: Feelings

Topic 7: Additional information