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Consumers' sustainable choices in fashion:

The influence of the relationships between sustainability labels, related competences
and meanings of the sustainable shopping practice

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Abstract

Sustainability labels have been used extensively in fashion companies recently as a way to communicate with consumers about sustainability issues, and to inform them of their choices by presenting relevant information about the environmental and social performance of products. This paper takes an approach to sustainable shopping in the context of fashion from a practice theory perspective. Therefore, it focuses on analyzing the links between sustainability labels functioning as materials and the related competences and meanings of the sustainable shopping practice; as well as exploring how consumers' sustainable fashion choices are affected by these components. The findings of this study present that due to a lack of related competences and meanings regarding consumers' knowledge, understanding and concerns about sustainability issues caused by the apparel industry; consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding of sustainability labels; as well as consumers' trust in sustainability labels, the influence of sustainability labels on consumers' sustainable fashion choices is not considerable enough to make them perform the sustainable shopping practice. It is indicated that in order for the sustainable shopping practice to be performed, there is a need for the specific configuration of all components that enables and shapes the performance of the practice. More specifically, consumers will act more sustainably when they have know-how and knowledge to use sustainability labels and are capable of understanding the conveyed information; perceive sustainability labels as meaningful and useful; have knowledge, understanding and concerns regarding environmental and social issues related to the fashion industry, and understand the significant difference of making sustainable choices and consumption compared with conventional shopping. Furthermore, it is indicated that the sustainable shopping practice in the fashion context is quite complicated as consumers are not always consistent when it comes to what they know, trust or are concerned about and what they actually do.

Keywords: sustainability labels, practice theory, sustainable shopping, sustainable fashion

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Introduction

The environmental and social concern has become a critical topic for both marketers and policy makers across the world (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). Not only has the concern about the effects of consumers' consumption behaviors on the environment increased, many organizations are also under increasing pressure to integrate environmental and social responsibilities into their business strategies. Therefore, corporate social responsibility is strongly argued as "a base requirement of operating in the 21st century and is not an option" (Charter et al. 2002, p.8). According to Shen et al (2014), in the fashion industry, companies have shown their efforts to reduce the negative effects on the environment and society through the marketing of their products. One of the primary ways is through sustainability labels. Therefore, sustainable labelling has become a more used tool by many retailers in a variety of industries, as it shows their efforts and strong intentions to fulfill consumer's demands of sustainable products (Henninger, 2015). D'Souza et al. (2019) further argue that eco-labels can be considered as a strategic initiative for companies and are identified as an effective communication tool for green marketing. Thus, eco-labels not only provide consumers with information about the environmental performance of the products but also impact and guide consumers towards a more sustainable purchasing behavior (Heinzle & Wüstenhagen, 2012). The notion of eco-labels has been understood, to a large extent, in connection to the information or the claims about a product that possesses specific environmental and social attributes (De Boer, 2003). In the studies of Horne (2009) and Taufique et al. (2014), this term is primarily concerned with the environmental aspect of sustainability while in the research of Bratt et al. (2011), it covers both environmental and social aspects of sustainability. In order to make it clear in this paper, the comprehensive notion of sustainability labels is understood to cover both environmental and social aspects of sustainability or either of them. This view is based on the definition of sustainable products proposed by Danciu (2013, p.390) which consists of all aspects of sustainability including economic, environmental and social, as follows:

"A sustainable product is an item or service that minimizes its impact on resource use and environment and maximizes that on society at each stage of its life cycle".

Many research studies have been conducted to investigate the ecological behaviors in purchasing choices, particularly the potential elements that can influence consumers' sustainable choices (Testa et al., 2015). Some researchers focus on the internal elements such as knowledge about product effects on the environment or attitude towards environmental issues while other scholars explore the motives leading consumers to purchase green products

(Testa et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the influence of sustainability label information on consumers' intention to purchase sustainable products is not very clear in some studies (D'Souza et al., 2019), particularly in the field of apparel industry. For instance, the effect of the cognitive process on consumers when reading label information, which is one of the selection principles that green purchase decisions can be based on (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). This study contributes to filling this gap by improving the understanding of how the information on sustainability labels is used and made sense by consumers in the fashion context, in connection with their knowledge, understanding and concerns with regard to sustainability issues. This study approaches sustainable shopping in the fashion context from a practice theory perspective. According to Røpke (2009), the practice theory approach in relation to studies of everyday life and domestic practices can be used as a primary framework for analysis to significantly enhance the understanding of sustainable consumption. It is because a co-evolutionary perspective that combines the research of domestic practices with the research of their wider ramifications can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the shaping of the environmental influences of consumption (Røpke, 2009). So far, most environmental studies on consumption and production have been conducted in separate fields.

As pointed out by Reckwitz (2002), practices that are performed by individuals involve routinized ways of doing, describing and understanding. Hence, in order to understand the practices, more specifically in this paper, sustainable shopping practices, it is critical to study the actions which are derived from the practice (Schatzki, 1997), hereby the sustainable consumption choices of the individuals. Sustainable shopping practices consist of three critical and interrelated elements, namely materials, competences and meanings (Fuentes, 2014; Røpke, 2009). In this paper, the specific configuration of sustainability labels, functioning as materials, and the related competences and meanings that together enable and shape the performance of the sustainable shopping practice in the fashion context, will be analyzed. One can argue that the way that consumers relate to sustainability labels can be affected by the related meanings and competences. It can be assumed that consumers' sustainable fashion choices, which are the actions derived from the sustainable shopping practice, are influenced by the presence of all elements of the practice. From the practice-based perspective, the views of the labels will be deepened in regard to both environmental and social dimensions, which are critical components of the concept of sustainability (Danciu, 2013). It is also essential to acknowledge that the notion of fashion in this paper refers to only clothing products with the aim of ensuring that the analysis and overall understanding will remain consistent.

The foremost aim of this study is to analyze how materials, in the shape of sustainability labels, connect to the related competences and meanings integrated in the sustainable shopping practice. In addition, the understanding of how consumers' sustainable fashion choices are influenced by these elements will be explored. In order to achieve these aims, a qualitative research approach, more specifically, non-participant observation of local fashion stores and semi-structured interviews with consumers residing in Gothenburg, will be used. The ambition of this study is to contribute to the field of sustainable shopping, sustainability labels, and sustainable consumption with the aim of increasing the knowledge of consumers' sustainable consumption in the fashion context. The following research question is formed to guide the study throughout the analysis and to achieve the aims as mentioned above:

How can sustainability labels and its connection with related competences and meanings of the sustainable shopping practice influence consumers' sustainable fashion choices?

This paper is structured as follows: the first section provides an introduction of the research background, the research question and research outline. The following section presents the theoretical framework for the analysis and previous findings that are mainly concerned with the concept of practice theory and the approach to sustainable shopping as a practice, the strategies used by consumers when practicing sustainable shopping, and the specific configuration of the components enabling the sustainable shopping practice. Thereafter, the methodological approach and its limitations are presented to provide details about how the study has been conducted. Afterwards, the most important parts in the paper, consisting of the significant findings and the discussion that relate the findings to previous research and the theoretical framework, are put forward. Last but not least, the final section of the paper contains the conclusion, the managerial implications and suggestions for future research.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework begins with clarifying the concept of practice theory. Based on that, the approach to sustainable shopping as a practice can be further scrutinized. Then, a discussion of the strategies that consumers use when practicing sustainable shopping is presented. After that, a discussion of previous studies, which is contextualized in the perspective of practice theory, includes the specific configuration of the components involving sustainability labels functioning as materials, and the related meanings and competences that enables and shapes the sustainable shopping practice in this study.

Practice theory

According to Perera et al. (2018), practice theory is developed from the sociology area and then introduced to the studies of consumer behavior mainly by Shove (2004) and Warde (2005). Hartmann (2016, p. 7) claims that practice theory concentrates on the organization of “what” (practical understanding), “how” (procedures) and “what is aspired and why” (teleoaffective structures), instead of concentrating on the individuals “who” (producer – consumer – prosumer). Therefore, a *practice* is defined as:

“...a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, “things” and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002, p.250).

Furthermore, Perera et al. (2018) argue that a practice is made up of an active integration of images, meanings, forms of competence and materials. The sense of the objects and their symbolic meanings are communicated through the images and meanings. There are three primary elements integrated in a practice, namely *competencies*, *meanings* and *materials*. The performance of a practice relies on how these elements are interconnected to each other, hence, there will be changes in the performance if these components are altered (Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017; Perera et al., 2018). Due to the fact that the components embedded in the practice are closely linked to each other and enable the practice together, it is not possible to reduce the practice to any single component (Reckwitz, 2002). *Competences* refer to the cognitive capabilities (knowledge, understanding and know-how) that are required to carry out a particular practice (Reckwitz, 2002). *Meanings* are used to describe “the social and symbolic significance of participation”, hereby the feelings, motivational knowledge and mental activities (Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017, p.139). Thus, meanings refer to the understanding of why we do things and are also an important element that help the individuals to make sense of the activities (Shove & Pantzar, 2005; Røpke, 2009). The last component, *materials* consist of the physical things such as objects, tools and infrastructure and the body itself that are necessary in a practice’s performance (Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017). The meaning of skills and procedures shared by practitioners can be communicated by the forms of competence while the sense of materials is communicated by stuff and technology which are integrated by the skilled practitioners (Hargreaves, 2011).

In practice-based perspective, a practice is performed by an individual, in other words, a bodily and mental agent who plays the role as *a carrier or practitioner* of “...certain routinized ways of understanding, knowing how and desiring” (Reckwitz, 2002, p.250). Because the individuals

are carriers of a practice, they can understand the world and themselves as well as use the know-how and the knowledge. Indeed, the individuals are required to have certain knowledge of how to perform the practice as both mental and bodily activities are needed (Reckwitz, 2002). It is claimed that as the agents get involved in the reproduction of practices and the focus is on practices as shared behavioral routines, then practices become the units of analysis rather than the individuals (Spaargaren, 2011).

A practice theory approach to sustainable shopping

Practice approaches can be found in the research field of consumption and have been used to conceptualize shopping (Fuentes et al., 2019). Practices can act as a guidance for the process of consumption starting from the point of acquiring the objects, gaining knowledge or skills about them and then putting them to use (Perera et al., 2018). Fuentes (2014) claims that shopping needs to be viewed as a social practice which includes different cognitive techniques, embodied knowledge and understanding of the world. The concept of shopping in this perspective indicates that people go shopping because they are driven not only by desires but also to gain shopping experiences and acquire the products that they want. Hence, shopping needs to be understood in a broader sense, including practices ranging from browsing, window-shopping to purchasing (Fuentes, 2014). The practice of shopping, like all practices, consists of particular competencies; how (such as how to choose a fit garment), meanings (such as shopping as a pleasure), and materials (such as physical settings like stores) (Fuentes et al., 2019). From a practice theory approach, shopping practice “involves assembling a heterogenous set of elements”, which comprises material artefacts, meanings and understandings, know-how and knowledge (Fuentes et al., 2019, p. 259). It is further argued that practice theory can be used to get an insightful understanding of environmental consumption (Perera et al., 2018; Røpke, 2009; Shove, 2004). In order to study the marketing and promotion of sustainable consumption, it is critical to examine sustainable shopping (Fuentes et al., 2019). This implies that the understanding of sustainable shopping can take a practice approach.

As pointed out by Fuentes (2014), all shopping comprises devices and a supporting socio-material landscape. The research of Fuentes et al. (2019) also put a strong emphasis on the importance of the surrounding socio-material landscape that reconfigures the shopping practice and makes it more sustainable. Shopping occurs in a (socio-material) place and is an important part that makes a contribution to the production of the place. As stated by Fuentes (2014, p.486), retail sites are “both produced by and productive of shopping practices”. Hence, the researcher argues that a supportive socio-material retailscape is necessary for guiding consumers in their shopping and promoting sustainable consumption, and sustainability labels are a part of it.

Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) also agree with this argument by stating that the in-store sustainability service plays an important role in enhancing sustainable consumption by encouraging and guiding consumers to make more sustainable shopping and consumption choices in a retailing context. The store layouts, the availability and arrangement of sustainable products, signs and labels are examples of the in-store sustainability service that offers consumers the possibility of examining, searching for and purchasing sustainable products as well as informing them of sustainability-related issues (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016). Moreover, the sustainability service is also considered as a socio-material accomplishment, in which staff and store materialities combine to provide a consumer service (Fuentes & Fredriksson, 2016). However, the in-store materialities, particularly the sustainability labels, not the consumer service, will be the primary focus of this study.

Warde (2005) argues that depending on different individuals performing the practice, social practices will be varied regarding how they are performed and what they are made up of. This is due to the differences in knowledge, skills and resources between individuals. It is highlighted that there is a need for the practitioners to show know-how, commitment and understanding of the value of the practice (Warde, 2005). Furthermore, in order to keep the practice alive, it needs to be persisted by the individuals (Shove et al., 2012). This means that sustainable shopping can only become a practice when people conduct and are engaged with it.

The strategies used by consumers when practicing sustainable shopping

The study of Fuentes (2014) points out that shopping practitioners use different strategies, techniques and know-how to make their shopping practice more sustainable. These strategies are operationalized through a variety of green shopping techniques that involve a particular set of competences, with the support of the in-store socio-material landscape. One of the common strategies for managing complexities is that the shoppers actively look for labelled environmental products. The study of Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) also suggest that sustainability labels play an important part in a supportive socio-material landscape as they help to guide people when shopping and to promote sustainable consumption. However, it is found that products with sustainability labels are not central to consumers' sustainable shopping (Fuentes, 2014). Instead, the consumers put more focus on buying durable products so that they can decrease the need to purchase new products in the short-term, which then leads to reducing overall consumption levels. Moreover, when it comes to sustainable fashion consumption, products need to not only be long-lasting but also meet the wants and needs of consumers in regard to identity creation and function (Clancy et al., 2015). The consumers also use other techniques to make their shopping practices more sustainable, such as purchasing only what

they need and acquiring the green products based on some specific characteristics (green brands, green materials, and clean products) (Fuentes, 2014). Nevertheless, it is necessary for consumers to have some prior knowledge in order to judge which material is environmentally friendly, green or long-lasting.

The components of the sustainable shopping practice

As mentioned previously, shopping practice, like any practices, includes three components, materials, competences and meanings. The materials involve material artefacts; the competences include know-how, understanding and knowledge; and the meanings include the beliefs, feelings and mental activities (Reckwitz, 2002; Røpke, 2009; Fuentes, 2014; Fuentes et al., 2019). The sustainable shopping practice in this paper has the specific configuration of sustainability labels functioning as materials, and the related competences and meanings. As there have been many separate studies conducted in different research fields about sustainability labels (e.g. Thøgersen et al., 2010; Testa et al., 2015) and sustainable consumption (e.g. Hargreaves, 2011; Taufique et al., 2017), the following sections of this paper present the previous results of these studies for each component of the sustainable shopping practice.

Sustainability labels as materials

As mentioned earlier, the materials of the sustainable shopping practice include the objects and equipment, hereby the in-store materialities, in which sustainability labels are the main focus of this study. The following sections will present how previous studies have shown that sustainability labels play an important role in affecting consumers' sustainable consumption (Test et al., 2015; Horne 2009).

Types of labels

Eco-labels can be categorized in different ways, but there are two important criteria to distinguish, whether the scheme is mandatory or voluntary and if the granting of the certificate can be conducted by a third party (Horne, 2009). Mandatory environmental labelling is regulated by law and appears more common in some specific areas such as water and energy consumption issues. The voluntary labelling has three categories as proposed by the International Standards Organization, namely Type I, II and III. Type I consists of independently certified green product label schemes that allow the producers to put a logo on their certified products (Horne, 2009). Type II refers to the self-declarations of producers, distributors, importers and retailers, whereas type III provides quantitative life cycle

environmental data “in a more extensive report format” (Horne, 2009, p.176). It is necessary to clarify that type III is not considered in this study as it is not the main interest.

Chkanikova and Lehner (2015) argue that self-declared labels are used by many companies to become more competitive in the market by differentiating themselves from other companies that do not offer sustainability-labelled products. In this situation, products, which hold an eco-label, are selected if they are seen as reliable, since consumers will feel that they help the environment. In other words, eco-labels increase the competitiveness of a product (Testa et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is indicated that certification labels are expensive to acquire, leading to many retailers self-declaring instead (Aguilar & Vlosky, 2007). Additionally, many companies want to create their own labels because, according to the research of Beard (2008), consumers do not trust terms such as eco-friendly or fair trade. This leads to fashion retailers having to invent their own terminology. However, Thøgersen et al. (2010) claim that the effects of sustainability labels will be dramatically decreased if they cannot be recognized and understood by consumers. Also, an interesting finding in the study of Taufique et al. (2017) is that consumers are less likely to trust self-declared labels than third-party certified labels because of perceived vested interest of retailers.

Functions of sustainability labels

Eco-labels are used by companies to communicate asymmetric information between the producers and consumers (Sammer & Wüstenhagen, 2006). By using sustainability labels, it is argued that consumers can easily understand the environmental properties of a product as well as identify the most preferable products regarding environmental quality (Testa et al., 2015). As stated by D’Souza et al. (2006) and Thøgersen et al. (2010), sustainability labels are increasingly made use of by many marketers with the aim of promoting the identification of green products. Furthermore, Sharma and Kushwaha (2019) claim that using labels is one way to inform consumers about the environmental issues as well as to guide them to choose products that have sustainable attributes. Therefore, eco-labels can be used by consumers to be made aware of their impacts on the environment and show their interests towards sustainability through their purchasing choices (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). However, it has been found that consumers are facing a major challenge about selecting products with sustainability labels among a variety of other products. It is explained by the fact that due to the lack of awareness and insufficient information provided, many consumers feel highly confused about the eco-labeling practices used by different companies (Testa et al., 2015). Consequently, consumers are more likely not to purchase sustainable products when the information of the environmental performance of these products is not sufficient and understandable or if it takes consumers too

much time and effort to acquire that information. Then, it can be argued that the purposes of eco-labels can only be accomplished when consumers are well-informed of their meanings, characteristics and fulfilled requirements (Testa et al., 2015). Indeed, eco-labels can only become effective marketing tools if they are accompanied by a communication strategy and a full set of reliable information addressed to consumers, on which the consumers depend as a guide to make a purchasing decision (Testa et al., 2015). In other words, the information of a product's environmental performance needs to be provided sufficiently, credibly and appropriately using eco-labels through proper communication (Bleda & Valente, 2009; Testa et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Dörnyei and Gyulavari (2016) discuss that the presentation form and the content of the label should be simple, clear (such as images) and avoid using too many technical terms. On the other hand, it is indicated that while simple labels can make the decision-making process of consumers easier, the effectiveness of the claims will be decreased (Horne, 2009).

Consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding as competences

The competences of the sustainable shopping practice involve knowledge, know-how and understanding. The following sections present previous research about how the knowledge, know-how, and understanding of consumers regarding sustainability issues and eco-labels significantly influence their consumption behavior toward the purchases of environmentally-friendly products (Taufique et al., 2017; Sharma & Kushwaha, 2019).

The influence of consumers' knowledge and understanding concerning sustainability issues on consumers' sustainable consumption

Testa et al. (2015) argue that environmental knowledge appears to be an important predictor of sustainable purchasing intention. There are two forms of environmental knowledge. The first is general knowledge regarding environmental issues that can direct people to act in an environmentally conscious way. The other one is consumers' knowledge concerning the production process of the product itself being environmentally friendly, which can increase a person's ability in pursuing a green consumption behavior (Testa et al., 2015). When it comes to clothing shopping, McNeill and Moore (2015) state that consumers' levels of knowledge, understanding about, and concern for, sustainability issues can influence their choices. As indicated by Connell (2010), there is a higher chance that consumers who are more knowledgeable about environmental issues, will be more involved in pro-environmental consumption. However, the engagement of consumers' sustainable fashion shopping can be limited by various reasons. For example, consumers can have difficulties in understanding the

environmental and social issues caused by fashion consumption and production, have limited knowledge about where to search for and acquire sustainable fashion products, or lack knowledge about desired sustainability features of products (Connell, 2010; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Ritch, 2015). Consumers can also express skepticism about the actual motives of fashion companies behind the production of sustainable products due to inefficiency of information and their limited knowledge (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Ritch, 2015).

The influence of consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding concerning sustainability labels on consumers' sustainable consumption

It is found that the awareness of eco-labels has a significant positive effect on the knowledge of environmentally friendly products and consumers' purchase intentions (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). Nevertheless, Leire and Thidell (2005) claim that even though consumers acknowledge the roles of eco-labels, it does not mean that they will make green purchasing decisions automatically. Interestingly, one of the findings in the study of Joergens (2006) points out that consumers rarely read information provided on a label of a garment. Furthermore, it has been found that consumers can easily feel confused by the conveyed messages about some notions such as "eco-safe" or "environmentally friendly", as they do not know or understand which product is more sustainable compared to other products (Bratt et al., 2011). Hence, it is more difficult for consumers to make a sustainable purchase decision. The research of Michaud and Llerena (2011) mentions that the likelihood of green products being selected by consumers increases if they are well-informed about the environmental features of a product. Therefore, it can be claimed that knowledge regarding the environmental performance of sustainable products, and sustainability labels offering trustworthy and appropriate information, is one of the essential requirements that impacts consumers' ability to make reasoned and conscious choices (Testa et al., 2015; Chen & Burns, 2006). This means that knowledge and information play an essential role for sustainable consumption. Indeed, information is significant for consumers to make better ethical judgements and ethical fashion companies should communicate the information in a more effective way (Joergens, 2006; Shen et al., 2014). In addition, consumers will not get involved in pro-environmental behavior if they do not have the knowledge needed to make an informed pro-environmental purchase decision and do not perceive claims provided by the fashion firms as trustworthy (Taufique et al., 2017; Auger et al., 2008). It is also strengthened that consumers need to understand the available information provided on sustainability labels by using their know-how and knowledge (Salaün & Flores, 2001).

Consumers' trust and concerns as meanings

The meanings of the sustainable shopping practice consist of the feelings and mental activities. The following sections present previous research regarding how consumers' ethical and environmental concerns of sustainability issues, and consumers' trust in sustainability labels can influence their sustainable consumption (Johnstone & Tan, 2015; Salaün & Flores, 2001; Bratt et al., 2011; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Meise et al., 2014).

The influence of consumers' ethical and environmental concerns on consumers' sustainable consumption

One of the interesting findings in the research of D'Souza et al. (2015) is that the information provided on the labels of fashion products does not have a strong effect on consumers. Hence, it is critical to include more information about eco-effectiveness of the product, such as how the purchase of sustainable products can help shoppers contribute to the environment and society. Nevertheless, the focus is on understanding consumers' needs to provide products and product-related information which are perceived as useful for their decision-making concerning sustainable choices (Shen et al., 2014; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Meise et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential to know which features of information will be valued by consumers (Meise et al., 2014). In this way, consumers can be guided in the right direction and the chances for selecting sustainable products will be increased (Meise et al., 2014; Leire & Thidell, 2005; Testa et al., 2015; Taufique et al., 2014). For example, as suggested by many researchers, the information about supply chain and value-differentiating sustainability-related attributes is valued more than the price of the product (Meise et al., 2014; Salaün & Flores, 2001; Shen et al., 2014). Indeed, it is pointed out that consumers, who are concerned about sustainability issues, are willing to pay more for clear benefits that can be gained from consuming sustainable products (Meise et al., 2014). McNeill and Moore (2015) also supports this argument by stating that the more concerned consumers are about environmental and social issues, the more likely they are to involve themselves in sustainable fashion consumption. However, it has been found that the influence of ethical issues on consumers' fashion purchase decisions is not significant, and only some specific ethical issues that are directly related to consumers themselves will be taken into account (Joergens, 2006; Shen et al., 2014).

As strongly indicated by Danciu (2013), convincing and transparent information about the social and environmental performance of products play a significant role in the purchase decision and sustainability preferences of consumers. Hence, it is necessary for companies to communicate credible messages to consumers about different attributes of sustainable products

such as manufacturing conditions, safety, health concerns, environmental effects and quality (Salaün & Flores, 2001). Otherwise, consumers will not feel well-informed enough to act more sustainably.

The influence of consumers' trust in sustainability labels on consumers' sustainable consumption

Various studies point out that eco-labels significantly enhance consumers' trust towards an environmentally-friendly product because it evokes positive assessment and assures consumers that the sustainability-labelled product has all the favorable features regarding sustainability (Amos et al., 2014; Sharma & Kushwaha, 2019). Hence, in order to make sustainable products successful, the consumers' trust for eco-labels should be considered as an imperative condition (Potts & Haward, 2007).

A major issue related to sustainability labels is the use of misleading claims, which turn into "greenwashing" (Kirchhoff, 2000). An example of a misleading claim can be the use of "green" on sustainability-labelled products without any proof, another is if the claims on sustainability labels are not verifiable. This causes a breach of trust between consumers and the green claims on the labels, particularly when companies, which have their own labels, only adopt sustainability practices that meet minimum standards and still present themselves as sustainable leaders to consumers (Kirchhoff, 2000). In addition, because of the large number of various sustainability labels, consumers become highly confused about the standards and criteria of labelling schemes, which decreases the consumers' trust in eco-labels (Sharma & Kushwaha, 2019). As a consequence, the erosion of trust and difficulties in differentiating sustainability labels can remarkably influence the green purchase attitudes of consumers (Bratt et al., 2011). Johnstone & Tan (2015) propose a notion, "green reservations", which shows consumers' ambivalence or doubt in regard to green consumption practices. For example, consumers do not know if there will be any considerable difference to the environment if they are engaged in green consumption practices. These researchers argue that because of insufficient information, ethical purchasing decisions are negatively influenced. However, as stated by Shaw et al. (2006), when consumers are faced with a lack of information while purchasing an ethically produced garment, they simply try to trust the claims of fashion companies, even though they know that there might be a high level of uncertainty regarding the claims.

It is indicated that consumers generally do not need to know all the detailed information, but they want to ensure that the retailers are doing what to be expected (Castaldo et al., 2009). Furthermore, Salaün & Flores (2001) claim that trust can only be created and developed on the basis of minimum shared knowledge. Hence, it is necessary to provide consumers with

sufficient, useful, relevant and trustworthy information that meets their needs of being informed (Thøgersen et al., 2010). Otherwise, consumers will rely on heuristics that are related to other particular attributes of fashion products to guide their sustainable preferences, and ignore eco-labels and the regulations allowing firms to put labels on their products (Ritch, 2015; Schwartz & Miller, 1991).

The sustainable shopping practice

Overall, the previous results and previous studies have shown that consumers' sustainable consumption choices are influenced by various factors such as sustainability labels; consumers' knowledge, know-how, and understanding of sustainability labels and sustainability issues; consumers' environmental and ethical concerns of sustainability issues; and consumers' trust in sustainability labels. As this study takes a shopping-as-practice approach and focuses on the specific configuration of the practice, it can be indicated that the sustainable shopping practice in this paper consists of three important and interrelated components. The material component consists of the objects and equipment (Røpke, 2009; Reckwitz, 2002; Fuentes, 2014). In this paper, they are the in-store materialities such as sustainability labels, clothes, signs and the store itself, of which sustainability labels are the main focus. The competence component covers the skills and knowledge needed to perform the practice (Røpke, 2009; Reckwitz, 2002; Fuentes, 2014). In this study, this element consists of the knowledge, understanding and know-how of the individuals that are needed to use and make sense of sustainability labels, as well as their knowledge and understanding of the impacts of the fashion industry on the environment and society. The last component, meaning, is about making sense of activities, the emotions related to the activities and the beliefs (Røpke, 2009; Reckwitz, 2002; Fuentes, 2014). In this research, this element comprises the ethical and environmental concerns of consumers and whether the sustainability labels are considered to be meaningful and useful to them. Consumer's trust in sustainability labels is found to be closely related to meaningfulness and usefulness, because if one does not trust it, he/she will not use the label or perceive it as meaningful. Hence, consumer's trust can be used as an indicator of how consumers perceive sustainability labels.

Methodology

The aims of this paper are to understand and interpret the influence of sustainability labels in combination with the related competences and meanings of the sustainable shopping practice on consumers' sustainable fashion choices. Therefore, in this study, a qualitative research approach was selected. As proposed by Sztompka (2008), when studying a phenomenon

connected to everyday life, the methodological counterpart is qualitative methods. The research methods in this paper include store observations and semi-structured interviews with consumers with more clarifications below why these are selected as appropriate techniques. Thereafter, the explanations for data gathering are presented to specify how the data of the observations and interviews was collected, the criteria used to choose interview participants as well as the guide for the interview questions. After that, the data analysis is explained and the explication of the coding themes, which the findings and the discussion sections are based on, is provided.

Store observations

Observation is an important social science method of gathering data in which the researcher may or may not interact directly with the people and events being observed (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Furthermore, it is indicated that observation can be a supplement to interviews (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). As pointed out by Flick (2014), this method requires the researcher to take part in the field and observe from consumers' perspective. It is necessary to mention that participant observation, which is mostly used in ethnographic research, is not appropriate in this study because the researchers will be required to spend weeks, if not months or even years, on participant observation depending on whether they are familiar with the context or not (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Moreover, doings per se is not the major focus in this study. Instead, the observation of things that allows the doings to take place is more critical (Hargreaves, 2011). This means that the contexts and the in-store materialities, which function as materials of the sustainable shopping practice, become the focus, rather than the consumers themselves. Since it is the context and in-store materialities that are of interest during the observation, non-participant observation is more suitable for this research.

To facilitate the observation, a material list has been made to guide the author when conducting the observation in the stores:

- The in-store layout and arrangement of fashion products with sustainability labels
- The availability of fashion products with sustainability labels
- The presence of sustainability labels on fashion products
- The information provided on sustainability labels on fashion products

As pointed out by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), technology is one of the main tools to help the researcher to gather data because he/she is watching rather than participating. Thus, in this research, taking photos was selected to help with data collection and used as probes in the interviews.

The observed stores were selected based on the idea that the author would like to understand how the in-store materialities such as sustainability labels, store layout and signage are

constructed in the store, which may affect consumers' purchasing choices. These specific stores were chosen after an initial contact was made with potential participants of the interviews. In the initial contact, the author not only explained the purpose of the interview, but also quizzed the participants about which stores they had previously encountered sustainability labels. However, no photos from the stores which were mentioned by a specific participant were shown to that same participant.

Consumer interviews

As indicated by Saunders et al. (2003), the qualitative method is based on the meanings that can be presented through words. The use of interview technique in qualitative research can help to achieve a considerable understanding of the topic as it provides the interviewers with lots of chances to come up with the open-ended and follow-up questions that can arise during the interviews (Saunders et al., 2003). In addition, the interviewers can concentrate on the specific issues that are closely related with the topic and research question of the study (Saunders et al., 2003). Thus, it is supposed that the aims of the research could be obtained through such descriptions. As a result, interviews become the most suitable research method in this paper as they allow the participants to share their thoughts, understandings and previous experiences with sustainability labels on fashion products. Moreover, through interviews, the participants can provide more detailed descriptions of how these labels can be perceived in the way that they can affect consumers' product choices, which is a part of the sustainable shopping practice. In this study, the in-depth and semi-structured interview is chosen as a suitable choice to collect primary data for analysis because of its flexibility and high probability of getting relevant ideas from the participants (Ryan et al., 2009). In addition, the possibilities with less-structured interviews can result in spontaneous issues, which are raised by the interviewees. This means that the in-depth information can be gathered and the understanding as well as perspective of the participants' perception concerning the current subject can be significantly enhanced (Ryan et al., 2009; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The primary purpose of the interviews is to study the two other elements of the sustainable shopping practice (meanings and competences) and their relationship with sustainability labels. Due to the fact that the interviews were semi-structured, more follow-up questions were asked during the interviews so that a deeper and broader point of view of the participants could be expressed. It is also important to mention that the questions were open-ended as they allowed the participants to feel more in control over what was talked about, which could lead to more thorough answers (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Thus, the carriers of the practice – the participants of the interviews, had lots of opportunities to talk about their prior experiences concerning sustainable fashion products in

relation with sustainability labels by providing their answers to the questions of “what” and “how”. Based on that, the relationships between all components of the sustainable shopping practice were investigated. As such, the information gained from the responses of the participants was assumed to consist of both competence and meaning elements. It is important to mention that the interviews in this research were inspired by the ethnographic interview because ethnography is primarily concerned with “the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand” (Spradley, 1979, p. 5). However, they did not meet all requirements suggested by Spradley (1979). For example, the ethnographic interview of a participant can be conducted for several hours (Spradley, 1979), which is considered not to be essential to fulfil the aims of this paper. The interview questions in this study were designed in the way that they included three types of questions, namely descriptive, structural and contrast questions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Descriptive questions are quite broad and allow the researcher to study the views of the participants on “their experiences, their daily activities, and the objects and people in their lives” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.146). Structure questions refer to those that can be repeated to learn about the structures or elements of any given social behavior while the contrast questions are used by the researcher to compare and contrast if any difference can be found in the category of social behavior (Short, 1991).

Furthermore, in this paper, photo interviewing was used as a part of the interviews when conducting the research. According to Hurworth (2003), the photo interviewing is an effective tool to challenge participants, offer nuances and trigger memories, which then lead to new perspectives and help the researcher avoid misinterpretation. In order to perform this part of the interview, photos were presented to the participants of the interviews with the aim of gaining a deeper insight into whether the interviewees have knowledge and know-how to use and make sense of the sustainability labels in the photos, as well as if they perceive these labels as meaningful and useful.

Data collection

In order to gather data for the observation method, six fashion stores located in the central areas of Gothenburg were chosen based on the initial contacts with participants, namely Dedicated, Nudie Jeans, Kappahl, H&M, Lindex and Gina Tricot. Each field trip lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, depending on how large the store is and the ranges of sustainable fashion products available. During the field trips, pictures of the products, the sustainability labels and the store layout were taken in the fashion stores. These pictures were then presented to the interviewed participants as part of the photo interviewing.

With regard to the data collection for the interviews, in total, eight interviews were conducted during a period of two weeks. The following criteria were used to select the participants: (1) be aware of and/or familiar with sustainability labels on fashion products, and (2) live in Gothenburg. The criteria were formed because of several reasons. First of all, the participants needed to have some experiences in engaging with sustainability labels so that their answers to the interview questions would be more relevant and meaningful for the analysis. Secondly, as the store observations took place in Gothenburg and the research was carried out in Sweden, it was supposed that the interviewees needed to be familiar with local fashion stores.

Snowball sampling technique has been used in this study because it helped the author to reach and make contacts easily with the people who could meet the criteria. According to Atkinson and Flint (2001), this technique is appropriate for interviews when the aim of the research is mainly qualitative, explorative and descriptive. Snowball sampling is defined by Vogt (1999 cited in Atkinson & Flint, 2001, para. 4) as follows:

“A technique for finding research subjects. Our subject gives the research the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on”.

In this research, some of the participants were introduced by the author’s acquaintances who knew people that were interested in participating in the research and could meet all criteria. The background information of the participants is presented briefly in the following table:

Name	Age	Occupation	Gender	Interview time
Hanna	32	UX Designer	Female	91 minutes
Maja	24	Student	Female	72 minutes
Kajsa	24	Student	Female	68 minutes
Magnus	29	IT Engineer	Male	54 minutes
Alexander	30	Software Engineer	Male	45 minutes
Carla	28	Key Account Manager	Female	83 minutes
Johanna	31	Marketing Coordinator	Female	62 minutes
Victoria	34	Trade Marketing Manager	Female	48 minutes

Table 1. Participants’ background information

The first contact with the potential participants was made by email, in which the author explained the research project and set up an interview time that could be suitable for each participant. Moreover, through initial contact, the author quizzed the participant regarding

stores with sustainability labels, as previously mentioned. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to one and a half hours. The interviews were communicated in English and made face to face or via Skype because of location issues. The author also offered the participants to select a place for the interviews so that they would feel more comfortable and convenient when conducting the interview. With the consent of the participants, all interviews were recorded in order to ensure that the material could be accessed at anytime and anywhere as well as to make the transcription process easier. After all interviews were completed, the interviewees were categorized into two distinct groups: one group with four participants who show higher concern and competence regarding sustainability while the other group has lower concern and competence in the same field. The following criteria were used to help with this process: (1) concerns about sustainability issues related to the fashion industry, (2) existing knowledge about sustainability issues related to the fashion industry, (3) existing knowledge and know-how to use and understand sustainability labels. A participant was placed into the group of more concerned and competent if he/she placed at the high end of the scale both regarding criteria (1) and at least one of the other two. Otherwise, the participant was placed in the group of less concerned and competent. The purpose of grouping consumers was to make it easier to compare their responses to the interview questions. Therefore, the distinct differences can be found between groups rather than between individuals.

An interview guide was created before the interviews started so that the questions would be directed towards the research question that the author would like to study, and to ensure that all critical aspects of interests would not be missed. The interview guide consisted of multipart questions that were largely based on previous studies presented in the theoretical framework. The following themes were included: consumers' fashion shopping routine; consumers' interests in sustainability in the fashion context; consumers' ethical and environmental concerns regarding, and knowledge about, sustainability issues related to the apparel industry; consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding of sustainability labels; the perceived meanings in connection with sustainability labels; and the critical features of a fashion product. All interviews began with direct but open questions to get an overall image of the participants' fashion shopping routine. To begin with, the participants were asked to describe the latest clothing shopping trip that they made and continued with follow-up questions about the sustainability labels that they encountered during the trip. After that, the interviewees were asked to talk about their experiences with any sustainability-labelled garment that they bought before and compared this product with other fashion products which do not have a sustainability label. Then, the participants were required to provide their points of view on the concept and

meaning of sustainability related to fashion and to reflect on their shopping behavior. Indeed, the aims of these questions were to provide the participants with a chance to explain what fashion means to them when taking sustainability into account. Afterwards, the interviewees were asked to share their knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues caused by the apparel industry and how concerned they were about these issues. The following questions of the interview tended to put a lot of focus on the participants' experiences in connection with sustainability labels by asking them to share and talk about their opinions, particularly when they were presented with some photos of sustainability labels and the in-store materialities that the author took during the field trips for observation. In this way, the responses were assumed to become more specific and closely related to the research topic. In order to get a better understanding of whether sustainability labels were meaningful and useful to the participants when making purchase decisions, they were then asked some questions regarding, for example, how they perceived the information provided on sustainability labels and whether or not they placed trust in the labels. Thereafter, the interview continued with the questions about what aspects or characteristics of fashion products that the participants valued the most and how these attributes influenced their choices. In this way, the participants gave some hints in their answers which indicated how they connected the fashion product attributes with their knowledge and concerns about sustainability in fashion, and what they would do if they did not consider sustainability labels as useful and meaningful. It was also interesting to find out if the participants could present how they felt and reacted when they encountered the fashion products with and without sustainability labels, when these products have similar attributes.

Data analysis

After all interviews were finished and recorded by a smartphone, the transcribing process began as it helped the author to have the ability to use any quotes in the analysis part. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), the coding scheme can be started by comprising all coding categories, which are derived from theory and data. However, before the data-driven coding categories are initiated, an overall analysis of the data is required to be completed to identify the categories (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). In this paper, with the availability of the transcriptions, the keywords, phrases, and sentences that were closely related to the categories were highlighted. Then, the critical coding categories were driven by previous studies presented in the theoretical framework and the empirically collected data about the sustainable shopping practice, including three main components. After that, the sub-categories in each primary coding category were developed inductively from the data. Moreover, the coding of the observation data was also completed before proceeding with the analysis. Due to the fact that

there were only the materials of the sustainable shopping practice involved in the observation, which were also one of the main categories of the interviews, this coding process followed the main coding categories of the data collected from all interviews.

As argued by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), coding categories can help the researcher to achieve a more comprehensive and factual description of the phenomena that needs to be investigated. It is more likely that new theoretical and conceptual ideas can be generated based on the collected data. In order to get good coding categories, all content should be placed in a specific group, which results in the data being independent (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Following the claims of Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), the data in this study was categorized independently and mutually exclusive. Thus, different sub-categories were defined to help categorize the data in a more comprehensive way.

- Competence:

- + The comprehension of consumers concerning sustainability labels on fashion products
- + The knowledge of consumers with regard to sustainability issue related to fashion industry
- + The consumers' previous experiences of using sustainability labels on fashion products to make informed decisions
- + The knowledge of consumers with regard to sustainable fashion products

- Meaning:

- + The environmental and ethical concerns about sustainability issues related to fashion industry
- + The significance of fashion products' characteristics
- + The interests in sustainable fashion products
- + The perceived value of sustainability labels on fashion products

- Materials

- + The in-store layout and arrangement of fashion products with sustainability labels
- + The availability of fashion products with sustainability labels
- + The presence of sustainability labels on fashion products
- + The information provided on sustainability labels on fashion products

As pointed out by Reckwitz (2002), because all components are embedded in a practice and closely related to each other, the analysis of the practice cannot be reduced to any single element. Therefore, in this paper, the combination of all categories is essential to lead to a better analysis. With support from the theoretical framework and previous research, the author identified four important themes from the collected data that considerably influence consumers' fashion choices. These themes involve the specific sets of competences and meanings of

sustainable shopping practice that are related to the sustainability labels. These specific sets include consumers' knowledge and understanding regarding sustainability issues caused by the fashion industry as competence; consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding concerning sustainability labels as competence; consumers' ethical and environmental concerns regarding sustainability issues as meaning; and consumers' trust in sustainability labels as meaning.

Issue of quality

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) claim that the researchers need to ensure the overall quality of the qualitative research concerning scientific nature, quality and trustworthiness. There are four critical aspects that the researchers need to take into account when evaluating the quality, namely dependability, transferability, credibility and confirmability.

Dependability refers to the process of research that needs to be logical, traceable and documented (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). In this research, dependability was achieved by the in-depth explanation of how the store observations and semi-structured interviews with consumers were carried out, what techniques were used to get significant findings, and how the data was analyzed afterwards. Therefore, it was supposed that the outcomes of the research were found to be able to provide an answer to the research question and fulfil the aims of the study through the detailed descriptions in the analysis. Furthermore, the information in this study is available for traceability and documentation for all readers. A list of used references can be found at the end of the paper. The data from the interviews was also recorded and transcribed, however, because of the confidentiality agreed upon for the interviews to take place, the transcriptions were not provided in the paper or in appendix.

Transferability describes the degree of similarity between the current research and other research with the aim of creating some form of connection between the findings of the studied paper and previous results (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The readers of this paper can find that most of the findings that this study contributes are similar to previous results in other research contexts. However, it is necessary to strengthen that the author of this paper is less concerned with the generalizations to the entire population as it is not the primary focus of the paper.

Credibility refers to the data being sufficient enough to merit the claims of the researchers and whether other researchers can come close to the same interpretations as made on the basis of the author's materials (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). According to Guest et al. (2006), 12 interviews are needed for a homogenous group, which the group selected for this study is, to reach a point where no new information is gained. However, in this research, due to the fact

that there was limited time to find participants and carry out the interviews, along with the author noticing a high degree of knowledge saturation after only a few interviews, it was deemed that eight participants would be enough. Hence, credibility in this paper can be evaluated on the basis that the significant data generated from selected research techniques could help the author to reach a high level of knowledge saturation, which then leads to strong claims. As a result, it is argued that the interpretations have been made in a careful way.

The last element, confirmability implies that the connection between findings and interpretations to the data is easily understood by others (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). As the author of this study had determined the studied subjects of each different research method and made comprehensive categories based on the collected data and theoretical framework, it can be argued that the strong links have been established between the findings and the interpretations. Therefore, the author focused on the findings without mixing her own personal opinions and thoughts into the research.

Findings

In this section, the significant findings from the consumer interviews and store observations are presented and analyzed. The section starts with the findings of the sustainability labels and other materialities in stores as these are the objects that allow the doings of this type of sustainable shopping practice of consumers to select and purchase sustainable fashion products. After that, the four main themes of competences and meanings related to sustainability labels that have a significant influence on the consumers' fashion choices are presented and interpreted in more details. These themes, which are identified in the data analysis, consist of: consumers' knowledge and understanding regarding sustainability issues caused by the fashion industry; consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding concerning sustainability labels; consumers' ethical and environmental concerns regarding sustainability issues; and consumers' trust in sustainability labels.

Sustainability labels as materials in the sustainable shopping practice

The findings from the store observations indicate that the in-store layout and arrangement of fashion products with sustainability labels differ between the various fashion retailers. While the appearance of the sustainability labels is found to have a simple design in all studied stores, which is similar to the findings of Dörnyei and Gyulavari (2016), they differ in content and type. For example, as illustrated in Figure 1, the sustainability labels of Dedicated products can be found on brown medium-sized tags while the labels of Kappahl appear on a smaller-sized

green paper and those of Lindex have the brown circle-shaped look. With regard to the types of the sustainability labels, the labels on products of Dedicated, Nudie Jeans and Lindex are certified by the third parties, namely Fairtrade and Better Cotton Initiatives. Hence, these labels are categorized as Type I (Horne, 2009) as the products of these retail brands meet the specific requirements concerning sustainability so that they can put a logo on their offers. On the other hand, the sustainability labels of Kappahl, Gina Tricot and H&M can be categorized as Type II



Dedicated



Kappahl



Lindex

(Horne, 2009), as they are self-declared labels.

Figure 1. Illustration of the appearance of sustainability labels

Furthermore, in most fashion stores that the author visited, such as H&M, Kappahl, Lindex and Gina Tricot, the products with sustainability labels are mixed with other products without the labels. In these stores, it is not easy to see a specific sign which tells consumers where they can find sustainability-labelled products. Hence, consumers are required to go around the store and figure out which products are sustainable by themselves. It can be seen that without the proper presence of the store materialities of the sustainability service, such as signs or store layout, consumers will find it difficult to know whether the sustainable fashion products exist in a store. Thus, in order to locate the sustainability-labelled products in physical stores, some of the more concerned and competent consumers claim that they do online research before going shopping. In this way, they can be informed of where to find and acquire sustainable fashion products. Moreover, when the signs are encountered, the messages are different among the fashion retailers (see Figure 2). In comparison with the findings of Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) about the materialities of the in-store sustainability service, it can be seen clearly that the retailscape of these observed stores does not seem to be supportive, as they do not properly guide or encourage shoppers to make more sustainable shopping and consumption choices.



Lindex: Sustainability choice. This means the product is produced with water and energy saving processes.



Kappahl: Responsible fashion. Our clothes should provide a nice feeling and become your favorites in the wardrobe. They should also feel right because you know they have been produced with care - without compromising either quality or design



H&M: 100% sustainably sourced cotton in all basic garments in the women section.

Figure 2. Illustration of the store layout and marketing of sustainability-labelled products

Nevertheless, the exceptions that were found in the field trips are Dedicated and Nudie Jeans, where the signs are used extensively (see Figure 3). This can help lead consumers to find their way to the sustainability-labelled products easily. On the one hand, the visualizing signs in the Dedicated store present implied meanings about the sustainable products on sale. For example, they show how many plastic bottles have been recycled to produce wool hats or the amount of water and emissions have been reduced by using organic cotton and recycled polyester to make their clothes. On the other hand, the signs written on the walls in Nudie Jeans store indicate what they mean with their fair products concerning both the environmental and social dimensions of sustainability as well as guide consumers to strive for sustainable consumption patterns. It can be argued that the retailscape of Dedicated and Nudie Jeans stores are considered to be more supportive following the arguments of Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016) as these stores contain the signs and the layouts that offer consumers with possibilities to search for, examine, purchase and get informed of the sustainable products available. It can be assumed that sustainable consumption can be enhanced in those stores because the in-store sustainability service can help to promote and guide consumers to make more sustainable shopping and consumption choices.



Dedicated



Dedicated



Nudie Jeans

Figure 3. Illustration of the store layout and marketing of sustainability-labelled products

As argued by many researchers (Meise et al., 2014; Salaün & Flores, 2001; Shen et al., 2014; Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Horne, 2009), it is essential to have a careful look at the conveyed messages of the sustainability labels because they are a part of the critical components that consumers base their actions on. In this research, it has been found that the sustainability labels of the studied retailers are quite different when it comes to the conveyed messages. Thus, in the interviews, when the participants were required to describe their previous experiences with sustainability labels, more than half of them stated that they only saw labels with brief information while the others encountered sustainability labels with both brief and more detailed information. In regard to the labels with brief information (illustrated in Figure 4), all participants mentioned that the most common information on the labels that they could recall is about the materials and production, which mostly concerns the environmental aspect of sustainability. However, the retailers do not offer detailed information to help consumers understand how sustainable the offered fashion products are. In addition, on some labels, the links of the websites to look for further information are also provided to consumers. An interesting finding that can be observed in the stores of Lindex and Kappahl is that they have the same claims on their sustainability labels: “less water, less chemical, less energy”. As commented by three interviewed participants, these messages are very vague, which shows a high lack of transparency of fashion companies when making claims about their sustainability facts.



Figure 4. Illustration of sustainability labels with brief information

Regarding the sustainability labels with more detailed information, social claims can be found on the labels of Dedicated and Nudie Jeans (illustrated in Figure 5) regarding fair price for cotton farmers, living wages for manufacturing workers and investments in infrastructure and education. Moreover, environmental claims can also be seen on these labels, concerning the sustainable sources of the used materials such as organic cotton and eco fibers, the better health for the farmers and the non-use of harmful chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Interestingly, all of the interviewed participants reflected the same thoughts about how they liked sustainability labels that provide either more detailed information covering different dimensions of sustainability or some type of story-telling about how the production workers earn a living wage and how much it helps them. Additionally, some more detailed descriptions can be found on some products of Dedicated, such as jackets. However, the information provided in these descriptions is a bit complicated for the interviewees to understand because of the use of some technical terms such as fluorine-free recipe. As discussed in the research of Dörnyei and Gyulavari (2016), companies should avoid the use of many technical terms in the content of the label as it can lead to confusing consumers. The following figures illustrate the more detailed information found on the sustainability labels of some products in the studied retail stores.



Figure 5. Illustration of sustainability labels with more detailed information

According to Reckwitz (2002), the understanding of a practice cannot be reduced to any single element. This indicates that it is critical to take all elements into account and to find out how sustainability labels in connection with the related competences and meanings can affect consumers' sustainable fashion choices.

Competences and meanings related to sustainability labels of fashion products

As argued by Reckwitz (2002) and Røpke (2009), competences of a practice refer to cognitive abilities, including knowledge, understanding and know-how, which are required to carry out a specific practice. In this paper, the competences of the sustainable shopping practice include the knowledge and understanding of consumers regarding the impacts of the apparel industry on the environmental and social aspects. Moreover, this element also covers the knowledge and know-how that the consumers need to use sustainability labels in their shopping, as well as their understanding of information provided on sustainability labels. Meanings refer to “the social and symbolic significance of participation” (Fuentes & Svingstedt, 2017, p.139). In this study, the meaning component of the sustainable shopping practice can be understood as the ethical and environmental concerns of the consumers as well as consumers' trust in sustainability labels in the way that they perceive sustainability labels as meaningful and useful to help them make sustainable consumption choices. As proposed by Schatzki (1997), in order to understand the practices, it is important to study the actions which are derived from the practice. In this paper, it can be argued that the competences and meanings related to sustainability labels can influence the actions of consumers, which are derived from the sustainable shopping practice, hereby the consumers' choices of sustainable fashion products. The following themes which come from the data analysis will provide more details.

The influence of consumers' knowledge and understanding regarding sustainability issues caused by the fashion industry on consumer's sustainable fashion choices

The findings in this study show that there is a varying degree of knowledge and understanding about sustainability issues related to the apparel industry between consumers. Therefore, it is interesting to find that the more concerned and competent participants possess knowledge and understanding in terms of both social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. In contrast, the group of participants who are less concerned and competent, do not pay much attention to the social aspects or they are more aware of the environmental dimension than the social aspect.

A quote that represents the participants who are more concerned and competent:

“I care deeply about the labor conditions and living wages of the workers, [...] and how much water is used to make a clothing or whether the cotton plants are grown with the use of fertilizers and pesticides or not.” – Carla

Another quote that represents the other group:

[...] I'm more concerned about the environmental dimension. But I don't think about the social aspect, like I said” – Kajsa

It can be assumed that the information about social issues provided by many retailers is not adequate, which makes it more difficult for the consumers to be aware of it. Moreover, some participants stated that the environmental issues tend to be the main interest of many fashion companies as the consumers can be aware of how their shopping and consumption influences the environment, since these influences are noticeable in terms of a shifting climate all over the world. The social issues on the other hand, are found in developing countries where the manufacturing factories are, which is much further away from the end-consumers. Hence, some of the consumers raised a question about the motive behind this kind of purposive action of the retailers. The more concerned and competent participants also found it really tricky to investigate where and how the sustainable clothing has been produced, because most fashion retailers do not disclose detailed information about it. For this reason, the consumers feel that they do not possess sufficient knowledge to make an informed sustainable purchasing decision for garments that they are really keen on. This finding is consistent with the research studies of Connell (2010) and McNeill and Moore (2015) about the fact that an increase in consumers' knowledge and understanding regarding sustainability-related issues can positively impact their choices of sustainable fashion products.

One of the most common ways for the interviewed consumers to be informed about their purchases is to visit fashion retailers' website or google it on the internet so that they can get detailed information about the products. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram, documentaries or articles are powerful tools that help the shoppers to investigate the sustainable business activities of an apparel company. Moreover, another interesting finding from the interviews with the participants is that the more knowledge and understanding consumers have about sustainability issues, such as where to look and find information, the more they like to keep themselves updated about it in various ways. The following quotes illustrate this argument:

“I am trying to read a lot. I also watch documentaries and read articles and the news about big companies [...]. I read about a big factory that was very poorly built that people were working in that eventually collapsed and some of these big companies actually had their production in that factory and after that accident they did not even help the workers that got injured in the accident.” – Carla

Nevertheless, the same kind of investigation regarding their purchases is rarely seen in the responses of the participants who have lower knowledge. Most participants in this group claimed that they would not check on the website of the retailers during or after their shopping trip and just ignored it. Only two participants in this group claimed that they keep themselves up to date with sustainability issues of fashion retailers. However, it is only when a scandal comes up on their phone or computer screens rather than actively searching for any information by themselves. As for most consumers in this group, the purchase decisions of fashion products tend to be less influenced by their knowledge of the sustainability issues due to their lack of awareness. Moreover, because of their low interests in sustainability when it comes to fashion, they tend to be more interested in their personal needs and wants rather than concerning themselves with the needs of those who are involved in the fashion value chain. One of the less concerned and competent participants commented like this:

“I only read articles about it when they come up in my normal news feed, I don't go looking for them”. – Magnus

The influence of consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding concerning sustainability labels on consumers' sustainable fashion choices

Common for all interviewed participants was that they found the presence of the labels useful to inform them of any sustainable choices available in a store and to communicate the sustainable performance of a specific product to them. Moreover, some participants claimed that sustainability labels provide them with guidance for selecting sustainable products. It can

be assumed that the consumers become more knowledgeable as the knowledge is transferred from the producers to the consumers through sustainability labels. As such, all consumers consider the use of sustainability labels as a good start for increasing the knowledge of consumers. A participant commented below:

“Getting informed is really important so the consumer can hold the product in their hand and see the background story” – Hanna

As strongly highlighted by some interviewed participants, transparency is one of the most critical aspects that they expect regarding the information on the sustainability labels of fashion companies. In this way, the consumers can be made aware of, and learn about, the working conditions in manufacturing factories on the other side of the world, the logistic processes as well as how their consumption behaviors can considerably affect the environment and society. However, all interviewed participants agreed on the fact that many fashion retailers are not transparent about product-related information that they share with consumers on sustainability labels, especially when it comes to information that the consumers value, such as information about the value chain. As a consequence, it is more difficult for them to compare products and evaluate which one is better. Therefore, as pointed out by Testa et al. (2015) and Taufique et al. (2017), it is challenging for the consumers to make conscious and reasoned choices without the related knowledge about the environmental performance of products and without labels offering reliable and proper information.

One of the significant findings from the interviews is that all participants found it hard or confusing to distinguish between the sustainability labels on products. It is caused by the fact that there are different types of sustainability labels available, such as self-claimed labels of fashion companies and third-party certified labels. Thus, most consumers cannot figure out which label is better than the others due to their lack of knowledge regarding sustainability labels, especially when they have been exposed to many labels in different stores with different messages. This issue decreases the trust of the interviewed consumers in the sustainability labels and negatively affects their choices of sustainable products. This finding is similar to the research of Sharma and Kushwaha (2019) when the scholars discussed the erosion of trust due to a large number of different sustainability labels, which make consumers confused about the standards and criteria of labelling schemes. Thus, having difficulties in differentiating the sustainability labels can remarkably influence the green purchase attitudes of consumers.

Furthermore, it has been found that the more confused the consumers feel about the information provided on the label and the less knowledge they have about sustainability, the less likely they are to make a sustainable consumption choice. This pattern was detected by the author of the

study when showing the participants some photos of the sustainability labels in stores taken during the observation trips. Even the use of some common terms that can be found on the sustainability labels of many fashion products, such as “ecological”, “natural” and “organic”, turned out to be quite challenging to understand for the less concerned and competent group. Consequently, they decide either to buy nothing or choose any product that they prefer the most, without considering if there is any sustainability label on it, since they are not sure which one is more sustainable than the other. The more concerned and competent group, on the other hand, tend to be more knowledgeable when encountering the same information on the sustainability labels and show more willingness to make sustainable purchases. Therefore, they could provide quite detailed descriptions of what it means with, for example, 100% organic cotton or Tencel material, in relation with farming practices and textile manufacturing.

When it comes to the use of very technical terms (such as fluorine-free recipe) that can be found on some detailed labels, many participants claimed that these terms do not make sense. They also feel highly confused when encountering the labels that contain different terms in the same store as they could not identify the differences between these labels. It is explained by the fact that the consumers are not familiar with the terms and cannot obtain the information that they wanted to know, such as how much water and energy has been used to produce an organic cotton shirt. Therefore, the information provided on the labels is not perceived to be helpful enough to guide them in selecting sustainable products. The following quotes illustrate this argument:

“[...] there are quite a lot of buzzwords. Like they use good words so it sounds cool but you don’t know what it actually means, it is quite abstract [...]”. – Hanna

“They [Gina Tricot] have a label named Good Project and it means something with good cotton. They also have Good Collection and I didn’t understand if Good Collection is the same as Good Project or if they are different, they didn’t talk about it”. – Kajsa

In addition, it is interesting to mention that the interviewed participants drew parallels between the labels on sustainable clothing and the ones on sustainable food, which turned out to be a spontaneous topic during the interviews. The consumers claimed that it is quite difficult for them to understand the labels on the sustainable fashion products when compared to those on food products. Thus, more than half of the participants mentioned that the sustainable labels on food products, such as ecological labeling, are recognizable and understandable and they find it very easy to buy sustainable food in many grocery stores. In contrast, in order to get a sustainable garment, the consumers have to actively search for it, then end up feeling confused as they are not very sure about what the conveyed messages on the labels mean. Hence, making

a purchasing decision on food products with sustainability labels seems to be less time-consuming and easier than on fashion products with sustainability labels.

The influence of ethical and environmental concerns on consumer's sustainable fashion choices

The participants who put a strong emphasis on both dimensions of sustainability, are very concerned with different social issues ranging from fair wage, child labor to working conditions. They also expressed their strong reactions by not purchasing any fashion products that they knew were produced by children or by very low-paid workers. It is because these consumers believe that their choices will partly contribute to the unethical manufacturing process of retailers, which they think is morally wrong. This finding aligns with the research of many scholars (Connell, 2010; Ritch, 2015; McNeil & Moore, 2015) who claim that consumers' levels of sustainability concerns and knowledge can positively influence their choices when they are engaged with clothing shopping. Thus, the most concerned consumers will be more likely to involve themselves in sustainable fashion consumption. The following quote illustrates this argument:

“Sometimes you hear stories in the news how a factory is burned down and I think “oh, the working conditions there were horrible” or they use child labor or they use some chemicals that are harmful and there is some incident. [...] I actually think like “I am a person I wouldn't like to work in those conditions, so why would I let someone else do it just so I can wear a sweater? I don't want to buy any clothing produced by these retailers” – Hanna

According to previous research of Joergens (2006) and Shen et al. (2014), ethical issues which are in close relation to an individual consumer, will be more influential than other ethical issues. When making comparison between sustainable food and sustainable clothing, the consumers in this study indicated that health benefits are the major concern that drives them to choose more organic food nowadays, because food can have a direct impact on their health. Hence, the types of food that people eat on a daily basis is very important. On the other hand, clothing is more related to matters of their body and the harmful effects of clothing materials to the body are not easily noticeable. It can be clearly seen that the considerable difference between food and clothing is that food is seen as more related to a persons' health and sustainable food tends to be easier to acquire. Based on this finding, it can be assumed that the options for sustainable products will be increased when consumers' perception of fashion can be improved in the way that they find themselves to be personally affected by their clothing choices.

As commented by some interviewees, understanding the bad outcomes from their conventional shopping is an effective approach that can help to change their behavior towards sustainable

fashion shopping and consumption. As claimed by Johnstone and Tan (2015), behavioral change happens when an individual can see how their actions might negatively impact others or how a product may benefit the environment. Indeed, it is important for people to see the negative long-term effects of their actions, otherwise, the adoption of green consumption behavior will be difficult. The quote below illustrates this idea:

“If I know that it would be the other way around, that instead of having sustainability labels that said “this is good” and instead on all other clothes “this is bad”, like if it said how much water or energy was used or how children worked on it. If that information was visible instead, I think it would change my behavior [...]. I will buy the sustainable clothing more because it would affect me more if I knew how it affected others, not just how it fit me or fit my wardrobe”
– Kajsa

Common for all interviewed participants is that they expressed positive feelings when they were asked to describe how they felt after purchasing sustainable clothing. Even though there is a varying degree of ethical and environmental concerns between the participants, the selection of sustainable clothing makes them feel good. This is because they acknowledge that they are contributing significantly to the environment, for themselves and for other people. One of the participants commented below:

“I have to say sometimes I'm a bit proud because it feels a bit like I have changed my behavior in a better way “this is not just any kind of sweater, but it is fair living for people, for the environment”. – Hanna

One of the most interesting findings from the interviews is that the less concerned and competent participants normally ignored or paid little attention to sustainability labels when encountering fashion products. This finding supports the study of Joergens (2006) which implies that consumers rarely read the information on a label of a garment. This might be explained by the fact that these consumers think that other attributes of the products (such as price, design) are more important to them. However, this stands in contrast to the behavior of the more concerned and competent group as they tend to pay a lot of attention to all labels that they can find on the garments. These consumers always want to know if a garment is claimed to be sustainable and take both environmental and social aspects into account when they go shopping. Hence, it is essential for them to try on and purchase a fashion product with a sustainability label. One of the very concerned consumers said as below:

“Nowadays I would mostly look for it (sustainability label) [...]. If it does not have a sustainability label, I would be more hesitant to try the clothes on or consider buying it [...] I

always at least skim through it [...] If there is information attached to the clothing, I will read it". – Hanna

The influence of consumers' trust in sustainability labels on consumers' sustainable fashion choices

Although the functions of sustainability labels are recognized by the participants as communicating about the efforts of retailers and informing of the sustainable performance of products available in a store, all of them expressed a lack of trust in the conveyed messages on the labels. It is argued that sustainability in the fashion industry is demanded by consumers, governments and non-profit organizations. Hence, fashion retailers have to adapt to this trend. However, the consumers know this and that makes them feel that the messages on the sustainability labels, especially the self-claimed labels, are less trustworthy. Therefore, the consumers present considerable skepticisms towards the green claims of fashion companies. Moreover, consumers have lower trust towards self-claimed labels because these labels lack a high level of transparency regarding the sustainability practices of the company and contain misleading and vague information.

Additionally, as exemplified by some participants, sustainability labels are used by fashion companies to persuade the consumers that they are sustainable brands, even when this is not the case. "Green-washing" is a term that has been used a lot in conjunction with the previously described belief in the interviews of many participants. The consumers believe that sustainability labels are only present on clothes to persuade shoppers that the fashion retailers are offering a "sustainability choice" among other fashion products, even if the sustainability-labelled products are not sustainable. Thus, the main purposes of the sustainability labels as perceived by the interviewed consumers, particularly self-declared labels, are to differentiate between products, increase companies' competitiveness and profits, as well as to stimulate shoppers into buying products without questioning or investigating further if the products really are sustainable. As pointed out by Taufique et al. (2017) and Kirchhoff (2000), consumers do not place lots of trust in self-declared labels of companies because of the companies' vested interests. The following quote illustrates this argument:

"I feel like you can't really trust it, it feels like it is just an effort to try to get consumers to pay a little bit more, it does not feel real. I think they are doing greenwashing and trying to trick us [...]. So many companies are probably just taking a chance and doing greenwashing and claiming things that are not true. [...] Some companies are concerned for real and doing brand development focusing on putting a lot of effort and time into getting the eco friendliness

integrated into their brand. But for other companies they are just jumping on a trend and trying to market themselves as more sustainable because they have to talk about it, but I don't feel that it is always reliable". – Johanna

Nevertheless, all participants claimed that even though their trust in sustainability labels is low, it does not affect their consumption choices negatively. This is because they think that there is at least a chance that the products are produced sustainably, unlike products without the labels. Hence, the consumers believe that there might be some truth involved in the messages conveyed by the fashion firms, so they try to trust the claims to some extent. This finding is in line with the arguments of Shaw et al. (2006) who stated that even when consumers are faced with the lack of information and a high level of uncertainty, they simply try to trust the claims of fashion retailers.

It is also interesting to find that sustainability labels are not the only factor that impacts the consumers' trust in the claims of fashion retailers. Instead, there are different elements that the consumers take into consideration, such as the store environment, the diversity and availability of sustainable products, the reputation of the brands and the business models of the fashion companies in regard to sustainability. This helps to explain the reasons why all interviewees expressed very great skepticism towards the sustainability-labelled products of fast fashion retailers such as H&M. The following quote illustrates this skepticism:

"I know that H&M has a conscious collection and if you're concerned about sustainability and the prices are still cheap and they still produce so many new clothes and put them in the store, at least for me it does not feel like they are sustainable for real". – Hanna

Moreover, it is interesting to highlight that all interviewees expressed stronger reliability in third-party verified labels from well-known organizations, such as Fairtrade and Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS), rather than self-declared labels, as they believe that the fashion products certified by these organizations need to meet very strict requirements of either or both dimensions of sustainability. Indeed, the third-party certified sustainability labels tend to be more transparent and reliable to the consumers (Taufique et al., 2017). Furthermore, it can be highlighted that, when all attributes are similar, there is a higher chance of a garment certified by a third-party to be selected than the one with a self-declared label because of the fact that the first one is seen as more reliable and trustworthy by consumers. However, it is important to point out that this also depends on the kind of third-party labels, as some are seen as more reliable by the consumers. For example, one of the very competent and concerned participants claimed that she did not place her trust in EU flower ecolabels as the political interests of the labels prevail over the environmental reasoning in the process of establishing criteria.

Another significant finding in this study is that the sustainability labels do not significantly influence the consumers' clothing choices, no matter how they perceive the labels. This finding is consistent with the arguments of D'Souza et al. (2015), as the researchers state that sustainability labels on fashion products do not have a considerable effect on consumers' purchasing decisions. Regardless of the consumers' trust in sustainability labels or the presence of sustainability labels, all participants stated that their clothing choices are guided by other main characteristics of products such as fit, design, material and quality. It may be explained by the fact that when it comes to fashion products, consumers pay more attention to a garment's function as a way to create their identity. The design of a garment and fit are the first important factors that the interviewed participants take into account when they go shopping. Indeed, they want to ensure that the garment that they are interested in will match their wardrobe, fit their body nicely and have a timeless design. After design and fit, material is another critical element that the consumers pay attention to and this attribute is closely related to other factors, including quality, comfortability and durability. It is strongly claimed by some consumers that they felt very confident and comfortable when they wear a garment that makes them feel good about themselves. Quality, in this context, means that it should be long-lasting and that there is no need to go shopping too often, which then leads to another important attribute that is highly emphasized by all participants, "the need for it". The later attribute is closely related to the functions of the product, such as if that garment can be worn in different situations. As argued by Clancy et al. (2015), there are some important attributes of sustainable fashion products, such as not only being long-lasting but also fulfilling the needs of consumers regarding identity creation and function. Price is another element that all participants consider as they are aware of the fact that a sustainable garment should not be too cheap. Thus, the logical thinking that can be found in the perception of all consumers is that a cheap garment cannot be completely sustainable. As commented by the participants, very cheap clothing is produced at the expense of the intense use of water, energy and chemicals. It also implies that the working conditions are bad, the wages are low, and the raw materials are not sourced sustainably. Hence, they are willing to pay a premium price for a garment which is made of good materials, has high quality, durability, good appearance and fits them well, as they believe that the garment is inherently more sustainable than a very cheap one that lacks these same characteristics. It is important to notice that all attributes are closely related to each other and have a strong link to consumers' perception of a sustainable product regardless of the presence of its sustainability label or their trust in the label. Therefore, the degree of sustainability can be evaluated based on these

characteristics which are valued by all participants, rather than a sustainability label found randomly on a fashion product. Two participants commented below:

“I always try to have a critical mindset. [...] I don’t buy it because of the label, I always consider other aspects before purchasing clothing [...].” – Maja

“Material is one thing, how it feels. Looks of course, if I like how something looks, I would wear it more often and I would want to buy it if I like how it looks”. – Hanna

However, it is interesting to mention that when being asked about the choice between a garment with a sustainability label and one with no labels, with the other product attributes being quite similar, all consumers agreed that they would select the first option even though they may not put great trust in the label. To explain why, many consumers stated that the sustainability label can be used as a confirmation of their choice or at least, it makes them believe that they have done a good action towards sustainability. For instance, an interviewed consumer who is very concerned and competent about sustainability issues related to the fashion industry, stated that she felt more hesitant to purchase a garment without a sustainability label as she did not know if the purchase decision was wrong or not.

The above findings in this section show that there is a high complexity in making sustainable fashion choices and in how consumers perceive the value of sustainability labels on clothing products. On the one hand, the consumers present a low level of trust towards sustainability labels, particularly self-declared labels. On the other hand, they still consider sustainability labels in their purchasing decision because purchasing a sustainability-labelled product makes them feel happy, as they believe that they are doing something good to the environment and society. Furthermore, it can be argued that the knowledge of consumers regarding sustainability labels and their ability to understand the provided information can contribute to their selection of a sustainable fashion product to some extent. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that through a piece of clothing, people express their identity and make statements about themselves. Hence, sustainability labels on fashion products are not of the highest priority. The findings present that there are some specific product attributes that are more valued than sustainability labels by the consumers when it comes to fashion shopping. Moreover, the consumers also apply different strategies to evaluate whether a garment can be qualified as sustainable, no matter if the sustainability labels are present or not. In addition, there is a close relationship between the more valued attributes and the durability of the product and sustainable shopping in this research, which is similar to the previous findings of Fuentes (2014) about how consumers focus on buying durable products to ensure that they do not have to make purchases often in the long run, which affect their consumption levels. Furthermore, these attributes are

also used by consumers to help evaluate the products when the information provided by the sustainability labels is not perceived to be credible, trustworthy or helpful. As claimed by Ritch (2015), heuristics are used by consumers to guide their sustainable fashion choices when there is a lack of reliable and appropriate information provided by fashion companies.

Discussions

The findings of this study present that because of the lack of related competences and meanings, the influence of the sustainability labels on consumers' choices of sustainable fashion products is not considerable enough to make them perform the sustainable shopping practice.

With regard to the competence element, the consumers in this study present a varying degree of knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues caused by the fashion industry. It can be explained by the fact that low awareness affects consumers' level of knowledge and that the information provided on sustainability labels is not adequate, relevant or trustworthy enough to make up for the lack of awareness. Additionally, it can also be because of the fact that consumers have low interest in sustainability when it comes to fashion. As a result, the less concerned and competent consumers seem to be more interested in their personal needs, which then affect their consumption choices. As stated by Connell (2010) and McNeill and Moore (2015), consumers will be more engaged in sustainable consumption when there is an increase in their knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues. Furthermore, the consumers also show varying levels of knowledge, know-how and understanding of sustainability labels. The variety of label types, the use of vague and misleading claims, and the use of terms that are unusual or inconsistent on sustainability labels also cause high confusion for the consumers, due to their limited knowledge or lack of familiarity. Therefore, they are generally not very sure about what the differences are between choices, or do not properly understand the information about the environmental and social performance of sustainable fashion products. Consequently, they either do not buy anything or just choose a product that they are more interested in. It means that the effectiveness of sustainability labels on guiding consumers' choices is reduced, which negatively affects consumers' ability to make ethical purchase decisions about sustainability-labelled fashion products. This finding is consistent with the research of Testa et al. (2015) and Taufique et al. (2017) who claim that consumers find it difficult to make informed decisions when they do not have the related knowledge about the sustainable performance of products, and sustainability labels not providing credible and sufficient information about the sustainable performance. However, as for more concerned and competent consumers, there are exceptions, since they are sometimes familiar with some commonly conveyed messages,

because they are more knowledgeable. Moreover, the distinct characteristic that can be found in the group of the more concerned and competent participants is that they always keep their knowledge updated so that they can be able to use the information provided on the labels to make more reasoned and conscious purchases. It can be implied that in order to carry out the sustainable shopping practice, the consumers are required to have the knowledge and know-how to understand the information conveyed by the sustainability labels that they encounter, which is found to be in line with the study of Salaün and Flores (2001). This means that only information cannot lead to the carriers of the practice increasing their knowledge and changing their shopping behavior towards more sustainable fashion choices.

In regard to the meaning component, it has been found that the more concerned and competent consumers show moral feelings when selecting fashion products with sustainability labels. These kinds of feelings are not expressed clearly when they compare with, for example, shopping for sustainable food. As discussed by Joergens (2006) and Shen et al. (2014), ethical issues which are closely related to an individual consumer, will have a higher influence on the consumer's choices than other ethical issues. This helps to explain the fact that consumers purchase sustainable food on a regular basis because they acknowledge that it is healthier for their bodies while the detrimental effects of clothing on their body are less noticeable. It can be implied that the consumers lack perceived meanings about personal sustainable benefits of fashion products, which is one of the major reasons preventing them from acting more sustainably. Hence, it can be assumed that the consumers will be more likely to take actions in a more sustainable way if they can acknowledge the personal benefits and differences from consuming sustainable fashion products. Furthermore, the findings also indicate that the consumers may change their shopping and consumption behavior if they are able to understand the bad outcomes from their conventional shopping. This aligns with the arguments of Johnstone and Tan (2014) about the fact that consumers find it difficult to change their behaviors if they cannot completely realize the long-term negative outcomes and consequences of their actions on the environment and society. Furthermore, the interviewed consumers also doubt the reliability of the self-declared labels. It is because they perceive the presence of these labels as a marketing trick that fashion companies use to increase their competitiveness and differentiate themselves from competitors. This significantly erodes the trust of the consumers in the sustainability labels of the retailers. However, even though the consumers place low trust in sustainability labels, particularly self-declared labels, it does not influence their choices negatively as they try to trust the claims of retailers to some extent. This is because they experience positive feelings when they believe they are doing something good for the

environment and society. Moreover, when making a choice between a fashion product with a sustainability label and one without, consumers tend to choose the sustainability-labelled garment, when all other characteristics are similar. It is also necessary to emphasize that when it comes to shopping fashion products, which helps people build their identity, all interviewed participants put a strong emphasis on other more valued attributes of a garment (such as design, fit, material, and quality), especially if the consumers perceive the claims on sustainability labels as less credible, trustworthy or helpful. As stated by Ritch (2015), consumers are dependent on heuristics to guide their decision-making of sustainable fashion choices when there is a lack of trustworthy and relevant information provided by fashion companies. Additionally, the participants indicated that they relate the other more valued attributes of a product to sustainable shopping and consumption, rather than solely depending on the presence of sustainability labels when making a sustainable fashion choice. This is in line with the arguments of Fuentes (2014) about how consumers concentrate on purchasing durable products with the aim of reducing the frequency of shopping and consumption levels.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that sustainability labels and other materialities, which are a part of the material component of the sustainable shopping practice, play a critical role in guiding and promoting sustainable fashion products to the consumers. The findings from the observations and interviews of this paper show that consumers found the sustainability-labelled fashion products more reliable and trustworthy in a supportive socio-material retailscape, which can have a positive impact on their sustainable choices. As not all consumers actively search for sustainable products when they get into a fashion store, the in-store materialities of the sustainability service consisting of signage, sustainability labels and store layout, help to increase the chances that the consumers will be able to recognize and pay attention to the garments with sustainability labels. As discussed by Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016), the in-store sustainability service provides the consumers with the possibility to encounter and buy sustainable products, as well as increase their knowledge concerning sustainability issues. As a result, sustainable shopping and fashion choices can be greatly enhanced.

All in all, the findings in this study present that the sustainability labels alone, which function as materials of the sustainable shopping practice, do not significantly affect consumers' sustainable fashion choices. As argued by Warde (2005) and Røpke (2009), the carriers of a practice need to possess the knowledge, know-how and commitment to the value of the practice as well as make sense of the activities when performing the practice. It can be indicated that in order for the sustainable shopping practice to be performed, there is a need for the specific configuration of all components in this study that together enables and shapes the performance

of the practice. The competence component of the sustainable shopping practice is about consumers' knowledge and understanding about sustainability issues; consumers' knowledge, know-how to use sustainability labels when going shopping, and consumers' ability to understand the information provided on the sustainability labels. Furthermore, the meaning component of the sustainable shopping practice includes consumers' knowledge regarding sustainability issues caused by the apparel industry, and consumers' trust in sustainability labels in the way that the labels are perceived to be useful and meaningful. It can be argued that consumers perform the sustainable shopping practice when they can relate the related competences and meanings to sustainability labels. More specifically, the sustainable shopping practice is conducted when consumers have the know-how and knowledge to use sustainability labels and understand conveyed messages, perceive the sustainability labels as meaningful and useful, have the knowledge and concerns about environmental and social issues related to the fashion industry, and understand the significant difference of making sustainable consumption choices compared with conventional shopping. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that the information provided on sustainability labels need to be closely connected to consumers' knowledge and understanding in the way that consumers are able to make sense of and use it to make informed purchase decisions. As a result, it can be assumed that the chances of integrating sustainability labels into the sustainable shopping practice will be increased. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the sustainable shopping practice in the fashion context is quite complicated as consumers are not always consistent when it comes to what they know, trust or are concerned about and what they actually do. Therefore, even though all consumers in this study mention that they feel good and happy when they purchase fashion products with sustainability labels, it does not mean that they will automatically buy any sustainability-labelled products when going shopping. Rather, they seem to be more influenced by other more valued attributes of fashion products (e.g. design, fit, etc.). This adds more complexity to the sustainable practice theory. Even when the consumers are knowledgeable and concerned, and the sustainability labels are present on fashion products, they might still choose products without labels because they value the other attributes of products more, particularly if they can use their own strategies to judge that garment as sustainable.

Conclusion

The first aim of this paper is to study the relationship between sustainability labels functioning as materials of the sustainable shopping practice and the related competences and meanings in the fashion context. Then, the second aim is about understanding how consumers' sustainable

fashion choices, which are actions derived from the sustainable shopping practice, are influenced by these components. It has been found that due to the lack of related competences and meanings regarding consumers' knowledge, understanding and concerns about sustainability issues caused by the apparel industry; consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding of sustainability labels; as well as consumers' trust in sustainability labels, the influence of the sustainability labels on consumers' choices of sustainable fashion products is not considerable enough to make them conduct the sustainable shopping practice. Furthermore, it is indicated that the sustainable shopping practice can be performed when the components are in the specific configuration of sustainability labels as materials and the related competencies and meanings. Thus, consumers perform the sustainable shopping practice when they have knowledge and know-how to use sustainability labels and understand the conveyed information; perceive sustainability labels as useful and meaningful; possess knowledge, understanding and concerns about environmental and social issues related to the fashion industry; and understand the significant difference of making more sustainable shopping and consumption choices. The findings in this paper contribute to previous knowledge and the research fields of sustainable consumption, sustainable shopping, and sustainability labels (e.g. Testa et al., 2015; Rahbar & Wahid, 2011). By taking a practice theory approach, it can be argued that the understanding of how the cognitive processes (such as trust, concern, knowledge and understanding) related to sustainability labels has been enhanced, which then leads to increasing the understanding of consumers' sustainable choices in fashion. It can be implied that when consumers are more knowledgeable and concerned about sustainability issues, are able to understand the information conveyed by sustainability labels, as well as perceive the sustainability labels as meaningful and useful, they will be more likely to engage in sustainable shopping and consumption. However, this study shows that it is not true in all cases as the sustainable shopping practice is complex in the fashion context. It is because there is a lack of consistency regarding consumers' behavior and their knowledge and concern about sustainability.

Furthermore, it can be implied that sustainability labels need to be communicated in a way that the consumers perceive them as meaningful and useful to make a reasoned and conscious purchase decision. There are several ways that can help to increase the awareness and knowledge of consumers through the use of sustainability labels. For example, as the information regarding sustainability issues caused by the fashion industry or the sustainable performance of products cannot be fully provided on a sustainability label, this can be solved by making the label scannable and easily accessible by using QR code. Then, consumers can

easily search for and acquire complete information about the source of raw materials and the production processes with a few simple taps on their phone. Also, the conveyed message of sustainability labels should be made more understandable by using numbers and visualization. In this way, the consumers can compare between different products easier and judge which one is better than the others. In addition, one of the ways that can help to enhance consumers' trust in sustainability labels is by providing transparent information. Because it is not only about how fashion products are produced and the related impacts of the fashion industry on the dimensions of sustainability, but also about other aspects such as how the retailers deal with the logistics processes. Additionally, it is necessary for the combination of other materialities (such as signs, store layout) of the in-store sustainability service to guide and promote consumers towards more sustainable shopping and consumption. An increase of consumers' knowledge about sustainability issues and their understanding of the significant differences of engaging with sustainable consumption, together with improvements to sustainability labels as well as other in-store materialities, can also help to contribute to the changes of consumers' shopping practice. Therefore, enhancing all components integrated in the sustainable shopping practice will lead to a high possibility that consumers will take actions of selecting sustainable fashion products. It can be argued that the understanding of sustainable consumption in fashion can be further increased from a practice theory perspective rather than studying sustainability labels or cognitive processes separately. As claimed by Røpke (2009), a co-evolutionary perspective that combines the study of domestic practices with the research of their wider ramifications can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the shaping of the environmental influences of consumption.

Managerial implications

This research puts a strong emphasis on the sustainable shopping practice and the elements that are embedded in the practice, which then leads to practical implications for the fashion retailers. The findings of this research present that consumers show a low level of trust in the sustainability labels of the fashion retailers due to the fact that the information provided is not very useful, trustworthy and relevant, which lead them to feeling that it is difficult to make an informed purchase decision. Therefore, they will rely on their own strategies to help them with decision making about sustainable fashion choices. Furthermore, the consumers also show limited knowledge concerning sustainability issues caused by the apparel industry and lack strong meanings of acting more sustainably. Therefore, this study provides some suggestions on how the fashion retailers who have a strong interest in developing their business towards

sustainability, can make necessary changes to achieve their goals. For example, the important attributes of the products such as design, functions and materials need to be taken into account, along with considerable changes of the conveyed messages of sustainability labels regarding transparency, easy access of information and understandability. Besides, the in-store materialities such as signage and store display also need to be taken into account with the aim of increasing the presence of sustainable fashion products, guiding consumers in their shopping and promoting them towards more sustainable consumption. In addition, it is necessary for the retailers to make their claims on sustainability labels more sincere and meaningful by showing their dedicated efforts towards sustainability in their business operations. In this way, the retailers may present themselves as less greenwashing and more trustworthy towards consumers.

Future research

This study focuses on the sustainable shopping practice in a fashion context by analyzing the influence of the relationships between the material component in the shape of sustainability labels, and related competences and meanings on consumers' sustainable fashion choices. The analysis of this study presents that the performance of sustainable fashion shopping is connected to a particular configuration of components and may vary between contexts and carriers. As stated by Warde (2005, p. 138), "social practices do not present uniform planes upon which agents participate in identical ways but are instead internally differentiated on many dimensions". The future research can be extended to explore how sustainable shopping practice of consumers varies between specific groups (male or female, age ranges). As indicated by Warde (2005) and Fuentes and Fredriksson (2016), studies of sustainable shopping practice among other groups of carriers may lead to different results, presenting variations in the way in which the practice is performed.

Appendix

Interview guide

Consumers' fashion shopping routine:

- Can you describe the latest shopping trip for clothing? Where and when did you go? What did you buy? How long did you go shopping?
- Did you see any sustainability labels? What labels did you recognize? Can you give examples of labels that you saw? Does it have any message? Did you read it? How did you understand it? How did you feel when you saw it?
- Do you remember any garment with sustainability labels that you bought? What kind of sustainability label is it? How much did the garment cost? What was the product made of? How do you compare it with other garments which don't have sustainability labels? What do you think about its design, material and comfortability?
- Do you always look for sustainable fashion products when you get into a store?

Consumers' interests in sustainability in the fashion context:

- What does sustainability mean to you in the fashion context? How can you find a sustainable garment when shopping in a store?
- Do you care about where and how sustainable clothing is produced? How do you do it?

Consumers' ethical and environmental concerns regarding, and knowledge about, sustainability issues related to the apparel industry:

- What do you know about the environmental and social issues caused by the fashion industry? Can you provide some examples?
- How important is it to purchase sustainable fashion products to you?
- How do you consider sustainability (both environmental and social aspects) in your purchasing?

Consumers' knowledge, know-how and understanding of sustainability labels

- What do you think when you see fashion products with sustainability labels?
- What do you think about the functions of sustainability labels?
- What do you think about the message on the labels of fashion products that the producers share with you? Do you always read the information on the label when shopping for clothing?
- How do you understand the information provided on the labels? What do you do if you don't understand the conveyed messages?

- Do you feel confused when you are exposed to different kinds of sustainability labels from many fashion retailers?
- How do you take the messages on sustainability labels into account when purchasing a fashion product?
- If you want to be informed of sustainability issues in the way you want, how would you change it? Will it affect your product choices and how?

The perceived meanings in connection with sustainability labels:

- How do you perceive the conveyed message on sustainability labels? Do you think that the conveyed information is reliable, relevant and appropriate? How much do you trust it?
- Do sustainability labels on fashion products affect your choices? In which way?
- How do you assess fashion retailers' effort into sustainability?
- How do you feel after purchasing a fashion product that has a sustainability label?

The critical features of a fashion product:

- What kinds of product attributes do you consider when purchasing clothing? How do you prioritize these attributes?
- Are you willing to pay more for a sustainable garment? What is your highest budget for clothing in general? How?
- If the attributes of two fashion products are similar, which garment will you choose, a product with a sustainability label or a product without a sustainability label?

General question:

- Could you tell me a bit about yourself? Age? Education? Job status?

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