Ibrar muhammad ilyas

Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Brand Positioning in Online Fast Fashion Retailers

School of Management
Strategic Business Development

Vaasa 2026

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA
School of Management
Author: Ibrar muhammad ilyas
Title of the Thesis: Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Brand Positioning in Online Fast Fashion Retailers
Degree: Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration
Programme: Strategic Business Development
Supervisor: Jukka Partanen and Anni Rajala
Year: 2026 **Pages: 81**

ABSTRACT :

The study examines the aspect of consumer trust and purchase intention about sustain-able brand positioning in the online fast-fashion sector. Quantitative research design was used, and data were collected with regard to 100 respondents using an online structured question-naire. To evaluate the relationship between the constructs, statistical tests employing a de-scriptive analysis, reliability encompassing tests, factor analysis, multiple regression, and moderation modelling were utilised. The results show that consumer trust is most strongly dependent on the perceived authenticity, which means that clear and verifiable sustainability assertions have a strong impact on increasing credibility. Trust, in its turn, has a positive im-pact on purchase intention, but social media influence is even more active, which implies the significance of external digital clues in online buying scenarios. Moderation tests explain that the effect of trust on purchase intent is reinforced by greenwashing awareness, such that knowledge is rewarded by always choosing the brand that seems to be dedicated to sustain-ability sincerely. On the other hand, subjective norms and perceived authenticity have no moderating effects on the trust-intention relationship but have a significant direct impact on the purchase intention. The research has theoretical implications in that the author has com-bined attributional, signalling, and behavioural perspectives to elucidate sustainability deci-sion-making and provided actionable information to brands, policymakers and regulators, who seek to establish credibility and create sustainable consumption. Limitations are being recognised, and future research suggestions are to be longitudinal, cross-cultural compari-son, and a broader moderation model. Altogether, the paper highlights the pivotal role of authenticity and trust as the key messages in sustainability communication and indicates the changing complexity of consumers to judge environmental discourse.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable fashion; Fast fashion; Perceived authenticity; Trust; Green-washing awareness; Social media influence; Subjective norms; Purchase intention; Attribution Theory; Signalling Theory; Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB); Consumer behaviour; Sustainability communi-cation

Table of Contents

Figures

Tables

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
PA	Perceived Authenticity
TRST	Trust
GW	Greenwashing Awareness
SN	Subjective Norms
PBC	Perceived Behavioural Control
EC	Environmental Concern
PI	Purchase Intention
SIM	Social Media Influence
ACB	Authentic Brand Behaviour
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

INTRODUCTION

Background

The fast fashion industry has experienced meteoric growth in recent decades. In 2024, its recent valuation stands at about USD 136.2 billion, and this is expected to rise to USD 150.8 billion in the year 2025, although it is projected to achieve a CAGR of 10.7% by the year 2032, as illustrated by Figure 1 (Cardona, 2025). It is not only performing very well economically, but it is also among the most resource-consuming and polluting sectors on earth. The textile industry contributes about 10 percent of carbon dioxide emissions globally, which is larger than international flights and shipping by sea (Maiti, 2025).

The water usage is one of the most astounding effects of fast fashion. Globally, approximately 93 billion cubic metres of water are consumed in the industry annually, which is enough to serve five million people (United Nations, 2019). According to a report published by UNEP (2018), producing a single pair of jeans can require over 3,781 litres of water, and according to a report presented by the European Parliament (2020), manufacturing just one cotton t-shirt may need more than 2700 litres of freshwater. Textile dyeing is the second-largest polluter of clean water on earth, contributing between 17–20% of industrial wastewater globally (Dutta et al., 2024).

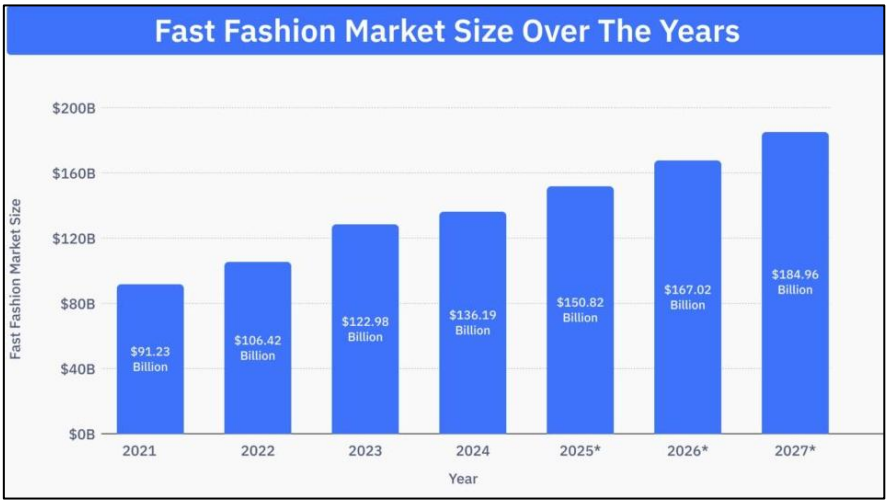

Figure 1: Fast Fashion Market Size from 2021 to 2027 (Cardona, 2025).

Beyond resource usage, fast fashion causes immense waste. According to the United Nations Environmental Protection (UNEP) (2025), every year, 92 million tonnes of textile waste is produced globally, equivalent to one garbage truck, which is burned or dumped in landfills every second. In the U.S. alone, 11.3 million tons of textiles were landfilled in 2018, representing over 7% of municipal waste (Chiu, 2025). Globally, less than 1% of clothing is recycled into new garments (Gueye, 2021). Synthetic microfibers exacerbate the problem. Up to 500,000 tons of microplastics enter the oceans each year from laundering synthetic garments like polyester, equivalent to 50 billion plastic bottles (McFall-Johnsen, 2020). According to IUCN, 35% of all ocean microplastics are textile-derived (Barrett, 2018).

Moreover, fast fashion continues to grow dramatically, reinforcing its global environmental burdens. The production of garments worldwide has grown in excess of 107 million metric tons of material in 2018 to a projected 111 million metric tons in 2019, with less than 20 per cent having some sort of sustainability credential (Textile Exchange, 2020). The fastest-growing segment is online fast fashion. SHEIN alone emitted 16.7 million CO_2 in 2023, more than four coal-fired power plants, and increased emissions 9.7% from the 2023 baseline, as shown in Figure 2 (Illuminem, 2024). In addition to CO_2, the fashion production lifecycle uses synthetic fibres, 60% of which are polyester, petroleum-derived, and shedding microplastics (Thomas et al., 2023). Producing polyester consumes approximately 342 million barrels of oil annually (Andreadakis and Owusu-Wiredu, 2023).

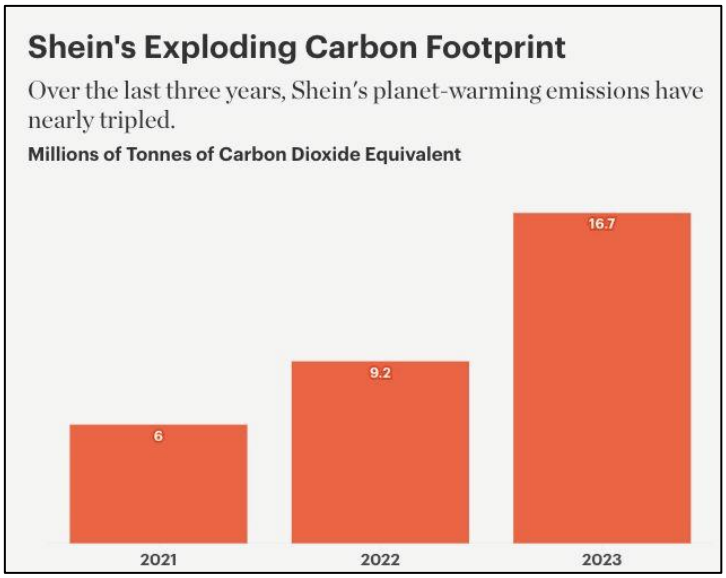

Figure 2: Shein's CO2 carbon footprint over the years

As environmental awareness increases, consumer attitudes toward sustainability in fashion have shifted noticeably, particularly in digital retail. According to a report presented by Forbes revealed that 80% of consumers consider sustainability important, and 70% are willing to pay more for traceable, eco-friendly brands (Widlitz, 2020). PwC's Voice of the Consumer survey of 20,000 people across 31 countries indicated that consumers are willing to pay on average 9.7% more for sustainably produced goods, even amid inflation (PwC, 2024). It is important to note that 85 percent said that they personally felt climate disruption, and one-fourth of all consumers purchase sustainability-focused products online (PwC, 2024).

The younger people, like the Gen Z generation and Millennials, are the most demanded segments in terms of sustainability. The findings of First Insight report (First Insight, 2025) suggest that 62 percent of Gen Z favour sustainable brands, and 73 percent are willing to pay more (Brook, 2020). On the same note, a YouGov survey of 17 markets revealed that 53 percent of consumers would be willing to pay a premium on sustainable clothing as it was reflected in Figure 3. In spite of this goodwill, there is still an impediment in price: 31 percent note inflation as one of the major risks to their purchases, and 62 percent anticipate an increase in the cost of groceries compared to fashion (PwC, 2024). This brings out how fragile sustainability versus affordability as a factor of consumer choice is.

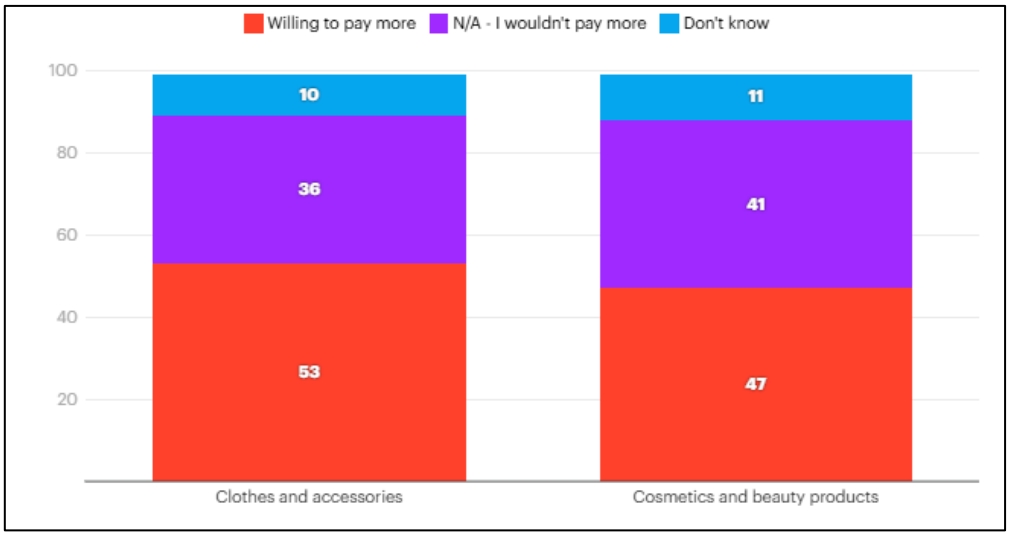

Figure 3: Survey of consumers across 17 international markets

As a reaction, the fast fashion brands have initiated several environmentally friendly programmes. The Washington Post confirms that, for example, H&M, Zara, and Primark invested in recycled materials, the take-back scheme, and repair services (Chiu, 2025). Nevertheless, the model of volume is here to stay; according to a recent McKinsey report, 2/3 of fashion companies fail to reach their 2030 emissions goals, and some companies are even advancing their carbon footprint (Janmark et al., 2024).

Increased greenwashing, false proclamations on the environment, is also of high interest. In a report conducted by Khaitan Legal Associates (2024), it was possible to discover that the sustainability claims of up to 60 percent of fashion brands are either misleading or unchecked. The social media consumer ecosystems are now proactive in combating greenwashing, and young consumers are quick to derail irregular claims. However, opposing evidence is present: even though 58 percent of Gen Z says they will buy sustainable products, a great number of people remain customers of such sites as SHEIN (New York Post, 2024).

Problem Statement / Research Gap

The fashion industry, particularly the fast fashion segment, is under growing scrutiny due to its substantial environmental footprint and unsustainable production practices.

As the industry faces increasing pressure to adopt more sustainable models, brands have responded by promoting eco-friendly initiatives, green product lines, and responsible sourcing through their digital platforms (Testa et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the issue of authenticity of these sustainability claims is becoming increasingly more prominent as consumers find it hard to root out the real commitments of actual commitments to sustainability, and greenwashing, a deceptive marketing technique where a brand overhypes or outright lies about their green commitment.

Although in digital branding of fast fashion, sustainability messages are already quite common, a mismatch between brand communication and customer trust is also significant (Goldsmith, 2015). Despite this growth in the number of advertisements related to sustainability, however, more recent polls show that consumers are not as uniformly trusting of such claims, especially when they are uttered by the lips of companies that just recently made a great deal of them, whose prices have always been low, and whose products have a short shelf life. This inconsistency raises certain paramount issues when it comes to the meaning and response of consumers to sustainability messages in the online context of fast fashion.

Existing literature (Božić, 2017) on sustainable fashion has centred on the subtopics of supply chain improvement, corporate social responsibility (CSR) or policy-level practices. Not many studies have examined the real practice of the consumer when responding to the message of sustainability, particularly in cases when online retailing will encounter more contact with the brand, since exposure to the brand through online media will be increased. Furthermore, the approaches to assessing brand authenticity also frequently do not take into account the cognitive and emotional viewpoint of the consumer in the scholarly community of discourse, which is more of a firm-based attitude.

This gap is essential to conduct the research in the spirit of a consumer-centred approach to examine the points of trust, awareness and perception of authenticity of sustainability claims in online fast fashion. The subjective understanding of what consumers feel is real and what is only a superficial desire when making a decision of

using true effects and a more superficial variety of greenwashing is a valuable component of both theoretical knowledge and strategy behind branding in a rapidly evolving world of retailers.

Research Question

The primary research question of this study is:

"How do consumers perceive sustainable brand positioning efforts by online fast fashion retailers?"

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how consumers perceive and respond to sustainable brand positioning strategies employed by online fast fashion retailers. This aims at becoming familiar with the strength of consumer trust towards sustainability-related claims, the influence of these sustainability-related claims on the intentions to buy green products, and the level of awareness of the concept of greenwashing. These aspects will assist the research in coming up with some empirical findings as to how empirically and practically sustainability-based branding has influenced consumer behaviour within the fast fashion e-commerce environment.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

1. To explore consumer trust in sustainable fashion branding

This objective investigates how much confidence consumers place in the environmental and ethical claims made by fast fashion retailers and what factors influence this trust.

2. To assess how sustainability affects purchase intentions

The study examines whether the presence of sustainability narratives in branding strategies influences consumers' willingness to purchase from fast fashion brands.

3. To measure awareness of greenwashing and perceptions of authenticity

This objective measures how much consumers understand greenwashing actions and perceive genuine sustainable activities and a false brand message.

Theoretical Motivation

The study is based on interdisciplinary theories of consumer behaviour, brand positioning and sustainability communication. It is theoretically driven by the necessity to learn more about the ways of how the consumer thinks and feels about branding cues under environmental ethics and online business. Much of the current literature on the sustainability area of the fast fashion industry has been firm-centric and dwells upon corporate strategies (Webb, 2021), supply chain enhancements (Božić, 2017), or sustainability reporting (Gazzola et al., 2020; Goldsmith, 2015). Contrarily, this research takes the consumer's point of view, and thus it adds to the theoretical knowledge on how consumers interpret the signal of sustainability in the online retail setting.

Also, the research has an input towards the branding and trust theory, especially because it touches on the perceived brand authenticity, green consumer scepticism, and ethical decision-making. Through a systematic method of quantitative research, the study fills the research gap in qualitative/descriptive studies previously conducted, providing empirical research on consumer perceptions and reactions to sustainable branding in a competitive and sometimes paradoxical fast fashion industry.

Significance of the Study

Academic Significance

This research fills a gap in the literature on sustainability and consumer behaviour since it is carried out based on findings of the empirical research conducted on the concerns

that consumers bring to bear on sustainable brand positioning within the online fast fashion industry. Recent research on this topic is normally taken with a firm-based or theoretical approach without a focus on the subtle consumer perceptions. The study is part of the expanding body of literature on sustainable consumption, especially in the online shopping setting, that places emphasis on the consumer-focused accounts and experience. It adds value to the academic discussion of green marketing, brand authenticity, and ethical consumerism within a rather under-researched setting of fast fashion e-commerce.

Practical Significance

Practically, the study offers practical information to brand strategists, digital marketing managers, sustainability managers, and e-commerce platforms. Connected to the growing popularity of fast fashion brands addressing environmental concerns in their digital branding strategy and delivering claims, therefore, the key question is how such information is perceived by the audience, by whom it is aimed, consumers, particularly younger, digitally-focused consumers, who are at the same time the most active consumers and often the most sceptical of greenwashing. The research assists businesses in avoiding repurchase intentions and greenwashing awareness of purchase intentions by understanding the context of trust. It also educates the development of effective, transparent and moral branding strategies that can create long-term loyalty of consumers and brand equity in a marketplace that is becoming more and more value-oriented.

Scope and Limitations

This research addresses the consumers' perception of 18-35 as a market segment because this is a segment that is the main market when considering fast fashion e-commerce, since these consumers have great digital penetration and are powerful consumers. The research is limited only to online fast fashion to physical stores and retailing. In the case of scalability and statistical analysis, a structured and quantitative

survey is utilised as the main data collection instrument. Nevertheless, this strategy can prevent the possibility of getting deeper emotional or psychological depth, which may be disclosed through qualitative methods. Moreover, the sample can be biased by geographical or even cultural concentrations in the distribution of surveys, which can lead to the problem of generalizability, although the study is aimed at a global view. These shortcomings will be considered with keen consideration in the research analysis and discussion process.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is structured into six chapters, which create a logical continuity with each other to create a coherent and all-inclusive narrative of research:

- **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The chapter is a critical review of scholarly literature on sustainability in the fast fashion sector, digital branding, greenwashing, and consumer behaviour theories. It determines major controversies, literature gaps, and theoretical frameworks guiding the research.

- **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The chapter describes the research design, which involved the development of the structured survey, sampling, data collection protocols and the quantitative analysis techniques which will be used to interpolate the data.

- **Chapter 4: Results**

The results chapter gives support to the empirical findings based on the survey. It contains descriptive statistics, correlation and regression analysis demonstrating consumer attitudes and behaviour concerning sustainable branding.

- **Chapter 5: Discussion**

In the chapter, the empirical findings are interpreted based on the research questions and available literature. It evaluates the balance or imbalance between the actual outcomes and theoretically expected outcomes, as well as some implications towards the academic field and industry in general.

- **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The last chapter presents some conclusions of the main findings of the study and states how it contributes to the theory and practice, and finally gives realistic suggestions that can be applied to the fashion retailers. It also deals with shortcomings of the study and suggests future research directions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter critically evaluates the available body of literature in line with three main research objectives, including (1) the role of trust in sustainable branded fashion, (2) the effects of sustainability features on buying intentions, and (3) the degree of awareness of greenwashing and brand authenticity perceptions. The review questions the presence of theoretical coherence, methodological issues, and relevance to contexts instead of simply summarising results. Finally, it develops a unified conceptual framework that brings together the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), Signalling Theory, and Attribution Theory to frame further empirical research.

Theoretical Framework

This study considers three theoretical frameworks, that is, Attribution Theory (Shin and Ki, 2021), Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973), and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), to describe consumer perception, evaluative responses, and responses to sustainability-related fast fashion claims of online fast fashion shops (Figure 4). Regarding sustainable branding, the Attribution Theory is used to describe the way in which consumers evaluate the intentions of their favourite brands when making environmental claims (Shin and Ki, 2021). When online fast fashion retailers promote sustainability, consumers attempt to determine whether these actions are driven by genuine environmental commitment (intrinsic motivation) or profit-driven marketing tactics (extrinsic motivation).

If the perceived motive is genuine, such as transparent reporting of shortcomings, supplier information, or lifecycle impact, consumers are more likely to form positive brand attitudes and trust (Kang and Hustvedt, 2014). Conversely, when motives are suspected to be opportunistic, the perception of greenwashing emerges, reducing purchase intentions (Nguyen et al., 2019). This interaction is particularly well applicable given the high sustainability literacy where consumers are more set up to uncover discrepancies between what is said and what is done.

Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973), is used in the brand communications about sustainability made in a manner that decreases consumer uncertainty (Williams and Hodges, 2022). Sustainability refers to an intangible quality in online fashion retail and cannot be perceived physically beforehand, so the consumer makes use of indicators like third-party certification (e.g., Nordic Swan Ecolabel), comprehensive tracking of products, or a publicly available impact report. Clear, verifiable messages increase the perceptions of genuineness and brand trustworthiness, whereas the clearly weak or unclear messages (labels saying that a product is environmentally friendly, but not any proof) do not help differentiate between genuine endeavours and greenwashing (Hossain, 2025). Digital literacy and environmental awareness tend to be high in the international market, so it is important that consumers are concerned with the quality of these signals, and strategic communication is critical to shape the trust (Tolegenov et al., 2024).

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) connects the perceptions of sustainability and the perceptions of the real intentions to make a purchase (Judge, Warren-Myers, and Paladino, 2019). Within this framework, consumer behaviour towards sustainable fast fashion is shaped by three factors. Attitude toward the behaviour, whether sustainability claims are seen as credible and beneficial, influences willingness to buy (Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Positive attitudes are more likely if authenticity is established through credible signals and transparent motives (as explained by Attribution and Signalling Theories). Social expectations, where sustainable consumption is culturally encouraged, can reinforce pro-sustainability purchasing if peers and influencers validate the brand's claims (Goldsmith, 2015). Perceived behavioural control. Even if attitudes and norms are favourable, consumers must feel they have accessible, affordable, and stylish sustainable options (Harris, Roby, and Dibb, 2016). Any mismatch, whether in high prices or lack of variety, can prevent intentions, no matter how strong the signals or perceived authenticity are.

These theories are brought together so that the study looks at consumer perceptions from several angles. Attribution Theory is used to explain the motivation, trust

inferences that are so as to create an impression of authenticity. Signalling Theory is an issue related to the sustainability communications of brands and how consumers decipher the brand messages online in a retail setting. These perceptions are directly related to purchase intentions in TPB and therefore help the study to conclude on the ultimate effect of trust and authenticity on consumer behaviour. This hybrid approach provides a strong foundation for the development of knowledge about the complex relationships between sustainability branding efforts, perceived authenticity, perception of greenwashing and consumer buying behaviour in the fast fashion e-commerce sector.

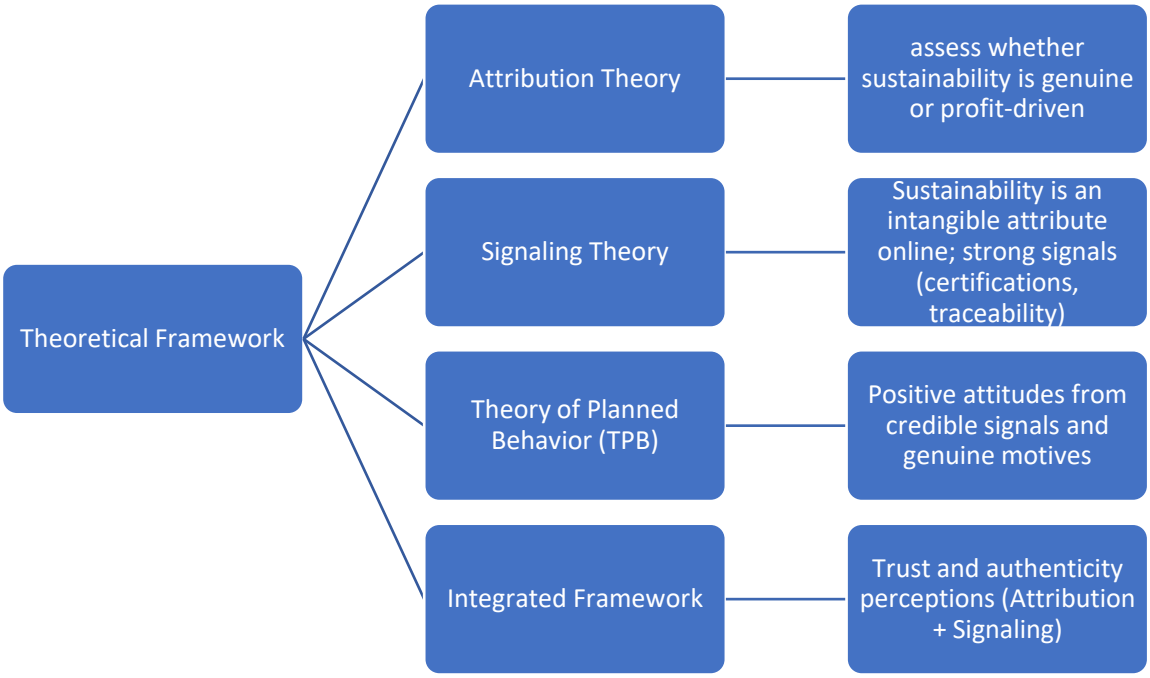

Figure 4: Theoretical Framework

Consumer Trust in Sustainable Fashion Branding

Credibility, Transparency, and Trust Dynamics

Neumann, Martinez, and Martinez (2021) revealed that perceptions of social responsibility have a great impact on trust and purchase intentions, whereas the consumer attitude and perceived consumer effectiveness did not demonstrate trust as a critical mediating factor. Nevertheless, this is opposed to the overall results, where

trust might not always mitigate low structural transparency within the messaging of fast fashion. To give an example, according to Vogue Business, not only confessions of failures could help to build credibility with Millennials and Gen Z, but they should be heavily supported by actual processes of sustainability other than mere positioning strategies (Webb, 2021).

Likewise, fast fashion companies such as H&M and Zara have encountered criticism over unspecified assertions and self-proclaiming sustainability, in a move that weakens credibility despite the ongoing efforts to brand the company ethically (Kozlowski, 2012). These studies reveal conflicting dynamics: institutional trust can be gained through transparent communication, but only if paired with substantive environmental integrity. Trust built merely on messaging may fail to withstand consumer scrutiny.

Digital Branding, Influencers, and Consumer Scepticism

According to the social media research conducted by MDPI, more than 90 percent of consumers aged 18-35 years had encountered greenwashing on the Internet (notably Instagram and YouTube); 60 had continued to research the brands they encountered, and more than 70 percent had developed negative attitudes whenever they saw misleading messages (Li, Cavender, and Lee, 2025). As an irony, 35% nevertheless made purchases within those brands, which reacted on the basis of prices and product availability, which pointed at the conflict between reliance and convenience (Li, Cavender, and Lee, 2025). It means that, although social platforms enhance sustainability assertions and greenwashing allegations, consumers can easily create (or demolish) credibility: influencers are capable of both. The power of these platforms is, therefore, two-sided. Such contradiction shows that the knowledge of greenwashing does not necessarily decrease purchasing, which reveals a gap in the current researches on the ways convenience and price outweigh ethics scepticism in online setting.

Trust in Fast Fashion vs. Luxury and Ethical Brands

Relative retail research (Neumann, Martinez, and Martinez, 2021) postulates that the structures of trust fast fashion has are not similar to those of luxury divisions, where ethical assertions have the potential to be taken more seriously because of legacy practices. High frequency and low-cost Fast fashion require, and, therefore, may compromise trust, particularly when the claims resonate with the business model. Honest disclosure can help reject scepticism, and the model used by the fast fashion industry puts it in an unfavourable position (Božić, 2017). This indicates the inherent incompatibility between brand strategy and consumer trust-building capacity. Although the literature is almost unanimous about the lack of trust in fast fashion, it is not yet clear whether the lack of trust is structurally determined or it is reinforced by poor disclosure and accountability systems.

Sustainability and Purchase Intentions

Ethical Purchase Intent - Behaviour Gap

There are a number of studies that continue to point to the attitudes-behaviour gap in which consumers declare their high attitudes with regard to sustainability and are not paying them through actual purchases. Indicatively, Bray, Johns, and Kilburn (2011) established that 30% of the people involved in their survey on sustainability in the UK, when purchasing clothes, thought it was important. Similarly, Jacobs et al. (2018) observed that fast fashion consumers often use sustainability as a secondary consideration, with price and trend relevance serving as primary drivers.

This is echoed by the First Insight report, which reported that 62% of online shoppers expressed willingness to pay more for sustainable products. Conversely, McNeill and Moore (2015) argued that when a brand is part of some really ethically driven customer groups, especially millennials, sustainability assertions can lead to purchasing intent increases as long as the brand presents proof that is not biased in terms of environmental and social activities. This indicates that the gap does not occur to an

equal extent in all consumer groups, as it is a factor of value orientations and also demographic factors. This evidence hence indicates that the attitudebehaviour gap is contingent but not universal, although very little is known how long-term credibility can narrow the gap in the long run.

Perceived Value of Sustainability in Online Retail

Sustainability has different significance with regard to perceived contribution to purchase intentions depending on the context. Han, Seo, and Ko (2017) showed that purchasers who see sustainability as a part of the product quality and not an added feature have a higher chance of developing strong purchase intentions when buying products online. This conforms to Testa et al. (2015), in which they concluded that core brand identities that integrate sustainability have a positive contribution to brand equity and purchase intentions.

The findings obtained by Niinimäki et al. (2020) are opposed, however, by the research results that the authors discovered that the pace of production in fast fashion brands tends to negate the validity of related messages of sustainability, lowering their effect on the intention to purchase a product. Studying European customers, despite the introduction of sustainability-based efforts by the brand, there was much doubt about whether the initiatives were genuine, which strongly curbed purchase intentions. The contradiction in the studies suggests that sustainability can only strengthen purchase intention when perceived as plausible and in accordance with the business model of the brand.

Influence of Generational and Cultural Factors

The sustainability purchase intention link is also constructed by generational differences. According to Gazzola et al. (2020), Gen Z consumers in Italy and the UK expressed more connection to sustainability values in buying behaviour than their older counterparts, especially when they acquired the services of online retailers who provided clear sourcing information to their consumers. In contrast, Joy et al. (2012) also

stated that novelty and high turnover of styles in the modern fashion industry frequently trumps the issue of sustainability, even among young consumers who might be aware of these facts in general.

Relationship is also made complex by cultural influences. In another example, Park and Lin (2020) informed that cultures that are collectivistic in nature (e.g., South Korea, China) would be more responsive to sustainability claims when framed in terms of community benefit, whereas cultures that are individualistic would prefer to be appealed to in terms of individual benefit. These results indicate that purchase intentions based on sustainability are ungeneralised across the nations and might need culturally composed brand messages. These combined results suggest that the influence of generational and cultural impacts plays off with industry structure which current research has a tendency to analyse separately.

Awareness of Greenwashing and Perceptions of Authenticity

Consumer Recognition of Greenwashing

Most importantly, various studies affirm that the perception of greenwashing greatly decreases consumer trust and purchase intent. A systematic literature study conducted by Tarabieh (2021) concludes that the resulting confusion and perceived risk of greenwashing damage trust and willingness to buy green products directly. It is consistent with results obtained in the context of fast fashion, where Rausch and Kopplin (2021) demonstrate that suspicion based on brand deception suspicions can cause consumers to make the simple decision to avoid buying altogether, instead of becoming victims of fraud.

On the contrary, some consumers with strong brand loyalty may be more forgiving, viewing ambiguous claims as misunderstandings rather than deliberate misrepresentation (Yu, Yang, and Wang, 2025). Further supporting this, a broader review of green brand equity literature finds that greenwashing erodes *green trust*,

weakening consumer perception and brand loyalty across contexts from manufacturing to retail (Gutiérrez, Torres, and Restrepo, 2024). Overall, brand loyalty can buffer part of the negative impacts, but greenwashing as a disruptive force on consumer trust is evident, specifically in high-vigilance online shopping contexts.

Authenticity as Signal

In attribution theory, the consumer perceives brand motives as a form of sustainability message. Better brands will be honest and gain fame through their own admissions. As an example, Ace & Tate enjoyed the positive perception of authenticity by being rawly honest about difficulties, which is a tactic that creates credibility, as opposed to diminishing it (Hoepner, 2024). Meanwhile, defective or questionable certification compounds the scepticism of the consumer. The scandalous example of Princess Polly being awarded the B Corp certification also posed questions of legitimacy among consumers because of the lack of transparency and disproportionate correspondence to the brand practices (Richards, 2025).

It is worth noting that according to a report by ACCC (Australian Competition and Consumer Commission), 57 per cent of Australian fashion firms made arguably false environmental claims, which only fueled the call to have regulatory clarity and greater authenticity standards (ACCC, 2023). A complementary study in *Sustainability* (2024) highlights that authenticity in brand communication through clarity, stakeholder interactions, and demonstrated values reduces perceptions of greenwashing. Robust, interactive, and consistent commitment signals help preserve the brand's green image (Tu et al., 2024). This underscores a common indifference regarding the definition of valid signals of authenticity and makes sustainability communication throughout the industry less effective.

Cynicism, Backlash, and Long-Term Effects

The result of this greenwashing is negative publicity due to the backlash, not only on the concerned brands but on green marketing in general. It is documented in the literature that epidemic greenwashing, in addition to lenient policing, contributes to a rise in

consumer mistrust overall, which ultimately tends to spread distrust in brands, even those that take the environment seriously (Salo, 2020).

The trend can be developed into the phenomenon of greenwashing, i.e., when companies are afraid to reveal or even subdue the genuine activities of sustainability protections to avoid customer backlash, or governmental regulation, and respond as such, which also poses a threat to transparency and trust-building in the long term (Hilton, 2025). Both factors undermine the opportunities of sustainability communication to convey more robust brand-consumer relations, which creates a vicious cycle of distrust and the emergence of so-called eco-fatigue. This implies that the prevalence of greenwashing is not just detrimental to single brands, but also jeopardising the entire concept of sustainability communications, and is a self-perpetuating cycle of distrust on the part of consumers.

Conceptual Framework

The study assumes that consumer trust, purchase intention, and awareness of greenwashing/authenticity perceptions are interrelated in assessing sustainable brand positioning in the online fast fashion industry based on the Attribution Theory, Signalling Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The framework assumes (Figure 5):

- Attribution processes influence whether sustainability claims are believed to be genuine or opportunistic, thereby shaping trust.
- Signalling strength (clarity, verifiability, and credibility of sustainability claims) impacts perceived authenticity, which in turn can moderate both trust and purchase intention.
- Awareness of greenwashing can undermine trust and weaken the relationship between sustainability claims and purchase intentions.
- TPB pathways link these perceptions to behaviour, where attitudes, norms, and perceived control collectively determine purchase intentions.

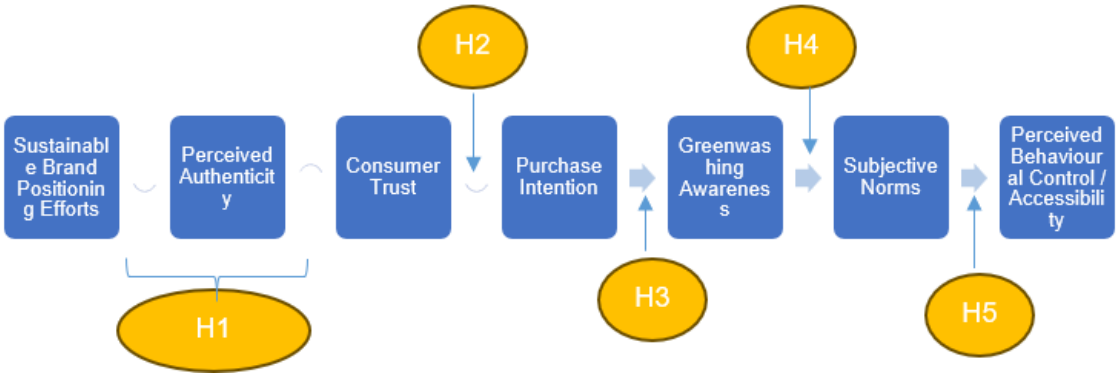

Figure 5: Visual Representation of Conceptual Framework

Hypothesis Development

Consumers who are highly sustainability-literate are highly sceptical of the sustainability claims of fast fashion retailers. The Attribution Theory is used to explain that a truthful motive is linked with the reinforcement of trust, whereas a view of a profit-based motive is linked with undermining trust. According to research findings by Rausch and Kopplin (2021), the perception of sincerity increases brand credibility, and greenwashing perception decreases brand credibility.

H1: There is a positive relationship between perceived authenticity of sustainability claims and consumer trust in online fast fashion retailers.

From the TPB perspective, attitudes shaped by credible sustainability claims should positively influence purchase intentions if consumers perceive the brand as genuinely sustainable. However, some research (De Angelis and Monasterolo, 2024) shows that sustainability claims can backfire when perceived as insincere. Accordingly, it is a mediating factor of trust.

H2: Consumer trust in a retailer's sustainability claims positively influences purchase intention.

Signalling Theory points to the fact that bad or obscure signals enhance uncertainty. Having the knowledge of greenwashing, consumers can dismiss sustainability messages

entirely, whether seen in a brand or not. This is consistent with the research findings that reveal increased scepticism to moderate the relationship between trust and intention.

H3: Awareness of greenwashing negatively moderates the relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention, such that higher awareness weakens this relationship.

Since sustainable brand positioning is a market that is socially responsible, the perceived behavioural control (TPB elements) and subjective norms could be contextual activators. Peer recommendation and availability of the sustainable options can reinforce the transformation of mistrust into purchasing behaviour.

H4: The positive relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention is stronger when subjective norms favour sustainable consumption.

H5: The positive relationship between consumer trust and purchase intention is stronger when consumers perceive sustainable options as accessible and affordable.

Numerous studies confirm that TPB constructs are significant to sustainability consumption, yet many studies often ignore the effects of trust and greenwashing. The position of trust is proven but situationally unsound, particularly in fast fashion, the business ideas of which are inherently incompatible with the idea of sustainability. The consumer level of greenwashing recognition is growing, although the role of greenwashing in their intention and actual purchase, particularly online and among younger audiences, has not been well studied. Having a few integrations of attribution and signalling theories and TPB in the fast fashion online environment requires the need to adopt a consumer-focused, theory-combined strategy. The study is a response to the fact that more subtle, integrative models are sought that consider both cognitive and affective content in online fast fashion sustainability perception.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology of the research is described that was used to explore the perception of consumers of sustainable brand positioning in the online fast fashion industry. The primary objective is to understand how sustainability initiatives, trust in sustainability claims, and awareness of greenwashing influence purchase intentions among online fashion consumers aged 18–35. This chapter details the research philosophy, design, target population, sampling strategy, data collection methods, analysis techniques, ethical considerations, and limitations.

Research Philosophy and Approach

The given research employs a positivist research philosophy that is applicable in investigating consumer opinion towards sustainable brand positioning in the fast fashion industry online. The positivism focuses on observable events and tries to find out patterns, and thus its application seems to be apt in this research that borrows data based on quantifiable and objective surveys. Saunders et al. (2019) state that positivism allows a researcher to adopt a value-free attitude and remain focused on empirical data and not interpretations.

Consumer attitude towards the sustainability claim, awareness of greenwashing, and any purchase intention will also be measured in this study in a systematic numerical scale manner that allows a certain objectivity and agreement in reproduction. The study is also deductive in the sense that it goes from theory to empirical verification. It is consistent with this perspective as posited on theoretical underpinnings like the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) which deems the causative links between purchase-decisions such as attitudes and the perceptions of behavioural control, and Signalling Theory (Spence, 1973), which describes how branding on the aspects of sustainability can be used as signals of authenticity in the minds of consumers.

It is possible to test the theoretical relationships through the use of deductive reasoning, as this type of reasoning provides the study with a possibility to test whether these theoretical relationships are true in the fast fashion context. Quantitative research design is preferred over the qualitative ones because the focus would not be on the individual accounts but on the ability to measure and statistically analyse trends in a wider population. The hypothesis testing can be specifically done through quantitative means, where it is possible to conduct correlation and regression analysis in determining the magnitude and direction of connections (Bryman, 2016).

As an example, it will be tested whether the implication of greater trust in sustainability statements is associated with more purchase intentions and whether the awareness of greenwashing will moderate this association. Given the widespread use of online surveys in consumer behaviour studies (Hair et al., 2019), this methodological approach ensures that findings can be statistically validated, are generalizable within the limits of the sampling method, and can contribute to bridging the existing gap in sustainability branding literature, which is often dominated by firm-centric or qualitative studies.

Research Design

This research will engage a cross-sectional form of the survey to understand consumer perceptions of a sustainable brand position in the online fast fashion market at one point in time. The cross-sectional design is optimal when it comes to analysing attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs without long-term follow-up, which is cost- and time-effective (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). It also enables researchers to obtain information on several respondents at a time, and this is given as a snapshot of the actual consumer sentiment.

Considering that the study goals suggest testing the relationships between such variables as trust in greenwashing, knowledge of greenwashing, purchase intentions, etc., the survey questionnaire will help conduct the statistical analysis using correlation and regression as key measures aimed to address the research questions (Saunders et al., 2019). Cross-sectional design especially fits the fashion consumers online, whose

choices, as well as habits, may change quickly because of trends, social media nature, and marketing initiatives.

As the study makes use of data at a single time, the confusion of time variations in fashion marketing strategies or environmental regulations does not occur. Moreover, a popular tool in the sustainability-oriented consumer research projects is a survey because the responses can be measured consistently across the respondents and facilitator comparisons and segment analyses (e.g., by age, gender, or frequency of purchase). The uniformity of data collection ensures reliability and facilitates hypothesis testing in line with the deductive approach. While a longitudinal design could provide insights into changes over time, it is less feasible within the scope and resources of this research. Therefore, the cross-sectional survey remains the most pragmatic choice, balancing methodological rigour with accessibility and efficiency.

Target Population and Sampling Strategy

The target audience in this research includes consumers (18-35 years old) who buy fast fashion products on the Internet regularly. The group has been selected since younger con-consumers are digitally engaged and becoming exposed to environmental conversation regarding sustainability in fashion marketing (McNeill and Moore, 2015). Also, studies posit that Gen Z and younger generations of Millennials are more conscious of the environment, yet their purchasing behaviour can be driven by pricing value and fashionability (Han, Seo, and Ko, 2017). The non-probability sampling technique is utilised, namely, the purposive sampling with the help of convenience sampling.

The purposive sampling is used to select those respondents who respond to the study based on the criteria of inclusion, age bracket, and buying behaviour of online fast fashion, and convenience sampling is used to reach the respondents by easily accessible means. Although such a method restricts the scope of generalizability, it is common in exploratory and perception-based consumer studies when it is impossible to use rigorous random sampling (Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim, 2016). Recruiting will happen through university friends, social media, including Instagram, TikTok, and X (Twitter),

where people talk about fashion and sustainability most often, as well as online forums/groups focused on fashion and sustainability, which will guarantee access to consumers already interested in related issues.

The sample size consisted of 50-100 respondents because the sample size provided is recommended to be used in small-scale quantitative research where multiple regression analysis is aimed (Green, 1991). This size is sufficient to fulfil the needs of statistics and resource needs and meet the needs of meaningful data analysis. Seeing that online survey distribution is rather coarse, geographical limits are not so strict, and one can get responses that represent various urban and suburban areas. Nonetheless, the respondents verified that they get involved in online fashion shopping to guarantee their relevance towards the topic of study.

Data Collection Method

The structured online questionnaire was implemented in Webropol and formed the data collection. Internet surveys have been credited with high efficiency, availability and access to digitally active target populations. The measurements were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Example items include:

- “I put into consideration the way a brand would impact the environment before purchasing.”
- “I believe online fashion retailers are sustainable in their assertions.”
- “Sustainable branding augments my chances of purchasing with a retailer.”
- “Most fast fashion companies overstate their environmental activities.”

The pilot test involved 10- 15 respondents to clarify the aspects, reliability and logical nature of the questions. Before complete distribution, changes were made based on feedback. Pilot testing is also a best practice that should be used to maximise the validity and ensure bias in responses is avoided (Connelly, 2008).

Data Analysis Plan

After the gathering of data, it was cleaned and coded, ready to be analysed. This involves the treatment of missing data, ensuring that data is accurate and the allocation of numerical codes to the categorical data. Given that perceptions did not involve any concepts or answers that are statistically measurable, the summarisation of the demographics of the participants and general trends in the perception were performed through descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations and frequencies). This gave a preliminary impression of the attitude levels towards sustainability, trust and level of awareness of greenwashing.

Incorporated inferential statistical methods were used in testing the hypotheses. Correlation analysis to determine the relationships among variables that include trust in sustainability claims, awareness of greenwashing and purchase intentions. Multiple regression test to ascertain the predictive ability of the independent variables, brand authenticity, environmental concern and trust on the variable of purchase intention. Regression models are also the appropriate tools to investigate the predictors of consumer behaviour in terms of sustainability (Biswas and Roy, 2015).

To ensure internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was computed for each construct. A score above 0.70 will indicate acceptable reliability (Ahmad et al., 2024). If required, factor analysis was performed to verify construct validity by identifying underlying dimensions in the survey data. All analyses were conducted using SPSS, a robust statistical package for social science research. SPSS's capability to run both basic and advanced statistical procedures ensures accuracy and replicability. Tables, regression coefficients (β), R^2, and p-values were used to present the results, allowing them to be easily interpreted to indicate that the relationship between sustainability perceptions and consumer decision making in online fast fashion exists.

Ethical Considerations

The transparency, integrity, and credibility of this research, which was required to ensure ethical adherence, should be assured. The code of ethics of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the university in which the researcher is undertaking his studies will be followed to the letter in the study; it was the British Psychological Society code of ethics and the institutional code of ethics of the university where the researcher is studying.

To begin with, the informed consent of all participants was taken before they were involved in the process. The survey began with a consent statement to clarify what the study is all about, that it is voluntary, and the amount of time to be spent. Before they continue with the research, the respondents indicated that they agree by clicking on an option to confirm the consent. Second, there was confidentiality and anonymity. Personally identifiable data (names, contact information, or IP addresses, etc.) was not gathered. The responses were securely stored as password-protected digital files, with the researcher having access only. Reporting was another way that anonymity would be preserved due to the use of aggregated data (Saunders et al., 2019).

Third, voluntariness in participation was highlighted. They were told that they can drop out at any point before they submit the survey for final submission without being penalised. This is based on the principle of respecting autonomy according to Resnik (2018). Fourth, consideration is made to minimise harm. Since the survey included the aspects of perceiving sustainability and the behaviour of consumers, the chances of psychological or emotional harm are low. Nonetheless, parties to the study were given contact information of the researchers in case of any questions or any other needs. Lastly, data security was observed with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). All the data was kept in a safe manner within the span of time mandated by the institution and irreversibly erased later. The integration of these measures in the study allowed the study to prioritise the rights and well-being of the participants and build trust, as well as maintain academic integrity.

Limitations of Methodology

Though the research design and methodology are well-developed, it is important to mention some limitations that should provide transparency and inform directions of future research refinements. The first is that non-probability sampling (purposive and convenience) limits the problem of generalizability of findings. Second, there is a threat of bias in the self-reported data, especially social desirability bias; the participants might give the answers they think will be more socially acceptable instead of the correct answers regarding their beliefs or actions. Third, the cross-sectional design determines the perceptions of time. Although this is a helpful snapshot, it does not allow one to determine a causation or explain the fluctuation in consumer attitudes over time.

Fourth, the survey form does not take into consideration the use of the internet because it might attract a certain population with age and technological level that might be overlooked by this medium and type of survey method. Last but not least, the small number of respondents (50-100) reduces the statistical power of the analysis. Nonetheless, the methodology that was adopted can be deemed as relevant to the exploratory characteristics of the study despite these shortcomings. Surprisingly, by confirming these limitations, the research retains its transparency and leaves room to advance its findings in future works with the help of wider and more representative samples.

This chapter has detailed the philosophical, methodological, and analytical framework guiding the study. A positivist philosophy and deductive approach underpin the cross-sectional quantitative survey design, targeting online fast fashion consumers aged 18-35. The use of structured Likert-scale questionnaires enables measurement of sustainability perceptions, trust, greenwashing awareness, and purchase intentions. Data will be analysed using SPSS through descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses, ensuring reliability and validity checks. Ethical guidelines and potential methodological limitations have been addressed, ensuring the study is both academically rigorous and ethically sound.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The chapter summarises the empirical results based on the quantitative data of an online survey among participants. This analysis aims at assessing the connections among a means of perceived authenticity, trust, awareness of greenwashing, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, impact of social media, and purchase intention in the context of sustainable brand positioning of online fast fashion retailers. The chapter starts by providing an overview of the sample characteristics and descriptive statistics, which is followed by reliability and factor analysis results. Inferential analyses, such as multiple regression tests, moderation tests, are then given to test the hypotheses of the research.

Data Cleaning and Analysis

The online questionnaire received a total of 114 survey responses. The dataset has been subjected to a systematic data cleaning process before being analysed to ensure accuracy and reliability. In the course of the screening, some entries were defined as invalid since they had no usable data, generally blank submissions or those whose respondents had not completed any substantive elements of the surveys after the consent or demographic page. Incompleteness cases are not fit to be subjected to statistical analysis since they undermine the validity of descriptive and inferential tests. These non-responsive and empty entries were eliminated from the dataset following the known quantitative research standards. Upon elimination of such cases, 100 complete and valid responses were obtained, and all further SPSS procedures, including descriptive statistics, reliability testing, and factor analysis, were conducted using these results.

Sample Characteristics

The dataset consisted of 100 valid answers, and all the core variables had no missing values. The demographic was such that most of the respondents were young adults, as

demonstrated by the mean age group (M = 1.54, SD = .773) within an age scale of 1 to 4. There was an equal number of males and females, with a mean score equal to 1.54 (SD =.501). It was established that there was enough representation of both male and female consumers. There was also some variation in education level (M = 2.37, SD =.825), which demonstrates that there were both undergraduate and postgraduate participants. This population is also consistent with the average consumers of online fast fashion retailing, which implies that the sample would be suitable for studying the perception of sustainability and buying intentions.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Characteristics

Statistics										
		PA	TRST	GW	SN	PBC	EC	PI	SIM	ACB
N	Valid	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PA: Perceived Authenticity, TRST: Trust, GW: Greenwashing Awareness, SN: Subjective Norms, PBC: Perceived Behavioural Control, EC: Environmental Concern, PI: Purchase Intention, SIM: Social Media Influence, ACB: Actual Consumer Behaviour										

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were produced to learn about the central tendencies and variability of the important constructs.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	

	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
PA	100	1	5	3.734	1.03046719	-0.88	0.241	0.391	0.478
TRST	100	1	5	3.73	1.06995	-0.712	0.241	0.049	0.478
SN	100	1	5	3.63666667	1.0051439	-0.573	0.241	-0.079	0.478
PBC	100	1	5	3.60166667	1.02710051	-0.459	0.241	-0.238	0.478
GW	100	1	5	3.7325	1.07584794	-0.737	0.241	0.006	0.478
EC	100	1	5	3.6615	0.95101899	-0.747	0.241	0.354	0.478
PI	100	1	5	3.69666667	1.09390209	-0.771	0.241	0.065	0.478
SIM	100	1	5	3.58	1.13867	-0.659	0.241	-0.339	0.478
ACB	100	1	5	3.448	1.07576423	-0.432	0.241	-0.389	0.478
Age	99	1	4	1.54	0.773	1.568	0.243	2.268	0.481
Gender	99	1	2	1.54	0.501	-0.144	0.243	-2.021	0.481
Education	100	1	4	2.37	0.825	-0.014	0.241	-0.563	0.478
Valid N (listwise)	98								

The findings suggest that on a 5-point Likert scale, all key variables had mean scores of between 3.44 and 3.73, indicating moderate to moderately high levels of endorsement of the sustainability-related attitudes and behaviours. There were fairly high perceived authenticity (M = 3.73, SD = 1.03), trust (M = 3.73, SD = 1.07), and greenwashing

awareness (M = 3.73, SD = 1.08), indicating that the respondents are more inclined to recognise sustainability signals and also have knowledge about deceptive environmental activities. The purchase intention (M = 3.69, SD = 1.09) expresses the moderate degree of willingness to buy the products of sustainable fast fashion, as well. The social media influence (M = 3.58, SD = 1.14) and the subjective norms (M = 3.64, SD = 1.01) show that social contexts and the exposure to digital media have a significant impact on consumer attitudes. All variables had negative skew values between -.43 and -0.88, and this meant that there was slight skewness towards the higher levels of agreement in the responses. Standard deviations that are near or over 1.0 between variables indicate that they have an adequate level of variability to further analyse the data using inferential statistics.

Reliability Analysis

To determine the internal consistency of all the measurement scales, reliability analysis was carried out by using Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's alpha)

Reliability Statistics		
Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Perceived Authenticity	0.938	5
Trust	0.938	4
Greenwashing Awareness	0.903	4
Subjective Norms	0.818	3
Perceived Behavioural Control	0.853	3
Environmental Concern	0.9	5
Purchase Intention Scale	0.898	3
Social Media Influence Scale	0.909	4
Authentic Brand Behaviour Scale	0.915	5

Each of the constructs was highly reliable (above the recommended value of 0.70). The internal consistency of perceived authenticity (α =.938), trust (α =.938), and greenwashing awareness (α =.903) was also highly accurate, which means that the items in these scales were highly coherent. There were also constructs in the form of subjective norms (α = 0.818), perceived behavioural control (α = 0.853) and environmental concern (α = 0.900), which regulated strong reliability. Another interesting scale is the purchase intention scale (α = 0.898) and social media influence scale (α = 0.909), and authentic brand behaviour scale (α = 0.915): it proves that the instrument was effective in capturing the perception of the respondents in all the dimensions. The results of the reliability are consistent, which implies that the data were appropriate to move to regression and moderation analyses.

Factor Analysis

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was used to justify the structure of the constructs and measure item loading.

Table 4: Principal Component Analysis (PCA): Communities, Variance, and Component Matrix

Factor Analysis						
Communalities						
	Initial	Extraction				
PA1	1	0.682				
PA2	1	0.837				
PA3	1	0.767				
PA4	1	0.883				
PA5	1	0.869				
TR1	1	0.862				
TR2	1	0.866				
TR3	1	0.797				

TR4	1	0.839				
GW1	1	0.79				
GW2	1	0.906				
GW3	1	0.831				
GW4	1	0.724				
SN1	1	0.688				
SN2	1	0.623				
SN3	1	0.758				
PBC1	1	0.719				
PBC2	1	0.56				
PBC3	1	0.691				
EC1	1	0.705				
EC2	1	0.751				
EC3	1	0.757				
EC4	1	0.669				
EC5	1	0.709				
PI1	1	0.716				
PI2	1	0.682				
PI3	1	0.761				
SMI1	1	0.816				
SMI2	1	0.662				
SMI3	1	0.758				
SMI4	1	0.853				
ACB1	1	0.74				
ACB2	1	0.812				
ACB3	1	0.746				
ACB4	1	0.756				
ACB4	1	0.65				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						
Total Variance Explained						
Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	19.916	55.323	55.323	19.916	55.323	55.323
2	2.917	8.103	63.427	2.917	8.103	63.427
3	2.015	5.598	69.025	2.015	5.598	69.025
4	1.277	3.547	72.572	1.277	3.547	72.572
5	1.109	3.081	75.653	1.109	3.081	75.653
6	0.959	2.664	78.317			
7	0.735	2.042	80.359			
8	0.696	1.933	82.292			
9	0.597	1.659	83.951			
10	0.553	1.535	85.486			
11	0.54	1.5	86.986			
12	0.475	1.321	88.307			
13	0.441	1.225	89.532			
14	0.429	1.191	90.723			
15	0.37	1.026	91.749			
16	0.309	0.86	92.609			
17	0.279	0.774	93.383			
18	0.271	0.753	94.136			
19	0.237	0.658	94.794			
20	0.218	0.607	95.401			
21	0.203	0.564	95.965			
22	0.19	0.528	96.493			
23	0.17	0.472	96.965			

24	0.15	0.418	97.383			
25	0.145	0.402	97.784			
26	0.128	0.356	98.14			
27	0.103	0.287	98.426			
28	0.099	0.276	98.702			
29	0.093	0.257	98.96			
30	0.086	0.239	99.198			
31	0.072	0.201	99.4			
32	0.063	0.174	99.573			
33	0.05	0.139	99.712			
34	0.048	0.133	99.845			
35	0.033	0.091	99.936			
36	0.023	0.064	100			
Component Matrixa						
	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	
PA1	0.734	0.263	-0.221	-0.034	-0.155	
PA2	0.831	0.276	-0.215	-0.074	0.136	
PA3	0.785	0.313	-0.209	-0.005	0.097	
PA4	0.822	0.223	-0.385	0.045	-0.09	
PA5	0.849	0.226	-0.303	0.073	0.01	
TR1	0.819	0.232	-0.338	0.152	0.015	
TR2	0.828	0.274	-0.312	0.043	-0.081	
TR3	0.757	0.173	-0.402	0.1	-0.15	
TR4	0.832	0.213	-0.305	0.077	-0.031	
GW1	0.648	0.442	0.281	0.131	0.28	
GW2	0.602	0.466	0.418	0.142	0.363	
GW3	0.624	0.472	0.402	0.006	0.239	

GW4	0.583	0.5	0.342	0.068	-0.11	
SN1	0.668	-0.09	0.358	0.197	-0.259	
SN2	0.644	-0.097	0.154	0.047	-0.416	
SN3	0.814	0.051	0.17	-0.008	-0.252	
PBC1	0.788	-0.008	0.11	0.2	-0.216	
PBC2	0.703	-0.234	-0.003	-0.048	-0.091	
PBC3	0.774	-0.043	0.096	-0.037	-0.282	
EC1	0.72	-0.241	0.226	-0.278	0.037	
EC2	0.684	0.004	0.194	-0.477	-0.136	
EC3	0.797	-0.017	0.081	-0.337	-0.038	
EC4	0.725	0.295	0.097	-0.17	0.136	
EC5	0.74	-0.03	0.34	-0.209	-0.014	
PI1	0.813	-0.223	-0.012	0.046	-0.046	
PI2	0.762	-0.248	0.113	-0.161	0.009	
PI3	0.822	-0.139	0.166	-0.166	-0.104	
SMI1	0.669	-0.487	0.091	0.34	0.085	
SMI2	0.648	-0.383	0.054	0.302	0.027	
SMI3	0.743	-0.225	0.135	0.371	0.022	
SMI4	0.732	-0.375	0.166	0.351	0.157	
ACB1	0.767	-0.307	-0.169	-0.027	0.172	
ACB2	0.826	-0.239	-0.155	-0.158	0.153	
ACB3	0.651	-0.414	-0.18	-0.13	0.317	
ACB4	0.693	-0.447	-0.122	-0.158	0.187	
ACB4	0.748	-0.176	-0.135	-0.119	0.163	
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.						
A 5 5-component extracted.						

The preliminary analysis factorised out five components whose eigenvalues were above 1, and these components had a cumulative variance of 75.65. This is an indicator that

there is a good amount of data variance that is accounted for by the underlying variables. There were communalities that were between .56 and.91, and they showed that most of the items have significant common variance with their particular constructs. In general, the first factor alone contributed to 55.32 per cent of the total variance, implying that there was an overriding underlying factor associated with sustainability perceptions. Results of the Component Matrix showed high item loadings on constructs, with the majority having well-loaded items of over .65, which was an indicator of good representation of factors. These findings are in favour of the structural validity of the measurement tool and can be used in further hypothesis testing.

Regression Results and Hypothesis Testing

Effect of Perceived Authenticity on Trust (H1)

Trust was regarded as the dependent variable, and perceived authenticity (PA) and social media influence (SIM) were taken as predictors to carry out a multiple regression analysis.

Table 5: Regression Predicting Trust from Perceived Authenticity and Social Media Influence

Regression						
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.896a	0.802	0.798	0.48074		
a Predictors: (Constant), SIM, PA						
ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	90.918	2	45.459	196.7	.000b
	Residual	22.417	97	0.231		
	Total	113.335	99			

a Dependent Variable: TRST						
b Predictors: (Constant), SIM, PA						
Coefficientsa						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.148	0.193		0.765	0.446
	PA	0.867	0.056	0.835	15.425	0
	SIM	0.096	0.051	0.102	1.891	0.062
a Dependent Variable: TRST						

This model has a strong model fit since it explained 80.2 of the variation in the trust (R^2 =.802). Perceived authenticity was viewed as one of the most important (β = .835, p < .001) predictors, as it shows that the greater the perceived brand authenticity, the more the consumer trust. This implies that the judgments associated with authentic sustainability initiatives are very important in influencing consumer confidence in the brands of fast fashion. The influence of social media exhibited an insignificant effect (β = 0.102, p = 0.062), which implies that although social media affects the formation of trust, it does so with a lower impact than authenticity. These results verify that the concept of authenticity is the most influential factor of trust in consumers who interact in the context of sustainable branding. The result is consistent with the attribution theory because perceived authenticity functions as a credibility cue where the consumers form inferences about brand motives, which hinge on the perception of authenticity in a determination of trust.

Effect of Trust on Purchase Intention (H2)

The second regression was done to test the hypothesis that trust is a predictor of purchase intention, in addition to the impact of social media.

Table 6: Regression Predicting Purchase Intention from Trust and Social Media Influence

Regression						
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.787a	0.619	0.611	0.6820209 8		
a Predictors: (Constant), SIM, TRST						
ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	73.346	2	36.673	78.84 1	.000b
	Residual	45.12	97	0.465		
	Total	118.466	99			
a Dependent Variable: PI						
b Predictors: (Constant), SIM, TRST						
Coefficientsa						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.57	0.267		2.134	0.035
	TRST	0.301	0.078	0.295	3.888	0
	SIM	0.559	0.073	0.582	7.678	0
a Dependent Variable: PI						

The model used 61.9 per cent of the purchase intention variance (R^2 = .619), which was very predictive. Trust was also a strong indicator of purchase intention (*β = .295, p <*

.001), indicating that consumers who believe in the sustainability of a brand in its claims stand a significantly higher possibility of developing purchase intention towards sustainable fast fashion products. The impact of social media was even more considerable (β = 0.582, p < .001), which means that online signifiers and content affect buying behaviour to a significant extent. These results validate that trust is a significant predictor of purchase intention, and other social media mechanisms add an extra, strong aspect of influence. In line with models of trust-based consumer behaviour, trust operates as a mitigating factor that converts the positive brand assessment into purchase intention.

Moderation Analyses

Moderating Effect of Greenwashing Awareness (H3)

In order to examine the relationship between the forms of trust and purchase intention and the awareness of greenwashing, an interaction term (TRST × GW) was added to the regression equation.

Table 7: Moderation Analysis: Trust × Greenwashing Awareness

Regression						
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.716a	0.513	0.5	0.81206787		
a Predictors: (Constant), mod3, GW, TRST						
ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	75.799	3	25.266	38.314	.000b
	Residual	71.881	109	0.659		

	Total	147.679	112			
a Dependent Variable: PI						
b Predictors: (Constant), mod3, GW, TRST						
Coefficientsa						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.258	0.321		3.923	0
	TRST	0.186	0.135	0.178	1.375	0.172
	GW	0.178	0.088	0.173	2.012	0.047
	TRST*GW	0.075	0.022	0.439	3.491	0.001
a Dependent Variable: PI						

The total model described 51.3% of the variance (R^2 =.513). The interaction was statistically significant (β = .439, p = .001), which means that greenwashing awareness does change the intensity of the relationship between trust and purchase intention. Interestingly, the awareness of greenwashing reinforced the relationship rather than undermined the relationship. It implies that more enlightened respondents on greenwashing showed a stronger relationship between their trust in the brand and purchase intention. This indicates that knowledgeable consumers in regard to greenwashing can be more selective and can give credit to brands that they find to be genuinely trustworthy, hence increasing the power of trust. Theoretically, this indicates that greenwashing awareness will enhance the process of attributional theory which allows informed consumers to reward brands they view to be really trustworthy as opposed to disengaging entirely.

Moderating Effect of Subjective Norms (H4)

Moderation was tested by including a regression with trust, subjective norms and interaction term (TRST × SN).

Table 8: Moderation Analysis: Trust × Subjective Norms

Regression						
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.773a	0.598	0.587	0.73806892		
a Predictors: (Constant), mod2, SN, TRST						
ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	88.302	3	29.434	54.033	.000b
	Residual	59.377	109	0.545		
	Total	147.679	112			
a Dependent Variable: PI						
b Predictors: (Constant), mod2, SN, TRST						
Coefficientsa						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.209	0.297		0.704	0.483
	TRST	0.463	0.114	0.444	4.07	0
	SN	0.579	0.086	0.537	6.76	0

	TRST*SN	-0.023	0.017	-0.145	-1.325	0.188
a Dependent Variable: PI						

The model accounted for 59.8 per cent of the purchase intention (R^2 =.598). The trust (*β = .444, p < .001*) and the subjective norms (*β = .537, p < .001*), however, were significant independent predictors of purchase intention, but the interaction was not significant (*β = –.145, p = .188*). This shows that the subjective norms do not moderate the relationship between trust and purchase intention. That is, social pressure or the influence of other individuals does not alter the degree to which trust is relevant in determining the propensity of consumers to buy products from sustainable fast fashion retailers. Rather, the subjective norms work on their own, and they have a direct effect on the intentions of consumers. This is consistent with theory that proposes that subjective norms have a direct normative impact on intention, but do not change the cognitive trustintention pathway.

Moderating Effect of Perceived Authenticity (H5)

Table 9: Moderation Analysis: Trust × Perceived Authenticity

Regression						
Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.705a	0.497	0.484	0.82512714		
a Predictors: (Constant), mod4, PA, TRST						
ANOVAa						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	73.468	3	24.489	35.97	.000b
	Residual	74.211	109	0.681		

	Total	147.679	112			
a Dependent Variable: PI						
b Predictors: (Constant), mod4, PA, TRST						
Coefficientsa						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.367	0.396		0.926	0.357
	TRST	0.448	0.213	0.429	2.107	0.037
	PA	0.691	0.18	0.649	3.837	0
	TRUST*PA	-0.062	0.033	-0.384	-1.874	0.064
a Dependent Variable: PI						

The model that considers the moderating effect of perceived authenticity between the trust and purchase relationship described 49.7 per cent of the variation in purchase intention (R^2 =.497). Both trust (β = .429, p = .037) and perceived authenticity (β = .649, p < .001) were important predictors. Nonetheless, the interaction term (TRST × PA) did not show a significant value at the 05 level (β = –.384, p = .064). This implies that perceived authenticity does not have a significant effect on purchase intention because of trust. Trust and perceived authenticity, instead, do not interact with each other but have an additive effect. The lack of moderation effect shows that authenticity is mainly an upstream means of working as a signal of trust and not an influence in determining the translation of trust into behavioural intention.

In sum, the results are consistent with the theoretical background where perceived authenticity is a prominent signalling cue that influences trust, which in turn

retrospectively benefits purchase intention in the context of sustainable fast fashion. The power of social media influence is demonstrated as an influential predictor of various models. Of the moderation tests, one only appeared important in moderating the relationship between trust and purchase intention: the awareness of greenwashing. Surprisingly, it enhanced the relationship between the two instead of diminishing it. None of the subjective norms and perceived authenticity produced significant moderating effects. On the whole, the regression models revealed high explanatory power, which supports the use of the selected constructs to explain responses of consumers towards sustainable brand positioning in the fast fashion industry.

DISCUSSION

This chapter explains the empirical results proposed in Chapter 4 and explains them in terms of the theoretical frameworks developed above, that is, Attribution Theory, Signalling Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The purpose is to interpret the development of the observed relations between the data, to interpret them by their correspondence or disparity with the current literature, and what they provide in terms of consumer reaction to sustainable brand positioning in online fast fashion retailing. The discussion is continued by exploring the key effects and moderation outcomes in detail and correlating them with the theoretical predictions and past studies.

Interpretation of Primary Relationships

Perceived Authenticity as the Foundation of Trust

The strongest and most significant result of the study is that there is a strong and statistically significant effect of perceived authenticity on consumer trust. The regression model that predicts trust attained an R^2 of 0.802, which suggests that the explained variance by the regression model that is centred on authenticity and social media influence is more by 80.2 per cent. The beta coefficient showed a high level of perceived authenticity only, which indicates its leading role. This shows that when sustainable claims are perceived to be authentic by customers, that is, genuine, transparent, and congruent to brand behaviour, a consumer is much better placed to place their trust in that brand.

This finding is highly consistent with the Attribution Theory, which holds that consumers evaluate the motives of a brand on the basis of the available information and their evaluations of the affective and behavioural actions (Kelley, 1973; Malle, 2011). Consumers place motives on sustainability contexts as altruism, commitment, environmental responsibility in sustainability or, on the contrary, opportunism and

manipulation. The results of the studies by Napoli et al. (2014) and Fritz et al. (2017) confirm that authenticity cues decrease the idea of opportunistic behaviour and enhance the idea of sincerity. The current research confirms it: customers in the fast fashion industry, which is repeatedly reported to be unsustainable in terms of its practices, are highly responsive to signals of authenticity. Holding all the false claims of sustainability, it is only to be expected that the respondents approach brand messaging with reservations; only the claims that look transparent and verifiable are apparently adequate to trigger trust.

Empirical research confirms this result, leading to the fact that consumers are becoming more and more demanding when it comes to proof, not promises (Testa et al., 2021; Gabrielli et al., 2013). Authenticity is a critical factor of credibility in the digital retail setting, where the control of mediated, non-physical cues is virtually the sole means of sustainability claims. The great role of authenticity in trust building indicates that consumers make judgments concerning the consistency between what the brands assert and what they actually prove. The more there is coherence, the more trust is in place; the more there is a gap, the faster trust is destroyed.

Trust as a Driver of Purchase Intention, Understood Through TPB

In line with the literature and as the Theory of Planned Behaviour anticipates, the aspect of trust became an important predictor of purchase intention. According to TPB, behavioural intentions are highly affected by the attitudes towards a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Trust is an attitudinal consideration means an assessment of the credibility and reliability of the information offered by the brand. When consumers believe in a sustainability claim, they feel favourable intentions about buying the product of that brand. This is in line with the existing research that revealed that trust boosts the desire to purchase environmentally friendly or ethically promoted products (Jung and Jin, 2016; Kim and Oh, 2020; Hameed et al., 2021).

In the present research, the influence of trust was not a significant predictor of purchase intention, although its effect was weaker than that of social media influence. The social

media influence (SIM) had a greater beta coefficient, this is to shows that consumers have heavy dependence on social and external stimuli, such as peer views, influencer promotion, reviews, and online discussion when making buying preferences. This creates the idea that trust, which is a direct result of the brand message, is significant but not enough in the fast fashion buying process.

This helps in supporting the combination of Signalling Theory and TPB. Signalling Theory holds that consumers base the appearance of attributes to obtain an idea of the quality or honesty of unobservable ones (Spence, 1973; Connelly et al., 2011). Social media material offers effective external cues in the online setting. As an example, influencer endorsements can serve as credibility enhancers; peer reviews can support sustainability. And viral content can support brand credibility. Some of them reveal that social media has a substantial impact on consumer attitude and intention towards sustainable brands (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Ki et al., 2020). This research is in line with the present study: the social media turned out to be a powerful, independent predictor of purchase intention.

These results indicate that the attitude determined by trust is needed but not a guarantee to transform sustainability perception into behaviour intent. Rather, social signals (external potentiations provided by online communities) are influential determinants that seal the divide between trust and action.

Interpretation of Moderation Effects

Greenwashing Awareness as a Strengthening Moderator

The most interesting and surprising result is the theoretically significant finding that the influence of greenwashing awareness on purchasing intention and trust is positive and moderated. In particular, the greater the consumer awareness about greenwashing, the greater the impact of trust on purchase intention. This is contrary to the initial conclusions in the sustainability literature that anticipated an inverse effect as more

awareness would increase consumer resistance to sustainable brand communications as a result of enhanced scepticism (Nyilasy et al., 2014).

In recent literature, such general scepticism, however, has started to distinguish between general scepticism and informed awareness. De Freitas Netto et al. (2020) state that greenwashing consciousness can have two outcomes: the cynical, apathetic, and the very conscious and critical consumer. The results of the present findings conform to the latter. It seems that greenwashing awareness does not reduce consumer uniform distrust; rather, it increases their discrimination. They do not dismiss the claims of sustainability per se, but have a second look at it. These enlightened consumers react more intensely in their behavioural intentions when they trust the brand after being attracted by an authentic and consistent approach.

Theoretically, this moderation effect depicts a more complicated attributional process. The Attribution Theory implies that people derive motives from accessible information. Very conscious consumers are in a better position to know more about what is meant by misleading or incongruent sustainability messages. They are more careful and more meaningful in allocating trust. Therefore, when trust is built, it has a higher behavioural weight than consumers who have low awareness.

It is also in line with Signalling Theory: the more sustainably optimistic consumers are more likely to decode the signal, differentiate higher-quality signals and low-quality ones, and reward those brands that perform action based on their intentions (Akturan, 2018). Hence, the positive correlation between trust and purchase intention of high-awareness customers relates to the increased capacity to confirm and decode sustainability assertions. This result leads to a larger body of literature showing that awareness is not necessarily the destroyer of trust; instead, it adds to the value of trust after having been maintained at its foundation. It implies the consumer behaviour changes to a more informed, analytical decision-making process in the situations of sustainability.

Subjective Norms as an Independent but Non-Moderating Influence

The subjective norms were identified to be a strong independent predictor of the purchase intention and did not mediate the trust-intention relationship. The perceived social pressure to perform or not perform a behaviour is the subjective norms of the Theory of Planned Behaviour. The observed high main effect is in line with the research that has indicated that consumers are affected by the approval of peers, social dialogue, and normative expectations towards sustainability (White et al., 2019; Kumar and Ghodeswar, 2015). This is especially the case in fast fashion, which is a very visible, conservative and socially expressive genre.

But the fact that there is no moderation shows that there is no influence of subjective norms with respect to the strength of trust on purchase intention. That is, irrespective of the social expectations, the level of trust-intention connection does not change. This indicates that trust and subjective norms do exist through different motivation channels. Trust is based on a cognitive appraisal of brand credibility, and subjective norms are based on social desirability and external social expectations.

This observation relates to the fact that research has indicated that subjective norms influence intentions, but in most cases do not change the impact of attitudinal constructs unless the behaviour has high identity stakes (Hassan et al., 2016). Moderation may not take place as far as identity-defining is a property of sustainable fast fashion, even though this is socially conditioned. Rather, it seems that consumers integrate social norms without experiencing trust-based judgments. Therefore, the lack of moderation is consistent with TPB and is consistent with research that has indicated normative influence predicts behaviour, though it does not influence the internal cognitive evaluation underlying trust (Paul et al., 2016).

Perceived Authenticity: Independent Predictor but Non-Moderator

Perceived authenticity had a direct effect on high purchase intention and no mediating effect of the trust-intention relationship. It implies that authenticity has effects on trust

formation and purchase intention on its own, but does not work together with trust to increase or decrease its impact. It is also notable because this discovery is related to the subtle influence of authenticity in consumer decision-making.

In Attribution Theory, there exists a phenomenon of authenticity used as a source of motive interpretation. After trust has been formed under authenticity, it may not be able to creep up to reforming the behavioural effect of such trust. This difference the research by Choi and Johnson (2019) proved that the idea of authenticity served more as a predictor of brand behaviour and did not moderate trust-based behaviour.

One reason can be that the consumers regard authenticity within the provision of credibility of the brand. Authenticity does not bring any explanatory power to the strengthening of the behavioural link once the actual trust has already factored in perceived sincerity and legitimacy. Rather, authenticity and trust are independent attitudinal antecedents of intention, through which brand integrity is evaluated through the separate but complementary evaluations.

Integration of Findings with the Theoretical Framework

The results support all three theories that were incorporated in the research, yet they add enhancements and revolutions as well.

Attribution Theory Integration: The Attribution Theory is quite useful in explaining the core centrality of authenticity in influencing trust. The results confirm that consumers evaluate the motives displayed by a brand using observational indicators, and trust is the result of positive attributions of motives. Besides, the reinforcement accuracy of the greenwashing attitudes affects the trust-intention relationship, indicating the increasing significance of the attribution process to more knowledgeable consumers.

Signalling Theory Integration: Social media influence became a strong predictor of purchase intention as external signals are important in minimising perceived risk and uncertainty. There is another element, the moderating effect of greenwashing

awareness, which points out that the interpretation of the signal is not equally applicable; rather, it depends on the literacy and the decoding ability of the authenticity signals by the consumer.

Theory of Planned Behaviour Integration: TPB predictive pathways were highly justified: trust has a role in attitude to the brand, subjective norm relationships have a value of their own, and perceived behaviour control (which was not discussed as a moderator) seemed to match its theoretical contribution. A combination of TPB, signalling and attributional constructs offers a better behavioural framework for sustainability decisions.

In this chapter, the relationships that were present in the empirical analysis were discussed in detail. It is perceived authenticity underlying trust development, trust largely affects purchase intention, and social media is an effective sign that generates behaviour. The results of the moderation showed how greenwashing awareness exacerbates the role of trust, whereas the subjective norms and perceived authenticity do not depend on the trust-intention channel. Combined with the Attribution Theory, Signalling Theory and the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the results were explained quite well. The results provide a particular insight into consumer behaviour in an online fast fashion sustainability setting and establish a strong theoretical base for the implications and recommendations that were constructed in Chapter 6.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter is the conclusion of the study, where the findings are synthesised, and an observation of the research objectives is made. It also notes the shortcomings of the study and gives directions for future research. This chapter is aimed at summarising the empirical knowledge gained in Chapters 4 and 5, as well as outlining the impact of the work on the overall knowledge of the consumer reaction towards sustainable brand positioning in the online fast fashion business. The chapter concludes by reaffirming the importance of the study both in the academic and practically.

Summary of the Study

The research examined the determinants of consumer trust and purchase intention in line with sustainable brand positioning in fast fashion retailing online. It analysed the functions of perceived authenticity, social media impact, greenwashing knowledge, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control put into a context that was informed by Attribution Theory, Signalling Theory and Theory of Planned Behaviour. The quantitative data used were a result of 100 consumers and were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability tests, factor analysis, regression modelling, and moderation analyses.

The results showed that perceived authenticity is the most influential factor in determining trust, trust has a strong predictive ability in selecting purchase intention and social media influence is an influential neutral factor in determining behavioural intention. The analysis of moderation revealed that the awareness of greenwashing enhances the trust intention relationship, whereas the subjective norms and perceptions of authenticity do not moderate the relationship, although they portray strong direct relationships. These findings also reveal the multidimensional nature of consumer decision-making on sustainability issues, and emphasise the advanced means by which consumers interpret trust cues and sustainability messages.

Achievement of Research Objectives

The study was aimed at attaining three specific objectives in regard to consumer reactions towards sustainable brand positioning in online fast fashion retailing. The initial aim was to test consumer trust in sustainable fashion branding, which includes the level of confidence that consumers have in environmental and ethical claims of fast fashion retailers is and the extent to which it depends on factors such as branding and marketing welfare. This was achieved in the form of reliability and regression analysis, which proved that perceived authenticity is the biggest predictor of trust. The reliability tests showed internal consistency in the trust and authenticity scales, and regression model used to predict trust (predictors being perceived authenticity and social media influence) indicated a large percentage of variance (R^2 =.80). As evidenced by such findings, consumers are very dependent on perceived sincerity and verifiable practises to make trust judgement regarding sustainability claims, thus fulfilling Objective 1.

The second one was to determine the impact of sustainability on purchase intentions, that is, whether sustainability reports in branding strategies have any effect on consumer desire to buy a product in the fast fashion brands. This aim was met by using multiple regression analyses, where trust and social media influence were used as predictors of purchase intention. The findings revealed that trust is a positive and significant predictor of purchase intention and that there is a strong independent impact on intention by social media influence. The mixed models accounted for a significant amount of variation in purchase intention (R^2 in the mid-range of .50s to .60s), which indicates a significant influence of the sustainability-related perceptions moderated by trust and enhanced by social signals, meaningfully on the consumers' state intentions to purchase. Objective 2 has therefore been accomplished.

The third goal was to examine greenwashing awareness and individual perceptions of authenticity, including how widely consumers understand that the idea of greenwashing is in place and how they identify genuine sustainable behaviour versus deceiving brand messages. The attainment of this goal was done in descriptive analysis and moderation

testing. According to descriptive statistics, moderate to high levels of greenwashing awareness were observed in the respondents, and moderation analysis indicated that there is a significant moderation effect of greenwashing awareness on purchase intention and trust. In particular, the impact of the influence of trust on the intention to purchase was reinforced under the effect of the increased level of awareness, since informed consumers rely on more demanding evaluative criteria and reward the brands that they see as truly trustworthy.

Limitations of the Study

Although it has contributions, the study has a number of limitations that it should address. The researchers employed a sample population of 100 respondents who were enlisted through convenience sampling. Although sufficient to do the regression analysis, the sample removes the scope of generalisability. The sample size was mostly comprised of young and digitally active people, which means that the results are not likely to apply to older and less technologically advanced consumers. The study is a cross-sectional study and, therefore, no conclusive causal links can be determined. Consumer perceptions and behaviour change through the course of time due to the nature of fast fashion, where trends change very quickly. The longitudinal studies would give a more causal understanding.

The self-reported data can be influenced either by social desirability or recall bias. Nonetheless, behavioural intention may not necessarily be translated into actual purchase behaviour even though validated scales were applied in the study. The test was done on only three moderators, including the greenwashing awareness, subjective norms, and perceived authenticity. Other constructs like environmental involvement, price sensitivity or sustainability literacy could show extra interactive effects. The researchers narrowed down to sustainable brand positioning in online fast fashion retailing. The results might vary across other industries, including luxury fashion, beauty goods, or food retail, where sustainability would imply other things and expectations.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical implications

- The findings empirically validate Attribution and Signalling Theory as they reveal that perceived authenticity is a major source of trust in sustainable fast fashion branding.
- The strengthening effect of greenwashing knowledge builds up current trust-intention theories because informed consumers choose to reward credible brands, but do not pay off indifferently.

Practical implications

- Sustainability communication should focus on verifiable authenticity rather than quantity of messages since trust is informed more by credibility rather than exposure.
- Bands that target digital active consumers must incorporate sustainability cues in social media planning since social influence significantly influences purchase intent.

Recommendations for Future Research

According to the weaknesses and the results of this study, the following suggestions are made for future topics of research.

1. The longitudinal study to be conducted in future will investigate how the level of trust and behaviour intentions change with the change in sustainability practices of the brand.
2. Self-report measures would be overcome by means of purchase history, click-tracking of the website or experiments.
3. Future research may be done on moderators, including environmental involvement, ethical identity, sustainability knowledge, perceived risk and price sensitivity.

4. Comparative studies through cultural situations would enhance the knowledge of the disparity in terms of social norms and sustainability values among nations of the world.
5. There should be research on post-purchase behaviours. This would be more comprehensive to study both satisfaction, loyalty, advocacy and repeat purchasing as that as sustainable brand engagement.
6. Because AI-mediated communication is progressively used in marketing efforts to sustainably communicate, in the future, its effects on authenticity impressions and trust will be investigated.

Managerial Recommendations (Fast Fashion Managers)

- Clear evidence on sustainability claims should be provided by the managers through the use of certifications, transparent reporting, and measurements of indicators of environmental impact. This enhances perceived authenticity as the study recognised perceived authenticity as the highest driver of consumer trust.
- Sustainability efforts should not be an external marketing apparatus to prevent the notion of greenwashing, since they should be implemented within the nature of operations. They should align brand communication with actual practice because this is the only way to build long-term trust.
- As the power of social media influence has a high impact on purchase intention, the managers regard finding trusted social media influencers and promoting user-generated content in which a particular sustainable practice is shown, instead of inflated messages.

Policy Maker Recommendations

- In the area of fashion marketing, policymakers are encouraged to set clearer policies and legal standards and guidelines regarding environmental claims to reduce misleading facts and shield consumers against greenwashing.

- Making fast fashion retailers publicly report sustainability indicators (e.g. emissions, materials origin) would increase the trustworthiness of the signal and enable consumers to make informed choices.
- Consciousness of brand promises can empower the consumer to examine the claims by a brand critically by using public campaigns and educational programmes to improve the consumer's sustainability and greenwashing literacy.

Educator Recommendations

- Teachers are also encouraged to incorporate real-life examples of greenwashing and sustainability in the fashion industry so that learners can be able to comprehend how authenticity and trust are created in the digital market.
- Educating the students about the process of analysing sustainability statements through the theories, e.g. Attribution Theory, Signalling Theory and so forth, may enhance the ability of the students to identify deceptive actions.
- The marketing, ethics, and consumer psychology must be incorporated in sustainability education to capture the identified multi-faceted nature of sustainable consumption behaviour in this study.

Consumer Recommendations

- Brand communications should be consistent for a reason that consumers ought to seek third-party certification, transparency within their reporting and should be consistent, similarly to their trust in sustainability claims.
- Instead of throwing the sustainability messaging away, consumers can apply their conscientiousness to be selective when choosing a brand that they consider to have been truly authentic.
- Being transparent about the reviews and experiences related to sustainability in social media may positively impact others and reward truly sustainable brands.

Industry Recommendations (Fashion Industry as a Whole)

- The fashion industry is urged to work together to develop cohesive sustainability standards that reduce uncertainty and increase consumer confidence among the brands.
- The industry actors are expected to invest in traceability technologies to send credible sustainability signals and minimise scepticism in internet spaces.
- Consumer scepticism of fast fashion needs long-term sustainability commitments instead of short-term campaigning.

References

ACCC. (2023). ACCC “greenwashing” internet sweep unearths widespread concerning claims [WWW document]. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. Retrieved from http://accc.gov.au/media-release/accc-greenwashing-internet-sweep-unearths-widespread-concerning-claims

Ahmad, N., Alias, F. A., Hamat, M., & Mohamed, S. A. (2024). Reliability analysis: Application of Cronbach’s alpha in research instruments. Pioneering the Future: Delving Into E-Learning’s Landscape, 114–119. Retrieved from https://appspenang.uitm.edu.my/sigcs/2024-2/Articles/e-Book_SIGCSe-LearningVol8_2024.pdf#page=121

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behaviour. Organisational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, 50(2), 179–211. Retrieved from https://ojs.unbc.ca/index.php/design/article/download/1887/1414

Andreadakis, S., & Owusu-Wiredu, P. (2023). Fashion footprint: How clothes are destroying our planet and the growing impacts of fast fashion. IntechOpen. Retrieved from https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/93436/external_content.pdf?sequence=1#page=153

Barrett, T. (2018). 35% of microplastics in oceans come from clothing, research reveals [WWW document]. Environment Journal. Retrieved from https://environmentjournal.online/features/35-of-microplastics-in-oceans-come-from-clothing-research-reveals/

Biswas, A., & Roy, M. (2015). Green products: An exploratory study on the consumer behaviour in emerging economies of the East. Journal of Cleaner Production, 87, 463–468. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2014.09.075

Božić, D. (2017). From haute couture to fast-fashion: Evaluating social transparency in global apparel supply chains (Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology). Retrieved from https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/111237/1003284362-MIT.pdf?sequence=1

Bray, J., Johns, N., & Kilburn, D. (2011). An exploratory study into the factors impeding ethical consumption. Journal of Business Ethics, 98(4), 597–608. Retrieved from https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/16008/3/Factors_Impeding_Ethical_Consumption.pdf

Brook, E. H. (2020). Report: 62% of Gen Z shoppers demand sustainable retail [WWW document]. E+E Leader. Retrieved from https://www.environmentenergyleader.com/stories/report-62-of-gen-z-shoppers-demand-sustainable-retail,5835

Bryman, A. (2016). Social research methods. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from https://lib.mdpu.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Alan-Bryman-Social-Research-Methods2016.pdf

Cardona, N. (2025). Environmental impact of fast fashion statistics (2025) [WWW document]. UniformMarket. Retrieved from https://www.uniformmarket.com/statistics/fast-fashion-statistics

Chiu, A. (2025). Fast fashion is trying an Earth-friendly makeover. Is it real? [WWW document]. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-solutions/2025/06/25/fast-fashion-sustainability/

Connelly, L. M. (2008). Pilot studies. Medsurg Nursing, 17(6), 411. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/nur.20268

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage Publications. Retrieved from https://www.ucg.ac.me/skladiste/blog_609332/objava_105202/fajlovi/Creswell.pdf

De Angelis, L., & Monasterolo, I. (2024). Greenness confusion and the greenium. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4719166

Dutta, S., Adhikary, S., Bhattacharya, S., Roy, D., Chatterjee, S., Chakraborty, A., Banerjee, D., Ganguly, A., Nanda, S., & Rajak, P. (2024). Contamination of textile dyes in the aquatic environment: Adverse impacts on aquatic ecosystem and human health,

and its management using bioremediation. Journal of Environmental Management, 353, 120103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2024.120103

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, 5(1), 1–4. Retrieved from https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/...

European Parliament. (2020). The impact of textile production and waste on the environment (infographics) [WWW document]. European Parliament. Retrieved from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20201208STO93327/the-impact-of-textile-production-and-waste-on-the-environment-infographics

First Insight. (2025). The state of consumer spending: Gen Z shoppers demand sustainable retail. First Insight. https://www.firstinsight.com/white-papers-posts/gen-z-shoppers-demand-sustainability

Gazzola, P., Pavione, E., Pezzetti, R., & Grechi, D. (2020). Trends in the fashion industry: The perception of sustainability and circular economy—A gender/generation quantitative approach. Sustainability, 12(7), 2809. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/7/2809

Goldsmith, E. B. (2015). Social influence and sustainable consumption. Springer International Publishing. Retrieved from https://content.e-bookshelf.de/media/reading/L-3929230-58b86dbb84.pdf

Green, S. B. (1991). How many subjects does it take to do a regression analysis? Multivariate Behavioural Research, 26(3), 499–510. Retrieved from https://parsmodir.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/green1991.pdf

Gueye, S. (2021). The trends and trailblazers creating a circular economy for fashion [WWW document]. Ellen MacArthur Foundation. Retrieved from https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/articles/the-trends-and-trailblazers-creating-a-circular-economy-for-fashion

Gutiérrez, S. A. S., Torres, J. A. S., & Restrepo, L. A. M. (2024). A review of the factors influencing the relationship between greenwashing and green brand equity: A

research agenda. Revista CEA, 10(23), 1–25. Retrieved from https://www.redalyc.org/journal/6381/638177328011/638177328011.pdf

Hair, J. F., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Black, W. C. (2019). Multivariate data analysis (8th ed.). Pearson Prentice. Retrieved from https://eli.johogo.com/Class/CCU/SEM/_Multivariate%20Data%20Analysis_Hair.pdf

Harris, F., Roby, H., & Dibb, S. (2016). Sustainable clothing: Challenges, barriers and interventions for encouraging more sustainable consumer behaviour. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 40(3), 309–318. Retrieved from https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11483732/Harris_Roby_Dibb_2016.pdf

Hartmann, P., & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, V. (2012). Consumer attitude and purchase intention toward green energy brands: The roles of psychological benefits and environmental concern. Journal of Business Research, 65(9), 1254–1263. Retrieved from https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/...

Hilton, J. (2025). Innovation and green development. Elsevier. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/.../An-integrated-analysis-of-greenhush.pdf

Hoepner, A. (2024). Too good to be true: The greenwashers' box of tricks [WWW document]. Financial Times. Retrieved from https://www.ft.com/content/78b3c741-1ab8-48f5-92a8-4e98dfa230ab

Hossain, M. (2025). The role of green marketing in shaping sustainable brand perception (A systematic literature review). Retrieved from https://www.utupub.fi/.../Hossain_Mohammad_Thesis.pdf

illuminem. (2024). As fast fashion giant Shein embraces AI, its emissions are soaring [WWW document]. Illuminem.com. Retrieved from https://illuminem.com/illuminemvoices/as-fast-fashion-giant-shein-embraces-ai-its-emissions-are-soaring

Jacobs, K., Petersen, L., Hörisch, J., & Battenfeld, D. (2018). Green thinking but thoughtless buying? An empirical extension of the value-attitude-behaviour

hierarchy in sustainable clothing. Journal of Cleaner Production, 203, 1155–1169. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2018.07.320

Janmark, J., Magnus, K.-H., Marcos, I., & Wiener, E. (2024). Sustainable style: How fashion can afford and accelerate decarbonization [WWW document]. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/sustainable-style-how-fashion-can-afford-and-accelerate-decarbonization

Joy, A., Sherry, J. F., Venkatesh, A., Wang, J., & Chan, R. (2012). Fast fashion, sustainability, and the ethical appeal of luxury brands. Fashion Theory, 16(3), 273–295. Retrieved from https://www3.nd.edu/~jsherry/pdf/2012/fastfashionsustainability.pdf

Judge, M., Warren-Myers, G., & Paladino, A. (2019). Using the theory of planned behaviour to predict intentions to purchase sustainable housing. Journal of Cleaner Production, 215, 259–267. Retrieved from https://research.rug.nl/...

Kang, J., & Hustvedt, G. (2014). Building trust between consumers and corporations: The role of consumer perceptions of transparency and social responsibility. Journal of Business Ethics, 125(2), 253–265. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/...

Khaitan Legal Associates. (2024). Fashion industry's greenwashing crisis and the push for ESG [WWW document]. Khaitanlegal.com. Retrieved from https://khaitanlegal.com/fashion-industrys-greenwashing-crisis-and-the-push-for-esg/

Kozlowski, A. (2012). Corporate social responsibility in the apparel industry: A multiple case study analysis. Ryerson University. Retrieved from https://rshare.library.torontomu.ca/...

Li, M., Cavender, R., & Lee, M. Y. (2025). Consumer awareness of fashion greenwashing: Insights from social media discussions. Sustainability, 17(7). Retrieved from https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/7/2982

Maiti, R. (2025). The environmental impact of fast fashion, explained [WWW document]. Earth.org. Retrieved from https://earth.org/fast-fashions-detrimental-effect-on-the-environment/

McFall-Johnsen, M. (2020). These facts show how unsustainable the fashion industry is [WWW document]. World Economic Forum. Retrieved from https://www.weforum.org/...

McNeill, L., & Moore, R. (2015). Sustainable fashion consumption and the fast fashion conundrum: Fashionable consumers and attitudes to sustainability in clothing choice. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 39(3), 212–222. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ijcs.12169

Neumann, H. L., Martinez, L. M., & Martinez, L. F. (2021). Sustainability efforts in the fast fashion industry: Consumer perception, trust, and purchase intention. Sustainability Accounting, Management and Policy Journal, 12(3), 571–590. Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/...

New York Post. (2024). Hypocritical Gen Z can’t stop buying this planet-destroying product: Study [WWW document]. New York Post. Retrieved from https://nypost.com/...

Nguyen, T. T. H., Yang, Z., Nguyen, N., Johnson, L. W., & Cao, T. K. (2019). Greenwash and green purchase intention: The mediating role of green scepticism. Sustainability, 11(9), 2653. https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/11/9/2653

Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T., & Gwilt, A. (2020). The environmental price of fast fashion. Nature Reviews Earth & Environment, 1(4), 189–200. Retrieved from https://acris.aalto.fi/...

Park, H. J., & Lin, L. M. (2020). Exploring the attitude–behaviour gap in sustainable consumption: Comparison of recycled and upcycled fashion products. Journal of Business Research, 117, 623–628. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0148296318304004

PwC. (2024). Consumers willing to pay 9.7% sustainability premium… PwC 2024 voice of the consumer survey [WWW document]. PwC. Retrieved from https://www.pwc.com/

Rausch, T. M., & Kopplin, C. S. (2021). Bridge the gap: Consumers' purchase intention and behaviour regarding sustainable clothing. Journal of Cleaner Production, 278, 123882.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Cristopher-Siegfried-Kopplin-2/publication/343945414_Bridge_the_gap_Consumers'_purchase_intention_and_behavior_regarding_sustainable_clothing/links/5f55ef91a6fdcc9879d30eb4/Bridge-the-gap-Consumers-purchase-intention-and-behavior-regarding-sustainable-clothing.pdf

Resnik, D. B. (2018). Trust as a foundation for research with human subjects. In The Ethics of Research with Human Subjects: Protecting People, Advancing Science, Promoting Trust (pp. 87–111). Springer International Publishing.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/David-Resnik-2/publication/322336020_Conclusion/links/5f8b5f1692851c14bccf6b0e/Conclusion.pdf

Richards, H. (2025). Princess Polly's new B Corp status undermines the credibility of the certification [WWW Document]. RMIT.

https://www.rmit.edu.au/news/media-releases-and-expert-comments/2025/jul/fast-fashion-b-corp-certification

Salo, I. H. (2020). Greenwashing and consumer trust.

https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/346717/Thesis%20Ira%20Salo.pdf?sequence=2

Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2019). Research methods for business students (8th ed.). Pearson Education.

https://ebook.app.hcu.edu.gh/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Mark-N.-K.-Saunders-Philip-Lewis-Adrian-Thornhill-Research-Methods-For-Business-Students-2019-Pearson-Education-libgen.li-1.pdf

Shin, S., & Ki, E. J. (2021). Attribution and attributional processes of organisations' environmental messages. International Journal of Market Research, 63(5), 576–596.

https://openresearch.okstate.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/426b0433-3319-4744-9538-5281b0424e7d/content

Spence, M. (1973). Job market signalling. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 87(3), 355–374.

https://www.sfu.ca/~allen/Spence.pdf

Tarabieh, S. M. Z. A. (2021). The impact of greenwash practices on green purchase intention: The mediating effects of green confusion, green perceived risk, and green trust. Management Science Letters, 11(2), 451–464.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Saeed-Tarabieh/publication/344309996_The_impact_of_greenwash_practices_over_green_purchase_intention_The_mediating_effects_of_green_confusion_Green_perceived_risk_and_green_trust/links/675497c6ef2dc67228b07e5d/The-impact-of-greenwash-practices-over-green-purchase-intention-The-mediating-effects-of-green-confusion-Green-perceived-risk-and-green-trust.pdf

Testa, F., Iraldo, F., Vaccari, A., & Ferrari, E. (2015). Why eco-labels can be effective marketing tools: Evidence from a study on Italian consumers. Business Strategy and the Environment, 24(4), 252–265.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/bse.1821

Textile Exchange. (2020). Preferred Fibre & Materials Market Report 2020 [WWW Document].

https://textileexchange.org/app/uploads/2021/04/Textile-Exchange_Preferred-Fiber-Material-Market-Report_2020.pdf

Thomas, J., Patil, R. S., Patil, M., & John, J. (2023). Addressing the sustainability conundrums and challenges within the polymer value chain. Sustainability, 15(22), 15758.

https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/22/15758

Tolegenov, B., Rafif, K., Rafi, M., Herawati, R., Abdullah, A., & Sari, L. K. (2024). Digital transparency and consumer awareness: Digital platforms for educating consumers about product origins and sustainability. AL-MUZARA'AH, 12(2), 277–287.

https://journal.ipb.ac.id/index.php/jalmuzaraah/article/download/59980/29517

Tu, J. C., Cui, Y., Liu, L., & Yang, C. (2024). Perceived greenwashing and its impact on the green image of brands. Sustainability, 16(20), 9009.

https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/16/20/9009

UNEP. (2018). Cleaning up couture: What's in your jeans? [WWW Document]. UN Environment Programme.

https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/cleaning-couture-whats-your-jeans

UNEP. (2025). Sustainable fashion to take centre stage on Zero-Waste Day [WWW Document]. UN Environment Programme.

https://www.unep.org/technical-highlight/sustainable-fashion-take-centre-stage-zero-waste-day

United Nations. (2019). UN launches drive to highlight environmental cost of staying fashionable [WWW Document]. UN News.

https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1035161

Webb, B. (2021). Brutal honesty: The new look sustainable marketing [WWW Document]. Vogue Business.

https://www.voguebusiness.com/sustainability/brutal-honesty-the-new-look-sustainable-marketing-ace-and-tate?

Widlitz, S. (2020). Retailers get serious about sustainability into 2020 [WWW Document]. Forbes.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/staceywidlitz/2020/02/03/retailers-get-serious-about-sustainability-into-2020/

Williams, A., & Hodges, N. (2022). Signalling sustainability: Exploring consumer perspectives on communicating apparel sustainability information. Journal of Sustainable Marketing, 3(1), 26–39.

https://luminousdev.s3.amazonaws.com/gallery/134751656560089.pdf

Yu, J., Yang, Y., & Wang, H. (2025). The influence of greenwashing perceptions on consumer purchase intentions in the Chinese fashion industry. Innovative Marketing, 21(1), 65.

https://www.businessperspectives.org/images/pdf/applications/publishing/templates/article/assets/21542/IM_2025_01_Yu.pdf

Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey Questionnaire

Study Title: Consumer Perceptions of Sustainable Brand Positioning in Online Fast Fashion Retailers

Researcher: Ibrar Muhammad Ilyas

University of Vaasa, School of Management (2025)

SECTION A: PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Please read the following information before proceeding:

- Participation is voluntary and anonymous.
- You may withdraw at any time before submitting your responses.
- The data will be used solely for academic research.
- The survey takes approximately 6–8 minutes.

☐ I am aged between 18–35, I shop online for fast fashion, and I consent to participate in this study.

(You must agree to proceed.)

SECTION B: SCREENING QUESTIONS

1. Age:

☐ 18–24 ☐ 25–29 ☐ 30–35 ☐ Above 35

2. Have you purchased clothing from an online fast fashion retailer (e.g., SHEIN, Zara, H&M, ASOS, Boohoo) in the past 12 months?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3. How often do you buy fashion items online?

☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Every 2–3 months ☐ Rarely

SECTION C: MAIN VARIABLES

Each statement uses a 5-point Likert Scale**:**

1 = Strongly Disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly Agree

Independent Variable 1: Perceived Authenticity of Sustainability Claims (PA)

1. When brands provide verified eco-labels (e.g., GOTS, Nordic Swan), their sustainability claims seem authentic.
2. Detailed factory or supplier information makes sustainability claims believable.
3. Quantified environmental impact reports (e.g., CO_2 saved, water used) increase a brand's authenticity.
4. Using vague phrases like "eco-friendly" without proof makes claims seem inauthentic.
5. Brands that admit their sustainability challenges appear more genuine.

Dependent Variable 1 / Independent Variable 2: Consumer Trust in Sustainability Claims (TRUST)

1. I trust sustainability claims made by online fast fashion retailers.
2. I believe that fast fashion brands genuinely fulfil their sustainability promises.
3. I am confident in the information brands provide about sustainability.
4. I generally doubt fast fashion retailers' environmental claims.

Independent Variable 3: Awareness of Greenwashing (GW)

1. I can easily identify when a brand is greenwashing.
2. I have seen misleading sustainability claims from fashion brands online.
3. I sometimes feel confused about sustainability labels and marketing.
4. Greenwashing makes me less likely to buy from that brand in the future.
5. Greenwashing does not affect my purchase decision.

Independent Variable 4: Subjective Norms (SN)

1. People close to me think I should buy from sustainable brands.
2. My peers or friends approve of choosing environmentally friendly fashion.
3. I feel social pressure to consider sustainability when buying clothes online.

Independent Variable 5: Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)

1. It is easy to find sustainable options that match my style online.
2. Sustainable fashion options are affordable for me.
3. I can access enough information about sustainability before purchasing.
4. Sustainable choices are inconvenient when shopping online

Independent Variable 6: Environmental Concern (EC)

1. I consider the environmental impact before buying clothes.
2. I try to reduce waste by buying fewer or longer-lasting items.
3. I feel personally responsible to support sustainable fashion.
4. Sustainability in fashion is mostly marketing hype.
5. I am willing to change my shopping habits for environmental reasons.

Dependent Variable 2: Purchase Intention (PI)

1. Sustainability claims increase my likelihood of buying from a brand.
2. I would prefer a sustainable brand over a non-sustainable one if quality and price are similar.
3. I intend to buy from brands that show clear sustainability efforts in the next 3 months.
4. Even if a brand is sustainable, price and style are still more important to me.

SECTION D: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE (CONTROL VARIABLE)

1. I frequently see sustainability messages from fashion brands on social media.
2. Influencers affect how I perceive a brand's environmental responsibility.
3. I have seen influencers expose greenwashing in fashion.
4. Influencer recommendations make me more likely to consider sustainable brands.