

## CONSCIOUS ECO-CONSUMERS OR MAINSTREAM FASHIONISTAS? THE PERCEPTION OF BARRIERS TO THE ETHICAL CONSUMPTION OF FASHION CONSUMER GROUPS

ECO-CONSUMIDORES CONSCIENTES OU *FASHIONISTAS* MAINSTREAM? A PERCEÇÃO DOS OBSTÁCULOS AO CONSUMO ÉTICO DOS GRUPOS DE CONSUMIDORES DE MODA

ÉCO-CONSOMMATEURS CONSCIENTS OU *FASHIONISTAS MAINSTREAM*? LA PERCEPTION DES OBSTACLES À LA CONSOMMATION ÉTHIQUE DES GROUPES DE CONSOMMATEURS DE MODE

¿CONSUMIDORES ECOLÓGICOS CONCIENCIADOS O *FASHIONISTAS CONVENCIONALES*? LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS OBSTÁCULOS AL CONSUMO ÉTICO DE LOS GRUPOS DE CONSUMIDORES DE MODA

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**ABSTRACT:** Fashion consumers engage with the environment in line with changing styles, while their clothing purchase strategies range from necessity or experience-shopping to sustainability-driven choices. The inconsistent attitudes and behaviours of such consumers points to the complexity of purchasing decisions. To position fashion-consumers' shopping practices on a spectrum of ethical concerns, this study identifies five segments of fashion consumer groups based on fashion-orientation, sustainability concerns, frugality, and emotional ties. This study investigates the potential segmentation of fashion-consumer groups to understand the connection behind fashion-orientation and eco-consciousness in purchasing decisions. This study confirms that the 'environment is trendy,' especially for the majority of segments identified among the concerned and conscious groups. The most suitable target group for ethical and sustainable brands and online shopping are the conscious trendy. This segment has a negative relation to frugality, and the highest commitment to and awareness. This study found that the most pro-environmentally and ethically committed segment is not interested in fashion and displays no affection for clothes. Ethical, slow, eco-conscious, second-hand, and vintage may all constitute a growing market, as new forms of consumption patterns may involve seeking to invest in timeless and circular models. To this end, awareness-raising, co-creation, and communication should be targeted at different segments. This study sheds light on the attitude-behavior gap based on the perceived barriers to ethical consumption of the different fashion-consumer segments, while provides strategic recommendations on how these segments could be achieved through social media in various forms.

**Keywords:** fashion marketing; ethical consumption; consumer groups; pro-environmental behavior; frugality.

**RESUMO:** Os consumidores de moda comprometem-se com o ambiente em linha com a mudança de estilos, enquanto as suas estratégias de compra de vestuário vão desde a necessidade ou experiência de compra até às escolhas orientadas para a sustentabilidade. As atitudes e comportamentos inconsistentes de tais consumidores apontam para a complexidade das decisões de compra. Para posicionar as práticas de compra dos consumidores de moda num espectro de preocupações éticas, este estudo identifica cinco segmentos de grupos de consumidores de moda com base na orientação para a moda, preocupações de sustentabilidade, frugalidade, e laços emocionais. Este artigo investiga a potencial segmentação dos grupos de consumidores de moda para compreender a ligação por detrás da orientação para a moda e da consciência ecológica nas decisões de compra. Este estudo confirma que o 'ambiente está na moda', especialmente para a maioria dos segmentos identificados entre os grupos interessados e conscientes. O grupo-alvo mais adequado para marcas éticas e sustentáveis e para compras em linha é a tendência consciente. Este

segmento tem uma relação negativa com a frugalidade, e o maior compromisso e consciencialização. Este estudo descobriu que o segmento mais pró-ambiental e eticamente empenhado não está interessado na moda e não demonstra qualquer afeto pelo vestuário. Ético, lento, eco-consciente, em segunda mão, e vintage podem constituir um mercado em crescimento, uma vez que novas formas de padrões de consumo podem envolver a procura de investir em modelos intemporais e circulares. Para o efeito, a sensibilização, a cocriação e a comunicação devem ser dirigidas a diferentes segmentos. Este estudo lança luz sobre a diferença de atitude-comportamento baseada na perceção das barreiras ao consumo ético dos diferentes segmentos de consumidores de moda, enquanto fornece recomendações estratégicas sobre como estes segmentos poderiam ser alcançados através das redes sociais sob várias formas.

**Palavras-chave:** marketing de moda; consumo ético; grupos de consumidores; comportamento pró-ambiental; frugalidade.

**RÉSUMÉ:** Les consommateurs de mode s'engagent dans l'environnement en fonction de l'évolution des styles, tandis que leurs stratégies d'achat de vêtements vont de l'achat par nécessité ou par expérience à des choix axés sur la durabilité. Les attitudes et comportements incohérents de ces consommateurs soulignent la complexité des décisions d'achat. Pour positionner les pratiques d'achat des consommateurs de mode sur un spectre de préoccupations éthiques, cette étude identifie cinq segments de groupes de consommateurs de mode basés sur l'orientation mode, les préoccupations de durabilité, la frugalité et les liens émotionnels. Cette étude examine la segmentation potentielle des groupes de consommateurs de mode afin de comprendre le lien entre l'orientation de la mode et la conscience écologique dans les décisions d'achat. Cette étude confirme que "l'environnement est à la mode", en particulier pour la majorité des segments identifiés parmi les groupes concernés et conscients. Le groupe cible le plus approprié pour les marques et les achats en ligne éthiques et durables est celui des branchés conscients. Ce segment a une relation négative avec la frugalité, et l'engagement et la sensibilisation les plus élevés. Cette étude a révélé que le segment le plus pro-environnemental et le plus engagé sur le plan éthique n'est pas intéressé par la mode et ne montre aucune affection pour les vêtements. Les produits éthiques, lents, éco-conscients, d'occasion et vintage peuvent tous constituer un marché en croissance, car les nouvelles formes de consommation peuvent impliquer de chercher à investir dans des modèles intemporels et circulaires. À cette fin, la sensibilisation, la co-création et la communication devraient être ciblées sur différents segments. Cette étude met en lumière l'écart entre les attitudes et les comportements en fonction des obstacles perçus à la consommation éthique des différents segments de consommateurs de mode, tout en fournissant des recommandations stratégiques sur la façon dont ces segments pourraient être atteints par le biais des médias sociaux sous diverses formes.

**Mots-clés:** marketing de la mode; consommation éthique; groupes de consommateurs; comportement pro-environnemental; frugalité.

**RESUMEN:** Los consumidores de moda se comprometen con el medio ambiente en consonancia con los cambios de estilo, mientras que sus estrategias de compra de ropa van desde la compra por necesidad o por experiencia hasta las opciones basadas en la sostenibilidad. Las actitudes y comportamientos incoherentes de estos consumidores ponen de manifiesto la complejidad de las decisiones de compra. Para situar las prácticas de compra de los consumidores de moda en un espectro de preocupaciones éticas, este estudio identifica cinco segmentos de grupos de consumidores de moda basados en la orientación hacia la moda, las preocupaciones por la sostenibilidad, la frugalidad y los vínculos emocionales. Este estudio investiga la segmentación potencial de los grupos de consumidores de moda para comprender la conexión que existe entre la orientación hacia la moda y la conciencia ecológica en las decisiones de compra. Este estudio confirma que "el medio ambiente está de moda", especialmente para la mayoría de los segmentos identificados entre los grupos preocupados y concienciados. El grupo objetivo más adecuado para las marcas éticas y sostenibles y las compras en línea son los "trendy" conscientes. Este segmento tiene una relación negativa con la frugalidad, y el mayor compromiso y concienciación. Según este estudio, el segmento más comprometido con el medio ambiente y la ética no está interesado en la moda y no muestra afecto por la ropa. Los productos éticos, lentos, ecoconscientes, de segunda mano y vintage pueden constituir un mercado en crecimiento, ya que las nuevas formas de consumo pueden implicar la búsqueda de inversión en modelos atemporales y circulares. Para ello, la sensibilización, la cocreación y la comunicación deben dirigirse a diferentes segmentos. Este estudio arroja luz sobre la brecha actitud-comportamiento basada en las barreras percibidas hacia el consumo ético de los diferentes segmentos de consumidores de moda, al tiempo que proporciona recomendaciones estratégicas sobre cómo se podría llegar a estos segmentos a través de los medios sociales en diversas formas.

**Palabras-clave:** marketing de la moda; consumo ético; grupos de consumidores; comportamiento proambiental; frugalidad.

## 1. Introduction

Consumers are simultaneously being exposed to the trends of accelerated fashion and messages intended to increase sustainability and ethical consumption. Sustainable Fashion (SF) has become mainstream (Henninger et al., 2016), and the environment has become the new trend. The disruptive efforts of activists have spread on social media with the aim of popularizing pro-environmental attitudes and behaviour – such as the Plastic Free Foundations' (established in 2017) campaign that has won series of awards since 2019, or the Fridays for Future movement, which impacted public discourse and raised attention to the climate, the environment, and particularly focused on impacts on society and consumption patterns, among other topics (Marquardt, 2020). The criticism of fashion as one of the most polluting global industries has a long history. Movements such as the international Fashion Revolution, or Sustainable Fashion Matters, along with campaigns such as that of Clean Clothes are being embraced by bloggers, influencers, and sustainability-concerned sites.

SF ever since has targeted consumers aware of the impact of the clothing industry (Henninger et al., 2016). Ethical fashion promotes fair working conditions and sustainable sourcing (Joergens, 2006). However shifting consumers from pro-sustainability and ethical attitudes to behaviour is challenging. Eco-conscious motivation is reportedly present among consumers, although purchasing behaviour may be inconsistent with a pro-environmental, ethical attitude. Research has focused on the attitude-behaviour gap (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Joergens, 2006; Steg & Vlek, 2009; Van der Werff et al., 2013; Lanzini & Thøgersen, 2014; Thomas et al., 2016), including in relation to purchasing decisions and their environmental outcomes (Goldsmith & Flynn, 2015; Gatersleben et al., 2019; Roozen & Raedts, 2020; Davis & Dabas, 2021). Ethical clothing product preferences can also be driven by other motives such as a desire for value for money, personal image, and wellbeing (Jägel et al., 2012), as consumers shift between ethical and unethical choices.

Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002: 257) suggest that the biggest positive affect on pro-environmental behaviour can be achieved through the synergy of external (socio-economic-cultural and institutional-) and internal (such as personality, values, attitudes, knowledge) factors. They identify a series of barriers to pro-environmental behaviour, of which the biggest are old behaviour patterns (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Consumers despite of their environmental concerns, reportedly follow the "power of habit" in purchasing apparel in regular stores, that offer the reliable style and fit (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). No less important are a lack of both internal and external incentives. Furthermore, the information gap about the origin and production of clothing results in less care in relation to consumers' purchasing decisions (Joergens, 2006), while information on the environmental impact (Roozen & Raedts, 2020), and green demarketing strategies (Kim & Oh, 2020) may shift behaviour.

The switch between unethical and ethical consumer behaviour may be affected by positive and negative emotions, such as sentiments of guilt. Balancing a willingness to consume 'the easy way' but also to shop ethically is challenging. Consumers manage such cognitive dissonance (or fail to) by engaging in contradictory behaviour (Gregory-Smith et al., 2013), as they compromise between conflicting consumption choices (Shaw et al., 2006; Jägel et al., 2012). Purchase-related guilt has been reported to be muted in relation to some brands (Bray et al., 2011), meaning that consumers follow the prevalent consumption logic. Barriers to ethical consumption, can be external – when goods from reliable sources are not available, or available only at a premium price.

Conspicuous consumption can promote sustainable consumption under a specific set of conditions (Sexton & Sexton, 2011). We also know since early on that the fashion- and shopping-orientation of consumers did not exclude their eco-friendly behaviour (Gam, 2011). The sustainability vs. fashion dilemma is now being addressed by the SF trend, which, despite the growing familiarity of shoppers with the term SF, is being seen as a high-end phenomenon (Henninger et al., 2016; Di Benedetto, 2017). This proposition reinforces the ethical mainstreaming tactics of global companies (Joy et al., 2012) providing affordable sustainability by fast fashion brands (Chang & Jai, 2015; Neumann et al., 2021). It then examines how these groups perceive ethical consumption, and its perceived barriers. Consumers' efforts to identify/purchase certified products sealed with certificates, are not discussed in this study.

Fashion leaders are consumers that adopt trending shopping behaviors. As they seek for new knowledge, consumers looking forward to adopt new patterns of consumption are likely to be found on social media. Pro-environmental behavior and sustainable practices are discussed in Facebook groups and pages, where communities and audiences find navigation and affirmation of their explorations in fashion. As this study is focused on pro-environmental attitudes of apparel shoppers that can be reached on social media – fashion-orientation, particularly the dimension of fashion leadership was a suitable frame for this study, to which the dimensions of frugality and thrifting associated with eco-friendly behavior were added. We know that the perception of SF differs among consumers (Mukendi et al., 2020; Dabas & Whang, 2022), and consumers with various behaviors may perceive themselves as concerned about sustainability matters. Therefore, adding to the less explored scholarship on grouping of consumers in the intersection of SF, consumer behavior and online presence, this study investigates the potential segmentation of fashion-consumer groups based on consumers' preferences related to fashion-orientation, sustainability-concern, frugality, and emotional ties to their clothes.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Fashion-consumer groups and sustainability

Ethics and sustainability in fashion purchasing have not been demonstrated to have a straightforward causal relationship; it is viewed as an oxymoron, especially in relation to fast fashion (Armstrong *et al.*, 2017). However, the fact that a SF market exists has been grasped through understanding consumer attitudes, and preferences that culminate in purchasing decisions. Attitudes toward fashion have been addressed in consumer behaviour research, predominantly in the form of studies focused on consumer segmentation and the relationship of attitudes to behaviour (Hirschman & O. Adcock, 1978; Gutman & Mills, 1982; Eastman *et al.*, 1999; Belleau & Nowlin, 2001; Park *et al.*, 2017).

As a basis with regards to their relation to fashion, consumers fundamentally were found to belong into four groups – fashion innovators, opinion leaders, innovative communicators, and fashion followers – that are claimed to reflect attitudes. This segmentation was based on a measurement of innovativeness and leadership using self-assessment (Hirschman & O. Adcock, 1978), and has been adopted by others (Baugh & Davis, 1989; Workman & Johnson, 1993). Fashion leaders adopt exotic offers to purchase them – and proved to have a different shopping-orientation from followers – that implies less cost-consciousness, traditional and conservative values (Belleau & Nowlin, 2001). The link between fashion consumers and sustainable consumption can be found in the intersection of values, attitudes, and behaviour. We know, for example, that the value of self-transcendence is shared among pro-environmental consumers (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2002). Studies also report to identifying conflicts between pro-environmental concern and fashion purchasing behaviour. A positive attitude towards ethical consumption may be distorted by consumers' social orientation, ideals, and ideology, which all affect purchasing decisions (Niinimäki, 2010).

Followers of fashion, with regard to their willingness to purchase ethical apparel, have been differentiated into three major groups by McNeill and Moore (2015). Self consumers were found to be concerned with fulfilling hedonistic needs, social consumers were concerned about their social image, and sacrifice consumers sought to reduce their impact on the world. Inconsistency between behaviour and attitude was most often spotted among social consumers, whose increasing concern about environmental issues conflicted with their social wellbeing, thus demonstrating inconsistent purchasing patterns. This group was found to be a potential driver of sustainable consumption, given their concern with the opinions of their peers. Sacrifice consumers readily prioritized the reduction of their fashion consumption, and were the group least likely to report meeting barriers to sustainable consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Park *et al.* (2017) found four groups ranging from concerned shoppers to apathetic shoppers in the US context. To understand the connection

between shopping-orientation and sustainability-concerns among consumers of apparel (Park et al., 2017) identified four groups of consumers in their relation to sustainability-related and shopping-related factors for apparel purchase. Sustainability-related attributes –knowledge and consciousness –, and shopping-related attributes, such as fashion consciousness, price and quality sensitivity, are connected to intention and behavior. Among the four groups, concerned and holistic shoppers were most aware of the sustainability impact of their clothing shopping behavior, whereas the apathetic, and the traditional turned out to be least interested.

In another study, consumers inclined toward slow fashion values were segmented into four groups – from highly-involved to low-involved fashion groups (Jung & Jin, 2016). The core characteristic of slow fashion consumers was a willingness to pay a premium for equitable and local products, along with the desire for uniqueness and exclusivity. Moreover, this group was less likely to change their wardrobe and prone to invest into authentic and durable apparel. Jung and Jin (2016) suggest that creating customer value in relation to slow fashion can positively affects purchase intentions. Roozen and Raedts (2020) found that negative publicity about the fast fashion industry has different impact on groups of consumers, depending on their environmental consciousness or fashion involvement. A recent study (Haines & Lee, 2022), looked into emotional and shopping characteristics along with consumption patterns to identify three groups, among which the ‘warm and thrifty’ group was found to be least likely to follow fashion trends, and to be driven by pro-social concerns in their SF consumption. Zaman et al. (2019) found that consumers’ orientations split them into three groups along the store type they prefer for second-hand shopping. Online shoppers had higher ratings on ecological consciousness and fashion consciousness than thrift store attenders. Preferences for styles differed among these groups.

All in all, despite the fact that (Niinimäki, 2010) demonstrated that only a minority of fashion-consumers considered sustainability, later studies pointed to triggers such as communication (Vehmas et al., 2018), negative publicity (Roozen & Raedts, 2020), or set of interventions (Harris et al., 2015) or involving consumers into value creation (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011) that could achieve a positive shift in consumer knowledge, attitude, and purchasing intention (Jung & Jin, 2016). Moreover, consumers are open to buying into the contemporary trend of pro-environmental behaviour motivated by gaining social approval (Chi, 2015), and through forming a shared identity by viewing the self as a member of a group (Gupta & Ogden, 2009). Therefore, social media is an important tool for group formations and communication about SF practices. However, no study addressed the segmentation of the possible target groups of such a communication activity. The power of social media over corporations and fashion consumers – is a yet unexplored territory (Shrivastava et al., 2021).

To meet this gap, respondents of this survey were connected to Facebook pages and groups concerned with SF practices, fashion trends, and the environment, residing in Hungary. The paper investigates the segmentation of the audience around sustainability and fashion – whose self-perception is that of environmentally concerned, the results thus contribute to the understanding of consumer groupings that can be achieved through social media. This study adds value to the discourse on SF in at least two ways: first, it reveals that the perception of sustainability may create various patterns of consumer groupings, second: no similar study was conducted before on consumer segments in the intersection of fashion orientation, sustainable practices and consumer behaviour – including variables such as education to test for its predictive value.

## **2.2. Fashion-orientation and affection**

Fashion involvement is a construct to explain the emotional charge of interaction with the fashion product involving the consumer into the purchase activity (Han *et al.*, 2017), where emotions and mental state play as a trigger for hedonic consumption (Saran *et al.*, 2016; Park *et al.*, 2017). In fashion studies involvement was researched particularly from the angle of situational and decision factors of shopping, or product focused, suggesting that clothing represented a high-involvement product class (Naderi, 2013).

This study follows the concept of fashion orientation used by several studies stemming from the framework of the fashion adoption theory. Fashion-oriented behaviors are found to contribute to adoption of sustainable/ ethical fashion consumption (Gam, 2011) and lead to a variety of hybrid attitudes. There is no question that fashion-oriented consumers are driven by the pleasure of shopping, are open to symbolic forms of consumption even in thrifting (Park *et al.*, 2020) and are influenced by e-compulsive buying behavior (Bhatia, 2019). Wearing clothes is more than a functional act – it is also a symbolic one. Having a fashion-orientation involves seeking social approval, which fuels the desire to keep up to date with fashion, and having a distinct style.

Workman and Kidd (2000) found that the need for uniqueness is particularly important for fashion change agents but is less important for followers. Moreover, fashion innovators have a significantly greater need for variety in their closets than followers, due to their greater need for mental stimulation (Workman & Johnson, 1993). Mental stimulation is today served by the consumption of social media and an active presence, which is backed up by the shopping experience. The need for variety can be satisfied from different sources: fast fashion, second-hand clothes, online shopping, etc.

This study adopts the dimension of fashion leadership to connect the adoption of eco-conscious and fashion attitudes by consumers as a potential way to generate

more considerate purchasing behavior. Therefore, it adds the importance of being well dressed (trendy) and the dimension of need for variety, while being less focused on the experiential and emotional dimensions of hedonism. The need for variety is captured by the items ‘desire to not be seen on social media in the same clothes,’ ‘having more clothes than are needed,’ and ‘spending a lot on clothes and accessories’ (Table 1). As an antidote to voluntary simplicity (Ganassali & Matysiewicz, 2021; Bardey et al., 2022) and the result of consumption satiation ‘having more clothes than are needed’ reflects less willingness to discard clothes, but rather to accumulate them, keeping emotionally-charged items or a hedonic attitude to fashion.

Composite Variables and Items		Dimension
<b>Hedonic</b>		
1. I spend a lot on clothes and accessories.	<i>fashion-leader</i>	<i>hedonic</i>
<b>Frugal</b>		
2. Expensive brands are not worth their price.		<i>value-for-money</i>
3. Fashion is for companies to make more profit.		<i>moral-frugal</i>
4. I prefer buying more clothes for less money.		<i>thrifty</i>
<b>Fashion-orientation</b>		
5. I spend a lot on clothes and accessories.	<i>fashion-leader</i>	<i>hedonic/ need variety</i>
6. I've got more clothes than I need.		<i>need variety</i>
7. Fashion is a way of self-expression.	<i>fashion-leader</i>	<i>trendy</i>
8. I don't like wearing the same clothes twice on social media.		<i>need variety</i>
9. Anyone can be trendy with accessible brands.		<i>trendy</i>
10. I am satisfied with the quality of accessible brands.		<i>hedonic</i>
11. I always buy at least one outfit connected to new trends.	<i>fashion-leader</i>	<i>trendy/ need variety</i>
<b>Affection</b>		
11. I have clothes that have been worn by a relative.		<i>emotional</i>
12. I love my clothes that have personal memories.		<i>emotional</i>
<b>Sustainability</b>		
13. I try to keep up with sustainable consumption.	<i>attitude</i>	
14. I only buy clothes from brands I know, and I know where they were produced.	<i>awareness</i>	<i>ConRes</i>
15. I know how garments are being produced.	<i>awareness</i>	
16. People can be agents of change through boycotts, hashtag campaigns, and communication	<i>activism</i>	<i>ConRes</i>
17. Companies should step up to improve the working conditions of their workers.	<i>activism</i>	
18. I don't drink bottled water.	<i>behavior</i>	<i>ConRes</i>

**Table 1 - Composite Variables and Items**

Source: the author.

A study by Gutman and Mills (1982) identified four factors in the fashion-orientation of individuals, while Gam's (2011) study revealed three of the latter. This study draws on the fashion leadership dimension, thus adapts three items. The items 'I spend a lot of money on clothes and accessories', and 'clothes are one of the most important ways I have of expressing my individuality' were converted into the more general statements 'fashion is a way of self-expression,' while 'I always buy at least one outfit of the latest fashion' was substituted by 'trend'. It is claimed that the need for variety in fashion and hedonic motivation have become widespread since the time of Workman and Johnson's (1993) study due to the spread of accessible fashion and social media. To grasp these dimensions, this study includes them in the fashion-orientation section. Being elicited in the preliminary qualitative phase of the research, emotional ties to precious items in one's wardrobe are included under affection. It is assumed that an affection for items of clothes defines a consumer's relationship to their wardrobe, and may create an inclination to pro-environmental behaviour, or to slow-fashion values of buying less and durable, quality items.

### **2.3. Frugality and sustainability**

Pro-environmental behaviour is defined as behaviour intended to promote a beneficial outcome for the environment (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Others argue that intention itself does not result in environmental impact, thus it is suggested that the focus should be on behaviour that results in impact, whether intentional or not (Steg & Vlek, 2009; Gatersleben et al., 2019). (Non)spending on fashion might be tied to cost-consciousness, frugality, or moral drivers. Consumers cut their spending and restrain their consumption of economic goods for reasons of frugality (Gatersleben et al., 2019). Frugality is associated with self-control (Goldsmith & Flynn, 2015) and reduced consumption, while thriftiness (Evans, 2011) is associated with utility maximization, which may potentially increase consumption. In sum, a reduction in the environmental impact of behaviour combined with a reduction in cost can help frugal and moral identities to become better aligned (Gatersleben et al., 2019; Zaman et al., 2019).

Gatersleben et al. (2019) distinguished four consumer types with several salient identities, including planner, budget, frugal and energy, connected to frugal, which is associated with saving/planning. Value and bargain were the main traits of the utility maximizer thrifty, and green, fair, and local for moral, whereas sway, trend, shopper, and impulsive were associated with a wasteful consumer identity. The study concludes that moral identity is not negatively associated with wasteful identity but is simultaneously present, while thrifty and frugal identities were found to be positively related. The current study used three identity features to capture the pro-environmental disposition related to fashion purchasing behaviour, thrifty, frugal and moral.

## **2.4. Consumer responsibility and sustainability**

The role of consumer responsibility (ConRes) is debated and questioned by consumers themselves. The individual need to bear the 'burdens' imposed by the state, working conditions, and difficulties consuming due to high prices or the accessibility of products creates the rational reasoning that the responsibility for ethical, etc. decisions should not be imposed on the consumer. Thus, consumers may believe that they should not be charged the cost of information-gathering, finding distribution channels, or paying a premium for green, sustainable, ethical, etc. products. These views are less explored, given that scholarship is mostly shaped by the trickle-down view in relation to the investigation of sustainability and fashion. Research typically explores either the connection between luxury and environmental concerns (Bray *et al.*, 2011; Sexton & Sexton, 2011; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Woodside & Fine, 2019) or environmental-concern driven consumption (Shaw *et al.*, 2006; Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Consumer responsibility assumes that individual choice is not exclusively defined by rational, information-oriented, or psychological behaviour, but should be considered from a social and cultural perspective as being supported by social and moral norms (Bürklin, 2019). Social norms effect personal norms and knowledge which affects buying behaviour (Davis & Dabas, 2021). Personal values are thus being connected to relevant social other values or wider norms within society, therefore ConRes should be fostered by multiple stakeholders (Bürklin, 2019). The belief that people can be agents of change is a dimension of empowerment, and a stronger attitude that may result in pro-environmental behaviour on a community level.

To tap into the different segments and understand their behaviour and preferences more precisely, the survey included questions about the purchasing of second-hand items and vintage shopping, but also 'non-purchasing' practices related to obtaining fashion items, like wearing kin-owned clothes, swapping clothes, or DIY fashion and repairing clothes. As mentioned above, sustainable behaviour, such as thrifting and wearing used clothes, might not be linked to the environmental concerns or ethical considerations of consumers, but to other patterns of social and cultural behaviour.

## **3. Method and data**

### **3.1. The survey tools**

The aim of the research was to identify consumer segments, thus the analysis focused on eliciting consumer attitude and practices with regard to clothing and sustainability in order to identify the barriers to ethical consumption. Consumer segments can be explored in the form of homogenous groups using cluster analysis (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019). Therefore, a survey was designed to generate the relevant data. To capture the different dimensions of sustainable consumption, frugality, affection and fashion-orientation, the survey used self-reporting. The dimensions that were used were

derivative of earlier scholarship, as shown in the literature review sections. To operationalize the dimensions and to validate them, insights were collected from focus groups of conscious consumers, and in-depth interviews were implemented with an ethical fashion blogger, and a fashion influencer. These insights revealed the role of emotional connections to particular clothes, especially among sustainability-conscious consumers. The nature of this emotion was defined as loyalty to a memory or to a relative, defined as affection. After generating the sample of self-reporting items for measuring the dimensions, questions were added to the survey tool to map shopping behaviour and attitudes toward SF. Two items were added as proxies. The item about bottled water consumption measured frugality and pro-environmental behaviour. The Plastic Free July event of 2019 and communication around ocean pollution were prominent items on social media and beyond in Hungary, while using refillable bottles was trending. An item about the perception of sustainability with regard to recycled plastic garments was added as a proxy of awareness about the discourse on the environmental impact of fibres and the likely problems associated with the recycling of PET bottles (Table 4). The survey was tested with two sustainability experts, and four consumers. The survey was distributed across sustainability-themed and fashion-oriented social media communities from October to November 2019. The sample was not an entirely random adult one, as advised by Eastman et al. (1999) to increase the generalizability of the findings, but the pool of respondents allowed for the mapping of different consumer segments. The questionnaire was filled out by 422 respondents, with 416 as valid. As women tend to be overrepresented in Facebook groups, especially those related to fashion and sustainability, it was no surprise that the overwhelming majority – 95.4% – of respondents were female, and 60% reportedly had an average income. Among the respondent’s 90,6 percent were 45 years old or younger, and almost half of the sample resided in the capital city of Budapest (47,1 percent). Half of the respondents were employees (49 percent), and almost one third (29 percent) were students. It is also worth mentioning that most of the respondents (63 percent) had at least a BA degree.

Variables	Factor loading
<b>Sustainability</b>	
1. I try to keep up with sustainable consumption.	0.68
2. I only buy clothes from brands I know, and I know where they were produced.	0.61
3. I know how garments are being produced.	0.57
4. People can be agents of change: through boycotte, hashtag campaigns, and communication	0.53
5. Companies should step up to improve the working conditions of their workers.	0.46
<b>Fashion-orientation: Hedonism</b>	

6. I spend a lot on clothes and accessories.	0.72
7. I've got more clothes than I need.	0.72
8. Fashion is a way of self-expression.	0.50
9. I don't like wearing the same clothes twice on social media.	0.42
<b>Fashion-orientation: Trendy</b>	
10. Anyone can be trendy with accessible brands.	0.67
11. I am satisfied with the quality of accessible brands.	0.65
12. I always buy at least one outfit connected to new trends.	0.62
<b>Frugality</b>	
13. Expensive brands are not worth their price	0.75
14. Fashion is for companies to make more profit.	0.66
15. I prefer buying more clothes for less money.	0.52
<b>Affection</b>	
16. I have clothes that have been worn by a relative.	0.80
17. I love my clothes that have personal memories.	0.65
<b>Recycled-plastic garment</b>	
18. Garments made of recycled plastics are eco-friendly.	0.77
<i>Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.</i>	

**Table 2 - Factor analysis**

Source: the author.

### 3.2. Factor and cluster analysis

First, the 18 self-reported items were organized into factors (see table 2), serving as a basis to segment the market. The results met the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion, having a value of 0.636, the data were deemed suitable for further analysis. To determine the number of factors, the Kaiser criterion was used to identify six factors with at least one as the eigenvalue, with Varimax rotation. As a result, one item – bottled water consumption – was omitted from the factors. Second, to identify the market segments an exploratory cluster analysis was executed. After defining attitudes, the number of clusters was determined from the fifteen values of the dendrogram. The five consumer segments were created based on the average values of the factors in the clusters. The five clusters were examined with Ward-method crosstabs to provide a description of the identified segments.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Consumer groups

The groups are associated with attributes that are statistically significant (see above), and it turned out that the consumption of bottled water was an insightful proxy that expressed how much decisions meet the criteria of conscious consumption. It can also be seen from the data that second-hand shopping is associated with conscious consumption and being price-conscious.

<b>Convenience consumer</b> <b>15.3%</b> Least conscious among all groups, shop in SUPERMARKETS, and fav. popular shops DRINK bottled water DON'T CARE about ethical consumption	<b>Mainstream fashionista</b> <b>22.3%</b> cost-conscious no interest in sustainable fashion love their clothes: precious memories shop: in their favorite shops, second-hand/ shopping malls, and other places the youngest group	<b>Concerned Fashionista</b> <b>14.3%</b> own more clothes than they need spend a lot on fashion items fashion is self-expression satisfied with fast fashion brands Love NEW trends Concerned with environment, sometimes DRINK bottled water cannot avoid FAST FASH oldest group	<b>Conscious trendy</b> <b>22,5%</b> concerned about the fashion industry the textile industry processes Believe in AGENCY for change concerned with TRENDS shop SECOND HAND, Favorite and popular stores, NO shopping malls Online shopping	<b>Conscious Consumer</b> <b>25,5%</b> care about conscious consumption, show an interest in the processes of the textile industry cost-conscious NO bottled water Less likely to eat meat mostly SECOND HAND
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Environmentally conscious, ethically concerned consumption: a scale from unconcerned to conscious consumer

**Table 3 - Overview of the five segments of fashion consumers and their preferences**

Source: the author.

#### 4.1.1. Concerned Consumerists

The group of concerned consumerists, representing 14.3 percent of the sample, tend to care about new trends, and fashion, and readily spend on fast fashion although they are concerned about the environment as well, thus messages about greener products may come through. This group may be attracted to brands that tap into ethical mainstreaming tactics.

#### 4.1.2. Convenience shoppers

Despite the sample being drawn from a pool of presumably more concerned respondents, a relatively large share was classified as unconcerned. These individuals don't mind drinking bottled water, don't care about ethical consumption (as reflected in the answers given to the environmental- and responsibility-related block of questions), and they tend to buy their clothing along with their food, etc. in supermarkets. Members of this group can be described as unconcerned consumerists.

### **4.1.3. Mainstream fashionista**

The youngest group of respondents are price-conscious and have no interest in SF; they love their clothes and indulge in shopping. What drives this group is finding a good buy either in a shopping mall or from a fast-fashion brand or in a second-hand shop. This group is less sensitive to SF, and is the group most exposed to influencers who promote fashion and cosmetics. The preferences of this group might be most easily shaped by influencers who communicate sustainability values.

### **4.1.4. Conscious trendy**

Almost as large a group as the mainstream fashionista, with individuals as young as the latter, conscious trendy consumers care about fashion trends as well as share more knowledge and concern about the textile and fashion industry. This group expressed most commitment and consumer-related responsibility to change. This group shops online to find suitable brands, and has a set of preferred and loved brands.

### **4.1.5. Conscious Consumers**

Not surprisingly, the largest segment of the sample proved to be concerned about conscious consumption, showing ethical awareness and knowledge about the issues in question (the social and environmental devastation caused by the fashion industry, as well as the impact of the production of given fabrics on the environment, etc.). This group tends to exclude the consumption of bottled water and to cut out meat from their diet, containing the largest share of vegans and vegetarians. The conscious consumers of fashion also proved to be price-conscious, with a preference for second-hand clothing and exchanging clothes.

## **4.2. Interpretation**

The conscious trendy and the conscious consumer groups contain the largest proportion of individuals with master's degrees (58% of all respondents with a master's degree) and PhD degrees (64% of all PhD respondents) and half of the BAs (53% of all respondents) compared to the other groups. This needs to be controlled for age of the respondents, but the overall pattern suggests that education is correlated with pro-environmental concern. On the other hand, consumerist groups (thus the convenience shoppers and mainstream fashionistas), account for the 76% of respondents with vocational training. There is a sharp split within the younger generations – those with a high school education can be divided into two larger groups that are divided among either the most concerned two groups (39%) or the mainstream fashionistas (32%). It is worth noting that the majority of the overall sample, 63 percent, had at least a BA degree.

<b>Crosstabulation Ward Method / percentage</b>	<b>Convenient consumer</b>	<b>Mainstream fashionista</b>	<b>Concerned Fashionista</b>	<b>Conscious Trendy</b>	<b>Conscious eco- consumer</b>
<i>Where do you buy your clothes?</i>					
Groceries (Lidl, Tesco, Auchan, etc.)	23.5	17.9	17.4	14.3	4.3
Second-hand shop	41.2	57.1	34.8	54.8	82.6
Shopping mall	47.1	60.7	52.2	31	21.7
Favorite and well- known shops	64.7	78.6	56.5	61.9	26.1
Market	0	10.7	0	2.4	0
Online	12.8	21.1	17.3	31.6	17.3
<i>Barriers to ethical consumption</i>					
Don't care.	11.9	3.6	0	1.2	1.1
Too expensive.	49.2	51.2	50.9	60	53.8
There are no such shops nearby.	28.8	39.3	34.5	42.4	52.7
I know little about it.	52.5	41.7	38.2	20	16.1
I don't know ethical labels.	30.5	32.1	25.5	15.3	24.7
Some items are not available from sustainable sources.	32.2	28.6	41.8	49.4	36.6
<i>Feel guilt about non-ethical purchase</i>					
Acceptable: can't buy it anywhere else.	15.9	11.3	10.2	12.2	7.8
Feel uncomfortable.	20.5	53.5	42.9	50	64.4
Don't care: nothing is ethical.	20.5	4.2	6.1	1.2	6.7
Sometimes it is ok.	43.2	31	40.8	36.6	21.1
<i>Bottled water</i>	0	0	0	0	0
Regularly buy it. It is healthy.	15.3	7	10.9	1.1	2
Only when there is no other option.	47.5	53.5	45.5	43.2	36.4
Tap/ filtered water.	37.3	39.5	43.6	54.5	61.6
Too expensive.	0	0	0	1.1	0
<i>Education</i>					
Vocational	17.7	12.4	3.5	4.4	1
High school	30.6	42.7	28.1	22.2	26.5
BA, BSc	21	22.5	42.1	35.6	31.4
MA, Msc	27.4	20.2	24.6	33.3	36.3
PhD	3.2	2.2	1.8	4.4	4.9
<i>Crosstab, Ward Method</i>					

**Table 4 - Crosstabulation**

Source: the author.

Frugality often leads consumers to cut their costs by decreasing their consumption of economic goods (Gatersleben et al., 2019), and is negatively related to materialism,

and is associated with self-control and consumer independence (Goldsmith & Flynn, 2015). As a distinction, thriftiness (Evans, 2011) is associated with utility maximization and potentially increased consumption, while financial concerns are important for both types. The non-consumption of bottled water may be considered pro-environmental behaviour (Thomas et al., 2016), although we know this behaviour is not exclusively aligned with attitude, but may be based on incentives (Lanzini & Thøgersen, 2014) or motives related to cost-consciousness. We may also assume that purchasing items second-hand is driven by thriftiness or frugality. As stated above, pro-environmental behaviour and attitudes may not be consistently linked in consumers' decision-making.

In terms of bottled water consumption within the five groups, a difference in the attitude-behaviour relationship, and a variety of motives can be discovered. We can clearly see that conscious consumers display defined pro-environmental behaviour by rejecting bottled water and meat, and purchasing second-hand items. This group also show a cost-conscious attitude which suggests that frugality (which is connected to pro-environmental behaviour) is an important feature. The other group that shows a clear pattern and consistency between behaviour and attitude is located at the other end of the spectrum – namely, the unconcerned consumerists who drink bottled water and explicitly don't share pro-environmental concerns. This group is not associated with a cost-conscious attitude either, and the related individuals can mainly be described as convenience shoppers. The group in the middle of the spectrum (from unconcerned to ethically concerned) stands at the intersection of fashion-orientation and pro-environmental concern. This is the group that wears environmentalism as a trend, displaying a concerned attitude but conflicting behaviour. Concerned fashionistas can be spotted in shopping malls, and show awareness of sustainability matters with inconsistent behaviour in relation to purchasing clothes. These kinds of individuals were described by McNeill and Moore (2015: 221) as 'social' consumers. The segment shows a "burgeoning interest in sustainable fashion" with a perceived lack of social acceptance of SF, and a perception of the latter as expensive. Concerned fashionistas own and spend a lot on clothes, just like 'social' individuals who invest in clothing and are concerned about the image they convey to their peers. This group might be ideally targeted by 'conscious' labels. Their level of awareness may be improved by targeted communication.

The conscious trendy group believes in consumer agency, and is well-informed about environmental and textile production issues. This group may be aligned with the 'sacrifice' group in terms of conflict between a desire for style and concern with the impact of consumption. These individuals morally reject fast fashion and avoid shopping malls (70 percent of the sample) but are exposed to trends, and their favorite stores. Shopping online provides a wider pool of products to choose from,

and from which to obtain information about the background of the brands and products. Accordingly, the latter represent a perfect target for emerging sustainable, fair, and ethical brands. Interestingly, this group contained most individuals who claimed that sustainable and ethical fashion is overpriced (60 percent) compared to other groups, and half of the individuals complained that some fashion items are not offered by sustainable and ethical brands. Cost-consciousness is related to frugality, which is associated with consumer agency and pro-environmental behaviour. This group, along with the conscious consumer group, is most informed about SF, yet their sensitivity to the 'eco-premium' is high.

Frugality is most associated with the concerned fashionistas, while mainstream fashionistas and conscious eco-consumers also share the frugality trait. The thriftiness dimension of frugality (prefer buying more clothes for less money) suggests enhanced consumption, which is the motivation for mainstream fashionistas, whereas the moral-frugal dimension (see Table 2) is more explicit for conscious trendy individuals, who prefer to satisfy their need for trends with second-hand items and concept stores. Concerned fashionistas feed their needs with inconsistent behaviour, switching between pro-environmental and convenient choices, and consuming fast fashion. A fashion orientation both in terms of hedonism and the trendy dimension best describes concerned fashionistas, who are least likely to be attached to their special clothes among all the groups. This implies a high turnover of garments in their wardrobes. Despite the fact that mainstream fashionistas are explicitly not interested in sustainability issues, this group's consumption pattern is more likely to have a less harmful environmental impact than that of the concerned fashionistas, as they love their clothes, prefer second-hand shopping, do not share the attitude of hedonism, and are price-sensitive. Trendiness is as important for mainstream fashionistas as for the conscious trendy consumers, whereas sustainability awareness is explicitly very important for the conscious trendy group. In contrast, absolutely the opposite is valid in the case of the mainstream fashionistas. The joy associated with the fashion shopping experience is distributed unevenly among the groups. Less joy, but rather practicality is associated with convenience consumers, who thus demonstrate a utilitarian approach to clothing. A fashion-orientation is associated with the consumption of both second-hand and popular fast-fashion brands. Only in the case of mainstream fashionistas does price-consciousness play a role in their choice of garments. This suggests that frugality is of less importance in second-hand consumption.

Most of the respondents were uncertain about the environmental impact of clothes made of recycled plastic (45.7 percent neutral), while a slightly larger proportion (28.3 percent) were said 'no', thus claiming that clothes made of recycled plastic harm the environment. The question "Are clothes made of reused plastic eco-friendly?" was used as a proxy for measuring awareness of the impact of fabrics. A later question in

the survey asked about the impact of plastic-fibre clothes on the environment. The question was purposefully formulated using the word plastic instead of lycra or nylon. A shift toward the recycling of PET-bottles and other plastics into producing fabrics has been embraced by some bigger brands already, and is now in the mainstream of 'conscious' collections. Since, the impact of the particles of the various fabrics on water pollution and environmental degradation has been reported, the issue has attracted attention among eco-conscious consumers. Despite this recent turn in the discourse, big brands are now promoting 'conscious' product lines made of reused plastic, representing a close-up example of less authentic ethical mainstreaming. The group of mainstream fashionistas seemed to mainly accept the message that clothing made of reused plastics is eco-friendly, the group showing no interest in SF, and indulging in thrifting or shopping in malls. Interestingly, on the negative slope were unconcerned consumerists who are the least environmentally conscious among all the groups in their choices.

## **5. Conclusions**

This study confirms that the 'environment is trendy,' especially for the majority of segments identified among the concerned and conscious groups. Both fashionista segments share the joy of shopping, and could be efficiently targeted by social media campaigns along with influencer marketing to shift their attitudes toward ethical choices, given that there exist an attainable set of products and brands. The most suitable target group for ethical and sustainable brands and online shopping are the conscious trendy, who have the potential and openness toward new market segments with a green message. This segment has a negative relation to frugality, and the highest commitment to and awareness with regard to sustainability. The conscious trendy is less prone to buy into idea of recycled-plastic garments, but rather open to ethical production, and local sustainable brands.

The conscious eco-consumers have no interest in fashion: neither in the trend, nor in the hedonism dimensions of fashion-orientation, and they show no affection for special clothing items, and are rather skeptical about the eco-friendliness of recycled-plastic garments. 'Loved clothes last' calls for change in attitude Orsola de Castro, or the *ilovemyclothes* hashtag campaign, and other activists in the field of fashion. This study found that the most pro-environmentally and ethically committed segment is not interested in fashion and displays no affection for clothes. Therefore, the message should be communicated to the mainstream fashionista and the concerned fashionista segments that a change in attitudes and consumption patterns is required. Moreover, mainstream fashionistas are a wide consumer group, representing the youngest (25.4 years old on average) and most price-sensitive members of the sample. Members of this group love their special clothes the most, compared to the other groups. Despite the decline in social media use among Gen Z compared to the other age groups, Gen Z leads in discovering brands and products through

influencers (GlobalWebIndex report<sup>1</sup>). Therefore, to reach Gen Z (as the next generation of consumers), awareness-raising about sustainable and ethical fashion along with demonstrating consumption patterns through authentic influencers would be a most efficient strategy. It may be noted that insights obtained from qualitative research confirm that most fashion influencer followers belong to Gen Z, especially those pre-, and teenage girls who are exposed to the content sponsored by brands. Prosumer and co-creation strategies could activate conscious trendy shoppers along with the use of vlogs, blogs, and social media communication.

The conscious trendy group represent those online shoppers who prefer to select their favourite brands online, and to obtain more information about products. The thin layer of convenience consumers in the sample relate to fashion consumption in a utilitarian way, with no interest in sustainability or ethical consumption, while – in contrast – conscious consumers care about their choices and show no interest in trends. Members of the concerned consumerist and the convenience consumer groups are most likely to shop for fast fashion items. There are several limitations to this research. Women, environmentally conscious individuals, and members of the younger generation were overrepresented in the sample. Men are growing segment in second-hand and SF markets, it is a prospective avenue of research. Hierarchical cluster analysis has its limits, including a high sensitivity to noise and outliers, and there is a chance that bigger clusters may end up being split. The sample respondents were active social media users, thus a group more prone to contribute to and consume online content. Ethical, slow, eco-conscious, second hand, and vintage may all constitute a growing market. If fashion is an investment in exposure, then new forms of consumption patterns may involve seeking to invest in timeless and circular models. To this end, awareness-raising, co-creation, and communication should be targeted at different segments. The aim of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the segmentation of fashion consumers that can be achieved through social media. Further studies are needed to reach consumers outside the social media network.

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/10/social-media-use-by-generation/>

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