

SUSTAINABLE FASHION BRANDS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AMONG CUSTOMERS



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This report researches sustainable fashion brands (SFB) and their work towards promoting sustainable consumption (SC) among their customers.

The following research question is examined:

How are sustainable fashion brands promoting sustainable consumption among their customers?

For answering the research question, four companies that are considered to be working towards sustainable consumption according to literature, are interviewed after analyzing SFB in Europe. The literature review is used for building the knowledge about fashion industry, sustainability in supply chain, circular economy (CE) and sustainable consumption.

The results of the interviews show that as there is no sustainable standard in fashion industry, the SFB definition is quite difficult to form and greenwashing might appear. What is more, fashion companies seem to show that they are not perfect, but as sustainable as possible and mostly they want to be an easy, fun alternative for fast fashion.

When it comes to actual SC promotion, SFB notice the importance of SC and the most popular way to promote it seems to be CE based business model initiatives: producing from organic materials, upcycling, taking-back, repairing, leasing, reselling second-hand and designing for longevity.

The report's content is freely available, but publication (with references) can only be done in agreement with the author.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Master thesis was conducted between 2017.02.01 and 2017.06.02 and represents 30 ECTS. The research was conducted by Gabriele Staneviciute, as a part of her final Master program's in Environmental Management and Sustainability Science assignment. The thesis was inspired by the experience on previous semester projects in textile industry.

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I would also like to thank the companies' representatives for participating in the interviews:

- Kasper Eis, AMOV
- Reimer Ivang, Better World Fashion
- Bert van Son, MUD Jeans
- Miisa Asikainen, Globe Hope

I would also like to thank my family for continuous support during the Master studies.

Abbreviations

SFB- sustainable fashion brands;

SC- sustainable consumption;

CE- circular economy

ABSTRACT

Due to the rapidly increasing human population, our footprint on Earth is getting heavier, especially due to our growing consumption rates. Fashion and textile industry is already among one of the most polluting industries in the world, and there is no question that changes are needed. More and more companies choose to work towards controlling sustainability in clothing supply chain, and there are different reasons and ways to do it. The most common ways that companies do it includes working towards sustainability on the production side (materials, fabrics, garment production and distribution), but as sustainable fashion brands state they want “to do good”, there comes a question, what about other part consumption in supply chain (retail, user phase, disposal) sustainability?

As sustainable consumption is very much connected to sustainable development and it could be one approach towards making businesses more sustainable, this Master research investigates how sustainable fashion brands (SFB) work towards promoting sustainable consumption (SC) among customers. In order to answer the main research question, two supporting sub-questions are formed about what is actually considered as SFB and what real initiatives sustainable companies have for encouraging customers to consume sustainably. Four fashion companies which state they are work towards sustainability are interviewed in order to get a deeper insight about the topic.

The results show that there is a lack of sustainable standard in clothing industry and it causes chaos and even phenomenon like greenwashing in fashion. But in this Master thesis SFB are considered if they are working towards triple bottom line and CE based business model. More insight about the way companies work is got: they try to approach two kinds of customers (the environmentally conscious and style oriented) to buy their garments with an easy and fun attitude. What is more, additional information is obtained about the challenges SFB face today (limited budget, too high price barrier, consumers reluctance and retailers’ acceptance being crucial).

All but one SFB that were interviewed agree that both parts of clothing supply chain (production and consumption) should be taken care regarding sustainability. With CE based initiatives SFB try to promote SC among customers in retail, user and disposal stages: designing for longevity, producing from organic materials, upcycling, repairing, taking-back,

reselling and leasing. Additional data about customers is obtained: SFB think they know their customers quite well; they get positive feedback from customers; and they would divide their customers' base in two groups-sustainability oriented and style conscious persons.

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INTRODUCTION

The fact that fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world, might not be a surprise to society anymore. It also might not be news that fast fashion is the guiltiest part in this situation, as it has a lot of negative impacts on environment and society. Finally, it may not be a novelty that there is an alternative for this kind of clothing industry and it is called sustainable fashion. High consumption levels of goods are one of the most alarming issues in today's Western world and if we want to live accordingly to sustainable development guidelines, we have to change consumption habits, and fashion or textile industry is one of the most polluting, so the change needs to happen there. For the plan to be successful, different actively participating actors are needed, and sustainable fashion brands (SFB) are one of the mentioned above. Today more and more fashion brands try to implement sustainability or circular economy features in their business models, by manufacturing from organic materials or waste, teaming up with different organizations in order to ensure that the workers are treated right during the supply chain processes, that used garments are collected for recycling, leasing and many more activities. As sustainability can be controlled all over the supply chain of the clothing industry, sustainable fashion brands are usually working towards the production part of the chain, but should they feel responsible for the other part- consumption?

Though, it is not only the clothing brands that are responsible for the problems caused by clothing industry. Consumers also play a sufficient role in this issue, if they act unsustainably by supporting the fast fashion brands, not treating their clothes sustainably or not caring about responsible disposal of the garments-in short- consuming unsustainably during purchase, use and disposal stages. Thus, the sustainable consumption is an essential matter in terms of controlling sustainability in clothing supply chain and making the society more aware and dedicated to sustainability in relation to fashion. Consequently, it is important to investigate how sustainable fashion brands are working towards customers consuming more sustainably during retail, user and disposal phases.

BACKGROUND FOR STUDY

The chapter introduces short summary of the literature review that was used in order to get deeper understanding of sustainable fashion brands.

Short introduction to textile industry

As the world's population has crossed the line of 7.3 billion people, the demand for everyday products like food and clothing has been also increasing. Due to the growth in textiles and fashion industry, and the fact that textile industry is the second most polluting industry in the world, it has received considerable attention recently, especially in relation to its' sustainability caused issues (Strähle & Müller, 2017). Many fashion industry companies have been trying to incorporate sustainability focus in their business models in order to maintain their competitiveness ("Sustainable Brands Insights | Sustainable Brands," 2012).

The textile and clothing industry is very complex industry, consisting of different companies involved in separate steps of supply chain, also very often including different countries around the world, being highly globalized and international (Strähle & Müller, 2017). According to Christopher, Lawson and Peck, fashion market can be characterized with low predictability, low volatility, short life cycles and high impulse purchasing (Christopher, Lawson, & Peck, 2004). As the traditional fashion industry has many negative impacts on environmental and societal level, more fashion brands tend to turn their focus on being a sustainable example in fashion industry, but it is important to understand the motives behind the greener choice, as not all of the companies choose sustainability due to ethical motive.

Why companies turn to sustainability?

European Commission states *"retailers are increasingly recognizing sustainability as a significant opportunity for their businesses to grow, compete and innovate"*(European Commission, 2009). According to Strähle and Müller the main reasons that companies decide to incorporate sustainability focus can be divided in 4 main categories (Figure 1):

governance, economic prosperity, environmental stewardship and social-wellbeing (Strähle & Müller, 2017).

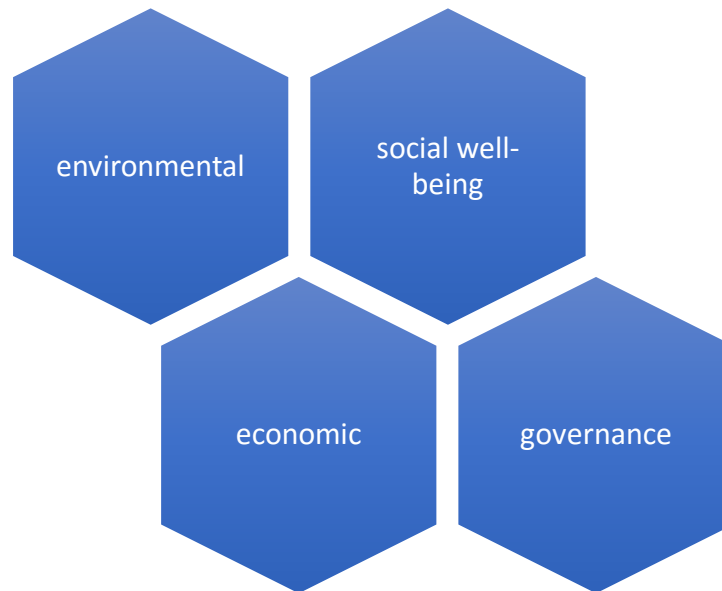


Figure 1 Types of reasons for sustainability focus

Governance is not as formal as term government, as it is more like arrangement for member groups. These groups should have acknowledged each other as stakeholders, such as public and private, large and small, national and trans-national, producer and consumer, profit and non-profit, expert and amateur. As Lang and Murphy suggest these arrangements can be used for setting up sustainable business program's standard and monitoring systems (Lang & Murphy, 2014). As a result, the retailers with these standards increase their reputation in front of their customers and become more competitive (Strähle & Müller, 2017).

Another kind of reason for focusing on sustainability can be in relation to economic prosperity. According to Mahler (2007), economic prosperity is composed by creating jobs, reducing costs, promoting profits, attracting customers, assuming and managing long-term risks, encouraging long-term competitiveness (Mahler, 2007). Economic sustainability depends on long-term perspective in relation to handling financial assets and human resources. Moreover, it focuses on diversity of industry's structure, its' carrying capacity and consumption patterns (Lang & Murphy, 2014).

Behind environmental sustainability in fashion stand conservation of energy and resources, more use of renewables and less of polluting resources, increase of recycling, reducing packaging and carbon footprint of retailer (Mahler, 2007). Or as Vezzoli and Manzini say: *“The term environmental sustainability refers to systematic conditions where neither on a planetary nor on a regional level do human activities disturb the natural cycles more than planetary resilience allows, and at the same time do not impoverish the natural capital that has to be shared with future generations”* (Manzini & Vezzoli, 2008).

The most common social well-being activities include upgrading labor standards and conditions, strengthening communities and socially responsible products and services (Mahler, 2007). For company to be sustainable in relation to social well-being sustainability means going further with including transparency and socially responsible values into company's supply chains (Strähle & Müller, 2017). According to Lang and Murphy social well-being sustainability results in increasing social justice, social coherence and the quality of life (Lang & Murphy, 2014).

Production vs consumption impacts on sustainability

It is known that both fashion production and consumption have negative effects on environment (Strähle & Hauk, 2017). As Strähle and Hauk investigate which side is more negative in terms of environmental sustainability, there are different areas that production or consumption is more accountable for. On the one side, production has more significant impact than consumption on eutrophication, natural land transformation and agricultural land occupation, also on social issues. On the other side, consumption is more accountable for increasing water depletion, freshwater and marine eco-toxicity, human toxicity. Moreover, fashion garments consumers are responsible for large amounts of energy use and disposal waste from the clothing which contributes to global warming (Beton, Dias, Farrant, Gibon, & Le Guern, 2014; Strähle & Hauk, 2017). Thus, in order to improve sustainability in fashion retail sector, there is no better or worse side, as they both are responsible for different negative impacts in relation to sustainability (Strähle & Hauk, 2017). Even though today's focus on sustainability improvements in fashion retail industry is

mostly on the production side, the consumption side should also not be underestimated (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2010). Some studies even suggest that the usage phase of the consumption part compared to production has higher negative impact to sustainability, especially for consumers' lack of awareness about their own actions responsibility (Kogg, 2009). After the fashion garment has been purchased, with the usage phase environmental impacts continues through activities such as washing, tumble drying and ironing the clothes. Unfortunately, there among consumers there is a lack of knowledge about the impacts of their consumption practices (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

What is more, demand for consumption drives the production. Due to absence of knowledge about sustainability and the importance of their own behavior for it, consumers are not acting sustainably during the use phase and don't change the habits that negatively influence sustainability (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). What is more, even the government and NGO's do not stress the importance of consumer caused negative effect on sustainability, just bringing out the production part (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2010). Thus, it strengthens the fact that there is an unrecognized opportunity to improve the fashion industry's sustainability, by looking closer at the consumption side. As the clothing supply chain is quite complex and has particular steps, the sustainability can be controlled all over the whole supply chain in fashion or textile industry (Strähle & Müller, 2017). But in this research the focus is on consumption part of supply chain, which includes retail, use and disposal stages and illustrated in the Figure 2 (Strähle & Müller, 2017)



Figure 2. Consumption stages in clothing supply chain (Strähle & Müller, 2017)

In conclusion, as the attention to the production side is obvious and more fashion retailers are adopting sustainable business practices in their own companies, there is a need for turning the focal point to producers' responsibilities in relation to sustainable fashion consumption.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The section presents the main research question with supporting sub-questions.

Due to previous experience with projects on consumption side through the consumers' point of view and the reasons mentioned above, this Master thesis is going to examine the sustainable fashion consumption situation through the retailers' point of view and what is being done by the sustainable fashion companies in order to change the consumer's consumption habits. It is significant to investigate how sustainability oriented fashion companies are contributing to sustainability by advocating sustainable consumption for their customers. Thus, the research question is:

How are sustainable fashion brands promoting sustainable consumption among their customers?

In order to answer the main research question, some specifics need to be answered, as it is not really clear what sustainable fashion are considered to be yet, especially what it is considered to be according to fashion companies. Then, it is significant to actually investigate what activities can be illustrated as promotion of sustainable consumption among customers. Thus, 2 supporting sub-questions are identified:

1. What does the term "sustainable fashion brands" mean? How it can be defined according the fashion companies?
2. What kind of activities sustainable fashion brands try to promote for sustainable consumption?

METHODOLOGY

The section presents the way that research for this thesis was carried out. It describes the process of the research, data collection and analyzing methods.

Research process

The choice of the topic for Master thesis research was inspired by previous semester project work experience on fashion industry and its sustainability issues through the whole Master education. The first semester report that was done in a group with 4 other students and it investigated consumer's attitudes regarding motives for buying (sustainable) clothes, garments' treatment activities, etc. The second experience with research in the same industry field was conducted on my own, as part of an internship at AMOV (one of the sustainable fashion companies, also interviewed for this research). But on previous research the goal was to get company's perspective about communication with customers due to their significance on company's circular business model. Both reports were investigating the sustainable brands in Danish fashion industry, but focused on different aspects and perspectives. This Master thesis is focusing on companies' perspective on overall sustainable consumption and their efforts for customers consuming more sustainably, not only on sustainable Danish fashion industry, as it also includes two international brands (Dutch and Finnish).

The research question points out the goal of the whole Master thesis research, which is to investigate how sustainable fashion brands work towards and promote sustainable consumption among their customers. After forming a research question, the first step of research is to build deeper knowledge on the topic and the issues within, so literature review is used in achieving that. When particular insight on the issues with fashion industry and sustainable brands is gained, the documentation analysis is used for selection of the sustainable fashion brands for the Master thesis research. The following step is to gain knowledge on the matter through sustainable brands perspective using one of the qualitative methods- interviews. Those choices of methods are used in order to get and

interpret the possible results for the research. The overall research design process is illustrated in Figure 3.

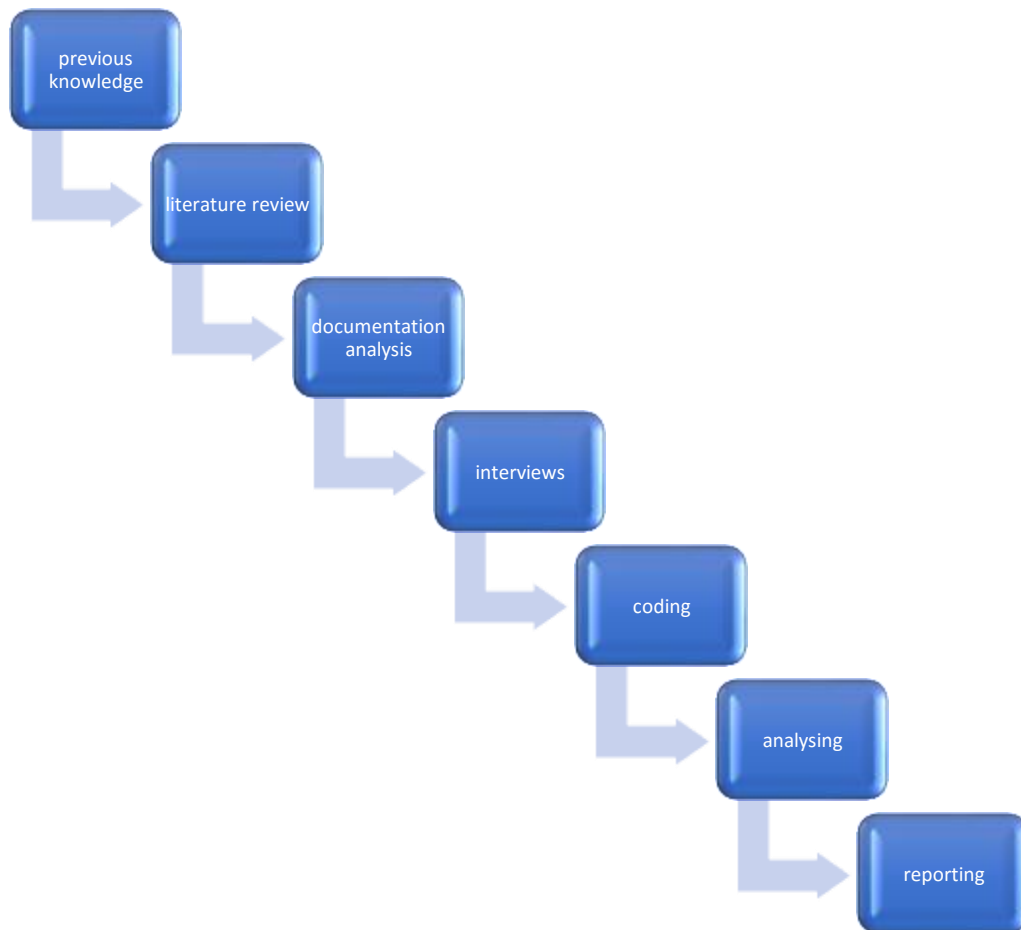


Figure 3. Research process

Data collection

Literature review and document analysis

The literature review is used to introduce fashion industry and the issues within, the reasons why companies decide to add sustainability to their goals and to present the issue of production vs consumption in fashion industry. In order to find relevant scientific sources, the Aalborg University's online library was used as the primary search option. The key words

used for the search were: sustainable fashion; sustainable brands; sustainable fashion consumption; slow fashion consumption, post-retail initiatives, etc.

When learning about circular economy, most of the recent and mostly relevant sources were Ellen McArthur foundation website with its publications and N. M. Bocken's work on sustainability, sustainable business models and circular economy. A book "Green fashion retail" (2017), which was edited by Jochen Strähle, helped in expanding the knowledge on key aspects in sustainable fashion industry. The most knowledge about sustainable consumption and post- retail initiatives in fashion industry was gained from the book "Green Fashion. Volume 1" edited by S. S. Muthu and M. A. Gardetti, "Handbook of Research on Sustainable Consumption", edited by L. A. Reisch and J. Thøgersen, as well as K. Hvass' scientific papers.

Besides literature studies, for Master thesis research document analysis is used for investigating companies' profiles in order to select the appropriate ones for the interviewing. Before conducting the document analysis, and in this case companies' web-pages, 2 out of 4 companies were known due to my previous work with them (AMOV and BWF) during semester projects. As two companies were known already, it was decided that I need more insight from the sustainable fashion brands, which were also based outside Denmark. Some names of the sustainable fashion brands were learned during the literature review, but it was not enough for deciding if they are suitable for the interviewing. Thus, next step was to analyze the information that was available about those companies on their websites. The most significant data were about companies' dedication to sustainability and sustainable consumption, and in particular it was important that they would have circular economy based initiatives, as it is chosen as one of the main concepts in this research. The initial plan was to find and interview 4-5 companies for this Master thesis research. Thus, after analyzing companies' information regarding their sustainability, 9 companies were selected for contacting them about the possibility of their collaboration in the research. The emails regarding the option of being interviewed were sent to either the sustainability, CSR, environmental department representatives or to the general email, if the previous were not available. The companies that were contacted included: AMOV, BWF, MUD Jeans, Filippa K, Nudie Jeans, Thought, Deadwood, Boomerang and Globe Hope. Nudie Jeans responded with

a negative answer regarding the interview, while Filippa K, Thought, Deadwood and Boomerang didn't respond at all, even after couple more attempts to contact them. It was nevertheless possible to make arrangements with 4 companies: BWF, AMOV, MUD Jeans and Globe Hope.

Interviews

After some considerations, it is decided to conduct a qualitative research, which broadly means: "*any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification*" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The main reason is due to the fact that quantitative method is more useful for coming up with the results of some statistics and numbers. And in this Master thesis research, as it was mentioned before, the main aim is to investigate how companies think and act towards endorsing the sustainable consumption among their customers. And for that matter, it is important to get deeper and more personal insight from companies. This method is chosen, as the advantages of the interviews (nuanced, depth and new information, being flexible) outweighed the disadvantages (time consuming, can't generalize, possibility of influencing the answers, irrelevant answers) (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Particular qualitative research method- interviews- are chosen to collect data about sustainable brands' dedication to sustainable consumption among customers. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this research, the interviews are semi-structured, because it is based more on the themes, rather than the questions and there can be follow-up questions that might give a significant additional insight. According to Kvale, there are 7 steps for conducting a valid and reliable interview: thematization, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, validating and reporting (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). And in order to get data that is more valid and reliable, those steps were followed. The themes and information from literature studies were designed and grouped into categories in order to be more prepared before the interviews and formulate the questions for the interview according to the research question and theoretical framework. What is more, the derived interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to make the results more valid and reliable. Qualitative method's results cannot be used in order to generalize, and as it is not a purpose of this Master thesis research, it was a preferable way to conduct a research.

Qualitative research analysis mainly is used for understanding specific context settings, where “*researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest*” (Patton, 2001, p.39)(Gibbs, 2007). And as it was mentioned, the main research goal is to get a deeper insight from 4 fashion companies about how they work towards sustainable consumption among customers.

What is more, there is a possibility of interviewees’ being dishonest and wanting their companies image to look better than they actually, which would have affected the results’ validity and reliability, as well. For that reason, follow-up questions were asked to make the answers more clear and trustworthy.

Interview settings

Better World fashion (BWF), AMOV, MUD Jeans and Globe Hope were among the 4 sustainable fashion companies that I interviewed for this Master thesis research. The interviews with Better World Fashion and AMOV were made one on one with companies’ representatives through Skype. The calls were carried out without the videos, due to low internet connection or interviewee’s unavailability to turn the video on. The setting of the interviews could have affected the mood of the situation and it may have had some impact on the results of the interview, but as the companies were interviewed before for other projects, they knew me and there is a little chance they were feeling uncomfortable and it might not have an effect on reliability.

The interview with MUD Jeans was conducted with 10 more students from all over the world. The reason behind this kind of setting is that MUD Jeans get a lot of attention recently for their circular business model, so they came up with solution- monthly Skype conference call with the interested students. Thus, the setting of Skype call again was made without video, due to low quality of network at MUD Jeans, which may have affected the quality of the interview, as during some parts of the interviews the connection was extremely bad and some words of the interviewee were lost. But all in all, it was interesting to hear other students’ questions and interest in this company. Because of the limited time and many students conducting interviews, each of us got a chance to ask a couple of

questions, so I didn't get the chance to ask the same questions as other companies. Though some of the other students' questions were related to my topic, especially about circular economy, so they were also included in this research. The "interview" or more likely personal mail correspondence, with Globe Hope was conducted through email, because the company preferred to answer the questions this way due to the tightness of their schedule. The answers were types in the same Microsoft Word document, where the questions were written. The benefit of this way asking the questions, was that it was not time consuming neither for company, nor for me, as no recording and transcribing were necessary. But the main disadvantages were that it was not possible to ask follow-up question, which could have naturally emerged during the interview, also no specifications on the questions or answers could have been made. It may also have affected validity, as no deeper insight could have been caught through the written answers.

Data treatment

As the qualitative method is used in order to conduct the research, the data that are derived from the interviews have to be treated properly, so it was recorded and transcribed (Appendix I). After transcribing the data to Microsoft Word document, it had to be analyzed properly, and for that matter coding method was used. The first steps include identifying and recording extracts of text or other data that is in some way illustrating the same descriptive or theoretical idea. After that usually comes linking and naming those extracts to an idea- the code (Gibbs, 2007). The coding is very much useful in terms of categorizing the information that is derived from data and then grouping it in themes. Thus, most of the text passages were aligned with themes and transcribed to Microsoft Excel program, as it was easier to see deeper analytical elements of the codes. The codes can be suggested by theories or themes in the research before the actual coding or can emerge during the coding process. In this research, both ways were used in order to come up with codes, as the literature studies suggested some of the codes prior to coding and some emerged during the coding process. Most of the codes were related to the main research question, but some codes that emerged were used as additional information. After coding, validating and reporting of the results were carried out in this Mater thesis research.

Limitations

As the textile industry has quite long and complex supply chain and sustainability can be controlled all over it, it is decided to narrow the focus of research down to consumption steps of supply chain and mostly omit the materials, garment production and distribution stages (Figure 4). Though, some parts of production are touched upon slightly in cases of comparing the importance on sustainability on sides of production vs consumption.

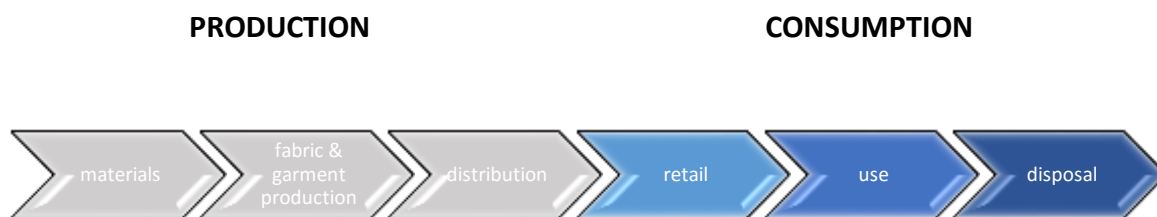


Figure 4 Clothing supply chain

Moreover, in fashion industry there are many different stakeholders, but in this Master thesis the research approach is taken through company's perspective, therefore customers or other stakeholders' opinions and attitudes about sustainable consumption are not included in the Master thesis.

Another significant limitation is that in terms of sustainability's triple bottom line, the economic pillar is not considered in this research, because the environmental and social parts are prioritized.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The following chapter introduces the concepts and theories that are used in this Master research in order to investigate the topic and analyze the results. Sustainable development, sustainable consumption and circular economy are among the essential ones.

In order to address the research question, it is important to define the concepts around sustainable consumption and understand where it is stemming from. Sustainability and sustainable development definitions and research on it are significant in terms of sustainable consumption concept's development. In general, sustainable development or sustainable transitions are quite broad concepts and there can be much more ways to investigate possible change in fashion industry, but one way to actually get a hold of an actual transition is to use sustainable consumption concept. When it comes to this phenomenon, there are two big players that participate in sustainable consumption-producers (fashion companies, brands) and customers. The sustainability of an actual consumption is mostly affected by consumers' behavior but producers also play an essential role in this transition and in this Master research I have chosen to investigate from company's or brand's perspective. It is interesting to see how companies work in order to help customers with transition towards consuming sustainably. Circular economy (CE) based practices or business models are becoming more popular recently, especially among fashion businesses and it is also connected with sustainability. The actual work or strategy that companies can use and recently many of sustainable fashion brands are using is based on CE concept. The shift from linear to circular economy is one of the most important happening right now in business and it is one of the ways towards implementing sustainable consumption among society. Thus, the connection between the main concepts that will be used in this Master thesis research can be visualized in *Figure 5* and each of them would be explained a bit more explicitly later in the chapter.

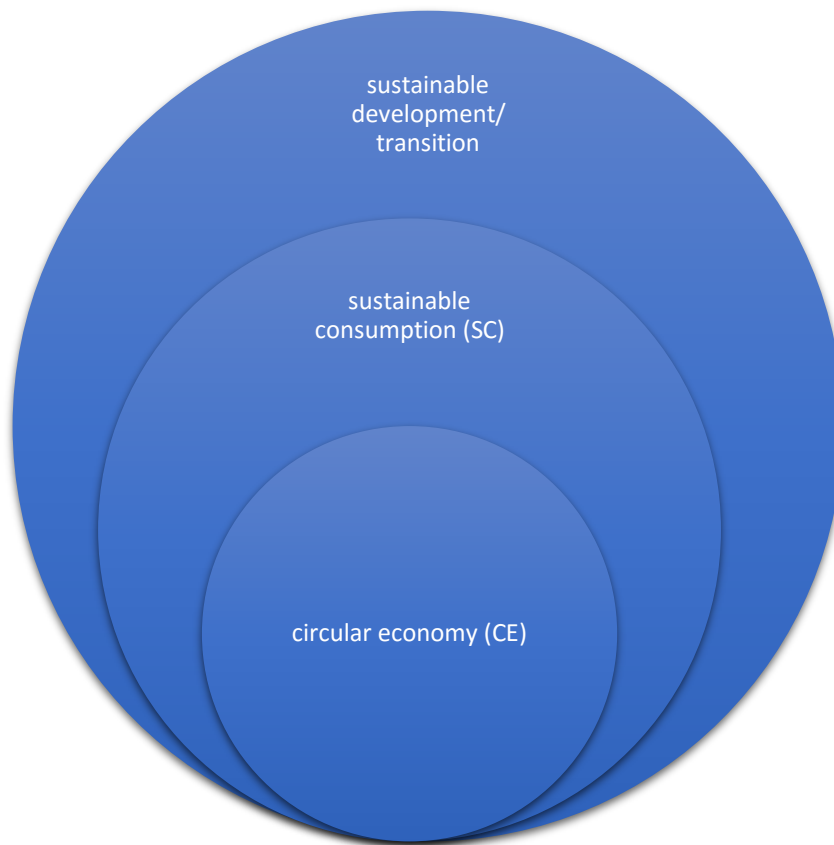


Figure 5 Conceptual framework

Sustainability and sustainable development

The term sustainability has originated from the French verb *soutenir*, meaning “to hold up or support” (B. J. Brown, Hanson, Liverman, & Merideth, 1987). When talking about its modern version, it has originated in the field of forestry. It is based on the foundation that the amount of harvested wood should not outcome the amount that grows back. The concept is also known as the “*Sylvicultura oeconomica*”, written in the 18th century (von Carlowitz, 1713). What is more, there are even older sources in relation to principles on lack of wood supply (Mantel, 1990). Later, it progressed from becoming part of ecology concept, in relation to respect of nature’s ability to generate itself (Duden, 2015), to ability “to be maintained at a certain rate or level”- the basic for the modern definition (Online, 2010). According to Johnston et al. (Johnston, Everard, Santillo, & Robèrt, 2007), there are around 300 different definitions of sustainability. The special attention to the concept could be explained due to the growing number of environmental risks (on global level) since the 1960s, resulting in questions if the present prosperity can be kept in the future and bringing

to light many sources of tensions ((Clark & Clark, 2005);(Steffen et al., 2009)). Then, according to Ehrlich and Commoner's, these sources of tensions were expressed in the equation " $I = P \times A \times T$ ", where Environmental impact (I) is expressed as a function of three factors: population (P), affluence- the representative for consumption (A); technologies (T) Commoner,1971; (Chertow, 2000; Holdren & Ehrlich, 1974). Among scholars the importance of all these factors (population, consumption and technology), but also the interrelation between them has varied. Some stress the necessity to focus on demographics, others on lessening the consumption, but there has been an increasing trend for focusing on the technology, science and innovation (Nancy M P Bocken, Bakker, & Pauw, 2016). The different tensions have influenced the international discussion on the complex and interconnected environment, society and economy (Robert, Parris, & Leiserowitz, 2005). The most common understanding of sustainable development was fixed in Brundtland Report in 1987: "the concept of sustainable development does imply limits- not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities" (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). The most commonly used definition of sustainability was also expressed by the Brundtland Commission as: "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Despite originating from environmental concerns, sustainable development has addressed a variety of different expectations for the urged goals (Robert et al., 2005).

The so-called triple bottom line (Elkington, 1997) is another inseparable definition to sustainability, which since the World Summit in 2002, is stating that three main pillars (people, planet and profit) mean the balanced assimilation of environmental, economic and social performance (Figure 6) (Wise, 2016). These three sections are also defined "as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars" (Committee, 2003), which can be adjusted to different contexts and time horizons (Wise, 2016).

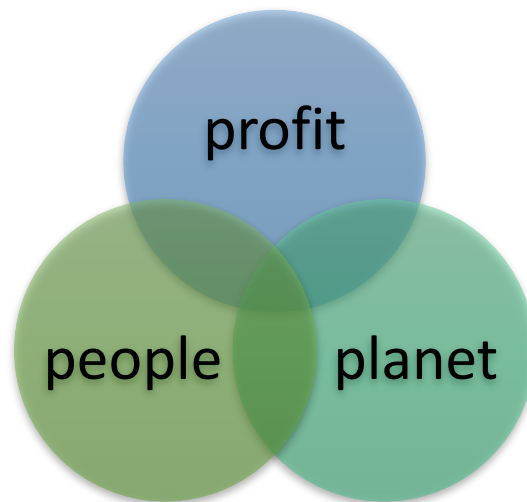


Figure 6 Triple bottom line

The quite simple triple bottom line features are explained in the 2nd chapter of Green Fashion Retail (Strähle & Müller, 2017), which was adapted from Savitz and Weber (2006) (Table1).

	Economic	Environmental	Social
Typical measures	Sales, profit, ROI	Pollutants emitted	Health and safety record
	Taxes paid	Carbon footprint	Community impacts
	Monetary flows	Recycling and reuse	Human rights; privacy
	Jobs created	Water and energy use	Product responsibility
	Supplier relations	Product impacts	Employee relations

Table 1 Triple bottom line (Strähle & Müller, 2017)

To sum up, sustainability is used in this research as a way to answer the first sub-question in regards to what is actually sustainable fashion brand and it helps to analyze the chosen companies' suitability for the interviews. What is more, it also helps to analyze the sustainable consumption concept.

Sustainable consumption

Another concept that is very much connected to sustainability is sustainable consumption (SC). The research on the topic has been part of many different scientific fields: environmental and ecological economics, consumer research, psychology, environmental

sociology, behavioral economics, political sciences, and many more (Reisch & Thøgersen, 2015). As Verplanken and Roy states, “sustainable consumption is a loosely defined concept, which encompasses a large variety of behaviors and domains”, and the definition of sustainable development formed at Brundtland report does not define which behavior in relation to consumption is suitable in order to develop in a sustainable matter (Verplanken & Roy, 2008). Like the Defra (The Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs) in UK, where sustainable behavior was specified and grouped in broader categories, such as using energy and water wisely, travelling sustainably and being part of improving the environment (The Department for Environment, Food, 2008). The benefits of having concrete examples are in order for the citizens and policy makers to actually improve it, while the disadvantages can include the lists being outdated, incomplete, or influenced by other policy agendas (Verplanken & Roy, 2008).

According to the Oslo Roundtable (“[Oslo Roundtable] 1.2 Defining sustainable consumption,” n.d.) sustainable consumption is: *“the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations”*. The concept has many meanings but more generally it is related to shared use of products, the shift from material products to immaterial services, the use of products with higher lifespan and better quality, changing consuming with the use of less resource demanding products, saving energy (Lebel & Lorek, 2008). In other words, it means a change on cultural level, society’s shifting from overconsuming culture to sustainable lifestyles embracing culture (H. S. Brown & Vergragt, 2008). Consumption is part of a bigger system, which has different aspects such as economic, cultural, material, power and institutional; it is also closely connected to: investments, production, trade, consumption and waste (Lorek & Vergragt, 2015). When changing consumption, the whole system is also changed from different aspects: economic system, dominant culture and lifestyles, institutions and power relationships, the infrastructures (Vergragt, Akenji, & Dewick, 2014).

As sustainable consumption is part of the main research question, it is important to get to know what is it considered to be in order to properly answer the research question.

Circular economy

The concept of circular economy has been receiving attention since the late 1970s (Ellen MacArthur Foundation & McKinsey & Company, 2014). Some authors agree that the introduction of the concept could be assigned to Pearce and Turner (Pearce, 1993), who talked about natural resources effect on the economy, which was inspired by Boulding's (1966) work about earth being a circular and closed system with limited assimilative capacity and the economy and the environment being in balance (Nancy M. P. Bocken, de Pauw, Bakker, & van der Grinten, 2016). Later it was adjusted for the focus on industrial economics (Stahel and Reday, 1976), with the industrial strategies like resource efficiency, prevention of waste, local jobs creation, minimizing the materialization of the industrial economy. Stahel also talked about preference of paying for the services rather than the goods (Stahel, 1982) (Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, & Hultink, 2017).

The modern concept of the Circular Economy was influenced by theoretical concepts, like laws of ecology, cradle-to-cradle, biomimicry, blue economy, industrial ecology, regenerative design, looped and performance economy (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017). Nowadays, the most common definition of the concept has been formed by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (Geissdoerfer et al., 2017), which stated it as "an industrial economy that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design" (Ellen MacArthur Foundation & McKinsey & Company, 2014). Besides the previous one, there are also other definitions for the concept. Bocken et al. have defined it as: "*a regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emissions, and energy leakage are minimized by slowing, closing, and narrowing material and energy loops. This can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, and recycling.*" (Nancy M. P. Bocken et al., 2016).

CIRCULAR ECONOMY – an industrial system that is restorative by design

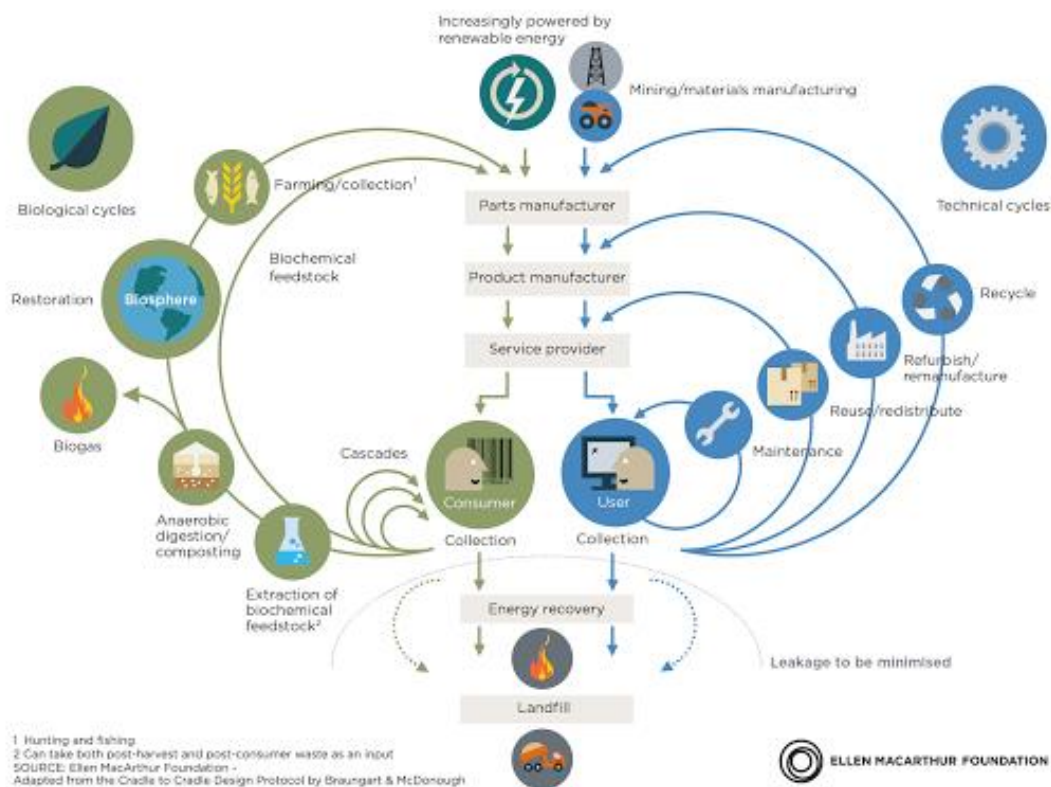


Figure 7 Circular Economy (The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012)

Circular economy is based on three main principles against the challenges that traditional economies face today. The first principle is about natural capital and sensible use of it, meaning that resources should be used efficiently and involve the use of the best available and cleanest technologies. What is more, the nutrients in the cycle should also be circulating in the loop. According to the second principle, the importance is put on the products, components and materials participating in the both loops (biological and technical) as long as possible and at the highest utility at all times (Figure 7). This means that the products should be designed for longevity and durability, so the speed of the loop is slowed down. The last principle is mostly about revealing and excluding negativities. The damage to areas like food, health, shelter, education, mobility, entertainment, and managing systems like water, land use, air, noise pollution, release of toxic materials should be reduced (The Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2012).

The circular economy has been very much related to sustainability and sustainable businesses, and especially as in this research the companies with circular economy based

business models, are considered to be sustainable and working towards sustainable consumption. It helps to analyze the initiatives which companies have for promoting sustainable consumption (2nd sub-question).

CASE COMPANIES

The section introduces the companies that were selected for the research.

The selection of the companies

The companies that were interviewed for this Master thesis are all manufacturing clothes and are stating that they are sustainable or ethical brands. But for the company to be considered for an interview in this research, it was not enough if they produce from organic materials, (which is very often feature of brand's business model). The main requirement for the companies was that their business model had some circular economy based initiatives, as it is considered as one of the ways to promote sustainable consumption. The interviewed companies needed to express an attempt to control sustainability at least at one of the stages after retail step of the supply chain. After doing analysis of companies' profiles, four companies were chosen for the interviews: AMOV, Better World Fashion (BWF), MUD Jeans and Globe Hope. The short descriptions of the companies are presented in the following.

AMOV

AMOV is still a very young and small Danish start-up company, which aims to be sustainable and ethical clothing manufacturer. Though the company was started in 2015 by CEO Kasper Eis, together with an innovation expert and one intern, the employee number didn't grow, as it still has 3 employees. AMOV not only produce their clothes from organic materials, such as cotton and wool, but also make sure that the fabrics are high quality, and the style of the clothes aims to be as classic and timeless as possible, which stands for increasing durability (feature of eco-design, circular and sustainable business models). The company should also introduce the free repairing kits in the nearest future, as it could be used for fixing the broken garment. What is more, AMOV has the full transparency information about how the specific item was produced and they make sure the clothes are produced responsibly. All these features stand for sustainability and wearing AMOV products as long as possible, which is the opposite for unsustainable fast fashion brands, where the

collections are changing every month, which results with negative effects on planet and people.

Better World Fashion (BWF)

BWF is another Danish company that is very young and small, as they were established in 2015, which was founded by three men: Reimer Ivang, Karsten Lund and Kresten Thomsen. But the main difference from AMOV is that they produce leather products, particularly leather jackets for now. They also consider themselves as a sustainable and circular company, particularly because they are not only selling the leather jackets, but they also have a leasing option for their customers, which is part of circular or sharing economy, so it doesn't create waste, while the BWF jacket is in the user's loop. What is more, this brand is cleaning up the planet from the waste that is already here, because BWF produces from recycled leather and they encourage their customers to bring their old leather jackets for the discount on the new sustainable BWF leather jacket. Also, BWF designs the jackets in a way that it is easier to repair the items in case of a breakage, and the repairing can also be provided by the company itself.

MUD Jeans

MUD Jeans is a Dutch company is a sustainability oriented company that was established in 2012. As it is stated in the brand's name, they originally started with manufacturing jeans, but now they go beyond with shirts, sweaters and small goods, like beanies. The MUD Jeans produce from the certified organic cotton and they work with recycling companies as well. What is more, they also have a leasing feature in their business model, so customers don't have to own the product, as they can rent it for some time and then change to another pair of jeans. They also sell old jeans, that are upgraded and sold as a unique pair, and the design of the new MUD Jeans is circular, as it is produced in a way that it is easier to recycle it afterwards (for example, no leather details). What is more, the company encourages customers to return the used garments that are not being used anymore, so it could be reused or recycled. MUD Jeans are transparent about their factories that produce their products.

Globe Hope

Globe Hope is a Finnish brand, that specialises in small goods from recycled and discarded materials. The company which was started in 2003 in Finland, is run by 13 people and they currently produce their garments in Finland and Estonia, except shoes come from Portugal and organic shirts from Turkey. The Globe Hope garments include clothes, bags and other accessories. What is interesting, that they make their garments from recycled vintage and workers clothes, textiles that come from army, hospitals, sailing equipment, seatbelts, advertisement banners and use other details from different industries. The only new textile fabric that they use is organic certified cotton and peat threads, which were actually produced 10 years ago and not used in the industry before. They also promote reusing, repairing and slow consumption with their clothes style and durability.

Interview questions

As it was mentioned in order to make a valid and reliable qualitative research, a proper preparation for the actual interviews was very significant. As the main research question was about sustainable fashion brands work towards advocating sustainable consumption among their customers, two three big themes were created. The first one was about the sustainable consumption and sustainable fashion brands, and it was intended to get an inner insight about what companies consider the SFB and SC inside their organizations, plus more additional questions about the issues that companies face were included. The second one was related to actually what of kind initiatives they have that help promoting the sustainable consumption. Finally, the last one was related to an important player in this change- customers, as it was supposed to show companies attitude and knowledge about their customers. The actual questions and themes can be seen in the Appendix I, II.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The following section presents the findings from the literature and the interviews conducted with selected companies. The findings are divided into topics according to the sub-questions and themes that emerged during the data treatment.

The main findings

During the process of data treatment- coding- 2 main themes were identified, in relation to two sub-question: sustainable fashion brands and their issues; sustainable consumption promotion among customers.

Inside those two big themes, more narrowed topics were classified, and when talking about analysing sustainable fashion brands, the greenwashing topic was noticed, the interesting comparison between self-image and attitude towards other brands was identified, as well as the way of doing business (strategy). What is more, additional information about the challenges SFB face today (the financial aspects, retailers' acceptance, price issue and consumers' reluctance) has been derived. The overall topics that emerged during the analysis are illustrated in Figure 8.

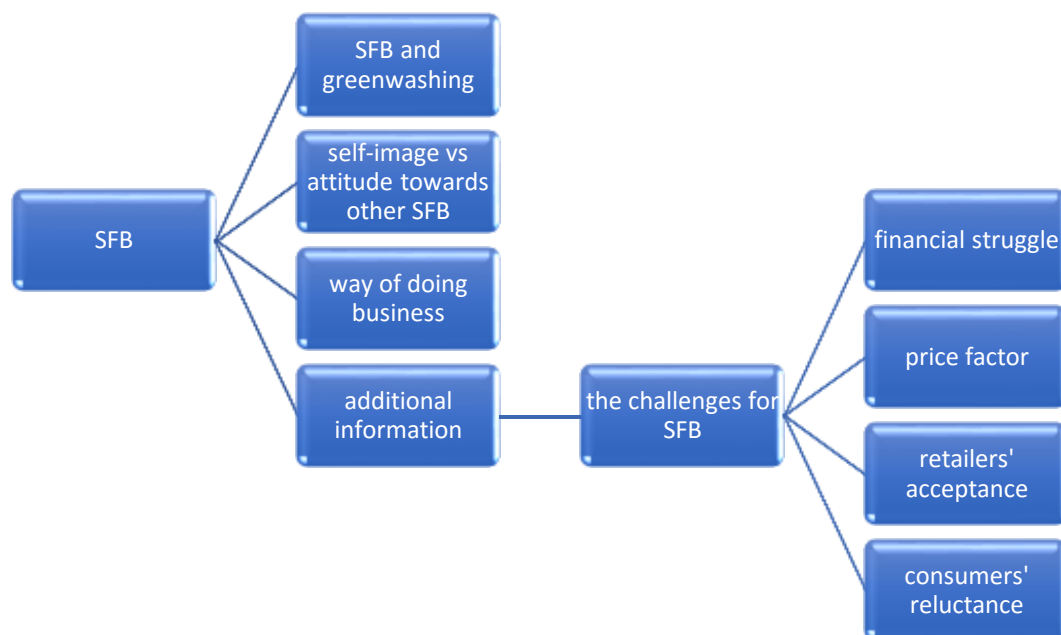


Figure 8. SFB and topics within

When talking about the second sub-question, inside the sustainable consumption theme, the topics include producer's responsibility towards SC, the initiatives that are inspired by circular economy, which promote SC. Moreover, the additional information about SFB's knowledge and opinions about customers was derived, as it does not answer the second sub-question, but is very much related to SC, because customers are another important stakeholder in sustainable fashion industry, and their behaviour needs to be changed as well. The additional data includes information about the how companies and customers influence each other, the feedback that is got from customers and preliminary portrait of SFB customers. The summary of the second sub-question theme can be seen in Figure 9 below.

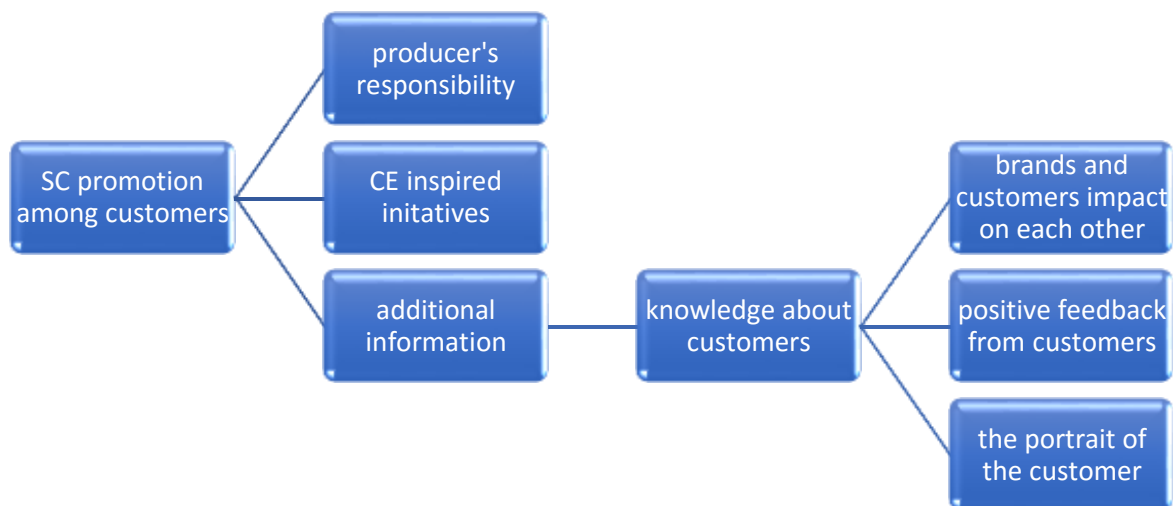


Figure 9. SC promotion among customers

Sustainable fashion brands

As sustainable fashion is becoming more wide spread, there comes a question, what is actually sustainable fashion company? What does divide sustainable from unsustainable or fast fashion company? What elements or features are essential for a company to be sustainable? The following parts of the report analyses and discusses the first sub-question related topics.

Sustainable fashion and green washing

Just as sustainability has three different pillars (environmental, economic, social), there can also be three different kinds of sustainability, and in this Master's research the fashion company is considered to be sustainable if it takes into account all three pillars in their business practice, especially environmental and social sustainability. As Williams et al. (2009) suggests sustainability is not only about lowering the negative impacts, but it's also about increasing positive effect, letting economic systems, communities and individuals to progress.

But it is worth to say that there is no industry standard and that brings more chaos to defining sustainable fashion (Lundblad and Davies, 2016). Moreover, as sustainability has many definitions, sustainable fashion has also quite a few synonyms, such as ecological, eco-friendly, conscious, green, ethical, fair-trade, organic and so on. All of them mostly try to fix what is wrong with fashion industry, mostly trying to eliminate negative impacts connected to environment, workers' or animals' wellbeing. Though organic fashion is quite different from actually being sustainable. As it is more likely suggests the way the textile was produced, mostly from organically farmed raw materials (Joergens, 2006). For example, ethical fashion is defined as "fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton" (Joergens, 2006). But green fashion is also considered to be defined in the same way by Carvellon and Wernerfelt (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012)

Between all this chaos, not only customers can also be affected by lack of clarity among sustainable fashion brands, but also the sustainable brands itself. What is interesting, even though there was no question during the interviews about what companies consider to be a sustainable brand, the topic emerged during one interview. BWF's Reimer Ivang discussed this matter, saying: *"I wouldn't label them [organic] as sustainable. They are more sustainable than normal (conventional) cotton (producers), but they are not sustainable. So, we also need to have a look at the sustainable label"* (Ivang, 2017). This really supports the importance of defining what is a sustainable fashion company or brand and that is really crucial for the actual sustainable fashion brands, so they are not categorised to the same

box with brands that are just producing from organic materials. It is delightful to see a representative for a sustainable fashion brand to agree and point out to the lack of industry standard regarding sustainable fashion industry.

To illustrate this industry issue, the same correlation was discovered during one of the interviews. It is learned that all companies call themselves sustainable fashion brands, but so far one particular brand's sustainability's status should be discussed. As it is told on their website, AMOV wants to be sustainable or practically are sustainable because of their business model elements they have. But during the interview it is learned that they still lack some business model features mentioned on their official webpage. It is interesting to see that AMOV is still not ready with some of sustainable business model features. If we consider company's plans for the future- repairing kits for broken clothes, taking back the used clothes, reselling platform or recycling, then it could be called sustainable company. But so far, as they haven't implemented these opportunities for customers to use, they probably should careful with using the word "sustainable" with their image. They are definitely more sustainable than traditionally manufacturing fast fashion brands, as they produce from organically grown cotton, design products for longevity, they are also transparent about their factories, and they even are involved with one charity organization, DINNoedhjaelp and helping Africa's children in need. Besides these mostly social sustainability elements in their business model, company should be careful with branding themselves as sustainable, because they might be accused by other brands as using a bit of greenwashing towards their customers. Their environmental sustainability is expressed so far through the use of organically grown cotton, and the design for durability, as it slows down the consumption loop, but despite that other interviewed companies are far ahead with their leasing, take-back options for customers. And it is clear that those companies have a negative attitude towards companies using greenwashing.

What is more, this shortage of sustainable label brings out another heavy topic that was just mentioned in sustainable fashion academic environment- the greenwashing, which can easily occur as there is no standard on sustainable fashion brand. Green washing is relatively new concept, but already is found quite often in fashion industry. It has quite few definitions, though in this research the most related is formulated by Laufer: "a strategy

that companies adopt to engage in symbolic communications of environmental issues without substantially addressing them in actions” (Laufer, 2003). As Strähle and Müller suggest there is a difference “between the green talk and green walk” (Strähle & Müller, 2017). With recent acknowledgement of sustainability’s significance in fashion industry, some companies try to use greenwashing as a tool to attract more sustainability aware customers.

To support that, two of the interviewed companies actually share the concern about other companies using green-washing as a marketing tool. Some brands use it as a trick to get customers believing that they are better than they are actually, and BWF Reimer Ivang, illustrates it: *“Let’s talk about H&M, they have the Conscious line, it’s 1% recycled, it’s stupid, it doesn’t make sense to call something conscious line because it has 1% recycled. It’s a marketing gimmick.”* (Ivang, 2017). Likewise, MUD Jeans CEO, Bert van Son, has a negative attitude towards those companies: *“when a big company tries to use green as a marketing, one day it will come back to you as a boomerang.”* (Van Son, 2017). Even though H&M which is fast fashion brands seem to have more than just 1% of the recycled materials, as they also work towards recycling their own garments, improving workers conditions, sharing treatment suggestions and so on. Thus, it maybe suggests that Reimer Ivang wants BWF to look way much better than fast fashion brand like H&M. It also attracts attention that as there is lack of standard, companies can call themselves sustainable even if they way less sustainability features than other, which might not be fair to more sustainable brands.

So, it is quite obvious that sustainable fashion standard and green-washing are one of the heavy issues in sustainable fashion industry, and it is delightful to see that sustainable brands see it as a significant issue and want to bring attention to this matter. What is more, companies have clearly negative attitude towards other companies when they want to sound better than they actually are, but when it comes to their opinion about themselves, then they are bit different.

Other than the general industry issues that came out unexpectedly during the interviews, it was important to get know better how sustainable fashion brands are actually carrying out with sustainability in their companies, what is their way of business and dealing with the challenges they experience. The information is relevant to getting a hold on more personal level, in order to investigate how companies see themselves and the issues they have. As the four companies that were interviewed for the research, are considered sustainable in this Master thesis, it was interesting to learn and compare the different approaches to their beliefs in doing sustainable business and issues within.

Thus, it is clear that companies have a negative attitude towards other companies wanting to sound better than they actually are, but when it comes to their opinion about themselves, then they might be slightly different. Many sustainable fashion companies and brands usually have these optimistically sounding vision statements, and it is interesting to see that the interviewed companies are not an exception. What is noticed during the interviews, is that companies try to state that they are trying to be as good, sustainable, honest and etc. as possible. But could it mean something more? On one side, it may be true that they want to be better, want to really “make a difference”. But on the other side, they might use these statements as a way to shut down the possibility of more questions regarding their sustainability. They might try to dodge an answer to a particular topic, using these nice expressions in order to show they are doing the best they can. There may actually come even more questions regarding what is it that they tried to do? What does the “sustainable as possible” mean to their company and why those elements are chosen for their business models? And many more.

Regarding the interviewed companies, as the interviews can sometimes involve the irrelevant answers to particular questions, it might have happened, as sometimes companies talked about slightly different topics than asked. Or maybe they actually were trying to avoid talking about something that is not exactly related to the question. For example, when asked about production vs consumption importance, it was surprising that MUD Jeans CEO spent more time trying to describe how their production side is sustainable

and how sustainability is embedded in their supply chain rather than discussing their attitude towards sustainable consumption or lack of acknowledging it, but it is going to be explained later in the analysis. But that might be not just because the company didn't believe in their responsibility for sustainable consumption. Maybe the CEO was not really sure about their company's position towards sustainable consumption or was lacking some kind of knowledge about this matter? But that cannot be answered here.

Thus, the one of the companies use these expressions to comment on their overall strategy and opinion during the interview: *"We try to be the best and to be more sustainable. But we have to realize, when you try to make a social enterprise and a sustainable business, there is always something wrong. So, it's not that from day 1 you are 100% sustainable. That's not possible... we are not 100% sustainable and there is always where to improve. We try to make noble jeans, where nobody on Earth is heard for making it..."* (Van Son, 2017). Besides, the obvious attempt to show how they try to be sustainable, another thing that attracts the critical attention, is slightly superior attitude towards other companies, as MUD Jeans CEO talks about them being one of the kind. But it would be interesting to actually ask if they are sure there is no other company *"on Earth"* that makes jeans or other type of clothes that also has the same circular business model features? That seem a bit short centred attitude as for sustainable company's opinion or maybe it is just a marketing trick trying to show how special the company is? Even though the company's CEO shows this kind of attitude towards being so much better than everyone, it is pleasant to hear them acknowledging that they are not perfectly sustainable and that there is always space to become better.

Similar view can also be found in other companies when asked about their sustainability. Correspondingly, Kasper Eis from AMOV also says: *"it's not perfect yet. It's in our mission statement to become as sustainable as possible"* (Eis, 2017). This shows the company admits they want to be as responsible as possible, though acknowledges the fact of being far from it. AMOV representative also uses the similar expression to MUD Jeans CEO's to state their sustainability's situation, but somehow, they he doesn't seem to think they are one of the kind. Though that also is kind of logical because as it was discussed before, they are not as sustainable as other interviewed companies, so it is nice to hear that at least they admit

they are not the best, even though the saying about being as sustainable as possible again drives similar questions as with MUD Jeans response.

In addition, Miisa Asikainen, the representative for Globe Hope stands on the same spot with other two previously mentioned companies, as she shares similar expression: *“We try to do everything in our business as green as possible”* (Asikainen, 2017).

But what is very interesting to observe is that she puts their company’s sustainability on the contrary to these unsustainable brands’, which makes the company look much better. That shows how they want to be the opposite for unsustainable brands and wants to be the better choice. She mentions: *“We try to offer as good option as we can for those unethical and un-ecological brands”* (Asikainen, 2017).

Convenient and easy option for customers

Besides showing off how great and responsible sustainable fashion brands are, it is interesting to learn how they approach their customers and in what manner they carry on with their businesses. What is in common for most of the companies, is that they don’t want to approach their present or potential customers by pressuring them too hard, so that they probably don’t get pushed away. It can be sensed that companies are in for taking it in a slow and steady than hard and aggressive way to reach their customers, which can be understandable.

One of the companies, Globe Hope, wants to reach their customers in a fun way so it is not all negative and depressing information, which can just make customers turn away from sustainability topic in fashion industry. They try to use the opposite way of reaching and informing their customers: *“we try to approach our customers about sustainable choices in general but with a happy attitude”* (Asikainen, 2017). It shows that company doesn’t want to push and blame customers for their not so sustainable actions, but rather to show them that they are other options in clothing industry that are beneficial to environment and society.

What is very interesting, Globe Hope also mentions informing their customers about other sustainable choices in fashion industry, though it is not clear what are those exact suggestions, as the interview answers were sent via email and it could not be dug deeper. But it at least shows company's intentions to have an educational impact on their customers, which is not supported but all of the interviewed companies: *"We don't want to make anyone feel guilty about their consuming habits but to educate them for better solutions"* (Asikainen, 2017).

Moreover, the company states their attitude towards taking it slow, taking care of different parts of sustainability, not pushing too much on their customers. They argue: *"We believe that the solution is in small steps. It is important to make better choices one small step at the time..."* (Asikainen, 2017). Similar expression is also heard during the MUD Jeans interview, as they talk about the way they do their business and wants to show that they are thinking about every possible matter in their supply chain in order to be sustainable: *"What we do is, we try to think of every step of a way"* (Van Son, 2017).

But not all companies think about this way of approaching customers in an easy and steady way, as for example AMOV was trying to use the aggressive manner of approach: *"we have this kind of "push effect"- we go to a fair and we push, push, push for our product and I think we need to change in a way where we "pull", so we tell people about it and they go to the stores and ask for a product"* (Eis, 2017). But apparently, this kind of strategy not necessarily works and now company's CEO is thinking about changing their strategy towards the opposite, going easier with the pushing part: *"now the whole AMOV concept is a bit complicated and I think also we have to watch out not to make it more complicated, so we shouldn't be launching any more things, we should rather just to make business out of this and try to make a good sustainable business"* (Eis, 2017).

What is more, the fact that company aims to be sustainable doesn't mean that they are reaching only for conscious customers, as some of the companies also express a goal to be chosen by not so sustainability oriented customers. There may come a question then, why do they also want to be preferred by not so conscious customers? Is it because of expanding

their customers' base and business or is it because they want somehow to have a positive influence on those not so eco- friendly customers? Well, that may not be answered in this research but there are couple of interviewed companies that share similar intention. Globe Hope expresses their opinion: *"we want also to be the better choice to not so conscious consumers"* (Asikainen, 2017). Similar attitude is also expressed by AMOV, as they talk about retailers that are not oriented towards sustainable fashion only. Kasper Eis discussed: *"it is very important that we are not just aiming for the green stores, but we also aim for the fashion stores"* (Eis, 2017). As the company wants to reach not only the sustainability conscious customers, that makes sense, as mostly just this kind of society shop at special kind of stores, and by offering the garments at traditional fashion stores, they become more available to other parts of society.

Better World Fashion's attitude seems mostly oriented towards making it easy and convenient for their customers. They want to be a sustainable but also easily purchased option and help customers in such a busy and complicates life pace. It is not only about the easy purchase, but what is actually even more important, it is also directed to circular economy initiatives and taking back option, what Reimer Ivang discusses: *"we have tried to make it easier. You just go into our website, you just order it and when you get package with a new jacket, you put the old jacket into a box and return it to us"* (Ivang, 2017). Moreover, Ivang also points out the significant fact about fashion industry reality today regarding having too many clothes: *"it's very easy to get a hold of clothes, buy it, but it's really not easy to get rid of clothes in a sustainable way."* (Ivang, 2017). It shows that the company also care about not making it difficult for the customers, as they are the ones choosing what to buy. They want to help their customers with the disposal of the garments in a sustainable way, which may not be that easy without BWF option.

What is actually surprising, that Reimer Ivang expresses that their company is offering an opportunity for customers that doesn't involve changing their lifestyles so much in order to be more sustainable, as the jackets they would be wearing, already would make their environmental footprint lower. He mentions: *"we want to provide this opportunity for the consumers, where they can just continue what they are doing and then we make sure that the environmental footprint becomes much better and we believe that we can initiate a*

change in society much faster this way compared to if we were standing on a box and preaching.” (Ivang, 2017). But on the one hand, when Ivang mentions that customer can go on with their usual lives, maybe it is a bit too suspicious, as society actually needs to change their attitude and behaviour at least slightly in order to become more sustainable, and it might not be enough just to buy a sustainably produced leather jacket. On the other hand, it may be true if at first it helps just to get in touch and get closer to customers, then help them adopt sustainable perspective towards fashion and then in the end encourage with a bigger change directed at their lifestyles.

But when asked about teaching customers to be more conscious, the opposite attitude towards Globe Hope’s behind this matter is expressed by BWF: *“I don’t think we are in a market for education. So, we don’t want to preach to the consumer, because I don’t think you would get a lot of change out of preaching... We want to try to create an opportunity and a product that consumers can love and that they can be a part of the change just by using that product.” (Ivang, 2017). That shows that the company doesn’t see making customers more conscious about their choices as their responsibility. But if they are a sustainable company, and customers are still reluctant towards sustainability, and lack of knowledge or awareness is one of the reasons for the issue, maybe they should really reconsider such position towards educating consumers.*

Additional data: [The issues among sustainable fashion brands](#)

Some additional data about challenges that SFB face today was derived from the interviews. It does not answer the actual 1st sub-question, but is somehow elaborates about SFB and their difficulties when doing sustainable business.

Besides the knowledge about sustainable fashion companies’ attitudes towards other companies and themselves, it is interesting to get a hold on the issues the sustainable fashion industry experience. Of course, it is no wonder that the first challenge they might experience is related to economic side of their business, and the interviewed companies back it up with the experiences they had.

The financial aspect in business is usually one of the most important challenges, but when it comes to sustainable business, even though there is a lack of standard, there are still some expectations for a sustainable fashion company to fulfil. And with those expectations being higher than for traditional textile industry, it is logical that they might get a lot to deal with financially. The more responsible supply chain is, the more it costs for the brand.

All the costs for production without harming the environment, exploiting people working in the industry, minimizing the quality of the garment are higher than in the fast fashion industry. BWF's Reimer Ivang illustrates the issue related to the price for the sustainable garments: *"if you want to do it sustainable you can't bring down the prices to the same level with something that is done not sustainable"* (Ivang, 2017).

What is more, the country of origin is a huge issue in fashion industry, as usually the costs in developing countries are way lower due to child labour, lack of workers' rights and working conditions. BWF Reimer Ivan also touches this topic: *"I could get 5 jackets produced in Cambodia for 1 (produced) in Poland. So of course, that means that when ¾ of my production price is salary, I would bring down my production price significantly if I went to (produce in) Cambodia and then I would get my products into retail stores, but it wouldn't be sustainable anymore"* (Ivang, 2017).

Let alone the supply chain costs, marketing is another area where money has a lot of impact. The marketing campaigns are usually one of the sectors where companies have to empty their pockets. With bad marketing companies' customers expand may be influenced negatively. During the interviews, it can be sensed that companies really have some struggles with finance in their business, especially when it comes to marketing.

All of the companies, except one (Globe Hope) express worries about their budget. The three companies are acknowledging the fact that they are struggling with financial part:

"we are looking at changing something in our company, because I have been spending a lot of my marketing budget on talking to stores" (Eis, 2017);

"not having enough budget to do these fantastic marketing campaigns, so we try to be smart, we try to use social media in smart way" (Van Son, 2017);

“we would need a bunch to breakthrough to make this huge, but that’s the matter of money, that the matter of having maybe famous people wearing our jeans and that’s the challenge every day” (Van Son, 2017);

“but they [retailers] are focused on their own pockets, and they want to sell the products that gives them the best opportunity for profits.” (Ivang, 2017).

The last quote also points out to another issue that is retailers and their acceptance or negligence towards the sustainable fashion brands. If company sells through retailers, they are especially important as the last step in supply chain before products reach its customers. It can still be sense that retailers are reluctant towards sustainable fashion and prefer the regular fashion goods. AMOV’s Kasper Eis also shares his experience with retailers’ attitude towards sustainable fashion: *“If I look at a special fashion stores, they don’t care so much about organic fashion” (Eis, 2017).*

If regular fashion retailers don’t accept the sustainable brands as competitive players and let them into their stores, the brands are affected extremely because they are taken out of an opportunity to be exposed to regular or potential customers. It has an impact not only on sustainable brands, but also might even have more significant impact on the traditional fashion customers, as they usually don’t go deliberately to sustainable or special fashion stores. The fashion retailers are oriented towards the bigger profit and pick the brands with which they can earn more. Similar thoughts are heard during the interviews as companies’ representatives share the challenges they experience with retail stores. BWF’s Reimer Ivang shares his opinion: *“they [retailers] are a real barrier” (Ivang, 2017).* As Ivang notices, the barrier may be especially due to the retailer’s lack of support for them: *“the retailer stores do not have very good incentives to take in sustainable goods and that means that the broad audience of consumers actually do not get exposed to the opportunity of buying sustainable products.” (Ivang, 2017).*

What is more, if the retailers choose to sell both, sustainable and unsustainable fashion goods, it may hurt the unsustainable fashion marketing, as more customers might prefer the sustainable option. The choice of the products issue for the retailer stores is also discussed by AMOV: *“for some it is actually a problem... what about other stuff in store that are not*

organic or sustainable, how do they explain that.” (Eis, 2017). Moreover, Kasper Eis acknowledges the retailer’s importance for their business: *“the retailers are getting used to us”* (Eis, 2017).

Even though the sustainable fashion customers sector has been growing recently, there are still many people that do not prefer sustainable fashion for different reasons. It might be because customers think the price is too high or the style is more old-fashioned than trendy, at least the respondents from the first project about customers’ attitudes towards sustainable fashion think so. But not all sustainable fashion brands want to be associated with unstylish and boring clothes, and that might be a challenging goal to achieve, as the trendy clothes get out of fashion pretty soon and become untrendy, which encourages to move on with buying another garment. And in sustainable fashion one of the features is the product’s design for longevity, so that is the opposite of fashion trends. But still the classical style could be more appropriate and some brands try to adjust their clothes style, though it is challenging still. AMOV is one of the companies which is very familiar with this issue: *“we need to also in some way follow macro trends, but we also have to avoid following short time trends, so people throw it out afterward”* (Eis, 2017).

Thus, another challenge that sustainable fashion brands are facing today is the customer base and their reluctance or unfavourable attitude towards sustainable fashion. That’s why it is so important for retailers to let in sustainable brands into their space in order for new customers to experience the sustainable fashion garment on their own. BWF’s Reimer Ivang sums up: *“there are still people that are reluctant to buy a new leather jacket made out of 98% of reused materials.”* (Ivang, 2017). AMOV’s CEO Kasper Eis accordingly mentions what they don’t have so many regular customers: *“well it is just couple persons [reordering], so I don’t get like big trends”* (Eis, 2017). Similarly, he mentions that among the most important everyday challenges is the part where you need to touch customers: *“the challenge we are talking every day because we need to reach more consumers”* (Van Son, 2017).

What is more, the price issue is still a problem for customers according to some brands, but not everything that is sustainable costs more than regular fashion, as we can find two pairs of jeans that cost 100 euros, but one can be produced sustainably and the other might not

be. In this case, MUD Jeans shares some additional insight about the reason why customers might be reluctant to sustainable fashion products: *“people say that ethical fashion is expensive. We think that 98 euros... a very sustainable price, which is the fact we can explain also”* (Van Son, 2017). On the other hand, if we consider the MUD Jeans for 98 euros and the fast fashion produced jeans for 20 euros, then there is quite a difference in a monetary value, it still can be too expensive for some customers, but that is not the main question to answer in thesis research, so it is not worth to focus on this matter.

Finally, it is not news that sustainable fashion brands experience some challenges, especially when it comes to reaching customers, explaining the price value or managing the financial aspects of their business, so it is for sure not easier to work in a sustainable fashion industry. MUD Jeans and BWF illustrates these challenges in a way that could come up this chapter: *“It’s a very difficult business, your products’ service has to be fantastic”* (Van Son, 2017). What is more, Reimer Ivang also acknowledge on of the most important insights about sustainable fashion struggles: *“right now, sustainable products have a hard time competing with unsustainable products”* (Ivang, 2017).

To sum up the answer for the first sub-question regarding the SFB and its issues, it is clear that as there is no standard for sustainable fashion brands, there might be space for greenwashing, which has negative effects on actually sustainable fashion brands and on customers believes in sustainable fashion in general. As an example, is one of the interviewed companies- AMOV- they should careful with using term “sustainable” to describe themselves. What is interesting, the interviewed companies have negative attitude towards other brands using greenwashing, but it seems that some companies might also be trying to look better than they actually are. In terms of their business strategy’, SFB try to attract their customers in an easy, happy attitude so they don’t they don’t get scared and pushed away. Finally, as sustainable fashion has difficulty competing with unsustainable products, the interviewed SFB name most challenges they face today: financial budget, the price factor, retailers lack of acceptance and consumers’ reluctance (*Figure 10*).



Figure 10. 1st sub-question answer's summary

While reflecting on 1st sub-question answer, there comes a question- are SFB really doing everything they can to be an example for other not so sustainable companies? It seems they choose to approach customers about sustainability in an easy and convenient way, so customers are not pushed too hard. But maybe customers should be taught, pushed a bit harder and then they would become more sustainability aware and conscious about their consumption habits and its negative affect on environment and society. Then maybe these sustainable brands would not have issues with customers' reluctance towards their products and they would experience more support and acceptance from retailers, as more customers would be choosing sustainable garments instead of fast fashion.

The sustainable consumption promotion among customers

The chapter presents the results for the second sub-question, which was "what kind of activities sustainable fashion brands try to promote for sustainable consumption?". The section also analyses and discusses the companies' attitudes towards sustainable consumption, circular initiatives in their business model, with additional data about SFB's knowledge and interaction with customers.

Sustainable consumption and producer's responsibility

It is interesting to see what kind of attitude sustainable fashion brands have towards themselves, each other or the challenges that they experience nowadays. But what I am also very curious, is how companies see their responsibility towards sustainable consumption and how they promote it among customers with the knowledge they have.

To begin with, it is common that producing companies are responsible for the impacts on sustainability through the whole supply chain until the garment is passed over to the consumer (Strähle & Müller, 2017). But in sustainable fashion industry companies want to be responsible and “make world a better place to live”, so it is interesting to investigate if they feel some kind of responsibility towards society consuming sustainably and if they actually do something towards this goal. With sustainability issues becoming more escalated lately, it is important to see if sustainable fashion companies think they have the responsibility towards society not only to produce sustainably, but also take care of the garments later after the purchase. It is not news that some sustainability oriented companies are already taking care of their products after it is passed to consumer with initiatives like taking back, leasing or repairing the broken products. And the interviewed companies also have some of the post-retail initiatives that include customers and could be called activities towards sustainable consumption, so it is essential to ask their opinions about the matter.

But if these brands are the companies seeing the future and how it is important to be sustainable in fashion industry, maybe they should also consider crossing the production responsibility line and promote sustainable consumption more eagerly. As K.K. Hvass suggests the sustainable fashion brands could commit more with their initiatives through products stewardship or EPR, which is defined as “...an environmental policy approach in which a producer's responsibility, physical and/or financial, for a product is extended to the post-consumer stage of a product's life cycle” (Hvass, 2014; OECD, 2001). The EPR has two different functions, whereas the first is connected to transferring the responsibility to producer by incorporating the environmental costs of products' disposal and treatment in the price of the product; the second is about expanding producer's responsibility to post-

consumer products. The EPR is spread all around the world and it can be either mandatory (forced by policy), or voluntary (stemming from the company) (OECD, 2001).

When companies are asked about their position towards sustainable consumption, it can be sensed that they are caught a bit off guard during the interviews. It seems like they are trying to talk more about how sustainable their production part is, about how responsible they are with their manufacturing processes. That might be due to the reason that they don't have the actual knowledge about their actions towards sustainable consumption or they cannot relate their initiatives with sustainable consumption. Even though they say they believe both parts, production and consumption, are important and should be considered, they can't elaborate actually how they are working towards sustainable consumption. They talk about customers as an important and significant factor in sustainable fashion development, but they don't seem to really explain to their customers that it is important to consume sustainably.

When asked if the sustainable fashion companies should be responsible not only for production, but also consumption part, most of the companies mention that the goal is to be conscious about both parts, but one has a slightly different opinion towards this question. MUD Jeans' Bert van Son was more eager to discuss how sustainability is embedded in their production part than to actually consider their actions towards sustainable consumption. He discussed a lot about the production side: *"We try to buy organic cotton, certified by GOTS, we try to use as much as possible recyclable cotton, post-consumer; we do that in factory that is approved by that Fairwear foundation has been looking at the way that people are working; The sewing, the cutting is all done in a very proper way without those people being asked to do ridiculous overtime; We don't use chemicals anymore; on a market, you will not find any MUD Jeans on sales because we don't over-deliver them ; we also try to work closer to home, to lower our CO2 footprint, so we try to be CO2 neutral, we don't want to make our goods being shipped all around the world"* (Van Son, 2017). The long and the detailed answer about the supply chain's sustainability might mean that interviewee needed more time to gather thoughts about their company's position towards sustainable consumption. What is more, the word "try" is very much used in Bert van Son's answer, which shows that they really want show they are trying to do the

best, as probably they are not in reality, because they spend most of the time talking about production side.

Beside all these sustainability elements that are quite common for sustainable business model in fashion, MUD Jeans surprises mentioning another important feature that works against overstock, which is quite a problem in fashion industry. It shows that MUD Jeans sees the overall picture with their business strategy, without creating additional clothing that might not be purchased and might lose the value or even end up in the landfills. Strähle and Müller names overproduction as one of the biggest issues in fashion industry, because only two-third of seasonal clothes are sold on full price and the rest is kept and sold later during reduction periods (Strähle and Müller, 2017; Mattila et al., 2002). MUD Jeans CEO adds up: *“retailers can just buy small quantities and increase their orders when the sales start working”* (Van Son, 2017). That also shows the collaboration with retailers, which is the opposite besides having some issues with retailers, what was discussed in the previous chapter.

But to sum up, the company doesn't not share the same attitude towards production vs consumption importance for sustainable fashion brands. It doesn't not sound completely the opposite from other brands' position, but MUD Jeans doesn't think that customers' consumption patterns are their responsibility: *“...if you buy a pair of jeans, I can give you ideas of how to wash them, but I don't see that really as my task”* (Van Son, 2017).

Regardless of MUD Jeans attitude towards sustainable production vs sustainable consumption importance, some companies believe that it is significant to think not only for production, but also for consumption part to be sustainable. It was delightful to hear that three out of four interviewed companies see the need for sustainable fashion brands to take care of both sides. AMOV's Kasper Eis says: *“I think you need to take care of both parts [production and consumption] ...we also try with AMOV that we look into production, but we also look into the lifetime of our products, after the people buy from us.”* (Eis, 2017). AMOV believes sustainable brands should be accountable for more than just production's sustainability. Even though the company shares their dreams for the future and how they want to take care of sustainable consumption among customers, it is actually not clear yet if

they would go through with it, because it is not a reality yet. As it was mentioned before, company hasn't implemented any of the circular business models' initiatives, so it is one thing to say for what they dream of and it is actually another thing to go on with these activities. Thus, AMOV looks good in relation to their website information and talks about the future, but the present situation suggests a bit different picture so far.

Honesty to your customers is one of the values among sustainable fashion brands, but what is especially nice to hear, is that those kinds of brands also encourage their customers to purchase garments from other sustainable companies. It shows brands' integrity and dedication towards sustainability as they choose to inform their customers about other brands on the sustainable fashion market. These kinds of intentions also show that sustainable companies are really focused on sustainable consumption and that is their goal. Though it is not clear if they would in case customers choose the competitor's brands instead theirs. But that kind of question could not be answered by Globe Hope, due to the setting of the interview (the answers were sent via email). But all in all, Globe Hope is a company that promotes other sustainable brands among customers: *"We try to get our consumers to choose environmentally friendly products as ours"* (Asikainen, 2017).

As it was mentioned before, EPR could be one of the solutions for the brands' promotion of sustainable consumption and that kind of opinion seems to be found among one of the interviewed companies. BWF's Reimer Ivang thinks that sustainable fashion brands have prior responsibility towards production's sustainability, but also acknowledges the consumption part: *"the company primary has the responsibility for the production part, but the production part also expands into producing materials that will pollute as little as much during consumption"* (Ivang, 2017). Besides mentioning the producer's responsibility for pollution from the garment, Reimer Ivang does not talk about the consumer's actions importance for sustainable consumption.

The more sustainable attitude could be sensed in Globe Hope's answer, as they even tell their customers how to act with their goods during the user phase, which actually sounds like promoting sustainable treatment of garments. Globe Hope representative illustrates about their sustainable consumption among the customers: *"we always tell our customers*

of how to handle their items...We encourage customers to choose for example a fabric bag instead of a plastic bag...We have also collected recycling tips for used clothes” (Asikainen, 2017).

The similar information about treatment of the clothes is shared during the interview with AMOV: *“we do some things and on the care label. But of course, telling people exactly how they can make the product last for many years, is also a good idea.” (Eis, 2017).* They work towards consumers acting more sustainably during user phase but they also acknowledge the fact that they could be more specific in terms of suggestions for treating their products, so it could be used as long as possible.

To sum up most of these companies share similar attitude, though BWF expresses a deeper conclusion: *“I don’t think that sustainable fashion producers can take responsibility over how the consumers are treating the product when they bought it, but they can take responsibility of what kind of product they are offering to the consumers” (Ivang, 2017).* Of course, maybe it is too much to expect from producers to be accountable for customers’ behaviour, but as sustainable brands are innovative companies which tend to work for a better future, they could also consider some kind of responsibility to teach and make their customers aware about sustainable consumption practices.

Sustainable consumption and CE inspired initiatives

In general, companies have a significant part in society by shaping and meeting its’ needs through the marketing campaigns and supply of products and services (N. M P Bocken & Short, 2016). As N. Bocken suggests companies can be not only drivers for unsustainable consumption, but also for sustainable one (N. Bocken, 2017). Thus, these interviewed companies can be ambassadors for sustainable consumption promotion among customers. As they use the circular economy based initiatives in their business model among customers, they are working and promoting sustainable consumption towards the society. But seems they are doing that without consciously naming it as part of a sustainable consumption and that may have a downward effect on consumers’ attention to sustainable consumption practices in the end. Because it is important for customers to be aware that

some of them are already partly participating in sustainable consumption with circular initiatives offered by companies.

Nevertheless, what companies say regarding the importance of sustainable consumption for their businesses, all of them are practising initiatives that close or slow down the consumption loop among customers. As it was mentioned in theories section, the Circular Economy (CE) inspired activities are considered as one of the illustrations towards sustainable consumption in this Master research. Thus, it shows that companies are working towards applying sustainable consumption among their customers, and it is just interesting to see how exactly. Most of the sustainable fashion companies acknowledge circular economy as one of the ways to be sustainable and in this research, all of the companies in a way are working according to circular economy concept. Overall, all interviewed companies have quite a few sustainability or circular economy based initiatives in their business models, which promote sustainable consumption among their customers (Table 2).

SFB	Producing from organic materials	Upcycling/producing from recycled materials	Taking-back/collecting the textile waste	Reusing/Selling second-hand clothing	Design for longevity/durability	Repairing	Leasing
BWF	-	+	+	+	-	+	+
AMOV	+	-	Not yet	Not yet	+	Not yet	-
MUD Jeans	+	+	+	+	-	-	+
Globe Hope	+	+	+	+	+	+	-

Table 2 CE based initiatives for SC

One of the first companies to name circular economy as their business model, is MUD Jeans: “we are very well known for circular economy” (Van Son, 2017). They are quite famous for their circular economy initiatives, which slow down or close the materials loop. Among those initiatives there is returning the garments to the producer or leasing, which makes

sure that the used garment can be put back on the loop. They have leasing agreement, which makes sure that customers have to send back the unwanted jeans, which can be repaired, reused by other customers or recycled in the end. The CEO of MUD Jeans Bert van Son points out: *“we also have a system with leasing jeans, where people are sending the jeans back after a year, order new styles, order a second pair.”* (Van Son, 2017). This way of consumption not only makes sure that the customers are disposing the used clothing in a responsible way, but also it encourages them again to buy or lease a sustainable pair of jeans again, which promotes sustainable products purchase or leasing, on one side. But on the other side, it might influence them to buy or rent more often than they actually would, so it is a bit questionable feature of the sustainable consumption at this point.

But MUD Jeans are not the only company among interviewed that has leasing or take-back option for their customers. Better World Fashion also talks about availability for their customers to return the used and unwanted clothes. They have a take back possibility with leasing contract: *“and then we lease or sell it on a buy-back agreement, so we are pretty sure that the jackets come back to us”* (Ivang, 2017). What is special in this company’s case without leasing activity, is that they already clean up the landfills from additional waste, because of the recycled leather that they are using in the production stage: *“business model that is circular business model, so our inputs are thrown-away materials that if we would not use it, it would probably go to landfills”* (Ivang, 2017). Even though there is some uncertainty in terms of leather goods, as it has many negative impacts on environment with the whole livestock industry, the company does not create demand for new leather fabric, it basically removes the overstock from the old leather goods.

What is more, the option of bringing back customers’ old leather jackets or BWF jackets relates to what company is hoping from their customers with the leasing and recycling: *“we ask consumers to coproduce with us”* (Ivang, 2017). It shows BWF wants their customers to know about how important they are for the company, already in the production stage, as they help to produce the sustainable leather jackets. Beside this opportunity, BWF offers customers another way to get engaged in the whole leasing, returning-the products-back act with their app and the possibilities it gives them to share stories: *“by offering consumers the opportunity to create stories on each individual jacket, we can slow down this*

degeneration” (Ivang, 2017). The storytelling seems to also be important for other companies such as MUD Jeans or AMOV, as they want their customers to share their life stories while wearing their garment. Finally, the company sums up how their business model is working against overconsumption which again encourages sustainable consumption among customers and closes the consumption loop: *“we are trying to fight overconsumption in the way our business model is made and that means that the consumer can actually continue their current lifestyle of changing and ...within the textile without polluting because we have secured that our own products and resources we return into the cycle”* (Ivang, 2017).

As it was discussed in previous chapters, AMOV seems to be the least sustainable considered to other interviewed companies and the circular initiatives that they want to proceed with are still not ready, so the context is future related in this case. Thus, Kasper Eis mentions his hope for the future: *“Going forward we want people to be able to resell it and then also follow the lifetime of the product afterwards”* (Eis, 2017). The previous quote also illustrates a different approach for bringing back the used garments to the loop- customers reselling the goods on their own, which is yet not available at the moment: *“when they don’t want to have it anymore, they sell to somebody else with our resell platform, that is not ready yet”* (Eis, 2017). When talking about being sustainable consumption oriented, it is clear that AMOV also works towards the slowing down the consumption loop, as they try to design their products for longevity: *“already in the design phase we try to create products that we know that in the fabrics, in the quality, in the feel, in the colours is something that can last in a wardrobe for many years...I imagine that they buy something from us that has long life and high quality products and they want to keep it for a long time because of a quality and the colours and fabrics”* (Eis, 2017). What is more, Kasper Eis also considers helping with exchanging of the pieces between customers: *“I like the idea of going to cafes, the kind of swap meeting, where people can swap with each other”* (Eis, 2017). In addition, regardless their young age, AMOV also considers providing free repairing kits for the customers that need to fix their AMOV garments: *“So that people could go to the store, they could go to the website and they can find these repairing kits”* (Eis, 2017). As all of these ideas sounds really nice and could be a way to actually promote sustainable consumption among customers, it is still considered as future plans, even though it might be very near

future, still things can change and AMOV might not go through with all plans mentioned above.

The circular initiative for repairing the broken clothes seems also to be a popular way of promoting sustainable consumption, as it makes sure customers are using fuller potential of clothing and the value of the garment is not lost at the early stages of lifecycle. It also teaches customers to use the clothing as long as possible and be more responsible against throw-away culture. Globe Hope also has this post-retail initiative at their business model: *“We have a long guarantee for our products, cheap prices for repairing if it’s not part of the guarantee anymore.”* (Asikainen, 2017). What is more, they even guarantee that the product should not be broken to natural causes, which for sure stands for high quality and longevity. The company also works towards recycling the products that they get back: *“we help with the recycling of products as best as we can”* (Asikainen, 2017). Moreover, the company has the special second-hand clothing line from the brought back garments, which promotes the way customers can consume sustainably, but with used clothing and in a cheaper way. They elaborate about the concept: *“we have launched Twice Loved Hope – concept that is second hand of Globe Hope products”* (Asikainen, 2017). What is more, Globe Hope discusses their engagement with other business in relation to slowing down or closing the loop: *“We also do a lot of B2B so that companies would choose more eco-friendly business gifts made of recycled material or even from their own materials such as workwear that can’t be used anymore”* (Asikainen, 2017).

For the circular economy based initiatives to actually work, companies need to have customers, who are willing to participate in those activities, because if they don’t, who else is going to use the garment longer, bring it back or rent it for a while, as it was learned from the last semester’s project. Without consumers being involved and connected to their sustainable fashion providers, the circular post-retail initiatives will not have a result and sustainable consumption will not occur. In order to get the customers participating in these circular activities, companies have some tools for motivation. Besides being interested in sustainability and “doing good” customers might need some inspiration to invest their time and effort for bringing back the piece of clothing that ran its course or repairing it, so companies have some rewarding campaigns for customers who participate. Mostly it is a discount or reduced price for the next purchase, as most of the interviewed companies carry on with this kind of practice: *“and when we receive the jacket, we give you 50%*

discount on the jacket that you bought” (Ivang, 2017); our customers can bring Globe Hope bags and clothes that they don’t use anymore and get a discount voucher for their next purchase” (Asikainen, 2017); “next year we would also implement the whole deposit system that people can get money back for their products. And then they can buy something else if they want to.” (Eis, 2017). But what is interesting, that these motivational incentives not only bring back the used garments back to the loop, but also encourage customers to continue with their purchasing/leasing activities. The reward they get usually applies for their next purchase, which is beneficial not only for the customer, when he needs to buy something new, but also for the companies itself, as it secures the customer coming back for another purchase.

Additional data: Knowledge about customers and influences

Influencing each other

As the companies that practise circular economy based initiatives have to be in close contact with their customers, it is significant to investigate how they consider having an impact on each other. I was curious to learn if companies think about actually having some influence on their customers in relation to the circular activities, so they were asked about their position towards this matter. Most of them sound very confident to have an impact on their customers and to be more precise, a positive impact. The companies think that their initiatives are influencing their customers to become more conscious with their consumption habits. Better World Fashion’s Reimer Ivang answers *“yes, definitely”* when asked if their circular initiatives help form their customers’ habits (Ivang, 2017). In addition, he actually says that they are actually making new kinds of customers regarding conscious consumers: *“...we create a lot of new sustainable fashion interested people”* (Ivang, 2017). The quotes strengthen the image of how company sees their influence on customers, as they use the word *“create”*, showing that they think they are inventing something new in consumers’ society, a new kind of customers, which might be again a bit too self-centred. AMOV shares similar attitude in relation to their impact on the customers. Kasper Eis especially expresses his company’s goal to have an effect on customers, especially the ones who are not sustainability aware or oriented people: *“it’s a very important point for us to*

influence, because it is part of the vision statement and we want to influence people to some more sustainable textile choice... we can start influencing some people that would not normally buy sustainable fashion.” (Eis, 2017). Again, what is mostly noted in the quote, is that Kasper Eis talks about the future in the answer, which shows more his hopes than reality situation. AMOV also believes they have a positive influence or at least imagine they would in the future, regarding customers becoming more aware about the products sustainability and importance of the whole picture, which connects to making customers more aware about sustainable consumption concept. He hopes that his clothes will have a bigger impact in terms of sustainable fashion choices: *“also in that process that they become aware and think about the product’s lifecycle and they think about that a product should have long lifetime... they start learning a lot about sustainable fashion.”* (Eis, 2017). Finally, AMOV’s CEO Kasper Eis even shares some personal experience regarding sustainable fashion influence on his own lifestyle and how he became aware about his and his family’s sustainable choices: *“since I started working a lot with organic, sustainable fashion, we started eating vegetarian food a lot of the time at home, so I started influencing myself with sustainable fashion and now I’m kind of trying to influence myself with other areas, so I think it does help, that hopefully we can just make people to think in a more sustainable way.”* (Eis, 2017).

Globe Hope joins BWF and AMOV regarding affects for the consumers in becoming more sustainably conscious in relation to their clothing consumption, as they also note the positive affect on their customers’ behaviour, even though it was not so much elaborated in which way, they see it: *“these activities/initiatives have helped our customers in changing their consuming habits towards better”* (Asikainen, 2017). They also express the intention to have an impact not only on sustainably oriented people, but also others that are not so conscious consumers: *“we also want to influence other parts of society”* (Asikainen, 2017).

But naturally if companies have an impact on their customers, it might also be true that customers the influence might come over way around. Thus, it was significant to ask those companies about their customers’ importance in relation to changes in the company. When asked about the opposite question, if they think their customers are influencing their company to change, the interviewed companies have different views. Some acknowledge the fact that customers’ opinion is important, but it hasn’t changed anything yet in their

companies. Globe Hope doesn't see their customers influencing their sustainability so far, mostly because they think are quite ahead with their initiatives: *"it is not really often that we are influenced with something new that we hadn't already thought about"* (Asikainen, 2017). The representative for the company Miisa Asikainen agrees that customers would make a difference on company's sustainability if they would come up with something new that they haven't: *"They do influence if they ask for example of how we do something and could we do it better. Any how we have thought of so many things already"* (Asikainen, 2017). The last quote shows that again there could be noticed a bit presumptuous self-observation, as if really sustainability aware and conscious customer would not come up with something new. Or that might show the lack of communication between company and its customers, as they haven't really approached them with some suggestions or questions. Likely, BWF doesn't think that they are so much influenced by their customers, as they say they creating the customer demand and *"currently we are not responding to a customer demand, we are creating a customer demand."* (Ivang, 2017). On the other hand, Reimer Ivang also sounds hopeful for the impacts resulting in the future: *"we will hopefully get to a position, where the consumers will start demanding things from us that would make us more sustainable"* (Ivang, 2017). AMOV's Kasper Eis keeps faith regarding future related impacts stemming from customers: *"I'm sure they can come with a lot of comments over time and help us develop a better system"* (Eis, 2017).

All in all, it seems that sustainable fashion brands are hoping for mutual influencing process going both ways, to and from customers for achieving a bigger goal towards sustainable consumption. And for that to happen it is important to have particular knowledge about customers and know what are they interested or how to make them more sustainable consumption- aware citizens.

Positive feedback

As the sustainable consumption promoting initiatives are engaging customers towards closer connection with sustainable fashion brands, it is interesting to see how close they are to the customers and what they know about them in terms of their sustainable consciousness. The companies share the observations they get from their customers and most of them believe they have quite good insight about them. Most of them acknowledge

they get support from their customers. MUD Jeans shows the positive feedback they get: *“I don’t hear many concerns from my customers, they feel secure with the FairWear foundation, and I don’t hear much about it honestly... We are lucky with most of the customers that get their jeans are very happy with the quality and the fit and everything, and they write about it, so it important that people are posting pictures of MUD Jeans somewhere on Instagram, are important, that’s the way we do it now”* (Van Son, 2017). It shows that customers trust the foundation that company works with and also additionally they like MUD Jeans garments’ quality and what is more interesting Bert van Son mentions that customers share the positive feedback on social media, which is working as a marketing for the company.

AMOV’s knowledge sounds similar about customers being happy with the style, quality of the fabrics, and seems that customers like the changes between AMOV’s collections: *“the feedback that I get is that the newest collection we are making are much better than the oldest ones. I get that the old collection is kind of boring and now they feel that something is happening...A lot of people comment of the quality of the fabric and they think that the quality is very good”* (Eis, 2017). BWF also has insight about positive comments from their customers, regarding their business model element: *“Most consumers believe this is a brilliant idea [the buy-back] ...there is a lot of consumers that say it makes sense, because “why should I have so much clothes in my dressing room?””* (Ivang, 2017).

More specific detailed feedback is get from customers at BWF, as they want to understand better how to treat the leather jackets better. That kind of feedback shows that not enough information is provided to customers about treatment the leather goods or it is not clear enough, especially in a more sustainable matter. Reimer Ivang shares the feedback: *“we get a lot of answers about how they should treat them, should they give leather fat, should they give them... colour... grease... those questions we get”* (Ivang, 2017). The more system focus related questions MUD Jeans get from customers is in relation to the initiatives’ to make sure that customers are doing it right: *“more about the system and about the leasing program we have, how it works, what they can or cannot do, if they can sell it online, send other jeans for us to recycle, those kind of questions, more about circular economy”* (Van Son, 2017).

In conclusion, it seems that customers are really staying in contact with sustainable fashion brands and bother to express positive feedback towards the brands. What is more, they ask

more specific questions regarding treatment of the garments during user phase. In addition, customers are really interested in sustainable consumption initiatives and bother to ask companies about it, so maybe it means that not enough information is shared with customers in terms of sustainable consumption opportunities. It just raises questions then, what if there was more information about how to treat and care about the sustainable garments more sustainably? Would then customers be acting more responsibly in terms of buying, using and disposing phases?

The portrait of the customer

As there are many different customers and the three of the companies seem to be quite young, it was interesting to investigate what they know about their customers, besides the actual feedback they get about their initiatives. All companies seem to think that they know their customers and they categorize consumers in two groups. The first one would consist of customers who are conscious about negative impacts stemming from the fashion industry and choosing deliberately to consume sustainably. Those customers prefer sustainable fashion brands because of their dedication to sustainability and all of the interviewed companies share some insight about the conscious customer. All companies agree that this kind of customers make a great share of their customers' base. It is interesting to see that companies aim for both kinds of consumers, and they think they reach what they aim for, as they see their customers not only as sustainability oriented people, but also as the ones who are attracted to SFB by their clothing features that doesn't involve sustainability features. AMOV quite elaborately describes their customers: *"one category are people who just prefer to live in a more organic and sustainable way... a certain part of our customers buy AMOV, because it is sustainable, so I think they already kind of know what is going on with the word and you know they take more clever decisions going forward"* (Eis, 2017). BWF talk about a community of their customers who are aware and conscious about their choices: *"Our consumers are a community of people that would like to do the right thing when it's possible... Our consumers are consumers not so much within a specific age and within specific gender... Our consumers have a common interest, a community around sustainable shopping"* (Ivang, 2017). MUD Jeans has a similar view and Bert van Son even names some parts of this eco-friendly customers, like vegans, which show that they are

caring about sustainability not only in fashion but also in their food choices: *“Most of our customers are not only thinking in fashion more sustainable, but their whole lifestyle...this whole society of vegan people, which is fast growing, like our brands”* (Van Son, 2017).

Globe Hope also joins the other companies towards having environmentally conscious customers: *“A lot of our customers are really conscious consumers”* (Asikainen, 2017).

The other group of customers could be called traditional or fashion/style oriented customers, who prefer style than sustainable attribute for choosing what garment to buy.

This kind of customers care more about fashion, style, looks, expressing themselves through particular clothes. It opposes the myth that sustainable clothes are very unstylish and boring, as people without sustainability consciousness are purchasing the garments. It means that the style of sustainable clothing also be one of attributes to promote buying sustainable instead of unsustainable items. Most of the companies share the same opinion about having this kind of customers. Globe Hope acknowledged the fact that their customers' sector is changing and growing: *“Our customers are nowadays a wide variety of people. Our customers used to be mainly sustainably living conscious people but nowadays as it is more important to know the social impacts of the products you buy, we have had a lot wider customer base”* (Asikainen, 2017). BWF joins Globe Hope: *“I’m selling a lot of jackets to people that do not traditionally focus on sustainable textiles.”* (Ivang, 2017).

AMOV elaborated more about customers focusing more on AMOV products' style: *“the other part are people who like the style that we have, which is kind of minimalistic, sporty, basic, and then it happens to be organic, which is fine but they buy it basically more because of the style, not because its sustainable.”* (Eis, 2017). To sum up, MUD Jeans has quite interesting and business like attitude about customers' preferences when considering fashion choices: *“that customers are not really interested in buying green, customers are want to have first of all, a great pair of jeans at a good price, at a reasonable price, the stitching has to be fantastic, the service has to be fantastic”* (Van Son, 2017).

To sum up (Figure 11), most of sustainable fashion brands admit the importance to take care of sustainability on both sides of supply chain (production and consumption), except one- MUD Jeans. EPR could one of the solutions for companies to make sure they are taking care of SC of their products. Today, the interviewed SFB promote sustainable consumption among customers mostly without actually naming it, through CE inspired initiatives, which include producing organically, upcycling, taking-back or selling second-hand clothes,

designing products for longevity, repairing and leasing. What is interesting, without encouraging customers to buy their own brand, Globe Hope suggest their customers to purchase other sustainable brands, as well. When it comes to treatment of the clothes during the user phase, all interviewed SFB give some advice, but admit they could give more. Companies believe in mutual influencing process with their customers, even though they don't experience impacts from customers' side yet. The feedback they get, is mostly positive and the questions include about the systems and the details of taking care about the products. All SFB acknowledge the two kinds of customers they have- conscious about sustainability and more style oriented consumers.

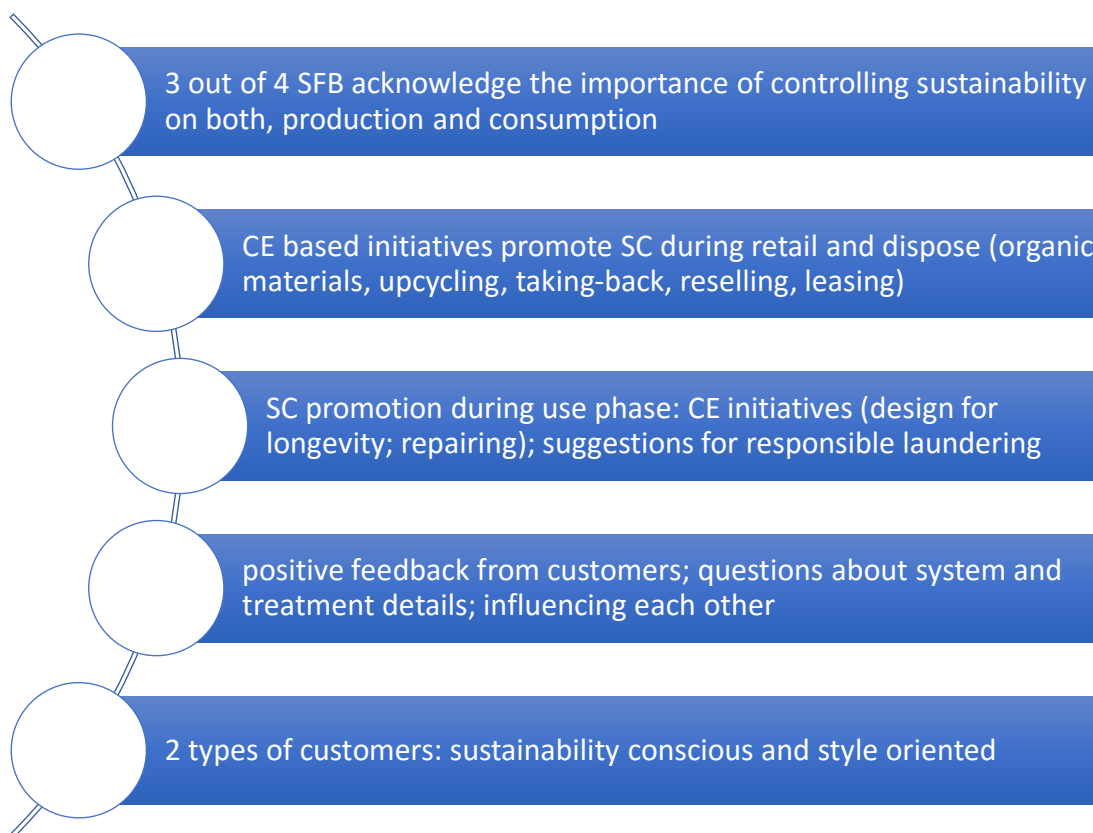


Figure 11. 2nd sub-question answer summary

CONCLUSION

The following chapter concludes what is learned during the research and answers the research question.

There is a definite need for sustainable transition to happen in fashion industry and there are many important actors, among whom the sustainable fashion brands are one. Businesses play an important role in creating and fulfilling society's demand for goods, but it not necessary has to be unsustainable demand. Thus, sustainable fashion brands could be driving society towards becoming more sustainable when consuming clothing. The main goal of the research was to answer how SFB are promoting SC among customers.

The 1st sub-question was asking how SFB can be defined in order to answer the main research question. When it comes to answering the 1st sub-question, it is important to note that that there are many different synonyms for sustainable fashion and what makes the matter worse, there is no standard for sustainable label. This fact causes a lot of chaos and lack of clarity, which lets particular negative tendency to grow- greenwashing. Some sustainable fashion brands express a negative attitude towards companies using greenwashing with their customers and when it comes to their opinion about themselves, they state that they try to be as sustainable as possible, though admit not being perfect. Another important insight about SFB, is that they want to reach both parts of consumers, conscious about sustainability and the ones who are not, and that might be connected why they try to approach them in an easy and fun way, without pushing too hard. Additional data that was derived from interviews shows insight about the most common challenges that SFB face today. It is dealing with the limited budget, the price for sustainable products being higher than for fast fashion goods, consumers' reluctance towards sustainable brands and retailers' acceptance.

The second sub-question was dealing with actual SFB's efforts towards SC among customers through actual initiatives. The research shows that most of the companies acknowledge the fact that SFB should control sustainability among both parts of supply chain, production and consumption, except one- MUD Jeans. And quite a strong recommendation could be EPR or product's stewardship that SFB could willingly dedicate to. Regarding actual activities that companies carry out in relation to SC promotion among their costumers, the CE based business model's initiatives are the answer. All of the interviewed companies have most of

the CE inspired activities, which operate in all the circles of CE concept in Figure 7, except for AMOV, as some of them are not ready yet. SC promotion among customers can be expressed through consumption part of the supply chain through purchasing sustainably produced products, treating the garment responsibly during the user phase and disposing sustainably. Most of the companies encouraged their customers to buy sustainably produced products, and one of the interviewed (Globe Hope) is actually suggesting them to buy other SFB's products, as well. When it comes to user phase, all interviewed companies share some tips of how to treat their products sustainably, but also admit they could be more elaborative on this matter. And the disposal stage is taken care with CE based initiatives, such as upcycling, reusing/selling second-hand, taking back the used clothes, leasing. What is more, the designing for longevity and repairing slows down the consumption during user phase for customers. As the circular economy based business model has an essential connection to customers and their participating in the post-retail initiatives, additional data about was obtained about SFB's knowledge and insight on their customers. Some tendencies were noticed: SFB believe in mutual cooperation with their customers in influencing each other to become more sustainable. What is more, sustainable fashion companies say their customers share a positive feedback about the brands and the only questions they get is regarding the garments' treatment details or the system of the initiatives, for example, leasing. What is interesting, all companies notice that the variety of their customers' base is expanding, as there are now two kind of customers buying sustainable fashion: the sustainability oriented and style/fashion motivated customer.

To sum up, the companies that were interviewed are considered to be SFB according to literature, besides chaos on the standard in industry. The actual way that SFB promote sustainable consumption is mostly expressed through CE business model initiatives, though more direct connection to sustainable consumption could be voiced and EPR could one of the ways to be more engaged with SC.

FUTURE RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Master thesis research could not include all of the interesting topics that came up during the research or that were omitted due to the limitations. But those topics or different angles could be included in future research regarding sustainable consumption among customers.

If continuing with the topic, it would be appealing to actually try to go even deeper with what are companies' positions towards engaging with products stewardship (EPR). It would also be interesting get better insight about the user phase of the consumption part and whether SFB try to teach and make consumers are treating their garments as sustainably as possible.

As it was one of the first ideas to include customers' opinions about the topic, but due to limited time the research could not be carried out, it would be interesting to go deeper in sustainable consumption topic through customers' perspective and learning about their reaction to SFB efforts for SC.

Another significant player in the sustainable transition is governmental and non-governmental organizations and it would be intriguing to get their insight on the SC among customers, and what is done, what is lacking, how to change it, etc. The possible future research could also focus more on lack of sustainable label or standard in the industry.

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