

# Overcoming barriers for sustainable fashion: bridging attitude-behaviour gap in retail

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to explore the attitude-behaviour gap consumers experience when transitioning from buying fast fashion to embracing sustainable fashion consumption. Despite being driven to make sustainable fashion purchases, consumers are confronted with certain retail barriers that impede them from making the shift.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study draws from the theory of planned behaviour and the behavioural-reasoning theory approaches to theoretically develop and assess five key fashion consumption barriers that moderate the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption motivations and actual behaviour. These are the steep price of sustainable fashion, low visibility, restricted availability, limited cognisance of the deleterious consequences of fast fashion and low trust in sustainability claims. Under heightened levels of moderators, the relationship between motivation and behaviour was predicted to be weaker. The author's data sample of 376 consumers validated the hypotheses.

**Findings** – This article contributes to the field of sustainable fashion retail consumption in three ways: (1) it reveals that the expensive cost of sustainable fashion is not an obstacle to its adoption, and consumers are willing to pay more but struggle to access the styles they prefer; (2) it unveils that, in contrast to recent scholarship, the lack of knowledge of the adverse environmental effects of fast fashion is still a barrier to transitioning to sustainability and (3) it implies that consumers are less motivated to lower their consumption of clothing when they feel dubious about fashion companies' sustainability claims.

**Originality/value** – The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge on green consumption by shedding light on the complex dynamics between moderating factors and the transition from intention to behaviour in sustainable fashion consumption.

**Keywords** Sustainable fashion, Fashion retailing, Fast fashion, Sustainable consumption, Slow fashion

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

The fashion industry is one of the most polluting economic sectors globally (United Nations, 2019). The advent of “fast fashion” and “ultra-fast fashion” has been a prevailing phenomenon in the industry since the dawn of the 21st century (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015; Camargo *et al.*, 2020) and has seen an exponential rise with the emergence of e-commerce (Bhatt *et al.*, 2021; Ratchford *et al.*, 2023). This type of clothing is characterised by being mass-produced at high speed with methods and processes that necessitate significant quantities of natural resources, leading to environmental degradation (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, fast-fashion retailers often outsource production to developing countries with cheaper labour costs (Henninger and Singh, 2017), leading to difficulties in controlling supply chain operations and poor working conditions (Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021), and potential human rights violations (Bly *et al.*, 2015). The disposable nature of fast fashion results from frequent collection launches and low-quality garments (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015), leading consumers to dispose of clothing quickly, contributing to waste and fashion obsolescence (Henninger and Singh, 2017; Bly *et al.*, 2015, p. 125).

In recent years, consumer awareness has led to an increase in demand for more sustainable clothing consumption amongst fast-fashion retailers (Dagilienė *et al.*, 2022; Evans *et al.*, 2022; Ross *et al.*, 2022). This shift is known as “slow fashion” consumption, prioritises environmental protection and social fairness (Liu *et al.*, 2017). Consumers have embraced



sustainable approaches such as advocating for eco-friendly production methods, purchasing second-hand clothing, and exploring fashion rentals (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Kim *et al.*, 2021; Lee and Chow, 2020). These trends have been influenced by eco-fashion movements and minimalism for sustainable living (Wagner *et al.*, 2019; Shafqat *et al.*, 2023). However, despite the growing awareness, some consumers, especially women and younger generations, continue to buy unsustainably produced garments, influenced by the allure of low-priced fast-fashion goods, as explained by the behavioural-reasoning theory (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Diddi *et al.*, 2019; Koay *et al.*, 2022).

Building upon prior research on the attitude-behaviour gap in green consumption (Jägel *et al.*, 2012; Shen *et al.*, 2012; McNeill and Moore, 2015; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018), this article comprehensively examines the attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable fashion retail consumption. The study makes a triple contribution: firstly, it explores diverse motivations driving consumers towards sustainable fashion consumption; secondly, it investigates various contextual retail barriers hindering the transition to sustainable fashion; and finally, it examines the moderating effect of these barriers on consumer motivations, offering insights into the existence of the attitude-behaviour gap.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1 Sustainable fashion consumption: the attitude-behaviour gap

Since the 1960s, fashion consumers have become increasingly aware of the environmental impacts of the fast-fashion industry's unsustainable supply chain systems (Diddi *et al.*, 2019). This awareness has led some consumers to adopt sustainable practices, including advocating for sustainable production (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Dagilienė *et al.*, 2022), purchasing second-hand garments (Kim *et al.*, 2021; Evans *et al.*, 2022; Ross *et al.*, 2022), and engaging in fashion renting (Lee and Chow, 2020). Unsustainable fashion production and consumption not only lead to pollution from hazardous materials but also raise concerns about safe and fair working conditions (Jung and Jin, 2016; Shen *et al.*, 2012; Liu *et al.*, 2017). The growing awareness since the 1980s has made contemporary consumers more conscious of the environmental and social implications of their fashion choices.

Sustainable fashion encompasses the entire life cycle of retail garments, addressing material selection, design, production, transportation, maintenance, and disposal (Henninger and Singh, 2017; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021). It aims to reduce the environmental impact of fashion and improve garment workers' welfare and security (Henninger and Singh, 2017). Sustainable fashion producers prioritise natural fibres and fabrics that consume less energy and water, as well as fair working conditions and wages for workers (Berger-Grabner, 2018; Shen *et al.*, 2012; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021). However, these practices can lead to higher production costs and retail prices compared to mass-produced alternatives (Jung and Jin, 2016). Slow fashion consumption advocates for preserving environmental resources, minimising ecological impacts, and promoting sustainable development (Peattie, 2010). In this study, sustainable fashion consumption is defined as fashion consumption driven by environmental and resource concerns, reflecting a broader societal welfare perspective (adapted from Nguyen *et al.*, 2018, p. 2).

Sustainable consumption has gained increasing attention in the literature (Wagner *et al.*, 2019; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2023), particularly regarding consumer decision-making. The theory of planned behaviour, specifically the hierarchical model of value-attitude-behaviour proposed by Peattie (2010), is the leading framework for understanding this process. According to this theory, an individual's intention to engage in specific consumption behaviour is determined by their motivations, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1991). This theory effectively explains the adoption of sustainable behaviour in various sectors, such as food consumption (Pozharliev *et al.*, 2023) and generic green consumption (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018).

However, recent studies on green consumption have revealed conflicting results regarding the attitude-behaviour correlation (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Diddi *et al.*, 2019). Despite the assumed strong correlation between positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption and actual behaviour, many consumers who express a strong motivation to consume responsibly do not consistently act accordingly (Peattie, 2010). As a result, although most consumers exhibit positive attitudes towards sustainable consumption, they often do not change their consumption habits to align with those values, leading to an attitude-behaviour gap (Echegaray and Hansstein, 2017; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018).

The attitude-behaviour gap, also known as the intention-behaviour gap, has been extensively studied in psychological and medical research related to health promotion (Echegaray and Hansstein, 2017; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). This phenomenon is explained by the behavioural-reasoning theory (Diddi *et al.*, 2019), which posits that there is a discrepancy between the attitudes and behaviour of individuals motivated to adopt specific behaviours (e.g. having a more active lifestyle) but who struggle to translate those motivations into action.

The attitude-behaviour gap framework is increasingly crucial in sustainable consumption research to understand the low rates of adopting sustainable practices (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018), such as recycling (Echegaray and Hansstein, 2017) or using renewable energy (Claudy *et al.*, 2013). The literature suggests that predictive models should include adoption barriers as moderating constructs of sustainable behaviour, as these barriers hinder the adoption of sustainable practices (Claudy *et al.*, 2013). When adoption barriers are high, the relationship between motivation and behaviour weakens (Claudy *et al.*, 2013; Nguyen *et al.*, 2018). Such barriers can include habits, lifestyles, ethical factors (Gleim *et al.*, 2013; Lee and Chow, 2020; Koay *et al.*, 2022), convenience and performance beliefs (Silva *et al.*, 2021; Roh *et al.*, 2022; Kim and Kim, 2022), and economic costs (Hedegård *et al.*, 2020). Thus, reducing adoption barriers allows motivational factors to translate more effectively into action.

The attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable fashion retailing has been extensively studied, revealing that despite awareness of sustainable consumption benefits, consumers often choose mainstream fast-fashion brands (Henninger *et al.*, 2016; Diddi *et al.*, 2019). Whilst attitude-behaviour gap models with the moderation effect of adoption barriers have been proposed in green consumption research (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018), sustainable fashion consumption research has yet to explore how retail barriers moderate the impact of motivation on sustainable fashion consumption. This study aims to uncover the attitude-behaviour gap in the fashion industry by examining the moderation effect of adoption barriers.

## *2.2 Motivations towards sustainable fashion consumption*

The motivational antecedents of attitudes towards sustainable consumption have been extensively studied in green consumption research (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018; Diddi *et al.*, 2019) and have gained increasing attention in the context of social commerce (Kim and Yoon, 2021; Zafar *et al.*, 2021). This study aims to extend the model results by re-examining the relationships between specific motivations towards sustainable consumption and behaviour. Prior studies have shown that reasons for buying sustainable fashion are linked to perceived product attributes (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Roh *et al.*, 2022; Kautish *et al.*, 2022) and individual factors (Van Tonder *et al.*, 2023). Sustainable fashion attributes can be tangible, such as price or production materials, or intangible, such as fair working conditions (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021). Individual factors include social and personal criteria, internal values, or subjective norms (Roh *et al.*, 2022; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, consumer motivations for purchasing sustainable fashion can be categorised into four themes: reduction of consumption, self-image, environmental concern, and social concern (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; McNeill and Moore, 2015).

*2.2.1 Motivational theme 1 – the reduction of consumption.* The reduction of consumption represents a paradigm shift in consumer values towards sustainable living (Shafqat *et al.*, 2023; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2023). Embracing trends like minimalism and consumer well-being leads to increased positive emotions and reduced negative emotions, contributing to overall positive emotional well-being (Shafqat *et al.*, 2023). Sustainable garment attributes that facilitate reduced fashion consumption include higher price, quality, extended durability, and performance (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Kautish *et al.*, 2022). A higher price signals superior garment quality and can influence budget-conscious consumers (Jägel *et al.*, 2012). Garment quality and performance lead to longer lifespans, encouraging consumers to use them more frequently before disposal (Zarley Watson and Yan, 2013). These attributes motivate consumers to invest in high-quality garments, appreciate their value, and decrease the frequency and quantity of their purchases (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Van Tonder *et al.*, 2023).

- H1.* The engagement of consumers in sustainable fashion consumption behaviour is explained by motivational theme 1 – reduction of consumption – such that the more the consumer is motivated to reduce their consumption, the stronger the positive causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.2.2 Motivational theme 2 – the self-image.* Fashion consumption is intrinsically linked to individuals' desire to express their self-identity and self-perception (Roggeveen *et al.*, 2021). This aligns with the self-concept theory, which posits that possessions, including clothing, play a crucial role in representing people's identities (Belk, 1988). Past studies have shown that clothing serves as a mechanism for individuals to identify themselves and others, influencing social hierarchies and fashion choices (McNeill and Moore, 2015). As a result, individuals seek clothing that aligns with their self-image, expresses their inner meanings, and boosts their confidence when worn (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Lundblad and Davies, 2016).

Within sustainable fashion, consumers are drawn to the category's unique styles that deviate from fast-fashion industry trends (Evans *et al.*, 2022). They search for timeless garments that complement their style and self-image (Zarley Watson and Yan, 2013). Moreover, slow fashion's seasonless style and versatility allow consumers to wear these garments in various styles across different seasons, offering a sense of stylishness (Jung and Jin, 2014; Evans *et al.*, 2022). Consumers also prioritise sustainable fashion that fits their body contours and utilises soft fabrics made from natural materials, promoting skin health and a positive sense of well-being when wearing such clothing (Zarley Watson and Yan, 2013; Lundblad and Davies, 2016).

- H2.* The engagement of consumers in sustainable fashion consumption behaviours is explained by motivational theme 2 – the self-image – such that the more the consumer is motivated to express their self-image, the stronger the positive causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.2.3 Motivational theme 3 – the environmental concern.* Characteristics associated with environmental awareness in the context of sustainable fashion include environmental-friendly manufacturing processes, the use of natural materials, and local production, which motivate individuals to protect the environment and reduce resource usage and waste (Jägel *et al.*, 2012; Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Koay *et al.*, 2022). Consumers are drawn to sustainable apparel made using processes with minimal environmental impact or a low footprint (Niinimäki *et al.*, 2020; Zafar *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, the use of natural materials that reduce water and energy consumption and lower carbon emissions encourages consumers to purchase sustainable garments (Berger-Grabner, 2018). Local production also influences consumers' intention to buy sustainable garments, as it utilises nearby resources (McNeill

and Moore, 2015; Rybaczevska and Sparks, 2020) and minimises transportation effects (Jung and Jin, 2016; Hedegård *et al.*, 2020).

- H3. The engagement of consumers in sustainable fashion consumption behaviours is explained by motivational theme 3 – environmental concern – such that the more the consumer is motivated to protect the environment, the stronger the positive causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.2.4 Motivational theme 4 – the social concern.* The attributes associated with social concern that drive individuals to support fair labour practices and local communities in sustainable fashion include proper working conditions, fair wages, and local production (Lundblad and Davies, 2016; Rybaczevska and Sparks, 2020; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021). Sustainable fashion's significant influence on consumers' decisions to invest in it lies in its commitment to ensuring fair working conditions for labourers (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021). This entails respecting workers' rights, advocating for equality, and ensuring fair wages for all producers and workers. Consumers aim to avoid contributing to the exploitation of workers, as this causes feelings of remorse (Balsiger, 2015). Furthermore, supporting local business and communities by purchasing locally-produced clothing items is an expression of consumers' commitment to social concerns (Jung and Jin, 2016). Thus, these attributes motivate consumers to refrain from supporting exploitation, reduce guilt, and strengthen local communities through sustainable fashion consumption.

- H4. The engagement of consumers in sustainable fashion consumption behaviours is explained by motivational theme 3 – social concern – such that the more the consumer is motivated to protect fair social conditions, the stronger the positive causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

### *2.3 Barriers towards sustainable fashion consumption*

The literature identifies five barriers hindering consumer adoption of sustainable fashion: high price, lack of knowledge and misconceptions, limited availability, low awareness of fast fashion's adverse effects, and lack of trust in sustainability claims. Addressing these barriers is crucial when seeking solutions for sustainable retail (Hedegård *et al.*, 2020).

*2.3.1 Barrier 1 – the high price of sustainable fashion.* The financial burden associated with sustainable fashion often hinders customers from transitioning to such clothing (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Moon *et al.*, 2015; Davoudi *et al.*, 2023). Limited budget individuals face challenges finding sustainable fashion products that match their preferences (Lundblad and Davies, 2016) and, therefore, opt for affordable garments from fast-fashion companies (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Additionally, some customers are hesitant to pay a significant premium for sustainable clothing, especially when they perceive limited tangible benefits (Bray *et al.*, 2011; Sadiq *et al.*, 2021; Alyahya *et al.*, 2023).

- H5. The high price of sustainable fashion moderates the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption motivation and behaviour. The higher the price of sustainable fashion is, the weaker the causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.3.2 Barrier 2 – the lack of knowledge and misconceptions about sustainable fashion.* The lack of knowledge about sustainable fashion is a relevant barrier that hinders consumers from making appropriate purchases (Connell, 2010; Bray *et al.*, 2011). Some consumers believe that sustainable fashion items lack visual appeal and proper fit, often associating them with unattractive fabrics that are out of touch with current fashion trends (McNeill and Moore, 2015). Moreover, the cluttered and disorganised setups of sustainable or second-hand stores contribute to the negative reputation of sustainable clothing (Ross *et al.*, 2022). Although

perceptions have evolved over the last decade due to the popularity of second-hand stores and online platforms, second-hand clothing still carries a stigma, particularly amongst unfamiliar shoppers (Silva *et al.*, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2022; Valor *et al.*, 2022). This erroneous image of sustainable fashion acts as a hindrance for customers when considering the switch to sustainable fashion.

- H6. The lack of knowledge and misconceptions about sustainable fashion moderates the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption motivation and behaviour. The less information about there is sustainable fashion, the weaker the causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.3.3 Barrier 3 – the low availability of sustainable fashion.* Limited availability of retailers selling sustainable clothing is another barrier that hinders the transition to sustainable fashion (Goworek *et al.*, 2012). Many consumers are aware of only a few options, primarily accessible online (Lee and Chow, 2020; Kim *et al.*, 2021; Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). This limited availability poses challenges for consumers in finding and purchasing sustainable garments, leading them to rely on mainstream stores for their clothing needs (Moon *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, consumers often struggle to find sustainably produced clothes with desired characteristics, particularly in categories like casual wear, due to limited garment variety (Connell, 2010; Evans *et al.*, 2022). Fast-fashion retailers offer an overwhelming array of styles through e-commerce, drop-shipping, and subscription services, making it difficult for customers to find specific clothing items like business attire, footwear, and underwear (Bhatt *et al.*, 2021; Sodero *et al.*, 2021).

- H7. The low availability of sustainable fashion garments moderates the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption motivation and behaviour. The lower the availability of sustainable fashion garments, the weaker the causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.3.4 Barrier 4 – the low awareness of the adverse effects of fast fashion.* A lack of awareness regarding the environmentally damaging techniques used in fast fashion and the sweatshop conditions of fashion workers worldwide is another barrier to consumers adopting sustainable consumption (Shen *et al.*, 2012; Bianchi and Gonzalez, 2021). Many shoppers are unaware of the environmental impact of certain fabrics, making it challenging to differentiate between eco-friendly materials and those with a high carbon footprint (Connell, 2010). Moreover, the majority of fashion consumers lack awareness of the negative consequences of unsustainable fashion on society, leading to potential boycott and resistance behaviours (Sadiq *et al.*, 2021; Alyahya *et al.*, 2023). Fast-fashion companies' lack of transparency about outsourced production processes creates long supply chains where ethical requirements are difficult to guarantee, further exacerbating the problem (Diddi *et al.*, 2019; Camargo *et al.*, 2020).

- H8. The low awareness of the adverse effects of fast fashion moderates the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption motivation and behaviour. The lower the awareness of the negative effects of fast fashion, the weaker the causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

*2.3.5 Barrier 5 – the lack of trust in sustainability claims.* Consumers may question the durability and efficiency of sustainable products (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Additionally, as sustainable fashion gains popularity, numerous corporations use appealing terms like “eco-friendly” or “sustainable” in their marketing to attract consumers, leading to greenwashing and fostering scepticism about the authenticity of such claims (Berger-Grabner, 2018, p. 171). Global fast-fashion brands introducing sustainable collections also face scepticism, as customers question the sincerity of their initiatives amid continued



production of fast-fashion lines (Roh *et al.*, 2022; Zafar *et al.*, 2021). Some consumers require more evidence than an eco-friendly label to believe in fashion companies' sustainable practices (Goworek *et al.*, 2012; Sadiq *et al.*, 2021). As a response, fashion retailers have relied on trusted intermediaries like celebrity influencers to promote sustainable garments instead of solely depending on their corporate social responsibility claims (Johnstone and Lindh, 2022). The presence of scepticism and greenwashing practices creates a barrier to transitioning to sustainable fashion.

H9. The lack of trust in sustainability claims moderates the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption motivation and behaviour. The lower the trust, the weaker the causal relationship between motivation and behaviour.

Figure 1 shows the assessed model based on Nguyen *et al.*'s (2018) green consumption behaviour model, incorporating various control variables to ensure result reliability.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Sample collection

The data were collected from consumers in a major Spanish city via an online survey created in Google Forms, distributed through email, social media, and instant messaging (IM) platforms (Instagram, Facebook and WhatsApp) for six weeks. Ultimately, 376 useable questionnaires were obtained, with respondents ranging in age from under 18 to over 55, and 73.4% falling in the 16–40 age bracket. The sample comprised 78.2% females, and 74.9% had a monthly income of €2,000 or more. The sample size of around one million inhabitants in the metropolitan area ensured representation of the studied population with 95% confidence (Tejada and Punzalan, 2012).

3.2 Questionnaire design

The survey outlined “sustainable fashion” to guarantee all participants understood the term: “clothing that is designed, produced, distributed, and used in ways that are eco-friendly along with ways that value social welfare and worker rights”. Subsequently, respondents were shown four screens with enquiries. The first screen covered demographic questions, whilst

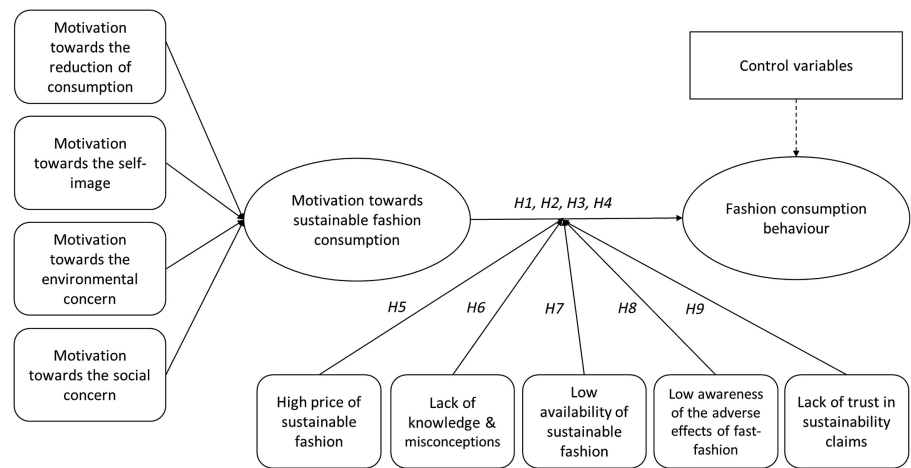


Figure 1. Sustainable fashion consumption behaviour — tested model

Source(s): Figure by author

the second screen focussed on fashion consumption behaviours followed by three claims referring to Fashion consumption attitudes respondents had to agree or disagree with through a Likert-type format scale in which respondents had to choose, according to their beliefs, an option from 1 to 5, 1 meaning “totally disagree” and 5 “totally agree”. The third screen included Likert-type scale questions measuring four motivational themes adapted from Jägel *et al.* (2012), Jung and Jin (2016), Lundblad and Davies (2016), McNeill and Moore (2015), and Zarley Watson and Yan (2013), with respondents selecting options from 1 to 5, indicating “totally disagree” to “totally agree.”. On the fourth screen, respondents selected barriers to sustainable fashion consumption from a list adapted from Diddi *et al.* (2019), Lundblad and Davies (2016), Bray *et al.* (2011), and Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik (2015) that they believed hindered their change.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations

Descriptive statistics reveal an attitude-behaviour gap in fashion consumers (Table 1). Whilst 33.2% of participants feel no guilt when buying fast fashion, 64.1% are willing to pay more for sustainably produced fashion, and 68.3% believe it is fair to do so. However, 71.5% still shop at fast-fashion stores, suggesting that moral concerns do not consistently influence individual behaviour (McDonough and Braungart, 2010; Burcikova, 2019).

The Cronbach's alpha of the constructs exceeds the 0.60 cut-off value, confirming the reliability and consistency of the identified constructs from the literature review. Bivariate correlation analyses (Table 2) reveal the presence of the four motivational themes in fashion consumption as outlined in the theoretical framework, representing two distinct consumer profiles. One profile exhibits “motivational theme 2 – the self-image” but does not engage in sustainable fashion consumption behaviours. These consumers buy fashion frequently, spend more money per month on it (0.425\*\*), and make impulsive purchase decisions (0.359\*\*). They show an affinity for unique styles in sustainable garments (0.231\*\*) and the confidence derived from wearing such apparel (0.164\*\*). However, they do not prioritise item durability or longevity (−0.137\*\*) and tend to dispose of their purchases rapidly after acquisition (0.225\*\*).

The second consumer profile exhibits “motivational theme 1 – reduction of consumption”, “motivational theme 3 – environmental concern”, and “motivational theme 4 – social concern”. These individuals genuinely prioritise various dimensions of sustainability in fashion, including responsible use of energy, water, and chemicals (0.483\*\*). They also value clothing comfort and versatility (0.157\*\*) and feel confident when wearing sustainable apparel (0.152\*\*). Durability of fashion items is significant to them (0.128\*), as they aim to extend the lifespan of their garments (0.397\*\*). They are willing to invest more in sustainable and superior quality clothing (0.436\*\* and 0.147\*\*, respectively). Additionally, they experience remorse when consuming unsustainable fashion, leading them to seek alternatives like purchasing sustainable garments to alleviate this guilt (0.297\*\*).

### 4.2 Hypotheses testing

The dependent variable, *Unsustainable Fashion Consumption Behaviour*, was created by averaging the scores of its constituent items. *Motivational Themes* were utilised as independent variables, each variable being the average of item scores for its respective theme. *Barriers Towards Sustainable Fashion Consumption* served as moderation variables, with each variable being the average of item scores for its respective barrier. Z-scores were calculated for all dependent, independent, and moderation variables to achieve normalcy in the sample. Multiplication variables were created by multiplying the moderators (barriers) and the independent variables (motivational themes) to examine moderation effects.



**Table 1.**  
Descriptive statistics of  
sustainable fashion  
consumption attitudes  
and fashion  
consumption  
behaviour, *n* = 376

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Sustainable fashion consumption attitudes</i>		
“I am willing to pay a higher price for clothing that has been produced in a sustainable manner”		
Totally disagree	7	1.9%
Disagree	38	10.1%
Neutral	90	23.9%
Agree	120	31.9%
Totally agree	121	32.2%
“I believe that it is fair that sustainable clothes are more expensive to cover higher production costs”		
Totally disagree	6	1.6%
Disagree	17	4.5%
Neutral	96	25.5%
Agree	149	39.6%
Totally agree	108	28.7%
“I feel guilty when I purchase fast-fashion and non-guilty when I purchase sustainable fashion”		
Totally disagree	48	12.8%
Disagree	63	16.8%
Neutral	140	37.2%
Agree	72	19.1%
Totally agree	53	14.1%
Fashion consumption behaviour		
Average monthly expenditure on fashion		
Less than 50€	163	43.4%
50–99€	139	37.0%
100–200€	59	15.7%
More than 200€	15	4.0%
<i>Fashion purchase frequency</i>		
Once per year or less	44	11.7%
Once every three months	178	47.3%
Once a month	133	35.4%
Once a week	19	5.1%
Once a week or more	2	0.5%
<i>Nature of the purchase decision</i>		
Necessity	204	54.3%
Impulse	149	39.6%
Both	23	6.1%
<i>Type of shop</i>		
Fast-fashion store	269	71.5%
Sustainable fashion store	46	12.4%
Second-hand store	27	7.3%
Street market	3	0.7%
Small local shop	19	5.0%
Branded store	10	2.6%
Exclusive boutique	2	0.5%
<b>Source(s):</b> Table by author		

However, to avoid correlations between the multiplication variables and the independent variables, mean-centring was applied before taking the multiplication. Control variables, including gender, age, household size, income level, and price sensitivity of green products, were included to ensure result reliability. The proposed models were tested using ordinary least squares (OLS) Regressions (Nguyen *et al.*, 2018).

Two regression models, M1 and M2, were tested to establish *Unsustainable Fashion Consumption Behaviour* as the dependent variable (Table 3). The whole model (M2) had a

	Fashion consumption behaviour					"I dispose of my clothes fast and barely wear them"
	Monthly expenditure on fashion	Frequency of fashion shopping	Purchase out of necessity (0) vs impulse (1)	"I keep the clothes I buy for a long time"		
<i>Motivational themes (MT)</i>						
<i>MT1 – the reduction of consumption</i>						
– "I want my clothes to be of good quality"	0.135**	0.065+	–0.012	0.098		0.054
– "I want my clothes to last me a long time"	–0.077	–0.137**	–0.146**	0.397**		–0.059
– "I want to minimise my fashion consumption"	0.027	–0.048	–0.081	0.100		0.059
<i>MT2 – the self-image</i>						
– "I want my clothes to be comfortable"	0.021	0.025	0.058	0.227**		0.023
– "I want my clothes to have unique styles"	0.222**	0.231**	0.221**	–0.040		0.152**
– "I want to feel excellent and well-dressed in the clothes I wear"	0.180**	0.164**	0.193**	0.049		0.133*
<i>MT3 – the environmental concern</i>						
– "I want my clothes to be manufactured with natural materials that require less natural resources"	0.085	–0.086	0.004	0.130*		–0.033
– "I want my clothes to be produced locally"	0.082	–0.033	–0.035	–0.002		0.024
<i>MT4 – the social concern</i>						
– "I want my clothes to be manufactured by workers with fair salaries and working conditions"	0.039	–0.026	0.021	–0.049*		0.027
<i>Barriers</i>						
<i>Barrier 1 – the high price of sustainable fashion</i>						
– "Sustainable fashion is too expensive for me to afford it"	–0.233**	–0.019	–0.044	0.142**		–0.050
<i>Barrier 2 – the lack of knowledge and misconceptions</i>						
– "I have very little information about sustainable fashion and therefore do not think much about it"	0.062	–0.015	–0.031	0.000		–0.028
<i>Barrier 3 – the low availability of sustainable fashion</i>						
– "There are very few shops that sell sustainable fashion"	0.037	0.102*	0.021	–0.052		–0.090
					(continued)	

**Table 2.**  
Bivariate correlations among fashion consumption behaviour, motivational themes and barriers,  $n = 376$

	Fashion consumption behaviour				
	Monthly expenditure on fashion	Frequency of fashion shopping	Purchase out of necessity (0) vs impulse (1)	"I keep the clothes I buy for a long time"	"I dispose of my clothes fast and barely wear them"
– "I do not know where to find stores that sell sustainable fashion"	–0.104*	–0.047	0.047	0.022	–0.066
– "Sustainable fashion does not have much variety"	0.026	0.202**	0.133*	–0.121*	0.056
<i>Barrier 4 – the low awareness of the adverse effects of fast-fashion</i>					
– "I do not have much information about the adverse effects of fast-fashion in the environment and society"	0.053	0.046	–0.030	–0.100	0.126*
– "I do not have much information about the materials used in fashion and their impact on the environment"	0.014	0.004	–0.008	–0.023	0.015
– "I think those fashion companies that are not sustainable are not transparent"	0.012	0.089	0.137**	–0.032	–0.005
<i>Barrier 5 – the lack of trust in sustainability claims</i>					
– "I do not trust fashion companies when they say they are sustainable"	0.044	0.041	0.102*	0.085	0.025
<b>Note(s):</b> *** $p < 0.001$ ; ** $p < 0.01$ and * $p < 0.05$					
<b>Source(s):</b> Table by author					

Table 2.

higher  $R^2$  of 23% compared to the model without multiplication variables (M1). Results indicate that consumers motivated to reduce their consumption exhibit less unsustainable fashion consumption behaviour (–0.403\*\*). Conversely, consumers motivated by improving their self-image tend to consume clothes more unsustainably (0.599\*\*\*). Thus, H1 and H2 are supported, but there is insufficient evidence to support H3 and H4.

The moderation effect of barriers in motivational themes reveals the following results. The impact of "Motivational theme 2 – the self-image" is moderated by Barrier 1 – the high price of sustainable fashion – (–0.244+) and Barrier 3 – the low availability and variety of sustainable fashion – (0.179\*). Consumers motivated by their self-image may purchase more responsibly when sustainable clothes are pricier, but the lack of availability positively moderates their engagement in unsustainable consumption patterns. Barrier 4 – the low awareness of the adverse effects of fast fashion – positively moderates the impact of motivational themes 3 – the environmental concern – (0.155+) and 4 – the social concern – (0.001\*\*) in adopting an unsustainable fashion consumption behaviour. This suggests that consumers willing to reduce their negative social and environmental impact are not aware of fast fashion's adverse effects. Finally, the effect of Motivational theme 1 – reduction of

			Barriers for sustainable fashion
Variables	M1	M2	
Gender	1.079***	0.057***	
Age	0.044	0.050	
Working situation	−0.082	−0.064	
People in the household	−0.168	−0.136	
Monthly income	0.601***	0.613***	
The reduction of consumption ( <i>Z-score</i> )	−0.403**	−0.405**	
The self-image ( <i>Z-score</i> )	0.599***	0.641***	
The environmental concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )	−0.094	−0.078	
The social concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )	0.198	0.209	
The reduction of consumption ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The high price of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.136	
The reduction of consumption ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of knowledge and misconceptions ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.024	
The reduction of consumption ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low availability of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.063	
The reduction of consumption ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low awareness of the adverse effects of fast-fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.225	
The reduction of consumption ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of trust in sustainability claims ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.309+	
The self-image ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The high price of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.244+	
The self-image ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of knowledge and misconceptions ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.277	
The self-image ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low availability of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.179*	
The self-image ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low awareness of the adverse effects of fast-fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.140	
The self-image ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of trust in sustainability claims ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.171	
The environmental concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The high price of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.286	
The environmental concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of knowledge and misconceptions ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.072	
The environmental concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low availability of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.324	
The environmental concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low awareness of the adverse effects of fast-fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.155+	
The environmental concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of trust in sustainability claims ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.211	
The social concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The high price of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.115	
The social concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of knowledge and misconceptions ( <i>Z-score</i> )		−0.074	
The social concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low availability of sustainable fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.323	
The social concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The low awareness of the adverse effects of fast-fashion ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.001**	
The social concern ( <i>Z-score</i> )×The lack of trust in sustainability claims ( <i>Z-score</i> )		0.113	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	16.1%	23.0%	
Observations	376	376	
<b>Note(s):</b> *** <i>p</i> < 0.001; ** <i>p</i> < 0.01; * <i>p</i> < 0.05 and + <i>p</i> < 0.1 <b>Source(s):</b> Table by author			<b>Table 3.</b> Regression results from unsustainable fashion consumption behaviour as the dependent variable

consumption – is moderated by Barrier 5 – lack of trust – (0.309+). Consumers who distrust companies’ sustainability transparency are motivated to consume less and engage in responsible fashion consumption patterns. H7, H8, and H9 are supported as barriers moderate and weaken the effect of motivational themes on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. H5 was not supported, as the higher price of sustainable fashion moderates and strengthens the effect of motivation on sustainable behaviour. There is no evidence to support H6, suggesting that the lack of knowledge and misconceptions about sustainable

fashion does not moderate the impact of motivation on fashion consumption behaviour. By incorporating barriers into the equation, the model's explanatory power increases to 23%, implying that motivations and barriers towards sustainable fashion explain nearly one-fourth of consumer adoption of sustainable fashion consumption patterns.

## 5. Conclusions

This study explored the attitude-behaviour gap in sustainable fashion consumption and how retail market barriers moderate this relationship. Five barriers were identified as potential obstacles to the transition to sustainable fashion, and it was hypothesised that they would weaken the effect of motivational themes on sustainable behaviour. The collected data supported the hypotheses, with four out of the five barriers acting as moderators of the relationship between motivational themes and sustainable consumption behaviour. Regression results showed that the high price of sustainable fashion strengthened the effect of motivation for sustainable fashion, whilst the low availability weakened it for consumers concerned about their self-image. Increased availability of sustainable clothing would contribute to more responsible consumption amongst these consumers who are willing to pay higher prices but face limited access. Moreover, the low awareness of the negative impacts of sustainable fashion also moderated the motivation to consume it, particularly for consumers with environmental and social concerns. Furthermore, lack of information about the detrimental effects of fast fashion hindered consumers' efforts to reduce negative social and environmental impacts. Lastly, the lack of trust in sustainability claims weakened the influence of motivation on responsible fashion consumption, particularly in moderating the effect of the incentive to decrease consumption. This indicates that consumers are sceptical of fashion companies advocating sustainable consumption and question their commitment to reducing garment consumption instead of promoting further consumption.

## 6. Discussion

Sustainable consumption has emerged as a crucial research area in both consumer and business literature, shifting the academic focus from consumer characteristics to consumer behaviour. In this field, the attitude-behaviour gap reveals how consumers struggle to translate their motivations for sustainable consumption into actual behavioural change. This study explored sustainable fashion consumption, investigating the barriers that moderate consumer motivation.

The study's findings contribute to existing research in several significant ways. Firstly, they provide empirical evidence on how contextual barriers influence consumer motivation in sustainable fashion consumption, identifying key factors that hinder individuals from making sustainable choices. Additionally, the study sheds light on the complex relationship between motivational themes and retail barriers, offering insights into how these elements interact to influence consumer behaviour. Secondly, the research challenges conventional assumptions about the relationship between consumer costs and sustainable fashion consumption. Contrary to expectations, the higher price of sustainable fashion does not diminish consumers' motivation to buy it; instead, it actually strengthens their desire to do so. This suggests that individuals are willing to pay more for clothing that aligns with their desired self-image, highlighting the economic feasibility of sustainable fashion and consumers' willingness to invest in environmental-friendly options. Thirdly, the study adopts a cognitive approach using behavioural-reasoning theory to investigate moderators that bridge the intention-action gap in sustainable consumption. This fresh perspective offers new insights into understanding and addressing the disparity between attitudes and behaviours, going beyond the conventional theory of planned behaviour. This study adds to

the existing consumer behaviour literature and opens avenues for further research and interventions to bridge the gap.

Furthermore, this study reveals a significant lack of consumer awareness regarding the harmful effects of fast fashion, hindering the transition to sustainable fashion consumption. It underscores the need for education and awareness initiatives to bridge the attitude-behaviours gap. Our findings align with previous research from a decade ago, which also identified a lack of knowledge and understanding of sustainability issues (Ozdamar Ertekin and Atik, 2015). This suggests that social and environmental concerns alone may not strongly motivate consumers to change their habits due to limited awareness of fast fashion's negative impacts. The persistence of this knowledge barrier in 2023 warrants critical consideration. Future studies should explore whether this lack of knowledge is due to consumers' unawareness or a conscious decision to ignore the issue. If the former, education could encourage sustainable fashion purchases. Conversely, if consumers consciously overlook the problem, it raises questions about the conflicting behaviours and lack of remorse amongst participants who continue to buy fast fashion despite feeling remorseful. Further research is needed to shed light on this issue.

Finally, the present research is not without its limitations. It didn't include additional important variables in sustainable fashion consumption like purchase intention, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. Future research should explore these factors and consider other contextual obstacles like habits, lifestyles, ethics, and convictions.

## 7. Managerial implications

This study offers valuable insights and recommendations for promoting sustainable fashion consumption amongst retailers and stakeholders. Firstly, fashion retailers can implement strategies to enhance accessibility and reduce adoption costs of sustainable fashion. This includes expanding sustainable fashion offerings, introducing rental services, and partnering with sustainable platforms to reach a wider consumer base. Additionally, retailers can attract and retain consumers willing to pay more for sustainable products by incorporating price premiums and emphasising the quality and desirability of sustainable fashion through effective communication.

Secondly, raising consumer awareness of fast fashion's negative effects is crucial. Collaboration amongst fashion retailers, policymakers, educators, and influencers can play a key role. They can develop educational campaigns to inform consumers about the environmental and social consequences of their fashion choices. Workshops, seminars, and events focussing on sustainable fashion can be organised, and social media platforms and digital content can be leveraged to reach a wider audience effectively. By fostering a deeper understanding of sustainability issues, these initiatives will encourage consumers to align their behaviour with their attitudes towards sustainable practices, leading to a significant shift towards more responsible consumption.

Finally, fashion retailers should prioritise transparency to build trust and loyalty amongst customers, driving increased demand for sustainable fashion. This involves openly disclosing supply chain, manufacturing, and material information. Eco-labelling and certification schemes can also provide clear sustainability credentials to consumers. Transparency empowers informed purchasing decisions and holds retailers accountable for their practices, contributing to a more sustainable industry.

## 8. Social implications

When fashion retailers adopt strategies that enhance the accessibility of sustainable fashion and reduce its adoption costs, they contribute to a more inclusive and equitable



fashion industry. This not only benefits consumers but also contributes to environmental sustainability and social responsibility. Educating consumers about the environmental and social consequences associated with their fashion choices is another effective way for retailers, policymakers, and educators to empower individuals towards making informed decisions. By doing so, the collective behaviour of consumers can shift towards responsible consumption practices that support ethical values within the fashion industry. Building trust through transparency and responsible consumption strengthens customer-brand relationships, enhancing confidence in their purchases.

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