FROM FAST TO SLOW FASHION

Raising students' interest in sustainable fashion through education to foster sustainable behaviour

Annika Schewitz

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Academic Supervisor: Dr. ir. Niels Faber
Second Assessor: Dr. Thomas Long

Master Sustainable Entrepreneurship
University of Groningen - Campus Fryslân
Leeuwarden

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ABSTRACT

The fashion industry is the second most polluting sector in the world and is in need of consumers who are open to using sustainable fashion alternatives. However, the recognized attitude-behaviour-gap shows a lack of sustainable behaviour change, especially within Generation Y which is the biggest target group of fast fashion consumption. To bridge this gap, awareness has to be created through education. To investigate how education fosters this awareness, a qualitative, comparative study was held around an educational workshop on sustainable fashion. The results show the overarching theme of consumers' interest levels in sustainable fashion as most influential: the higher the interest, the fewer contextual barriers are hindering the intention to behavioural change. To raise interest in sustainable fashion, high and low-interest consumers can be matched, creating a positive learning atmosphere. Through active knowledge exchange, education fosters awareness and starts the participant's re-thinking process, which eventually leads to a higher intention to behave sustainably. Thus, low-involvement products change into high-involvement ones, consciously decided upon and resulting in demand for slow, sustainable fashion.

Keywords: fashion, attitude-behaviour-gap, education, interest, sustainable behaviour intention

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Definition
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ESC	Education on Sustainable Consumption
ESD	Education on Sustainable Development
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable change is one of the biggest challenges our society has to face this century (Metcalf and Benn, 2013; Steffen et al., 2015). Many expect businesses to offer more sustainable products and services to create value for people, planet and profit and thus be future-fit (Kendall and Rich, 2019). Less focus, however, lies on the consumer, even though this part of the supply chain requires special attention (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015), due to the negative environmental impacts being generally high in the post-purchase phase and the highest in the fashion and apparel industry (Claudio, 2007; Kozlowski et al., 2012). With 1.53 trillion US dollar turnover in 2022 (Smith, 2022), this industry is one of the most lucrative ones. The established fast fashion industry benefits from consumers' high willingness to buy many clothing items in a short time frame. This led to the development of fast-, ultra-fast- and real-time fashion and made the textile and apparel sector the second most polluting industry currently existing (European Environment Agency, 2023). Social pressure to address this negative impact led to a gradual process for the industry to improve its manufacturing conditions (Kozlowski et al., 2012). But addressing simply business-related aspects is not enough. While sustainable entrepreneurs developed consumption alternatives, their businesses face the challenge of selling the products (Belz and Binder, 2017). A similar struggle in practice can be found within the sustainable enterprise *ReStyle*, a fashion rental platform for students in Groningen for which this study is conducted.

The endeavour of selling sustainable products is related to the attitude-behaviour-gap defined as the imbalance between the consumer's positive attitude towards sustainability, and the actual buying behaviour lacking "green" purchases (McGregor, 2011; Öberseder et al., 2011; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015).

This gap is also recognized in the fashion industry (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). Given that sustainability is seen as a wicked problem (Meckenstock et al., 2016; Metcalf and Benn, 2013) and fashion consumption is complex on many levels as well (Aspers and Godart, 2013), sustainable behaviour change in the fashion industry is challenged by a dual complexity of sustainability and fashion requiring specific attention. Additionally, through the development of the fast fashion submarket, fashion is seen as a low-involvement product (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Kozlowski et al., 2012; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). This is problematic for the general perception of the product, resulting in quick, unconscious decisions, as the consumer can exchange old items for something new (Brooks et al., 2017; Claudio, 2007; Crewe, 2008). Behavioural studies suggest that humans make sustainable decisions consciously, slowly, and in their cerebral cortex, which is controversial towards quick, habitual decisions made for low-involvement products such as fast-moving consumer goods which are made in the limbic system (Kahneman, 2012; Rezvani, 2017; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). To foster sustainable consumption, it is necessary to actively involve consumers to re-think their behaviour and thus enable decision-making in the cerebral cortex. Fast decisions towards fast fashion would thus be replaced by slow decisions resulting in slow fashion, defined as fashion seeking timeless and durable garments (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022).

Engaging consumers in changing their decisions begins with raising awareness of negative environmental and social defects (Karahan and Roehrig, 2015; Rezvani, 2017; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). This awareness is widely lacking in the fashion industry (Claudio, 2007; Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022).

One way of raising awareness is via education which can play an important role in sustainable behaviour changes (Choi et al., 2009a; Karahan and Roehrig, 2015; Szerényi et al., 2011). This is also acknowledged by the United Nations with an official decade from 2005 until 2014 focussing on this topic (Buckler and Creech, 2014). Education can be used to create awareness, which is important for the further development of the sustainable behaviour change process. A few studies give insights into what exactly this relationship looks like. For instance, consumers changed their opinions towards fashion stores after learning about their environmental practices (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022). Karahan and Roehrig (2015) state the importance of active education on the environmental awareness of students. Rezvani (2017) found that positive emotions such as pride, pleasure, or happiness are drivers of sustainable consumption. Furthermore, "green" purchases can have a positive influence on the perceived (self-) image, increasing the individual status (McAndrew, 2021). Despite these insights, the research stream on how education is influencing sustainable behaviour change is rather immature, especially for the fashion industry and the target group of students.

Focussing on a younger audience is important for several reasons. First, the so-called Generation Y, born between 1980 and 2000 (Goldman Sachs, 2023), is recognized as the biggest consumer group of fast fashion. They are highly consumption- and technologically oriented, expecting a wide range of products for low prices, thus mainly making low-involvement decisions. In fact, this Generation is reluctant to ownership of high-involvement products and prefers a service offering access (Goldman Sachs, 2023). Generally, their attitude is lacking behaviour change toward sustainable consumption (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022). Second, the attitude-behaviour-gap of this target group is poorly understood (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022).

Finally, *ReStyle* operates in Groningen, which is characterized by 25% of all inhabitants being students (City of Groningen, 2023). This study is thus contributing to the research gap of this relevant target group.

The aim of this study is twofold, (a) to understand how education can trigger the sustainable behavioural change process and (b) to consequently contribute to closing the attitude-behaviour-gap. Therefore, the research question of this study is: *How is education about the fashion industry influencing students' willingness to try out sustainable fashion alternatives?* To answer this research question, a qualitative study was conducted, comparing the fashion knowledge of students in Groningen during a before-and-after assessment scheduled around an educational workshop about sustainable fashion. Given the importance of investigating this topic due to our planet and society demanding more slow fashion consumption, this research is of high relevance by enriching insights for sustainable entrepreneurs and educational practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainable Behaviour

To foster sustainable behaviour changes, it is necessary to understand how behaviour develops (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). One established model in behaviour economics (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015) is the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). This social thinking theory explains behaviour in three steps. An individual's attitude based on beliefs leads to an intention that consequently results in a specific behaviour (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). Being critiqued for not including contextual factors in the process, the framework has often been revised (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2023; Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). Terlau and Hirsch (2015) combine conceptual adjustments and introduce individual, social, and situational factors influencing the intention of the behavioural process. By integrating contextual indicators, the model can be situated in a less positivist but rather interpretivism philosophy of science (Cesarina Mason et al., 2022). Today, the revised TPB is often used in the context of sustainable behaviour, regarding sustainable food, recycling (Papista and Krystallis, 2013), energy transition (Tan et al., 2023), and fashion (Becker-Leifhold, 2018; Blazquez et al., 2020; Iran et al., 2019; Jain and Khan, 2017; Johnstone and Lindh, 2022).

Attitude-Behaviour-Gap

Through revising the TPB, a weak relationship between the positive attitude and the actual buying behaviour was found (Papista and Krystallis, 2013). Furthermore, the model lacks the integration of social influence, which is important for sustainability (Soyer and Dittrich, 2021). Öbseder et al. (2011) identify a gap between the consumer's interest in *Corporate Social Responsibility* and their buying behaviour.

McGregor (2011) highlights sustainable behaviour change is lacking behind, despite public information being available. Terlau and Hirsch (2015) describe this phenomenon as the attitude-behaviour-gap or attitude-intention-behaviour-gap which applies to general sustainable lifestyle integration (Akenji et al., 2019) as well as for specific markets such as the fashion consumption behaviour (Leinenga, 2019). Gomes de Oliveira et al. (2022) compared consumers' environmental perception of fashion stores and showed that knowledge about the store's sustainability practices was not existing, and the majority's perception changed positively after learning about it. Nevertheless, this did not lead to the acceptance of a higher price for the products (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022). Similar results were also found by Leinenga (2019) for Dutch consumers' environmental awareness, while the study is lacking evidence of whether the behaviour actually changed. Terlau and Hirsch (2015) emphasize that the further downstream in the supply chain, the less predictable the results get and that, therefore, consumer behaviour requires specific attention from researchers. The post-purchase phase is the largest negatively influencing part of the fashion industry, seen from an environmental point of view, and the most overlooked one (Claudio, 2007; Kozlowski et al., 2012). It is especially interesting to investigate how the attitude-behaviour-gap can be bridged regarding sustainable fashion to foster sustainable beliefs and attitudes that influence the pre-, purchase, and post-purchase phases.

Reasons for the Attitude-Behaviour-Gap in Fashion

Understanding why the attitude-behaviour-gap exists is complex for three reasons. First, the wicked problem of sustainability requires a holistic view (Meckenstock et al., 2016; Metcalf and Benn, 2013). Second, the role of fashion for consumers is highly connected to intangible and subjective assets of self-identity and self-confidence (Aspers and Godart, 2013; Crewe, 2008).

Third, finding the balance between the desire to distinguish oneself from society while also searching for social adaptation over the choice of clothing is a long and iterative process (Gronow, 1993). This led researchers to investigate the gap in more detail, while two possible explanations can be projected well onto sustainable fashion and are introduced in the following.

Prior research by Kahneman introduces an important perspective on the perception of consumers regarding different levels of involvement when deciding on a product in the pre-and purchase phase (Kahneman, 2012), which Terlau and Hirsch (2015) see as the main reason for the attitude-behaviour-gap as it builds the foundation for sustainable decision-making. The psychologist describes two different mental systems which influence and control our decision-making process. While the limbic system is used for habitual, subconscious, and quick decisions, the cerebral cortex is involved in slow, logical, and conscious decision-making. Sustainable decisions that need cognitive efforts and conscious awareness happen in our cerebral cortex, as they base on ethical beliefs (Young et al., 2009). Kahneman (2012) therefore concludes that a strong green choice needs to replace the non-sustainable habit of deciding in the limbic system to foster the use of the cerebral cortex. Further research connects low-involvement products such as fast-moving consumer goods like food with decision-making in the limbic system (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015) and high-involvement decision-making with the cerebral cortex (Rezvani, 2017). As the majority of the contemporary fashion industry is focussing on fast production and disposal as well as aims to offer lots of clothing in a short timeframe (Brooks et al., 2017; Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Kozlowski et al., 2012; Molderez and Van Elst, 2015), fast fashion can be defined as a low-involvement product.

Bridging the attitude-behaviour-gap of the fashion industry would therefore mean changing the perception of consumers to rethink their consumption behaviour more slowly and consciously. Thus, decision-making regarding fashion in the cerebral cortex could be enabled, allowing sustainability to play an influential role.

Another phenomenon that gives insight into why the attitude-behaviour-gap exists was first introduced by Moody-Adams (1994). Despite knowledge being available, consumers tend to affectively and strategically ignore the information at hand to be able to continue their behaviour as before without the need to change. Wieland (2017) describes this cognitive concept of *wilful ignorance* with the example of consumers buying products, although they know the products were made in slavery-like working conditions. While the ethically correct decision would be to buy a product made in better working conditions, this consideration does not happen. Ignoring the choice of self-education on sustainable alternatives beforehand is more convenient for the consumer for two reasons. First, consumers see their perceived (self-) image within society at risk if they would consciously choose an unethical product over a well-produced one. Second, consumers want to keep the possibility to buy the same products in the future again, and knowing about the production circumstances would hinder that. Wieland (2017) calls these two reasons backward-looking and forward-looking self-interest. Ehrich and Irwin (2005) also add that especially consumers who care about the ethical aspects of their purchase choice wilfully ignore the information to avoid negative emotions of anger and frustration. *Wilful ignorance* is culturally embedded by legalizing the behaviour and manifesting it throughout society, whereas peers act in the same way (Wieland, 2017). The fashion industry is criticized strongly for its slavery-like working conditions (Brooks et al., 2017; Claudio, 2007; Crewe, 2008).

The fact that companies are still allowed to act this way and consumers are still buying fashion in this manner, explains why *wilful ignorance* can influence the attitude-behaviour-gap. To overcome the attitude-behaviour-gap, it is necessary to change the status quo where fashion is perceived as a low-involvement product with the possibility to wilfully ignore the defects of that same industry. One way to bridge this gap and foster the development of fashion back to a high-involvement product is through education.

Education on Fast and Slow Fashion

Education is an important tool to foster sustainable development (Choi et al., 2010) and has been researched in various studies (Barr and Gilg, 2007; Choi et al., 2009b; Karahan and Roehrig, 2015; Yildirim and Candan, 2015) resulting in different streams: *Education for Sustainable Development* (ESD) and *Education for Sustainable Consumption* (ESC). Choi et al. (2010) see the latter as a sub-category of ESD and state that ESC has to be supported on an individual level as well as providing a social infrastructure. Furthermore, the authors distinguish between three types of education: (a) Formal education including our educational system, (b) non-formal education raising awareness through marketing or community-based learning and (c) informal education focussing on individual long-term learning outcomes through "learning by doing" (Choi et al., 2010). Karahan and Roehrig (2015) state that most environmental education is still delivered passively and informationally, even though their results show that constructional learning progresses have a better outcome on the increase of environmental awareness. It is thus important to integrate all types of education and enable a positive learning atmosphere to foster sustainability awareness (Karahan and Roehrig, 2015; Rezvani, 2017).

While sustainable entrepreneurship is established from a business perspective (Bocken et al., 2014; Lüdeke‑Freund, 2020; Schaltegger et al., 2012), the role of education and the perception from a consumer's perspective is rather immature (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015), yet the most influential one throughout the supply chain for fashion (Claudio, 2007; Kozlowski et al., 2012). By researching how education is influencing the consumer's willingness to engage in sustainable fashion alternatives, this study is following the official UNESCO guidelines for future research on ESC (Choi et al., 2009a). Further adapting Terlau and Hirsch's (2015) framework based on the TPB model (Ajzen, 1991), the attributes of attitude, intention, and behaviour are now described through an educational lens. Education acts as a trigger that results in increased awareness, which leads to a re-thinking process influencing sustainable behaviour change. As education is assumed to re-trigger, enhance, or hinder the process, this conceptual model (figure 1) is causal. To find out how exactly education is triggering this dynamic and iterative process is the aim of this study.
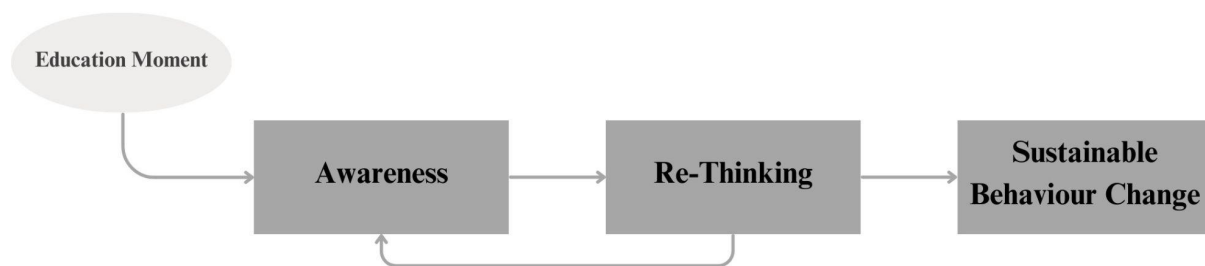
Figure 1: Conceptual model on the sustainable behaviour change process through education

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Educating on Sustainable Fashion

To investigate how education influences the willingness of students to change their behaviour towards sustainable fashion alternatives, a qualitative, comparative study was conducted consisting of two assessments scheduled around a workshop (in adaption to the frameworks of Hassan et al., 2016; Myrskylä and Margolis, 2014; Schröder et al., 2022). The workshop was hosted by the researcher representing the fashion rental platform *ReStyle*. The workshop informed about the fashion industry and sustainable alternatives, as well as engaged the participants actively during a clothing swap to ensure the three types of education (Choi et al., 2010) being integrated into the process. Preferably, a shift in the participant's intention on sustainable fashion behaviour can be measured during a before-and-after assessment that can then be connected to the role of education. The study is based on a thematic analysis approach which is an iterative process focusing on identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns of qualitative data (Verhoeven, 2019). Thus, the focus lies on finding out how and where education exactly influences the sustainable behaviour change process to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon.

The sample size consisted of eight students from Groningen that are part of the student music association *BRAGI* which approached *ReStyle* to host the workshop a few months before the data collection. The choice of this purposeful sampling technique builds upon several reasons. First, prior research shows that a supportive group structure toward sustainable consumption can enhance the individuals' intention to do so (Rezvani, 2017).

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Second, the moral obligation to consume sustainably due to the consumer's context has a similar effect on the intention (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Rezvani, 2017; Stern, 2000). Lastly, due to the short time frame possible for conducting this master thesis, this sampling technique was of advantage allowing quick results. *BRAGI* represents a framework in which students of Generation Y and fitting to the age group of *ReStyle*'s clients, were found. As the participants connected over an independent topic regarding the study - in this case, music, different views on fashion were united during the workshop. The sample size resulted from 14 sign-ups for the workshop, of which eight students were open to participating in the accompanying research. Because of illness, two pre-assessed participants were not able to join the workshop. However, due to comparing a general before-and-after effect on how education is influencing sustainable consumption, it was possible to approach two other students who joined the workshop that agreed to participate in the interviews. Despite the change of individuals, the number of participants in the pre-and post-assessment is thus similar. Because the participants knew each other beforehand as well as the researcher, an open-minded, positive learning atmosphere was created supporting the group dynamic and moral obligation to actively take part in the learning process.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Quality of Data

The pre-assessment consisted of a 15-minute open-questions survey sent out one week prior to the workshop, which was hosted on the 17th of April after the weekly *BRAGI* choir and orchestra rehearsal in the evening. Thus, a joyful learning experience was created, enabling a higher participation rate.

Lastly, the post-assessments were semi-structured interviews held on the 23rd, 24th, and 25th of April. Data consistency regarding the time between the assessments and the workshop was thus ensured, being six to eight days. The participants received information about the schedules upfront. Both feedback assessments covered the participant's level of knowledge about the fashion industry, sustainable alternatives, and insights into their shopping behaviour. Furthermore, questions asked whether the participant already voluntarily invested time into learning more about (sustainable) fashion. The interview guide can be found in appendix A, covering questions about awareness, re-thinking, and the likelihood to change behaviour (in adaption to the quantitative questions of Leinenga, 2019). The workshop itself lasted 1.5 hours, including a clothing swap. While five post-assessment interviews were held in person, two interviews were conducted online. All interviews lasted 30–40 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the possibility to compare individuals' responses with the pre-assessment by the researcher. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed with the software *otter.ai*. The data analysis was done with the qualitative research tool *Altlas.ti*, while the data was first coded, axial grouped and then categorized into overarching topics inductively. Important for the coding process were aspects mentioned repeatedly, as well as specific similarities and differences regarding the interviews and prior literature (Bell et al., 2019). Data saturation was reached after six interviews, and appendix D shows the final coding tree. Due to technical insufficiency, the first planned AI coding of *Atlas.ti* was neglected during the data analysis stage. A short reflection on this matter can be found in the appendix E.

The collected data follows the anonymization process of Meyermann (2014) and is not given to third parties outside the University of Groningen. The study follows the university's ethical code of conduct (University of Groningen, 2017) and was approved by the faculty's ethic committee. The ethics checklist can be found in appendix F, additionally to the participant's informed consent forms, as well as the workshop video and the full transcripts (appendices B, C, G). To ensure data consistency, trustworthiness, and transferability, several measures were taken. Two pilot pre- and post-assessments were held and analysed, minimizing leading question biases. Besides, the workshop was tested a month before the data collection at a local school. Additionally, participants were asked to member check the transcripts, ensuring high-quality of data. By thoroughly describing and taking rigorous steps throughout the data collection and analysis, response set biases and situational biases on time are minimized, as well as social desirability and confirmation biases.

RESULTS

As described in the methodology, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted. The time component of the research design did not enable actual behaviour change to be measured. Whether the intention to sustainable behaviour grew stronger, however, was connected to the participant's interest level. The data analysis of the pre-and post-assessment results in eight axial coding groups which can be assigned to the three main topics of the conceptual model which are awareness, re-thinking, and the adjusted topic of sustainable behaviour intention. Various quotes for each of the codes were found repeatedly in the interviews, which verifies the coding groups. Furthermore, the quote overview enabled the foundation on which interpretation of overarching themes happened, whereas the most prominent theme is the level of interest in sustainable fashion. In the following, the results for each main topic are elaborated.

Awareness

Regarding the topic of awareness, the coding groups "level of knowledge" and "learning type" were found. Generally, all participants had some knowledge prior to this study, whereas the level of it differentiated widely. Most knowledge focussed on poor production circumstances and the negative environmental impact of the fashion industry. All participants gained new knowledge through the workshop, being able to call out new sustainable alternatives. Some participants remembered, in particular, a pyramid shown during the workshop that described six ways of consuming fashion, while others remembered a *ReStyle Style Card* which helped participants find the colour scheme fitting their style. Going beyond general facts, three participants highlighted the sustainable background of the clothing swap as something new to them and participant D changed his definition of fast fashion as a result of the given knowledge:

D: *"I had a different definition of fast fashion in mind. I thought that fast fashion meant that the consumer uses fashion for a short period, and then throws it away. I wouldn't have considered that fast fashion meant that fashion brands put out new looks every single week. So yeah, that pretty much changed my mind on that definition."*

Additionally, participants E and H especially showed knowledge of fashion development and history. Lastly, five participants also indicated they gain knowledge unconsciously by fashion being a highlighted topic in the news or on events. Participant B also mentioned unconscious education happening over social media: *"There are a lot of videos popping up through algorithms for some reason. So that's how you get passively educated into a topic that you don't actively pick."*

Regarding how the participants learned about sustainability and fashion, three important categories arose. First, several participants mentioned self-education over various channels such as the internet, social media, and news channels. Participant E watched YouTube videos as a teenager to learn about Japanese fashion, fashion history, and sustainable fashion, and participant G watches explanation videos about sustainability. Participant H conducts online research about brands before buying items in second-hand stores. While the majority mentioned social media as an important channel, some participants prefer news channels. C stated: *"I don't really use Instagram or Facebook or anything for my news intake. I just don't think that's the way to go. So I'd rather depend on the newspapers, like the proper sources for those kinds of things."*

Besides, participant H mentioned education in school as a source of learning about sustainability and sustainable fashion alternatives. Lastly, active talking and active thinking prior to, during, and after the assessments are shown in the data. Participant A shared, he learned to invest in high-quality sports equipment and thus changed his old habit of buying cheap items. Participant C described *"During the workshop, the gears in my brain went like, okay and started to spin and I did start to think about options, like legislation",* and participant D mentioned he actively realized a change while walking through the city after the workshop: *"I was like walking through H&M. And I was like: Oh, this is bad. This isn't that good at all."* Generally, all participants mentioned they learned something regarding sustainable fashion and were partly thinking about active choices reflecting the new knowledge.

Re-Thinking

Participant E described the interaction throughout the research as an important reminder to re-think and critically assess her own behaviour: *"I was already kind of aware of a lot. But I think it engages you to think about it even more than maybe you were already doing. The workshop was, I think, a good eye-opener."* While all participants have the skill to critically assess and build an opinion about the fashion industry, the intensity of the re-thinking process seems to be dependent on the level of interest. Several combinations of different levels of interest regarding fashion, sustainability, and sustainable fashion alternatives were found. Three participants show high interest in all three topics, spending lots of time on fashion, using the sustainable alternative of second-hand clothing for years, and are aware of why they do so. Individual activities show their passion well. Participant H for example wanted to study fashion design, actively went to stores, and donated old clothes to people in need.

E discovered the 1940s style for herself and is interested in fashion history, and participant A hosted a clothing swap for friends prior to the workshop. Additionally, E and A stated to be early adopters of sustainable products. Through their passion for fashion, these participants also discovered sustainable fashion and are thrifting most clothing items, H even all of his wardrobe. The interest level is highlighted by A: *"I have obviously thought about slower fashion before. And I would say that except for, I don't know, underwear and socks, my closet is now at least half thrifted, gifted, or exchanged."*

The second combination regarding the interest level can be seen in the interviews of participants C and G. They have a low interest in fashion, however through a high interest in sustainability also have a high interest in sustainable fashion. Both see the fashion industry as influential, in need of improvement and compared the topic to sustainable food, which is also important for both. Participants B and F have a low interest in fashion and semi-interest in sustainability, resulting also in an average interest in sustainable fashion. When asked about sustainability, sustainable food options were mentioned by B among others. Lastly, participant D has an average interest in fashion, low interest in sustainability, and low interest in sustainable fashion.

Generally, all participants were reflective, showing honest, critical assessments of the fashion industry, their behaviour, sustainable alternatives, and the likelihood of using them. Several participants highlighted positive aspects and participant G stated: *"It also becomes more normal around me. And I think that's a good thing that you donate your clothes back. They get reused. And then you enter that cycle where you also reuse other people's clothes."* Three participants also reflected on their behaviour and understood why they are behaving as they do.

F was critically reflecting and shared she would like to be more sustainable, "*but I really don't know how I can incorporate that in daily life and like daily routines*".

Four participants also reflected on the topic on a higher overarching level, discussing top-down and bottom-up solutions and what role society and government play to encourage sustainable (fashion) behaviour.

> G: "*Trying to find that balance of how much change should come from a more organized point, like the government, and how much you can do from a more personal point for yourself, without necessarily having to spend so much time and energy that it becomes counterproductive into being sustainable.*"

Lastly, six participants showed a lack of understanding, lack of skills, or general insecurity about their knowledge and the self-trust to actually change their behaviour. Participant E highlighted she lacks the knowledge of what to do with the gained information and warns: "*I also think that I have to be careful not to fall into the pitfall of 'Oh, I know a lot about it now. So I'm sustainable.' What I need most is information, how to actively use information.*"

Sustainable Behaviour Intention

Translating re-thinking into sustainable behaviour intention is shown in the data by four coding groups. Various influences were mentioned based on personal preferences during the interviews. Participants A, E, and H described the development of their personal styles as influential to their shopping behaviour, enhancing sustainable options.

Participant E also stated that clothing has a huge influence on her self-confidence. In all three cases, this translated into the personal dedication of the participants to self-organised clothing swaps, or other projects as described above. Additionally, E and H mentioned bringing friends to second-hand stores and sharing their knowledge during this experience. Other participants did not extensively elaborate on their personal style development throughout the assessments. However, B and F showed interest in participating in further clothing swaps, and participant F is also interested in a sewing course to foster her skills in repairing clothing.

Generally, the following sustainable fashion alternatives were mentioned by the participants: repairing, renting, reusing, reducing, buying second-hand, swapping, upcycling, and buying high-quality. The most used alternative is about investing in high-quality items and using them for as long as possible, thus reducing the need to get new clothes. Participant E stated her opinion on why using what is already owned is important: "*Sustainability is going back to the roots of how to just inspire yourself again, on how you used to do things and then adapt it to maybe the situation you're in at the moment.*" The second most used alternative is shopping second-hand clothing. This fashion consumption is used elaborately by A, E, and H and more increasingly by B and G while barely used by D and F. Another way of using second-hand clothes was mentioned whereas clothing is being passed down from older siblings or their surroundings, mostly during their childhood. Third, repairing is used by three participants. While only participant E is repairing her clothes by herself, others mentioned family members repairing them instead. Additionally, buying new clothes is mentioned as a way of consumption for basic clothing such as underwear or for high-quality investments into functional clothing (e.g. hiking clothing) or high-end suits.

The alternatives of swapping and renting were new for the majority of the participants. Three out of eight took part in clothing swaps before, while for the others, the clothing swap during the workshop was their first experience. Lastly, renting was new to most, which resulted in some restraint towards this possibility.

Depending on the level of interest, several conditions were mentioned influencing the intention to actually use these sustainable alternatives. The higher the level of interest, the lower these conditions are hindering sustainable behaviour intention. Mostly mentioned, and independent of the level of interest, is the budget. Five participants mentioned a higher and stable income as a condition for more sustainable consumption. Participant D connected budget as a factor with the influence of increasing the likelihood to use more sustainable alternatives in the future: *"You need to have a bigger budget for sustainable clothing. I need to save money for that. But I am willing to do so."* Another condition mentioned is time. For some, it is negatively connotated that sustainable alternatives take more time to be consumed, while for others this is not the case. H explained that he looks up information about the brands while shopping, as *"I already spend time [in second-hand stores] anyway. It wouldn't make a difference if it takes even longer."*

Next to time and budget, the situational context was mentioned by all participants. Having a supportive surrounding is a condition for the use of sustainable alternatives, as stated by six participants. Participant E mentioned situations in which her mother would ask her if she would wear items the participant bought beforehand and thus fostered conscious investment into practical clothes.

And B reflected on the workshop: *"I think as a first-time experience, this clothing swap was really nice, like having a friendly environment to actually look and see how swapping clothes looks like."* Contrary, two participants mentioned that back in their home country, second-hand stores would not offer clean clothes, and thus the unsupportive surrounding decreased the likelihood of using the alternative. Some participants furthermore mentioned general accessibility as an important condition to be more motivated to try out sustainable alternatives.

> G: *"Now, on every corner, you have a DHL or PostNL pickup point. If you had like a clothing swap point, it will be 10 times easier to just indicate online what I want to swap. Go pick it up after work. And then that's it."*

These above-mentioned conditions of budget, time, supportive surroundings, and accessibility also influenced the development of change processes, whereas the participants' behaviour developed over a wider time horizon. Generally, all participants stated to make conscious decisions and rarely go shopping without a clear idea in mind of what they are looking for. Most participants mentioned the likelihood of using more sustainable fashion options as well as sustainable options in other parts of their lifestyle, e.g. food consumption. Participant G reflected that moving abroad broke his stereotype about second-hand clothing stores, and A mentioned he learned a new sustainable routine after moving out from home. B reflected that the workshop inspired her, yet did not change her picture of the fashion industry. Nevertheless, she can imagine to "*actively think about it in the future*".

Summarizing these results, the overarching theme of the interest level seems to be of influence. Grouping participants with higher and lower interest together shows the complexity of the data and emphasizes the relationship between the relevance of some coding groups dependent on the interest level of the participant. While participants with a higher interest level were more elaborate on their personal style journey, lower interest participants mentioned the conditions of accessibility and time-consumption as decisive for the translation of their re-thinking process into sustainable behaviour intention. The higher the interest level, the less relevant these conditions seem to be.

DISCUSSION

To close the attitude-behaviour-gap, prior research suggests using education to raise awareness and thus starting a re-thinking process that fosters sustainable behaviour change (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Karahan and Roehrig, 2015; Leinenga, 2019). Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted within a comparative analysis to explore how education can start and influence this change process of sustainable consumerism regarding sustainable fashion alternatives and thus contribute to closing the attitude-behaviour-gap. The collected data showed an overarching theme as the most influential. The participant's level of interest in fashion, sustainability, and sustainable fashion is building the foundation on which data was most variable. The intention for sustainable behaviour emerged depended on the participant's interest level, creating a high-involvement product decided consciously upon in the cerebral cortex (Kahneman, 2012). The following chapter will focus on this level of interest and how it mediates the intention to sustainable fashion behaviour.

Contextual Dependency as a Barrier

Several conditions applied for consumers to translate re-thinking into the intention to behave sustainably; namely budget, supportive surrounding, time availability, and accessibility of sustainable alternatives. Most of these contextual conditions were mentioned, despite the level of interest. However, the lower the interest in sustainable fashion, the higher the contextual fit was acting as a barrier towards sustainable behaviour. New knowledge increased the consumer's awareness, created interest, and started the re-thinking process. The translation into the actual intention of behaviour change, however, is hindered or supported by the individual context, which is indicated by Terlau and Hirsch (2015) and supported by this study's findings.

Gomes de Oliveria (2022) found similar results, whereas price holds back behaviour change due to the context not fitting. The higher-level interest consumers did not let these conditions hinder their sustainable behaviour. The phenomenon of *wilful ignorance* (Wieland, 2017) was not found, as critical reflections show that the re-thinking stage was reached by consumers, which is where this cognitive concept would come into play. What hindered the intention to behaviour change is rather dependent on the contextual fit of the individual's situation than the lack of cognitive skills to re-think their behaviour. The results thus show that the contextual fit is necessary for consumers of low interest to behave more sustainably. The stage of sustainable behaviour intention is only reached, if the contextual fit is given, for instance regarding time or accessibility. The question of how education can bridge the attitude-behaviour-gap can thus be answered with the interest level of the topic. It is necessary to reach a higher level of interest to motivate consumers towards sustainable behaviour beyond the contextual fit as a barrier.

High Level of Interest for Sustainable Intention

The more interest is perceived by consumers in sustainable fashion, the less the change to sustainable alternatives felt like a mandatory "*time-consuming task*" and rather like a "*nice little adventure*". Intrinsic motivation makes sustainable shopping a hobby, which leads to more time spent on the topic. Important to mention is, however, that high-interest level consumers go shopping more often and own more clothing than those with low interest. Therefore, it is necessary to stress that interest needs to be raised not only for fashion, but sustainable fashion and thus encouraging reducing, reusing/renting, or repairing. Based on the TPB model of Ajzen (1991), attitude is based on beliefs and values. If these beliefs are pro-environmental, it leads to an intention that consequently results in a specific sustainable behaviour.

In case interest is only raised for fashion, this can not be guaranteed. Through educational moments, consumers are able to build or intensify their personal opinions about the fashion industry and their behaviour through active thinking, talking, and learning. Important for this development is the type of education used. McGregor (2011) identified a lack of sustainable behaviour despite the information being available. This research results show that simply having information available is not enough. Especially for lower-interest consumers, it is crucial to use activating education that starts re-thinking processes. The lack of interest discourages consumers from self-educating over sustainable fashion, opposite to consumers with high interest. Activating education for interest creation is also important due to the dual complexity of sustainable fashion having a huge influence on the consumer's self-identity (Aspers and Godart, 2013; Crewe, 2008). Generally, the higher the level of interest, the more reflective and further ahead the consumers are in their personal style development. Raising the interest level challenges low-interest consumers to actively think about their self-identity within a sustainable context, and thus find the values and beliefs necessary for closing the attitude-behaviour-gap.

Matching Interest Levels

Using the right type of education is crucial to increase interest, as passive information is only sufficient for consumers with high interest who are open to self-education. For low-interest consumers, supportive surrounding and active talking is necessary to start their re-thinking progress. Choi et al. (2010) state that sustainable consumption needs to be supported over social infrastructure. Increasing the level of interest from a holistic perspective can be done by matching consumers with high and low interest over, for instance, workshops or events. Matching consumers with different interest levels is interesting for several reasons.

High-interest consumers show an openness to share their knowledge and often do so already with friends. Low-interest consumers are open to learning about new topics if being taught, however, lack access to the right network that would motivate them to translate sustainable intention into behaviour changes. Thus, matching different interest groups creates the necessary supportive surrounding, which Terlau and Hirsch (2015) added to their adjustments of the TPB model as a crucial contextual influence. Besides, Soyer and Dittrich (2021) state that social influence is important for the integration of sustainability. Lastly, regular and active knowledge exchange is also appreciated by consumers with a higher interest in sustainable fashion, similar to a reminder for re-thinking processes. Increasing general communication through matching different interest levels is thus of advantage for all consumers.

This study's research design is showing this phenomenon on a small scale. In the beginning, only the researcher with a high interest in sustainable fashion shared knowledge. Throughout the clothing swap, information exchange between different interest levels began, creating a positive learning atmosphere. The importance of active learning to increase environmental awareness is also highlighted by Karahan and Roehrig (2015). In addition, Choi et al. (2010) introduce three types of education, and this research shows that all types are necessary for a successfully increased interest. The workshop integrated formal education through teaching about pollution and integrating quizzes. Non-formal, community-based learning showed in the *ReStyle Style Card* and informal learning was fostered by the interactive clothing swap. Furthermore, consumers self-educate on the internet, in particular social media and news channels. This informal "learning by doing" happens over a long time horizon.

Through using various education types, consumers develop the skills to assess their behaviour and build an opinion about the fashion industry. The created awareness is then reiterated at home during self-observations of the consumer in day-to-day situations and shows in the intention to behave sustainably.

The research design allowed this development to take place throughout three weeks and encouraged participants to actively gain knowledge as well as re-think their behaviour during three educational moments. As the workshop integrated all types of education and individual informal learning was enabled during the assessments at home, the choice of a comparative study as the methodology was of advantage. The decision to compare the pre-and post-assessments not on an individual basis as the original TPB suggests (Ajzen, 1991), but from a holistic perspective, enabled the researcher to see the level of interest as an overarching theme, grouping the participants. While comparing each person individually would show marginal changes, the group comparison highlights the role of education on a collaborative level. This is important for sustainable behaviour changes (Soyer and Dittrich, 2021) and fits Generation Y's preference of service offering access over ownership when deciding on products (Goldman Sachs, 2023). Especially, the workshop and the familiarity of the participants enriched the learning atmosphere and thus enabled to see the development of active learning processes, confirming Rezvani's results (2017).

Prior literature highlights the connection between education and awareness (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Karahan and Roehrig, 2015). This research enriches the phenomenon by showing what happened after. Through awareness, interest arose.

Matching high and low-interest consumers created a positive learning atmosphere and fostered the individual re-thinking process. While re-thinking, especially low-interest consumers increased their interest in sustainable fashion, which eventually intensified the intention to act sustainably. This intention is still dependent on the contextual fit, which however becomes less influential with the rise of interest. It can be assumed that these intentions will most likely be translated into sustainable behaviour as shown in figure 2 as a higher interest turns sustainable fashion into a hobby.
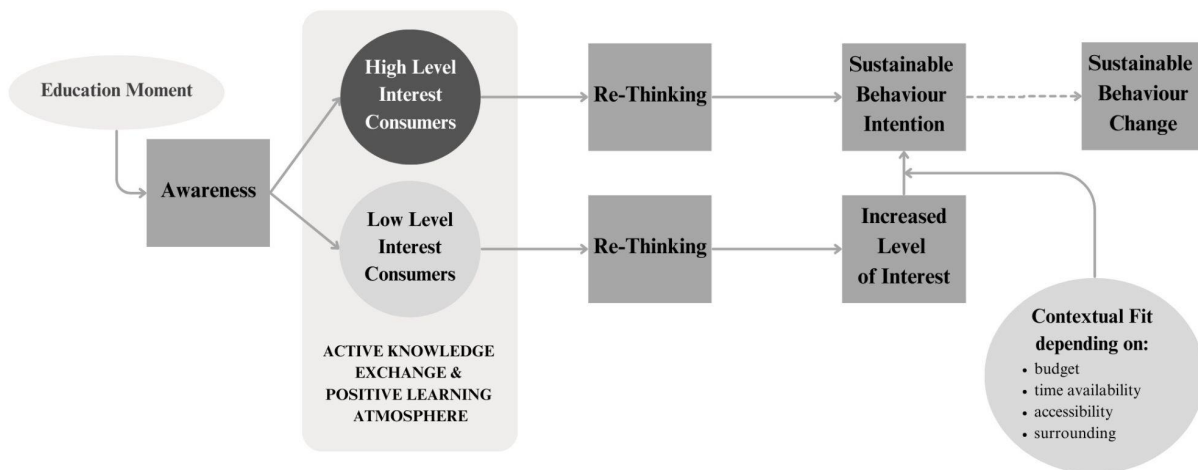

Figure 2: Iterative process of education leading to sustainable behaviour intention

CONCLUSION

The fashion industry is the second most polluting industry in the world (European Environment Agency, 2023) and is in need of more consumers trying out sustainable alternatives (Brooks et al., 2017; Claudio, 2007; Crewe, 2008). The translation of sustainable attitude into actual sustainable behaviour is lacking, creating the attitude-behaviour-gap (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015). A shift is necessary whereas fashion is seen less as a low-involvement, fast-consumed product and rather as a high-involvement, slow-consumed product (Gomes de Oliveira et al., 2022; Kahneman, 2012). One way of creating this change is by educating the consumer and raising awareness (Choi et al., 2010; Szerényi et al., 2011). The results of this comparative study show how high involvement in sustainable fashion is created by raising the level of interest in the topic. Through matching different interest groups of Generation Y students, a positive learning atmosphere evolved, fostering individual re-thinking processes of participants which lead to the intention of changing their behaviour. Interestingly, regarding food, which has also been recognized as a product that needs a switch back to high-involvement decision-making (Terlau and Hirsch, 2015), some participants are already at a further stage of their change process towards sustainable consumption, accelerated through a high level of interest. Fostering an interest rise can thus turn fashion into a similar high-involvement product, consciously decided upon in the cerebral cortex, and create the switch from fast to slow fashion.

Qualitative studies come with limitations, which also apply to this study. The short timeframe allowed solely sustainable behaviour intention to be investigated, rather than sustainable behaviour change. Additionally, the research sample represents a few students from Groningen.

Generation Y, however, also consists of other target groups with most likely other insights on the phenomenon. Furthermore, the familiarity of the researcher and participants is necessary to mention. While this created a positive learning atmosphere, which was of advantage, it can also intensify possible biases despite the rigorous descriptions of the research design. Based on these limitations, further longitudinal research is recommended. By adding more educational moments over time, sustainable behaviour development should be measurable. Furthermore, using the interest level as a pre-condition for quantitative research is interesting to generalize this research. Through exploring the attitude-behaviour-gap, this research contributes to the understanding of how education can be used to bridge the gap and thus enrich the research field on sustainable behaviour change. These insights furthermore guide educational institutions to use various types of education to increase environmental awareness. Lastly, this research is supporting sustainable entrepreneurs like *ReStyle* amongst other practitioners in building their business strategies with a high focus on activating education to create interest for sustainable fashion, which lastly results in demand for slow fashion, which is the shift our contemporary fashion industry needs.

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APPENDIX

Google Drive Link to Appendices

Data

    A. Interview Guide:

        https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y-7yT1B0eP9q_lm9ZSM5ruduo2vQYdcN/view?usp=sharing

    B. Transcripts:

        https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/18zS8d9VpOISGYcXjgzcwOIaEiDlh8JFj?usp=share_link

    C. Workshop Footage

    D. Coding Tree:

        https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sY6ulO28JofwMckbVYUY9h8Gzal7fVhr/view?usp=share_link

    E. Reflection on AI Coding:

        https://drive.google.com/file/d/1L7reKqfUSqRFITkYosoqLyOfZyDbmCPE/view?usp=share_link

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