The Dark Side of Fast Fashion –

In Search of Consumers' Rationale Behind the Continued Consumption of Fast Fashion

Tobias Zellweger

Stockholm Business School

Stockholm University

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Abstract

This study investigates the underlying rationale of environmentally and socially conscious young Swedish consumers for their continued consumption of fast fashion. Furthermore this study assesses influential factors that shape young Swedish consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. The fast fashion business model is largely based on the exploitation of poor working conditions and lack of environmental protection laws in the production countries. However, consumers are becoming increasingly aware of this dark side of fast fashion and the retailers are addressing their concerns with selective organic clothing collections. In order to gain in debt understanding of young Swedish consumers rationalizations, I applied an inductive research approach based on the philosophy of interpretive social science. More specifically I conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 Swedish participants between the ages of 18 and 25. The findings of this study show that the participants prioritize price, quality and how the clothes look over where they have been produced and under what circumstances. Furthermore, the interviewees indicate a high dependency on the Swedish government to punish misconducts of fast fashion retailers. Greenwashing, the Swedish school system as well as a green trend in contemporary Swedish society seem to shape young consumers attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. Future research could investigate how the Swedish government and the Swedish school system can take a more pro-active role in educating their citizens and students about the actual negative impacts caused by the overconsumption of fast and disposable fashion towards society and environment.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Problematization

On April 24th 2013 a tragedy shocked the world: the Bangladeshi garment factory Rana Plaza collapsed, more specifically 1'127 human beings were crushed to death and hundreds more were maimed while sewing clothes for Western fast fashion retailers under poor working conditions (Taplin, 2014; Economist, 2014). The term fast fashion refers to the current business model of global fashion conglomerates that successfully reduced the lead-time process from 6 to 12 months to less than 30 days (Anguelov, 2016; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Joy et al. 2012). In a nutshell it takes for garments to go from the catwalks in Paris, to the sweatshops in Bangladesh and then back to Europe to the retail stores less than a month. It is needless to say that the Rana Plaza incident is only one out of many disasters directly related to the fast fashion industry. Nevertheless the magnitude of the Rana Plaza tragedy reached almost every Western consumer and confronted them with an ugly truth, namely who pays the price for their cheap and fast fashion. Apart from the exploitation of cheap labor, fast fashion retailers also exploit the lack of environmental regulations in production countries (Anguelov, 2016). The toxic elements used in contemporary textile production cannot be eliminated through purification, which results in permanent environmental damages (ibid).

1.1.1. Lifestyle made by Fast Fashion

Fast fashion provides a fashionable, progressive and modern lifestyle for very little money. Besides selling garments, the business model of fast fashion is also designed to sell a lifestyle; hence fashion companies facilitate the identity construction of their costumers (Anguelov, 2016; McNeill & Moore, 2015). This concept is particular appealing to young and fashion-conscious consumers with a small budget at their disposal (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009; Anguelov, 2016; Kim et al., 2013; Taplin, 2014). There seems to be a general unawareness among this consumer group regarding the ecological damages related to fast fashion consumption (Birtwistle and Morgan, 2009). Consumers who consider fashion as a tool to create their own identity indicate a low level of environmental and social concern in connection to their purchase decisions (McNeill & Moore, 2015). This is particular concerning given the fact that identity-construction is an essential part of the fast fashion business model (ibid). Taplin (2014) concludes that Western fashion consumers in general are reluctant to pay price premium for fair working conditions in production countries. However, Devinney et al. (2010) state that fashion consumers living in social democracies like Sweden and Germany are concerned about working conditions in production countries but they deny individual responsibility and rationalize their continued consumption by blaming the government for not issuing more stringent regulations.

According to Joy et al. (2012) young people recognize the importance of sustainability but strictly separate fashion from sustainability, while Kim et al. (2013) found in their research that there are no connection between irresponsible business practices of fast fashion retailers and fast fashion avoidance. This indicates that even those individuals, who don't engage in

fast fashion consumption, don't do so because they have environmental or social concerns (ibid). Despite the lack of awareness regarding the negative ecological and social impacts of fast fashion, today's youth otherwise indicates a high sensibility regarding environmental and social issues (Anguelov, 2016; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Hill & Lee, 2012; Joy et al., 2012). Why don't they act upon their personal convictions once they stay in front of a fast fashion retail store?

1.1.2. Constructing a Green Image

The production process and supply chain of fast fashion is complex and almost impossible for the individual consumer to fully understand (Anguelov, 2016; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). Fast fashion retailers further increase the ignorance of their customers by not communicating the actual social and environmental impacts their business model causes. Instead, the Swedish fast fashion retailer Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) for example introduces conscious fashion lines made from organic cotton and recycled materials and publishes sustainability reports to provide the feeling to the consumers that something meaningful takes place (Anguelov, 2016; Bradshaw & Zwick, 2014; Shen et al., 2012; H&M, 2015; H&M, 2017a).

H&M, Zara and forever21 are among the world's largest fast fashion retailers and all of them pledged to do everything in their power to reduce the negative side effects of their business practices towards environment and society. H&M however shows significant more efforts than its main competitors to be perceived as a sustainable and transparent company. The Swedish fast fashion retailer for example publishes on the company website a list of all its suppliers and an annually 100+ pages sustainability report (H&M, 2017b; H&M, 2015). Furthermore, celebrities like Gisele Bündchen, Madonna and David Beckham, all known for their social and environmental activism, serve as brand ambassadors for H&M's fashion (Anguelov, 2016; H&M, 2016a; 2013). Companies who deliberately mislead their customers regarding their sustainable and ethical business practices engage in a practice called greenwashing (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Baldassarre & Campo, 2016; Laufer, 2003). I am not going to deny H&M's efforts towards more sustainability and I also acknowledge that they achieved some progress relative to the industry standards. However, I argue that H&M deliberately distracts its consumers from the inconvenient truth that their entire business model is based on the exploitation of cheap labor and lack of environmental regulations in the production countries.

1.1.3. Shortcomings of Previous Literature

The findings of Devinney et al. (2010) provide valuable insights about rationalizations of Swedish and German citizens for engaging in unethical fashion consumption. However the participants for that study were aged between 20 and 60 years and they were presented with a case that solely highlighted the poor working conditions in production countries but neglected the environmental impacts (ibid). The lack of emphasis on young consumers who represent the main fast fashion target group might indicate a potential shortcoming of Devinney et al.'s (2010) research. A similar approach was employed by Joergens (2006), who conducted focus

group discussions with participants aged from 21 to 26 in Germany and England regarding their fast fashion consumption and perception towards ethical fashion. Her findings indicate some degree of awareness regarding working conditions among young fashion consumers but in general "…ethical issues take a backseat in purchasing clothing" (Joergens, 2006, p. 364). Even lesser impact on purchasing-decisions was accredited to environmental issues related to fashion consumption, which echoes the findings of Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011). The study has been conducted more than 10 years ago, more importantly; the study has been conducted before the Rana Plaza tragedy, which significantly increased awareness regarding poor working conditions in production countries. The rise of Social Media in the past decade created a new young generation who is more aware of environmental issues than previous generations (Anguelov, 2016). Also Hill & Lee (2012) and McNeill & Moore (2015) described young consumers as very well informed about environmental issues and simultaneously they highlighted a lack of specific knowledge regarding the environmental impacts of fashion. They call for more specific information and actions from fast fashion retailers regarding environmental-friendly business practices (ibid). However they did not specify how young consumers rationalize their purchase decisions against better knowledge. Instead they presented a ranking regarding the importance of different attributes such as price and quality.

1.2. Purpose and Contributions

The main purpose of this research is to shed light on the pertinent question of why environmentally and socially conscious young Swedish citizens do not act upon their convictions once they enter a fast fashion retail store. Swedes have higher self-expression values than any other country according to the World Value Survey (2017b), which is among others an indicator for high environmental awareness and egalitarianism. I want to explore the rationalizations behind their fast fashion consumption in order to understand how they justify and developed their rationalizations. Furthermore, I want to assess what influential factors shape their attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. In order to achieve my purpose I am going to conduct semi-structured interviews of Swedish citizens between 18 and 25 years of age. This target audience is particular relevant because they are currently the main fast fashion consumption group and also because they are likely to shape the fashion consumption behavior of the next generation. Additionally this research project aims to contribute to the call for further research from Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011) regarding the interrelations between knowledge regarding the negative environmental and social impacts, and apparel purchasing behavior.

1.3. Research Question

What is the underlying rationale of environmentally and socially conscious young Swedish consumers for their continued consumption of fast fashion?

1.4. Structure

Introduction – The introductory chapter provides a background and problematization section followed by the research purpose and contribution, the research question and preliminary delimitations.

Literature Review – This chapter provides an overview of the key theoretical concepts relevant for this thesis and how they relate to the research question. Finally a theoretical framework based on the extant body of literature is presented.

Methodology – This chapter consists of the methodological approach employed for this study including the empirical setting, limitations, research design and research ethics.

Findings – This chapter presents the empirical findings and of this research underlined by quotes from the interviewees.

Analysis – In the analysis I am going to put the findings in relation to the pre-existing knowledge from the literature review.

Discussion – Within this chapter the research question is going to be answered and implications and directions for future research are suggested.

Conclusion – Finally, I am going to finish this research project with some personal and concluding words.

1.5. Preliminary Delimitations

This research project focuses solely on the Swedish fast fashion retailer H&M. I make no attempt to generalize the outcome of this study towards the entire fast fashion industry, neither should the results be generalized to other consumer goods industries. Given the limited amount of time, I employed a non-probability sample, which is not a representative sample of all H&M customers in Sweden. Instead this research project focuses on young Swedish H&M consumers between 18 and 25 years of age from Stockholm, Sweden. The intention is not to determine generalizations outside the empirical sample but instead to explore and understand the individuals' argumentation and rationalization for his/her continued consumption of fast fashion.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter I am going to elaborate the theoretical key concepts relevant for this research project. Firstly, the concept of greenwashing is elaborated and how it influences consumers' attitudes towards ethical businesses in general. The middle part of the literature review consists of different theoretical explanations for consumers' social purchase decisions, an explanation of the attitude-behavior-gap within the fashion context and previous research regarding consumers' rationalization for unethical consumption. Finally, an overview of contemporary research about Swedish cultural values and a theoretical framework are going to complete this chapter.

2.1. Greenwashing

The concept of greenwashing refers to companies, who purposely overstate their antipollution efforts by spreading misleading information regarding their actual environmental performance (Markham et al., 2014; Walker & Wan, 2011; Baldassarre & Campo, 2016; Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Laufer, 2003; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). More specifically, greenwashing describes a firm's "…discrepancy between the green talk and the green walk" (Walker & Wan, 2011, p. 231). Corporations who successfully greenwashed their business practices remain sometimes among the worst polluters and drivers of social injustice because they successfully created a green image and as a result the public no longer scrutinizes those companies regarding the compliance of their stated efforts (Laufer, 2003).

However, contemporary society and especially young consumers indicate a high awareness regarding the business practices of polluting industries (Anguelov, 2016; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Hill & Lee, 2012; Joy et al., 2012). The textile production is the second most freshwater polluting industry after the agriculture industry (Anguelov, 2016). Furthermore, organic cotton is even more freshwater polluting than traditional cotton because the process of turning organic cotton into yarn uses significantly more freshwater than the use of pesticides in traditional cotton agriculture (ibid). As a result fast fashion retailers are facing great pressure responding to society's and investor's demand for more sustainability and at the same time keeping prices low to stay competitive (Markham et al., 2014; Baldassarre & Campo, 2016; Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Apart from those market related external drivers, fast fashion retailers also face scrutiny from the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (ibid). However, according to Lyon & Montgomery (2015) NGOs sometimes help companies to greenwash their business practices through collaborations. In the analysis chapter I am going to further look into this issue within the context of the Swedish fast fashion retailers.

Deception as a direct result of greenwashing has been divided into three elements such as fronting, posturing and examples (Laufer, 2003). Fronting refers to hyperbolic claims; posturing deals with persuasion of stakeholders to comply with sustainability claims and the

final element of deception are examples of NGO collaborations and attempts to create an image of ethical leadership within the industry (ibid). Within the analysis chapter I am going to analyze how relevant Laufer (2003) is within the context of Swedish fast fashion industry.

2.1.1. The Impact on the Consumers' Attitudes

Once greenwashing companies are exposed, they might suffer from financial losses, increased fluctuation and a damaged reputation (Walker & Wan, 2011). On the consumer-side, exposed cases of greenwashing impact the consumers' attitudes towards sustainable business practices in general (Markham et al., 2014). Similar conclusions are drawn by Delmas & Burbano (2011) who expressed their concern about consumers' cynicism that eventually could destroy the entire market for sustainable products, while Sheth et al. (2011) describe consumers' distrust in green marketing as one of the major reasons why green consumption remains on a low level without a meaningful impact towards society and environment. Skepticism towards sustainability claims of fashion retailers seems to have a particular impact on young consumers attitudes towards fashion consumption (Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012). The majority of the participants from those three studies were between 18 – 25 years old and skepticism was expressed regarding the information provided by the fashion retailers (ibid). Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011) obtained similar findings in their study, indicating that participants aged between 23 and 60 distrusted the transparency claims from businesses regarding their supply chain.

There seems to be a general agreement that especially young fashion consumers do not trust sustainability claims of fast fashion retailers. Greenwashing incidents create skepticism in consumers' minds and accordingly impact their attitudes towards sustainability claims from fashion retailers. The findings of Joergens (2006), McNeill & Moore (2015) and Hill & Lee (2012) all conclude that, young consumers are aware of the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion and that they distrust what fast fashion retailers tell them but nevertheless the materialistic need for fast, cheap and trendy fashion is stronger. Those studies provide valuable insights regarding fashion consumers' priorities but they do not elaborate sufficiently how young customers rationalize their acting against their convictions.

2.2. How Ethical are Consumers?

In the previous section the concept of greenwashing has been elaborated and how companies are trying to delude their consumers, which results in a general mistrust and skeptical attitudes especially among young consumers towards sustainability claims of fashion retailers. In the current section studies and theories surrounding the myth of the ethical consumer are identified.

2.2.1. The Rational vs. the Unconscious Consumer

Within consumer behavior there are two fundamental schools of thought, the first one identifies the consumer as a rational or quasi-rational individual, suggesting that consumers

consciously make their decisions based on their best knowledge and beliefs (Devinney et al., 2010). This concept describes the consumers' voice as significant, more specifically it refers to the consumer as a voter, who approves or disapproves a product or service with his or her vote in the form of a purchase (Devinney et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2012). However Devinney et al. (2010) also point out potential defectiveness regarding the reliability of the consumer-as-voter model. Firstly, consumers do not always have access to sufficient information while making the purchase decision and secondly, the variety of options to choose from depends on the cultural context and might not even include the desired products or services the consumer is looking for (ibid). Devinney et al.'s (2010) criticism of the consumer as a voter concept is echoed by Schwarzkopf (2011), who designates the definition of the sovereign consumer as voter, judge and jury within a capitalistic free market as a myth. The second school of thought in consumer behavior characterizes the consumer as an "evolved ape" who doesn't know the origins of his or her purchasing behavior because it is caused by the unconscious mind (Devinney et al., 2010). The evolution of the human mind is based on unconscious simple survival and not on conscious rational thoughts, which leads to a constant battle in consumers' minds between contemporary social pressure to do the right thing and thousands of years of primitive biological evolution (ibid).

According to Devinney et al. (2010) the rational consumer follows a linear process when making a social purchase decision, starting with values based on the consumers' ethical and moral Weltanschauung who then transform into beliefs and attitudes towards a certain social or environmental issue. Subsequently the consumer develops purchase intentions, determining his or her readiness to buy or not to buy a certain product, which eventually results in actions (ibid). A similar linear conceptual model has been proposed by Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011) with an additional emphasis on the influence of the trustworthiness of a company's transparency claims on the interface between attitudes and purchase intentions. Also Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe (2008) propose a rather simple linear ethical decision-making process starting with moral consciousness that leads to a moral decision and eventually results in an ethical or unethical decision, while Shen et al.'s (2012) linear model further distinguishes between the attitudes towards social responsible businesses and the attitudes towards environmentally responsible businesses. The linear process of social purchase decision implies that the rational consumer is by nature a well-intentioned human being (Devinney et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2012).

To ensure that he or she makes the right decision fashion retailers have to make sure that the rational consumer has sufficient information about a social or environmental issue (ibid). This aligns with Dickson (2000) who concludes that consumer education is "…an essential component for directing [the consumers'] purchases toward socially responsible businesses" (p. 28). Those findings highlight the profound impact companies have towards their consumers' attitudes and how vulnerable consumers are towards misleading information. Above all Shen et al. (2012) emphasize the direct correlation between consumers' knowledge about social and environmental issues within the fashion industry and their willingness to reward ethical business practices through their vote in the form of purchases. In the context of fast fashion this would imply that especially young consumers who are sophisticated Internet

and Social Media users and therefore possess infinite access to information about the negative social and environmental impacts of fast fashion would naturally avoid buying fast fashion. However, several studies such as Joergens (2006), McNeill & Moore (2015) and Hill & Lee (2012) indicate that young consumers are aware of the negative social and environmental impacts of fast fashion but nevertheless act against their better knowledge. This phenomenon is characterized by Žižek (2009) as fetishist disavowal "I know, but I don't want to know that I know, so I don't know. I know it, but I refuse to fully assume the consequences of this knowledge, so that I can continue acting as if I don't know it" (p. 45-6).

Contrary to the school of thought that describes the consumer as rational and who suggests that he or she pursuits a linear process when making social purchase decisions, the other school of thought describes the consumer as unconscious and suggests that he or she pursues a recursive process when making a social purchase decision (Devinney et al., 2010). The recursive model does not follow a linear process, attitudes towards a certain environmental or social issue might directly influence the values held by the consumer or sudden emotions might lead to purchase decisions (ibid). Therefore the context of the individual consumer is very important in order to understand their decision process (ibid). Devinney et al. (2010) suggests that consumers act against better knowledge because they don't know that their actions contradict their values, which refers back to the battle in consumers minds between contemporary social pressure to do the right thing and millennia of primitive biological evolution. In the context of young fast fashion consumers' purchase decisions this battle is evident. The social pressure to do the right thing, namely to reduce fast fashion consumption, is battling against a primitive biological instinct, namely to hunt and gather as much clothes as possible. Human beings used to be hunters and gatherers, those two activities determined more or less their entire life. While our ancestors were driven by basic utilitarian needs, contemporary young consumers are driven by the need to create an identity, which is facilitated by fast fashion retailers (Anguelov, 2016). This battle is also mirrored in Joergens (2006), McNeill & Moore (2015) and Hill & Lee (2012) who depict the young fashion consumer as socially and environmentally conscious but also driven by the need to keep up with the fast pace of the fashion industry.

2.2.2. The Delusion of the Attitude-Behavior-Gap

As described by Devinney et al. (2010) and Shen et al. (2012) the linear model of social consumption characterizes the consumer as a rational voter. It is based on consumer empowerment because the consumers' vote is the ultimate determinant if a product is going to succeed or fail in the market (Schwarzkopf, 2011; Carrington et al., 2016). The consumer is responsible to make the right decisions by buying products and services that do not harm society or the environment. Within the linear model of social consumption the consumer is considered as well intentioned and if provided with sufficient information he or she is expected to make the right decision (Devinney et al., 2010). If he or she fails to successfully transform positive attitudes towards social or environmental issues into a respective purchase behavior, an attitude-behavior-gap arises (Perry & Chung, 2016; Carrington et al., 2016; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). This gap suggests that if consumers live up to their attitudes and

eventually close the gap they can make a difference; more specifically consumers have the power and therefore the responsibility to repair the flaws of the current capitalistic system by closing the attitude-behavior gap through ethical consumption decisions (Schwarzkopf, 2011; Carrington et al., 2016). The existing body of literature surrounding the attitude-behavior-gap within the fast fashion industry aims to investigate the gap between consumers' environmentally and socially conscious attitudes towards the fast fashion industry and their failure to transform this attitudes into ethical fashion purchases (Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012; Perry & Chung, 2016). All of those studies discuss the consumers' failure to make the right decision. Carrington et al. (2016) argue that the attitude-behavior-gap shifts the responsibility to be ethical from companies towards the individual consumer who has to make the right choice among a range of products provided by companies.

2.2.3. Rationalizations for Unethical Fashion Consumption

Even though the concept of the attitude-behavior-gap as stated before might delude consumers, it also provides valuable insights regarding consumers' attempts to rationalize their unethical consumption behavior. The findings of Perry & Chung (2016) for example indicate that environmentally conscious consumers do not buy eco-apparel because the environment is not their first priority when buying clothes, they question the environmental-friendliness of eco-apparel, they disbelieve that eco-apparels have a relevant impact towards saving the environment and they deny personal responsibility because the industry should be held accountable to purse ethical business practices. The participants of Perry & Chung's (2016) study had an above-average interest towards the environment, which further reduces the applicability towards the average fashion consumer. However some participants identified the most pressing problem of the fashion industry, which is according to Anguelov (2016) the promotion of overconsumption. McNeill & Moore (2015) has also found that few participants who considered the reduction of consumption as more important than buying ethical fashion. However, the majority of the participants described high prices and the aspiration to be fashionable as main barriers to buy ethical fashion (ibid).

There seems to be an consensus that price, quality, desire to be fashionable and skepticism towards sustainability claims of fashion retailer are the most frequently used rationalizations by consumers for not buying ethical fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012; Joergens, 2006; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Jegethesan et al., 2012). Those rationalizations indicate that consumers mostly prioritize their personal convenience and self-interest over ethical purchase decisions. However, Devinney et al. (2010) identified among participants from social democracies like Sweden a general denying of personal responsibility as a common used social consumption rationale. Swedish people expect the government to enforce a legal framework to ensure that all products sold within the country did not harm the environment or the well being of the labor in the production countries (ibid). This aligns with Joergens (2006) and Sheth et al. (2011) where participants expected more scrutiny from the government to ensure that companies comply with regulations to curtail pollution and labor exploitation.

2.3. Swedish Cultural Values

This study is conducted within the Swedish context and is therefore influenced by Swedish cultural values. First of all I would like to acknowledge that there is no complete set of cultural values that applies to every Swedish citizen. However there are several scholars who identified values held by most members of Scandinavian societies. Bjerke (1999) for example describes Scandinavian countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark) as egalitarian because those countries are determined to eliminate gender inequality and to prevent social class division through high income taxes. Similarly Kjeldgaard and Östberg (2007) describe equality and egalitarianism as central Scandinavian cultural values as a result of a long domination of social democratic ideas in the region. Those findings are mirrored in the World Value Survey (WVS), which is a global network of social scientists conducting continuously generalizable surveys in almost 100 countries to compare cultural value changes over time (WVS, 2017a; 2017b). Sweden achieved the highest self-expression values and the second highest secular-rational values of all participating countries (WVS, 2017b). According to WVS, countries that score high on self-expression values indicate among others a high environmental awareness and a high demand for gender equality, whereas countries that score high on secular-rational values put among others less emphasis on traditional family structures and religion (WVS, 2017b).

According to Hofstede (2017) Sweden scores low on the masculinity dimension and on the power distance dimension, indicating a low level of competition and a low inequality among different social classes, while Fang (2011) describes Sweden as both a feminine and a masculine country. Hofstede argues that culture is "either / or", whereas Fang (2011) argues that culture consist of paradoxes that reinforce each other. Fang (2011) agrees with Hofstede (2017) that Sweden is a feminine country but simultaneously he claims that Sweden has also its masculine side, e.g. Swedish multinational companies who prevail within a highly competitive global business environment indicate a high level of masculinity. While Hofstede (2017) characterizes Sweden as an individualistic country, Bjerke (1999) argues that Sweden among other Scandinavian countries is characterized by a collective individualistic culture. On the collective side Swedes held a great national pride according to Bjerke (1999), whereas the individualistic part is embodied e.g. in the term "Lagom" which means everybody should have the right amount, not too much and not too little (Hofstede, 2017). "Lagom" is also evident in Swedish consumer culture; it is generally frowned upon if one tries to present him or her better than others by wearing expensive clothing brands (Bertilsson, 2015).

There seems to be a general agreement that gender equality, environmental awareness, low social-class division and egalitarianism are commonly held Swedish cultural values. It is expected that young Swedish fast fashion consumers are heavily influenced by those values since they grew up surrounded by them. According to Anguelov (2016) women represent roughly 90 % of the manufacturing workforce in the Bangladeshi apparel industry and the majority of the Rana Plaza casualties were women. As stated before the fast fashion business model is damaging the environment and exploits cheap labor in production countries, therefore it does not align with the aforementioned Swedish cultural values.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature review and particularly influenced by Devinney et al. (2010) and Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011) I developed the following preliminary theoretical framework for this research project, which illustrates the fast fashion purchase decision process. I am going to further develop this framework into a conceptual model at the end of the analysis chapter. Within the consumer behavior literature the majority of scholars describe the social consumption decision process as linear (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Shen et al., 2012). However Devinney et al. (2010) argues that consumers are also controlled by their unconscious minds, which results in a recursive social consumption decision process.
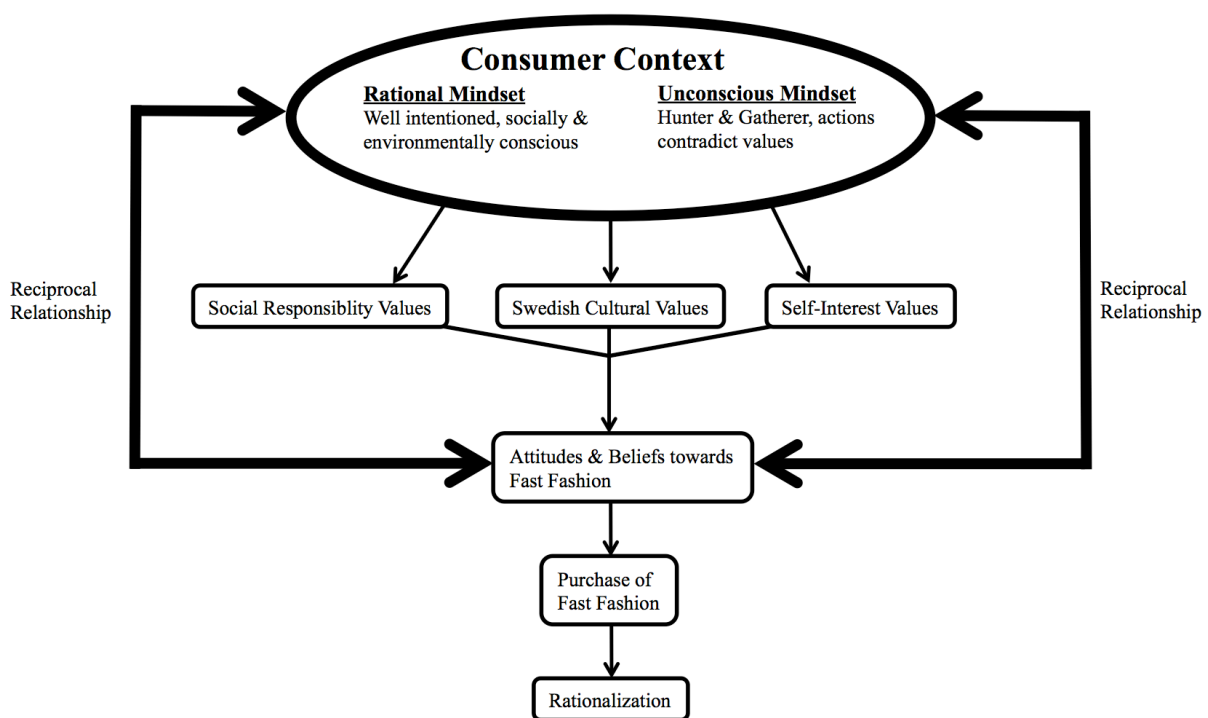
Fig. 1: Theoretical framework inspired by Devinney et al. (2010) and Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011)

The oval form depicted on the top of the theoretical framework illustrates the consumers' context influenced by the continued struggle between the rational and the unconscious mindsets. Even though some scholars like Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011), Tenbrunsel & Smith-Crowe (2008) and Shen et al. (2012) describe the purchase decision process as linear and the consumer as rather rational than unconscious, others such as Devinney et al. (2010) mention that in order for the consumer to make rational decisions he or she has to have sufficient information regarding the product. However the fast fashion supply chain is highly complicated and nearly impossible for the individual consumer to fully understand in detail (Anguelov, 2016; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011).

As a result of consumers' individual context he or she develops social responsibility values, Swedish cultural values and self-interest values. Those values refer to the Swedish context in

which this study has been conducted and might vary in different cultural contexts. The emphasis of each value depends on the individual consumers' context and derives directly from it. The consumer context together with his or her values results in attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. However there seems to be more that influences attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. As I previously mentioned within this literature review, greenwashing seems to have a particular influence in deceiving consumers as well as fast fashion retailers' collaborations with NGOs. Within the analysis chapter I am going to look into those influences from a consumer perspective.

It is important to highlight, that attitudes and beliefs might impact the consumer context as well as the individual emphasis on social responsibility values, Swedish cultural values and self-interest values. This relationship is reciprocal and is highlighted as such within the theoretical framework. After establishing attitudes and believes towards the fast fashion industry the next step within the consumer purchase decision process is the actual act of purchasing. As previously stated within this literature review, young consumers tend to be aware of social and environmental issues however they also act against their better knowledge once they stand in front of a fast fashion retail store. This phenomena seems to be particular contradictious within the Swedish context because overall held Swedish cultural values such as gender equality, environmental awareness, low social-class division and egalitarianism appear to be frequently neglected within the fast fashion industry. The final step of the theoretical framework is the rationalizations of young Swedish consumers for their continued consumption of fast fashion. To shed light on this question is the main purpose of this research project and will be further elaborated within the analysis chapter.

3. Methodology

Within this chapter I am going to outline and elaborate the applied methods to answer the research question. Furthermore I am going to specify my scientific approach and my research design. I will also present my empirical setting. Finally, data analysis and generation methods are elaborated as well as the consideration of research ethics.

3.1. Philosophical Approach of Social Science

As depicted in the theoretical framework, this research relies upon the assumption that consumers' individual contexts determine how they rationalize their continued consumption of fast fashion even though it runs counter to what consumers consider socially and environmentally acceptable. The consumers' context is not being considered as a static construct; instead the context is continuously changing as the individual adapts its beliefs and attitudes towards fast fashion, which in return leads to new attitudes and beliefs. The theoretical framework also indicates that the consumers' context consists of multiple realities. Given the complex nature of the human mind I applied an inductive research approach based on the philosophy of interpretive social science. From an ontological point of view I take the position that individuals construct their own realities, hence even within the context of fast fashion every consumer has to deal with multiple realities (Hudson & Ozanne, 1985; Hirschman, 1986). Furthermore the ontology of interpretivism stresses the importance of the individuals' context in order to truly gain understanding (ibid). As a result of the contextual dependency of the research phenomena and the non-probability sample of this study I do not attempt to establish overall generalizations regarding consumers rationalizations. Instead I pursue an interpretive epistemological position; more specifically I only endeavor to identify generalizations within the time and context framework of my non-probability sample (Hudson & Ozanne, 1985).

3.2. Research Design

In order to gain in-depth understanding of young Swedish fast fashion consumers' rationalizations for the continued consumption of fast fashion, a qualitative study was employed. More specifically I conducted a case study, which enabled me to analyze and understand the phenomena under investigation as accurately as possible (Flick, 2014). A quantitative approach on the other hand aims to isolate the cause in order to generalize the phenomena (ibid). Since the consumers and their rationalizations are at the center of my research project I refrained from doing quantitative research because the individual context and opinion of each consumer are not quantifiable. After carefully studying the fast fashion industry it became evident that H&M shows significant more efforts than its competitors to be perceived as a sustainable company. Also since H&M is a Swedish company and this study is being conducted within the Swedish context I decided to focus on young Swedish H&M customers. Given the limited amount of time and resources at my disposal to conduct this

research I refrain from doing a longitudinal study; instead I provide a snapshot of the phenomenon at the time of my research (ibid).

3.3. Empirical Setting

The sampling of this study consists of Swedish citizens between the age of 18 and 25 who completed at least one clothing purchase at H&M in the past 5 months. All participants live within the metropolitan area of Stockholm, Sweden. As I already mentioned those criteria have been chosen because young consumers are the main target group of fast fashion retailers because they are fashion-conscious and have a limited budget at their disposal (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Anguelov, 2016). Furthermore, young consumers indicate a high socially and environmentally awareness, which makes their rationalizations of fast fashion consumption particular interesting (Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012). Finally, all participants are Swedish citizens and grew up in Sweden. As a result they were influenced by Swedish cultural values such as egalitarianism, gender-equality, environmental awareness and low social-class division, which makes them additionally sensitive towards businesses who exploit the lack of environmental and labor protection laws in developing countries (Fang, 2011; Hofstede, 2017, Bertilsson, 2015; WVS, 2017b; Bjerke, 1999).

Due to my international background I only have a few Swedish acquaintances between the age of 18 and 25 in my social network. In order to access suitable participants for this study I self-selected four participants who fulfil the sampling requirements and used them as foundation for a snowball sampling (Waters, 2015). I also asked older Swedish friends of mine if they could provide me with suitable participants for my interviews. One of the original four participants is a Swedish high school student. Through the application of snowball sampling I was able to reach participants within her high school who otherwise would have been difficult to access (Waters, 2015). Due to the limited amount of time and resources at my disposal to conduct this research and the lack of a sampling frame, a non-probability sample seemed appropriate and suitable to answer the research question. In total I interviewed 12 participants, which complies with Saunders et al. (2012) who suggests a minimum sample size of five to 25 semi-structured interviews. A gender balance was not entirely achieved with five male and seven female participants. Although this is a rather limited sample, the transcription and analysis of the conducted interviews indicated data saturation because additional participants' responses started to echo responses of previous interviews (Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011).

3.4. Data Generation Method

To gain detailed, in-depth understanding into the underlying rationalizations of young, Swedish H&M consumers consumption of fast fashion I conducted semi-standardized face-to-face interviews. All interviews were conducted in Stockholm, Sweden at places chosen by the

participants to ensure the highest possible level of comfort for them. The interviews were conducted in English and recorded with a mobile device after participants have expressed their consent. Every interview was transcribed and analyzed, which I am going to further elaborate later in this methodology chapter.

Questionnaires and standardized interviews usually provide a selection of closed questions for the interviewee to choose from (Flick, 2014). As a result the interviewee is limited to choose from a given set of possible answers even though his or her preferred answer might now be among the options (Schwarz, 1999). Open questions on the other hand encourage the interviewee to speak freely and to turn his or her implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge (Flick, 2014). The open design of semi-standardized interviews including a variety of open questions that serve as guideline rather than a step-by-step course of action enables the interviewee to layout his or her viewpoint in detail (ibid). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow the interviewer to ask follow-up questions about certain statements that seem particular relevant to answer the research question (ibid). Greenwashing, as mentioned in the literature review, seems to influence consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. In order for me to gain further understanding how exactly the greenwashing practices of H&M impact young consumers I conducted two experiments during the interviews. Both experiments include sensitive materials and controversial issues. As a result I refrained from doing a focus group discussion because participants might feel pressured to express themselves in a socially acceptable manner and therefore provide inaccurate and false representations of their viewpoints (Flick, 2014; Devinney et al., 2010). According to Flick (2014) interviewees are more likely to engage in an honest conversation about a sensitive issue within a face-to-face environment as if surrounded by a group of strangers.

3.4.1. Experiment One

I presented two pictures of basic H&M t-shirts including their price tags and materials they are made of. The first t-shirt is made of 90% traditional cotton whereas the second t-shirt is partially made of organic cotton and consists of 100% cotton. The second t-shirt costs 60% more than the first t-shirt and is labeled as part of H&M's "Conscious Fashion Collection" (H&M, 2017a; 2017e). I asked the participants which one they would choose and what their reasoning behind their decision is. Afterwards I presented a short excerpt of Anguelov (2016) describing organic cotton as equal harmful for the environment as traditional cotton. Then I asked the participants how this additional information impacts their choice and if they would like to reconsider it. A detailed layout of experiment one is presented in Appendix B.

3.4.2. Experiment Two

I presented an excerpt of H&M's (2015) sustainability report highlighting the donation of USD 500,000 to help stranded refugees on the Mediterranean shores. Then I asked the participants how they feel about this philanthropic deed of H&M. Afterwards I presented an excerpt from the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), an alliance of trade unions and NGOs who closely monitor sustainability claims of fast fashion retailers, highlighting the insufficient precautions of H&M to prevent Syrian refugees in Turkey from exploitative working

conditions while sewing clothes for H&M (CCC, 2017b). Afterwards I asked how the participants feel about this exploitation of Syrian refugees and if they identify a conflict of interest between those two statements. A detailed layout of experiment two is presented in Appendix B.

3.4.3. The Participants

The following table provides an overview of the individuals who participated in this study. All names of the participants, high schools, universities and employers have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Name	Citizenship	Gender	Age	Profession	Date & Time	Meeting Place	Duration
1. Monica	Swedish	Female	18	High school student / part-time nanny	24th March 2017 at 11.30	Study room at a high school in Stockholm	27 minutes 03 seconds
2. Enia	Swedish	Female	18	High school student / part-time bartender	26th March 2017 at 16.00	Coffee place in central Stockholm	35 minutes 02 seconds
3. Lula	Swedish	Female	24	Full-time management trainee	27th March 2017 at 12.15	Conference room at her office in Stockholm	35 minutes 26 seconds
4. Jan	Swedish	Male	24	Full-time customer service employee	28th March 2017 at 12.00	Conference room at his office in Stockholm	33 minutes 36 seconds
5. Niki	Swedish	Female	18	High school student / part-time babysitter and telemarketer	31st March 2017 at 16.15	Coffee place in a suburb of Stockholm	26 minutes 54 seconds
6. Peter	Swedish	Male	19	High school student / part-time worker in a convenience store	1st April 2017 at 20.00	Chinese restaurant in a suburb of Stockholm	45 minutes 6 seconds
7. Tom	Swedish	Male	20	Full-time seller at a gas station	2nd April 2017 at 16.00	Coffee place in central Stockholm	23 minutes 19 seconds
8. Anton	Swedish	Male	25	Full-time waiter	10th April 2017 at 18.30	Coffee place in central Stockholm	35 minutes 5 seconds
9. Harris	Swedish	Male	22	Full-time business administration student / vice treasurer at a student union	13th April 2017 at 14.00	Coffee place at his university in Stockholm	35 minutes 3 seconds
10. Sofia	Swedish	Female	22	Full-time student, currently completing an unpaid internship	16th April 2017 at 14.00	Coffee place in central Stockholm	40 minutes 46 seconds
11. Fatma	Swedish	Female	24	Full-time graduate management student / part-time customer service representative at	20th April 2017 at 11.45	Library at her university in Stockholm	31 minutes 35 seconds

				a large Swedish bank			
12. Berta	Swedish	Female	22	Full-time student / part-time accountant	20th April 2017 at 13.30	Coffee place at her university in Stockholm	28 minutes 52 seconds

Table 1: Table of the participants

3.5. Data Analysis Method

In order to analyze and understand the collected data I employed an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). More specifically I identified themes and pattern that frequently occurred within the collected data (ibid). I started the process of inductive thematic analysis with a verbatim transcription of the conducted interviews (ibid). All interviews were transcribed (see Appendix C) according to the rules of transcription by Flick (2014). After carefully reading through the transcripts I identified directly expressed themes by the interviewees (semantic themes) and underlying conceptualizations (latent themes) that were not directly verbally expressed by the interviewees but instead "…examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations – and ideologies – that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Once all the themes were identified, I further sub-divided them if deemed necessary or eliminated non-relevant themes. Inductive thematic analysis does not follow any particular coding framework; instead the approach is entirely data-driven (ibid). This method is particular adequate to analyze and gain in-depth understanding of individuals' viewpoints (Flick, 2014).

3.6. Research Ethics

Through the course of this research project I fully complied with the research ethics outlined by Flick (2014). Prior to every interview I elaborated the purpose, the methodological approach and intended contributions of my research. By sharing this information I ensured that the participants felt comfortable being a part of this study. All participants expressed their specific consent that allowed me to record the interviews with a mobile device, transcribe and analyze them. After completion of this study I will irrevocably delete all recordings. The names, high schools, universities and employers of the interviewees have been changed to protect their anonymity. Before initiating the data generation stage of my research I carefully assessed that there is no potential damage for the participants resulting form this study. All individuals who participated in this study were at least 18 years old and full of age, which enabled them to be a part in my research without supervision or approval of a legal guardian. Every interview took place in a venue chosen by the participants to ensure that he or she felt as comfortable as possible.

3.7. Limitations

For the purpose of this study I employed a non-probability sample, which means the results of this study are not generalizable towards the whole population of Sweden as a country or Stockholm as a city. Instead the aim of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of consumers' rationalizations in the context of fast fashion consumption, more specifically of the fast fashion consumption at H&M, and to provide in-depth insights into the perspectives of the participants. This study provides solely a snapshot of the phenomenon at the time of the research. As a result, changes that might occur over time are not within the scope of this research project.

To initiate the snowball sampling I self-selected four people from my social network that fulfilled the empirical requirements. Even though I am neither related to them nor do they belong to my close circle of friends, I nevertheless might have been biased towards them, which potentially could have impacted the course of the interview and consequently the data from those interviews. Since I conducted all the interviews and analyzed them, my recollection of the interviews might have been biased depending on how I perceived the interviewee as an individual and thus influenced the course of my analysis. From a data collection point of view, the semi-structured interviews might have lead participants to provide socially acceptable answers that do not represent how they actually felt (Schwarz, 1999).

All interviews were audio-recorded, which might have unsettled the interviewees and therefore resulted in less truthful and authentic statements (Walsham, 2006). Video recording of the interviews would have further enforced the feeling of insecurity among the participants, which is why I decided not to do it. As a result I was not able to capture non-verbal communication signs on tape, which would have added further context to my data collection (Walsham, 2006). An inductive thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data; hence this approach indicates a general lack of methodological and theoretical context (Flick, 2014).

All interviews were conducted in English, which is not my first language and neither it is of any of the participants. As a result some participants might not have been able to articulate themselves in a way they would have been able to if the interviews were conducted in Swedish. Nevertheless, authenticity of the gathered data was ensured because I have a high proficiency level in English given my international university education and my international working experience. Furthermore, Sweden as a country indicates a high level of English literacy and is ranked as the 3rd best non-native English speaking country in the world (Education First, 2015). Quantitative research and especially inductive thematic analysis is often criticized for being too subjective. However, since I am not a Swedish citizen and only live in Sweden since one and a half years, I was able to investigate the phenomenon from a slightly more objective position as if I would be a Swedish national, which is adds further credibility to my findings.

4. Findings and Analysis

In this chapter I present the findings of the qualitative data and how they relate to the extant body of literature. This method of data analysis is simultaneously a presentation of the main findings and a juxtaposition of the findings from previous work (Burnard, 1991). The findings are analyzed in a descriptive way and structured into themes in order to shed light on the research question why environmentally and socially conscious young Swedish citizens do not act upon their convictions once they enter a fast fashion retail store and how they rationalize their behavior. Later on in this chapter I am going to illustrate how H&M impacts young Swedish consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards the fast fashion industry and how those actions are reflected within the extant body of literature.

4.1. Struggle between Rational and Unconscious Mindsets

The participants where asked if they consider H&M as a good company, the struggle between their rational and unconscious mindsets became evident. On one hand young Swedish consumers are suspicious towards H&M's fast fashion business model, on the other hand they have a strong desire to buy cheap and fashionable clothes.

> Harris: Yeah people are aware of it but I mean it is like you have to sides and I think that the cheap prices is for most of the people the one deciding in this occasion.

> Fatma: …you can get a handbag that looks exactly like the one who costs 20'000 SEK, so in that sense it [H&M] is good but […] I don't know much abut how they [H&M] work but I know that they [H&M] have had issues with child labor and different environmental issues that is not good…

Nonetheless some interviewees' answers suggest that the unconscious mindset driven by their hunter-and-gatherer instincts is commanding their fashion consumption behavior. The ability to buy a large quantity of clothes for little money triggers a frantic urge to buy. Some participants described the process of buying clothes as an adventure with several obstacles they have to overcome in order to eventually be rewarded with a successful purchase.

> Lula: …it's still fashion and you […] you don't have to really think a lot about the purchase it's just you go in and out grab a t-shirt for SEK 99 it's nothing you have to think about but if you go into Ralph Laurent […] you have to think like oh shit, okay it's a t-shirt for SEK 999, okay should I buy it? And then you are going to think again but H&M is more like okay let's get four of those [t-shirts]…

> Anton: Well it's like a hunt you know […] if I want to buy a shirt […] I need to have something hat I need to wear in the summer and it has to be colorful and it has to fit […] so I need to go around and look it up. So that's why I might say it's like a hunt…

At the same time the majority of the participants were convinced that consumers are eventually deciding fashion trends because they are the ones that wear the clothes. If consumers refuse to buy and wear clothes the fast fashion retailers would have to adjust their offerings accordingly if they want to stay in business. Those statements echo Schwarzkopf's (2011) marketing myth that describes the consumer as voter, judge and jury, the ultimate determinant if a product is going succeed or fail on the market, implying that consumers will naturally make the right decision because they are well intentioned. They also align with the linear consumption decision model that describes the consumer as rational (Devinney et al. 2010).

> Niki: …I am thinking about the consumers are the one steering it, if it's popular or not, if it's going to go well or not if the consumers don't buy it it's not going to go well and they are not going to keep producing things in that trend.

Especially the younger participants between 18 and 19 years of age and the students often referred to their limited budget as an explanation why they have to buy their clothes as cheap as possible and therefore neglect ethical and environmental aspects. However several participants expressed sincere desire to change their consumption behavior towards more ethical and environmental friendly products once they have graduated and earn a good salary.

> Harris: …I am a student I have not even SEK 3'000 a month. To buy a new shirt for SEK 1'000 is very different from buying a new one at H&M for SEK 200 and it looks kind of similar…

> Sofia: …I mean I have in a way decided that I put this on hold while I am a student and I don't have the money to take this responsibility and when I get older and I have more money and I have a job I think I will take this responsibility a lot more.

4.1.1. Social Responsibility Values

When the participants where asked what is important to them when they are evaluating in which store to buy their clothes; price, quality and how it looks was more important than where the clothes were made. Those findings mirror the findings of the extant literature indicating that the origin of the clothes has not a necessarily high priority for consumers (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012; Joergens, 2006; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011).

> Enia: Yeah because you don't think about that as a consumer here, what I know in Sweden you don't think about oh where was is it made, you just see the ticket on the t-shirt that was made in well… China or something like that and you are like oh okay, and you go on with your life I guess […] if it looks good you will buy it, that is the main point.

> Tom: I mean if it's something I think looks nice and it's reasonable I buy it, I don't really care where it comes from.

Nevertheless several participants mentioned that young Swedish consumers are more aware of environmental and ethical issues than previous generations. However their awareness seems to be directed towards issues that directly affect their personal well-being. Buying ecological food items is more important than buying eco-friendly clothes. Participants also indicated that they are more likely to take actions against sexism or racism rather than to improve the working conditions in developing countries.

> Enia: …the modern Swedish person […] like from 18 to 25 maybe, they will think more environmental that's why supermarkets – we have more ecological food options and stuff like that…

> Peter: So that is why people don't take matter in their hands to do something about how the situation on the other side of the world looks and but that is why I think more people focus on problems like racial matters and feminism and stuff because that is what is happening in our society.

4.1.2. Swedish Cultural Values

Young Swedish consumers seemed very credulous towards sustainable marketing claims. If a company publishes an advertisement stating that they are ecological, people tend to just believe it without asking additional questions because the government in Sweden would punish false marketing claims.

> Monica: Well mostly people think if it's like on bags or something like that, it's not possible that they [fast fashion retailers] lie about it because in Sweden they have like laws that go against it […] what they [Swedes] read they [Swedes] think it's real […] because they [Swedes] know that in Sweden they [the Swedish government] are like strict with their marketing rules…

If something is ever going to change the government has to take action. Young Swedish consumers tend to deny personal responsibility and expect instead actions from their government. Devinney et al. (2010) discovered similar findings and described consumers living in social democracies such as Sweden or Germany as "governmental dependents" because they are concerned about negative social and environmental impacts of the fashion industry but they fail to take individual action and instead expect the government to take the lead and issue more stringent regulations for the industry.

> Tom: …I just feel like if you want to make like a real change it has to be like a law, the government has to do something about it […] I just think there should be laws regulating that kind of things more.

H&M is a Swedish multinational company and serves as an ambassador for Sweden around the globe and also represents success and economic strength of Sweden as a country. Fang (2011) who describes the Swedish culture as both feminine and masculine whereas the latter is particular exemplified in the success of Swedish multinational cooperation like H&M. The participants revealed that they prefer buying clothes at H&M because of its Swedish heritage

and they feel proud about H&M, which aligns with Bjerke (1999) who described national pride as part of the Swedish collective individualistic culture.

> Monica: I think most like it because it's also like a Swedish brand […] a lot of people would rather like buying from H&M than from Zara because it's a Swedish [brand]…

> Fatma: I think young Swedes are pretty proud of H&M. This is Swedish, this is something that has reached worldwide and we the Swedes are behind it kind of but also I think Swedes are very aware of H&M's production and like the problems they had lately but still I think that pride is […] larger than the problems…

Young Swedish H&M customers seem to be willing to overlook ethical misconduct in H&M's production process more easily because of the company's Swedish origin. This indicates that other cultural values such as environmental awareness and egalitarianism are less important in this context. Those findings also contradict Hofstede (2017) who describes Sweden as a purely feminine country and aligns with Fang (2011), claiming that culture consists of paradoxes that reinforce each other. The majority of the participants appreciate the balanced assortment of H&M; it is not too fancy and not too cheap and represents the Swedish term Lagom (Hofstede, 2017b). Fast fashion retailers facilitate the identity construction of their customers (Anguelov, 2016; McNeill & Moore, 2015). H&M is providing its young customers a secure and affordable path into Swedish society.

> Harris: …even though it is from H&M you can say that to people and people won't judge you, they would be like yeah cool it's from H&M it doesn't really matter that much even though people know it's a cheap company.

> Sofia: …I think everybody in this room has a piece of H&M. Definitely.

4.1.3. Self-Interest Values

Young Swedish consumer not only appraise the good value for money at H&M, they also seem very satisfied with the entire shopping experience. Several participants appreciate the good aftersales service and a majority mentioned the dense network of retail stores around the globe and particular in Sweden as a competitive advantage that increases the trustworthiness of H&M.

> Fatma: First of all the availability, there is an H&M store in every city I think in Sweden and it's not only one, sometimes it's several…

> Monica: …it's a trustworthy company and I like how they handle the service like with returns and stuff […] I could return if something was like damaged or something, so I think they […] offer a good service for their customers.

Shen et al. (2012) claimed that consumer knowledge regarding negative social and environmental of the fast fashion industry correlates with the readiness to buy ethical products. However some interviewees who indicated a high level of awareness regarding

negative social and environmental impacts of the fast fashion industry eventually concluded that personal needs such as saving money and getting the desired fashion item are more important than to act upon their convictions once they are about to make a purchase decision. Those findings align with Taplin (2014) who describes Western fashion consumers as contained to pay more money for better working conditions in production countries.

> Sofia: …I think also when you go to H&M you think like I shouldn't actually buy something, I should think about the children in these countries but right now I really need this top…

This containment became even more evident after some participants where exposed to the experiments (see Appendix B).

> Harris: …when I think about myself I would like to have a shirt for a cheaper price so I mean even though I want them [the workers] to have a higher salary I am not really ready to pay a higher price just because they should have a higher salary over there…

4.2. Influential Factors of Consumers' Attitudes and Beliefs towards the Fast Fashion Industry

In the previous sections I presented the findings in connection to social responsibility values, Swedish cultural values and self-interest values deriving from the consumer context. Those values together with the consumer context eventually shape the consumer attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. However there seem to be other factors that also influence the consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion.

4.2.1. Greenwashing

There was a general consensus of distrust towards sustainability claims of H&M among all participants. As part of my second experiment during the interviews (see Appendix B) I presented an excerpt of H&M's annual sustainability report highlighting a donation of $ 500'000 to help stranded refugees in the Mediterranean Sea (H&M, 2015). Even though all interviewees appreciated the good gesture they immediately dismissed it as an attempt to get good publicity. The participant's distrust towards sustainability claims of fast fashion retailers aligns with the findings of the extant literature (Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012).

> Jan: …I mean they probably did it [donation] to be nice but they also probably did it [donation] because they were hoping for good publicity (laughs).

> Fatma: …So I think they are doing something for others but for themselves at the same time because this is something that really builds on their brand and their values so I think it's a win-win situation I don't think that they just give money just to give.

Some interviewees directly associated H&M with greenwashing. They believe that H&M is overstating their efforts to be a sustainable and environmental friendly company. Several participants also mentioned that H&M has recycling campaigns and a conscious fashion collection, which they think is good but they also mentioned that H&M is at the same time one of the primarily responsible party for todays throwaway society.

> Sofia: …I mean they do some small things great but then they have this huge pile of terrible things that they do but it's being greenwashed by this small things, that's how I think.

> Harris: …they are really a company that creates this where you just buy things and throw them away […] the create this and still they are trying to say that they are sustainable to their consumers […] but at the same time they are creating tons of clothes, which is not good for the environment and also as I said they are using labors that are really cheap […] so I think that is why I would call them a greenwash company.

As part of experiment one, the participants had to choose between two different H&M t-shirts and were afterwards presented with an excerpt of Anguelov (2016) who explains why organic cotton is equal damaging for the environment as traditional cotton (see Appendix B). Several interviewees expressed sincere frustration about H&M's misleading marketing claims but they were also frustrated about the entire fashion industry. Those reactions exemplify the impacts exposed greenwashing incidents can have on consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards the entire sustainable fashion industry (Markham et al., 2014). Sheth et al. (2011) label this phenomenon as a central reason why green consumption in contemporary society has not yet achieved a higher level and remains a niche market.

> Nikki: …I feel kind of dumb not knowing about this because […] I think about eco and organic clothing as the holy thing but now that I know that's actually not I wouldn't think about it that much and I wouldn't lift it that much.

> Fatma: …I am a bit disappointed because it feels like we are fooled by thinking this [organic cotton] is actually a better alternative…

4.2.2. Celebrities

Some participants mentioned that celebrities have no influence regarding their perception of H&M as a fast fashion retailer because it is more important for them what their friends are wearing or that they create their own style. However some participants also said that celebrity endorsement increases the status of H&M as a brand and that they associate the positive reputation of the celebrity with H&M.

> Niki: …if he [celebrity] is wearing it I am going to wear this as well because it's good because famous people don't wear bad clothes […] they don't wear H&M clothes if they are not good so I am going to… yeah wear it for that reason maybe.

> Harris: …I remember when David Beckham released his underwear I went to H&M right away to buy a pair […] I mean when I see David Beckham associated with H&M I think that

they are a good... a better company I don't know really why but I mean I like Beckham and that is why I like H&M as well I think that it really works.

For some young Swedish consumers a celebrity is an ultimate seal of approval directly influencing their purchase decision. If a desired celebrity designed his or her own clothes for H&M, other factors that would normally influence the consumers purchase decision are ignored.

4.2.3. Education

Corporate social responsibility and environmental issues in connection with multinational cooperation seems to be a frequent subject in Swedish classrooms both at high school and university level. Roughly half of the participants were at least once in contact with this subject during their education. When young Swedish students learn about sustainable fashion in school, H&M seems to serve as a role model.

> Tom: Well I think school makes us very aware of like environmental problems and like how serious it is…

> Enia: …our teacher said that we would be seeing how they [H&M] market themselves as environmental and how they [H&M] work with environmental issues and stuff…

What exactly Swedish students learn in school regarding the fashion industry in connection with environmental and ethical issues is not within the scope of this research project. Yet some participants expressed rather cynically about what they learned in school regarding this subject.

4.2.4. The Green Trend

Being aware of ethical and environmental issues is trendy according to several interviewees. Even though all participants expressed to a greater or lesser degree concerns about the environment and indicated some actions towards more sustainable consumption, there seems to be certain skepticism towards consumers who strictly purse an ethical life style. It is almost like a social pressure among young consumers to be aware of social and environmental issues. This awareness should be reflected in some purchase decisions, mostly food choices.

> Jan: …I think to some people it's like a trend to be environmental smart or environmental aware. I think it's a trend among some people, like turning vegan, that's a trend.

4.2.5. Job Creator in Production Countries

During the interviews the participants had to share their feelings about the fact that H&M is producing the majority of their garments in developing countries like Bangladesh. As anticipated everybody thought it was sad and was also aware that the workers in Bangladesh might not always be treated fairly. However the participants also seem to perceive H&M's

engagement in Bangladesh as an opportunity for the local people to get jobs. As a result the Bangladeshi people are able to provide a better life to their families.

> Jan: …as long as they treat their employees in a good way, if they give them a decent paycheck and if they provide work I think that's a great thing but […] I am not too sure about if they treat them right and stuff like that…

> Fatma: …it can be good as well, if they can have good conditions for the labor […] I think that is great because then they create jobs and contribute to the wealth fare of that state…

The participants perceived Bangladesh and other production countries as extremely poor. They think that the fast majority of the people living there are unemployed and have a very limited perspective in their lives. Sewing clothes for fast fashion retailers seems to be the only reasonable choice for them to rise from poverty.

> Niki: …they don't get paid that much like they should because they are in an underdeveloped country because that is the only thing they get.

> Peter: …I think their human rights are very limited because they want to survive so this is what they have to do.

Overall the participants revealed an indifference towards the working conditions in Bangladesh. They mention that they think it is sad but at the same time they did not seem to really be affected. A similar indifference was detected when the participants were asked were the chemicals used to dye garments are disposed. Everybody but one person believes the chemicals are poured into the sea, lakes, environment or buried somewhere, which they think is sad but at the same time they did not made an impression of real empathy.

> Sofia: I think that the people […] that are coloring the clothes they probably just don't even know that it's bad for the environment or don't even care because they just want to feed their kids […] I think there are probably purple lakes in Pakistan or something.

4.2.6. Scandals and Disasters

Every participant of this study has read or heard at least at one point in his or her lives some rumors about the fast fashion industry or H&M involving human rights abuse or cases of child labor. However nobody could provide a specific source or timeframe where and when exactly they read or heard about these rumors.

> Tom: I think I read something about them being… some article long ago, because I have like this thought in my head like something […] about environment and H&M, yeah I guess that is my knowledge of it.

The participants possessed almost no knowledge about the Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh in 2013 that killed 1'127 workers. Only one participant brought up the issue and she didn't seemed to be very well informed about the incident.

Sofia: …a whole facility in Pakistan I think, just ehm collapsed because the management didn't listen to the workers about that there were big cracks in the house and eventually the whole thing broke down and so many people died and it was a long time ago but I didn't know about it even.

4.3. How H&M Impacts Customers' Attitudes and Beliefs towards the Fast Fashion Industry

In this section I analyzed how H&M's business practices directly influences young Swedish consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion.

4.3.1. The Role of NGOs

NGOs play an important role to hold companies accountable for their claims to be more ethical and environmental-friendly (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). One such example is "The Clean Clothes Campaign" (CCC), an alliance of trade unions and NGOs who closely monitor claims of fast fashion retailers to improve working conditions and antipollution standards within the fashion industry (CCC, 2017a). In its latest sustainability report H&M highlights a USD 500'000 donation to help refugees, which stranded on the Mediterranean shores (H&M, 2015, p. 121). Contrary to this good gesture, CCC posted on January 2017 a report by "Fair Actions and future in our Hands", indicating that H&M among other fashion retailers does not take sufficient precautions to prevent Syrian refugees in Turkey from exploitative working conditions (CCC, 2017b). H&M promised to take immediate actions to improve the situation but like Delmas & Burbano (2011) mentioned it requires organizations like CCC to hold companies like H&M accountable.

On the other hand NGO collaborations with fast fashion retailers can also be controversial. For instance H&M presents on its website a variety of collaborations with trade unions (e.g. "The Ethical Trading Initiative"), Swedish government agencies (e.g. "Sida and Swedish Leadership for Development"), foundations (e.g. "World Wide Fund for Nature") and non-for-profit organizations (e.g. "Textile Exchange") (H&M, 2017c). This group of stakeholders collaborates with H&M to help establishing environmental-friendlier business practices and to improve the working-conditions in the production countries. According to Lyon & Montgomery (2015) there have been some successful collaboration with multi national organizations and NGOs but unfortunately some NGOs help companies to greenwash their business practices as the following example of H&M's collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature illustrates.

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) defines water as the world's most precious resource and simultaneously collaborates with H&M, regardless of the fact that textile production is the world's second biggest freshwater polluting industry (Anguelov, 2016; H&M, 2017c). H&M pledges to eliminate the discharge of hazardous chemicals into the environment by

2020 indicating that they are planning to discharge hazardous chemicals into the environment for three more years (H&M, 2017d). Additionally, H&M is the second biggest buyer of organic cotton and as aforementioned collaborates with the non-for-profit organization "Textile Exchange" (Textile Exchange, 2016). However, Anguelov (2016) describes organic cotton as even more freshwater polluting than traditional cotton. The process of turning organic cotton into yarn causes more freshwater pollution than the use of pesticides in traditional cotton agriculture (ibid). Neither H&M, nor Textile Exchange or WWF highlight the damages of organic cotton for the environment. This retention of information deludes customers because it overstates the environmental performance of H&M and it exemplifies the assistance of an NGO in greenwashing H&M's business practices (Loy & Montgomery, 2015).

WWF encourages the consumption of something that itself causes the problem they pledged to fight against. The following image depicts an advertisement of the H&M –WWF clothing campaign, #roarforwildlife.

Fig.2: H&M Kids collection to raise funds for WWF (H&M, 2016b)

4.3.2. The Role of Celebrities

Walker & Wan (2012) describe greenwashing "…as a strategic communication tool to camouflage a firm's lack of efforts in engaging in true environmental performance" (p. 231). H&M's strategic communication is to some extend carried out by celebrities such as M.I.A. and Gisele Bündchen (H&M, 2013; 2016). Both are environmental and social activists and widely recognized for their engagement; Gisele for example is a member of the Rainforest Alliance Board of Directors (Rainforest Alliance, 2014). Celebrities have a particular influence on young and unsophisticated consumers who identify themselves with the celebrities (Anguelov, 2016). Gisele Bündchen is famous among other things for her

engagement to preserve the rainforest; at the same time Gisele also promotes the consumption of H&M clothes. This results in a delusion for the consumer because he or she does not associate H&M clothing with environmental destruction since an environmental activist encourages the consumption of it.

4.3.3. Shift of Responsibility towards the Consumer to Make the Right Decision

Rundhalsad t-shirt
49:90
Nyhet

Fig.3: T-shirts & linnen (H&M, 2017e)

Rundhalsad t-shirt Regular fit
79:90
Nyhet

Fig.4: Conscious-sustainable style (H&M, 2017a)

The t-shirt depicted on Fig. 3 is made of traditional cotton, whereas the t-shirt depicted on Fig. 4 is partially made of organic cotton and is part of H&M's "Conscious Fashion Collection". The consumer needs to decide if he or she is willing to pay a 60% price premium to make the right decision in the form of a t-shirt that is partially made of organic cotton. Carrington et al. (2016) argue that the emphasis on the consumers' responsibility to make the right decision, deludes him or her from companies' unethical business practices.

"Ethical fashion can be defined as fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labor conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton" (Joergens, 2006, p. 361).

As was previously stated, this definition of ethical fashion includes several contractions, firstly "not harming the environment […] by using […] organic cotton". Anguelov (2016) describes organic cotton as equal harmful for the environment as traditional cotton. Secondly, H&M as the industry leader of ethical fast fashion failed to prevent Syrian refugees from being exposed to exploitative labor conditions in Turkish garment factories while sewing clothes for H&M, which just describes the latest sweatshop labor incident in January 2017

(CCC, 2017b). In conclusion, H&M does not comply with Joergens (2006) definition of ethical fashion. Instead H&M exemplifies Laufer's (2003) elements of deception and shifts the responsibility to make ethical purchasing decision to the consumers by offering "conscious" fashion items while simultaneously maintaining a polluting and unethical business model.

4.3.4. H&M's Elements of Deception

Deception as a direct result of greenwashing has been divided into three elements such as fronting, posturing and examples (Laufer, 2003). In the table below those elements are further elaborated and exemplified with H&M's greenwashing practices.

Elements of deception	1. Fronting	2. Posturing	3. Examples
How the elements of deception are defined by Laufer (2003)	A - Publish hyperbolic claims B - Retain relevant information C - Rebrand	A - Persuade stakeholders to comply with sustainability claims B - Use public affairs office C - Employ front groups	A - Advertise image of ethical leadership within the industry B - Advertise minor projects as if they would be significant C - Establish NGO collaboration
How the elements of deception are employed by H&M	A - Publishing an annually 100+ pages sustainability report B - Retention of information regarding the negative environmental impacts of organic cotton and overconsumption of disposable clothing C - Launching the "Conscious-Sustainable Style" or a kids clothing collection to raise funds for WWF	A - Including sustainability as a part of the promoted lifestyle, consumers will create their identity around it B - Weekly website updates regarding "the latest sustainability news" C - Gisele Bündchen, M.I.A & Co. advocate for more sustainability and simultaneously promote consumption of H&M clothing around the globe	A - For the 6th consecutive year H&M has been named as one of the most ethical companies in the world B - Eliminating the discharge of hazardous chemicals by 2020 C - 23 published memberships & collaborations with NGOs, NPOs, foundations and government agencies

Table 2: Three elements of deception by greenwashing (Laufer, 2003)

H&M walks a tightrope maintaining its green façade as a leading ethical company and simultaneously staying competitive within an industry that is based on the exploitation of cheap labor and lack of environmental regulations in the production countries. Corporations who successfully greenwashed their business practices remain sometimes among the worst polluter and driver of social injustice because they successfully created a green image and as a result the public no longer scrutinizes those companies regarding the compliance of their stated efforts (Laufer, 2003).

5. Discussion

The current study investigates the underlying rationale of environmentally and socially conscious young Swedish consumers for their continued consumption of fast fashion as well as the different influential factors that shape their attitudes and believes towards fast fashion. Throughout the interviews it became evident that the participants possess a rather superficial knowledge about the impacts of fast fashion towards environment and society. There seems to be a green trend in contemporary Swedish society, which the interviewees feel almost obligated to follow. This trend is further promoted by the Swedish school system. However, the young Swedish consumers of my sample consider price, quality and look as the most decisive factors when buying clothes. In this chapter I am going to present my main findings and compare them to previous findings of the extant literature. Based on my findings and the theoretical framework (see chapter 2.4) I developed an enhanced conceptual model. Finally, I am going to propose managerial implications for the Swedish school system, the Swedish government and H&M.

5.1. Answering the Research Question

When participants were asked what is most important to them when buying clothes; price, quality and how it looks were the determinant factors. Those findings align with previous studies within the field of consumer preferences in the fashion industry (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012; Joergens, 2006; Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire, 2011; Jegethesan et al., 2012). The origin of the garments and the working conditions under which the garments where produced seem to be rather unimportant, which echoes particularly the findings of Joergens (2006). Nevertheless the participants, especially the younger participants (18-19 years old) and the students pledged to buy more ethical and organic products once they have more money at their disposal. Many participants rationalized their current consumption of fast fashion with having no choice, other than buying clothes at cheap fast fashion retailers because they cannot afford other stores. However nobody suggested reducing fashion consumption, which would according to Anguelov (2016) be the only meaningful solution. This unawareness indicates a general lack of substantial environmental knowledge among the young Swedish consumers of this sample and echoes the findings of Hill & Lee (2012) and McNeill & Moore (2015).

Another commonly used rationalization by the participants was that they expected the government to take actions and issue more stringent laws for the fashion industry, which is described by Devinney et al. (2010) as government dependency. The young Swedish consumers of this sample seem to trust the Swedish government to closely monitor the fast fashion industry and to take actions if there would be any misconduct. Several participants mentioned that they learned in high school about corporate social responsibility and particularly how H&M as a Swedish multinational company is dealing with environmental and social issues in the fast fashion industry. Public school education seems to be an

important influential factor to shape young Swedish consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. Furthermore, some participants of this sample referred to H&M's Swedish heritage as a reason why Swedes are more likely to buy clothes at H&M. The assortment of H&M represents the Swedish term Lagom, it is not too fancy and not too cheap. According to several participants there is an ongoing trend within Swedish society to be perceived as social and environmental conscious. Some interviewees had a rather cynical tone when they referred to this green trend and described it as something temporary. However the efforts of H&M to be perceived as environmental-friendly and ethical seem to go hand in hand with the desire of young Swedish consumers to be perceived as environmental-friendly and ethical. H&M offers its consumers for a few extra SEK an affordable way of being conscious without actually reducing their consumption level, which seems to be a win-win situation for both H&M and its consumers.

All participants have heard in one way or another stories about human rights abuses and environmental pollution in connection with the fast fashion industry. However nobody could name any specific incident. The Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh, which has killed 1'127 people on April 24th 2013, seems to be buried in oblivion. Only one participant recalled some blurred memories about an accident that happened in Pakistan a few years ago, which killed a lot of people because a factory collapsed. She was referring to the Rana Plaza incident but she did not know any specifics about the disaster, not even the country where it took place. Those findings indicate the limited lifespan of disasters in consumers' minds. In the age of Social Media consumers are exposed to a constant stream of tragedies that take place every day around the globe. Every interviewee expressed a concerning level of numbness towards the working conditions and the lack of environmental regulations in the production countries of the fast fashion industry. Even though they unanimously agreed that the working conditions are bad and environmental regulation should be more stringent, they also seemed to accept it as the way it is. Bangladesh for example was perceived as so poor that their citizens simply have to work under those bad conditions if they want to feet their families. Some participants even rationalized the engagement of the fast fashion industry in developing countries like Bangladesh as something good because they create jobs. The interviewees further thought it was normal to dispose chemicals after they have been used to dye garments in the water bodies and the environment of the production countries.

Another major influential factor that shapes the interviewees attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion is greenwashing. The vast majority of the participants expressed sincere distrust in H&M's sustainability claims, which resulted in suspiciousness towards ethical and sustainable fashion in general and aligns with Markham et al. (2014). Even though celebrity endorsement was not important for some consumers because they rather rely on what their social environment is wearing, other participants described it as the ultimate seal of approval that the clothes are good. However, only one participant knew that H&M's spokespersons like Gisele Bündchen, Madonna, David Beckham or M.I.A are environmental and/or social activists. The findings of this research project also show that H&M is leveraging their conscious clothing line alongside with their efforts to be a role model of eco-friendly fashion within the fast

fashion industry to create additional value for their customers and to establish a competitive advantage rather than push for actual change within the industry.

5.2. Enhanced Conceptual Model

Based on the extant body of literature I presented a theoretical framework in my literature review (see chapter 2.4). In the enhanced conceptual model depicted below I further added influential factors that impact the attitudes and beliefs of the interviewees towards fast fashion. Those additional factors are greenwashing, celebrities, the green trend, education, scandals & disasters and fast fashion as a job creator in production countries. They directly derivate from my findings and contribute to the existing body of research within the field. The relationship between the consumer context and the attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion is reciprocal and eventually impacts the consumers' rationale for their continued consumption of fast fashion.
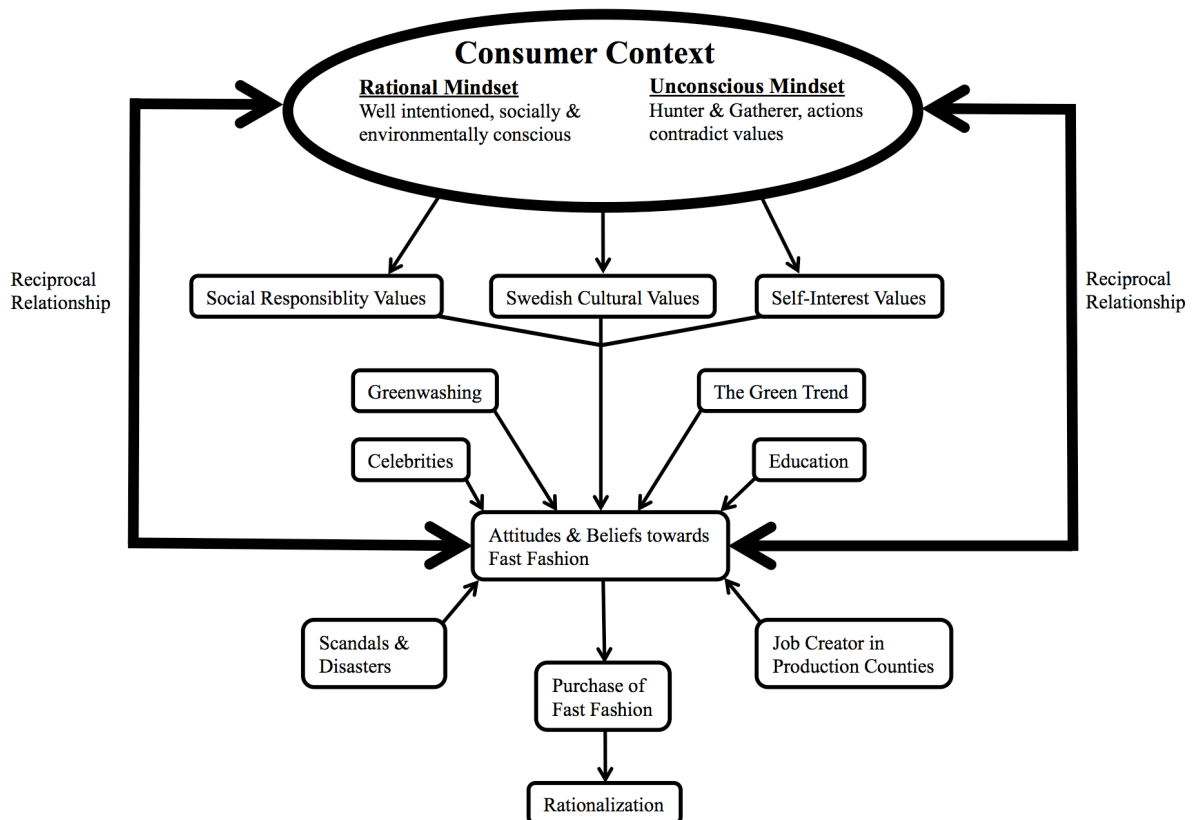
Fig. 5: Enhanced conceptual model inspired by Devinney et al. (2010) and Bhaduri & Ha-Brookshire (2011)

5.3. Implications

The vast majority of the participants considered buying ethical and environmental-friendly advertised products as the right way to be pro-active against poor working conditions and environmental pollution. This approach suggests that consumers can maintain their current level of consumption as long as they buy ethical and environmental-friendly products such as

H&M's conscious fashion line. However, Anguelov (2016) suggests that organic cotton is equally harmful for the environment as traditional cotton. Therefore the only option for consumers to contribute achieving actual change is to reduce their fashion consumption. The results of this study show that young Swedish consumers learn in high school about corporate social responsibility and how important it is to buy organic products. They also rely on the Swedish government to introduce more stringent regulations if deemed necessary. Therefore my findings suggests that both the Swedish government and the Swedish school system should take more pro-active roles sensitizing young Swedish consumers regarding the negative impacts of the current level of fashion consumption. Rather than advertising H&M as a role model of eco-friendly fashion, the public sector could highlight the importance of a more mindful approach towards consumption as suggested by Sheth et al. (2011).

Even though NGOs are important to monitor sustainability claims of fast fashion retailers and holding them accountable, some NGOs like the WWF should be more careful regarding their corporations with companies like H&M. Rather than promoting to buy more clothes, WWF should educate consumers about the actual consequences of fast fashion consumption for environment and society. The media should rather than just report about disasters and scandals in hindsight also inform their audience about opportunities to help preventing future disaster and scandals from happening in the first place. Finally, H&M should be careful not to face consumer boycotts in the future. In 2009, the movie "*Bananas! On trial for Malice"* by the Swedish filmmaker Fredrik Gertten exposed Dole, an American food company, for their human rights abuse in Nicaragua (Bananasthemovie, 2009). As a result of the public outcry, the Swedish fast food chain Max Hamburgerrestauranger AB decided to boycott Dole fruits from their Menu (ibid). Even though H&M is not depended on third parties to sell their products, they nevertheless are dependent on consumers' willingness to buy their products. The findings of this study indicate that young Swedish consumers are willing to keep buying clothes at H&M but if the green trend in Swedish society keeps evolving, this might rapidly change in the future.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the young Swedish consumers of this sample rationalize their continued consumption of fast fashion with their preferences of price, quality and look over ethical and environmental considerations. They also deny personal responsibility because they expect the government to take actions. Furthermore this study showed that greenwashing, the Swedish school system and the green trend in Swedish society particularly impact the participants' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion.

This snapshot of young consumers' rationale regarding their fashion consumption within the Swedish context serves as a fertile ground for future research. A longitudinal study could highlight changes regarding consumers' rationalizations. It might also be interesting how young consumers in other social democracies rationalize their continued consumption of fast fashion. Corporate social responsibility and eco-friendly fashion seem to be frequently discussed subjects in Swedish high schools and universities. However the results of this study indicate that students are being taught to buy clothes made from organic materials rather than lower their overall consumption. It might be interesting from a pedagogical point to investigate how Swedish students perceive the efforts from the public sector to sensitize them towards more sustainable fashion consumption. Also there seems to be a lack of actual knowledge regarding the far-reaching negative consequences of the fast fashion industry towards society and the environment in the production countries. Future research could address how the Swedish government could take a more pro-active role in sensitizing young Swedish consumers regarding those consequences. This study highlights the dependency of Swedes towards their government. However, further research could investigate on what scale Swedish consumers would like to have more regulations and if they would be willing to accept higher prices and slower fashion trends in return. Bloggers on Social Media, especially on Instagram and Facebook are having an increasing impact on consumers' purchase preferences. It might be interesting to investigate what actual influence bloggers have towards young Swedish consumers' perceptions of sustainable fashion consumption.

In the beginning of this research project I thought the 1'127 people who died in the Rana Plaza factory collapse had a long-term impact on consumers' attitudes and beliefs towards fast fashion. Even though young Swedish consumers do care about social and environmental issues, nobody could accurately recall the Rana Plaza tragedy, indicating the limited lifespan of tragedies in today's society. The participants of this study mentioned among others their limited budget as a rationalization for their unsustainable consumption while simultaneously they pledge to change their consumer behavior once they earn more money. It is time to spread awareness among young consumers that reducing consumption is necessary to achieve meaningful change and that reducing consumption does not cost anything, in fact it helps saving money.

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8. Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Questions inspired by the Nike Scenario from "The Myth of the Ethical Consumer" by Devinney et al. (2010)

Hi, thank you for participating in this interview. How old are you? What is your occupation?

Do you remember the last time you bought something at H&M? When was it?
Please, tell me about your experience. Who was with you when you made the purchase?
What influenced your decision and what made you eventually buy the clothes you bought?

What does shopping clothes mean for you?
→ Would you rather describe it as an act of purchasing or is it more entertainment and a social excitement for you?

How closely do you follow fashion trends?

Do you believe consumers decide fashion trends?
If so, how do they influence new trends?
If not, who do you think decides fashion trends?

Do you think fast fashion retailers like H&M simply deliver what their customers ask them to?

How do think spokespersons of H&M such as Gisele Bündchen, Madonna, David Beckham or M.I.A. influence your perception of H&M?
→ Did you know that all of them are environmental activists?

What do you think young Swedish people think about H&M as a fast fashion retailer?
→ Do you personally think H&M is a good company?

How likely do you think it is, that young Swedish people are buying clothes at H&M?
→ Why do you think so?

What is most important to you when you are deciding in which store you are going to buy your clothes?

If you compare H&M to other fast fashion retailers, what do you think symbolizes H&M, how does H&M stand out in comparison to other fast fashion retailers?

Do you think young Swedish people are concerned about ethical and environmental issues in general?

To which degree are you concerned about ethical and environmental issues?

Why do you think H&M produces the majority of their garments in developing countries such as Bangladesh?
→ How do you feel about that?

What do you think happens with the chemicals after they have been used to dye H&M garments?

Do you feel that you have sufficient information from H&M regarding their production processes?
Did you know that H&M publishes all its suppliers on their Website?
Have you ever read the annual sustainability report of H&M?
How are those transparency efforts of H&M impact your perception of H&M?

Do you think that young Swedish people are aware of potential ethical and environmental impacts of H&M's fast fashion business model?

Do you personally think that there are any ethical or/and environmental impacts of H&M's fast fashion business model? If so, did you thought about them when you made your last purchase at H&M?

Have you read any articles, newspapers, or seen any documentaries addressing potential ethical and environmental issues of the fast fashion industry in general, or H&M in particular?
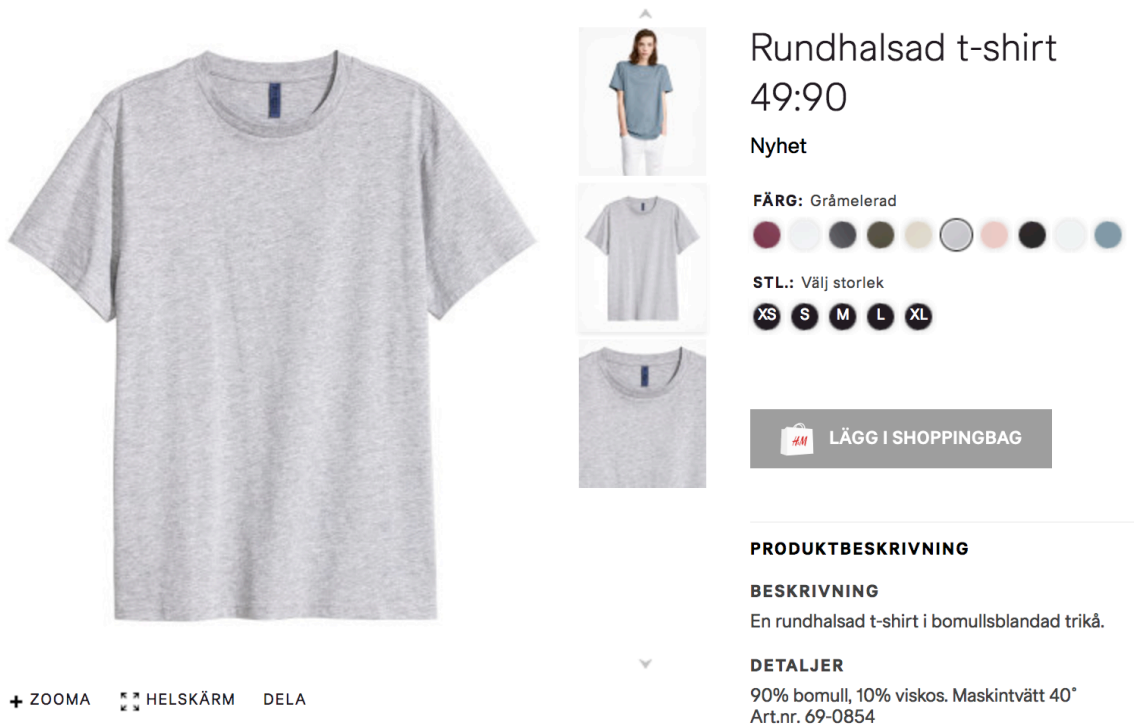
Optional final question if deemed appropriate

You mentioned before that you consider yourself as aware of environmental and ethical issues in general, you also seem to be aware of ethical and environmental impacts of H&M's business model, how would you explain me why you are still buying clothes at H&M?

Appendix B: Experiments

Experiment One

Below you can see two pictures of grey, basic, regular fit H&M t-shirts with a crew neck. Let's assume you need to buy such a t-shirt. Which one would you buy? Please explain why?
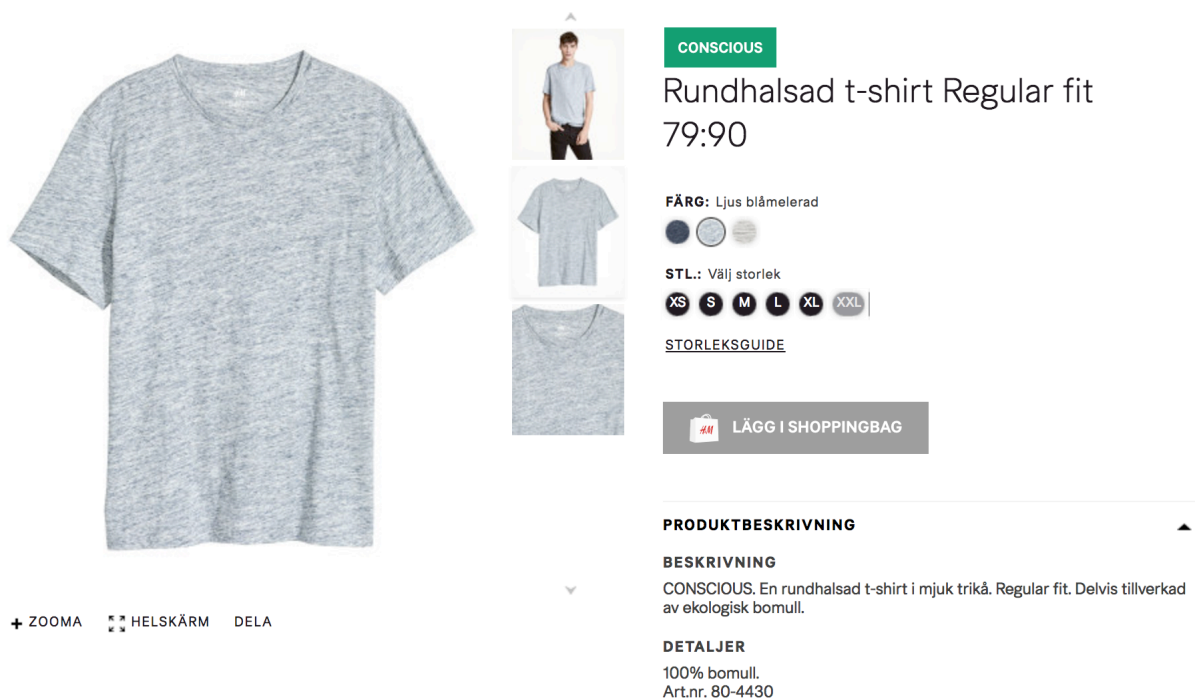
Fig. 1: Rundhalsad t-shirt (H&M, 2017a)

Fig. 2: Rundhalsad t-shirt Regular fit (H&M, 2017b)

Now I would like you to read the following two excerpts from a book written by Nikolay Anguelov who is a professor of economic development in the department of public policy at the University of Massachusetts, Dartmouth.

"Many environmentalists praise organically grown cotton because of its lower use of pesticide (Dem et al., 2007). But organically grown cotton has raised objections from human rights activists because it is much more water intensive. In developing nations, populations must choose between using precious water for organic cotton farming or for daily human necessities such as proper hydration and hygiene" (Anguelov, 2016, p. 87).

"…The evidence presented in this book suggests that there is no such thing as eco-fashion. There is organically grown cotton, but not organic cotton fabric. This is the case because of the "spinning" of the organic fibers into yarn, which is a process based on the heavy use of industrial bleach, peroxide, and acid – decidedly inorganic chemicals. Even the most environmentally friendly dyes employing the highest concentration of natural pigment are not really eco-friendly. For one thing, they are manufactured very inorganically – the pigment is extracted from its natural sources through intense production processes in refining that create toxic waste. For another, these "eco" dyes are applied to fabric through environmentally degrading methods that use 200 times the amount of water per one cubic unit of fabric. Therefore, eco-fashion, with currently employed technological methods, is not really an environmentally safe consumer option. It may be just a slightly less polluting option" (Anguelov, 2016, p. 163-164).

How does this additional information impact your t-shirt purchase decision? Would you like to reconsider your decision?

References

Anguelov, N. (2016). *The dirty side of the garment industry – Fast fashion and its negative impact on environment and society*. Boca Raton, USA: CRC Press.

H&M. (2017a). Rundhalsad t-shirt. Retrieved March 15th, 2017 from H&M: http://www.hm.com/se/product/60191?article=60191-E#article=60191-J

H&M. (2017b). Rundhalsad t-shirt regular fit. Retrieved March 15th, 2017 from H&M: http://www.hm.com/se/product/61891?article=61891-A#article=61891-B

Experiment Two

Below you can see a screenshot from H&M's (2015) conscious actions sustainability report. Read it and tell me how you feel about it?

Additionally, the H&M Foundation made the decision to donate USD 500,000 to support the organisation UNHCR in their emergency relief work related to the Mediterranean refugee crisis, offering refugees food, medical care and shelter as well as migration services. The H&M Foun-

Fig. 1: H&M Conscious Actions Sustainability report 2015 (H&M, 2015, p. 121)

Now I am going to show you a screenshot from the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), an alliance of trade unions and NGOs who closely monitor claims of H&M and other fast fashion retailers to improve working conditions and antipollution standards within the fashion industry (CCC, 2017a).

Nordic fashion brands need to tackle abuse of Syrian refugees in Turkish garment factories

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Thousands of Syrian refugees work long hours in Turkey's apparel factories in unhealthy conditions with salaries below the minimum wage. Despite Turkey being an important sourcing market for the Nordic brands H&M, KappAhl, Lindex, Gina Tricot and Varner (BikBok, Cubus, Carlings et al), the companies are not doing enough to prevent discrimination of Syrians in their supply chains, according to a report by Fair Action and Future in our hands.

Turkey is the world's third-largest supplier of clothing after China and Bangladesh, and the third-largest non-EU exporter of garments to Sweden and Norway. Although Syrians can now be employed legally in Turkey, only around 7,000 of the estimated 250,000 to 400,000 Syrians who work in the country have obtained work permits. The clear majority of Syrians continues to be undocumented, which means they lack access to employment contracts and social

One of the workers interviewed for the report

security. They are also unlikely to complain about low wages and excessive working hours to their employers or the authorities, as they are easily laid off and risk losing their only source of income.

Syrian workers are generally earning under minimum wage, and do not get social security. They have to accept any working conditions offered to them and can get dismissed at any time, says Engin Celik, Organising Officer at the Turkish trade union Deriteks, which organises workers in the garment sector.

Fig. 2: Nordic fashion brands need to tackle abuse of Syrian refugees in Turkish garment factories (CCC, 2017b)

How do you feel about H&M not doing enough to prevent Syrian refugees in Turkey from exploitative labor conditions? Is there according to you a conflict of interest?

References

Clean Clothes Campaign. (2017a). Who we are. Retrieved March 11th, 2017 from Clean Clothes Campaign: https://cleanclothes.org/about/who-we-are

Clean Clothes Campaign. (2017b). Nordic fashion brands need to tackle abuse of Syrian refugees in Turkish garment factories. Retrieved March 11th, 2017 from Clean Clothes

Campaign: https://cleanclothes.org/news/press-releases/2017/01/18/nordic-fashion-brands-need-to-tackle-abuse-of-syrian-refugees-in-turkish-garment-factories

H&M. (2015). H&M Conscious Actions – Sustainability Report 2015. Retrieved March 11th, 2017 from H&M:
http://sustainability.hm.com/content/dam/hm/about/documents/en/CSR/2015%20Sustainability%20report/HM_SustainabilityReport_2015_final_FullReport_en.pdf

Appendix C: Excerpt of Transcription

Excerpt of Sofia's Interview Transcription

Interview 10
Interviewer: I: Tobias Zellweger
Interviewee: S: Sofia

Background of the interviewee
Sofia is a 22 years old student who is doing right now an unpaid internship. The last time she made a purchase at H&M was 5 weeks ago, when he bought a dress with dots for her new internship, where she is required to dress formal.

Date of the Interview: April 17th, 2017

I: Hi, thank you very much for participating in this interview, how old are you?

S: 22, turning 23 this year.

I: And what is your occupation?

S: I am studying slash doing an internship course basically, so but I don't have a salary so I am not working so I would say studying then.

I: A student?

S: Yes.

I: Do you remember the last time you bought something at H&M?

S: Yes.

I: Could you please describe me your experience, like how was it, when did you bought it and what did you buy?

S: Okay ehm so I like to wear dresses, that something I really like, I hat to wear pants normally, I think it's uncomfortable so and I was going to start this internship where you have to be quite formal and wear formal clothes, so I went to this department *2 seconds* what do you say… this section in the store where they have a little bit more formal business clothes and I bought a dress there, which I am very happy for it was a blue dress with dots, which is very girly but in a way I sort of feel that so I bought that and ehm… it was so good that I think that… I mean I have been considering buying another exactly the same dress just to have like…

I: One extra?

S: Yeah one extra if my first is going broke (laughs). But ehm so that was really cool I think. What I like about H&M in that sense is that there are this sections like if I want to have something casual I go to this section, if I want to have that I go to that section and that is not

mixed, so it is quite easy they have the basics and so, ehm but there are also many other good stores so I don't buy everything at H&M but that dress I bought and I am happy for it.

I: Great and where you alone when you bought this dress or have you been with a friend or…?

S: I was actually alone. I am such a loner…yeah.

I: Okay, and what influenced your decision and what made you eventually buy this dress when you were in the store? Like if you would mention factors that made you buy this dress with the dots, what would that be?

S: Okay, the first was that it was just *2 seconds* first of all it fitted me but that was not the only thing because many things fit me so the reason was that it was not too expensive, that was very important for me since I am a student, I thought it could have been cheaper for the material but it was not too expensive so I bought it and also that it was not too complicated to wash, like the laundry instruction, I mean if it says like "hand wash" and stuff, I can't wear that daily you know as a student you… I mean I live with shared washing machine and you have to book a time and I mean it's complicated to wash, so that is also the thing that I sort of put in there.

I: I see and when do you bought the dress, do you remember that? How long time ago was it?

S: Ehm maybe 5 weeks.

I: 5 Weeks, okay. And what does shopping clothes mean for you?

S: It means that I get clothes to wear (laughs).

I: (Laughs) but would you rather describe it as an act of purchasing or is it more like entertainment, like a social excitement for you?

S: I would say if it is shopping, if it has to do with anything but pants it is a great experience, it's just fun but when it comes to pants it's just horrible and it's just a burden.

I: You don't like pants (laughs).

S: (Laughs) I don't like pants, it's just… but otherwise I think it's just very nice, I mean there are of course occasions when you are in a very like urgent… you are in a hurry and you need to buy something very specific then it's more of a burden but mostly I just think it is entertaining.

I: Okay, and how closely do you follow fashion trends?

Stockholm Business School

Stockholm University

SE-106 91 Stockholm

Tel: 08 – 16 20 00

www.sbs.su.se