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ETHICAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: THE ATTITUDE-BEHAVIOR GAP IN THE TEXTILE
INDUSTRY



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Abstract

In today's society the trend of ethical consumerism is undeniable, yet, even though consumers are ethically concerned, they rarely transform their intentions into a green purchasing behavior – a phenomenon that is also present in the sustainable fashion industry. This study aims to understand the prevailing attitude-behavior gap and explores the barriers that constrain consumers in purchasing green apparel. A total of thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted and analyzed to the principles of grounded theory. The analysis reveals that the following barriers impede consumption of sustainable fashion: Price, availability, knowledge, transparency, image, inertia and consumption habits. The impact of each on consumers' purchase decisions might be of interest to apparel manufacturers and retailers who should implement strategies to encourage eco-conscious apparel acquisition and focus on diminishing these barriers. Hence, this paper recommends industry parties (1) to concentrate on product attributes, (2) to adopt a digital communication strategy and (3) to make a greater effort on making green apparel attainable. This study contributes to the overall understanding of consumer behavior in the ethical fashion industry and examines in-depth the purchasing criteria for sustainable fashion for consumers.

Keywords: Ethical Consumer Behavior; Sustainable Fashion; Attitude-Behavior Gap; Fast Fashion

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1. Introduction

The media coverage of environmental and social issues has been growing tremendously in the last decade and has reached mainstream society. Empirical evidence shows that more and more consumers are attracted by the values of ethical consumerism (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2010) – a trend that is also reflected in the sustainable fashion industry (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Ethically minded consumers are nowadays concerned with environmental aspects, social issues, health-related implications and animal welfare (Carrigan, Szmigin & Wright, 2004). Introducing the concept of ethical fashion, it appears that the contradiction between the terms ethics and fashion could not be greater. The fashion industry is characterized by short product lifecycles and hedonistic consumers (Lundblad & Davies, 2016), whereas ethical fashion aims to minimize the impact on the environment by using biodegradable or organic cotton, and maximizing the benefit for workers by avoiding sweatshop and incorporating fair working conditions (Ethical Fashion Forum, n.d.; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Yet, even though ethically concerned, consumers do not “walk their talk” (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2010) and buy repeatedly products that have harmful environmental impacts, irrespective of their desire to buy greener alternatives (Devinney, Auger & Eckhardt 2010). Cowe and Williams (2000) show in their study that 30% of the consumers have the

intention to buy ethical products, whereas only a small fraction of 3% actually purchases them. This discrepancy is widely known as the “attitude-behavior gap” (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Chatzidakis, Kastanakis & Stathopoulou, 2014; Chatzidakis, Smith & Hibbert, 2006). Prior researchers have sought to examine the behavior of ethical consumers and built upon behavioral models, in particular referring to Azjen. However, often these studies are incomplete and collapse at the hurdle of the identified gap, as they primarily focus on the formation of ethical purchase intentions.

Due to the increasing trend of ethical consumerism, it becomes crucial for businesses to understand the driving forces of ethically minded consumers: What they intend to do at the point of purchase, what they actually do and how to close the existing disequilibrium (Carrington et al., 2010). Since research on the gap between the consumers’ green rhetoric and his purchasing behavior in the fashion industry remains limited, this study deals with the research question: *What are the main factors influencing the attitude-behavior gap in the ethical fashion industry?*

With this in mind, psychological and attitudinal factors will be taken into account that impede the ethical purchase behavior of consumers. After taking a closer look on previous research on the consumer behavior and in particular the attitude-behavior gap, the used methodology will be explained and the analyzed data will be presented. Finally, the results are discussed and the limitations and recommendations for further research are presented.

2. Literature Review

For the purpose of this study, ethical consumerism stands in its broadest form for “the conscious and deliberate choice to make certain consumption choices due to personal and moral beliefs” (Carrigan et al., 2004, p. 401). The media coverage of environmental and social issues affects consumers and lead to a more sensitized consumer behavior. Individuals show a greater

awareness towards the impacts of their own purchasing behavior and have developed a new type of buying behavior, which involves responsible consumption. Today's consumers strive to manifest their values either through boycotting companies or brands and/or through ethical consumption (Carrigan et al., 2004). However, especially in the sustainable fashion industry, consumers find themselves in an enormous field of tension. Being caught between their desire to behave ethically and their need to pursue belonging and self-esteem, as well as obtaining social acceptance, consumers are exposed to a variety of influencing factors, all contributing to the buying decision (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Thus, in the following subchapters, light will be shed on the consumers' decision making and the arising issues related to ethical decision making and linked, at a later stage with qualitative data, to the sustainable fashion industry.

2.1. Key determinants of ethical decision making

A number of recent studies (e.g. Fukukawa, 2002; Shaw, Shaw & Shiu 2002a, 2002b; Shiu, & Clarke, 2000) have sought to examine the decision making in ethical purchases. The relation between consumer attitude and purchase intention has been approached with the help of attitude-behavioral models. The most commonly applied and the most influential theoretical frameworks in social psychology are Ajzen's behavioral models. The theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), visualized in Appendix 1, and its later published extension, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985; 1991), visualized in Appendix 2, argue that a person's behavior can be explained through his intention, the attitude, social norms (e.g. perceptions of social pressure) and his perceived behavioral control (Kang, Liu and Kim, 2013). The theory of planned behavior can be seen as a good predictor of purchase intentions and the consumer's behavior, however, it is underlying the assumption that individuals act rationally (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Blake (1999), indicates that individual, social and institutional

obstacles are not taken into account with such behavioral models and also Armitage and Conner (2001) admit that 80% of the behavior remains unexplained by Azjen's theory. The in empirical studies identified (Auger & Devinney, 2007; Chatzidakis et al., 2014; Chatzidakis et al., 2006), attitude-behavior gap requires therefore a more holistic approach, considering the complexity of the determinants affecting and hindering pro-environmental behavior.

Based on extensive literature review, it becomes apparent that internal and external elements influence ethical consumer behavior. This study will rely on Kollmuss and Agyeman's established conceptual model (2002) as it underlies different behavioral models. Further this research includes Bray, Johns and Kilburn (2010), Carrigan and Attalla (2001) and Papaoikonomou et al. (2010) findings from empirical research on ethical behavior. Following the structure of Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), the determinants affecting ethical behavior can be classified into external factors, such as institutional, economic, social and cultural factors, and internal factors, e.g. motivation, environmental knowledge, locus of control, attitudes and values.

2.2. External factors

External factors may have an influence on an individual's ethical decision making, depending on economic, institutional, social and cultural aspects.

Economic factors. Bray et al. (2010) identified that price is a decisive point when making a purchase decision. As individuals act primarily considering the greatest benefits for themselves, at the point of purchase they keep aside their care for environmental protection, and favor lower prices suiting their small budgets (Balderjahn, 2013). Products, produced locally, receive a higher appreciation, however, when consumers do not see a "significant tangible reward", in other words do not understand the justification for higher prices, ethical alternatives are rejected and consumers maintain their habitual purchasing behavior (Bray et al., 2010).

Institutional factors. In many occasions, ethical behavior can be only exercised when the necessary infrastructure is provided. Availability plays a crucial role in the consumer's purchasing criteria and inhibits consumers when the range of ethical offers is limited. Even though when the initial intention is different, consumers tend to end up buying unethical brands, which are available immediately (Papaoikonomou et al., 2010).

Social and cultural factors. Culture as well as the social environment plays a crucial role in a person's decision making. As the cross-national study on ethical consumers conducted by Bucic, Harris and Arli (2012) shows, the country of residence is shaping decision making on ethical products. Ethics has varying significance among cultures impacting to a different degree individual values and the person's lifestyle (Bucic et al., 2012). This is in accordance with Carrigan's and Attala's findings (2001), pointing out the influence of demographical characteristics on ethical purchase behavior. A strong influencer on the buying behavior is according to them, image, fashion and price, emphasizing that especially for young consumers, the relevance of brand image is prevailing for products like apparel rather than ethical criteria. Wearing the "right" brands and following up fashion statements outweigh the benefits of ethical alternatives (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

2.3. Internal factors

Motivation. Purchasing ethical alternatives is often a question of one's own willingness to change consumption patterns. Consumers, that are loyal to brands, are less likely to move to an ethical brand due to their attachment to specific brands and the related laziness to move to ethical alternatives (Bray et al., 2010; Papaoikonomou et al., 2010). The degree of brand loyalty is therefore a crucial factor in the final purchasing decision. Moreover, brand loyalty can result in selective information processing. Highly loyal customers tend to ignore negative messages about

their beloved brands or do not consider bad practices, such as sweatshop conditions, as bad as they might be. Instead, committed consumers are more inclined to believe positive information and believe in positive corporate behavior. Therefore, the selection of information leads to a biased perception, resulting in a greater elasticity of what is ethical (Papaoikonomou et al., 2010).

Environmental knowledge. Adequate decision-making requires a full understanding of the related conditions and circumstances (Sproles & Badenhop, 1978). Media is a crucial information source for consumers and although there are individuals that have some background knowledge about ethical products, confusion as well as cynicism is still predominant when thinking about ethical alternatives (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Consumers are often confused and overwhelmed by existing information due to the availability of abundant and accessible information. According to Bray's et al. exploratory study (2010), consumers also feel that companies only use ethical claims for marketing purposes, to justify their higher prices, to boost their profits and to gain a competitive advantage. It is an expression of cynicism that reflects the low or incomplete level of knowledge inhering in the consumer's mindset (Bray et al., 2010) and results in the creation of stereotypes of ethical and unethical firms (Papaoikonomou et al., 2010). Individuals are unsure whether the small pieces of information they obtain is credible and tend to avoid companies that are receiving bad press for unethical behavior as it appears easier than proactively searching for ethical offers (Bray et al., 2010).

Locus of control. Furthermore, Bray et al. (2010) finds out in his study, that consumers doubted whether their purchase would make a difference. In academic literature this perception refers to the degree of locus of control. Individuals with an external locus of control have the feeling that their actions are insignificant and believe that change can be only brought about by others with more power. Consumers with a high external locus of control are much less likely to

purchase ethical products, as they feel that it would make no difference (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

Attitudes and Values. Attitudes, characterized by positive or negative feelings towards an issue or an object, are closely related to beliefs. The inconsistency between the individual's environmental attitude and his/her behavior can be explained through the low-cost/high-cost model (Appendix 3). According to this model, people behave pro-environmentally when they have the least cost, meaning the minimum effort and time needed to behave ethically. For an extensive review, see Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) basing the model on Diekmann and Preisendoerfer (1992). Accordingly, Carrigan and Attalla (2001) see time pressures and information overload for reasons disregarding ethical products. Consumers often do not have much time and rush through the streets and shopping centers. This leads to a reduced consumer search activity, which in turn results in the consumer's disregard of ethical aspects. Further, consumers are confronted with an information overload on the growing number of competing products. Since nowadays consumers can choose from a wide variety of products, they are overstrained with comparing brands and attributes. The consequence is resignation and a stronger focus on few attributes such as price while ignoring ethical aspects (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

3. Methodology

3.1 Procedure and sample

For this research snowball sampling (Patton, 2002) was used for data collection, with 13 informants participating in the study, taking place in August and September 2016. A small pool of initial interviewees was selected and subsequent participants were reached via the initial informants' social network. The selection criterion for finding the most suitable applicants was that they should be interested in fashion and have at least heard about ethical fashion. All participants are Germans, consisting of five males and eight females with an average age of 25,5

years old, ranging from 23 to 30. In order to ensure a greater representation in the target population, a relative heterogeneous demographic sample is selected with participants originating from diverse parts of Germany, with different educational backgrounds. The sample consists of managers, consultants, engineers, students, one sociologist and one coming from the film industry, all with an accordingly diverse academic background. All respondents either already hold a Bachelor's degree (92,31%) or are currently pursuing one (7,69%), whereas 23,08% do also pursue a Master's degree. Looking at the professional side of the sample, it can be said that 61,54% of the total is already working. Table 1 gives a comprehensive overview of the sample.

Table 1 Demographic summary of research participants

| Name | Gender | Age | Education | Major | Job | City of Origin |
|----------------|--------|-----|-----------|--|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Phillip Belz | Male | 26 | Bachelor | Mechanical Engineering | Process Engineer | Fulda |
| Catalina Esser | Female | 26 | Master | Organizational Development and Change Management | Consultant | Bonn |
| Lisa Kött | Female | 24 | Bachelor | Legal Studies | Student | Fulda |
| Pascal Smyrek | Male | 23 | Master | Management | Student | Miltenberg |
| Selma Schlick | Female | 26 | Master | Global Marketing Management | Marketing Manager | Münster |
| Sina Möller | Female | 25 | Bachelor | Event | Project Manager | Langenfeld |
| Caroline Wild | Female | 25 | Master | Sociology | Student | Lüneburg |
| Isabel Greifzu | Female | 24 | Bachelor | Business Administration | Market Intelligence Manager | Fulda |
| Christin | Female | 25 | Bachelor | Media Management | Property | Recklinghausen |

| | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------|----|----------|-------------------------------|--|------------------------------|-----------|
| Schwarzhoff | | | | | | Mistress | |
| Miriam | Female | 25 | Master | Management | | Student | Münster |
| Scherf | | | | | | | |
| Sebastian | Male | 28 | Master | Economics | | Student | Frankfurt |
| Hein | | | | | | | |
| Jonas Elster | Male | 30 | Bachelor | Sport Management and Sciences | | Football Assistance Engineer | Hannover |
| Sandro Stroh | Male | 24 | Master | International Business | | Student | Speyer |

The used data collection technique was semi-structured one-to-one interviews that had an open-ended format. The pre-questionnaire helped to identify the desired sample, consisting of people interested in fashion and having at least heard of ethical fashion. The chosen interviewees were then introduced to the project and its purpose. Beginning with general questions about the participants' purchasing behavior for apparel, the respondents were then confronted with more specific questions on their attitude and behavior towards ethical fashion. See Appendix 4 for the questionnaire, which was used as a guideline. The thirteen interviews were conducted either face to face, via phone or Skype, whereas a pleasant and quiet environment was ensured. Further, with the permission of participants, all interviews were audio-recorded and had a duration of half an hour. The point of data saturation depended on the gathered information and was reached at a stage when no new insights were gained with further interviews (Willig, 2001). The data, containing categories, concepts of different mindsets and similarities were then transcribed verbatim for a subsequent in-depth analysis.

3.2 Data analysis

The raw data taken from the conducted interviews were analyzed following the principles of grounded theory, keeping in mind the aims of this study (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded

theorizing is a methodological approach that allows an iterative, inductive and interactional process of data collection, concurrent analysis and enriching interpretation (Goulding, 2005). This process was performed with the help of Nvivo, a qualitative analysis software, which facilitated a continuous interplay between data collection and analysis of the data. Nvivo was used in particular to systematically read, interpret and categorize the content of the interviews and simplified the coding throughout the process.

As recommended by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (2008), the analysis started by comparing constantly the data and coding them simultaneously, all done at a micro-level. Accordingly, the interview transcripts were analyzed word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence, similar meanings were linked together and themes were generated and subsequently compared with one another. This initial open coding allowed identifying first-order concepts.

The next stage involved the establishment of higher levels of generalization, meaning that higher-order theoretical concepts were identified (Spiggle, 1994). Therefore, relationships and linkages between the identified first-order concepts were determined and then grouped by using a paradigm model into main second-order themes. This step is also known as axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and enables developing a template of emerging factors.

As proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), the final stage of the grounded theory development implies the creation of a core category. This is done with theoretical coding, linking all categories and sub-categories to a core. The core category provides a theory in order to explain the phenomenon. However, for the purpose of this study, the final stage was not taken into account, as otherwise the identified concepts would get too abstract.

Within the open and axial coding process, the data were analyzed based on their content only, disregarding the frameworks provided by literature. This is linked to Glaser and Strauss's (1967, p. 37) advice to "[...] ignore the literature of theory and fact on the area under study, in

order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas. Similarities and convergences with the literature can be established after the analytic core of categories has emerged.”

4. Results

This chapter presents the results of this study and examines the participants’ attitude on ethical apparel. Since this study set out to determine the factors impeding ethical purchase decisions, the participants were asked about their clothing purchase behavior, their environmental behavior and their attitude towards ethical fashion. The analyzed data is summarized in Figure 1, giving an overview of the concepts and key themes of this study. Whereas the left-side column illustrates first-order concepts, the right-side column shows the recognized themes. Accordingly, the key themes emerging from this study are price, lack of availability, transparency, image, lack of information, inertia and consumption habits. The contributions of each creating the purchasing gap for ethical fashion are presented in the following.

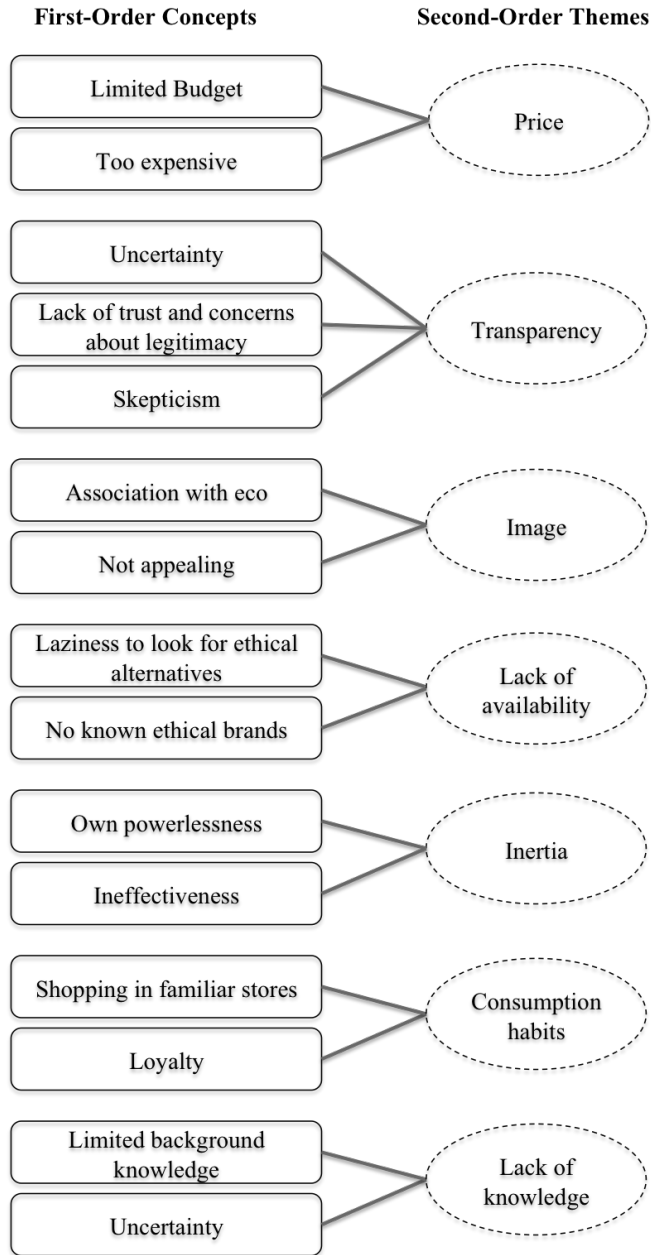


Figure 1. Model of factors impeding ethical purchase behavior.

4.1 Image

A major hurdle in the purchase of ethical fashion is the associated image. The participants think of ethical apparel as something old-fashioned. The first idea coming to the mind of the majority of the respondents was “Öko” – a German word with a negative connotation and which

can be translated with the English word “eco” and is linked to the stereotype of environmentalists. They think of linen, muted colors, jute and natural materials and relate it to alternative, hippie people with a comfy look. The participants do not consider ethical clothes as trendy or fancy: “I think of *Ökos* in linen robes. I know it’s stupid [laughter]. They don’t wear pretty clothes but normal pieces. Not very trendy and nothing extraordinary.” (Lisa Kött, 24, Interview III). When buying clothes it is often in line with their own style, following a certain type of fashion direction. Switching to ethical alternatives is not worth considering in the eyes of the interviewees: “I am not sure whether I could have the same style when buying ethical pieces.” (Catalina Esser, 26, Interview II), instead they wish for the future that ethical fashion would meet their tastes. However, one respondent admits that the associated image does not seem appropriate in this day and age and sees ethical fashion as very multifaceted: “I have made the experience at flea markets that there do exist people that design on a small scale sustainable clothes. Their clothes look indeed very trendy, so I would say that the style of ethical apparel is very diverse.” (Caroline Wild, 25, Interview VII)

4.2 Price

The high prices of ethical clothing have been raised as an issue by the interviewees. Indicating that price is one of the most important attributes when selecting an item of clothing, the participants do not even recognize ethical products as an alternative as they already assume beforehand a higher price level: “When thinking of green apparel, I immediately think that it’s very expensive. [...] I don’t even consider ethical clothes because I think from the very beginning that I can’t afford it anyway.” (Selma Schlick, 26, Interview V)

Mentioning often a limited budget, due to their current position as a student or young professionals, the consumers wished that sustainable clothes would be priced in the same level as

mainstream apparel. So does Isabel state, “I think that sustainable clothing items are more expensive than those that are manufactured in a conventional way. I wish that sustainable fashion would have the same price level as fast fashion brands.” (Isabel Greifzu, 24, Interview VIII) Moreover, the participants attributed ethical fashion to an upper-class society with high-income earners that have also a higher level of education. They did ascribe it as not being accessible for the vast majority of consumers due to its missing affordability.

Nevertheless, the interviewees justify the higher price range of ethical products with higher wages, fair productions and natural materials. This can be seen in, for example Miriam’s definition of sustainable fashion: “For me sustainable fashion is fashion that is produced under fair conditions, without the use of child labor and [...] and a good salary for its employees. It has also something to do with the materials out of which the clothes are produced. Polyester cannot be sustainable.” (Miriam Scherf, 25, Interview X)

4.3 Lack of availability

The interviewees complained about the limited possibilities to purchase ethical apparel. Albeit the participants live in urban areas they were not sure where to buy ethical alternatives and the lack of offers becomes a restraining factor: “If there would be a greater presence of stores that sell ethical clothes, I would consider buying them. It is sheer convenience and I guess. [...] It shouldn’t be so complicated to buy. I am just trying to imagine if I would need to drive 5km to buy ethical apparel [...] or if I would need to buy it online, then I would also feel guilty, as my footprint wouldn’t be green at all.” (Sebastian Hein, 28, Interview XI) With a greater presence of sustainable fashion stores, purchasing ethical apparel would be considered more likely. In the eyes of the respondents looking for ethical alternatives requires more time, which is why they prefer the easier and more convenient option to buy their clothes.

The confined brand recall of the participants is another inhibiting factor that is related to the limited availability of ethical clothes. They found it difficult to name specific retailers or brands that provide sustainable apparel and were not aware of the location of the stores. The repertoire of known ethical brands is limited as it was pointed out by one participant:

“I know smaller labels, but I couldn’t tell any names. I know that H&M launched a conscious collection [...] but apart from that I don’t know any other brands as I don’t buy in those stores.”

(Sina Möller, 25, Interview VI)

Moreover, the male participants argued that the offered products are often exclusively addressing women, whereas in their perception males are often disregarded in the ethical fashion collections.

4.4 Lack of information

When the respondents were confronted with the question on how much they know about ethical fashion, they stated having a low level of background knowledge on that topic. They did not feel educated and one participant declared, “I really know very little about that topic. I have heard and read here and there but I haven’t intensively dealt with it yet.” (Christin Schwarzhoff, 25, Interview IX). Another respondent recognizes the barrier and said, “I would say that there exists a huge lack of information. Time after time, I hear about the big companies, like H&M or Primark, that they produce under terrible conditions in Bangladesh or elsewhere. But there is little information on the backgrounds and even less what is done against it.” (Jonas Elster, 30, Interview XII)

However, when asking specifically about the definition of sustainable fashion, the majority of the participants could tell at least partially what it is about. Hence, it becomes clear, that even though having background knowledge to some extent, they feel unfamiliar and unsure.

Especially when it comes precisely to the labeling of sustainable clothing and the criteria, which classify ethical items to its legitimacy.

4.5 Transparency

Nevertheless, it seems that the problem does not only lay in the lack of information, but also in the credibility of the existing information. The participants expressed skepticism about retailers' ethical claims as a justification for their hesitancy of buying ethical apparel. There was a feeling that companies use ethical claims or fair trade labels only for marketing purposes.

Ethical conduct was questioned and concerns about the legitimacy of labels were raised during the interviews, for instance: "I cannot take these claims seriously. Such a big retailer [speaking of H&M – ed. note] does that for a particular reason and for me it is highly questionable whether these actions are verifiable sustainable." (Selma Schlick, 26, Interview V) The articulated doubts and uncertainties seem to be related to the lack of information as respondents argued that ethical clothing items could be produced only partially under sustainable conditions and wished more transparency in all levels of production.

4.6 Consumption habits

Besides the already mentioned aspects, another factor influencing the participants in their purchasing decision is their consumption habits. The participants favor shopping in familiar stores since they are well aware of the quality and the fit of the offered products. Also from a fashionable point of view the own, over years, developed style, is perceived to be found mostly in the usual stores. "Most of the time it's the power of habit. [...] There is no store that comes spontaneously to my mind, where I know that it perfectly fits me and my style and is also sustainable. [...] I go to the regular stores, the same as usual, like 3 to 5 where I go every now

and then and see what's new. I am not the one who is looking proactively for new inspiration.”
(Miriam Scherf, 25, Interview X)

4.7 Inertia

The incapacity to make a difference took a clear form in this study. Some participants perceived the impact of their own action as meaningless and felt powerless as the broad masses are still buying fast fashion brands. They do not see any possibilities to change the situation towards a more sustainable behavior except if more people can be reached. For instance: “If I would decide to boycott the store and if more people do the same collectively, it would have a great impact. The only problem is to convince such big masses to do that.” (Jonas Elster, 30, Interview XII) Yet, another participant was not willing to change her own behavior and did not see the efficiency: “Of course you have to start with yourself to change the world. But when I see other girls, that buy fast fashion brands, I ask myself why I shouldn't do it as well? I can't educate them. If I can buy the clothes for a cheap price and if I like them, why not also buying them?” (Lisa Kött, 24, Interview III).

5. Discussion

The study contributes to the existing literature on the attitude-behavior gap in the fashion industry, as it is one of the very few studies examining the determinants inhibiting ethical consumption in the fashion industry and uncovers the purchase criteria for sustainable fashion. The research is built on previous works that had a generic focus on the attitude-behavior gap in the purchase of ethical products, presenting findings from Bray et al. (2011), Carrigan and Attalla (2001) and Papaoikonomou et al. (2010). Even though the results of this study are mainly conform to other studies, also new explanations emerge accounting for the sustainable fashion industry.

To begin with the most striking part of this study, is that price was the barrier most discussed in the interviews. One might assume, that this can be attributed to the participants' age as the sample consisted mainly of students and young professionals. However, this can be found again in other studies, so do also Carrigan and Attalla (2001) identify price as one of the major factors in their study and Papaoikonomou et al. (2010) argues that the price sensitivity is related to a limited budget.

Papaoikonomou et al. (2010) further suggests that the lack of information and the credibility of existing information, in other words, a missing transparency, would be another factor influencing the consumer's purchase decision. This could be verified in this study since the participants complained about an incomplete background knowledge making an adequate selection of ethical apparel more difficult. It became clear that the consumers wished to be better informed about the details of ethical apparel, seeing it as a responsibility of the retailers. The expressed skepticism demonstrated that the participants wished more transparency and see the retailers in the obligation to provide information on ethical labels and a clearer classification of sustainable fashion. The prevailing lack of information contradicts with Boulstridge and Carrigan (2000) who state that consumers are often overwhelmed by the existing information and Carrigan and Attalla's assumption (2010) that businesses deal with "increasingly sophisticated consumers".

The lack of availability of sustainable fashion has been recognized in Lundblad's et al. (2015) study and is also found in this project. Participants in both studies comment that ethical brands can be rarely found in stores and that it is very difficult to find clothes with trendy designs. Within the lack of availability, there were two one additional issues, which can be identified only in this study: First, the limited brand recall, since participants have difficulties in naming ethical brands and ethical oriented stores, which can be seen as a result of the limited

availability. Second, the perception that ethical apparel is only available for women, complaining about the limited range of offers.

Speaking of restricted, trendy designs, the image of ethical apparel has found to be a problem in this study. The participants have a preconceived opinion on sustainable fashion, attributing it as old-fashioned, alternative, and boring. Hence, they do not even consider ethical alternatives in their purchase decision. This is partially reflected in Hiller Connell's (2010) study. Albeit the author does not mention explicitly the poor image, she verifies with her findings that the ethical clothing is not appealing to consumers, suggesting that style prevails over environmental intentions.

The deep-rooted habits of consumption identified in this study can be understood as an expression of own convenience. The participants rely on a familiar shopping environment, and see an advantage in their habits because they experience a positive shopping outcome. The habits of consumption appear to be a relevant factor as it contributes to the limited radius of motion and can be seen as a constraint for the already limited presence of sustainable fashion. Further, it fits to Papaoikonomou et al. (2010) finding that consumer prefer the easiest and most familiar option when making a purchase decision.

Furthermore, within this study a perceived powerlessness is noted. The participants' justify their purchasing inertia with the feeling that no difference can be made with the own behavior and no significant impact will be generated. This observed external locus of control, related to Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), is a further hindering factor for pro-environmental behavior.

5.1 Practical implications

This study provides insights to the decision-making of consumers and contributes to a better understanding of the attitude-behavior gap within the fashion industry. The presented findings might be of potential interest to sustainable fashion brands, retailers and manufacturers who are keen to acquire more consumers through transforming consumers' green intentions into actual buying behavior and interested in maintaining them in the long-term. Understanding how consumers view sustainable apparel and what hinders them to purchase sustainable garment items may help the industry to (1) focus on the product attributes, including creating emotional benefits, (2) to adopt an adequate communication strategy and (3) to make a greater effort on making green apparel attainable.

When purchasing apparel, the participants considered as most important product attributes price, quality, style and fit. Therefore, the industry should solve the identified barriers such as over-pricing and poor style by introducing trendier and stylish ethical apparel, so that consumers are willing to trade-up for environmental benefits. Wearing sustainable fashion should make the consumers feel good and should not create the feeling wearing outdated or hippie apparel.

Further, sustainable fashion brands should adopt a modern communication strategy. Participants of this study relied heavily on social media, such as Instagram or Snapchat, for getting inspiration for their style. The ethical fashion industry should take advantage of this development and might communicate through bloggers with the Generation Y. As this study also revealed a lack of knowledge, a more digital oriented strategy might also help creating awareness on environmental issues and to educate the consumer towards a more conscious purchase behavior. Anyways, speaking of consumer education, it is crucial for corporate communications to focus on providing credible and reliable information. The perceived missing transparency makes it even more important for the industry to highlight their true interest in the environment.

For this purpose it is recommended to use authentic sources, as trustworthiness appears to be key for consumers. However, marketers cannot stem education solely, which is why governmental regulations are necessary to implement and explain green fashion accreditation scheme, making green labels comprehensible for consumers.

The current study also shows that there is a big lack of availability when it comes to sustainable apparel. Therefore, efforts should be made to make sustainable apparel more accessible so that consumers do not have to change their habitual shopping behavior. As pointed out in this study, consumers are not willing to pro-actively search for sustainable stores or drive far to buy green apparel, therefore ethical fashion should be found close to the regular shopping streets. In order to generate positive shopping experiences, retailers should make a bigger effort on being more present, so that the consumers' spent time and energy is kept at a minimum. One approach could be to invest in fashion sharing platforms, as introduced by Euromonitor International (2016). The accessibility would increase and as renting clothes is likely to move to mainstream (Euromonitor, 2016), fashion brands and retailers would go proactive steps. All in all, it becomes clear that the findings of this study should encourage the ethical fashion industry to take action in order to close the illustrated attitude-behavior gap and to fulfill the needs of the emerging trend.

5.2 Limitations and further research

Although the paper on hand contributes to prevalent literature on the attitude-behavior gap in sustainable fashion, this study has procedural and contextual limitations that shall now be examined and addressed in further research.

Procedural limitations can be characterized by constraints that concern the research's sample, methodology and data. First, this study sought to use a relative heterogeneous demographic sample, reaching participants of different ages and from diverse educational

backgrounds, nevertheless the usage snowball sampling narrowed the diversity of the interview participants. The sample consisted of twelve participants in the age range from 23 to 30 year-old living in Germany, were mainly women had either held a university degree or were seeking one. The small sample size and the specific target population restrict generalization to a wider population. Because consumer behavior, especially consumer decision-making in the fashion industry, differs for various genders, age or purchase item, each of the variations in the target group presents a valuable future research approach. It would be interesting to repeat the research by, for instance, to an older generation to see if the findings would be still the same. Additionally, further studies might continue to investigate the gap with a random sampling technique to allow for the drawing of generalization. Second, concerning the methodology, it needs to be said, that the interviews were conducted on a basis of qualitative research. This allowed the researcher to achieve a deeper understanding of respondents' behavior concerning their consumer decision-making for fashion in general and for sustainable fashion in particular. For future research it is recommendable to additionally combine qualitative results with data gained by quantitative research in order to get a more complete data set. This study might serve as a basis for the formulation of future hypothesis. Interesting hypotheses to look at might therefore be:

H₁ Low prices and the actuality of fashion are the main reasons for buying fast fashion.

H₂ The low availability of sustainable clothes hinders consumers to buy ethical fashion.

H₃ Consumers have biased attitudes on sustainable fashion.

H₄ The missing transparency of sustainable apparel causes uncertainty for consumers.

These hypotheses would verify the obtained data empirically.

This leads to third, the obtained data. The interviews might be biased by the respondents' feelings or moods. They might not have been as honest as they pretended to be in order to avoid humiliation in front of the researcher. Moreover, the researcher himself took over the task of

analyzing the data. The identification of concept and the coding into themes might be subjective and not reliable. In the future, a multi-level approach could counteract these issues to allow for more reliable data.

Contextual limitations directly refer to the results of this research. Within the scope of this research the main focus was placed on only one category of sustainable fashion consumption: The buying behavior of green apparel. A suggestion for expanding this research is a) broaden the term fashion and include also ethical footwear in future studies and b) to conduct further research projects on the recycling or disposal behavior of consumers in order to increase the knowledge of ethical consumers. Moreover, with the fast pace of development, there might be a further need to investigate on how consumers think of emerging trends, such as fashion rentals or online fashion exchange platforms. Expanding and examining the research of the attitude-behavior gap might be therefore also interesting for other industries and not only for the fashion industry as these are concepts, which are adaptable to a broader range of ethical products.

6. Conclusion

Unlike numerous previous studies in this area that explained ethical consumer behavior with the help of behavioral models, not taking into account the attitude-behavior gap that is well documented in the ethical consumerism literature, the current study started from the position of a prevailing gap. Therefore, this study sought to understand the main drivers and barriers that influence the attitude-behavior gap, referring to the ethical fashion industry. Through qualitative analysis a wide range of factors impeding ethical decision-making could be identified. In total seven key themes emerged during the conducted in-depth interviews. The findings from this study correspond to other studies related to the consumption of ethical apparel, but notwithstanding also provide new insights and can be seen as a useful step forward in the

understanding of ethical consumer behavior. This study presents various implications for the fashion industry, generating valuable approaches for developing strategies in the future. However, it gets clear that this study represents only a starting point and future research is needed to consolidate the findings.

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