
IMPACT OF BRAND- AND COUNTRY IMAGE ON THE PERCEPTION OF SUSTAINABILITY IN THE FASHION BUSINESS

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ABSTRACT

The Fashion and Textile industry is presently confronted to participate in the sustainability movement and society demands Corporate Social Responsibility. Today, it is crucial for fashion companies to be able to measure, monitor and improve environmental and social performance, due to the fact that there is a heightened awareness of sustainable practices by stakeholders. The purpose of this study is to investigate fashion consumers on their sustainable perception of a fashion company. More specifically, the objective of this study is to highlight the fashion consumer's awareness in regards to the sustainable practices of a fashion company by considering the brand- and country image factors. An experimental research design was utilized for the study and the researcher surveyed 120 fashion students. The basis of the surveys within the experiment is the present sustainable practice of the fashion brand H&M. This research aims to understand, if and how fashion consumers are influenced by a fashion brand image or its sourcing practices, when it comes to evaluate the sustainable performance of a fashion company. Results show, that participants have significantly different perceptions when considering the fashion brand image of H&M on the one hand and the sourcing countries of H&M on the other. The result of this research provides useful information about the actual state of affairs in sustainable knowledge of the consumer and the related power of a brands image and its sourcing strategies.

Keywords: Fashion, Sourcing, Sustainability, Brand Image, Country Image,

1. INTRODUCTION

More and more consumers pay attention to fair-trade and organically produced apparel and there is an increased demand for greater transparency and disclosure in today's sustainability marketplace (Mol, 2013; Schmitt & Renken, 2012). It is evident that fashion consumption causes social and environmental threat and thus have a huge impact on the supply chain of fashion companies (Chen & Burns, 2006). Therefore, the idea of implementing sustainability to daily business is a very important fact and should be considered by fashion companies (Battaglia, Testa, Bianchi, Iraldo, & Frey, 2014; Gardetti, 2013). Due to the increasing awareness of social and environmental issues of the consumer, sustainability has become significantly important in fashion businesses. Therefore, developing a sustainable supply chain is crucial for fashion companies to meet consumer's consciousness. To date many researches has been made on sustainability (Battaglia et al., 2014; Bin Shen, 2014; Chan & Wong, 2012; Gardetti, 2013; Jayaraman, Singh, & Anandnarayan, 2012; Nagurney & Yu, 2012; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). Due to the fact that a Fashion supply chain is labour-intensive and sensitive to environment and society (Dicken, 2007), it is essential for fashion companies to cover all three aspects of the Triple Bottom Line within a sustainable supply chain (Li, Zhao, Shi, & Li, 2014). As a consequence, from an industrial point of view, there are many advantages for fashion companies in acting sustainable and to cover environmental, social and economic aspects (Bin Shen, 2014). With a sustainable approach fashion companies can attract remarkable attention of academics and industrialists in the field of textile and supply chain management (Jayaraman et al., 2012; Morana & Seuring, 2011; Turker & Altuntas, 2014).

It has been shown that consumers are willing to purchase eco-fashion products as long as green marketing is successful (Bin Shen, Yulan Wang, Chris K.Y. Lo, & Momoko Shum, 2012; Chan & Wong, 2012; G. Birtwistle & C.M. Moore, 2007; Sharma, Iyer, Mehrotra, & Krishnan, 2010). Birtwistle and Moore (2007) found in their exploratory research that there is a general lack of information or knowledge towards sustainability and the related sustainable manufacturing processes among consumers (Connell, 2010; G. Birtwistle & C.M. Moore, 2007). Hence, it has been suggested that companies should share and release information about their sustainable practices and act more transparent to promote sustainability in the supply chain among consumers and thus, counteract towards the lack of knowledge and information about eco-products (Beard, 2008; Fraj & Martinez, 2006; G. Birtwistle & C.M. Moore, 2007; Joergens, 2006). However, it has not been discussed yet, whether the new transparency of business practices leads to a better image of the companies or if an established brand overrules the actual sourcing practices in terms of the consumers perception of the company's sustainability.

The purpose of this study is to figure out where fashion companies should put their focus in conveying their sustainable practices to the consumers preferably. The research questions are thus defined as follows:

- Does a brand of a fashion company have an influence on the consumers' perceived sustainable sense towards a fashion company
- Does a fashion companies' sourcing countries have an influence on the consumers' perceived sustainable sense towards a fashion company.

In this context, the researcher analyses the Brand Image of H&M, as well as the Country Image, where the fashion company supplies its products from, to highlight the influence on the consumers' perception. An experimental research design, including four surveys was utilized for the study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability from the Consumer Perspective

2.1.1 Corporate Social Responsibility Perception

Sustainable branding is becoming more powerful today because the consumer is firmly positioned in the driver's seat. Therefore, sustainability is to be regarded as an integral part of strategic branding decisions" (futurebrand, 2015). Within this context Kim and Hall (2015) used the schema theory as the conceptual framework in their study to investigate the connections between consumers, brands and environmental sustainability. Kim and Hall (2015) formulated propositions by summarizing past studies on green branding to bring ideas on consumers process and respond to sustainability (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). They found that related studies constantly argue that consumers with higher levels of environmental concern (EC) will be more likely to have favourable attitudes towards products or related company efforts that support environmental sustainability (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). More specifically, that leads to the assumption that consumers with a higher environmental attitude will have an increased tendency to draw a natural connection between environmental sustainability, products and brands (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015).

Previous studies suggest that consumers favoured fashion brands with information about environmentally friendly products (Yan, Hyllegard, & Blaesi, 2012). The investigation of Conell (2010) supports the findings and shows that there is a lack of knowledge of consumers about sustainability, thus a barrier to consume green apparel. Conell (2010) further suggests that consumers are willing to improve their apparel acquisition with better information. It has been found that consumers also lack on basic knowledge about the production, the distance that their apparel travelled throughout the supply chain and the related carbon emissions (Connell, 2010). One possible approach is to state clear explanations of environmental impact on the labels of the product to improve consumer evaluation (Borin, Cerf, & Krishnan, 2011).

Kim and Hall (2015) argue consistently that the ability of the consumer to understand the background of the sustainable strategy is crucial for the success of the strategy itself (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). However, findings of D'Souza and Taghian (2005) show that consumers with a high environmental involvement tend to be more critical to green advertisement (D'Souza & Taghian, 2005). By considering how consumers connecting sustainable strategies with fashion and brands, it can be assumed that a high level of knowledge about the development and supply chain of fashion products will have a better understanding of the environmental implications of the green strategy developed by a fashion brand (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). Furthermore, Dickson (2000) supports the above mentioned findings that consumers had fairly positive perceptions of the U.S. apparel industry and much less positive perceptions of the foreign apparel industry. When consumers have greater knowledge and concern their support for socially responsible business goals increases (Marsha A. Dickson, 2000). To measure the general *CSR perception (CSR P)* of consumers Swaen and Chumpitaz (2010), developed a questionnaire including 20 items inspired by Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) and Maignan et al. (1999) (Maignan, Ferrell, & Hult, 1999; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Swaen & Chumpitaz, 2008). The items are categorised into four constructs such as philanthropic activities, respect for the environment, respect for consumers, and respect for workers. For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected two items of philanthropic activities, three items of the respect for the environment construct, one item of respect for consumers and four items of respect for workers.

2.1.2 Environmental Concern (EC)

Following the definition proposed by Dunlap and Jones (2002), environmental concern is “the degree to which people are aware of problems regarding the environment and support efforts to solve them and/or indicate a willingness to contribute personally to their solution” (Dunlap & Jones, 2002). In other words, environmental concern has been treated as an evaluation of one’s own behaviour with consequences for the environment (Fransson & Gärling, 1999; Takala, 1991; Weigel & Weigel, 1978).

Generally, it has been found that environmental concern has a direct effect on purchasing behaviour (Aytekin & Büyükahraz, 2013). Additionally, Kim and Choi (2005) found a strong positive link between environmental concern and green purchasing behaviour (Y. Kim & Sejung Marina Choi, 2005; Pagiaslis & Krontalis, 2014). It is evident that consumers are aware of environmental issues and the impact of their behaviour. Moreover consumers think their individual efforts contribute to solve the problems. Hence, they care about environmental problem solutions and they are ambitious to reallocate their time, money and attention with the aim to make their behaviours more friendly (Minton & Rose, 1997).

2.1.3 Perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE)

Roberts (1996) found that perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE) is one of the most striking factors to explain environmentally conscious consumer behaviour. PCE is a measure of the subject’s judgment in the ability of individual consumers to affect environmental resource problems (Roberts, 1996). As Roberts (1996) supports, the more consumers feel that they can be directly active in reducing pollution, the more they strive to consider the social outcome of their purchases (Roberts, 1996). In other words, a high level of PCE motivates consumers to show their positive attitudes towards sustainable products through actual consumption behaviour (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008).

In fact, plenty of researchers found that PCE directly affects sustainable consumption (Y. Kim & Sejung Marina Choi, 2005; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008; Webb, Mohr, & Harris, 2008). The study of Vermeir and Verbeke (2008) supports that PCE was positively associated with consumers’ willingness to purchase organic food (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). Additionally, Kim and Choi (2005) show that PCE significantly affected energy-saving and recycling behaviour (Y. Kim & Sejung Marina Choi, 2005). Recently, Wesley et al. (2012) indicated that PCE affected socially responsible purchasing behaviour when mediated by positive personal and social attitudes. With respect to Kang et al. (2013), PCE is expected to influence attitudes, perceptions and other behavioural intentions towards environmentally sustainable textiles and apparel (ESTA) consumption (Kang, Liu, & Kim, 2013).

2.1.4 Transparency (TRA)

According to Flynn (2009) transparency is defined as “A measure of increased accountability and decreased corruption in which a business reports on its ethics and performance results through accessible publication of business practices and behaviour; there is a strong movement to increase the transparency of business processes via independently verified corporate responsibility reporting” (Flynn, 2009). Middlemiss (2003) argues that communicating CSR efforts begin with the suggestion that brands be credible, transparent and honest (Middlemiss, 2003). McDonald and Rundle-Thiele (2008) suggest that CSR initiatives can establish the highest level of customer satisfaction especially when it comes to child-labour and sweatshops issues and the support of human rights (McDonald & Rundle-Thiele, 2008). Therefore it is inevitable for companies, specifically within the fashion industry where overseas activities are on the foreground related to environmental and social issues, to be transparent.

Reynolds and Yuthas (2008) state, that transparency is a basic factor in developing positive relationships between consumers and companies, which is built by the communication of CSR efforts (Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008). Moreover, Willmott (2003) suggests that transparency is a crucial factor of the consumer-company relationship built by brand trust, along with communication (Willmott, 2003). In her analysis of corporate citizenship, Waddock (2004) suggests that although transparency seems to be simply a governmental aspect of corporate behaviour, along with anti-corruption and upholding the rule of law, it is in fact the one corporate value that directly impacts all three spheres of the Triple Bottom Line (economic, social and environmental) of corporate behaviour (Waddock, 2004). As a result, it becomes obvious how transparency plays an important role within CSR efforts. This view is clearly in line with Bodwell et al. (2007) who argue that being transparent is the basis for accountability and in turn being accountable to stakeholders is one of the fundamental factors of social responsibility (Bodwell, Waddock, & Leigh, 2007). The study of Kang and Hustvedt (2014) shows, how transparency and trust is related to each other. In their study, they focused on efforts to be transparent and honest in companies, especially in addressing labour conditions, sweatshop issues, and related activities in manufacturing, producing, and/or sourcing processes. Their findings suggest that communicating the efforts more directly to consumers will allow to achieve increased trust between a company and consumers (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014).

However, some studies argue that a great deal of transparency can have its limitations, as the consumer may tend to use the information to put more pressure on the company, instead of complying with the green initiatives covered by the CSR (Bansal & Roth, 2000; Hendry, 2006). But in general, the majority of CSR related studies point to the positive impact of transparency on green, collaborative consumer-company relationships since information disclosure is considered as necessary to ensure corporate social accountability and to get the trust of the consumer (Reynolds & Yuthas, 2008; Tapscott & Ticoll, 2012).

2.1.5 Trust (TRU)

The knowledge how transparency can improve the consumer-company relationship leads to the motivation to improve the behaviour of companies and their suppliers, as well as the willingness of a company to be transparent. As investigated by researchers, building the consumer-company relationship should be grounded on trust (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Esch, Langner, Schmitt, & Geus, 2006; Fournier & Yao, 1997).

In a corporate context, trust is defined as the belief that a company will act in the best interest of its consumers and keep what the company promises (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Trust has significant contribution to desirable outcomes for the company such as loyalty towards the company, customer retention, product choices, purchase intention, willingness to act, and overall market performance (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán, & Yagüe-Guillén, 2003; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Matzler, Grabner-Kräuter, & Bidmon, 2008; Willmott, 2003). Consequently, being considered as a trustworthy company by consumers is crucial and companies should pay high attention to establish trust between the firm and consumers (Knowles 2003).

In an effort to build trust with customers, many companies including major brand corporations such as H&M, Levi's, Adidas and the PVH Group and have expanded the scope of CSR initiatives by being transparent about their supply chain and labour issues ("Sustainability of Adidas," 2015, "Sustainability of H&M," 2015, "Sustainability of Levi Strauss," 2015, "Sustainability of PVH Corp.,"

2015). By quickly analysing the above mentioned companies` efforts, it becomes obvious that in order to generate trust the companies strive to be transparent and communicate in detail about their CSR efforts.

It can be proposed that consumers` subjective evaluation on a company`s efforts to be transparent and socially and environmentally responsible is critical in predicting how trustworthy the company is perceived by consumers (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014).

2.2 Country of Origin

In the course of an extensive research of FutureBrand (2015) people were asked to rank the importance of country of origin with regard to their daily purchase decisions. Surprisingly, country of origin, design and manufacture were all ranked higher than traditional drivers of choice like price, availability and style (futurebrand, 2015). According to Johansson et al. (1985) the country of origin is defined as being the country where corporate headquarters of the company are marketing the product from, or where the brand is located (Johansson, Douglas, & Nonaka, 1985). As one of the first investigators in the field of the country of origin phenomenon, Nagashima (1970) defined the image that consumers associate with a given country of origin: "The picture, the reputation, the stereotype that businessmen and consumer attach to products of a specific country. This image is created by such variables as representative products, national characteristics, economic and political background, history and traditions" (Nagashima, 1970). Martin and Eroglu (1993) established and validated a scale for measuring the construct of Country Image Perception (CIP). In this scale economic, political and technological dimensions were developed to evaluate country image perspectives, what then, for instance, can be utilised to understand if and how different countries are perceived by consumers, thus are likely to affect consumers` evaluations of different product classes (Martin & Eroglu, 1993). As Min Han (1989) identified, buyers utilise the Country Image factor in product evaluations, especially when consumers are not able to determine the true quality of a country`s products before purchase. Hence, Country Image indirectly affects brand attitudes and it has been found that country image stimulate consumers to think more precisely about other product information as well (C. Min Han, 1990; Hong & Wyer, 1989). Papadopoulos et al. (1993) considered Country Image measures in the field of country of origin research, and was one of the pioneers in establishing a model to show the relationship between country beliefs, product beliefs, familiarity, product evaluation and willingness to buy (Papadopoulos, Heslop, & Kaynak, 1993).

Additionally several researchers agree that the country image has effects on customer perception of brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Baldauf, Cravens, Diamantopoulos, & Zeugner-Roth, 2009; Hye Jung Jung, Yuri Lee, HaeJung Kim, & Heesoon Yang, 2014; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2006; Yasin, Noor, & Mohamad, 2007). According to Pappu et al. (2006), consumers who achieve knowledge in the case of country of origin effects show positive or negative associations towards the country and thus the perceived image of the country is likely to influence the image of brands from the country (Pappu et al., 2006). Since consumer perception of a certain country of origin influence the evaluation of products from the country, the preference, purchase intention and choice of a particular brand will be influenced significantly (Bilkey & Nes, 1982). For the purpose of the study, Yasin et al. (2007) developed a country of origin image scale to measure consumer`s perception of the image of the country where a brand originates from (Yasin et al., 2007).

To sum up, with respect to the existing literature, there is a vast amount of studies documenting country of origin perspectives. The studies imply that the country of origin effect is an crucial influencing

factor in consumers perception and decision-making (C. Min Han, 1990; DeBono & Rubin, 1995; Johansson, 1989; Knight, 1999; Piron, 2000; Yasin et al., 2007). During the literature review, however, none of the existing country of origin studies aimed at the sustainable performance of a country so far.

2.3 Fashion Brand Image

According to Lee et al. (2009) the traditional concept of brand, which is related to logo, sign or label for physical differentiation has been, to date, criticized by researchers as (Lee, Leung, & Zhang, 2009) “too mechanical, too concerned with the physical product, too input oriented, with little reference to manufacturers’ strategic thinking or visions for the brand and failing to recognize that the brand acquires connotations in consumers’ minds through their experiences” (Chernatony & Riley, 1997). Therefore the concept of brand was renewed by de Chernatony and Riley (1997) and the researchers defined it with concern to nine themes as “a legal instrument, as a logo, as a company, as an identity system, as an image in consumers’ minds, as a personality, as a relationship, as adding value and as an evolving” (Chernatony & Riley, 1997). From this general perspective, a brand is more than a visual label for differentiation and includes an imagery mean.

Interpreting the term brand to the fashion industry, fashion branding can be seen as the context that surrounds the garment as well as the image that designers, retailers, manufacturers and promotional consultants create in order to encourage consumers to buy new items (Hancock, 2009). Hancock (2009) states that a fashion brand offers an overall experience that is unique, different, special and identifiable. Branding is also seen as a competitive strategy that targets customers with products, advertising and promotion in order to encourage purchase and repurchase of products from the company (Hancock, 2009).

Over the years many studies have been conducted in the field of brand and sustainability related research. The recent study of Kim and Hall (2015) points out that the current Brand Image is additionally depending on the consumers’ perception, whether the brand and the green strategy fits together and how the brand’s environmental strategy is communicated (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). Moreover, Ng et al. (2014) found that brand credibility is influencing green brand perceptions (Ng, Butt, Khong, & Ong, 2014). In this case, brand credibility is dominated by two components, trustworthiness and expertise. According to Erdem and Swait (2004), brand credibility has been defined as the believability of the product information contained in a brand, which requires that consumers perceive that the brand has the ability (i.e., expertise) and willingness (i.e., trustworthiness) to continuously deliver what has been promised (Erdem & Swait, 2004). This is an important point of view when it comes to evaluate sustainability perception in regard to a fashion brand, because the credibility of a company’s sustainability efforts is influenced by the fit of a green branding into the existing consumer perception of the apparel brand. For instance, H&M’s well-known marketing campaign “conscious” represents the brand’s sustainable apparel collection. This “conscious” collection of H&M considers environmental consumer commitments, from textile sourcing to factory working conditions (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015; “Sustainability of H&M,” 2015). However, as Fernandez (2013) notes that albeit well-intentioned, the “conscious” collection seems to be paradoxical when it is compared with H&M global distribution practices of fast fashion (Fernandez, 2013).

Kim and Hall (2015) conducted the schema theory to investigate the connections between consumers, brands and environmental sustainability (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). Their research indicates that the consumer response to new branding strategies is influenced by their existing relationships with

the parent brand. In the case of green brand extensions where established parent brand names (e.g. H&M) are used to launch and introduce a new collection (e.g. H&M “conscious”), many studies have noted the influential role of parent brands on consumer attitudes toward the new brand extension (Czellar, 2003; Pina, Dall’Olmo Riley, & Lomax, 2013; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). It has been evaluated that the perceived fit between the parent brand (e.g. H&M) and extension (e.g. H&M “conscious” collection) as well as consumers’ attitude towards the parent brand is influencing the success of the new brand (Pina et al., 2013; Völckner & Sattler, 2006). Considering the rapidly growing offer of green brands, it is possible that with regard to authenticity, quality, and price competitiveness, consumers may have negative perceptions. Therefore, the parent brand equity will play a more and more important role in how consumers evaluate and perceive green brand extensions of a company (H.-S. Kim & Ma, 2014). Chatterjee (2009) depicts that the success of launching a green brand extension is very important, as long as there is no negative impact to the parent brand (Chatterjee, 2009). However, in their study of green brand extensions, Kim and Ma (2014) found that consumers who strongly identify with a parent brand showed intentions to purchase green brand extensions although they did not develop positive attitudes toward the green brand extension itself (H.-S. Kim & Ma, 2014). Hence, when consumers are loyal to a brand regardless of whether a new green brand strategy does not necessarily relate to the current brand or appeal to the customer base, it has been proposed that consumers will respond positively to the new green brand extensions (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Hypothesis

Brand image has been defined as “the sum of total of impressions the consumer receives from many sources: from actual experience and hearsay about the brand itself as well as its packaging, its name, the company making it, the types of people the individual has been using the brand, what is said in its advertising, as well as from the tone, format, type of advertising vehicle in which the product story was told” (Britt, 1966). It has been widely supported by researchers that a brand has the ability to create an image in consumers’ minds (Chernatony & Riley, 1997). This implies, from a general perspective, that a brand is more than a visual label for differentiation and includes an imagery mean. In today’s marketplace, a brand image is threatened by many factors as more and more brands are being observed and reported by media for their environmental and social sustainability practices.

According to Kim and Hall (2013), consumers must be able to fit the green strategy of a fashion company to the parent brand perception (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). This is a very important point of view in order to evaluate the sustainability perception with regard to a fashion brand, because the credibility of a company’s sustainability efforts is influenced by the fit of a green branding into the existing consumer perception of the apparel brand. Due to previous findings and as there is no investigation in consumer’s perception of a fashion companies sustainable performance with regard to Brand Image evaluation, the researcher of this study proposes:

(H1) Brand Image affects consumer perception of a fashion company’s sustainable activities.

As already examined in previous researches, sustainable consumers are convinced of the Made in tag as a crucial factor when it comes to the evaluation of sustainably manufactured apparel. Several researchers agree that the Country Image has effects on consumer perception including brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. As indicated by Saydan (2013) country of origin is a very important

factor and significantly has its impact on the purchasing decision of consumers. It is defined as comprising the subjective perceptions of a consumer about the products that provide an important observation including belief, ideas and impressions before making buying decisions. Thus, where and how a product is made has become crucial in the consumer's decision making process and it can additionally qualify key considerations, such as safety, quality and ecological standards. By considering how consumers connecting sustainable strategies with fashion and brands, it can be assumed that the higher the level of knowledge about the development and supply chain of fashion products, the better a consumer understands the environmental implications of a fashion brand's green strategy (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). Furthermore, a company's efforts to be transparent about production and labour conditions and to be socially responsible, plays a crucial role in building consumer trust towards the company. As a consequence, it can be assumed that the more positive the Country Image (CIP) evaluation of a consumer is, the more likely he or she will perceive a companies' efforts as sustainable. Therefore, it is important that companies should put their focus on the right communication to influence consumer perceptions to understand how country of origin information influences the brand of a company as a valuable factor to marketing practitioners (Pappu et al., 2006).

Due to previous findings and the related tendencies, and as there is no investigation in consumer's perception of a fashion companies sustainable performance with regard to country image evaluation, the researcher of this study proposes:

(H2) Country image of suppliers affects consumer perception of a fashion company's sustainable activities.

3.2 Survey Object

The sample company was selected under three very important criteria: (1) the sample is a well-known and globally acting and sourcing fashion brand. (2) The fashion brand provides its factory or supplier list and (3) promotes its sustainable approaches on the corporate webpage. Finally, the fast fashion retailer H&M met these requirements and was chosen as the sample for this work. H&M is a leading mass fashion company in sustainable practices (Choi, Liu, Tang, & Yu, 2011). The company promotes broadly their sustainability program on the corporate website which is called H&M conscious. H&M claims that they take responsibility from the use of natural resources to social aspects and reducing electricity consumption. Thus, they state that sustainability is thoroughly integrated into their business. The three major goals of the H&M Conscious program is the effort to run the operations in an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable way. To achieve the goals they conduct seven commitments, such as providing fashion for conscious customers; choose and reward responsible partners; be ethical; be climate smart; reduce, reuse and recycle; use natural resources responsibly; and strengthen communities. One of their recent conscious projects was the launch of garments using fibres recycled from garment collecting, in which H&M stores worldwide accept old garments in any condition and of any brand for re-use and recycling. Furthermore the company claims that it does not have own manufacturing companies but instead outsources manufacturing to around 850 independent suppliers ("H&M Annual Report," 2014).

3.2 Research Design and Measurement

An experiment is a form of research that owes much to the natural sciences, although its feature strongly in psychological and social science research. The purpose of an experiment is to study a probability of a change in an independent variable causing a change in another, dependent variable

(Creswell, 2009; Hakim, 2000; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). In other words, the basic intent is to test the impact of a treatment on an outcome, controlling for all other factors that might influence that outcome what has the advantage of enabling a researcher to identify a cause and effect between variables. Thus, the researcher can isolate whether it is the treatment that influences the outcome, or not (Creswell, 2009). The variables need to be specified in an experiment so that is clear to readers what groups are receiving the experimental treatment and what outcomes are being measured. In this case, the independent variables within each of the groups or surveys are declared by different combinations of the brand name and a sourcing chart. The brand names include H&M and an imaginary Brand X, whereas the sourcing charts include the real, actual sourcing chart of H&M and a faked sourcing chart with countries of high scorings on human-, environmental, and economic wellbeing (Group/Survey 1: H&M, Real Sourcing; Group/Survey 2: H&M, Fake Sourcing; Group/Survey 3: Brand X, Real Sourcing; Group/Survey 4: Brand X, Fake Sourcing). That means each group faces different combinations or respectively undergoes special requirements, different to the other groups. It is important to note that in general the countries of the faked sourcing chart have high scorings on human -, environmental- and economic-wellbeing on the SSI contrary to the actual H&M sourcing chart. On the other hand, there is the dependent variable, which is the response or the criterion variable that is presumed to be caused by or influenced by the independent treatment conditions and any other independent variables. Hence, the researcher declared the constructs, namely CRSP, TRA, TRU and CIP, as the outcome being representative for the sustainable perception of a consumer towards a fashion company. Table 1 summarizes all the variables used in the experiment.

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the means scores of each group pairings and test whether there is a significant difference between the control and treatment group. There is a necessity of two variables to perform the independent-samples test: one categorical, independent variable which is the treatment and control group and one continuous, dependent variable which is presented by the scores of the constructs measuring the sustainability perception of a consumer towards a fashion company (CSRSP, TRA, TRU and CIP). It is important to note, that the researcher declares that within the 5-point-Likert scale the distance between the items are equal, thus the scale can be treated as a continuous scale (Pallant, 2010).

First, for each comparison between two groups, the researcher generated the Group Statistics box, to check the number of students (N), the mean, as well as the standard deviation to ensure that there is no missing data and that the correct groups are being compared.

Then the researcher gave attention to the firsts section of the independent-samples t-test box, the Levene`s test for equality of variances. This tests whether the variance of scores for the groups (e.g. Group 1 and 2) is the same. The result of the test determines which of the t-values that SPSS generates will be the proper one during the analysis. There are two possible approaches: If the significance of Levene`s test is larger than $p = 0.05$, it is recommended to consider the line which refers to *equal variances assumed*. To the contrary, if the test is $p = 0.05$ or less, then the line which refers to *equal variances not assumed* is pertinent (Pallant, 2010).

After checking the assumptions, the researcher assessed the differences between the groups by finding out whether there is a significant difference between the control and treatment group. The significance level appears in the column labelled as *Sig. (2-tailed)* which appears in the section *t-test for equality of means*. If the value in the *Sig. (2-tailed)* is equal or less than 0.05, there is a significant difference in the mean scores on the dependent variables (CSRSP, TRA, TRU, CIP) for each group of the

comparison. Conversely, if the value is above 0.05, there is no significant difference between the groups. Furthermore the independent-samples t-test provides useful information such as the mean difference between the groups, which shows at a glance whether the treatment had a positive or negative impact on the outcome. Consequently, it has been possible to test Hypothesis H1 and H2.

3.3 Sample Size and Selection

Participants included 120 students of the Reutlingen University in Germany who were all recruited through a convenience sample during the summer term 2015. For the distribution of the quantitative survey, the researcher of this study aimed the textile and design faculty of Reutlingen University, because, these students already experienced insights into the fashion industry, as well as sustainability issues. Participants were asked to voluntarily participate in the survey during a regularly scheduled class meeting time and the researcher then randomly assigned students from each class into four groups while keeping a reasonable number of respondents in each of the group. When individuals can be randomly assigned to groups, the procedure is called a true experiment. This procedure ensures that there is no systematic bias in assigning the individuals (Creswell, 2009). According to Vishnawath (2005) students tend to be homogeneous in nature which is desirable for theory testing (Vishwanath, 2005). Furthermore, college students list clothing shopping as one of their favourite and most frequent activities (Eun Joo Park, Eun Young Kim, & Judith Cardona Forney, 2006). Thus, the age range of the majority of undergraduates, falls within the age range of individuals who are most likely to shop at H&M (Byun, 2008). The age of the respondents ranged from 17 years to 35 years, where mainly the participants ranged between 17-21 years with 44 students and between 22-26 years with 66 students.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Brand Image impact

To test the Brand Image impact on the dependent variables, Group 1 and 3 were compared as well as Group 2 and 4. This pairings ensured an appropriate evaluation, as H&M and Brand X are confronted continuously in each comparison.

4.1.1 Comparison of Group 1 and 3

During the first group comparison, Group 1 was declared as being the control group (given brand name H&M and real sourcing chart of H&M), whereas Group 3 is presented as the experiment group, which is undergoing a treatment (treatment by given Brand X and real sourcing chart of H&M).

Table 2 shows that on the dependent variable **CSR**, Group 1 ($N = 30$) is associated with $M = 2,0667$ ($SD = 0,408$). By comparison, the treatment Group 3 ($N = 30$) was associated with a numerically higher mean score $M = 2,5800$ ($SD = 0,648$). Considering the dependent variable **TRA**, it can be reported that Group 1 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 2,0750$ ($SD = 0,673$), whereas the treatment Group 3 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $M = 2,3250$ ($SD = 0,858$). Further, on having a look on **TRU** it can be reported that Group 1 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 2,4400$ ($SD = 0,559$), whereas the treatment Group 3 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $M = 2,7933$ ($SD = 0,726$). Lastly on **CIP** it can be obtained that Group 1 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 1,855$ ($SD = 0,857$), whereas the treatment Group 3 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically similar $M = 1,8944$ ($SD = 0,625$).

It is important to note that the descriptive statistics Table 2 merely shows a tendency by analysing the mean score, but do not provide a fact that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups, due to the treatment.

Table 3 indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not satisfied for the scores of **CSR**P between Groups 1 and 3 via Levene's F test, $F(48) = 4,299$, $p = 0,043$ ($< 0,05$). The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 1 and 3, $t(48) = -3,669$, $p = 0,001$ ($< 0,05$). Thus participants of Group 1 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 3. In other words, the $MD = -0,5133$ supports that the participants of the control group (H&M, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Corporate Social Responsibility Perception** than the treatment Group (Brand X, real), due to the Brand Image of H&M. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied for the scores of **TR**A between Group 1 and 3 via Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,520$, $p = 0,474$ ($> 0,05$). The analysis highlights that there is no significant difference between Group 1 and 3, $t(58) = -1,255$, $p = 0,215$ ($> 0,05$) regarding to **Transparency**. For **TR**U, equal variances are assumed according to the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,680$, $p = 0,439$ ($> 0,05$). It can be reported that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 1 and 3, $t(58) = -2,110$, $p = 0,039$ ($< 0,05$). Thus participants of Group 1 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 3. More precisely, the $MD = -0,3533$ supports that the participants of the control group (H&M, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Trust** than the treatment Group (Brand X, real), due to the Brand Image of H&M. Finally for **CIP**, the assumption of equal variances for Group 1 and 3 are not violated considering the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 3,342$, $p = 0,073$ ($> 0,05$). The t-test shows that there is no significant difference between Group 1 and 3, $t(58) = -2,01$, $p = 0,842$ ($> 0,05$) with respect to **Country Image Perception**.

4.1.2 Comparison of Group 2 and 4

During the second group comparison, Group 2 was declared as being the control group (given brand name H&M and fake sourcing chart), whereas Group 4 is the experiment group, which is undergoing a treatment (treatment by given Brand X and fake sourcing chart).

Table 4 shows that on the dependent variable **CSR**P, Group 2 ($N = 30$) is associated with $M = 2,7933$ ($SD = 0,575$). By comparison, the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) was associated with a numerically higher mean score $M = 3,1767$ ($SD = 0,610$). Considering the dependent variable **TR**A, it can be reported that Group 2 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 2,4083$ ($SD = 0,877$), whereas the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $M = 2,9167$ ($SD = 0,804$). Further, on having a look on **TR**U it can be reported that Group 2 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 2,9200$ ($SD = 0,692$), whereas the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) has scored a slightly higher $M = 3,1533$ ($SD = 0,836$). Finally on **CIP** it can be obtained that Group 2 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 2,6000$ ($SD = 0,900$), whereas the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically similar $M = 3,4167$ ($SD = 0,651$).

Table 5 indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied for the scores of **CSR**P between Group 2 and 4 via Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,048$, $p = 0,828$ ($> 0,05$). The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 2 and 4, $t(58) = -2,503$, $p = 0,015$ ($< 0,05$). As a consequence, participants of Group 2 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 4. More precisely, the $MD = -0,38333$ supports that the participants of the control group (H&M, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Corporate Social Responsibility Perception** than the treatment Group (Brand X, real), due to the Brand Image of H&M. The assumption of homogeneity of

variances was satisfied for the scores of **TRA** between Group 2 and 4 via Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,431$, $p = 0,515 (> 0,05)$. The t-test highlights that there is a significant difference between Group 2 and 4, $t(58) = -2,339$, $p = 0,023 < 0,05$ regarding to **Transparency**. As the $MD = -0,50833$ supports, participants of the control group (H&M, fake) are scoring significantly lower on **Transparency** than the treatment Group (Brand X, fake), due to the Brand Image of H&M. For **TRU**, equal variances are assumed according to the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,687$, $p = 0,411 (> 0,05)$. The test emphasizes that there is no statistically significant difference between Group 2 and 4 regarding to **Trust**, $t(58) = -1,177$, $p = 0,244 > 0,05$. Lastly for **CIP**, the assumption of equal variances for Group 2 and 4 are not violated considering the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 3,286$, $p = 0,075 (> 0,05)$. The t-test shows that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 2 and 4, $t(58) = -4,023$, $p = 0,001 < 0,05$. Therefore, participants of Group 2 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 4. In other words, as the $MD = -0,81667$ supports, the participants of the control group (H&M, fake) are scoring significantly lower on **CIP** than the treatment Group (Brand X, fake), due to the Brand Image of H&M.

4.2 Country Image impact

To test the Country Image impact on the dependent variables, Group 1 and 2 were compared as well as Group 3 and 4. This pairings ensured an appropriate evaluation, as the actual sourcing chart of H&M and the faked sourcing chart are confronted continuously in each comparison.

4.2.1 Comparison of Group 1 and 2

During the first group comparison, Group 1 was declared as being the control group (given brand name H&M and real sourcing chart of H&M), whereas Group 2 is representing the experiment group, which is undergoing a treatment (treatment by brand name H&M and fake sourcing chart).

Table 6 implicates that on the dependent variable **CSR**, Group 1 ($N = 30$) is associated with $M = 2,0667$ ($SD = 0,408$). Group 2 ($N = 30$) is related with a numerically higher mean $M = 2,7933$ ($SD = 0,575$). Considering the dependent variable **TRA**, it can be reported that Group 1 ($N = 30$) has a $M = 2,0750$ ($SD = 0,673$),. Conversely the treatment Group 2 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $aM = 2,4083$ ($SD = 0,877$). By analysing **TRU** it can be reported that Group 1 ($N = 30$) has a $aM = 2,4400$ ($SD = 0,559$), whereas Group 2 ($N = 30$) has scored numerically higher $M = 2,9200$ ($SD = 0,692$). Lastly on **CIP** it can be obtained that Group 1 ($N = 30$) has a $aM = 1,855$ ($SD = 0,857$), and the treatment Group 2 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $M = 2,6000$ ($SD = 0,900$).

As Table 7 depicts, the equal variances are assumed for the scores of **CSR** between Group 1 and 2, Levene's F test, $F(58) = 2,090$, $p = 0,154 (> 0,05)$. The t-test signifies that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 1 and 2, $t(58) = -5,639$, $p = 0,001 < 0,05$. This implicates that participants of Group 1 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 2. By considering the $MD = -0,7266$, it is supported that the participants of the control group (H&M, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Corporate Social Responsibility Perception** than the treatment Group (H&M, fake), due to the actual sourcing chart of H&M. The equality of variances between Group 1 and 2 are satisfied for the scores of **TRA**, $F(58) = 3,281$, $p = 0,075 (> 0,05)$. However, the analysis depicts that there is no significant difference between Group 1 and 2, $t(58) = -1,651$, $p = 0,104 > 0,05$ in regards to **Transparency**. For **TRU**, equal variances are assumed according to the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,584$, $p = 0,448 (> 0,05)$. Due to the statistically significant difference between Group 1 and 2, $t(58) = -2,955$, $p = 0,005 < 0,05$ it can be reported that participants of Group 1 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 3. The $MD = -0,48000$

supports that the participants of the control group (H&M, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Trust** versus the treatment Group (H&M, fake), due to the different sourcing charts. By analysing **CIP**, the assumption of equal variances for Group 1 and 2 are not violated, $F(58) = 0,049$, $p = 0,825 (> 0,05)$. The t-test shows that there is a significant difference between Group 1 and 2, $t(58) = -3,279$, $p = 0,002 > 0,05$ in respect to **Country Image Perception**. Furthermore, the $MD = -0,74444$ assists the fact that the participants of the control group (H&M, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Country Image Perception** than the treatment Group (H&M, fake), due to the actual sourcing chart of H&M.

4.2.2 Comparison of Group 3 and 4

To analyse the second group comparison, Group 3 was declared as being the control group (imaginary Brand X and real sourcing chart of H&M), and Group 4 is the experiment group, which is undergoing a treatment (by given Brand X and fake sourcing chart).

Table 8 illustrates that on **CSR**, Group 3 ($N = 30$) is associated with $M = 2,5800$ ($SD = 0,648$). By comparison, the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) was associated with a numerically higher mean score $M = 3,1767$ ($SD = 0,610$). Considering the dependent variable **TRA**, it can be reported that Group 3 ($N = 30$) has $aM = 2,3250$ ($SD = 0,877$), whereas the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $M = 2,9167$ ($SD = 0,804$). On evaluating **TRU** it can be reported that Group 3 ($N = 30$) has $aM = 2,7933$ ($SD = 0,726$), whereas the treatment Group 4 ($N = 30$) has scored a slightly higher $M = 3,1533$ ($SD = 0,836$). Finally on **CIP** it can be read out that Group 2 ($N = 30$) has $aM = 1,8944$ ($SD = 0,625$), whereas Group 4 ($N = 30$) has scored a numerically higher $M = 3,4167$ ($SD = 0,651$).

Table 9 of the analysis Chapter indicates that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was satisfied for the scores of **CSR** between Group 3 and 4, $F(58) = 0,159$, $p = 0,692 (> 0,05)$. The test depicts that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 3 and 4, $t(58) = -3,670$, $p = 0,001 < 0,05$. This implies that participants of Group 3 are related to a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 4. That shows in turn that the participants of the control group (Brand X, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Corporate Social Responsibility Perception** than the treatment Group (Brand X, fake), $MD = -0,59667$ due to the actual sourcing practices of H&M. Equal variances were assumed for the scores of **TRA** between Group 3 and 4, $F(58) = 0,041$, $p = 0,840 (> 0,05)$. Further the Table highlights that there is a significant difference between Group 3 and 4, $t(58) = -2,753$, $p = 0,008 < 0,05$ regarding to **Transparency**. As the $MD = -0,59167$ supports, participants of the control group (Brand X, real) are scoring significantly lower on **Transparency** than the treatment Group (Brand X, fake), due to the actual sourcing practices of H&M. For **TRU**, equal variances are assumed according to the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,541$, $p = 0,465 (> 0,05)$. The test signifies that there is no statistically significant difference between Group 3 and 4 regarding to **Trust**, $t(58) = -1,779$, $p = 0,080 > 0,05$. Lastly for **CIP**, equal variances for Group 3 and 4 are not violated considering the Levene's F test, $F(58) = 0,036$, $p = 0,851 (> 0,05)$. The t-test shows that there is a statistically significant difference between Group 3 and 4, $t(58) = -0,9227$, $p = 0,001 < 0,05$. In line with this, participants of Group 3 are associated with a statistically significant lower mean than participants of Group 4. In simple terms, as the $MD = -1,52222$ supports, the participants of the control group (H&M, fake) are scoring significantly lower on **Country Image Perception** than the treatment Group (Brand X, fake), due to the actual sourcing practices of H&M.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Research Objective A

The first objective in this study was to investigate the impact of the Brand Image on the consumers' perceived sustainable sense towards a fashion company. For this purpose the researcher compared Group 1 and 3 and in addition Group 2 and 4. According to the analysis part of the study, it has been found that there is a significant impact of the Brand. Thus the first Hypothesis (H1) of the study can be confirmed as being true.

The authors find that the Brand Image of H&M involves a negative scoring on the research items, whenever the difference between the two groups was found as being significant. Considering the first analysis Group 1 vs 3, where H&M and Brand X were confronted and the actual sourcing practices of H&M were held on both sides, the author found significant differences on the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Trust (TRU). This implies that *Students between the age of 17 and 35, who are tending to have an environmental concern (EC) and show tendencies to have a positive attitude towards sustainable products through their actual consumption behaviour (PCE) have significantly less trust to H&M and a negative perception of its Corporate Social*

Responsibility presence, due to the image that H&M has on the marketplace.

The second pairing supports this proposal and provides additional information by comparing Group 2 vs 4. Again, H&M and Brand X were confronted but this time the faked sourcing chart was attached to each Group. The researcher then found additionally significant differences on the perception of Transparency (TRA) and Country Image (CIP). Even the fact that the countries, where H&M sources its products from, were tuned by the researcher to a highly sustainable composition, the brand H&M caused a negative perception, compared to an unknown, imaginary Brand X. This implies that *Students between the age of 17 and 35, who are tending to have an environmental concern (EC) and show tendencies to have a positive attitude towards sustainable products through their actual consumption behaviour (PCE) have significantly negative perceptions towards the transparency and sourcing practices of H&M, due to the image that H&M has on the marketplace.*

To sum up, research objective (A) of the study has been satisfied, as the results show that the brand of a fashion company can have a significant influence on the consumers' perceived sustainable sense towards a fashion company.

5.2 Research Objective B

The second objective of this study was to investigate the impact of the Country Image on the consumers' perceived sustainable sense towards a fashion company. For this purpose the researcher compared Group 1 and 2 and in addition Group 3 and 4. According to the tests in Chapter 3.4.2, it has been found that there is a significant impact of the Country Images, where a company sources its products from. Hence, also the second Hypothesis (H2) of the study can be confirmed as being true.

The authors find that the actual sourcing practices of H&M causes a negative scoring on the research items, whenever the differences between the two groups was found as being significant. Considering the first analysis Group 1 vs 2, where the actual sourcing practices of H&M and the faked sourcing chart were confronted by providing the brand H&M on both sides, the author found significant differences on the perception of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Trust (TRU) and Country Image (CIP). This implies:

Students between the age of 17 and 35, who are tending to have an environmental concern (EC) and show tendencies to have a positive attitude towards sustainable products through their actual consumption behaviour (PCE), have a significantly negative perception of the countries, where H&M sources its products, thus less trust to the company and negative way of thinking about its Corporate Social Responsibility presence, due to the actual sourcing practices of H&M.

The second pairing supports this proposal and provides additional information by comparing Group 3 vs 4. Again, the actual sourcing practices of H&M and the faked sourcing chart were confronted, but this time Brand X was attached to each Group. The researcher additionally found significant differences on the perception of Transparency (TRA). Even the fact that the brand name of H&M was hidden during the comparison, the actual sourcing practices of H&M caused a negative perception, compared to the tuned and faked sourcing chart. This implies:

Students between the age of 17 and 35, who are tending to have an environmental concern (EC) and show tendencies to a positive attitude towards sustainable products through their actual consumption behaviour (PCE) have significantly negative perceptions towards the transparency of any Fashion Brand, when the sourcing practices of H&M are implemented.

Finally it can be stated that research objective (B) of the study has been satisfied, as the results show that the actual sourcing practices of a fashion company can have a significant influence on the consumers` perceived sustainable sense towards the fashion company.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that fashion companies have to be aware of both, the Brand Image from a communicational point of view and their sourcing practices from a strategic point of view to suggest an environmentally and socially responsible fashion company to consumers. The production and consumption of textile and apparel merchandise can cause a great deal of damage to the environment and researchers generally agreed, that the use of sweatshop labour led to negative publicity (Abernathy, Dunlop, Hammond, & Weil, 1999; Marsha Ann Dickson, Loker, & Eckman, 2009; Haesun Park & Lennon, 2006; Klein, 2002; Kozlowski, Bardecki, & Searcy, 2012; Shaw & Tomolillo, 2004)

Due to the findings of the analysis, four highly qualitative statements have been established, which are highlighting the effects of Brand and Country Image. In regard to Brand Image impacts, the first learning is that the participants have significantly less trust to H&M and a negative perception of its CSR presence, due to the image that H&M has on the marketplace. Related to the first fact, it has been found that participants have additionally significantly negative perceptions towards the transparency and sourcing practices of H&M, due to the image that H&M has on the marketplace. In order to maintain a brand which aims to be perceived as environmentally and socially correct, fashion companies should implement CSR policies but be aware of the credibility of their efforts. By developing a credible Brand Image and authenticity to be perceived as sustainably responsible it is inevitable that green communication strategies should be carefully planned by fashion companies to establish a credible and authentic sustainable presence among consumers. In the case of H&M, the brand image is negatively biased in terms of sustainability issues and seems to be not credible to consumers which is in line with suggestions of Kim and Hall (2013) who stated that the brand's current image within the consumer market must be able to fit the green strategy to the parent brand perception (H.-S. Kim & Hall, 2015). This can be a result of negative publicity of H&M over the recent years, especially the factory collapse in

Rana Plaza (Bajaj, 2015; Benrath, 2014; Farrell, 2013; Klink, 2014; *SchlechteArbeitsbedingungen*, 2011; Yee, 2015) and the increasing awareness and knowledge of the consumer regarding to sustainability issues (Chan & Wong, 2012; Flynn, 2009; Mol, 2013; Schmitt & Renken, 2012).

Concerning the Country Image impacts, the conducted research suggests that the participants of the study have a significantly negative perception of the countries, where H&M sources its products, thus less trust to the company and a negative way of thinking about its CSR presence, due to the actual sourcing practices of H&M. Furthermore they have significantly negative perceptions towards the transparency of any Fashion Brand, which performs similar sourcing practices to that of H&M. Previous studies show that country of origin effects are a very important influencing factor in the consumer decision making process. The “Made in” label plays an important role during the buying process and more and more consumers take this information into account, as the millennium consumers are socially minded, environmentally conscious and care about work ethics and sustainability (futurebrand, 2015).

Limitations of the presented study are as follows: First, this study aimed at fashion students between 17-35 years, who tend to be environmentally concerned and show tendencies to a positive attitude towards sustainable products through their actual consumption behaviour. Therefore this study is limited in the utilization for future purposes and is not generally applicable for all demographic levels and individual characteristics such as environmental concern and perceived consumer effectiveness makes it harder to transfer the findings to a larger population. Secondly, this study is not representative for all fashion companies, as the survey object, H&M, is a well-known and very present fast fashion retailer. Moreover, the validity is threatened due to the fact that the control and the experiment group were able to communicate with each other during the experiment. Finally, maturation effects can occur, as the sustainability issue becomes more and more evident and important in daily life and changes the attitudes and perceptions of consumers quickly as time elapses.

Although the present work procures valuable insights regarding sustainability perception of consumers towards fashion companies, the findings set several open areas for future research. Apparently, it would be very interesting to extend the sample size. Hence, future researchers can have a closer look on a larger population regarding the effects of Brand and Country image on consumer` sustainability perception. Moreover, this research should be applied to further fashion companies in different segments, to see whether the findings of the present study are transferable. Of course, this is only possible by considering that the potential fashion companies do meet the requirements to be appropriate candidates for an investigation. Additionally, future researchers can investigate behavioural and attitudinal factors in more detail in order to develop a scale, which can serve as a general and easy measure to assess the sustainability perception of consumers towards a fashion company.

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APPENDICES**Appendix 1: Tables**

Table 1:

Measurement Scales

Construct/Items	Codes	Source
<i>Environmental Concern (EC)</i>		Maloney (1975), Antil (1984)
I think we are not doing enough to save scarce natural resources from being used up	EC1	
Natural resources must be preserved even if people must do without some products	EC2	
I feel sorry that the government does not do more to help control pollution of the environment	EC3	
I feel angry and frustrated when I think about the harm being done to plant and animal life by pollution	EC4	
Consumers should be interested in the environmental consequences of the products they purchase	EC5	
<i>Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE)</i>		Roberts (1996)
It is worth it for the individual consumer to make efforts to preserve and improve the environment	PCE1	
When I buy products, I try to consider how the use of them will affect the environment	PCE2	
Since each individual can have any effect upon environmental problems, what I do can make meaningful difference	PCE3	
By purchasing products made in an environmentally friendly way, each consumer's behaviour can have a positive effect on the environment and society	PCE4	
<i>CSR Perception (CSRP)</i>		Swaen&Chumpitaz (2010)
I have the impression that ____ tries to ...		
... help developing countries	CSRP1	
... develop projects in poor countries	CSRP2	
... reduce its consumption of natural resources	CSRP3	
... make its production process more environmentally friendly	CSRP4	
... make its products as ecological as possible	CSRP5	
... provide consumers with accurate information about the products composition	CSRP6	
... create jobs	CSRP7	
... protect employee rights	CSRP8	

... guarantee employees health and safety	CSRP9	Hustvedt& Kang (2013)	
... respect human rights in all countries where the company operates	CSRP10		
Transparency (TRA)			
If I wanted to, I could easily find out about labour conditions in the factories of ____	TRA1		
____ would make any effort to improve poor labour conditions in their factories	TRA2		
I believe that ____ doesn't have anything to hide	TRA3		
I believe that ____ provides easy-to-read information on its website to teach the customer about their whole supply chain and their environmental efforts	TRA4		
Trust (TRU)			
This fashion brand gives me the feeling that it is competent and knows what it is doing	TRU1		Erdem &Swait (2004)
I have the feeling that I can trust this fashion brand	TRU2		
I think this brand delivers what it promises	TRU3		
I think this company is honest with its customers	TRU4		
This company is forthright in its communication with consumers	TRU5		
Country Image (CIP)		Yasin et al. (2007), SSI Index (2014)	
The countries from which ____ supplies, are countries where basic needs are covered (drink, food, safe sanitation)	CIP1		
The countries from which ____ supplies, are countries where personal development and health of citizens are ensured (education, healthy life, gender equality)	CIP2		
The countries from which ____ supplies, are countries with a well-balanced society (income distribution, population growth, good governance)	CIP3		
The countries from which ____ supplies, are countries with many natural resources (biodiversity, renewable water resources, consumption)	CIP4		
The countries from which ____ supplies, are countries with balanced climate and energy (Energy use , energy savings, renewable energy, greenhouse gases)	CIP5		
The countries from which ____ supplies, are countries with economic well-being (organic farming, genuine savings, GDP, employment, public debt)	CIP6		

Table 2:

Brand Image - Descriptive Statistics of Group 1 and 3

	Group 1 and 3	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSR)	H&M, real	30	2,0667	,40881	,07464
	Brand X, real	30	2,5800	,64829	,11836
Transparency (TRA)	H&M, real	30	2,0750	,67323	,12291
	Brand X, real	30	2,3250	,85890	,15681
Trust (TRU)	H&M, real	30	2,4400	,55931	,10212
	Brand X, real	30	2,7933	,72679	,13269
Country Image Perception (CIP)	H&M, real	30	1,8556	,85739	,15654
	Brand X, real	30	1,8944	,62588	,11427

Table 3:

Brand Image - Independent Samples T-Test of Group 1 and 3

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Differenc e
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSR)	Equal variances not assumed	4,299	,043	-3,669	48,915	,001	-,51333
Transparency (TRA)	Equal variances assumed	,520	,474	-1,255	58	,215	-,25000
Trust (TRU)	Equal variances assumed	,608	,439	-2,110	58	,039	-,35333
Country Image Perception (CIP)	Equal variances assumed	3,342	,073	-,201	58	,842	-,03889

Table 4:

Brand Image - Descriptive Statistics of Group 2 and 4

Group 2 and 4		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSRP)	H&M, fake	30	2,7933	,57532	,10504
	Brand X, fake	30	3,1767	,61064	,11149
Transparency (TRA)	H&M, fake	30	2,4083	,87711	,16014
	Brand X, fake	30	2,9167	,80498	,14697
Trust (TRU)	H&M, fake	30	2,9200	,69202	,12635
	Brand X, fake	30	3,1533	,83655	,15273
Country Image Perception (CIP)	H&M, fake	30	2,6000	,90083	,16447
	Brand X, fake	30	3,4167	,65177	,11900

Table 5:

Brand Image - Independent Samples T-Test of Group 2 and 4

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2- tailed)	Mean Difference
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSR)	Equal variances assumed	,048	,828	-2,503	58	,015	-,38333
Transparency (TRA)	Equal variances assumed	,431	,514	-2,339	58	,023	-,50833
Trust (TRU)	Equal variances assumed	,687	,411	-1,177	58	,244	-,23333
Country Image Perception (CIP)	Equal variances assumed	3,286	,075	-4,023	58	,000	-,81667

Table 6:

Country Image - Descriptive Statistics of Group 1 and 2

Group 1 and 2		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSRP)	H&M, real	30	2,0667	,40881	,07464
	H&M, fake	30	2,7933	,57532	,10504
Transparency (TRA)	H&M, real	30	2,0750	,67323	,12291
	H&M, fake	30	2,4083	,87711	,16014
Trust (TRU)	H&M, real	30	2,4400	,55931	,10212
	H&M, fake	30	2,9200	,69202	,12635
Country Image Perception (CIP)	H&M, real	30	1,8556	,85739	,15654
	H&M, fake	30	2,6000	,90083	,16447

Table 7:

Country Image - Independent Samples T-Test of Group 1 and 2

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSRP)	Equal variances assumed	2,090	,154	-5,639	58	,000	-,72667
Transparency (TRA)	Equal variances assumed	3,281	,075	-1,651	58	,104	-,33333
Trust (TRU)	Equal variances assumed	,584	,448	-2,955	58	,005	-,48000
Country Image Perception (CIP)	Equal variances assumed	,049	,825	-3,279	58	,002	-,74444

Table 8:

Country Image - Descriptive Statistics of Group 3 and 4

Group 3 and 4		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSRP)	Brand X, real	30	2,5800	,64829	,11836
	Brand X, fake	30	3,1767	,61064	,11149
Transparency (TRA)	Brand X, real	30	2,3250	,85890	,15681
	Brand X, fake	30	2,9167	,80498	,14697
Trust (TRU)	Brand X, real	30	2,7933	,72679	,13269
	Brand X, fake	30	3,1533	,83655	,15273
Country Image Perception (CIP)	Brand X, real	30	1,8944	,62588	,11427
	Brand X, fake	30	3,4167	,65177	,11900

Table 9:

Country Image - Independent Samples T-Test of Group 3 and 4

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Corporate Social Responsibility Perception (CSR)	Equal variances assumed	,159	,692	- 3,670	58	,001	-,59667
Transparency (TRA)	Equal variances assumed	,041	,840	- 2,753	58	,008	-,59167
Trust (TRU)	Equal variances assumed	,541	,465	- 1,779	58	,080	-,36000
Country Image Perception (CIP)	Equal variances assumed	,036	,851	- 9,227	58	,000	-1,52222