Consumer Perceived Brand Authenticity and Sustainable Marketing in the UK Fast Fashion Sector

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Abstract

The thesis considers challenges in sustainability marketing in the fast fashion sector. This is in light of discourse by some commentators in relation to perceived unsustainable brand image and misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises. The thesis suggests that through the contribution of brand authenticity, the desired trustworthiness could be enhanced so that unsustainable brand image can be reformed to contribute to a more sustainability-oriented brand image. Meanwhile, the improved communications can be utilised to deliver sustainability-related information to consumers. The study utilised qualitative research methods, including focus group and in-depth interview, and used thematic analysis to build theory and address research questions. In addition to providing a novel approach for marketing research in solving sustainability marketing problems, the results also suggest a means for fast fashion companies to enhance sustainability and sustainable brand image whilst maintaining a competitive advantage.

PART ONE

Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Research Background

The significance of sustainability has been increasingly emphasised in contemporary society, which has also seen its trend in both industrial and academic research (Nagurney & Yu, 2012). The prevalent definition of sustainability can be traced back to 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission at present) provided in the Brundtland Report as: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987, p.8). In recent years, the importance and significance of sustainability have been further highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), which explicated that the combination of sustainable consumption and production can substantially contribute to sustainability. Hence, the responsibility for sustainability has been emphasised from both industry and consumer perspectives.

In this research, the fast fashion industry has been chosen as the targeted research sector due to its strong consumer connection and significant sustainable criticisms. According to the latest research, fast fashion can be summarised as a business strategy that combines low production cost, low price, and rapid/time-limited production of clothing in limited quantities according to the very latest perceived fashion industry trends and consumer demands (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Fernie, 2004; Joung, 2014; Park & Kim, 2016). Two significant characteristics of fast fashion can be obtained from the above definition: time/cost limited manufacture and consumption, which can

reduce the "waiting time" for consumers to consume the trendiest products. Meanwhile, "boundless demand for newness" (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 269) promotes fast fashion enterprises to reduce lead-time further and increase update speed (Dabija, 2018).

The sustainability of the fashion sector has raised significant concerns, particularly the environmental impact. As the second-largest economic sector (European Commission [EC], 2013), the environmental impact of the textile and fashion industry, especially the energy and water wasting, toxic dye utilisation, and raw materials dissipation, has been a crucial concern (Niu et al., 2017). Compared with the general fashion sector, the environmental impacts are even worse in the fast fashion sector due to its fast replacement and productivity-oriented manufacturing techniques (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Hence, fast fashion enterprises have been criticised for their unsustainable behaviour, including but not limited to excessive carbon emissions, labour conditions, waste of water resources, and abuse of chemicals (Claudio, 2007). Those sustainability impacts also influence the decision-making process when consumers shop for fast fashion products (Bruce & Daly, 2006).

In order to tackle sustainable impacts, fast fashion enterprises have implemented several tentative measures, such as using an ecological friendly supply chains, utilising eco-materials, and reducing energy consumption (McCormick, 2001; McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, the sustainability concerns of the fashion industry are not only found during its progress of transforming raw materials to end products, but also heavily relays on the products' purchasing, consumption and disposal (Pedersen & Gwozdz, 2014).

In recent years, fast fashion companies have established and promoted sustainable fast fashion products to achieve corporation sustainability goals and

relieve the increasing unsustainable criticism (Joy et al., 2012, Wei & Jung, 2017). Through consuming sustainable fast fashion products, consumers are expected to satisfy personal fashion-related requirements and sustainability requirements simultaneously (Fuchs et al., 2013; Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, sustainable fast fashion products have not been widely accepted by consumers and have even been misunderstood as "greenwashing", which is a marketing method to establish a superficial sustainable brand image instead of providing practical sustainability benefits (Kong et al., 2016; Truant et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017).

In order to relieve challenges in sustainability marketing in the fast fashion sector, specifically the perceived unsustainable brand image and misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises, brand authenticity has been introduced in this research. Brand authenticity can be defined as "the perceived genuineness of a brand as manifested in its stability and consistency, uniqueness, ability to keep its promises and unaffectedness" (Bruhn et al., 2012). From the consumer perspective, authenticity has a significant effect on the purchasing decision-making process, which replaces quality as the primary criteria (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). For companies, brand authenticity has significant effects on marketing management (Campagna et al., 2021; Holt, 1998), especially benefits brand positioning, brand maintenance, brand identity and marketing communication (Beverland, 2005; Morhart et al., 2015, p. 211). Through brand authenticity, a strong connection between enterprises and consumers can be established (Campagna et al., 2021; Fournier, 2017), which counters criticisms and increases brand loyalty (Uysal & Okumuş, 2021). When considering the role of brand authenticity, brand image, marketing communication, and trustworthiness are three objects that can be encouraged. According to Bruhn et al. (2012), brand authenticity contributes to the establishment of a positive

brand image. While brand authenticity also could contribute to effective and comprehensive marketing communication (Ibarra, 2015; Potter, 2010), especially for non-commercial information, such as those sustainability-related (Kim & Bonn, 2016; Beverland et al., 2008). Meanwhile, brand authenticity can be recognised and accepted when consumers believe a brand to be faithful and trusted (Morhart et al., 2015).

Based on the above discussion, brand authenticity will be implemented to achieve efficient communication of genuineness, which contributes to building trustworthiness of sustainability, effective marketing communication, and associated sustainable brand image.

In this research, qualitative research will be utilised to evaluate the feasibility of the proposed approach. Data used in this research will be collected using focus group and in-depth interview with Salford University students, while thematic analysis approach will be used to build theory and address research questions.

1.2. Motivation

The research necessity and potential contribution to advancing knowledge will be given to explore the research motivation. The following section will examine the research necessity from a set of aspects, including social claim, industry competitive pressure and consumer demand, followed by an explanation of possible improvements related to this research.

1.2.1.   Research Necessity

Along with increasing environmental problems, the public raised significant concerns about the sustainability of many industries, especially their environmental impacts (Brundtland Report, 1987, p.8; De Brito et al., 2008; Nagurney & Yu, 2012). The textile and clothing industry, particularly those fashion-related, has been considered one of the most polluting industries (Choudhury, 2014). In contemporary society, the fashion industry has been criticised for its unsustainable behaviours, which impact the environment through uncontrolled carbon emissions, unnecessary energy consumption, waste of water resources, and abuse of chemicals (Claudio, 2007). As a branch of the fashion industry, the fast fashion sector is further suffering from its fast-updating production, which causes additionally and even serious waste and overconsumption.

Additionally, fashion industries (especially the fast fashion sector) are also exposed to social responsibility and unsustainable brand image pressures. In modern marketing theory, the brand has become one of the crucial elements in the company's developing progress (Keller, 2001; Keller, 2003). Since corporate competitiveness has been upgraded from product-oriented to brand-oriented

competition (McCarthy et al., 1998), it has driven corporations to establish sustainable brand images. Hence fast fashion enterprises may be risky and potentially lose a competitive edge if they fail or refuse to correct their non-sustainable brand image. On the other hand, the corporation's sustainability focus could also contribute to the company's overall development, and enhance the central corporate competitiveness (Cao & Zhang, 2011; Wu & Pagell, 2011). Research has also demonstrated that positive circulation can be reflected by the interaction among elements from the economy, environment, and society (Cruz, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003). Hence, activities such as investment in social responsibility, especially the environmental aspect, can contribute to society's acceptance, improve the employee satisfaction level, and further transfer into economic income for fast fashion companies (Brammer & Millington, 2008; Cruz, 2009; Margolis & Walsh, 2003), therefore, contributing to the company's overall development.

In addition to sector-level pressures, the stress and urgency from the consumer perspective also need to be considered. In particular, if sustainability-related knowledge and information can be delivered to the public, consumers' awareness of sustainability will be heightened. For the consumers of the textile and clothing industry, carrying on increasing numbers of sustainability duties, sustainable consumption has been treated as an effective method to deal with sustainable demand (Joy et al., 2012; Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011), exclusively in the product purchasing period, which will add the personal social responsibility. Therefore, the increased consumer conscientiousness urges fast fashion companies to adopt measures to address consumers' sustainable concerns (Maloney et al., 2014; Peattie, 1999).

Moreover, consumers' environmental understanding, concerns, and awareness

have been explored in research. In the context of public environmental responsiveness, the influences on clothing disposal behaviours also have been examined (Joung, 2014). Those research (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Goworek et al., 2012) showed that, with the gradually increased sustainability awareness, consumers are starting to consider sustainability and tend to choose eco-friendly products during the purchasing process. Therefore, sustainability needs to be focused on by fast fashion companies, which can satisfy the ever-increasing sustainable consumerism recognised and accepted by numbers of consumers (Singh et al., 2012; Valor, 2007; Kim & Choi, 2005; Shen et al., 2013).

In recent years, sustainable fast fashion products have landed on the market, as a platform for fast fashion companies and consumers to realise sustainability simultaneously (Fuchs et al., 2013; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wei & Jung, 2017). This implementation has been considered the most effective way for fast fashion consumers to realise the long-term sustainability goal without extra cost (Joy et al., 2012; Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, the realisation of sustainability by this implementation has been impacted by the low acceptance and marketing misinterpretation (Kong et al., 2016; Truant et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017). Hence, the necessity and urgency of exploring the relieving propositions for this sustainability marketing issue have been revealed.

1.2.2. Potential Knowledge Contribution

Based on those discussion above, this research will try to relieve the sustainability marketing problem in the fast fashion industry from the consumer perspective by utilising brand authenticity. Combined with knowledge gaps recognised from the literature review, five potential knowledge contributions are expected to be obtained:

I) The feasibility of utilising brand authenticity to relieve sustainability marketing problems will be evaluated, especially in perceived low acceptance and misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products, as well as communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises. Accordingly, the role of brand authenticity in perceived sustainability will be discovered in this study as the main contribution.

II) A definition of fast fashion from the consumer perspective has been derived from the proposed consumer research, in order to understand the research background in this consumer-oriented study. Meanwhile, the consumer perceived definition of fast fashion can perform a comprehensive analysis of fast fashion from both consumer and company perspectives.

III) The main consumer perceived concerns about the sustainability of fast fashion brands will be explored in this research, to fill the deficiency of sustainability claims from the consumer perspective. In current sustainability studies of the fast fashion industry, the unsustainable claims were mainly provided from the company perspective. Accordingly, the consumer perceived sustainable concerns may contribute to the reform of unsustainable corporate behaviour, satisfy consumers' sustainable requirements, and realise corporate sustainability; but also as the supporting knowledge for future studies to explore solutions for sustainability issues from the consumer perspective.

IV) Although challenges of managing sustainable fast fashion products have been discussed from the company perspective in the literature, the consumer perceived challenges are still missing. This research will provide the consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products from a consumer-oriented aspect, which may contribute

to the improvement of product acceptance of sustainable fast fashion products, also guide fast fashion enterprises to improve the marketing management of sustainable fast fashion products.

V) The consumer perception of brand authenticity specific to the fast fashion industry will be explored. Although the significance and effect of brand authenticity for consumers and marketing operations have been revealed in previous literature, the consumer perspective of brand authenticity specific to the fast fashion industry is still missing. Accordingly, this potential contribution may reflect the role of brand authenticity within this specific research area, and also provide a means for fast fashion enterprises to establish, maintain and enhance their brand authenticity.

1.3. Research Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the role of brand authenticity in relation to the perceived sustainability of fast fashion products. According to this, fast fashion companies can relieve their unsustainable reputation, maintain a competitive advantage and change the "greenwashing" image in consumers' minds.

Based on the above discussion, the research objectives can be formulated, which include:

(a) Understand consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in the context of the fast fashion sector.

(b) Understand what consumers perceive as challenges in fast fashion companies' management of sustainable products.

1.4. Research Structure

The research structure will be provided in this chapter. The chapters of this thesis are grouped into five sections, which are detailed below. In the following chapter, a brief introduction of each chapter is also provided as the summarise of the content.

1.4.1. Part One: Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter, the research background is presented at the start of the chapter, which details the research question and the significance of introducing brand authenticity as a potentially novel approach. The exploration of research motivation forms the second segment of the introduction chapter, where the research necessary is explored from three aspects: the social claim, industrial competitive pressure and consumer demand. The potential knowledge contributions of this research are also listed in this segment, hence clarifying the effects and benefits of brand authenticity in contributing to sustainable products' management concerns in the fast fashion industry. In the third section, the research aim and research objectives are provided on the basis of author observations and underpinned by literature. Lastly, the research structure will be presented.

1.4.2. Part Two: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Chapter 2 Literature Review

In this chapter, the research themes will be discussed from current academic literature, as the knowledgable foundation of this study. Accordingly, the literature review of this study will be presented from three aspects: the fast fashion sector, sustainability marketing, and brand authenticity.

Under the literature exploration of each aspect, a critical discussion of related themes and knowledge will be presented, providing a multi-dimensional view of this study. Therefore, the knowledge gap will be explored as the guideline research questions to be investigated in this research. Furthermore, the literature review provides resources for establishing a conceptual framework and generating interview questions, as well as supporting knowledge for the discussion of research outcomes.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework

Based on the analysis of the literature review, the conceptual framework can be generated and further discussed in this chapter.

Through the conceptual framework, the structure of this specific research can be presented visually, also crucial themes and the presumed interrelationships will be reflected simultaneously. Meanwhile, the research question and potential knowledge contribution can be raised and assumed logically through the conceptual framework, and the corresponding research methods, data collection, and data analysis can be designed.

1.4.3. Part Three: Methodology

Chapter 4 Methodology

Based on the guidance and knowledge support from the literature review and conceptual framework, this qualitative research will be conducted under the research paradigm of realism philosophy, which will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Followed by the discussion and presentation of specific research methods, both focus group and in-depth interview will be utilised in this research. Then the detailed steps of conducting hybrid interview methods will be presented, particularly the data will be analysed by utilising the thematic analysis method. Then, the research trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and research ethics (Huberman & Saldana, 2014) will be explored at the end of this chapter.

1.4.4. Part Four: Findings and Discussions

Within this part, the content will be categorised into two parts, findings and discussion. The findings will be sub-divided into three separate chapters, including chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7, which will display the findings according to themes (fast fashion, sustainability, and brand authenticity). Followed by a separate chapter 8, the findings will be further discussed, combined with literature, around the potential contribution shown in the conceptual framework.

Chapter 5 Fast Fashion

This chapter will present the findings collected from the focus group and in-depth interview related to fast fashion, in order to explore the understanding of fast

fashion from the consumer perspective

Chapter 6 Sustainability

The findings of the sustainability-related question, especially associated with fast fashion products, have been queried and presented in this chapter. Therefore, the research objective (consumers perceive as challenges in fast fashion companies' management of sustainable products) has been explored and indicated in this chapter.

Chapter 7 Brand Authenticity

In this chapter, the brand authenticity-related findings have been presented, which mainly involve the figurative elements of brand authenticity, and the possible method for consumers to recognise brand authenticity. Accordingly, the research objective (consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in the context of the fast fashion sector) has been explored.

Chapter 8 Discussion

According to the above three chapters, the discussion will be presented in this section. By combining the final findings (Chapter 5 – Chapter 7) and the literature reviews (Chapter 2), the discussion of this research will be conducted and presented in this chapter, under the discussion orders reflected in the conceptual framework. The discussion will be expanded from four sub-sections, which cover the explored knowledge gap and research objectives of this research.

1.4.5. Part Five: Conclusion

Chapter 9 Conclusion

As the summarised chapter of the thesis, except the research aim, the content will further involve the following sections: the summary of the thesis, knowledge contributions, the limitation of this research, the future work of this research, and the recommendation to the fast fashion sector. These will provide a more clear direction for readers to understand this study.

PART TWO

Literature Review and Conceptual

Framework

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

According to Mertens (2014, p.90), the literature review can be considered as a reading framework for readers to quickly and clearly obtain the associated knowledge and research rationales of the proposed research topic based on previous research. In the following sections, the literature review of this study will be presented from three aspects:

1) The fast fashion sector;

2) Sustainability marketing;

3) Brand authenticity.

Based on the literature review of the above themes, the knowledge gap can be recognised and discussed.

2.2. The Fast Fashion Sector

As the proposed research industry of this study, the fast fashion sector will be studied first to explore the feasibility and significance of investigating research questions within this industry. In this section, the literature review of the fast fashion sector will be presented from five aspects:

1) Fundamental exploration of fast fashion;

2) The uniqueness of fast fashion;

3) Comparative analysis with other fashion models;

4) Considerations of consumer perception, demand and behaviour of fast fashion;

5) Analysis of branding perspectives of fast fashion.

Hence, a comprehensive recognition of the sector can be presented, which provides industrial features for sustainability concerns in the next section, and also reveals the significance of resolving sustainability claims from the consumer perspective.

2.2.1. Foundational Exploration of Fast Fashion

As mentioned above, the Fundamental exploration of fast fashion will be presented in this section at: investigations of the concept of fashion, the concept of fast fashion, and the market perspective of the fast fashion sector. According to the literature review detailed here, the background of the research sector can be manifested, which can derive core attractive elements of fashion and the target market of fashion products.

2.2.1.1. The Concept of Fashion

The term "fashion" originated from the French word "façon", which primarily represents a particular operating method. While the phrase "travaux à façon" initially referred to a particular activity or an occupation for dressmakers to manufacture clothes for femininity (Tungate, 2008). Conventionally, Paris, the capital of France, has been agreed as the birthplace of fashion, which forms its distinction from cities, such as New York, London or Milan, which are commonly seen as symbols for communicating fashionable information to the public (Tungate, 2008).

Along with the continuous development of modern society, the conception of fashion also has been expanded, in which from a cloth manufacturing technique to a complex social phenomenon. In 1988, Schultheis described fashion as a sociological mark to distinguish "taste, social identity, and cultural capital" (Schultheis, 1988). While in 1994, Campbell mentioned that the core feature of fashion is continuously changing, which brings imitation and differentiation (Campbell, 1994). In recent years, published research led by Fuchs further defined fashion as a special style where "clothes and accessories under the style

will be worn at a certain period by groups of people" (Fuchs et al., 2013). Correspondingly, the function of fashion has also been broadened from purely delivering stylish dressing trends to the public, to those changing consumers' lifestyles and contributing to product innovation. In detail, fashion has been recognised as a mechanism to express consumers' lifestyles through periodical contact with the targeted market (Potts, 2007), which could be further enhanced through the similarity in lifestyles in different countries (Gentina et al., 2016). On the other hand, fashion has also been recognised as an effective way to distribute innovation due to its high market attention (Goldsmith et al., 1998). Moreover, this massive market attention has been ensured by the continuous updating of styles, which promotes the manufacturing of innovativeness (Simpson et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the fashion sector has been regarded as a unique industry due to its "supply-demand relationship". According to Tungate (2008), the core difference between fashion and traditional industries is that "traditional marketing is based on need … that corresponds to an existing demand, and attempt to prove that your product is the best in its category. But fashion is based on creating a new need where … Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire." Consequently, the associated promotional approaches in the fashion industry were also different from traditional industries, such as runway shows, celebrity models, elitism, and, of course, a charismatic brand spokesman (Tungate, 2008).

2.2.1.2. The Concept of Fast Fashion

As a branch of fashion, fast fashion has been widely accepted and becoming an increasing market under the modern fast-paced lifestyle (Walters, 2006, p.258). The concept of fast fashion was initially developed in the European market (Choi et al., 2010), and has been recognised as an effective business model through its

high performance in the fashion sector (Kim et al., 2013). In recent years, fast

fashion has attracted additional and border public attention, not only reflected by

the market reaction but also demonstrated by the various definitions of fast

fashion from academic research (Zhang et al., 2021). As shown in Table 2.1., five

definitions of fast fashion have been reviewed and studied, forming the

fundamental sources of theories for the exploration of the fast fashion sector.

Table 2.1 Definitions of Fast Fashion.

Author	Year	Definition	Journal's Name
Barnes & Lea-Greenwood	2006	"Fast fashion is a business strategy which aims to reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion product into stores, in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak."	Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management
Choi et al.	2010	"Fast fashion can be considered as a widely-used industrial practice in fashion retailing, in order to provide a continuous stream of last trended and hottest designing merchandise to the market, depending on shortened lead time, improved fashion design and limited quantities to attract target customers."	Decision Support Systems
Turker & Altuntas	2014	"Based on its shortened lead-times, faster inventory turnovers and high order fulfilment rates, fast fashion can transform trendy design into Commodities that can be bought by the masses in very short lead times, which attracting public to shop into stores frequently and increasing their purchasing frequency of fashionable styles through low cost and low price."	European Management Journal
Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik	2015	"The phrase "fast fashion" refers to low-cost clothing collections that imitate current luxury fashion trends and it is commonly used to describe how designs are adapted very quickly from catwalk to stores and into the mass-retailing market."	Journal of Macromarketing

Chang & Fan	2017	"The fast-fashion trends are defined as that fashion retailers distribute catwalk-inspired items at much lower prices so that consumers can affordably embrace products embedded with the latest fashion elements and fashion retailers increase the amount of sales."	International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management

From those definitions listed in Table 2.1., fast fashion has been widely regarded as an effective business strategy ("business strategy" (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006), "industrial practice" (Choi et al., 2010), "operation strategy" (Turker & Altuntas, 2014), "clothing collection" (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015), "an industrial manner" (Chang & Fan, 2017)), which can provide competitiveness against the quick changes in the fashion industry (Choi et al., 2010). The core differentiation of fast fashion could also be obtained from these definitions, "fast", which shortens the "waiting time" for consumers to get fashionable items, distinguishes fast fashion from other types of fashion models. "Fast" has been further discussed by varieties of researchers; Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2010) presented that "lead-time" and "consumer demand" are two cores when defining fast fashion. Cachon and Swinney (2011) and Mrad et al. (2020) demonstrated that quick response and the latest fashionable design are core characteristics of fast fashion, while highlighting the quick response, which provides the possibility of delivering the most trendy products to fast fashion consumers. Althrough Cachon and Swinney (2008) indicated that product is the core attribute of the fast fashion model, the competing factors for fast fashion enterprises have changed from price-driven to response speed-driven, which also enhances the "Fast", as the product's high response speed is needed to catch fashion trends and fulfil consumer requirements (Christopher et al., 2004; Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

The literature studies of other factors, including "lead-time", "fast fashion product", and "consumer demand" will be detailed in sections 2.2.2. and 2.2.4.

2.2.1.3. The Market Exploration of the Fast Fashion Sector

The fashion industry can be recognised as a business for "changing in the design of objects for decorative reasons", which contains apparel and related accessories, such as shoes, bags, ornaments and scarves (Robinson, 1961, p. 376; Sapir, 1931; Sproles, 1981).

The fashion sector has been considered the third largest industry within the global manufacturing field, with more than 150 billion productions yearly (Zhang et al., 2021). In the UK market, the fashion sector occupies a dominating position compared with other European countries (Zhang et al., 2021), demonstrated through product purchasing volume (26.7 kg per person in tops, cited from House of Commons, 2019), industrial growth rate (5.4% versus 1.6% in 2016, cited from ECAP, 2018), and industrial labour force (890,000, cited from BFC, 2018). Research such as the publications from Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2019) indicated that "UK consumers buy more than one million tons of clothing annually", further proving the economic volumes of the fashion sector in the UK market.

According to Kong, Witmaier and Ko (2021), fast fashion has been presented as the dominant business model in the fashion industry. The rise of the fast fashion business model can be traced back to the mid-1970s, which through imitation, provided catwalk-style products to the market at low product prices and a short "waiting period" (Tokatli, 2008; Siege, 2019). The fast fashion model flourished in the 1980s, allowing mass-market access to fashionable icons, which are conventionally dominated by luxury brands only (Zhang et al., 2021). Through

market expansion and globalisation, fast fashion has become even more popular in the past 20 years (Zhang et al., 2021).

Modern digital technologies have also reformed the fashion industry, Amatulli et al. (2021) outlined the significance of online channels to the development of the fashion industry, especially in the fast and luxury branches. Along with the utilisation of digital technology and the expansion of online channels, fast fashion has demonstrated its advantages in promoting fashionable items to targeted consumers (Amatulli et al., 2021; Brownlie et al., 2013). In comparison, for luxury fashion, distance selling has been regarded as a growing threat, since the "psychological distance" attribute of luxury fashion results in less online interaction with consumers. The relationship between online purchasing and fast fashion consumers has been discussed by Cook and Yurchisin (2017), which shows that consumers also prefer online shopping for fast fashion products. This trend has been further amplified in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Dewalska-Opitek & Bilińska-Reformat, 2021). As young generations form the targeted consumer for fast fashion products (Walters, 2006, p.258), using online channels, fast fashion companies are able to deliver products and communicate the on-trend design to consumers efficiently and effectively (Dewalska-Opitek & Bilińska-Reformat, 2021; Nurnafia, 2021).

According to Walters (2006, p.258), young people shape the targeted consumer for fast fashion products, where most are female consumers, and those aged between 16 to 25 take the dominant position. Meanwhile, spending on fashionable clothing has also been significant, and the shopping frequency is higher among other consumer groups (Walters, 2006, p.258). Additionally, to catch the latest fashion trend, fast fashion consumers have been seen as frequent

visitors to fast fashion retailers in both online and in-store channels (Barnes & Lea- Greenwood, 2006, p.260).

Walters (2006, p.258) indicated that the market size of fast fashion is increasing along with the popularity and acceptance of fast fashion, especially among young consumers. Meanwhile, the research from Watson and Yan (2013) demonstrates that the most significant characteristic of fast fashion is that the consumption of fashion can be satisfied with little cost. Meanwhile, a shorter lead-time provides the possibility and encouragement for consumers to shop for low-cost fast fashion products frequently (Keynote, 2008).

2.2.2. The Uniqueness of Fast Fashion

According to the definitions of fast fashion presented above (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Chang & Fan, 2017), the characteristic of fast fashion model can be explored from three perspectives: business goal, product and target market (Shown in Table 2.2). In the following sections, fast fashion will be studied from these three aspects to explore fast fashion from a holistic market view. Additionally, the technique undertaken by fast fashion to achieve its business goal will also be discussed within the business goal perspective.

Table 2.2 The Uniqueness of Fast Fashion.

Definition's Author	Year	Uniqueness of Fast Fashion		
		Business Goal	Product	Targeted Market
Barnes & Lea-Greenwood	2006	1) Process reduction; 2) Lead-time reduction;	1) New fashion;	1) Satisfy consumer demand.
Choi et al.	2010	1) Shorten lead-time; 2) Continuous supply system;	1) Last trended and hottest design; 2) Improved fashion design; 3) Limited quantity;	1) Attract target consumers.
Turker & Altuntas	2014	1) Short lead-time; 2) Fast turnover; 3) High order fulfilling rate;	1) Trendy design; 2) Low cost; 3) Low price;	1) Purchasing by the mass; 2) Frequent shopping.
Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik	2015	1) Shorten lead-time;	1) Low-cost; 2) Imitate luxury fashion trends;	1) The mass-retailing market.
Chang & Fan	2017	1) Increase the amount of sales.	1) Lower price; 2) Latest fashion;	1) Satisfy Fashion consumers in affordable products.

2.2.2.1. Business Goal Perspective of Fast Fashion and Supported Techniques

Based on Table 2.2, it can be recognised that "lead-time reduction" is the core of the fast fashion business model, which aims to enable consumers to get the fashionable product in the most limited time. Meanwhile, "lead-time reduction" also co-relating to the "fast" attribute of the fast fashion model. Accordingly, the gap for consumers from conception to access has been shortened, while the lead-time reduction has also been presented as the cornerstone of fast fashion by Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) and Sull and Turconi (2008).

In order to reduce the lead-time, innovative technologies have been utilised in the manufacturing, retailing and marketing communications of fast fashion products (Bruce et al., 2004), hence providing the fastest responses to the market (Closs et al., 1997). In particular, "electronic communication, frequent deliveries, and minimal markdowns" have been utilised to increase the speed within fast fashion stores (Watson & Yan, 2013). Furthermore, Kim et al. (2013) indicated that the development of "supply chain management, merchandising techniques, and retail technology" supports the enhancement and further development of fast fashion.

Meanwhile, the marketing communication techniques utilised by fast fashion have been directed by the development of social media. Social media has been shown as an effective channel between companies and consumers, benefiting from the continuous conversation and informational exchange, the utilisation of social media could enhance the positive relationship and further motivate user perception (Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014; Park et al., 2020). Furthermore, the function of social media toward fast fashion companies have been enhanced in academic research (Kim & Ko, 2010; Pentina et al., 2018; Kong et al., 2021), where effective communication, close relationship, and associated decision-

making can be provided to consumers. In the meantime, fast fashion companies can obtain promotion evaluation, enhanced brand loyalty, and positive purchasing intentions from consumers (Ko & Megehee, 2012). Accordingly, the development of communication channels, especially the modern, effective, and convenient approaches increase fashion awareness and promote fashion consumption for the fashion industry, such as social media platforms, magazines, and celebrities (Barnes et al., 2007; Doyle et al., 2006). In particular, the importance of media has been emphasised by Mintel (2007), which drives the efficiency and convenience of fashion searching ability and broadens the spread of the latest fashion trends. While celebrity-driven trends can be obtained from weekly renewed magazines, which provide style references for high street fashion consumers (Crompton, 2004), and result in the increased shopping frequency for fashion products weekly (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010).

2.2.2.2. Product Perspective of Fast Fashion

Fashion products generally have been considered as a category of goods that primarily emphasises the importance of design, aesthetics and style (Fuchs et al., 2013).

According to Table 2.2, it can be seen that fashionable has been regarded as the core feature of fast fashion from the product perspective, standing out as the latest fashionable (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Chang & Fan, 2017), and trendy designs (Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). In particular, freshness has been regarded as a representative characteristic of fast fashion (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010), through constantly updated fashion and corresponding product range delivered to fast fashion stores. In addition to these, other characteristics of fast fashion products have been proposed as low

price, limited quantity and trendy designs according to definitions of fast fashion (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Chang & Fan, 2017).

From the consumer perspective, the characteristics of fast fashion products have been focused on four elements: low price, acceptable product quality, broad and deep product classification, and frequent updates (Gabrielli et al., 2013). In particular, the combination of the low product prices and lower product quality provides an acceptable balance for fast fashion consumers, which reduces the consideration of the negative impact of fast fashion products, such as imitation and short product life cycle. Moreover, based on the classification of fast fashion products, the variety of choices promotes the quickly updating speed of fast fashion products, which increases the convenience of shopping and encourages consumers to frequently visit fast fashion branches (Gabrielli et al., 2013).

The imitation to luxury fashions has been identified as another important product factor of fast fashion (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015), while Amatulli et al. (2016) also indicated that cheap product prices, convenient access, fashionable design, and imitation of luxury fashion designs can be regarded as the majority characteristics of fast fashion.

Meanwhile, the product lifecycle of fashion products is insufficient, which states a limited time range in the market from conception to decline (Bruce & Barnes, 2005). Moreover, research published by Sull and Turconi (2008) and Barnes et al. (2007) has proposed that the product lifecycle of fashion products descends from months based to weeks based, or even days. Correspondingly, Watson and Yan (2013) have indicated that the shelf space occupation period for fast fashion products is limited due to the constant updating of new fashion trends.

2.2.2.3. Targeted Market Perspective of Fast Fashion

According to definitions of fast fashion, the target characteristics are those that mainly attract consumers' attention, so that can be accepted and consumed by the mass public market (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). Due to consumers' increasing demand for updating wardrobes with the latest fashion trends, fast fashion satisfied the market by providing affordable, fashionable products (Cachon & Swinney, 2008). Additionally, fast fashion companies encourage consumers to shop more frequently by increasing fashion seasons and delivering more trendy items in limited quantities (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

From a consumer perspective, variety and up-to-date well-designed clothes are expected when shopping for fast fashion products, with both quality and price considered in the shopping process (Hall, 2018). In particular, price and variety of choices have been considered the majority and attractive indicators (Gabrielli et al., 2013). Additionally, trend catching, good service, and well-designed store layout also have been proposed by Walters (2006, p.258) as other attractions that can be concluded from the shopping process of fast fashion products.

Based on the above presentation, the attractions of shopping for fast fashion products can be summarised as:

i)   Updated fashion design;

ii)   Immediately catching trends;

iii)   Variety/diversity;

iv)   Low price with sufficient quality;

v)   Self-concept enhancement;

vi)   Well-designed store layout;

vii)   Good service.

2.2.3. Comparative Analysis with Other Fashion Models

Along with the development of fashion, contemporary fashion can be divided into different branches representing different business models. However, there are still missing prevalent standards to category fashion, where researchers have shown different standpoints, which will be detailed in the following section.

Pal (2016) indicated that the current fashion industry could be divided into two opposite business models – fast fashion and slow fashion, depending on the influence of directional industrial features involved in predictability, volatility, impulsivity, and product-life-cycle (Christopher et al. 2004; Masson et al. 2007). This categorising method also has been supported by Thorisdottir and Johannsdottir (2019) who show that fashion can be divided into two models – fast fashion and slow fashion. While Zhang et al. (2021) proposed four types of fashions following the developing timeline of the fashion sector, from luxury fashion to fast fashion, then slow fashion, further to the latest model – sustainable fashion. Furthermore, according to Quinn et al. (2007), fashion can also be categorised based on two reference frames - fashion content and price point, where levels (high/ low) of these two reference frames can be used to evaluate the position of different fashions.

Furthermore, product pricing has been proposed by Amed et al. (2016) as another categorising standard to divide fashion into "luxury, with high end and affordable luxury brands, premium, mid- or mass-market, value and discount" segments. Meanwhile, mass-market brands have been analysed as equivalent to fast fashion brands from other academic research (Joy et al., 2012; Kapferer et al., 2014), emphasised by their fast speed and low product price attributes.

Based on the above discussion, it can be seen that fast fashion is the acceptable business model in the fashion sector, whereas other fashion models can be

differentiated within the various research and standpoints. However, comparing other fashion types and fast fashion can benefit the further understanding of fast fashion. Therefore, three types of fashion (following mainstream academic research) will be explicated in the following section: luxury, slow, and sustainable fashion.

2.2.3.1. Luxury Fashion

Luxury fashion has been regarded as representative of high quality, high price and elitist connotations (Okonkwo, 2007). Correspondingly, the luxury fashion brand can be differentiated from other categories of fashion brands by features such as global visibility, core competitiveness, a guarantee of high quality, product innovative ability, effective advertising, perfect in-store display and superb customer communication ability (Li et al., 2012). Under the research from Fuchs et al. (2013) and Nieroda et al. (2018), luxury fashion brands can be defined as fashion brands that provide the best quality with the highest or premium price, and can be recognised by their materiality, personal experience, representative of wealth and taste (Joy et al., 2014). While Heine (2012) and Riley, Lomax and Blunden (2004) stated that the luxury brand could be defined as "a brand that is characterized by a set of unique factors including exclusivity, high price, quality, and symbolic attributes". Furthermore, Achabou and Dekhili (2013) indicated that luxury is connected with "pleasantness, superficiality, and ostentation". Ko et al. (2017) proposed that five features can be seen from luxury fashion, including consumer perceived premium quality, desirable fulfilment in authentic value, high brand image, worthy high price, and in-depth association with consumers.

Luxury fashion plays a significant role for fast fashion enterprises and consumers,

which has also been proposed as the design model of fast fashion products, also the attractive symbolic icons to affect consumers' purchasing decision-making process (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). According to Ferdows et al. (2003), the design of fast fashion products are commonly seen as adapted or imitated from luxury fashion products. Imitation has also been discussed by Gabrielli et al. (2013) as the prerequisite for fast fashion, which guarantee the aesthetic attribute within the fast fashion products.

The consumer experience plays a significant role in luxury fashion (Mrad et al., 2020), which has also been proposed by Fionda and Moore (2009). Meanwhile, McFerran et al. (2014) indicated that "luxury brands are associated with status, wealth, exclusion, and ego-enhancement", which provide emotional fulfilment such as pride and success to luxury fashion consumers (Mrad et al., 2020). Accordingly, when doing social media marketing, luxury fashion brands will maintain a high psychological distance from consumers, in order to maintain the perception of high brand value (Park et al., 2020).

Compared with luxury fashion brands, fast fashion brands occupied advantages in various aspects (Mattila et al., 2002). The market size of fast fashion brands is larger than luxury fashion brands due to a higher number of target consumers than luxury fashion (Shen et al., 2017). The diversity of product lines launched by fast fashion brands is also more than luxury fashion brands, in order to fulfil consumer requirements from the mass market (Lee et al., 2014). According to Sull and Turconi (2008), the profit margins of fast fashion brands are higher than those of luxury fashion brands, even if the price of fast fashion products is much lower than those of luxury fashion.

Psychological distance from consumers/ market has been proposed as the significant difference between luxury fashion and fast fashion (Kapferer, 1997;

Kapferer & Bastien, 2012; Wiedmann et al., 2009), as the luxury brand creates exclusivity through price control, distribution channel, and aesthetic attributes, so that satisfy consumers' requirement in social status maintenance (Wiedmann et al., 2009; Jiang et al., 2014).

2.2.3.2. Slow Fashion

According to Hall (2018), slow fashion was created along with the development of the slow food trend provided by Carlo Petrini in Italy in 1986 (Fletcher, 2007). While Watson and Yan (2013) indicated that slow fashion can be regarded as the collection of garment retailers who produced durable products without quickly following and responding to the latest fashion trends. Furthermore, slow fashion has been regarded as an effective method to tackle the sustainable impact of the fashion industry (Hall, 2018). Similar to sustainable fashion, slow fashion also utilises sustainability attributes as the philosophical core to confront the negative impact of fast fashion due to its unsustainable business model, promote sustainable purchasing, reduced consumption, and quality-driven purchasing (Fletcher, 2010; Ertekin & Atik, 2014). However, slow fashion has always been biasedly promoted on social media as a fashion type that produces fashionable garments in reduced fashion seasons instead of the sustainability and ethics claims behind slow fashion (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013; Henninger et al., 2016).

Compared to fast fashion, different characteristics could be presented from slow fashion and associated products. First, the fundamental drive of slow fashion has been proposed as quality-driven, which is differentiated from the limited time-driven attribute seen in fast fashion (Fletcher, 2007). From the operation aspect, local materials and traditional production techniques (i.e. handcrafted) have been

utilised to manufacture slow fashion products in longer production times (Fletcher, 2010). Accordingly, characteristics from the product aspect of slow fashion could be summarised as limited quantity, disconnected from fashion seasons, high quality, durable products and a focus on sustainability (Fletcher, 2010). Meanwhile, the target characteristic is also different from fast fashion; for instance, slow fashion products are primarily sold in local markets (Fletcher, 2010), and slow fashion encourages reduced consumption to bring down waste (Hall, 2018).

However, slow fashion has not been regarded as a simple set of standards that is directly opposed to fast fashion (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010). It increased recognition of fashion's impacts on the ecosystem and communities, for public and industries, so that terms such as "sustainable new, eco fashion, ethical fashion, locally made" have been emphasised. Correspondingly, the impacts on fair trade (Zoica & Matei, 2009), workers, communities, and ecosystems can be re-recognized by designers, buyers, retailers, and consumers through the "slow fashion" approach (Fletcher 2007, p.61).

2.2.3.3. Sustainable Fashion

In some articles, sustainable fashion is regarded as a branch of slow fashion, or has been described as eco-fashion, green fashion, or ethical fashion (Carey & Cervellon, 2014), proposing that sustainable fashion has always been connected with some sustainability measurements, such as sustainability business strategy, fair working conditions (Joergens, 2006), utilisation of sustainable materials (Johnston, 2012), and traceability (Henninger, 2015). In another opinion, some researchers define sustainable fashion as a distinct fashion type, which can be considered as a corrective fashion type that stands in the opposite of adverse claims of the fashion industry, such as environmental, working conditions and

animal protection, and declare positive keywords such as sustainable, slow, fair trade, and organic (Bray, 2009; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Blanchard, 2013; Cervellon et al., 2010). In contrast, Zhang et al. (2021) described sustainable fashion as a new trend/ strategy in the fast fashion sector instead of a separate fashion category, utilising to realise sustainability claims.

Although slow fashion has sometimes been equally considered as ethical fashion (Joergens, 2006), unlike slow fashion, sustainable fashion has not been regarded as the opposite type of fast fashion (Henninger et al., 2016). Additionally, sustainable fashion is a complex fashion type, instead of purely standing on the opposite of fast fashion, which combines "cost" influencing elements from society, nature, and economy within the production process (Henninger et al., 2016).

Due to the importance and significance of sustainability research have stated that sustainable fashion should be regarded as mainstream in the fashion industry (Watson & Yan, 2013; Mittelstaedt et al., 2014, Mora et al., 2014), while Lundblad and Davies (2016) have demonstrated the market size of sustainable fashion is reflecting the increasing trend in the development of the fashion market.

2.2.4. Consideration of Consumer Perception, Demand and Behaviour of Fast Fashion

According to Watson and Yan (2013), fast fashion consumers could be defined as "consumer who chooses to purchase trendy, fashion forward clothing at low prices thus instilling a high replaceable factor allowing them to fulfil a need to purchase frequently and in quantity". As the receiver and users, consumers play a significant position in fast fashion's communication, innovation, and development (Waston & Yan, 2013). In this section, fast fashion will be explored from three aspects at its consumer perspective: consumer perception, consumer demand, and consumer behaviour.

2.2.4.1. Consumer Perception of Fast Fashion

On a broader level, when considering fashion from the consumer perspective, it has been proposed as an influencing factor for an individual's daily life and personal image (Kim et al., 2012). Similarly, fast fashion has been considered as a symbolic tool to express self-identification or self-image so that consumers can deliver personal identity information to the public (Cinjarevic et al, 2011). Therefore, consumers tend to shop for fast fashion products that represent themselves, hence emanating meanings about the wearer to others (Belk, 1988).

Driven by self-expression, fast fashion has been regarded as a fitted mechanism to satisfy personal requirements by providing the latest fashion product at reduced lead-time and price. Meanwhile, consumers prefer to increase the number of fast fashion products in the wardrobe to enhance self-expression (Christopher et al., 2004; Frings, 2002), which creates an individual identity through continually shopping for fitted fashion products (Thompson & Haytko,

1997; Murray, 2002). In the meantime, frequently updating became an attractive characteristic for fast fashion consumers, presenting their lifestyles and values through in-depth and frequent involvement in fashions (Cinjarevic et al, 2011).

2.2.4.2. Consumer Demand for Fast Fashion

When considering the consumer demand for fast fashion, newness and aesthetics have been regarded as the major requirements from the consumer perspective. The "boundless demand for newness" can be considered as the core consumer demand for fast fashion, which promotes the development of fast fashion and increases the updating speed of fast fashion products (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010; Gabrielli et al., 2013). While the aesthetic requirements always have been regarded as the primary element for fast fashion consumption (Joergens, 2006).

Furthermore, the development of mass communication and popular culture provides an effective channel and possibility for consumers to access the latest fashion trends, correspondingly, the desire to renew their wardrobes, resulting in shopping for fast fashion products more frequently (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). The consumer demand for fast fashion can be promoted by fashionable information, which is communicated through catwalks, celebrities, and novelty desires, especially those from media channels to consumers (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Therefore, the consumer demand for fashionable products has increased.

However, the consumer demand for fast fashion is constantly changing due to lifestyle changes and the curiosity to experience different wearing styles (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Frings, 2002). However, the significance of consumer demand has shown its consistency, which can be regarded as the majority influencing

elements of the decision-making for fast fashion consumption (Dickson & Littrell, 1996; Kim et al., 1999; Shaw & Tomillo, 2007; Joergens, 2006). Meanwhile, Joergens (2006) proposed that the influencing factors of fast fashion product purchasing among young consumers can be ascribed to brand image, product price and the fashionable attributes of fast fashion products.

2.2.4.3. Consumer Behaviour of Fast Fashion

Frequent shopping has been presented as significant consumer behaviour in fast fashion consumption due to the increasing consumer desires for fashion and appearance created by convenient communication (i.e. social media platforms, celebrity effect, and catwalk) (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2010). Meanwhile, the increase in shopping frequency has been promoted by the expectation of trying different styles of fast fashion products that are differentiated from their usual wearing style, which also increases the quantity of ownership from shopping (Gabrielli et al., 2013).

Furthermore, consumers' frequent purchasing of fast fashion products resulted in impulsive buying behaviour. According to Pentecost and Andrews (2010), impulsive purchasing of fashionable items can be regarded as "a person´s awareness or perception of fashionability attributed to an innovative design or style". When consumers are motivated by fast fashion companies' marketing strategies, impulsive behaviour will occur in their shopping process for trendy and up-to-date fashionable products (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010). The impulsive purchasing behaviour can be further affected by fashionable engagement, hedonism, and consumer emotions, which can be delivered to consumers conveniently through both online and offline channels (Pentecost & Andrews, 2010).

2.2.5. The Brand Perspective of Fast Fashion

Proposed by Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006), fast fashion brands can be defined as a unique business strategy that produces trendy, inexpensive products in a limited quantity under a quick response mechanism. In this section, the significance and influencing factors of fast fashion brands will be discussed.

2.2.5.1. The Significance of Brand to Fast Fashion

When promoting brands and related products to the market, the fundamental aim for fast fashion brands is to deliver different styles to targeted audiences, while the low price and short fashion cycles can be seen as added values in the brand promoting process. Currently, the competing direction for fast fashion has been changed from product-oriented to brand-oriented, enhancing the significance of brand in the fast fashion sector (Tungate, 2008). The function of brand has also been expanded to price acceptability. Hence, the uniqueness and speciality of brands need to be emphasised when companies are expected to arrange a higher price, which can further impact consumers' brand preferences and purchasing desires as well as increase their price acceptability (Kalra & Goodstein, 1998; Netemeyer et al., 2004).

2.2.5.2. Influencing Factors for Fast Fashion Brands

The brand value can be identified from consumers' perceptions of whether fashion enterprises have provided a positive shopping experience (Schechter, 1984) and satisfied their personal expectations (Choi et al., 2016). According to Choi et al. (2016), the brand value of a fast fashion brand can be influenced by customer value which can be influenced by customer experience. Thus, fast

fashion enterprises should emphasise emotional features and enhance positive experiences during customer interaction (Choi et al., 2016). Hence, establishing and enhancing a solid connection with targeted consumers has been considered as an important aspect of the fast fashion brand marketing process (Choi et al., 2015). Furthermore, brand recognition will be enhanced in brand-customer interactions when aesthetic value and quality value have been emphasised (Choi et al., 2016).

Social media provides an effective channel for consumers to interact with others, so that required information and decidable ideas can be switched among them (Kim & Ko, 2012; Tsimonis & Dimitriadis, 2014). Accordingly, the brand value can be strengthened with the utilisation of social media, where positive consumer perception can be derived (Park et al., 2020). Furthermore, social media channels provide the feasibility of reducing informational unbalance between consumers and fashion brands, which may reduce misinterpretation from the consumer perspective (Kim & Ko, 2012). Furthermore, effective communication through social media can enhance brand loyalty for fast fashion enterprises, and further increase consumers' purchasing intentions (Ko & Megehee, 2012).

According to Shen et al. (2017), brand loyalty in fast fashion brands can be explored and presented by focusing on the co-branding strategies conducted between luxury and fast fashion brands. Correspondingly, the brand loyalty of both categories of fashion brands can be enhanced, and the targeted consumer range can be extended, which could also contribute to corporate profit (Shen et al., 2017). Meanwhile, co-branding has been recognised as an effective method of dealing with the fast-changing fashion market and increasing public brand loyalty (Voss & Mohan, 2016). A comparative study of loyalty formatting mechanisms has been conducted between sustainable fashion brands and fast

fashion brands (Park & Kim, 2016). In order to convey advisements to fashion brands, especially from the perspective of corporate managers, credible proof of corporate sustainability claims should be promoted to target markets, and an effective communication channel needs to be launched to establish and promote mutual trust between the brand and the consumer (Park & Kim, 2016).

Moreover, Lee et al. (2014) examined the effects of customer equity to fast fashion brands, which revealed that brand positioning would influence sales directly. In another research (Chang & Fan, 2017), the author pointed out that fast fashion consumers might be motivated to continuously maintain the relationship with the brand if customers have a highly effective commitment to a specific fast fashion brand (Choi et al., 2010).

2.3. Sustainability Marketing

Currently, sustainability has been increasingly considered a crucial goal worldwide, influencing global development from social, industrial and consumer aspects (Nagurney & Yu, 2012). While sustainability marketing has been considered as "a marketing that seeks to integrate the ecological and ethical concerns of the green marketing era, along with a relationship marketing focus, to create a form of marketing that develops long-term, sustainability oriented value relationships with customers" (Peattie & Belz, 2012). In the following content, literature reviews will be provided from four aspects: sustainability, sustainability criticisms in the fast fashion sector, current measures to tackle sustainable criticism, and sustainable fast fashion products.

2.3.1. Sustainability

2.3.1.1. The Concept of Sustainability

The prevalent definition of sustainability can be traced back to 1987, when the World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission at present) provided in the Brundtland Report as: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987, p.8). With social developments, additional prerequisites have been added to the concept resulting in the definition of sustainability becoming more encompassing and sophisticated (Dobers & Strannegård, 2005). On the other hand, some researchers have proposed sustainability as an increasingly utopian and sophisticated concept due to the multi-dimensional obstacles and impacting elements reflected in environmental and sustainable problems, such as greenhouse emissions, chemical over-usage, and employee working conditions (Worldwatch Institute, 2004). Nevertheless, the significance of sustainability has been widely recognised and expanded from a government-level topic to sector and individual levels (De Brito et al., 2008; Kale & Öztürk, 2016).

The discussion of sustainability considered from three domains: economy, environment and society (Kale & Öztürk, 2016). Notably, its environmental domain impacts global sustainable development, incurring worldwide concerns and requiring worldwide collaborations (Nagurney & Yu, 2012). In the following content, focusing on the environmental aspect, the significance of sustainability, and the necessity to promote further and achieve sustainability will be provided.

2.3.1.2. The Significance of Sustainability

The United Nations have proposed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015) and highlighted the necessity and significance of sustainability, which explicated seventeen clear sustainable development goals to support the realisation of sustainability. In particular, three goals (Goal 9, 12, 13) are related to the polluting industry and corresponding consumers, revealing the necessity of co-operation between industry and consumers to achieve sustainability. In particular, Goal 9 proposed that the target of industrialisation should be promoted in a more sustainable direction. At the same time, Goal 12 emphasised sustainable consumption and sustainable production patterns to relieve environmental problems, such as climate change, with its impacts mentioned in Goal 13 (United Nations, 2015). Hence, this further accentuates that industries and consumers should work together to combat sustainable-related issues.

Meanwhile, the significance of sustainability to corporate development has been reflected by the research presented by Orlitzky et al. (2003), where sustainability can be regarded as an encouraging factor to increase the benefits and reputation of a company. In particular, the corporate level sustainability can be realised from three aspects, including economic, environmental, and societal (Dyllick & Hockerts 2002; Marrewijk, 2003), especially the sustainability involved in environment and society can be regarded as the improving elements of economic objectives (Strand, 2014). Additionally, sustainable issues have been generally criticised in the supply chain of fashion companies, especially the material usage and working conditions, which may heavily impact industrial competition (De Brito et al., 2008). Furthermore, the core obstacle of sustainability to business development has been positioned as the continuously increasing consumer

demands, especially for the industry that focuses on exploiting consumer desire instead of satisfying consumer requirements only (Böhme, 2003).

2.3.1.3. The Significance of Sustainability for the Fast Fashion Sector

Based on the view of Yeung and Yeung (2011), the concept of sustainability in the fashion industry can be defined as "satisfying the present needs for fashion but without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own fashion needs". The impact of sustainability has been emphasised in the value chain of fashion products (Yeung & Yeung, 2011).

For fast fashion companies, sustainability concerns have been regarded as potential issues that impact future development (Colucci et al., 2020). Accordingly, sustainable impacts have been demonstrated in three aspects: carbon emissions, energy and material usage, and the treatment of wastes, throughout the lifecycle of fast fashion products (Beamon, 1999; Green et al., 1998; Yeung & Yeung, 2011). In particular, sustainable criticism towards the manufacturing process, such as energy and water waste, toxic dye utilisation and raw materials dissipation, has been regarded as the most significant sustainability issues in the environmental aspect (Niu et al., 2017).

Hence, fast fashion companies tried to adjust their business model by combining sustainability concerns, which can contribute to both short-term economic targets and long-term corporate development goals (Rinaldi & Testa, 2014). Accordingly, fast fashion companies have increased the engagement and attention of corporate social responsibility, which benefits the enhancement of brand sustainability and further satisfies the consumer requirement for sustainability (Amatulli et al., 2018; Colucci et al., 2020; Kapferer & Michaut, 2015). Meanwhile, these measures are further expected to satisfy the consumer's increasing

requirements for sustainability awareness (Colucci et al., 2020). Therefore, the significance of sustainability has been verified that ethical and sustainable activities and concerns have been conducted and involved into daily operations in fast fashion enterprises, which can not only maintain the existing consumers' loyalty through the satisfaction of sustainability awareness but also attract further potential consumers through a sustainable/ ethical brand image (Joy et al., 2012; Kozlowski et al., 2015), which requires fast fashion companies' long-term investment to change the original unsustainable brand image to a sustainable form (Neumann et al., 2020). Meanwhile, due to its broad audience and large-scale market, the possibility of realising large-scale sustainability in the fast fashion sector has been proposed (Ritch, 2015). Hence, fast fashion brands can be considered an effective channel for the public to accept and further practice sustainability, with the help of the large consumer numbers and the massive market (Ritch, 2015).

2.3.1.4. The Significance of Consumer for Sustainability

In recent years, consumers have shown an increased focus on their purchasing behaviour to the environmental and sustainability impact (Kang et al., 2013; Miller & Merrilees, 2013). Accordingly, along with the increased awareness from the consumer perspective, changes have shown that sustainable consumption has affected the industries and society (Kim et al., 2013; Zavestoski, 2002). Along with the increased sustainable responsibility that has been proposed to consumers within the textile and clothing industry, sustainable consumption is becoming an increasingly effective method to deal with sustainable demand, especially in promoting corporate social responsibility during the textile requiring period (Cho et al., 2015). In particular, the relationship between conveniently

available and low cost fashionable products and personal impact on environmental sustainability has been recognised by consumers, which further influences the product's consumption (Kim et al., 2013). Hence, when shopping for fast fashion products, consumers may combine fashion, identity and identity construction together with sustainability (Dobers & Strannegård, 2005), highlighting the significance of consumers-realised sustainability. However, according to the research from Bruce and Daly (2006), it has been reflected that the impact of sustainability still positions a limited part in consumers' decision-making process when shopping for fast fashion products, even if they possess sustainable awareness. According to Cho et al. (2015), consumers who focus on long-term individual style are more likely to purchase environmentally-friendly clothing and dispose of their clothing environmentally rather than fashion followers.

Compared with luxury fashion brands, consumers presented a more negative perception and attitude toward fast fashion brands in terms of sustainability, demonstrating the significance and necessity of accomplishing sustainability for fast fashion companies (Davies & Ahonkhai, 2012; Kong et al., 2021). Based on the increasing sustainable conscientiousness from the consumer perspective, fast fashion companies have enhanced the significance of maintaining the ecosystem to relieve the consumer's sustainable concerns (Maloney et al., 2014; Peattie, 1999). Meanwhile, due to the growth of sustainability awareness from the consumer side, sustainability has been added to the core corporate value of fashion companies, hence contributing to the enterprise's long-term development (Kim & Hall, 2015; Kong et al., 2021).

2.3.2. Sustainability Criticisms for the Fast Fashion Sector

2.3.2.1. Industry-level Sustainability Criticisms

Due to the negative impact on carbon emission, water waste, solid waste, and working conditions, the fashion industry has been proposed as the second largest polluting/ unsustainable industry worldwide (Colucci et al., 2020). Focusing on its carbon footprint, the fast fashion industry also significantly impacts the global climate (Colucci et al., 2020). The unsustainable influence within the fast fashion industry can be attributed to two aspects: the producing phase and the post-purchase phase. The negative claims in the production phase mainly focused on product volume, resources consumption, chemical abuse, and working conditions (Pedersen et al., 2018), whereas garments underutilisation and low recycling have been concerned in the post-purchase stage (Colucci et al., 2020).

In detail, sustainable criticisms during the manufacturing phase can mainly concentrate on three aspects: production techniques, supply chain, and worker conditions. When considering unsustainable production techniques, the public criticised unnecessary energy consumption, waste of water resources, and abuse of chemicals (Claudio, 2007). Additionally, since fast fashion encourages consumers to catch "insatiable demand for newness" (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 269), an increased number of fashion seasons have been introduced into the targeted market (up from the traditional four seasons), which exacerbated the sustainability issues. The fash fashion industry has conventionally emphasised speed as the priority factor instead of sustainability, during the design, sourcing and manufacturing process (Bruce & Daly, 2006). Furthermore, to keep fashion cycles increasingly fast-paced, unsustainable production techniques have been utilised by certain fast fashion companies, which satisfying corporate requirements and also increase the profitability (McNeill & Moore,

2015). Meanwhile, fast fashion's supply chain can also be considered a significant source of pollution (de Brito et al., 2008; Caniato et al., 2012; Lo et al., 2012; Perry, 2012), mainly seen its carbon footprint pollution (Choi, 2013).

Hence, fast fashion brands have been considered notably unsustainable, bringing negative influences on the environment and poor in realising corporate social responsibility, such as the employment condition (Sinisalo, 2020). Moreover, according to Arrigo (2013), the lack of attention to corporate social responsibility can be seen as a result of their focus on efficient production processes, which have occupied almost the entire company's concerns (Cachon & Swinney, 2011; Segre Reinach, 2005). Furthermore, the negative influences within the fashion industry not only come from producers and suppliers when transforming raw materials to end products but also can be found in the product utilising process within the post-purchase period (Pedersen & Gwozdz, 2014).

Based on Fletcher's investigation (2008), the majority of sustainability concerns and environmental impact comes from the clothing's post-purchase period, costing up to 82% of its overall energy consumption during laundering. And the waste of clothing also has been considered a leading contributor to negative sustainability impact, primarily seen as the disposal of large numbers of unworn clothes (Hollins, 2006). Chau (2012) indicated that "fast fashion creates a wasteful culture, since such apparel is made of cheap materials, it is not uncommon for shoppers to wear them once or twice before discarding them".

According to Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), the throw-away and waste culture have been encouraged, intensifying the sustainable criticisms for the fast fashion sector. Furthermore, research has demonstrated that it is difficult for consumers to transfer sustainable awareness into real action, even if consumers have shown strong concerns about the seriousness of sustainability (Joergens, 2006). When

transferring decisions into actual fashion product consumption, consumers show concerns primarily focus on personal requirements instead of other aspects within the supply chain of fast fashion (Joergens, 2006). On the one hand, the unsustainable aspect directly connected to consumers has shown as deciding elements which will be concerned in the decision-making process, such as material origins, fair trade, and animal protection (Joergens, 2006). On the other hand, elements, such as chemical usage in the production process and worker conditions, will cause less attention to consumers' fast fashion product consumption (Joergens, 2006).

However, it also has been pointed out that consumers can make an ethical-orinated decision if reliable information can be delivered to them effectively (Dickson, 1999; Mohr & Webb, 2001; Shaw & Tomolillo, 2007; Joergens, 2006), such as a separate label containing ethical information provided from reliable origins (Shaw & Tomolillo, 2007). This emphasised the importance of information for fast fashion consumers to make a more sustainable choice in the decision-making process (Joergens, 2006).

2.3.2.2. Influence of Sustainability Criticisms on Consumers

Based on the increasing sustainability awareness, consumers have concerned about sustainable problems during their consumption process (Kim et al., 2015; Maloney et al., 2014). Moreover, consumers have realised the significance of balancing the relationship between sustainability and personal fashion demand, which can be reflected by the research from Joy et al. (2012, p. 277) in "individual consumption fosters organizational production, creating an ongoing cycle of appetite, simultaneously voracious and insatiable". Correspondingly, consumers have concerned about sustainability in fashionable product purchasing and the

post-purchasing period (Bly et al., 2015).

According to Ottman (2011), sustainability has been concentrated by the increasing number of consumers, who have realised the negative influence caused by unsustainable consuming behaviours on the social sustainability level. The mass market increasingly accepts a consuming trend - "sustainable consumerism" (Singh et al., 2012; Valor, 2007); hence, consumers are expected to receive sustainability-related information from fast fashion companies, especially in the ethical and environmental aspects (Schaltegger & Hörisch, 2017). Moreover, it has been shown that consumers prefer to shop from fast fashion companies that care more about the environment and consumers, especially in sustainable wellbeing (Jacquelyn, 2011; Philip, 2011; Sinisalo, 2020). Additionally, Dickson (2001) mentioned that the working condition, especially human rights and well-being, may highly influence the decision-making of fast fashion product purchasing. For instance, consumers show the desire to pay more for sustainable fast fashion products rather than regular products (Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009). Furthermore, consumers are adding sustainability concerns into their daily decision-making process to achieve personal sustainability, such as through recycling (Kim & Choi, 2005; Shen et al., 2013).

Nonetheless, the environmental concern has been mainly focused on the clothes purchasing process, even among consumers with robust sustainable awareness of clothing (Bly et al., 2015). For instance, the price of fast fashion products can highly influence the young consumer group's decision-making, as low prices are shown attractive (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). Moreover, the influencing elements of decision-making for fast fashion products' purchasing can be attributed to the measurement between consumer behaviour and personal beliefs, involving product price, product value, fashion and social trends, and brand image

(Carrigan & Attala, 2001; Solomon & Rabolt, 2004).

Moreover, clothing disposal behaviour can be affected by consumers' environmental attitudes, concerns, and awareness (Joung, 2014). For example, consumers who practised regular waste recycling (i.e. plastic, glass, and paper) will intend to treat unwanted fashion products in sustainable methods, such as reuse (personal usage, and transfer to other family members), resale, and donation (external reuse) (Shim, 1995; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Goworek et al., 2012). This also can be explained as the representative of environmental awareness (Goworek et al., 2012). In the meantime, according to Birtwistle and Moore (2007), the unsustainable disposal behaviour can be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the negative environmental impact of the fashion industry.

Based on the above reviews, it has shown that consumers understand the significance of sustainability and wish to improve it through their behaviours. However, consumers may ignore sustainability when shopping for fast fashion products due to the aspiration for aesthetics and the attraction of low prices (Fuchs et al., 2013). However, they may consider the sustainability element in the post-purchase period and criticise unsustainable aspects of fast fashion companies (Fletcher, 2008).

2.3.3. Current Measures to Tackle Sustainability Criticisms

2.3.3.1. Industry Perspective Sustainable Measures

Based on literature, current measures taken by fast fashion companies to tackle perceived unsustainable problems, further change consumers' behaviour have been presented (Allwood et al., 2006; Bekefi & Epstein, 2008; Fletcher, 2008; Goworek, 2011; Hoivik & Mele´, 2009; Park & Lennon, 2006), including:

I)　　Utilising sustainable fabrics (i.e. fair trade cotton; encouraging fur-free policies; utilising innovative, recycled and reused materials);

II)　　Tracing and evaluating environmental system (i.e. launching traceability mechanism in the supply chain; evaluating system for fabric selection; creating environmental performance measurement system);

III)　　Cooperate with suppliers;

IV)　　Reform the product packaging;

V)　　Establishing a sustainable product line;

VI)　　Reform manufacturing technologies,

VII)　　Replace the utilisation of harmful chemicals,

VIII)　　Introducing the utilisation of sustainable labels;

IX)　　Providing guiding information to consumers in sustainable usage of fast fashion products;

X)　　Improve the recycling and reuse of disposed of fast fashion products.

In particular, promoting sustainable products (Han, Seo, & Ko, 2017; Jang et al., 2012) and presenting corporate social responsibility (Aoki et al., 2019; Fineman, 2001; Minton et al., 2012) have been considered as the two major effective

approaches to fulfil consumer requirements in sustainability and ethics (Kong et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, utilising a quick response system provides a possible method to use local resources to replace overseas resources, which can reduce the logistical cost, lead-time, and consumption (Choi, 2013). Additionally, Larsen et al. (2012) introduced the carbon footprint tax towards fast fashion companies that utilised additional energy and produced environmental pollution during the overseas production and long-distance transportation process. Meanwhile, consumers have been suggested to be liable for carbon emission tax, if they purchase from the fast fashion company manufactured overseas with more carbon footprint (Choi, 2013). Accordingly, the above approaches have been expected to reduce carbon emissions based on the cooperation between fast fashion retailers and fast fashion consumers. Furthermore, Choi (2013) also indicated that other measures to reduce carbon emission also had been utilised, such as carbon quota, and the trading mechanism for green shipment control.

In order to solve the sustainable claim for the unsustainable brand image, several measures have been undertaken by fast fashion companies. For instance, the brand position of fast fashion brands has been changed into sustainability-oriented, which presents environmentally responsibility in the production process (Chen & Burns, 2006). Additionally, fashion companies have reduced production quantity and recycled unwanted fashionable products to increase sustainability, along with the sustainability attribute has been added to the corporate sourcing decision-making process (Niu et al., 2017).

2.3.3.2. Consumer Perspective Sustainable Measures

In order to lead consumers into sustainability, several sustainable purchasing behaviours have been suggested under the Sustainable trend, which includes Do-It-Yourself fashion (i.e. self-sewn) (Walliker, 2006), "trashion - design and create by using disposable items" (Claudio, 2007), vintage shopping among teenagers and slow fashion (created by the writer Angela Murrills). Furthermore, to help consumers strengthen their awareness of sustainability, a recognised method has been proposed indicating that consumption responsibility and the responsibility for pressure on natural resources and environments need to be conveyed to the public from the moral aspect (Boström & Klintman, 2008; Jordan et al., 2004; Kasa, 2003; Kjærnes, 2011; Rumpala, 2011).

Since sustainable awareness at the social level has received significant enhancement in recent years, several sustainable suggestions have been provided to consumers to help them better practice sustainability within the purchasing and utilising phase of fast fashion products, such as reducing the washing frequency; utilising ecological-friendly washing liquid, purchasing for fashion products with high product quality, and recycling for unwanted fashionable items (Claudio, 2007). Moreover, some researchers have proposed significance of improving sustainable awareness that "increasing consumers' awareness of clothing lifecycle and its impacts is the best hope for sustainability in the fashion industry" (Claudio, 2007), which could change consumer attitude and consumer behaviour towards fast fashion products, especially in the clothing launching period (Goworek et al., 2012).

Accordingly, several suggestions have been conducted by fast fashion companies, such as effectively delivering required information about sustainable fast fashion products to targeted consumers (Markkula & Moisander, 2012),

separate ecological labels for sustainable fast fashion products, and improvement of specific marketing strategies to meet consumer requirement (Connell, 2010). However, some research has demonstrated that labelling might only offer supplementary information to consumers, rather than leading an effective communication mechanism for sustainable informational delivery. Therefore, labelling should combine with other measures when promoting sustainability to consumers. Furthermore, it has been explored by Sinisalo (2020) that the expected product lifespan and the environmental footprint have been regarded as the required information to increase the reliability between fast fashion brands and consumers.

2.3.4. Sustainable Fast Fashion Products

2.3.4.1. The Concept of Sustainable Fast Fashion Products

In recent years, fast fashion companies have established and promoted sustainable fast fashion products to achieve corporation sustainability goals and relieve unsustainable criticism (Joy et al., 2012, Wei & Jung, 2017). The expected function of sustainable fast fashion products will be able to contribute to communicating sustainable related information from fast fashion enterprises to consumers, which also helps the product be treated more sustainably (Joy et al., 2012).

Although a widely-accepted definition of sustainable fast fashion products is deficient, the definition of sustainable clothing can provide supporting knowledge to understand sustainable fast fashion products. According to Goworek et al. (2012, p. 938), sustainable clothing can be defined as "clothing which incorporates one or more aspects of social and environmental sustainability, such as Fair Trade manufacturing or fabric containing organically-grown raw material".

As a type of fast fashion products, sustainable fast fashion products share major characteristics of fast fashion products, while showing sustainable attributes, such as eco-material, sustainable manufacturing process, and ease of recycling (Wei & Jung, 2017). Compared with conventional fast fashion products, the acceptance of sustainable fast fashion products has been affected by less fashionable design (Joergens, 2006) and higher product prices (Joy et al., 2012), which may prevent consumers from shopping for sustainable fast fashion products.

2.3.4.2. The Necessity to Launch Sustainable Fast Fashion Products

As the consumer perceived sustainability awareness increases, the significance of sustainability in the consumption of fast fashion products is correspondingly emphasised in consumers, especially the broader influence of consumption on animals, humans and environment (McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, the conversion rate of sustainable awareness to sustainable consumption is lower than expected, even if consumers represent a strong belief toward the consumption of fast fashion products (McNeill & Moore, 2015). The current situation for sustainable fast fashion products is that only minimal consumers are made sustainable changes in their decision-making process when purchasing fast fashion products (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Meanwhile, the desire for updated fashion exceeded the concern of whether the fashion product is made from sustainable fabric sources, which also increases waste and disposal of "obsolete" items (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). While sustainability will be regarded as the minor deciding element when shopping for fashion products (Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Mohr et al., 2001). This can be attributed to the indirect impact caused by sustainability issues on the consumer's personal well-being (Chan & Wong, 2012). Hence, consumers will feel less pressure and challenges, even if environmental and social consequences are caused by purchasing unsustainable fast fashion products (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Within the decision-making process of shopping for fast fashion products, the aspiration for aesthetics and the attraction of the product's price have been considered as the primary influencing element instead of sustainability (Fuchs et al., 2013); thus, consumers may ignore sustainability when they are shopping fast fashion products. Meanwhile, fast fashion consumers are less likely to consider

sustainability than price and fashionable design (Chan & Wong, 2012; Joergens, 2006). Joergens (2006) summarised that consumers consider personal fashion-related requirements foremost when purchasing fashion products, then requirements in other aspects, such as ethical awareness, which resulted in the low conversion rate to ethical or sustainable purchasing. However, the disregard for sustainability from the consumer perspective can be attributed to the knowledge deficiency about the sustainability to fast fashion products (Hill & Lee, 2012; Ritch & Schröder, 2012).

Based on the above discussion, sustainable fast fashion products provide a consuming option for targeted consumers who are expected to realise personal identification establishment while satisfying their sustainable awareness (McNeill & Moore, 2015). In other words, consumers are expected to satisfy personal fashion-related requirements and sustainability requirements simultaneously by consuming sustainable fast fashion products (Fuchs et al., 2013; Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

2.3.4.3. Comparison with Sustainable Fashion Products

According to Lundblad and Davies (2015, p. 149), sustainable fashion can be regarded as "a series of corporate promise to correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation". Correspondingly, sustainable products have typically been considered products that are manufactured under sustainable fashion, which may be considered a specific fashion type stand on the opposite side of fast fashion. Meanwhile, sustainable fashion can be referred to as ethical fashion (Kim & Oh, 2020; Wei & Jung, 2017), which according to Joergens (2006, p. 361), can be defined as "fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with

sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton".

Two core themes can be abstracted from sustainable fashion as fashion and sustainability. Accordingly, sustainable fashion has sometimes been considered a contradictory concept since fashion and sustainability can be regarded as the opposite characteristic (Lundblad & Davies, 2015, p. 149). Fashion can be regarded as representative of hedonism and short product life cycles, (Bray, 2009; Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010; Blanchard, 2013; Ertekin & Atik, 2015). While sustainability represents ethics, durability, and multi-utilisation of a product, especially highlighted features like organic, green, fair trade, sustainability, slow, and ecological (Cervellon et al., 2010).

However, few consumers purchase products manufactured by sustainable fashion brands even if they have sustainability awareness (Kong et al., 2016), since consumers consider the product and purchasing experience in fast fashion brands better than those in sustainable fashion brands (Kim et al., 2014). The major challenge faced by sustainable fashion brands is that "fashion customers are hungry for goods…Low prices, good design, good quality fashion clothing items, coupled with an exciting shopping leisure experience on the cheap, mean an increase in purchases, which is difficult to reconcile with the idea of looming environmental Armageddon" (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011, p.21). Additionally, fashion consumers considered "fashionable" more than social responsibility when they consuming fashion products (McNeill & Moore, 2015), where young consumers may perceive sustainability and fashion as two separate constructs in their cognitive schemas (Kong et al., 2016). Accordingly, consumers may separate the sustainable value from the fashion products purchasing process, even if they are concerned about sustainability (Joy et al., 2012). Therefore, consumers may

refuse to purchase products from sustainable fashion brands due to the gap between consumer attitude and behaviour toward purchasing products from sustainable fashion brands (Niinimäki, 2010). Additionally, sustainable fast fashion products can attract more consumers than sustainable fashion products, due to their trendy design, quicker updating speed, and lower price (McNeill & Moore, 2015). It has been indicated that reducing the updating frequency of clothing is a spurious concept with fashion and economic growth, since pursuing beauty and self-concept is the nature of females who forms the consumers of fashion products, thus will negatively influence emotion and finance aspects (Slyker, 2008).

Based on the above discussion, it can be seen that sustainable fast fashion products are not only the future developing direction for the fast fashion sector, but also a good promotion for the whole fashion sector. Hence, the sustainability goal can be achieved from both company and consumer perspectives through the shopping for sustainable fast fashion products.

2.3.4.4. Consumer Evaluation of Sustainable Fast Fashion Products

Compared with traditional sustainable measures, the sustainable collection can be readily accepted by consumers due to its high engagement, which provides a straightforward way for consumers to recognise the sustainability awareness and awareness practice by fast fashion companies (Neumann et al., 2020), and realising individual sustainable goal at the same time. However, the evaluation of sustainable fast fashion products from the consumer perspective still shows a negative estimation.

From the product perspective, price, style and quality have been regarded as the main influencing elements when consumers decide on fashion products

purchasing (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst 2010; Iwanow et al., 2005; Joergens, 2006), even if sustainable problems have been recognised by consumers (Iwanow et al., 2005). Consumers are mainly attracted by various fashionable design products with low-price; however, the appearance and style of sustainable fast fashion products are less attractive than regular fast fashion products (Joergens, 2006). Accordingly, sustainable items can not satisfy the consumer requirements at the aesthetic level (Beard, 2008), which also loses attention caused by the higher product price.

On the other hand, the negative evaluation can be demonstrated by the misunderstanding of the function of sustainable fast fashion products. Accordingly, sustainable fast fashion products have not been widely accepted by consumers and have even been misunderstood as "greenwashing", which is a marketing method to establish a superficial sustainable brand image instead of providing practical sustainability benefits (Kong et al., 2016; Truant et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017).

According to Cavender and Lee (2018), greenwashing provides a possibility for fast fashion companies to keep promoting fast fashion to the targeted market, which satisfies consumer desire for updated fashionable products, meanwhile desalinating the unsustainable criticism towards fast fashion brands from the consumer side (Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Moreover, greenwashing has been defined as "a corporation's act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practises of the corporation or the environmental impact of their products" (Delmas & Colgan, 2018). Proposed by Delmas and Colgan's (2011, p.66-67), greenwashing can be further divided into two types, including corporate greenwashing and deceptive greenwashing. In particular, corporate greenwashing can be regarded as a partly greenwashing

that fast fashion companies to conceal their unsustainable behaviour from the supply chain, while the deceive greenwashing can be regarded as the false claim of fast fashion products as sustainable items (Cavender & Lee; 2018). The greenwashing-related information is usually transferred to consumers effectively through presenting environmental concerns (Cavender & Lee; 2018). In other words, greenwashing can be regarded as a marketing strategy undertaken by fast fashion companies to rebuild the consumer perception of sustainable awareness of fast fashion companies into a positive direction through positioning sustainability as corporate social responsibility (Cavender & Lee; 2018; Ertekin & Atik, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

The impact of misinterpretation will reduce the fast fashion company's environmental effort, further misleading the sector's image into doubt, which hinders the communication of sustainable related information to the public (Henninger et al., 2016). Therefore, solving this misinterpretation problem between sustainable fast fashion products and consumers is significant and crucial, which could contribute to the realisation of sustainability.

2.3.4.5. The Influencing Elements of the Negative Evaluation

According to Connell (2010), the barrier to sustainable product purchasing can be presented by internal and external barriers. In particular, the product price has been regarded as an external barrier (Hines & Swinker, 1996; Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009); while the internal barrier can be explored from consumers and emotional aspects. From the consumer perspective, the internal barrier has been mainly reflected in the awareness, knowledge and personality aspects, such as the lack of care and consideration of the environment (Stephens, 1985; Shim, 1995; Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009); deficiency of knowledge related to negative influence

from clothing consumption to the environment (Stephens, 1985; Kim & Damhorst, 1998); the consumers' negative attitudes to sustainable products (Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009); as well as the personal demographic characteristics, such as age and education (Stephens, 1985). From the emotional perspective, internal barriers have been explored from elements below, including motivation (Lipsey, 1977), values (Axelrod, 1994; Grunert & Juhl, 1995; Blake, 2001), locus of control (Tanner, 1999), and perceived time and effort (Ellen, 1994). Additionally, Connell (2010) also stressed the influence of standards from society and culture aspect.

In order to increase consumers' awareness of sustainability, an accepted method demonstrated the necessity of emphasizing sustainable pressure and responsibility to consumers from an ethical perspective, such as the pressure from natural resources and environments and consumers' responsibility in the fashion products purchasing process (Boström & Klintman, 2008; Jordan et al., 2004; Kasa, 2003; Kjærnes, 2011; Rumpala, 2011). Moreover, another method of altering consumers' unsustainable behaviour in consuming fashion products can be implemented in the products' promotions (Goworek et al., 2012), through increasing consumers' awareness of the clothing lifecycle and its impacts (Claudio, 2007).

Furthermore, a challenge has to be faced by fashion marketers defined by the rapid turnover of trends and associated disposal culture of 'unfashionable' apparel (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). While some clothing recycling and reusing methods have been provided to the social consumers, the main disposal destination of unworn and unwanted clothes is landfill instead of charity shops, which indicates the lack of recycling awareness that should be established from the early childhood period as a long-term education. Even among environmentally aware consumers, clothing disposal

behaviours are guided by consumer habits and social routines (Goworek et al., 2012).

Another focused part of negative evaluation is the misunderstanding of greenwashing. Sustainable fast fashion products have been criticised as greenwashing, which can be attributed to the deficiency of supporting information related to the manufacturing process, materials, and corporate measures to benefit the environment provided by fast fashion companies (Sinisalo, 2020). In particular, advertisements have been regarded as the influencing factor that leads consumers to misunderstand sustainable products as greenwashing (Sinisalo, 2020), since required information and trustworthiness of information are lost from the consumer side (Wicker 2020). Correspondingly, the consumer perception of a certain brand will be negatively impacted by "greenwashing" advertisements, and further influence the decision-making process (Sinisalo, 2020).

Moreover, the sustainability report published by fast fashion companies has been regarded as supporting evidence of "greenwashing" (Truant et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017). However, the reason behind distrust of sustainability and environmental statements delivered by fashion companies is the difficulty in verifying the authenticity of the claim instead of the statement itself (Chen & Chang, 2013; Henninger et al., 2016). According to the research by Rahman et al. (2015), the trustful relationship between consumers and companies is difficult to establish and further maintain, which requires a long-term investment. Meanwhile, the deficiency of consistency between corporate commitment and corporate actions is the other reason that leads to the misunderstanding of greenwashing (Castelló & Lozano, 2011; Garcia-Torres et al., 2017).

2.4. Brand Authenticity

In order to relieve challenges in sustainability marketing in the fast fashion sector, specifically on the perceived unsustainable brand image and misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises, brand authenticity has been introduced in this research. Brand authenticity has been assumed as the appropriate proposition for this consumer-oriented research, specifically in the fast fashion sector, to meet the sustainable requirement from the consumer perspective. Furthermore, brand authenticity will be implemented to achieve efficient communication of genuineness, which contributes to building trustworthiness of sustainability, effective marketing communication, and associated sustainable brand image.

In the following content, the significance of brand has been reflected initially, which demonstrated the necessity to relieve this research problem from the brand aspect. Followed by the discussion of brand authenticity, three aspects of content will be presented: definition, significance, and associated influence on consumers. Lastly, the influence of brand authenticity on marketing management will be discussed from two aspects: the content of influence and the influencing factors of brand authenticity.

2.4.1. The Significance of Brand

In current society, the importance of a brand has been enhanced in the corporate operating process and in the consumers' decision-making process. de Chernatony (2011) defined the brand as "a cluster of functional and emotional values that enables organizations to make a promise about a unique and welcoming experience". In the twenty-first century, academic research mainly focuses on exploring associations between brands and consumers (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019).

When discussing the brand value and brand influence, brand-associated components need to be considered, including differentiation, positioning, personality, logo and trademark, brand name, risk reduction, brand identity, brand image, brand equity and visual identity (de Chernatony, 2010). These themes interacted with each other, contributing to the establishment and maintenance of brands.

From the perspective of the enterprises, the combination of name, symbol or design within its brand always has been considered an effective way to clarify corporate sustainable and competitive advantages (de Chernatony, 2010) to identify the product from an organization. Besides, as a source of ownership of a benefit, a branded differentiator can add credibility and legitimacy to a claim (Aaker, 2013). Furthermore, the most important reason for branding for enterprises is that a successful brand is valuable as they are more likely to guarantee future income streams (de Chernatony, 2010). However, the corporation should invest in all aspects that it applied, in order to reach customers' physical demands and relevant emotional demands by matching customers' imaginations (de Chernatony, 2010), the detailed and reasonable benefits under the support of marketing mix incompatible, reliable and correlative need to be

provided by companies. Accordingly, the brand value will decline if a further investment has not been provided. Moreover, along with the difficulty of distinguishing a brand from competitive brands has increased for customers as well as the simplicity of gaining information from online platforms has raised, the price sensitivity within similar products has substantially increased, as the lowest price established at that moment (de Chernatony, 2010). Therefore, the present meaning of a brand has been transferred from product brands (such as Persil, Mars) purely to a complicated name which combined with personality, influence, as well as the establishment of communities promoted by innovations and values (Kapferer, 2012).

From the consumer perspective, the significance of the brand has also been emphasised. As a significant part of the intangible assets, the brand and its name can be considered a guarantee that fundamentally protects the company's relationship and the target consumers, who provide profits (de Chernatony, 2010). Moreover, due to the customer orientation of products, marketers constantly adjust their branding strategies by following public perceptions, which depend on customers' own interpreted messages and images (de Chernatony, 2010), because the ultimate assessor of brands is the consumer and user, instead of the manufacturer or the retailer. As a result, repeated purchasing will occur periodically based on brand loyalty, and trustworthiness can be enhanced by loyalty, even if the brand falls into a brand crisis (de Chernatony, 2010). Combining with current marketing context, the customer has been given added values, such as speed, choice, control and comparability, and the quick development of e-business, which enhanced the importance of the brand than previously in modern companies (de Chernatony, 2010). Furthermore, strong brands have been recommended as the primary consideration element in the public purchasing decision-making process. Since difficulties increase in

distinguishing products from other competitors while industrial imitations get easily, consumers need a strong brand image to replace price within the purchasing process (de Chernatony, 2010).

2.4.2. Brand Authenticity

2.4.2.1. The Concept of Brand Authenticity

According to Cappannelli and Cappannelli (2004), the origin of authenticity can be dated back to "authentikos" in Greek, which communicates the meaning of trustworthiness.

Napoli et al. (2014) defined brand authenticity as "a subjective evaluation of genuineness ascribed to a brand by consumers", which is communicated through objective and subjective elements. In particular, the objective elements can be reflected as brand heritage, brand origin, and approaches of production, whereas subjective elements have been revealed through credibility, morality, and self-verification (Morhart et al., 2015). From the holistic marketing perspective, an authentic brand has been regarded as a noble brand that represent the business impartiality (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), which has also been revealed in the research from Holt (2002) as "To be authentic, brands must be without an instrumental economic agenda, and be disseminated by people who are intrinsically motivated by deeply held values".

According to Morhart et al. (2015), brand authenticity can be specifically understood through three aspects, including objectivist (indexical authenticity), constructivist (iconic authenticity), and existentialist (existential authenticity). From the objectivist perspective, authenticity has been considered as a measurable standard that is demonstrated by experts to determine the real quality of a specific object (Trilling, 1972). While the constructivist perspective, authenticity can be considered as a set of reflections of consumer attitude, involving individual belief, consumer expectation, and personal opinion of a specific object (Wang, 1999). Moreover, authenticity from the existentialist aspect

has been explained as an individual necessity that consumers should be true to themselves (Golomb, 1995). Additionally, it also has been indicated by Leigh et al. (2006) that the above three aspects are interactive, then the coefficient impact will benefit brand authenticity to communicate to targeted consumers effectively.

Furthermore, brand authenticity has been constituted by two types of consistency, including the internal aspect and external aspect (Spiggle et al., 2012). In particular, internal consistency has been reflected through the preservation and maintenance of brand proposition and brand heritage to keep the consistency of brand essence (Spiggle et al., 2012). While external consistency can be regarded as the consistency in brand claims and appearance-related information (Spiggle et al., 2012).

2.4.2.2. The Significance of Brand Authenticity for the Fast Fashion Sector

According to Kapferer (2001), authenticity attracts increasing attention through the continual development in the fast fashion industry, based on its typical functions in the purchasing decision-making process of fast fashion products that are tightly connected with aesthetic, product performance, and symbolic attributes. This opinion has been further supported and proved by Choi et al. (2015), thus the significance of brand authenticity for consumer decision-making has been emphasised. Consequently, the benefit of establishing brand authenticity has been further reflected (Choi et al., 2015), which may be positive for maintaining a long-term stable relationship between fast fashion brands and consumers.

In order to help fast fashion brands maintain a positive relationship with the

targeted market, brand authenticity should be explored and presented through the constructivist aspect (mentioned in last section 2.4.2.1), thus iconic authenticity can take effect for this aim, based on the research combined by Choi et al. (2015) and Morhart et al. (2015). More specifically, iconic authenticity can communicate information associated with innovativeness, sustainability and fashionability, which benefit the reproduction of original brand intention for the development of fast fashion brands (Choi et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2015). Correspondingly, the development of iconic authenticity can contribute to the theoretical extension of authenticity from the economic perspective to the experience perspective (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Therefore, fashion enterprises should focus on the establishment of brand authenticity, especially iconic authenticity, in order to strengthen brand value.

2.4.2.3. The Influence of Brand Authenticity to Consumers

A consumer's perceived brand authenticity consists of authentic content and reliable communication. Authentic content, including brand touchpoints and brand image, confirms perceived formats of information, while reliable brand communication provides effective channels to perceive authenticity (Campagna et al., 2021; Fournier, 2017).

From the consumer perspective, brand authenticity has been considered as the key criterion for verifying the reliability of marketing activities (Audrezet et al., 2020). According to the research from Yang et al. (2021), brand authenticity has been recognised as the evaluating channel for consumers in brand consistency, brand originality, brand reliability/ credibility, brand symbolism and brand truthfulness (Bruhn et al. 2012; Morhart et al. 2015; Akbar and Wymer 2017). In particular, Bruhn et al. (2012) stated that brand authenticity can be presented

from four specific attributes, including credibility, genuineness, realness, and truthfulness; especially genuineness and trustworthiness, which will influence consumer perceived brand authenticity (Yang et al., 2021). Correspondingly, the perceived trustworthiness of sources can positively impact consumers to realise the perceived brand authenticity through transfer reliability to consumer attitude and corresponding consumer behaviour (Yang et al., 2021). Therefore, consumers can realise the expectation that reflects personal value through purchased brands under the impact of transparency and authenticity (Yang et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the communication model of brand authenticity shows a modern technique-driven characteristic, in which social media and online platforms can better communicate trustworthiness to targeted consumers (Yang et al., 2021). In other words, brand authenticity-related information can be effectively delivered to consumers who are good at and easily affected by online content.

2.4.3. Brand Authenticity for Marketing Management

According to Gilmore and Pine (2007), authenticity has been regarded as the prior purchasing criterion, replacing quality in the current market (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019). Furthermore, Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis (2019) indicated that the development of authenticity promotes the increase of genuineness from the product and service level (Beverland et al., 2008) to the non-commercial difference and brand value level (Kim & Bonn, 2016). Additionally, brand authenticity has been considered as the core part of the establishment and maintenance of a certain brand (Tran et al., 2020), based on its ability to build brand identification (Beverland 2005), also benefit in providing reliable and positive relationship (Keller, 1993).

2.4.3.1. The Influence of Brand Authenticity

For companies, brand authenticity has significant effects on marketing management (Campagna et al., 2021; Holt, 1998), especially benefits brand positioning, brand maintenance, brand identity and marketing communication (Beverland, 2005; Morhart et al., 2015, p. 211). Through brand authenticity, a strong connection between enterprises and consumers can be established (Campagna et al., 2021; Fournier, 2017), which counters criticisms and the uncertain marketing environment, and also increases brand loyalty (Uysal & Okumuş, 2021).

In holistic marketing, the role of brand authenticity has been explored from five specific aspects of marketing management to encourage the relationship between brands and consumers (Yang et al., 2021), including brand attachment (Kim et al., 2005), brand loyalty (Lu et al., 2015), brand trust (Schallehn et al.,

2014), marketing communication (Bruhn et al., 2012), and brand image (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020). In the following content, the relationship between above-mentioned aspects will be discussed and presented separately.

Brand Authenticity and Brand Awareness

According to Lu et al. (2015), a positive relationship between brand authenticity and brand awareness has been revealed (Choi et al., 2015). Meanwhile, brand awareness can be enhanced and further increased at a limited expense if the brand authenticity can be recognised and accepted by the target consumers (Beverland, 2009).

Brand Authenticity and Brand Attachment

According to Kim et al. (2005), brand authenticity can provide a positive impact to brand attachment, which further benefits the enhancement of consumer relationships. Moreover, it has been recognised by Kim et al. (2005) and Paxton and Moody (2003) that "brand attachment is predicted by brand authenticity", while brand attachment is affected by three elements, including product quality, consumer experience, and brand trust. Especially to the specific impacting factors, innovativeness, sustainability, authority, and fashionability have been regarded as the predicting elements for brand attachment from the brand authenticity perspective (Choi et al., 2015). In particular, fashionability and innovativeness have been considered the influencing factors associated with consumer emotions, which are especially core for establishing a long-term relationship with consumers (Kim et al., 2005). Furthermore, fashionability and innovativeness are also significant for establishing brand loyalty and the realisation of consumer

commitment (Kim et al., 2005).

Brand Authenticity and Brand Loyalty

According to Kim et al. (2005), brand authenticity possesses a positive impact to brand loyalty. This can be proved by the below associations: brand authenticity has been regarded as the predictor for brand attachment, while brand loyalty has been regarded as the outcome variable of brand attachment (Kim et al., 2005; Paxton & Moody, 2003). Moreover, brand attachment has been regarded as the emotional and attitudinal indicator of brand loyalty (Hwang, 2011). Accordingly, the connection between brand loyalty and brand authenticity has been proved indirectly. In particular, the influencing elements of authority, consistency, and innovativeness have emphasised the significance to brand loyalty, according to Choi et al. (2015).

Brand Authenticity and Brand Image

According to Bruhn et al. (2012), brand authenticity can be considered a typical brand association, reflecting the relating factors between consumers and certain brands. Accordingly, brand authenticity plays a significant influence on brand image, especially the positive brand image encouraged by an authentic brand (Bruhn et al., 2012). Moreover, the role of brand authenticity revealed a profound understanding of brand image from the consumer side (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020). Furthermore, brand authenticity has been indicated as a judging criterion for the genuineness of brand image, replacing quality attributes (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020).

Brand Authenticity and Marketing Communication

Authenticity has been considered the indicator and motivator within marketing communication (Ibarra, 2015), especially reflecting the consumer requirement effectively (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; O'Neill et al., 2014). Moreover, brand authenticity benefits effective and comprehensive marketing communication (Ibarra, 2015; Potter, 2010), especially for non-commercial information (Kim & Bonn, 2016; Beverland et al., 2008). In order to enhance the brand authenticity, an effective communication mechanism should be established, and where the internal and external communication (among different target groups) keeps consistent, the credibility can be proven (Bruhn et al., 2012). Moreover, the continuity between brand commitment and corporate actions has also been emphasised as an important element in communicating brand authenticity (Bruhn et al., 2012).

Brand Authenticity and Brand Trust

Based on the research from Delgado and Fernandez (2016, p.11), brand trust has been defined as a "feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer". In particular, brand trust generally has been presented from reliability and mental intentionality (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019).

According to Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis (2019), the relationship between brand authenticity and brand trust has been specifically explored that brand authenticity can be considered as the encouraging component for brand trust. This opinion has been further presented from the below evidence:

i)   Authenticity plays a significant position in the establishment process of trustworthiness;

ii) "brand trust mediates the effects of authenticity on attitudinal measures" (Coary, 2013, p. 22);

iii) Correspondingly, the level of trustworthiness will significantly influence the recognition of brand authenticity from the consumer perspective;

iv) Higher acceptability and recognition of brand authenticity can promote higher acceptability and recognition of brand trust;

v)   A deeper understanding and acceptability of brand authenticity can encourage the establishment and enhancement of consumer perceived brand trust, also contributing to the acceptance of brand trust in consumers' minds (McColl et al., 2018).

2.4.3.2. Influencing Factors of Brand Authenticity

When considering consumer perceived brand authenticity, the characteristics of influencing elements focus on continuity, credibility, integrity, and symbolism (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Urde et al., 2007). Accordingly, the above characteristics have been regarded as the criteria for evaluating the influencing factors of brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector (Morhart et al., 2015). In particular, the brand performance has been evaluated by consumer expectations (Frazier & Lassar, 1996), while credibility can be verified by brand quality (Morhart et al., 2015). Correspondingly, expected quality and trustworthiness also have been regarded as the effects of brand authenticity (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; Moulard et al., 2016). Furthermore, Yang et al. (2021) explored the antecedents which impacted the consumer perceived brand authenticity, such as corporate social responsibility (Dwivedi & McDonald,

2018), brand consistency, and effective communication.

In the following content, the influencing factors of brand authenticity will be explored from five aspects: brand reputation, corporate social responsibility, information, transparency, and consumer experience.

Brand Reputation

According to extant literature (Balmer, 2010; Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997), brand reputation can be regarded as a long-term representative of brand quality, brand trustworthiness, and credibility. Compared with brand image, brand reputation is difficult to change in a short period (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000; Markwick & Fill, 1997). In order to effectively judge the brand reputation, consistency has been regarded as the priority, where the information provided by fast fashion companies should keep consistent with the corporate actions (Napoli et al., 2016). For an authentic brand, a positive brand reputation is easier to obtain (Napoli et al., 2016). Although a direct relationship between brand authenticity and brand reputation has not been reflected, dimensions of brand authenticity in genuineness, brand heritage, and quality commitment has been regarded as the predictor of brand reputation (Napoli et al., 2016).

Corporate Social Responsibility

Although corporate social responsibility does not have a clear association with brand authenticity, corporate social responsibility can implicate the brand reputation (Baghi et al., 2009). Accordingly, brand authenticity can be affected. Meanwhile, the brand image and brand reputation can be promoted and improved through corporate actions under the guidance of corporate social responsibility

(Salehzadeh et al., 2018).

Information

The information provides a significant role in brand authenticity. Due to the increasing distrust between consumers and provided information, the requirement for genuineness and trustworthiness is increasing (Burnett & Hutton, 2007; Portal et al., 2019). Moreover, Beverland et al. (2008) explored the influence of reliable information on product authenticity, where the consumer will judge the trustworthiness through objective information, such as "labels of the origin, age, ingredients, or performance" (Morhart et al., 2015).

Transparency

Based on extant literature, transparency has a strong connection with honesty, credibility (Morhart et al. 2015), consistency, and commitment (Eggers et al. 2013). Moreover, brand authenticity has a high expectation of transparency (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Furthermore, according to Guèvremont and Grohmann (2018), brand authenticity can relieve the negative impact caused by scandals which may be reflected through the consumer requirement of transparency. Therefore, the consumer requirement of transparency between brand commitment and corporate practice can be proven by brand authenticity (Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018).

Consumer Experience

Since consumers prefer the experience that can represent their personal identifications (Emmons, 2005), authenticity can help consumers better realise

and achieve the personal goal (Arnould & Price, 2000). According to Hernandez-Fernandez and Lewis (2019), the consumer experience has a strong connection to brand authenticity, which relative corporate activities can improve, thus the brand authenticity can be enhanced simultaneously.

2.5. Knowledge Gap

Based on the above literature review, five knowledge gaps have been discovered, which prevent the realisation of the research question and the exploration of the research proposition. Hence, these knowledge gaps are expected to be explored and filled in this research, which includes:

I)   As a novel proposition, the feasibility of utilising brand authenticity to relieve sustainability marketing problems will be evaluated, especially in aspects of perceived low acceptance and misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products, also communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises. Accordingly, the role of brand authenticity in perceived sustainability will be discovered in this study.

II)   The concept of fast fashion from the consumer perspective is still missing, so that need to be filled in this research. As consumer-oriented research, the consumer perceived definition of fast fashion can provide sectoral background information to researchers to explore consumer-associated research. Accordingly, the deficiency of the consumer-perceived definition of fast fashion will prevent future research in the fast fashion sector from the consumer perspective. However, current definitions of fast fashion are generated from the company perspective, while only characteristics of fast fashion have been found from the consumer perspective.

III)   The sustainability claims of fast fashion brands from the consumer perspective are deficient, so the main consumer perceived concerns about sustainability will be identified and analysed in this research. In current sustainability studies of the fast fashion industry, the unsustainable claims were mainly provided from the company perspective, whereas the

sustainable concerns about fast fashion summarised from the consumer perspective are still missing.

IV) The consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products are deficient from the latest literature, which will be discussed in this research. Current challenges of managing sustainable fast fashion products only have been discussed from the company perspective in the literature, but the consumer perceived challenges are still missing. Accordingly, the deficiency of this knowledge caused the consumers' low acceptance of sustainable fast fashion products, which influenced the exploration of the research question in this study.

V) The consumer perception of brand authenticity specific to the fast fashion sector is deficient, which prevents the exploration of the research proposition, so that will be explored in this research. Although the significance and effect of brand authenticity for consumers and marketing operations have been revealed in previous literature, the consumer perspective of brand authenticity specific to the fast fashion industry is still missing.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter reviews the fast fashion sector, sustainability marketing, and brand authenticity, which provides a knowledgeable basis for the exploration of this research. Accordingly, the knowledge gap has been discovered in this chapter, which can contribute to the establishment of research objectives, and further the generation of the interview guide.

The literature review serves as the foundation for the construction of the conceptual framework, which will be presented in the next chapter. Furthermore, the literature review provides the knowledge basis for the discussion in chapter Eight, to verify the reliability of research outcomes.

Chapter 3 Conceptual Framework

3.1. Introduction

According to Ravitch and Riggan (2017), the conceptual framework can be defined as "an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous". Accordingly, the conceptual framework can be considered as a mechanism to connect all elements within a research together, which contributes to the whole research process, especially in research design, data collection and data analysis (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). Through the conceptual framework, the structure of this specific research can be presented visually. Also the key themes and the presumed interrelationships will be reflected simultaneously (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Based on the literature reviews discussed in the last chapter, the conceptual framework of this research can be established and shown in the figure below (Figure 3.1), which demonstrates the core themes and posited interrelationships of this research. According to Figure 3.1, this research will be separated into three stages. In the necessity phase, the research background will be discussed initially, followed by the clarification of the research question. Within the necessity phase, the significance and urgency of concern about sustainability marketing issues in the fast fashion sector will be reflected, and the necessity to explore this research question from the consumer perspective will be presented. In the method phase, brand authenticity has been introduced into this research as the research proposition, so the rationale for choosing brand authenticity and the influence of brand authenticity will be discussed in this phase. In the achievement phase, the benefit of utilising brand authenticity to relieve sustainability marketing issues,

specifically in the fast fashion sector, will be presented.

In the following content, the conceptual framework will be discussed in phases according to Figure 3.1, and detailed conceptual frameworks for every phase will be generated separately.
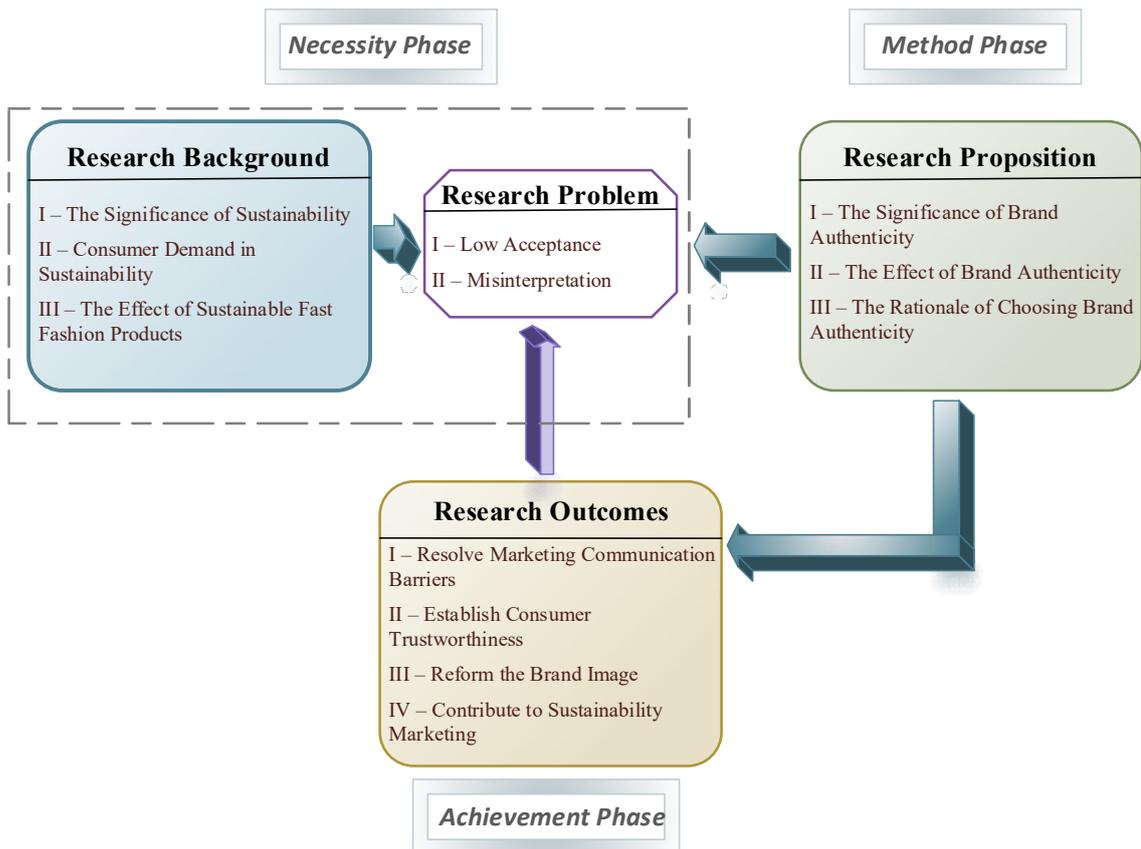
Figure 3.1 Stages of Conceptual Framework.

3.2. Necessity Phase

In the necessity phase, the rationale of why this research question is worthy to be studied will be presented as the research background, together with the discussion of the research problem. Three aspects of content will be included in the research background: (i) the significance of sustainability; (ii) consumer demand for sustainability; and (iii) the effect of sustainable fast fashion products. While the research problem discusses the marketing response of sustainable fast fashion products, which has shown low acceptance and misunderstanding as greenwashing. In the following section, key themes and corresponding relationships will be presented and discussed, which have also been visualised in Figure 3.2.
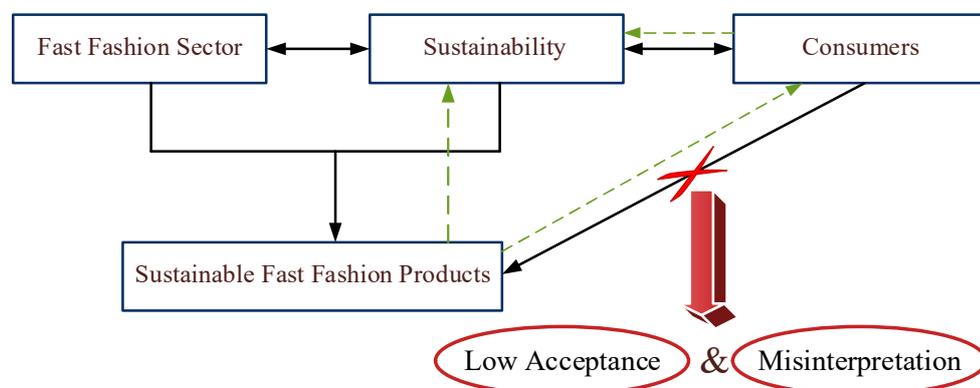
Figure 3.2 Conceptual Framework Showing Necessity Phase.

3.2.1. Research Background

The prevalent definition of sustainability was provided by Brundtland Commission in the Brundtland Report as: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Report, 1987, p.8). In recent years, the importance of sustainability

has been further highlighted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015), which explicated that the combination of sustainable consumption and production can substantially contribute to sustainability. Meanwhile, the significance of sustainability also has been emphasised at the government level, through generating consumer-industry collaborated programmes to contribute to sustainability (Zhang et al., 2021). From the company perspective, sustainability can be regarded as an encouraging factor in increasing brand reputation, which promotes long-term development (Orlitzky et al., 2003).

According to the latest research, fast fashion can be summarised as a business strategy that combines low production cost, low price, and rapid/time-limited production of clothing in limited quantities according to the very latest perceived fashion industry trends and consumer demands (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Fernie, 2004; Joung, 2014; Park & Kim, 2016). The fast fashion sector has not only been regarded as the second largest economic sector that occupying 7% of the world export share (European Commission [EC], 2013), but also has been criticised as one of the world's heaviest polluting industries that connected with consumers tightly (Niu et al., 2017). For the polluting criticism, the fast fashion sector has been criticised for its unsustainable operating behaviour, especially the environmental impact (Niu et al., 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). In order to tackle sustainable impacts, fast fashion enterprises have implemented several tentative measures, such as using an ecological friendly supply chain, utilising eco-materials, and reducing energy consumption (McCormick, 2001; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Along with the increase of consumer awareness in sustainability, consumer behaviour has changed correspondingly to a sustainability-concerned frame, which further influences the development of industries and the whole society (Kim

et al., 2013; Zavestoski, 2002). In particular, the environmental impact of purchasing behaviour to sustainability has been a growing concern for consumers (Kang et al., 2013; Miller & Merrilees, 2013). Meanwhile, consumers have been regarded as becoming more responsible to protect the environment when making purchasing decisions (Joy et al., 2012; Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011). When shopping for fast fashion products, sustainability, especially sustainable criticisms, has become a significant influencing factor in consumer's decision-making process (Bly et al., 2015; Bruce & Daly, 2006).

In recent years, sustainable fast fashion products have been established and promoted to the market as an innovation to satisfy the increasing consumers' sustainability requirements and expand market share (McCormick, 2001; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Compared with conventional fast fashion products, sustainable fast fashion products not only owe the major characteristics of fast fashion products, but also show sustainable attributes, such as eco-material, sustainable manufacturing process, and easily recycling (Wei & Jung, 2017). From the company perspective, the promotion of sustainable fast fashion products has been considered as an effective and efficient approach to achieving corporation sustainability goals and relieving the increasing unsustainable criticism (McCormick, 2001; Chen & Burns, 2006; Niu et al., 2017; Larsen et al., 2012). In the meantime, fast fashion companies are expected to provide an innovative channel for consumers to satisfy personal fashion related requirements and sustainability requirements simultaneously, through consuming sustainable fast fashion products (Fuchs et al., 2013; Joergens, 2006; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

3.2.2. Research Problem

However, sustainable fast fashion products have not been widely accepted by consumers and have even been misunderstood as "greenwashing", which is a marketing method to establish a superficial sustainable brand image instead of providing practical sustainability benefits (Kong et al., 2016; Truant et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017).

Although the rationale for low product acceptance is still missing, this currency of sustainable fast fashion products can be obliquely explored from the purchasing intentions. It can be realised that the consumers' purchasing intentions can be highly influenced by the brand image (Apaydin, 2011; Chang & Jai, 2015), especially in the purchasing of sustainable products (Chen & Chai, 2010; Suki, 2013). However, due to the unsustainable operating behaviour, fast fashion companies have been criticised, and even brand image has been recognised as negative (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Thus the authenticity and reliability of sustainable products will be viewed suspiciously by consumers since the original brand image is unsustainable.

When considering greenwashing, the misinterpretation may be caused by the deficiency of supporting information, consistency, and trustworthiness (Cavender & Lee, 2018; Hill & Lee, 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Ozdamar & Atik, 2015; Rahman et al., 2015). The consumer decision-making process will be accordingly influenced due to the negative impact of greenwashing (Sinisalo, 2020). Furthermore, the deficiency of effective communicating channels has been regarded as the promoting factor of greenwashing (Chen & Chang, 2013; Henninger et al., 2016; Sinisalo, 2020).

The impact of misinterpretation will reduce the fast fashion company's environmental effort, further misleading the sector's image as suspicious, which

hinders the communication of sustainable related information to the public (Henninger et al., 2016). Therefore, it is significant and urgent to solve this misinterpretation problem between sustainable fast fashion products and consumers, which contributes to the realisation of sustainability.

In order to explore the proposition for this research question, three knowledge gaps will be studied in the necessity stage, including:

1) *The concept of fast fashion from the consumer point of view;*

2) *The consumer perceived sustainability claims of fast fashion brands;*

3) *Consumer perceived challenges in fast fashion companies' management of sustainable products.*

The concept of fast fashion provides a basic understanding of the research sector for this consumer-oriented study. According to the latest literatures, fast fashion has been defined from the company perspective, but a consumer-side definition is still missing. Therefore, the concept of fast fashion from the consumer point of view will be explored to support the further recognition of the research background.

The misinterpretation can be considered as an unbalancing situation between fast fashion companies and consumers, where consumer demand for sustainability not satisfied by the planned sustainable information delivered through sustainable fast fashion products. Hence, consumer perceived sustainability claims need to be explored, in order to support the exploration of propositions for misinterpretation. Accordingly, guidance for fast fashion companies can be derived to better reform the enterprise's unsustainable behaviour, match the consumers' sustainable requirements, and then realise corporate sustainability.

Although low acceptance has been widely accepted as the current situation of sustainable fast fashion products, the rationale for this perception is still missing. The low acceptance of sustainable fast fashion products will be explored as a result of deficiencies in the consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products, which hindered the solution's exploration in sustainability marketing and product improvement. Accordingly, consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products will be explored, which further contributes to the exploration of the research aim.

3.3. Method Phase

In this research, brand authenticity has been introduced as the proposition to relieve the research problem. Except the definition, brand authenticity will also be presented through three aspects in this method phase: the significance of brand authenticity, the effect of brand authenticity, and the rationale for choosing brand authenticity. In the meantime, relationships among each theme will be shown in Figure 3.3 and further discussed in the following section.
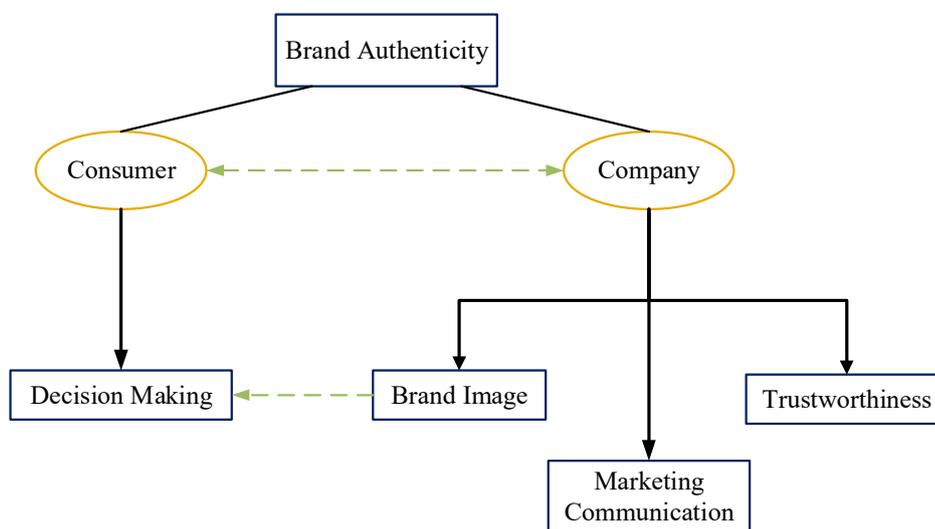
Figure 3.3 Conceptual Framework Showing Method Phase.

In order to tackle the research question of changing the unsustainable brand image in consumers' minds also enhancing trustworthiness, brand authenticity has been abstracted as the proposition based on the literature review. According to Bruhn et al. (2012), brand authenticity can be defined as "the perceived genuineness of a brand as manifested in its stability and consistency, uniqueness, ability to keep its promises and unaffectedness". In contemporary society, the significance of authenticity in corporation management has been increasingly enhanced, which has been considered the primary evaluation criteria within the

consumer purchasing process (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). According to Kapferer (2001), authenticity attracts increasing attention through the continual development in the fast fashion industry, based on its typical functions in the purchasing decision-making process of fast fashion products that are tightly connected with aesthetic, product performance, and symbolic attributes. This opinion has been further supported and proved by Choi et al. (2015), thus, the significance of brand authenticity for consumer decision-making has been emphasised. Moreover, the benefit of establishing brand authenticity has been further reflected (Choi et al., 2015), which may be positive for maintaining a long-term stable relationship between fast fashion brands and consumers.

For companies, brand authenticity has significant effects on marketing management (Campagna et al., 2021; Holt, 1998), especially benefits brand positioning, brand maintenance, brand identity and marketing communication (Beverland, 2005; Morhart et al., 2015, p. 211). Through brand authenticity, a strong connection between enterprises and consumers can be established (Campagna et al., 2021; Fournier, 2017), which counters criticisms and increases brand loyalty (Uysal & Okumuş, 2021). When considering the role of brand authenticity, brand image, marketing communication and trustworthiness are three objects that can be encouraged. According to Bruhn et al. (2012), brand authenticity can be considered as a consumer-directed aspect of brand image, and also the criterion to judge the reliability and veracity of brand image (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020). Meanwhile, the utilisation of brand authenticity can contribute to the establishment of a positive brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012). While brand authenticity also could contribute to effective and comprehensive marketing communication (Ibarra, 2015; Potter, 2010), especially for non-commercial information, such as those sustainability-related (Kim & Bonn, 2016; Beverland et al., 2008). Meanwhile, brand authenticity can be recognised and accepted

when consumers believe a brand to be faithful and trusted (Morhart et al., 2015).

Therefore, brand authenticity has been assumed as the innovative proposition to solve the research problem in this research. Through the utilisation of brand authenticity, the negative currency of sustainable fast fashion products is expected to be reformed, accordingly the acceptance may increase, and the misinterpretation may be relieved.

In this stage, one knowledge gap is expected to be studied, which can support the exploration of the research aim:

1) *Consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in the context of the fast fashion sector.*

Through the exploration of consumer perceived brand authenticity, the role of brand authenticity can be presented, which also provides guidance to companies when establishing, maintaining and enhancing their brand authenticity.

3.4. Achievement Phase

Based on the discussion in the necessity and method phases, the consumer perceived brand authenticity has been assumed as an appropriate means to relieve sustainability marketing issues in the fast fashion sector. According to Figure 3.4, the potential relationship between the research problem and research proposition has been presented, which connects through influencing factors shown in the middle column.
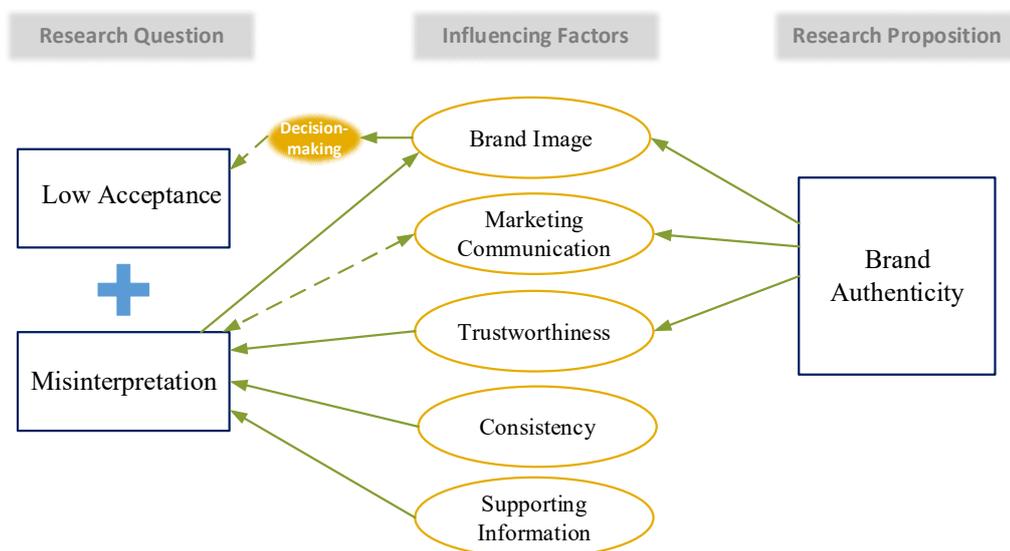
Figure 3.4 Conceptual Framework Showing Achievement Phase.

Through the utilisation of brand authenticity, it can be assumed that the unsustainable brand image can be changed and reformed to a sustainability-oriented brand image, the corresponding trustworthiness can also be enhanced, and an effective communicating channel can be established, which provides the feasibility to deliver sustainable related information to consumers. Meanwhile, the misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products as greenwashing may be relieved from the consumer perspective. Furthermore, the role of brand

authenticity to sustainability can be examined, and the following research aim can be indicated simultaneously:

This research aim to examine the role of brand authenticity in relation to the perceived sustainability of fast fashion products.

According to the establishment and enhancement of brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector, it has been expected to increase the acceptability and purchasing intentions of sustainable fast fashion products. Correspondingly, the associated sustainability attributes of sustainable fast fashion products can be better presented to the public, contributing to the encouragement and realisation of sustainability in the fast fashion sector. Meanwhile, a future developing direction has been provided to fast fashion companies by replacing all regular unsustainable fast fashion products with sustainable ones to realise a positive, sustainable cycle. Furthermore, sustainability can be realised through the cooperation between fast fashion companies and consumers.

3.5. Conclusion

Based on the description of the conceptual framework in this chapter, the research aim, objectives, and potential knowledge gaps have been illustrated through the logical analysis of this research. Correspondingly, the future research design, data collection, data analysis, and discussion will be established according to the conceptual framework shown in this chapter.

PART THREE

Methodology

Chapter 4 Methodology

According to Blaxter (2001), the methodology has been regarded as the approach to support and enhance research, which mainly involves the philosophical foundation and research design (Crotty, 2015; Neuman, 2014). Based on the guidance and knowledge support from the literature review and conceptual framework, this qualitative research will be conducted under the research paradigm of realism philosophy, which will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Followed by the discussion and presentation of specific research methods, both focus group and in-depth interview will be utilised in this research. Then the detailed steps of conducting hybrid interview methods will be presented, particularly the data will be analysed through the thematic analysis method, and corresponding results will be presented in the following chapters (Chapter 5, 6, 7). Furthermore, trustworthiness and research ethics will be discussed in the later sections of this chapter.

4.1. Research Philosophy

As the fundamental guidance for researchers, research philosophy provides channels for exploring and developing knowledge (Saunders et al., 2007), especially contributing to the confirmation of methodology, research methods, and analytical approaches (Creswell, 2013). When exploring research philosophy, the paradigm has been introduced as the "conceptual framework" for research philosophy. Within marketing research, the paradigm has been regarded as a worldview to guide researchers in exploring a particular scientific phenomenon. Applicably, the function of paradigm has been revealed and explained in previous literature as a "basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.105), or "a set of linked assumptions about the world shared by a community of scientists investigating the world" (Deshpande, 1983, p. 101).

When exploring paradigms, three elements have been explored and presented, include ontology, epistemology and methodology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Healy & Perry, 2000), also as the criteria for philosophical paradigms (Healy & Perry, 2000). Ontology has been regarded as the reality that researchers are trying to investigate (Perry et al., 1999), epistemology has always been described as the relationship between reality and the researcher (Riege & Brown, 1999), and methodology has been recognised as the research techniques to explore the reality (Healy & Perry, 2000). Furthermore, ontology, epistemology and methodology have been recognised as criteria among different paradigms, which are interrelated. According to the combination of analysis within these three criteria, guidance on selecting specific research methods will be generated (Healy & Perry, 2000). Apart from the illustration of each paradigm's criteria, these elements will also be

compared across paradigms separately to reveal the in-depth difference among different scientific paradigms. Therefore, a comparative analysis has been presented in the following table 4.1, where different scientific paradigms have been compared among ontology, epistemology and methodology.

Table 4.1 Four Categories of Scientific Paradigms and Their Elements (Perry et al., 1999).

	Paradigms			
Element	Positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism	Realism
Ontology	Reality is real and apprehensible	"Virtual" reality shaped by social, economic, ethnic, political, cultural, and gender value, crystallised over time	Multiple local and specific "constructed" realities	Reality is "real" but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehensible
Epistemo logy	*Objectivist.* findings true	*Subjectivist.* value mediated findings	*Subjectivist.* created findings	*Modified objectivist.* findings probably true
Common methodologie s	*Experiments/ surveys.* verification of hypotheses, chiefly quantitative methods	*Dialogic/dialectic al.* researcher is a "transformative intellectual" who changes the social world within which participants live	*Hermeneutica l/ dialectical.* researcher is a "passionate participant" within the world being investigated	*Case studies/ convergent interviewing.* triangulation, interpretation of research issues by qualitative and by some quantitative methods such as structural equation modelling

Notes: essentially, ontology is "reality", epistemology is the relationship between that reality and the researcher, and methodology is the technique used by the researcher to investigate that reality; adapted from Perry et al. (1997, p.547) based on Guba and Lincoln (1994)

Based on the comparison shown in Table 4.1, four main scientific paradigms have been presented in marketing research, including positivism, critical theory, constructivism and realism, helpfully steering researchers' work (Healy & Perry, 2000). However, these four paradigms are not entirely independent separately, and these four paradigms can be categorised into three "worlds" based on different ontological assumptions (McGee, 1985, p.61). Positivism has been considered as World one, composed of objective and material things, whereas

critical theory and constructivism have been categorised as World two, composed of subjective minds. In other words, positivism and constructivism have always been considered opposite paradigms, which stand on two ends of paradigms, due to their contrary composition. However, realism - the representative of World Three- stands between World one and two, composed of "abstract things" produced by people's minds but exist independently, not relying on any individuals (Perry et al., 1999).

4.1.1. Rationale for Using Realism

Based on the above discussion, four paradigms can guide the researcher to explore and conduct research at the philosophical level. As Sobh and Perry (2005) indicated that "there is no 'objective' ground for choosing a paradigm", based on the researcher's personal belief and philosophical standpoint, realism has been selected as the research paradigm for this research, and the associated rationale will be presented in the following section. Meanwhile, the use range among different paradigms will also be discussed and presented in the following content, which further explains the rationale for using realism.

Realism has been proposed as the most suitable paradigm for marketing research, especially for exploring marketing context and phenomenon (Healy & Perry, 2000; Hunt, 1991; Perry et al., 1999; Riege, 2003, p.75). Based on Perry et al. (1999), realism can be considered as a blend of positivism and interpretivism, and includes the advantages of these two opposite paradigms, contributing to the explanation of extensive and complex social realities. Accordingly, realism is suitable for research phenomena that enquire into objective explanations and subjective descriptions (Perry et al., 1999). Hence realism is suitable for marketing studies since marketing research generally

focuses on explaining and describing complex phenomena (Healy & Perry, 2000). Furthermore, Riege (2003, p.75) indicated that realism is especially appropriate for exploring social phenomena that "have not been fully discovered and comprehended". In this research, challenges in sustainability marketing in the fast fashion sector are the objective research phenomenon, which only has been partly discussed in the latest literatures, and has outstanding knowledge gaps that require further study. Meanwhile, the feasibility of using brand authenticity to understand this research phenomenon needs to be explored and understood from the consumer perceptions. Hence, realism is suitable for this study, which can guide the research from both objective and subjective dimensions.

When discussing suitable paradigms for marketing research, realism and constructivism generally have been considered as appropriate philosophical frameworks (Healy & Perry, 2000). Positivism is a widely accepted paradigm in scientific research, which states the "single apprehensible reality" will not be affected by observed data and associated analysis (Healy & Perry, 2000). Therefore, positivism is unsuitable for exploring social science phenomena that highly rely on human reactions and personal experiences (Healy & Perry, 2000; Robson, 1993, p. 60). Meanwhile, the critical theory is also not been considered as a suitable paradigm for marketing context due to its particular usage in "critiquing and transforming social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 112; Healy & Perry, 2000). Although constructivism is an appropriate research paradigm for certain social science research, it has limitations for marketing management studies due to the exclusion of considerations for "economic and technological dimensions of business reality" (Healy & Perry, 2000; Hunt, 1991). Correspondingly, participants' perceptions have been considered as investigable "realities" in constructivism, in contrast to viewing windows to recognise "reality" in realism.

Based on the above discussion, positivism, critical theory, and constructivism are therefore inappropriate for this study, since this research is aimed to explore consumers' perceptions and attitudes behind their practical experience and behaviours of the "real existing" sustainability objective.

Hence, realism has been selected for this research, which will be explored and discussed in the following section, detailed in ontology, epistemology and methodology.

4.1.2. Realism

Realists believe a "real" world exists and should be discovered, even if it is only imperfectly apprehensible (Godfrey & Hill, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Tsoukas, 1989; Perry et al., 1999). This is distinguished from positivism which only relies on objective data, whereas participants' perceptions are also important for realism. Thus knowledge gained from realism cannot be verified as entirely accurate or wrong as positivism, so research under realism will be considered real "but fallible" (Wollin, 1995, p.80). Moreover, realism provides a window for researchers to explore the reality behind perceptions instead of being considered a reality straight for constructivism (Riege & Brown, 1999). In contrast, realism supports that reality is objectively existent, and the cognitive process of reality, especially the expression of knowledge, can be subjective. Accordingly, realism can be considered as the combination of positivism and constructivism. Realists support that reality is sole, and perceptions of the reality should be multiple, which provide triangulations to get a more comprehensive and authentic acknowledgement of the reality (Perry et al., 1999). According to the triangulated points of view, reality can be realised completely.

4.1.2.1. Realism Ontology

Realism ontology assumes that the researcher is dealing with the comprehensive social phenomenon and individual-owned reflectiveness (Healy & Perry, 2000, p.121), which have been regarded as the "open fuzzy boundary systems" (Bhaskar, 1979; Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the realism paradigm realises that naming and describing manners are the operative mechanisms in exploring knowledge from the real world (Bhaskar, 1979; Perry et al., 1999). Differentiated from positivism, the causal relationship between variables in realism is not fixed, fluctuating, and the change of environment of social phenomenon. Accordingly, realism research stands on the collection of "a set of answers", which reflect different connections from multiple perspectives, even if the reality is not perfect or probabilistically apprehensible (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p.152). Meanwhile, realism believes that reality is authentic, which is the fundamental difference with critical theory and constructivism, claiming that reality is the product of variables.

4.1.2.2. Realism Epistemology

When discussing epistemology, positivism stands in the opposite position from critical theory and constructivism, whereas realism points to "modified positivism". Based on Table 4.1, paradigms in World 2 (critical theory and constructivism) suppose the epistemology is subjective and that researchers can build a connection with participants through knowledge sharing and social activities engagement (Manning, 1997). In contrast, positivism supports epistemology as purely objectivist, the representative of the paradigm in World 1, removes the researcher from the relationship between reality and research objectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). However, realism epistemology is not extreme as paradigms in World 1 or 2, which consider the findings probably accurate, called

modified objectivist or "modified positivist epistemology". In other words, realism researchers have been considered value-aware, unlike positivism is value-free, nor constructivism and critical theory are value-laden.

4.1.2.3. Realism Methodology

Within marketing research, the methodology has been considered as a technique to explore the reality by marketing researchers (Riege & Brown, 1999), different among paradigms, generally situated in qualitative, quantitative or a mix of both. According to Table 4.1, reality needs to be verified by accurate data in positivism, thus quantitative methodology will be utilised commonly, such as experiments or surveys. In contrast, the rest of the three paradigms mainly connect to qualitative research (Healy & Perry, 2000). For critical theory and constructivism, reality will be revealed or created by researchers through their participants in a dialectical approach, thus qualitative methodology can better provide descriptive data to these two research paradigms (Healy & Perry, 2000). However, research under realism guidance can not only interpret by qualitative methodology, but also explored by quantitative methods. Thus multiple research methods suit realism studies, such as survey, structural equation modelling (SEM), case study, focus group and in-depth interview (Perry et al., 1999). Furthermore, the significance of triangulation has been emphasised in realism research, providing multi-dimensional perceptions for realists to further recognise a single reality (Healy & Perry, 2000; Hunt, 1990; Hunt, 2018).

4.1.3. Research Methodology

Based on the above discussion, it has been realised that both qualitative and

quantitative methodologies are suited for realism research. However, the selection of methodology not only depends on the research philosophy, but also considers the function of the research. According to Healy and Perry (2000), a corresponding relationship between detailed methodologies and paradigms has been presented in Figure 4.1, which also matched the function of the research. Combining the philosophical guidance and the research topic, the methodology can be confirmed.

Methodology   **Paradigm**

Grounded theory   CONSTRUCTIVISM

Indepth interviewing and focus groups   REALISM
(with an interviewer protocol)

Instrumental case research   REALISM

Theory-building research:
emphasis on meaning

Survey and structural   REALISM
equation modelling

Survey and other
multivaraite techniques
                                                             POSITIVISM

Theory-testing research: emphasis on measurement

Figure 4.1 A Representative Range of Methodologies and Their Related Paradigms (Healy & Perry, 2000).

According to Figure 4.1, the selection of paradigm and corresponding methodology depends on the function of the research topic, which reflects the proportion and preference of theory-building and theory-testing. From what has been shown, constructivism has always been utilised in purely theory-building research, so the grounded theory has been utilised as an appropriate methodology. Conversely, positivism supports theory-testing research that emphasises measurement, so quantitate methodologies are applied. As the middle position between constructivism and positivism, realism has a broad range

of methodologies that can support research conduct, including in-depth interview, focus group, case study, survey, and structural equation modelling (SEM) (Healy & Perry, 2000). These methodologies include both qualitative and quantitive, which also reflect the utilising range of realism - from theory-building to theory-testing. However, although realism has a wide range of usage shown in Figure 4.1, combined with the complex factor of a realist environment, realism research mainly focuses on theory-building instead of theory-testing function within a large population (Healy & Perry, 2000, p.123; Yin, 2009).

According to Healy and Perry (2000), realism provides a philosophical foundation for various methodologies utilised in the marketing research, including both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In particular, qualitative methodologies show an increasingly utilising trend in marketing research, especially derived insights from consumer behaviour by in-depth data collection (Bathmanathan et al., 2018; Lim et al., 2021; Marshall & Rossman, 2014; Ting et al., 2018).

Within this research, the role and utilisation of consumer perceived brand authenticity have been further explored, which is assumed to be an effective proposition to relieve consumer perceived sustainability attributes of fast fashion products. Based on the literature, it can be realised that consumer-perceived brand authenticity attracted little attention in current academic research, also has not been extended into the role of sustainability marketing area. Accordingly, exploratory research has been considered as the appropriate methodology for this specific research, which suits the research topic without previously in-depth investigation (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002). The qualitative method has been regarded as an effective approach in exploratory research, which contributes to establishing theory (Given, 2008) and extending knowledge in poorly investigated

research areas (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002).

Based on the above discussion, the qualitative methodology is more suitable for this theory-building research under the guidance of the realism paradigm, also matching the uniqueness of this research topic. Meanwhile, qualitative methodologies are often utilised to obtain a deep and comprehensive view of a specific research topic (Moffatt et al., 2007; Fern, 1982; Kroll et al., 2005). Differentiated from quantitative methodologies, qualitative research methodologies promote participants to deliver their personal categorisations and perceived associations through their own words (Coenen et al., 2012).

The following section will present the specific qualitative research approach, with the rationale of research methods' selection, and a detailed discussion of associated research methods.

4.2. Research Approach

Based on the above discussion of research philosophy, realism has been confirmed as the philosophical guidance for this research, and qualitative methodology has corresponding been chosen as the research methodology. Within this research, focus group and in-depth interview have been selected as the specific research approaches, according to the support of realism philosophy and previous academic research. The following section will discuss the rationale for research methods selection, comparable analysis and advantages of hybrid research methods.

Focus group has been regarded as an effective qualitative research technique in which information and knowledge can be obtained from group interactions in terms of generalised research questions and topics (Morgan, 1997; Solomon, 1992, p.585). The utilisation of focus group in marketing research can be derived back to the 1930s and then flourished from the 1950s (Leonhard, 1967; G. H. Smith, 1954), in order to address numerous issues in product and services designing, such as investigating the consumer perception of a specific marketing strategy, or investigating the consumer satisfaction for certain products and services (Stewart, 2014).

The in-depth individual interview has been considered as an effective method through guided equally communication between researchers and interviewees to gather data from "informants' lives, attitudes, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words" (Taylor et al., 2015; Yin, 2009).

4.2.1. Rationale of Research Approach Selection

According to Figure 4.1, the typical research methods, under qualitative guidance, include case study, focus group and in-depth interview (Perry et al., 1999). In particular, focus groups (Morgan, 1997; Vaughn et al., 1996; Sim, 1998) and individual interviews (Kvale, 1996; Wengraf, 2001) have been considered two broadly used techniques in qualitative research. Stewart (2014) claimed that information about general background could be obtained through the focus group, which is especially suitable for research with rarely knowledge support. The in-depth interview has been regarded as the most appropriate research method when exploring little-known and cutting-edge research areas/ social phenomena (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002). In contrast, the case study has been regarded as the unsuitable research method for this research, due to difficulties in generalising universal conclusions (Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2009). Therefore, the focus group and in-depth interview has been chosen and will be further enhanced by combining previous research as discussed below.

Based on current literature, quantitative research methods, especially surveys, have been utilised when exploring consumer perceived brand authenticity (Dwivedi & McDonald, 2018; Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019; Napoli et al., 2014; Safeer et al., 2021; Yang & Battocchio, 2020). These mentioned research mainly focused on exploring the effect of brand authenticity on different variables, providing a valid testing conclusion at the statistical level (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002). Therefore, the utilisation of qualitative research methods in this research can supplement the deficiency of qualitative data in consumer perceived brand authenticity research. While exploring consumer perceived sustainability topics in the fast fashion sector, research methods involved both qualitative and quantitative, such as in-depth interview (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Joy et al., 2012;

Ritch, 2015), focus group (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Gabrielli et al., 2013), survey (Kim et al., 2013; Neumann et al., 2020) and questionnaire (Zhang et al., 2021). Under the utilisation of quantitative methods, the aim of the research was to test the theory (Neumann et al., 2020) or investigate the effect of variables (Kim et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2021), whereas little-known phenomenon and rationale/ behaviour related research have been applied by qualitative methods (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Gabrielli et al., 2013; Joy et al., 2012; Ritch, 2015). Accordingly, the applicability and feasibility of focus group and in-depth interview have been verified in previous literature.

Within this specific research, both the focus group and in-depth interview will be utilised as research approaches, since the combination of methods can create an in-depth understanding associated with personal experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 1998), and also provide triangulated perceptions of reality (Healy & Perry, 2000). The comparable analysis between focus group and in-depth interview will be presented in the following section.

4.2.2. Comparable Analysis of Hybrid Research Approaches

Compared with the individual interview, focus group interview concentrated on the "group" setting, where multiple interactions can be established among participants, and associated discussion questions need to be adjusted according to interactions by the moderator (Morgan, 1996). Also, broad opinions and comprehensive information can be collected by using focus group than the individual in-depth interview (Morgan, 1988; Kingry et al., 1990). Meanwhile, the group interaction enriches the information generated, which has been considered as the main difference between individual interviews and focus group (Kitzinger, 1995; Sim, 1998; Stewart, 2014). In order to further explore the advantages of

using hybrid research methods, a comparison table between focus group and in-depth interview and associated analysis will be presented in the following content.

Table 4.2 Comparison between Focus Group and In-depth Interview.

Research methods	Focus Group	In-depth Interview
Participants Quantity	• Large number of participants (group amount * number of participants in a single group)	• Less number of participants
Participants Feeling	• non-threatening • free to express • sometimes not confident	• as an expert • confident • relaxed • encouraged to express
Data Content	• a rich understanding of people's experiences and beliefs • group interaction • more ideas and more information • generate valuable information on interactions • multiple, includes content, body language etc.	• personal feelings, opinions, and experiences • insight into how people interpret and order the world
Research Applicability	• identify perceptions, thoughts and impressions of a selected group	• participant's perspective on a specific research topic • appropriate for addressing sensitive topics
Research Cost	• At least 60 mins/group • Low research cost	• Normally 30 min/person • Low research cost

According to Table 4.2, the focus group and the in-depth interview have been compared through five aspects: participants' quantity, participants' feeling, data content, research applicability, and research cost. From the participant quantity, a larger number of total participants will be included in the focus group than in the in-depth interview, since a minimum of 30 persons in total has been required for a single-method applied research, whereas this depends on the research topic when in-depth interview is applied. A free and relaxed environment will be

provided to participants in the focus group and in-depth interview, which contributes to informants expressing personal opinions comfortably (Milena et al., 2008). The comparable elements – data content and research applicability are interacting, so they need to be analysed simultaneously. Focus group and in-depth interview all suits data collection for participants' perceptions, feeling, experiences, and impressions, but the in-depth interview can be conducted for sensitive research topics (Kairuz et al., 2007). The utilisation of the focus group or in-depth interview can both contribute to a deep understanding of human beliefs and experiences, valuable information and insights generation, as well as obtaining multiple ideas (Kairuz et al., 2007; Milena et al., 2008). The core difference between these two comparable techniques is the data gathering formats: group interaction or individual expression. For the consideration of research cost, both focus group and in-depth interview have been regarded as "low cost" research techniques in terms of expense (i.e. facilities, room rental, snacks, and incentives). While the main comparable element is time cost, that focus group (minimum 60 mins/group) needs more time than in-depth interview (30 mins/interview), which enables enough data can be gathered from each participant in focus group (Stewart, 2014).

Based on the comparable discussion between focus group and in-depth interview, the advantages of utilising hybrid research methods will be reflected in the following section.

4.2.3. Advantages of Utilising Hybrid Research Approaches

Combined with the above comparable discussion, the advantages of the hybrid research approach will be discussed in the following content from three aspects:

participants' involvement, content enrichment, and research credibility (Stewart, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015).

I) Within the data collection process, the time cost and interviewing environment can be considered as the major difference between focus group and in-depth interview, which further influence participants' involvement. Compared with in-depth interview, participants may feel unconfident and under social pressure during interactions in the focus group. Participants could convey information in a relaxed communication environment when they do the individual interview. In contrast, within focus group discussions, participants commonly feel non-confident and will mind others' attitudes when giving their opinions (Milena et al., 2008), especially if there is a strong expresser in the group. When considering time cost, the average time cost for the focus group technique is 60 - 90 minutes. Accordingly, the individual interview should be utilised simultaneously to avoid withdrawing from participants who do not want to share opinions in a public environment or prevented by the long interview span.

II) Under the utilisation of hybrid research approaches, enriched data and information can be obtained. Within the focus group interview, participants can converse with others in the group discussion, where brainstorming may occur in the interaction process, thus, a broad range of data can be gathered. While in-depth interview provides the opportunity to explore a deeper understanding of research questions from informants. Therefore, the collaboration of focus group and in-depth interview can provide broad and in-depth data for this research.

III) The application of hybrid research approaches ensures the trustworthiness of this research. As a realism study, the utilisation of focus

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group and in-depth interview simultaneously provides multiple "windows" for the researcher to recognise the reality, thus, a more reliable and comprehensive reality can be obtained through data triangulation. Accordingly, the triangulating data set can also prove the credibility of this research.

4.3. Procedure in the Design and Conduct of Hybrid Interview Approaches

In order to ensure the consistency and credibility of data collection, the same design and conduct procedure will be utilised for collecting data by both focus group and in-depth interview techniques. Based on Morgan (1997) and Stewart (2014), the procedure of utilising interview techniques (group and individual) for this research can be divided into nine steps (shown in Figure 4.2), including (the following list cited from (Stewart, 2014)):

"

i)   Problem definition/Formulation of the research question ;

ii) Identification of sampling frame;

iii) Identification of moderator/ interviewer;

iv) Generation and pretesting of interview guide;

v) Recruiting the sample;

vi) Conducting the interview;

vii) Analysis and interpretation of data;

viii) Writing the report;

ix) Decision making and action;

"
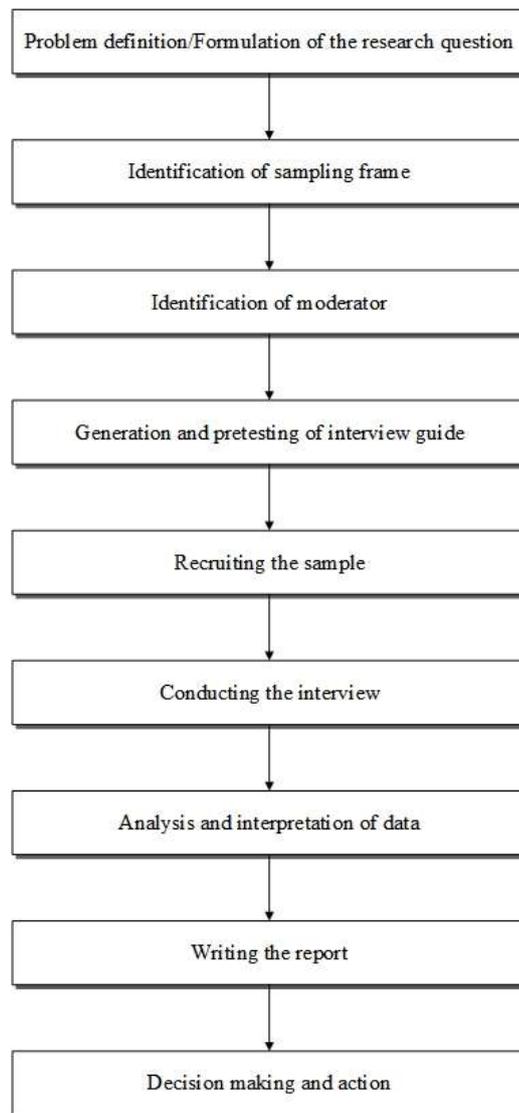
Figure 4.2 Steps in the Design and Use of Focus Group/ In-depth Interview (cited from Stewart, 2014).

4.3.1. Problem Definition

As the initial step of research design, a clear research problem needs to be generated to clarify the required information and potential informants (Stewart, 2014). The research problem for this study can be traced back to the consumer perceived unsustainable brand image and the misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises. Accordingly, sustainable measures taken by fast fashion enterprises have difficulties being accepted by the market. In order to relieve this problem, consumer perceived

brand authenticity had been assumed as the proposition to relieve unsustainable reputation and the marketing communication barrier between companies and consumers, maintain a competitive advantage, and further achieve consumer preserved trustworthiness. The research problem will be explored from the consumer side in three aspects: understanding of fast fashion (research sector), challenges of sustainable fast fashion products (research object), and effects of brand authenticity for fast fashion enterprises (research proposition). Therefore, such information needs to be collected from fast fashion consumers.

4.3.2. Identification of Sampling Frame

Stewart (2014) defined the sampling frame as "a list of people that the researcher has reason to believe represents the larger population of interest", which can enhance the reliability of research by collecting data from targeted audiences.

Within this research, the sampling criteria need to be considered from three aspects. According to Walters (2006, p.258), the targeted consumers for fast fashion products are mainly concentrated on young people, especially those aged from 16 to 25 years old. Meanwhile, the significance of demographical factors for the sampling frame has been emphasised (Stewart, 2014), so elements including age, sex, education, income, occupation, religion, and race need to be considered. Due to this research topic focused on the fast fashion sector, the screening condition of participants needs to be restricted to fast fashion consumers only, which can provide essential background for participants and ensure engagement within interviews.

Considering the above criteria, the sampling frame for this research has been limited to students from the University of Salford with fast fashion consuming

experience, which can minimise the influence of educational level, age, income, occupation, religion, and race (Stewart, 2014), informants are also located into the age range for fast fashion consumers.

4.3.3. Identification of Moderator

According to Stewart (2014), the moderator plays a significant role in data collection exclusively by focus group, which can encourage participants to be involved in the discussion. Within this research, the researcher was selected as the moderator for the focus group. In order to obtain more reliable and valuable information from the focus group, the moderator needs to create a friendly communicating environment and treat participants equally to maximise participants' interactions. In the following content, the preparation for moderating will be presented.

4.3.4. Generation of Interview Questions Guidance

Semi-structured questions will be applied in this qualitative study, which promotes interactions among participants and ensures enough data can be collected to support this theory-building preferred research. Since data related to understanding, perceptions, and feelings can be easier to obtain through the semi-structured interview (Saunders et al., 2009), so the suitability of utilising the semi-structured interview can be verified, where data can be acquired to explore the relationship between research themes and the associated variables (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Blumberg et al., 2014; Saunders et al., 2009).

The interview questions will be designed based on research objectives and knowledge gaps generated in the conceptual framework, which will match the

interview questions (Table 4.3). Specifically, interview questions will be generated from three aspects: research sector (understanding of fast fashion), research object (challenges of sustainable fast fashion products), and research proposition (effects of brand authenticity for fast fashion enterprises), which can acquire data of understanding, attitude and personal feelings from the consumer perspective.

Table 4.3 Interview Questions Guidance.

Research Themes	Research Objective/ Knowledge Gap	Interview Questions	Prompts
Research Sector (Understanding of fast fashion)	The concept of fast fashion from the consumer point of view;	What do you understand by the term 'fast fashion'?	Which brands can be considered as fast fashion brand?
			What are the characteristics of these fast fashion brands?
			How do you distinguish fast fashion from other types of fashion brands?
		Why would you like to shop for fast fashion products?	What attracts you to shop for fast fashion products?
		How frequently do you shop for fast fashion products?	Are you used to shopping for fast fashion products on-line or in-store?
		Do you have specific brands to shop for, or choose any brand when shopping for fast fashion products?	Which fast fashion brands are your favourites? Why?
			In your daily life, do you purchase specific brands or just focus on the product instead of the brand?
Research Object (Manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products)	The consumer perceived sustainability claims of fast fashion brands;	Are fast fashion brands sustainable or non-sustainable?	Which fast fashion brand can be considered as sustainable?
			Which factors may make you think fast fashion products are non-environmental friendly?

			Have you ever received information that fast fashion brands are non-sustainable? If so from which channel? (media platform, in-store experience, product, friends)? How have you responded to this information?
	Consumer perceived challenges in fast fashion companies' management of sustainable products;	How do you distinguish sustainable and non-sustainable fast fashion products?	How do you distinguish whether products are sustainable or non-sustainable?
			What are characteristics of sustainable products?
			What are characteristics of non-sustainable products?
			Would you like to shop for sustainable fashion products?
			Would you like to pay more for sustainable products?
		Do you know some activities that fast fashion companies undertake to enhance their sustainability?	Do you know some examples?
			(Such as clothes recycling, using recycled fibres, using organic cotton)
			Would you like to take place in these activities?
		How would you deal with unwanted fashion products? (Disposal/ recycling/ store return/ donation)	What prevents you from dealing with clothes in a sustainable way?
		What are challenges of managing sustainable products for fast fashion companies?	Limited choice of sustainable fast fashion products?
			Limitations of design?
			Higher Price?
			Knowledge/ Awareness gap?
			Shelf space/ distribution issues?
			Promotional limitations?
	Consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in	What do you understand when a	What is an example of authentic brand?

Research Proposition (Effects of brand authenticity for fast fashion enterprises)	the context of the fast fashion sector;	company claims its brand is authentic?	What can represent that the brand is authentic?
		How are fast fashion brands authentic?	What is an example of authentic fast fashion brand?
			What are the characteristics which make them authentic?
			In what ways would you say fast fashion brands are authentic?
			In what ways would you say fast fashion brands are not authentic?
			What can represent that the brand is authentic?
		How can you recognise brand authenticity in fast fashion companies?	What are the general ways to recognise brand authenticity?
	The role of brand authenticity to perceived sustainability of fast fashion products.	How can a fast fashion brand encourage you to believe in its brand?	

Within this study, the semi-structured interview will be utilised through both focus group and in-depth interview, in order to maintain the reliability of acquired data.

4.3.5. Recruiting the Sample

Participants for the focus group and in-depth interview will be recruited simultaneously under the guidance of a purposive sampling strategy. For the focus group, the number of participants will be limited to 5-8 for each group, and three groups will be arranged. While fifteen individual in-depth interviews will be conducted in this research. Accordingly, the detailed list of participants will be displayed in Appendix I. In the following content, the sampling strategy for this research and the procedure of sample recruiting will be presented.

4.3.5.1. Sampling Strategy

Different from quantitative research, qualitative research focuses on context from the in-depth investigation, often with a smaller sample size (Miles et al., 2018). The sample of qualitative research is purpose-driven, instead of randomly picked in quantitative research (Miles et al., 2018; Robinson, 2014), based on the uniqueness of the research context. Within the qualitative study, three sampling strategies can be applied: purposive, quota, and snowball (Mack, 2005).

Within this research, the purposive sampling method has been chosen to restrict and recruit participants into the focus group and in-depth interview. According to Tongco (2007), The purposive sampling technique is "a type of non-probability sampling that is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within", commonly used in theory-building research. Within this specific study, the researcher focused on building a theory in marketing management, extending the function of brand authenticity in relieving sustainability claims, so that the purposive sampling strategy is suitable. The data collection of this research will proceed with data analysis simultaneously, which further supports the selection of purposive sampling. When data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously, purposive sampling is the most suitable strategy, which can flexibly control the data sets based on theoretical saturation (Mack, 2005). As this research has a clear restriction for sampling range - fast fashion consumers only, purposive sampling is satisfied, so the researcher can subjectively screen fitted participants to enhance the accuracy of data collected from appropriate participants (Mack, 2005; Miles et al., 2018; Oliver & Jupp, 2006).

4.3.5.2. Procedure of Sample Recruitment

This research will recruit participants by putting up posters (Appendix II & III), briefly introducing the research and inviting students to participate in the lecture rooms. In the meantime, the participant invitation letter (Appendix IV) will be given to lecturers who can distribute it to students at lectures. If students are interested in this research, they can contact the researcher through email and will be sent the research information sheet (Appendix V) to introduce the research further and explain the conditions of participation. An interview consent form (Appendix VI) will be sent out through emails to informants if they show interest to join into this research. After completing and signing the interview consent form, the agreement between participants and the researcher will be set, which illustrates that the validity of participants has been confirmed. After the required documents are settled, the researcher will contact participants to schedule a time to do the interview and send a reminder to each person one to two days before the scheduled time.

4.3.6. Conducting the Interview

In order to collect valuable data from participants effectively, the researcher should do preparation and precautions before conducting the interview. Then the interview can be conducted according to the detailed process shown in Figure 4.3.

4.3.6.1. The Preparation of Interview

According to Krueger (1997), three aspects should be prepared before conducting the interview: mental, equipment and research room.

In order to keep concentration and the quality of listening, the moderator should make a schedule to minimise the risk of unexpected pressure. Moreover, the moderator should be familiar with all questions, and a questioning routine should be prepared as a reminder. Moreover, the moderator should prepare for the ability to listen and analyse simultaneously, since the questioning routine needs to be modified through the participants' discussion process. For instance, some latter questions may be discussed forward, so the moderator does not need to ask for the discussed ones in the following interactions. Therefore, the moderator needs to hold a past-present-future perspective throughout the discussion. Due to the strong mental pressure and fatigue, the number of interviews should be limited to two on the same day to maintain the quality of research.

For the equipment preparation, both video recorder and audio recorder need to be prepared in advance, to maintain the quality of large data sets. Accordingly, the utilisation of these facilities will be notified to participants in the recruiting process also at begin of the interview, based on the ethical requirement. The audio record has been utilised in both focus group and in-depth interview, whereas the video record has only been utilised for the focus group, which contributes to recognising the participant to match with the voice. In the meantime, the moderator also needs to prepare the required documentation, including a question routine, sets of questions tablets, name cards, and registration forms. In order to better protect individual privacy, name cards (showing nicknames) will be provided to every participant to enhance the convenience of communication and better privacy protection, and any data transferred to documents will be anonymised.

With regard to the room arrangement, the moderator needs to inspect the availability of the room (referenced by elements like temperature, lighting, noise,

facilities etc.), and if the room can be used, then arrange tables and chairs in a round shape for the focus group. In this research, study rooms in the Clifford Whitworth library have been selected as the interview room for data collection, as interactions in the university can provide a familiar environment to participants and reduce the possibility of absence with travel issues. As a smaller room, study rooms can help participants to reduce strangeness and tension during the interview. The round-shape arrangement will be set for the focus group interaction, where a psychological protective barrier, and a place to relieve physical fatigue and uneasiness can be provided. Thus, a comfortable interacting environment can be provided, with enough space for eye contact and appropriate distance between participants. Followed by the checking and preparation of recording equipment, finally set up the registration and refreshment table that includes drinks, snacks and incentives. Thus, ten pounds of Amazon gift cards will be given as incentives to every participant at the end of the interview.

4.3.6.2. The Precautions of Interview

According to Stewart (2014), several precautions need to be considered in advance to ensure the conduction of data collection, which will be discussed in the following content.

In order to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of data collection, differences among participants should be considered carefully, especially the impact of background, since both domestic and international students will be involved in this study. Thus the expression of interview questions needs to be adjusted based on the different interviewees, in order to help them better understand the question, which can also benefit information collection.

The interaction between the moderator and participants can influence collected

data quality, accuracy and authenticity, since the expression of questions from the moderator may unconsciously limit the thinking model of participants, and the diversity of answers will also be restricted. Thus, the moderator must avoid delivering personal opinions to participants during the interview process.

Within the focus group, interactions among participants may be dominated by an individual and restrict other people's engagement. Compatibility (Shaw, 1981) and social power (Emerson, 1964) can impact the effectiveness and satisfaction of research (Stewart, 2014), so the moderator needs to balance the discourse power between high-status and lower-status individuals who should be given more opportunities to express their opinions to a specific question.

Meanwhile, it is significant to ensure the consistency between participants' expectations and the research aim, explicitly guiding the discussion focused on the main research themes – brand authenticity, sustainability and fast fashion. When the interaction exceeds the research question, the moderator needs to take the discussion back to the research.

Lastly, the time range of interviews needs to be controlled by the researcher that the focus group was planned to last 90 minutes, while the in-depth interview was planned to last 45 minutes. Accordingly, the interviewer needs to gauge the extent and time length of each question, in order to ensure every question can be discussed within the limited interview period.

4.3.6.3. The Process of Conducting Interview

As interview guidance, the process of conducting the interview will be shown in the following figure (Figure 4.3), which is further discussed in detail in the following content.
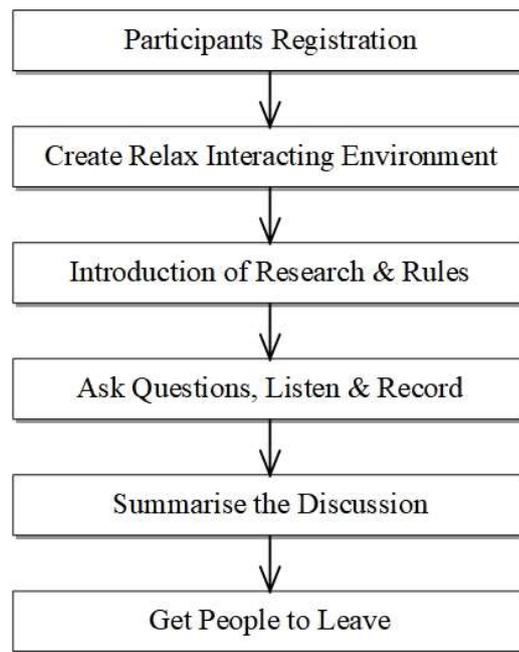
Figure 4.3 Steps of Conducting Interview.

1) Participants Registration

In order to classify the eligibility of participants, a registration form requires to be filled out by participants, which also contributes to the following data analysis. Five elements have been included in the registration form, name, age range, gender, education, and background (domestic/ international). The confirmation of elements has been supported by Krueger (1997) that name, gender, age, education level, occupation, income, marital status, and involvement status needs to be considered as the criteria for participants. However, the occupation has not been considered as the sample frame for this research has been limited to students from University of Salford, while income and marital status have been ignored for ethical reasons.

2) Create Relax Interacting Environment

In order to improve the quality and quantity of collected data, a relaxing communicating environment needs to be created for participants in both focus group interaction and in-depth interview (Miles et al., 2018). After completing the registration form, a warmup was applied as the prologue of the interview, which provides the opportunity for the interviewer and interviewees to familiarise themselves with each other, and also helps interviewees reduce tension. Specifically for the focus group, participants will be required to present a brief and simplified personal introduction before the start of focus group interactions, which can provide the opportunity for participants to familiarise themselves with others, and then ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of interactions.

3) Introduction of Research and Rules

Based on Krueger (1997), the introduction should include four aspects of content: welcome, an overview of the topic, ground rules and opening questions. In order to attract participants' attention, introductions of the research background and explanations of research themes, should be lively and interesting and avoid monotonous textual narrative. In the following content, the introduction has been generated:

Good afternoon everyone and really welcome to today's focus group/individual interview. Thank you for taking the time to join our discussion of sustainability and brand authenticity in fast fashion. My name is Mengyao Zhang, and I am the researcher for this topic. I hope to hear how consumers regard about sustainability and brand authenticity in the fast fashion industry.

Today we will be discussing your thoughts and opinions about sustainability and brand authenticity. We basically want to know your opinion of sustainability and how you recognised brand authenticity in your shopping period. There are no wrong answers but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your opinions even if differs from what others have said.

Before we begin, let me suggest somethings that will make our discussion more productive. In order to clear record comments in the group interview process, (both) audio (and video) recorder will be utilised. But all data will be kept confidential, you will not identified it in my later publications.

My role here is to ask questions and listen. I won't be participating in the conversation, but I hope you to feel free to talk with other participants. I will be asking about a dozen questions, and I will be moving the discussion from one question to the next. In order to help you easier communicating, name cards have been placed in front of you. Any questions? If not, let's begin our discussion.

4) Ask Questions, Listen and Record

Within the interviewing process, the researcher collected data according to the generated interview guide shown in Table 4.3. In order to attract participants' attention and enhance interactions among participants, some simple questions should be asked in the first part of questions (i.e. which kind of fast fashion products would you usually purchase from a fast fashion brand?; which fast fashion brand have you usually shop and why?). Furthermore, four matters have been considered to ensure the fluency of the data collecting process. Firstly, the interviewer stands as a pure asker and listener in this research, instead of a participant joining the discussion of interview questions (Mack, 2005), which can significantly reduce the influence of participants to express opinions from their

own opinions. Secondly, the researcher should control the time spent on each interviewing question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), ensuring all required data can be collected in a limited time range. Thirdly, the researcher may require to adjust the sequence of interviewing questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), since participants may answer questions together with other interview questions. Lastly, specifically for the focus group, the moderator needed to balance the expression opportunities among participants and encourage less involved participants to join the discussion and share their opinions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014), which can enhance the data quality collected from a wide range of participants.

As another task within this step, the researcher is responsible for recording data collected from the in-depth interview and focus group, which can provide reliable evidence for future analysis and discussion. Therefore, both audio and video (only for focus group) data have been recorded and stored safely.

5) Summarise the Discussion

At the end of the interview, the researcher will summarise the discussion and express appreciation for the sharing by participants, also mentioning that participants can email the researcher to withdraw their data from this research if they change their minds, as shown below:

Well, that's the end of today's interview. Thank you very much for your sharing about brand authenticity and sustainability in the fast fashion sector, which provide me excellent supporting evidence for my research, and appreciated again for your contribution to this research area.

All the data collected today will be used and kept anonymous and secure. However, if you hope to withdraw your opinion and data from this research, please don't hesitate to contact me.

6) Get People to Leave

Before participants leave the interview, every participant will be given an incentive to thank for their time expressing and sharing individual opinions to support this research.

4.3.7. Analysis and Interpretation of Data

In this research, the thematic analysis method will be utilised to analyse the data collected from both focus group and in-depth interview.

Thematic analysis can be defined as "a method for identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As an effective analysis method for qualitative studies, thematic analysis suits the research with large amounts of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In particular, data matrices will be established in this research, providing visualised information and evidence to the researcher to clarify research outcomes. In the following content, the process of thematic analysis will be presented.

As the preparation for data analysis, the audio and video data collected from interviews will be transcribed verbatim, allowing the researcher to familiarise with the collected data. In the first cycle of coding, an open coding framework is applied to the transcript, so initial codes will be generated from the raw material, then categorising codes according to similarities and perceived patterns.

Followed by the review of themes, the meta-codes can be clarified, and patterns among explored themes will be discovered. Then, the themes under interview questions can be defined and named, which need further review to ensure validity before generating outcomes.

Based on the data matrices established in this analysing stage, research findings will be presented in three chapters - fast fashion, sustainability and brand authenticity.

4.3.8. Decision Making and Action

Based on the data analysis shown in the above stage, the research objectives, knowledge gaps and research aim will be discussed in chapters 8 and 9.1, combining the guidance from the conceptual framework. Accordingly, the feasibility of utilising brand authenticity to relieve sustainability marketing issues, specifically in the fast fashion sector, will be demonstrated. In particular, the function of brand authenticity to relieve low acceptance and misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products will be discovered. In the meantime, the role of brand authenticity to the perceived sustainability of fast fashion will also be discussed. Followed by the generation of research contributions, the recommendation to the fast fashion sector and future academic works will be presented.

4.4. Trustworthiness

Differentiated with quantitative research, the acceptability and usefulness of qualitative research cannot be verified by quantitative data, so the quality of the research probably has been queried. In order to tackle this problem, Lincoln and Guba (1985) established widely accepted criteria to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research, including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.4.1. Credibility

In order to guarantee the credibility of this research, three focus groups and fifteen in-depth individual interviews will proceed to collect valuable data. Since each group/individual participant distinguished from others rely on their group/individual facts, data from the different group will compose a triangulation data set, revealing the "reality" from multiple aspects and then increasing the credibility of the research. Moreover, the moderator avoided adding her own opinion to the group interactions, by just moderating discussions concentrated on the research instead of irrelevant questions.

4.4.2. Transferability

The research findings are not only fitted with a population range in this research, but also may be used in the rest of universities in the UK, since factors of participants founded from university students are similar. In order to keep the transferability of this research, the researcher provides a thick description, especially in the methodology chapter, to maximise the possibility of successful

transfer within other sites.

4.4.3. Dependability

As the group interview data was recorded by both audio and video, the thoroughness of data documentation can be confirmed. Furthermore, combined with previous sections, the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be utilised as the data analysing method accepted in high dependability (Nowell et al., 2017).

4.4.4. Confirmability

Based on Lincoln and Guba (1985), triangulation can be a significant confirmability establishment technique. Group interview among multiple groups also provides a triangulating method to test the confirmability. Furthermore, confirmability can be realised when credibility, transferability, and dependability have been satisfied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure other researchers can clearly follow the decision trail, an audit trail will be established in this research. Specifically, markers will be made in the theory-building and data analysed processes, such as methodology and analytical choices (Koch, 1994). Moreover, the raw data, field notes and transcripts will be kept records (Halpren, 1983).

4.5. Research Ethics

Apart from the quality of research, the ethical issues need to be treated carefully and set solutions in advance. Mile et al. (2014, p.56) indicated that the development of ethical consciousness in research is the primary expectation instead of solving existing ethical issues. In order to make an ethical agreement with participants, several aspects should be considered particularly, including:

I) Set informed consent with participants

An interview consent form will be sent out by email for participants to complete. The interviewer will request that this is emailed back by the participant upon agreeing to participate in the study. If confirmation were not received from participants, it would be considered a rejection to attend.

II) Benefits and costs for participants

Since participants need to take around 90/45 minutes from their life, the researcher needs to pay their "time spend", so the researcher will provide every interviewee with a ten pounds Amazon gift card. Meanwhile, participants can also benefit from the focus group or in-depth interview, who can get insights into the sustainability issues in the fast fashion sector and recognise corresponding actions that fast fashion companies adopted. The interaction also provides a broader mind for achieving sustainability in daily life, and participants can better evaluate sustainable measures shown in the purchasing process of fast fashion products.

III) Anonymity for participants

In order to protect participants' identities, name cards (showing nicknames) will be provided to each person, displayed within the interview process in front of interviewees, which is especially convenient for interactions and better for privacy protection for the focus group interview. Moreover, the researcher should avoid disclosing participant identities due to the use of audio and video in the interview process. Furthermore, participants will be coded in the data analysis process, in order to keep informants anonymous and protect privacy.

IV) Intervention in group discussion

Since participants may hold different opinions on the interview questions, the moderator should prevent potential harmful, illegal or wrong behaviour (Mile et al., 2014, p.64), such as conflict. Not only to provide ethical protection to each participant, but also to guarantee the quality of the data collected from the group interview.

V) Ownership and storage of data

The researcher is the direct owner of collected data, and the electronic data (audio and transcripts) will be stored safely on a password-protected PC. They will be retained by the researcher until dissemination and publication are complete. If one of the supervisors or assessors needs to check the data analysis, they may have access to it, but it will be from the anonymised files. The data will be carried from the interview in a secure bag. The researcher will ensure that the audio-typist(s) understands the need for complete confidentiality, and the ethical

provisions. When the data is used to disseminate, all data will be reported in an anonymised manner. The researcher will not disclose who has taken part in the study but will use anonymised quotations (from interview transcripts) in publications, conference proceedings, and other forms of dissemination. The researcher will ensure that neither the participant is directly or indirectly identifiable by the nature of comments made in the interviews.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has displayed clear guidance for conducting this qualitative research, which provides criteria and conditions for the researcher to utilise in the data collection and analysis process.

Accordingly, the data collected under the methodology guidance will be analysed by the thematic analysis method, and the analysis of results will be presented in the following chapters (Chapters 5, 6, 7). Moreover, the findings provide supporting evidence for the discussion of potential knowledge contributions shown in Chapter 8.

PART FOUR

Findings and Discussions

This part will present the research findings (chapters 5, 6 & 7) and discussions (chapter 8).

The research findings are the analysing results generated from the data matrices. Accordingly, research findings will be presented by themes recognised from the data matrices. The research findings will be demonstrated by following the sequence of interview questions, further separated into three chapters - fast fashion (chapter 5), sustainability (chapter 6), and brand authenticity (chapter 7).

Based on the findings in chapters 5, 6, and 7, a discussion will be presented correspondingly (chapter 8). The discussion will combine the current knowledge basis (gained from chapter 2) and research findings (chapters 5, 6, and 7), to explore the knowledge gaps and research objectives (generated in chapter 3). Meanwhile, the sequence of discussion will follow the exploring sequence shown in the conceptual framework chapter.

Chapter 5 Findings in Fast Fashion

5.1. The Understanding of Fast Fashion from Consumer Perspective

As the fundamental concept and focus industry of this research, the concept of fast fashion from the consumer perspective has been explored. As the start of the interview, participants were asked to share personal understandings of what was meant by fast fashion. Based on collected data, responses can be categorised into four aspects (shown in Figure 5.1), including (I) marketing strategy; (II) provide large amounts of various fashionable products at a low price to the market in the most limited time possible; (III) satisfy customer perceived value for consumers whilst encouraging impulsive purchasing; (IV) criticisms of short product usage, perceived design imitation and unsustainable behaviour. In particular, the marketing strategy reflected the position of fast fashion from the consumer perspective, whereas the rest of the findings has been connected to fast fashion products. Accordingly, the significance of fast fashion products can be revealed, which has been considered as the most effective and major carrier for the targeted participants to recognise and distinguish fast fashion from other fashion types.
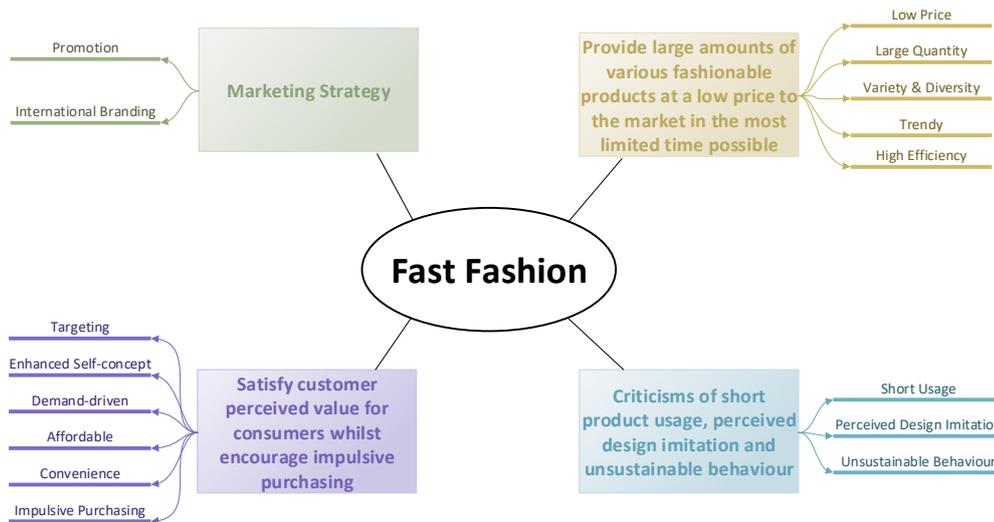
Figure 5.1 Findings of Understanding of Fast Fashion from Consumer Perspective.

5.1.1. Marketing strategy

When talking about fast fashion, it has been considered as the associated marketing strategies that fast fashion companies undertook by most of the participants. According to informants, they were utilised by fast fashion companies, in order to increase sales volume, attract target consumers, and enhance the brand impression in consumers' minds. The marketing strategy can be supported by two sub-divided aspects (shown in Figure 5.2): promotion and international branding.
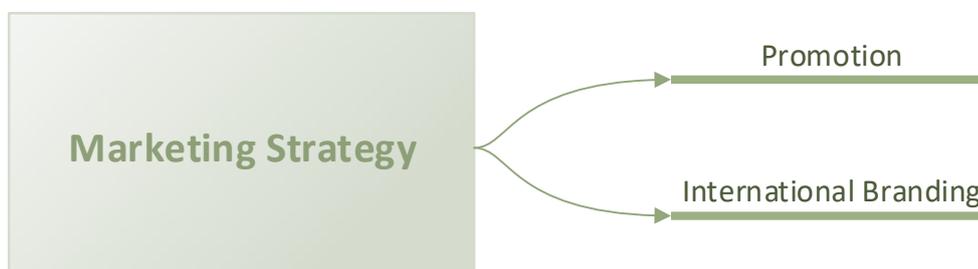
Figure 5.2 Marketing Strategy.

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I – Promotion

Through various promotions that fast fashion companies conducted, fast fashion has been recognised as a marketing strategy in most participants' minds, especially from advertisements, precise market positions and sales-driven. A clear market position has been regarded by two interviewees as a marketing promotion that fast fashion companies apply, to connect with targeted consumers. In order to effectively undertake promotion, advertisement has been regarded as an effective method by several informants. For instance, to attract consumers' attention, multiple advertisements have been introduced into the market by fast fashion companies, resulting in an increase in sales. As the interviewee stated:

"I think you see that advertisement is everywhere, because they have to stand out in a way, because there's so many of these fast fashion brands that you need to gain an edge above your competitors, so that's why they have to advertise a lot." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

II – International Branding

International branding strategy is the element discussed by the majority of participants, which reflected the significance of branding to marketing management for fast fashion enterprises. In particular, international has been regarded as an approval trend for the significance of branding. Accordingly, the brand impression can be enhanced in global consumers' minds. Also strong brand loyalty can be established with targeted consumers. Thus, the influence of brand has been enhanced in fast fashion consumers' minds through the international branding strategy, promoting brand awareness enhancement. For example, informants argued:

"So I think they are everywhere as well, I think you can buy from [fast fashion] whatever you are in the world. I mean is mostly in Europe or some other countries."

(Individual Interview, Participant 3)

5.1.2. Provide Large Amounts of Various Fashionable Products at a Low Price to the Market in the Most Limited Time Possible

As the most direct way for consumers to recognise fast fashion, fast fashion products had been widely discussed when informants expressed understanding of fast fashion. Fast fashion products can be mainly described from the following five characteristics: low price, large quantity, variety and diversity, trendy, and high efficiency (shown in Figure 5.3). Price and trendy are elements directly connected to a certain fast fashion product from the consumer perspective, while large quantity and diversity are revealed by the shopping experience, and the high efficiency is reflected in the production and marketing process.
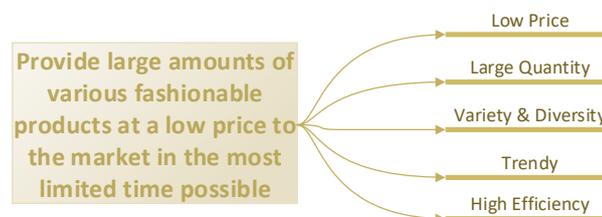
Figure 5.3 Provide Large Amounts of Various Fashionable Products at a Low Price to the Market in the Most Limited Time Possible.

I–Low Price

According to the data analysis, the majority of participants stated that fast fashion was associated with low prices. The low price can be explored from three divided aspects: the price of fast fashion products is low, the production cost is low, and low price has been utilised as competition in the market. When discussing the low

price characteristic, the low product price has been argued by most of the participants, whereas the low production cost is the basic support of low product price by several participants, even low price has been regarded as a competitive factor for fast fashion enterprises by some interviewees. This can be shown in the following data:

"I think it should be very cheap, and … when I pay attention to the manufacturer, so it writes it from usually Bangladesh, or maybe Cambodia, or something like that. So I think these countries make a very cheap product, and it's come from to this, you know UK, and people buy their cheap. So this is I think happened in this shop, because of this is cheap." (Individual Interview, Participant 10)

II – Large Quantity

Another core characteristic identified by some interviewees is the large perceived quantity of fast fashion products. It was argued that fast fashion companies manufactured huge amounts of items in the production stage, in order to provide an ample amount of products to the market, as shown in the following content:

'These brands will produce amounts of clothes every year, huge amounts of clothing. For example, I shop in one brand this week, and I can find more new items if I shop in the same brand next week.' (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

III – Variety and Diversity

Variety and diversity also have been referred to by most people as a characteristic of fast fashion products, which can be expressed in three branches: variety, more fashion seasons, and more product styles compared with high-end brands. The variety of products had been stressed by the majority of interviewees, which can be regarded as a significant element of fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. Several participants stated that there are more fashion seasons in

fast fashion than in other types of fashion. A few informants mentioned that more product styles could be found in fast fashion brands than in high-end brands, which also reflected the high-speed feature of fast fashion products. As the interviewee states:

"[fast fashion] always offer me a lot of clothes choice in the same season. For example in summer, they have more than the clothes choice compared to other brands, and then they're also very fashionable, wearable." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

IV - Trendy

Perceived trendiness is another core factor for fast fashion products that were discussed by the majority of participants. All responses can be categorised into three parts, perceived fashionability, the similarity of fast fashion products with high-end fashion products, and trend-driven high sales volumes. Most participants mentioned that the stylish design of fast fashion products is the core attraction for the target consumers to purchase. Several informants pointed out that the design of fast fashion products is similar to high-end fashion products, which can also be considered an attractive factor for consumers who hope to shop for luxury fashion products at a limited price. As emphasised by the following interviewee:

"And sometimes when you see that designs, they have beautiful designs, even if they're cheap. They have unique designs." (Focus Group 1, Participant 4)

V - High Efficiency

The high perceived efficiency is the last key characteristic most participants stressed of fast fashion products, which has been discussed from three aspects, fast production, quick to market, and high market reaction. The majority of

informants concentrated on fast fashion products' manufacturing speed, which can reduce the lead-time of fast fashion products and shorten production periods. Another factor most participants described as high efficiency in fast fashion is promoting products to market quickly, which not only shortens the lead-time, but also cuts down the waiting time for fast fashion consumers. Additionally, a few interviewees pointed out that fast fashion's marketing reaction speed is high, effectively providing insights into the industry. The high efficiency is demonstrated well in the following data:

"I think the fast fashion for me is when you have a fashion brand or a fashion company who went through a cycle very fast. So for example, it could be a company that has a quick turnover with their collections. So for example in original fashion, if we think about … they always used to have or still have only winter and summer season. But now, if you ….look [at] all these fast fashion corporations, they have new trends, and new styles, new collections every other week, maybe every three or four weeks, so it's a much quicker turnover." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

5.1.3. Satisfy Customer Perceived Value for Consumers whilst Encourage Impulsive Purchasing

From the consumer perspective, fast fashion has also been discussed as the potential obtained value by interviewees. According to Figure 5.4, the targeted consumer group of fast fashion products has been identified, and the customer perceived value has been explored from four directions: enhanced self-concept, demand-driven, affordable, and convenience. Meanwhile, impulsive shopping has been mentioned as a promoted consumer behaviour in purchasing fast
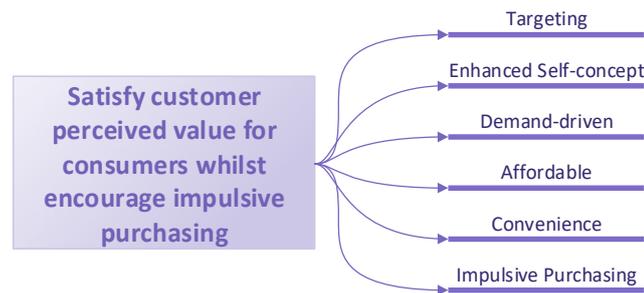
fashion products.

Figure 5.4 Satisfy Customer Perceived Value for Consumers whilst Encourage Impulsive Purchasing.

I – Targeting

Since every product has its particular targeted consumers, the consumer group of fast fashion products has been delimited by several informants when discussing fast fashion, mainly including students and low-income individuals. Targeted consumers have been attracted by the affordable price of fast fashion products, which has been described in the following transcript:

"If it depends on the money, but I think especially fast fashion products would be cheap enough to and affordable, for such for example students, it's affordable, they are affordable and I think fast fashion would be good for students, for low level workers, for low income people, other type of people, the children that their parents are gonna pay for their clothes." (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

II – Enhanced Self-concept

As a significant part of customer perceived value, the perception of clothing from a mental aspect has also been emphasised by many participants under this theme. The function of enhancing self-identification can reflect the personality behind clothing preference, and even enhance the wearer's confidence.

Correspondingly, fast fashion companies can create attractions for their products, and satisfy consumers with good shopping experience. The above content can be reflected through the following transcript:

'For some fashion brands, I will purchase bags, neckerchief, necklace and other items … these items will increase yourself, attract more attentions for you … which may increase … [your] total personality.' (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

III – Demand-driven

Apart from mental satisfaction, several participants mentioned that fast fashion products were designed and promoted under the target consumer requirement, to satisfy not only the essential demand for garments, but also requirements for special occasions. Therefore, the necessity and effectiveness of fast fashion products have been extended and strengthened. The following transcript part can reveal this:

"For fast fashion brands, I always buy some fashionable, trendy items from them, such as products with leopard prints, sequins. For example, I need a special clothing for an activity, and I don't want to spend too much money for it, so I can find … [fitting] clothing from fast fashion brands, [they are] really convenient." (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

IV – Affordable

Another element considered by the majority of informants within the customer perceived value, is the price of fast fashion products that are affordable for consumers. As an essential life requirement, fast fashion consumption has been significantly influenced by price. So the affordable price of fast fashion products has been regarded as a main attraction for the targeted consumers and has become a significant competing factor. This can be realised in the transcript part

below:

"Fast fashion or high street fashion for me, I think it's we are fashion clothes on sold at affordable prices, where people you know can afford to buy what they need at any particular time or season of the year. That's for high street fashion means to me, affordable prices, where you can get things like cheaper rate." (Focus Group 1, Participant 1)

V – Convenience

Additionally, the majority of informants stated that fast fashion was associated with convenience, which concentrated on the various shopping channels and quick shopping speed. When talking about convenience in fast fashion, most participants indicated that fast fashion products could be purchased from various channels conveniently, such as high street (the most popular location to access fast fashion stores), supermarket, and online. In the meantime, a few interviewees also claimed that shopping for fast fashion products is speedy, so shortening the shopping time and simplifying the shopping process. As can be revealed in the following transcript:

'I generally understand it's what most people tend to shop for, so it's like very trendy, like it's what in like most of our common shopping store, … [you] can get [it] as quick as possible.' (Individual Interview, Participant 5)

VI – Impulsive purchasing

Furthermore, several participants also identified that fast fashion companies intend to encourage consumers to shop for their products frequently, even pursuing them for prospective impulse purchasing through the acceleration of shopping speed. For example, one interviewee stated:

'A fast fashion, mm-hmm, I would say it's like clothes made on demand, for like

in trend things, like low cost prices and it's like trying to get people to buy on impulse, buy clothes that they might not need, particularly or and it's not so much about the quality.' (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

5.1.4. Criticisms of Short Product Usage, Perceived Design Imitation and Unsustainable Behaviour

This research has discussed fast fashion not only from the attractive sides, but also criticised for its shortage aspect. When participants criticised fast fashion, the topics mainly concentrated on three aspects (shown in Figure 5.5), including the short usage of fast fashion products, the perceived design imitation problems, and unsustainable corporate behaviours. All these three codes have been mentioned by a large number of informants, which provides guidance for fast fashion companies to recognise the potential, improving areas to better maintain and even attract more target consumers.
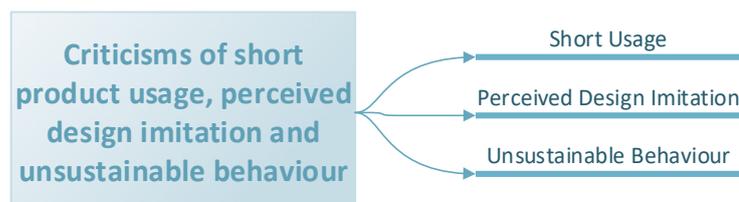
Figure 5.5 Criticisms of Short Product Usage, Perceived Design Imitation and Unsustainable Behaviour.

I – Short Usage

When considering the disadvantages of fast fashion, short usage is the main feature mentioned by almost all participants. Generally, short usage has been explained from three directions, the limited usage time of fast fashion products, the quality of fast fashion products being perceived as inferior, and the short

lifecycles of fast fashion products. Specifically, non-durable and poor quality has been discussed by the majority of participants simultaneously. Meanwhile, short usage can also be ascribed to the quick updating of fast fashion products, so consumers will renew their wardrobe constantly, resulting in the usage of fast fashion products being shortened. For example, one interviewee stated:

"You know, like when you buy a trousers, and then you wear twice, and then you think the quality is so bad, [so you] just throw it away instead of you wash[ing] it and then reuse it." (Focus Group 3, Participant 3)

II – Perceived Design Imitation

Furthermore, several informants indicated the shortcoming of fast fashion brands that always copy designs from high-end fashion brands, lacking independent innovation. Although similar designs may attract consumers who hope to wear luxury fashion at a low price, but will cause a brand crisis for the fast fashion companies, even damaging the brand image. This can be revealed below:

"So because they just made it from, you know they try to copy I think, sometimes I have seen something that's a very good brand. For example a bag with a good brand, and you can see the cheap one exactly the same no differences exactly, you know in my country it happened a lot." (Individual Interview, Participant 10)

III – Unsustainable Behaviour

Furthermore, the unsustainable behaviour within fast fashion companies is also a key factor discussed by participants from various aspects, which can be regarded as a major criticism in fast fashion. The discussed aspects generally can be categorised into two processes, the production process of fast fashion products is unsustainable, and the disposing process of fast fashion products is non-eco-friendly. Within the production process, fast fashion companies have

been blamed for their unsustainable production behaviour, especially products mainly manufactured in sweatshops in developing countries, to reduce the production cost, but causing unfair trade and carbon emission problems. Correspondingly, several participants mentioned that the destination of fast fashion products is disposing or incineration, due to the bad quality of products and overproduction in the manufacturing process, which also bring negative aspects to the sector's sustainability. This has been shown in the excerpt below:

'What I see as if, they're selling it with rails rails rails of the same item, which has been made in sweatshops of stuff, that's what I'd characterize is like fast fashion. Also, I think fast fashion companies mis-defined fair trade, although they always calling for fair trade…one product has to be fair trading, the rest doesn't.' (Individual Interview, Participant 6)

5.2. Attractions of Shopping for Fast Fashion Products

In order to explore the attractions of fast fashion products from the consumer perspective, participants had been inquired about why they intended to shop for fast fashion products. Accordingly, the responses can be categorised into three aspects: the product, the shopping experience, and consumer expectation. The findings can be described as: (I) cost-effective well-designed fashionable products in a limited time; (II) pleasurable shopping experience; (III) satisfying consumer expectation of fast fashion products. This is depicted in Figure 5.6. In particular, theme (I) has been demonstrated from the product perspective, while themes (II) and (III) have been summarised as the mental attraction and shopping experience attraction.
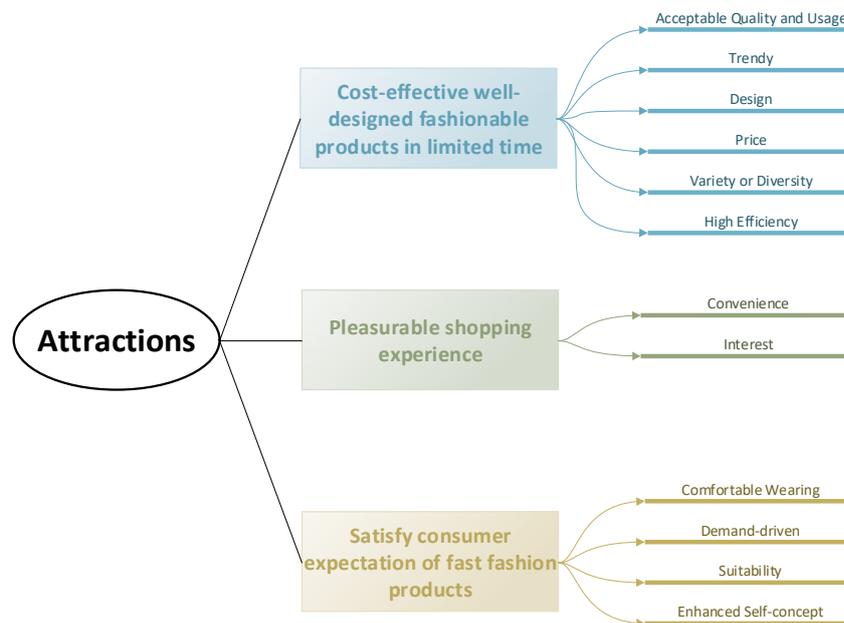
Figure 5.6 Findings for Attractions of Shopping for Fast Fashion Products.

5.2.1. Cost-Effective Well-Designed Fashionable Products in Limited Time

As the main attraction of shopping for fast fashion, fast fashion products have been considered the most direct way and identified by most participants. The product attraction has been presented from three aspects, the performance of products, the price of products, and the timeliness of obtaining products. In particular, the performance of products has been reflected in usage, trendy, design, and variety diversity. Meanwhile, the timeliness of obtaining products has been directed to high efficiency. Therefore, these six product features will be discussed and displayed in the following content separately according to the sequence shown in Figure 5.7.
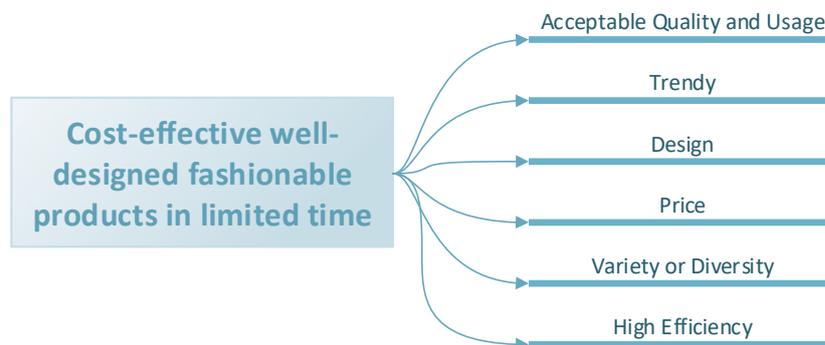
Figure 5.7 Get Various Cost-Effective Well-Designed Fashionable Products in Limited Time.

I – Acceptable Quality and Usage

When participants mentioned the performance of the fast fashion product, quality and usage were the two core detailed factors that initially came into consumers' minds, which several participants supported. Compared with usage, the quality of fast fashion products attracted more attention and has been identified by many

informants in this research. However, differentiated from the criticism of poor quality in the last section, consumers mentioned the quality could be regarded as an attraction if the quality is acceptable instead of poor. In addition to the bonus of fashionable design, fast fashion products can be more attractive. The following transcript can reflect this:

"Also they are also quite designed fashionable, because for me the design of the products is really important … The quality is also secondly important for me, but what I realized the comparing quality between them." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

II – Trendy

For the category of fashionable design, the fashion factor places a significant position in attracting consumers' attention. Also, as a type of fashion, fast fashion has been claimed by its fashion characteristic, which means its design should catch the latest fashion in an agile manner. Hence, most participants expressed that trendy is a core point of attraction in fast fashion products. As the participant mentioned:

"Also, clothes in [fast fashion] are really trendy, follow the fashion trends tightly." (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

III – Design

As another part of the fashionable design aspect, the keyword design is a popular code under this interview question, which has been pointed out by most participants as the main benefit of fast fashion products. When discussing the design of fast fashion products, the features such as style and colour have been mentioned mainly by participants. Moreover, several informants stated that they were interested in designing high-end fashion products, but were prevented by

the high price. Therefore, fast fashion provided an excellent replacement item at an affordable price, which satisfied consumer requirements. The following transcript can express the design:

"I mean like price, style and colours something like that, but for me is style. Seriously, if I see the colour and style that I like, I'm gonna try it, the price can come later. If it's like 'wow', like 'wow' elements, it's gonna be like whatever price I'm gonna buy it. But it was just like okay and I will consider the price, if it like cheap, I'm gonna buy it, if it's not cheap, I wouldn't buy it." (Focus Group 1, Participant 3)

IV – Price

Within this theme, the price is the most significant code mentioned by nearly all participants in this interview question. Most of the answers focused on the low price of fast fashion products, which even made the price lower by frequently providing more sales products. While others expressed that fast fashion products in affordable, and pricing is reasonable. Consequently, the low price can be considered the most attractive factor of fast fashion products, which has been shown below:

"Price. So I'm not looking for too expensive, that's why I go there." (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

V – Variety or Diversity

The variety or diversity has been mentioned by several participants as an attractive characteristic of fast fashion products. Correspondingly, consumers can shop for multiple fashion products within one store. In other words, different styles can be explored under one specific product type. Accordingly, shopping

convenience has increased, enhancing the attraction of fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. In the following content, this element can be reflected:

"I can find most suitable fashion style and according to my style, which is very sweet [they are] not only offering like one type of like fashion designs of cloths, they are offering [different] kinds... For example, even the shape, according to your shape, body shape, like a little bit like a chubby people, or a little bit fat, or a little bit slim, or very normal people, you can find [products]... which look really nice." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

VI – High Efficiency

The last code demonstrated under this theme is high efficiency, including the short lead-time, and high product item update speed. Several participants stated that the fast fashion product could be promoted to the market in a limited time; thus the lead-time has been shortened from the fashionable factor to the final product. Also, one interviewee mentioned that the update speed of fast fashion products is quicker than other types of fashion product, so consumers can catch fashion trends promptly through shopping for fast fashion products. This can be shown below:

'Whatever style [is] popular recently, it will launch products in this style very quickly, I think this attract me so much.' (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

5.2.2. Pleasurable Shopping Experience

Furthermore, the shopping experience has also been considered a series of attributes when consumers shop for fast fashion products. The shopping experience has always been evaluated from two aspects; convenience and

interest, which is shown in Figure 5.8.

Figure 5.8 Pleasured Shopping Experience.

I – Convenience

When identifying the quality of the shopping experience, convenience has been regarded as the significant element, mentioned by the majority of participants under this interview question. This was reflected by the store location, reduced shopping procedures, and multiple shopping approaches. In particular, the store location attracted more attention than the rest two features, which has been stressed by the central part of participants under the discussion of convenience. Accordingly, "easy to access and obtain" is a significant criterion for consumers to evaluate the attractiveness of fast fashion products. For example, one interviewee stated:

"In fact they're so available, so like any city you go to you probably find them and if I think like oh I need something I know I can get it that day. I don't have to wait too long and like they're comfortable so and they don't fall apart that is the main thing." (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

II – Interest

Additionally, several participants also mentioned that shopping for fast fashion products could be considered as a personal hobby or even a social aspect of their life so that shopping will be conducted regularly. The following transcript can represent that:

'Well, I enjoy shopping, so I try to like go with my friends and family, so we'd like to go to Trafford Centre, or to the town , and we'll just like we look at things. I wouldn't necessarily buy anything, but like I'll make sure like I've done that like every few weeks. Even if you don't buy anything, while my cousin to eat, so it's like a social thing for me.' (Individual Interview, Participant 11)

5.2.3. Satisfying Consumer Expectation of Fast Fashion Products

Furthermore, participants also mentioned the attraction of the expectation fulfilment from the fast fashion product, through both physical and mental aspects. The expectation can be detailed from four aspects: comfortable wear, demand-driven, suitability, and enhanced self-concept (shown in Figure 5.9). In particular, comfortable wear and demand-driven has been categorised as the physical requirements of fast fashion products, whilst suitability and self-concept enhancement have been categorised as the mental requirement area.
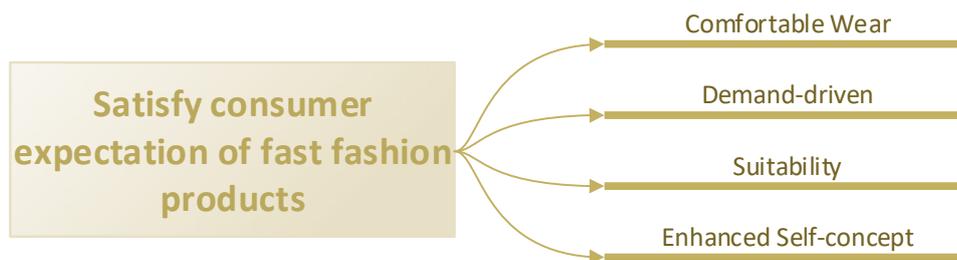
Figure 5.9 Satisfying Consumer Expectation of Fast Fashion Products.

I – Comfortable Wear

When discussing the expectation of fast fashion products, several participants in this research mentioned the significance of comfortable wear, which can partly reflect the product's quality and design. Meanwhile, comfort has been regarded

as the essential requirement of wearing garments, which can be considered a major attraction of fast fashion products and a criterion for product purchasing. As interviewees stated:

"Comfortable, good quality, as I mentioned above." (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

II – Demand-driven

Many informants stated that fast fashion products are constantly being designed and promoted according to the consumer requirement, involving the essential requirement such as keeping warm and special requirements such as satisfying unusual dressing codes or trying for trendy designs. As the participant stated:

"Yes, like if I need to go to some former dinner, and I need to wear formal dress." (Focus Group 3, Participant 2)

III – Suitability

From the mental requirement, suitability has been demonstrated by most of the participants in this question, related to two parts in detail. On one side, consumers evaluate the suitability of fast fashion products through elements like design, colour or even price. On the other side, consumers will decide whether the product is suitable for their identity or occupation instead of mismatching with the dressing code. One interviewee stated:

"If I need something very quickly, I would rather go to … it will last me a long time, but they're mostly price. And also it's more for young people, I think their clothes is very young and fresh, is not so adult." (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

IV - Enhanced Self-concept

Informants indicated that fast fashion could be used to enhance their self-concept. The majority of informants stressed that personality and confidence could be

represented and even enhanced through their appearances. Meanwhile, it has been revealed that self-concept can be discovered and enhanced during the shopping process for fast fashion products, which even increases the shopping pleasure from the consumer's point of view. For example:

"For example in parties, it's very important to build your own characteristics with your own clothes, with your own style, it's very important. Especially when you for example go on a date, it's very important to give your first impression very good and strong." (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

5.3. The Brand Effect on Fast Fashion Consumption

In order to explore the significance of brand when consumers shop for a fast fashion product, participants were asked about their shopping preferences and the driving elements of fast fashion purchasing under this interview question. The participants can be divided into two sides, brand-oriented and product-oriented, as shown in Figure 5.10. The result shows that most participants have certain preferred brands when shopping for fast fashion products. Moreover, the rest of the participants showed their motivation as being product-driven instead of brand. In the following content, detailed reasons will be presented.
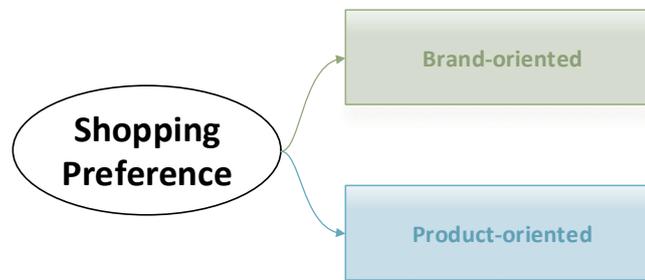
Figure 5.10 Findings of Brand Effect on Fast Fashion Consumption.

5.3.1. Brand-oriented

According to responses, about two-thirds of participants have indicated that certain fast fashion brands will be considered when shopping for fast fashion products. Moreover, the related reasons behind this choice can be summarised from two aspects, quick shopping and requirements satisfaction. Some participants mentioned that shopping for certain favourite brands can save shopping time, and quickly find fitted items. Additionally, the positioning of some fast fashion brands can meet the requirement from the consumer perspective, not only in the budget aspect, but also from the product itself, such as design, quality,

and fit. This is respected in the following data:

'Yeah, I'm trying to get better about doing that, but I think especially as like a university student, and under a budget, it's a bit hard to find both the money and the time to like research brands, so I just go to my favourite brands and shopping.' (Individual Interview, Participant 5)

5.3.2. Product-oriented

The rest of the participants showed their preference for product-oriented when shopping for fast fashion products, occupying approximately one-third of the participants. This shopping preference can be ascribed to shopping behaviour and product attractiveness. As a few informants stressed that they always purchase fast fashion products from second-hand shops, the brand will be ignored but rather focus on the product itself. Furthermore, several interviewees mentioned that they concentrated more on style, design, and quality when they purchased fast fashion products. The transcript below stated:

'Not really. I don't really tend like myself look for different for certain brands. I usually shop like if it depends what I'm looking for. I'm looking to buy if it's like something practical that go to like a practical shop for that or maybe I look for like things that say sustainable but I think that doesn't always mean that it's not fast fashion. But yeah not any certain brands. Yeah I prefer to choose the product initially, yeah I don't really care about the brand, it's more about the product itself.' (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

5.4. Conclusion

The findings in chapter 5.1 demonstrate a basic understanding of fast fashion from the consumer perspective, while chapter 5.2 provides supplements for the attraction of fast fashion products. Meanwhile, the significance of brand to the fast fashion sector has been demonstrated in chapter 5.3. Based on the research findings in this chapter, the consumer perceived definition of fast fashion can be generated, shown in discussion chapter 8.1.

Chapter 6 Findings in Sustainability

6.1. The Sustainability Claims of Fast Fashion Brands

According to the responses on whether the fast fashion brand is non-sustainable, nearly all participants indicated that the fast fashion brands could be categorised as un-ecological-friendly brands. The reason why fast fashion brands have been considered unsustainable has also been reflected by participants, which will be demonstrated in the following content. Accordingly, the reasons can be categorised into two dimensions: experiential and informational. The experiential reasons can be regarded as the reason obtained from the shopping and utilisation of the products, such as the unsustainable performance of fast fashion products, and the unsustainable producing process of fast fashion products. The informational reasons can be received from the information provided by the fast fashion companies and social media, including the production, corporate social responsibility, and the branding of fast fashion brands (Figure 6.1).
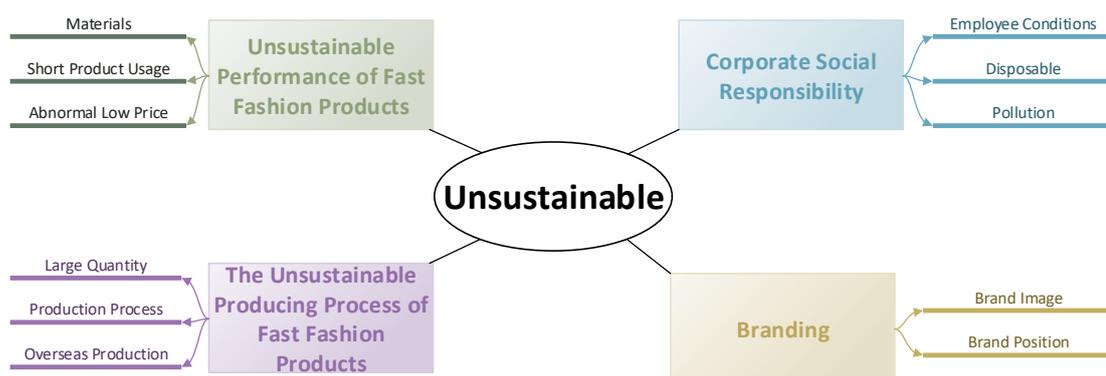
Figure 6.1 Findings of the Sustainability Claims of Fast Fashion Brands.

6.1.1. Unsustainable Performance of Fast Fashion Products

As an effective way for consumers to recognise the brand, fast fashion products can be regarded as the most direct way. Considering the unsustainable features of fast fashion products, three specific elements have been presented by the majority of participants (Figure 6.2), including materials, short product usage, and the low price of fast fashion products. These elements have been regarded from the shopping and the utilising process of fast fashion products, and these claims were obtained from multiple ways, such as personal experience and information from public platforms.

Figure 6.2 Unsustainable Performance of Fast Fashion Products.

I – Materials

When mentioned about fast fashion products, the information of materials with the product can be easily obtained from touching or reading the label, also previous experience. The unsustainable factor of materials has been discussed extensively by a large number of participants through several subdivided directions, such as the origin, the production, types, and sustainable attribute. From the origin aspect, materials have been identified by a few participants, such as water usage and chemical usage during the planting process. Towards the production process, the materials may be regarded as unsustainable respective of fast fashion product, if the employee conditions have not been proven.

Moreover, the types of materials have been considered as the criterion for sustainability feature of fast fashion products based on responses from several participants; thus, degradable and recyclable materials possessed higher sustainability levels. This is also linked with the lack of information delivery, since consumers stressed that they had limited information on materials, thus making it difficult to determine which material is sustainable. For instance, one interviewee commented:

"I mean as these manufacturers, like I said before, it's the resourcing problem. So where do the resources come from, how much water is being used, for example to grow the cotton, or any other plants to make the fabric." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

II – Short Product Usage

Another criticism of fast fashion products is short product usage, which has also been demonstrated by many participants under this interview question. To be subdivided, two detailed aspects can be revealed within the short usage element, including quick changing, and bad quality. These two sub-elements interact with each other. Consumers mentioned that fast fashion products could not be used for a long period, and the reason behind this phenomenon is that the quality of fast fashion products is bad. Meanwhile, another reason for limited usage can be attributed to the quickly updating speed of fast fashion products; thus, consumers will unconsciously purchase more products according to the various diversity of fashionable products provided in a limited time. Therefore, the short usage of the product will lead to an increased usage of energy and materials during the production of fast fashion products, thus negatively influencing the environment and sustainability. Another unsustainable issue will be taken based on the short usage, since the treatment of unwanted fast fashion products from the consumer

perspective can bring recycling and reusing problems. As participants commented:

"They design things to not last long, so you'll replace them for something that's trendy." (Individual Interview, Participant 5)

III – Abnormal Low Price

Based on the definition of fast fashion, it can be realised that the low price is the main characteristic of fast fashion products, attracting consumers' attention. However, several participants indicated that the low price of fast fashion products could be attributed to a reason which can cause unsustainable problems. In particular, some participants mentioned that the pricing of some kinds of fast fashion products is relatively low, even lower than the cost of the product, which could not match the knowledge of pricing from the consumer perspective. Thus, the unreasonable price has caused worry and suspicion of the corporate social responsibility behind the fast fashion product, making consumers consider the low price obtained from exploiting employees and the environment. For example, informants argued:

"So if [a] Brand are selling a t-shirt for 2 pounds, we want to know why everybody else isn't selling a t-shirt for 2 pounds. When like I said, the fact of the matter is the people or making that a t-shirt, on making any money, the people you know, who are growing the cotton aren't making any money whatever, and we should be more aware of kind of like that kind of thing." (Individual Interview, Participant 12)

6.1.2. The Unsustainable Producing Process of Fast Fashion Products

Based on the product, the production of fast fashion products is another significant theme that caused the unsustainable recognition of fast fashion brands from the consumer perspective, which many participants have mentioned. These three detailed subdivisions have been stated by responses (Figure 6.3), including the output aspect, the producing process, and the production aboard. In particular, the output has been criticised for the large quantity, which will negatively impact sustainability. In the following content, these three aspects will be described in detail.

The Unsustainable Producing Process of Fast Fashion Products

- Large Quantity
- Production Process
- Overseas Production
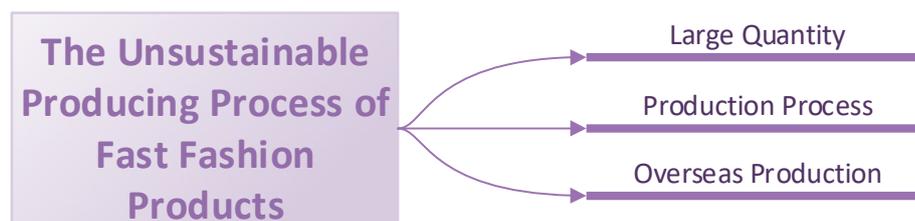
Figure 6.3 The Unsustainable Producing Process of Fast Fashion Products.

I – Large Quantity

As the most popular element with the production, large quantity has been mentioned by more than two-thirds of participants under this interview question. It has been discussed from four aspects: overproducing, huge production, over materials consumption, and extensive stock. These all caused the waste of energy and resources, thus providing a negative effect on sustainability. In particular, overproducing is the core element discussed by most of the responses, leading to excess materials consumption. Correspondingly, the treatment of superfluous stock will cause unsustainable behaviour, especially the polluting

environmental problem stressed by some participants. This is seen in the following data:

"I think they're using lots of resources, and that's gonna run out. I think that they have big big warehouses and produce lots of emissions as well. And then there's all this wasted clothes that just gets thrown out. You don't think it's sustainable." (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

II – Production Process

Moreover, the production process of fast fashion products can be considered as another element within the production, which can cause sustainable problems, had been presented by several participants. In particular, the abuse of chemicals during the production process has been especially discussed, such as using dyes, as it will cause chemical pollution to the environment, negatively impacting sustainability. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'Also the dyes on certain clothing, if they are not sustainable, the dyes can be quite harming, they can be out of quite harming chemicals.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

III – Overseas Production

Besides, some participants demonstrated that the fast fashion products manufactured in foreign countries had caused sustainable problems. It has been emphasised that overseas production will cause a higher transportation fee. Meanwhile, long-distance transport will cause more carbon footprints, which are bad for the environment and sustainability. Additionally, the fast fashion products are manufactured in foreign countries, especially the developing countries where the working conditions of employees are difficult to be guaranteed, thus the corporate social responsibility of fast fashion companies will be influenced

negatively. Based on the above two aspects, the unsustainable related claims about overseas production have been reflected. For example, one participant commented:

'I think because they often make their products like far away … things like that, transport costs, and emissions is big.' (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

6.1.3. Corporate Social Responsibility

Moreover, the conduct of corporate social responsibility by fast fashion enterprises also caused criticism of sustainability from the consumer perspective, which has been discussed by more than half of the interviewees. Specifically, corporate social responsibility has been explored from two aspects (Figure 6.4), including the conditions of employees, and sustainability. In particular, sustainability has been subdivided into pollution, which can negatively impact the environment, and the disposable treatment of unwanted fast fashion products, which can bring waste and indirect pollution to sustainability.
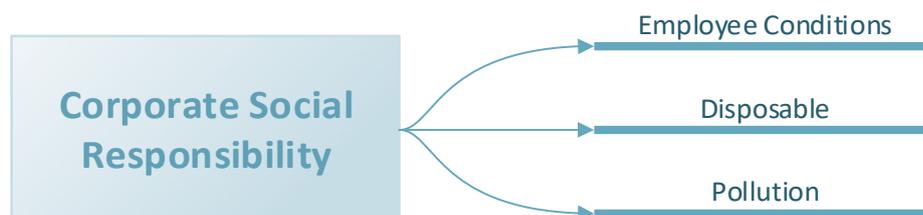
Figure 6.4 Corporate Social Responsibility.

I – Employee Conditions

When discussing corporate social responsibility, the employee condition has always been considered an important part, which has also been indicated by a

few participants under this interview question. Specifically, it has been explored from the treatment of employees, the fair wage, the working conditions, also ethics. According to the response from some participants, the working conditions and the rights of employees are difficult to guarantee, especially in the fast fashion industry, as some product suppliers are outsourced; thus, the employee conditions in this industry are a negative part of consumers' minds. Meanwhile, the negative reporting about fast fashion brands always concentrated on the employee conditions, which can be regarded as a deduced influenced element of the sustainable image within the fast fashion sectors. As a participant said:

'Then also I mean sustainability is not just about the environment in fact, obviously we're also talking employee conditions. So how are they being treated, do they get a fair wage, do they have, obviously I always think about that example when was in Bangladesh, where the building just collapsed a few years ago.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

II – Disposable

The disposable attribute can be considered an environmental claim within the fast fashion industry, which can negatively impact the sustainability image. This reflected the unsustainable treatment of unwanted fast fashion items, not recycling or reusing the product, but delivering the unwanted items to the garbage dump, and may be incinerated as a result. Thus, the incineration of fast fashion products will cause environmental pollution, which negatively affects the development of sustainability. As emphasised by the following participants:

'And then there's all this wasted clothes that just gets thrown out. You don't think it's sustainable.' (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

III – Pollution

The most discussed element about sustainability in the corporate social responsibility theme can be concentrated on pollution throughout the life-cycle of fast fashion products, which two-thirds of participants have stressed. Informants mentioned that the pollution involved multiple aspects, such as water pollution, air pollution,and chemical pollution. Air pollution has been claimed from the production process to the end of the fast fashion product, especially the overseas production will bring more emission footprint from the long-distance transportation. While the incineration of unwanted fast fashion products will also increase the negative influence on the environment, especially the air quality. Besides, several participants criticised the overuse of plastic packaging of fast fashion products, which was exacerbated along with the generalisation of online shopping; thus, the environmental quality has been deduced. Correspondingly, the universal utilisation of plastic also caused the micro-plastic problem to the environment, exacerbating ocean pollution. Therefore, the fast fashion company should solve the pollution-associated problem, in order to improve a more sustainable image. As emphasised by the following informants:

'But to just try to do online shopping, you will find a lots of plastic bags wrapping inside each other, so they are sustainable but they didn't clear from the plastic from their process yet. So they are partially, maybe markets for themselves as marketing that they are going green and things like that, but still they are using plastic.' (Individual Interview, Participant 9)

6.1.4. Branding

Within the branding aspect, two detailed elements have been stated (Figure 6.5), including the brand image and brand position demonstrated by several participants. These two elements work together to build a corporate image in

consumers' minds, thus influencing the decision-making process.

Figure 6.5 Branding.

I - Brand Image

Brand image can be considered the brand's whole impression from the consumer perspective, summarised by the customer experience, and the information from internal and external channels. Especially for fast fashion brands, one participant mentioned that the product's quality will heavily influence the brand image. Correspondingly, participants revealed a positive correlation between the brand image and the corporate sustainability level so that a good brand image can increase the sustainability attribute of fast fashion brands. As one participant argued:

'*It depends on the brand itself. I don't remember if the [Fast Fashion Brand A] has high quality, I don't believe [Fast Fashion Brand A] was high quality, but as [Fast Fashion Brand B] itself, the products of [Fast Fashion Brand B] is good quality.*' (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

II - Brand Position

The brand consciousness of fast fashion companies has been considered by a few participants as low environmental-friendly. Consumers regarded that the unsustainable behaviour of fast fashion brands can be attributed to the deficiency of sustainable awareness. Accordingly, the low eco-awareness may encourage consumers to do more impulsive shopping. Furthermore, consumers could not

get effective information about sustainability from the companies, since the eco-brand consciousness either deficient from the company perspective. A participant stated this:

'*Or if you buy this product like what I saw mainly, they did some collaboration with a famous people to attract more customers, they more focus on their profits.*' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

6.2. Understanding of Consumer Perceived Challenges of Managing Sustainable Products by Fast Fashion Companies

Based on literature and the above research investigations, sustainable fast fashion has generally been considered a significant and effective method to deliver sustainability from fast fashion companies to targeted consumers. Therefore, the interview question about the challenges of managing sustainable products from the consumer perspective needs to be explored, which is also the core research question in this study. Therefore, the shortage in managing sustainable products can be reflected in the responses. Correspondingly, consumers may be more acceptable of sustainable fast fashion products if these challenges can be overcome. Based on the responses, the challenges can be categorised into four aspects (Figure 6.6), including I) limitations of products, II) knowledge/awareness gap, III) promotional limitations, and IV) increased cost & profit loss. In particular, the theme of cost increase and profit reduction can be regarded as the internal challenge for fast fashion companies, while the other themes can be considered as the connection challenges between consumers and fast fashion companies. Although the elements have been categorised into different themes, the interactions among elements also can be found, which will be discussed in the following content.

Figure 6.6 Findings of Understanding of Consumer Perceived Challenges of Managing Sustainable Products by Fast Fashion Companies.

6.2.1. Limitations of Products

As the subject and most direct way for consumers to determine, the sustainable product itself has been suggested by more than half of the participants under this interview question when investigating potential management-related challenges. Based on the responses, two aspects have been stressed about the productive limitations (Figure 6.7), including product attractiveness and classification. In particular, attractiveness reflects the potential purchasing desire for sustainable products, whereas classification reflects the possibility for consumers to purchase conveniently.

Figure 6.7 Limitations of Products.

I - Attractiveness

As a type of fast fashion product, sustainable products should possess the core feature - fashionable, which can be regarded as the decided element of whether consumers intend to shop for the fast fashion brand, further the sustainable collection. This has been demonstrated by the majority of participants under this interview question, as the prior criterion when shopping for sustainable items. In particular, the design of sustainable items has been emphasised by many participants who claimed the design of sustainable products should be more fashionable than regular products to offset the higher price of the sustainability attribute. Meanwhile, several informants mentioned the necessity to maintain aesthetics when designing a sustainable item, as it can not only influence the sales volume of the sustainable collection, but also impact the whole brand image of fast fashion brands from the consumer perspective. Moreover, the sustainability influence of the fast fashion brands can be enhanced as well. For instance, one interviewee commented:

"Because for me, if it is like really sustainable or recycle, it must be the wearable and fashionable, it must be attracted for me." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

II - Classification

For consumers who hope to shop for sustainable products, challenges have been pointed to the difficulty in differentiation, stressed by more than half of the participants. It is challenging to distinguish sustainable products from regular products. This can be ascribed to the disordered shelf spaces, or the deficient and intangible product describing information. Therefore, consumers have difficulty accessing sustainable items in a limited time, and even difficulty in differentiating which one is sustainable. Accordingly, it has been suggested that fast fashion companies should divide a separate area for sustainable products,

and do more promotions to communicate related knowledge to consumers, to enhance the comprehension and acceptability of the sustainable collection. This is seen in the following data:

"They should do a separate area for the sustainable products … I think they should set up a separate area for sustainable products, if they hope to establish its own sustainability. For example … Similar like shopping for clothing, I can't look through to find sustainable clothes from lots lots of clothes, if I'm a sustainable consumer." (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

6.2.2. Knowledge/Awareness Gap

As the most significant connection challenge in managing sustainable products, the knowledge gap and awareness gap have been indicated by nearly all of the participants under this interview question. This partly reflected the acceptability of sustainable products from the consumer perspective and presented the deficiency of effective information between the brand and the targeted market. The knowledge and awareness gap has been detailed and presented from three aspects: knowledge gap, awareness gap and brand image. According to these four codes, the content of deficient information has been revealed.
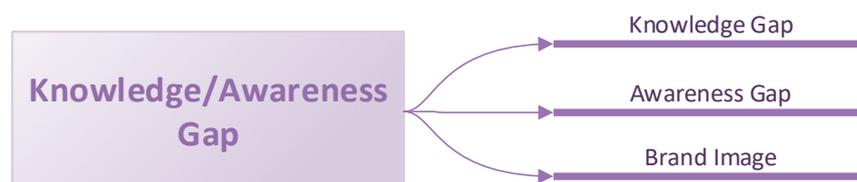
Figure 6.8 Knowledge/Awareness Gap.

I - Knowledge Gap

Due to the deficiency of sustainable knowledge, the acceptability and comprehension of sustainable products could not be the same as tegular fast fashion products, which a number of informants have discussed. According to the responses, it has been realised that the knowledge gap not only focused on the unknown of sustainable products, even the definition and associated concepts with sustainability did not show clearly in consumers' minds. However, the most crucial gap is the unbalance between the desire for a sustainable explanation of sustainable products from the consumer perspective and the deficiency of information on sustainable products from the company perspective. This will enhance the distrust between these two subjects, and even influence the whole brand image of the fast fashion brand. Therefore, consumers have suggested that fast fashion companies should communicate more explanatory and educational information about sustainability to the targeted market through effective channels, such as advertisements. For example, one participant commented:

'I think they should tell us information about why they are being sustainable, not all the people know what is sustainability, and so what the environment in the climate is changing so what. … So I think this kind of analysis would make me, it would be easier for me to make the decision, to sacrifice this amount of price for a sustainable product or not.' (Individual Interview, Participant 9)

II - Awareness Gap

The awareness gap can be explored from two aspects, the employee perspective, and the consumer perspective. If the knowledge gap is regarded as a deficiency of content, the awareness gap can be considered the deficiency of guidance in shopping for sustainable products. In particular, the consumer awareness gap can rarely attract consumers to shop for sustainable products, as consumers are

challenged to realise the importance and possibility of realising sustainability through purchasing sustainable fast fashion products. Meanwhile, employee perspective awareness also needs to be filled, since employees state a communication position between consumers and products, which can help consumers make the decision quickly and effectively. As a participant said:

"I don't think everyone is asking this is recycle or sustainable that what I am wearing, like this, because everything is changing so quick, the people just want to focus on what I'm wearing at that moment." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

III – Brand Image

Furthermore, the original brand image will also influence the promotion and acceptability of sustainable fast fashion products, which one interviewee has mentioned. The brand image of the fast fashion brand is unsustainable in consumers' minds, which is established by unsustainable cooperative behaviour. Thus, consumers may feel suspicious about the reality of the sustainability attribute of sustainable fast fashion products. For example, one participant commented:

"And maybe included in fast fashion, would be the employees, so maybe they aren't really being legal with their employees at the minute. You know like Brand A, you hear about sweatshops in China and places like that." (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

6.2.3. Promotional Limitations

As the communication channels between fast fashion companies and consumers, the limitations in promotions were discussed by more than half participants, which emphasised the choice of promoting methods. Accordingly, two aspects have

been identified (Figure 6.9): promotion and internationalization.

Figure 6.9 Promotional Limitations.

I – Promotion

Specifically to the promotion, two approaches have been enhanced by informants, including advertisement, and social media. Through the effective delivery channels, the required information can be communicated to consumers efficiently, which can benefit the acceptability of sustainable fast fashion products. In particular, the significance of online and modern approaches has been concentrated, especially on the social media platform that can bring a wider influence, since fast fashion products consumers mainly rely on this channel. As one participant argued:

"Advertisement. For example when I see a poster on bus station or bus stop that would be helpful. Or when I see a YouTube, YouTube advertisement it helps, because it comes to my life, I have to see it, I don't have any option to not see it. And slowly and gradually, my thinking about buying the product would be different." (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

II – Internationalization

As another challenge in promotion, internationalization has been presented by two interviewees under this interview question, especially for a global fast fashion company. The differentiation in promoting sustainable products in different countries may cause a confused feeling from the consumer perspective.

Moreover, consumers may feel suspicious about the sustainability attribute of the sustainable collection, further increasing the difficulty in promoting sustainable products. For example:

"And also, if it is the global operations, I think what hinders them as well is that it is very difficult to, if you put a fast fashion around for years and years for decades, to then implement that change is going to take you a long time." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

6.2.4. Increased Cost & Profit Lost

When discussing the challenges in the management of sustainable products, the financial challenge has been identified by the majority of participants, including investment, market share loss, cost increase, and post-purchase tracking cost (Figure 6.10). In particular, the investment element mainly focused on the preliminary cost for sustainable products, whereas the element cost increase regarded to the production process and supply chain process of sustainable products.

Figure 6.10 Increased Cost & Profit Lost.

I – Investment

According to the understanding and realisation of sustainable products, many participants identified that fast fashion companies had spent lots of money on technological innovation and the research and development input to increase the sustainability attribute of their products. This not only focused on the innovation of materials, but also on the improvement of sustainable production, which truly benefit the environment, instead of greenwashing. This was clearly stated by participants:

"Because you need to do the research and the development, you need to make lots of investments. That's why maybe companies is a little bit hesitating, or I don't know, step back from the producing these kinds of products. Because you need to make lots of investments, you need to spend a lot of money." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

II –Market Share Lost

Significantly, the core challenge for fast fashion companies when they promote sustainable products is the potential of losing market share, which has been stressed by the majority of consumers. According to the general realisation, the cost of sustainable products is higher than regular products; meanwhile, the price of the sustainable product can be placed a little bit higher, but should state in a reasonable range. Whereas consumers will refuse to shop for fast fashion products if the price is relatively high. Therefore, the profit of sustainable products will decrease, which may cause economic problems for the companies. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

"I think they ask out that they're going to lose a profit, because the turnover will be slower, and customers might not be willing to pay more, so they scared that they're gonna loss profit and customers, and that they're gonna lose market share

basically." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

III – Cost Increase

Except for the investment of innovation input, the production cost of sustainable products is also higher than normal products, which has been stated by a few participants. Accordingly, the sourcing of materials within the sustainable products has increased; meanwhile, the cost of transportation also increased, such as fast fashion companies will produce products in local factories or using electric vehicles to transport the items, which all increased the full cost of sustainable items. Correspondingly, the fast fashion brand may lose its market comparison. In this respect, participants said:

"All the challenges I think is really sourcing, so it's not just about kind of like sourcing fabric, and sourcing factories where kind of like the workers are paid. It's properly about having a transparent supply chain from one end to the other, and even then, kind of like you know, looking at how their products being disposed of afterwards." (Individual Interview, Participant 12)

IV – Post-purchase Product Tracking

Additionally, as another important sustainability process, recycling utilised products is also important for the fast fashion brand to realise sustainability; thus, another part of investment has been presented. This will further increase the cost of sustainable products and weaken the market comparison simultaneously. This can be seen clearly in the following data:

'The company also, the government also support them, in terms of research and development, and how can be recyclable after using this cloth.' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

6.3. Sustainable Activities Undertaken by Fast Fashion Companies and Corresponded Evaluations

As the worldwide second polluted industry, fast fashion enterprises have taken several measures, in order to reform their unsustainable image and improve their sustainable attribute simultaneously. Therefore, participants were questioned about the awareness of sustainable associated activities that fast fashion companies undertake to explore the popularity and acceptability of adopted sustainable measures. According to the responses, around three-fourths of participants stressed that they realised sustainable activities undertaken by fast fashion companies before, and the rest stated they had either never heard of or found it difficult to determine the sustainable activities. For the known group participants, detailed activities have been discussed, which can enhance the understanding of the popularity of each activity. Moreover, all interviewees have also been queried about their willingness to attend these sustainable activities, but the responses showed a proportion of half and half between attendance and uncertainty. Therefore, in order to explore the reason behind the ratio, the evaluation of each activity has been explored, so the impact and comprehension of different activities can be displayed. Based on these, the activities and evaluation sections will be represented in detail below, shown in Figure 6.11.
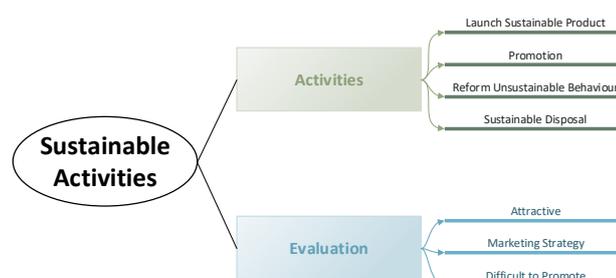
Figure 6.11 Findings of Sustainable Activities Undertaken by Fast Fashion Companies and Corresponded Evaluations.

6.3.1. Sustainable Activities

Although fast fashion companies have taken multiple measures to modify the unsustainable image, the popularity and acceptability of different measures should be explored to make corresponding modifications to increase the effect of conducted sustainable activities. Based on the responses, the realised activities can be categorised into four aspects: launch of sustainable products, promotion, unsustainable behaviour reform, and sustainable disposal, as shown in the figure below (Figure 6.12).
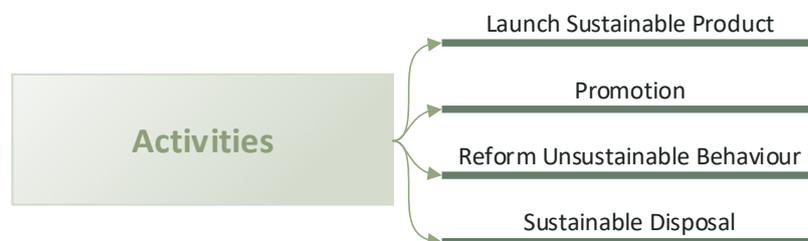
Figure 6.12 Sustainable Activities.

I – Launch Sustainable Product

As the initial approach for consumers to recognise the brand, fast fashion products can be considered the most direct way for consumers to realise the information that fast fashion companies deliver. Accordingly, sustainable fast fashion products have been created and promoted to the market, in order to communicate the effort to increase sustainability undertaken by fast fashion companies. Based on the responses, the measure of designing sustainable products has been demonstrated by the majority of participants, involving sustainable collections, and fast fashion products manufactured with sustainable materials. Many interviewees have stressed that fast fashion brands have

launched a sustainable collection of products made from sustainable materials, even recycled materials, which attract targeted consumers' attention. Moreover, it has been identified by several participants that currently, some fast fashion brands promote products made with sustainable or organic materials, which benefit the environment and also sustainability. For example:

"I saw [fast fashion], the collection or they have a collection, that's they have clothes that are sustainable and more sustainable." (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

II – Promotion

In order to make more consumers realise and accept sustainable fast fashion products, fast fashion companies have taken several promoting methods, which also benefit the reform of sustainable image. According to the responses, two promotion methods have been presented by a few participants, including the advertisement, and email. Specific to the advertisement, it has been reflected that fast fashion companies generally communicate sustainability-related information to consumers and promote sustainable products through this method, which has also been realised with the support of social media platforms that can deliver information effectively and conveniently. Correspondingly, two participants mentioned that fast fashion companies always promote sustainable information through newsletter emails, especially the instruction on the sustainable product provided by email, which can guide consumers on utilising the sustainable item to maximize the sustainable attribute. As one participant argued:

'Yes, I received an email, it wasn't an event, but it was like a recommendation for using the product. I don't know from whom I received it, but I think it was like a newsletter email.' (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

III – Reform Unsustainable Behaviour

Except for the direct way for consumers to recognise the conduct that fast fashion undertakes, consumers also need to make the decision based on the operating behaviour from the company perspective; thus, fast fashion enterprises need to modify the unsustainable behaviour throughout the whole business process. Several informants have presented two subdivided aspects, including sustainable production and reducing the utilisation of paper and plastic. In particular, the sustainable production process can be regarded as more environmentally friendly manufacturing, such as less water or energy usage, even bringing less negative environmental influence. Furthermore, some fast fashion companies intend to build a more sustainable image by rejecting animal tests. It has also been emphasised that paper and plastic usage need to be deduced, especially for the packaging aspect. This is seen in the following data:

'They don't include packaging, labels anymore. So I think that's kind of people can't be bothered to send the clothes back, so that's not good on their part, but they're making the consumer keep the clothes … So it kind of make means less is made, I think by reducing, they're reducing the paper as well.' (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

IV – Sustainable Disposal

Fast fashion products have always been criticised for unsustainable treatment of unwanted clothes, which can be regarded as a significant part of unsustainable representative. Thus, several measures have been undertaken by fast fashion companies in order to guide consumers to deal with unwanted clothes sustainably. Most consumers indicated that they have ever known several fast fashion companies conducted the old cloth recycling activities, giving the worn item a second life. So the material of the recycled items can be abstracted and then used

in the production of future sustainable fashion products. Therefore, a sustainable circle can be established, where materials can be utilised several times. Besides, one participant mentioned that the cloth swapping activity attracted interest and attention, which can help build a sustainable image and enhance brand loyalty from the consumer perspective. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'I don't remember clearly because I've seen them quite some time ago, it's like recycling things from advertisement. I've seen it it's about that, and also I've seen it in the shop itself I see but I'm not sure which brand I think it's Brand A? I remember they recycle the clothes they asked for donation if you do not want the clothes anymore.' (Individual Interview, Participant 15)

6.3.2. Evaluation of Sustainable Activities

Since the ratio of sustainable attendance is half-and-half, it is necessary to explore the evaluation of sustainable activities, in order to improve the attending ratio. On the basis of these detailed activities above, participants stated their evaluation of these sustainable conducts, which can reflect the effectiveness and potential modifications to the fast fashion sectors. In particular, the evaluation can be categorised into three aspects (Figure 6.13), including attractive, marketing strategy, and difficult to promote. Specifically, the attractive and marketing strategy can be regarded as the attitude to sustainable activities; meanwhile, the difficulty of promoting can be considered a suggestion and improvement point for fast fashion companies.
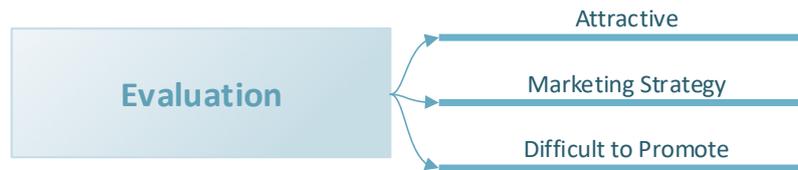
Figure 6.13 Evaluation of Sustainable Activities.

I – Attractive

According to the responses, about one-third of participants demonstrated that the sustainable activities undertaken by fast fashion companies are attractive, thus expecting to participate in them. Attractiveness can be divided into two types: sustainability attractive and activity attractive. For the sustainability attractive, several participants mentioned that sustainable activities could help consumers realise sustainability in their daily lives, especially through the gradually increasing sustainable awareness from the consumer perspective. Moreover, a few participants stressed that sustainable activities attracted more attention, especially the invitation of sustainable products by fast fashion companies. Correspondingly, consumers stated that more sustainability-related knowledge could be obtained from the activities; while sustainable awareness can be enhanced simultaneously. Therefore, sustainable activities can be regarded as an effective way to achieve sustainability. For example, interviewees argued:

"I would like to like research about it, but I don't know how involved, I would actually get like physically going to an event or something, I don't know if I would do that, but I definitely I interested in it as like a topic." (Individual Interview, Participant 5)

II – Marketing Strategy

Several interviewees considered sustainable activities as marketing strategies undertaken by fast fashion companies, in order to realise sustainability. Sustainable activities have been regarded as the marketing strategy, especially the conduct to promote sustainability awareness to the market, and reform the unsustainable brand image simultaneously. In particular, advertisement is the most conscious way recognised from this interview question, promoting the sustainable product and delivering sustainability-related knowledge to consumers. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

"And then it's quite interesting, because like I said those kind of brands they'll be advertising a lot more about the sustainability factor, whereas companies unknown, or people think are sustainable." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

III – Difficult to Promote

As the last code realised from this theme, the difficulty of promoting had reflected the obstacles when fast fashion companies undertook sustainable activities. This is significant for fast fashion sectors to explore, if they hope to effectively deliver sustainable information to consumers and establish a sustainable image. Based on the responses, four elements can be investigated: lack of information, less cognition, authenticity, and cultural limitation. In particular, the problem of the deficiency of information and related knowledge has been identified by more than half of the participants, which can be considered as the most serious problem in the conduct of sustainable activities. Meanwhile, consumers indicated that the authenticity of the sustainable activities could not be proved, which also can be ascribed to the lack of information. Therefore, the importance of effective informational delivery has been emphasised in this question, in order to realise sustainability. As emphasised by the following informants:

"And I saw something in Brand A once, about their use of water and dyes, but I

have never kind of received anything via email, or you know physically -- from a

brand saying this is what we're doing to make a difference." (Individual Interview,

Participant 12)

6.4. Distinctions between Sustainable and Unsustainable Fast Fashion Products

As the most direct and familiar sustainable activity, lots of fast fashion brands have launched sustainable fast fashion products to satisfy consumers' sustainability requirements within the shopping process. Therefore, a series of interview questions about sustainable fast fashion products have been queried by the participants. Based on the responses, nearly all participants stressed the expectation of purchasing sustainable fast fashion products. Correspondingly, it is necessary to explore the distinguishing factors for differentiating regular and sustainable fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. According to the responses, the distinguishing factors can be categorised into three aspects (Figure 6.14), including the performance of products, the shopping process, and the evaluation of the fast fashion brand. In particular, the productive performance and the shopping process can be regarded as the active method to obtain related knowledge and information, to determine which fast fashion product is sustainable. Whereas the evaluation can be considered as the side and auxiliary approach that delivers sustainable associated information by fast fashion companies or public platforms. From other categorising dimensions, the performance and evaluation theme can be considered as the content that consumers require for sustainable determination, and the shopping process can be regarded as the channel for consumers to obtain the required information. Otherwise, participants mentioned that the sustainable attributes of fast fashion products could be investigated effectively through the product, and the production process, which involved performance and the evaluation sectors. Furthermore, more than two-thirds of participants indicated that the differentiation between sustainable and regular products is difficult, as discussed in detail below.

Figure 6.14 Findings of Distinctions between Sustainable and Unsustainable Fast Fashion Products.

6.4.1. Performance of Products

As the most direct way to realise the brand, fast fashion products play a significant situation in delivering the required information to consumers. Correspondingly, consumers can recognise the sustainable related information through sustainable products effectively. The sustainable attributes can be explored from four aspects (Figure 6.15), including material, design, quality and usage, and price. In particular, the quality and usage have always been mentioned simultaneously, which reflects a positive correlation between these two elements.
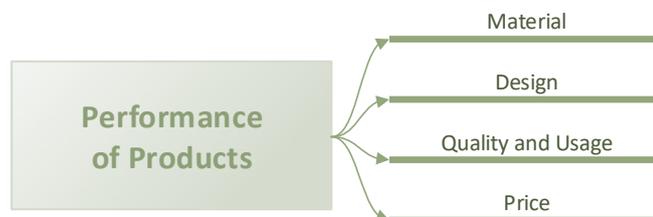
Figure 6.15 Performance of Products.

I – Material of Product

When determining the sustainable attribute of fast fashion products, materials have always been considered at the initial point, by the majority of participants, which can enhance the understanding of sustainable products. Based on the responses, consumers stated that fast fashion products made with ecological-friendly materials are attractive, benefiting them to realise sustainability. It can be regarded as sustainable items, if the product is manufactured from natural material, recycled material, or a single fabric. Consumers indicated that the product seems more sustainable, if it is made of a single fabric, since the product will be easier to recycle and reuse, which benefits sustainability, especially the environment. Moreover, the type of material also influences the decision from the consumer perspective, such as cotton being more sustainable than synthetic. This reflected that the material of sustainable products should be more natural than regular products; thus, consumers are easy to accept and believe. For instance, one interviewee commented:

"the clothes material, because environmental friendly clothes is like maybe 100 percent cotton, and then another one will have like 10 percent cotton, 20 percent spandex, 30 percent another plastic material." (Individual Interview, Participant 15)

II – Design

On top of the material, the design has also been identified by a few participants, which may be different from regular fast fashion products. However, the design of sustainable products should be proven, as consumers will refuse to purchase sustainable products from fast fashion brands if the product is unfashionable. Moreover, the colour of sustainable products has unique characteristics, always making consumers associate with the environment, such as green or blue. This

is seen in the following data:

"And maybe the colour, maybe the green, because what I saw in that collection they are launching, they all is from the greens, the tones of the greens, like shades of greens, like different kinds of green you know, like dark green, forest green. And they are using mainly blue also, the sky, which present for me, which immediately reminds me about the environments." (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

III – Quality and Usage

As another important element in the determination of sustainable products, quality has been considered by the majority of participants under this interview question. Correspondingly, the usage reflected a positive connection with the product quality, which has also been mentioned by several interviewees as the criterion to determine the sustainable attribute of fast fashion products. It has been indicated that the quality of sustainable products is higher than regular fast fashion products, which can be regarded as a criterion for consumers to determine the sustainable attribute. Furthermore, consumers stressed that a longer usage could be provided by high-quality, sustainable products, which also benefit for consumers to realise sustainability in daily life. Moreover, durable usage can bring less energy usage, and less disposal, which benefits sustainability. For example, interviewees argued:

"Just the quality, just the quality with me. Because I know that if the quality were high, I would use it for longer period, more likely have it for a longer period. And it depends on the quality." (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

IV – Price

Moreover, the price has also been considered as an important criterion for

consumers to determine the sustainable attribute, which has been demonstrated by a number of participants. The price of sustainable products is higher than regular fast fashion products; thus, consumers can infer which one is more sustainable. For example, one participant commented:

'I also heard somebody said ... [they are] very sustainable, the clothes which is made of like a some recycle clothes. Yeah, I heard that, but in the prices which is quite higher and more expensive than the other clothesline, but looks really fashionable.' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

6.4.2. Shopping Process

Except for the product itself, the difference between sustainable and regular fast fashion products can also be explored from the shopping process by most participants, which reflected approaches that consumers utilised to determine whether the fast fashion product is sustainable. Three aspects have been explored by interviewees (Figure 6.16) under the discussion of the shopping process, including label, store layout, and the advertisement. In particular, the advertisement can not only be discovered in the shopping process for fast fashion products, but also can be found before or during the shopping process.
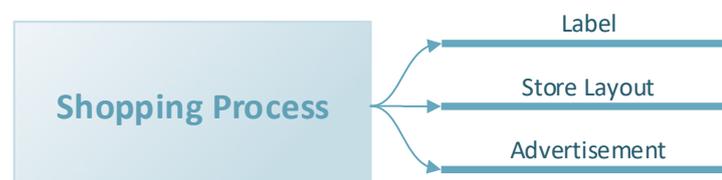
Figure 6.16 Shopping Process.

I – Label

According to the responses, the product label has been considered the quickest and most significant way to obtain required information by the majority of consumers. In particular, the material of the product can be known from the label; thus, consumers can realise whether this product is sustainable. This can be combined with the material element discussed in the above theme; thus, consumers can through read the material information from the label to determine the sustainable attribute of the fast fashion product. It has also been revealed that the sustainable collection always has a separate label so that consumers can distinguish the sustainable item from regular products quickly and effectively. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'*They put a separately label on the products, otherwise actually I wouldn't notice*.' (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

II – Store Layout

When consumers shop for fast fashion products, the layout of products can also influence the decision-making, which has been stated by a few participants. For instance, a separate area has been set up in-store, which specialises in the range of sustainable products; thus, consumers can easily access the sustainable items, and correspondingly the purchasing likelihood will be increased. In particular, it has been indicated by several interviewees that sustainable products can be easier recognised, if other distinctive element has been added when designing the store layout, such as green label, or promoting advertisement of sustainable products. As emphasised by the following interviewee:

'*I know they will always tell with some signs you know, for example this area or product is recyclable or sustainable*.' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

III – Advertisement

Furthermore, several participants stated that the advertisement has also been considered an ancillary method for consumers to distinguish between sustainable and regular fast fashion products. In particular, the advertisement can be regarded as a guide for consumers to find the sustainable product area in-store, shorten the shopping time, and emphasise the sustainability image in consumers' minds. On the contrary, it has been stressed by two informants that the blurred image of sustainable fast fashion products can be attributed to the weakness in advertising sustainable items, as consumers did not know about the launch of fast fashion products. Therefore, fast fashion companies should focus on the advertisement of sustainable fast fashion items. This is demonstrated well in the following data:

'You can see the advertisements, and you see it in big written letters, so you see straightaway where it is.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

6.4.3. Evaluation of the Fast Fashion Brand

Except for the product itself, the evaluation of the fast fashion brand also needs to be presented, which has been mentioned by several participants. The evaluation has been explored from two aspects (Figure 6.17): production and brand image. In particular, the production can be considered as the complementary content for fast fashion products. Moreover, the brand image can influence the desire to purchase, also the criterion to determine sustainability from the consumer perspective.

Figure 6.17 Evaluation of the Fast Fashion Brand.

I – Production

When considering the sustainable attribute of a fast fashion product, it not only involves the product itself, but the production process also needs to be regarded, which has been identified by the majority of participants under this interviewee question. Within the manufacturing process, the usage of energy, resources, and chemicals all been mentioned by participants, which presented an inverse correlation between these elements and sustainability. Therefore, less usage of resources can bring a higher sustainable level for fast fashion products. Followed by the transportation process, the distance between the manufacturing place to the market has also been discussed by consumers under the sustainability attribute; similarly, an inverse correlation has been presented. Thus, short transportation distances can bring a higher sustainable evaluation of fast fashion products. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'I guess a little or no amount of chemicals being used, so I'm talking bleaching, dyeing, all those kind of things, or if dyeing, that natural dyes, maybe even plant-based dyes from any kinds of flowers, or whatever you can make it from.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

II – Brand Image

As a criterion of sustainable products, the brand image of fast fashion brands has been emphasised by a few participants, as additional information to support the

sustainability attribute. According to one participant, it has been realized that the employee condition can influence the sustainability level of one brand. Since fast fashion companies have always been criticised for their unfair wage, consumers will consider the product more sustainable if the working condition of the employee who manufactured the sustainable product can be proven. Moreover, a positive connection between brand awareness and sustainability can be explored, which further presents that an authentic brand is more trusted and sustainable. As one participant argued:

'Maybe I can add 10 pounds, like five to ten, if it's a good brand, if it's a good company, with confident when I take it.' (Individual Interview, Participant 9)

6.5. Consumer Perceived Treating Method for Unwanted Fast Fashion Products

In order to investigate the proper approaches for promoting sustainable products from fast fashion brands to targeted consumers, participants have been enquired about methods of treating unwanted fast fashion products, which can help fast fashion brands to reform the promoting method, and then better-realising sustainability as well. Based on the responses, the treatment approaches can be categorised into three aspects (Figure 6.18): uncertainty, sustainable, and unsustainable approaches. In particular, only one interviewee indicated unsure about the treatment of unwanted fast fashion products; meanwhile, informants who were directed to the unsustainable approach were also limited. On the contrary, the majority of participants stated the attitude and behaviour to the sustainable aspect, which enhanced the possibility of promoting sustainability to consumers from the brand perspective.
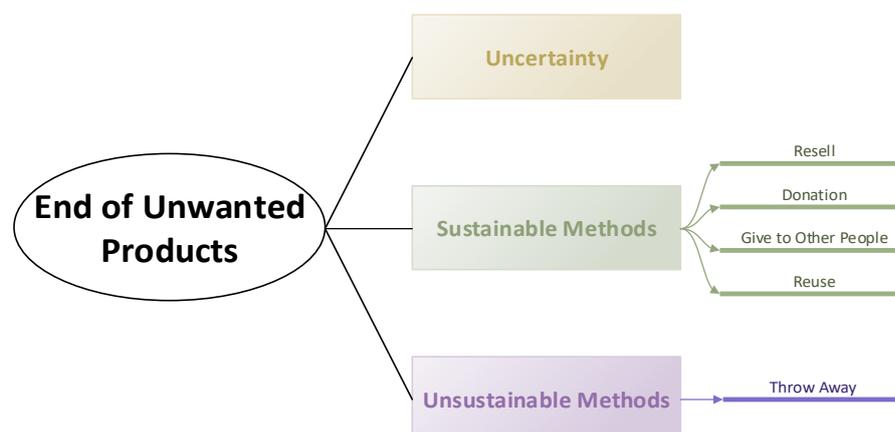
Figure 6.18 Findings of Consumer Perceived Treating Method for Unwanted Fast Fashion Products.

6.5.1. Uncertainty

Considering the discarded fashion items, one participant indicated an uncertain attitude about the treatment of unwanted clothes, especially regarding the sustainable methods. This has been attributed to the lack of understanding of the dealing methods and the comparison among those approaches. Correspondingly, the participant stressed the necessity for communicating sustainable treatment approaches for used fashion products to consumers, especially international students, to guide them deal with fashion items in a sustainable way. For instance, the interviewee said:

'To be honest, I'm still thinking about this. I just heard a method from my friends before.' (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

6.5.2. Sustainable Methods

According to the responses, the majority of participants will deal with unwanted fashionable items in the sustainable approaches, which can be regarded as the main treatment towards the used fast fashion products. Sustainable conduct can be divided into four detailed ways (Figure 6.19), including resell, donation, using by other people, and reuse, which will be investigated in the following sections. From the economic perspective, reselling is the only method to obtain economic benefits, and the rest of the sustainable methods could not receive economic benefit directly; even the reuse method may cause economic input. Besides, the differentiation between giving cloth to charity and other people is receivers, an organisation or familiar people.
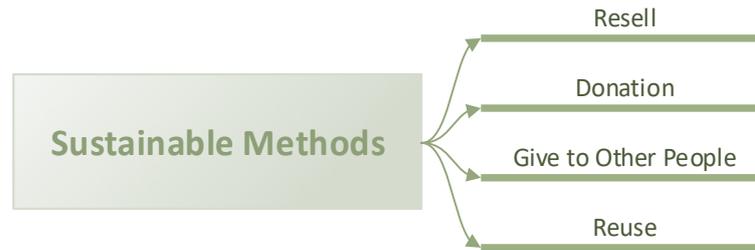
Figure 6.19 Sustainable Methods.

I - Resell

When considering the treatment of a used item, the priority method for participants is reselling, especially for selling online, which has been stated by a number of participants. According to the responses, resell behaviour has been regarded as an effective method to renew the wardrobe, especially for people interested in pursuing fashion trends by shopping for fast fashion products. Meanwhile, it has been revealed that informants who tend to resell fashion products are people who accept to shop for second-hand products. In addition, participants also indicated the status of reselling items that should be branded and in good product conditions, which can be regarded as the criterion for product resell. This is seen in the following data:

'But here and today, I have some clothes that I don't want to wear anymore, which is not so old, but because of the fashions just be quick, and I want to sell in the second-hand shop. I found a new application … so you can sell these products in the USA and other countries as well. So I'm planning to sell.' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

II - Donation

As the main non-economic approach for dealing with unwanted items, donation

has been stressed by nearly all of the participants under this interview question, which can be regarded as the most popular and usual method. Two donating channels have been demonstrated by participants, including the charity shop and the donation bin. Similar to resell, the conditions of donating items have been discussed by the majority of participants, which less attract consumers to purchase again, thus being considered the alternative approach behind reselling. Moreover, the benefits of donation have been emphasised by most of the participants as an effective way to realise sustainability, through extending the usage of fashionable products, indirectly giving help to poor people and the donating organizations. For instance, one interviewee commented:

'*But recently in the UK, I saw some boxes, that you can put your, for example shoes, clothes in … I like to try that. I'd like to try that, and pull this jacket for example … Or if it's in good condition to give it to charity shops that is somebody's gonna pay for it, and the money is going to a charity.*' (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

III – Give to other people

As another type of receiver, familiar people have also been stressed under this interview question by more than half of the participants. In particular, the core difference compared with the donation is the type of receivers; thus, the range of receivers can be defined as friends or family members. Correspondingly, the continuing usage of fashion items has been realised by non-market transfer. Based on the responses, it has been considered a valuable method to extend the usage of fashion products and promote the fashionable attribute, then realising sustainability. As participants commented:

'*I will go through my clothes like find the stuff, and then I'll usually like ask friends or my mom, if they want something, if I think they would like it.*' (Individual

Interview, Participant 5)

IV – Reuse

When considering the sustainable method to deal with unwanted fashion items, reuse has been presented by a few participants as an effective method. Specifically, reuse has been defined as repairing or redesigning fashion items, instead of the general understanding of reuse. Although reuse can be regarded as a creative method for utilising the fashionable product in a sustainable way, the limitations of this method have also been pointed out by informants, such as the time or cost consuming. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'But last year I went to tailor also to fix it for me, and then I'm also still now with me, I get dressed, but with a little bit different style.' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

6.5.3. Unsustainable Method

Except for the above treatments for used fashion products, an unsustainable method has also been mentioned and discussed by a number of participants. Participants expressed that the unwanted items will be thrown away directly, if the product is damaged. Therefore, the importance of improving fast fashion products' quality has been partly proved. As emphasised by the following interviewee:

'Some of it, I will throw away, because it might just be that there's a hole in it, or you can no longer wear it, so then I'll get rid of it.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

6.6. Conclusion

Based on the findings shown above, the associated knowledge gap and research objective will be explored and presented in chapters 8.2 and chapter 8.3, including:

I)   The consumer perceived sustainability claims of fast fashion brands;

II)   Understand what consumers perceive as challenges in fast fashion companies' management of sustainable products;

The knowledge gap (the consumer perceived sustainability claims of fast fashion brands) explored in the literature review will be discussed in chapter 8.2 according to findings from chapter 6.1. While the research objective (Understand what consumers perceive as challenges in fast fashion companies' management of sustainable products) will be discussed in chapter 8.3, based on the findings from chapters 6.2 to 6.5.

Chapter 7 Findings in Brand Authenticity

7.1. Evaluation of Company Claimed Brand Authenticity from the Consumer Perspective

In order to explore the basic understanding and initial impression of brand authenticity from the consumer perspective, participants in this research had been asked about their evaluations of brand authenticity claims by fast fashion enterprises. Correspondingly, the finding can be divided into two types - positive evaluation and negative evaluation (Figure 7.1). The negative one, which can be referred to as a promotion approach operated by fast fashion enterprises, so that difficult to trust this concept. Whereas the positive one can be trusted, consumers require supporting and reassuring information. Based on responses, it can be revealed that the majority of participants showed a positive and acceptable attitude to the brand authenticity, whereas fewer participants expressed negative opinions. However, opinions from both two sides will be discussed in details in the following part of the thesis.
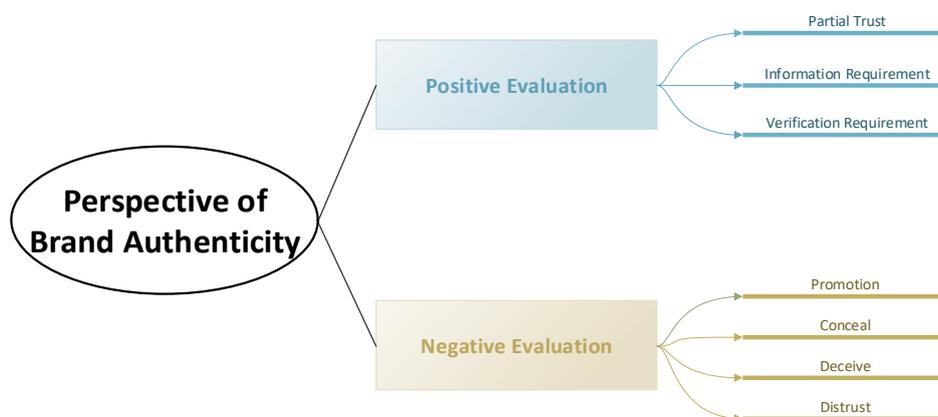
Figure 7.1 Findings of Evaluation of Company Claimed Brand Authenticity from the Consumer Perspective.

7.1.1. Positive Evaluation

When fast fashion companies claim brand authenticity, the majority of interviewees preferred to show a positive evaluation and attitude of the corporate proposition associated with brand authenticity. However, the main obstacle under this positive evaluation has also been indicated by participants, where difficult to determine the authenticity without information or evidence. Based on responses, the possibility of applying and delivering brand authenticity to consumers can be verified indirectly, if supporting evidence can be provided. Correspondingly, the significance of supporting evidence for recognising brand authenticity has been reflected, increasing the acceptability from the consumer side. Accordingly, the supporting evidence can be categorised into two aspects: informational support and verifying support, which will be demonstrated separately in the following content.
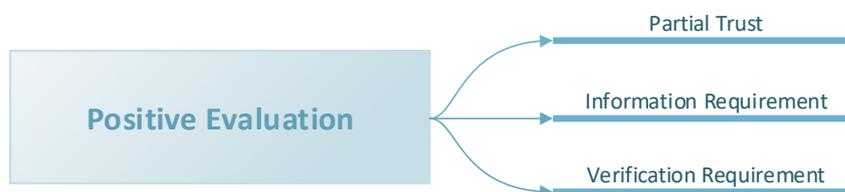
Figure 7.2 Positive Evaluation.

I – Partial Trust

When participants showed their trust in brand authenticity, it can be reflected by the responses that several participants expressed their trust to some extent in this research, instead of fully trusting. This can be influenced by previous brand image, the corporate behaviour, and consumers need more information to determine for themselves. When participants showed a negative attitude to the brand

authenticity that fast fashion companies undertook, suspicion is the most common attitude reflected under this interview question, which was revealed by one-third of interviewees. This could not be considered a totally opposed or distrusting opinion, it can be regarded as tending to be partly trusted, and participants stressed that information and verification provided by the fast fashion companies could enhance trust and relieve suspicion. This can be seen in the following data:

'I don't think it would be 100% true … So like still like based on the information, what they provided, so it's a partly trusted, not fully.' (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

II – Information Requirement

In order to build and enhance the trust of corporate claims by consumers, the informational support requirement can be considered as the prerequisite of brand trust, since the deficiency of supporting information caused the decline of brand trust from the consumer perspective. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'Um, I think they should have clear areas online, stating what they do, how they do it, and what they want to achieve in the future. I think we should lay it all out, I think it should be very clear.' (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

III – Verification Requirement

In addition, another supporting evidence has been indicated is verifying information requirements that had been stressed by a number of participants. This can be considered as the judging process of the information provided by the fast fashion companies, so participants stated that they would determine whether to believe the brand based on the obtained information. Therefore, the significance of providing reliable and deterministic information to enhance brand

authenticity has been emphasised. As a participant said:

'So where are they come from, what are their core values, does this go in line with what they're saying now, and have they proven to stick to their values over the last few years. So I think again it's about doing that research, and going beyond just believing whatever brand tells you.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

7.1.2. Negative Evaluation

Differentiated from the positive attitude, a few informants indicated a negative evaluation of the brand authenticity within the fast fashion enterprises, which can be concluded as a set of emotions difficult to trust, such as conceal, deceive, and distrust (shown in Figure 7.3). Although the negative attitudinal evaluation has been divided into three separate elements, the cognition of brand authenticity has been regarded as a marketing promotion approach. This exacerbated the negative evaluation of brand authenticity from the consumer perspective.
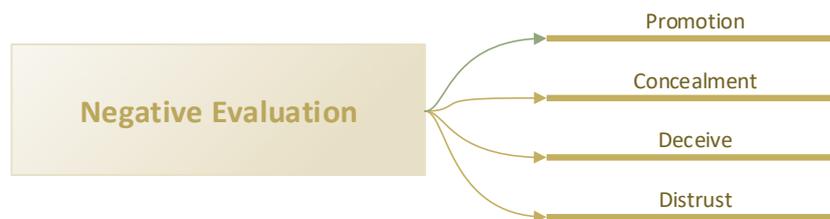
Figure 7.3 Negative Evaluation.

I - Promotion

Brand authenticity has been considered a type of marketing promotion approach conducted by fast fashion companies, in order to promote the brand and corresponding products. For instance, one interviewee stated:

'At the same time, kind of like it's a lot of marketing. You know it's all about kind of like selling product, rather than actually making people consider how much product they're buying, which is also another problem.' (Individual Interview, Participant 12)

II – Concealment

Moreover, a few participants demonstrated that there should be some information hidden or concealed by the fast fashion companies when companies claim authenticity for their brands. However, it can also be attributed to the deficiency of required information by informants, which influences consumers to make positive decisions and build a good brand image for the enterprises. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'I don't know, I don't think it would be 100% true, though I think when they say things like that, there's always something hidden, something they don't show us.' (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

III – Deceive

Apart from the above two sub-negative codes, the other two codes show an entirely negative attitude to the brand authenticity, including deceive and distrust. Although the informants who presented negative attitudes are limited, these two codes also need to be emphasised. Two participants show that the information provided by the fast fashion companies is unable to be trusted, and even misguides consumer behaviour to a false destination. This can be seen in the following statements:

'Because I don't believe them, and I want to talk about this. I will be a bit angry about not being honest, and putting slogans everywhere, false information, promoting false information. People don't like this, people don't like dishonest,

and like to talk with the others about the false information, the seducing of people.'
(Individual Interview, Participant 4)

IV - Distrust

Additionally, a few participants even indicated that it could not be trusted when a fast fashion company claim its brand is authentic. In their minds, the aim of fast fashion companies is selling the products, so all the attempts are serving to this aim, including establishing the authentic brand, and some participants also stated that verifying actions should be provided instead of just a claim in word. This can be presented by the following transcript:

'I don't trust them, because I want to see actions not words.' (Individual Interview, Participant 15)

7.2. The Characteristics of Consumer Perceived Authentic Brand

Participants were asked about the characteristics of an authentic brand. This can give suggestions to fast fashion companies when they intend to establish brand authenticity. Based on the responses, the characteristics can be abstracted into three aspects (shown in Figure 7.4), including (I) better product and customer experience; (II) quality supporting information; (III) positive brand image. In particular, the theme (I) related to product and experience can be considered the physical requirement of the authentic brand, which only occupied a small part of the required elements. Whereas the rest of the two themes can be regarded as the identifying level requirements of the authentic brand, which occupied the majority of the influencing elements.

Figure 7.4 Findings of Characteristics of an Authentic Brand.

7.2.1. Better Product and Customer Experience

Many participants under this interview question identified fast fashion products

and associated customer experience as the most direct way to recognise brand authenticity. The findings have been explored from the product and customer experience section, especially customer experience discovered from the customer relationship and customer service (shown in Figure 6.5). The customer experience can be considered as another important element of the authentic brand from the consumer's point of view.
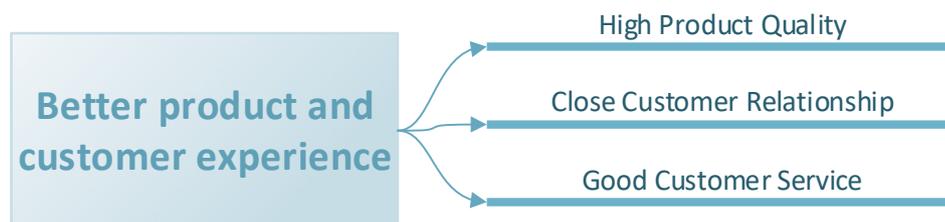
Figure 7.5 Better Product and Customer Experience.

I – High Product Quality

Fast fashion products have been claimed to increase the product quality by the majority of participants, especially in the material section. Since the poor quality of fast fashion products has been mentioned and discussed by participants, it has been reflected that improving and innovating fast fashion products should be the most direct way for consumers to recognise and accept brand authenticity. Moreover, attempts to enhance the durability of fast fashion products will increase sustainability. For example, one participant commented:

'Quality is a main thing. In my mind, I think [fast fashion brands] does good in quality.' (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

II – Close Customer Relationships

A few of the participants demonstrated the significance of customer relationships, since a better relationship can enhance the reliability between the company and

the consumer. Moreover, it has been presented that the employees within fast fashion companies should strengthen their understanding of the brand and products, since the employee can be stated as the bridge for consumers to realise the brand. As a participant said:

'Close customer contact I think. If the brand's vision is authentic, that shows through the employees ... So I think authenticity starts from the bottom level, where the customer and consumer can actually see it.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

III – Good Customer Service

As another discussion aspect of customer experience, customer service should be improved in fast fashion companies, which several interviewees stated. Therefore, it has been stressed that good customer service can improve brand reputation. Moreover, the shopping experience should be increased, and the client affinity can also be strengthened. On the contrary, the consumers will not further shop from the brand, if the customer service is terrible. This can be demonstrated well in the following data:

'I think their customer service is really good, so that's also attract me and enhance my sense of the brand. If the customer service is not that good, I think it's heavily influenced my shopping experience.' (Individual Interview, Participant 2)

7.2.2. Quality Supporting Information

As a fundamental requirement, information occupies a significant situation when consumers make decisions, thus the quality of information provided by the fast fashion enterprises will influence the whole brand image in consumers' minds. Three aspects have been claimed about the quality of the information under this

interview question, including transparency, the consistency of information, and effective informational communication (shown in Figure 7.6). This can be considered the criterion for the information fast fashion companies were delivering to the market.
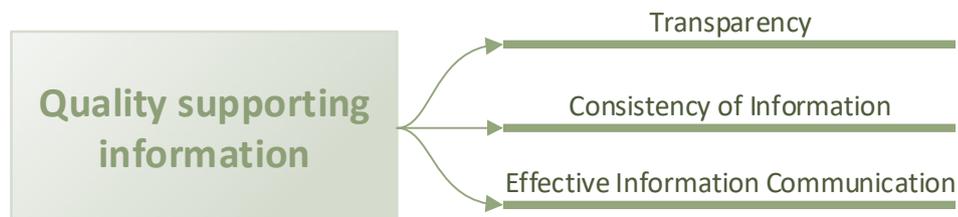
Figure 7.6 Quality Supporting Information.

I -Transparency

If the information shared by the fast fashion companies is not transparent, consumers may feel suspicious if some information has been hidden. For example, one interviewee indicated that it makes it difficult for consumers to believe sustainability is operated by fast fashion brands, since the deficiency of required information. Therefore, the participant mentioned that it is important to keep the transparency of the information, if the brand hopes to establish an authentic brand. As one participant argued in response to brand authenticity, there is an example:

'Their transparency to give information. But I haven't seen yet any brand that's like that.' (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

II - Consistency of information

As the other criterion of informational quality, the consistency of information has been stressed by a few of the participants. This reveals that the information communicated by fast fashion companies should keep consistent, in order to

establish an authentic brand image. In other words, the core idea delivered by the company should keep stable, instead of changing through the market, which may make consumers feel suspicious and less likely to believe the authenticity; even the established authenticity will be damaged. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'*I think like keeping the same ideas and so they need to say what they want their ideas, whether it be sustainability or keeping up with fashion trends. And they need to stick with that. I feel like if they change and then decide 'oh, we're going to now just focus on this' thing, then it gets confusing for the customer, and it's hard to understand.*' (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

III – Effective Information Communication

Furthermore, the communication channel also has been stated by participants as a criterion of effectiveness of information. According to responses, the utilisation of various communication approaches has been emphasised, such as advertisement and social media. Moreover, employees within fast fashion companies have been defined as communicators, as consumers can generate emotional decisions from the information provided by fast fashion companies through conversations with employees. Additionally, some participants indicated that the information could be delivered to more consumers, if the fast fashion brand had a number of stores located in a wide range of places. The significance of communication is seen in the following statements:

'*And I think authenticity is also about communication, like I said like a long term strategy.*' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

7.2.3. Positive Brand Image

According to the analysis, the relationship between a good brand image and an authentic brand has been stressed by the majority of participants. The effectiveness of positive brand image has been presented from five aspects (Figure 7.7), including brand awareness, trustworthiness, brand reputation, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability. In particular, corporate social responsibility and sustainability emphasise the significance of sustainability to the recognition of brand image towards the authentic brand, so promoting sustainability will benefit fast fashion companies to establish brand authenticity. Above all aspects reflected the influencing elements of brand authenticity, which also stressed the modified areas if a fast fashion brand is expected to establish an authentic brand.
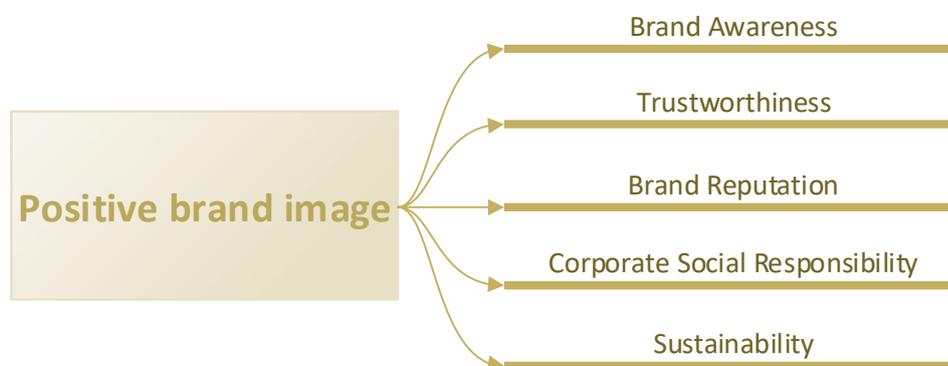
Figure 7.7 Positive Brand Image.

I – Brand Awareness

As mentioned by a number of participants under this theme, brand awareness can be considered a confirmation sign of an authentic brand. This can build the connection between the fast fashion brand and targeted consumers, and also press the first image of the brand and associated products in consumers' minds.

Moreover, brand awareness has been regarded as the criterion for the company and the product from the consumer perspective. For example, some participants indicated a positive connection between brand awareness and brand image. This was clearly stated by participants:

'I guess generally the bigger brands are quite trusted, like when you buy shoes, if you see something, for example bigger brand said this is good or this is well-designed, or this is even they said this is very healthy or sustainable, you tend to believe that. But if you buy something like, sometimes like non-branded or something, you feel just because it's just going for cheap, so they don't even care or something.' (Focus Group 3, Participant 3)

II – Trustworthiness

The function of trustworthiness has been stressed by a large part of participants, which presented significance in the establishment of reliability between the authentic brand and consumers. For instance, several participants mentioned that trustworthiness should be based on reliable information and can be confirmed by consumers, which may help consumers build trust with fast fashion brands and further enhance authenticity. Accordingly, trustworthiness plays a positive relationship with brand authenticity, which may increase the authentic attribute of a certain brand. As interviewees commented:

'It's like a feeling, yeah, I think it's like a feeling, if they'll have my trust, I would be the customer for a longer period. And I would be proud of being a customer from this company, because they have built their trust for me.' (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

III – Brand Reputation

Since consumers can easily be affected by other people, brand reputation is quite important in establishing brand authenticity, which can be considered a confirmation element of brand authenticity. Several participants indicated that consumers might feel suspicious about the brand, if the evaluation of that fast fashion brand is negative. Consequently, the authenticity of the brand will be destroyed. Therefore, a good reputation will enhance the reliability and acceptability of brand authenticity from the consumer perspective. As one interviewee stated:

'I get a lot of it, like a word-of-mouth, it's like hearing what other people have to say about the brand, so I can guess more from other consumers. So the reputation is really important.' (Individual Interview, Participant 5)

IV – Corporate Social Responsibility

Moreover, one participant also mentioned that increasing social responsibility can benefit the improvement of corporate image and further enhance brand authenticity. Therefore, the fast fashion company should redefine its corporate to a more responsible situation. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'And yeah just being like at the forefront of things, like on top of these issues and actually having to say and like inputting some of their money into charities and into good people things so that you trust them.' (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

V – Sustainability

The significance of sustainability has been emphasised in the brand authenticity by the majority of informants, and more sustainable elements should be added to the establishment of authenticity. In other words, sustainability should be

established at the same time when building an authentic brand for fast fashion companies. This is seen in the following data:

'Which elements of the brand, I think they need to be kind of like incorporate sustainability more into their marketing messages.' (Individual Interview, Participant 12)

7.3. Channels of Recognising Brand Authenticity

In order to effectively deliver authenticity-associated information and knowledge to consumers, participants have been queried about the general ways to recognize brand authenticity, which can provide suggestions to fast fashion companies in the establishment of communication channels for brand authenticity. According to responses, the recognising channels can be categorised into two types (Figure 7.8): subjective recognising channels that consumers obtained the authentic demonstration based on practical experience and evaluation, and objective recognising channels established based on corporate communicated information. In the following content, the findings will be presented in detail under these two types of channels.
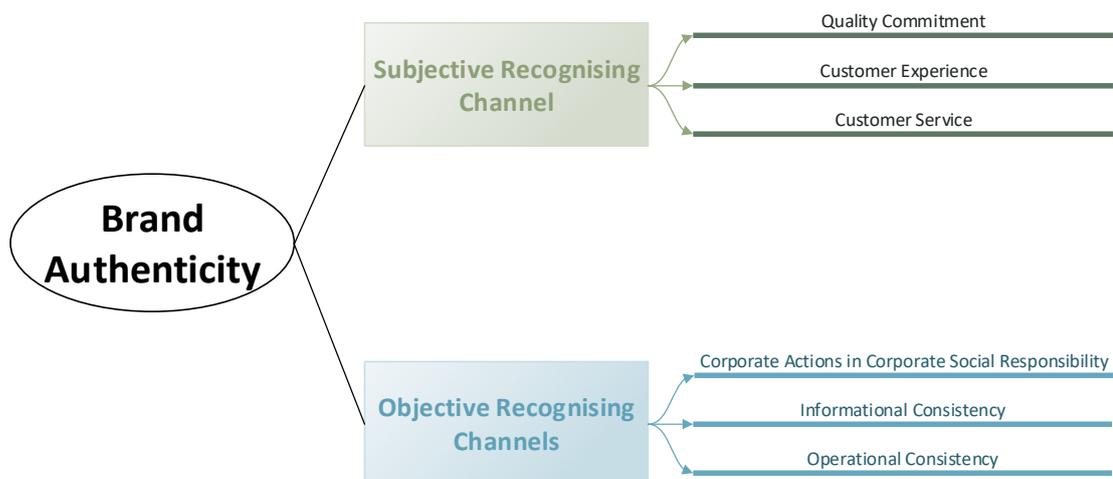
Figure 7.8 Findings of Channels of Recognising Brand Authenticity.

7.3.1. Subjective Recognising Channels

As subjective channels, consumers can recognize the brand authenticity through the fast fashion products and corresponding experience, which has been reflected in the responses. This has been considered as the most direct and

convenient approach to comprehending the brand authenticity to the market by the majority of interviewees. In particular, the quality commitment of fast fashion products has been regarded as the product-oriented channel, while customer experience and customer service have been regarded as the experience-oriented channel (shown in Figure 7.9).
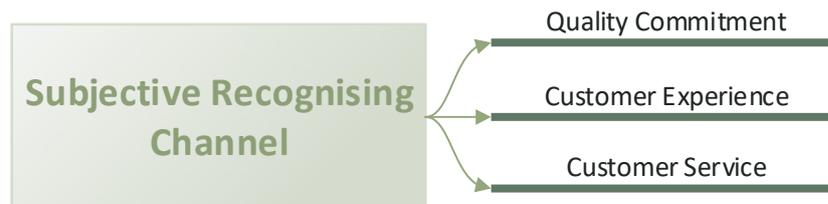
Figure 7.9 Subjective Recognising Channels.

I – Quality Commitment

Based on the responses, the product quality has been claimed by several participants who indicated that the authenticity can be determined by touching the material of products or verified within the utilisation of the fast fashion products. Moreover, interviewees have emphasised that the quality of fast fashion products can decide the purchasing behaviour and influence further shopping intentions, since fast fashion products have always been criticised for poor quality. For instance, one interviewee commented:

'I think you do have to try first, good quality, I think good quality, it's always hard to find good quality with good price.' (Individual Interview, Participant 9)

II – Customer Experience

As the most important section of customer experience, personal experience has been mentioned by the majority of participants under this interview question. Furthermore, the personal experience can throughout the whole shopping and

utilising process of the fast fashion product, always been mentioned together with the product quality element when determining brand authenticity. In particular, some participants stressed that the user experience of the fast fashion product could significantly influence the authenticity from the consumer perspective; thus, brand authenticity can be demonstrated under the utilisation process of fast fashion products. On the contrary, the authenticity will be destroyed if the user experience could not match the information communicated by fast fashion companies during the shopping period. For example, informants argued:

'*You know, our brand trust is based on our previous experiences of the brand, so it might be our experiences kind of in the brand store say, … so those experiences are always going to be different for everybody.*' (Individual Interview, Participant 12)

III – Customer Service

Moreover, customer service is another important element of customer experience, which has been identified by a number of participants under this interview question. Differentiated from personal experience, customer service can cover the whole shopping process, utilising, and even extended to the post-sale process emphasised by many informants. This also can influence the brand image from the consumer perspective, particularly in the returning service, the handling speed and the attitude of the employees. Furthermore, the benefits of international fast fashion brands have been praised, since the customer service can be provided at the same level in different countries, enhancing the authenticity in consumers' minds. As seen in the following interview excerpts:

'*But when I cooler, even I didn't like the style, it doesn't fit me, I can change easily, and I can take my money back. Or I can change with some of products easily, they never asked you why is like that, or they're not unhappy or something. And*

also they are really helpful, they are the employees … it doesn't matter in every, they are kind of friendly with this issue, you can change easily.' (Individual Interview, Participant 8)

7.3.2. Objective Recognising Channels

From the objective recognising perspective, consumers indicated the general ways to identify the brand authenticity through corporate information and actions. According to responses, three specific channels have been reflected, including corporate actions in corporate social responsibility, informational consistency, and operational consistency (shown in Figure 7.10). Accordingly, the significance of consistency to the recognition of brand authenticity has been presented.

Objective Recognising Channels

- Corporate Actions in Corporate Social Responsibility
- Informational Consistency
- Operational Consistency
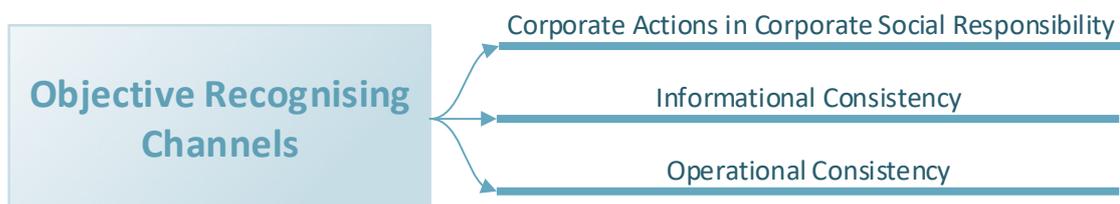
Figure 7.10 Objective Recognising Channels.

I – Corporate Actions in Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate social responsibility has been indicated by several participants as the criterion of a reliable brand, especially the reality within the practical process, instead of an oral statement. Correspondingly, the brand authenticity can be realised and enhanced if the fast fashion brand possesses a high social responsibility. In particular, two aspects have been discussed for social responsibility, including charity, and the environment, especially sustainability has been emphasised as a core criterion for authenticity. Moreover, participants

provided some suggestions to fast fashion companies to help them enhance the authenticity and effectively communicate the authenticity to the targeted consumers, such as cooperating with some organizations or universities to sponsor sustainability-related research. As a participant said:

'Definitely if they give money to charities, or to study to improve the quality of product, I'll show a lot. I think charity will be great, to be honest. To show that they actually care, even though they do make money out of profit, it will show a lot, if they do something for the planet. Or sponsor something, sponsor sorts of studies, I think that should be amazing.' (Individual Interview, Participant 3)

II – Informational Consistency

Moreover, informational consistency has been stressed by the majority of participants as an effective channel to identify brand authenticity. In order to effectively deliver information to the target market, several communication approaches have been utilised by fast fashion companies at the same time, such as official websites, annual reports, and advertisements. It has been pointed out by the majority of informants that the reliability of brands will be enhanced, if the same information obtained from different communication channels can keep consistent. As emphasised by the following interviewee:

"If all communications are in line, if everything seems to end up, and everything seems to be the same, so forget the same feeling by the sales rep in store. As I get from their marketing communications, as I get from their yearly reports, as I might get from interviews that the head of the company is doing." (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

III – Operational Consistency

As another aspect of consistency, the operational consistency can be shown by more than half of the participants, from the brand vision to operation further to brand evaluation. Brand vision can be considered as a core element for brand image, where consumers can get the long-term aim of companies. Then by comparing the brand vision with the enterprise operations, where these two elements match, the authenticity can be realised and established. Furthermore, the evaluation of corporate operating behaviour can be regarded as the estimation of brand authenticity, which will further influence brand's reliability. Therefore, the brand can be considered authentic if the above operating process can be proven as consistent. This is seen in the following data:

"Second is it also depends on their reputation and how the public review of this company … the way they 'brand image' themselves, how they market themselves. And last one is their history and also how the clothes is being produced, the steps basically." (Individual Interview, Participant 15)

7.4. Encouraging Elements of Trustworthiness from Fast Fashion Brands to Consumers

In order to increase the trustworthiness between consumers and fast fashion companies, participants have been queried about the encouraging elements for enhancing the trust in brands. Based on responses, the encouraging elements can be categorised into direct influencing elements and supporting influencing elements. The direct influencing element has been defined as the factor abstracted from consumer experience about fast fashion products, including better products and customer experience. While the supporting element has been regarded as the factor recognised from the information and actions conducted by fast fashion companies, including reliable supporting information and a positive brand image.

Figure 7.11 Findings of Encouraging Elements of Trustworthiness from Fast Fashion Brands to Consumers.

7.4.1. Better Product

As the most direct channel, fast fashion products play a significant situation in presenting the brand image to targeted consumers. Within this theme, two

detailed opinions have been provided from consumers, which can be involved in two aspects, the extended usage of fast fashion products, and the pricing of fast fashion products (shown in Figure 7.12).
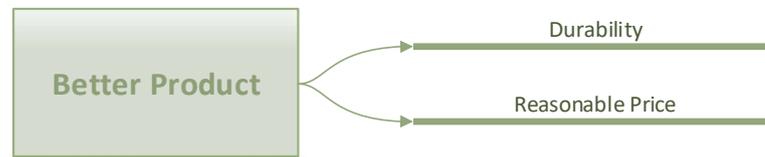
Figure 7.12 Better Product.

I – Durability

Moreover, several participants mentioned that the durability of fast fashion products should be improved, especially through sustainability and environmental-friendly has been emphasised gradually in the fast fashion industry. The durability can be explored from two aspects, quality and usage. This has been criticised as an obstacle to trustworthiness, the quality of fast fashion products is perceived as poor, and correspondingly the usage of fast fashion items is short than expected. Thus the trustworthiness between consumers and fast fashion brands has been weakened, so it should be enhanced when fast fashion enterprises intend to increase the trust in consumers' minds. For instance:

"Definitely look at … how they make the products last longer." (Individual Interview, Participant 13)

II – Reasonable Price

Apart from the product itself, the pricing of fast fashion products has also been discussed by a few participants. Although the low price has been considered and the main characteristic of fast fashion products, however informants indicated that

sometimes the product price is even lower than the manufacturing cost, which will cause associated concerns from the consumer side, such as unsustainable behaviour, unfair and other operating behaviours behind the manufacturing process. Based on this, the unacceptable recognition will decrease the trust between target consumers and fast fashion brands. So the pricing of fast fashion products should be reasonable, instead of only using the low price to attract consumers all the time, which may cause suspicion of the credibility of products. As shown below:

"So I think the price can represent whether is true or not." (Focus Group 3, Participant 2)

7.4.2. Better Customer Experience

Except for the product, the customer experience can be regarded as another significant direct approach for consumers, from an emotional way, to understand and decide the brand trust provided by fast fashion companies. The customer experience can be presented from two subdivided aspects (shown in Figure 7.13), including customer service, and consumer relationship, which involve the purchasing and post-purchasing period.
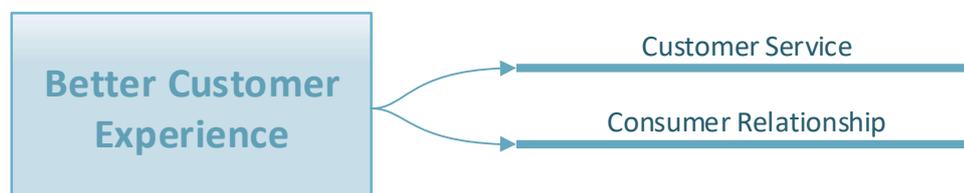
Figure 7.13 Better Customer Experience.

I –Customer Service

As a major part of customer experience, customer service has been mentioned by several participants under this theme, where consumers can determine the relationship with brands through the attitude that fast fashion companies treat them. Correspondingly, the participant stated that they would stop purchasing from that company again, even give up purchasing from that brand, if its customer service is bad; accordingly, the belief between these two subjects cannot be established. Therefore, offering good customer service can be regarded as a prerequisite for brand trust between fast fashion brands and target consumers. As mentioned by interviewees:

'Well I think the customer service is the most important thing. If the customer service are treating people bad on the phone, or not understanding the problem, or not fixing the problem, they were just stop dealing with the company I think. Because if there is a product is faulty, and whenever I return it, there is a problem, or I have to explain for a long time and evidence, and things like that, to just say I want to return it. So I think I'd be thinking twice the next time I buy anything.' (Individual Interview, Participant 9)

II –Consumer Relationship

One participant also stressed that fast fashion companies should establish a good and tight relationship with consumers, which can contribute to delivering information effectively to consumers. In the meantime, it is beneficial to establish a positive attitude and trustworthiness from the consumer perspective, which may provide support to the brand reputation. As one interviewee stated:

'I think they should focus on building a relationship with customers … Trying to build that reputation with the customers. And then they will have a better relationship, and then in the future, the customers will be like 'oh well, we know

they did this, we know that they have a relationship with us, so we can believe

what they say'.' (Individual Interview, Participant 14)

7.4.3. Reliable Supporting Information

As one of the supporting influencing elements, reliable supporting information has been discussed and indicated by the majority of participants, which can be considered the criterion for judging whether the brand is believable. Based on responses, supporting elements can be detailed and explored from three factors associated with the quality of information, including transparency, informational consistency, and informational understandability (Figure 7.14).

Transparency

Reliable Supporting Information

Informational Consistency

Informational Understandability
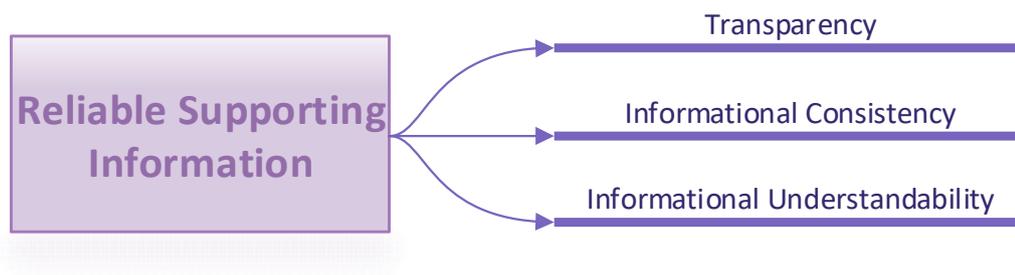
Figure 7.14 Reliable Supporting Information.

I – Transparency

Within the informational requirement, transparency has been emphasised by the majority of participants under this interview question. This can help consumers build trustworthiness and reduce suspicion as a result. On the contrary, consumers may feel deceived, like some information or facts has been hidden if the company could not be transparent, thus the trust will be ruined correspondingly. As participants said:

'You know, basically it depends on what caused the support … and then second thing is about being transparent, show that how was the things at the back scene, and why are they different, why are they authentic, why are they more environmental friendly, how are they more environmental friendly than other brands.' (Individual Interview, Participant 15)

II – Informational Consistency

As another requirement of information quality, consistency has been stressed by the majority of participants under this theme. According to responses, fast fashion companies have utilised multiple communication channels when delivering information to the market, such as visual platforms, advertisements, corporate annual reports, social media, feedback, slogan, and official website. Correspondingly, the consistency of information that is communicated through different channels should be proven. Although the diversity of informational communication provides resources and opportunities to understand and further enhance the trustworthiness of fast fashion brands, whereas the discrepancy of information will bring suspicion of the authenticity of information conveyed by fast fashion companies. This can be seen in the following data:

'Maybe they post a video like on their website, through the process of producing or manufacturing the clothes, then should work. Or maybe even better, if I can visit there, in their factories.' (Focus Group 3, Participant 1)

III – Informational Understandability

Furthermore, as the last requirement of informational quality, the understandability of information has been emphasised by a few participants. As an unexpert information receiver, consumers may misunderstand the describing information about products or fast fashion brands, which may influence the judging of truthfulness from the consumer perspective. Therefore, the information

provided by fast fashion brands should be easy for consumers to understand, and the real meaning of the information provided by the retailers should be straightforward. This can be reflected by the following transcript:

'When I see the information about the product, I can right understand the information in the leaflet about the product and the product itself … I want to see the information, and detailed description.' (Individual Interview, Participant 4)

7.4.4. Brand Image

As another aspect of supporting influencing elements, the brand image has been stressed by the majority of participants as the influencing factor of the trustworthiness of consumers to fast fashion companies. Five specific elements have been presented under the reflection of brand image (Figure 7.15), including (I) brand authenticity; (II) internationalization; (III) stability; (IV) corporate social responsibility; (V) sustainable marketing strategy. In particular, brand authenticity and sustainability attracted the most comment from participants.
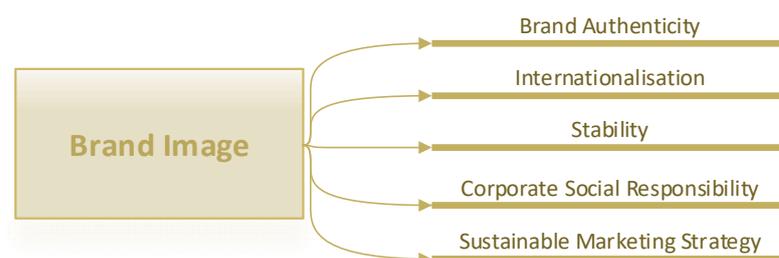
Figure 7.15 Brand Image.

I – Brand Authenticity

As the core element of branding, brand authenticity has been indicated by several participants under this theme, which can be considered as the cornerstone of

trustworthiness, also helping consumers to determine all information, and further enhancing brand loyalty. On the contrary, participants also demonstrated that the trust would be broken down if the information provided by fast fashion companies could not match the action or product conducted by the companies. Therefore, establishing brand authenticity is important for enhancing brand trust within the fast fashion sections. As emphasised by the following interviewee:

'So yeah, I mean authenticity is, I don't know it's a big kind of buzz word in branding at the moment, there are companies that kind of like, the message feels authentic, and they're a company's way, doesn't necessarily.' (Individual Interview, Participant 12)

II – Internationalization

Moreover, two participants mentioned that the internationalization of the fast fashion brand is important for enhancing brand trust, since a globally famous brand can deliver information to a broader range of consumers. On the other side, people will more likely believe the message from an international company based on its reputation and global recognition. As a participant said:

'So if some of the fast fashion brands just known in one area, it's difficult for them to tell some sustainable information to their consumers due to the limited region problem. [An] international brand, with huge international influence, more people would like to listen [to] their sustainable information and buy their sustainable products.' (Individual Interview, Participant 1)

III – Stability

Additionally, a few of the informants also stated the significance of stability for brand image, which realised that trustworthiness should be established from the beginning and maintaining a reliable image at all times. Because the trust can be

ruined and difficult to recover, if the suspicions are produced in consumers' minds. Meanwhile, a participant has stressed that fast fashion companies should admit their mistakes (if required) rather than keep delivering faulty information to consumers to enhance brand trust from the consumer perspective. As emphasised by the following contents:

'And I think as well, that it has to be built from the beginning, and that is very hard, once people have grown suspicions against you as a brand to regain that trust.' (Individual Interview, Participant 7)

IV – Corporate Social Responsibility

Moreover, informants also stressed that it could feel more reliable if the fast fashion company possesses responsibility towards the current society, such as caring about employees and the environment. Participants also realised that fast fashion companies should cooperate with environmental organizations to enhance their corporate social responsibility, instead of only communicating sustainability to the targeted market. Under this code, interviewees mentioned that it's more significant for consumers to realise from the actions than just words. For example, one participant commented:

'First thing I think in there are CSR what's their corporal responsible thing, I'm not sure if you know what I meant CRS control risk responsible scheme or something like that. You know, basically it depends on what caused the support, maybe that they need to support more causes on planting more trees...' (Individual Interview, Participant 15)

V – Sustainable Marketing Strategy

In order to improve the corporate image, sustainability can be regarded as the most important element under this theme, which has been demonstrated by the

majority of participants. In detail, the importance of sustainability has been discussed and emphasised. Furthermore, three main specific measures that fast fashion companies should focus on are further stated, including recycling, low carbon emission, and building ecological image perceptions. This points out the direction for fast fashion companies to enhance brand trust and further attract consumers' attention since consumers are currently increasingly concerned with the environment and sustainability issues. In this respect, informants said:

'See, it just creating like the overall brand image, that's like moving in the direction of being environmental, instead of just saying like, look at our new green product. I kind of show that there's like a company-wide change, instead of just like maybe not specifically line of products or something.' (Individual Interview, Participant 5)

7.5. Conclusion

Based on the findings shown above, the associated research objective and research aim will be explored and presented in chapter 8.4 and chapter 8.5, including:

I)   Understand consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in the context of the fast fashion sector;

II)   Examine the role of brand authenticity in relation to the perceived sustainability of fast fashion products.

Accordingly, the research objective (Understand consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in the context of the fast fashion sector) will be discussed in chapter 8.4, based on the findings from chapter 7.1 to 7.3. Meanwhile, the findings of chapter 7.4 provide supporting information to the investigation of the research aim of this study (Chapter 9.1).

Chapter 8 Discussion

8.1. The Concept of Fast Fashion from the Consumer Point of View

Based on the data analysis shown in chapter 5, the concept of fast fashion from the consumer perspective has been defined as: a marketing strategy through providing large amounts of various fashionable products at a low price to the market in the most limited time possible, to satisfy the consumer perceived value for consumers whilst encouraging impulsive purchasing, meanwhile been criticisms of short product usage, perceived design imitation and unsustainable behaviour. Contrastingly, fast fashion from the company perspective has been redefined as a business strategy that combines low production cost, low price, and rapid and time-limited production of clothing in limited quantities according to the very latest perceived fashion industry trends and consumer demands (according to Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Fernie, 2004; Joung, 2014; Park & Kim, 2016). Accordingly, the core elements reflected from the company-side definition of fast fashion can be categorised into three aspects, involving operation characteristics, product characteristics, and target characteristics. However, the consumer perceived definition of fast fashion have been provided not only from the above three characteristics, but also from evaluation characteristic (i.e. satisfaction), and hindering characteristic (i.e. perceived design imitation, unsustainable behaviour), which will be detailed discussed in the following content of this chapter.

8.1.1. Marketing Strategy

Based on the findings from the interview, fast fashion has been recognised as a marketing strategy by the majority of participants. Similarly, fast fashion also has been defined as a marketing strategy from the company perspective, which can be reflected in extant literature (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). Therefore, consumers and companies stand in the same direction that considers fast fashion as a marketing strategy. Moreover, participants also stressed the aim of conducting fast fashion as a marketing strategy by fast fashion companies in the findings, in order to increase sales volume, attract target consumers, and enhance the brand impression in consumers' minds, which has also been identified in the definitions of fast fashion in existing literature (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). In particular, the significance of brand has been emphasised from the consumer side when discussing the marketing strategy, where fast fashion companies enhance the brand impression in consumers' minds, meanwhile building strong brand loyalty for targeted consumers. Accordingly, consumers determined fast fashion through the specific fast fashion brands and presented as an understanding of fast fashion. Comparably, in previous academic research, brand recognition has been enhanced in branding management by fast fashion companies, which can benefit from maintaining a brand-customer long-term stable relationship (Choi et al., 2016; Chang & Fan, 2017; Choi et al., 2010).

8.1.2. Provide Large Amounts of Various Fashionable Products at a Low Price to the Market in the Most Limited Time Possible

On top of marketing strategy, fast fashion has been described from the output direction by the majority of participants within the findings; thus, large amounts of various fashionable products at a low price to the market in the most limited time possible. This includes elements involving the product and production aspect and will be discussed by combining literature in the following content. In relation to the product aspect, four specific elements of fast fashion products have been mentioned by consumers, including large quantity, diversity, trendy, and low price.

As the core element of fast fashion products, low price has been identified by almost all of the participants in this research, which can be regarded as the reflected element of fast fashion from the consumer perspective. Correspondingly, low price has also been mentioned and emphasised in existing definitions of fast fashion from the company perspective (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Chang & Fan, 2017), which has also been regarded as a significant characteristic of fast fashion products from the consumer point of views by Gabrielli et al. (2013).

Moreover, variety and diversity have also been indicated as representative elements for fast fashion products referred to by most interviewees in the findings. Whilst variety and diversity have been regarded as the attraction of fast fashion products by participants when discussing the attraction-related question in the interview. This also can be realised from the previous research that the diversity of fast fashion products became an influencing consideration when making the purchasing decision (Gabrielli et al., 2013; Christopher et al., 2004; Frings, 2002).

Meanwhile, the 'trendy' attribute of fast fashion products has been demonstrated as the core element for fast fashion from the consumer side according to the research findings, which is further regarded as the core attraction for the target consumers and appeals to them to purchase. Combined with findings in the attraction aspect (chapter 5.2), trendy has been regarded as the major attraction of fast fashion products by participants, especially the design of the products possessed trendy attributes. Similarly, trendy has also been presented through all discussed definitions of fast fashion from the company perspective, which was shown in the literature review chapter (i.e. 'new fashion' from Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; 'last trended and hottest design' from Choi et al., 2010; 'trendy design' from Turker & Altuntas, 2014; 'imitate luxury fashion trends' from Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; 'latest fashion' from Chang & Fan, 2017). Additionally, trendy has also been presented as the influencing element in the previous consumer-oriented research of fast fashion (Gabrielli et al., 2013).

Furthermore, large quantity has also been discussed as a representative element of fast fashion products from this consumer-oriented research, which has also been regarded as the attraction of fast fashion products by participants. However, the quantity of fast fashion products is limited from the definition of fast fashion from the company perspective (Choi et al., 2010). Thus, the opposite opinion related to the quantity has been stressed in the definition of fast fashion from consumer and company perspective, which has been regarded as a defining difference according to the different subjects.

Whilst fast fashion expressed high efficiency, especially the rapid updating speed to obtain trendy products, when considering the production and promotion of fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. Comparably, as the reflection of high efficiency from the company perspective, the lead-time reduction has been

presented in several definitions of fast fashion (such as Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Choi et al., 2010; Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015), which been categorised as the operating characteristics of fast fashion. Meanwhile, the high efficiency identified from extant consumer studies has shown the frequently updating of fast fashion products (Gabrielli et al., 2013).

8.1.3. Satisfy Customer Perceived Value for Consumers whilst Encourage Impulsive Purchasing

In addition to the product perspective explanation of the fast fashion concept, the aim of fast fashion was also demonstrated in the findings as another part of the definition of fast fashion from the consumer perspective, detailed as satisfying customer perceived value for consumers whilst encouraging impulsive purchasing. In particular, the customer perceived value and impulsive shopping have been identified by participants to aim towards fast fashion from the consumer side, whilst the targeting of consumers has also been discussed by participants simultaneously.

When demonstrating the targeting of fast fashion consumers, it has been identified by participants that students and low-income people are the main consuming group of fast fashion products. Thus they can be regarded as the major promotion receivers for fast fashion products. Compared with existing literature, the young age group, especially consumers aged between 16-25 years old, has been indicated as the major consumers of fast fashion products (Walters, 2006). In this research, the participants have been limited to university students, mainly in the age range that was mentioned by Walters (2006). Meanwhile, according to the findings, the low-income people group has been discovered as

supplementary to the targeting consumers.

In relation to the consumer perceived value, four specific elements have been mainly emphasised within the findings, including self-concept enhancement, consumer demand-driven, affordability, and convenience. Combining with the latest research, consumer demand-driven has been mentioned as the target characteristic in the definition of fast fashion by Barnes & Lea-Greenwood (2006), detailed as 'in order to satisfy consumer demand'. While affordable has been stressed in the fast fashion definition by Chang & Fan (2017), satisfying consumers' purchasing desire is based on the affordable price. Meanwhile, the low price has also been regarded as a major attraction for fast fashion product revealed by participants. Additionally, the rest of the two elements within the consumer perceived value have not been reflected from the definitions of fast fashion from the company perspective, only been explored in previous consumer research about fast fashion. According to previous research (Christopher et al., 2004; Frings, 2002), personal consumer image can be enhanced by increasingly purchasing garments in a stable "wearing taste", similarly, Belk (1988) also mentioned that "clothing has been used to reinforce meanings to oneself". This matched with the customer perceived value of self-concept enhancement in this research. Meanwhile, the self-concept enhancement has also been pointed out as a major attraction of fast fashion products by participants, increasing the shopping pleasure from consumers and may cause frequently shopping as a result. Moreover, shopping convenience has also been emphasised in preceding consumer research. Whether consumers can "conveniently access the products they want" has become a consideration when shopping for fast fashion products (Gabrielli et al., 2013). This has also been considered as an attraction of fast fashion products from the findings.

Whist impulsive shopping has also been regarded as the aim of fast fashion from the consumer perspective. Compared with the definition of fast fashion from the company perspective, this element has been revealed as the target characteristic. Based on the research from Turker and Altuntas (2014), fast fashion tends to "attract the public to shop into stores frequently and increase their purchasing frequency", which matched the claim from the consumer understanding of fast fashion in this research. On the other side, impulsive shopping can be regarded as fulfilling consumer shopping interest, which has been demonstrated as an attraction to fast fashion products.

8.1.4. Criticisms of Short Product Usage, Perceived Design Imitation and Unsustainable Behaviour

Apart from the positive understanding of fast fashion, participants' negative understanding of fast fashion has also been explored by participants in this consumer-oriented research as hindering characteristic, detailed as criticisms of short product usage, perceived design imitation, and unsustainable behaviour. This has not been mentioned in the definition of fast fashion from the company perspective previously, but reflected the differentiation as the shortages and potential improvements from the consumer side. Thus, the negative evaluation needs to be concerned by fast fashion companies, and involved in the definition of fast fashion.

Three specific elements can be presented from this negative understanding, including short product usage, perceived design imitation, and unsustainable behaviour from the company side. Specific for the short product usage, it focuses not only on the poor quality of fast fashion products, but also on the short usage

caused by the quick updating speed. Based on the research from Gabrielli et al. (2013), the "frequently updating for collections" has been considered as a judging indicator for fast fashion, which causes the potential short usage of fast fashion products. Compared with the primary data collected in this research, participants presented a critical attitude to the short usage when describing the understanding of fast fashion. However, participants also indicated that the acceptable quality and usage could be regarded as an attraction of fast fashion products. Thus the poor quality and usage is the criticism of fast fashion from the consumer perspective. This can be attributed to the increasing awareness of sustainability from the consumer side (Maloney et al., 2014; Peattie, 1999; Joung, 2014; Bly et al., 2015; Ritch, 2015). Therefore, the significance of improving sustainability for fast fashion companies has also been enhanced through this element.

Moreover, perceived product imitation has been discussed by participants as a negative point in this research, which has also been regarded as the product characteristics within the fast fashion definition (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015) as "imitating current luxury fashion trends". However, this hindering characteristic should be paid attention to, since it has been considered as the shortage of fast fashion products from the consumer side in this research.

Furthermore, unsustainable behaviour is also a core factor discussed by participants in the criticising understanding of fast fashion in this research, specifically from both the production and disposing processes of fast fashion products. The study revealed that sustainable awareness increased from the consumer point of view (Maloney et al., 2014; Peattie, 1999; Joung, 2014; Bly et al., 2015; Ritch, 2015), and became an obstacle for consumers to shop for fast fashion products, and also prevented the development of fast fashion company as well. Therefore, it is necessary to add this special element into the definition of

fast fashion from the consumer perspective.

According to the above discussion, the consumer perceived definition of fast fashion has been presented, which provides supporting knowledge for this consumer-oriented research. In addition, the consumer perspective also provides reform information to fast fashion companies to help them modify the associated marketing operations to match consumer requirements.

8.2. Consumer Perceived Sustainability Claims of Fast Fashion Brands

In order to effectively correct the unsustainable behaviour, it is necessary for fast fashion companies to explore and understand the sustainability claims of the market. This can guide fast fashion companies to better reform the enterprise behaviour, match the consumers' sustainable requirement, and realise corporate sustainability. Based on the literature, it can be realised that current sustainability claims mainly concentrate on aspects such as excessive carbon emissions, labour conditions, waste of water resources, and abuse of chemicals (Claudio, 2007). However, in consumer-oriented research, the sustainability claims from the consumer perspective present the answer from a different position. According to the responses, the consumer perceived sustainability claims can be categorised into two aspects, the experientially oriented claims that include the unsustainable performance of fast fashion products, and the unsustainable producing process of fast fashion products. While the informational-oriented claims include corporate social responsibility, and the branding of fast fashion brands. In the following content, the sustainability claims will be discussed in detail, combined with current literature.

8.2.1. Experiential Oriented Claims

When discussing the unsustainable attribute of fast fashion brands, the fast fashion product has been considered as the prior object that is stressed by the majority of informants. The unsustainable performance of fast fashion products has been criticised in terms of materials, short product usage, and abnormal low product price.

According to Allwood et al. (2006), the material of fashion products has been considered as an essential step in improving sustainability, which can be realised by consumers directly, further influencing the consuming behaviour of fast fashion products. Regarding the unsustainable attribute of fast fashion materials, the type of material has been mainly criticised by participants according to the personal knowledge related to materials. For instance, natural fabric such as cotton and wool has been considered as sustainable materials, whereas petrochemical-produced fabric like nylon and polyester has been pointed out as unsustainable material. In particular, the composite material specifically has been criticised by participants as unsustainable materials, due to the difficulty in recycling and reusing it. Moreover, the unsustainable attribute of raw materials can also be reflected in the production process, such as chemical usage, energy usage, and even employees' working conditions. Therefore, the significance of materials towards the sustainability level of fast fashion products can be revealed, which not only impacts the product itself, but also influences the whole sustainability journey in consumers' minds.

As another unsustainable element of fast fashion brands, the short product usage has been discussed by most interviewees from two aspects, quickly changing and bad quality. Based on Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), quickly updating has been regarded as an attractive factor of fast fashion products due to the consumer's pursuit of fashionable attributes, which caused limited usage. Moreover, quickly updating products has also been considered the main characteristic and judging indicator for fast fashion products, which may bring the potential short usage of fast fashion products (Gabrielli et al., 2013). Additionally, quickly updating products can be regarded as the promise of trendy clothes supplied in time, while perceptions of trendiness are the main attraction for consumers to shop for fast fashion products (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004; McNeill & Moore, 2015). Therefore,

regular updates to product ranges can be considered the unsustainable claim provided by consumers who have not been attracted by fast fashion. Furthermore, the bad quality of fast fashion products has been claimed to lead to short product usage. Correspondingly, good quality has been regarded as an attractive core element (Gwilt & Rissanen, 2011) and the influencing element of fast fashion product purchasing (Iwanow et al., 2005). Accordingly, in order to solve the short product usage issue, the quality of fast fashion products should be improved, which can effectively relieve perceived sustainability claims.

Additionally, the product's low price has been considered the representative element of unsustainable conditions of fast fashion brands. From the extant literature, it can be realised that the low price can be regarded as an attractive element (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004) and the main characteristic of fast fashion (Gabrielli et al., 2013), which can provide a positive influence to the development of fast fashion brands. However, the low price of fast fashion products has been categorised as the negative influencing element in the unsustainable claims from the consumer perspective, due to the potential sustainable related problems behind the abnormally low price. In particular, the abnormally low price can be caused by corporate social responsibility problems, also the quality reducing risks of materials and production process, which will be categorised as the sustainable problems of fast fashion brands.

The experientially oriented claims also have been indicated from the production aspect. Specifically, the unsustainable producing process of fast fashion products can be regarded as another consumer-perceived sustainable claim. This includes large quantities, production processes, and overseas production.

When criticising the large quantity of fast fashion production, participants mainly focused on the overproduction of fast fashion products, which may cause

unsustainable producing behaviour, such as materials overconsumption, and waste of energy. This is not only leading to the oversupply of fast fashion products in the market, but also causing the worry about future treatment of superfluous stock in unsustainable approaches. However, according to the literature about fast fashion, the quantity of fast fashion products has been defined as limited (Choi et al., 2010) instead of large. Correspondingly, it can be realised that the development of fast fashion towards the quantity aspect has brought unsustainable concern from the consumer perspective.

According to McNeill and Moore (2015), the utilisation of unsustainable production techniques increases due to consumer demand and profit guidance. Within the production of fast fashion products, participants mainly focus on the unsustainable producing process and ingredients utilised in the producing process. In particular, the abuse of chemicals has been significantly pointed out by participants. Compared with extant literature, sustainable problems have been identified within the manufacturing process (Niu et al., 2017), specifically in energy and chemical usage aspects. In order to solve the sustainable problems, the potential solutions have been indicated by academics that the development of production technologies, especially replacing the standard chemicals with an environmentally friendly ones, can change sustainable awareness and further influence consumer behaviour (Allwood et al. 2006).

Within overseas production, two potential sustainable problems have been mentioned by participants, including transportation and employee working conditions. First, it has been stressed that the long-distance transportation of fast fashion products will cause more carbon footprints, resulting in reducing the sustainability attribute of fast fashion products. Based on extant literature, the increasing carbon footprint caused by transportation has been explored (Perry,

2012; Choi, 2013), as well as associated solutions have been demonstrated, such as local manufacturing (Choi, 2013), imposing a carbon footprint tax (Larsen et al., 2012). Secondly, overseas production can cause worry about the working conditions of employees, which has been considered as a significant criticism of sustainability in fast fashion brands (Cachon & Swinney, 2011).

8.2.2. Informational Oriented Claims

As one of the informational-oriented sustainability claims, corporate social responsibility has been emphasised by the most of informants, from employee conditions, disposability, and pollution. Considering of literature, the deficiency of corporate social responsibility has been shown specifically in the fast fashion industry (Cachon & Swinney, 2011; Segre & Reinach, 2005). Furthermore, the connection between corporate social responsibility and sustainability has been reflected from the consumer point of view in this research.

In particular, the employee condition has been regarded as the major consideration of corporate social responsibility by participants. Moreover, the negative reporting about fast fashion brands always concentrated on the employee conditions aspect, which can be regarded as a deduced influenced element of the sustainable image within the fast fashion sectors. In particular, fast fashion brands have always been criticised for their bad labour condition, due to the difficulty in guaranteeing employees' rights (Sinisalo, 2020).

Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the unsustainable treatment methods of used cloth also will cause sustainable problems, even creating the disposable culture of fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. For instance, consumers will dispose the unwanted items in the garbage instead of recycling or

reusing them. This also has been reflected in literature as a waste culture (Chau, 2012), established from fast fashion consumption that the destination of fast fashion products is discarding, which will negatively influence the environment. Further research (Joung, 2014) extended to explore the negative effects of clothing disposal behaviours on the environment. However, according to responses, it can be reflected that consumers lack channels and supporting knowledge in sustainably treating unwanted items, which hinders their sustainable behaviour.

Additionally, environmental pollution can bring the sustainability claim to the fast fashion brands from two sides, the manufacturing process, and the operating processes. The environmental pollution caused by the manufacturing process, such as air pollution, water pollution and chemical pollution, will directly influence the consumer perceived cognition of the corporate social responsibility of fast fashion brands. Similarly, pollution has also been reflected in previous research (de Brito et al., 2008; Caniato et al., 2012; Lo et al., 2012; Perry, 2012), which needs to be relieved to increase sustainability within the fast fashion industry. Meanwhile, the utilisation of plastic packaging has also been indicated by interviewees as the operating pollution in the fast fashion sector, which is getting serious due to the popularity of online shopping.

Furthermore, the unsustainable corporate image has been stated as another informational-oriented sustainability problem from the consumer perspective, which can influence the decision-making process of fast fashion products purchasing. In particular, it can be recognised that brand positioning will influence sales directly (Lee t al., 2014). Since the brand position of fast fashion brands is generally located the profit instead of sustainability, which causes low sustainability awareness within the brands, limited sustainability-associated

information and knowledge can be delivered from the company to the consumer. Meanwhile, the unsustainable brand image also influenced the corporate image, especially from the quality commitment perspective. On the contrary, the bad quality influenced the sustainability level of the brand image.

Furthermore, based on the above discussion, it can be realised that the sustainability claims are always interactive with each other, so it is necessary to consider the sustainability claims from a comprehensive perspective. For example, the production process is highly influenced by the level of corporate social responsibility. Therefore, they should consider sustainability multi-dimensionally when they intend to solve sustainable problems for a fast fashion company.

8.3. Understand What Consumers Perceive as Challenges in Fast Fashion Companies' Management of Sustainable Products

When exploring the consumer perceived challenges of managing sustainable fast fashion products, informants presented findings from both consumer-oriented and company-oriented. Within the consumer-oriented challenges, three aspects of content have been reflected, including the limitation of products, knowledge/awareness gap, and promotional limitations. Correspondingly, the company-oriented challenge has been indicated by the possibility of cost increase and profit loss. The exploration of challenges not only revealed the current consumer opinion about sustainable products, but also provided the potential modifying guidance to fast fashion companies in the management of sustainable fast fashion products.

8.3.1. Product Guided Challenges

Within product-guided challenges, attractiveness has been indicated by participants as the necessary feature of sustainable products. Since attractiveness has been regarded as a major influencing factor for the decision-making of fast fashion product purchasing (Joergens, 2006), thus attractiveness has been demonstrated as the core criteria for sustainable fast fashion products. Otherwise, the targeted market may refuse sustainable fast fashion products due to less attractiveness. Moreover, the aesthetic feature of fast fashion products is the core attractiveness of fast fashion products (Beard, 2008), so sustainable fast fashion products should keep this feature, in order to satisfy consumer

requirements in self-concept enhancement. According to the findings, the trendy and fashionable level of sustainable fast fashion products should be higher than regular fast fashion products, which can increase consumer willingness to accept the potential higher price of sustainable products (Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009). Therefore, it can be realised that the design of sustainable fast fashion products is the core attractiveness in consumers' minds, similar to standard fast fashion products, so fast fashion companies should strengthen the fashionable attribute of sustainable items.

Moreover, the difficulty in classifying sustainable and regular fast fashion products can be regarded as another challenge in the product aspect challenge. According to the findings shown in the distinction between sustainable and regular fast fashion products, three aspects of classifying challenges have been presented: the performance of products, the shopping process, and the evaluation of fast fashion brands. Consumers will differentiate the sustainable product from the performance aspect, such as the price, material, usage, and trendy level. For instance, the material of the sustainable product is environmental-friendly, which also brings better quality and longer usage, but the design is less fashionable with a higher product price. Moreover, the shopping process is another main channel for consumers to distinguish, such as product labels, store layout, and even advertisements. Since consumers have limited knowledge and information about sustainable items, the product label can be regarded as the most direct way for consumers to determine the sustainability attribute of fast fashion products. Compared with extant research, the label can provide supplementary information to consumers to help consumers make decisions (Connell, 2010), so adding a separate label has been considered an effective way to deliver sustainability to consumers (Markkula & Moisander, 2012). Furthermore, the store layout, especially the arrangement of shelf space,

provides another direct channel for consumers to discover sustainable products. According to the findings, the necessity to combine the usage of labels, layout, and advertisement has been revealed in the classification of fast fashion products. Furthermore, the production of sustainable products also needs to be more sustainable than regular fast fashion products, which will further influence the brand image of a fast fashion brand.

However, the difficulty in classifying sustainable and regular fast fashion products was not only caused by the management-related issue from the company side, but also due to the deficiency of related information and knowledge from the consumer side. Therefore, the necessity to discuss consumer-oriented challenges – the knowledge/awareness gap has been reflected.

8.3.2. Knowledge and Awareness Guided Challenges

Based on the findings, it has been presented that consumers tend to purchase sustainable products or intend to realise sustainability within the shopping and utilising of fast fashion products. However, the current knowledge and awareness gap between consumers and fast fashion companies, hindered the trust establishment and also delayed the realisation of sustainability. Three specific gaps have been indicated by responses, including knowledge gap, awareness gap, and brand image.

According to responses, it has been reflected that consumers showed a deficiency in both sustainable products associated knowledge and sustainability-associated knowledge. Compared with the literature, the lack of information and knowledge from the consumer consumption of fast fashion products will negatively influence the environment (Harris et al., 2016). Correspondingly, an

associated effective method has been suggested to improve sustainability, through better delivering information about sustainable clothing and its availability (Markkula & Moisander, 2012). In particular, it has been emphasised that the central knowledge gap can be focused on the imbalance between consumer-required sustainable knowledge and the information provided by fast fashion companies, which causes distrust from the consumer perspective. This has also been reflected in the evaluation of sustainable activities undertaken by fast fashion companies, which are difficult to promote due to the deficiency of associated knowledge and effective information. Correspondingly, the information gap also explained why sustainable activities have difficulties to be e highly accepted by the market. In the meantime, the effective channels of delivering sustainable information also have been indicated by participants, such as advertisements.

Meanwhile, informants have also regarded the awareness gap as a major challenge in managing sustainable fast fashion products. The awareness gap is formatted based on the sustainable knowledge deficiency. According to the extant literature, the impact of consumer awareness has also been reflected. For example, consumers with strong, sustainable awareness will consider more about sustainability within the products shopping process (Bly et al., 2015), indicating the significance of establishing a sustainable awareness from the consumer side (Kjærnes, 2011; Rumpala, 2011). Moreover, it has been pointed out that increasing the sustainable awareness of the lifecycle of fashionable products from the consumer perspective may be an effective method to realise sustainability in the fast fashion industry (Claudio, 2007), which may change the consumer behaviour of fast fashion consumption (Goworek et al., 2012). However, the deficiency in current consumer awareness of sustainability, especially sustainable fast fashion products, caused decision-making difficulties since

consumers are unsure whether to shop for sustainable collections that will benefit sustainability. This phenomenon has also been influenced by employees in fast fashion companies, who may deliver inaccurate sustainable information to consumers due to the personal deficiency of sustainable awareness and knowledge. Therefore, the unprofessional behaviour may cause the suspicious feeling about sustainable items from the consumer side, which has also been reflected by Hustvedt and Dickson (2009). Accordingly, the awareness-associated requirements have been extended from consumers to employees working in fast fashion companies, in order to help consumers better make purchasing decisions based on their knowledge and information.

According to Solomon and Rabolt (2004), brand image has been regarded as an influencing element and judging factor for the conversion rate from sustainability awareness to consumer behaviour. Furthermore, the original unsustainable brand image will influence the awareness of fast fashion brands, which indicates the significance of reforming the brand image in a more sustainable direction (Schaltegger & Hörisch, 2017). Whereas consumers may feel suspicious about the reality of sustainability attributes within sustainable fast fashion products. This opinion has also been revealed from the evaluation of sustainable activities in this research, in which sustainable activities have been considered a type of marketing strategy conducted by fast fashion companies to reform the unsustainable brand image. Accordingly, fast fashion companies should provide related information to fill the awareness gap from the consumer side, since consumers prefer to shop from fast fashion companies with a concentration on sustainability and the environment (Jacquelyn, 2011; Philip, 2011).

Based on the above discussion on the knowledge and awareness gap, it can be realised that an imbalance of information between consumers and fast fashion

companies and a lack of effective communication channels can be regarded as the main reasons that prevent consumers from accepting sustainable fast fashion products. Therefore, fast fashion companies should pay attention to the challenge in knowledge and awareness when they intend to promote sustainability in the market.

8.3.3. Promotional Challenges

As the last consumer-oriented challenge, promotional challenges concentrated on the information delivering channel, especially the effectiveness of proper channels, which emphasised the significance of approaches for marketing communication. Similar to previous literature, exploring suited communication methods to deliver information from the company to the consumer became more significant (Park et al., 2011).

Consumers have emphasised two specific promoting channels as effectively, involving advertisement and social media. Compared with extant literature, the reality and authenticity of advertisement may be suspected (Sinisalo, 2020), if the manufacturing technologies in making sustainable fast fashion products with ecological materials have not been effectively delivered in advertisement (Wicker, 2020). Therefore, the advertisement design should be significantly focused on by fast fashion companies, combined with the informational requirement from the consumer side. Moreover, participants have emphasised social media in promoting sustainable products due to the high reliability of this channel from current fast fashion consumers. Similarly, previous research also indicated the significance of digital communication, such as online communication, social media platforms, and mobile application program (Park et al., 2011). Therefore, communication and promotion should change from traditional channels only to

multiple channels utilisation, especially the online approaches.

Furthermore, internationalisation has been demonstrated by participants, especially for global fast fashion companies. As mentioned by informants, the suspicious feeling about fast fashion brands may form due to the differentiated sustainable product promotion methods in different markets. Similarly, it has been identified by McNeill (2006) that different cultural backgrounds can influence detailed promotion approaches. For example, consumers may find a sustainable collection in the UK market. However, the same collection has not been discovered in the market from other countries, which may cause the unbelievability of the authenticity of sustainable fast fashion products in the UK market. This phenomenon may especially occur in the consumers with an international background, who will access fast fashion products launched in different markets worldwide by an international fast fashion brand. Therefore, the significance of promotional consistency has been demonstrated for fast fashion companies, especially when communicating created information or products to consumers.

Based on the discussion of promotional challenges, the significance of communication approaches and channels can be realised, which may influence the information communication quality.

8.3.4. Financial Guided Challenges

As the company perspective challenge, the financial challenges have been stressed by the majority of participants, in both the lead-time period and post-purchase period.

Within the lead-time period, the financial challenges concentrated on the

increasing cost of research and development input, also the manufacturing cost that involves materials and transportation, which will further influence the market share of fast fashion brands. At the innovation stage, interviewees indicated that lots of money would be invested into developing sustainable materials or sustainable production technologies, which can increase the sustainability attribute of fast fashion products. Meanwhile, in order to reduce the carbon footprint caused by transportation, local manufacturing has been stressed by lots of participants, but the manufacturing cost, especially the labour cost, may increase significantly in the UK market. Therefore, the total cost of sustainable fast fashion products will be higher than regular fast fashion products, which may provide less profit from the sustainable collection to the fast fashion companies. Accordingly, the price of sustainable products may be higher than regular fast fashion products, which has been regarded as the main characteristic of sustainable fast fashion products mentioned by participants in this research. Although consumers expressed the acceptability of higher prices for the sustainability attribute, the price of a fast fashion product still is the major influencing factor for fast fashion purchasing (Sinisalo, 2020; Joergens, 2006; Iwanow et al., 2005). Therefore, the pricing of sustainable products should be a concern for fast fashion companies, which may bring the potential loss of market share as a negative result. In particular, the significance of enhancing consumers' reliability and trustworthiness of the authenticity of sustainability attribute of fast fashion products has been realised from this financial challenge.

When discussing the challenges in the post-purchase period of sustainable fast fashion products, product tracking, especially the disposal of unwanted fast fashion products, has been considered as another financial challenge. The unsustainable treatment of unwanted sustainable products will increase the unsustainable recognition of sustainable products (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009),

increasing research on the influence of disposal on sustainability (Joung, 2014). Considering the treatment of unwanted fashion items, most participants indicated the desire to dispose of fashion items in sustainable methods, such as reselling, donating, giving to other people, and reusing. According to Goworek et al. (2012), the disposal behaviour has been driven by consumer habits; correspondingly, the significance of sustainability to consumers can be side reflected. However, a few participants indicated that unwanted fashion clothes' destination is garbage, since the quality of products is bad and cannot be used for a second life. This revealed the significance of quality for consumers, which may influence their further disposing behaviour and negatively influence the environment. Additionally, some participants mentioned that they have difficulty dealing with used items in a sustainable way, since they have limited knowledge about the sustainable method, especially how to do it. This reminds the fast fashion companies, to help consumers to do the disposal, which will benefit the brand image, but also can establish brand loyalty for consumers.

Based on the above discussion, it can be realised that the challenges should be considered from both the company and the consumer perspectives, as the consumer is the product receiver and evaluator. In particular, the awareness and knowledge associated with challenges can be regarded as the content of challenges, while the promotional challenge can be regarded as the channels of challenges. Therefore, fast fashion companies should try to fulfil consumer desires when promoting sustainable products to the market.

8.4. Understand Consumer Perceptions of Brand Authenticity in the Context of the Fast Fashion Sector

In order to present the consumer perceived understanding of brand authenticity within the fast fashion industry, this research explored brand authenticity from three aspects, including evaluation, characteristics, and recognising channels (shown in chapters 7.2 - 7.4). Based on responses, three themes have been abstracted, which strongly connect with brand authenticity, including brand image, information, and product and customer experience. These three connections reflected the significant elements, within the establishment and enhancement of brand authenticity to consumers in the fast fashion industry, which has also been regarded as criteria to determine the authenticity of brands. In particular, consumers stressed that the negative evaluation of brand authenticity is caused by a lack of quality supporting information and a positive brand image. In the following content of this section, these three connections will be discussed separately by combined with current literature.

8.4.1. Brand Authenticity and Brand Image

According to the extant literature, brand authenticity can be regarded as a consumer-directed aspect of brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012), a promoted brand association to the brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012), the criterion to judge the reliability and veracity of brand image (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020). Compared with this research, a positive brand image has been regarded as the main characteristic of authentic brands; thus, the consumer evaluation of a brand image can influence the authenticity level of a specific brand. Under the discussion of brand image, five elements have been mentioned by informants as

the detailed criterion to evaluate the brand image, including brand awareness, trustworthiness, brand reputation, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability. The above elements have shown the influence on the establishment and evaluation of the perceived brand image, further influencing the recognition of brand authenticity.

Brand awareness can encourage the recognising level of brand authenticity through enhancing the associated brand image in consumers' minds. According to Lu et al. (2015), a positive relationship has been stressed between brand authenticity and brand awareness. Moreover, it has been mentioned that (Beverland, 2009) brand awareness can be increased through little expense if the brand authenticity has been recognised by the target market. Correspondingly, a complementary relationship has been identified between brand awareness and brand authenticity.

Since trustworthiness has been regarded as the delivering content of authenticity (Cappannelli & Cappannelli, 2004) and an essential attribute of brand authenticity (Bruhn et al. 2012), it has been realised from previous literature that trustworthiness can influence consumer perception of brand authenticity (Yang et al., 2021), even influence the establishment of brand authenticity (Bruhn et al., 2012). Within this research, the significance of trustworthiness has been emphasised in the discussion of brand authenticity since trustworthiness has been regarded as the evaluating elements of a positive brand image, which may confirm the authentic attribute of brands. Correspondingly, trustworthiness can influence perceived brand image, further influencing brand authenticity from the consumer perspective.

Moreover, the influence of brand reputation on the brand image has also been reflected in this research. Brand reputation has been regarded as the confirming

element in the evaluation of brand authenticity in this research. According to the extant literature, brand reputation can influence consumer recognition of brand image due to its durability and longer nurturing period (Bennett & Kottasz, 2000). Meanwhile, the recognising channel of brand reputation has also been mentioned as operational by responses in this research. This has also been indicated by Herbig and Milewicz (1993) that the brand reputation can be established in consumers' minds based on the consistency of brand signal delivering to company operating actions. On the contrary, brand authenticity can benefit brand reputation, since authenticity provides the external foundation to brand reputation recognition (Napoli et al., 2016).

Furthermore, corporate social responsibility, especially the environmental part – sustainability, has been emphasised in the establishment of a positive brand image in the fast fashion industry as a significant component of brand authenticity. Additionally, corporate actions in corporate social responsibility have also been regarded as an effective channel to recognise brand authenticity from the consumer perspective. Accordingly, the importance of corporate social responsibility to brand authenticity has been reflected in this research. Compared with extant research, corporate social responsibility can implicate the brand reputation (Baghi et al., 2009). Meanwhile, actions in corporate social responsibility can provide a good brand image and brand reputation for companies (Salehzadeh et al., 2018). Moreover, sustainability has been indicated as one factor of fashion brand authenticity (Choi et al., 2015). Therefore, corporate social responsibility should be concentrated on and stressed in the brand authenticity in fast fashion brands.

8.4.2. Brand Authenticity and Information

The significance of information has been emphasised in all three exploring aspects of brand authenticity in this research. According to Morhart et al. (2015), the information provided reliable evidence for the perception of brand authenticity, whilst authentic brands can increase the credibility of information provided by companies (Portal et al., 2019; Burnett & Hutton, 2007). As the component of brand authenticity, quality supporting information has been considered as one of three-segment, involving transparency, informational consistency, and effective information communication. In particular, informational consistency has been indicated as an effective channel for consumers to recognise brand authenticity. Meanwhile, the required information has been stated as significant supporting evidence for consumers to judge the reliability of brand authenticity.

As one criterion about required information, transparency has been demonstrated by most of the participants, which has further been regarded as the characteristic of supporting information for brand authenticity. Since an authentic brand is expected to have a high requirement for transparency (Gilmore & Pine 2007), negative evaluations of brand-related information can be eased (Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018). Moreover, through increased consumer demand for transparency, the investigation of ethical and environmental-related information has been emphasised (Eggers et al. 2013; Guèvremont & Grohmann, 2018). Therefore, the significance of transparency to information required by brand authenticity has been reflected. While the deficiency of information and unbalance of information between consumers and companies have been regarded as obstacles to brand authenticity, especially in the trust aspect, which should be enhanced in the establishment of an authentic brand.

Under the discussion of information, the consistency of information has been

stated and stressed as the main characteristic of brand authenticity and an effective way to recognise brand authenticity. The significance of consistency to information further to brand authenticity has been reflected, which has been revealed in previous literature. Based on the definition of brand authenticity (Bruhn et al., 2012), consistency has been considered as the core feature of the concept. Moreover, consistency has been considered as one requirement of brand authenticity (Eggers et al. 2013). Similar to this specific research, it has been demonstrated that the information obtained from multiple platforms should remain consistent, forming the basis of authenticity from the consumer perspective. Otherwise, the doubtful attitude will be produced and destroy the trust between brands and consumers, even influencing the brand image in a negative direction.

As the other core element of quality supporting information, effective information communication approaches have been indicated by a few of the interviewees. In particular, the function of multiple communication channels not only benefits consumers to verify the information and establish trustworthiness with companies, but also coordinates communications to enhance reliability from a consumer perspective (Bruhn et al., 2012). Correspondingly, the information presented in both external and internal communication should remain consistent (Bruhn et al., 2012), which can increase the authenticity in consumers' minds. The external communication platform contains social media and advertisement, while internal communication should be realised through employees who play the information delivery function between brands and consumers. Furthermore, the effectiveness of communication has been regarded as an assisting requirement of information, which can realise functions for consistency and verification of brand authenticity.

8.4.3. Brand Authenticity and Product and Customer Experience

According to findings, the fast fashion product and associated customer experience identified from the shopping process have been considered the subjective channels, which is the most direct way for consumers to recognise brand authenticity. Meanwhile, the fast fashion product and the associated customer experience in high quality have also been regarded as a significant characteristic of brand authenticity. Thus the necessity of improving product quality and customer experience has been emphasised. Correspondingly, brand authenticity states an irreplaceable position when consumers make purchasing decisions about performance-guided products (Choi et al., 2015). Therefore, the mutual encouraging relationship between brand authenticity and fast fashion products has been presented. However, the relationship between customer experience and brand authenticity has not been revealed in extant literature. Within this specific research, the customer experience has been especially demonstrated in customer relationship and customer service, which will be discussed with literature separately in the following content.

In order to increase the recognition of brand authenticity, the high product quality has been indicated by participants, especially through improving and innovating of materials of fast fashion products. Moreover, the requirement of quality commitment has also been regarded as the influencing element of consumer purchasing behaviour toward fast fashion products. According to Napoli et al. (2014), quality commitment has been regarded as the initial influencing factor of brand authenticity, which has also been identified as a presentative element of honesty - the core value of brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015). Therefore, the quality commitment to the establishment and recognition of brand authenticity,

specifically in the fast fashion sector, has been revealed.

According to Peppers and Rogers (2016), customer relationship plays a significant role in customer experience management. When discussing the customer relationship, it has been demonstrated as the verifying element of reliability between consumers and companies in this research. In particular, two specific factors have been mentioned by participants under the close customer relationship towards brand authenticity. One factor is the employee, who can be considered as the information communicating bridge between consumers and brands, and also can help consumers recognise brand reliability and authenticity. Another factor is the utilisation stage of products, which has been identified as the evaluating and strengthen stage of the customer relationship.

Further to customer service, it has been considered as a challenge for companies to build an authentic brand in contemporary society (Beverland, 2014). Compared with this study, good customer service has been indicated as a characteristic of brand authenticity from the consumer perspective, which can improve the brand reputation and promote further shopping as a positive result. Meanwhile, customer service has been stressed as a subjective channel for consumers to recognise the authenticity behind brands. Accordingly, customer service plays a significant role in the establishment and recognition of rand authenticity in the fast fashion sector.

Based on the above discussion about consumer perceived brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector, it can be realised that brand image, supporting information, and products and customer experience have been considered the representative themes of consumer perceived brand authenticity. In particular, the quality supporting information has been identified as the core element of brand authenticity, which will influence the establishment, recognising, and evaluation

process.

8.5. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, the knowledge gaps and research objectives of this study have been fulfilled by the combination of findings and current literature. Meanwhile, the discussion provides evidence and supporting knowledge to deduce the research aim in the following chapter, demonstrating the feasibility of utilising brand authenticity to relieve sustainability marketing issues in the fast fashion sector. Furthermore, the role of brand authenticity in relation to the consumer perceived sustainability, specifically in the fast fashion sector, can be presented.

PART FIVE

Conclusion

Chapter 9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the content will be demonstrated from six aspects:

1) The research aim;

2) The summary of the thesis;

3) Research contributions;

4) The limitation of this research;

5) The future work of this research;

6) The recommendation to the fast fashion sector.

9.1. The Research Aim

Based on the content of findings and discussion shown in Part Four, research objectives have been demonstrated, which provide supporting knowledge to examine the research aim further. Accordingly, the feasibility of utilising brand authenticity to relieve consumer perceived sustainability marketing issues in the fast fashion sector will be explored. Furthermore, the role of brand authenticity in relation to the perceived sustainability of fast fashion products will be discussed in this section, based on the research findings and discussions. In order to visualise the relationships between factors and themes that have been discovered in this research, Figure 9.1 has been created on top of the Figure 3.4. In Figure 9.1, new connections discovered in this research have been coloured in yellow, while green arrows show relationships proposed in existing research. In the following content, influencing factors will be discussed following their order shown in Figure 9.1.
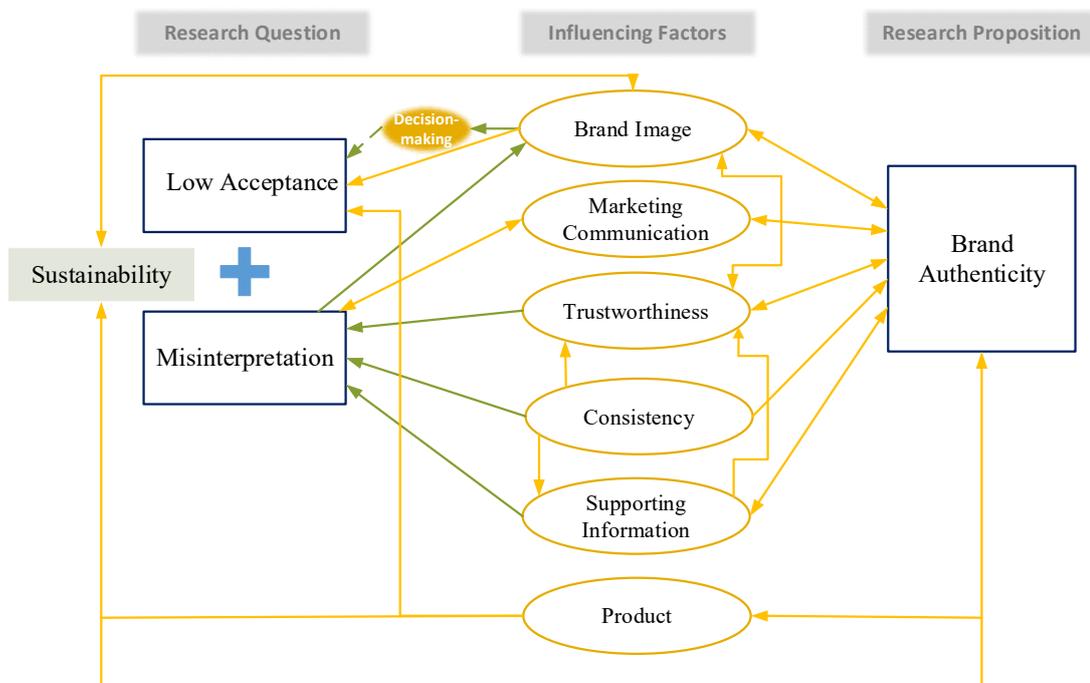
Figure 9.1 Conceptual Framework of Research Aim.

Based on the findings and discussions shown in Part 4, the function and significance of brand image have been enhanced and expanded. When considering its effect on sustainability, negative brand image has been regarded as an influencing factor in reducing the consumers' purchasing intentions for sustainable fast fashion products (Apaydin, 2011; Chang & Jai, 2015). In this research, the negative brand image has been directly considered as the consumer perceived challenges of managing sustainable fast fashion products, which influence the acceptance of sustainable fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. Furthermore, brand image has been emphasised as the criteria of sustainable fast fashion products, and the consumer perceived sustainability claim of fast fashion brands. In particular, sustainability has been regarded as a core element of brand image, influencing the establishment and evaluation of the perceived brand image, and further influence the recognition of brand authenticity. Meanwhile, brand authenticity has been regarded as the criterion to judge the reliability and veracity of brand image (Cinelli & LeBoeuf, 2020), as well as the contributor to a positive brand image (Bruhn et al., 2012). Whereas the effectiveness of the positive brand image has been presented as the main characteristic of authentic brands in this research; thus, the consumer evaluation of a brand image can influence the authenticity level of fast fashion brands. In particular, trustworthiness has been discussed as the main contributor to a positive brand image, and associated significance has been emphasised in the establishment of reliability between the authentic brand and consumers. Based on the above discussion, brand image can be regarded as the consumer perceived influencing factor to connect sustainability and brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector.

For marketing communication, it has been demonstrated as an influencing factor for the misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products in previous

literatures. According to Henninger et al. (2016), the impact of misinterpretation will reduce the fast fashion company's environmental effort, further misleading the sector's image as suspicious, which hinders the communication of sustainable related information to the public. Whereas the deficiency of effective communicating channels has been regarded as the promoting factor of greenwashing (Chen & Chang, 2013; Henninger et al., 2016; Sinisalo, 2020). From the responses, this research discussed that the effectiveness of marketing communication channels limits the management of sustainable fast fashion products, which may further impact the informational delivery of sustainability attributes to consumers. Meanwhile, the relationship between brand authenticity and marketing communication has been discussed in the latest literatures, which brand authenticity also could contribute to effective and comprehensive marketing communication (Ibarra, 2015; Potter, 2010), especially for non-commercial information, such as those sustainability-related (Kim & Bonn, 2016; Beverland et al., 2008). While this relationship has been expanded, effective marketing communication has been demonstrated as a consumer-perceived characteristic of authentic brands. Therefore, the improvement of effective marketing communication can not only contribute to relieving the consumer perceived misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products, but also be beneficial for establishing brand authenticity.

Following the discussion of trustworthiness, consistency, and supporting information, these three influencing factors will be presented simultaneously, which also represents the interactive relationships. According to the latest literatures, the misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products is caused by the deficiency of supporting information, consistency, and trustworthiness (Cavender & Lee, 2018; Hill & Lee, 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Ozdamar & Atik,

2015; Rahman et al., 2015). Furthermore, the research findings expanded the connections between brand authenticity and these three influencing factors.

The deficiency of trustworthiness can be regarded as the core obstacle for consumers to recognise and accept brand authenticity claimed by fast fashion companies, so the significance of trustworthiness to brand authenticity has been reflected. According to findings, brand authenticity has been regarded as the encouraging element for enhancing the trustworthiness of brands. More specifically, brand authenticity has been considered as the cornerstone of trustworthiness, also helping consumers to determine information, recognise the brand image, and further enhance brand loyalty. Accordingly, establishing brand authenticity is important for enhancing trustworthiness within the fast fashion sector. Correspondingly to literature, brand authenticity can foster brand trust (Hernandez-Fernandez & Lewis, 2019), while brand trust can be predicted by brand authenticity (Kim et al., 2005; Paxton & Moody, 2003). Meanwhile, trustworthiness has been presented as a core characteristic of authentic brands from the consumer perspective, contributing to the recognition of the positive brand image. Therefore, through trustworthiness, brand authenticity can relieve the misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products, and also increase the credibility of sustainability.

When considering consistency, it not only influences brand authenticity but also be regarded as a core criterion and influencing factor for trustworthiness and supporting information. According to research findings, informational and operational consistency have been proposed as objective channels for consumers to recognise brand authenticity effectively. Meanwhile, consistency has been regarded as a major characteristic of supporting information, which is

the criteria for fast fashion consumers to justify the brand authenticity and encourage trustworthiness from fast fashion enterprises to consumers.

While the significance of supporting information has been emphasised in research outcomes from both sustainability marketing and brand authenticity. When exploring the manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products from the consumer perspective, the knowledge and awareness gap has been proposed as the content's requirement of informational challenges. More specifically, the deficiency of knowledge concentrates on sustainable products-associated knowledge and sustainability-associated knowledge. Correspondingly, the awareness gap formatted based on the sustainable knowledge deficiency, which presented the deficiency in current consumer awareness of sustainability, especially sustainable fast fashion products, caused decision-making difficulties since consumers are uncertain that shopping for sustainable collections will benefit sustainability as a result. Meanwhile, when considering the connection between supporting information and brand authenticity, the supporting information has been discussed as the characteristic of the authentic brand from the consumer perspective and the contributor of trustworthiness from fast fashion brands to consumers. In particular, the quality requirement of supporting information has been emphasised, including transparency, consistency and understandability. Correspondingly, brand authenticity can help consumers better recognise the sustainability of sustainable fast fashion products, while effectively delivering consumer-required sustainable information. According to Morhart et al. (2015), the information provided reliable evidence for the perception of brand authenticity, whilst the authentic brand can increase the credibility of corporate information (Portal et al., 2019; Burnett & Hutton, 2007). Therefore, the supporting information can be concluded as an

influencing factor, enhanced by brand authenticity, and also relieves the misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products.

When considering products, it is a significant supplementary influencing factor discussed by informants in this research, so it has been added to figure 9.1. Also, correlations between products and other themes will be present in the following content. According to the research findings, the unsustainable performance and unsustainable producing process of fast fashion products have been regarded as the main sustainability claims of fast fashion brands from the consumer perspective. In particular, the performance of products has also been regarded as the major approach for consumers to distinguish between sustainable and unsustainable fast fashion products. While the attractiveness and difficulty in classification have been indicated as consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products. In particular, attractiveness has been emphasised as the direct channel for consumers to recognise the sustainable attributes behind fast fashion products. Corresponding to brand authenticity, the fast fashion product has been considered the subjective channel to recognise brand authenticity from the consumer perspective. Meanwhile, the high quality of fast fashion products has been regarded as a significant characteristic of brand authenticity, and the durability of fast fashion products has been proposed as the directly encouraging element of trustworthiness. Accordingly, the significance of product to brand authenticity has been demonstrated. While Choi et al. (2015) indicated that brand authenticity is irreplaceable when consumers make purchasing decisions about fast fashion products. Therefore, the correlation between brand authenticity and fast fashion products has been reflected.

Furthermore, the significance of sustainability has been emphasised as the characteristic of the authentic brand from the consumer perspective, so sustainability can contribute to the establishment and evaluation of brand authenticity.

Based on the above discussion, brand authenticity contributes to the recognition, communication and evaluation of sustainability attributes of fast fashion products. Therefore, brand authenticity can relieve the low acceptance and misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products in the UK market by reforming sustainable brand image, promoting effective marketing communication, establishing consumer perceived trustworthiness, and providing consumers' desirable fast fashion products. Hence, fast fashion enterprises' sustainability efforts could be efficiently and effectively accepted and acknowledged by the consumers, thus contributing to the implementation of sustainability marketing.

9.2. Summary of Thesis

This research explored the role and function of brand authenticity in sustainable marketing. In particular, this research considered challenges in sustainability marketing in the fast fashion sector in the UK market, especially exploring the ultimate reasons and appropriate propositions for the low acceptance and misinterpretation of sustainable fast fashion products. This is in light of discourse by some commentators in relation to perceived unsustainable brand image and misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises (Ozdamar & Atik, 2015; Hill & Lee, 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Cavender & Lee, 2018).

In order to support the verification of the role of brand authenticity to sustainability, two research objectives have been explored. One research objective focused on the consumer perceived challenges of managing sustainable fast fashion products, which can provide clear recognition of the shortage of sustainable fast fashion products in consumers' minds. The other research objective concentrated on exploring consumer perceptions of brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector, especially can reflect the role of brand authenticity for consumers when they shop for fast fashion products.

Furthermore, two knowledge gaps have been found during the process of reviewing relative knowledge for this research, which also have been fulfilled in the exploration of this research. One research gap is the deficiency of the definition of fast fashion from the consumer perspective. The other knowledge gap is that the sustainable concerns towards fast fashion brands from the consumer perspective are still missing.

According to the findings and results from this research, the desired trustworthiness could be enhanced through the contribution of brand authenticity, so that the original unsustainable brand image can be reformed into a more sustainability-oriented brand image. Moreover, brand authenticity can provide an effective communicating channel to deliver sustainability-related information to consumers. Overall, brand authenticity plays a significant position in establishing, recognising, and evaluating the sustainability attributes of fast fashion products from the consumer perspective. Furthermore, brand authenticity has been regarded as an effective method to enhance sustainability and positive brand reputation in consumers' minds, which also can help fast fashion brands to maintain a competitive advantage at the same time.

The two research objectives and knowledge gaps all have been explored and filled, which will be presented as knowledge contributions in the next section. Additionally, managing implications have been suggested in the below content of this chapter.

9.3. Knowledge Contributions

As detailed in previous chapters, this thesis presented the research and its outcome to relieve the misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises. Hence, the research outcome contributes to the state of the art in sustainability marketing in the fast fashion sector, by offering a novel brand authenticity based proposition to relieve sustainability marketing issues. This research also contributes to the industry by providing a novel consumer-originated definition of fast fashion and a detailed list of consumers' sustainable concerns towards fast fashion brands, which also contributes to the broader fast fashion research. A summary of the contributions can be found in the following section.

I)   A detailed review of the state of the art sustainability marketing has been given in chapter 2, where the gaps and insufficiencies have been discovered and can be traced back to the unsustainable brand image perceived by the consumer together with the misinterpretation in communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises. To mitigate above issues, brand authenticity has been introduced into this research. By resolving the marketing communication barrier between the company and consumers, the next level of consumer preserved trustworthiness could be achieved. Therefore, a sustainable brand image can be achieved, and reliable communications between consumers and fast fashion enterprises could be established. Hence, fast fashion enterprises' sustainability efforts could be efficiently and effectively accepted and acknowledged by the consumers, thus contributing to the implementation of sustainability marketing.

II)   The latest researches are trends to provide company perspective

definitions of fast fashion. In order to perform a comprehensive analysis of fast fashion, therefore, explore the consumer-side solution to facilitate sustainability marketing, a definition of fast fashion from the consumer perspective has been derived from the proposed consumer research. The definition of consumer-perceived fast fashion can be summarised as: a marketing strategy through providing large amounts of various fashionable products at a low price to the market in the most limited time possible to satisfy consumer perceived value for consumers whilst encouraging impulsive purchasing, meanwhile being criticised for short product usage, perceived design imitation and unsustainable behaviour.

III)   The main consumer perceived concerns about the sustainability of fast fashion brands had been identified and analysed. The consumer-perceived sustainability claims of fast fashion brands can be determined from two aspects, the experience-oriented and information-oriented claims. The experience-oriented claims include the unsustainable performance of fast fashion products, and the unsustainable producing process of fast fashion products. Meanwhile, the information-oriented claims include corporate social responsibility, and the branding of fast fashion brands. Therefore, guidance for fast fashion companies can be derived, to better reform the enterprise's unsustainable behaviour, match the consumers' sustainable requirements, and then realise corporate sustainability.

IV)   The low acceptance of sustainable fast fashion products has been explored as a result of deficiencies in the consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products, which

hindered solution exploration in sustainability marketing and product improvement. This research has presented the consumer perceived manageable challenges of sustainable fast fashion products from both consumer-oriented and company-oriented aspects. Within the consumer-oriented challenges, three aspects have been reflected: the limitation of products, knowledge/awareness gap and promotional limitations. While the company-oriented challenge has been identified from cost increase and profit loss. Therefore, this contribution provides guidance for fast fashion enterprises to improve the marketing management of sustainable fast fashion products, therefore contributing to the improvement of product acceptance.

V) In this research, the criteria for the establishment, recognition, and evaluation of brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector have been provided, as: products and customer experience, brand image, and supporting information, while high-quality supporting information demonstrates its domination. This not only contributes to future research in consumer perceived brand authenticity in the fast fashion sector, but also provides a means for fast fashion enterprises to establish, maintain and enhance their brand authenticity.

9.4. Limitations of Research

A few limitations have been discovered in this qualitative research, especially in the data collection process. The limitations have been listed below, in order to provide recommendations for future research to reference, which include:

I) Due to demographic factors that may influence the decision-making of fast fashion products, participants should involve interviewees from different cultural backgrounds. However, the sample size is limited in this qualitative research, so that impossible to gauge all perceptions and cultural attitudes related to sustainability in the fast fashion sector. Therefore, this research only proposed theoretical feasibility instead of empirical generalizability.

II) This research explored the sustainable problems in the British fast fashion market, and the sample frame of this research had been demarcated as students from the University of Salford. However, the sample frame is limited by the time cost, which can partly represent the UK market. Consequently, the sample frame should be expanded to different parts of Britain.

III) This research only focused on collecting and analysing verbal-based data, so that the non-verbal associated information may be ignored, such as body language and facial expression.

IV) Since the focus group and in-depth interview have a set time length, participants may have difficulty expressing all opinions on a specific interview question, especially for the focus group interview. As a result, participants in the focus group may have unbalanced opportunities and interests to share opinions on the interview question in a limited time.

V) Since this research focused on the exploration of sustainability, participants may hide some ideas based on the social pressure from the perceived

sustainability requirement. Therefore, quantitative research should be conducted in the future study, in order to relieve the social pressure on participants.

9.5. Future Work

According to the discussion of limitations in the above section, the future potential research directions have been presented below, which provides an exploring direction for future studies.

I)   As discussed in the above limitations, the recruitment of participants had been demarcated in the University of Salford. However, the range of participants should be extended to more universities in different UK areas, which can better reflect the consumer attitudes around the UK market.

II)   Moreover, participants aged between 16-25 years old have been considered the majority of consumers of fast fashion products (Walters, 2006, p.258), especially university students selected as the research objects located in this age range with similar demographic factors. However, many consumers are situated in the age range instead of university students. Thus, future studies should add more consumer groups to the research objects.

III)   Based on the literature, it can be realised that several consumers recognised sustainable measures adopted by fast fashion companies as greenwashing (Kong et al., 2016; Truant et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2017; Castelló & Lozano, 2011). However, the appropriate methods for consumers to recognise greenwashing have not been indicated in previous literature, so it is necessary to explore a criterion of perceived greenwashing in the future study. This expects to relieve the misunderstanding as greenwashing between fast fashion companies and consumers.

IV)   In future research, a quantitative study should be conducted by using the sustainability associated elements collected in this qualitative research to explore the weight in impacting sustainability under less social pressure.

9.6. Recommendations

Based on the exploration and investigation of this research, brand authenticity plays a significant role in the recognition and realisation of sustainability for fast fashion companies, especially in increasing the acceptability of sustainable fast fashion products. Accordingly, fast fashion companies should enhance the establishment and emphasis of brand authenticity, which can help them better practice sustainability, reform sustainable brand image, and effectively communicate sustainability information to consumers. In particular, several detailed recommendations will be given in the following content, provided through the findings and discussion of this research:

I) As the most direct channel for consumers to recognise the sustainability attribute behind fast fashion products, the attractiveness and quality need to be improved. These two elements have been regarded as obstacles by consumers to consuming sustainable fast fashion products and receiving sustainable information from fast fashion brands. In particular, the attractiveness of sustainable fast fashion products has been considered as a prerequisite for consumers to make purchasing decisions. Meanwhile, the quality product has been considered as the core characteristic and recognising channel of brand authenticity.

II) In order to enhance brand authenticity, an effective informational communicating channel needs to be established, which can benefit reinforcement of trustworthiness from the consumer perspective. In particular, informational consistency, informational value, and informational transparency need to be promised, which can promote effective communication between fast fashion brands and consumers. Otherwise, the recognition of greenwashing will increase in consumers' minds, which will

prevent the realisation of sustainability for fast fashion brands.

III) In order to increase sustainability, fast fashion companies need to strengthen corporate social responsibility, especially the corporate actions in environmental protection, and the improvement of working conditions, which will improve the original unsustainable brand image in consumers' minds. Moreover, collaboration with external organisations also will benefit the perceived recognition of sustainability. For instance, fast fashion brands can collaborate with universities to invite a new sustainable material for fast fashion products, so that the sustainable attribute of this creative material can be more credible and acceptable by consumers. Furthermore, the unsustainable brand image can be reformed at the same time.

9.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, five theoretical contributions of this qualitative study have been presented, and the future research directions have been indicated simultaneously. Meanwhile, several managerial implications have been provided to fast fashion companies, in order to help the fast fashion sector better realise sustainability through the utilisation of brand authenticity.

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Appendix

Appendix I

List of Participants

Interview Type	Participant No.		Gender	Education	Domestic/International
Focus Group	Group 1	1	Female	PhD	International
		2	Female	PhD	International
		3	Female	PhD	International
		4	Female	PhD	International
	Group 2	1	Male	UG	Domestic
		2	Male	UG	Domestic
		3	Female	MSc	International
		4	Female	UG	Domestic
		5	Male	UG	Domestic
	Group 3	1	Male	PhD	International
		2	Female	MSc	International
		3	Male	MSc	International
		4	Male	PhD	International
In-depth Individual Interview	1		Female	PhD	International
	2		Male	PhD	International
	3		Female	UG	International
	4		Male	MSc	International
	5		Female	UG	International
	6		Male	UG	Domestic
	7		Female	UG	International
	8		Female	UG	International
	9		Female	MSc	International
	10		Male	PhD	International
	11		Female	UG	Domestic
	12		Male	MSc	Domestic
	13		Female	UG	Domestic
	14		Female	UG	Domestic
	15		Female	MSc	International

Poster for Recruiting Participants for Focus Group

Appendix III

Poster for Recruiting Participants for Individual Interview

Appendix IV

Participant Invitation Letter

Dear students,

My name is Mengyao, I am a PhD student in the Business School of the University of Salford. Currently I am conducting a research project as part of the requirements of my degree in Business and Management, and I would like to invite you to participate.

The title of my study is: **A study of consumer perceived brand authenticity to sustainability of the fast fashion sector in the UK**.
If you interested in this research and decide to participate, you will be invited to participate an individual interview about sustainability and fast fashion, which topics and areas you are familiar with. Within the discussion, data will be collected to complete my thesis, publication, and dissemination.

All students who study in the University of Salford are welcomed to participate in this research. But it is entirely up to you whether to take part.

Also, as a student myself, I understand the value of your time, so an incentive will be provided to appreciate for your participation. If you would like to participate or have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact me through the contact information below to discuss participating.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards
Mengyao

Contact details:
Ms Mengyao Zhang
Phone number: 07746284138
E-mail: m.zhang5@edu.salford.ac.uk

Appendix V

Participant Information Sheet

A study of consumer perceived brand authenticity to sustainability of the fast fashion sector in the UK

Ms Mengyao Zhang

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this research. This document will provide you detailed information about this individual interview study, such as why you have been invited, what will be involved, and how the study will be conducted. And if you wish to find out any further information please contact me.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

With seemingly endless updated fast fashion designs and the pressure of maintaining price competitiveness, fast fashion products have been more readily accepted by consumers. However, some may assert that the fast fashion industry has been tarnished by unsustainable behaviour by some firms and consumers. Hence, fast fashion companies are increasingly challenged to implement measures to enhance their sustainability Brand authenticity can provide an effective lens to connect consumer's personal lives and consumption behaviour; so that it enhances consumers' behaviour and attitudes towards acquisition and usage favourite fast fashion brands in a more sustainable manner. The purpose of this research is to discover the role of consumer perceived brand authenticity in the management of sustainable products in the fast fashion industry.

2. Why have I been invited to take part?

As younger people, and in particular students are considered as consumers of fast fashion products this research will collect data from this population group. Participants have been limited to students from the University of Salford, so anyone in this population range will be warmly welcomed.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether to take part in. It will be helpful to make a decision by taking some time to read all of the information about the study in advance. You can also withdraw or cancel your participation without needing to give a reason before the focus group interview begins.

4. What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to have an individual interview with the researcher, which will last around 20 minutes. Within the interview process, you will be asked a series questions relating to fast fashion products, sustainability and brands. You need to sign for the consent form of this research before the interview started, and then give your personal view of the interview questions that the researcher asks.

5. Expenses and payments

Since the individual interview will take place at the University of Salford, this research will cost limited transport fees for the students to attend. In order to compensate the time that students spend for attending the individual interview, a £5-10 Amazon Gift Card will be given to each participant. Also, snacks will be provided during the interview process.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

Participating in the research is not anticipated to cause you any disadvantages or discomfort. The potential physical and/or psychological harm or distress will be the same as any experienced in everyday life. If you wish to withdraw your data after the interview is completed, you can email the researcher and request your data to be removed, up and until publication and dissemination has occurred.

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

If you can participate in the research, you may obtain inspirations on realizing sustainability in daily life.

8. What if there is a problem?

If there is any problem you can raise this with the researcher Mengyao Zhang (contact details at the bottom) or if this is not suitable then contact her main supervisor –
Dr. Peter Reeves. Email: p.reeves@salford.ac.uk. Telephone: 0161 295 5720. Lecturer, Salford Business School. 608e, Maxwell Building, University of Salford, Salford, Manchester, M6 6PU.

9. Will my participation in the study be kept anonymous?

All data will be kept anonymous. Your name will be coded in pseudonym and not be able to link with the research materials, so you will not be able to be personally identified or identifiable in any publications or dissemination. If one of my supervisors needs to check my analysis of your data, they can access to it, but it will be from the anonymised files not my original emails with you. Since all the information that we collect about you during the study will be kept anonymous, you will not be able to be personally identified or identifiable in any publications or dissemination.

10. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

In order to keep a clear record of the data in the individual interview process, the audio recorder will be utilized for recording. It will then transcribed verbatim, which will be regarded as the basic data for the research analysis.

11. What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results will be disseminated through my PhD thesis, along with publications and/or dissemination in academic journal articles and conferences. These outputs will contain a pseudonym so that your identity will remain anonymous.

12. Who is organising or sponsoring the research?

The research is being supervised by the Business and Management Research Centre, University of Salford, Salford, M6 6PU. This research is a self-funded PhD project.

13. Further information and contact details:

If you would like to participate in the study or enquire about any additional information please contact Mengyao Zhang at m.zhang5@edu.salford.ac.uk. Mobile phone: 07746284138.
Supervised by Dr. Peter Reeves. Email: p.reeves@salford.ac.uk. Telephone: 0161 295 5720. Lecturer, Salford Business School. 608e, Maxwell Building, University of Salford, Salford, Manchester, M6 6PU.

Thank you for taking the time to read about this study and for considering participation.

Appendix IV

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

You will recall from our recent correspondence that I am conducting a study entitled:
A study of consumer perceived brand authenticity to sustainability of the fast fashion sector in the UK.

As part of this study, I am conducting focus group interviews, in order to gain your views and opinions of this topic as data.

In this document, I would like to make you aware of a number of matters relating to the data you will give during the individual interview, and how the data will be managed.

If you agree with each of the below statements, please mark with an X in the following boxes.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet (06/01/2020) explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time before the interview start without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Also, I can withdraw my data after the interview is completed, which can be done up to the point that publication and dissemination has occurred. ☐

I understand that my responses will be kept anonymous. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be personally identified or identifiable in any report or publications (include academic journals, e-journals, books, research grant bids, conference proceedings/ presentations, practitioner journals, presentations, interviews, teaching, internet web sites and systems, and any other relevant form of dissemination) that result from the research. ☐

I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research as anonymised quotations (from interview transcripts). ☐

I agree to use audio recorder to record our interview process. The data I provided in the individual interview may be transcribed in verbatim by typists who may be a University of Salford employee or student, or a person who is external to the University of Salford. The typist will be informed of the need for complete confidentiality. I agree to typists to transcribing my data. ☐

To ensure a high-quality research project, the data analysis process may be involved by other academics, and/ or postgraduate students at the University of Salford. In such cases, they may allow to access to my data, but my name will be kept anonymous, replaced by a pseudonym. ☐

Notes:

_____   _____   _____
Name of Participant   Date   Signature
(*or legal representative*)

_____   _____   _____
Lead Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix VII

Coding on Transcription of Collected Data

Q1: The Understanding of Fast Fashion from Consumer Perspective			
Themes	**Meta-Codes**	**CODES**	**QUOTES**
Marketing Strategy	**Promotion**	<u>Advertisement:</u> In4 (p.In4_1); In7 (p.In7_2); In7 (p.In7_2); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In9 (p.In9_1); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); <u>Sales-driven:</u> In2 (p.In2_1); <u>Clear market positioning:</u> In7 (p.In7_2); In12 (p.In12_1);	G2_P3 (p.FG2_2): *My boyfriend for example, he worked for a fast fashion company, which I won't right mentions name. But he said there was always, they were cheaply made, and they were fraying a lot, and there was they used a lot of advertising technique, so it looks really good.* In7 (p.In7_1): *I think you see that advertisement is everywhere, because they have to stand out in a way, because there's so many of these fast fashion brands that you need to gain an edge above your competitors, so that's why they have to advertise a lot.*

	International Branding	International Brands: In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_2); In7 (p.In7_2); In7 (p.In7_2); In7 (p.In7_2); In7 (p.In7_2);In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_5); In9 (p.In9_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_6); G2_P1 (p.FG2_12); G2_P5 (p.FG2_12); G2_P1 (p.FG2_13); G2_P1 (p.FG2_15); G2_P1 (p.FG2_15); G2_P4 (p.FG2_16); Brand awareness: In7 (p.In7_2); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); G2_P1 (p.FG2_12); Brand image: In8 (p.In8_1); Brand loyalty: G2_P1 (p.FG2_13);	In3 (p.In3_1): *So I think they are everywhere as well, I think you can buy from [fast fashion] whatever you are in the world. I mean is mostly in Europe or some other countries.*
Provide Large Amounts of	Low Price	Low product price: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1	In10 (p.In10_2): *I think it should be very cheap, and … when I pay attention to the manufacturer, so it writes it from usually*

Various Fashionable Products at a Low Price to the Market in the Most Limited Time Possible		(p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_3); In1 (p.In1_5); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_5); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In11 (p.In11_1); In11 (p.In11_1); In11 (p.In11_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_2); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In15 (p.In15_1); In15 (p.In15_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P4 (p.FG1_2); G1_P3 (p.FG1_4); G1_P3 (p.FG1_4); G1_P1 (p.FG1_7); G2_P1 (p.FG2_1); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P4 (p.FG2_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_2);	*Bangladesh, or maybe Cambodia, or something like that. So I think these countries make a very cheap product, and it's come from to this, you know UK, and people buy their cheap. So this is I think happened in this shop, because of this is cheap.* G2_P4 (p.FG2_2): *they keep their prices low, by using … the cheaper resources. But they also kind of do it on purpose, so that people will continuously buy. So even if I feel like they had access to a similar material that was just as good, I could imagine these …fast fashion industry companies [would]…still pick the cheaper alternative, just so that people would carry on and buy.*

| | | G2_P5 (p.FG2_3); G2_P1 (p.FG2_3); G2_P3 (p.FG2_16); G3_P2 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_2); G3_P1 (p.FG3_3); G3_P2 (p.FG3_3); G3_P2 (p.FG3_3); G3_P2 (p.FG3_4);

Low price competition:
In1 (p.In1_2); In2 (p.In2_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In12 (p.In12_1);
G1_P2 (p.FG1_1); G1_P3 (p.FG1_1); G2_P1 (p.FG2_1); G2_P4 (p.FG2_2); G2_P4 (p.FG2_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_8); G2_P1 (p.FG2_8);

Low production cost:
In5 (p.In5_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In11 (p.In11_1); In12 (p.In12_1);
G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P4 (p.FG2_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_6); | |
| | **Large Quantity** | Huge production:
In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In14 (p.In14_1);
Huge amounts of clothing: | In1 (p.In1_1): *These brands will produce amounts of clothes every year, huge amounts of clothing. For example, I shop in one brand this week, and I can find more* |

		In1 (p.In1_1); In7 (p.In7_1);	*new items if I shop in the same brand next week.*
	Variety & Diversity	More product styles compared with high-end brands: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In8 (p.In8_1); Variety: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_2); In2 (p.In2_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_2); G1_P1 (p.FG1_2); More fashion seasons: In2 (p.In2_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_2); In8 (p.In8_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1);	In8 (p.In8_1): *[fast fashion] always offer me a lot of clothes choice in the same season. For example in summer, they have more than the clothes choice compared to other brands, and then they're also very fashionable, wearable.* G1_P1 (p.FG1_2): *And also you can get varieties of items, fashion, in high street shops. Varieties of accessories, besides fashion I get accessories to go with your fashion in the high street shop.*
	Trendy	Fashionable:	G1_P4 (p.FG1_2): *And sometimes when*

| | | In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In2 (p.In2_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P4 (p.FG1_2); G1_P4 (p.FG1_2); G1_P1 (p.FG1_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_12); G3_P2 (p.FG3_1); G3_P2 (p.FG3_1); Similar with high-end brands: In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In15 (p.In15_1); G3_P2 (p.FG3_2); Best-seller: In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); | *you see that designs, they have beautiful designs, even if they're cheap. They have unique designs.* |
| | High Efficiency | Fast production: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In11 | In7 (p.In7_1): *I think the fast fashion for me is when you have a fashion brand or a* |

		(p.In11_1);	*fashion company who went through a*
		G2_P2 (p.FG2_1); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2);	*cycle very fast. So for example, it could be*
		Quick to market:	*a company that has a quick turnover with*
		In2 (p.In2_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In7	*their collections. So for example in original*
		(p.In7_1); In11 (p.In11_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In14	*fashion, if we think about … they always*
		(p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1);	*used to have or still have only winter and*
		G2_P2 (p.FG2_1); G2_P4 (p.FG2_7);	*summer season. But now, if you ….look [at]*
		High market reaction:	*all these fast fashion corporations, they*
		In2 (p.In2_1); In6 (p.In6_1);	*have new trends, and new styles, new*
			collections every other week, maybe every
			three or four weeks, so it's a much quicker
			turnover.
Satisfy Customer Perceived Value for Consumers Whilst	Targeting	Students: In1 (p.In1_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_3); Low income people: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1);	In4 (p.In4_1): *If it depends on the money, but I think especially fast fashion products would be cheap enough to and affordable, for such for example students, it's affordable, they are affordable and I think fast fashion would be good for students, for low level workers, for low income people, other type of people, the children*

Encourage Impulsive Purchasing		G1_P4 (p.FG1_5); G1_P2 (p.FG1_5); G2_P1 (p.FG2_3);	*that their parents are gonna pay for their clothes.*
	Enhanced Self-concept	Personality &taste: In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In2 (p.In2_1); In3 (p.In3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_3); G3_P3 (p.FG3_3); Attraction: In1 (p.In1_2); G3_P1 (p.FG3_3); Pleasure: G2_P1 (p.FG2_12); G3_P3 (p.FG3_3); G3_P3 (p.FG3_3); G3_P4 (p.FG3_4); G3_P4 (p.FG3_4); Confidence: G2_P1 (p.FG2_12); G2_P1 (p.FG2_12); G2_P5 (p.FG2_12); G2_P4 (p.FG2_12); G2_P5 (p.FG2_12); G3_P3 (p.FG3_3); G3_P3 (p.FG3_3);	In1 (p.In1_2): *…these items will increase yourself, attract more attentions for you.* In1 (p.In1_2): *For some fashion brands, I will purchase bags, neckerchief, necklace and other items … these items will increase yourself, attract more attentions for you … which may increase … [your] total personality.*
	Demand-driven	In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_5); In2 (p.In2_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8	In1 (p.In1_1): *For fast fashion brands, I always buy some fashionable, trendy items from them, such as products with leopard prints, sequins. For example, I*

| | | (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In15 (p.In15_1); G2_P4 (p.FG2_7); G3_P3 (p.FG3_4); | *need a special clothing for an activity, and I don't want to spend too much money for it, so I can find … [fitting] clothing from fast fashion brands, [they are] really convenient.* |
| | **Affordable** | In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In2 (p.In2_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_2); In12 (p.In12_2); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P2 (p.FG1_1); G1_P4 (p.FG1_1); G1_P4 (p.FG1_1); G1_P4 (p.FG1_2); G2_P3 | G1_P1 (p.FG1_1): *Fast fashion or high street fashion for me, I think it's we are fashion clothes on sold at affordable prices, where people you know can afford to buy what they need at any particular time or season of the year. That's for high street fashion means to me, affordable prices, where you can get things like cheaper rate.* |

		(p.FG2_2); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P4 (p.FG2_16); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1)	
	Convenience	In1 (p.In1_2); In10 (p.In10_1); Multiple shopping channels (store location): In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In5 (p.In5_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In14 (p.In14_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_3); Quickly shopping: In5 (p.In5_1); In7 (p.In7_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In13 (p.In13_1);	In6 (p.In6_1): *so I understand fashion just say like the high street stores.* In5 (p.In5_1): *like it's what in like most of our common shopping store, is like at the mall.* In5 (p.In5_1): *I generally understand it's what most people tend to shop for, so it's like very trendy, like it's what in like most of our common shopping store, … [you] can get [it] as quick as possible.*
	Impulsive Purchasing	In10 (p.In10_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In15 (p.In15_1);	In13 (p.In13_1): *A fast fashion, mm-hmm, I would say it's like clothes made on demand, for like in trend things, like low cost prices and it's like trying to get people*

			to buy on impulse, buy clothes that they might not need, particularly or and it's not so much about the quality.
Criticisms of Short Product Usage, Perceived Design Imitation and Unsustainable Behaviour	Short Usage	Worn in limited time: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In15 (p.In15_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_3); G1_P1 (p.FG1_4); G2_P1 (p.FG2_2); G3_P2 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); G3_P4 (p.FG3_1); G3_P1 (p.FG3_2); G3_P2 (p.FG3_3); G3_P2 (p.FG3_3); G3_P4 (p.FG3_3); G3_P4 (p.FG3_3); Poor quality: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_1); In1	G3_P3 (p.FG3_1): *You know, like when you buy a trousers, and then you wear twice, and then you think the quality is so bad, [so you] just throw it away instead of you wash[ing] it and then reuse it.* In14 (p.In14_1): *And I think very quick changing I think.*

		(p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_2); In1 (p.In1_5); In2 (p.In2_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In3 (p.In3_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_1); In8 (p.In8_5); In9 (p.In9_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In11 (p.In11_1); In12 (p.In12_2); In12 (p.In12_2); In12 (p.In12_2); In13 (p.In13_1); In13 (p.In13_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In15 (p.In15_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_6); G1_P1 (p.FG1_6); G1_P1 (p.FG1_6); G2_P3 (p.FG2_1); G2_P4 (p.FG2_2); G2_P1 (p.FG2_6); G2_P4 (p.FG2_13); G2_P4 (p.FG2_16); G3_P2 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); Quick changing: In1 (p.In1_1); In1 (p.In1_5); In1 (p.In1_5); In1 (p.In1_5); In3 (p.In3_1); In8 (p.In8_6); In9 (p.In9_1); In9 (p.In9_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_2); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In15 (p.In15_1);	

		G1_P3 (p.FG1_1); G1_P3 (p.FG1_1); G2_P1 (p.FG2_2); G2_P2 (p.FG2_11); G2_P2 (p.FG2_11); G2_P2 (p.FG2_11); G2_P1 (p.FG2_11); G3_P1 (p.FG3_2);	
	Perceived Design Imitation	In1 (p.In1_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In4 (p.In4_1); In6 (p.In6_1); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In10 (p.In10_2); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In15 (p.In15_1); G1_P2 (p.FG1_4); G1_P2 (p.FG1_5); G1_P3 (p.FG1_5); G2_P1 (p.FG2_3); G2_P4 (p.FG2_3); G2_P1 (p.FG2_3); G2_P5 (p.FG2_3); G2_P4 (p.FG2_4); G2_P5 (p.FG2_4); G2_P1 (p.FG2_8); G2_P1 (p.FG2_8); G2_P1 (p.FG2_8); G3_P2 (p.FG3_2); G3_P2 (p.FG3_2);	In10 (p.In10_2): *So because they just made it from, you know they try to copy I think, sometimes I have seen something that's a very good brand. For example a bag with a good brand, and you can see the cheap one exactly the same no differences exactly, you know in my country it happened a lot.*
	Unsustainable Behaviour	In1 (p.In1_2); In6 (p.In6_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In11 (p.In11_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_3); Unsustainable production: G2_P1 (p.FG2_1); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G2_P3 (p.FG2_2); G3_P3 (p.FG3_2); G3_P3 (p.FG3_2);	G3_P3 (p.FG3_2): *I guess when the way they actually manufacture the clothes, …For example, the way they dye the fabric…the chemicals they use, or the post process for the water that sort of stuff, maybe not as good as the high-end brand,*

		G3_P3 (p.FG3_2); G3_P3 (p.FG3_2);	*maybe.*
		Overseas production: In6 (p.In6_1); In7 (p.In7_2); In10 (p.In10_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In11 (p.In11_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); In14 (p.In14_1); G1_P1 (p.FG1_3); G1_P3 (p.FG1_3); G1_P4 (p.FG1_3); G1_P2 (p.FG1_3); G2_P1 (p.FG2_1); Sweatshop: In6 (p.In6_1); In11 (p.In11_1); G2_P1 (p.FG2_6); G2_P4 (p.FG2_6); G2_P1 (p.FG2_6); G2_P5 (p.FG2_6); Unfair trade: In6 (p.In6_1); Incineration: In1 (p.In1_2); Disposability: In1 (p.In1_1); In10 (p.In10_1); In12 (p.In12_1); In12 (p.In12_1); G3_P2 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1); G3_P3 (p.FG3_1);	*In6 (p.In6_1): What I see as if, they're selling it with rails rails rails of the same item, which has been made in sweatshops of stuff, that's what I'd characterize is like fast fashion. Also, I think fast fashion companies mis-defined fair trade, although they always calling for fair trade…one product has to be fair trading, the rest doesn't.*