

Sustainable Fashion and Social Media Influencers

An experimental study on the effectiveness of Instagram fashion influencers on consumers' attitude, awareness and purchase intention of sustainable fashion

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Master's Thesis
July 1st, 2019

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the impact of social media influencers on consumers' attitude, awareness and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. In recent years, the fashion industry has become the second most polluting industry in the world. Fast fashion has increased the quantity of clothes, while decreasing the quality. In an attempt to stop the negative impact, sustainable fashion is produced. Sustainable fashion focuses on environmentally friendly materials, fair trade principles, and changing consumers' mindset. While making decisions for a purchase, consumers are searching for new ways to gather information that could guide them. Social media influencers (SMIs) have proven to be very effective for promoting fast fashion and influencing attitude towards a product. Yet, fast fashion is not the same as sustainable fashion. The latter has more than a product to sell; it is also the awareness towards the environmental and societal issues. Attitude and awareness can both be influenced by SMIs, but they can also play a mediating role in influencing consumers' intention to purchase. This research tests if SMIs can perform the same promotional role for sustainable fashion as they do for fast fashion. An experimental 2x2x2 factorial design tests the effect of three specific characteristics of SMIs and influencer marketing—expertise, attractiveness, and message content—on consumers' attitude, awareness and purchase intention. The experiment was conducted among 240 participants. The data yielded a respondents group consisting of females with an average age 23 predominantly living in the Netherlands. They were presented a manipulated Instagram post. After the exposure, participants answered questions regarding their attitude towards sustainable fashion, general and specific awareness towards the environmental and social issues, and purchase intention. The research demonstrated that the characteristics of the SMI that were tested were not effective in influencing the attitude, awareness, or purchase intention. Instead, only when participants recognized the brand did the message content and attractiveness influence attitude and awareness. Yet, the fast fashion message was more effective than the sustainable fashion message. Additionally, neither of the characteristics, whether respondents recognized the brand or not, had an impact on the purchase intention. The result was the same for the direct effect and for the mediated effect on purchase intention through attitude and awareness. This shows that the same mechanism that is effective for fast fashion might not be effective for sustainable fashion, at least not on the platform Instagram. The implications that can be made from these results are that sustainable brands should first focus on making their brand a household name in the movement to change the fashion industry, and organizations should explore other media channels to share their information to consumers because Instagram SMIs are not effective.

Key terms: sustainable fashion, social media influencers, source credibility, attitude, awareness, purchase intention, brand familiarity

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1. Introduction

The fashion industry has changed a lot in the past decade, predominantly because of the competitive nature of the market (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The industry is highly impacted by the global economy, distinct trends, and industrial changes. On top of that, digitalization has resulted in a more active consumer who is constantly updated with fashion trends via social media (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Social media makes it easier for consumers to connect with brands and help them to make more informed, selective and in charge decisions regarding their purchases (Lay, 2017). This has contributed to the development of a new business model known as fast fashion, where consumers constantly feel the pressure to keep up with the rapid changes in styles and trends (Michaela & Lavie Orna, 2015).

The term fast fashion usually involves clothing that is transformed from the runway to stores in just two weeks. To keep up with the market demand without the high cost, the products used for these types of clothing are low cost because of the cheap, and often toxic, fabrics that are used (Neelis, 2018). Also, the production process is mostly moved to factories in low-income countries where labor is relatively cheap (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The production process, combined with the constant need to update one's wardrobe, has resulted in the fashion industry becoming the second most polluting industry in the world (ABN AMRO, 2018; Dooley, 2018). People continue to buy low quality products that are hard to recycle and thus create more toxic waste (Joung, 2014). In an attempt to counterbalance the negative influence of fast fashion production, there is sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion is about the slower production of clothing, using less toxic fabrics and local production processes (Jung & Jin, 2014). The main objective for sustainable fashion is that it decreases the environmental and social impact it has for everyone involved (Fletcher, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

The changing landscape within the fashion industry is not an unfamiliar topic in society, but the increased visibility of the environmental impact in recent years has heightened the discussion (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Social media has made it a habit for people to share everything online and showing purchases online has proven to have a positive effect on how much people enjoy their own clothes (Duan, 2018). The way fashion is promoted has resulted in a seeing is buying mentality, which in turn encourages the fast consumption of fashion (Join, 2017). However, the faster products can be bought and delivered, the lower consumers value the clothing that they buy (Friedman, 2018), and the larger their disposable habits become (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). People are becoming aware of this throwaway culture but are unable to act on it because they have no idea how (Beard, 2008; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). For the promotion of fast fashion, influencer marketing is hailed as the number one marketing strategy for fashion products by both users, social media influencers (SMIs) and brands (Carbone, 2019, Launch Metrics, 2018).

This research will test if the same mechanisms can be applied to promoting sustainable fashion.

The media is quick to discuss the impact of other damaging industries like the meat and oil industry, and the use of plastic, but the damage of fashion is only now growing in prominence (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). In 2018, BBC released a documentary, 'Fashion's Dirty Secrets', that featured prominent brands refusing to address the environmental repercussions of fast fashion. Given this, the producers of the documentary turned to the crucial role of SMIs as advocates of more responsible and sustainable practices in fashion (Dooley, 2018). So far, knowledge about the impact of SMIs on consumers' awareness and support for sustainable fashion is still lacking. This thesis intends to address this gap in scientific knowledge, by researching to what extent SMIs can have an impact on the attitude, awareness and consumption of sustainable fashion.

Scientific relevance

In the academic field there are not many studies that discuss the impact of SMIs on sharing a message of and promoting sustainable fashion. There are however some key elements within this research that have been studied separately in the past. On the one hand there is research by Senecal and Nantel (2004), and Hall, Towers and Shaw (2017) that discusses the importance of the internet in the changing consumer journey. Their results showed that the internet created an open space for people to find and share information and that has led to recommendations made by peers or endorser to be very effective in influencing purchase intention. In line with that, there is research on the new marketing strategy that is influencer marketing (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019), where SMIs are found to be the new tool to promote products because they are closer to the target audience than traditional marketing (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016).

On the other hand, there is the environmental and social sustainability aspect in this research paper. Literature on how to encourage ecological behavior dates back as far as 2002 (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2012; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002) also highlighting the role of brands in spreading a message of responsibility (Moon, Lai, Lam & Chang, 2014). However, sustainability in relation to online communication tools is not often discussed. When the concept of sustainable fashion is explored in relation to social media it is often times mentioned as part of an online community. Research by Hamid, Iljab, Sulaiman, Anwar and Norman (2017), and by Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012) state that sharing knowledge through social media is an effective tool to spread the message of sustainable fashion. Furthermore, two academic researches were found that looked more closely at the impact of SMIs on ecological behavior (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018) or the purchasing of sustainable fashion (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2016). However, the focus within both of these papers was not on sustainable fashion or SMI respectively. Their

research mainly addressed the potential impact SMIs could have. Based on those findings this research paper will expand on the current academic field by researching the characteristics of SMIs that could influence the attitude, awareness and consumption of sustainable fashion.

Societal relevance

Sustainable fashion is the fair production of clothing and making sure that everyone involved in the process is aware of the impact of products. Sustainable, vintage and second hand clothing are all part of what is called the slow fashion movement (Fletcher, 2007). The concept of slow fashion came into existence to counteract the fast fashion business model that has gained prominence due to social media (Fletcher, 2010; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Sustainable fashion is more than the product that is being sold; it is also a message about impact and improvements that could be made. The changes do not only have to be made in the production process of fashion, but also in consumers' mindset. The less products consumers buy that are made from a higher quality material, the more value they will place on each item (Fletcher, 2007). Yet, fast fashion is still considered the leading business model in the fashion industry, making it hard for people to find sustainable options (Beard, 2008). Research shows that consumers are searching for more specific information on sustainable fashion (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012) and that they are also looking for multiple sources to inform them (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2016; Park & Lee, 2008;). Social media can help by sharing more information on sustainable fashion. Different platforms offer consumers the opportunity to make more informed decisions when purchasing products, relying on recommendation by peers and brands to guide them (Michaela & Lavie Orna, 2015). SMIs move between peer community and brand advocates, which can help by creating a connection between the two.

Research objective

The objective of this study is to investigate the impact SMIs have on the attitude, awareness and consumption of sustainable fashion. The ability to find information before making a purchase is growing, but a lack of knowledge still negatively impacts the intention towards buying sustainable fashion (Carrington et al., 2012). Consumers are either not aware of the possibilities for ethical alternatives or they do not know how to move towards a more sustainable lifestyle (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). The intention to buy can be impacted by three elements: the subjective norm, attitude towards the product, and perceived behavioral control. The more positive consumers perceive these three elements to be, the stronger the intention towards consumption is (Ajzen, 1991). The perceived behavioral control is the possibility the consumer has to engage in the behavior, which is out of the control of the SMI. Yet, the subjective norm and attitude can be

influenced by the way SMIs portray themselves online. In this research the focus will only be on the attitude change that could impact the purchase intention. In addition to that, awareness will also be tested as a mediating factor for purchase intention.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are a type of micro-celebrity. They are ordinary users who gathered a following online by sharing parts of their everyday life and creating an online persona (Abidin & Ots, 2016). Because of their start as ordinary users, SMIs are perceived to be more accessible than any other type of celebrity (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016) creating a perceived closeness and intimacy with their audience (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). SMIs can provide entertainment through videos about varying topics and they can also fill an educational role by sharing information about less discussed topics (Rasmussen, 2018). Findings also show that SMIs are an effective marketing tool for brands, through promoting their products or helping to establish a brand identity (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). These abilities are important for SMIs to make people more attentive and aware of certain topics like sustainable fashion.

In this research there are three characteristics of influencer marketing that will be used as the independent variables. The three specific characteristics are message content, expertise and attractiveness. When discussing message content this research talks about a sustainable or fast fashion message. Fast fashion messages are more common when it comes to influencer marketing, but sustainable messages can be found online as well. Here the distinction is made between sustainable messages that discuss the benefits of buying less clothes with higher value (Fletcher, 2010) and fast fashion messages that focus more on trends and affordability (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). The other two characteristics are part of the Source Credibility Model by Ohanian (1990). Expertise refers to the level of knowledge and experience the SMI shows in their messaging when they are promoting the product. A SMI that is considered an expert in their area can affect how consumers accept the opinion as valid and affect how consumers apply that to their own purchase intentions (Ohanian, 1991). Attractiveness can refer to different elements of a persona, but in this research it means the physical attractiveness of a SMI. The attractiveness of a SMI can have an effect on how well the SMI as a person and their message is received (Trampe, Stapel, Siero & Mulder, 2010). The three different characteristics will be tested separately for their effect.

This research paper thus investigates the impact SMIs have on attitude, awareness and consumption of sustainable fashion. The three characteristics —message content, expertise and attractiveness— will be investigated to answer the following research question: to what extent do social media influencers impact consumption of sustainable fashion as it is mediated by consumers' attitude and awareness? With this research question, the goal is to extend the research on SMIs in creating social awareness and promoting a cause that requires less purchasing instead of more.

The rest of this research paper will be divided into five sections. The first section places the research in a theoretical framework and from that hypotheses and questions are constructed. The second section describes the methodology used to conduct this research. This section will include the research design, sample, operationalization, procedure, and the quality check. The third section presents the statistical results of the experiment. In the fourth section a discussion and implications of the results will be provided. This section will also include the limitations of this research and will give suggestions for future research. The final section will give a conclusion and an answer to the proposed research question.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The fashion industry and the consumer

2.1.1 Fast fashion

In recent years the fast fashion trend has become one of the pillars of the fashion industry, but simultaneously the industry has also grown to be the biggest polluter in terms of environmental and social sustainability (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Fast fashion is a business strategy that aims to “reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion products into stores, in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak” (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006, p. 259). Often times this means that the manufacturing of clothes draws on low-cost materials and labor, efficient and large volume production, and keeping prices low (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Fletcher, 2010; Michaela & Lavie Orna, 2015). Fashion companies that are well known for handling this fast fashion business strategy are H&M, Zara and Uniqlo (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Fast Retailing, n.d.; Ranker, n.d.). What pushes this business model of fast clothing production is the constantly changing demand of the consumer and their lifestyle (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Taplin, 2014), which has become more fluctuating and fast changing in the past few years (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2014). The media has a big influence on the wishes and demands of consumers. Fashion trends have long been created through music, films and television, but more recently trends are started by what is happening on the streets, in clubs and at lifestyle hotspots (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006) and subsequently shared online. Consumers are becoming more knowledgeable, are able to adapt quicker (Taplin, 2014), and are generally more understanding of fashion trends, forcing brands to produce the right product at the right time (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

The consumer driven approach to manufacturing clothing has resulted in two elements that, according to research by Caro and Martínez-de-Albéniz (2014), and Cachon and Swinney (2011), are key to the fast fashion business model: quick response and frequent assortment changes. These two elements have made the current fashion industry highly competitive. Brands are desperate to fulfill the consumers' needs, which has led to retailers releasing new product ranges almost weekly (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Brands can no longer predict trends months in advance, but have to adjust to the information they are given by the consumer at this moment (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). In addition to production being sped up, fast fashion also demands a fast marketing strategy (Sheridan, Moore & Nobbs, 2006). It is much less about advertising full collections or wholesale channels and more about constantly reviewing and adding new items to the stock (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2014). Social media, and SMIs in particular, has proven to be a great way to upgrade the marketing of single fashion pieces (Carbone, 2019). It lets people keep

up with the latest trends and with the buying process (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Moreover, people love sharing their purchases online as well as watching others post their outfits (Duan, 2018) extending the reach of the clothing brand pictured.

The fast fashion business model might be good for the economy, but it also starts to have a visible impact on the environment, the value consumers attribute to clothing, and consumers' disposable habits (Fletcher, 2007; Friedman, 2018; Join, 2017). Production is moved to low income countries where they make use of toxic fabrics (Neelis, 2018), which lowers the quality and shortens the longevity of clothing. People value their clothes less and throw them away quicker, yet the use of toxic fabrics makes it harder to recycle and damages the environment more (Joung, 2014). Consumers have three main reasons for disposing clothes: the quality of the clothes is low, a new fashion trend is emerging, or the clothes are bought for a one-off event (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007). Research shows that especially younger consumers value clothing less when the quality is lacking or they know it will go out of style quicker (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Fast fashion is said to only contribute to a throwaway culture "where products and fashion lost intrinsic value, encouraging consumers to replace and dispose of products before their real life cycle had ended" (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007, p. 214). New clothes are bought so frequently that sometimes fashion consumers dispose of them for convenience because they need to make space for new clothes to be added (Joung, 2014). The problem is that a lot of consumers are not aware of the correct way to dispose of clothing. A solution for lack of knowledge can be found in the media. According to research, the same media that increase the information on trends also has the potential to educate people on disposal habits (Joung, 2014; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Despite it being a large and underdeveloped issue, this research will not focus on post-purchase disposal behavior. Instead, it will discuss pre-consumption intentions and how SMIs can play a role in impacting consumers' decisions.

2.1.2 Sustainable fashion

The fashion industry is comprised of multiple different production processes and trends. In addition to fast fashion, another trend that has gained attention in the last couple of years with the growing environmental problems is sustainable fashion (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). The term sustainable fashion is often times used interchangeably with concepts like eco-, green-, and ethical-fashion (Carey & Cervellon, 2014), and fair-trade and organic clothing (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). They all encompass two main things: the use of environmentally friendly products and fair trade principles (Moon et al., 2014; Shen et al., 2013). Environmental concern revolves around reducing the energy, chemicals and water used to produce clothes and replacing them with non-toxic material (Jung & Jin, 2014), and the use of technology to decrease waste and pollution (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). The production is also made more locally to reduce the carbon footprint (Henninger, Alevizou

& Oates, 2016). The localization of production not only positively affects the environment, but also positively affects social issues. This links well to the aspect of equity, which refers to sustainable fashion being equally available for everyone and equal treatment for those involved in the production process (Jung & Jin, 2014) including good working conditions, and fair wages (Henninger et al., 2016; Jung & Jin, 2014). Slowing down the process and carefully thinking about the production of fashion can be rewarding for workers because it allows for secure long-term employment and the opportunity to grow (Fletcher, 2007). In consumers' minds the focus has been predominantly on the environmental impact of fashion production, but social sustainability is just as vital in establishing a healthy industry from fashion (Jung & Jin, 2014).

The concept of sustainable fashion and its main principles can be gathered under the slow fashion movement. The term, often considered as the opposite of fast fashion, stems from the food industry where people felt the need to counter the growing power of fast food restaurants (Fletcher, 2010). Slow fashion is not so much a direct reaction to the time driven nature of fast fashion as a way to slow down consumption and trends, but more a change in mindset, culture and production (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). According to Fletcher (2010), slow fashion "professes a heightened state of awareness of the design process and its impacts on resource flows, workers, communities, and ecosystems" (Fletcher, 2010, p. 264). It is about full transparency and traceability of every step in the supply chain (Harris, Roby & Dibb, 2016; Henninger et al., 2016), from the employee that handcrafts the clothing to the consumer that buys the product. In her earlier article, Fletcher (2007) explains that this change in mindset can, on the production side, help companies effectively plan and hire the right amount of people for the job and increase the use high quality materials. On the consumption side, a different mindset can encourage consumers to buy fewer pieces that have a higher price and greater value (Fletcher, 2007). However, value of clothing is not only enhanced through buying new, sustainable pieces, but also by reusing and recycling through reselling, secondhand and vintage clothing (Harris et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2013). Fast fashion is predominantly about quantity over quality, but for slow fashion it is much more about functionality. Functionality of sustainable fashion extends the life-cycle of a piece of clothing and increases versatility; "people buy high quality pieces that they wear longer, more often and in multiple ways" (Jung & Jin, 2014, p. 517). Fletcher (2007) underlines this by saying that slow fashion is about symbolic expression, of being creative through fashion choices, as well as about durability and long-term engagement with quality products. Slow fashion is about changing not just the pace of production, but also the way people consume.

In recent years, the industry has seen a great development in alternative ways of producing clothes and more fashion conscious consumers are not only interested in the appearance, but also in its green features (Moon et al., 2014). However, this is just a smaller group of people in a large consumer filled world. Fast fashion is still the most dominant trend

in the fashion industry and the constant need for updated trends and consumer demand contradicts the principals of slow fashion (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Sustainable fashion is thus considered a niche market and often times described as not stylish enough for high-street fashion, using terms as dull or natural (Harris et al., 2016; Kong et al., 2016; Moon et al., 2014). Apart from the lack of design capabilities and source material, sustainable fashion is also considered expensive (Moon et al., 2014). Both consumers and production workers alike understand that this is to ensure a fair production process with good quality fabrics (Fletcher, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014); however, more often than not, there are other priorities placed above ethical considerations (Shaw, Hogg, Wilson, Shiu & Hassan, 2006; Shen et al., 2013). According to Henninger et al. (2016), the media are focusing on the key concerns of environmental and social sustainability and people accommodate these issues to their own needs. The more expensive sustainable fashion is the more consumers see it as a high-end phenomenon that has no applicability in high street retailers and is not available for them (Henninger et al., 2016). It is mainly knowledge that is lacking for sustainable fashion to become more than a niche market (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009) and it is important for the fashion industry to change that. In this research the role of SMI is investigated in their potential to bridge this knowledge gap by sharing their own ways of sustainable fashion consumption.

2.1.3 The (ethical) fashion consumers

The strategies of both the fast and sustainable fashion trends are based on the consumer. Fast fashion companies are trying to accommodate to the consumer by speeding up the business process and sustainable fashion is as much about conscious production as it is about changing consumers' mindset. The latter is not that simple to overcome. According to research by Harris et al., (2016) there are three barriers for consumers to buy sustainable apparel, to care for their clothes and change their disposable behavior. The first barrier is that clothing is an altruistic purchase. Sustainability is a low criterion when consumers' make a decision to purchase. Clothing is not something that you primarily need, but more a purchase to satisfy your secondary needs (Harris et al., 2016). Especially young fashion consumers consider trendiness and social acceptance more important than whether or not the product last them for a long time (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

The second barrier for buying sustainable fashion, according to Harris et al. (2016), is consumers' lack of knowledge and understanding. This lack of knowledge is even considered as the main reason there is a gap between peoples' intention to purchase environmental products and their actual behavior (Carrington et al., 2012; Shen et al., 2013). Sometimes this lack of knowledge is due to unclear terminology (Shen et al., 2013), but it is also because sustainability is often not related to fashion (Kong et al., 2016). Increasing consumers knowledge regarding the concept of sustainable fashion can happen in many

different ways. Three effective ways are social, effective (Kong et al, 2016) and procedural knowledge (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). First, social knowledge is about understanding others and learning from them, which can positively influence the attitude towards sustainable clothes. Second, effective knowledge will explain the benefits of shopping sustainably (Kong et al., 2016). Third, procedural knowledge gives consumers step-for-step guidance on how to evaluate sustainable values of a product and where to find trustworthy sources of information (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). Knowledge is closely related to the concept of awareness. In their research, Kollmus and Agyeman (2002) define environmental awareness as the “knowing of the impact of human behavior on the environment” (Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002, p. 253). They see knowledge as a subcategory of awareness. In this research, knowledge will also be seen as one of the main components when testing for participants’ awareness. The awareness of environmental issues and of sustainable alternatives within the fashion industry will be tested as a mediating factor to increase consumers’ intention to purchase sustainable fashion.

The third barrier is that consumers are very diverse in their concerns, and engaging them all would be difficult (Harris et al., 2016). Knowledge is only one of the reasons for the gap between intention and behavior, and there are more factors that could influence the resistance to actually buy sustainable clothing (Moon et al., 2014). It is the environmental knowledge, values, and attitudes, together with emotional involvement that all make up environmental consciousness (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). According to research by Carrington et al. (2012), there are four main elements that have to be aligned with a consumer go from an intention to shop ethically to actual behavior. The first is prioritizing ethical problems, because consumers tend to not prioritize ethical issues believing they are not actually helping the cause. The second is planning and making a habit of ethical behavior. The third is the willingness of consumers to make commitments and sacrifices to establish ethical behavior as a lifestyle pattern. The fourth is shopping modes and how ethical concerns relate to other more personal concerns, like price and social acceptance. Only when these different concerns align will ecological purchasing occur (Carrington et al., 2012).

The different motives consumers have can lead to three types of ethical consumers, as defined by McNeill and Moore (2015). The self-consumer is neutral and unfavorable towards sustainable fashion; the sacrifice-consumer is highly involved in ethical concern and therefore favorable towards new ways to consume fashion; and the social-consumer balances somewhere in between, interested in sustainable fashion but constrained in their behavior by the social barriers like the norms and opinions from their peers. The latter is also defined as an ethically influenced consumer, someone who does it for the self and others perceptions of them, opposed to the ethical consumer who actively researches the impact products have (Davies & Gutsche, 2015). Social-consumers can greatly benefit from the media —specifically social media— to develop their level of awareness and attitude towards

sustainable fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015). In this research both the awareness and attitude towards sustainable fashion will be tested through the information that is shared by SMIs, and whether or not it will increase the intention to purchase sustainable fashion.

2.2 Advertising (sustainable) fashion

2.2.1 Consumer journey

The motives consumers have towards acting sustainably can arise from their day-to-day interactions, but they can also be shaped through their exposure to content related to the concept. Research shows that the more people are confronted with content discussing sustainable behavior, whether that is from brands, eco-activists or magazines, the more they believe that other people in their surroundings are also buying sustainable fashion (De Lenne & Vandebosch, 2017). Marketing efforts from big companies about sustainable fashion can have a big role in influencing consumers perceptions, but what is really changing the way people purchase is the change in their consumer journey.

The internet has offered many ways for people to make decisions on purchasing a product. In their research Hall et al. (2017) discuss that with all the possibilities that it offers, the internet has proven to be an inherent part of the new consumer journey. This journey towards purchasing a product has extended in the past years. In their decision-making process consumers willingly let themselves be influenced by others through online and offline word-of-mouth and they tend to seek out multiple sources and options before they make the actual decision to purchase (Hall et al., 2017). The recommendations that people can find online are more personalized than those from traditional advertising (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). The rise of the World Wide Web has on the one hand resulted in a seeing is buying mentality where people feel the need to buy whatever they lay eyes on (Join, 2017). On the other hand, it has also offered a chance for more well-informed decisions. It is often believed that having a large amount of choices makes it harder for people to actually choose. According to Beard (2008), people are so overwhelmed with fast fashion choices that sustainable fashion does not even get noticed. Yet, research shows that those consumers that research their products more and seek out multiple recommendations before purchasing do so to limit their options. They want more information to make a well-informed decision (Senegal, Kalcynski & Nantel, 2005) and increase the amount of information they read to do so. Instead of depending on the information to come to them, consumers are at liberty to search for it themselves.

The freedom that the internet has given consumers is of importance to brands. Consumers are becoming more inclined to take the word of their peers over that of traditional marketing (Nunes, Ferreira, Freitas & Romas, 2018). This implies that it would benefit brands to be more considerate of the shopping behavior and consumer journey of their target

audience if they want to make more effective branding (Hall et al., 2017; Needel, 2015). Especially with regards to ethical drivers, it is important for brands to establish a clear statement. Environmental issues in the fashion industry are being noticed (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) and consumers are quick to find out whether a brand is just claiming to be environmentally friendly or is actually ethically producing (Beard, 2008). In this information age it is better to be open about company values towards consumers so they will not spread a negative message. A marketing strategy that has gotten brands closer to their target groups' consumer journey is influencer marketing. In the following section this strategy will be elaborated on.

2.2.2 Social media influencer marketing

The internet has offered new ways to find information and the possibility to create social media platforms. The two main functions of social media are the opportunity for consumers to form communities (Brodie, Ilic, Juric & Hollebeek, 2011) and to engage in the practice of self-representation (Khamis et al., 2017). People can connect online and create communities around the same interests, but be geographically located somewhere else (Brodie et al., 2011). It has offered new ways to share information and interact with friends in a much larger network (Tiggeman & Zaccardo, 2016). Brands make use of this community building by gathering those that are interested in their products (Laroche, Habibi, Richard & Sankaranarayanan, 2012). Green advertisers in particular can benefit from social media platforms, because sustainability is an inherently social ordeal and being able to connect with people from all over the world can increase the awareness towards it (Minton, Lee, Orth, Kim & Kahle, 2012). The other main function of social media is that these new applications enable people to manage a personal brand, fine-tune their profiles and share their ideas through blogs, micro-posts and online discussions (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011). Unlike other, more traditional media forms, users of the platforms are able to create a personal profile (Tiggeman & Zaccardo, 2016) and create visual collages that express parts of their identity (Labrecque et al., 2011). Through self-presentation practices ordinary users are also given the chance to gather an audience that was once only available for those with access to broadcasting media (Marwick, 2015). Now all you need is an internet connection.

What is so appealing to this idea of social media stardom is that everyone has a chance to become a star, and those that do are just like everyone else. The people that have turned their social media profile into a widely viewed form of entertainment are also called social media influencers (SMIs). These SMIs are a form of micro-celebrities, who acquired fame by creating an online persona (Senft, 2013). They gathered a large audience by standing out in this attention-drive economy through sharing compelling narratives that create feelings of relatability and inspiration (Kahmis et al., 2017). They perform an act of intimacy all in line with their online persona, making a SMI capable of shaping the public

opinion (Abidin & Ots, 2016). The intimate connection SMIs manage to build between themselves and their audience can be defined as a parasocial relationship. Online celebrities position themselves as a friend to their viewers, allowing them a peek inside their lives creating a bond that is based on intimacy (Rasmussen, 2018). When people feel a closer connection to the SMI they are more willing to believe them when they make a suggestion (Abidin, 2016; Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). Research shows that this bond between celebrity and audience is especially beneficial when SMIs are used for marketing purposes, so much so that SMIs are almost inseparable from their marketing value (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019).

Media and celebrities have been influencing purchasing behavior for a long time (Beard, 2008). However, nowadays friends, streets styles and SMIs are the main source for fashion inspirations (Rickman & Cosenza, 2007). Research by Djafarova and Rushworth (2016) shows that non-traditional types of female celebrities, like SMIs, are more influential to young females. Brands, especially beauty, luxury and fashion, benefit from hiring a SMI to create a bridge between the consumer and the brand, increasing awareness as well as actual sales (Nunes et al., 2018; Sudha & Sheena, 2017). According to a report on fashion influencer marketing from 2018, this type of marketing has the power to “shift brand perception, target new consumer groups, change their fashion conversation and provide engaging content for their consumers” (Launch Metrics, 2018, p. 7). SMIs give an added layer to the experience consumers have with a brand. One reason for this added layer is the perceived closeness of the online celebrity. Every user can potentially become a SMI; people view them as being more real and closer to them, and thus consider them to be more of a reliable source than traditional celebrities (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). However, the increase in brand connection between SMIs and brands can blur the lines between sponsored content and editorial content (Abidin, 2016), because SMIs implement the brand into their daily lives. The credibility of the SMI, especially in relation to the product they are promoting, is thus important to keep in mind as well for an advertisement to be effective.

For the fashion industry, the most effective social media platform is Instagram. Instagram was founded in 2010 and is a platform that is based around sharing pictures of people’s lives with textual captions (Moreau, 2019). As of 2018, the platform has one billion active users, a number that continues to grow (Statista, 2019a). The platforms visual nature has made it almost twice as popular for brands as any other social media platform and almost 99 percent of SMIs prefer this platform over any other (Launch Metrics, 2018). Yet, not only brands and SMIs like the platform. Users share their outfits online through using hashtags and tagging brands to direct other people to the stores (Abidin, 2016) and the hashtag fashion is used nearly seven hundred million times (Instagram, n.d.). Posting purchases online is part of the self-presentation that social media platforms are known for, because it helps people build their identity around their sense of fashion. At the same time,

sharing outfits online helps direct people to purchasing items. It would benefit marketers to put more effort in consumers creating more of their own content (Duan, 2018). Fashion is part of everyday life and so is social media. These platforms are so embedded in people's lives that they turn to social media for showing them trends, giving insights or reviews of the products, which can in turn enhance the purchase intention (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). SMIs have slowly transformed the original philosophy of the platform Instagram to one that is more fitting for marketing, changing spontaneous phone images to staged high end images of them promoting themselves or a brand (Abidin, 2016). The platform has transformed in an online catalog for fashion trends, but instead of one time exposure in a magazine, SMIs can share pictures all the time and consumers view the content all throughout their day (Carbone, 2019; Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

For sustainable fashion, the premise is different because the goal is to decrease the amount of clothes purchased. Despite the platforms influence on creating trends, sustainability has also become a more prominent topic on Instagram in recent years (Carbone, 2019). Simultaneously in this time of environmental awareness, brands are expected to be more authentic and transparent in their messaging (Beard, 2008). Using a SMI can thus be interesting for brands to not only sell their products, but also spread their message on sustainability. SMIs balance this line between what Kong et al. (2016) presented as social knowledge and effective/procedural knowledge, offering both a personal take on the issue as well as being able to inform their audience on how to take similar steps. What is important here is that there is a shared value between the endorser and their audience, which is a strong aspect of persuading their purchase intention (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). SMIs already share their sense of ordinary with their audience, and now they can also share their experience with sustainable clothing brands. Not much research so far has focused on the effect of SMIs on sustainable fashion. However, in their research on SMIs and ethical behavior, Johnstone and Lindh (2018) found that young consumers are influenced by SMIs to behave more sustainable and think more deeply about their role in environment behavior. Therefore, this research will shed another light on how SMIs could be used as a marketing tool and as educators of sustainable fashion.

2.3 Theory of Planned Behavior

As is evident from previous sections, sustainable consumption has much to do with consumers general concern towards ethical behavior (Kollmus & Agyeman, 2002), their understanding of the concepts (Harris et al., 2016) and the amount of exposure sustainable fashion gets within the media (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017). Advertising products is incredibly important for any company and so it is for those operating in the fashion industry. The main reasons for this is that the goal of advertising is to persuade audiences to an attitude change towards the product or services that is offered, and the more positive an

attitude the more likely it is that the product is purchased (Walley, 1987 as cited in Ohanian, 1990).

Attitude is one of the pillars within the Theory of Planned Behavior of Ajzen and Fishbein (Ajzen, 1991). This model explains how certain behavior is constructed, thereby focusing on the matter of control people have over the actions they take. The stronger the intention to perform the behavior, the more likely it is that the behavior will actually be executed. Attitude is considered one of the indicators that could influence intention and thus behavior. Ajzen and Fishbein (Ajzen, 1991) define the concept of attitude as the favorable or unfavorable standpoint with regards to the perceived behavior. In this research, the concept refers predominantly to the initial feeling towards sustainable fashion consumption (as opposed to the previously mentioned concept of awareness). The other two indicators of the Theory of Planned Behavior model are subjective norm and the perceived behavior control. The first is about the social pressure people feel to perform the behavior when they see someone in their surroundings perform the behavior. SMIs can be considered a subjective norm when they position themselves as part of the consumer group. The second is about the perceived ease or difficulty for an individual to perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). In this research, however, the focus is on consumers' attitude and awareness. Thus, this research will investigate how sustainable fashion promotion by SMIs impact consumers' attitude and awareness; and, in turn, their influence on purchase intention. Findings from Kozar and Hiller Connell (2013) show that both knowledge and attitude are positively related to social issues, and purchasing of responsible clothing. As explained before, knowledge in this research is related to the consumer's awareness of sustainable fashion. Just like in the model from Ajzen and Fishbein (Ajzen, 1991), who claim that intention is almost always followed by actual behavior, this research will assume the same and will only focus on the first part of the model that impacts purchase intention. The following two hypotheses will thus be tested:

H1: A positive attitude towards sustainable fashion has a positive effect on purchase intention.

H2: Greater awareness towards sustainable fashion has a positive effect on purchase intention.

2.4 Messaging and credibility

2.4.1 Message content

Media has a significant impact on increasing consumers' support towards sustainable fashion (Kolandai-Matchett, 2009) and on creating greater marketing exposure for sustainable products from brands (Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008). The visibility of environmental issues puts pressure on brands to adjust their behavior and their messaging with regards to the environment (Bowen, 2000). Additionally, consumers look towards brands

to educate them on the topic as well (Beard, 2008). Brands have to make sure that their claims are constructed accurately, because a wrong impression of a brand claiming to be sustainable can impact consumers' attitude towards general environmental consumption in the long run (Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995). Nonetheless, when brands do not only claim, but also show they are being ethical by introducing green products they can increase the positive attitude consumers have towards their brand (Olsen, Slotegraaf & Chandukala, 2014). In turn, an increase in brand attitude, especially when they use SMIs who are already perceived to be more real and genuine, can positively affect the way consumers view sustainable brands and activities within the fashion industry.

Although research on the impact of SMIs on sustainable fashion is limited, De Lenne and Vandenbosch (2017) do address the potential for fashion SMIs on spreading a message of sustainability if they were to promote it in their posts. SMIs are considered an extension to the original word-of-mouth technique, albeit focusing on a specific social context, their followers, and performed in a professional way. They can introduce a product and subsequently create a need among consumers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Similarly, recommendations from bloggers can increase the purchase intention (Hsu, Lin & Chang, 2013). Research also shows that the more positive reviews people see online about a product or a brand, the more popular it is perceived and the more informative the reviews are considered (Park & Lee, 2008). In addition to that, the larger the number of messages that are shared containing the concept of sustainability, or the bigger a sustainable product is advertised, the more people are inclined to have their attitude changed (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017; Pickett-Baker & Ozaki, 2008).

Social media is thus considered a good tool to spread messages about sustainable fashion. There is however a difference between the types of messages fashion SMIs send out. On the one hand, the majority of the fashion SMIs promote clothing produced through the fast fashion business model. They are constantly updating their followers on the newest trends (Sudha & Sheena, 2017), showing off different clothes (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), and using hashtags like Outfit of the Day (#OOTD) to show their versatility in styling (Abidin, 2016). Studies on these types of fashion SMIs showed that they have a negative impact on the intention to purchase sustainable fashion (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017). On the other hand, there are SMIs that promote sustainable fashion who have a different approach to their message construction. Their messages about sustainable fashion often contain information about where consumers can buy sustainable clothes, what brands are considered sustainable (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017), and the different elements of the supply chain that contribute to sustainability (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). A key factor in the posts of sustainable fashion SMIs is the repetitiveness of certain clothes that they style in a different way. According to Fletcher (2007), this more thoughtful way of creating outfits can contribute to creating an identity, and it is also a way to harvest exclusivity, since sustainable

fashion is less mass produced and thus less likely to look alike (Jung & Jin, 2014).

Sometimes people do not even know where to find sustainable fashion options because all they see online is fast fashion (Beard, 2008). SMIs offer an approachable way for consumers to be familiarized with sustainable fashion in a similar way as other fashion trends.

The more visible the concept of sustainability is worldwide through the media or brands, the more messages containing the concept will be shared. In spreading a message discussing what exactly is sustainable fashion, people collectively can increase the attitude (McNeill & Moore, 2015) and awareness (Hamid et al., 2017) towards it. Brands use SMIs to convey a message that is deemed more relatable and real than when they would share it themselves (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). In addition to that, Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012) state that SMIs and other social media users can also engage in conversations online that discuss the developments surrounding and importance of sustainable fashion and Hamid et al. (2017) underline this by stating that “the pervasiveness of social media should actually be leveraged as the most effective medium to convert a message on environmental sustainability awareness” (Hamid et al., 2017, p. 486). Engaging in a conversation and sharing knowledge can have a positive effect on the attitude towards and awareness of the topic. SMIs can jumpstart this conversation. Since they have proven successful for fast fashion, it is believed this approach could work for sustainable fashion as well. Based on these findings the following hypotheses can be constructed:

H3a: Messages from social media influencers about sustainable fashion positively impact the attitude towards sustainable fashion more than messages about fast fashion

H3b: Messages from social media influencers about sustainable fashion positively impact the awareness towards sustainable fashion more than messages about fast fashion

Attitude and awareness towards sustainable fashion can be increased through sharing content in green communities online (Hamid et al., 2017; Kong et al., 2016), but in addition to that, when consumers see other people or organizations share sustainable brands they are also more inclined to believe that their peers are buying sustainable brands. This can make consumers more prone to purchase the products too (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2017). In their research, Johnstone and Lindh (2018) found that, especially younger, consumers are impacted by SMIs promoting sustainable behavior and felt encouraged to adapt that behavior as well. To analyze whether this is also true for SMIs promoting sustainable fashion the following hypothesis will be tested:

H3c: Messages from social media influencers about sustainable fashion can positively impact the purchase intention more than messages about fast fashion

2.4.2 Source credibility

The emergence of the internet provided people with other forms of recommendations, which positively influence the purchase intention (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Especially since celebrity endorsers, and now SMIs, it is important to not only look at the changing nature of messages, but also look at the different characteristics that these endorsers need to persuade an audience to buy a product (Ohanian, 1990). One of the models often used to research some of these characteristics is the Source Credibility Model by Ohanian (1990). She combines the Source Credibility Model consisting of the characteristics of trustworthiness and expertise, and the Source Attractiveness Model from McGuire (1985), consisting of the characteristic attractiveness. To be a credible source means that the consumer has a certain level of reliability that they place on the words of an endorser (Doney & Cannon, 1997). According to previous research, it is believed that the more credible a source is, the more persuasive they are in encouraging consumers to buy a certain product (Ohanian, 1990), in this case sustainable fashion. In the following sections the different characteristics —expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness— that can have a positive effect on the attitude and awareness consumers' have towards the SMI advertisement will be elaborated on.

Expertise

The first element that Ohanian (1990) addresses in her version of the Source Credibility Model is expertise. The concept of expertise can be defined as the endorser's ability to provide information based on their experience, education or competence (Tedeschi, Schlenker & Bonoma, 1973 as cited in Horai, Nacarri & Fatoullah, 1974, p. 601). Other terms used to measure the concept are expert, experienced, knowledgeable, qualified and skilled (Ohanian, 1990). Expertise is one of the dominating factors that can help influence attitude, awareness and purchase intention (Ohanian, 1991; Till & Busler, 1998). It is seen as the delayed effect for advertising, meaning it will stay longer and thus could help increase the awareness towards an issue because the message was more clear (Eisend & Lagner, 2010). Expertise is often times studied as part of the Source Credibility Model, and as a factor alone it is not always considered equally effective (Reichelt, Sievert & Jacob, 2013). In this research, the characteristic of expertise is however seen as separated and tested alone to see whether or not it is an influential characteristic for promoting sustainable fashion.

Whether someone is perceived to be an expert endorser is dependent on a number of factors. The most prominent factor that is studied often in previous research is the match-up hypothesis. This match-up refers to the relationship between an endorser and the product they are advertising. When they match, for example when an athlete promotes sportswear, the attitude towards the product and the brand is more positive than when they do not match (Daneshvary & Schwer, 2000; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016; Ohanian, 1991; Thomas &

Johnson, 2017; Till & Busler, 1998). Often times traditional celebrities are investigated as part of the match-up hypothesis because consumers are familiar with them and find it easier to recognize the relationship. However, other research shows that the same match-up hypothesis applies to SMIs as well (Johnstone & Lindh, 2018). Additionally, McCormick (2016) discovered that unfamiliar endorsers, like SMIs that people come across for the first time, can also be considered an expert. Here it is not about knowing if the SMIs message matches their persona as long as the message seems congruent with the impression people have of the SMI. McCormick (2016) also emphasizes that especially with unfamiliar influencers, congruency is highly dependent on the individual consumer and if they perceive the match-up to be realistic or not. When the message is perceived as congruent, it can increase the attitude towards the advertisement and the brand. In the fashion industry, traditional celebrities still sometimes have a higher status of expertise than SMIs. Yet, SMIs have the advantage of being relatable and closer to their audience (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack & Zahid, 2018). They share their knowledge based on their experience with the product or lifestyle, which makes them an expert within that certain field (Abidin, 2016). When an endorser is considered to have a higher level of expertise regarding a product or a lifestyle, whether that is based on knowledge or experience, the more positive their attitude will be (Horai et al., 1974).

The other factor that is important for an endorser to be perceived as an expert is the message construction. Advertisements should be formulated in such a way that fits the desired mindset of the consumer (Kaptian & Silvera, 2015), therefore brands reach out to SMIs to reach their target group with a more comprehensive message (Veirman et al., 2017). SMIs are known for not endorsing directly, but incorporating the brand or product into a personal story in an original and authentic way (Casaló, Calvin, Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). For fashion experts, this means constructing a message that makes them an appropriate source of information for fashion trends that could influence people to follow their advice and purchase items (Casaló et al., 2018; Rahman, Saleem, Akhtar, Ali & Khan, 2014). In their research, Nunes et al. (2018) studied the elements that make a message more persuasive. They made a distinction between elements that could make the endorser as a person more persuasive, which is closely related to the match-up hypothesis, and elements that can increase the quality of the message. Messages that are more detailed, comprehensible, reliable and relevant are considered more persuasive (Nunes et al., 2018).

Three specific elements of a message that can enhance the expertise are explained in further detail. First, it is important to disclose when content on social media is sponsored to ensure there is no negative impact on consumers' attitude and intentions because they felt misled (Evans, Phua, Lim & Jun, 2017). Second, the positing of the expert element within a message is highly dependent on how cognitively engaged the consumer is. Research by Homer and Kahle (1990) shows that early identification of an expert endorser is more

persuasive when consumers are deeply engaged. When consumers are less engaged with the message, having the expert source be identified at the end of the message is more persuasive. Social media mainly contributes to people's shortened attention span (Newman, 2010), so the identification of expertise should be placed at the end of the message. Third, for social media advertising it is relevant to encourage consumers to engage with the content through sharing, commenting or liking. A higher number of likes, comments or followers can help with making an endorser be perceived as an expert (Casaló et al., 2018; Martensen et al., 2018). However, other research shows that a general larger number of followers is not immediately more effective than a lower number of followers (Veirman et al., 2017). A higher number can be beneficial, but is not a leading factor in increasing purchases.

In addition to all the general elements that make a message more expert based, attention should also be given to the type of information presented in the endorser's message. Environmental products require a more forward approach by having, for example, environmentally oriented claims and emphasizing the role of the individual in improving environmental impact (D'Souza & Taghian, 2005; Kim, Forney & Arnold, 1997). This type of information is also called transparent authenticity, where the message is provided in a more fact-based message (Audrezet, De Kerviler & Moulard, 2018). According to research by Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012), the level of expertise among consumers interested in sustainable fashion has also increased in the past years. Therefore, this group of consumers is looking to move away from broader definition of sustainable fashion and search for more specific sources that could increase their knowledge. Key here is to keep fashion at the core of the messages, because it is not about making sustainable products more fashionable, but making fashion more sustainable (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). Additionally, attitude towards sustainable fashion can improve when consumers are confronted with effective and social knowledge (Kong et al., 2016), and SMIs are capable of providing both. Based on these findings the following hypotheses will be tested:

H4a: Social media influencers with a higher level of expertise about sustainable fashion positively affect the attitude towards sustainable fashion more than social media influencers with a lower level of expertise

H4b: Social media influencers with a higher level of expertise about sustainable fashion positively affect the awareness towards sustainable fashion more than social media influencers with a lower level of expertise

Attitude and awareness, the latter being increased through knowledge on varying issues, products or lifestyles, can positively influence the purchase intention of the consumer (Homer & Kahle, 1990). The same result was found in a later study by Kozar and Hiller Connell (2013) stating that people that are more knowledgeable and have stronger attitudes towards social and environmental issues, are more engaged in responsible apparel-purchasing. The

effect of expertise on these mediating factors is evident, but results are less straightforward on how it can directly impact purchase intention. Previous research often times mentioned trust as a key component in combination with expertise (Reichelt, et al., 2013). Consumers follow the endorsers' advice more when they trust their product experience and perceived knowledge (Casaló et al., 2018). However, other factors are important as well in influencing purchase behavior, for example the consumers' motives towards buying sustainable fashion. Ethically conscious consumers are less affected by advertising messages that make ethical claims because they already have a positive standpoint. Consumers that are less ethically conscious will prefer the fashion-oriented message to the ethical one (Kim et al., 1997). This would make the expert level irrelevant in persuading either of them to buy sustainable clothes.

The other important factor is the product type. Sustainable fashion can be considered a hedonic and a utilitarian product. Hedonic products are more experiential and for pleasure, while utilitarian products are more functional and goal-oriented (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Fashion is often considered an altruistic purchase that is about the appearance (Harris et al., 2016), yet the sustainable message of consciously buying clothes makes it goal-oriented. For hedonic products, expertise is considered irrelevant (Wen, Tan & Chang, 2009), but for utilitarian products results differ. Reichelt et al. (2013) state that people that use recommendations from others to get pragmatic —utilitarian— information on products are not affected by message containing expertise. Paradoxical, research by Eisend and Lagner (2010) showed that the endorser's expertise is especially relevant when a product is informational, meaning products that consumer want more knowledge of before purchasing. Utilitarian products are often picked deliberately and require more information; thus, it would benefit brands to select people that have expertise about the product (Wen et al., 2009). Who could best endorse this message is also debatable according to the literature. Kong et al. (2016) state that consumers consider brands to be more knowledgeable as opposed to their peers, while Hoonsopon and Puriwat (2016) discovered that for utilitarian products consumers do not want to be influenced by strangers or celebrities. Additionally, Eren-Erdogmus, Lak and Çiçek (2016) concluded that credible endorsers, including experts, are predominantly relevant for green products that affect the consumers' direct health, and fashion does not fit in that category.

The effect of expertise on purchase intention that has been researched in the past show inconsistent findings, and is too ambiguous to state confidently that expertise has a direct effect on purchase intention of sustainable fashion. There are too many factors that could alter the outcome, which are also highly depended on the type of consumer and how they view the message in the Instagram post. Therefore, in this research the following research question will be presented:

RQ1: What is the effect of the level of expertise of social media influencers on purchase intention?

Attractiveness

The second element that Ohanian (1990) mentions in her Source Credibility Model is attractiveness. She adapted this concept from the Source Attractiveness Model by McGuire (1985). He defined attractiveness as the extent to which the receiver, in this research the follower of the Instagram SMI, identifies with the endorser based on likability, familiarity and similarity (McGuire, 1985 as cited in Martensen et al., 2018). This similarity can also be defined as social attractiveness, which especially for SMIs is an important element because it creates that parasocial bond that SMIs are aiming for (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Other elements that constitute attractiveness are attributes like intellectual skills, personality properties, lifestyle or athletic power (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). In popular language however, attractiveness is often related to physical attractiveness, which is also how Ohanian (1990) in the Source Credibility Model and Martensen et al. (2018) in their research use the concept. Because this research follows the guidelines of the Source Credibility Model and because fashion in general is considered an altruistic purchase (Harris et al., 2016) within which sustainable fashion is regarded to be less physically appealing (Shen et al., 2013), the concept of attractiveness will also be used in terms of a SMIs physical attractiveness.

Physical attractiveness is a difficult topic to define in terms of what is considered attractive and what is not because it is closely tied to personal taste and views. Nonetheless, academic literature provides a good overview of the attractiveness standard. The general standard is the beauty is good stereotype that was established by Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972). It means that people that are perceived as physically attractive are also assumed to possess more socially desirable traits; live a happier and more successful life than those that are perceived to be less physically attractive. The constructed stereotype stems from 1972, but still rings true in several areas of today's society: finding a partner (Hill, Nocks & Gardner, 1987), the labor market (Sierminska & Liu, 2015), and marketing (Yan & Bissel, 2014). In all these aspects of life, physically attractive people seem to get the best end of the deal. What must be noted is that research by Griffin and Langlois (2006) contradicts this statement slightly by stating that beauty might not be good, rather it is ugly that is considered less. Nonetheless, there is the clear notion that physical attractiveness, whether good-looking or not, has an impact on people's perception of themselves and others.

Beauty is considered "a singular notion culturally produced by advertising and visual communication that autonomous individuals recognize, accept and often aspire to" (Gurrieri & Cherrier, 2013, p. 292). Yet, the beauty standards found in the literature are predominantly based on Western standards. Even though differences between cultures are presented, the

Western standard, through dominance in the media, has proven impactful to varying degrees on other cultures (Calogero, Boroughs & Thompson, 2007; Yan & Bissel, 2014). The media still mainly shows the stereotype of thin being attractive and fat being repulsive (Levine, 2012). We as consumers are quite willing to accept that stereotype of beauty that is presented as good and let it affect our behavior. That is why companies keep using good-looking endorsers because this characteristic seems to make them more effective (Reingen & Kernan, 1993). People compare themselves to those figures they see in advertising and aspire to be them (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2011; Levine, 2012). Media thus plays a defining role in creating and maintaining a beauty stereotype.

In the last few decades a lot of research has been conducted on which elements of a person are considered physically attractive. The media often focuses on the body (Levine, 2012), but facial features are equally important in establishing if someone is considered good-looking or not (Reingen & Kernan, 1993). Since this research is focused on a female SMI only the female characteristics of attractiveness are highlighted. For the body, aside from being thin, the attractive type is lean and tall, has a good hip-to-waist ratio, and a sculptured body with larger breasts (Calogero et al., 2007; Levine, 2012; Sierminska et al., 2015). For the face, symmetry, a smooth and youthful looking skin, and defining features like high cheekbones, full lips and large eyes are defining characteristics for an attractive model (Cunningham, Roberts, Barbee, Druen, & Wu, 1995; Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005; Little, Jones & DeBruine, 2011; Muñoz-Reyes, Iglesias-Julios, Pita & Turiegano, 2015). In addition to physical features, other attributes like make-up, tight fitting clothes that show of the figure, and good facial expressions like a smile can also help someone look generally more attractive (Bloch & Richins, 1992). In this research, the different elements will be applied to the SMI to see if they are indeed considered more attractive and whether they have an effect on attitude, awareness and purchase intention.

In marketing, when endorsers like celebrities or SMIs are used to promote different types of products, the above explained stereotypical image of physical attractiveness is highly visible and effective. The more attractive an endorser is perceived, the more consumers agree with their opinion and see the SMI as superior (Horai et al., 1974), leading them to have a more positive attitude towards the endorsed product or the brand mentioned in the post (Trampe et al., 2010). The physical attractiveness of an endorser is especially impactful for the initial impression that consumers have (Reingen & Kernan, 1993) and as the first effect as part of an attitude change (Eisend & Lagner, 2010). Research shows that when people are not cognitively paying attention to the advertisement, physical attractiveness does not have to be related to the product they are endorsing. Instead, the physical appearance was used as a positive cue to evaluate the product on display (Trampe et al., 2010). Physically attractive endorser can also be received positively because people tend to compare themselves to the endorser. People like to compare themselves to an ideal image

especially if that image is important to them (Levine, 2012). The appearance can then positively influence the attitude towards the influencer, and in turn that of the product they are advertising. With regards to advertising clothes, the fashion style of the SMI is considered more appealing when the endorser is attractive (Shaw et al., 2006). Sustainable fashion, which is often considered not stylish, natural or dull (Harris et al., 2016; Shen et al., 2013), can then benefit from an attractive influencer enhancing the appeal of the clothes. As for brands trying to sell clothes, it seems very important to have their clothes actually be found attractive by the consumers; therefore, they might go for an attractive influencer to impact the attitude towards the clothing. Based on these findings, the following hypothesis regarding attractiveness can be constructed:

H5a: Social media influencers perceived as attractive have more impact on attitude towards sustainable fashion than influencers who are perceived to be unattractive

Physical attractiveness can thus positively impact the consumers' perception of the product on display. This first impression of a product, when positive, can lead to a buying intention. When that happens, the consumer will most likely base their decision on the information they can remember. There is a higher chance for consumer to remember a picture that looks like the stereotypical image of beauty that is presented in society (Reingen & Kernan, 1993). Again, the match-up between the endorsers' attractiveness and the product they are selling is important (Eisend & Lagner, 2010). Especially when the product on display is beauty related (Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 1998) or when they are more cognitively invested in the purchasing process (Trampe et al., 2010), consumers are likely to be more affected by the endorser. Yet, despite physical attractiveness impacting attitude towards a product, research by Ohanian (1990), and Till and Busler (1998) showed that it does not have a significant direct effect on purchase intention. Lim, Radzol, Cheach and Wong (2017), emphasizes this by showing that SMIs do influence attitude, but that purchase intention directly in their research was left unaffected. When physical attractiveness does have a small effect on purchase intention, it is still less impactful as opposed to other character traits like social attractiveness (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Rifon, Jiang & Kim, 2016). When it comes to sustainable products, non-fashion related, this notion is underlined by research by Eren-Erdogmus et al., (2016), which showed that physical attractiveness is not sufficient for an endorser to be effective in leading purchase intention. The following research question is therefore asked in this research:

RQ2: What is the effect of social media influencers' attractiveness on purchase intention of sustainable fashion?

In this research the main focus is not just on selling fashion through SMIs on Instagram, it is also about creating awareness by increasing knowledge towards sustainable ways of

contributing to the fashion industry. The match-up effect between an endorser and the product they are advertising is very important for consumers to see physical attractiveness as an added source of information (Kahle & Homer, 1985). Products related to enhancing someone's appearance are much more likely to be affected by attractive endorsers (Thomas & Johnson 2017, Till & Busler, 1998). Fashion can be considered such a product that has to be physically appealing, but when it comes to sustainable fashion there are more reasons behind the production and consumption of these clothes than the appearance (Fletcher, 2007). Sustainability advocacies are in that sense not really related to physical attractiveness. Instead, the physical attractiveness of the endorser is much more used as a factor for recall; research shows that people remember something better when it is promoted by someone that is considered attractive (Kahle & Homer, 1985). In terms of SMIs, attractiveness is considered more as a factor deciding whether or not to follow the SMI (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016), but for the delayed effect that could influence long-term awareness for sustainable causes, consumers rely more on the SMI's level of expertise (Eisend & Lagner, 2010) or other characteristics of attractiveness (Eren-Erdogmus et al., 2016). Physical attractiveness could thus help consumers memorize the product that they saw, but their intention to buy will likely not be sustainable. Research by Kang and Choi (2016) showed there was no significant effect between sustainable products and attractiveness. Physical attractiveness as a first effect, that impacts attitude (Eisend & Lagner, 2010), can thus be considered a peripheral response without a cognitive reaction (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). There is the contradiction between fashion being impacted by physical attractiveness and sustainable products much less so, thus the following research question is asked:

RQ3: What is the effect of social media influencers' attractiveness on the awareness of sustainable fashion?

Trustworthiness

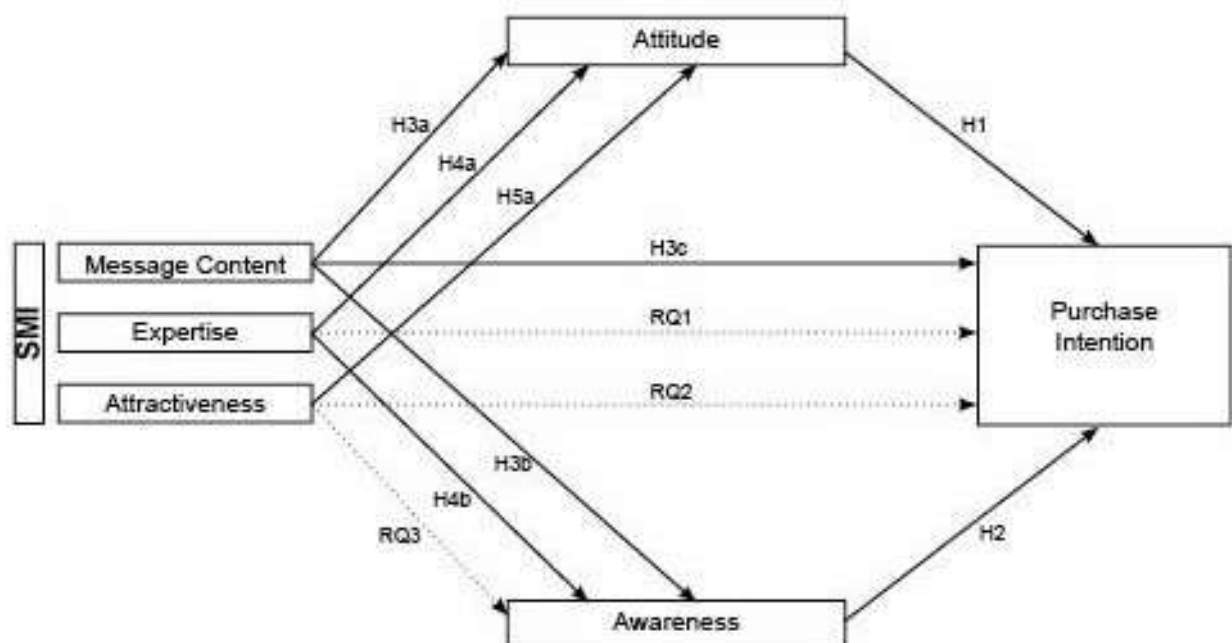
The third element of Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility Model is trustworthiness. According to the model, concepts like dependable, honest, reliable and sincere can measure the trustworthiness of an endorser. Trust can be defined as "the confidence one party has in the exchange party's reliability and integrity" (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 23). SMIs that position themselves as a friend and share their personal experience are considered to be trustworthy (Abidin, 2016; Scott, 2018). Therefore, consumers place value on the recommendations from others (Hsu et al., 2013), and use word-of-mouth-techniques to reduce the perceived risk they feel when purchasing something based on the trust they place on their idol (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2016). When it comes to sustainable fashion, there seems to be a divide between who is considered trustworthy in their messaging. Peers for example are not considered a trustworthy source for information (Kong et al., 2016), but endorsers, especially

if they operate in name of a brand that is trying to be sustainable, are considered trustworthy enough to influence brand credibility, ethicality and purchase intention (Kang & Choi, 2016). However, because trust is something that is built over time, like SMIs showing that they are consistent in their claims of using the product over time (Abidin & Ots, 2016), it will not be included in this experimental research. In this research the focus will instead be on one singular post, which could only lead to trust if the respondents were familiar with the influencer and their behavior over time.

2.5 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework presents an overview of the hypotheses and research questions posed. It must be noted that attitude and awareness are dependent variables, but are also tested for their mediating role towards purchase intention. The following conceptual model will explain the eleven hypotheses and research questions that are tested in this research:

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework



Note. Solid arrow means positive effect of independent variable on dependent variable, dotted line means unclear effect of independent variable on dependent variable

3. Methodology

The focus of this study is on the consumers' perspective towards SMIs. It examines how message content, expertise and attractiveness affect consumers' awareness and consumption of sustainable fashion that is promoted by a fashion SMI on the platform Instagram. In this section the research design and the different components that are central in this study are elaborated on in terms of how they are used to help answer the research question.

3.1 Research design

For this study, a quantitative research method was used to test the eight hypotheses and answer the three research questions constructed in the theory section. It applies an experimental research method to investigate the hypothesized effect of the independent variables (IVs) on the dependent variable (DVs). The benefit of an experimental methods is that the effect is tested in a controlled setting that can isolate the impact of possible other variables (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Matthews & Ross, 2010). This study used a laboratory experiment, meaning it took place in a controlled setting where it is possible to measure more accurately (Bryman, 2012). The controlled setting placed participants in one condition through randomization. An experimental method also always consists of a comparison of sorts between those in the control group and those in the experimental group (Bryman, 2012). In this study the control group was presented a fast fashion SMI and the experimental group was presented a sustainable fashion SMI.

The specific design chosen for this study was a factorial 2x2x2 design. There were three two-level IVs that were tested. In addition to that, the design allows testing for a possible interaction effect between the IVs. The design consists of eight different cells/conditions, in this case eight different Instagram posts, for every possible combination of IVs (Collins, Dziak & Li, 2009; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). The IVs of this research are the characteristics of the SMI and participants were assigned to one of the eight specific combinations of SMI characteristics present in the Instagram post. The different IVs tested were: sustainable fashion message/fast fashion message, expertise/non-expertise, and attractive/unattractive. They were tested for their effect on three DVs: attitude, awareness and purchase intention. In Table 3.1 a visual overview of the factorial design is presented.

3.2 Sample

The sample for this research was taken from a target population, meaning that the people asked to participate in this research were selected from a pre-organized group. The people belonging to this target population needed to fit three criteria. The first criterion was that they use the platform Instagram. They did not have to be active through visible acts of liking, scrolling or posting, but they did have to be familiar with the platform. It is important for the

Table 3.1: A conceptual table of the applied factorial design

Type of message	<i>Level of expertise</i>	
	<i>Expertise</i>	<i>Non expertise</i>
Sustainable fashion message	Attractive	Attractive
	Non-attractive	Non-attractive
Fast fashion message	Attractive	Attractive
	Non-attractive	Non-attractive

participants to be familiar with real Instagram content for them to consider the manipulated version in the experiment as genuine and for the effect to be generalizable outside the controlled setting. The second criterion was that participants had to be over eighteen years of age. According to statistics from 2019, the highest percentage of users on Instagram is between the age of eighteen and 44 (Statista, 2019b). Additionally, SMIs are considered especially influential towards consumers when they share the same age (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009), and most SMIs are between the age of eighteen and 35 years (Abidin, 2016). The third criterion was that the participants were women. The experiment concerns the purchasing of a female fashion item that is advertised by a female SMI. Previous research also showed that fashion and lifestyle SMIs are predominantly young women and thus attract more female followers (Abidin, 2016). Statistics also show that women are generally more active on Instagram than men (Spredfast, n.d.). To make sure that the results were solely based on what participants see as part of the manipulated Instagram posts and not because of a lack of identification with the influencer or the product they are selling, only women were asked to participate.

The sampling method used to select the participants from the target group is non-probability sampling. The main objective of this method is reaching a number of participants without checking the probability of the participants. Non-probability sampling can be subdivided into numerous sampling methods and in this study the convenience sampling method was used. Central for this type of sampling is the ease with which participants can be recruited. Convenience sampling is one of the most frequently used sampling methods by researchers because it is easy to use and low in cost. Participants had to conform to the three criteria to fit the target group, but within this group they were chosen for their availability (Sarstedt, Bengart, Monim, Shaltoni & Lehman, 2018). Since the topic of this research is about online influence and the experiment is constructed online, the sample was also gathered by recruiting participants online. The survey was shared through various social media groups, comments on fashion and styling YouTube videos, and among peers to get a response as wide as possible.

The experiment yielded a total of 240 respondents. Data cleaning pointed out that 96.3% was female ($n = 231$), 2.9% was male ($n = 7$), and 0.8% filled in gender neutral or other ($n = 2$). The research required only women to participate, but those that filled in gender neutral or other were included as well because they might identify with both male and female SMIs. The seven males were excluded from this research. Furthermore, participants were asked to confirm that they were above eighteen before continuing the survey. Still, three participants were fifteen ($n = 2$) or seventeen ($n = 1$). They were also excluded from further analysis.

The remaining 230 participants had a mean age of 23 ($M = 23.13$, $SD = 5.14$), ranging from eighteen up to 55. The participants came from 35 different countries: 58.7% was from The Netherlands ($n = 13$), 8.7% from the USA ($n = 20$), 5.2% from Germany ($n = 12$), 4.3% from the UK ($n = 10$) and 2.2% from Australia ($n = 5$). The other 48 participants were from varying countries around the globe. The highest educational level resulted in five different categories: 3.9% had less than high school ($n = 9$), 32.3% had a high school diploma ($n = 74$), 44.8% had Bachelors degree ($n = 103$), 18.3% had a Masters degree ($n = 42$) and 0.9% had a doctoral degree ($n = 2$). When asked about their knowledge about sustainable fashion 91.7% ($n = 211$) had heard of the concept before the experiment and 8.3% ($n = 19$) had not. The majority of the participants got their information from brands ($n = 101$), websites ($n = 94$), SMIs ($n = 92$), and family/friends ($n = 80$). The experiment also asked about participants' online behavior on Instagram. The majority spend either the entire day ($n = 80$) or 2-3 times a day ($n = 104$) on Instagram, where 60% engaged in scrolling ($n = 183$), 36.1% in liking ($n = 83$), 12.2% in posting ($n = 28$), and 43.9% chose all of the above ($n = 101$).

3.3 Operationalization

3.3.1 Stimuli material

The experiment tested the effect of SMIs on consumers' attitude, awareness and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. To measure this effect two characteristics from the Source Credibility Model and the message content produced by a SMI were singled out. An Instagram post from a fashion SMI was used as the stimuli material. The social media platform Instagram was chosen for two main reasons. First, the visual aspect of the platform gives the opportunity to fashion brands and consumers alike to share their looks with others (Abidin, 2016). Second, the platform is one of the leading social media platforms in the fashion industry for brands and SMIs. Statistics show that 52%, mainly youngsters, see Instagram as the best platform to introduce new products (Spredfast, n.d.). The platform is thus considered the best way to promote fashion online and therefore it could also be considered a valuable platform to promote sustainable fashion through the use of SMIs.

In order to conduct an experiment, it is vital to manipulate the IVs to test if there is an effect on the DVs (Bryman, 2012). This experiment counts three IVs that had to be manipulated to create a total of eight different conditions in which all components are connected. For the manipulation of the Instagram post multiple sustainable and fast fashion SMIs were researched to create stimuli that resembled real life Instagram content and matched the literature about sustainable and fast fashion. The messages were created to be equal in length to test the effect of the message content and not the visual length. For the picture, a real life fashion SMI gave permission to use her photo. After manipulating the message and the picture a total of eight conditions were constructed that linked the IVs together. An overview of what each condition contains can be found in Table 3.2, and a visual representation of the manipulated Instagram post that will be shown to the participants can be found in appendix B.

Table 3.2: Overview of the different conditions

Condition	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Message content	FF	FF	FF	FF	SF	SF	SF	SF
Expertise	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE	E	NE
Attractiveness	A	A	NA	NA	A	A	NA	NA

Note. FF = Fast fashion, SF = Sustainable fashion, E = Expert, NE = Non-expert, A = Attractive, NA = Non-attractive

3.3.2 Independent variables

Message content

The message content refers to the text used in the Instagram caption. These texts were based on real life Instagram captions as fashion SMIs use them. However, they were manipulated for this experiment using information from the literature on sustainable and fast fashion. For the sustainable fashion message, five key points were important: clothing lasting longer due to handling them with care; buying less clothes for a higher price (Fletcher, 2007; Jung & Jin, 2014); locally produced clothing; use of natural and non-toxic material (Henninger et al., 2016; Jung & Jin, 2014); benefits of styling less trend sensitive items (Harris et al., 2016). For fast fashion messages, there were four different key points important: advertising the trendiness of clothing; making consumers feel stylish and up to date (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Sudha & Sheena, 2017); affordability of clothing (Fletcher, 2010; Michaela & Lavie Orna, 2015; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009); discount codes to increase sales. The hashtags used for the different messages were taken from real life Instagram captions to further clarify the nature of the content for example ethical consumptions,

conscious closet, and slow fashion for sustainable fashion, or fashion blogger, OOTD, trendy, color for fast fashion.

The manipulation of the message content also required the use of two different brands, one sustainable and one fast fashion. The sustainable brand chosen for this study was Reformation. The brand is known for its sustainable practices and it has grown in prominence through advertising on Instagram (Reformation, n.d.). Their own Instagram account has 1.3 million followers and they make frequent use of fashion influencers to advertise their clothing (Carbone, 2019). Their style of advertising was likely to be familiar for participants, thus it was considered the best choice for the sustainable message. The fast fashion brand chosen for this study was Zara. Zara is one of the biggest fashion brands in the world so participants will most likely be familiar with their collections and their status. Additionally, the brand is also mentioned quite often as one of the leading fast fashion companies in both popular (Tyler, 2018) and academic literature (Cachon & Swinney, 2011; Taplin, 2014).

Expertise

The expertise refers again to the message in the caption of the Instagram post, but focuses more on the level of knowledge and experience present. The messages were manipulated for this experiment to construct a message containing a high or low level of expertise. The expertise message used the following seven key points that were taken from the literature and real life Instagram content. The key points were altered to fit the sustainable or fast fashion message: excitement, brand, benefits, origin/material, ways to wear, price, and a question to end the message with. The expertise messages were constructed in this exact order, because as researched by Homer and Kahle (1990) showed, when consumers are less cognitively engaged with the message it is better to identify the expertise further on after the name of the brand is mentioned.

The Instagram post begins with a personal story and a high level of excitement from the SMI, because it makes the message more persuasive and relevant (Casaló et al., 2018). Research shows that a general expert message is more detailed, comprehensible, reliable and relevant (Nunes et al., 2018), but is also important to fit the message in the context, in this case the Instagram culture. Next, the name of the brand is mentioned. After that, the sustainable message emphasizes how consumers can contribute to a better environmental and social sustainability (D'Souza & Taghian, 2005; Kim et al., 1997) and how sustainable fashion is easier to style. The fast fashion message focuses more on how the item is trendy and can be paired with other items from the current collection. Since consumers interested in sustainable fashion are actively looking for more detailed information on products (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012) the Instagram post followed with information on the material. For sustainable fashion, the emphasis was on the natural production and for fast fashion it was

more on comfort. The post ends with a question meant to engage the audience. Research showed that encouraging consumer to engage with content through sharing or commenting, can help increase the perceived expertise of the SMI because there is more traffic on their posts (Casaló et al., 2018). Ending with a question is a form of encouragement and showing interest in their audience.

The expert message differed from the non-expert message by adjusting the focus from the piece of clothing on display to a personal story from the SMI. The message was also more advertised based, only mentioning the piece of clothing or brand to promote a discount code or by disclosing that it was sponsored. The personal story in the sustainable and fast fashion non-expert message was the same except for the brand and the hashtags used. For the sustainable fashion message, terms like ethical consumption, conscious closet, slow fashion, and sustainable style were used. The fast fashion message mentioned terms like fashion blogger, style, OOTD, today I wore, ad, and advertisement. Furthermore, the expert and non-expert messages were about the same length to ensure participants did not base their judgment on the length of the message, but purely on the content.

Attractiveness

The attractiveness referred to the physical attractiveness of the SMI in the picture, which is the main feature of the Instagram post. The picture was obtained from an Instagram fashion SMI with over 10.000 followers. Three elements were important for choosing this SMI. First, she had to be considered attractive based on the literature. Second, she had to be wearing a piece of clothing that could pass as sustainable and fast fashion. Third, she had to be female because the literature on SMIs promoting fashion also predominantly discusses female SMIs and the majority of Instagram users are also female (Abidin, 2016). After selection, the picture was manipulated to create an attractive and a non-attractive version. The original and manipulated versions of the picture can be found in appendix C.

The physical attractiveness of a person is hard to measure and to manipulate because it is largely based on the personal taste of the participants. Therefore, the decision was made to manipulate an attractive SMI to be unattractive, using previous research that tested what people considered attractive and what not. It should be noted that the previous findings were all collected in Western countries. However, Western beauty standards are, to varying degrees, found to be relevant in other cultures (Calogero et al., 2007; Yan & Bissel, 2014). To make sure that manipulating the picture based on these Western beauty standards had the desired effect, a pre-test was conducted to determine whether or not the people thought the manipulated picture was physically attractive or unattractive.

The picture was manipulated using characteristics mentioned in previous literature. Three categories can be defined: face, body and attributes. The first category is the face. The attractive face is symmetric, has a smooth and youthful skin, and has defining feminine

features like high cheekbones, small nose, large eyes, narrow face and soft, thick lips (Cunningham et al., 1995; Gangestad & Scheyd, 2005; Little et al., 2011; Muñoz-Reyes et al., 2015). The unattractive face is stripped of these elements and has an asymmetric face, weathered skin that shows signs of aging or a skin condition, and harsher facial features like a strong jaw line, thinner cheeks, smaller eyes and thinner lips. The second category is the female body, a physical feature that is heavily discussed in society (Levine, 2012). The attractive body is considered thin, lean and tall, with a sculptured body that has a defining hip-to-waist ratio (Caloger et al., 2007; Levine, 2012; Sierminska et al., 2015). The unattractive body is considered fat or heavier, with a non-sculptured body that has a much less accentuated hip-to-waist ratio. The third category is attributes to enhance attractiveness, which refers to external factors that can be easily manipulated by the SMI them self. Attributes that make someone more attractive are make-up, tight fitting clothes that show of body features, and a positive facial expression like a smile (Little et al., 2011). Attributes that make someone less attractive are no make-up, a plain or dull expression (Parekh & Kanekar, 1994; Till & Busler. 1998) and less tight fitting clothes. Since this research is about advertising clothes, the element of fitting or unfitting clothes was not part of the manipulation. A number of the above elements were applied to the picture to make the SMI look unattractive compared to the original picture.

3.3.3 Dependent variables

Purchase intention

The variable purchase intention asked about the possible consumption habits of the participants with regards to the product advertised in the Instagram post. The variable was measured using ten items from four different researches and from the researcher's own construction. The first question was adapted from research by Spear, Surendra and Singh (2004) and asked 'how likely is it that you would consider purchasing the product?'. The answer options for this question were a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from, 1 = Very likely, 5 = Very unlikely. The following nine questions are all answered using a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from, 1 = Completely disagree, 5 = Completely agree. The first three questions asked about purchase intention with regards to influencer marketing were adapted from Hsu and Tsou (2011): 'Given the change, I predict that I would consider buying products that are posted by this Instagram influencer', 'It is likely that I will actually buy the products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the near future', and 'Given the opportunity, I intend to buy the clothes that are posted by this Instagram influencer'. The three brand related questions were adapted from Putrevu and Lord (1994): 'It is very likely that I will buy from the brand mentioned in the Instagram post', 'I will purchase from the brand mentioned in the Instagram post the next time I need a new piece of clothing', and 'I will definitely try the brand

mentioned in the Instagram post'. The questions regarding the brand were asked to establish whether or not participants would base their purchase intention on the name of the brand. The next two questions were constructed by the researcher herself and test whether the participants purchase intention were affected by the influencer or the product on display: 'I would be interested in buying a similar looking product if it was promoted by this influencer', and 'I would be interested in buying the same product if it was promoted by a different influencer'. The final question asked participants about environmental purchasing and was adapted from Haws, Winter and Naylor (2014): 'My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment'. This question was added to test participants' relation to more specific environmental purchasing.

A factor analysis was conducted to test whether all ten items could be used for measuring purchase intention. The ten Likert-scale items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .90$, $\chi^2 (N = 230, 45) = 1255.22$, $p < .001$. There were two factor loadings with an Eigenvalue above 1, meaning the ten items constructed two scales to test purchase intention. The resultant model explained 64.67% of the variance in purchase intention. However, testing with these two factors showed that there were no differences between the results of purchase intention based on the influencer and the results based on the brand. Therefore, this research presents the results based on all items of purchase intention together as one scale. This and all other factors are presented in Appendix A. To test the reliability of this ten-item purchase intention scale a reliability analysis was conducted. The reliability analysis showed that the scale purchase intention had a Cronbach's α of .89, which demonstrates that the scale was reliable. The reliability test also showed that the Cronbach's α could be improved by removing one item. Since the Cronbach's α was already high there was no need to remove the item, however, the item 'my purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment' theoretically also did not match with the other nine items. The other items specifically asked for purchase intention with regards to the product, influencer or brand the participants saw, while this one item asked about general purchase intention with regards to the environment. Therefore, it was decided to remove this item from the purchase intention scale. The analysis showed that removing the item resulted in a Cronbach's α of .91. Therefore, the item was removed and the remaining nine items were combined to construct a new scale '*purchase intention*' that was used in further analysis. The new scale ranges from 1 to 5 with a mean of 2.65 ($SD = 0.74$).

3.3.3.1 Mediating variables

Attitude

In this research the variable attitude refers to the initial feeling that consumers have towards environmental consumption. Depending on which condition the participant saw, either sustainable or fast fashion, the attitude questions were related to the content of the Instagram post. To measure attitude five questions adapted from research by Leonidou, Leonidou and Kvasova (2010) were used. These five questions measured the feelings participants have towards their own position as ethical consumers. The participants were asked to answer the following questions using a 5-point Likert-scale, 1 = Completely disagree, 5 = Completely agree. 'If I decide to buy sustainable fashion I think I am doing the right thing', 'I think deciding to buy sustainable friendly will satisfy me', 'there is a big possibility that I will start buying sustainable fashion', 'sustainable fashion matches my expectations regarding the ideal piece of clothing', and 'my general experience with sustainable fashion choices is high'.

A factor analysis was conducted to test whether all five items could be used for measuring attitude towards sustainable fashion. The five Likert-scale items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .77$, $\chi^2 (N = 230, 10) = 356.91$, $p < .001$. There was one factor loading with an Eigenvalue above 1, meaning the five items together were appropriate to construct one scale. The resultant model explained 55.18% of the variance in attitude towards sustainable fashion consumption. This and all other factors are presented in Appendix A. To test how reliable this attitude scale was, a reliability analysis was conducted. The test showed that the scale attitude towards sustainable fashion consumption had a Cronbach's α of .79, which proves that the scale was reliable. The five items were combined to construct a new scale '*attitude towards sustainable fashion*' that was used in further analysis. The new scale ranges from 1.8 to 5 with a mean of 3.60 ($SD = 0.66$).

Awareness

The variable awareness refers to the knowledge and experience consumers have of the issue. In this research, awareness refers to the underlying message of fashion production and the conscious understanding of the topic is sustainable fashion. Awareness was measured in two steps, the first five questions focused on awareness towards general sustainable behavior, and the next six questions asked about the awareness towards sustainable fashion.

The five general awareness questions were adapted from research by Haws, Winterich and Naylor (2014). They constructed their Green Scale from a list of 58 items asking about participants thoughts towards the product advertised, which they then scaled

down to the six most reliable items. One of these six items was related to purchase intention, but since this is a separate variable in the research, awareness was measured using the remaining five items: 'It is important to me that the clothes I wear do not harm the environment', 'I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions', 'I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet', 'I would describe myself as environmentally responsible', and 'I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly'. The answer options were based on a 5-point Likert-scale, 1 = Completely disagree, 5 = Completely agree.

The six specific awareness questions were constructed by the researcher. The questions were created to match the Instagram caption of the sustainable/expert condition, to measure whether or not reading the information before answering the questions had any effect. The following questions were constructed: 'I would describe the Instagram influencer sustainable responsible based on their Instagram post', 'I think buying one single piece of a higher price is better than buying many pieces of a lower price', 'I believe handling product with more care will make them more valuable and thus better for the environment', 'I believe it is possible to have a brand that is stylish as well as good for the environment and social conditions', 'I think locally produced clothes have an impact on social conditions', and 'I think naturally dyeing fabrics by hand has an impact on the environment'. The answer options were based on a 5-point Likert-scale, 1 = Completely disagree, 5 = Completely agree.

A factor analysis was conducted to test whether all eleven components could be used for measuring awareness towards sustainable fashion. The eleven Likert-scale items were entered into factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Varimax rotation based on Eigenvalues (> 1.00), $KMO = .86$, $\chi^2 (N = 230, 55) = 789,27$, $p < .001$. There were three factor loadings with an Eigenvalue above 1, meaning the eleven items represent three dimensions. The resultant model explained 60.37% of the variance in attitude towards sustainable fashion consumption. However, for the purpose of this research only two factors were used based on the original conceptualization (general and specific awareness). The factor analysis showed that the two scales that were constructed beforehand, general and specific awareness were indeed separate and this categorization was considered most important for this research. One of the three factors all had the general awareness items and was used a one scale (awareness general). The other two factors based on the factor analysis both included specific awareness questions and were combined into one scale, thus retaining a single specific awareness dimension (awareness specific). This and all other factors are presented in Appendix A. To test how reliable these awareness scales were, a reliability analysis was conducted. The test showed that the scale general awareness towards sustainable fashion consumption had a Cronbach's α of .86, which proves that the scale was indeed reliable. The five items were therefore used to construct a new scale '*awareness general*' that was used in further analysis. The new scale ranges from 1.4 to 5

with a mean of 3.63 ($SD = 0.73$). The other factor consisting of six items was barely reliable with a Cronbach's α of .61, but the reliability analysis showed that by removing the item 'I would describe the Instagram influencer sustainable responsible based on their Instagram post?' the scale became more reliable with Cronbach's α of .69. It was therefore decided to remove this item and create a new scale '*awareness specific*' with the five remaining items. The new scale ranges from 1.8 to 5 with a mean of 3.85 ($SD = 0.57$).

3.3.4 Control variables

Awareness of sustainability

The first control variable asked about the prior knowledge participants had of sustainability and sustainable fashion. It is important to test this to establish whether or not they answered the awareness and attitude questions based on previous knowledge or lack thereof. First, participants were asked a yes or no question, 'did you hear/know of the concept of sustainable fashion before this research'. If answered yes, another question asked was where they got their information. The answer options for this second question were: television program, documentary, newspaper, brands, social media influencers, blogs, website, friends/family, other.

Instagram usage

This study focuses on SMIs that operate on the social media platform Instagram, therefore the next three questions asked about the participants' regular Instagram usage to understand how familiar they were with the platform. The first question asked about time management, 'how much time do you spend on the platform Instagram?', with answer options that included: constantly during the day, 2-3 times a day, once a day, 4-6 times a week, 2-3 times a week, once a week, and never. The second question asked about engagement, 'do you engage through posting, liking or scrolling?', with answer option that included: commenting, posting, scrolling, liking, and all of the above. The third question asked about the likelihood that participants would follow the influencer based on the Instagram post that they saw, 'would you consider following the influencer you saw on the Instagram post?', with answer options that included: I would definitely follow the influencer, undecided on whether or not I would follow the influencer, and I would definitely not follow the influencer.

Product related

The last three questions of the survey were control variables to test if there are other reasons for the participants to purchase or not to purchase the sweater advertised. It could be that the participants just wanted to buy the sweater because of the brand. The question asked for *brand familiarity* was 'did you hear of the brand that was mentioned by the influencer?' with

answer options being: yes I have heard of the brand and have bought something from them before, yes I have heard of the brand but I have never bought anything from them, and no I have not heard of the brand. Another reason could be that participants think the sweater is not pretty enough, meaning the *perceived attractiveness of the sweater*, which asked ‘did you think the sweater advertised by the influencer was:’ with answer options being: attractive or unattractive. The last possible reason for participants to purchase or not to purchase the sweater was their need for the product, *necessity of the sweater*, which asked ‘would you, at this time, consider yourself in need of a new sweater?’ with answer option being: yes, no, and I have not thought of it but might consider it now.

3.3.5 Demographics

Participants’ demographics were asked to determine whether they are the right target group, how well their educational level related to the questions and where they are from. The target group consisted of females above the age of 18, and although the experiment was conducted in the Netherlands, the target group was gathered online where it was accessible to everyone. The first question asked ‘how old are you?’ which was answered by filling in a number. The second question asked ‘what is your gender?’ with the answer options: male, female, gender neutral, and other. The third question asked ‘what is your nationality?’, where participants chose from a drop down list of nationalities. The last question asked ‘what is your highest level of education?’ with the following answer options: less than high school degree, high school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED), bachelor’s degree in college (4 year), master’s degree doctoral degree, professional degree (JD, MD).

3.3.6 Manipulation check

The manipulation check is a test used to determine the effectiveness of the manipulation of the Instagram picture used in this experiment. The check consists of questions that test whether participants correctly perceived, interpreted or reacted to the manipulation (Hoewe, 2017). The first two questions asked participants to review the type of message they saw by asking ‘what type of message was written in the caption of the Instagram post?’, answer options being: fast fashion, sustainable fashion, and I am not sure what type of message I saw. The next question asked ‘what type of influencer did you see?’. To answer this question participants had to choose from a 6-point scale if they considered the influencer: fashionable — non-fashionable, old — young, friendly — unfriendly, expert — non-expert, and attractive — unattractive. With regards to attractiveness it was taken into account that participants might feel restraint in their right to call someone unattractive. Therefore, it was decided to use a 6-point scale without the option for a neutral answer. This was done to check whether the manipulation was successful by forcing participants to choose either one or the other, but allowing them to choose marginally attractive or unattractive.

After conducting the manipulation check to test whether or not participants interpreted the Instagram post correctly, it was concluded that not all of the three manipulated IVs, message content, expertise and attractiveness, were fully successful. The manipulation of the message content and attractiveness proved significant. Participants did see a significant difference between messages that discussed sustainable fashion and messages that discussed fast fashion $\chi^2 (7, N = 230) = 95.67, p < .001$. They also saw a difference between the image of an attractive SMI and a non-attractive SMI $\chi^2 (7, N = 230) = 24.07, p = .001$. The manipulation for expertise was marginally significant. The participants did not see a significant difference between an expert and a non-expert message $\chi^2 (7, N = 230) = 13.55, p = .060$. This result was taken into account in the discussion section.

3.4 Procedure

The experiment was conducted using the online tool Qualtrics. The participants were randomly assigned to one of eight different conditions. When starting the experiment, the participants saw a message containing information about the content they were about to see and if they give consent to use their answers for this research only. They were also informed that the research can be performed on a computer, but that the preferred medium is a phone because that is where they would normally encounter an Instagram post. After the general information, the participants were randomly presented one out of eight Instagram posts representing the different stimulus conditions. Participants were encouraged to take the time to look at the post before answering the post-exposure questions. The questions were organized in the following manner. First, participants were asked one question about the likelihood that they would purchase the product advertised in the Instagram post. After that, nine questions asked more about purchase intentions in the future, from the brand, by the influencer, and regarding the environment. The next five questions asked about attitude to general sustainability and sustainable fashion that were then followed by eleven questions about first general awareness towards environmental behavior and second specific awareness about sustainable fashion. After completing the first 26 questions, participants were asked about control variables starting with previous awareness of sustainable fashion followed by Instagram usage. The next few questions asked about demographics like age, gender, educational level and nationality. The last questions were with regards to a manipulation check and asked about what type of message and type of influencer they saw, and how they felt about the product they saw advertised. Participants were informed again that their answers were confidential and were asked to confirm to record them. The full experiment as presented to the participants can be found in Appendices E and F.

3.5 Quality check

3.5.1 Validity

Validity is defined by Malhotra and Birks (2007) as “the extent to which a measurement represents characteristics that exist in the phenomenon under construction” (Malhotra & Birks, 2007, p. 159). It tests whether the research and all its components are measuring what they are supposed to measure (Bryman, 2012; Drost, 2011). Validity is one of the most important criteria to consider when conducting a research. There are multiple elements to research validity and in this section four of those are discussed.

Internal validity refers to the validity of the entire research, meaning whether the caused effects that are found in the data are really because of the manipulation of the IVs (Drost, 2011; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). According to Drost (2011), there are many threats to internal validity, e.g. history, testing, instrumentation, selection, diffusion of treatment and compensatory equalization, rivalry and demoralization. Minimizing these threats and covering the internal validity was done through using control variables. These variables tested whether participants knew the concept beforehand and based their answers on that knowledge, and if their liking, need or familiarity with the product or brand influenced their decisions.

Construct validity refers to how well the concepts constructed from the literature are translated into an operationalization (Drost, 2011). Because the hypotheses and research questions were based on previous research and a relationship was expected, it had to be made sure that the correct measurements were present (Bryman, 2012). The validity of the manipulations was guaranteed by the use of academic literature on sustainable and fast fashion, and on research that tested peoples' perception of attractiveness. The validity of the DVs was covered through using an expert in the field of quantitative research who reviewed the items used in the scales. According to Drost (2011), construct validity can be subdivided into five types of validity. In this research two are accounted for: face and content validity. Face validity is a subjective judgment on the operationalization of a construct, which means that the researcher checks whether the measurements are understood as they are supposed to (Bryman, 2012; Drost, 2011). The content validity is a means to ensure that the indicators mean the same as the concept as it is defined by the researcher. This was ensured by conducting a pre-test, which asked fellow student-researchers how they understood the questions and if they felt they could answer them truthfully based on their understanding.

External validity is about the extent to which the study can be generalized to a larger population and if this can happen outside the experimental situation (Drost, 2011). The conducted research has a limited generalizability due to the sampling procedure. A convenience sample was used to reach a number of people of the target group, which means that not everyone within the target group was equally presented in this research. However, external validity also means generalizing the study outside the experimental

situation. This was guaranteed by constructing the experiment in a setting that already resembled the natural state that participants would be in when viewing the manipulated content. The experiment was shared and filled out online, and asked participants to fill it out on their phone where they would normally also encounter the Instagram post.

3.5.2 Reliability

The second quality criterion applied in this study was reliability. The concept is defined as the extent to which a measurement reproduces consistent results if the process of measurement is conducted again (Malhotra & Birks, 2007; Matthews & Ross, 2010). According to Bryman (2012) there are three main elements to reliability that are further discussed.

First, stability, which refers to the consistency of the measurement in the research over time. Research is considered reliable when the research can be performed over time and when there is only a small variation in the results. Second, internal reliability, which means that the indicators used in this research should correlate with each other in order to be considered highly reliable (Bryman, 2012). For reliability to be secured, most of the scales used in this research were taken from existing research where they proved to have high correlation levels. However, after data gathering the scales were tested again using a reliability analysis. If the Cronbach's alpha is higher than 0.7 the scale is considered to have internal reliability (Drost, 2011). The results of the factor and reliability analysis of the scales used in this study can be found in Appendix A. Third, inter-observer consistency, which is especially relevant when there is a great deal of subjective interpretation because it is important to ensure that there is consistency in the decision making process (Bryman, 2012). In this research there are no question open for subjective interpretation, but only Likert-scale answer options. The research is also conducted by just one researcher, so the inter-observer consistency is guaranteed through the experimental design.

3.5.3 Ethical consideration

The last quality criterion is the ethical consideration. It is important to follow the ethical guidelines so that participants are well-informed and not harmed in the research. The participants were informed in the introduction of the experiment that their answers are completely anonymous, confidential and only used for this research. Before participants started the experiment, they were asked to agree to these terms and had to confirm that they are over eighteen years old to make sure they met the ethical requirements. At the end of the experiment participants were informed again on the anonymity of their response and their answers were only used for this research only. The consent message before and after the survey can be found in Appendix D.

Ethical requirements also had to be met when it comes to measuring attractiveness. The concept of attractiveness is very ambiguous, which makes it hard to define what could

be considered unattractive enough for this research. It would be unethical to use a picture of a SMI and present it as unattractive. Therefore, this research used a picture from a fashion SMI that was then digitally manipulated to look unattractive. Before manipulation, the SMI was asked for her consent to not only use her picture but also manipulate it accordingly.

4. Results

In this section the results received from the experimental research are presented. The data was collected from the sampled population and control questions assured that only those who are female, above eighteen and active on Instagram have answered the questions.

4.1 Descriptive variables and correlations

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive values of the control variables per condition. The mean age within each condition is close to the mean age of the total respondents group ($M = 23$). In all eight conditions the majority of participants were not in need of a new sweater and they were also not interested in following the SMI. Brand familiarity proved to be higher for the conditions containing a fast fashion message. The attractiveness of the sweater was moderately equal among all conditions with an attractive model having a slightly higher number of participants thinking the sweater is attractive.

Table 4.1: Descriptive overview of the conditions

Conditions	Frequency	Mean age	Brand familiarity	Need sweater	Attractive sweater	Follow SMI
1. FF A E	27	23.63	26	3	19	0
2. FF A NE	30	22.07	28	2	16	0
3. FF NA E	29	22.59	26	2	18	1
4. FF NA NE	26	21.85	22	7	12	1
5. SF A E	28	23.29	9	2	22	3
6. SF A NE	31	23.74	5	5	22	4
7. SF NA E	30	23.60	13	4	19	0
8. SF NA NE	29	24.14	11	2	18	1

Note. FF=Fast fashion, SF=Sustainable fashion, E=Expert, NE=Non-expert, A=Attractive, NA=Non-attractive

Note. The numbers are based on the positive answers given by participants

To get an overview of the relations between the variables, a correlation matrix was constructed, which can be found in Table 4.2. The matrix shows that a strong correlation was found between general awareness and specific awareness ($r = 0.54$, $p < .01$), which is a positive result because these variables together were used to measure awareness. The strongest correlation was between brand familiarity and message content ($r = -.71$, $p < .01$). A possible association that showed to have a negative relation, meaning the higher one variable gets, the lower the other variable. The matrix also shows that there is a strong correlation between awareness and attitude ($r = .60$, $p < .01$), and ($r = .50$, $p < .01$), the two mediating roles for purchase intention. This means that the higher one variable gets, the

higher the other will also be. The control variable perceived attractiveness of the sweater was positively correlated with purchase intention, yet this was only a weak correlation ($r = .23, p < .01$). The other control variable, brand familiarity, had a positive correlation with all three of the dependent variables. The highest correlation was between brand familiarity and participants' attitude ($r = .16, p < .05$), but the correlation here was also weak. For both the control variables it means that when one variable changes it will not highly correlate with the other variables.

Furthermore, the matrix shows there was a positive correlation between the mediating variables and purchase intention. The Pearson correlation showed there was a small positive correlation between attitude and purchase intention ($r = 0.22, p < .01$). There was also a small positive correlation between purchase intention and general awareness ($r = 0.16, p < 0.05$) and specific awareness ($r = 0.16, p < 0.05$). This correlation was only moderate for both possible associations, meaning that when changes occur in one variable it will not highly correlate with the other variable. Finally, the correlation matrix shows there were no significant correlations between either of the IVs: expertise, message content and attractiveness and the DVs: attitude, awareness and purchase intention. The next sections will further analyze these correlations to establish the nature and direction of the relationships between the variables.

Table 4.2: Correlation matrix (N = 230)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Purchase intention	2.65	0.74									
2. Attitude	3.60	0.66	.22**								
3. General awareness	3.63	0.73	.16*	.60**							
4. Specific awareness	3.85	0.57	.16*	.50**	.54**						
5. Brand familiarity	2.04	0.86	.14*	.16*	.13*	.14*					
6. Perceived attractiveness sweater	1.37	0.48	.23**	.02	.01	-.09	-.08				
7. Necessity sweater	2.01	0.50	.20**	.09	-.02	-.03	.08	.22			
8. Expertise	0.50	0.50	.10	-.08	-.11	-.00	.08	-.10	-.06		
9. Message content	0.51	0.50	.01	-.01	-.05	-.03	-.71**	.11	-.27	-.01	
10. Attractiveness	0.50	0.50	.03	.12	.13	.05	-.03	-.10	-.02	-.04	-.01

Note. Correlation is significant at: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

4.2 Hypotheses and research questions testing

This thesis proposed a parallel mediation model where the various experimental conditions are predicted to impact purchase intention via three mediators: attitude, specific awareness,

and general awareness. To test this model, Hayes' Process mediation Model 4 analysis was used. The analysis was first conducted without covariates followed by the same analysis with the covariates brand familiarity and perceived attractiveness of the sweater.

4.2.1 Process Mediation analysis on IV, DV and mediators

To test whether the IVs had an effect on the DVs when taking into account the other factors of the model, a Process Mediation analysis was conducted for each of the hypotheses and research questions posed in this study.

Message content

The first analysis was calculated to test the effect of message content (IV) on attitude, awareness and purchase intention (DVs). First, the effect of message content on attitude towards sustainable fashion was tested. The model was found to be not significant, $F(1, 228) = 0.05$, $p = .827$, $R^2 = .00$. The results showed that message content had no significant effect on attitude as the mediated factor for purchase intention in the overall model, $b = -0.02$, $t(228) = -0.22$, $p = .827$. H3a has to be rejected because attitude towards sustainable fashion is not affected by message content. Second, the effect of message content on awareness as the mediated factor for purchase intention in the overall model was tested. The DV awareness was divided in two separate factors: general and specific awareness. As part of the entire model, the model was shown to be insignificant, for general awareness, $F(1, 228) = 0.60$, $p = .441$, $R^2 = .00$; specific awareness, $F(1, 228) = 0.22$, $p = .639$, $R^2 = .00$. The effect was not significant for general awareness, $b = -0.07$, $t(228) = -0.77$, $p = .441$, nor was it for specific awareness, $b = -0.04$, $t(228) = -0.47$, $p = .640$. These results mean that H3b has to be rejected because there is no effect between message content and awareness towards environmental behavior and sustainable fashion. Third, the direct effect of message content on purchase intention was investigated. The model was shown to be not significant, $F(1, 228) = 0.023$, $p = .879$, $R^2 = .00$. Message content showed to have no significant effect on purchase intention, $b = 0.02$, $t(228) = 0.15$, $p = .879$. This means that H3c has to be rejected because purchase intention was not affected by the message content.

Furthermore, to test if there were mediation effects via each mediator, the total indirect effect of message content on purchase intention was not significant because the Confidence Interval (CI) was lower than zero, Indirect effect = -0.01, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.06, 0.04]. For the specific indirect effect, attitude did not mediated the relationship between message content and purchase intention, Indirect effect = -0.00, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.05, 0.03]. The same non-significant result was found for general (Indirect = 0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.02]) and specific (Indirect = -0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.02]) awareness. The results thus showed that message content did not have a direct or indirect effect through the mediating variables of attitude and awareness on purchase intention.

Expertise

The second analysis was conducted to test the effect of expertise (IV) on attitude, awareness and purchase intention (DVs). First, the effect of expertise on participants' attitude towards sustainable fashion was tested. The model was shown to be significant, $F(1, 228) = 1.48$, $p = .225$, $R^2 = .01$. However, the analysis yielded no significant effect on attitude as the mediated factor for purchase intention in the overall model, $b = -0.11$, $t(228) = -1.22$, $p = .225$. Thus, H4a has to be rejected because there was no effect of expertise on participants' attitude towards sustainable fashion. Second, the effect of expertise on awareness was tested. The DV awareness was again divided and tested using two factors: general and specific awareness. The model showed to be not significant for general awareness, $F(1, 228) = 2.98$, $p = .086$, $R^2 = .01$, and specific awareness, $F(1, 228) = 0.00$, $p = .954$, $R^2 = .00$. The results showed there was no significant effect for general awareness, $b = -0.17$, $t(228) = -1.73$, $p = .086$, and specific awareness, $b = -0.00$, $t(228) = -0.06$, $p = .954$. These results mean that H4b has to be rejected because neither the expert nor the non-expert message had an effect on awareness towards environmental behavior and sustainable fashion. Third, the effect of expertise on purchase intention was investigated to answer RQ1: what is the effect of the level of expertise of social media influencers on purchase intention?. The model was found not significant, $F(1, 228) = 2.25$, $p = .135$, $R^2 = .01$. Results showed expertise to have no significant direct effect on purchase intention, $b = 0.15$, $t(228) = 1.50$, $p = .135$. The answer to RQ1 can thus be concluded, there is no effect of expertise on participants' purchase intention.

Furthermore, to test if there were mediation effects via each mediator, the total indirect effect of expertise on purchase intention was not significant because the Confidence Interval (CI) was lower than zero, Indirect effect = -0.03 , $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI $[-0.09, 0.02]$. For the specific indirect effect, attitude did not mediated the relationship between expertise and purchase intention, Indirect effect = -0.02 , $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.08, 0.01]$. Additionally, the specific effects for general (Indirect = 0.01 , $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI $[-0.04, 0.03]$) and specific awareness (Indirect = -0.00 , $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI $[-0.02, 0.02]$) were also found not significant. The results thus showed that expertise did not have a direct or indirect effect through the mediating variables of attitude and awareness on purchase intention

Attractiveness

The last analysis was conducted to test the effect of attractiveness (IV) on attitude, awareness and purchase intention (DVs). The model was found non-significant, $F(1, 228) = 3.32$, $p = .070$, $R^2 = .01$. The results showed that attractiveness had no significant effect on attitude in the overall model, $b = 0.16$, $t(228) = 1.82$, $p = .070$. Thus, H5a has to be rejected because neither an attractive nor an unattractive SMI had an effect on participants' attitude towards sustainable fashion. Second, an analysis was calculated to answer RQ2: what is the

effect of social media influencers' attractiveness on purchase intention of sustainable fashion? The model showed to be insignificant, $F(1, 228) = 0.15$, $p = .703$, $R^2 = .00$. Attractiveness showed to have no significant effect on purchase intention taking into account all the other variables in the model, $b = 0.04$, $t(228) = 0.38$, $p = .703$. This result answered RQ2; physical attractiveness has no effect on participants' intention to purchase. Third, the last research question (RQ3) asked: what is the effect of social media influencers' attractiveness on the awareness of sustainable fashion?. To answer this question the model tested the influence of attractiveness on participants' general specific awareness. The model was shown to be not significant for general awareness, $F(1, 228) = 3.64$, $p = .058$, $R^2 = .02$, and neither was it for specific awareness, $F(1, 228) = 0.49$, $p = .484$, $R^2 = .00$. Attractiveness showed to have no significant effect on general awareness, $b = 0.18$, $t(228) = 1.91$, $p = .058$, and on specific awareness, $b = 0.05$, $t(228) = 0.70$, $p = .484$. The answer to RQ3 is that there is no effect of physical attractiveness on awareness towards environmental behavior and sustainable fashion.

Additionally, to test if there were mediation effects via each mediator, the total indirect effect of attractiveness on purchase intention was not significant because the Confidence Interval (CI) was lower than zero, Indirect effect = 0.04, $SE = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.10]. For the specific indirect effect, attitude did not mediated the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention, Indirect effect = 0.03, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.00, 0.09]. Furthermore, the specific effects for general (Indirect = 0.00, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.04]) and specific awareness (Indirect = 0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.04]) were also found to be not significant. The results thus showed that attractiveness did not have a direct or indirect effect through the mediating variables of attitude and awareness on purchase intention

4.2.2 The effects of the mediators on purchase intention

The first two hypotheses discussed the roles of attitude and awareness on purchase intention. The results based on the mediation analyses using Process are presented below:

Mediation effect:

The first step was to prepare the data to make it appropriate for the statistical analysis. The various experimental conditions are categorical variables that can be arranged in terms of increasing level of effectiveness to impact purchase intention based on the theoretical predictions. Treating the independent variable this way makes the analysis applicable and easier to interpret. Thus, the experimental conditions were recoded from the lowest level: 1 = all 3 negative conditions (i.e., FF, NA, NE); 2 = 2 negative and 1 positive (e.g., FF, NA, E); 3 = 1 negative and 2 positive (e.g., SF, A, NE); and 4 = all 3 positive conditions (i.e., SF, A, E). Using Process the recoded experimental conditions of increasing effectiveness used as the

predictor, purchase intention as the dependent variable, and attitude, specific awareness, and general awareness as the mediators.

Focusing specifically on the effects of the experimental conditions on each of the mediators, for attitude, the results showed that the model was not significant, $F(1, 228) = 0.05$, $p = .824$, $R^2 = .00$. The experimental conditions did not have a significant effect on attitude ($b = 0.01$, $t(228) = 0.22$, $p = .824$). Similarly, non-significant results were found for the effects of the experimental conditions on general awareness: $F(1, 228) = 0.12$, $p = .727$, $R^2 = .00$; ($b = -0.02$, $t(228) = -0.35$, $p = .728$); and specific awareness: $F(1, 228) = .011$, $p = .919$, $R^2 = .00$; ($b = .00$, $t(228) = 0.10$, $p = .919$).

For the effects of the experimental conditions and the mediators on purchase intention, the model was found to be significant and explains 6% of the variance; $F(4, 225) = 3.35$, $p = .011$, $R^2 = .06$. The direct effect of the experimental conditions on purchase intention was not significant, $b = 0.06$, $t(225) = 1.18$, $p = .237$. The effect of attitude on purchase intention, on the other hand, was significant, $b = 0.20$, $t(225) = 2.08$, $p = .039$. This means that the more positive the attitude, the greater the purchase intention. Therefore, H1 has to be accepted because attitude did affect the purchase intention. The effects of general awareness and specific awareness on purchase intention were both not significant ($b = 0.03$, $t(225) = 0.29$, $p = .770$; $b = 0.07$, $t(225) = 0.67$, $p = .504$, respectively). Therefore, H2 has to be rejected because there is no effect for awareness on purchase intention. For the mediation effects, the total indirect effect of the experimental conditions on purchase intention was not significant, Indirect = 0.00, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.03, 0.03]. The specific indirect effects of the experimental conditions on purchase intention via attitude (Indirect = 0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.02, 0.03]); general awareness (Indirect = -0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01]), and specific awareness (Indirect = 0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01]) are also all not significant.

4.2.3 SMI characteristics with covariates

The analysis of the three IVs —message content, expertise and attractiveness— showed that none of the characteristics of the SMI or their message had an effect on attitude, awareness or direct purchase intention. However, as is evident from the correlation matrix in Table 4.2, brand familiarity and perceived attractiveness of the sweater had an effect on the DVs. Therefore, another Process mediation analysis was conducted with the two control variables. The analysis yielded that the control variables made a difference on message content influencing attitude and purchase intention, and on attractiveness influencing attitude and general awareness.

Message content

For the effect of message content on attitude, the model was found to be significant, $F(3, 226) = 3.52, p .016, R^2 = .04$. The analysis yielded a significant effect on attitude, $b = 0.25, t(226) = 2.08, p = .038$. For the direct effect of message content on purchase intention the model was shown to be significant, $F(3, 226) = 7.63, p < .001, R^2 = .09$. The results showed that message content had a significant direct effect on purchase intention, $b = 0.28, t(226) = 2.09, p = .038$. If participants were familiar with the brand, the message content had an effect on both the attitude towards sustainable fashion and the direct intention to purchase the product.

In addition to the direct effect, the mediating role of attitude was tested for message content including the covariates brand familiarity and attractiveness of the sweater. Results showed that the effect of message content on purchase intention was not mediated through attitude because the CI was lower than zero, Indirect = 0.05, $SE = 0.04$, 95% CI [0.01, 0.14]. Message content thus had an effect on attitude when participants were familiar with the brand and thought the sweater was attractive, but it did not mediate the relationship between message content and purchase intention.

Attractiveness

For attractiveness on attitude, the model was shown to be significant, $F(3, 226) = 3.23, p .023, R^2 = .04$. The analysis proved that brand familiarity and attractiveness of the sweater had no impact on the effect of attractiveness on attitude as part of the overall model, $b = 0.16, t(226) = 1.87, p = .063$, although the significance level was marginal. For general awareness, it was predicted that attractiveness would not have an effect on awareness. Yet, results showed that the model was marginally significant, $F(3, 226) = 2.61, p .052, R^2 = .03$. When brand familiarity and attractiveness of the sweater were taken into account, attractiveness had a marginally significant effect on general awareness, $b = 0.19, t(226) = 1.96, p = .052$. Thus, when participants were familiar with the brand or thought the sweater was attractive; a physically attractive SMI had a positive effect on the attitude towards sustainable fashion and the general awareness towards environmental behavior.

Additionally, the mediating role of attitude and general awareness was tested for the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention including the covariates brand familiarity and attractiveness of the sweater. The analysis yielded that attitude did not mediate the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention, Indirect = 0.03, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.08] because the CI was less than zero. There was a marginally significant effect of attractiveness on attitude when participants were familiar with the brand, but it did not mediate the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention. Furthermore, results showed that general awareness also did not have a mediating role in attractiveness influencing purchase intention, Indirect effect = 0.00, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-

0.03, 0.04]. Attractiveness was effective for increasing general awareness, but it did not mediate the relationship between attractiveness and purchase intention.

4.2.4 The effects of the mediators on purchase intention with covariates

The first two hypotheses discussed the roles of attitude and awareness on purchase intention. The results based on the mediation analyses using Process are presented below, but this time the covariates brand familiarity and perceived attractiveness of the sweater are taken into account:

Mediation effect:

An additional analysis was conducted to test the total indirect effect of the model. The same recoded experimental conditions variable was used to conduct the analysis for the total indirect effect. For the effect of the experimental conditions on attitude, the results showed that the model was marginally not significant, $F(3, 226) = 2.51, p = .059, R^2 = .03$.

Additionally, the experimental conditions with covariates did not have a significant effect on attitude ($b = .07, t(226) = 1.18, p = .238$). Similarly, non-significant results were found for the effects of the experimental conditions on general awareness: $F(3, 226) = 1.37, p = .253, R^2 = .02$; ($b = 0.03, t(226) = 0.40, p = .689$); and specific awareness: $F(3, 226) = 2.59, p = .054, R^2 = .00$; ($b = 0.06, t(226) = 1.24, p = .215$), although the results for the latter were only marginally non-significant.

For the effects of the experimental conditions and the mediators on purchase intention, the model was found to be significant and explains 12% of the variance; $F(6, 223) = 5.23, p < .001, R^2 = .12$. The direct effect of the experimental conditions on purchase intention was not significant, $b = 0.08, t(223) = 1.40, p = .164$. The effect of attitude on purchase intention was also not significant, $b = 0.16, t(223) = 1.73, p = .085$. The effects of general awareness and specific awareness on purchase intention were both not significant ($b = 0.01, t(223) = 0.13, p = .894$; $b = 0.10, t(223) = 0.97, p = .334$, respectively). For the mediation effects, the total indirect effect of the experimental conditions on purchase intention was not significant, Indirect = 0.02, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.05]. The specific indirect effects of the experimental conditions on purchase intention via attitude (Indirect = 0.01, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.04]); general awareness (Indirect = -0.00, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.01]), and specific awareness (Indirect = 0.01, $SE = 0.01$, 95% CI [-0.01, 0.03]) are also all not significant.

4.3 Additional findings

4.3.1 Covariates effectiveness

The Process mediation analyses showed that there was significant effect for two of the IVs. In order to establish which of the categories was more effective a 2x2x2 ANOVA was conducted for message content on attitude and purchase intention, and for attractiveness on attitude and awareness general.

Message content

For the effect of message content on attitude when taking into account the covariates brand familiarity and perceived attractiveness of the sweater, a 2x2x2 ANOVA was conducted to test whether the sustainable or the fast fashion message was more effective. Results showed there was a significant effect for message content on attitude when participants were familiar with the brand and thought the sweater was attractive, $F(1, 220) = 5.12, p = .025$, partial $\eta^2 = .023$. Yet, it was the fast fashion message that was slightly more effective ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.67$) than the sustainable fashion message ($M = 3.59, SD = 0.66$). For the direct effect of message content on purchase intention, a 2x2x2 ANOVA yielded there was a significant effect, $F(1, 221) = 4.35, p = .038$, partial $\eta^2 = .019$. In general, sustainable messages proved to be slightly more effective ($M = 2.65, SD = 0.78$) than fast fashion ($M = 2.64, SD = 0.70$).

Attractiveness

For the effect of attractiveness on attitude and awareness when taking into account the covariates brand familiarity and perceived attractiveness of the sweater, a 2x2x2 ANOVA was conducted to test whether the attractive or the unattractive SMI was more effective. The results showed there was a marginally significant effect for attractiveness on attitude, $F(1, 220) = 3.66, p = .057$ partial $\eta^2 = .016$. In general, when participants were familiar with the brand, an attractive SMI increased the attitude towards sustainable fashion ($M = 3.68, SD = 0.65$) more than an unattractive SMI ($M = 3.52, SD = 0.68$). Another 2x2x2 ANOVA showed that there was a marginally significant effect for attractiveness on general awareness, $F(1, 221) = 3.80, p = .053$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.017$. When participants were familiar with the brand, an attractive SMI increased the general awareness of participants ($M = 3.72, SD = 0.72$) more than an unattractive SMI ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.74$).

4.3.2 Interaction effect

The 2x2x2 factorial design that was used in this study lends itself for testing the interactions between the different IVs. So in addition to the individual effect of message content, expertise and attractiveness on attitude, awareness and purchase intention, the interaction

effect between them was also tested. A 2 (message content) x 2 (expertise) x 2 (attractiveness) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted without the covariates to test the interaction effect.

First, an analysis was conducted for the interaction effect among the IVs on attitude. Results showed there was no interaction effect between message content and expertise ($F(1, 222) = 0.21, p = .646, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$), message content and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 0.19, p = .667, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$), expertise and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 0.03, p = .873, \text{partial } \eta^2 < .001$), or among all IVs ($F(1, 222) = 0.02, p = .884, \text{partial } \eta^2 < .001$). Thus, the IVs had no effect on attitude when analyzed together.

Second, a 2x2x2 ANOVA was calculated for the interaction effect among the IVs on general and specific awareness. The results for general awareness showed there was no interaction effect between message content and expertise ($F(1, 222) = 3.01, p = .084, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .013$), message content and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 0.18, p = .675, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$), expertise and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 0.03, p = .853, \text{partial } \eta^2 < .001$), or among all three ($F(1, 222) = 0.31, p = .577, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .001$). The results for specific awareness also showed no interaction effect between message content and expertise ($F(1, 222) = 0.56, p = .456, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$), message content and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 2.75, p = .099, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .012$), expertise and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 0.47, p = .493, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .002$), or among all IVs ($F(1, 222) = 6.21, p = .032, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$). Therefore it can be concluded that the IVs had no effect on awareness when they were analyzed together.

Third, a 2x2x2 ANOVA tested the effect on purchase intention, and here too there was no interaction effect between message content and expertise ($F(1, 222) = 0.11, p = .740, \text{partial } \eta^2 < .001$), message content and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 0.67, p = .413, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$), expertise and attractiveness ($F(1, 222) = 1.59, p = .209, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .007$), or among all IVs ($F(1, 222) = 0.73, p = .392, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .003$). The results thus show that neither of the IVs were effective separately or collectively for affecting purchase intention without mediators.

5. Discussion

This research explored the question: *to what extent do social media influencers impact consumption of sustainable fashion as it is mediated by consumers' attitude and awareness?*

Based on an experimental research design the results showed that the individual characteristics of SMIs and their messaging did not have an effect on their attitude, awareness and purchase intention for sustainable fashion. In this discussion section the results will be reviewed in light of previous research and implications that could be made for practitioners and for future research.

5.1 Findings and implications

5.1.1 Mediating roles of attitude and awareness

The first part of the study focused on the mediating role of attitude and awareness. Previous research already indicated that attitude is one of the factors that could influence consumers' intention to purchase a product. The more positive their attitude is towards the product they see, the more they intend to buy (Kozar & Hiller Connell, 2013). The analysis of the data collected for this experiment showed that attitude indeed has a positive effect on purchase intention, which is in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen and Fishbein (Ajzen, 1991). It means that the more positive the attitude towards sustainable fashion is the more consumers have the intention to buy the sweater advertised by the SMI. The attitude questions did not ask specifically about what they liked about the product, but more about the values participants attached to clothes in general. This research thus shows attitude towards valuing clothes is important for how much they want to buy the product. Regarding these findings, it shows fashion companies should be aware that sustainable fashion consumption indeed starts with influencing the attitude of the consumer.

The other mediating factor analyzed is awareness. The concept of awareness was measured in two parts, general awareness towards environmental behavior and specific awareness towards sustainable fashion. Previous literature brought forth that a lack of knowledge is one of the main barriers for people to behave more environmentally friendly (Harris et al., 2016) or buy sustainable fashion (Kong et al., 2016). It was therefore believed that increasing the awareness, by making participants more knowledgeable and sharing experiences with sustainable fashion, could lead to a bigger intention to purchase. However, the experiment pointed out that awareness, whether that is about general awareness towards the environment or specific awareness towards sustainable fashion, does not impact participants' intentions to purchase. The results showed there was a correlation between awareness and purchase intention, but there was no positive direct effect of awareness on purchase intention. Of all participants included in the data 211 participants were familiar with the concept of sustainable fashion before they participated in this experiment, but being

familiar with it proves to not be the same as awareness and it is not the determining factor to engage in purchasing.

5.1.2 Social media influencer characteristics

After testing whether the mediating factors were effective for increasing purchase intention, the experiment tested which of the characteristics of the SMI are effective. The results showed that none of the characteristics of the SMI or their message were effective in increasing the attitude, awareness and purchase intention of sustainable fashion. In the only other research that looked at the impact of SMIs on environmental behavior, general and not fashion related, Johnstone and Lindh (2018) found that especially younger consumers were influenced by SMIs to behave more environmentally friendly. Despite the average age of participants in this experiment being 23, this same influence did not transfer to messages of sustainable fashion. The characteristics and respective results are explained accordingly.

Message content

The content of the message expressed by the SMI proved to have no effect on the three DVs attitude, awareness and purchase intention. According to De Lenne and Vandenbosch (2016) and Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008), a greater exposure to messages discussing sustainable fashion had participants believe others among them are buying it as well and thus they would be more inclined to buy it too. The more people are confronted with positive reviews the more popular they perceive the product to be (Park & Lee, 2008). All the messages in this experiment were constructed with a positive note and the SMI was pleased with the product they were advertising. However, the participants were only exposed to one post. Previous research underlines that people use multiple sources to make a well-informed decision (Hall et al., 2017). Exposing participants to a single post might not have been enough for them to trigger the idea of buying sustainable fashion. The research showed that the majority of the participants had heard of the concept sustainable fashion before, but the post they saw in the experiment might have been the first extensive message they came across in a while. The literature did not actively discuss the exposure to a smaller amount of posts, so the ineffective relationship between message content and attitude, awareness and purchase intention might be as the result of lack of volume.

There was not a lot of research directly discussing the effect of SMIs as a source for information gathering on general environmental behavior or sustainable fashion. Participants are more familiar with fast fashion Instagram posts because that is what the majority of fashion SMIs project and they have proven effective (De Lenne & Vandenbosch, 2016; Sudha & Sheena, 2017), Promoting sustainable fashion might not work using this approach. Social media in itself was mentioned often for increasing the attention towards sustainable fashion, but more in a community setting where people could actively engage in a

conversation about sustainable behavior, not fashion related (Harris et al., 2016). This experiment did not test for the engagement factor of social media, but only on receiving the message from a SMI. It could be that greater awareness is only effective when participants are able to actively engage with it more before making the decision to purchase. Static SMI messaging might not have enough effect on their own.

Expertise

The results showed that the level of expertise present in the message conveyed by the SMI does not impact the attitude and awareness towards sustainable fashion, and also does not increase participants' intention to purchase the product on display. Sustainability is a newer topic especially in the fashion industry and according to Cervellon and Wernfelt (2012) people want more specific information about it. It was assumed that because SMIs balance the line between social and procedural knowledge, a more experienced message would positively impact the awareness of participants. Yet, the results show that the level of expertise placed within the message did not affect awareness of the topic. The attitude was also left unaffected, maybe because participants did not believe the match-up relationship between the SMI and the product. McCormick (2016) in her research concluded that unfamiliar endorsers, like SMIs people see for the first time, could still be seen as an expert, as long as the person believes the relationship between the endorser and the product to be genuine. The results however showed that people did not consider the expertise message effective for changing their attitude or awareness. Participants only saw one image of the SMI so a possible explanation is the one time exposure was too short for the participants to establish the match-up relationship between the SMI and the product.

For purchase intention, the literature was inconclusive so this research asked whether or not expertise could affect purchase intention. The results showed that it cannot; participants did not intend to purchase the sweater whether the SMI they saw shared an expert or non-expert message. Literature showed expertise messages are only effective for certain types of people that have more cognitive environmental motives (Kim et al., 1997), and for certain types of products. Sustainable fashion is a very particular product that is hard to place within a product category, and not all product types need an expert endorsement. When looking at the results, participants showed not to be affected by information about the product when making the decision to purchase so either they had different motives or did not think the product needed extra information.

However, results containing expertise should be taken with caution. The manipulation check showed that the manipulation was not clearly effective. Participants did not recognize the message to be expertise or non-expertise. A possible reason for this failure is that Instagram might not be the platform for expert messages. The highly visual nature of the platform puts the attention on the picture and not the caption beneath. The manipulation was

created in such a way that the expertise and non-expertise message were equal in length so participants would not base their opinion on message length but on the content. However, it must be noted that Instagram captions are in a lot of cases not that long at all. The texts were based on those of real life ethical SMIs, but the regular fashion SMI normally does not share that much information. The more altruistic aspect to fashion might be well advertised on Instagram because it gives the looks of the product the center stage, the deeper meaning and informative texts about sustainable fashion do not translate well to the users of Instagram. The platform might thus be unsuitable for expert messages on sustainable fashion.

Attractiveness

As with the other two characteristics of the SMI, attractiveness also showed to have no effect on any of the three DVs: attitude, awareness or purchase intention. For the latter two it was questioned whether they would have no effect because the appearance of the SMI is especially relevant for the first impression (Eisend & Lagner, 2010; Reingen & Kernan, 1993). It was also believed that to increase awareness towards sustainable fashion people would focus more on other factors alongside the physical appearance of the product or the SMI (Fletcher, 2007; Lee & Watkins, 2016). The attractiveness of the endorser has been claimed to make the SMI more superior or popular (Horai et al., 1974), but the results showed the physical attractiveness of the SMI has no effect on either the intention to buy the product or the underlying message towards sustainable fashion that could create awareness. However, the results did not explain whether other factors were seen as more important than physical attractiveness.

Participants' attitude was also left unaffected by the attractiveness of the model. This was an interesting finding since literature showed that the feelings towards an attractive person are almost always more positive than those towards an unattractive person (Dion et al, 1972; Griffin & Langlois, 2006). Attractive people are considered more desirable and people tend to compare themselves constantly towards endorsers that are more attractive (Buunk & Dijkstra, 2011). Other research also highlights purchase intention directly might not be effective, but attitude almost always is (Ohanian, 1991; Till & Busler, 1998). The findings therefore diverge greatly from previous research. The data was tested with the control variables of perceived attractiveness of the sweater to see if the product in itself was not to their liking, but it showed to have no impact. A possible reason for this is participants did not see a match-up between the attractiveness of the SMI and the product on display. The match-up hypothesis explains beauty related products are more impacted by an attractive endorser than are non-beauty related products (Till & Busler, 1998; Kamins, 1990). Fashion can be considered beauty related and appearance enhancing, however, the experiment did not test for the attitude towards the product but for the attitude towards the deeper meaning

behind fashion production and consumption. The attitude towards what goes on behind the product might require a more cognitive approach that is not triggered by the attractiveness of the model, but by the way the participants approach the issue from their already existing standpoint.

5.1.2 Brand familiarity

One of the most interesting findings from the experiment is the effect of brand familiarity on participants' attitude, awareness and direct purchase intention. When brand familiarity was taken into account, the results showed that the effect for message content on participants' attitude and purchase intention, and for attractiveness on attitude and awareness towards general environmental behavior became significant. Previous research shows traditional marketing is becoming less effective because people seek out peers and bloggers for recommendations (Nunes et al., 2018), nevertheless brands are still seen as educators of sustainable fashion (Beard, 2008). The results put forth that this dynamic is indeed what people are looking for when it comes to changing their attitude, awareness and purchase intention towards sustainable fashion.

The effect of brand familiarity on the message content can be related to this element of education. When brands educate the consumer well on their green practices their name alone can become the trigger for potential consumers to either support or avoid the brand. Interestingly, it was the fast fashion message that had a bigger effect than the sustainable fashion message. The analysis showed the participants were in general more familiar with the fast fashion brand ($M = 25.5$) than they were with the sustainable fashion brand ($M = 8.8$). The brands used in the experiment were Reformation and Zara, both brands with a clear standpoint regarding sustainable fashion. Reformation is seen as an online game changer with their focus on sustainable production, while Zara is one of the leading fast fashion companies. If participants linked their knowledge of the brand to sustainable practices, Zara most likely would not have come out on top. It seems that for their attitude and purchase intention participants were more inclined to be influenced by the post if they recognized the brand, no matter the sustainable practices. What is clear from this research is that the brand name is leading in how people perceive the message and that a lot of responsibility for changing the view on the fashion industry is in the hands of brands.

The other characteristic that was influenced by participants' brand familiarity is that of attractiveness, which turned out to be effective for both attitude and general awareness. When participants recognized the brand, the more attractive they considered the SMI the more positive their attitude and the higher their general awareness towards sustainable fashion was. Previous literature showed attractiveness has a positive impact on attitude (Trampe et al., 2010). Consumers consider both the SMI (Horai et al., 1974) and their fashion style (Shaw et al., 2006) more superior and appealing when they are physically

attractive. Reingen and Kernan (1993) also showed that attractiveness helps the initial impression consumers have of the product. The positive feelings participants get from first seeing an attractive SMI can work through on how they feel towards related issues like the production of the clothes, yet this research shows this is only the case when participants also recognize the brand mentioned in the caption underneath the picture. The other finding, that attractiveness has an effect on general awareness, is less straightforward. Attractiveness is considered a first effect and not something that increase long term recognition or in this case awareness (Eisend & Lagner, 2010). It could be that the attractiveness caused participants to form the desirability to be like the SMI, albeit only based on their appearance, and believed that being more environmentally aware could make them more desirable and acceptable too. Research shows that people ascribe good character traits to someone that is considered attractive without knowing it to be true (Dion et al., 1972), and this might be what participants have done in this research. Participants might consider the SMI to be better for the environment because they are better looking, but again only when they recognize the brand. The familiarity of the brand in both of these attractiveness effects might help undermine or strengthen the SMI's claim of being environmentally friendly because they recognize the standpoint of the brand in the sustainability debate.

The experiment has thus highlighted that the importance of creating familiarity on sustainable fashion is still predominantly handled by brands. They can hire SMIs to spread their message, but it is the name of the brand that is the leading factor in increasing attitude, awareness and purchase intention towards sustainable fashion.

5.2 Limitations and future research

There are of course some limitations to this research. First, with regards to the data the sample size of this research was limited. The sample was collected using a convenience sample and consisted of predominantly younger women, studying and living in the Netherlands. The results can therefore not be generalized to a larger global population. In addition to that, after data cleaning the conditions were not all the same size and these differences could possibly impact the outcome of the research. Using a larger sample size consisting of a wider variety of ages and nationalities could increase the generalizability of this research.

A very important limitation that has to be addressed is that the manipulation of the variable expertise was not clearly effective. A slight majority of the participants could not tell the difference between a message written by an expert, containing more knowledge and an experienced point of view, and a message written by a non-expert. As touched upon before, the manipulation being ineffective could be attributed to the way the message differed from a real life Instagram caption. The expertise messages were based on the real life captions of ethical SMIs, which differed from the way ordinary fashion SMIs express themselves. The

messages in the caption might have been too long for the platform Instagram, which is more focused on the visual aspect. If this research were to be performed again, more attention should be given to how expertise can be expressed through Instagram because the lengthy messages in the caption did not work. In relation to that, this research focused predominantly on the SMIs post, but not on the engagement aspect a social media platform like Instagram can offer. In future research this would be an interesting element to add to research about promoting sustainable fashion using social media, especially since the community aspect has already proven to be an effective tool for this (Hamid et al., 2017).

The elements tested are all part of the Source Credibility Model, but the experiment did not test the model in its totality. The separate elements were tested for their effect and also for their total and interaction effect, but failed to make an impact on attitude, awareness or purchase intention. However, from previous research it became evident that they are closely intertwined and could possibly influence each other. The expertise of an endorser is for example closely related to trusting in their capability to convey knowledge. The experiment did not lend itself for testing trustworthiness and thus not the entire Source Credibility Model could be tested. For future research it is relevant to also include trustworthiness to be able to test both the separate elements as well as the entire Source Credibility Model for its influence on promoting sustainable fashion.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was to analyze the effect of SMIs on consumers' intention to purchase, mediated by their attitude and awareness towards sustainable fashion. The study did not test the SMI as a total entity, but highlighted two of the characteristics from the Source Credibility Model that are impactful for different types of endorsers, and the content of the message. The results showed that based on these three elements SMIs do not make an impact on consumers. Neither of the three characteristics —attractiveness, expertise and the message content— had an effect on consumers' attitude, awareness and consumption of sustainable fashion. There was also no total indirect or interaction effect between the three characteristics. The only time message content and attractiveness proved to be impactful was when participants recognized the brand. However, here it was the fast fashion message that had more of an effect than the sustainable fashion message. People were not very familiar with the sustainable brand and thus mentioning the brand name was not beneficial for promoting a sustainable message. Now, to answer the research question, SMIs do not have any influence on promoting sustainable fashion. Only when they are connected to a brand name do they have an added value to increase purchasing. Still, this is better for fast fashion than sustainable fashion.

The outcome of this research is interesting, as it was believed that because traditional advertising is considered less effective and people are more inclined to believe peers, bloggers, and SMIs, the latter would have an impact in changing the way people feel, think and intent to behave. Thus that promoting sustainable fashion through social media would increase the attitude, awareness and purchase intention of consumers. The use of influencer marketing has proven to be an effective tool for brands to sell their fast fashion products, however, it is clear from this research the same mechanism does not apply for sustainable fashion. The difference between fast fashion SMIs and sustainable fashion SMIs is that the latter has an underlying message that is attached to producing and selling these types of clothes. The platform Instagram might not be suitable for these types of more knowledge infused messages. Additionally, there is of course also a paradox between the constant fashion updates that social media offers and the principles of sustainable fashion that focuses more on conscious buying. The need to change consumers' *mindset* on sustainably producing fashion might be better promoted through a platform that does not consist of *mindless* scrolling. With these findings, this research adds to the current academic field that mainly focuses on the commercial value of SMIs by exploring the combination of SMIs and sustainable behavior, which so far has been only research by two other studies. For brands, it is important to take into account that they can use SMIs, but only when the name of the brand is already recognized by the consumer. Other organizations that want to protect the environmental and social sustainability should find better ways to spark attention.

Participants mentioned that brands, websites and family or friends were also frequently used as sources of information, so there are multiple access points to choose from to promote sustainable fashion.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Factor and reliability analysis for scales of purchase intention towards sustainable fashion (230)

	Purchase Influencer	Purchase brand
It is likely that I will actually buy products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the near future	.87	
Given the chance, I predict that I would consider buying products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the future	.84	
Given the opportunity, I intend to buy clothes that are posted by this Instagram influencer	.83	
I would be interested in buying a similar looking product if it was promoted by this influencer	.77	
How likely is it that you would consider purchasing the product?	.69	
I will definitely try the brand mentioned in the post		.81
It is very likely that I will buy from the brand mentioned in the Instagram post		.81
I will purchase from the brand mentioned in the Instagram the next time I need a new piece of clothing		.76
I would be interested in buying the same product if it was promoted by a different influencer		.68
My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment		.34
R ²	52.86	11.82
Cronbach's α	.90	.79

Table A2: Factor and reliability analysis for scales of attitude towards sustainable fashion
(230)

	Attitude
I think deciding to buy sustainable fashion will satisfy me	.84
There is a big possibility I will start buying sustainable fashion	.80
Sustainable fashion matches my expectations regarding the ideal piece of clothing	.75
If I decide to buy sustainable fashion I think I am doing the right thing	.65
My general experience with sustainable fashion choices is high	.65
R^2	55.18
Cronbach's α	.79

Table A3: Factor and reliability analysis for scales of awareness towards sustainable fashion
(230)

	Awareness general	Awareness specific 1	Awareness specific 2
I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions	.85		
I would describe myself as environmentally responsible	.80		
It is important to me that the clothes I wear do not harm the environment	.78		
I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly	.71		
I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet	.68		
I believe handling products with more care will make them more valuable and thus better for the environment		.76	
I believe it is possible to have a brand that is stylish as well as good for the environment and social conditions		.71	
I think buying one single piece of a higher price is better than buying many pieces of a lower price		.68	
I would describe the influencer sustainably responsible based on their Instagram post			.68
I think locally produced clothes have an impact on social conditions			.68
I think naturally dyeing fabrics by hand has an impact on the environment			.65
R^2	38.65	11.49	10.50
Cronbach's α	.86	.67	.42

Appendix B

An overview of the different conditions that were presented to the participants. Conditions were distributed at random with an equal variance across the number of participants.

1. Fast fashion — Expertise — Attractive



2. Fast fashion — Non-expertise — Attractive



3. Fast fashion — Expertise — Non-attractive



4. Fast fashion — Non-expertise — Non-attractive



5. Sustainable fashion — Expertise — Attractive



6. Sustainable fashion — Non-expertise — Attractive



7. Sustainable fashion — Expertise — Non-attractive



8. Sustainable fashion — Non-expertise — Non-attractive



Appendix C

The original and manipulated versions used for the measurement attractiveness. The original was taken from a real life fashion SMI who gave permission for the manipulation.

Original:



Manipulation attractive:



Manipulation non-attractive:



Appendix D

The experiment text explaining the purpose of this research and participants' consent.

Start of the experiment:

Thank you for participating in this research on fashion and social media influencers. This research is conducted as part of a thesis on sustainable fashion and social media influencers for the master's program Media and Creative Industries. In this questionnaire you will see an Instagram post of a fashion influencer, after which you will be asked a number of questions regarding the purchase of sustainable fashion. It will take approximately 7-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire is completely anonymous, all answers are completely confidential, and will only be used for this research.

By clicking yes, you acknowledge that you are over 18 years old and understand what your answers will be used for:

For the purpose of this research it is preferred you fill out the questionnaire on your phone since this is the standard situation in which you would view an Instagram post. If you do so, please turn up the brightness of your screen so you can better view the picture.

You will now be shown an Instagram post. Please take your time to look at the post (both picture and caption) before answering the respective questions.

End of experiment:

This is the end of the survey. Thank you again for participating in this research and for your time. Your answers are very much appreciated and will be handled with care.

Appendix E

The experiment post-exposure questions as they were constructed by the researcher.

Purchase intention

'How likely is it that you would consider purchasing the product?'

- 1 = Very likely
- 2 = Likely
- 3 = Neither likely nor unlikely
- 4 = Unlikely
- 5 = Very unlikely

'Given the chance, I predict that I would consider buying products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the future'

- 1 = Completely disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Completely agree

'It is likely that I will actually buy products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the near future'

- 1 = Completely disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Completely agree

'Given the opportunity, I intend to buy the clothes that are posted by this Instagram influencer'

- 1 = Completely disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Completely agree

'It is very likely that I will buy from the brand mentioned in the Instagram post'

- 1 = Completely disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Completely agree

'I will purchase from the brand mentioned in the Instagram the next time I need a new piece of clothing'

- 1 = Completely disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree nor disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Completely agree

'I will definitely try the brand mentioned in the post'

- 1 = Completely disagree
- 2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I would be interested in buying a similar looking product if it was promoted by this Instagram influencer'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I would be interested in buying the same product if it was promoted by a different Instagram influencer'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

Attitude > towards purchasing sustainable fashion

'If I decide to buy sustainable fashion I think I am doing the right thing'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I think deciding to buy sustainable fashion will satisfy me'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'There is a big possibility I will start buying sustainable fashion'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'Sustainable fashion matches my expectations regarding the ideal piece of clothing'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'My general experience with sustainable fashion choices is high'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

Awareness general > towards environmental behaviour

'It is important to me that the clothes I wear do not harm the environment'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I would describe myself as environmentally responsible'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

Awareness specific > towards the impact of sustainable fashion

'I would describe the Instagram influencer sustainably responsible based on their Instagram post'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I think buying one single piece of a higher price is better than buying many pieces of a lower price'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I believe handling products with more care will make them more valuable and thus better for the environment'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I believe it is possible to have brand that is stylish as well as good for the environment and social conditions'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I think locally produced clothes have an impact on social conditions'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

'I think naturally dyeing fabrics by hand has an impact on the environment'

1 = Completely disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Completely agree

Awareness of sustainability

Did you hear/know of the concept of sustainable fashion before this research?

Yes

No

If yes, where did you get your information from? (more answers apply)

Television program

Documentary

Newspaper

Brands

Social media influencer

Blogs

Website

Friends/family
Other

Instagram usage

'How would you describe your use of the platform Instagram on a daily basis.'

'How much time do you spend on the platform?'

Constantly during the day
2-3 times a day
Once a day
4-6 times a week
2-3 times a week
Once a week
Never

'Do you engage through comments, posting, liking, or scrolling?'

Posting
Scrolling
Liking
Scrolling
All of the above

'Would you consider following the influencer you saw on the Instagram post?'

I would definitely follow the influencer
Undecided on whether or not I would follow the influencer
I would definitely not follow the influencer

Demographics

How old are you? (please answer in numbers)

Open answer box

What is your gender?

Male
Female
Gender neutral

What is your nationality?

Choose from list

What is your highest level of education?

Less than high school degree
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
Master's degree
Doctoral degree
Professional degree (JD, MD)

Manipulation check

'What type of message was written in the caption of the Instagram post?'

Fast fashion
Sustainable fashion
I am not sure what type of message I saw

'What type of influencer did you see?'

Fashionable — non-fashionable

Old — young

Friendly — Unfriendly

Expert — non-expert

Attractive — unattractive

'Did you hear of the brand that was mentioned by the influencer?'

Yes, I have heard of the brand and have bought something from them before

Yes, I have heard of the brand but I have never bought anything from them

No, I have never heard of the brand

'Did you think the sweater advertised by the influencer was:'

Attractive

Unattractive

'Would you, at this time, consider yourself in need of a new sweater?'

Yes

No

I have not thought of it, but might consider it now

Appendix F

The experiment as it was presented to the participants through the online platform Qualtrics.

Fashion & influencers

Start of Block: Block 15

Thank you for participating in this research on fashion and social media influencers. This research is conducted as part of a thesis on sustainable fashion and social media influencers for the master's program Media and Creative Industries. In this questionnaire you will see an Instagram post of a fashion influencer, after which you will be asked a number of questions regarding the purchase of sustainable fashion. It will take approximately 7-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire is completely anonymous, all answers are completely confidential, and will only be used for this research. </div>

By clicking yes, you acknowledge that you are over 18 years old and understand what your answers will be used for:

- ☐ Yes

For the purpose of this research it is preferred you fill out the questionnaire on your phone since this is the standard situation in which you would view an Instagram post. If you do so, please turn up the brightness of your screen so you can better view the picture.

You will now be shown an Instagram post. Please take your time to look at the post (both picture and caption) before answering the respective questions.

End of Block: Block 15

Start of Block: Conditions

The eight conditions can be found in appendix B.

End of Block: Conditions

Start of Block: Purchase intention

How likely is it that you would consider purchasing the product?</p>

- ☐ Very likely
- ☐ Likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Unlikely
- ☐ Very unlikely

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
Given the chance, I predict that I would consider buying products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the future	O	O	O	O	O
It is likely that I will actually buy products that are posted by this Instagram influencer in the near future	O	O	O	O	O
Given the opportunity, I intend to buy clothes that are posted by this Instagram influencer	O	O	O	O	O
It is very likely that I will buy from the brand mentioned in the Instagram post	O	O	O	O	O
I will purchase from the brand mentioned in the Instagram the next time I need a new piece of clothing	O	O	O	O	O
I will definitely try the brand mentioned in the post	O	O	O	O	O
I would be interested in buying a similar looking product if it was promoted by this influencer	O	O	O	O	O
I would be interested in buying the same product if it was promoted by a different influencer	O	O	O	O	O
My purchase habits are affected by my concern for our environment	O	O	O	O	O

End of Block: Purchase intention

Start of Block: Attitude

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Completely agree
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If I decide to buy sustainable fashion I think I am doing the right thing	0	0	0	0	0
I think deciding to buy sustainable fashion will satisfy me	0	0	0	0	0
There is a big possibility I will start buying sustainable fashion	0	0	0	0	0
Sustainable fashion matches my expectations regarding the ideal piece of clothing	0	0	0	0	0
My general experience with sustainable fashion choices is high	0	0	0	0	0
It is important to me that the clothes I wear do not harm the environment	0	0	0	0	0
I consider the potential environmental impact of my actions when making many of my decisions	0	0	0	0	0
I am concerned about wasting the resources of our planet	0	0	0	0	0
I would describe myself as environmentally responsible	0	0	0	0	0
I am willing to be inconvenienced in order to take actions that are more environmentally friendly	0	0	0	0	0
I would describe the influencer sustainably responsible based on their Instagram post	0	0	0	0	0
I think buying one single piece of a higher price is better than buying many pieces of a lower price	0	0	0	0	0
I believe handling products with more care will make them more valuable and thus better for the environment	0	0	0	0	0
I believe it is possible to have a brand that is stylish as well as good for the environment and social conditions	0	0	0	0	0

I think locally produced clothes have an impact on social conditions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think naturally dyeing fabrics by hand has an impact on the environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

End of Block: Attitude

Start of Block: Awareness of sustainability

Did you hear of or know the concept of sustainable fashion before this research?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If yes, where did you get your information from? (more answers apply)

- ☐ Television program
- ☐ Documentary
- ☐ Newspaper
- ☐ Brands
- ☐ Social media influencer
- ☐ Blogs
- ☐ Website
- ☐ Friends/family
- ☐ Other

End of Block: Awareness of sustainability

Start of Block: Instagram Usage

How much time do you spend on the platform Instagram?

- ☐ Constantly during the day
- ☐ 2-3 times a day
- ☐ Once a day
- ☐ 4-6 times a week
- ☐ 2-3 times a week
- ☐ Once a week

- ☐ Never

How do you engage on Instagram?

- ☐ Posting
- ☐ Scrolling
- ☐ Liking
- ☐ All of the above

Would you consider following the influencer you saw on the Instagram post?

- ☐ I would definitely not follow the influencer
- ☐ Undecided on whether or not I would follow the influencer
- ☐ I would definitely follow the influencer

End of Block: Instagram Usage

Start of Block: Demographics

How old are you? (please answer numeric)

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Gender neutral
- ☐ Other

What is your nationality?

- ☐ List of countries

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- ☐ Less than high school degree
- ☐ High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)
- ☐ Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Doctoral degree
- ☐ Professional degree (JD, MD)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Manipulation check

What type of message was written in the caption of the Instagram post?

- ☐ Fast fashion
- ☐ Sustainable fashion
- ☐ I am not sure what type of message I saw

What type of influencer did you see?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Fashionable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Not fashionable
Young	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Old
Friendly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Unfriendly
Attractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Non-attractive
Expert on fashion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Non-expert on fashion

End of Block: Manipulation check

Start of Block: Block 16

Did you hear of the brand that was mentioned by the influencer?

- ☐ Yes, I have heard of the brand and have bought something from them before
- ☐ Yes, I have heard of the brand but I have never bought anything from them
- ☐ No, I have never heard of the brand

Did you think the sweater advertised by the influencer was:

- ☐ Attractive
- ☐ Unattractive

Would you, at this time, consider yourself in need of a new sweater?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I have not thought of it, but might consider it now

End of Block: Block 16