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***“Vintage Fashion: An Example of Circular Economy as a
sustainable alternative to the Fast Fashion”***

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INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry has recently been subject to many critics regarding its unethical and unsustainable practices, being labeled as one of the most polluting economies on earth. The world of fashion presents a double-sided nature: on the one hand, it can historically be seen as a driver for innovation and development, on the other, it undoubtedly is a resource-intensive and environmentally destructive economy. The increase in consumers' awareness towards ethical issues has generated a demand for a more sustainable and conscious approach. In addition, with global population estimated to surmount 8.5 billion people and total apparel production to increase by 63% by 2030, it becomes evident how today's linear economic model has reached its physical limits.

The aim of this thesis is to highlight the value of a possible application of a circular economy within the fashion industry, focusing on the already-existing example of secondhand clothing and proposing Vintage as an ethical and sustainable alternative to fast fashion.

The first chapter provides an overview on the concept of sustainability and its multifaceted structure, before centering the discussion on its contrasting relationship with the fashion industry. In addition, in the view of recent social developments, it addresses the importance for a business, of a careful and correct management of sustainability. Chapter II is intended to concentrate on the concept of Circular Economy, providing a general framework on the topic and applying the derived notions to the specific field of Fashion. It first proposes an analysis of the modern 'waste culture', aimed at highlighting its deep-rooted presence in society and the drastic consequences it will bring in the future if no disciplinary measure is taken. Secondly, it proposes the principle of Circular Economy as a mean to reach an efficient elimination of waste during both production and consumption processes, concentrating on its application within the apparel industry and the emerging concept of Circular Fashion. Finally, Chapter III converges the attention on a specific example of Circular Fashion, namely the one of secondhand clothing. It provides an exposition of Vintage's current market position, highlighting the exceptional growth it has faced in recent years. Furthermore, it analyses the motives behind the surprising expansion of secondhand apparel market over fast fashion, basing such investigation on a survey conducted on a sample of 3700 individuals.

CHAPTER I - Sustainability and the Fashion Industry

1.1 The notion of Sustainability

The first section will present different definitions of sustainability which have been proposed over time. Our aim is to show the complexity and multidimensionality of this concept and how it has evolved.

Starting our chapter by a purely academic point of view, we can begin our discussion by taking into account the dictionary definition of ‘sustainability’, which simply implies that a given activity or action is capable of being sustained¹ :

*“the quality of being able to continue over a period of time”*²

If we move from this basic definition to a more complete one, we will immediately notice how the concept of ‘sustainability’ involves a multidisciplinary approach that ranges from environmental issues to economic and social ones. Its importance has been widely growing in the past years, due to the development of an increasing concern for environmental and climate changes, as well as controversies regarding widening social disparities.

The first complete notion of Sustainability was developed in 1987 for the World Commission on Environment and Development and has been incorporated in the “Our Common Future” Report. In this document, the definition of ‘sustainable development’³ was outlined as *“...development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*. To better understand this notion it is fundamental to collocate it in a more broad picture and in the context in which it was inserted :

“Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The concept of sustainable development does imply limits – not absolute limits but limitation imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on

¹ P. Johnston, M. Everard, D. Santillo and K. Robèrt, Reclaiming the Definition of Sustainability , 2007

² Cambridge Dictionary

³ Similarly with Gray, (Is accounting for sustainability actually accounting for sustainability... and how would we know? An exploration of narratives of organizations and the planet, 2010) in this chapter we will address the terms ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ as two analogues. However we will acknowledge that there is a slight variation between the meaning of the two expression, in which ‘sustainability’ refers to a state, while ‘sustainable development’ refers to the mechanism for reaching this state.

*environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. But technology and social organization can be both managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth. The Commission believes that widespread poverty is no longer inevitable. Poverty is not only an evil in itself, but sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life”*⁴

By quoting this other statement of the Brundtland Commission Report, it becomes evident how the first complete notion of sustainability involves, at the same time, social, economic and environmental characteristics. In this way, development is seen as sustainable if it is able to generate effective solutions for all the three aspects, creating a situation of equilibrium among them. Nevertheless, this vision can be considered as quite anthropocentric, since the core of such statement is clearly men-oriented. What has been underlined in the passage mentioned and more broadly, in the whole report, is a focus on the future of human generations rather than the future of the ecosystem, giving too little attention to the survival and well-being of the environment and all its species.

In 1991 a more broad definition of sustainability has been brought by The World Conservation Union, The United Nations Environment Programme and The World Wide Fund for Nature :

*“improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems.”*⁵

Unfortunately, the inclusive nature of such statement was due to the persistent and strongly dangerous issues that have come from global production and consumption. The expression *“carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems”* refers to the concern driven by a constantly growing population and a subsequent alarming increased usage of the earth’s resources. What is really stressed in the sentence, is the need to carefully respect the natural capacity of an eco-system, which is the ability to produce the resources necessary to all species without putting its own existence at risk.

In 1994, a development has been described as sustainable if it *“delivers basic environmental, social and economic services to all residents of a community without threatening the viability of the natural, built and social systems upon which the delivering of such services relies”*

⁴ World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future Report, Brundtland Commission, 1987

⁵ IUCN/UNEP/WWF, Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living, Gland, Switzerland, 1991

This notion, elaborated by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, highlights how the economic, social and environmental dimensions are correlated and how every decision regarding sustainability has to take into account the reciprocal and interrelated effect it has on each one of them.

This concept has later been adopted by many authors; one of them is John Elkington, who coined the phrase “Triple Bottom Line”⁶ on the same principle as the one described above. The TBL relies on the idea that a company must not only focus on profits but also on its relationship with the society and environment that surrounds it, otherwise it will not see the bigger picture. According to this theory, a good firm should concentrate simultaneously on three interrelated elements : Profit, People, Planet.

The last definition that is going to be proposed in this chapter was formulated in 2007 by the American environmentalist Paul Hawken :

*“Sustainability is about stabilizing the currently disruptive relationship between earth’s two most complex systems—human culture and the living world.”*⁷

This recent denotation describes the relationship between “people” and the “planet” as disruptive, acknowledging the highly destructive impact that our species is having on the environment by using and spoiling earth’s resources at faster rhythm by which they can be restored. With respect to the previous “traditional” citations, Hawken decides to use a more strong and intense language to refer to the notion of sustainability. The reason of such choice could be seen in the realization about how environmental issues have advanced at an increasingly fast pace in our recent years, becoming an unbearable burden for our ecosystem.

Each one of the quotes presented highlights a different aspect of the ‘sustainable development’ issue. This reflects not only its variegated nature but also the fact that starting from 1987, after the Burtland Report, the concept of sustainability went through a propagation of hundreds of different definitions. It is currently estimated that around three hundred definitions⁸ of sustainability and sustainable development exist in the environmental management field and in the associated disciplines. On one hand, this can be seen as the reaction for a constantly increasing interest in the subject; on the other, this proliferation of different ‘sustainability’ concepts might have given the topic a vague and un-measurable focus, limiting its practical application.

⁶ J. Elkington, *Cannibals with Forks: the Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business*, 1997

⁷ P. Hawken, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World*, 2008

⁸ P. Johnston, M. Everard, D. Santillo and K. Robèrt, *Reclaiming the Definition of Sustainability*, 2007

1.2 Environmental, Social and Economic Sustainability

This section aims at analyzing the three different dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social and economic) separately, in order to acquire a deeper understanding of each one's identity. This said, it is important to keep underlying how the three aspects, after being studied singularly, should be incorporated in a more inclusive and interrelated view.

- i. Environmental Sustainability *“could be defined as a condition of balance, resilience, and interconnectedness that allows human society to satisfy its needs while neither exceeding the capacity of its supporting ecosystems to continue to regenerate the services necessary to meet those needs nor by our actions diminishing biological diversity”*.⁹ To take a step back, the term ‘sustainability’ was primarily used in connection with the ecosystems’ capacity to support the animal population. It was first associated to marine organism and later expanded to all nature.¹⁰ The latter has always been one of the main characters when talking within the sustainability topic. Environmental Sustainability relies on the concept upon which what we have to sustain is a ‘global life’ and not an ‘individual’ one. In other words, the sustainability of an eco-system requires the number of its components to be inferior or equal to the ecosystem’s capacity to support it. There is no doubt that the relationship between man and nature has always been at the center of the discussion ; in the course of the 70s, the term ‘sustainability’ commenced to be extensively used with reference to environmental problems and different books addressing the issue of sustainability from an environmental perspective began to be published.¹¹ In the following years, a growing consideration for the polluting and devastating effects of men on nature led to the formation of a wide concern towards the environment and most importantly, to the development of ‘eco-friendly’ Programs and Conferences addressing the issue. Among these we mention the UN Conference on Human Environment, which occurred in Stockholm in 1972 and was strongly significant not only for drawing up 26 Principles – the majority

⁹ M. Khosrow-Pour, *Advanced Methodologies and Technologies in Engineering and Environmental Science*, Information Resources Management Association, USA

¹⁰ Kidd, *The Evolution Of Sustainability*, 1992

¹¹ Kidd, *The Evolution Of Sustainability*, 1992

of which remitted to environmental matters - but also for addressing the crucial concept of *carrying capacity*. The idea of ‘sustainability’ and ‘sustainable development’ was now strongly linked to environmental discussions for the years to come; other significant examples include the 1980 World Conservation Strategy Report¹² by IUCN/UNEP/WWF¹³, where the definition of sustainable development was linked to the “*management of human use of the biosphere*” and the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, whose turnouts were *the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21* and the *Commission on Sustainable Development*.

- ii. Social Sustainability is often overlooked if compared to the other two approaches – economic and environmental. Nonetheless, many authors have linked the concept of Sustainability and Sustainable Development to the one of men’s needs and more broadly, society, as Beckerman addressed in his 1994 work : “*sustainability then indicates the maintenance of the level of human well-being, so that it may increase, but never worsen*”. Social Sustainability is defined as occurring “*when the formal and informal processes; systems; structures; and relationships actively support the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and livable communities. Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and democratic and provide a good quality of life.*”¹⁴ More simply, Social Sustainability is a life-enhancing status and the steps versus its accomplishment can be measured by the following features : equity of access to key services (health, education, transport...), equity among generations (future generations should not be penalized by earlier generations’ doings), evaluation and protection of different cultures, promotion of cultural integration, outspread citizens participation into political and local matters, creation of a system that allows one generation to communicate the awareness of social sustainability to the future ones, a sense of common responsibility.¹⁵ Associated to such features, are social sustainability’s ‘aspirational and visionary’ principles¹⁶: equity, diversity, interconnectedness, quality of life,

¹² IUCN, *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*, 1980

¹³ International Union for Conservation of Nature/United Nations Environment Programme/World Wildlife Fund

¹⁴ WACOSS, *Western Australia Council of Social Services*

¹⁵ Hawke Research Institute Working Paper Series No 27. The list is for discussion purposes and does not intend to be complete. Social Sustainability is here intended as an independent field of study, without references to economic or environmental perspectives.

¹⁶ S. McKenzie, *Social Sustainability: Towards Some Definition*, 2004

democracy and governance. Equity is what constitutes the core of social sustainability. It means that all the members of a community, including the poorest and defenseless, must be granted with equal opportunities and the instruments necessary to pursue such opportunities. Even though it is presented as an independent principle, 'equity' constitutes the fundamental ground upon which the other principles can be built.

If we looked at the concept of 'social sustainability' from a business perspective, we would mainly be concerned with the interactions between the firm and society, and the impact that they have on each another. In corporations, the level of such sustainability can be measured in many ways, quoting for example fair labor practices, safety, diversity, community engagement and many more. However, Social Sustainability represents – or should represent – a crucial issue for any firm, since it influences the quality of a business' relationship with its stakeholders.

- iii. Economic Sustainability has been through many definitions and can be seen as a system which “*supports sustainable social and environmental outcomes, where economics is the process through which humans create social and environmental outcomes*”¹⁷ or, more broadly, as “*maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth*”¹⁸. It is important to underline how to maintain such level, it is necessary to develop an economic model which supports the environments and its ecosystems; to grant an “*equal distribution of the resources and opportunities among both present and future generations*”, as well as allocating resources in a way to “*justify the natural capital*”¹⁹ In the literature, there are two ways to address economic sustainability : the internal perspective and the external perspective. The first one concentrates on issues such as the financial performance of a company and the management of intangible assets as, for instance, its reputation. These refer to the ability of a business to place a central focus on social and environmental topics, while still remaining profitable. In other words, we can say that from the internal point of view, sustainability is “*about managing a company in such a way as to ensure it stays around for future generations with social and environmental programs*

¹⁷ C. Tuppen and S. Zadek, *Adding Values*, 2001

¹⁸ UK Government, *2000 Annual Report*, 2001

¹⁹ Meppen and Gill, *Planning for sustainability as a learning concept*, 1998

firmly in act."²⁰ On the other side, the external perspective mainly focuses on the influence that an organization has on the wider economy, as well as on the environment and society. This approach takes into account the principle upon which "*The economic and financial are simply not equivalent. The financial concerns the market valuation of transactions that pass through a company's books. The economic, on the other hand, extends beyond the boundaries of the single organisation and takes into account activities in, and outcomes for, societies at large.*"²¹ The economic impacts that a business can reverse into its external environment are many and they can vary from employment to the production of goods that directly 'add value' to society (e.g. public transports). Aside from moral and altruistic motives, there are many reasons for which a business should always consider and improve its impact on the environment and society; such reasons range from reputation to the presence of a productive and healthy community that constitutes a constant supply of customers who has sufficient income and trust. Companies that do not adopt this inclusive approach will less likely be able to sustain themselves over time. Another topic that receives much attention in the economic development discussion is the production process, with respect to the relationship between costs and benefits. To be judged as economically sustainable, an operation must generate an outcome where benefits exceed costs. According to this, it is possible to resume the concept of sustainability as an "*economic state in which the population and market's requests can be satisfied without reducing the environments' capacity to provide for future generations*".

This analysis aims at providing a general background of the three main aspects of sustainability, without getting into the specifics of each dimension. Anyway, the presented subdivision is significant, since this 'triple' approach will constitute the perspective upon which we will base the analysis of sustainability in the fashion industry in the next chapter.

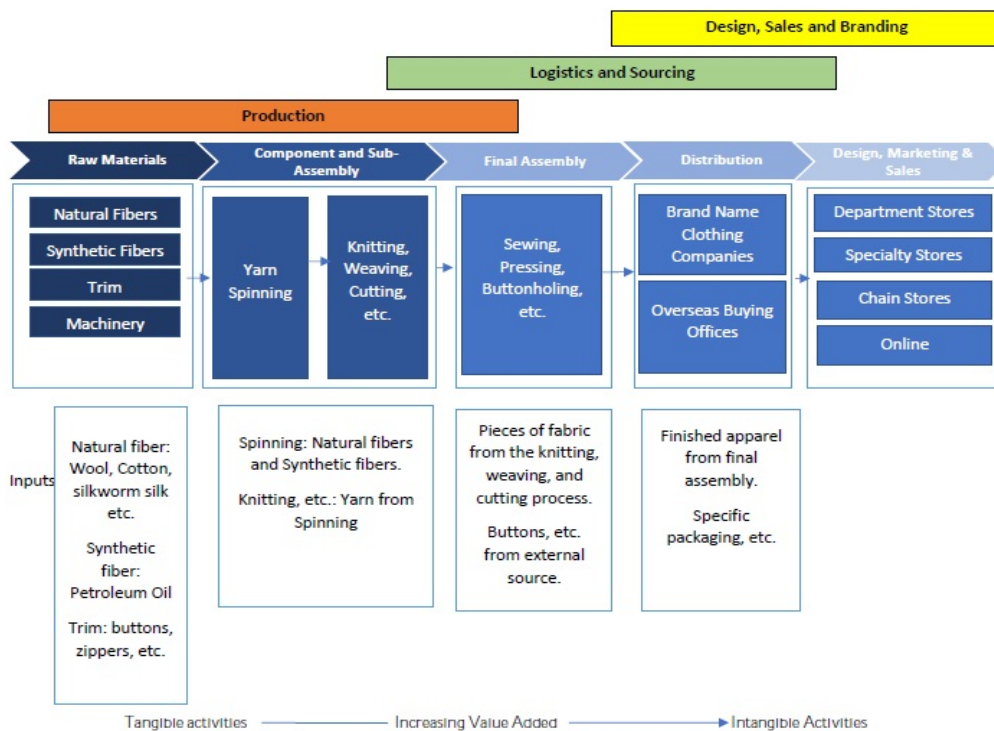
²⁰ *Economic Sustainability – The Business of Staying in Business*, R&D Development, Sigma Project

²¹ C. Tuppen and S. Zadek, *Adding Values*, 2001

1.3 Sustainability issues in the Fashion Industry

We will now analyze the issue of sustainability in fashion, by looking at its environmental, social and economic impacts. To discuss such topic, it is relevant to recognize the fashion industry as a polluting and resource-intensive business, that leaves evident repercussions on the environment and society throughout the course of its entire production cycle. The fashion industry has been criticized for not adopting an enough sustainable approach, due to the over-consumption of natural resources – treating them like a ‘bottomless pit’-, the frequent presence of a high percentage of ‘waste’ in the production process and its taking advantage of less strict environmental and safety regulations of certain developing countries. However, as we have previously mentioned, the rise in consumers’ awareness towards social and environmental issues has led many firms to embrace sustainable practices. The clothing and textile industry presents a very diversified value chain which includes many participants: raw material manufacturers and suppliers, assembling companies, retailers, consumers...

THE APPAREL GLOBAL VALUE CHAIN



Source: https://sites.duke.edu/sociol342d_01d_s2017_team-7/2-global-value-chain/

The graph above shows the main segments of the apparel Global Value Chain, displaying its complex and diversified nature. In accordance with its variegated structure, the fashion global industry manifests multifaceted social, cultural, environmental and political issues that range from fair working conditions to cultural appropriation. To analyze the many issues, it is necessary to assess the fashion industry's position in the overall economy; the global apparel industry is estimated to be worth US \$2.4 trillion. Many countries intensely depend on the clothing industry; particularly China, India, Turkey, Pakistan and Vietnam are the main suppliers for this market. To give an example of how significant this sector is for some countries, let's just consider how 80% of Bangladesh's total export revenues are generated by the clothing industry, which also provides for more than 4 million direct jobs.²² The fashion industry is estimated to account for approximately two percent of the world's gross domestic product and according to the "*A new textiles economy*" report developed by the Ellen McArthur Foundation, clothing production has roughly doubled in the past fifteen years, due to a constant increase in the size of the middle-class population all over the world and a consequent increase in per capita sales in developed countries. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development has estimated an expected 400% increase²³ in the global GDP by 2050, causing a further growth in demand for clothes. As this data shows, the impact of the clothing industry in the economy is significant and so are its sustainable issues. The 2018 *Pulse Report* provided by The Fashion Agenda, shows how undertaking environmental and social matters generated by the fashion industry could result into a \$192 billion overall benefit to the global economy by 2030. After having assessed the clothing industry's impacts on the economy, we will now address its main global impacts, following the division between environmental and social issues.

From an environmental perspective, the fashion industry is often considered as the second larger polluter in the world, following the oil industry, generating alarming impacts along its value chain. Some of the major issues are

- Water use: in the clothing and textile industry, high volumes of water are used during many stages, as in material production (cotton growing), dyeing process, finishing process and usage phase by customers. As a reference, growing one kilogram of cotton

²² WWF, *Environmental Rating and Innovation Report*, Switzerland, 2017

²³ Forecast is based on an assessment of the economic climate in individual countries and the world economy, using a combination of model-based analyses and expert judgement. The indicator is measured in USD at 2010 Purchasing Power Parities

requires up to 20,000 liters of water and up to 200 tons of fresh water can be needed for each ton of dyed fabric; it takes 2,700 liters of water to make one cotton shirt, enough to satisfy a person's drinking needs for more than two years.

- Water pollution: following the production process, some countries dump wastewaters from factories directly to rivers. The result is a release of toxic substances which are extremely damaging for both the aquatic life and the people who live nearby these waters. According to The World Bank, 20% of the industrial water pollution emerges from textile treatment.
- Use of chemicals: the clothing sector necessitates different types of chemicals such as pesticides, colorants, dyes and stain repellents. These can be toxic and very harmful, causing serious damages to workers and the environment.
- Use of microplastics: clothes made of synthetic materials are a significant threat for the planet, especially for the ocean. Whenever a garment made of nylon or polyester is washed, 1900 microfibers are released in the water and oceans. Such substances are later eaten by small aquatic organisms that are in turn eaten by bigger fishes, bringing microplastics to our food chain. According to the IUCN, the clothing and textile sector is the primary source of microplastics in the ocean, representing the 35% of the global total.
- Greenhouse emissions: fashion related industries²⁴ are estimated to emit around 1,7 billion tons of CO₂ every year, accounting for 10% of the global carbon emissions and significantly contributing to global warming. GHG emissions are mainly released during the production, manufacturing and transportation of garments.
- Soil degradation: the fashion industry is a fair contributor to soil degradation due to the overgrazing of pastures (coming from cashmere goats and sheeps), the use of chemicals for cotton growing and the deforestations implemented to obtain wood-based fabrics such as rayon, viscose and modal.
- Waste: clothing has now become a disposable income, leading to severe waste issues. On average, a family in the Western world discards around 30kg of clothing every year. This issue is crucial to the fashion industry and will be presented in more detail in the next chapter, constituting the ground for our Circular Fashion discussion.

²⁴ Clothing and textile industries

Shifting our focus on a social perspective, the fashion industry is to blame for unethical labor practices and unsafe working conditions. Fast fashion is particularly at the center of this discussion, since its cheap prices often reflect an exploitation of human resources, given by the possibility of businesses to take advantage of unstrict regulations in developing countries. Following the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh, where a total of 1,134 people were killed by the collapse, many brands have started to recognize the serious social issues that affect the clothing industry and have acknowledged how businesses should focus on ensuring fair working conditions to their workers. Nonetheless, many brands continue to assiduously squeeze costs, leaving ethical issues in a position of important discussion in fashion. The result is an industry fed on the unfair labor of mostly young women, who receive extremely low wages and are forced to work in unacceptable conditions. Most garments are made in Asia, where workers are often not paid enough to support a decent standard of living, even when they earn an official legal minimum wage. *“There hasn’t been a comprehensive response that shows that the industry is actually serious about implementing the living wage,”* said Dominique Muller, policy director at Labour Behind the Label, which campaigns for workers’ rights in the clothing and textile sector. *“Whatever estimate they use, they’re not paying it.”* For instance, according to the Living Wage Coalition in Bangladesh, the present minimum wage is 40% lower than an actual ‘living wage²⁵’. Also, following a Clean Clothes Campaign report, the minimum wage in Cambodia and China should be at least twice as high to cover a worker’s basic costs of living. This is even more alarming if we consider how garment workers are treated and how unsafe and unethical the environment in which they operate in is: not only workers are kept in a poverty cycle due to their low pays, but they also have to work for excessive time periods in dangerous places, having their health and security at danger. An average garment worker works seven days per week with shifts that last from 14 to 17 hours and is often forced to work overtime to meet a fashion company’s deadline, being threatened by the possibility of getting fired if they refuse. Cotton farmers are at risk for being in close contact with toxic chemicals, leading them to the possibility to suffer from lack of consciousness, consistent vomiting, headache, respiratory diseases and much more. Industry workers, who are especially women between 16 and 30 years old, often find themselves working in places with no ventilation, toxic substances in the air and unsafe buildings. On top of this, it has been proved how the fast fashion industry strongly contributes to child labor practices; for

²⁵ There are different definitions of a “living wage”, but in general, it is considered as wage which allows workers to cover their basic needs and provide a decent standard of living for their families

instance, in South India, a practice called the “Sumangali” scheme consists of selecting girls from poor families and sending them to work in textile factories in exchange for basic low pays. These girls are forced to work for excessively long hours and are found to be in conditions that match the definition of modern slavery.

The social and environmental issues affecting the fashion industry are devastating and should be addressed more carefully. A first step into implementing a solution would be increasing the awareness on such topics among customers worldwide and recognizing the importance and the need for action in the clothing and textile sectors. Following this step, fashion businesses should take a formal commitment to sustainability and consistently work to build strong programs and strategies to obtain practical results in bettering the social and natural environment on which they depend.

1.4 The Importance of Managing Sustainability

Never before has sustainability been more notable and outstanding in a business' corporate agenda. The issues analyzed in the previous section, together with an increasing customers' awareness towards environmental and social matters, are a crucial representation of the motives needed for a rapid call to action in the fashion industry as well as in the whole economy.

Given recent circumstances, it is relevant for an organization to operate in such a way to preserve the long-term quality and capacity of the global environment by which it is surrounded. The constantly increasing need for sustainability has been the result of a widespread awareness among people about the dangerous environmental impacts that we are disseminating in the world we live in. Such consciousness has led to the need for a common participation into different type of issues, that must be performed by politicians and citizens, as well as companies. Aside from ethical behaviors, adopting sustainability can be a source of success and innovation for a firm. Globalization has brought to a stage where it is necessary for companies to adopt a more inclusive and broad approach, that does not only involve the financial perspective. Also, the rise of the Internet has made firms more vulnerable to customers, exposing them to a more intense scrutiny and a deeply increasing importance of their 'public image'. "*Companies are much more in a goldfish bowl today*"²⁶ A survey²⁷ made on over 200 senior executives in the areas of sustainability shows that 87% of respondents agreed that sustainability will have an increasingly central role over the next three years. 24% of the executives surveyed agree that there is a solid link between financial performance and taking responsibility on sustainable issues in the short-run. However, 69% say they consider the link as fairly solid in the long-run. According to the survey, the main reason for advertising and encouraging sustainability policies is that it is an ethical and right choice (56%), but other causes include adhering to laws and regulations and enhancing the company's reputation. In any of these scenarios, "*the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and*

²⁶ N. Craig Smith, Professor of Ethics and Social Responsibility at INSEAD in France

²⁷ The Economist Intelligence Unit, *Managing for Sustainability*, A Report Sponsored by ENEL, 2010

*society at large*²⁸ represents an important feature of modern customers' modern demands towards companies.

In earlier days, the primary aim of a corporation was to provide shareholders with the maximum financial gain obtainable. Through the 1960s, a more broader vision which goes beyond the mere pursuit of profits started to be advocated and it reached an effective following with the notable social legislation of the early 1970s: the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), and the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). From that time on, corporations had to undertake an official commitment towards a larger group of stakeholders - including the environment, employees and communities - who could now claim legal and ethical rights.

The adoption of sustainable practices includes a wide range of responsibilities to embrace. Following Archie B. Carroll's denotation, we will identify four types of responsibilities (economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic)²⁹ in order to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of the sustainability concept. Economic responsibilities historically represent the primary incentive and purpose of a business; it is fundamental for a company to act in a consistent way with respect to maximizing earnings and committing to profitability, in order to maintain a competitive position in the market and to be able to sustain a good level of efficiency in its operations. To be successful, a business must be defined as persistently profitable. Secondly, legal responsibilities mean that a company cannot only follow a 'profit perspective' but it also has to comply with the laws and regulations promulgated and fulfill its legal obligations. Third, ethical responsibilities embrace practices of fairness and justice and the protection of moral rights. They involve complying with the values and norms that society expects a business to meet, even if those demand a more advanced standard of performance than the one prescribed by the law. The last category is the one of philanthropic responsibilities, involving the promotion of acts or programs that contribute to the enhancement of a community's welfare; these include, for example, financial contributions to the arts or education, participation in charitable activities, or any action which can increase the 'quality of life' of a community. The main difference between ethical and philanthropic responsibilities is that while the former are expected to be embraced by a

²⁸ L. Holme and R. Watts, *Making Good Business*, The World Business Council for Sustainable Development

²⁹The analysis of the four types of responsibility presented is in line with the one proposed in *The Pyramid of Corporate Social Responsibility: Toward the Moral Management of Organizational Stakeholders*, Carroll, 1991

business, the latter are not; in other words, a company can be engaged in philanthropic activities by voluntarily investing its money and time in humanitarian programs, but it is not regarded as ‘unethical’ if it doesn’t. Therefore, philanthropy is more of a voluntary and discretionary choice.

Given the multidimensionality and the proved significance of a business’ social responsibility and approach to sustainability, the management of such issues represents an important part of corporate management. A business, by managing sustainability, is aligning its economic responsibilities with social and environmental ones, consequently integrating these aspects into its planning, processes and activities. A company should develop and adopt a framework of corporate sustainability shaped on the basis of the firm’s contextual factors and its normative, strategic and operational management levels. The recent need for sustainable practices has increased the need for new business models and a bright focus on innovation, since it has opened new markets and sources of demand. Integrating economic, social and environmental issues in a solid and strategic way constitutes a big challenge for businesses, but it can also be seen as a good long-term investment; in our modern days, customers require a company to be fully transparent about its operations and regard as superior firms which adopt ethical corporate behaviors and perspectives.

The need and demand for a stricter control of sustainable practices and transparency has been manifested among different sectors, including the one of Fashion. Being a resource-intensive and polluting industry, a fair amount of pressure has been put on its shoulders in the course of the past years; the ‘burden’ of acting ethically and ecologically has placed the right incentives for a common mobilization of Fashion towards sustainable trends, bringing many brands into realizing the growing importance of the topic and the need for a concrete action towards this destructive economic linear system. The next chapter proposes the concept of Circular Economy as an optimal strategy and solution for the implementation of sustainability within the economy, particularly in the clothing industry, where waste represents a major issue.

CHAPTER II – Circular Fashion

2.1 Modern Waste Culture and its Strong Presence in the Fashion Industry

Modern population has recently generated a quantity of household waste with no precedents, an amount that is increasingly moving forward in all industrialized nations³⁰. The mentioned circumstance has led to the development of a so called ‘Throwaway Society’, characterized by high purchases of goods with a short life cycle period, which often find themselves incinerated or in landfills instead of being recycled. Industrialization and the arrival of consumerism have stimulated individuals to maturate a disposable mindset; waste in developed countries has been increasing by 40% in the past 30 years, showing a growth rate which is very similar, in terms of pace, to the one of economic growth itself³¹. The main issue when talking about waste culture is surely the speed at which consumption take place; customers are acting following the steps of classical economy’s rationality, where the more is better. It almost seems like today there is no limits for an individual’s wealth aspiration, and nothing seems to be enough to satisfy a consumer’s needs. Therefore, this creates a situation of contrast between a buyer’s desires and their finite income, which cannot support all their demands. The economy has answered to this situation by increasing the quantity of goods produced and adding different options according to their price and quality. A medium consumer can now afford to buy more goods thanks to companies’ cheap prices but repercussions on quality are faced, leading buyers to find themselves with products of low quality and short life-span. Furthermore, many of these items are thrown away before they experience defaults or excessive consumption due to modern consumers’ strive for a ‘new version’; this substitution process is additionally encouraged by firms with the constant release of updated variants of the same product. The result of such process is also reflected in the usage and waste of resources, exploited at an always increasing rate in order to maintain a competitive position in the market and ensure a regular flow of a high quantity of newly produced goods to satisfy the mass market.

³⁰ T. Cooper, Reflections on Product Life Spans and the “Throwaway Society”, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University, 2005

³¹ OECD, 2001

The degree at which overall primary resources are depleted was approximately three times higher at the beginning of the 21st Century if compared to the 1960s.

Clothing and general apparel are now identified as disposable goods, generating, through the years, an always increasing amount of textile waste. Taking into account recent statistics, it has been revealed that an average family living in the western world discards around 30kg of clothes per year. Of the mentioned amount of clothing, only a small percentage (15%³²) gets recycled or donated, leaving all the remaining to incinerators and landfills. Just considering the United States' data, it is possible to state that more than 10.5 million tons of clothing find themselves in incinerators once their 'life cycle' is over. Such numbers become even more frightening if we consider the materials which compose our wardrobe; most apparel is made out of synthetic fibres which are non-degradable and can have a decomposing time equal to 200 years.

Professor Susan Strasser proposed an interesting chronological study of the modern clothing industry's trends and consumers behaviour. In her book "Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash", she illustrates how buyers' habits on apparel have changed during the years; in the time preceding and throughout World War I, the majority of clothes enjoyed a long life-cycle. Once they were abundantly used, they would get repaired, modified to fit another member of the family or kept inside the house to be used as rags and dusters. Despite this WWI conservatory trend, customers' approach deeply changed in the following decades. Starting from the mid 1920s, consumeristic trends began to pave their way and with the rise of industrialization, the production of many items, including clothes, had increased. Alongside economic growth, consumerism became an integral part of the economy and new products started to get released more quickly, allowing customers to throw away old ones and substitute them with their latest versions. Clothing, alongside with other goods, started to be considered as a disposable object, and its purchase and disposal rate grew rapidly. In the past couple of decades, clothing purchase has increased by 40%³³ in the E.U. and prices have fallen accordingly.

³² E. Cline, Where does discarded clothing go?, The Atlantic, 2004

³³ European Parliamentary Research Service, Environmental impact of the textile and clothing industry, 2019

One of the main drivers of increased clothing waste is therefore a rise in the production and volume of garment, as well as a parallel decrease in their prices. *“Right now, the main problem is the volume of clothing that is being produced, which is largely driven by our consumption habits,”* says Anika Kozlowski, professor of Fashion Design, Ethics & Sustainability at Ryerson University. *“Every product has impacts. The reason that volume is such an issue is that it just exacerbates all these impacts.”*

Kozlowski states how these trends took place with fashion companies outsourcing production to less developed countries, managing to decrease their prices. Cheaper prices paved the way for a new disposable mindset: as clothes became cheaper, repairing got less convenient and the life of apparel shortened dramatically. *“This price drop really correlated with a decreasing consumer knowledge on how to repair clothes, it’s cheaper to buy new socks than to darn a pair of socks.”* The consequence of this mindset is a paradox where spending does not diminish but instead often increases for small purchases on items of lower quality. This misconception has been analysed by Eleonora Amani, manager of a non-profit sustainable fashion business. As she says, *“One common misconception is that we actually spend less on fast fashion. Over the course of a lifetime we actually spend more on fast fashion than we would if we invest in higher quality things”*. Studies performed by McKinsey and Company have shown how the amount of clothing bought by an average customer has increased by 60% in 2014 in comparison with 2000, but the standard life of each garment has decreased by a half.

This disposable approach to clothing has led ‘waste’ into being a critical part of the fashion industry and on the basis of empirical studies, we can affirm that this unsustainable trend is very likely to continue its course over time, producing alarming environmental impacts for our planet. Following this section, we will present some solutions to the existing issue, focusing on the alternative of a circular economy within the fashion industry, and providing as a concrete example the one of vintage-wear.

2.2 The Circular Economy Model and its Benefits: a Solution to the Issue of Waste

The irresponsible exploitation of resources and the increasing customers' demand for sustainability among businesses has made now evident that the modern economy has reached a point where a transition to a more sustainable approach is needed. The current economic model based on linearity is to be considered obsolete, given its impossibility to satisfy the modern needs of our population and the environment, left alone the ones of future generations. According to the Ellen McArthur Foundation, the roots of our today linear economy can be found in the historically unequal allocation of wealth and resources. Following this theory, the most developed and industrialized regions of the world have found themselves with an abundance of resources, leading to cheap material input prices and expensive human work. This in turn has induced organizations to the adoption of a business model focused on a pervasive usage of natural resources and careful savings in terms of human labour. The result of this mind-set is an economy laid out towards the refusal of sustainable practices such as recycling and reusing, which are treated as an expensive and non-profitable option. This economic approach, adopted since the Industrialization, is reaching a dead-end; many researches and scholars have pointed out how the current concept of linearity based on the take-make-waste principle is no longer applicable to our economy, due to a growing reduction in natural resources and an increasing volatility in their prices. Empirical studies have shown how the Earth is moving towards a point where it will irreversibly lose its capacity to sustain the ecosystem in the way we know it. A report by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) of 2012 has shown how *“by the new millennium 1.5 Planet Earths are estimated to be needed to support our social, economic and demographic existence”*.

The concept of Circular Economy can therefore constitute a valuable solution to the now outmoded linear model due to its inclusion of principles based on the elimination of waste, the acquisition of respectful social and environmental practices and the adoption of a resource-conscious conduct. The concept of circularity within the economy finds its origins in the late 1960s, even though the phrase ‘circular economy’ itself was first proposed by Pearce and Turner in 1989, to whom many authors attribute the introduction of this notion. However, the idea of circularity applied to an economic system can be traced back to 1966, where Boulding proposed the application of a cyclical scheme to the economy as opposed

to a linear approach. Many authors have contributed to the discussion in the following years; notable examples include Stahel (1982) with its introduction of the *spiral-loop*, Benyus (1998) with its proposal of an economic system based on the imitation of nature and Braungart and McDonough (2008) with their acknowledged *cradle-to-cradle* initiative. Anyhow, the notion of Circular Economy should be considered as a general framework from which different economic approaches can be derived and most importantly, it must be recognized as a solution to the many challenges currently faced by our economy.

The purpose of Circular Economy is to maintain economic prosperity as well as protecting the environment in which we live in. Such idea is based on “*reducing wasteful resources through effective design and implementation of products and processes for improved resource-efficiency with circular material flow involving recovery, reuse, recycling and remanufacturing of products*”³⁴It conceptualizes a future where every waste is transformed into an asset, where no value remains unrecovered. In other words, the idea of Circular Economy is based on the elimination of waste and the creation of new value: instead of being discarded at the end of their lifecycle, products and inputs should be kept within the economy as a resource, in order to be reused advantageously and create additional value. This represents a redesigned system of operation, focused on the implementation of a “closed loop” and the removal of waste from the production process, achievable through a shift from the tradition “take-make-dispose” linear model to a more responsible and environmentally beneficial management of resources. The current system of operations adopted by businesses takes advantage of resources, uses them extensively during the production process and disposes of these materials once they have concluded their production life cycle, mostly by sending them to incinerators or landfills. During this process many valuable resources are irreversibly lost. In opposition to the linear system, the circular economy aims at designing a scheme of operation where resources, instead of being destroyed, are kept and reused for as long as possible for the manufacturing of new products. By adding to this process the already mentioned trend of increasing scarcity of resources and relative price volatility, the described method of operation allows businesses to obtain considerable financial savings in the long run as well as a reduction of their negative ecological impacts.

³⁴ I.S. Jawahir and R. Bradley, *Technological Elements of Circular Economy and the Principles of 6R-Based Closed-Loop Material Flow in Sustainable Manufacturing*, 2016

The overall benefits stemming from a concrete application of Circular Economy are many and are reflected in multiple results which largely vary in their nature.

From an environmental perspective, the adoption of a circular system within the economy would result into a positive impact on our ecosystem, due to its careful and responsible management of natural resources, representing a valuable solution for many of the issues affecting our planet:

- i. Greenhouse gas emissions would be significantly reduced: a report³⁵ by SITRA (2018) has stated how European Union's emissions would decrease by 56% in 2050 if the concept of Circular Economy was concretely applied to the economy.
- ii. Vital bodies as soil, air and water would be treated respectfully: by re-inserting already used resources in the production process and putting a focus on the safe management of natural resources, the issue of uninterrupted withdrawal and overuse of natural capacities would be solved.
- iii. Concerns about waste, materials dumping, and toxic substances release would undergo through a major reduction: results include the protection the earth's ecosystems and a reduction in polluting practices performed along the production chain. For instance, re-usage of materials like plastic and regulations on dumping toxic substances into the waters would crucially benefit the oceans and seas' living organisms, as well as our own food-chain.

The Circular Economy's benefits also encompass various economic aspects with positive outcomes for the overall economy and society:

- i. Stabilization of raw materials' prices: many factors linked to the overconsumption and strict dependence of businesses on natural resources pose a threat on market equilibrium. Starting from 2006, a significant increase in raw materials' price volatility has manifested, causing problems to both buyers and suppliers and resulting into a general discouragement towards investments on extraction and treatment of materials, which has contributed to rising their prices over time. Furthermore, fluctuations in price levels increase the difficulty of a business to develop price forecasts, causing them to stand in a position of competitive disadvantage when compared to less material-dependent businesses.

³⁵ SITRA Global, *World Circular Economy Forum Report*, 2018

The closed-loop system applied in a Circular Economy would reduce prices' volatility.

- ii. Responsible management of scarce resources: in the existent linear economic system, a significant amount of industries relies on the employment of determinant materials in their production process. The limited availability of such inputs constitutes an alarming issue for the dependent businesses. For instance, the computer and electronics industries make an intensive use of components such as indium and chromium, which are only available to a limited extent. The threat of scarcity of resources should be treated even more carefully if we consider the geopolitical interdependence of natural resources, caused by global trade. In more concrete terms, if a country is scarce in terms of raw material A but abundant in raw material B, it will use its surplus of A to buy B from a country which is B-abundant. As a consequence, these two raw materials become linked to each other. Moreover, the production of many goods directly depends on raw materials such water and fuels, causing a further interdependence. As an outcome of this geopolitical interrelationship, the scarcity of one raw material will affect the prices and availability of other multiple goods. The economic impacts deriving from a scarcity in natural resources can only be mitigated with a careful and responsible management of such materials, aimed at eliminating waste and introducing cyclical reuse practices.
- iii. Economic growth: the rigid dependence of many industries on particular raw materials also constitutes a limit for economic growth, since a shortage of a certain raw material, as we have seen in the paragraph above, might pose great risks for the ongoing growth of an industry. An important aspect of circular economy concerns the separation of economic growth from the consumption of resources. An estimate proposed by The United Nations Environmental Plan (UNEP) mentions how a more effective resource use would result into a benefit of \$2 trillion a year in 2050 for the global economy.
- iv. New profit for businesses: due to the high cost of many raw materials and their supply uncertainty, a shift to a cyclical model might result into the creation of new profit opportunities, based on lower inputs' costs and enhanced security of raw materials supply, as well as the augmentation of a business' positive image thanks to sustainability practices.

- v. Innovation: applying a circular economy would mean developing new and innovative business models and opening new opportunities for firms.
- vi. Enhanced customer relationship: a concrete application of circular economy would also imply a more durable relationship between the customer and the product. Customers' satisfaction and loyalty must therefore be treated very carefully and supported with maintenance, service and repair operations.
- vii. Promotion of 'sustainable customers': the rise of circular economy would not only bring sustainability to businesses but also to users. If circular economy was ever to be concretely applied, it would require customers to act accordingly to it, with a shift from a 'disposable mindset' to a more sustainable one, which includes a long-lasting relationship with products and the acquisition of sustainable customers' practices (e.g product sharing)

Having listed many benefits and eventual consequences of a future concrete application of circular economy, it is important to keep in mind the limits and threats of this system. This paper supports a beneficial view of the transition from a linear to a cyclical economic system, based on the idea that a linear economy is not able to sustain our society and environment's short-future needs. This said, negative aspects about a possible application exist and should be presented, even if briefly. "*Circular Economy still requires amalgamation of the entire product life cycle from raw material provision to annihilation*"³⁶. The emerging concept of circularity is increasingly being put in the spotlight, but it still lacks in terms of the technological perspectives it needs for an effective implementation. This is reflected in the absence of an international recognized institution aimed at proving regulations and guidelines for the sector. Also, Circular Economy has not managed to spread among the population and hasn't gained a particular focus in terms of public opinion, leading CE to be considered as an 'abstract concept', though representing a valuable solution for the unethical and unecological practices performed by modern economies and in particular, for the reduction or elimination of waste within production and consumption.

³⁶ Van Ewijk, 2014

2.3 Eliminating Waste in Fashion: the introduction of Circular Fashion

The notion and concept of ‘Circular Fashion’ has first been coined and proposed in 2014. Dr. Anna Brismar, founder of the ‘Green Strategy’ consultancy business, has been one of the first people to publicly mention the notion of circular economy in June 2014: the term was used during a meeting aimed at planning and preparing a new sustainable fashion event in Sweden, which, accordingly to the introduction of the new expression, took the name of “Circular Fashion – Show and Talk”. The well-known H&M brand has also represented a top player in introducing this expression, adopting it during a public appearance in Sweden in July 2014. We can therefore notice how the concept of ‘Circular Fashion’ has entered into the fashion world not a long time ago, placing the basis for all its the following debates and practical adaptations.

According to Dr. Anna Brismar, the concept of ‘Circular Fashion’ is built on sixteen main principles³⁷, of which the last three refer to consumers’ habits more than businesses’ activities:

1. *Design with purpose*: conceiving items aimed at no specific purpose contributes to overproduction and waste in the fashion industry. Clothing should be designed with particular characteristics in order to be used for specific occasions, therefore increasing their uniqueness and life cycle.
2. *Design for longevity*: putting a particular focus on the resistance and durability of fabrics and designing clothing in order to make them easily repairable in case of damage. This would turn away customers from the disposable mindset based on throwing away a piece of clothing every time it gets damaged and substitute it with a new one, instead of actively trying to repair it. The principle of ‘longevity’ also includes the creation of clothing with a long-lasting and ‘timeless’ style, which can be attractive for both current and future generations.
3. *Design for resource efficiency*: designing apparel focusing on managing resources efficiently, aiming at minimizing waste of all the resources used during the production process.
4. *Design for biodegradability and safe incineration*: most apparel items are made of different mixtures of materials, some of which are biodegradable and some of which may take hundreds of years to decompose. In addition, a large part of these fabrics

³⁷ Dr. Anna Brismar, CircularFashion.com, Stockholm, 2015-2019

releases toxic substances in the air when incinerated. For such reasons, it is fundamental to design fashion products made of elements that are not only biodegradable, but also safe when it comes to incineration procedures.

5. *Design for recyclability*: designing products keeping in mind their future value. Through recycling it is possible to re-use an item's components for the construction of new goods. Therefore a piece of clothing should be designed with materials that, once they're thrown away, can be recovered and used for the production of new items or processes.
6. *Source and produce more locally*: outsourcing the production process and extraction of materials overseas often results into cheaper production costs and lower quality, as well as an exploitation of less developed countries' more flexible social and environmental legislations.
7. *Source and produce without toxicity*: the production of clothing involves the release of toxic substances in the air and waters along the production chain. A strategy aimed at minimizing, if not eliminating, these impacts should be implemented.
8. *Source and produce with efficiency*: threatening resources in a more effective way is one of the pillars of circular economy.
9. *Source and produce with renewables*: using renewable resources such as biomass, wood waste, hydropower, wind or solar energy during the production process can significantly reduce the environmental impacts of the fashion industry.
10. *Source and produce with good ethics*: respecting social, economic and environmental ethical standards should be a pattern to follow for every business.
11. *Provide services to support long life*: alongside with producing clothing of more durable and resistant fabrics, it is important to provide customers with after-purchase services directed at increasing the life of the product.
12. *Reuse, recycle or compost all remains*: adopting sustainable practices with regards to 'production remains' constitutes a major player for reducing waste.
13. *Collaborate well and widely*: collaboration among different activities of the value chain and cooperation between suppliers and buyers often guarantees an efficient and more controlled method of production.
14. *Use, wash and repair with care*: wearing clothes more carefully and washing them with consideration due to their release of environmentally damaging substances when showered helps our eco-system. As well as repairing them instead of buying new strongly reduces clothing waste.

15. *Consider rent, loan, swap, secondhand or redesign instead of buying new:* considering alternative methods to personal buying and keeping should receive a major focus from the public. Buying second-hand clothes helps the flow of circular economy within the fashion industry. Also, the rise of new technology has allowed the creation of recent platforms where it is possible to loan, rent or swap clothes, reducing purchases and consequent overproduction.
16. *Buy quality as opposed to quantity:* the rise of fast fashion has brought in our society a large quantity of clothing that can be bought at a very low price, resulting into lower quality and bigger purchasing. Choosing quality over quantity would mean not only contrasting overproduction, but also owning clothes which will have a long-lasting life due to their excellent quality and material resistance.

The main goal of the Circular Economy is therefore to drive waste out of the system, both from a production and consumption point of view. The former includes elimination of waste through a careful management of natural resources, aimed at reducing pollution and ensuring that inputs can be re-used over time for the production of other garments. The latter focuses on consumers' behaviors and attitudes towards waste, pushing for a society where recycling, donating and adopting circular buying practices as secondhand shopping or rental plays a major role and becomes a common factor. If we were ever to implement such changes, the level of waste produced by the clothing market would decrease enormously.

The rise in consumers' awareness about ethical and sustainable topics is hopefully to represent a motive and mean for businesses to take concrete actions and steps towards a more circular approach. Many fashion companies are actively trying to get involved into social and environmental issues and the development of relative circular solutions. An important example can be found in the well-known luxury firm "Stella McCartney," which has recently dedicated a section of its business aimed at making circularity a reality: "*We believe that the future of fashion is circular – it will be restorative and regenerative by design and the clothes we love never end up as waste*"³⁸ or the sportswear brand "Nike", who has been sponsoring an intern project aimed at "*minimizing or eliminating waste in the product creation process*"³⁹ and has labeled the concept of 'circular design' as the future of fashion.

³⁸ Stella McCartney, www.stellamccartney.com/circularity

³⁹ Nike, www.nikecirculardesign.com/waste-avoidance

Anyhow, despite the interest shown by different companies, the steps to be taken in order to concretely apply a circular strategy within the fashion industry are still many and require much more focus than the one they're given today; sustainable practices are not being implemented fast enough to counterbalance the destructive effects of one of the most polluting and unethical industries in the world. There is a strong need of cooperation between businesses, law-makers and governments for the creation of regulations aimed at proposing the structure and guidelines for a tangible application of a circular system. The shift from a linear system to the one proposed in this thesis would undoubtedly require a set of radical changes as well as a level of commitment and innovation that has never been witnessed by this industry so far, but it should also be seen as an opportunity that will release the full potential of the fashion world and that should be caught proudly by all participants.

Due to the complexity and lack of regulations for an overall implementation of a circular system within the fashion industry, the next chapter proposes the already-existing circular alternative of secondhand clothing as a substitute choice to fast fashion; such presentation includes an analysis of its current position in the fashion market and an in-depth inquiry about the motives behind its recent growth.

CHAPTER III – Vintage Fashion: An Example of Circular Economy as an Alternative Choice to the Fast Fashion

3.1 A new type of buyer: the Conscious Consumer

Global population has experienced, through history, countless transformations on a social basis. Each transition was the result of a change in surrounding environments and gave birth to numerous and diverse behavioral trends. In our modern times, different factors have contributed to the advancement of a new class of customers, whose main characteristics are an increased awareness about social, political and environmental factors as well as a stronger influencing power on businesses. These two factors are noticeably linked and largely depend on the rise of new technology and the consequent increased facility in both acquiring and divulging information. The modern environment is characterized by alarming environmental conditions faced by our planet alongside episodes of social injustice incurred in different economic and political sectors. The rise of digital technology and social media platforms has enlarged the population's access to any type of knowledge and favored an always more rapid spread of information within society. These happenings have substantially modified the role of the consumer, who now has a greater voice and influential power with his opinion. Buyers' attitudes and judgements now have a capacity to concretely impact economic trends and a company's reputation without precedents. This has led to the establishment of a new type of consumer, who is powerfully conscious and able to damage an organization's image provoking considerable financial losses. Businesses therefore find themselves in a weaker position if compared to the past; customers now require full transparency about organizational and financial practices and expect leaders to act accordingly to their expectations. The 2019 SAI Global Reputation Trust Index has shown how topics regarding Social Corporate Responsibility, sustainability and ethics have acquired a major importance among consumers. It is clear that modern buyers demand businesses to base their conduct on the ground of strict rules which require a strategic management of environmental, social, ethical and financially transparent practices in order to gain their trust. Companies who do not fulfill certain requirements and behave irresponsibly have small chances to perform a positive customers acquisition and high probability of losing part of their market share. In the fashion industry context, the data

collected in surveys has revealed that 59%⁴⁰ of consumers expect retailers to adopt sustainable and socially ethical principles when producing an item and 72%⁴¹ are more likely to buy from eco-friendly firms.

This change in customers' behavior has led to a shift in control from business to society. The founder and CEO of Black Rock, the biggest investment management corporation in the world, has underlined how modern consumers are "*demanding that companies, both public and private, serve a social purpose. To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society. Companies must benefit all of their stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, and the communities in which they operate. Without a sense of purpose, no company, either public or private, can achieve its full potential. It will ultimately lose its license to operate from key stakeholders.*" Adapting to social changes and respecting the needs of the global community cannot be seen as an option anymore; companies must build a solid and safe reputational net around them to ensure the trust of both internal and external stakeholders, increase their public value and produce positive impacts on their overall surroundings.

The rise of the 'conscious consumer' role, although finding its apex in contemporary society, has been subject to analysis in previous times; academic literature reveals that the concept had already been explored by different authors in the 1970s. Economists W. Thomas Anderson and William H. Cunningham published an article in 1972 named "*The Socially Conscious Consumer*". The two scholars first propose an analysis of the relationship between ethics and the economy. The paper includes two opposite line of thoughts on the correlation between social activism and profits: the first, affirming the presence of a proportional dependence among the two factors, and the second, considering the two elements as "*essentially irreconcilable*⁴²". Alongside the presentation of these two economic currents, the work provides a detailed analysis of the new figure of 'conscious consumer', focusing on the role that demographic and sociopsychological variables play in influencing an individual's degree of social consciousness. Anderson and Cunningham had been surprisingly able to predict the future advance of this social trend: on the one hand, they recognized the limits that this approach presented at their time, on the other, they

⁴⁰ ThredUP 2019 Resale Report

⁴¹ ThredUp 2019 Resale Report

⁴² T. Anderson and W. Cunningham, *The Socially Conscious Consumer*, Journal of Marketing, 1972

demonstrated the capacity to fully understand the growing potential of this social phenomenon and the repercussions it would have brought to future economies:

“With growing customer sensitivity to social and environmental problems, market segmentation based on consumers’ societal orientation is emerging; markets will be evaluated [increasingly] according to the degree to which consumers accept the consumer-citizen concept and buy as individuals concerned not only with their personal satisfactions, but also with societal and environmental well-being ... It is through the analysis of social and environmental developments and through new marketing policies that management responds to the pressures and opportunities presented by social/environmental change”⁴³.

During the 1970s, further studies on the ‘conscious consumer’ followed the one cited above and started to shed a focus on the interrelation between the transition to a more ethically aware population and consumeristic tendencies. Notable examples include Frederick E. Webster’s “*Determining the Characteristics of the Socially Conscious Consumer*” research, introducing the figure of “*a consumer who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change.*”

Later studies performed on the psychological analysis of this figure and the motives behind its choices, highlighting how a buyers’ motives for ethical consumption are not always well linked to personal values and ethics belief. Many authors identify two different types of motivations: collective benefits, linked to consumers’ position in society, and individual benefits, which include elements such as price, quality, time saving and product convenience.

From an academic perspective, the concept of ‘conscious consumer’ has not been subject to major changes but the influence it exerts on the economy has vastly increased in terms of extension and effectiveness.

The fashion industry, possessing as intrinsic characteristic the ability to keep up with trends and undergo through rapid changes, cannot ignore such circumstances and neither can its consumers. Issues concerning ethical and sustainability practices had already been addressed by fashion buyers during the 1980s with the appearance of the first anti-fur campaigns; in the late 1990s, public information was released about the unethical and unsafe conditions of workers in clothing factories and customers started to pressure companies, demanding a more careful monitoring of textile factories to ensure that no violation of human rights was performed. Unfortunately, this topic remains still open to debates and has not seen any significant progress in the past years,

⁴³ T. Anderson and W. Cunningham, *The Socially Conscious Consumer*, Journal of Marketing, 1972

constituting one of the main ethical issues of the fashion industry. Such increasing interest in environmental and social matters has motivated different players into acquiring a more sustainable mindset and take relative action: in 2001 Stella McCartney launched her now well-known brand promoting the refusal of leather and fur materials in clothing design, in 2004 the worldwide event “*Ethical Fashion Show*” made its first appearance in Paris, in 2009 the New York Fashion Week inaugurated its first *Eco Fashion Week* and the notorious magazine Vogue started to promote the labelling of ‘green practices’ as a fashion trend. These events and developments also reached the world of fast fashion that, though being incompatible with the notion of sustainability by nature, started to sponsor ethical campaigns, as did H&M with the production of an organic Conscious Collection.

The motives behind this customers’ trend in sustainable fashion are many and can be classified on geographical, demographic, social, political and personal variables. Although there is not a significant amount of research on the analysis of motivations driving fashion consumers towards ethical consumption, we can state that studies on the general framework of ‘buying ethically’ have shown how personal values and ethics play a major role on consumptions’ decision-making process. Analyzing the influences that guide a consumer into being a conscious shopper requires a multifaced approach, since sustainability topics in the fashion industry may vary in their nature, encompassing concepts of fair trade, animal cruelty, environmental repercussions, waste and violation of human rights. Therefore, when conducting a survey on ethical fashion, it is important to consider that the customers surveyed might have different perceptions of what the term means, each associating it to the issue they are more involved in. Researches conducted by Kirsi Niinimäki and published in its 2010 work “*Eco-clothing, consumer identity and ideology*” show a significant increase in the level of ethical consciousness within fashion consumers. Different authors such as Dickson (2001), Tomolillo & Shaw (2004) and Freestone & McGoldrick (2008), consider social concerns as the most frequent driver of clothing’s consumption choices, with considerable focus on human rights violations within industries’ working conditions. Ha-Brookshire & Hodges (2009) reported that, according to the results of their survey conducted in the United States, more than a half of the individuals questioned was willing to pay an excess of \$5 for a completely sustainable apparel item. The “*Individual values and motivational complexities in ethical clothing consumption*” study proposed by Jagel et al. (2012), performed on a sample of customers who self-report themselves as active supporters of sustainability, recorded how alongside environmental, social and equalitarian values, themes regarding self-identity, style and product quality

surfaced as additional motives for the selection of sustainable products. Therefore sustainable fashion supporters are likely to be influenced by “multiple end goals including self-expression, aesthetic satisfaction and group conformity”⁴⁴, together with ethical beliefs and a reaction to feelings of guilt. The discussion about the psychology of ethical fashion customers remains questionable, due to a low quantity of empirical material and the relative under-researched position of this topic.

Nevertheless, the rise of this new group of consumers plays a central role in the enhancement of the secondhand vintage market, which will be presented above in a more detailed manner.

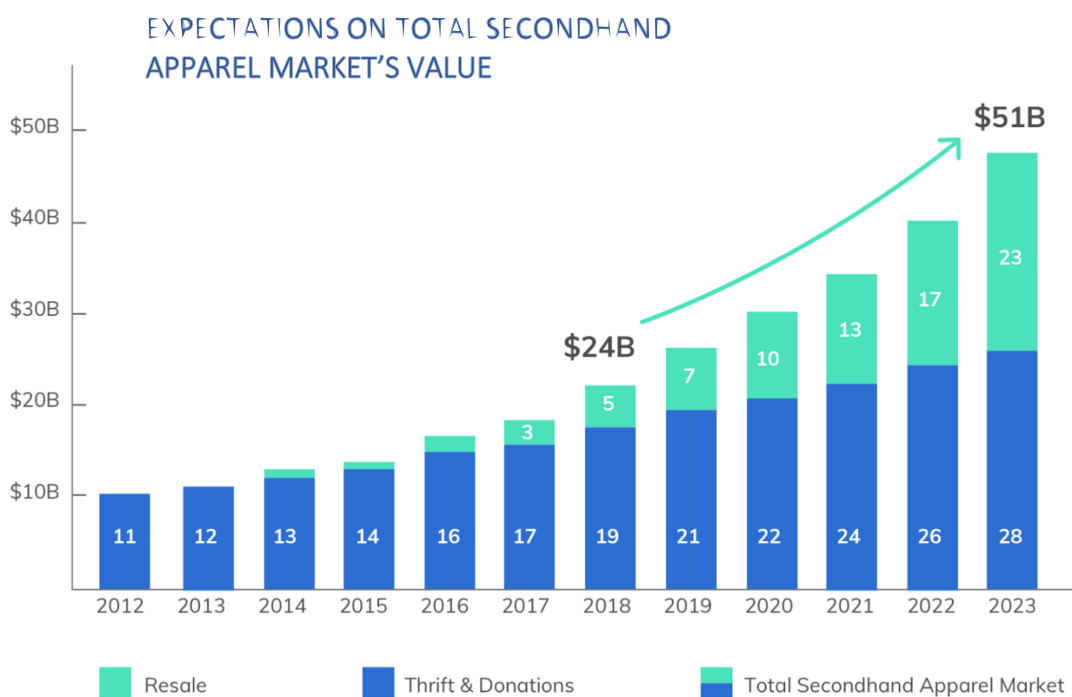
⁴⁴ Kim & Damhorst, 1998

3.1 The Rise of the Secondhand Clothing Market

The vintage fashion market is currently going towards a favorable period of rapid growth, acquiring more and more importance during the years, especially when considering young generations. Such climate can find its roots in many different reasons, that can vary in their nature accordingly to the type of customer we're considering. The increase in young generations' awareness towards social and environmental changes has given birth to a general feeling of resentment against the fast fashion industry and its unsustainable practices. Fashion mass-production has led to a common loss of individuality, resulting in a demand for more unique and personal items. Today's circumstances and contexts have paved the way for the rise of a type of items which allow buyers to explore their individuality and to act against the multiple disruptive changes that many economies are bringing to earth. Vintage wear, thanks to its unique garment characteristics and its sustainable nature, represents the perfect answer to the needs of young generations. Its fit to our modern time fashion claims has been clearly manifested in a rise of the general interest towards vintage fashion and sales, leading to a second-hand clothing market growth that had never been witnessed before. Current empirical researches have shown how the vintage fashion market is gradually stealing fast fashion's spotlight. The world's largest online thrift store "ThredUP" has recently promulgated positive statistics for this market, as well as incredible expectations for its ongoing growth, calling today the "*golden age of vintage shopping*". ThredUP has released its *Annual Resale Report* for 2019, containing research and data extracted by the third-party analytic firm GlobalData. Such report constitutes a significant source for the understanding of the second-hand clothing market's growth and it has been developed with the use of resources such as surveys, retailing trackings, official public data, store observations and an analysis of additional knowledge published by global associations as Green Story Research and The Ellen McArthur Foundation. Such combination of inputs has made it possible to acquire a general framework about the positioning of vintage retailing in the fashion industry, leading to surprisingly confident results. In the report it is specified how "*Compared to the overall apparel market, resale's growth has been phenomenal. As the market uniquely meets consumers' preference for variety, value, and*

sustainability, we expect the high growth to continue".⁴⁵ This market seems to be facing a constant growth: in 2012 the secondhand apparel market was estimated to be globally worth \$10 billions, in 2018 the numbers show an increase to \$24 billions, meaning that its value has doubled in a length of time equal to just five years. Vintage resale has been growing, in the past three years, at a rate which is 21 times faster than the one manifested by apparel retail. Furthermore, if we take into account the report's statistics about expectations and growth, clothing resale is presumed to reach a value of \$51 billions in 2023 (Figure 1).

Figure 1



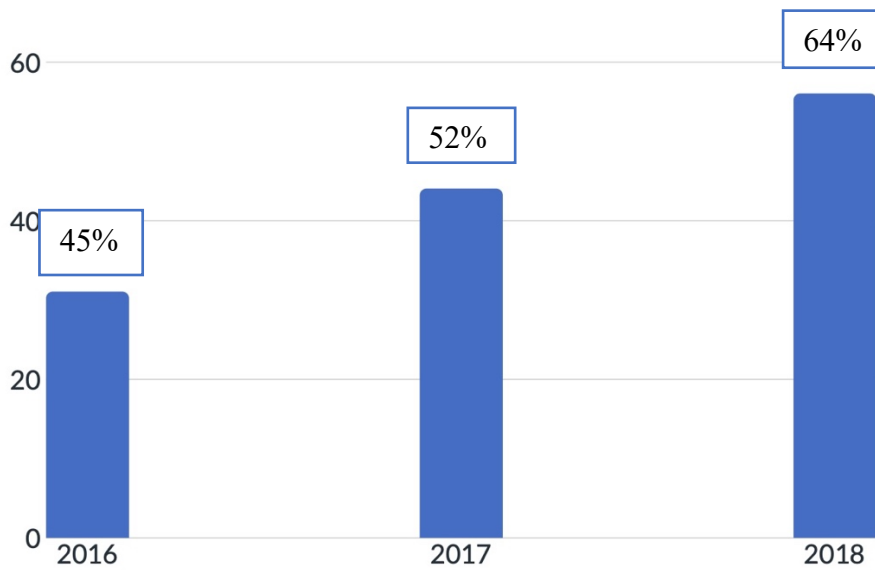
Source: ThredUP 2019 Report

This data is projected in the percentage of women who are favorable to buying second-hand clothing, going from a 45% in 2016 to a 64% in 2019. The company points out “*There are more second-hand shoppers than ever*” now. The numbers of women shopping vintage has gone from 44 millions in 2017 to 56 millions in 2018, once again demonstrating the sector’s growth rapidity. (Figure 2)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Neil Saunders, GlobalData Managing Director & Lead Market Analyst for thredUP’s Resal

⁴⁶ Quantities on the Y axe are represented in millions

Figure 2



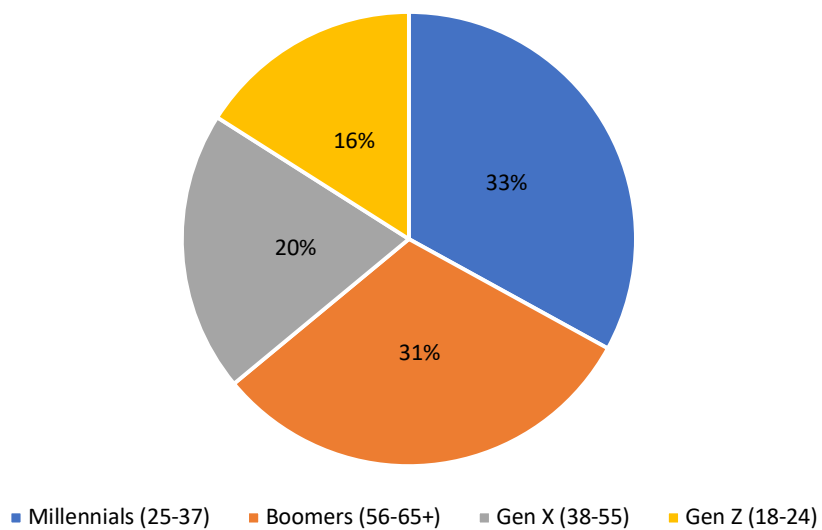
PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN OVER 18 WHO HAVE BOUGHT OR ARE OPEN TO BUYING SECONDHAND PRODUCTS IN THE FUTURE

Source: made by the author

The ThredUp report also provides a detailed analysis of secondhand apparel customers, with a focus on their age distribution (Figure 3)

Figure 3

Second Apparel Consumers by Age



Source: made by the author

Data has shown how the two main buyers of secondhand apparel are boomers (56-65 years old) and millennials (25-37 years old), representing a respective share of sales equal to 31% and 33%, leading the latter into being the primary acquiring group in the industry. Gen Z (18-24 years old) has a share of 16%, seeming surprisingly small with respect to the ones mentioned above. Anyhow, this group of customers is considered as the fastest-adopting one and researches show how by 2019, one out of three Gen Z members will be a vintage clothing buyer. The last share equal to 20% is represented by Gen X (38-55). Millennials and Gen X therefore represent the major drivers of growth for this industry, as the numbers show: the number of people aged between 25 and 37 years old who have made a shift towards vintage apparel has grown by 37% in the past two years, while the Gen X has performed an increase equal to 46%.

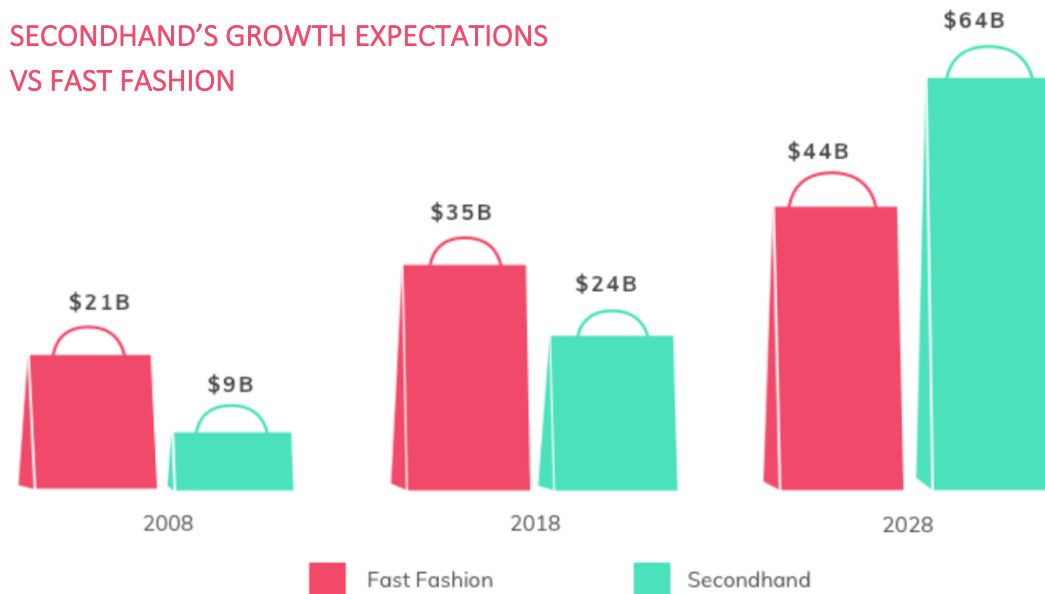
This age subdivision is very helpful when considering the reasons behind the resale market recent growth; a change in the world social and economic environment has occurred and it is projected into young generations, which now present a different awareness and needs when compared to older ones. Among the many changed adopted by our society in modern times, the rise of the “conscious consumer” can surely be seen as a major driver into the development and interest towards sustainable practices within the fashion industry; buyers tend to pose greater attention towards ethical and environmental issues, largely preferring businesses with sustainable behaviors to the ones who do not adopt eco-friendly positions. The number of buyers preferring to shop from environmentally conscious brands has increased from 57% in 2013 to 72% in 2018⁴⁷. The activist and writer Elizabeth Segran has mentioned how *“Shopping ethically has often been perceived as a luxury, because of the price points...The good news is that we now live in the golden age of secondhand shopping.”* The choice of buying from the secondhand apparel market does not only imply the acquisition of items with more individuality and uniqueness, but also a strong support in the implementation of a form of circular economy within the fashion industry. Such support would consistently help the reduction of waste and other unsustainable practices performed by businesses along the production process and customers during the usage phase of the product.

Considering the resale sector’s growth rate released by the ThredUp 2019 Report, it is unthinkable to not make a direct comparison with the fast fashion industry’s rates; in the

⁴⁷ ThredUP Annual Report, 2019

course of the last three years, the vintage apparel market has been growing 21 times faster than clothing retail. In 2008, fast fashion market had a value of \$21 billions, which increased to \$35 billions in 2018. The secondhand sector was accounted for a total of \$9 billions in 2008 and reached \$24 in 2018. By analyzing the growth rate of the last decade and projecting this data into future expectations, it is possible to estimate that, following this path, vintage wear will outshine fast fashion in 2028, leading the former in a value position of \$44 billions and the latter at \$64 billions (Figure 4). Such numbers provide confident and undoubtedly positive hopes for the future of the secondhand apparel market.

Figure 4



Source: ThredUP 2019 Report

Quoting Elizabeth L. Clane, author of *“The Conscious Closet”*, *“Resale offers the wardrobe-rotating fun of fast fashion without the guilt or waste. By driving preferences away from disposable fashion towards higher-quality clothes, reuse is a boon for our personal style and the planet.”*

ThredUp’s report also provides the results of a survey⁴⁸ aimed at identifying where consumers intend to direct their spending in the next years; when customers were asked where they planned to spend more or less in the next five years, responses were once again

⁴⁸ Responses represent buying intentions of those who shopped each retail category

encouraging for the secondhand industry and threatening for the one of fast fashion: the number of consumers surveyed who planned to increase their amount of apparel shopping in the vintage area was four times higher than the one of people who intended to raise their spending within fast fashion. Secondhand apparel's 16% annual growth compared to retail apparel's 3%, undeniably shows how vintage is increasingly capturing market share. *"In fashion, the shift to new ownership models is driven by growing customer desire for variety, sustainability, and affordability. In 2019, we predict more consumers will see growing proportion of their wardrobes made up of pre-owned or rented products."*⁴⁹

This 'resale revolution' has also been driven by the opportunity of developing new business models and ways of operating in the industry; the rise of the internet has made clothing shopping way more accessible than ever and the introduction of new technologies such as mobile apps allowed secondhand clothing to turn away from their traditional 'physical shop thrifting' approach, making vintage shopping as easy as buying new. In addition, there has been, and keeps being, a strong and vast development of techniques aimed at encouraging the circular life of clothing; an example is furnished by the "Clean Out" program offered by some secondhand websites. This scheme consists in ordering a kit which will be delivered right to the consumer's house, that can be filled with high quality clothes, accessories or shoes. This kit will be sent off to the shop that provided it and will not only allow the customer to make money for it, but will also provide the shop with new items to sell. In such a way, all parties are better off. This easy 'home selling' program is an intelligent and efficient way to increase profits for businesses as well as attracting masses into resale practices and encouraging them to discover the hidden power of buying secondhand.

This unleashed and growing potential is paving its way to the market and its starting to get recognized as a valuable opportunity. A survey conducted by the ThredUp firm on senior retail executives, has shown how a vast majority of the interviewed was strongly inclined into testing resale business practices in 2020; reasons included revenue boost, sustainability and ethical incentives, customer loyalty, attracting new customers and increasing store or site traffic. McKinsey & Company, one of the biggest consulting businesses in the world, has acknowledged the potential of the resale market and its future growth: *"While established brands have traditionally turned a blind or scorning eye towards secondhand*

⁴⁹ McKinsey & Company x Business of Fashion, "The State of Fashion 2019"

*retail, they are now wading into the pre-owned and rental markets. Turning to the year ahead, we expect the number of brands getting into the rental, resale, and refurbishment businesses will increase markedly.*⁵⁰

With the increasing trend in textile waste driven by a duplication in clothing consumption and a 50% decrease in its usage time period, the adoption of circular economy practices by businesses and customers is fundamental. One truck full of garment is being landfilled or incinerated every second, an equivalent of 108 millions tons of limited resources are consumed for the production of fashion items and the apparel industry is estimated to account for 25% of carbon emissions by 2050; resale businesses and secondhand buying is positively finding its way into representing a convenient and ethical choice within this industry and such belief is also strengthened and represented by empirical data based on markets' analysis. *“By helping to increase the use of clothing, resale can play a key role in making fashion circular. Raising the average number of times clothing is worn is the most direct way to design out waste and pollution and capture value.”*⁵¹

Resale therefore constitutes a key feature in enhancing the future of Circular Fashion, creating beneficial results for businesses, customers and the environment, through its recognized profit potential, the elimination of waste and the development of a sustainably conscious mindset within fashion customers; its recent growth is a positive signal of a shift towards a more ethical consumption approach, but the determinants of this increase are not always ethics-related and are presented and analyzed carefully in the next section.

⁵⁰ McKinsey & Company x Business of Fashion, “The State of Fashion 2019”

⁵¹ Francois Souchet, The Ellen MacArthur Foundation's Make Fashion Circular Lead

3.3 Choosing Vintage over Fast Fashion

The fast fashion industry has recently developed an unethical image, due to its production of mass items and exploitation of resources during the production process, as well as the frequent involvement of workers' human rights violations. In this decadent framework of the fast fashion industry, the secondhand clothing market has managed to rise and significantly step upon its opponent in terms of rates of growth and favorable reputation.

After having analyzed the general framework of sustainability within fashion and the proposal of a circular solution, this section is aimed at proposing and analyzing the motives driving a customer into buying vintage rather than the common choice of fast fashion, basing such investigation on a survey conducted on a random selected sample of consumers.

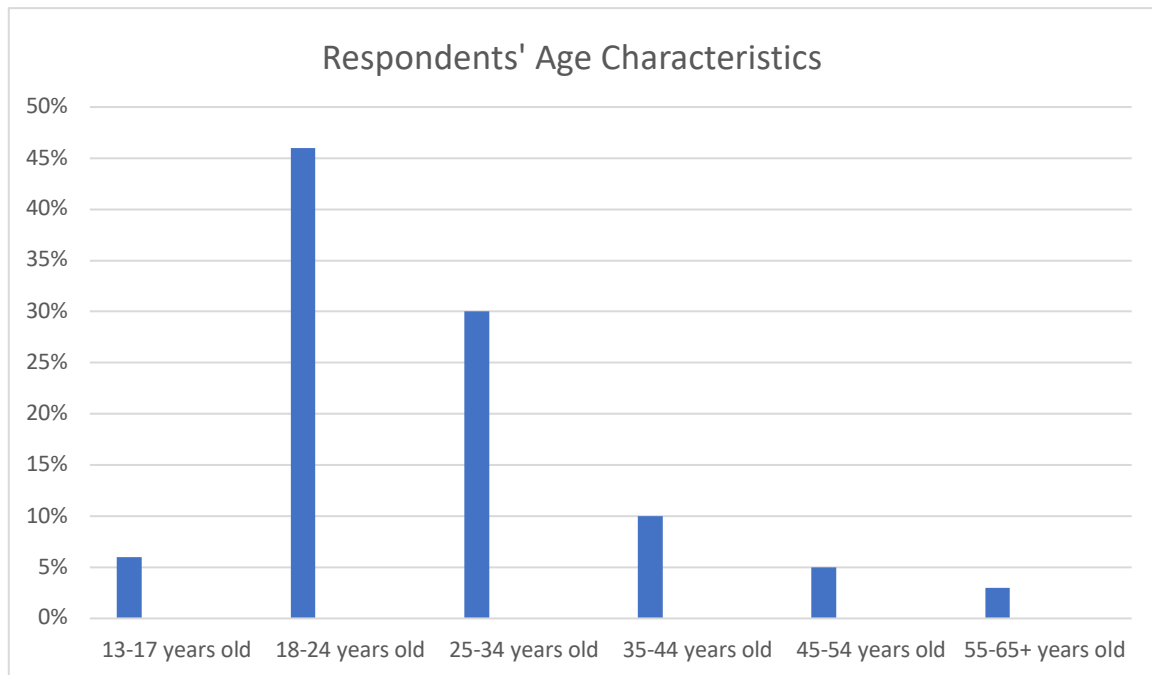
The study is performed for exploratory purposes, with the aim of investigating the aspects of an under-researched topic. The information presented has to be considered as primary data, having been collected directly by the researcher through the method of a 'survey'; it is therefore based on a quantitative approach and will be presented through the reorganization of data into graphical charts.

The survey was made in the form of questionnaires which allowed the subject to choose among two responses; the questionnaires method was adopted to collect data in a quick and reliable manner, allowing to obtain information in a timely and effective manner.

The sample size consists of approximately 3700 fashion consumers who showed to have an interest in the general concept 'vintage'⁵². The respondents present an international and random geographical distribution. The predominant gender was the one of female, accounting for 76% of the sample, leaving males to represent the 24%. In addition, the sample offered the age characteristics summarized in Figure 5.

⁵² Fashion, music, movies

Figure 5



Source: made by the author

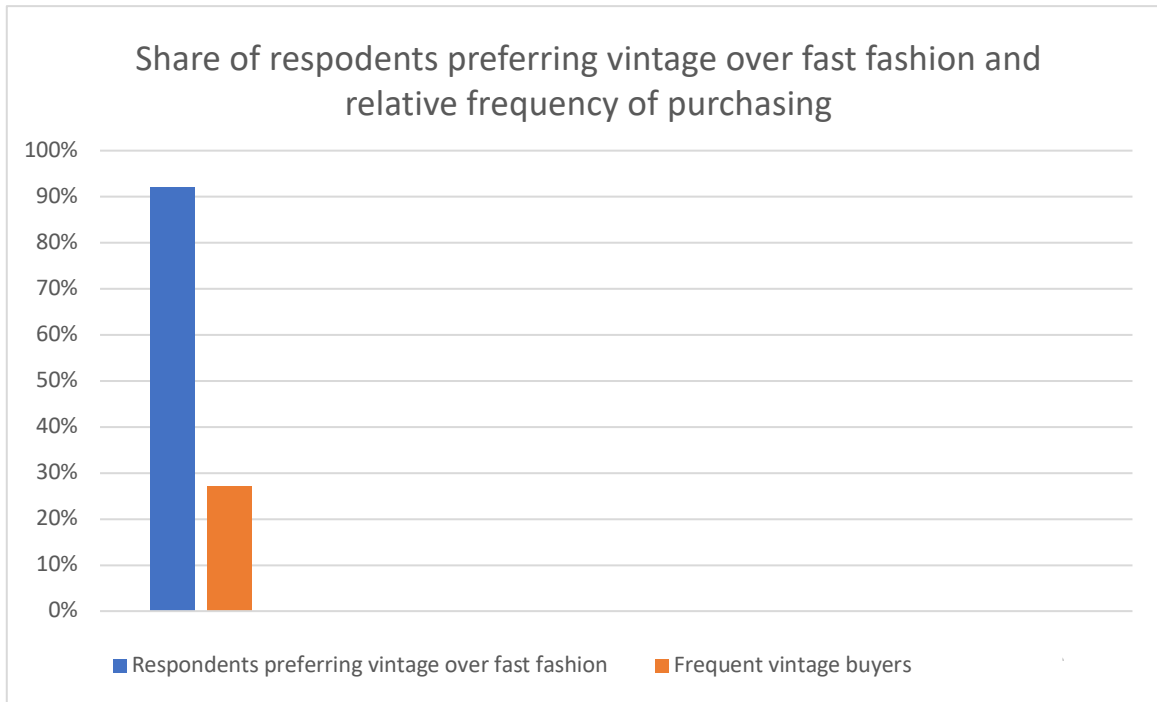
The questions were structured in order to first obtain a general background on customers' approach and interest towards vintage buying and subsequently understand the reasons behind a preference of secondhand clothing over fast fashion.

The first part is aimed at analyzing, on a broad basis, the percentage of participants who label themselves as actual buyers of vintage apparel and the frequency with which they buy. Results suggested that more than a half of the individuals surveyed considered themselves as buyers of secondhand clothing (67%). With regards to the frequency of their purchases, only 27% of respondents revealed to be usual buyers, while a 73% considered themselves as occasional consumers.

When a comparison against fast fashion was proposed, an almost unanimous result was presented: 92% of respondents said they consider vintage wear as a better option to fast fashion.

Anyhow, if we compare this result with the percentage of the surveyed who considered themselves as active vintage buyers, an important consideration emerges. (Figure 6)

Figure 6



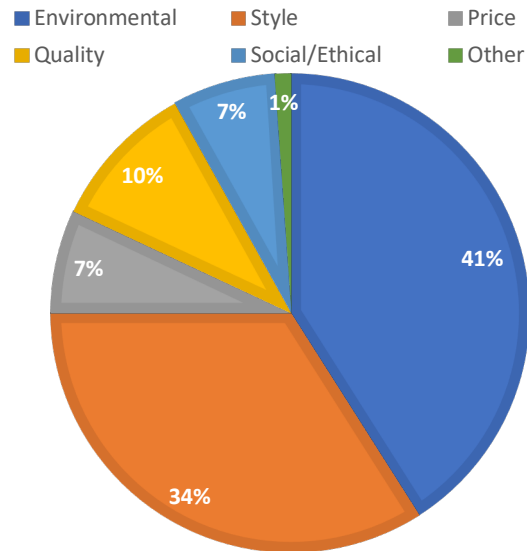
Source: made by the author

As showed by the graph above, while almost all the subjects surveyed advocated a definite preference for vintage over fast fashion, only 27% is a frequent secondhand buyer. This data reflects the presence of a gap between supporting sustainability within the fashion industry and actively engaging in the choice of sustainable practices, due to personal or convenience reasons.

The second part of the survey is perhaps the most explicative one and focuses on the motives which represented the reason why 92% of respondents agreed to consider vintage as a better option to fast fashion. Different answers were presented and have been grouped into categories to provide a systematic view and later be analyzed and explained in more detail. Figure 7 sums up the results of this question:

Figure 7

MOTIVES BEHIND THE CHOICE OF VINTAGE OVER FAST FASHION



Source: made by the author

1. Environmental motives

The graph presents the environment as the most mentioned matter behind the choice of vintage over fast fashion. This category includes the involvement of different topics, all concerned with the threatening ecological repercussions of fast fashion and positive results of vintage buying on the environment:

- Elimination of waste of natural materials and resources
- Enhancement of recycling and re-using practices
- Reduction of clothing waste
- Reduction of carbon footprint
- Reduction in overproduction and overconsumption
- Reduction in pollution

2. Style

A surprisingly high percentage shows that a vast number of the individual surveyed sees 'style' as the main driver of their choice. Many respondents referred to vintage as a 'never-

ending fashion’, defining its style and appearance as ‘timeless’ and mentioning how secondhand products will eventually come back in trend. Also, vintage wear is seen by many consumers as a source of inimitability: secondhand pieces are one-of-a-kind and cannot be found easily in other shops. As a consequence, vintage fashion gives individuals the possibility to be unique and inimitable in a world dominated by mass production. Many respondents highlighted how by buying vintage, “you never have to worry about someone wearing the same items as you”, allowing your personality and individuality to arise in a world where such characteristics are increasingly fading.

3. Quality

A valuable share of the respondents reported ‘quality’ as the primary reason for their secondhand shopping choice. Many mentioned how they consider fast fashion items to be produced in a poorly manner with low-quality materials and how these products consequently present a very short-lasting life. As opposed to this, the surveyed perceived vintage clothing as manufactured in a more efficient way with the usage of higher quality materials, aimed at ensuring a long-lasting life for the garment. This aspect is strengthened by the concept of vintage itself, based on a re-usage of products; such practice could not be possible if clothes presented low-quality and short-lasting characteristics.

4. Price

A small but still present percentage of respondents considered price as the reason behind vintage shopping. Anyhow, this factor has often been proposed as linked to the previous one of ‘quality’, meaning that secondhand clothing present a better price/quality relationship more than being generally cheaper.

5. Social/Ethical motives

With respect to previous empirical studies of the driving motives behind vintage clothing consumption, this percentage seems to be surprisingly small, accounting for just 7% of the surveyed. The following topics were mentioned by the respondents:

- Overall violation of workers’ rights
- Children abuse
- Going against general modern mass production
- Encouraging local economies rather than big industries

- Fighting conformity and consumeristic culture

6. Other

This group represents the answers given by individuals surveyed which have not recurred among the other participants, leaving them to ‘isolated cases’. Nonetheless, these answers represent an important tool for the understanding of minor drivers behind secondhand clothing consumption and give voice to a share of consumers which is often undervalued.

Motives included:

- Size characteristics : today’s mass-produced items do not present a structure which is meant to fit all type of sizes, making it impossible for a certain group of consumers to buy fast fashion.
- History of an item: already used and ‘loved’ items are considered by some, as having an added value due to their ‘hidden story’. Different respondents mentioned how, with vintage clothing, “each piece tells a story”.
- Thrifting: some considered the pre-acquiring process of searching for a vintage item as the main driver of their choice, mentioning how going through a large amount of apparel till finding the one that captures their attention, is a practice which adds value to the purchasing process and can be compared to the one of “browsing through old music vinyl”.

The survey shows how the motives behind vintage consumption and its preference over fast fashion present a variegated and multifaceted nature, linked not only to ethical reasons but also to personal characteristics as the research for individuality and a timeless style. Vintage fashion could strongly represent a valuable solution to the many issues faced by our modern clothing industry and its recent growth is expected to continue and increase over time, hopefully leading consumers to adopt this waste-reducing practice as their primary choice of consumption.

CONCLUSIONS

Our planet is reaching a dead end. The ecosystem's capacity to sustain itself and its living beings is slowly fading. Modern economy has brought and induced a series of unfortunate consequences with alarming repercussions on an ecological, social and environmental basis. The clothing industry represents a major player into enhancing this destructive process on all of its fronts. The production of garments includes the presence of strongly unsustainable practices such as the bottomless exploitation of natural resources, water pollution, release of toxic substances in the air, greenhouse emissions and textile waste accumulation. Furthermore, it involves the management of ethically unacceptable activities ranging from unsafe working conditions to children abuse. A crucial issue in the Fashion Industry is the one of waste, which finds its basis on the disposable mindset recently developed within modern society. Today's method of mass production has led to a point where consumers always beg for more, finding themselves with items of short longevity and no emotional attachment, which are easily replaced and thrown away as soon as their updated version is presented to the market. This conception has evolved in a constantly growing amount of waste agglomeration, posing the basis for an environmental issue that risks to destroy our planet if it is not acted upon. Apparel statistics alone highlight how an average family in the western world discards around 30kg of clothing each year. If we multiply this number for the total western population and we take into consideration expectations on global population growth within the next decades, the numbers which arise are critically dangerous and denote an urgent need for action. An application of the concept of Circular Economy within the fashion industry would result into an overall benefit for our environment and society. Considering the lack of official international regulations and guidelines for a concrete application of a circular system, this thesis focuses on the alternative of secondhand clothing, which is already-existing and is currently showing a magnificent market growth. The adoption of retailing practices from customers and the consequent choice of vintage over fast fashion, would result into a significant reduction of textile waste, as well as a change in customers' mindset. The rise in awareness towards ethical and environmental issues and the derived expansion of the conscious consumer has surely contributed to the positive growth of this sector. This in turn has helped to lay out threatening conditions for the fast fashion industry which, due to its unsustainable practices and unethical image, is slowly finding a valid opponent in secondhand retailing. The reason behind these favorable

circumstances towards vintage are many and, as described by the survey conducted, vary from environmental and ethical motives to matters of style and individuality. Aside from the variegated nature of the determinants of the mentioned growth, the increase in demand for re-usage practices within the fashion industry represents an important step towards the transformation of this resource-intensive and environmentally damaging system into a more cyclical and responsible economy.

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