

LUISS



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**How sustainability as a brand mission affects customer satisfaction
in the fashion industry: a field-research on the mediating roles of
guilt and trust**

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Academic Year 2020 / 2021

Per tutti coloro che hanno affrontato con me questo viaggio fianco a fianco lasciandomi qualcosa, anche un semplice frammento.

Per la mia famiglia, e chi continua a vivere alimentando la luce nei miei occhi.

Per i brevi e rari istanti, preziosi come metalli pregiati, in cui ho fugacemente percepito l'eternità.

Oltre le idee di giusto e di sbagliato, a mano a mano.

Roma, Copenhagen, Milano.
2019 – 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

AKCNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
1 INTRODUCTION	9
1.1 SUSTAINABILITY AND FASHION MARKET: A GENERAL OVERVIEW	9
1.2 SUSTAINABILITY IN THE APPAREL INDUSTRY: A LONG WAY TO GO.....	10
1.3 SOME ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY CASE STUDIES	10
1.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY	11
1.5 GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER	12
2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES.....	13
2.1 HYPOTHESIS 1: THE IMPACT OF SUSTAINABILITY ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	13
2.2 THE ROLE OF GUILT AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY SCENARIOS AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.....	17
2.3 THE ROLE OF TRUST AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN SUSTAINABILITY SCENARIOS AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.....	18
2.4 THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL: SUSTAINABILITY SCENARIOS IMPACT ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION WITH A 2-MEDIATOR EFFECT	21
3 METHOD	23
3.1 PARTICIPANTS: SAMPLE COMPOSITION AND DATA COLLECTION.....	23
3.2 SHOPPING HABITS AND SUSTAINABILITY AWARENESS.....	23
3.3 PROCEDURES	24
3.4 STIMULI.....	25
3.5 MEASURES.....	26
3.5.1 <i>Independent Variables</i>	26
3.5.2 <i>Mediating Variables</i>	27
3.5.3 <i>Dependent Variable</i>	27
3.6 DATA VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY	27
3.7 A COMPARISON BETWEEN TWO BRANDS WITH A PAIRED T-TEST, PATAGONIA AND ZARA	30
4 RESULTS.....	31
4.1 MEDIATION MODEL AND CONTROL VARIABLES.....	31
4.2 TOTAL EFFECT MODEL.....	32

4.3	A COMPARISON BETWEEN PATAGONIA AND ZARA: WHAT CHANGES IN BRAND PERCEPTION AND PURCHASE INTENTION REGARDING SUSTAINABILITY	33
5	GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	35
5.1	DISCUSSION	35
5.2	THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION	35
5.3	MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS	38
5.4	LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH	39
5.5	CONCLUSIONS.....	40
	REFERENCES	41
6	APPENDIX.....	49
6.1	GRAPHS AND CHARTS.....	49
6.1.1	<i>Table of Figures.....</i>	49
6.1.2	<i>Survey Charts.....</i>	49
6.2	SPSS OUTPUT	51
	<i>Demographics, Shopping Habits, Sustainability Awareness.....</i>	51
	<i>Confirmatory Factor Analysis</i>	57
	<i>Mediating Model and Control Variables.....</i>	63
	<i>Paired t-Test: Patagonia vs. Zara</i>	67
	SUMMARY	71

AKCNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before the start, I would like to thank everyone without whom I would have never reached this goal.

To all the professors and teaching assistants at my University, *LUISS Guido Carli*, to my Supervisor, Dr. Rumen Pozharliev, all the time proficient, helpful and gentle, to my Co-Supervisor, Dr. Michele Costabile, to all my colleagues that stimulated me to push my limits further every day, with a particular mention to my friends and fellow Edoardo, Carlotta, Flores, Luca, Roberto, Alessia and Chiara, to all the companies I have worked with and for through projects and assignments, especially *Fater* and *Mediaset*, to the *Copenhagen Business School* which taught me different and challenging ways of studying and facing obstacles and exams, to my exchange professors, colleagues and friends at CBS and *Nimbusparken* that made it an amazing experience of life as well as study, to *ProntoPro*, the company in Milan where I completed my curricular internship and where I am still currently and happily working at, to my managers and colleagues there who allowed me making mistakes and learning from, with a particular mention to Marine, Clara, Marco, and Andrea, to my family and all my friends from different places in Italy and all over the world, to Cristiano who promptly helped me.

To the eternal beauty of Rome which took me and changed my life, to the “hygge” lifestyle Copenhagen gave me and that I will never leave forever.

From the bottom of my heart,
thank you.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sustainability and fashion market: a general overview

Being a worldwide company in the third decade of the 21st century implies that it does not disregard the impact of business on the natural environment, regardless of the market. This problem is no longer for car manufacturers, oil and airlines companies only: during the last 20 years people from all over the world increased – more or less – their perception of the environmental problems (Figure 1) and started reflecting this awareness on their consumer behaviour and willingness to buy products (Nielsen, 2018).

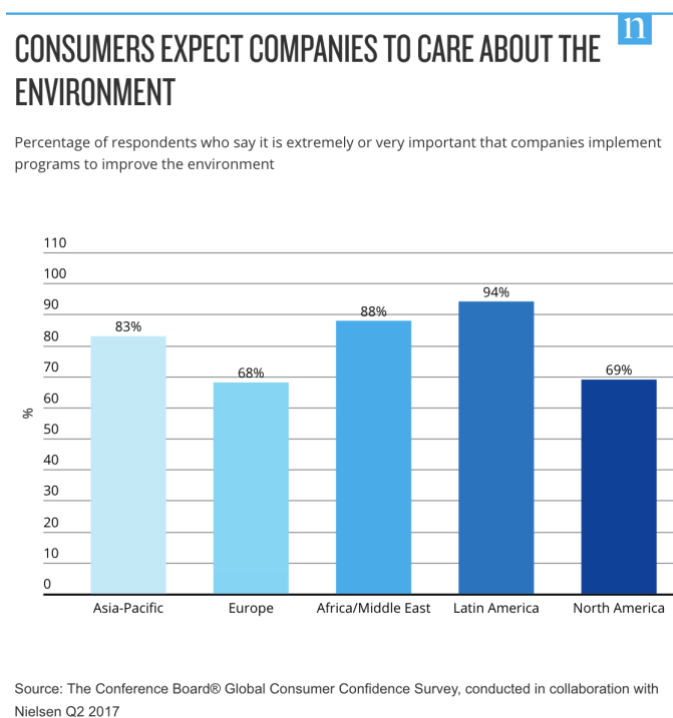


Figure 1 - Consumers' expectations about environment (Nielsen, 2018)

The fashion industry with all its niches lies in this complex field too. It may not be so heavily under the public opinion's spotlight as one of the worse "environment-friendly" market, but the overall impact on the world pollution is still noticeable: even if it is hard to define a conclusive chart of the most pollutant sectors, many research put fashion in the very first positions (Mukherjee, S., 2015) – 79 trillion litres of water consumed every year, 92 tons of waste and much more (Niinimäki et al., 2020). This means that especially big international companies must redesign the whole production flow with a central focus on the environment impact of each node of the pipeline, from the raw material processing to the final shop distribution (Porter, M.E., & Kramer, M.R., 2002). But even more than that, it becomes a fundamental branding and communication strategy to activate the "eco-friendly behaviour" into the customers (Lee et al., 2011) on a

side, and on the other one to gain a unique position in the competitive map as a brand which has the mission to leave the world a better place for the future generations.

1.2 Sustainability in the apparel industry: a long way to go

Notwithstanding, the fashion industry is still far away from taking a real and serious commitment to environmental stewardship. There are many and different reasons behind this: among them, the constant growth of demand for fast retail, a hard to change supply chain and the relative low customers' interest about environmental benefits, if compared to the product's price (Indvik, L., 2016; Appendix 6.1). Moreover, it is easier for smaller companies to build transparent supply chains, rather than for global fashion manufacturers, which may need to dismantle huge infrastructure systems at the expense of monetary and organizational costs. Huge fashion firms on a general basis are still far from being seriously engaged in this process, especially the biggest ones that rely upon scale economies and minimizing costs strategies. A remarkable percentage of them can be collocated in what is called "defensive Corporate Social Responsibility model" driven by reputation care (Brown, D.L., & Taylor, M.R., 2004), with the purpose to balance the social obligation with the stakeholders' interests. That is also explained by the evidence that approaching a full sustainability process rarely optimizes both the managerial organizations and profits. Recent academic works investigated the coexistence of profit and sustainability goals, reaching the conclusion that nowadays to accomplish that there still is the need to build some particular hybrid models that ground the strategy mostly on the beneficiaries, and then also deal with the "antagonists" (Alberti, M. & Garrido, F., 2017).

1.3 Some environment friendly case studies

However, there is also space for some exemptions and not only in the start-ups and small companies' segment. Levi Strauss created its "Terms of Engagement" in 1991, a global code of conduct regarding its supply chain, workers' rights, safe work environment and an environmentally friendly production pipeline (Levi Strauss & Co., 2019). Stella McCartney is one of the designers at the forefront of the sustainable movement: since the beginning of 2000 her namesake company has been driven towards some sustainability goals such as being PVC and PFC free, avoiding animal tests and leather usage, and more. Furthermore, Stella McCartney set its own policy regarding sustainability, moving a further step forward from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions (Novitz, T., 2020). According to these new principles, McCartney's suppliers are now supposed to uphold some strict codes of conduct regarding production techniques and processes, always in a collaborative approach with the company that dictates the guidelines and make orders (McCartney, S., 2020).

Do you agree that luxury brands are more respectful of the environment than other brands in the apparel, fashion, accessories industry?

Opinions on sustainability of luxury brands in Italy 2020

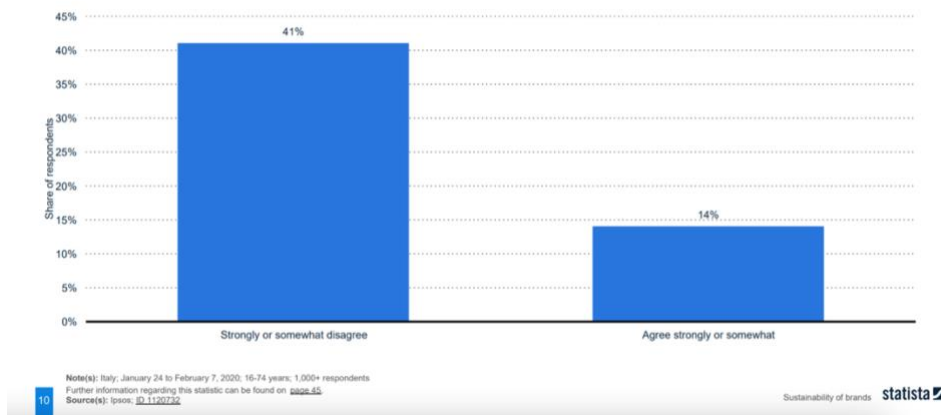


Figure 2 - Opinions of sustainability of luxury brands in Italy (Statista, 2020)

In this complex environment there is also space for some righteous companies in less niche markets as luxury fashion. One relevant example is Patagonia, a nearly 50-year old American apparel company. The theoretical model they adopted is totally overturned with the respect to most of the competitors: Patagonia has been a purely ethics-driven company since the very beginning, advocating sustainability as a mission. And what matters the most is the radical change in the business model: it adopted Corporate Social Responsibility as an innovative competitive advantage, offering to their customers lasting products that help them to live in a more environmentally responsible way (Patagonia, 2020). Later in this work this brand will be analysed in comparison with a fast fashion one, Zara, to better comprehend potential differences in the customers' perception.

1.4 Contribution of the study

A number of research has been done on the field of sustainability, with the fashion industry being in the group of the cases at issue mostly analysed by academics, which conducted to different and interesting conclusions. There are hardly disruptive findings left to discover in this field: the academic focus is more related to getting to know the topic from every different angle. Indeed, the target of this work is to improve this diversified literature with a particular viewpoint on the matter supported by a meticulous primary data collection.

In this study the customer satisfaction has been defined as the dependent variable; many previous researches already brought up to light some insights about different impacts on customer satisfaction regarding sustainability issues, with their findings used here as reliable basements. For the author it was interesting to consider two variables, trust and feeling of guilt, in the role of remarkable influencers – in academic taxonomy, mediators – on the customer satisfaction. In this direction there was a certain lack of previous literature, that

pushed the author to go deeper into the causes and consequences and make a research model to fill this void. The results from this manipulation were supposed to address some conclusions on the two mentioned variables, with the help of the on-field data collection.

From the very beginning, the ambitious goal of this work was to outline some key factors with potential value in the broad sense, starting directly from the field. This does not mean that this study's entity is satisfactory enough to draw conclusions on the topic, which is very wide and complex to analyse and cannot be reduced to a mere academic model. The key results explained in this script must be considered as interesting insights that can pinpoint some key conclusions to deep dive in for further and more complete research, which have bigger and different processes than a simple academic Master Thesis work.

1.5 General structure of the paper

This study provided a “mediator model” which is explained in detail in the next chapters: the results unveiled some relevant findings both for academic and commercial stakeholders. Thus, after a first part regarding the available literature about these topics review, the script will explain meticulously the creation of the various hypotheses, linking them with the related theoretical background.

After that there is a chapter regarding the academic method, which is going to depict each step of the technical process applied to accomplish the goal of this work. Firstly, there will be explained the method used to gather participants, the descriptive statistics and therefore the procedure to introduce them to the stimulus, namely the two scenarios that impact their satisfaction stressed by the mediators “Guilt” and “Trust”. The survey is composed by two parts, which will be thoroughly explained in the relative chapter: after the mentioned mediator model there is also an analysis of two specific brand cases, Patagonia and Zara. As mentioned, Patagonia's CSR model is well known in the sustainability environment, and it is useful to study its features that made it one of the most recognizable brands in fashion to understand this market nowadays. More specifically, a confrontation is made to compare the two brands pivoting on some different features regarding sustainability perception in the customers, with the aim to understand if there is a real and significant difference, and in what magnitude.

The final output is a two-side divided survey that provided some good results and incremented the number of sources to study this topic, even though at a raw level considering the tools and procedures at the disposal of an MSc academic work. These results are exposed with the support of statistical evidence, charts and graphs (Appendix 6.1), to make the output as plain as possible to the reader.

A general discussion will follow in the end, analysing the theoretical contribution of this work and how it can have managerial implications. As a conclusion, the limits and gaps not filled by this research are pinpointed to evidence possible areas of improvements for further and future academic works.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 Hypothesis 1: the impact of sustainability on customer satisfaction

The world is getting through huge changes which impact all the aspects of life in a certain way. With the boost to the digitization and the raise of digital culture, more and more people are trying to be aware of what is happening around them, both in a local and in a global way. Customers are more willing to understand the process behind a t-shirt they are buying, they are curious about the pipeline that brought a piece of cotton from somewhere in the world to be a coloured and trendy piece of clothing to wear (Marín-García et al., 2021). These increasing customers' awareness and conscience are remarkable not only for the final shopping experience – maybe physically at the store – but they are very important for many and broader reasons like company's reputation, branding and, more concretely, customer satisfaction and then sales and revenues (Whelan, T. & Kronthal-Sacco, R., 2019).

On a theoretical background, the environmentalism movement has recent roots compared to trade's evolution among history. The first book that analysed this trend was published in 1962 – “Silent Spring” by Rachel Carlson – and not before the late 20th century it became a true full-fledged industry. The food industry has been one of the first sector to be influenced by this wave, while on the other side a very huge one like fashion lagged behind for many years before getting the proper attention. The main pollution of the fashion industry regards lands and water, and another big problem to solve is the manufacturing and post-purchase waste that ends up in landfills (Dietz, D., 2017), considering the exponential increase of the consumption. Environmentalism as a mission could be considered a part of the more general topic that is Corporate Social Responsibility (later in the work just “CSR”). CSR has been defined by the European Commission as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis” (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

More specifically for this work, sustainability refers to doing business without negatively impacting the environment, community, or society as a whole. This can refer to two different stakeholders – considered with a broad meaning – that are tied together: environment and society. Not only sustainability is a key to preserve the world we live in and the quality of our lives but it is also a fundamental factor to drive investments: many investors today consider environmental, social and governance (ESG) as an index to measure an organization's ethical impact and sustainability practices. Investors consider elements such as a company's water usage, carbon footprint, community development efforts and board diversity (Whelan, T. & Fink, C., 2016). A good metric is the “Triple Bottom Line”, a business concept to whom companies can commit to moderate the environmental impact rather than just focus on the profit, which represents the standard “bottom line”. This concept can be divided into three parts (the “3P”): Profit, People and the Planet (Whelan, *ibid*). Even though

this can seem idealistic and ephemeral, in many cases pursuing these goals has become crucial also for the companies' financial stability, as long as the customers are increasingly careful of the process and pipelines that bring the products to the shelf. Indeed, almost half (48%) of U.S. consumers sustained in a recent survey that they would think about changing their consumption habits with a high level of probability to reduce their impact on the environment. And these consumers are already making actions follow to words putting their money on sustainable fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), with \$128.5 billion USD spent in 2019 (Nielsen IQ, 2018). Thus, CSR is starting to be no more just a matter of "corporate philanthropy" (Porter, *ibid*) but it is now increasingly recognized as a source of competitive advantage, and for this reason treated like a crucial asset of the company.

No exception for the fashion and apparel market: due to the rapid growth of awareness about environment issues, market leaders must pay more attention to the causes and improve their performance with respect to the sustainability goals. Furthermore, innovations in terms of sustainability are not only related to the product but can embrace many different fields of the company business. One example is to build a network of companies with the shared goal of having a concrete impact and can be pursued by taking different paths. A common one implemented by companies is the cooperation with non-profit associations following a "win-win" strategy. Indeed, the fashion firm takes advantage linking its name to well-known and respectable associations, not only with concrete and real actions but also with the benefits in terms of brand reputation. On the other hand, non-profit associations are always seeking for commercial partners to spread their mission and increase funds raised and people's awareness. One of the best examples in this direction is the "Destination Zero", the huge project launched by the non-profit association Greenpeace in 2012 that promoted the progressive removal of chemical material from the production of clothes; some of the most famous brands in the world, such as Nike, Burberry, H&M and many more, embraced this goal and committed to the guidelines (Greenpeace International, 2018).

Finally, the impact of COVID-19 on the firms' value has been huge, but sustainability operated as a painkiller against it. Even though generally where the impact of COVID-19 was high so was the decrease of the firm's value, this negative trend was less pronounced for companies with better sustainability performance. More specifically, these just mentioned performances regards a strong orientation to stakeholders and environmental value (Bose et al., 2021). Recent studies stated that businesses with a higher level of sustainability performance can better deal with some aspects of fiscal and legislative actions (Berman et al., 1999; Cheng et al., 2013; Hillman, A. & Keim, G., 2001) and attract both socially conscious consumers (Hillman *ibid*; Rashid et al., 2020) and socially responsible investors (Kapstein, E., 2001; Cheng *ibid*). In a recent survey of 12,000 people from 12 countries, near 65 % of respondents stated that their future purchasing decisions would be influenced by the firm's response during the COVID-19 pandemic (Edelmann Group, 2020). Moreover, companies that are more engaged with their stakeholders with the strategy of maintaining a high level of sustainability

performance are more visible (Bose, *ibid*). These strategies not only had a lifesaver role during the pandemic but they are also a basement to build the future after it. Indeed, the Covid-19 storm provided the opportunity to evaluate how firms dealt with their stakeholders during the crisis as well as how they are behaving in present time. All this commitment to sustainability has the noble target to make a remarkable impact on the world environment, but on the other hand it is also a concrete move to enhance the brand reputation and commercial results of the companies. Previous research proved that companies that made sustainability effort have also better scores in terms of attractiveness and loyalty (Mijeong, N. & Johnson, K.K.P., 2019). As aforementioned, choosing – and even more, communicating – sustainability is increasingly becoming a huge competitive advantage, even though with some differences depending on the market. On the other hand though, customers are getting more careful about the authenticity of companies’ statements, communication and actions. This way, a misleading communication strategy can retaliate against the company itself and become a threat for its reputation: this phenomenon is called “greenwashing” (Dahl, R., 2010), namely exaggerating claims of sustainability or environmental care with the goal to gain market share and competitive advantage. According to a report published by the advertising consultant Terra Choice, a huge percentage of the selected products that in promotion and advertising were bragging green claims resulted to be guilty of greenwashing (Terrachoice, 2010). The impact of greenwashing on the customer satisfaction is still a topic mainly uncovered by academics, but without a doubt the consumer will be more and more the true “actor” of the production and not just the final buyer (Fabris, G., 2008), putting his/her satisfaction at the very centre; this trend will be affected also by the raising awareness on the sustainability issues, leading companies to try to reach an honest balance between true and sincere effort in being sustainable and the right communication of these strategies without crossing the limit of exaggerated and not verified claims.

Some studies have been conducted to better understand the relationship between sustainability and customer satisfaction, and the retail industry is not excluded by this list (Marin-Garcia *ibid*). Surprisingly, even though this sector is one of the most polluting of the world, customers generally seem to take less care of the consequences of their shopping habits in this field compared to others, like food for instance. Indeed, fast fashion increased constantly in recent years and is expected to double its value worldwide in 10 years, forecasting a value of 43 billion US \$ in 2029 (Fig 3, ThredUp Resale Report, 2020).

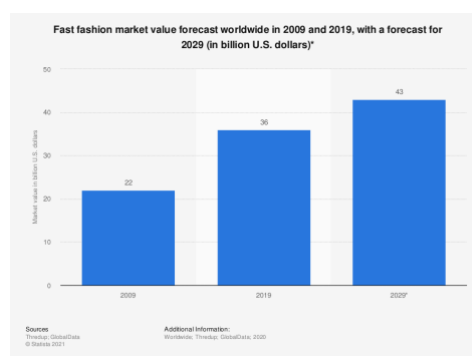
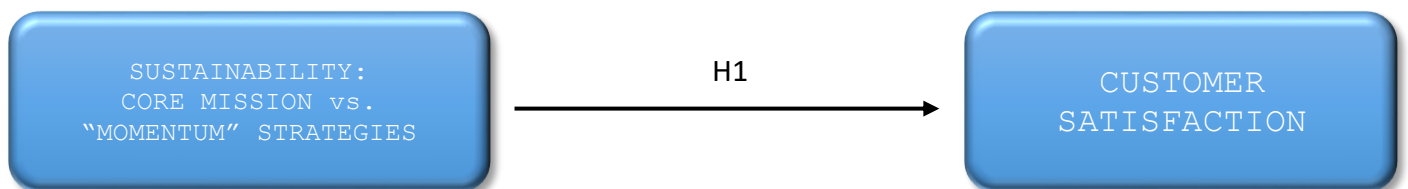


Figure 3 - Fast fashion market value and next 10 years forecast (ThredUp, 2020)

In the light of this, it is even more interesting trying to answer some of these juxtapositions providing on field-collected data. In such a sense, the first hypothesis considers the two different scenarios of the Independent Variable Sustainability: the company with sustainability as a core mission is expected to impact more positively customer satisfaction rather than the one with “momentum” green strategies. As a starting point, the direct effect between the Independent Variable “Sustainability” and the Dependent one “Customer satisfaction” must be proven. The hypothesis is enounced as follows:

H1. *Perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand positively affects Customer Satisfaction*



The Independent Variable is concentrated on the potential difference in perception of the sustainability commitment. To build a reliable scenario with two distinct cases in point, the author imaged the customer perceiving the stimulus to buy a piece of clothing the same way for both cases, running into an ads content scrolling a social media feed, made constant all the external factors apart from the content of the ad which is customized with the two different brand claims, tags and images; the exact stimulus will be precisely explained in the next chapter. The goal of this hypothesis test is to verify if and in what measure the perception of sustainability affects the customer satisfaction in each of the two scenarios, building the basement for the comparison of the two scenarios.

2.2 The role of guilt as a mediator between sustainability scenarios and customer satisfaction

On a general level, customer satisfaction is a dependent variable that can be directly and indirectly influenced by many factors. Sustainability, which in this study plays the role of the manipulated Independent Variable, is only one of the numbers. Among the others, the author decided to focus specifically on two of them in this study: they are feelings and perception activated in the mind of the customer thanks to sustainability efforts by the fashion company.

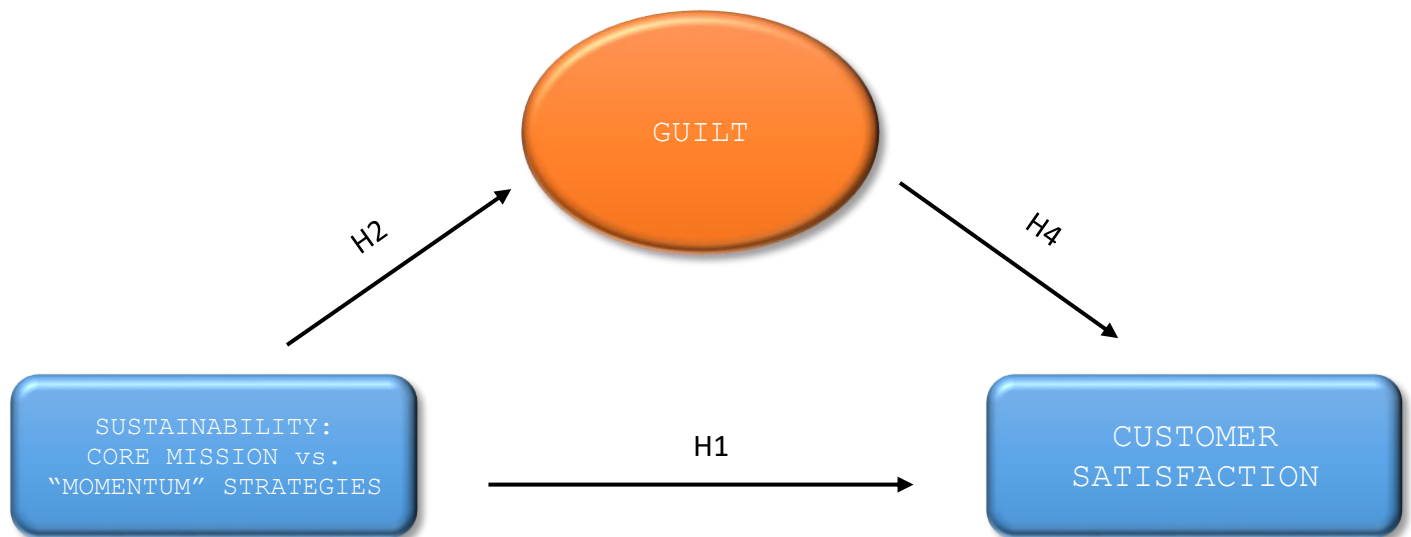
The first one is a powerful interior perception that customers feel on many occasions during shopping experiences, not only the ones regarding fashion items: the perception of guilt before, during and after a purchase. On a general level there are plenty of academic works analysing causes and effects of guilt felt by customers in every different stage of the purchase process, from the stimulus to the post-buy experience. Each product category has different features in the way a purchase generates guilt in the customer, due to different types of potential harm received from it, and many more causes. For some direct health damaging products like tobacco and cigarettes the sense of guilt is stronger (Kazancoglu, İ., et al, 2021). For products that do not directly harm the person but can have some indirect effect on the guilt feelings, such as fast fashion clothes, the effect and the way it shows are slightly different. For instance, in this case another important factor to consider is the type of customer, like hedonistic against utilitarian ones. Self-gifting is a relevant motivation to buy for hedonistic customers, leading to different reasons like hedonic, therapeutic, rewarding and celebratory. Each of these particular types of shopping behaviours has some different effects on regret and sense of guilt (Clarke, P., & Mortimer, G., 2013).

In this study the focus of the analysis regards the effect on the sense of guilt activated in the two sustainability scenarios, the first one as a strong stewardship by the fashion firm that founds its basement in the past, while the second one as some attempts to improve brand reputation with green actions and marketing statements. At this point, the author formulated the first relationship that may tie together the Scenario and the Dependent Variable customer satisfaction.

The hypothesis representing this gap in the research model is the following:

H2. *Perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand negatively affects the Guilt feeling*

H4. *The decrease of Guilt feeling positively affects Customer Satisfaction*



In this case, the sense of guilt plays the mediator role between the sustainability scenarios and the customer satisfaction in the research model. The author’s goal is to consider and study the impact of the two scenarios on the sense of guilt felt by the customers, and therefore to measure this feeling’s effect on their final satisfaction. There are two distinct relationships in the mediator model: the first one regards the direct effect of scenarios on the sense of guilt and is represented by H2, and the second one measures the impact of this feeling on the customer satisfaction (H4). These two hypotheses aim to compare between the scenarios the total effect, the direction and the magnitude of the mediator guilt.

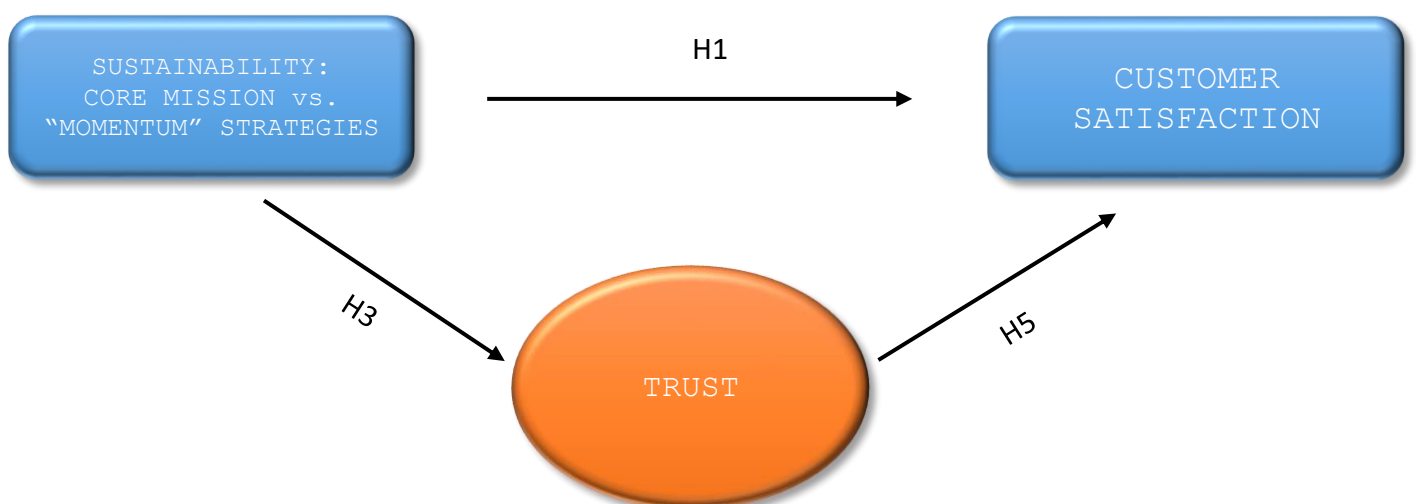
2.3 The role of trust as a mediator between sustainability scenarios and customer satisfaction

On the other side, the second mediator considered in this work is the feeling of trust towards a brand. Brand loyalty is one of the elements that compose the brand equity, namely the reaction and response of customers to marketing strategies of a company regarding a product, given by the brand identification (Romaniuk, J., & Nenycz-Thiel, M., 2013). One of the hardest goals of every company’s marketing team is to align the “consumer-based brand equity” (CBBE) with the “sales-based brand equity” (SBBE), more specifically matching what people think about a brand and in what measure they convert this perception into purchases of that brand’s products (Datta et al., 2017). One of the most remarkable parts of Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) regards brand loyalty, an outcome that companies heavily desire to reach. Again, brand loyalty has been studied a lot by academics, in some cases combined with customer satisfaction and brand equity, variously manipulating these variables to measure different effects and directions of the relationships on field (Nam, J. et al, 2011). According to Jacoby, brand loyalty is conceptually defined in terms of 6 necessary and sufficient conditions as: “(a) biased (i.e., non-random), (b) behavioural response, (c) expressed over time, (d)

some decision-making units, (e) with respect to one or more brands out of a set of such alternative brands, and (f) a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes.” (Jacoby, J., 1971). Given these conditions, the analysis of all the potential elements that can have an impact on one of them or on brand loyalty as a whole is very long. Regarding the goal of this work, sustainability is the core topic to analyse as long as it is playing an increasingly remarkable role in this direction. Notwithstanding, not all the products categories register the same results. This is a strong element for products like food in which market customers are advocating a change in the consumption to be more and more sustainable, but even in that case there can be some differences regarding types of food. For instance, keeping constant the impact on the output of demographics like gender, nationality and more, that can be highly remarkable in some specific cases, previous studies have provided some evidence about customers being willing to pay more for sustainable fruit and vegetables products rather than seafood ones (Li et al., 2021). Nonetheless, for what it concerns the fashion industry, if we take the 3-level division of apparel brands made by Noh – luxury, fast fashion and moderate – a positive role for sustainability in the customer-brand identification for all the levels is proven, concluding that there is no difference in the way customers perceive the sustainability effort of a brand from this sector (Li, M. & Noh, M., 2018).

Continuing on this path, in this specific work the author focused on the impact that perceiving a sincere and long-term commitment to sustainability for a fashion firm enhance the trust that customers prove in its regard, and therefore if this sense of trust positively impacts the customer satisfaction. The hypotheses emerged from this literature review are the following:

- H3.** Perception of sustainability commitment positively affects the Trustworthiness towards the fashion brand
- H5.** The increase of Trustworthiness towards the brand positively affects Customer Satisfaction



The first hypothesis tested here is about the relationship between sustainability scenarios and trust, comparing again the same two cases in which sustainability is a core mission for a company and another one trying to take advantage of it with temporary strategy and communications. The goal of the author is to measure the impact of the scenario on the customers' trust towards the brand, and therefore consider this mediator effect on the customer satisfaction, with a statistical comparison between the two scenarios' outputs perfectly symmetrical respect to the one conducted for Guilt.

2.4 The conceptual model: sustainability scenarios impact on customer satisfaction with a 2-mediator effect

The final research model of this study is composed by the 5 hypotheses previously explained.

There is one direct effect represented by the impact of sustainability scenarios on the customer satisfaction, which is the first hypothesis. Here the output is given by the differences between the two scenarios and their direct effect on the customer satisfaction, which is the model dependent variable.

H2 and H3 represent the direct effects of the scenarios on the two mediators, respectively sense of guilt and trust. These hypotheses are not studied independently but are combined with H4 and H5, the effect of the two mediators on the dependent variable. The final goal of this model is to compare the output of Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 in their entirety, and then unbundle all the differences regarding the mediators' effect.

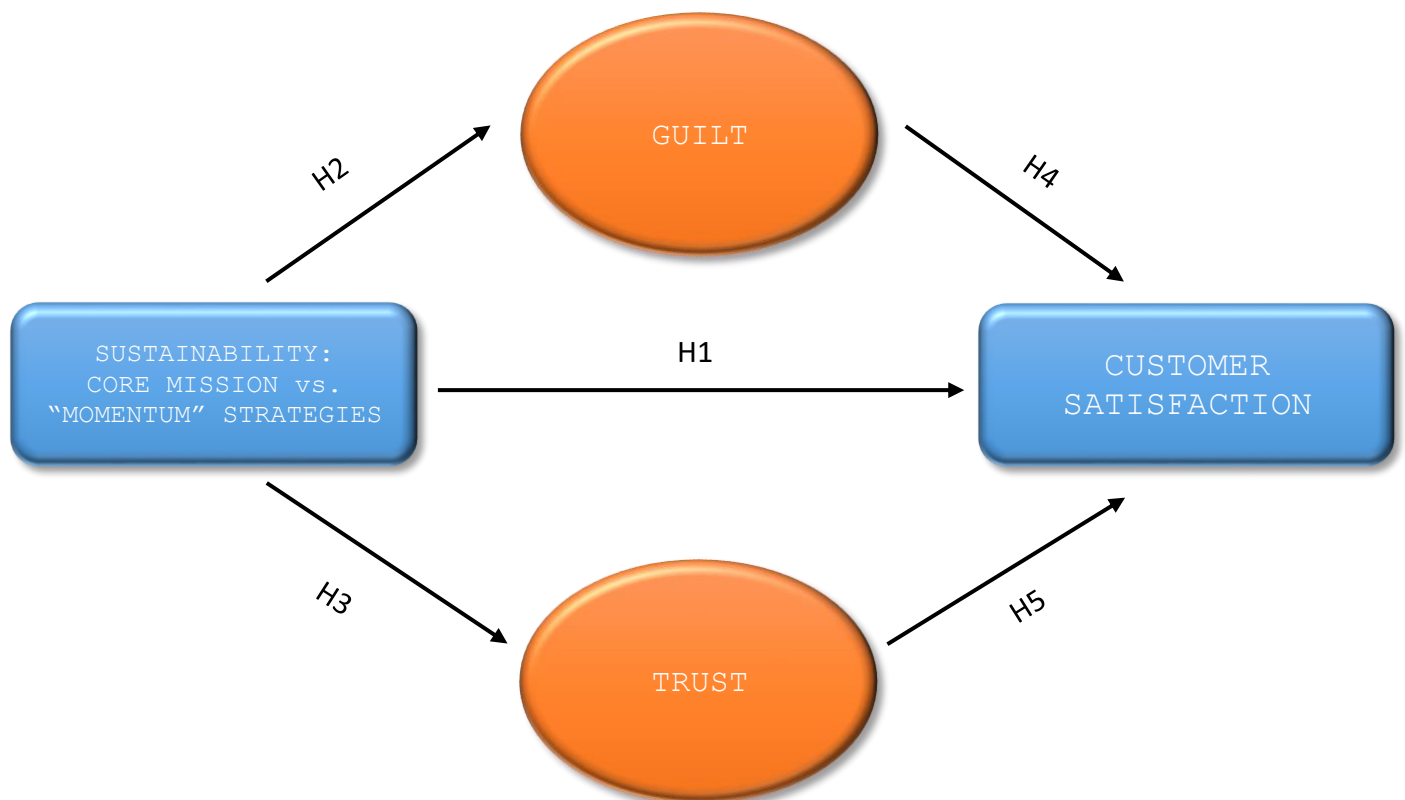


Figure 4 - Research Model

3 METHOD

3.1 Participants: sample composition and data collection

To conduct this study the author built a survey using Qualtrics, a platform gently offered by LUISS University. This tool is used by academics to design and compose online surveys and then to spread them to the public, in this case with no particular criteria to extract the sample of participants, being the goal of this work of general and worldwide interest without specific different features. Then the author made use of proximity and convenience sampling methods, like university and workspaces networks, acquiescence, and online platforms for academic studies share and discussion.

Analysing the structure of the survey, in the introduction the author wanted to explain the respondent that it was created for scientific purposes, collecting data for a marketing analytics Master's Thesis in a complete anonymous way, retrieving only demographic information that could not be linked with each singular response in any chances. Then, before proceeding with the survey the respondents were also informed that concluding the study they were confirming to be 18 years old or more and giving consent to the data collection and analysis of their answers.

In total, 239 anonymous answers to the survey were finally collected. 4 of them were incompletely submitted for external different reasons and were eliminated by the study, giving a final cleaned sample of 235 respondents. Considering gender and age distribution (Appendix 6.1), the sample is composed by 51.5 % female subjects and by 48.5 % of 18-24 year-old people, the largest registered age group, followed by 25-30 (39.1 %), 31-40 (8.9 %), 41-50 (2.6 %) and 51-60 (0.9 %).

Regarding nationality, 68.9 % of the sample is coming from Italy, with the remaining 31.1 % spared between 13.2 % from another European Country and 17.9 % from outside the EU (Appendix 6.1). Occupation distribution indicates that most of the respondents are students (54.9 %), with the almost remaining half of them distributed respectively as Employed (26.4 %), Self-Employed (9.8 %), Unemployed (2.1 %) and 6.8 % of Not Specified job situations (Appendix 6.1).

3.2 Shopping habits and sustainability awareness

Furthermore, some questions were made about shopping habits of the respondents to study and analyse potential distinguishable behavioural patterns. It resulted that 72.3 % of the participants went shopping only monthly or less before the Covid-19 pandemic (Appendix 6.1), concluding that going out looking for fashion products is not a very common activity for them regardless of external factors. Also, whether considering shopping or not as a valuable way to spend free time is a similarly divided opinion within the participants: 37.2 % does not agree with it, while on the other hand 45.5 % of them does (in between, 17 % neither agrees nor disagrees and 0.4 % does not know). The questions about looking for fashionable products and

consideration of price are more polarized: 69.8 % of the respondents wants to look for products that are fashionable, but on the other hand 50.4 % considers Price the most important variable in the shopping experience and nearly the totality of them (90.9 %) values the Quality to Price Ratio as important (Appendix 6.1).

For what concerns the awareness of sustainability as a topic and the most important problems related to it, the results from this sample are encouraging: a cumulative percentage of 85 % of the respondents is worried in a certain way about the state of the natural environment, with only 4.7 % that answered not being worried. Notwithstanding, this percentage decreases when it comes to putting a concrete effort to the cause: only 34.7 % said to endeavour to buy clothes that are low in pollutants, a value that slightly increases to 45.4 % about trying to put some effort in buying items that can be recycled somehow (Appendix 6.1).

This sample revealed that mostly among young students generally geographically distributed sustainability is a topic they care about in terms of awareness and attention, but still with a lot of improvements that can be made when it comes to playing a concrete role to marginalize the relative problems.

For what concerns this work, this pre-analysis is useful to define a frame of the considered sample in their personal features and behaviours when making conclusions about the core elements of the research. This general descriptive analysis could also be an interesting baseline in the future to study how and in which cases this lack of willingness to be part of the process can be reduced by enhancing in people the desire to make some concrete effort: a useful suggestion to further researches in this different direction.

3.3 Procedures

The online survey built to serve this study is composed by 28 questions divided into 4 parts. The default language is English but there was the option to switch to Italian if the respondents wanted to. After the author introduction with the presentation of the survey and the privacy statements, the first part is focused on shopping habits and sustainability awareness as aforementioned. After this introduction, the respondents were led to the core part of the study, the manipulation of the two scenarios which compose the hypotheses. These scenarios were randomly exposed to the respondents thanks to a Qualtrics' automatic feature that allowed the author to show them only one of the two, either Scenario A or Scenario B, and then answering the same questions with the goal of comparing the results afterwards to spot differences. The details of the stimuli, the related questions and results which represent the most important part of this work are explained in the following paragraphs.

Then the third one is an appendix to the core research model. Here the respondents were introduced to two brands, Patagonia and Zara, as mentioned very different in terms of company dimensions, ideal consumer, business and CSR models. In this case all the respondents saw both brands' logos and were asked if they knew them; according to their answers, the same questions were asked about both brands regarding sustainability,

authenticity, perception, willingness to buy and more. This allowed the author to run a comparison model and analyse potential and significant differences.

Finally, the last part is about demographics, useful to picture a frame of the sample in terms of gender, age, nationality, occupation and more.

3.4 Stimuli

The core part of this study pivots on the stimuli to which the respondents were exposed in the second part of the survey. Here there are two different scenarios (Figures below): then respondents were randomly assigned one of the two, composed of text and image.

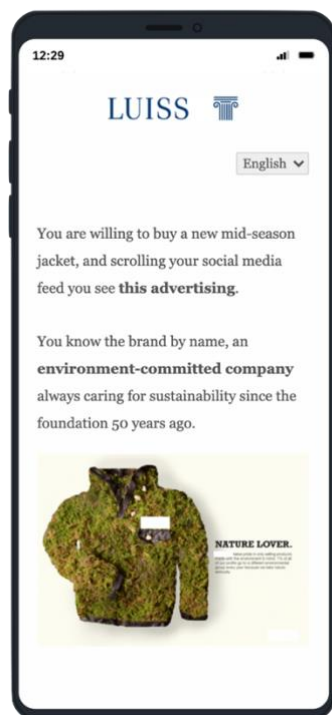


Figure 5 - Scenario 1

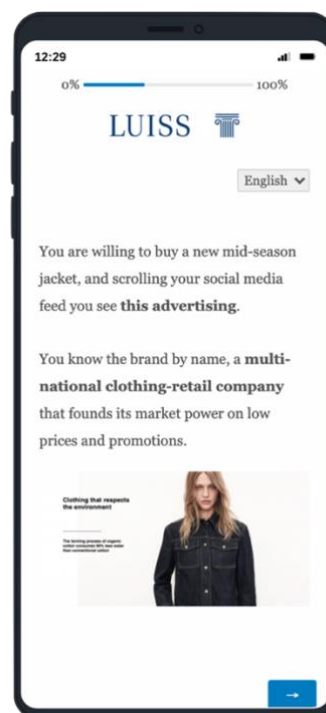


Figure 6 - Scenario 2

To provide a reliable comparison just on the object of this work avoiding any other external and potentially influent factors on the output, both scenarios introduce the respondent into the same daily life experience, the willingness to buy a new jacket. In this case, the trigger is an advertising seen online: “You are willing to buy a new mid-season jacket, and scrolling down your social media feed you see this advertising. You know the brand by name, and...”; at this point the stimulus is divided into different ads, which represent the two scenarios object of this study which are randomized. Scenario 1 is the ad showed by a company well known to be strongly committed to the sustainability cause, since its very first establishment. The tagline focuses on the love for the nature, adding that 1 % of all company’s profits goes to environmental groups. The tone of voice here is more directed towards branding rather than promoting the specific product. Scenario 2 on the

other hand is an advertising from a multi-national brand which established its power in the fashion industry thanks to aggressive low prices promotions and cost and process cuttings. The line this way is related to the specific product, a mid-season denim jacket produced with organic cotton making the ad say that it is a piece of clothing that respects the environment.

Finally, it is important to consider that to avoid biases in the respondents due to knowing the two brands or relating to previously shopping experience – both positive and negative – the brand logos are hidden.

3.5 Measures

Data analyses were performed using the platform IBM SPSS Statistics 26 Version 3.5, with the auxilium of PROCESS Model 4 by Andrew F. Hayes (2017) to proceed with inferential analyses. PROCESS Model number 4 is used to study the double mediation effect of guilt and trust on the customer satisfaction.

3.5.1 Independent Variables

The independent variable is represented by the following Scenarios, namely the two different stimuli explained before:

Scenario 1: Sustainability as a core mission for the fashion brand

Scenario 2: Sustainability as a “momentum” strategy for the fashion brand

The validity of both Scenarios has already been tested by academics: the first one is an advertisement taken from Patagonia, which as a company resulted 2nd overall in the Top 20 GlobeScan Sustainability Leaders Survey (Figure 7, GlobeScan, 2020); the second one is taken from Zara, whose brand image among the customers is far away from sustainability as a constant value – in a recent survey among 250,000 people, less than 1 % considered sustainability a relevant element of Zara’s products and strategy (Real Researcher, 2021).

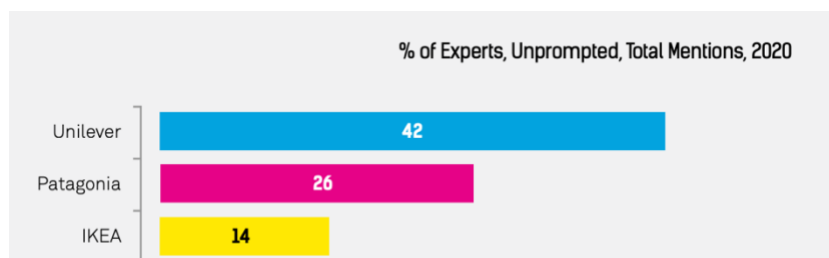


Figure 7 - Top 3 Sustainability Leaders worldwide in 2020 (GlobeScan)

Considered this, the two brand names were obscured anyway by the author to avoid any possible bias in the respondents due to previous experiences. Thanks to the casual randomization of scenarios implemented by

Qualtrics, 116 respondents were shown the first one and 119 the second one, making them answer the same questions but divided by stimuli.

3.5.2 Mediating Variables

To build this conceptual model, two elements were found interesting by the author to analyse the role of mediators between Scenario and the customer satisfaction: the perception of guilt considering the purchase of a certain product and the feeling of trust towards the brand. The theoretical background that led to these two has been already explained in the previous chapter.

The factor “Guilt” is composed by 3 scales a priori selected by the author, answering the following question with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): “buying a product from this brand would make me feel:” “guilty”, “remorseful” and “regretful” (Ki et al., 2017; Hung et al., 2011). The 3 scales (5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) that are supposed to represent the factor Trust are answering the question “seeing this advertising from this brand would make me:” with “think that is an honest brand”, “rely on this brand” and “trust the brand” (Koschate-Fischer, N. & Gartner, S., 2015).

3.5.3 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this work is represented by the customer satisfaction. The manipulation of this study aims to analyse the effects brought by the sustainability scenario on this factor, with the mediating role of the two mentioned variables “Guilt” and “Trust”. The scales selected for this factor are answering the question “buying a product from this brand would:” with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) “make me feel happy”, “give me pleasure” and “make me feel satisfied” (Ki, *ibid*). Again, to extract only one factor a process of data validation is run to confirm the a priori scales selection.

3.6 Data validity and reliability

Before starting the analysis of the various relationships between the variables and the following results, it is important to run a factor analysis to confirm validity and reliability of the selected scales; some statistic methods are used by the author to accomplish this task.

Firstly, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis is conducted to determine the factors that may represent both the mediators, “Guilt” and “Trust”, and the Dependent Variable, “Customer Satisfaction”. For this goal the first criterion is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and therefore the Bartlett’s Test for Sphericity. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is a statistic that tells the proportion of variance in the selected variables that might be caused by underlying factors: the higher the values close to 1 – interval 0-1 – the likelier a factor analysis may be useful. Then, Bartlett’s Test for Sphericity verifies the hypothesis that the correlation matrix studied is an identity matrix, which would affirm that the selected scales are unrelated and therefore unsuitable

for structure detection. The goal of this measure is to register the lower possible value, that means rejecting null hypothesis and affirm that the selected scales are suitable for the factor analysis.

After that, “communalities” and “eigenvalue” analyses are run for all the variables to confirm the validity of the a priori selected scales of this study. The acceptable lower threshold of communalities is 50 % (0.5, interval 0-1) for all the scales that are supposed to represent just one factor. The eigenvalue analysis represents the measure of how much of the variance a factor explains. Any factor with an eigenvalue higher than 1 explains more variance than a single observed variable, and on the other hand this value indicates whether it is the case to add more than one factor or not, if a 2-component factor would still explain an eigenvalue higher than 1. Finally, to add more certainty to the goodness of the process, the “elbow-point” empirical check of the Scree plot of the eigenvalues is done, along with the component matrix chart that studies the correlation of each scale with the latent factor. At this point, having confirmed the validity of the scales, the reliability of each extracted factor is tested with the Cronbach’s Alpha Analysis: technically, Cronbach’s Alpha is not a statistical test but a coefficient of reliability, and can be written as a function of the number of test items and the average inter-correlation among the items. More practically speaking, how close a set of different items are as a unique group. Regarding the acceptability threshold for the coefficient there are different academic opinions: generally in most of the social science researches 0.7 (interval 0-1) is set as the minimum good level of consistency, but it can be lowered for instance to 0.6 with few items scales, like the 3-item one of this work (Lance et al., 2006).

Starting with the first mediator, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis is conducted to determine the factor that represents the concept of “Guilt” with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) criterion. In this case, KMO Indicator is 0.712 – that is above 0.6. Afterwards, the Bartlett’s Test for Sphericity outlined a p-value < 0.001: result is perfect according to every possible significance level. The factor “Guilt” is composed by the 3 scales a priori selected: feelings of guilt, remorse and regret. Here a check of the communalities is run to verify that these 3 scales are sufficiently correlated to each other: they are all above 0.5 – interval 0-1 – and confirm the a priori selection (respectively, 0.878, 0.917, 0.787). The following analysis is the study of the eigenvalues: in this case 1-component factor register an eigenvalue of 2.58 that explains 86.07 % of the total variance. On the other hand, the 2-component supposed factor would explain an eigenvalue of only 0.312, widely below 1 and then not suitable, confirming the goodness of extracting only one factor – perception of guilt – from the 3 selected scales aforementioned (guilt, remorse, regret).

Continuing with the second variable, “feeling of trust towards a brand”, the same process is adopted. Here the 3 scales that are supposed to represent the factor are [“seeing this ad would make me...”] “think that is an honest brand”, “rely on this brand” and “trust the brand”. KMO Indicator for Trust explains the goodness of the factor analysis: 0.645 which is above 0.6, the lower threshold for acceptability results. In the Bartlett’s Test for Sphericity p-value = 0.000, another good result. Considering the communalities, every extracted item

were above the lower acceptance threshold of 0.5, concluding that each of them explains the singular variable's variance for more than 50 % (respectively 0.53, 0.59, 0.64). The cumulative explanation of the variance extracting 1 factor for this set is 58.62 %. Also, the screen plot visualization empirically suggests extracting only 1 factor, because there is only 1 factor with eigenvalue greater than 1 (1.759), with the 2-factor one registering only 0.683. Finally, all the 3 scales are positively correlated with the latent factor in the correlation matrix, respectively registering for "honest brand", "rely on this brand" and "trust the brand" 0.726, 0.769 and 0.799.

Analysing the Dependent Variable Customer Satisfaction with the same procedure, the KMO Indicator registers 0.743, above the acceptance threshold. The Bartlett's Test for Sphericity attests the goodness of the extraction too, registering p-value = 0.000. For what concerns study of communalities, all the 3 selected scales are widely above the level of acceptance for this index ("happiness", "pleasure" and "satisfaction" respectively at 0.814, 0.797 and 0.8). The total variance explained extracting only 1 factor from these scales is 80.32 %, with 1-component eigenvalue = 2.410. Also, the 2-component eigenvalue registers only 0.309, largely below the threshold of 1, confirm the choice of extracting 1 factor representing customer satisfaction, along with the "elbow point" empirical study of the Scree Plot. Finally, the correlation matrix also explained good correlations between each scale and the latent factor, attesting respectively 0.902, 0.893 and 0.894 for "happiness", "pleasure" and "satisfaction".

After the scale's validation process, the Cronbach's Alpha Analysis is run to confirm the reliability of the 3 variables. For what it concerns Guilt, the Cronbach's Alpha for the 3-item model is 0.919, above the mentioned 0.6 threshold for good consistency. To confirm the goodness of selecting 3 items a common procedure is to delete each item from the analysis and run again the model to compare the new obtained alpha with the general one. In this case, deleting the item "feeling regretful" from the model the general Cronbach Alpha would slightly increase from 0.919 to 0.941, suggesting that this item could be deleted. By the way, considering the very small increase (0.022), the author preferred to go on with the analysis of the other two variables and possibly consider of keeping "regretful", to be consistent with the 3-item variables model. Regarding Trust, the Cronbach's Alpha for the 3 items is 0.647, above the 0.6 threshold. In this case, deleting the items from the model would not increase the overall coefficient (respectively, 0.604, 0.545, 0.492), confirming the choice of having 3 scales for this factor.

Finally, for what concerns Customer Satisfaction the Cronbach's Alpha attested at 0.877. Also in this case, deleting an item from the model would not positively impact the study, having respectively a new Cronbach's Alpha of 0.817, 0.833, 0.830. Confirming Trust and Customer Satisfaction as 3-item factors suggested the author to keep also Guilt as a 3-item one, also because of the very small improvement that would depend on deleting the element "feeling regretful".

Variable	Scale	Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Dependent Variable	Customer Satisfaction	3 out of 3	0.877
Mediating Variable 1	Guilt	3 out of 3*	0.919*
Mediating Variable 2	Trust	3 out of 3	0.647

Figure 8 - Variables and Scales of this study (personal elaboration)

* Considering the strongness of the mediating variable "Guilt" (0.919 is a high value), 3 items were kept being consistent with the 3-item scale of the rest of the model, even though deleting "feeling regretful" would increase the Cronbach's Alpha of the Model from 0.919 to 0.941

3.7 A comparison between two brands with a paired t-test, Patagonia and Zara

Once analysed the main model of this study, the effect of Sustainability on Customer Satisfaction with 2 mediators, the secondary goal of the author is to understand the potential differences concerning 2 brands with opposite features regarding this item and therefore the differences in the purchase intention. The two selected brand here are the same as the main study, Patagonia and Zara, but in this case the brand name is properly the stimulus and is shown to the respondents: as explained before in this work, the first one has been a sustainability devoted brand since its establishment, while the second one is a huge multinational fast fashion brand.

Here both stimuli were shown to all the respondents in a randomized order to avoid anchoring bias (Furnham, A., & Boo, H.C., 2011), with the same questions to each of them. 6 scales (5-point Likert 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) were chosen by the author regarding wider and narrower topics on sustainability correlated to the brand under consideration. In the order shown to the respondents, the variables were regarding long term commitment to sustainability, the perceived authenticity towards sustainability statements from the brand, feeling to help sustainability cause by buying from the brand, feeling part of a community buying from the brand, general trust towards the brand and last but not least the purchase intention.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Mediation Model and Control Variables

In this analysis a mediation model is built with Process 3.5 Model 4, in which the Dependent Variable (successively DV) is the Customer Satisfaction, the Independent Variable (successively IV) is the Scenario, and the two Mediators are the variables Guilt (successively M1) and Trust (M2). The goal of this model is to analyse if the Scenario effect on Customer Satisfaction is mediated by the two variables M1 and M2 (Guilt and Trust), and measure that impact on the DV. The covariance is represented by Gender, Occupation and Age, and the final sample for the model is 235 people.

Scenario 1: *Sustainability as a core mission of the fashion brand*

Scenario 2 (considered as statistic layer in the Process Model 4): *Sustainability as a “momentum” strategy for the fashion brand*

Verification of H2: *Perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand negatively affects the Guilt feeling*

The effect of the IV on the M1 Guilt is tested. This effect is negative and statistically significant at a confidence level $\alpha = 0.05$ (p-value = 0.016), concluding that Sustainability is a significant predictor for the feeling of guilt. Indeed, the first scenario – sustainability commitment as core business – registered a lower Guilt by 0.326 with respect to the second scenario, sustainability as a “momentum” marketing strategy.

Verification of H3: *Perception of sustainability commitment positively affects the Trustworthiness towards the brand*

The effect of the IV on M2 Trust is tested. The results are not significant, leading to the consequence that Sustainability in the fashion industry is not a predictor for trust towards a brand at a confidence level $\alpha = 0.05$; nevertheless, considering that p-value = 0.09, it is possible to run the model at a confidence level $\alpha = 0.1$ and allow this way the association with small empirical evidence. Scenario 1 showed a higher trust than the Scenario 2 by 0.236.

Verification of H1: *Perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand positively affects Customer Satisfaction*

To run a “pure mediation” model the direct effect of sustainability on customer satisfaction must be not significant. In this case $p\text{-value} = 0.044$: the direct effect of Sustainability on Customer Satisfaction is significant at a confidence level $\alpha = 0.05$ ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$), proving that this model is not a pure mediation. Indeed, given equal trust and guilt (the two mediators considered in this study), the first scenario has a better customer satisfaction by 0.269 compared with the second one. Trust confirmed to be not significant ($p\text{-value} = 0.322$, above 0.05), while guilt resulted to have a negative effect that is statistically significant at a very good confidence level ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$): increasing the value of Guilt the DV Customer Satisfaction is negatively impacted.

Also considering the control variables, “Unemployed” occupation status resulted significant with a positive effect on the DV ($p\text{-value} = 0.013$). This model reaches a R-squared of 0.159, explaining 15.9 % of the variance of the DV.

4.2 Total Effect Model

To define the total effect, another model is run: there is a positively significant impact by 0.376 ($p\text{-value} = 0.006$). This way, the total effect (direct plus mediated) of Scenario 1 compared with Scenario 2 is 0.376 in favour of the first one, meaning that overall, in the case of a fashion brand devoted to sustainability as its core business there is a better Customer Satisfaction compared with a brand that only makes occasional uses of it.

Verification of:

H4: *The decrease of Guilt feeling positively affects Customer Satisfaction*

H5: *The increase of Trustworthiness towards the brand positively affects Customer Satisfaction*

To divide and analyse the global effect of the model the “Modern Approach” for mediations (Preacher, K.J. & Hayes, A.F., 2004) is run, with 5,000 “bootstraps samples” and $\alpha = 0.05$ as confidence level for the intervals. The author looked at indirect effects to test mediating output of Process Model 4. The null hypothesis in this case is that the indirect effect is equal to 0, assuming on the reverse that for the non-null Hypothesis 1 the effect is not 0. If there is the absence of 0 within the confidence intervals CI [BootLLCI; BootULCI] then there is significant mediating effect for that variable. M1 Guilt refused the null Hypothesis: 0 is absent in the relative Confidence Interval CI [0.012 – 0.200]. On the other side, M2 Trust confirmed not to be a significant mediating effect, not refusing H0: CI [-0.020 – 0.068].

This study proved that the total effect of the IV (Scenario) on the DV (Customer Satisfaction) has resulted to be positively significant. Decomposing this result, a big part is given by the direct effect (0.269, $p\text{-value} = 0.044$, confidence level $\alpha = 0.05$), concluding that sustainability in fashion industry had a relevant impact on customer satisfaction for the respondents, made constant all the other variables. Moreover, the indirect effect

on the DV Customer Satisfaction is 0.107. This value was given by Trust for 0.016, but it resulted not to be a statistically significant mediator and therefore has been excluded from the conclusion by the author. The remaining part of the indirect effect is caused by guilt, precisely with 0.091.

4.3 A comparison between Patagonia and Zara: what changes in brand perception and purchase intention regarding sustainability

The goal of this part of the study is to analyse the potential difference in terms of sustainability perception and authenticity, trust and purchase intention in the respondents that both know Patagonia and Zara. For this reason, a pre-question regarding the awareness of the mentioned brands was made to exclude all the people that did not know both or one of them, before deep diving into the core study. This way the total sample extracted here is limited to 155 people - 64.86 % of the total cleaned answers analysed for the first part of this survey - namely the ones that confirmed to know both brands. A “paired T-Test” is run with SPSS Version 26, considering Patagonia as Brand 1 and Zara as Brand 2. This method compares the means of the answers: the null Hypothesis 0 is that these means are equal, while refusing it leads to Hypothesis 1 that they are not. In this case, all the means about the answers of Patagonia are higher compared with Zara; the Paired T-Test Method is used to statistically confirm these differences and it happened to refuse all the null Hypotheses, confirming that the means are not equal in each single case with a strong statistical significance (all the p-values were 0.000).

We can conclude that Patagonia, famous for being a sustainability-oriented brand since its establishment in the 70s, has a better perception of commitment and authenticity regarding sustainability compared with Zara, one of the most famous fast fashion brands worldwide. Moreover, respondents feel more helping the sustainability cause and a part of a strong community buying from Patagonia, a brand that they trust more than Zara and that they are also more willing to buy, even though in this case there is lack of verification of the influence of the sustainability topic on the purchase intention.

5 GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Discussion

The initial objective of this work was to analyse the impact of sustainability actions by fashion companies on consumer satisfaction. In addition, its implementation aimed to test the mediating role of guilt when thinking about buying products from a certain brand and the trust this may generate to it, in the relationships proposed. Following the consumer's perspective, sustainability has been explained in this script through its theoretical basements, marginally introducing the influence of Corporate Social Responsibility and then deeper diving into the history of the relationship with business. Briefly recapping the theoretical background, sustainability started being remarkable for business development in the second half of the last century, increasingly becoming a key importance lever to gain competitive advantage (Bakos et al., 2020; Bottani et al., 2019; González-Lafaysse, L. & Lapassouse-Madrid, C. 2016; Marín-García ibid; Ruiz-Real et al., 2018). Furthermore, some academics developed a wider conceptualization of sustainability and considered it beyond an environmental perspective, including also social and economic variables (McCann-Erickson, 2007). The main results of these contributions are the aforementioned three-pronged approach - environmental, social and economic - on which the Elkington's Triple Base Line theory postulated is founded (Elkington, J., 1998). However, this concept is very broad to analyse: for the sake of this specific work it was necessary to circumscribe its limit to sustainability related to the fashion industry, and how dealing with it can affect customers in their satisfaction. Indeed, the focus of this study relies more on the social and economic approach to sustainability rather than on the environmental one: social sustainability in many cases is concerning the stakeholders' management, widely referring to all the agents that interact with the company, including - and especially - customers.

Finally, the two brands comparison aimed to build the basis for some interesting analysis on the different features of brands with different structures, organizations and policies. This goal was quite reached revealing some useful results both in academic and managerial directions and lay the groundwork for further and exhaustive works.

5.2 Theoretical Contribution

Here the results are discussed from a theoretical viewpoint. This work was composed by 2 models, a main one including some topics regarding research gaps about sustainability and fashion industry, with each of them having different lack of previous literature, and a secondary model with the simple goal to add some insights for two real brands present in the market nowadays.

The first hypothesis introduced in this work is a general question: "Does perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand have a positive effect on customer satisfaction?". For what it concerns

customer satisfaction from a general perspective, previous literature is extensive: the academic definition is given by a double approach, specific/cumulative (Boulding, K.E., 1966) and cognitive/affective (Oliver, C., 1997). The specific approach is sustained by many authors (Giese, J., & Cote, J., 2000; Spreng et al., 1996) but in the retail sector the “cumulative approach”, i.e. the sum of different experiences, is well accepted (Jones, M. A., & Suh, J. 2000; Sivadas, E., & Baker-Prewitt, J. L., 2000). Despite this topic is receiving a growing interest, no literature deeply tested yet the relationship between sustainability and customer satisfaction. In the case of retail, Marín-García et al. (ibid) analysed the impact of sustainability on consumer satisfaction, but as an indirect effect through store image and notoriety. This study started from this literature and added an interesting result about the direct effect of sustainability on customer satisfaction: this relationship has been found statistically significant with a positive effect. More specifically, the scenario that was related to an advertisement proposed by a brand involved in sustainability performed better in terms of customer satisfaction, proving that a good stewardship in this direction helps also for business results.

At this point, the two mediators were introduced and analysed, namely the feeling of guilt when thinking about buying a product from the brand seen in the advertisement, and the trust that the latter may generate or not in the customer’s perception. These variables were chosen by the author for a certain lack in the previous literature of the fashion industry about the specific relationship between them and sustainability scenarios. This way, the gaps addressed here are represented by two questions: the first one, “does perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand negatively affect the guilt feeling?” and the second one, “does the perception of sustainability commitment positively affect the trustworthiness towards the brand?”, representing respectively Hypothesis 2 and Hypothesis 3 of this study. Guilt in business can be analysed by different point of views: for instance, marketers subtly use it in advertising to manipulate customers and gently force them to a certain choice or purchase (Coulter, R. H., & Pinto, M. B., 1995). What matters the most for this work is the feeling of guilt in the consumer decision-making process. This topic was introduced and studied by some academics in the past, along with other emotional responses that can affect the customers’ behaviour like love, anger, fear and more (Aaker et al., 1986). A general definition of consumer guilt states “a negative emotion which results from a consumer decision that violates one’s values or norms. Consequently, the consumer will experience a lowering of self-esteem as a result of his decision.” (Bozinoff, L., & Ghingold, M. 1983; Darlington, R.B., & Macker, C.E., 1966; Freedman et al., 1967; Konoske et al., 1979). In this case, there was a certain lack of literature in the specific field of sustainability and guilt relationship. The Hypothesis 2 was directed to verify the significance of this direct effect and fill this void, and the results accomplished the goal: sustainability has been proved as a relevant and statistically significant predictor of the feeling of guilt. Not only, this effect was higher for the sustainable brand scenario with respect to the fast fashion one, with a negative direction: the more a company is involved in sustainability, the less it activates perception of guilt in the customers.

The second variable which plays the mediator role in this study is trust towards a brand: in this case too, the previous literature was lacking precise analyses in the field of sustainability and fashion industry. Stoica and Hickman studied how sustainability and trust in sustainable brands are fixed in the mind of professionals, discovering some interesting insights (Stoica, M., & Hickman, T.M., 2021), even though more concerning the managerial perspective rather than the customers' one. The goal of this work then was the same as for guilt, to demonstrate the direct relationship between sustainability and trust for the brand. In this case, this relationship was not proven at the same confidence level of guilt but instead it was recognized valid by the statistical model only at a lower threshold, testifying that the strength of the effect is way lower if compared with guilt. However, being the result still statistically acceptable at a lower confidence level, the author proceeded with some further verification before going on with the deletion from the model. Anyway, the perception of trust is higher to the brand devoted to sustainability rather than to the fast fashion one, even if by a lower difference than in the case of guilt.

At this point, verified the effects of the independent variables on the two mediators, there comes the test regarding the effect of these two on the dependent variable - customer satisfaction. The research gaps identified here are summed up by the questions "Does the decrease of guilt feeling positively affect customer satisfaction?" and "Does the increase of trust towards the brand positively affect customer Satisfaction?", respectively for the mediators guilt and trust. As mentioned, the role of guilt has already been proven to influence customer satisfaction on a general direction. What lacked in the previous literature was a deep study of this relationship in the fashion industry. A mediating model is run to verify the statistical evidence in the study, and the results are aligned with the previous tests: guilt confirmed to be a statistic significant mediator between sustainability and customer satisfaction, meaning that not only sustainability scenarios impact the feeling of guilt in the customers, but also that this inner perception has a relevant role in their satisfaction.

On the other hand, though, trust again did not reach the confidence level statistically required, not rejecting the null hypothesis that its indirect effect on customer satisfaction is 0: it proved that the effect of trust towards a brand was not such a remarkable influencer of the customer satisfaction for the respondents. Given these conditions, the author proceeded with the deletion of trust from the conclusions, affirming that the only significant mediator between sustainability scenarios and customer satisfaction revealed by this work is the feeling of guilt. Finally, the total effect result of this study is composed of a direct relationship between sustainability scenarios and customer satisfaction, whose strong statistical significance denied the possibility for the model to be a pure mediation, and an indirect effect given by the perception of guilt. Considering the magnitude of these effects, the direct role of sustainability scenarios alone on customer satisfaction resulted to be 3 times higher than the mediating role of guilt between the two, surprisingly affirming that this mediation is actually a one-way relationship for the most part.

Finally, this total effect of sustainability on customer satisfaction resulted higher by 0.376 in the case of a brand devoted to the matter rather than one trying to take temporary competitive advantage from it, confirming all the trends already showed by each singular relationship.

5.3 Managerial Implications

In this section managerial implications are exposed, namely some tips and insights that the author extracted from this work and could be in a certain way remarkable not only for academics, but also for managers and business people. The first and highly predictable conclusion is that sustainability is a strong predictor of the customer satisfaction with the direct effect by itself: this translates into the raising care to these topics, that are already there in the market and have been already studied too by academic for many aspects. In this direction this work did not add anything on a general perspective, but rather analysed the specific case of the fashion industry: here the results confirmed the general trend, affirming the statistical significance of the direct relationship between sustainability and customer satisfaction also in this market. Adding the suggestion for the companies involved to switch their processes and branding communication to more sustainability is trivial and a bit useless: as analysed in the theoretical background, there is much more than that behind, and fashion industry is also a very wide and differentiated market, making it difficult to generalize for everyone this generic finding. A general implication that is both extracted from this work and from the previous literature is that there will hardly be other directions for companies in the next future, especially big ones, than at least trying to pursuit sustainability, both to improve their processes and their customer satisfaction.

For what concerns guilt and trust, the second one proved not to be statistically significant enough in the model and has been therefore not considered in the final conclusions. The perception of guilt instead played the mediating role in the model with appreciable results, giving good insights for marketers and business people. This is a strong emotion that provokes a huge effect into the customers, in both directions depending which brand is stressing on. Activating it on purpose is one way, and plenty of examples are present in the market and studied to understand the effect of this activation; on the other hand, a strategy to reduce it may be a less invasive way but certainly it still has an impact on the customer. Indeed, this study proved the mediating role of guilt between sustainability scenarios and customer satisfaction, leaving managers and marketers with a statement: producing good value for the stakeholders, whether being them shareholders, customers or external agents, is a good strategy to enhance many companies' key features like branding, brand loyalty and reputation, customer satisfaction and more. Obviously, it is important for the company to be fit and reliable with the adopted processes and communication strategies: the "greenwashing" storm is always behind the corner, and with the huge information availability it is harder and harder to mislead the audience.

These findings are also what emerged from the comparison between Patagonia and Zara: standing out for sustainability values pays off, but only if having a reliable and strong background of sincere stewardship. An

interesting tip here is given by the answers on the community perception: not only people perceived helping a good cause by buying from a certain brand rather than another, but choosing a sustainable company activates more the feeling of being part of a community. This concept is generally raising and finding it also in the fashion industry is a good insight for managers, no matter the dimension of the company: surely the larger a network is the stronger are the links, but this does not mean that for small companies this strategy is useless or even counterproductive.

5.4 Limitations and future research

This academic work has been ambitious since its conception, trying to take a broad and important topic and encompasses the weaknesses in the academic sources to fill certain voids. On the other hand, for the same reasons many are obviously the limitations met before, during and after this challenging journey.

Before this study it was already clear that such a wide topic could not be covered by only a Master Thesis work, even circumscribing it within delimited borders. This reason forced the author to deep dive into a specific research gap, with some particular features in a precise segment: the fashion industry. As previously stated, many other are the potential fields of study of sustainability and customer satisfaction, which still are fully or partially uncovered by academics: for instance, motors and tech are two interesting backgrounds to start with, and many more.

Apart from choosing a different market to jump in to build similar research models, many are the variables and predictors that can be considered for the manipulation of the scenario, and each of them could lead the study to different work areas. Guilt and trust are two strong and quite opposite feelings but there are also a lot of potential predictors, from the total abstract ones like these two to more “physical” perceptions. In such sense, neuromarketing is a well-developed field that could test hypotheses taking into consideration the physiological traits of the subjects, like hormone secretion, cardiovascular activity and skin conductivity, building the basement for further and interesting studies. In this case the limitation is given by the practical difficulty to apply these methods to the customers, while so far there is already a considerable application on the side of employees (Peterson et al., 2015). The dependent variable too is a feature of this work that can be rearranged and changed for further analysis: customer satisfaction can become some other remarkable variables like purchase intention, brand reputation or loyalty, and more.

For what it concerns the descriptive analysis done in the first part regarding sustainability awareness, the results obtained could also be an interesting baseline in the future to study how and in which cases this lack of willingness to be part of the sustainability process can be reduced by enhancing in people the desire to make some concrete effort: an intriguing suggestion to further researches.

Considering the structure of the study, even though the author tried to create the most possible unbiased scenarios narrating the same exact circumstances for both cases, some uncontrollable external factors could

still have impacted in a certain percentage the answers of the respondents. For instance, in the core part both brand names were obscured for these reasons, but this cannot avoid the effect of some respondents' experiences with similar products or, in a very low probability case, that they had seen those specific advertisements and recognized the brand, being therefore led to the answers by their previous experience. Indeed, the latter is the principal limitation of the second part of the study: showing two brands is a good way to compare the results between the two, but being the goal of the study to analyse abstract factors such as perception of sustainability commitment and similar, past purchase experiences could have influenced the results. Patagonia, a sustainability-oriented brand, has a better perception of commitment, authenticity and many other topics regarding sustainability compared with Zara, one of the most famous fast fashion one. Here many are the possible future researches, taking into consideration more than two brands, switching markets from luxury to fast fashion ones and asking different questions: here the main change can be manipulating the variables to put them in a cause-effect model, like for instance a mediator or moderator one.

5.5 Conclusions

This study statistically proved the mediating role of perception of guilt between different sustainability scenarios and customer satisfaction. The surprise outcome is that this relationship is mostly composed of the direct effect of sustainability on customer satisfaction, with guilt being present in the customers in the case of fast fashion companies and shortened in the case of sustainable ones, but in the end not playing a protagonist role with respect to satisfaction. On the other hand, trust is slightly impacted by sustainability scenarios, both positively and negatively respectively by first and second brand, but then was proven to be no predictor for customer satisfaction. The model in the end proved that the total effect of sustainability on customer satisfaction, comprehending the feeling of guilt, is positively higher for the devoted brand rather than the fast fashion one.

Finally, Patagonia registered better results in the customer perception than Zara, perceived as a fast one in all the asked questions, from the sustainability commitment perceived to the purchase intention, confirming the general trend of raising awareness on sustainability features, even in the fashion industry.

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6 APPENDIX

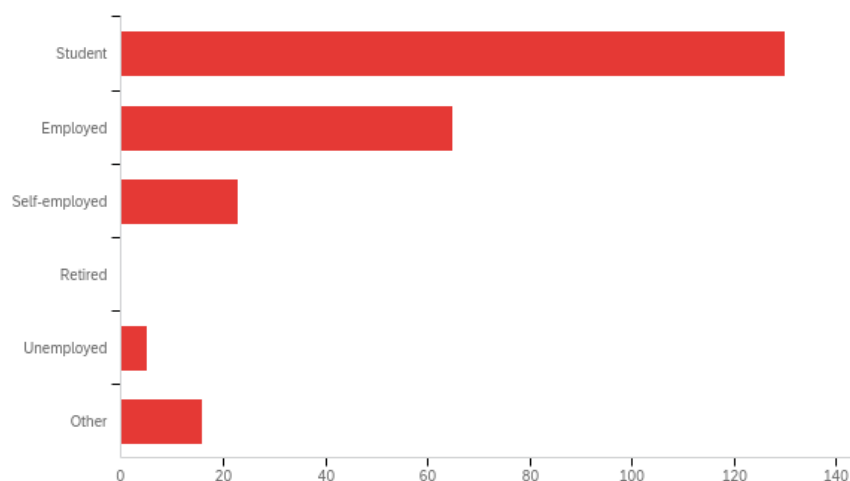
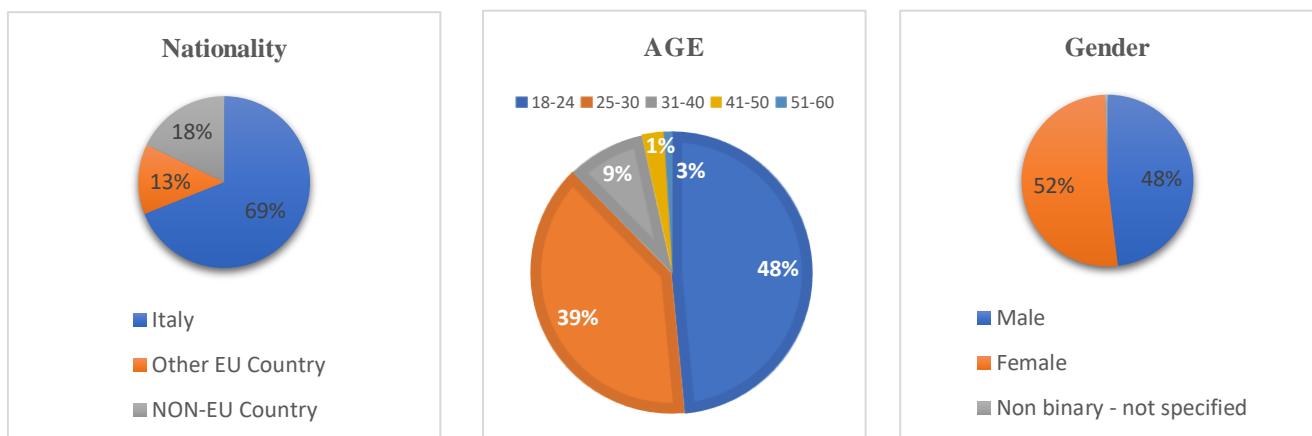
6.1 GRAPHS AND CHARTS

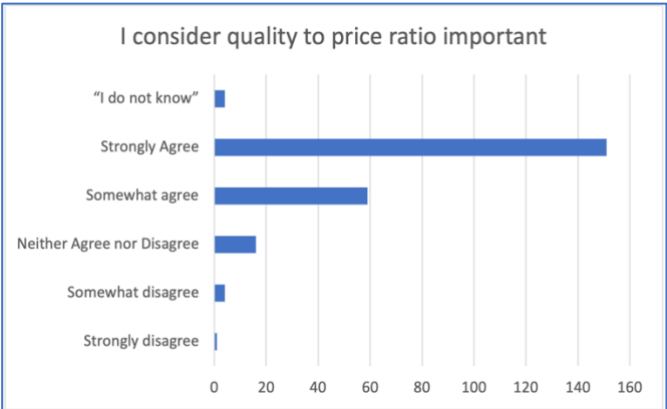
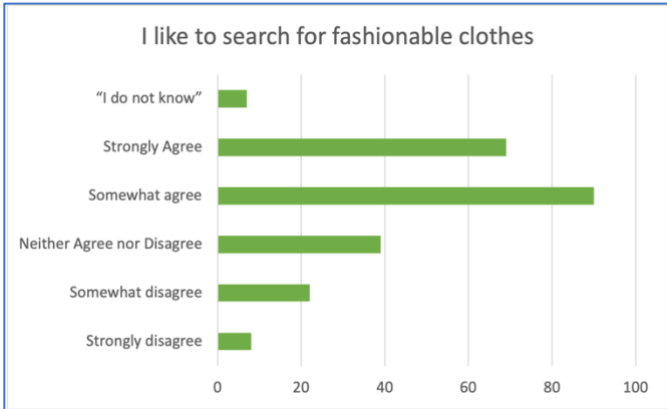
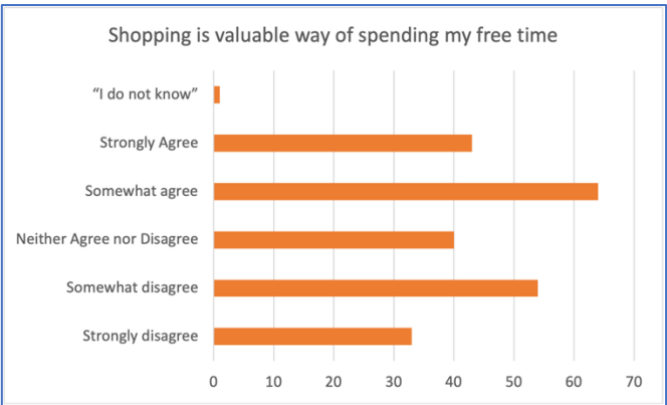
6.1.1 Table of Figures

FIGURE 1 - CONSUMERS' EXPECTATIONS ABOUT ENVIRONMENT (NIELSEN, 2018).....	9
FIGURE 2 - OPINIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY OF LUXURY BRANDS IN ITALY (STATISTA, 2020).....	11
FIGURE 3 - FAST FASHION MARKET VALUE AND NEXT 10 YEARS FORECAST (THREDUP, 2020).....	15
FIGURE 4 - RESEARCH MODEL.....	21
FIGURE 5 - SCENARIO 1.....	25
FIGURE 6 - SCENARIO 2.....	25
FIGURE 7 - TOP 3 SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS WORLDWIDE IN 2020 (GLOBESCAN).....	26
FIGURE 8 - VARIABLES AND SCALES OF THIS STUDY	30

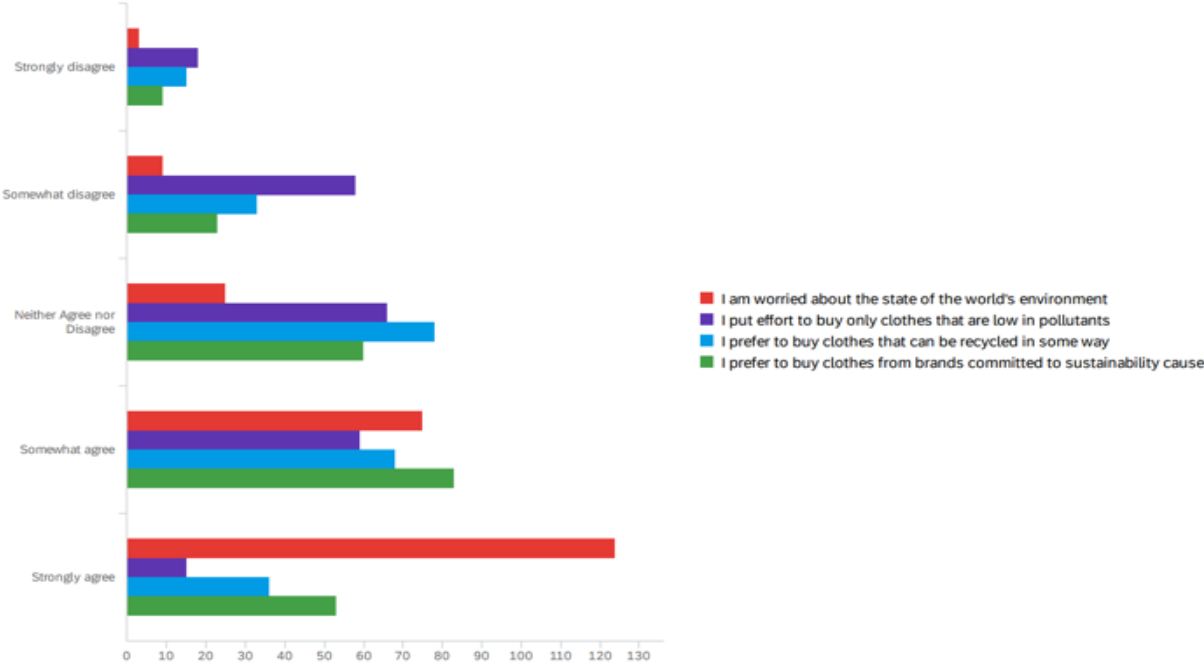
6.1.2 Survey Charts

Demographics, Shopping Habits and Sustainability Awareness





Q3 - About sustainability awareness, please rate the following sentences:



All data personally retrieved and elaborated by the author

6.2 SPSS OUTPUT

Demographics, Shopping Habits, Sustainability Awareness

- Nationalities

		Where are you from?			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Italy	162	68,9	68,9	68,9
	Other EU Country	31	13,2	13,2	82,1
	NON-EU Country	42	17,9	17,9	100,0
	Total	235	100,0	100,0	

- Occupation

		What is your current occupation?			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Student	129	54,9	54,9	54,9
	Employed	62	26,4	26,4	81,3
	Self-employed	23	9,8	9,8	91,1
	Unemployed	5	2,1	2,1	93,2
	Other	16	6,8	6,8	100,0
	Total	235	100,0	100,0	

- Gender

		Gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	113	48,1	48,3	48,3
	Female	121	51,5	51,7	100,0
	Total	234	99,6	100,0	
Other*		1	,4		
Total		235	100,0		

*Other: Not binary gender/preferred not to answer

- Age

What is your age?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	18-24	114	48,5	48,5	48,5
	25-30	92	39,1	39,1	87,7
	31-40	21	8,9	8,9	96,6
	41-50	6	2,6	2,6	99,1
	51-60	2	,9	,9	100,0
	Total	235	100,0	100,0	

▪ Clothes Shopping habits and Sustainability Awareness

Statistics

	How often do you shop for new clothes	Shopping is a valuable way to spend my free time	I like to search for fashionable clothes	I consider quality to price ratio important	Price is the most important variable to me	I am worried about the state of the world's environment	I put effort to buy only clothes that are low in pollutants	I prefer to buy clothes that can be recycled in some way	
N	Valid	235	234	228	231	232	233	213	227
	Missing*	0	1	7	4	3	2	22	8
Mode		1	4	4	5	4	5	3	3

*("Don't know" option)

How often do you shop for new clothes?

(Habits without Covid restrictions)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Monthly or less	170	72,3	72,3	72,3
	Twice a month	42	17,9	17,9	90,2
	Weekly	18	7,7	7,7	97,9
	Twice a week or more	5	2,1	2,1	100,0
	Total	235	100,0	100,0	

Shopping is a valuable way to spend my free time

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	33	14,0	14,1	14,1
	Somewhat disagree	54	23,0	23,1	37,2
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	40	17,0	17,1	54,3
	Somewhat agree	64	27,2	27,4	81,6
	Strongly Agree	43	18,3	18,4	100,0
	Total	234	99,6	100,0	
<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	1	,4		
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

I like to search for fashionable clothes

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	8	3,4	3,5	3,5
	Somewhat disagree	22	9,4	9,6	13,2
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	39	16,6	17,1	30,3
	Somewhat agree	90	38,3	39,5	69,7
	Strongly Agree	69	29,4	30,3	100,0
	Total	228	97,0	100,0	
	<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	7	3,0	
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

I consider quality to price ratio important

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	1	,4	,4	,4
	Somewhat disagree	4	1,7	1,7	2,2
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	16	6,8	6,9	9,1
	Somewhat agree	59	25,1	25,5	34,6
	Strongly Agree	151	64,3	65,4	100,0
	Total	231	98,3	100,0	
<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	4	1,7		
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

Price is the most important variable to me

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	4	1,7	1,7	1,7
	Somewhat disagree	46	19,6	19,8	21,6
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	65	27,7	28,0	49,6
	Somewhat agree	79	33,6	34,1	83,6
	Strongly Agree	38	16,2	16,4	100,0
	Total	232	98,7	100,0	
	<i>Missing</i>				

<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	3	1,3		
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

I am worried about the state of the world's environment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	3	1,3	1,3	1,3
	Somewhat disagree	8	3,4	3,4	4,7
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	24	10,2	10,3	15,0
	Somewhat agree	75	31,9	32,2	47,2
	Strongly agree	123	52,3	52,8	100,0
	Total	233	99,1	100,0	
<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	2	,9		
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

I put effort to buy only clothes that are low in pollutants

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	16	6,8	7,5	7,5
	Somewhat disagree	58	24,7	27,2	34,7
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	65	27,7	30,5	65,3
	Somewhat agree	59	25,1	27,7	93,0
	Strongly agree	15	6,4	7,0	100,0
	Total	213	90,6	100,0	
<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	22	9,4		
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

I prefer to buy clothes that can be recycled in some way

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i>	Strongly disagree	14	6,0	6,2	6,2
	Somewhat disagree	33	14,0	14,5	20,7

	Neither Agree nor Disagree	77	32,8	33,9	54,6
	Somewhat agree	68	28,9	30,0	84,6
	Strongly agree	35	14,9	15,4	100,0
	Total	227	96,6	100,0	
<i>Missing</i>	"I do not know"	8	3,4		
<i>Total</i>		235	100,0		

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Customer Satisfaction

Principal component analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test

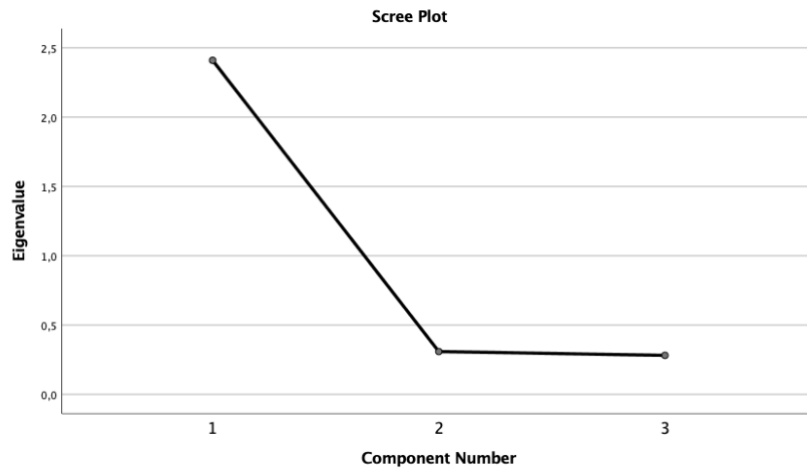
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,743
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	350,430
	df	3
	Sig.	,000

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
make me feel happy	1,000	,814
give me pleasure	1,000	,797
make me feel satisfied	1,000	,800

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2,410	80,323	80,323	2,410	80,323	80,323
2	,309	10,300	90,623			
3	,281	9,377	100,000			



Component Matrix

Component

1

make me feel happy	,902
give me pleasure	,893
make me feel satisfied	,894

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's	
Alpha	N of Items
,877	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
make me feel happy	7,50	2,835	,774	,817
give me pleasure	7,37	3,003	,757	,833
make me feel satisfied	7,30	2,912	,760	,830

Principal component analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test

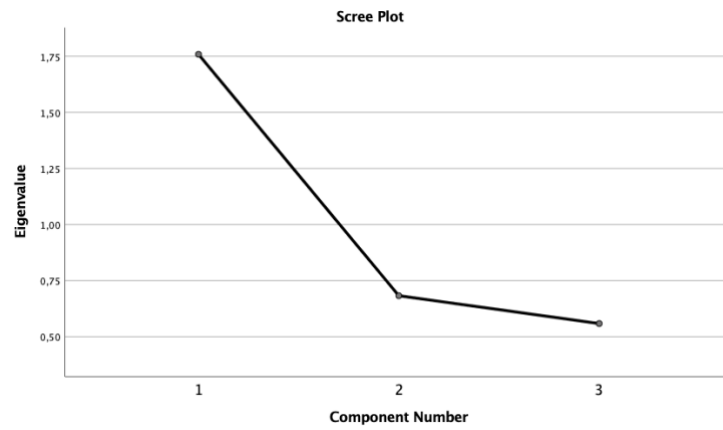
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,645
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	89,915
	df	3
	Sig.	,000

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
think this is an honest brand	1,000	,528
rely on this brand	1,000	,592
trust the brand	1,000	,639

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1,759	58,621	58,621	1,759	58,621	58,621
2	,683	22,755	81,375			
3	,559	18,625	100,000			



Component Matrix

	Component 1
think this is an honest brand	,726
rely on this brand	,769
trust the brand	,799

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,647	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item- Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
think this is an honest brand	8,14	19,957	,415	,604
rely on this brand	8,08	19,495	,460	,545
trust the brand	7,75	17,472	,496	,492

Guilt

Principal component analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test

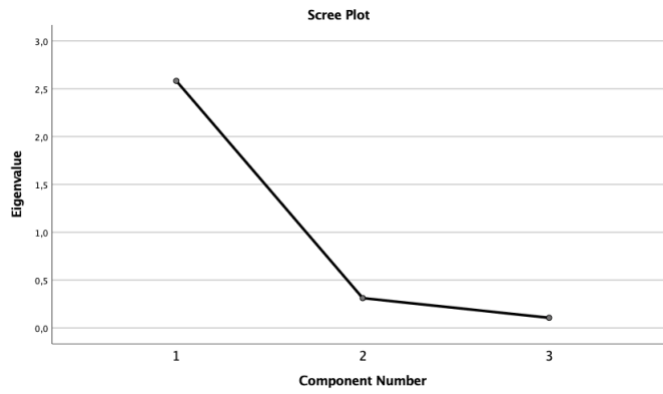
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		,712
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	549,044
	df	3
	Sig.	,000

Communalities

	Initial	Extraction
guilty	1,000	,878
remorseful	1,000	,917
regretful	1,000	,787

Total Variance Explained

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2,582	86,070	86,070	2,582	86,070	86,070
2	,312	10,393	96,464			
3	,106	3,536	100,000			



Component Matrix

Component

1

guilty	,937
remorseful	,957
regretful	,887

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's	
Alpha	N of Items
,919	3

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
guilty	3,97	3,381	,855	,868
remorseful	3,96	3,207	,897	,831
regretful	4,00	3,818	,763	,941

Mediating Model and Control Variables

Run MATRIX procedure:

***** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 3.5 *****

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com
Documentation available in Hayes (2018). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

Model: 4

Y: CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

X: Scenario Variable

M1: GUILT

M2: TRUST

Covariates:

Gender

Employed - Self Employed - Unemployed - Other

Age: A25_30 A31_40 A41_50 A51_60

Sample

Size: 235

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

GUILT

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,323	,104	,932	2,369	10,000	204,000	,011

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-,086	,344	-,249	,804	-,763	,592
Scenario	-,326	,134	-2,429	,016	-,591	-,061
Gender	,307	,153	2,004	,046	,005	,609
Employed	,493	,186	2,646	,009	,126	,861
Self_emp	,114	,266	,428	,669	-,411	,639

Unempl	,728	,470	1,548	,123	-,199	1,654
Other	-,174	,329	-,530	,597	-,823	,474
A25_30	-,074	,164	-,451	,652	-,396	,249
A31_40	-,141	,293	-,480	,632	-,719	,437
A41_50	-,688	,431	-1,596	,112	-1,539	,162
A51_60	1,065	,767	1,388	,167	-,448	2,578

.....

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

TRUST

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,223	,050	,992	1,070	10,000	204,000	,387

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-,513	,355	-1,445	,150	-1,212	,187
Scenario	,236	,139	1,705	,090	-,037	,510
Gender	,079	,158	,499	,619	-,233	,390
Employed	-,046	,192	-,239	,812	-,425	,333
Self_emp	-,270	,275	-,983	,327	-,812	,272
Unempl	,013	,485	,027	,979	-,943	,969
Other	,565	,339	1,664	,098	-,105	1,234
A25_30	,124	,169	,735	,463	-,209	,457
A31_40	,190	,303	,628	,531	-,407	,787
A41_50	-,139	,445	-,311	,756	-1,016	,739
A51_60	-1,199	,792	-1,514	,132	-2,760	,362

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,399	,159	,876	3,192	12,000	202,000	,000

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-,799	,336	-2,381	,018	-1,460	-,137

Scenario	,269	,132	2,032	,044	,008	,530
TRUST	,070	,070	,993	,322	-,069	,208
GUILT	-,279	,072	-3,856	,000	-,421	-,136
Gender	,193	,150	1,283	,201	-,104	,490
Employed	,011	,184	,058	,954	-,352	,373
Self_emp	,112	,259	,434	,665	-,398	,622
Unempl	1,154	,459	2,517	,013	,250	2,059
Other	,056	,321	,175	,861	-,577	,689
A25_30	,155	,159	,974	,331	-,158	,468
A31_40	-,014	,285	-,048	,961	-,575	,547
A41_50	-,087	,422	-,207	,836	-,919	,744
A51_60	,081	,750	,108	,914	-1,397	1,559

***** TOTAL EFFECT MODEL *****

**OUTCOME VARIABLE:
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION**

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
,269	,072	,957	1,586	10,000	204,000	,113

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	-,811	,348	-2,326	,021	-1,498	-,124
Scenario	,376	,136	2,764	,006	,108	,645
Gender	,113	,155	,728	,467	-,193	,419
Employed	-,130	,189	-,688	,492	-,502	,242
Self_emp	,062	,270	,229	,819	-,470	,594
Unempl	,953	,476	2,000	,047	,014	1,892
Other	,144	,333	,432	,666	-,513	,801
A25_30	,184	,166	1,109	,269	-,143	,511
A31_40	,039	,297	,130	,897	-,547	,625
A41_50	,095	,437	,217	,828	-,767	,957
A51_60	-,299	,778	-,385	,701	-1,832	1,234

***** TOTAL, DIRECT, AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF X ON Y *****

Total effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_ps
,376	,136	2,764	,006	,108	,645	,379

Direct effect of X on Y

Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_ps
,269	,132	2,032	,044	,008	,530	,271

Indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
TOTAL	,107	,050	,022	,218
TRUST	,016	,022	-,020	,066
GUILT	,091	,049	,012	,200

Partially standardized indirect effect(s) of X on Y:

	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
TOTAL	,108	,049	,023	,217
TRUST	,017	,022	-,020	,068
GUILT	,092	,048	,012	,198

***** ANALYSIS NOTES AND ERRORS *****

Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output:

95,0000

Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals:

5000

NOTE: Due to estimation problems, some bootstrap samples had to be replaced.

The number of times this happened was:

812

----- END MATRIX -----

Paired t-Test: Patagonia vs. Zara

Brand 1: Patagonia

Brand 2: Zara

H0: means are equal

H1: means are not equal

		Paired Samples Statistics			
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	I perceive a long term commitment to sustainability by this brand [Patagonia]	3,8903	155	,95051	,07635
	I perceive a long term commitment to sustainability by this brand [Zara]	2,3032	155	1,11294	,08939
Pair 2	I perceive authenticity seeing sustainability statements from this brand [Patagonia]	3,9419	155	,87712	,07045
	I perceive authenticity seeing sustainability statements from this brand [Zara]	2,3484	155	1,06047	,08518
Pair 3	I feel that I'm helping the sustainability cause buying from this brand [Patagonia]	3,7806	155	1,00822	,08098
	I feel that I'm helping the sustainability cause buying from this brand [Zara]	2,0645	155	1,06708	,08571
Pair 4	I feel part of a community buying from this brand [Patagonia]	3,4065	155	1,17162	,09411
	I feel part of a community buying from this brand [Zara]	2,6581	155	1,17572	,09444
Pair 5	I generally trust this brand [Patagonia]	3,7871	155	,93965	,07547
	I generally trust this brand [Zara]	2,8581	155	1,10159	,08848

Pair 6	Seeing sustainability statements from this brand, I am - LESS likely to buy their products: [LESS-MORE] likely to buy their products [Patagonia]	4,04	155	,904	,073
	Seeing sustainability statements from this brand, I am - LESS likely to buy their products: [LESS-MORE] likely to buy their products [Zara]	3,21	155	1,091	,088

Paired Samples Test

Paired Differences

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	I perceive a long-term commitment to sustainability by this brand	1,58710	1,52378	,12239	1,34531	1,82888	12,967	154	,000
Pair 2	I perceive authenticity seeing sustainability statements from this brand	1,59355	1,41741	,11385	1,36864	1,81846	13,997	154	,000
Pair 3	I feel that I'm helping the sustainability cause buying from this brand	1,71613	1,46719	,11785	1,48332	1,94894	14,562	154	,000
Pair 4	I feel part of a community buying from this brand	,74839	1,46205	,11743	,51640	,98038	6,373	154	,000
Pair 5	I generally trust this brand	,92903	1,44649	,11618	,69951	1,15855	7,996	154	,000

Pair 6	Purchase Intention	,832	1,362	,109	,616	1,048	7,608	154	,000
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Finished writing 22/09/2021

Lorenzo Alessandri

SUMMARY

Introduction

A number of research has been done on the field of sustainability, with the fashion industry being in the group of the cases at issue mostly analysed by academics, which conducted to different and interesting conclusions. In this study the customer satisfaction has been defined as the dependent variable; many previous researches already brought up to light some insights about different impacts on customer satisfaction regarding sustainability issues, with their findings used here as reliable basements. For the author it was interesting to consider two variables, trust and feeling of guilt, in the role of mediators on the customer satisfaction. In this direction there was a certain lack of previous literature, that pushed the author to go deeper into the causes and consequences and make a research model to fill this void. The results from this manipulation were supposed to address some conclusions on the two mentioned variables, with the help of the on-field data collection.

Structure

The first part of the paper regards the available literature about these topics review; then the script will explain meticulously the creation of the various hypotheses, linking them with the related theoretical background. After that there is a chapter regarding the academic method, which is going to depict each step of the technical process applied to accomplish the goal of this work. Firstly, is explained the method used to gather participants, the descriptive statistics and therefore the procedure to introduce them to the stimulus, namely the two scenarios that impact their satisfaction stressed by the mediators “Guilt” and “Trust”. The survey is composed by two parts, which are thoroughly explained in the relative chapter: after the mentioned mediator model there is also an analysis of two specific brand cases, Patagonia and Zara. As mentioned, Patagonia’s CSR model is well known in the sustainability environment, and it is useful to study its features that made it one of the most recognizable brands in fashion to understand this market nowadays. More specifically, a confrontation is made to compare the two brands pivoting on some different features regarding sustainability perception in the customers, with the aim to understand if there is a real and significant difference, and in what magnitude. The final output is a two-side divided survey that provided some good results and incremented the number of sources to study this topic; these results are exposed with the support of statistical evidence, charts and graphs, to make the output as plain as possible to the reader. A general discussion follows in the end, analysing the theoretical contribution of this work and how it can have managerial implications. As a conclusion, the limits and gaps not filled by this research are pinpointed to evidence possible areas of improvements for further and future academic works.

Literature review and Hypotheses

On a theoretical background, the environmentalism movement has recent roots compared to trade's evolution among history. The first book that analysed this trend was published in 1962 – “Silent Spring” by Rachel Carlson – and not before the late 20th century it became a true full-fledged industry. The food industry has been one of the first sector to be influenced by this wave, while on the other side a very huge one like fashion lagged behind for many years before getting the proper attention. The main pollution of the fashion industry regards lands and water, and another big problem to solve is the manufacturing and post-purchase waste that ends up in landfills, considering the exponential increase of the consumption. Environmentalism as a mission could be considered a part of the more general topic that is Corporate Social Responsibility. CSR has been defined by the European Commission as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”. More specifically for this work, sustainability refers to doing business without negatively impacting the environment, community, or society as a whole. This can refer to two different stakeholders – considered with a broad meaning – that are tied together: environment and society. Not only sustainability is a key to preserve the world we live in and the quality of our lives but it is also a fundamental factor to drive investments: many investors today consider environmental, social and governance (ESG) as an index to measure an organization's ethical impact and sustainability practices. Investors consider elements such as a company's water usage, carbon footprint, community development efforts and board diversity. A good metric is the “Triple Bottom Line”, a business concept to whom companies can commit to moderate the environmental impact rather than just focus on the profit, which represents the standard “bottom line”. This concept can be divided into three parts (the “3P”): Profit, People and the Planet. Even though this can seem idealistic and ephemeral, in many cases pursuing these goals has become crucial also for the companies' financial stability, as long as the customers are increasingly careful of the process and pipelines that bring the products to the shelf. Indeed, almost half (48%) of U.S. consumers sustained in a recent survey that they would think about changing their consumption habits with a high level of probability to reduce their impact on the environment. And these consumers are already making actions follow to words putting their money on sustainable fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), with \$128.5 billion USD spent in 2019. Thus, CSR is starting to be no more just a matter of “corporate philanthropy” but it is now increasingly recognized as a source of competitive advantage, and for this reason treated like a crucial asset of the company. No exception for the fashion and apparel market: due to the rapid growth of awareness about environment issues, market leaders must pay more attention to the causes and improve their performance with respect to the sustainability goals. Furthermore, innovations in terms of sustainability are not only related to the product but can embrace many different fields of the company business. One example is to build a network of companies with the shared goal of having a concrete impact and can be pursued by taking different paths. A common one implemented by companies is the cooperation

with non-profit associations following a “win-win” strategy. Indeed, the fashion firm takes advantage linking its name to well-known and respectable associations, not only with concrete and real actions but also with the benefits in terms of brand reputation. On the other hand, non-profit associations are always seeking for commercial partners to spread their mission and increase funds raised and people’s awareness. One of the best examples in this direction is the “Destination Zero”, the huge project launched by the non-profit association Greenpeace in 2012 that promoted the progressive removal of chemical material from the production of clothes; some of the most famous brands in the world, such as Nike, Burberry, H&M and many more, embraced this goal and committed to the guidelines.

Finally, the impact of COVID-19 on the firms’ value has been huge, but sustainability operated as a painkiller against it. Even though generally where the impact of COVID-19 was high so was the decrease of the firm’s value, this negative trend was less pronounced for companies with better sustainability performance. More specifically, these just mentioned performances regards a strong orientation to stakeholders and environmental value. Recent studies stated that businesses with a higher level of sustainability performance can better deal with some aspects of fiscal and legislative actions and attract both socially conscious consumers and socially responsible investors. In a recent survey of 12,000 people from 12 countries, near 65 % of respondents stated that their future purchasing decisions would be influenced by the firm’s response during the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, companies that are more engaged with their stakeholders with the strategy of maintaining a high level of sustainability performance are more. These strategies not only had a lifesaver role during the pandemic but they are also a basement to build the future after it. Indeed, the Covid-19 storm provided the opportunity to evaluate how firms dealt with their stakeholders during the crisis as well as how they are behaving in present time. All this commitment to sustainability has the noble target to make a remarkable impact on the world environment, but on the other hand it is also a concrete move to enhance the brand reputation and commercial results of the companies. Previous research proved that companies that made sustainability effort have also better scores in terms of attractiveness and loyalty. As aforementioned, choosing – and even more, communicating – sustainability is increasingly becoming a huge competitive advantage, even though with some differences depending on the market. On the other hand though, customers are getting more careful about the authenticity of companies’ statements, communication and actions. This way, a misleading communication strategy can retaliate against the company itself and become a threat for its reputation: this phenomenon is called “greenwashing”, namely exaggerating claims of sustainability or environmental care with the goal to gain market share and competitive advantage. According to a report published by the advertising consultant Terra Choice, a huge percentage of the selected products that in promotion and advertising were bragging green claims resulted to be guilty of greenwashing. The impact of greenwashing on the customer satisfaction is still a topic mainly uncovered by academics, but without a doubt the consumer will be more and more the true “actor” of the production and not just the final buyer, putting

his/her satisfaction at the very centre; this trend will be affected also by the raising awareness on the sustainability issues, leading companies to try to reach an honest balance between true and sincere effort in being sustainable and the right communication of these strategies without crossing the limit of exaggerated and not verified claims.

Some studies have been conducted to better understand the relationship between sustainability and customer satisfaction, and the retail industry is not excluded by this list. Surprisingly, even though this sector is one of the most polluting of the world, customers generally seem to take less care of the consequences of their shopping habits in this field compared to others, like food for instance. Indeed, fast fashion increased constantly in recent years and is expected to double its value worldwide in 10 years, forecasting a value of 43 billion US \$ in 2029. In the light of this, it is even more interesting trying to answer some of these juxtapositions providing on field-collected data. In such a sense, the first hypothesis considers the two different scenarios of the Independent Variable Sustainability: the company with sustainability as a core mission is expected to impact more positively customer satisfaction rather than the one with “momentum” green strategies. As a starting point, the direct effect between the Independent Variable “Sustainability” and the Dependent one “Customer satisfaction” must be proven. The hypothesis is enounced as follows:

H1. *Perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand positively affects Customer Satisfaction*

The Independent Variable is concentrated on the potential difference in perception of the sustainability commitment. To build a reliable scenario with two distinct cases in point, the author imaged the customer perceiving the stimulus to buy a piece of clothing the same way for both cases, running into an ads content scrolling a social media feed, made constant all the external factors apart from the content of the ad which is customized with the two different brand claims, tags and images. The goal of this hypothesis test is to verify if and in what measure the perception of sustainability affects the customer satisfaction in each of the two scenarios, building the basement for the comparison of the two scenarios.

On a general level, customer satisfaction is a dependent variable that can be directly and indirectly influenced by many factors. Sustainability, which in this study plays the role of the manipulated Independent Variable, is only one of the numbers. Among the others, the author decided to focus specifically on two of them in this study: they are feelings and perception activated in the mind of the customer thanks to sustainability efforts by the fashion company. The first one is a powerful interior perception that customers feel on many occasions during shopping experiences, not only the ones regarding fashion items: the perception of guilt before, during and after a purchase. On a general level there are plenty of academic works analysing causes and effects of guilt felt by customers in every different stage of the purchase process, from the stimulus to the post-buy experience. Each product category has different features in the way a purchase generates guilt in the customer,

due to different types of potential harm received from it, and many more causes. For some direct health damaging products like tobacco and cigarettes the sense of guilt is stronger. For products that do not directly harm the person but can have some indirect effect on the guilt feelings, such as fast fashion clothes, the effect and the way it shows are slightly different. For instance, in this case another important factor to consider is the type of customer, like hedonistic against utilitarian ones. Self-gifting is a relevant motivation to buy for hedonistic customers, leading to different reasons like hedonic, therapeutic, rewarding and celebratory. Each of these particular types of shopping behaviours has some different effects on regret and sense of guilt. In this study the focus of the analysis regards the effect on the sense of guilt activated in the two sustainability scenarios, the first one as a strong stewardship by the fashion firm that founds its basement in the past, while the second one as some attempts to improve brand reputation with green actions and marketing statements. At this point, the author formulated the first relationship that may tie together the Scenario and the Dependent Variable customer satisfaction. The hypotheses representing this gap in the research model are the following:

H2. *Perception of sustainability commitment for a fashion brand negatively affects the Guilt feeling*

H4. *The decrease of Guilt feeling positively affects Customer Satisfaction*

In this case, the sense of guilt plays the mediator role between the sustainability scenarios and the customer satisfaction in the research model. The author's goal is to consider and study the impact of the two scenarios on the sense of guilt felt by the customers, and therefore to measure this feeling's effect on their final satisfaction. There are two distinct relationships in the mediator model: the first one regards the direct effect of scenarios on the sense of guilt and is represented by H2, and the second one measures the impact of this feeling on the customer satisfaction (H4). These two hypotheses aim to compare between the scenarios the total effect, the direction and the magnitude of the mediator guilt.

On the other hand, the second mediator considered in this work is the feeling of trust towards a brand. Brand loyalty is one of the elements that compose the brand equity, namely the reaction and response of customers to marketing strategies of a company regarding a product, given by the brand identification. One of the hardest goals of every company's marketing team is to align the "consumer-based brand equity" (CBBE) with the "sales-based brand equity" (SBBE), more specifically matching what people think about a brand and in what measure they convert this perception into purchases of that brand's products. One of the most remarkable parts of Consumer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) regards brand loyalty, an outcome that companies heavily desire to reach. Again, brand loyalty has been studied a lot by academics, in some cases combined with customer satisfaction and brand equity, variously manipulating these variables to measure different effects and directions of the relationships on field. According to Jacoby, brand loyalty is conceptually defined in terms of 6 necessary and sufficient conditions as: "(a) biased (i.e., non-random), (b) behavioural response, (c) expressed

over time, (d) some decision-making units, (e) with respect to one or more brands out of a set of such alternative brands, and (f) a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes.” Given these conditions, the analysis of all the potential elements that can have an impact on one of them or on brand loyalty as a whole is very long. Regarding the goal of this work, sustainability is the core topic to analyse as long as it is playing an increasingly remarkable role in this direction. Notwithstanding, not all the products categories register the same results. This is a strong element for products like food in which market customers are advocating a change in the consumption to be more and more sustainable, but even in that case there can be some differences regarding types of food. For instance, keeping constant the impact on the output of demographics like gender, nationality and more, that can be highly remarkable in some specific cases, previous studies have provided some evidence about customers being willing to pay more for sustainable fruit and vegetables products rather than seafood ones. Nonetheless, for what it concerns the fashion industry, if we take the 3-level division of apparel brands made by Noh – luxury, fast fashion and moderate – a positive role for sustainability in the customer-brand identification for all the levels is proven, concluding that there is no difference in the way customers perceive the sustainability effort of a brand from this sector. Continuing on this path, in this specific work the author focused on the impact that perceiving a sincere and long-term commitment to sustainability for a fashion firm enhance the trust that customers prove in its regard, and therefore if this sense of trust positively impacts the customer satisfaction. The hypotheses emerged from this literature review are the following:

- H3.** *Perception of sustainability commitment positively affects the Trustworthiness towards the fashion brand*
- H5.** *The increase of Trustworthiness towards the brand positively affects Customer Satisfaction*

The first hypothesis tested here is about the relationship between sustainability scenarios and trust, comparing again the same two cases in which sustainability is a core mission for a company and another one trying to take advantage of it with temporary strategy and communications. The goal of the author is to measure the impact of the scenario on the customers’ trust towards the brand, and therefore consider this mediator effect on the customer satisfaction, with a statistical comparison between the two scenarios’ outputs perfectly symmetrical respect to the one conducted for Guilt.

The final research model of this study is composed by the 5 hypotheses previously explained. There is one direct effect represented by the impact of sustainability scenarios on the customer satisfaction, which is the first hypothesis. Here the output is given by the differences between the two scenarios and their direct effect on the customer satisfaction, which is the model dependent variable. H2 and H3 represent the direct effects of the scenarios on the two mediators, respectively sense of guilt and trust. These hypotheses are not studied independently but are combined with H4 and H5, the effect of the two mediators on the dependent variable.

The final goal of this model is to compare the output of Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 in their entirety, and then unbundle all the differences regarding the mediators' effect.

Method and Data Analysis

To conduct this study the author built a survey using Qualtrics: this tool is used by academics to design and compose online surveys and then to spread them to the public. Proximity and convenience sampling methods were used, like university and workspaces networks, acquiescence, and online platforms for academic studies share and discussion. In total, 239 anonymous answers to the survey were finally collected. 4 of them were incompletely submitted for external different reasons and were eliminated by the study, giving a final cleaned sample of 235 respondents.

The core part of this study pivots on the stimuli to which the respondents were exposed in the second part of the survey. Here there are two different scenarios: then respondents were randomly assigned one of the two, composed of text and image. To provide a reliable comparison just on the object of this work avoiding any other external and potentially influent factors on the output, both scenarios introduce the respondent into the same daily life experience, the willingness to buy a new jacket. In this case, the trigger is an advertising seen online: "You are willing to buy a new mid-season jacket, and scrolling down your social media feed you see this advertising. You know the brand by name, and..."; at this point the stimulus is divided into different ads, which represent the two scenarios object of this study which are randomized. Scenario 1 is the ad showed by a company well known to be strongly committed to the sustainability cause, since its very first establishment. The tagline focuses on the love for the nature, adding that 1 % of all company's profits goes to environmental groups. The tone of voice here is more directed towards branding rather than promoting the specific product. Scenario 2 on the other hand is an advertising from a multi-national brand which established its power in the fashion industry thanks to aggressive low prices promotions and cost and process cuttings. The line this way is related to the specific product, a mid-season denim jacket produced with organic cotton making the ad say that it is a piece of clothing that respects the environment.

Data analyses were performed using the platform IBM SPSS Statistics 26 Version 3.5, with the auxilium of PROCESS Model 4 by Andrew F. Hayes (2017) to proceed with inferential analyses, used to study the double mediation effect of guilt and trust on the customer satisfaction. The independent variable is represented by the mentioned Scenarios:

Scenario 1: Sustainability as a core mission for the fashion brand

Scenario 2: Sustainability as a "momentum" strategy for the fashion brand

The validity of both Scenarios has already been tested by academics: the first one is an advertisement taken from Patagonia, which as a company resulted 2nd overall in the Top 20 GlobeScan Sustainability Leaders Survey; the second one is taken from Zara, whose brand image among the customers is far away from sustainability as a constant value – in a recent survey among 250,000 people, less than 1 % considered sustainability a relevant element of Zara’s products and strategy. Considered this, the two brand names were obscured anyway by the author to avoid any possible bias in the respondents due to previous experiences. Thanks to the casual randomization of scenarios implemented by Qualtrics, 116 respondents were shown the first one and 119 the second one, making them answer the same questions but divided by stimuli. To build this conceptual model, two elements were found interesting by the author to analyse the role of mediators between Scenario and the customer satisfaction: the perception of guilt considering the purchase of a certain product and the feeling of trust towards the brand. The factor “Guilt” is composed by 3 scales a priori selected by the author, answering the following question with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): “buying a product from this brand would make me feel:” “guilty”, “remorseful” and “regretful”. The 3 scales (5-point Likert scale, 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) that are supposed to represent the factor Trust are answering the question “seeing this advertising from this brand would make me:” with “think that is an honest brand”, “rely on this brand” and “trust the brand”. The dependent variable of this work is represented by the customer satisfaction. The scales selected for this factor are answering the question “buying a product from this brand would:” with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) “make me feel happy”, “give me pleasure” and “make me feel satisfied”. Again, to extract only one factor a process of data validation is run to confirm the a priori scales selection. The manipulation of this study aims to analyse the effects brought by the sustainability scenario on this factor, with the mediating role of the two mentioned variables “Guilt” and “Trust”.

After the scale’s validation process explained in the script, the Cronbach’s Alpha Analysis is run to confirm the reliability of the 3 variables. For what it concerns Guilt, the Cronbach’s Alpha for the 3-item model is 0.919. In this case, deleting the item “feeling regretful” from the model the general Cronbach Alpha would slightly increase from 0.919 to 0.941, suggesting that this item could be deleted. By the way, considering the very small increase (0.022), the author preferred to go on with the analysis of the other two variables and possibly consider of keeping “regretful”, to be consistent with the 3-item variables model. Regarding Trust, the Cronbach’s Alpha for the 3 items is 0.647. In this case, deleting the items from the model would not increase the overall coefficient confirming the choice of having 3 scales for this factor. Finally, for what concerns Customer Satisfaction the Cronbach’s Alpha attested at 0.877. Also in this case, deleting an item from the model would not positively impact the study, having respectively a new Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.817, 0.833, 0.830. Confirming Trust and Customer Satisfaction as 3-item factors suggested the author to keep also

Guilt as a 3-item one, also because of the very small improvement that would depend on deleting the element “feeling regretful”.

Once analysed the main model of this study, the effect of Sustainability on Customer Satisfaction with 2 mediators, the secondary goal of the author is to understand the potential differences concerning 2 brands with opposite features regarding this item and therefore the differences in the purchase intention. The two selected brand here are the same as the main study, Patagonia and Zara, but in this case the brand name is properly the stimulus and is shown to the respondents: as explained before in this work, the first one has been a sustainability devoted brand since its establishment, while the second one is a huge multinational fast fashion brand. Here both stimuli were shown to all the respondents in a randomized order to avoid anchoring bias with the same questions to each of them. 6 scales (5-point Likert 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) were chosen by the author regarding wider and narrower topics on sustainability correlated to the brand under consideration. In the order shown to the respondents, the variables were regarding long term commitment to sustainability, the perceived authenticity towards sustainability statements from the brand, feeling to help sustainability cause by buying from the brand, feeling part of a community buying from the brand, general trust towards the brand and last but not least the purchase intention.

Results and Conclusions

The study proved that the total effect of the IV (Scenario) on the DV (Customer Satisfaction) has resulted to be positively significant. Decomposing this result, a big part is given by the direct effect, concluding that sustainability in fashion industry had a relevant impact on customer satisfaction for the respondents, made constant all the other variables. Moreover, the indirect effect on the DV Customer Satisfaction is 0.107. This value was given by Trust for 0.016, but it resulted not to be a statistically significant mediator and therefore has been excluded from the conclusion by the author. The remaining part of the indirect effect is caused by guilt, precisely with 0.091. The model in the end proved that the total effect of sustainability on customer satisfaction, comprehending the feeling of guilt, is positively higher for the devoted brand rather than the fast fashion one.

The goal of the second part of the study was to analyse the potential difference in terms of sustainability perception and authenticity, trust and purchase intention in the respondents that both know Patagonia and Zara. For this reason, a pre-question regarding the awareness of the mentioned brands was made to exclude all the people that did not know both or one of them. This way the total sample extracted here is limited to 155 people, the ones that confirmed to know both brands. A “paired T-Test” is run with SPSS Version 26, considering Patagonia as Brand 1 and Zara as Brand 2. The Paired T-Test Method is used to statistically confirm these differences and it happened to refuse all the null Hypotheses, confirming that the means are not equal in each single case with a strong statistical significance (all the p-values were 0.000). The conclusion is that Patagonia,

famous for being a sustainability-oriented brand since its establishment in the 70s, has a better perception of commitment and authenticity regarding sustainability compared with Zara, one of the most famous fast fashion brands worldwide. Moreover, respondents feel more helping the sustainability cause and a part of a strong community buying from Patagonia, a brand that they trust more than Zara and that they are also more willing to buy, even though in this case there is lack of verification of the influence of the sustainability topic on the purchase intention.