

# **SUSTAIN** *your ABILITY in consuming green!*

A Mixed Method Study on how Influencers' Characteristics relate to  
Young Adults' Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior.

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** The growth of sustainability awareness more and more shapes the consumption patterns of today's society. Even though the fashion industry is still facing environmental and societal challenges, an increase in consumers' demand for green fashion products is recognizable. The power of influencers can be considered as one of the key factors leading to this behaviour. Nowadays, brands and marketers integrate influencer marketing to shape consumers' buying behaviour. Different characteristics of influencers, such as perceived trustworthiness, credibility, or the number of followers, are seen as essential drivers shaping individuals' intentions towards consuming sustainable fashion. **Objective:** The main objective of this research was to investigate influencer characteristics' relation to young adults' intentions toward their sustainable fashion consumption behavior. **Method:** To fully explore the concepts of this study, a mixed-method design was applied. This was done to use the strengths of both methodologies which provided a broad-ranging angle of the concepts from a consumer perspective. First, a small-scale survey was conducted in which 96 participants took part (Mage = 21.5; 58.6% female). After that, semi-structured interviews were conducted with in total nine participants to gain more extensive insights in individuals' perceptions and opinions. **Findings:** This research showed a relationship between intentions and young adults' sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. However, the moderating effect of influencers yielded a non-significant prediction in the quantitative analysis. Nonetheless, influencers could be seen as compelling actors who can impact young adults' sustainable fashion consumption behaviour, which was found out during the interviews. In this context, subjective (e.g., trust and credibility) characteristics seem to be a relevant driver that could impact consumer's perceptions. Moreover, this study found that influencers with a smaller number of followers (e.g., nano, micro) can be perceived as more credible and trustworthy than influencers with bigger network size (e.g., macro). **Implications:** These findings can be applied to help brands and marketers understand how influencer marketing strengthens consumer's intentions toward consuming sustainable fashion products. It also allows influencers to get in-depth insights in consumer's attitudes and opinions regarding influencers which helps to maintain their influencing capability.

**Keywords:** *Sustainable Fashion Consumption, Intentions, Influencer Characteristics, Young Adults*

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## **Introduction**

In the following study, two ongoing and emergent topics are studied, sustainable fashion consumption and influencer marketing. In recent years, the fashion industry developed into one of the most impactful and damaging industries on the planet. The behaviour and intentions of consumers are constantly adapting to the expeditious production of clothes which gives people the possibility to adapt quickly to the latest fashion patterns. Significantly impacted by marketing campaigns on digital platforms, individuals are likely to even speed up their fashion consumption though it.

In April 2022, the European Parliament published an infographic (see Appendix A) on the impact of textile production on the environment, showing that clothing production is roughly causing 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions, which is more than shipping and international flights combined (E.P., 2022). However, sustainability awareness has received considerable attention to stop today's flamboyant trend-based overconsumption. Consumers increasingly acknowledged their results on the impact of their consumption patterns. Through this increasing awareness, individuals take action toward consuming eco-friendly products and show great interest in sustainable consumption (Brønn & Vrioni, 2001). Adding to that, existing literature has already found that an individual's intention of acting sustainable can be seen as a motivation for environmentally friendly consuming behaviour (Kumar, 2013). However, there is still the need to educate people further and create awareness of the problems of consuming fashion to protect against onward damage to our planet.

Within the growing popularity of digital platforms, brands recognized the powerful potential of integrating influencer marketing to approach their content to these matters in their communication strategies. In fact, this form of marketing was already used by 93% of marketers in 2020, of whom 71% are planning to integrate influencer marketing in 2021 and 2022 (Barker, 2022). Influencers have become a relevant connection between brands and their consumers where the influencer can share and affect individuals' lifestyles and directly interact with the consumer (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Thus, brands and marketers engage in influencer marketing as they trust influencers to have a close connection to their followers and appear more trustworthy and credible. (Schouten et al., 2019). Consequently, influencers have the power to strongly impact consumers' perceptions and opinions towards environmentally friendly services (Lidgren & Major, 2021).

Furthermore, the distinct types of influencers, characterized by influencers with fewer followers (e.g., nano, micro) and influencers with a big network of people (e.g., macro), have different effects on consumers' attitudes and perceptions towards influencers. For example, in the study of Marques et al. (2021) the different effects of celebrity endorsers and micro-influencers have been analyzed. The researchers ascertained through their exploratory study that both influencer types showed varying levels and interactions between followers and influencers.

The leading target group in this research are young adults between 18-25 years. Moreover, according to recent research, young adults can be considered an encouraging audience for future environmental activities (White et al., 2019). Especially as (Kim et al., 2012) declared, social influence is one of the most important predictors of adults' pro-environmental consumption behaviour.

Generally, previous research has already investigated the phenomena of sustainable consumerism and influencer marketing by using quantitative methods (e.g., Lim et al., 2017, Chetoui et al., 2020). Specifically, intentions of consuming sustainable fashion and how this is related to influencer have been touched upon by researchers but are not yet studied to a solid intensity. Nevertheless, it was found by prior studies that intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behavior are related to each other (e.g., Manchiraju, 2013).

Based on the results of prior research, the current study replicated and further elaborated the concepts mentioned before by using a quantitative approach to attain a greater understanding of the relationship between intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. Nonetheless, the current study dives deeper by adding knowledge to the barely explored field of influencer marketing in relation to sustainable fashion consumption though adding qualitative measurements and thereby adds onto the existing body of literature. With this, the relationship between intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour moderated by influencer's subjective (e.g., trust, credibility) and objective (e.g., number of followers) characteristics can be studied. Notably, this mixed-method approach allows extensive insights into individuals' perceptions and general beliefs about the different topics. It allows further investigation of individuals' attitudes toward the different characteristics of influencers. Hereby, the aim is to dive deeper into the coherences between the Influencers' characteristics and individuals' intentions towards sustainable consumption behaviour. Thereof, the primary purpose of this research is to develop a deeper comprehension of how intentions toward sustainable fashion consumption behaviour are

related to influencers' characteristics. For guidance, the following research question is formulated:

**RQ:** *How do Influencers' characteristics (trust, credibility, and followers) relate to young adolescents' (18-25) intentions towards sustainable fashion consumption behavior.*

## **Theoretical Framework**

In the following, the theoretical base for this research will be discussed. First, the sustainable consumption behavior of young adolescents in general is described. As sustainability is an essential part in this research, the sustainable consumption behavior of young adolescents will be discussed in more detail. Afterwards, influencer marketing, a reasonable new phenomena of marketing where social media opinion leaders are used to market certain products and services, is explained. Lastly, different influencers subjective and objective characteristics are demonstrated and characterized.

### **2.1 Sustainable fashion consumption behavior**

In the following, the theoretical base for this research will be discussed. First, the sustainable consumption behavior of young adolescents in general is described. As sustainability is an essential part in this research, the sustainable consumption behavior of young adolescents will be discussed in more detail. Afterwards, influencer marketing, a reasonable new phenomena of marketing where social media opinion leaders are used to market certain products and services, is explained. Lastly, different influencers subjective and objective characteristics are demonstrated and characterized.

### **2.1 Sustainable fashion consumption behavior**

Nowadays, sustainability and consumption have often been seen as two conflicting and distinct aspects which cannot be unified. Modernized perceptions of consumers arise from the recognizable importance of one self's consumption behavior in relation with emerging environmental damages. The rise of individuals awareness towards their own purchase intentions appears in a different nature of consumerism, which particularly involves ethical and reliable consumption (Berki-Kiss & Menrad, 2022). Thus, consumers' individual consumption habits can be recognized as being important operators of environmental challenges (Lidgren & Major, 2021). It becomes clear from previous research that unlike typical consumer decisions, such as focusing on self-exaggerated benefits, sustainable consumerism established benefits to the eco system as well as to the society.

Moreover, recent studies disclose a gap between individuals' attitudes towards green consumption habits and their truly existing buying behavior. McNeill and Moore (2015) found



out that consumers are generally concerned about their environmentally friendly behavior, still, their attitude is not always in line with their actual behavior towards consuming green.

Besides the noticeable attitude-behavior gap regarding sustainable purchasing, it becomes evident from research that through consuming fashion products, consumers can create their own individual identity. McNeill and Moore (2015) claim that consumption in the fashion sector is affected by individuals' self-identity. Adding upon that, the authors highlight those eco-friendly produced clothes has the potential to allay social and environmental well-being which results from social demand to buy fashion products and adapt to the latest fashion. The findings of McNeill and Moore (2015) research recommend that fashion consumers' general beliefs and attitudes towards a sustainable lifestyle are driven by prejudgments toward prior behavior and knowledge about ethical consumption. To further elaborate, the level of concern for environmental protection as well as individuals' construction of their own identity through fashion are crucial standpoints which need to be taken into consideration when addressing green fashion consumption behavior.

As awareness of sustainability is growing, individuals find their own resolutions and motivations to consume green. McNeill and Venter (2019) got to the point that individuals' motivations to purchase alternatives is generally impelled by determinants such as personal style or economic benefits. Nevertheless, individuals still face several barriers when consuming sustainably. To further elaborate upon that, different studies shed light on barriers which have an impact on the development of positive attitudes toward sustainable fashion consumption. Hiller Connell (2010) identifies that for example a lack of consumer knowledge can be an obstacle which needs to be considered when realizing sustainable consumption. Thus, it can be recognized that individuals are thoroughly aware of environmental concerns in the fashion industry and that they need to change their own fashion consumption behavior. However, consumers are still facing individual or societal barriers.

### ***2.1.2 Current taken measures***

When approaching the concept of sustainable fashion consumption behavior, individuals current taken measures towards sustainability need to be explicitly elaborated as it affects individuals green purchasing behavior. Recent research identified various types of consumers distinguished by their environmental concerns and willingness to buy green products. Lu et al. (2013) classifies five consumer types regarding sustainable buying behavior, from consumers

who believe that their actions can strongly affect the environment, to consumers that assume that their personal effort cannot solve any environmental issues. Meanwhile, McNeill and Moore (2015) distinguish between three consumer groups when approaching sustainable consumption behavior which is partly in line with the assertions of Lu et al. (2013). Current taken measures can be seen as a crucial driver when approaching the underlying concept of sustainable fashion consumption as it considers in what ways individuals already take actions to consume environmentally friendly products. Hereby, previous studies identified that aspects of sustainability, such as choosing secondhand fashion items instead of new ones, are relevant to consider when buying fashion clothing for individuals which can be seen as current taken actions towards eco-friendly consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

### ***2.1.2 Intentions***

Intentions towards acting in a sustainable manner can be seen as a relevant negotiator and key construct for explaining the current taken measures individuals are undertaking in order to consume sustainable fashion. The Theory of planned Behaviour is known as being a useful framework in predicting consumers' intention as well as their behavior in a wide range of pro-environmental areas (Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

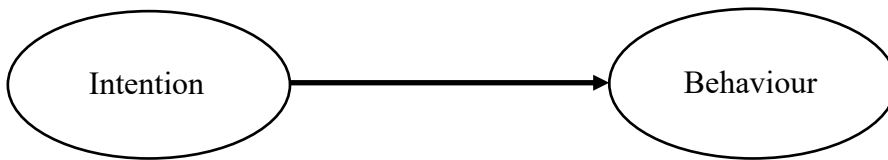
In the current study, intention is considered as the best predictor of the actual behavior towards sustainable consumption. A recent study found out that intention of undertaking or not undertaking the actual behavior is seen as a direct ancestor to the behavior (e.g., Kumar, 2013). Kumar (2013) observed that especially prior environmental knowledge, which serves as a fundamental base for current taken measures towards sustainability, has positive connections with intentions towards eco-friendly products. This in turn, impacts individuals' sustainable consumption behavior. Adding upon that, Chetioui et al. (2020) proved in their research that intentions are mainly about in what extend an individual is willing to buy certain products. The researchers explain that a growth in intention can also indicate a growth in the likelihood of performing the behavior.

Thereof, it is expected that in this study intention towards acting sustainably and individuals' consumption behavior towards sustainability are closely related to each other. Hereby, intention can be seen as a factor affecting the consumption behavior for environmentally sustainable products, such as fashion. In this part of the study, a quantitative measurement in form of a survey is applied to replicate the findings of prior studies about the relationship between

intentions and behavior demonstrated by the TPB. This is because partly the focus of this research lies on the relation between intentions and behavior. The most important elements of the TPB for this study are outlined in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*“Theory of planned behavior framework”*



**Sub-RQ 1:** *Is there a relationship between young adults’ intentions and the actual sustainable fashion consumption behavior?*

## **2.2 Influencer Marketing**

Digital platforms gained more and more popular among individuals during the last years. These social media platforms give new possibilities to find unique marketing approaches, such as influencer marketing. Especially this form of marketing and the possibility to communicate with different individuals simultaneously allowed for the developing improved opportunities to form targeted dialogues with consumers (Bakker, 2018). Recent studies found that influencers can reach a large network of people from which brands benefit in promoting their products by encountering trustworthy endorsers (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2016). As individuals search for specific advice about sustainable lifestyles, social media platforms are a relevant tool for gathering pro-environmental facts (White et al., 2019).

As digital communication will last for the following years as an essential part of our daily lives, influencers will enormously impact sustainable consumption behaviour globally. Chwialkowska (2019) highlights that influencers are seen as opinion leaders in digital sharing platforms, as they share their own experiences, lifestyle, and consumption patterns towards sustainability. Moreover, he claims that when influencers share moments from their own lives, they seem trustworthy and are highly able to lead sustainable lives. He further stated that "by consistently communicating information-rich content about their own sustainable life and their green behaviour, influencers address the lack of awareness as a barrier to green lifestyle adoption

"(p. 39). Accordingly, Byrne et al. (2017) studied more extensively to what extent influencers can guide individuals for healthier and greener lifestyles. For example, the authors found out that influencers can affect their followers by adapting to a healthier and eco-friendlier food lifestyle. Furthermore, Yıldırım (2021) supports these findings by claiming that influencers assist consumers in adapting to a green lifestyle by providing sufficient knowledge on green consumerism. Thus, it becomes evident from previous research that influencers can affect and guide consumers' lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviour by providing sufficient pro-environmental facts and information on social media platforms. Individuals' consumption behaviours can be altered by communicating and showing off their sustainable behaviour.

## **2.3 Influencer characteristics**

As influencers can have a direct and decisive impact on consumers' decision-making process, it is crucial to consider the different characteristics of influencers to understand how they can affect individuals' consumption behaviour. Lou & Yuan (2019) claim that influencers' characteristics are relevant to consider for brands and marketing agencies. Furthermore, influencers have already established themselves in terms of specialising in specific areas related to societal interests. Hence, consumers accept and believe influencers' opinions when collaborating with brands that correspond to their personal beliefs (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

### ***2.3.1 Subjective Influencer characteristics (trustworthiness and credibility)***

Several studies uncovered that influencer endorsement could change consumers buying intentions radically (e.g., Nugraha et al., 2018). Above all, social media users evoke products that are promoted by influencers. That is mainly because influencers are perceived as credible advocates that can affect their followers' perceptions and opinions about the brand's products (Marques et al., 2020, p. 3). However, Chetoui et al. (2020) discovered that the influencer's credibility and honesty are among the strongest factors affecting attitudes toward the influencer. In accordance with Marques et al. (2020) the credibility of the influencer is subordinated to factors such as reliability which is connected to the objectivity and honesty of the endorser. Thus, an opinion leader recognised as credible is more likely to change followers' attitudes and purchase intentions and, consequently, their consumption behaviour.

Several studies found that individuals' intentions and attitudes toward sustainable consumption are impacted by influencers perceived as honest and authentic. For example, Lim et

al. (2017) declared that a credible endorser usually positively affected consumers' perceptions. Adding upon that, he stated that any information which is presented by a perceived credible influencer affects individuals' attitudes, opinions, and consequently their behaviour. Further, Lim et al. (2017) illustrated that an influencer's higher acceptance of the delivered message can be achieved if the endorser is recognised as a credible and trustworthy source of information. Hereby, Verger (2019) adds that a positive attitude towards the endorser and the brand can be developed if a product promotion by influencers is perceived as authentic and trustworthy. The perceived expertise of an endorser is also a crucial element when affecting perceptions of individuals' purchase intentions (Verger, 2019). Adding upon that, Verger (2019) shed more light in his study on the product-endorser relationship and found out that it needs to be in line with their own beliefs and lifestyles in order to be perceived as an expert and as a credible source of information individuals can trust (e.g., a sustainable fashion influencer is promoting a sustainable fashion product). Therefore, this phenomenon can be considered a high product-endorser fit.

To what extent an influencer is perceived as influential is dependent on the level of expertise. The study of Lim et al. (2017) showed that influencers who are perceived as being experts with high levels of trust are noticed to be more influential on their followers' behaviours. In correspondence with that, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) discovered that consumers perceived influencers as more trustworthy than celebrities as they present product recommendations and experiences based on personal opinions and values, which are perceived as influential by consumers. Additionally, Verger (2019) remarks that a more credible value can be created if the influencer has a more personal experience with the product.

A considerable body of recent literature identified that trustworthiness and credibility in influencer endorsements are essential when affecting sustainable consumption behaviour. Kapitan et al. (2021) predict that influencers have often been recognised as more authentic and credible when they genuinely believe in the endorsed product, affecting individuals' consumption behaviour. Thus, based on the reviewed theoretical background, it can be expected that the influencers' perceived trustworthiness and credibility will affect consumers' perceptions and, correspondingly, their intentions to consume sustainable products. However, there is still limited research on whether there might be a moderating effect of influencers' subjective characteristics on the relationship between an individual's intentions and consumption behaviour towards sustainability. As a result, this research digs deeper to explore the impact of influencers on the

relation between intention and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour by applying quantitative and qualitative measurements.

**Sub-RQ 2a:** *Is the relationship between one self's intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behavior moderated by influencers subjective characteristics, such as trustworthiness and perceived credibility?*

**Sub-RQ 2b:** *How do young adults believe that subjective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming sustainable fashion?*

### **2.3.2 Objective Influencer characteristics (number of followers)**

The number of followers an influencer obtains can be seen in close relation to the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of an influencer which in turn has a big impact on an individual's consumption behaviour. In this study, a distinction between nano, micro and macro influencer will be made, which is referable to the influencer's number of followers. So-called nano influencers have the smallest number of followers, with less than approximately 5,000 followers. Influencers with a broader audience (10,000-100,000) can be recognized as micro-influencer. A macro influencer is someone whose number of followers usually ranges from 100,000 to one million followers. Even though there is still limited scientific research on the specific distinction between nano, micro, and macro influencers' trustworthiness and credibility, evidence suggest that usually influencers with a smaller network are perceived as more trustworthy than an influencer with a more extensive network of people (e.g., Coursaris et al., 2018).

Micro-influencers can be seen as an inspiration and opinion leaders for consumers. Marques et al. (2020) labelled micro-influencers as endorsers who constantly communicate with their followers in a rather personal way, leading to a more trustworthy relationship between endorser and consumer. Ewers (2017) even declared that micro-influencers have more power to affect individuals than macro celebrities as they can establish a relatable connection to their followers. This is in line with the findings of a recent study by Heuvel (2022), which showed that using micro-influencers can achieve higher levels of consumer-influencer engagement. Thus, micro-influencers have more power in building relationships as high levels of credibility are perceived by their followers than macro-influencers (Marques et al., 2021).

In contrast, Verger (2019) reached the point that consumers who follow macro-influencers have primarily positive attitudes towards endorsers. Moreover, the author stated that influencers perceived as popular on social media would be recognized as more likeable and hence can affect individuals' perceived credibility and trust. Macro influencers act in a large network of people and can consequently simultaneously affect many people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Verger, 2019). For brands, this type of influencer is helpful to consider when aiming to increase brand visibility and raise awareness about products

Nano influencers can be seen to be in the passing lane in the digital marketing world today. Brands see the use of nano influencers as an attractive marketing strategy to promote their products online because it can build a completely different type of relationship with their followers (Puce, 2021). This real-life relationship can be seen to be more based on a friendship level where the influencer recommends only precious products. In turn, the followers feel much closer as the influencer shares personal experiences and opinions about their own lives.

Based on this theoretical background, it can be expected in this research that the network size of an influencer can impact the relation between intentions and the actual behaviour of consuming sustainable fashion. Moreover, it is expected that young adults' perceptions of the influencer can vary in terms of credibility and trust, dependent on the number of followers an influencer obtains. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

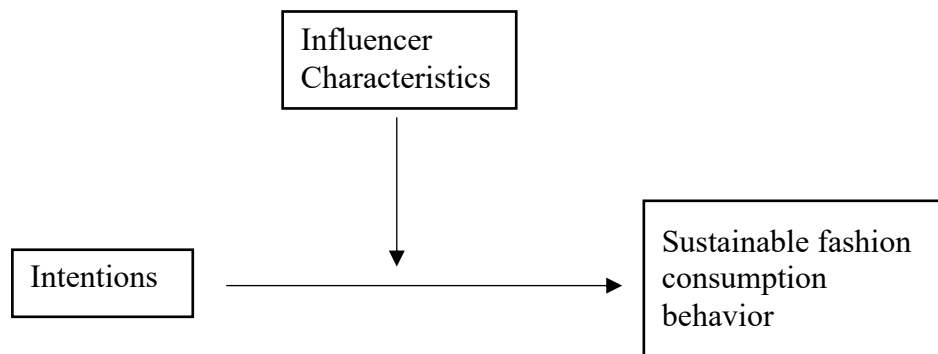
**Sub-RQ 3a:** *Is the relationship between one self's intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behavior moderated by influencers objective characteristics, such as number of followers of the influencer?*

**Sub-RQ 3b:** *How do young adults believe that objective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming sustainable fashion?*

In the following, a research model has been set up. This model suggests that there is a relation between intentions towards green consumption and young adults general sustainable fashion consumption behavior. This relationship is mediated by influencers subjective characteristics, such as perceived credibility and trustworthiness and by objective characteristics, the number of followers.

**Figure 2**

*Research Model*



## **Method**

### **3.1 Research Design**

To investigate to what extent influencer characteristics, relate to young adolescents' intentions toward sustainable fashion consumption, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was conducted. As this study aims to understand consumers' views, opinions, and experiences by studying different perspectives of individuals, a mixed-method approach was applied. Adding to that, the mixed-method approach was seen as crucial for providing valuable insights that could benefit this relatively recent and unexplored research area. Shorten and Smith (2017) encourage those assertions by clarifying that mixed-method approaches allow researchers to delve into various individual angles and uncover exciting relationships in nature.

The research design was structured in two sections: 1. Survey and 2. In-depth interviews. Starting off with the quantitative approach, a survey was created to collect data from individuals' intentions and current taken measures on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour and their general understanding of influencers. The survey contained questions regarding participants' demographics, their general social media usage, influencer knowledge and participants' intentions and current taken measures towards sustainable fashion consumption. To treat the data in a responsible and ethical way to protect participants privacy, an informed consent form was shown at the beginning of the survey, which needed to be confirmed before continuing to spread the survey beforehand to a larger population, which helped in forming a general understanding of the research topic and formulating relevant questions for the semi-structured interviews. The



interviews were used in order to gain more in-depth knowledge about fundamental concepts of how different characteristics of influencers are affecting participants' intentions toward sustainable fashion consumption behavior. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to indicate their mail addresses for a possible follow-up interview voluntarily.

A qualitative method was considered appropriate to serve different perspectives and experiences regarding the chosen topic. According to previous research, semi-structured interviews provide opportunities for researcher to learn more about the perspectives and experiences of individuals (Boeije, 2009). Thus, the interviews were used to gain more in-depth knowledge about fundamental concepts of how influencers' different characteristics affect participants' intentions toward sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

### **3.2 Research Procedure**

The survey took place in an online environment, using an online survey tool called Qualtrics. To reach participants, social media platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp were used. By doing so, people on social media were approached by three published Instagram stories that included a link that allowed all participants to find the survey easily. Furthermore, a small text with the study description and the link was sent out to various WhatsApp contacts and group chats. The entire survey, including the informed consent form, can be found in appendix A.

The 9 interviews were conducted via Zoom and were recorded to analyze them further. Thus, it was guaranteed that the study was conducted in a pleasant and quiet environment to constitute a feel-good feeling for the participants. To assure the participant's consent, they were asked before the interview if they were still willing to be included in the study. If a participant felt uncomfortable after the survey or the interview, the possibility of withdrawing from the study was given, and the voice recording was deleted. Moreover, to ensure the participant's privacy, the recordings of the interviews were omitted right after analyzing all the results. Moreover, data collection took place from the 6th to the 16th of May.

### **3.3 Sampling Method**

To assure relevancy for this research, all participants had to fulfil several criteria in terms of being active on social media platforms and possessing an Instagram account which was ensured by publishing the link for the participation of the questionnaire in an Instagram story. They also needed to follow or be aware of influencers on these platforms, best fashion

influencers, and have a basic understanding of sustainable consumption. To guarantee that, general questions were asked at the beginning of the questionnaire, and a short description of fashion influencers was provided. Moreover, due to the focus of young adults, participants between the age range from 18 – 25 years were asked to take part in this study.

To reach the participants, the following two sampling procedures were used. First, convenient sampling was used to reach participants by spreading the survey via the researcher's Instagram account. Thus, only participants who followed the researcher could see the survey and participate in the study. With this, it was ensured that the previous set of criteria was fulfilled, as the researcher's community on Instagram is active on social media, to name one example. For both the online survey and the interview, convenient sampling combined with intensity sampling was used. This is because only people from a specific population group have been contacted to fulfil the prefixed conditions. Thereof, friends or acquaintances who fit the criteria were asked to participate via WhatsApp or Instagram. For the interview, the aim was to include only participants from whom it can be expected to get rich information about the topic and which fulfil the conditions for the three different consumer groups. More specifically, individuals who correspond with the research population were requested to participate in the study via WhatsApp and Instagram. As the participants are derived from a specific population, according to Morgan (1997), this group of people can relate to the topic more efficiently and contribute to a comfortable dialogue. As a result, the interviewer-participant relationship is strengthened, and data collection and data validity are ensured (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

Furthermore, the previously mentioned friends and acquaintances were asked to share and spread the survey among fellow friends to reach any like-minded contacts who could be potential participants in the study. This procedure is also known as snowball sampling. It is worth mentioning that very close friends and family members were not asked to participate in the study to ensure that the results were not biased. As a result, a combination of convincing sampling and snowball sampling was applied in this study.

### **3.4 Participants**

SPSS was used to analyze the participants' general characteristics, such as gender, age, nationality, and level of education. In total, 96 young adults responded to the questionnaire. Five of these were excluded due to incomplete responses, and two participants did not fit the age

criteria between 18-25. As can be noticed, the mean of age is 21.45 (S.D.=1.92), which fits the prior set criteria of young adolescents between 18-25 years.

Furthermore, in total, 64 female respondents and 24 male respondents took part in the survey, whereas 70 participants were of German origin, 16 of Dutch origin and 4 of another origin. Most participants absolved a primary or secondary degree (59.3%). Respondents who absolved a bachelor's degree have a percentage of 25.3%, whereas master's degree graduates hit 8.8%. Table 1 provides a clear overview of the descriptive statistics of age, gender, education level and social media usage.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants*

	Frequency	Percent
Female	64	70.3
Male	24	26.4
Prefer not to say	1	1.1
German	70	76.9
Dutch	16	17.6
Other	3	4.4
Primary or Secondary	54	59.3
Bachelor's degree	23	25.3
Master's degree	9	8.8
Professional Degree	2	2.2
Prefer not to say	1	1.1
	Mean	S.D.
Age	21.45	1.92
Social Media Usage (in hours)	4.71	2.13
Instagram Usage	2.61	1.5

### 3.5 Measurements

#### 3.5.1 Survey

**Influencer Characteristics.** Subjective and objective influencer characteristics were measured with different questions throughout the survey. In total, four statements were answered by respondents by indicating how much they agreed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. The statements are the following: "I believe that fashion influencers I follow are convincing "and "I believe that fashion influencers I follow are credible and trustworthy endorsers "and "I believe that fashion influencers I follow use the same products in their daily routine they advertise "and "I believe that influencers who have more followers are more trustworthy and credible, than influencers with less followers ". Some parts of the statements were gathered from the study conducted by Chetioui et al. (2020), who studied the effect of attitudes toward fashion influencers on consumer purchase intention. The reliability of this measure is low, with a Cronbach's Alpha score of  $\alpha = 0.66$ . However, having a small number of scale items, the mean inter-item correlation showed a result of .352 and lies in the range between 0.2 and 0.5, which is still considered poor but acceptable reliability, which is why the items are included for further analysis.

**Intention.** To measure participants intentions on sustainable fashion consumption, a set of seven statements was used. In total, two questions were asked using a 1 to 10 scale, allowing participants to rank themselves unrestricted. Participants were asked to indicate how much they agreed with each statement using a five-point Likert scale. Questions from the research of McNeill and Moore (2015) was used to construct the statements. The items were slightly adapted. Consequently, the following statements are used to measure sustainable fashion consumption; "When I am buying fashion clothing, sustainability plays a crucial role for me "and "I believe that buying sustainable fashion items has a positive impact on the environment "and "I believe that the fast fashion industry (such as Zara, c&a, Primark) has a big environmental impact on the planet "and "I believe that environmentally sustainable products will help in improving the environment "and "I feel good about myself when I use environmentally sustainable product ". Generally, the items on intentions reached acceptable reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .76).

**Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behaviour.** In order to measure participants' general consumption behaviour on sustainable fashion items, a set of three statements was used. In total, two questions were asked using a 1 to 10 scale, allowing participants to rank themselves unrestricted. The questions are the following: "On a scale from 1 to 10, to what extent are you aware of sustainable fashion products? (1 being not aware at all, 10 being very aware) "and "On a scale from 1 to 10, are you consuming sustainable fashion products? (1 being not consuming at all, 10 being consuming)". Lastly, a question regarding participants' current taken measures towards sustainable fashion consumption was asked using a 6-item scale with multiple options. Participants were able to tick off as many applicable answers as possible. The question was the following: "What current taken actions/measures do you take regarding sustainability when buying fashion clothing? ". In the current study, the items on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour yielded acceptable reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .72). The 5-point Likert scale was used throughout the online questionnaire to "increase response rate and quality "(Babakus & Mangold, 1992). To check the validity of all measurement, factor analysis was conducted. This can be found in Appendix C.

The complete survey can be found in Appendix B.

### ***3.5.2 Semi-structured Interviews***

To gain more extensive outcomes and a deeper understanding of how influencers characteristics affect young adolescents' consumption behavior, semi-structured interviews were also used to better understand the collected statistical data. According to previous literature, Boeije (2009) defines semi-structured interviews which are based on a topic and questions list. That means the interview is not entirely pre-structured, and there is still room for flexibility in asking the questions. This approach was applied to leave some personal space for the researcher and the participant to ensure a feeling of comfortability. The topic list can be found in Appendix D.

Moreover, some questions of the interviews were collected from the previously filled-in surveys; however, additional questions were added to receive more in-depth insights. Adding to that, the researcher got one step further into subjective and objective influencer characteristics. With this, questions about how credible influencers are perceived by the participants and especially why they have been asked. In that case, the participants were asked to give concrete examples of influencers they are following and based on that, follow-up questions were asked.

At the end of the interview, the participant got the opportunity to raise any concerns or pose questions related to the topic. It was essential to lead a genuine and honest discussion with the participant. Doing so ensured the sense of a natural conversation during the interviews.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

#### ***3.6.1 Analysis of the survey***

To do a reliable statistical analysis of the survey, 87 participants were involved. To begin with, the data set was cleaned. Moreover, the survey data was analyzed by calculating the descriptive statistics (means, SD, frequencies, range) for all participants regarding age, gender, nationality, and level of education. To determine whether correct conclusions can be drawn from the results, assumptions were tested. This can be found in Appendix E.

Furthermore, a reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) and validity (Factor analysis) analysis of the variables Social Media usage, influencer knowledge, influencer characteristics, intention and sustainable consumption behaviour was conducted to ensure the quality of the study. To test the hypotheses, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the linear relationship between influencer characteristics and intention, intention and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour, as well as between sustainable fashion consumption behaviour and influencer characteristics. Lastly, the PROCESS v3.5 for SPSS tool of Andrew Hayes was applied to test the hypotheses of this study.

#### ***3.6.2 Analysis of semi-structured Interviews***

A deductive approach was used to analyze the data of the semi-structured interviews, meaning that a pre-defined list of codes was established in a coding frame before starting the actual coding of the data (Boeije, 2009). In the current study, this was done by establishing various categories before analyzing the data, which were structurally organized in a codebook. Moreover, appropriate codes were added to the codebook after reviewing suitable literature. However, before starting the actual coding of the empirical material, which was gathered during the interviews, analytical memos were written to reflect the raw data and make first notes concerning the researchers' impressions. Writing the memos was a necessary step to get familiarized with the data and get a deeper understanding of the data. The deductive approach (top-down) was chosen to focus the coding on theory testing or refinement. According to previous literature, a deductive approach is beneficial for analyzing qualitative data, as during

coding, the frames can still be modified if differences or interesting factors emerge (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Furthermore, the literature stated that choosing a deductive approach ensures structure when starting coding (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

After familiarising the empirical data, the actual coding process started with creating a pre-defined list of codes based on the previously established topic list and frequently mentioned aspects during the interview. Hence, initial codes were generated. However, descriptive and attribute codes were applied to the data to remain sensitive to the data and uncover underlying concepts. Descriptive codes were assigned to segments of the data and were summarized using labels which display the meanings of each segment (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). To explore the differences and similarities within the different codes to discover sub-themes, attribute codes were assigned to extract differences in participants' perspectives and experiences (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). As Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard (2019) stated, those different coding steps are also known as cycles of coding. From the first to the second cycle, codes develop from open coding to axial and selective coding, where connections are drawn between the codes and a more in-depth approach is chosen.

Altogether, 20 codes were generated, from which five are main codes and 15 subcodes. The main codes are "Type of Influencer", "Perception of Influencer", "Attitudes towards Influencer", and "Influencer in relation to sustainable consumption behavior" and "Number of followers". These main codes were divided into subcategories, which are for example, "Reasons of following", "Positive feelings toward Influencer", "Subjective characteristics of influencer (trust, credibility)", "Cooperation with brands" or "less followers (nano, micro)". The complete codebook with specific descriptions and examples of each code can be found in Appendix B. Thereupon, the program Atlas.ti was used to code the transcribed interviews based on the previously created codebook. Furthermore, intercoder reliability was tested to ensure the codebook is reliable. Hereby, in total 10% of the interviews were coded by peers. As a result, the Cohen's Kappa of 0.865 provided a high level of agreement between the coders. Thus, the codes were clearly defined, and the coding process was continued. The Cohen's Kappa's for the main categories can be found in Table 2. As a last step, new concepts or, better said, ideas about how concepts relate to each other were elaborated based on the coding analysis (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019).

**Table 2**

### *Cohen's Kappa of the main Categories*

Code	Cohen's Kappa
Type of Influencer	.862
Perception of Influencer	.788
Influencer in relation to sustainable consumption behavior	.811
Number of followers	.899

## **Results**

### **4.1 Results Questionnaire**

#### **4.1.1 Descriptive statistics**

When looking at the descriptive statistics for the item *sustainable fashion consumption behavior*, the mean is 7.31 (*S.D.* = 1.93). Having a closer look at the descriptive for intentions, the item “*I believe the fast fashion industry (such as Zara, c&a, Primark) has a big negative environmental impact on the planet*” has the highest mean with 4.34 (*S.D.* = .59) which indicate that participants . When looking at the descriptive statistics for the moderating variable *influencer* the item “*I believe that Fashion Influencer I follow are convincing*” has the highest mean with 3.57 (*S.D.* = .76). When asking participants specifically about their current taken measures towards sustainability, it becomes apparent that the majority of participants, in total 58 (67.4%), choose secondhand fashion items instead of new products. However, only 10 participants (11.6%) indicated that they choose sweatshop free products. The Descriptive Statistics for all items can be found in the tables 3,4,5 and 6.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive statistics for the items on Intention*



	Mean	S.D.
<i>When I am buying fashion clothing, sustainability plays a crucial role for me</i>	3.23	.92
<i>I believe that buying sustainable fashion items has a positive impact on the environment</i>	4.22	.70
<i>I believe the fast fashion industry (such as Zara, c&amp;a, Primark) has a big negative environmental impact on the planet</i>	4.34	.59
<i>I believe that environmentally sustainable products will help in improving the environment</i>	4.15	.70
<i>I feel good about myself when I use environmentally sustainable products</i>	4.1	.78

**Table 4**

*Descriptive Statistics for Intention and Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior*

	Mean	S.D.	N
Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior	7.31	1.93	87

**Table 5**

*Descriptive statistics for the items on Influencer*

	Mean	S.D.
<i>I believe that Fashion Influencer I follow are convincing</i>	3.57	.76
	3.4	.84

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<i>I believe that fashion influencer I follow are credible and trustworthy endorses</i>		
<i>I believe that fashion influencer I follow use in their daily life routine the same products they advertise on social media</i>	3.02	.99
<i>I believe that influencer who have more followers are more trustworthy and credible, than influencers with less followers</i>	2.76	1.34

---

**Table 6**

*What current taken measures do you take on sustainable consumption behavior*

	Frequency	Percent
Choosing second hand instead of new	58	67.4
Choosing renewable fabrics	24	27.9
Buying locally produced clothing	23	26.7
Recycling my previous purchases first	22	25.6
Buying the highest quality	15	17.4
Choosing sweatshop free products	10	11.6
Other	8	9.3

---

#### ***4.1.2 Correlations – for explorative purposes, to explore the data, to check the hypothesis***

A Pearson correlation coefficient was run to assess the relationship between influencer characteristics and intention, intention and sustainable fashion consumption behavior and between sustainable fashion consumption behavior and influencer characteristics. This approach was applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationships. As can be seen in Table 7 all correlations were found positive and significant. This signifies that participants with higher

levels of intention report higher on sustainable fashion consumption behavior. This correlation can be considered as strong. Also, an increase in intentions was moderately correlated with an increase in influencer characteristics. Moreover, an increase in participants sustainable fashion consumption behavior was moderately correlated with an increase in influencer characteristics.

**TABLE 7**

*Correlations between the variables - Pearson's r*

	Influencer	Intention	Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior
Influencer			
Intention	.41**		
Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior	.25*	.65**	

*Note \* Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)*

*\*\* Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)*

#### **4.1.3 PROCESS by Hayes - Analysis of Moderation effect**

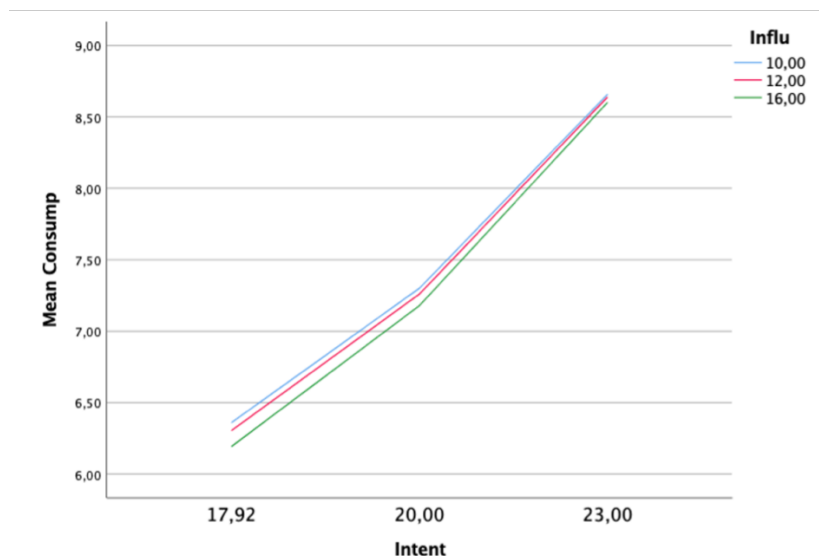
To test Sub-RQ2a (Is the relationship between one self's intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behavior moderated by influencers subjective characteristics, such as trustworthiness and perceived credibility?) and Sub-RQ3a (Is the relationship between one self's intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behavior moderated by influencers objective characteristics, such as number of followers of the influencer?), a simple moderation analysis was performed to test whether influencers' characteristics moderate the relationship between young adults intentions sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

By adding the moderating variable influencer to the actual linear model, the model itself remains significant  $F(1, 86) = 18.51, p < .001$ , and explained 40.4% of variance on consumption behavior. Hence, the model provided significant explanatory power for sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

Even though intention could statistically significantly predict sustainable fashion consumption behavior in the correlation analysis ( $b = -.46$ ,  $SE = 13.09$ ,  $t(86) = 7.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (in line with SubRQ1), there is a non-significant effect of intentions on consumption behavior through the moderating variable influencer,  $b = .004$ , 95% Bca CI  $[-.041; .048]$ . These results do not support Sub-RQ2a and Sub-RQ 3a. Figure 3 shows the plot of the simple slopes for the relationship between Intention at essentially -1 SD, below the mean +1 SD and at the mean on Influencer. Hereby, the correlation between influencer characteristics, intentions, and sustainable fashion consumption behavior can be observed. Since the lines are parallel, the moderating variable influencer characteristics cannot moderate the relationship between intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

**Figure 3**

*Plot of simple slopes for the relationship between Intention and consumption behavior at essentially -1 SD, below the mean +1 SD and at the mean on Influencer.*



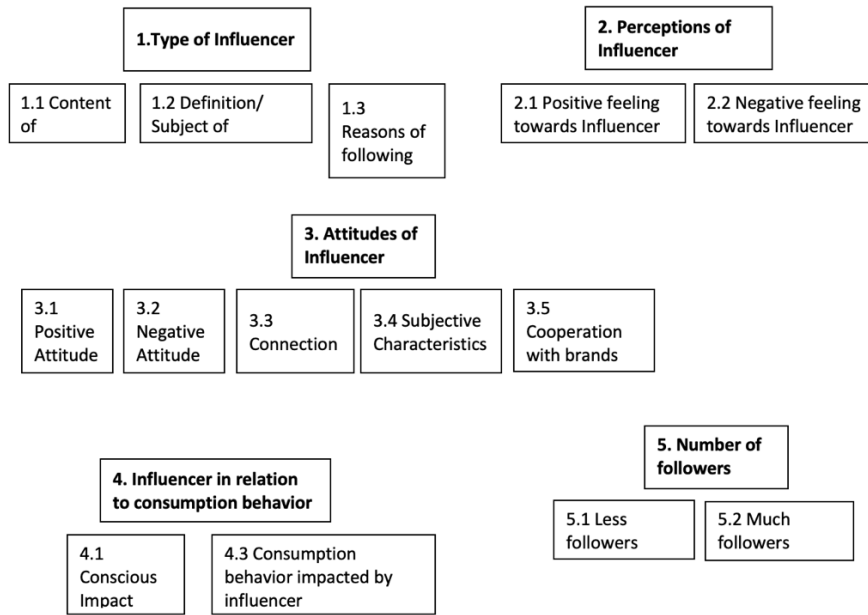
*\*\* Note Consump = Sustainable fashion Consumption Behaviour; Intent = Intention; Influent = Influencer characteristics*

## 4.2 Results Interview Coding

In total, five central topics based on the five main codes from the code book were identified, which are “Type of Influencer”, “Perception of Influencer”, “Attitude towards the influencer”, “Influencer in relation to sustainable consumption” and “Number of followers”. For “Type of Influencer” the previous sub codes were also separated into sub-themes, which are: Reasons of following and subject/definition. For perception of influencer, the sub-themes are Content of Influencer, negative/positive feelings towards the influencer, opinion and personal perceptions and attitudes. Furthermore, the theme “Attitude towards the influencer” consists of five sub-themes including Connection, cooperation with brands, negative attitude, positive attitude as well as subjective characteristics (trust and credibility). Influencer in relation to sustainable consumption behavior was also split into subthemes, namely conscious impact, unconscious impact, consumption impacted by influencers and impact influential. Lastly, “Number of followers” was divided into three sub-themes which are followers, less followers (nano, micro) and much followers (macro). A model of the visualization of the connection between the different themes can be found in figure 4. The interviews were conducted to answer Sub-RQ 2b (*How do young adults believe that subjective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming sustainable fashion?*) and Sub-RQ 3b (*How do young adults believe that objective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming sustainable fashion?*).

### Figure 4

*Visualization of the themes and sub-themes*



#### 4.2.1 *Type of Influencer*

**Content of Influencer.** The influencer's content is not primarily about the influencer's topics; it is more about how they communicate the content they produce and publish through their posts and stories on Instagram. Five out of nine participants find it interesting when an influencer is taking their followers along the day and are presenting real-life situations. For example, participant 1 stated: "I would always find that interesting to follow their normal life because then I think you get the possibility to kind of compare yourself a bit with them, so maybe get ideas for your own life in specific situations".

**Definition/Subject of the Influencer.** All the participants mentioned that lifestyle, travel and fashion bloggers are frequently followed and watched on Instagram. Crucial to mention is that seven participants find it relevant to follow influencers who address topics or undertake activities that align with their followers' interests and activities. One of the participants indicated: "For me, it is more about following people who influence my character and personality, but those can also be friends or musicians for example. It is more about that the influencer's interests and subjects are in line with mine as well" (participant 3).

**Reasons of following.** While discussing participants' reasons for following, it became prominent that eight participants pointed out that they particularly like to follow influencers as an

inspiration for travelling, food, or daily outfit inspirations. Adding to that, some participants also mentioned that they like to watch influencers who are motivating to their followers and take them through their lives. Participant 7 mentioned: "I like to watch influencers who take you through the day, if they study for example. When they go to the gym in the morning, then do something for university and how they organize their day."

Furthermore, it can be noted that participants are more likely to follow Influencers when they integrate the community, not just by sharing their own opinion but also by discussing it directly with the community and integrating their followers' opinions. One participant stated: "I like to follow influencers who especially share their own opinion about socially relevant topics like feminism, climate change or sustainability" (Participant 4).

Moreover, nine participants mentioned that they like when influencers give inspiration and recommendations for their followers. Notably, female and male participants in this study voiced that they enjoy following influencers who do fashion content to get outfit inspiration or outfit recommendations.

#### ***4.2.2 Perceptions of Influencer***

**Positive feelings toward influencers.** Another relevant element during the interviews was that overall, six participants mentioned that they have a positive feeling towards an influencer when the influencer is using their reach to make a reasonable difference. For instance, two participants stated that influencers should be appreciated highly as they can give added value to specific topics or to the society (e.g., "And that is very good, that he uses his reach to show us relevant topics and make us sensitive for them", participant 6.) Additionally, four participants highlighted that they have positive feelings towards the influencer when they see that the products they promote are integrated into their daily routine. It could be argued that individuals can form a positive attitude towards the influencer when congruence between recommendations and promotions to their followers are in line with the influencer's personal usage.

**Negative Feeling Toward Influencer.** Nevertheless, participants also reported negative feelings towards influencers in particular situations. This often involved influencers' ways of communicating, for instance, sustainability in an honest and transparent way. Participant 2 expressed: "I have doubts about her ways of communicating sustainability of the products she is

promoting because it seems like it is greenwashing". Adding upon that, one participant specified that negative feelings arise when influencers promote products and communicate it in a way that it is sustainable of a brand known to be prominent for fast fashion production (e.g., Oceans Apart as an example. "Because I already know the scandal about the brand, the influencers who are still advertising it are untrustworthy. The person promoting it loses credibility every time" (Participant 3). This quote suggests that participants could perceive influencers' ways of communicating product promotions as distrusting as it seems ambiguous.

#### ***4.2.3 Attitudes towards the Influencer***

**Positive Attitude.** Furthermore, five participants indicated that they could establish a positive attitude towards the influencer when the content is perceived as honest and transparent by the follower. Additionally, four participants mentioned that they see the influencer in favour if the stories and posts are made personally. However, participant 8 also affirmed: "If the influencer is raising awareness about a socially relevant topic, such as sustainability and wants you to buy sustainable, you are getting very aware of the problem and so influenced towards like being a little better. And that is why I have a positive attitude towards her and especially towards her content". Here, it can be recognized that influencers who act sustainably in real-life situations and take their followers along this way can establish a positive attitude. Accordingly, three participants indicated that their attitudes increased when the influencer presented the product in a more casual real-life situation.

**Negative Attitude.** However, there are still negative attitudes towards influencers from participants of this study. Participants in this study raised concerns that influencers are brought in connection with paid product and brand cooperation, which negatively affects participants' attitudes towards the influencer in general. Seven participants mentioned, for example: "I know that she earns money with it and that all the money makes it seem more unbelievable and fake, which consequently affects my attitude towards influencers in general." (Participant, 1). In addition, two participants supported this and indicated opposing viewpoints toward influencer advertising. One of the participants claimed: "But it's like an ad kind of in the video. So, it does not seem natural, which is why I do not like influencers who are doing advertisements" (Participant 5). This quote illustrates that participants are likely to form negative attitudes towards the influencer if it is perceived as an advertisement which is presented as inauthentic.



**Connection.** To gain more insights into participants' perceptions of influencers, they were asked whether they feel a connection or relation towards influencers. It becomes evident that all of the participants mentioned a connectedness to the influencers they are following. Participant 3 stated: "Through the content and the stories, you already develop a closeness with the influencer and learn a lot about the person, which simply builds up a closeness and trust".

However, a conflict in the responses of the participants was noticeable. Even though participants declared that they do not feel an explicitly emotional bond towards the influencer, their statements revealed that there is a relationship. For example, one participant mentioned: "I would not say now that it's a deep emotional attachment. But I guess I feel for them when they post something sad. For example, someone posted that her brother had killed himself. I found that intense. That really took me. I would say there is a bond" (Participant, 2). Moreover, it was recognized that a connection towards the influencer exists when the participant follows the influencer over a long period of time. "Watching her for a long time, and I kind of grew up with her too. So, she is kind of like a long-term friend or a big sister maybe" (Participant 1)

**Subjective Characteristics (trust, credibility).** During the interviews, the participants agreed when expressing that credibility is a relevant driver for influencing sustainable fashion consumption. Eight of the participants agreed that influencers are trustworthy endorsers, especially when their content is perceived as credible and natural as one mentions: "I feel like the lifestyle Influencer are more real and you kind of get to know the behind the scenes more and that is why I perceive them as trustworthy and credible" (Participant 4). Moreover, what could be noticed during the interviews was that four participants indicated that the time of following plays a crucial role when perceiving the influencer as trustworthy and credible. Further, five participants find it relevant to see the influencer using the products they are promoting in their daily routine without directly recognizing that they get paid for the promotion. This, in turn, created trust towards the influencer: "If I see the influencer using those products in their daily routine without getting paid, I 100% trust you with that" (Participant 7).

Nevertheless, two participants described the opposite of perceiving influencers as credible and trustworthy. With this, it was observed that especially influencers who are promoting products just for paid promotion but not out of conviction are perceived as untrustworthy endorsers ("I know that especially influencers who promote products only for the money and not

because they like the products. That makes it very untrustworthy", Participant 9). This shows that it is crucial for the participants that the influencer is not only cooperating with a brand for their benefit but rather standing behind personal beliefs and values to ensure coherence.

**Cooperation With Brands.** During the interviews, it became obvious that eight out of nine participants mentioned that influencers' cooperation with brands impacts their sympathy towards the influencer. One participant, for example, participant two stated: "It really depends on the brand they are cooperating with. When they are on the one side promoting sustainable fashion but on the other side promoting fast fashion products, then I'm not really sure about it if they are so honest and trustworthy". This quote is an example of what most participants find problematic when influencers cooperate with brands. The most common argument during the interviews was that often a mismatch between the promotion of the products and the actual action of the influencers appears. This demonstrates that it is vital for participants that the influencers' promotion needs to be in accordance with the brand he or she is cooperating with to establish trustworthiness towards the influencer. Thus, it can be elucidated that an alignment between brand and influencer must exist in order to impact participants' behaviour.

#### ***4.2.4 Influencer in relation to sustainable consumption behaviour***

**Conscious Impact.** All the participants can find themselves impacted by influencers in terms of their sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. When conducting the interviews, it became apparent that participants mentioned that their general behaviour is affected when influencers raise awareness about sensitive topics, such as sustainability, to name one example. To illustrate, participant 8 explained: "Sometimes, when they raise awareness, they bring in examples from everyday life, which I then try to implement in order to become more sustainable and of course you try to incorporate it into your everyday life, and it affects your behaviour in any sense".

Likewise, this statement is supported by participant 5, who mentioned that there is a strong influence which leads to an effect on the sustainable consumption behaviour regarding fashion items. Furthermore, participant 4 expressed: "I usually find artists much more credible, or they influence me more. If I like them and I can identify with them, then I automatically feel that if they say here, look, I'm making sure I eat less and less meat. That's an inspiration to imitate that, and it consciously impacts my behaviour. However, it depends on the personality behind it".

This statement shows that participants can easily identify with the influencer if their actions are in line with the interests of the follower, which consequently influence the consumption behaviour.

**Unconscious Impact.** Nevertheless, a joint statement during the interviews was that participants felt a certain lack of control when scrolling through their Instagram channels and watching influencers' content in a rather unmindful way. It could be noticed that in total, three participants indicated that they are not able to switch off the effects of influencers. These participants mentioned that they appreciate influencers' promotion; however, they do not reflectively react to it. Thus, participants voiced a rather instinctive impact as they do not look at promotions or recommendations attentively but rather incidentally. With this, a lack of self-control of the participants was recognized. To demonstrate, participant 6 explained that: "I think when I am scrolling through my Instagram account and seeing influencers promoting products or giving recommendations, I kind of perceive them at a more unconscious level and do not really click on the links every time. So, I would say that I am affected in some way but not fully conscious of changing my consumption."

**Consumption Behavior Impacted by Influencer.** During the interviews, all participants pointed out that influencers could alter their general consumption behaviour. Especially four participants specified that they perceive Influencers as actors who have control over their behaviour. Especially when it comes to sustainable fashion consumption behaviour, participants in this study raised that they are at least impacted even though it does not necessarily decide to purchase the products the influencer is promoting finally. To be more specific in which dimensions it affects participants' consumption behaviour, one participant for instance, clarified: "I think it influences you. So, for example, if one of the influencers I follow and like is talking about a face peeling, then maybe I'm not looking into the face cream directly at first, but it triggers my consumption behaviour".

Generally, during the interviews, it became visible that influencers giving inspiration and recommendations about leading a sustainable lifestyle have the power to impact participants' sustainable consumerism. Moreover, an influencer is perceived as more potent in affecting participants' sustainable fashion consumption behaviour when the way of communication and promotion of the products is perceived as honest and transparent. To illustrate, participant 5 made clear: "If they promote a sustainable fashion brand and they say like they are very nice, good for

the environment and that in a transparent and honest way. This will trigger my behaviour in any way. And it really makes me think about my own sustainable fashion consumption behaviour".

#### **4.2.5 Number of followers**

**Less Followers (nano, micro).** When asking participants about their perceptions of the Number of followers an influencer obtains, all the participants in this study explained that they like following influencers with small network sizes. With this, it became clear that participants perceive this group of influencers as a trustworthy source of information as they are more seen as friends who recommend products or talk about topics that align with their beliefs and values. To demonstrate, participant 8 stated: "I do follow influencers with a small number of followers, like nano influencer. I trust influencers with less followers, maybe even more because they are more like friends to me and their content is highly in line with their actual behaviour, which consequently impacts my behaviour". Furthermore, two participants precisely articulated that they perceive nano influencers as trustworthy and credible endorsers because they are seen as even more valuable and authentic than an influencer with more followers. Based on these statements, it can be noticed that authenticity, credibility, and trustworthiness are seen as essential drivers which impact participants' consumption behaviour.

**Much Followers (macro).** On the opposite side, asking participants about their attitude toward influencers with a big number of followers, the participants pointed out two things that came to their mind. First, one participant has a positive attitude towards macro-influencers and came to the point that following influencers with a big network size underline the credibility as many people follow the influencer. However, most of this study's participants were negatively appointed towards bigger influencers. This type of influencer is brought in connection with paid brand cooperation which has negative impacts on participants' perceptions. Accordingly, the perceived trust and credibility of the influencer is impaired. To demonstrate, participant 9 expressed the following: "I feel like the bigger the influencers get, the more fake they are, especially in ads, because brands know how many people are watching their content, and then they pay more. So maybe if the big influencers do not like that brand or the product would still do it because it is much money there, get for it and that's what I don't like about it". This quote shows that macro-influencers are rapidly brought in connection with paid product promotions or paid brand cooperation.

## **Discussion**

### **5.1 Main findings**

The central aim of this research was to acquire further knowledge and gain a deeper understanding of how the relationship between young adults' intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour can be affected by influencers' subjective and objective characteristics. The subsequent research question was posed: "How do Influencers' characteristics (trust, credibility, and followers) relate to young adolescents' (18-25) intentions towards sustainable fashion consumption behaviour". A mixed-method research design was applied to examine this, which added value to existing research and helped expand the knowledge of the different concepts. This study strengthened the recent findings of various studies and identified different aspects that contribute to a more in-depth understanding of sustainable fashion consumption and influencer marketing.

#### **5.1.1 Survey**

The first sub-question in this study (Is there a relationship between young adults' intentions and the actual sustainable fashion consumption behaviour?) concerns whether there is a relation between intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. Thus, Pearson's correlation coefficient was run. In this research, it was expected that young adults' intentions and their sustainable fashion consumption behaviour are related. Previous studies have already found that the intention toward environmentally sustainable products is related to the consumption of sustainable products (Kumar, 2013). In the current study, the quantitative analysis showed that participants with higher levels of intention reported higher on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. This can be returned to earlier research which discovered that growth in intention could also indicate a growth in the likelihood of performing the actual behaviour (Chetioui et al., 2020). The current study uncovered that individuals could take action by choosing second-hand clothing instead of new items and are aware that the fast fashion industry has a significant negative environmental impact. These findings are similar to the findings obtained by McNeill and Moore (2015). The researchers found that individuals' general attitudes toward sustainable fashion consumption are driven by prior intentions, such as their level of concern for social and environmental comfort and their pre-mindset toward sustainable fashion in relation to their final actions (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Furthermore, whether influencers' subjective and objective characteristics could impact the relationship between young adults' intentions and their sustainable fashion consumption behaviour was studied. To answer Sub-RQ2a (Is the relationship between one self's intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour moderated by influencers' subjective characteristics, such as trustworthiness and perceived credibility?) and Sub-RQ3a (Is the relationship between one self's intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour moderated by influencers' objective characteristics, such as the number of followers of the influencer?), moderation analysis was conducted. The findings revealed no significant predictions, as the moderating effect of influencer characteristics yielded a non-significant result on the relationship between intention and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. That indicates that influencers' characteristics could not moderate the relationship between one self's intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. This finding is not in line with previous research, which indicated that influencers could impact consumers' intentions towards their consumption behaviour when providing sufficient information on pro-environmental facts (e.g., Yildirim, 2021). Moreover, there is evidence from prior studies that subjective characteristics, such as perceived credibility, could have significant and positive effects on consumers' purchase intentions (Hikmawati, 2019). Additionally, according to (Coursaris et al., 2018), there could be different impacts of the number of followers an influencer obtains on consumers' perceived trustworthiness which consequently affects consumer behaviour.

To reflect on the non-significant effect, it could be that the assemblage of subjective and objective characteristics during the analysis does not explain the relationship between intentions and sustainable consumption behaviour. In this study, subjective and objective characteristics were merged into one variable and not measured separately, which could explain why this study did not find a significant effect. Moreover, it also could be that subjective and objective characteristics were not studied to a satisfactory extent in this research, as only a limited number of questions were asked in the quantitative analysis. Recent studies undertook a more explorative approach to clearly distinguish between nano, micro, and macro influencer, whereas comparisons in credibility and trustworthiness were established (Verger, 2019).

### ***5.1.2 Interviews***

**Subjective Influencer Characteristics.** The second sub-questions ("How do young adults believe that subjective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming

sustainable fashion?") could be answered through qualitative measurements in the form of semi-structured interviews. It can be said that a large number of participants in this study perceive influencers as trustworthy and credible endorsers when they share their own lives and incorporate their followers into their daily routine. Respectively, this was often linked to the reason for following influencers if their way of producing content matches the expectations of the participants. In line with these findings, Chwialkowska (2019) argued that influencers sharing moments from their own lives appear trustworthy and can affect individuals' green behaviour. Furthermore, this study expanded current knowledge and found out that the influencer's content and subject play a crucial role when addressing the lack of awareness towards consuming sustainable products. Respectively, this was often linked to the reason for following influencers if their way of producing content matches the expectations of the participants. It is essential to mention that many participants in this study emphasized that their consumption behaviour is closely related to the content the influencer produces. When perceiving the content as motivating or inspiring, influencers can consequently be perceived as more trustworthy and credible, which could influence individuals' intentions towards consuming sustainably.

Moreover, previous studies, such as the research by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017), found that consumers perceive influencers as trustworthy when they present products in the form of recommendations based on personal opinions and experiences. Their findings correspond with the findings of this study. Participants in the current study often clarified that they like posts and stories in which influencers give recommendations. In line with Lim et al. (2017) findings, influencers are viewed as influential towards their follower's behaviour if they are recognized with high levels of trustworthiness and credibility. Similarly, in this study, it came to light that all participants could be impacted by influencers when they recommend inspiring products and if the content matches up with the consumers' interests.

Additionally, this research revealed that influencers taking their followers along the day, presenting real-life situations, or sharing their own opinions help overcome barriers to fully adapting to a sustainable lifestyle. Accordingly, positive attitudes can be formed when the influencer presents the product in a more casual real-life situation. Thereof, it can be recognized that how an influencer communicates specific topics becomes a central driver of participants' general attitudes towards the influencer. Moreover, if the content is personal and authentic, aligned with beliefs and lifestyles, the influencer is perceived as an expert and a credible endorser. Previous research supports these assertions by detecting that influencer promotions or

recommendations must be in line with consumers' beliefs and lifestyles to be perceived as highly trustworthy (Verger, 2019). Moreover, a recent study by Kapitan et al. (2021) presents that influencers can be perceived as more authentic and credible when they genuinely believe in the endorsed product. When such a product-endorser fit emerges, a higher acceptance of the delivered message can be achieved, leading to impacts on individuals' consumption behaviour.

Lim et al. (2017) found that influencers with insufficient knowledge about the endorsed product led to a lack of credibility towards the consumer. Thus, the influencer might impair consumers' perceived images of the influencer and the product, which might cause negative purchase intentions (Lim et al., 2017). However, this study's findings demonstrate that negative feelings could also exist towards an influencer when a discrepancy between the actual communication of a product and its promotion is emerging. In this study, consumers' general attitudes are impacted negatively when there is a lack of trust between the influencer and the follower, which could emerge from paid partnerships or inauthentic communication. This is in line with the findings of Grafström et al. (2018) who also found that consumer attitudes could be affected negatively when there is a lack of trust between the influencer and the follower.

Influencers can guide individuals for a healthier and greener lifestyle as well as affect their follower's adoption process to an eco-friendlier lifestyle (Byrne et al., 2017). The results of this study show that perceived trust and credibility toward an influencer could affect an individual's sustainable consumption behaviour. Participants indicated that there could be a positive impact on their intentions toward sustainably consuming fashion. This aspect was also discussed in prior research.

In summary, one main conclusion this qualitative part of the research draws is that influencers' subjective characteristics can relate to young adults' intentions toward sustainable fashion consumption. These findings align with this study's expectations (Sub-RQ 2b: *Do young adults believe that subjective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming sustainable fashion?*). Nevertheless, various factors, such as the content, own beliefs or lifestyles of the influencer, could play a key role when affecting such a green fashion behaviour. Aligned with previous research, participants in this study demonstrated that their general sustainable fashion consumption behaviour could be altered by influencers perceived trust and credibility. For example, Chetioui et al. (2020) exposed that influencers who are perceived as credible and trustworthy in their ways of communicating or promoting products are more likely to alter followers' attitudes and, consequently their behaviour towards green fashion consumption.



**Objective Influencer Characteristics.** The semi-structured interviews could also answer the third sub-questions ("How do young adults believe that objective influencer characteristics affect their intentions of consuming sustainable fashion?"). One conclusion existing research drew is that generally, influencers with a smaller number of followers, such as nano or micro-influencers, could be perceived as more honest, trustworthy, and truthful than celebrities or macro-influencers (e.g., Marques et al., 2020). This research discovered that influencers with a small network could be perceived as credible endorsers. Additionally, the study conducted by Heuvel (2022) adds that influencers can achieve higher levels of consumer influencer engagement with a smaller network. In accordance with that, participants in this study recorded that they are more willing to engage with the influencer and adopt recommendations from influencers with fewer followers.

In line with prior findings, this study demonstrates that this group of influencers can be seen as an inspiration, leading to a more trustworthy relationship between endorsers and consumers. Despite this, primarily, nano influencers can build a different type of relationship with their followers based on a friendship level (Puce, 2021). This finding is consistent with the findings of this study. In this case, nano influencers could be seen as friends, forming a closer connection. Thereof, results of the current study show that the influencer recommends sustainable fashion products which are valuable for themselves, in turn, could impact individuals' sustainable consumption behaviour. With this, what could be noticed during the interviews was that influencers can impact eco-friendly fashion consumption with a smaller number of followers as they can keep up a real-life relationship with their followers and present real-life situations.

Influencers with a bigger network of people, also known as macro-influencers, are capable of reaching more people to engage with. Interestingly, this study showed limited evidence that macro-influencers can be recognized as more likeable than nano or micro-influencers and can affect individuals' credibility and trust towards the influencer, which is also explained by prior research (Verger, 2019). However, the minority of participants in the current study supported these results by clarifying that it can undermine the credibility and likeability of an influencer when many people are following the influencer. This is in line with the findings of De Veirman et al. (2017) and Cownie (2017), who found more expressly that a bigger network size could be led to higher effectiveness in product promotion and thus to higher levels of likeability towards the influencer. Moreover, the current study's results also shed light on

individuals' negative perceptions of macro-influencers. Participants described that macro influencers' recommendations or product promotions could not seem authentic as they are getting paid. Adding upon that, it became clear from the results of this research that a negative attitude can be formed when bigger brands with ordinary reputations pay influencers to advertise their products; however, the influencer and brand missions are not in line with each other.

To conclude, this study illustrates that differentiation between an influencer's number of followers could lead to different perceptions of young adults perceived credibility and trustworthiness. This could also influence their sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. As this shows, young adults' beliefs can be affected by influencers with a smaller network as they are more perceived as truthful friends who recommend, motivate, and inspire. However, consumer beliefs in this study can be rather negatively impacted by an influencer with a big network size. Very often, macro-influencers are brought in connection with content which is sponsored by brands which could lead to negative beliefs of consumers, which consequently can have an influence of consumers' intentions toward consuming sustainable fashion.

**Additional Findings.** Two additional aspects were mentioned frequently by participants: connectedness between influencer and follower, and influencer-brand cooperation. First, the results showed that a connectedness to the influencer can be considered as a crucial factor when impacting participants general beliefs about the influencer. When an influencer is followed by consumers over a long period, a connection could be formed which consequently can have an impact on young adults' intentions to consume sustainable fashion. These findings correspond with existing research. Yuan and Lou (2020) explored the relationships between the endorser and the consumer. They found that para-social relationships can be perceived as strong when influencers are considered as trustworthy and authentic. Respectively, this helps to establish a closer connectedness and could influence individuals' sustainably fashion consumption behavior.

A second aspect which arises often in this research was that influencers cooperation with brands can impact young adults' general behavior. This study revealed that trust and credibility can be damaged because of a recognizable discrepancy between the influencer's own beliefs and the cooperation with brands. Those findings are matched with existing research. Belanche et al. (2021) demonstrated in their study that followers could find an influencer who is showcasing a product only for money and not because of own interest not honest. Therefore, the content cannot be perceived as objective which can cause doubt on the influencer's credibility. It is relevant for

participants in this study that they follow influencers who are promoting products which are congruent with the topics and the content they are covering. Furthermore, Belanche et al. (2021) findings correspond with the findings of this study by clarifying that influencer-promoted product congruence is crucial to perceive the influencer as a credible source. Thus, it can positively impact consumers' perception and correspondingly their sustainable fashion consumption behavior. Thus, when influencers promote products financially supported by brands, it should be in line with their usual content to avoid the impair of attitudes and opinions of their followers.

## **5.2 Limitations**

Although this study contributed to new insights and gained a more in-depth understanding, it still faces some limitations which need to be revised in future research. First, to reflect on the mismatch between the non-significant predictions in the quantitative measurements and the findings from the interviews, it could be the case that the variable influencer characteristics yielded poor reliability; however, it was still included for further analysis. This could lead to non-significant predictions during the quantitative analysis. Within this, another limitation was that there was no clear distinction between subjective and objective characteristics regarding influencers in the survey questions. In this study, the measurement of influencer characteristics was seen as a combination of subjective and objective characteristics; however, there were more questions asked regarding subjective characteristics of influencers as there was more known by prior studies. Thus, no clear difference was made between the two characteristics which could also explain the poor reliability of the items.

Moreover, participants found the term sustainable fashion consumption behaviour hard to grab. When talking about participants' sustainable consumption behaviour during the interviews, it was noticeable that each participant had a different understanding of the term. During the interviews, participants stated that they think about sustainable consumption behaviour more deeply when talking about it and changing opinions or experiences.

Next, this study faced another limitation related to the small sample size (survey: n=96, interviews: n=9). Even though a combination of quantitative and qualitative research was made, which allowed for more in-depth investigations, an increased sample size is beneficial to allow for even more interpretations with high assurance and make the study findings more generalizable to the research population.

### **5.3 Recommendations for future research**

Based on the limitations of this study, recommendations for future research can be made. Starting from a more general perspective, as this study gained a more in-depth understanding of the effects of influencer characteristics on the relationship of intentions on sustainable fashion consumption behaviour, a definite idea for future research could be to dive even deeper into this research topic. Notably, as this study found a mismatch between the quantitative and qualitative approaches, future research needs to replicate the mixed method approach to find significant predictions.

Thus, it is recommended for future research to go more in-depth to investigate subjective and objective influencer characteristics separated from each other instead of combining them into one variable. Adding upon that, future research should simultaneously aim to research individuals' perceptions and intentions of consuming sustainably as this matter is paramount to consider reaching societal and environmental goals in the future. McNeill and Moore (2015) proposed a qualitative research design in which they examined whether the conception of sustainable fashion is part of consumers' lives. The researchers divided consumers into three groups based on their current taken measures on sustainable consumption. Dividing consumers into groups based on their intentions towards consuming green might be a valuable add-on to the current study. Thereof, it can be analyzed whether different effects of influencers can be recognized in the different groups. Correspondingly, a future study should then add influencer characteristics such as trust, credibility and how the number of followers can play a role. Adding to that, the mixed-method approach can be replicated; however, the sample size should be increased to make the study findings more generalizable.

### **5.4 Strengths**

The leading strength of this study is that it applied a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods which can serve as an added value for this research. It started off with a questionnaire, which paid off as being crucial for familiarize with the sample and served as a starting point to create questions for the semi-structured interviews. The interviews delivered valuable insights into the participants' beliefs and attitudes towards the research topic. As it integrates the benefits of both approaches, a complete picture of the phenomena of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption behaviour was gained. Thus, for exploring influencers'

characteristics and their impact on the relation of intentions on sustainable fashion consumption, the applied methods for data collection are viewed as being a great fit.

Another relevant strength of this study is that it confirmed existing research findings and added a more in-depth understanding of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. Nevertheless, more research is needed regarding the impact of influencers' subjective and objective characteristics and how that relates to individuals' intentions toward consuming sustainable fashion.

## **5.5 Societal Implications**

The findings of this study can be practically applied by sustainable fashion brands, marketers, or marketing agencies to improve their communication strategies and marketing activities. It helps to understand how influencer marketing can impact individuals' behaviour to consume sustainably. Hereby, this study helps to see which factors explain the beliefs and perceptions toward influencers and better cooperate with influencers who are perceived as most trustworthy and credible to cooperate. This serves to know best how to encourage consumers to buy sustainable fashion or at least become aware of it. Although this does not necessarily mean that sales are increased, the message to consume sustainable and eco-friendly products is conveyed to consumers with the integration of influencers' powers. However, what is relevant to mention here is that participants in this study stated that conspicuous cooperation with influencer reduce credibility and trust, and this does not have a big impact on their consumption behaviour. Thus, it can be thought-provoking for brands or marketers to find new ways to work with influencers to convey their mission of consuming green and promoting their products. The knowledge gained in this study can be applied to form long-term relationships with influencers. A rethinking of influencer-brand cooperation is vital to consider to be perceived as honest and authentic. For example, cooperating with unknown nano influencers or building long-term partnerships with more prominent influencers and creating campaigns together. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that there is still room for improvement regarding the integration of influencers by brands to increase consumers' intentions toward consuming green.

Adding upon that, this study implies that influencers can also benefit from the findings of this study in terms of understanding their followers' intentions and sustainable consumption behaviour. Due to the recognizable growth of sustainable demands of the society, it can be suggested that influencers need to use their power to be responsible for the planet by forming an

understanding of alternative sustainable fashion consumption. As most influencers share their personal lives with their followers, the behaviour they present should be aligned with their actions in real life to maintain the connectedness to their followers. When communicating sustainable alternatives, for example, they should stay in line with their own beliefs and values to successfully impact consumer behaviour. Additionally, influencers can benefit from this study's findings as they get in-depth insights into consumers' attitudes and opinions regarding influencers. Thus, influencers can use this knowledge to enhance their reputation and improve their content.

## Conclusion

This research investigated young adults' beliefs on influencers' characteristics and examined how they related to young adults' intentions and their sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. The results reveal a mismatch between the findings in the quantitative approach and the qualitative approach. More specifically, non-significant predictions on the moderating variable influencer characteristics were found. However, to answer the following research question: "*How do Influencers' characteristics (trust, credibility, and followers) relate to young adolescents' (18-25) intentions towards sustainable fashion consumption behaviour?*" this research found partly (qualitative research) that young adults' attitudes and intentions to consume sustainable fashion can be seen in relation to influencers characteristics. In this study, consumers' intentions toward consuming sustainable fashion can be affected by perceived trustworthiness and credibility, whereby various factors such as connectedness between influencer and follower, influencer-brand cooperation or content can play a key role. For example, consumers' intentions are negatively impacted when a lack of trust between influencer and consumer is experienced. Furthermore, the number of followers of an influencer can also be seen in relation to young adults' sustainable fashion consumption behaviour. In this study, different effects were recognizable, whereby influencers with a smaller network were perceived as more trustworthy and authentic than macro-influencers. Macro influencers were brought in connection with paid partnerships, which could lead to negative perceptions of the influencer. However, the mixed results of these studies suggest that further research is needed in this area. During the quantitative analysis, no predictions were found for the relationship between intentions and sustainable fashion consumption behaviour moderated by influencer characteristics.

Nevertheless, the results of this mixed-method study provide more insight into influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. The findings of this study are relevant to gaining a more in-depth understanding of influencer marketing and how influencers could shape consumers' perceptions through their recommendations. It helps sustainable fashion brands and marketers find innovative ways to promote their products by clearly understanding which influencer fits best and how that relates best to consumers' behaviour.

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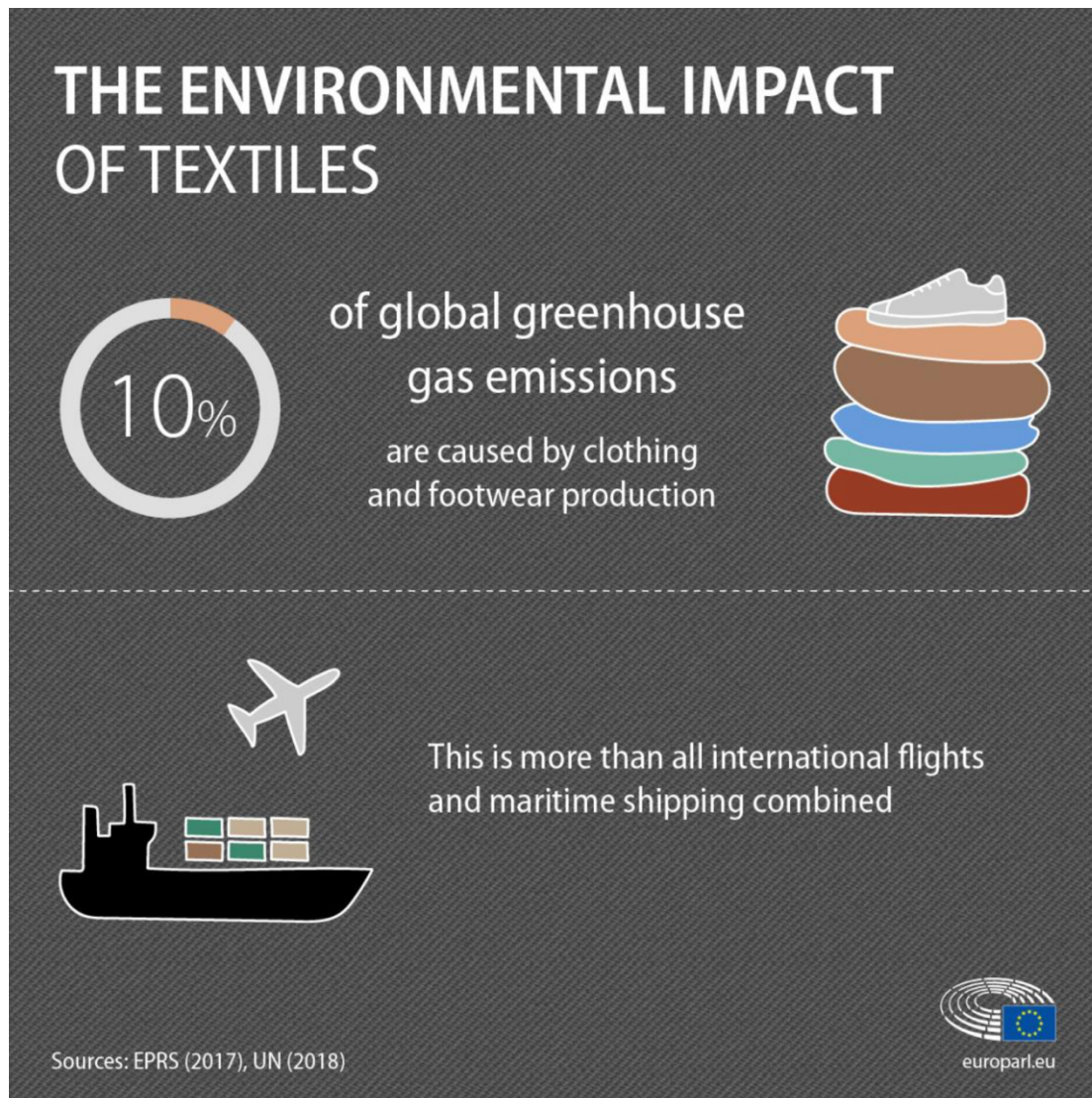
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## Appendix

### Appendix A – Infographic

Figure 6

*Infographic published by the European Parliament 2021*



## Appendix B - The Online Questionnaire

Influencers' impact on sustainable fashion consumption behavior

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### Start of Block:

Q1

Dear participant,

I hereby cordially invite you to take part in my bachelor's study. This study is conducted by Marie Wojtun from the Faculty of Behavioral Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente.

The aim of this study is to explore your perceptions about influencers and how that impact your sustainable fashion consumption behavior. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes. All collected data will be used exclusively for the bachelor thesis in the field of communication sciences. In addition, your data will be treated with care and is subject to absolute confidentiality. Participation in this study is voluntary and you have the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any further questions, you can always contact me by e-mail:

**m.n.wojtun@student.utwente.nl**

---

Q2 I hereby consent to voluntarily taking part in the study described. I understand that I can refuse to answer certain questions and withdraw from the study at any time without giving a specific reason.

☐ Yes, I consent

☐ No

### End of Block:

---

Start of Block: Block 1

How old are you (in years)?

---

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

---

What is your nationality?

- ☐ German
- ☐ Dutch
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

---



What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Primary or secondary school
- ☐ Bachelor's Degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ Professional Degree (PhD)
- ☐ Prefer not to say

End of Block: Block 1

---

Start of Block: Block 2

Q13 This part of the questionnaire is about your general use of social media and about your influencer knowledge.

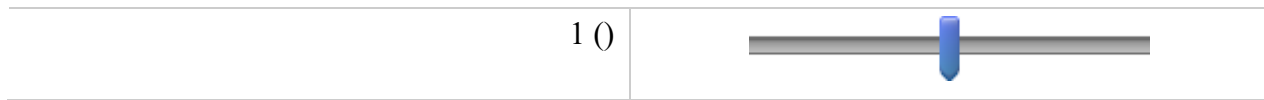
Please read the following statements and indicate how much time you spend by using the scale from 1 (= 1 hour) to 24 (= 24 hours).

-----

On average, how much time do you approximately spend on social media per day? (In hours)

Hours

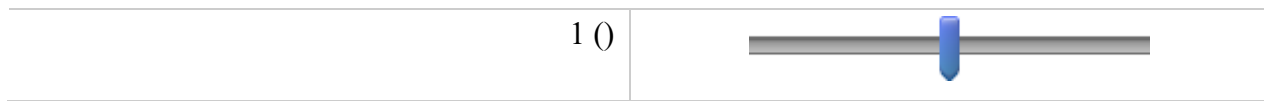
1 3 5 6 8 10 12 13 15 17 19 20 22 24



On average, how much time do you approximately spend on Instagram per day? (In hours)

Hours

1 3 5 6 8 10 12 13 15 17 19 20 22 24



Content What content do you consume the most on Instagram? (Multiple answers are possible)

☐

Recipes/Food

☐

Fashion

☐

Travel

☐

Food

☐

Sports/Fitness

☐

Comedy

☐

Other, namely: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

Which Instagram Influencer do you watch most? Describe 3 Influencers by name and content they produce.

---

---

---

---

---

Did you ever purchased a sustainable fashion item based on an influencer's communication?

- ☐ Definitely not
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Might or might not
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Definitely yes
- ☐ I do not know

End of Block: Block 2

---

Start of Block: Block 3

**Q23 Please read carefully:**

The following statements in this questionnaire are about fashion influencers. In this study, fashion influencer is known as influencers who are promoting fashion or presenting and talk about products related to fashion in an any sense/matter/impression. It does not mean that they are labeling themselves explicitly as fashion influencer. For example: An influencer who is mainly presenting its sports or fitness lifestyle is also able to promote gym fashion items, or an equestrian influencer who is mainly talking about its equestrian lifestyle can also promote several fashion items.

-----

Do you follow fashion Influencers?

- ☐ Definitely not
  - ☐ Probably not
  - ☐ Might or might not
  - ☐ Probably yes
  - ☐ Definitely yes
  - ☐ I do not know
- 

Please read the following statements and indicate how much you (dis)agree using the scale.

I believe that fashion influencers I follow are convincing

- ☐ Completely disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Completely agree
-

I believe that fashion influencers I follow are credible and trustworthy endorsers

- ☐ Completely disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Completely agree
- 

I believe that fashion influencers I follow use in their daily life routine the same products they advertise on social media.

- ☐ Completely disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Completely agree
-

I believe that influencers who have more followers are more trustworthy and credible, than influencers with less followers.

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Completely agree

End of Block: Block 3

---

Start of Block: Block 4

Q28 This part of the questionnaire deals with your general consumption behaviour on sustainable fashion items.

On a scale from 1 to 10, in what extend are you aware of sustainable fashion products? (1 being not aware at all, 10 being very aware)

Not aware at all

very aware

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10



---

Q30 Please read the following statements and indicate how much you (dis)agree using the scale

---

When I am buying fashion clothing, sustainability plays a crucial role for me

- ☐ Completely disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Completely agree
- 

I believe that buying sustainable fashion items has a positive impact on the environment

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Completely agree



-----

Page Break

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I believe that the fast fashion industry (such as Zara, c&a, Primark) has a big negative environmental impact on the planet

- ☐ Completely disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Completely agree
- 

I believe that environmentally sustainable products will help in improving the environment.

- ☐ Completely disagree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Completely agree
-

I feel good about myself when I use environmentally sustainable products

- ☐ Completely disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Completely agree

---

Page Break

On a scale from 1 to 10, do you consume sustainable fashion products? (1 not consuming at all, 10 consuming sustainable fashion)

not willing at all

very willing to buy

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10



What current taken actions/measures to you take regarding sustainability when buying fashion clothing?

- ☐ Choosing second-hand instead of new
- ☐ Choosing renewable fabrics
- ☐ Choosing sweatshop 'free' products
- ☐ Buying the highest quality available
- ☐ Recycling my previous purchases first
- ☐ Buying locally (country) produced clothing
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

End of Block: Block 4

---

Start of Block: Block 5

Q39 Would you be willing to return to a more in-depth interview? The interview will be about how explicitly influencer characteristics, such as the number of followers, trust and perceived

credibility affect your sustainable fashion consumption behavior. The interview will last approximately 10 to 15 minutes and can be conducted in German as well.

☐ Yes (please indicate your email address to further contact you

---

☐ No

**End of Block: Block 5**

---

## Appendix C – Factor analysis

**Table 8**

*Factor Loadings of the constructs*

Construct	Factor loading
Influencer characteristics	.65
Intention	.89
Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behaviour	.82

## Appendix D – Topic List

### Interview scheme

*Thanks for agreeing to do the interview with me today. This study aims at exploring individual's perceptions about influencers and how that impact sustainable fashion consumption behaviour.*

*Feel free to answer everything as detailed as you like and explore other directions. The purpose of this interview is to give you the opportunity to tell your story and share your thoughts, emotions and experiences. This interview will last about 20 minutes. Please note that you have the right to stop the interview at any time or to refuse to answer any question. Moreover, everything you say during the interview will be kept anonymously and you are able to withdraw from the interview at any time. I would like to ask you for your consent that I will record this interview for research purposes only.*

*\*wait for their answer\*.*

### Topics:

*In the following I would like to ask some questions about how you perceive influencers and how that affects your sustainable fashion consumption behaviour.*

*Let me first start with asking some general questions about your perception of influencers in the digital environment.*

- Based on the question in the survey, can you again explain me what **type of influencer** do you follow on social media? *For example: celebrities, influencer with a small number of followers, only fitness influencer etc.*
- And **why** do you especially follow this type of influencer you are mentioning here?
- **What do you like most about their posts and stories?** *About their opinions, experiences, daily routine? What do you like about posts and story*

*In the following section I would like to know more about in what extend you perceive fashion influencers as a credible source of information.*

- Please give an example of any influencer you follow on social media who is promoting fashion, and specifically sustainable fashion items?

What is your **opinion** regarding this influencer?

- 2) Do you perceive the influencer as a **credible and trustworthy** source or even as a friend you trust? Please explain why and give me a specific situation in which you perceived an influencer as trustworthy and credible.
- 3) Can you imagine that the way the influencer is promoting sustainable fashion can affect your consumption behaviour?
- If yes, can you give me an example of when you have purchased a fashion item based on an influencer's communication on social media platforms?

*Thank you! Now I would like to now more about how the number of followers an influencer obtained is affecting your perceptions and your intentions or current taken measures/actions towards sustainable fashion consumption.*

#### 4) Influencer objective characteristics

Nowadays a distinction between nano, mirco and macro influencer is being made based on the number of followers an influencer obtains. Let me briefly explain to you that nano influencers have less than 5000 followers, micro influencer between 10.000 and 100.000 and macro influencer more than 100.000 followers. When looking back at your answers from the survey, your three most watched influencers are \_\_\_\_\_. *name here kind of influencer* \_\_\_\_\_. Based on the results of the questionnaire you filled in before, I can see that you show high/moderate/low levels of concerns for pro environmental reasons

- Can you imagine that the number of followers an influencer obtains can affect your shopping behaviour?
- Do you believe that influencers with a small number of followers are able to affect you in terms of consuming sustainable fashion? Please explain why!
- Imagine \_\_\_\_\_ *influencer xy* \_\_\_\_\_ with a less/higher number of followers. Do you perceive the influencer still as a trustworthy endorser ?
- Do you think the influencer with a less/higher number of followers is still able to affect your behaviour/attitudes in terms of sustainability. Please indicate why.

Lastly, can you give me a specific example where you thought that your sustainable fashion consumption behaviour is strongly affected by on of your favorite influencer?

## 5) Last Words

- Do you have anything you would like to add?

*This was the interview. Thank you so much for participating and sharing your experience and opinions with me. Now that the interview is finished do you still consent to the usage of your input for the research or would you like to withdraw anything? If you would like I can send you the final results.*



## Appendix E – Codebook

**Table 9**

*Codebook*

Code	Subcode	Definition	Example Quotes
1. Type of Influencer	1.1 Content	1.1 What do you like most about their posts and stories?	“Content wise, I watch influencers that produce, travel content or fashion content”
	1.2 Definition/Subject		
	1.3 Reasons of following		
		1.2 What type of Influencer are you following on social media?	“Mainstream influencers or celebrities”
		1.3 Why are you following the Influencer?	“I like when influencer share their own opinions about politics or social relevant topics “
2. Perception of Influencer	2.1 Positive feeling toward Influencer	What is your opinion regarding Influencer and how do you feel towards them and their ways of communicating or promoting	“Mostly I like when I feel, like when it’s very honest content where they are showing their daily life“
	2.2 Negative feeling toward Influencer		

---

		products for example?	
3. Attitudes towards Influencer	3.1 Positive attitude	3.1/3.2 General	“I still think that it is a good start and an effort that she is making to raise awareness that sustainability needs to be valued on a higher level to save our planet“ or “I still have some doubts that like the full life cycle of the production is always fully sustainable because it can't be always so transparent“
	3.2 Negative attitude	attitude towards the influencer	
	3.3 Connection	3.3 Relationship/ established connection towards the influencer	
			“People I follow, I feel a relationship to the person as I have the feeling that we are close to the influencer and that connected us somehow. Maybe, I not only feel close

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		<p>to the influencer          itself but I'm also a          bit more open          towards the person          that mentioned the          Influencer, like,          kind of trusting. It's          nice that the person          I know also follows          the same influencer          I do follow.”</p>
3.4 Subjective characteristics (trust, credibility)	3.4 Credibility, Trustworthiness	<p>“I think many          influences are          trustworthy for me.”</p>
3.5 Cooperation with brands	3.5 With which brands Influencers are cooperating is important to consider in order to measure their credibility	<p>“For me it also          really depends on          the brand they are          cooperating with. It          is about in what          extend is the brand          sustainable they are          cooperating with          and if that is in line,          I perceive the          Influencer as          trustworthy and          credible. You          always have to see</p>

---

---

4. Influencer in relation to sustainable consumption behavior	4.1 Conscious Impact	4.1 Conscious awareness of how influencers are able to affect consumption behavior	with which brands they collaborate“ “I think there is a huge influence by the promotion of influencers. And sometimes also when I see something nice like clothes by an influencer, then I go to the link and to the website and have a look at the fashion items.”
	4.2 Unconscious impact	4.2 Unconscious awareness of how influencer is able to affect consumption behavior	“It does definitely affect your shopping behavior and influences you strongly at least unconsciously. I think there is a huge influence by the promotion of influencers.“
	4.3 Consumption behavior impacted by Influencer		„When she speaks out against the fast fashion industry alone, it has an effect on my

---

---

consumer behavior,  
so that I avoid the  
companies that  
produce fast fashion  
and instead choose  
the sustainable  
brands that she likes  
or that she links to  
and mentions in her  
stories, so that I am  
more interested in  
them or get a deeper  
insight. So, I do  
believe that this has  
a very strong  
influence on me,  
especially on my  
own thoughts and  
opinions.

5. Number of  
followers

In what extend is the  
number of followers  
related to the  
perceived  
trustworthiness and  
credibility?

In what extend is the  
number of followers  
related to  
sustainable fashion  
consumption?

---

5.1 Less followers

5.1 Nano, Micro

“I trust influencers with less followers, maybe even more because they are more friends to me. I think they are even more valuable“

5.2 Much followers

5.2 Macro

“I know that the bigger influencers get more money for what they promote. And that makes what they advertise a bit untrustworthy.”

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## Appendix F - Checking Assumptions of Multivariate Linear Regression

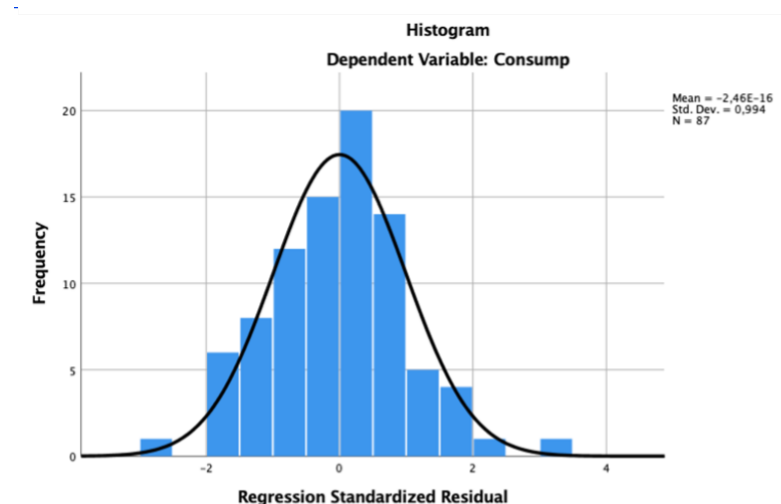
### 1.1 Assumption of Normality

By testing the assumption of normality for the dependent variable sustainable fashion consumption behavior a histograms and P-P plots (see Figure 7) were created. The histogram shows a tendency to a normal distribution without any drastic outliers which indicates normality.

Adding to that, even though a slight deviation is recognizable, the data points in the P-P plot are relatively close to the optimal line. Thereof, the assumption of normality is met for the dependent variable consumption behavior

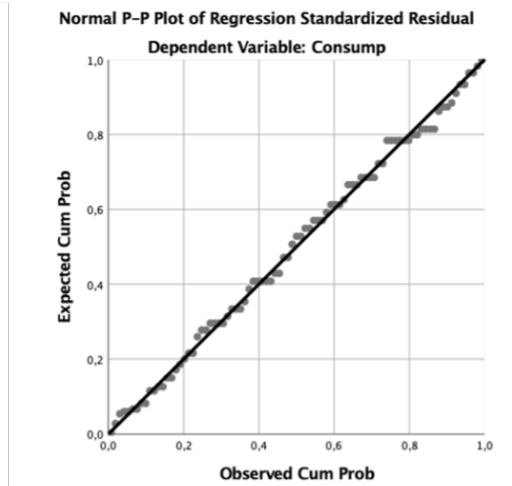
**Figure 7**

*Histogram of Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior for checking for Normality*



**Figure 8**

*P-P plot and Q-Q plot of Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior*



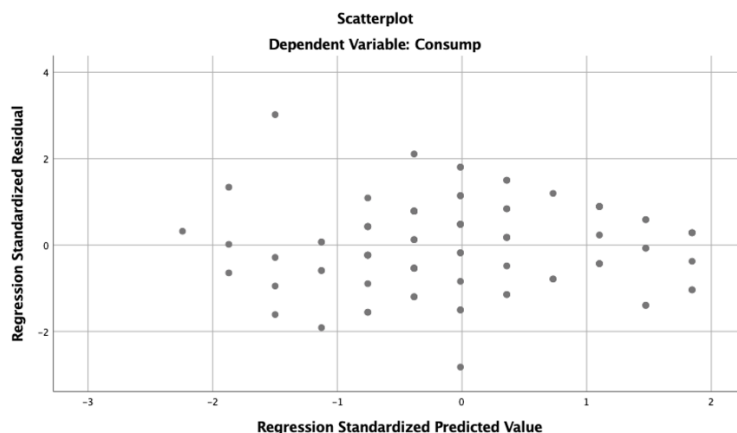
### 1.2 Assumption of Linearity and Homoscedasticity

For checking the assumption of linearity and homoscedasticity, a scatter plot of standardized predicted values against standardized residuals was conducted. By doing so, the relationship between the predicted values and the errors of the model was checked

No curve shape or clear funnel was recognizable in the scatter plots (see Figure 8). Hence, this means that the assumption of linearity and the assumption of homoscedasticity are met.

**Figure 9**

*Scatterplot to check Linearity and Homoscedasticity for Sustainable Fashion Consumption Behavior*





### ***1.3 Assumption of Independence***

Furthermore, it was also important to check the assumption of interdependence. Hereby, the Durbin-Watson test was applied for checking the errors in the model and to find out if they are unrelated to each other. The Durbin-Watson value of consumption behavior was 1.82, which means that there is no cause for concern as it falls between the fixed values 1 and 3.