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Master Thesis

"What field forces are at play in the sustainable transition of clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands?"

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ABSTRACT

Background: The clothing industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world with a huge environmental, social, and economic impact. Clothing retailers can play an important role in making this polluting industry more sustainable. However, there are many forces at play when it comes to sustainability transitions. Previous research has identified some of these forces, but an overarching model is not available in the literature. This study investigated the relevant forces at play in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands.

Methodology: Using Lewin's field theory as a theoretical lens, I conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with clothing retailers, who are (fully) sustainable or sell second-hand clothing, in the eastern part of the Netherlands. The aim was to find out the field forces they experience in their sustainability process. The Gio method was used to identify the relevant forces at play in the sustainability transition of the clothing retailers.

Findings: This study reveals the relevant forces that influence the sustainability practices of clothing retailers. The driving forces identified are intrinsic values about sustainability, knowledge about sustainability, and technological developments. However, these drivers face restraining forces, including financial considerations, behavior and time constraints, lack of transparency in the supply chain, and standards and regulations. Furthermore, I have found two force conflicts, these are conflicts between sustainable values and financial viability, and effort-allocation conflicts.

Conclusion: This study makes a substantial contribution to the field of sustainability transition research within the context of fashion retailers by providing a comprehensive understanding of the driving and restraining forces, as well as the force conflicts that shape these transitions. Moreover, the research expands upon Lewin's field theory by employing empirical data to enrich and deepen our understanding of this theory. Furthermore, the practical contribution of this study emphasizes the crucial role of policymakers and clothing retailers in driving sustainability transitions.

Keywords: Sustainability transitions; research for sustainability; clothing retailers; clothing industry; small medium enterprises; Lewin’s field theory

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world is experiencing serious sustainability challenges, such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity (Koistinen, 2019). These challenges are brought about by unstainable consumption and production patterns in different kind of industries (Köhler et al., 2019a). These problems cannot be addressed by incremental improvements and technological fixes, therefore there is a need for radical sustainability transitions (Elzen et al., 2004; Grin et al., 2010).

It is particularly pertinent to speak about sustainability when implemented in the clothing industry as it is one of the most polluting industries in the world, with a huge environmental, social, and economic impact (Garcia-Torres et al., 2017; Legere & Kang, 2020). Clothing retailers have an important role to play in making this polluting industry more sustainable. Therefore, it is from major importance to understand under which circumstances clothing retailers implement sustainable practices.

However, there are many forces to deal with when it comes to making changes (Dent & Goldberg, 1999; Pojasek, 2001). Therefore, there are many forces in the sustainability transition of clothing retailers at play which need to be better understood. A theory that can be used for this is Lewin's field theory. Lewin emphasizes the central role of individual or collective actors and directs attention towards the constellation of various field forces that influence them (Kump, 2023). It proves to be an effective theory for examining the intricate network of partially contradictory forces encountered by those involved in sustainability transitions, and for understanding their behavior based on the constellation of these forces (Kump, 2023). In other words, through Lewin's field forces "one can understand what (actors) do and why they do it" (Burnes & Cooke, 2013, P421).

Research findings have revealed multiple drivers for clothing retailers to integrate sustainable practices. Examples of driving forces found in the literature include governance and regulations pressure (Ki et al., 2020), consumer awareness (Peters & Simaens, 2020), peer pressure (Cowan & Kinley, 2014), intrinsic motives (Millar et al., 2010), technological innovation (Todeschini et al., 2017), and social pressure (Peters & Simaens, 2020).

Conversely, there is also evidence that certain forces can restrain sustainable change. In the context of clothing retailers, prior research points out the following restraining forces: lack of effort (Schmitt et al., 2018), lack of transparency in the supply chain (Blas Riesgo et al., 2022), lack of consumer concern (Kaur & Anand, 2018), lack of knowledge (Moon et al., 2015), and competitiveness (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010).

Moreover, forces may be conflict with each other. This is the case when the forces present in the field are of approximately the same strength but push in the opposite direction (Lewin, 1943). When a change toward more sustainable practices increases force conflicts clothing retailers may react with resistance to the change. However, if the change will reduce force conflicts, clothing retailers are likely to respond positively to it (Kump, 2023).

As showed above, prior research has identified multiple type of field forces (see e.g., Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Peters & Simaens, 2020) these forces could restrain or drive clothing retailers to integrate sustainable practices. However, to the best of my knowledge, an overarching model containing all the forces present in the sustainability transition of clothing retailers is missing.

Furthermore, Lewin's field theory is rather generic. Kump (2023), has identified a set of forces. However, these forces are quite abstract. Hence, this theory is not directly applicable to understand a specific real-life situation (Kump, 2023). While Lewin's field theory provides a broad conceptual framework, it requires empirical instantiation to capture the nuanced dynamics of specific context data (Kump, 2023). By finding the types of forces that play a role in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers, I try to further expand this theory.

In order to fulfill these gaps, I propose the following research question:

"*What field forces and force conflicts are at play in the sustainability transition of clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands*".

By answering this research question, this study contributes to the literature by employing empirical data to enrich and deepen the understanding of Lewin's field theory, particularly in the context of sustainability transitions for clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands. Furthermore, this research tries to contribute to sustainable transition research. By focusing on one industry, this research endeavors to provide a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the specific forces at play during the sustainability transition of clothing retailers.

By depicting the relevant forces that clothing retailers experience in the sustainability transition, this research makes a significant practical contribution to various stakeholders involved in sustainable fashion, including policymakers, consumers, and retailers themselves. The insights derived from this study can inform evidence-based decision-making and strategic interventions aimed at accelerating sustainable fashion consumption in the Netherlands.

This research focuses on clothing retailers based in the Netherlands. The motivation for this is as follows. The Netherlands has committed itself to contributing to the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) drawn up by the European Union. [1] This means that clothing retailers in the Netherlands must also become more sustainable, in particular SDG 12, which reads as follows: "responsible consumption and production" applies. Moreover, the Netherlands is part of Western Europe (Western Europe is one of the largest textile users in the world) and clothing consumption in Western Europe is still increasing every year (Niinimäki et al., 2020a). In addition, I live in the Netherlands myself and it is my mother tongue, so I expect to be able to get enough respondents and the chance of misunderstanding is considerably smaller.

[1] https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/downloads/pbl-2016-sustainable-development-in-the-Netherlands_1966_1.pdf

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the theoretical background of the study is provided. The following topics are discussed in more detail: sustainability, the fashion industry, and forces of sustainability transitions in the fashion industry.

2.1 Sustainability

In this section I will discuss the background and definition of sustainability, then the Sustainable Development Goals will be highlighted, and I will conclude with an explanation of the triple bottom line theory.

2.1.1 Definition and background information

In recent decades, the impact of humans on the earth has become increasingly tangible. The climate is changing, and this is causing more extreme weather conditions: droughts, floods, and extreme storms are also becoming more common (Nerlich & Jaspal, 2014). In addition, biodiversity is declining enormously (Chivian & Bernstein, 2008). We are in an age of extinction and at the point where irreversible environmental damage could be wrought (Harrington, 2016). As a result, sustainability has been recognized as a major concern worldwide (Kong et al., 2016).

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1987) (the Brundtland Commission) defined sustainability as “being able to satisfy current needs without compromising the possibility for future generations to satisfy their own needs.” A sustainable society must fulfill three conditions: the rate of use of renewable natural resources must not exceed the rate of their renewal; the rate of use of its non-renewable natural resources should not exceed the rate of development of sustainable renewable substitutes, and its emissions should not exceed the assimilation capacity of the environment (Alhaddi, 2015; Elkington & Rowlands, 1999).

2.1.2 Sustainable Development Goals

Because of the growing environmental concerns, the United Nations General Assembly created a development agenda. This development agenda has been drawn up to end extreme poverty, inequality, injustice, and climate change.[2] To achieve this, the development agenda consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which in turn, include 169 targets.[3] The SDGs have been agreed upon by the countries that are members of the United Nations (UN), one of those countries being the Netherlands.

The SDGs started in 2015 and will continue until 2030. The 17 SDGs are as follows: (1) *no poverty*, (2*) zero hunger*, (3) *good health and well-being*, (4) *quality education*, (5) *gender equality*, (6) *clean water and sanitation*, (7) *affordable and clean energy*, (8) *decent work and economic growth,* (9) *industry innovation and infrastructure*, (10) *reduced inequalities*, (11) *sustainable cities and communities*, (12) *responsible consumption and production*, (13) *climate action*, (14) *life below water*, (15) *life on land*, (16) *peace justice and strong institutions*, and (17) *partnership for the goals*. [4]

2.1.3 Triple bottom line

Over the years, more attention has been paid to sustainability. The triple bottom line theory has become an increasingly important framework for making the economy more sustainable (Strähle, 2017). The idea behind the triple bottom line theory is that a company's ultimate success can and should not only be measured through the financial performances, but also by its social and environmental performances (Norman & MacDonald, 2004). The triple bottom line is also abbreviated as the three Ps. These stand for people, planet, and profits (Slaper & Hall, 2011). By using the triple bottom line, organizations can, in addition to economic performance, also include environmental and social performance in the assessment of the activities performed (Żak, 2015).

The triple bottom line theory was first created to make large companies more sustainable. However, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have become increasingly important both in absolute numbers and financially in recent years (Castka et al., 2004). Therefore, SMEs contribute enormously to the business world and society (Muñoz-Pascual et al., 2019). To achieve a more sustainable world, it is important that SMEs not only measure their performance through financial indicators, but also consider their social/ethical and environmental performance.

[2] https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/ontwikkelingssamenwerking/internationale-afspraken-ontwikkelingssamenwerking/global-goals-werelddoelen-voor-duurzame-ontwikkeling
[3] https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-981-13-8787-6.pdf
[4] https://www.sdgnederland.nl/de-17-sdgs/

2.2 The Fashion Industry

This section will provide an overview of the fashion industry, offering insights into its characteristics, examining its environmental impact, and exploring the concepts of both fast fashion and sustainable fashion.

2.2.1 Characteristics of fashion industry

The fashion industry is considered as one of the most important industries in the world. For many people, fashion is a substantial part of their life and is seen as a way to distinguish themselves. Therefore, garments are regarded as one of the most desired objects in the world (Madhav et al., 2018). This industry produces around 80 billions of garments per year and thereby generates an annual turnover of 1.3 trillion dollars, which employs more than 300 million people worldwide (Gazzola et al., 2020). Over the past 15 years, clothing production has approximately doubled, this is mainly caused by a growing middle-class population worldwide and by an increase in sales in developed economies (Carvalho et al., 2020). In 2015, consumers bought 62 million tons of clothes. And if the growth trend continues, the world has to produce about 102 million tons of clothing in 2030 (Niinimäki et al., 2020).

Notably, Western Europe emerges as one of the world's largest clothing consumers, further accentuating the scale of the industry's impact. Clothing consumption in Western Europe is on average of 22 kg. With this, Western Europe only has to let Australia (27 kg) and North America go ahead (37 kg).[5] For comparison, in developing countries the average is 5 kg per person (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). While, at the same time, clothing use has declined by almost 40 percent (Carvalho et al., 2020).

In the Netherlands, the consumption of clothing continues to grow every year. Last year, approximately 800 to 900 million pieces of garments were sold. [6] This means that on average, each person in the Netherlands purchased 50 items of clothing in 2021.[7] This is mainly caused by the fact that new clothes come onto the market every season and the prices of garments are low (Claudio, 2007). It can therefore be concluded that the large supply of clothing and its low price are the main reasons for the growth of the Dutch clothing market. Clothing retailers plays an important role in the Dutch fashion industry because, approximately 66 percent of all the

[5] https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/nl/headlines/society/20201208STO93327/de-impact-van-textielproductie-en-afval-op-het-milieu-infografiek
[6] https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2021/05/steeds-meer-textiel-in-nederland
[7] https://assets.website-files.com/5d26d80e8836af2d12ed1269/60d484479ef55512ac50d615_20210624%20-%20CJI%20Tex%20skills%20-%20paper%20-%20297x210mm.pdf

clothing in the Netherlands is sold in physical retail stores [8]. Moreover, research shows that 80 percent of the Dutch consumers indicate that they would prefer to purchase their clothing in a physical retail store. [9]

2.2.2 Fast Fashion

In the past twenty years, clothing consumption has increased by about 400 percent (Jia et al., 2020). The clothing manufactures produces about 80 billion new clothing every year (Gazzola et al., 2020; Yoo et al., 2021).The increase in clothing consumption is mainly due to the 'fast fashion' phenomenon, with quicker turnaround of new styles, increased number of collections offered per year, and -often- lower prices (Xavier et al., 2015). Bick et al (2018) argues that fast fashion is used to describe the readily available, inexpensively made fashion of today. The word "fast" describes how quickly retailers can move designs from the catwalk to stores, keeping pace with constant demand for more and different styles.

Changes in technology have encouraged fast fashion (Sull & Turconi, 2008b). When new fashion trends are emerging, the fast fashion industry ensures that they are available on the market as soon as possible. Because of this, the clothes are still at the peak of their popularity when available to a wide audience (Wu et al., 2016). It is from major importance for designers, manufacturers, and retailers to keep the prices of end products as low as possible. This is partly made possible by low wages and increasing efficiency in production (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011a). Beside this, the fast fashion industry is able to use cheap resources and reduce the time cycles from production to consumption due to globalization and technology development (Joung, 2014).

Fast fashion is known to be mostly produced in low-and middle-income countries (mainly in Bangladesh) (Bick et al., 2018). The working conditions in those type of countries are bad, the work is unsafe, and the wages are low. This is because little or no knowledge is required to perform this work and because of this it is often performed by children (Księżak, 2017). Therefore, prices for clothing are low and consumers purchase more than ever. In addition, a lot of fast fashion clothing is thrown away, both during the production process and

[8] https://fashionunited.nl/nieuws/retail/in-2026-kopen-nederlanders-44-procent-van-hun-kleding-online/2021090250935
[9] https://fashionunited.nl/nieuws/retail/onderzoek-hoe-stimuleert-de-mkb-mode-retailer-duurzame-verkoop/2022063053977

by customers, partly because the clothing has often cost little, is of poor quality, or has gone out of fashion (Joung, 2014).

2.2.3 Environmental impact of Fashion Industry

Despite the widely published environmental impacts, the fashion industry continues to grow (Niinimäki et al., 2020b). As a result, the fashion industry, including the production of all clothes which people wear, contributes to around 10% of global greenhouse gas emission.[10] In addition, the fashion industry has been identified in recent years as a major contributor to plastic entering the ocean, which is a growing concern because of the associated negative environmental and health implications.[11] The environmental pollution caused by textile wastewater poses a worldwide threat to public health (Khan & Malik, 2014). Moreover, to produce one kilo of cotton, 20.000 liters of waters is needed (Rukhaya et al., 2021). In the production process, the fashion industry has consumed approximately 79 trillion liters of water globally in 2020, this is about 20 percent of all industrial wastewater (Bailey et al., 2022; Niinimäki et al., 2020a). Furthermore, the fashion industry produces an enormous amount of waste. This is mainly caused the huge amount of clothes that are discarded after being used for a short time and due to overproduction (Koszewska, 2018). This makes, the fashion industry the second largest industrial polluter, following the oil industry (Carmen & Daniela, 2012; Muthukumarana et al., 2018; Roy Choudhury, 2014). Therefore, to become more sustainable, not only the production but also the consumption of clothing has to become less environmentally harmful (Armstrong et al., 2015).

2.2.4 Sustainable Fashion

Around the 1960s, more sustainable clothing emerged. The generation of that time (hippie generation) wanted a simpler lifestyle and value sustainability and often opted for second-hand clothing. However, this trend changed in the 1990s due to the rise of globalization, clothing became cheaper, and the world became more materialistic (Khare, 2019). Nevertheless, around 2010 people realized that the current way of producing clothing caused a lot of damage to people and the environment, which led to more attention for more sustainable clothing (S. Jung & Jin, 2014). Given the negative impact of the fashion industry on environmental performance,

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[10] https://unfccc.int/news/un-helps-fashion-industry-shift-to-low-carbon
[11] https://unece.org/forestry/press/un-alliance-aims-put-fashion-path-sustainability

the consumption of sustainable clothing must increase, to reduce the negative impact of the clothing industry on the environment and make a positive change towards sustainability (Kulshreshtha et al., 2017).

However, confusion has arisen among scholars about the concept of sustainable fashion, there exist an overlap between sustainable fashion, ethical fashion, eco-fashion, slow fashion, and green fashion (Mukendi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, based on extensive literature research, Shen et al (2013) have drawn up a set of criteria when clothing can be considered as sustainable: (1) Recycle, (2) Organic, (3) Vintage, (4) Vegan, (5) Artisan, (6) Locally made, (7), Custom, and (8) Fair trade certified. *Recycled products* are products which are produced out of pre or post textile waste. However, because of its high-energy processes, it is less durable than the vintage option (Todeschini et al., 2017). *Organic products* are only created using natural ingredients that are produced without the use of synthetic pesticides.[12] *Vintage products* are second-hand products that are offered for sale again. *Vegan products* are clothing items that are produced without using animal-related products. *Artisan products* are produced in a traditional way. *Locally made* products are products that are produced close to the point of sale, so the product does not have to be transported far and contributes to the local economy. *Custom products* are products that are of good quality and therefore last longer. Finally, *the fair-trade products* are produced by companies that respect human rights.

It is of great importance, given the negative environmental impact of the fashion industry, to ensure that economic growth and sustainable development can coexist and support each other. This is necessary to achieve the sustainable agenda of 2030 with the associated SDGs. The fashion industry plays an important role in this, to achieve SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), the fashion industry will have to become more sustainable. This has also been confirmed by the president of the UN Economic and Social Council, who mentioned the following: "sustainable fashion is key to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda" (Jacometti, 2019).

Clothing retailers can play an important role in making this polluting industry more sustainable, as they can determine what kind of clothing is sold in their store. In addition, they can decide to exclude certain products from the market. This allows them to encourage the consumption of sustainable products to consumers (Hansen & Skytte, 1998). Moreover, they also can "educate" consumers and provide them with information about sustainable clothing and the possible impact it has on the environment (Wirthgen, 2005). Moreover, research by

[12] https://www.nomige.com/nl/blogs/skin-tips/organic-and-natural-products

Next Fashion Retail shows that Dutch clothing retailers can play a valuable role in stimulating sustainable purchasing.[13]

2.4 Forces of sustainability transitions in the fashion industry

This section will explain sustainability transitions, Lewin's field theory, forces driving sustainable change in the fashion industry, forces restraining sustainable change in the fashion industry, and force conflicts in the fashion industry.

2.4.1 Sustainability transitions

Sustainability transitions are “long-term, multi-dimensional, and fundamental transformation processes through which established socio-technical systems shift to more sustainable modes of production and consumption” (Markard et al., 2012, P.956). The socio-technical system consists of several parts: markets, infrastructures, technologies, user practices, policies, cultural meanings, industry structures, and distribution chains (Köhler et al., 2019b).

Sustainability transitions are difficult to understand because it involves many parties. For example, consumers, other companies in the supply chain, and the government. These parties can exert different kinds of pressure since they may have conflicting interests. This makes it difficult to determine why clothing retailers display certain behavior. If we want to understand why clothing retailers want to change or resist change, it is crucial to understand the forces which are at play in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers.

Kump (2023), state that Lewin’s field theory, an influential theory of social and organizational change, may be suited for this purpose. The essence of Lewin's field theory is to “create an understanding of what [actors] do and why they do it” (Burnes & Cooke, 2013, P.421).

2.4.2 Lewin’s Field Forces Theory

At the time of his unexpected death in 1947, Kurt Lewin was considered as one of the most important figures in modern psychology by outstanding psychologist of his time (Allport, 1947; Bargal et al., 1992; Tolman, 1948). Lewin's active involvement in early experimental social psychology during the late 1930s until his passing in 1947 positioned him at the forefront of a vibrant and dynamic period of groundbreaking research (Wheeler, 2008). Due to his sudden

[13] https://www.retailinsiders.nl/docs/dad33f7f-9e5d-4b7d-8bcf-d94da83cd36f.pdf

death, the general interest in field theory waned (Back, 1992). However, since the 1990s the interest in the field forces theory is increasing among scholars. Below, Lewin's field theory is further explained and the most important concepts regarding sustainability transitions are discussed.

Lewin's fundamental premise is that "*all human behavior is a function of the field at a given time*" (Kump, 2023, P.4; Lewin, 1943). Lewin states with his field theory that the behavior of an individual or group is the result of the totality of forces that exert influence and thus create the "life space" in which behavior takes place (Burnes, 2020). Therefore, the field theory can be used to understand individual and group behavior. Lewin claims that both the individual and the group operate in a dynamic field (Swanson & Creed, 2014). The behavior that an individual or a group show is the result of the forces in the field (Swanson & Creed, 2014). Moreover, one can understand the behavior of actors by using the constellation of the different forces (Kump, 2023). Therefore, Lewin's field theory is a good method to analyze the different forces experienced by actors in sustainability transitions.

One of the key concepts in Lewin's field theory is the idea of "forces", which refer to the various influences that shape behavior. These forces can be either "driving" forces, which push an individual towards a particular behavior, or "restraining" forces, which inhibit or block a behavior (Lewin, 1943, 1951a) According to Lewin change can only take place when the driving forces, forces in favor of change, outweigh the restraining forces, forces against change (Lewin, 1943, 1951a). Through this theory, one can understand forces that maintain certain behavior, but also understand forces that cause behavior change (Kimble & Wertheimer, 2000). Change refers to *"making something different from its initial position and involves confrontation with the unknown and loss of the familiar"* (Agboola & Salawu, 2011, P235).

Driving forces tend to push an actor to change. In the context of clothing retailers, a manager/owner may believe that the world must become more sustainable, and that his/her store must contribute to this. While a restraining force makes it difficult to implement change. This could be lack of financial resources. This can ensure that the status quo (also known as equilibrium) remains unchanged. However, if the forces for change are stronger than the restraining forces, change can occur (Kaminski, 2011). Lewin's field forces does not look at different factors in isolation but captures the complexity of social situations by focusing on the constellation of forces (Kump, 2023).

Forces can be divided into external and internal forces. The external forces are forces that act outside the company. The external forces arise from both the macro-environment and the micro-environment. The macro environment is formed by political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors (Achinas et al., 2019). The micro-environment consists of suppliers, competitors, customers, and the public (Mak & Chang, 2019). While the internal forces refer to forces within the company, this could be personal values, organizational culture, and needs (Kump, 2023; Predişcan & Roiban, 2014).

When forces are of approximately the same strength, but in opposite directions, they can cause *force conflicts* (Kump, 2023; Lewin, 1943). Lewin has described several types of force conflicts in his work. These are as follows (1) conflicts between driving forces, (2) conflicts between a positive and negative valence, and (3) conflicts between driving and restraining forces (Lewin, 1943, 1951a).

Lewin has given examples of several force conflicts in his work. Conflicts between driving forces is seen as the most powerful conflict (Kump, 2023). This occurs when an intrinsic driving force collides with an extrinsic driving force (Lewin, 1943, 1951a). An example could be that a clothing retailer wants to become more sustainable to meet a new customer demand for sustainable clothing, but at the same time the retailer is also confronted with financial constraints because he/she does not have enough money to purchase sustainable clothing. Beside this, an example of a conflict between a positive and a negative valence is when a clothing retailer offers a program where customers can trade in their old clothing for recycling. However, it appears that recycling old clothing requires a lot of energy and is therefore very polluting. Moreover, a conflict can arise between driving and restraining forces (Lewin, 1943, 1951a). An example of this is as follows; a clothing retailer buys its clothing locally to ensure it has a small ecological footprint. However, this makes them much more expensive, and they are no longer very competitive compared to clothing retailers who buy their clothing from far away for much lower prices.

2.4.3 Forces driving sustainable change in the fashion industry

Based on existing literature, several potential driving forces for sustainability are discussed below.

The fashion industry accounts for 10% of the total global greenhouse gas emissions. (>1.7 billion tonnes annually) (Niinimäki et al., 2020b). However, the Dutch government have set the target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 85 percent by 2050. [14] To achieve

[14] https://financieel-management.nl/artikelen/kostenreductie-belangrijkste-driver-mkb-voor-duurzaam-ondernemen/

this target clothing retailers also must reduce their impact. This will ensure that clothing retailers in the Netherlands also must become more sustainable. This is also in line with earlier findings of Pedersen & Andersen (2015), who state that policy makers must act to decrease the environmental footprint of the fashion industry. Moreover, research by Ki et al (2020), shows that governmental policies motivate clothing retailers to implement sustainable strategies. So, *governance and regulations pressure* could be a driver for sustainable transition.

Beside this, the fashion industry is strongly driven by consumer behavior, awareness, knowledge, values, and perceptions (Dickson, 2000). Concern for sustainability is strong among younger generations-and growing overall. [15] Therefore, sustainability has become an important force in consumers' purchasing behavior (Gazzola et al., 2020). Hereby, clothing companies are compelled to incorporate sustainability initiatives into their corporate strategy in order to fulfill consumer demand and meet their needs. (Hill & Lee, 2012; Peters & Simaens, 2020). Therefore, I conclude that *consumer awareness* is a driver for sustainability.

Besides the fact that consumers are more concerned about the environment, they are also influenced by peer pressure to buy more sustainable clothing (Cowan & Kinley, 2014). This finding is also in line with Mei et al (2012) who state that peer pressure could be a reason why consumers buy sustainable clothing. As a result, *peer pressure* can be seen as a driver for sustainability.

Corporate culture, leadership and people are also recognized as important driving forces for the sustainable transition in the fashion industry (Millar et al., 2010). The owner/manager personal values, beliefs, and sustainable orientation can also be considered as motivators for sustainable transition (Kump, 2023; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). Therefore, I conclude that *intrinsic values about sustainability* could be a potential driving force.

The emerging technological possibilities have played an increasingly important role in the sustainable change of clothing retailers in recent years. By using innovative technologies, the impact of waste reduction can be significantly reduced (Ikram, 2022). The ability to produce sustainable or alternative fibers is a technological innovation that currently has the most impact in the sustainability transition in the fashion industry. As a result, clothing lasts longer, less waste is produced, and alternative (synthetic) materials can be used instead of natural resources (Todeschini et al., 2017). Because of this, *technological innovation* can be considered as driving force for sustainability.

[15] https://businesschief.com/sustainability/consumer-demand-for-sustainable-fashion-on-rise-says-bain

According to a study of Peters & Simaens (2020) public pressure could also be a driver for clothing retailers to implement sustainable practices. The clothing industry has been put under pressure in recent years by the media, journalists, and social movements. This is because of scandals in the production of clothing in developing countries. Moreover, extra attention has been paid to it following the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh (Sinkovics et al., 2016). Brands that had clothing produced in this building included C&A, Primark, and Zara. The collapse of the building killed 1,138 people and injured more than 2,000 (Chowdhury, 2017). This resulted in a lot of negative publicity about well-known brands and as a result, many clothing brands have indicated that they will now have their clothing produced in a more sustainable way (Rahman & Rahman, 2020; Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). Therefore, I conclude that *social pressure* from newspapers, TV, and social media could be a driver for sustainable transition.

2.4.4 Forces restraining sustainable change in the fashion industry

However, beside the driving forces for sustainable transitions, there are also restraining forces at play.

Past research suggest that a variety of situational cues can reduce the probability that organizations will perform more sustainable behavior (Schmitt et al., 2018). For clothing retailers, it can take a lot of effort to implement sustainable practices. Owners/managers will have to put in a lot of time to make their product range sustainable. This could be a reason for fashion retailers to not implement sustainable practices. Hence, the perceived *level of effort* required for implementing changes can act as a barrier preventing businesses from pursuing them.

Beside this, because a lot of clothing is made worldwide, and the majority thereof is produced in countries that are still developing - partly because of the low wages - it is financially very attractive to have the clothing produced there (Hallward-Driemeier & Nayyar, 2019). Because of this, almost no clothing is produced in developed countries anymore. This makes it extremely difficult, especially for smaller clothing retailers, to know where raw materials come from, how they are produced and under what conditions (Blas Riesgo et al., 2022; Niinimäki et al., 2020b). As a result, retailers can buy clothing that they think has been produced in a sustainable way, when that is not always the case (Harris et al., 2016a; Pedersen & Andersen, 2015b). From this it can be concluded that *lack of transparency* in the supply chain can be a potential restraining force.

As I mentioned in section 2.4.3, consumers could be a driving force for clothing retailers to implement more sustainable practices, they could also play a restraining force. Even though consumers are becoming more aware about the environmental impact of the clothing industry, clothing purchases are mainly influenced by price. The price of a garment is considered as more important than ethical issues (Nilssen et al., 2019). Sustainable clothing often entails higher costs and customers are not always willing to pay this price. Therefore, I conclude that *higher costs* are a restraining force for sustainability. Furthermore, fashion consumers are not a homogenous group and therefore have different concerns about the consequences of environmental problems (Kaur & Anand, 2018). So, *lack of sustainable concern* among consumers could also restrain sustainability in the fashion industry.

In addition, research shows that *lack of knowledge* among consumers can also play a role. Consumers do not always completely understand what sustainable fashion is (Moon et al., 2015). Moreover, research shows that many consumers buy clothing based on emotional considerations and that rational considerations are not always decisive (Cao et al., 2014).
Beside this, the fashion market is highly competitive and the constant need to 'refresh' product ranges means that there is an inevitable move by many retailers to extend the number of 'seasons', that is, the frequency with which the entire merchandise within a store is changed (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). This ensures that more clothing is produced and therefore a lot of waste is produced with a negative impact on the environment as a result. In addition, much of this clothing is made in middle-low-income countries. Here employees are poorly paid, and the working conditions are bad. As a result, one can conclude that the *competitiveness* of the fashion industry plays a restraining force in sustainability.

2.4.5 Force conflicts

In most cases there are multiple forces present in the field and as I mentioned in section 2.4.2 forces may conflict with each other. Lewin state that a force conflict is a situation *"where forces […] are opposite in direction and about equal of strength*" (Lewin, 1951, P.260). Lewin has identified several types of force conflicts. One of the most powerful of these is conflicts between driving forces (Kump, 2023). For example, it could be that a clothing retailer is intrinsically convinced to implement sustainability (for example because he/she feels that sustainability is necessary to improve the world). However, customers may not be willing to pay extra for more sustainable clothing (see, e.g., a study from Harris et al., 2016b) who points out that consumers are not always willing to pay more for sustainable clothing). In this case, a clothing retailer experiences a conflict between driving forces.

Another type of force conflict is between a *positive and negative valence*. This is the case when "an undesired or disagreeable practice promises an attractive reward or a desirable practice is punished" (Kump, 2023). Assume, for example, that a clothing retailer wants to sell as much clothing as possible and therefore increase the frequency in which it offers new products. This is of course harmful to the environment since customers buy more clothing as a result (see also the study by Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011a). However, this does ensure that the turnover of the clothing retailer increases. In this case, the clothing retailer has a conflict between a positive and negative valence.

Furthermore, force conflicts exist *between driving and restraining forces*. For instance, it could be the case that a clothing retailer would like to become more sustainable and has to buy sustainable clothing to do so, but that they do not have enough in-house knowledge to realize that. Another reason could be that a retailer does not have sufficient financial resources to purchase sustainable clothing. Lewin claims that a clothing retailer experiences a force conflict between a driving and a restraining force.

As can be seen in sections 2.4.2 to 2.4.5, many different potential forces have been identified that can play a role in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers. These forces could restrain or drive clothing retailers to integrate sustainable practices into their companies. Lewin claims that both the individual and the group operate in a dynamic field and that the behavior that an individual or a group show is the result of the forces in the field (Swanson & Creed, 2014). However, despite the forces mentioned above, an overarching model in which all relevant forces that play a role in the sustainability transition of clothing retailers is missing.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this part, I will discuss the analytical approach, the selection and sampling of participants, the data collection, and the data analysis.

3.1 Analytical approach

The objective of this paper is to find out the relevant forces at play in the sustainability transition of clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands.

This research employed a qualitative approach to gain in-depth understanding of the forces influencing the sustainability practices of clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands. Qualitative research allows for exploration and explanation of complex human behaviors and processes (Foley & Timonen, 2015; Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Semi-structured interviews are chosen as the primary data collection method due to their effectiveness in exploring participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes (Adams, 2015; Barriball &While 1994). These interviews consist of open-ended and closed-ended questions, enabling deeper insights into interviewees' thoughts (Holloway, 2005). Additionally, semi-structured interviews facilitate follow-up questions, enhancing understanding of participant behavior (Kallio et al., 2016).

The target population for this study included clothing retailers in the Netherlands who sell sustainable clothing or second-hand clothing. Eleven semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted between March 2023 and May 2023, each lasting 45-60 minutes and conducted in Dutch. The data analysis followed a qualitative approach using the Gioia method (D. A. Gioia et al., 2013). This involved transcribing the interviews, sharing the transcripts with the interviewees for validation, and extracting relevant quotes to identify first-order concepts. Similarities among these concepts were explored, leading to the creation of second-order categories. Finally, relationships between the second-order categories were examined, resulting in the identification of aggregate dimensions.

3.2 Selection of participants and sampling

The targeted population for this study was clothing retailers who are selling sustainable clothing, with at least a part of their collection being sustainable, or retailers who are selling second-hand clothing. It was expected that owners/managers who had already implemented sustainable aspects had thought more consciously about sustainability and could therefore provide valuable insights.

Moreover, the research specifically focused on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), excluding large multinational retailers such as H&M, Zara, and Primark. Most of the interviews were conducted with managers/business owners as they held responsibility for the store and the policies pursued, providing valuable insights into the relevant forces at play. In addition, I also conducted two interviews with employees, but they were responsible for purchasing the clothing, so they were suitable to do the interview.

Desk research was conducted to identify clothing retailers that had implemented sustainable practices. Once these retailers were mapped out, they were contacted, and the purpose of the research was explained. Requests for interviews were made through email, phone calls, or physical visits.

However, arranging enough respondents was a lengthy process. I approached many retailers asking if they were open to an interview, but many retailers indicated that they had too little time for an interview. In addition, there were also quite a few retailers who simply did not respond to my e-mails / phone calls. This mainly happened at retailers located in other parts of the country. Moreover, my selection group was not very large, since I was looking for clothing stores that sell (new) sustainable clothing or second-hand clothing stores that have a strong affinity with sustainability.

3.3 Data collection

Ultimately, the data was collected from 11 interviews. These interviews were conducted between March 2023 and May 2023. These interviews all took place within the province of Overijssel. I chose to use semi-structured interviews as a way of collecting data. These interviews took place face to face. I deliberately chose this because face-to-face interviews have the advantage that they can detect social signals, such as voice, intonation, body language (Opdenakker, 2006; Wilson, 2012).

The aim of the interviews was to identify the different forces that occur during the sustainability of clothing retailers. Therefore, I created a semi-structured interview guide which is based on theory found in the literature review and a previously used interview guide related to this topic. The semi-structured interview guide included questions about the type of forces and conflicting forces they face. The interviews lasted between 45-60 minutes and were all conducted in Dutch. Prior to the interviews, I explained what the data is used for, and I explained the rights that the interviewees have. In addition, I recorded the interviews with an audio recorder, prior to each interview I asked permission for this. Table 1 gives an overview of the characteristics of the interviewees.

Characteristics of the interviewees								
ID	**Gender**	**Position within the company**	**Educational background**	**Years of experience**	**Assortment**	**Number of employees**	**Segment**	**Target audience**
ID_1	Female	Owner	University of Applied Sciences	28	Assortment is completely sustainable	8	Higher segment	Women
ID_2	Female	Co-owner	University of Applied Sciences	13	Assortment is completely sustainable	2	Higher segment	Women
ID_3	Male	Owner	Secondary school	26	Assortment is partly sustainable	2	Higher segment	Men
ID_4	Female	Owner	University	10	Assortment consists of second-hand clothing*	2	No specific segment	Children/Women
ID_5	Female	Employee**	Secondary school	20	Assortment is completely sustainable	3	Mid/high segment	Women
ID_6	Female	Employee**	Secondary vocational education	10	Assortment is completely sustainable	8	Higher segment	Women
ID_7	Male	Owner	Secondary school	30	Assortment is completely sustainable	1	Mid/high segment	Men
ID_8	Male	Co-owner	University of Applied Sciences	12	Assortment is partly sustainable	35	Mid/high segment	Women/Men
ID_9	Female	Owner	University of Applied Sciences	11	Assortment consists of second-hand clothing	5	No specific segment	Children/Women
ID_10	Female	Owner	Secondary school	14	Assortment consists of second-hand clothing	3	No specific segment	Children/Women
ID_11	Female	Owner	University of Applied Sciences	9	Assortment consists of second-hand clothing	2	No specific segment	Women
*Has also sold sustainable clothing								
**These employees are (jointly) responsible for purchasing clothing								

Table 1. Characteristics of the interviewees

3.4 Data analysis

After conducting the interviews and collecting the data, the next step was to analyze the data obtained. The first step was transcribing all the conducted interviews and sent them to the interviewees. To analyze the data, I followed the Gioia method (Gioia et al., 2013).
In the first step, I searched for relevant quotes from all the transcripts. This was done using Atlas.ti 8. The quotes were then exported to Excel to create emerging first-order themes. It is not uncommon to end up with 50 to 100 first-order categories. (Gioia, 2004). I ended up with a total of 92 first-order concepts. After that, I began identifying similarities among the first-order categories and creating second-order categories (this process is also known as axial coding)(Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This resulted in a reduction of categories, leaving 20 remaining. Among these, eight belonged to driving forces, nine were related to restraining forces, and three were part of conflicting forces. In the final stage, I analyzed the relationships between the second-order categories and proceeded with theoretical coding (D. Gioia, 2021). In addition, I made use of the previously acquired knowledge from the literature review. In section (2.4) I wrote down several driving, restraining, and conflicting forces. When creating the aggregate dimensions, I looked for certain patterns in the second-order categories that resembled the forces discovered in the literature review. As a result, 9 aggregate dimensions were identified, with three belonging to driving forces, four to restraining forces, and two to conflicting forces. Figure 3 gives an overview of the resulting data structure.

Figure 1. Data structure

Data structure resulting from Gioia analysis of interview data

Driving forces				
1st order concepts		2nd order concepts		Aggregate dimension
*Attach personal value to sustainability *Feels a responsibility to offer sustainable clothing to people *Inner motivation to be sustainable *Conviction to contribute to a better world	→	Personal motivation towards sustainability of owners	→	Intrinsic values about sustainability
*Employees have an affinity with sustainability *Employees must be interested in sustainability	→	Employees attach personal value towards sustainability	→	
*Vision on sustainability is evolving because more and more knowledge is available *People are becoming better informed because they have easier access to	→	Increase of available information	→	Knowledge about sustainability
*Knowledge about sustainability certifications is present and clothing is provided *Knowledge about sustainability has grown. *Knowledge about SDGs is available and is actively acted upon	→	Increase of knowledge among retailers	→	
*Observation of a growing interest in sustainability from customers *Consumers have more knowledge about sustainability *Consumers are becoming aware of sustainability *Consumers show more interest in sustainability	→	Consumer awareness	→	
*Educating consumers about sustainability *Storytelling drives sales *Storytelling creates awareness among the consumer	→	Influencing consumers about sustainability	→	
*The supply of sustainable clothing has increased because more and more ways can be produced *It is becoming possible in more and more ways to develop sustainable clothing	→	Increase in supply	→	Technological developments

Figure 1. Data structure continued

Data structure resulting from Gioia analysis of interview data

Restraining forces				
1st order concepts		2nd order concepts		Aggregate dimension
*Purchase prices are rising for sustainable clothing *Purchase price is the most important indicator when purchasing clothing *Challenge to buy nice sustainable clothing for a good price *Purchase price of sustainable clothing is higher than for normal clothing	→	Higher purchase prices for sustainable clothing	→	Financial considerations
*Price of sustainable clothing can be too high for consumers *The high price may prevent consumers from buying sustainable clothing *Fear of losing consumers due to higher prices for sustainable clothing	→	Sustainable clothing too expensive for consumers	→	
*Pressure from suppliers to sell more clothing *Small stores struggle to meet a supplier's financial requirements *Minimum number of products you must purchase from the supplier *The supplier does not want to enter into a partnership with every retailer	→	Supplier has (too) much power	→	
*Companies say they are sustainable, but in reality they are not *Big companies see sustainability as a marketing product and are not as	→	Big companies mislead the consumer	→	Behavior and time constraints
*People have too little knowledge about sustainability *Attracting new customers is a challenge *Non-sustainable clothing stores do not have enough knowledge about *People think that sustainable clothing is ugly and shapeless	→	Consumers have too little knowledge about sustainability	→	
*Difficult to raise sustainability with customers due to time constraints *Takes a lot of time to have sufficient knowledge about products *It takes effort for a retailer to have sufficient knowledge about sustainability *Takes a lot of time to communicate that we are sustainable	→	Time pressure	→	
*People simply do not care about sustainability *People are not interested in sustainability *Sustainability is not a priority for many customers	→	Lack of sustainable concern	→	
*Complicated chain with many parties and different interests *Not clear how products are made *Very difficult to control how products are made	→	Complicated and difficult to control supply chain	→	Lack of transparency in supply chain
*Stricter laws and regulations must be devised to make the fashion industry more *Environmental polluters must be burdened more heavily by means of legislation *Lack of international laws and regulations in the fashion industry *There are too few rules about sustainability in the fashion industry	→	(international) rules and regulations	→	Standards and regulations

Figure 1. Data structure continued

Data structure resulting from Gioia analysis of interview data

Force conflicts				
1st order concepts		2nd order concepts		Aggregate dimension
*A retailer that is going to become more sustainable can lose its consumers *There are consumers who are willing to pay more for sustainable clothing, but who simply cannot afford it *Retailers can become more sustainable, but if the consumer does not want to pay extra, this is not possible	→	Lack of consumers because retailer becomes (more) sustainble	→	Sustainable values and financial viability conflicts
*Retailer wants to become more sustainable, but lacks sufficient financial resources *It is financially much more attractive to sell as many clothes as possible *It is less profitable to sell sustainable clothing than to sell non-sustainable	→	Being non-sustainable is financially more attractive		
*Becoming more sustainble takes effort, while those retailers who do not become more sustainable can put effort into things *Becoming more sustainable takes a lot of time versus a retailer that is not sustainable can just go ahead and do not have to invest so much time	→	Becoming more sustainable takes a lot of time and effort	→	Effort-allocation conflict

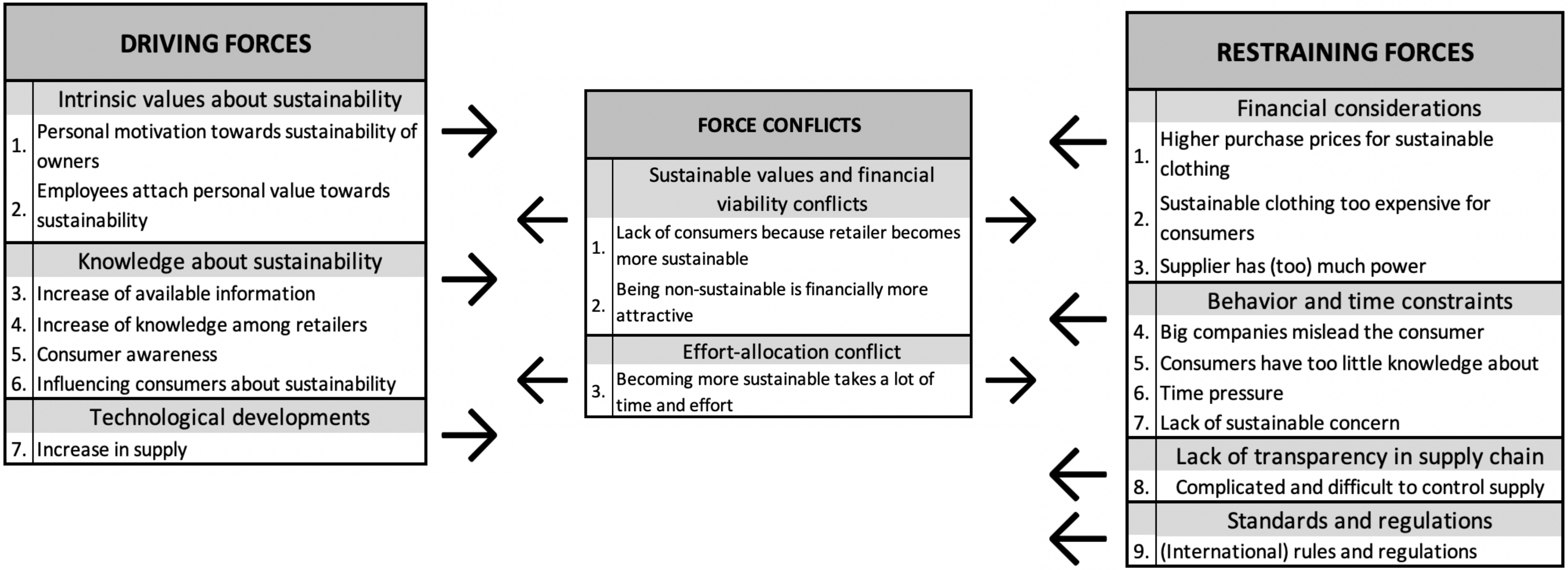
4. FINDINGS

A total of 19 forces have been identified in the data. These forces are subdivided into 9 aggregate dimensions and eventually further categorized into: (1) driving forces towards sustainability, (2) restraining forces towards sustainability, and (3) force conflicts. Figure 4 shows the model created from the data.

As can be seen in the model, the driving forces towards sustainability consist out of the following ones: (1) intrinsic values about sustainability, (2) knowledge about sustainability, and (3) technological developments. The restraining forces towards sustainability are as follows (1) financial considerations, (2) behavior and time constraints, (3) lack of transparency in the supply chain, and (4) standards and regulations. Finally, the conflicting forces consist of out (1) conflict between sustainable values and financial viability, and (2) effort-allocation conflict.

Figure 2: model

Driving forces, restraining forces, and force conflicts



4.1 Driving forces towards sustainability

As can be seen in Figure 4, the aggregate dimensions towards sustainability consist of the following: (1) intrinsic values about sustainability, (2) knowledge about sustainability, and (3) technological developments. These dimensions have been combined based on multiple forces. These forces will be explained below.

4.1.1 Intrinsic values about sustainability

Based on the analysis of the interview data, I have identified that intrinsic values about sustainability significantly influence the decision of retailers to become (more) sustainable. This dimension encompasses two key forces, which are discussed in detail below.

4.1.1.1 Personal motivation towards sustainability of owners

The findings reveal that personal motivation of an owner plays an important role and is related to whether a clothing store sells sustainable clothing or offers second-hand clothing. Many interviewees whose entire range consists of sustainable clothing and the interviewees whose range consists of second-hand clothing indicated during the interviews that they have a personal motivation regarding sustainability, as illustrated by retailer (ID_1): *"Sustainability has become increasingly important to me over the years, I personally always take into account whether there is a sustainable alternative to a product that I can possibly buy"*.

Furthermore, the interviewees indicated that they would like to contribute to making the world a better place. For example, ID_8 elaborated: *"I would like to contribute to improving this world, that is why I attach great importance to sustainability"*. Moreover, many respondents indicated that they feel a personal responsibility to offer sustainable clothing. As ID_9 stated: *"Sustainability is an important part of my life. It gives me energy to be able to offer sustainable products to my customers, and yes, I do feel a certain responsibility to offer sustainable products"*.

As a result, it can be concluded that the owner/manager's personal attitude towards sustainability is an important force towards sustainability.

4.1.1.2 Employees attach personal value towards sustainability

In addition to the personal motivation of owners towards sustainability, it emerged during the interviews that it is also important that employees attach personal value towards sustainability, as a quote by ID_2 illustrates: *"Moreover, you also need to have employees who are interested and care about sustainability. You cannot put someone here who does not care about sustainability"*. In addition, it was indicated that it is a core condition that employees are involved in sustainability, as ID_11 described: *"My colleague did not care about sustainability, while in my opinion that is a core condition for being able to become more sustainable. That was also the reason why she left the company"*.

Employees can come up with new ideas to make things more sustainable. As a retailer (ID_1) explained: *Employees also sometimes visit other clothing stores, and then sometimes they come back with a brand, like, do you know this?* In addition, employees will also be in frequent contact with customers and have to explain things about sustainability and the company's role in this, I will further elaborate on this later. It is therefore important that employees attach personal value towards sustainability. Afsar et al (2018) state that employees are ambassadors of an organization and therefore it is important that when a company considers sustainability of paramount importance that employees also care about sustainability.

Based on this, I can conclude that it is important for a retailer that employees also attach personal value to sustainability and that this is a force that can ensure that a retailer becomes (more) sustainable.

4.1.2 Knowledge about sustainability

Furthermore, I found that knowledge about sustainability is an important dimension towards sustainability. Knowledge about sustainability consists of the following forces: (1) increase in available information, (2) increase of knowledge, (3) consumer awareness, and (4) influencing consumers about sustainability. These forces will be discussed further below.

4.1.2.1 Increase of available information

During the interviews it emerged that the various interviewees indicated that more and more information about sustainability is available. This applies to both the customer and the retailer itself and all other parties involved in making the clothing industry more sustainable. As a quote by (ID_4) illustrates: *"Yes, people can get information more and more easily and the more* *information there is about sustainability, the more people learn about it, which of course creates a growing interest"*.

An example of this is the emergence of social media, which makes it easy for people to get information and more information is available to people (Carr & Hayes, 2015). In addition, sustainability has also received more and more attention in the traditional media over the years (Barkemeyer et al., 2018; Holt & Barkemeyer, 2012). Providing information is considered as an important step to encourage people to become more sustainable (Longo et al., 2019). The interviewees also indicated that the increasing available information has contributed to their knowledge of sustainability. This point was emphasized by an interviewee in the following quote: *"I know more about sustainability because more and more knowledge is being released and there is more attention for it (ID_9)"*.

As a result, it can be concluded that increasing available information can contribute to making clothing retailers more sustainable, making it an important pillar of the aggregate dimension knowledge about sustainability.

4.1.2.2 Increase of knowledge among retailers

This finding is connected to the previous result, as the dissemination of information about sustainability has led to an increase in people's knowledge and understanding of sustainable practices. Retailers are gaining more and more knowledge about sustainability, as (ID_1) stated, "*My vision on sustainability is constantly evolving, mainly because you are gaining more and more knowledge about it"*.

Moreover, I can see in the data that the retailers actively act on the knowledge they have about sustainability. Respondent ID_2 indicated the following: *"Yes, we are aware of the existence of those certificates, we do check whether our suppliers have them and we also know a bit about what they stand for"*. Similarly, ID_6 confirms this finding by stating the following: *"Yes, I am familiar with sustainability certifications. The brands that I sell in my store are affiliated with that"*.

As described above, the behavior of an owner is very important to be able to become more sustainable. Therefore, more knowledge about sustainability ensures that owners are more likely to show more sustainable behavior. As a result, the increase of knowledge among retailers is an important pillar in making clothing retailers more sustainable.

4.1.2.3 Consumer awareness

Consumer awareness is a force that often emerged during the interviews. Many retailers indicated that they saw an increase in consumer awareness. As a retailer (ID_2) from my sample said, *"I do think that customers are more aware of sustainability"*. This view was also shared by another retailer (ID_1) who said the following: *"I notice that from a period from, I call it to 2005, until now then I certainly notice a growing interest in sustainability yes"*. Moreover, customers want to know more about how certain clothing is made. For example, ID_5 elaborated: *"I do notice that people are asking more about sustainability. They are interested in where it is made, which fabrics, and they would like to see the label of the products"*.

Furthermore, consumers awareness is increasing and therefore they are seeking for more environmentally friendly clothing (H. J. Jung et al., 2020). Because consumer awareness is growing, the customer base of sustainable clothing stores is also growing, as ID_10 stated, *"I notice that we are getting more and more different types of customers"*.

This means that more customers are coming in and customer demand for sustainable clothing is increasing. This makes it more attractive for retailers to become more sustainable. This makes it an important force in making clothing retailers more sustainable.

4.1.2.4 Influencing consumers about sustainability

This force has an overlap with the force mentioned above. What differs, however, is that clothing retailers are actively trying to influence consumers about sustainability. A well-known example of this is a campaign by Patagonia, in 2011 many consumers saw the message, "Do not buy this jacket". The company has set up this action to encourage customers towards more sustainable consumption behavior (Joyner Armstrong et al., 2016). There is a trend that modern retailers not only provide products or services to customers, but also actively try to influence customer demand for products or services (Lai et al., 2010).

I also found evidence in the data that the retailers I interviewed are also trying to influence customers towards sustainability, as illustrated by a quote by ID_2: *"We also try to make people more aware. We also ask the customer very often, but do you need it?"* Furthermore, retailers are trying to educate consumers about sustainability and start conversations on this topic, as ID_6 explained: *"But also, that you trigger conversations in the store. So, that you can teach people about sustainability"*. In addition, conversations in the store ensure that products are sold, and that more conscious consideration is given to choices made by customers. For example (ID_2) mentioned the following: "*Selling is storytelling, whether you do it on social media or in the store, it doesn't matter*". While retailer (ID_3) state that: "*In the beginning we did more storytelling and then I noticed that people discussed it among themselves and that they sometimes came to us even more consciously*".

This highlights the important role clothing retailers have in educating/influencing customers about sustainability. Therefore, it can be concluded that influencing consumers about sustainability is a driving force towards sustainability.

4.1.3 Technological developments

A positive force towards sustainability that retailers indicated during the interviews was the technological developments that have taken place in the fashion industry. This makes it possible to develop sustainable clothing in more and more ways and therefore also offer it in the store.

During the interviews, the interviewees emphasized the importance of technological developments: *"In recent years, more and more can be recycled that is of course also due to technological developments. It may also be the case that certain fabrics last longer as a result (ID_9)"*. Moreover, besides the fact that clothes are of better quality, the range of fibers that can be used to produce sustainable clothes is also growing, as ID_1 elaborated: *"At first you were offered organic and ecological cotton, but now you are also getting more and more new fibers, and now you also see that there is an increasing supply of recycled fibers"*. Furthermore, retailers indicate that much more clothing can be recycled than before, as illustrated by a quote by ID_4: *"I mean, five years ago nothing was really done about the recycling of fabrics and old clothing, that is much better now, and there are already a number of factories in the Netherlands that are really focused on this to ensure that new clothing is made from old, discarded clothing"*.

Technological developments play an important role in making the entire fashion industry more sustainable. Due to the emergence of new technologies, the supply of sustainable clothing has increased, more clothing can be recycled, clothing is of better quality, and efforts are being made to use alternative materials to produce clothing. Due to technological developments, clothing is becoming increasingly sustainable, and the supply of sustainable clothing is increasing. This makes it more attractive for a retailer to become more sustainable.

4.2 Restraining forces towards sustainability

As can be seen in Figure 3, the restraining forces towards sustainability consist of the following: (1) financial considerations, (2) behavior and time constraints, (3) lack of transparency in the supply chain, and (4) standards and regulations. These aggregate dimensions consist of different forces. These will be highlighted below.

4.2.1 Financial considerations

Several financial forces can prevent clothing retailers in the Netherlands from becoming more sustainable. These financial factors will be discussed below.

4.2.1.1 Higher purchase price for sustainable clothing

During the interviews, retailers mentioned that they incur higher purchase costs for sustainable clothing compared to non-sustainable options, as (ID_6) stated: *"The purchase prices for sustainable clothing are simply much higher than for non-sustainable clothing"*.

This can ensure that non-sustainable or not fully sustainable clothing stores do not become (further) sustainable. As ID_7 explained, *"Ultimately when I go on a purchase, I just see what it costs, what will I get, what is the margin? And if an item is made of 100% recycled cartoon, then I'm not going to buy it because it's 100% recycled cotton"*.

In addition, there is also a tendency for the purchase prices of sustainable clothing to rise. This also makes it more difficult for retailers who are already more sustainable or who are already completely sustainable to remain sustainable, as ID_2 describes: *"Yes, we have just been on a purchasing trip, so we have just spoken to everyone again, but I do notice that it is all getting extremely expensive. Some of our brands are becoming too expensive for us"*. This can mean that retailers have to divest certain brands because it is not financially feasible to continue working with them, as (ID_5) explained: "*Those jackets hanging there have really gone up in cost a lot. They were first 109 euros and they now cost 249, yes then it will end for us at some point, then we said, that no longer suits us"*.

As a result, it can be concluded that the high purchasing price of sustainable clothing can prevent retailers from becoming more sustainable. In addition, the rising purchase price of sustainable clothing may mean that sustainable retailers can no longer offer their brands.

4.2.1.2 Sustainable clothing too expensive for consumers

Even though consumer are becoming more aware about the environmental impact of the clothing industry, the price of a garment is still considered very important by consumers. As a retailer (ID_5) from my sample said, *"Moreover, I really think that the price of a sustainable clothing can simply be too high for many people"*.

Moreover, there are consumers who want to buy sustainable clothing, but who cannot afford it, as a quote by ID_9 illustrates: *"Yes, in part that is of course price related. So, you must be able to afford it too. I think that sustainable clothing is also simply too expensive for many people, unfortunately"*. Similarly, ID_4 pointed out the following: *"For the people who are aware and interested, price is often the threshold"*.

It can be concluded from this that the price of sustainable clothing may be too high for consumers who are not willing to pay extra for sustainable clothing, but also for consumers who are willing to pay extra. This makes it less attractive for retailers to buy sustainable clothing because they cannot approach all customers that they might want to approach. It can therefore be said that this is a restraining force towards sustainability in the clothing industry.

4.2.1.3 Supplier has (too) much power

The findings of the data reveal that the suppliers of clothing can exert a lot of influence on the retailer's sustainable practices. It is financially attractive for retailers to sell as much clothing as possible. However, this also applies to suppliers, because they also have a financial interest in selling as much clothing as possible. To achieve this, they put a lot of pressure on clothing retailers to sell as much of their brand(s) as possible: *"Although there are also brands in the sustainable world that put pressure on you as a retailer, to sell more (ID_1)"*. Moreover, suppliers apply more pressure on retailers "*to get an ever-larger collection in their store" (ID_2)*.

Furthermore, many retailers have to purchase a minimum number of products in advance, and this can prevent a retailer from getting the sustainable brand he/she would like. Moreover, my data shows that suppliers of sustainable brands also expect a minimum purchase value from the retailers, as a retailer (ID_3) indicated: *"It is often also a game of what you should buy as a minimum, financially in terms of agreements you have"*. In addition, sustainable clothing retailers are often smaller than non-sustainable clothing retailers and therefore they do not always have enough financial strength to meet the financial requirements of a supplier. This can even cause a collaboration between a retailer and a supplier to end, as ID_4 elaborated: *"Unfortunately, I could no longer meet the minimum purchase that the supplier expected, so I stopped selling that brand"*.

Moreover, during the interviews it also emerged that suppliers do not want to work with every clothing retailer. This can be for various reasons, but one effect of this is that clothing retailers cannot always get hold of the sustainable brands they would like to have: *"I happened to be working on a new brand and we can't get that because they think our brand package doesn't fit their vision and then the deal just doesn't go through (ID_7)"*. In addition, it may also be that a supplier wants to maintain a certain exclusivity, as ID_3 elaborated: *"What can be difficult is that certain brands already have several points of sale in a city and then do not want to have more points of sale in that city, which is why I don't have certain brands"*.

As a result, it can be concluded that suppliers are a restraining force to make the clothing industry more sustainable. Suppliers are still very focused on selling as much as possible. In addition, they are very selective in choosing their partner retailers. With this they hinder the sustainability process of the clothing retailers.

4.2.2 Behavior and time constraints

This aggregate dimension is formed based on four different forces. These four forces will be discussed further below.

4.2.2.1 Big companies mislead the consumer

Based on the interviews conducted, it became evident that some retailers hold the belief that prominent companies in the clothing industry excel at portraying themselves as offering sustainable clothing, while the reality contradicts these claims. As a quote by ID_1 illustrates: "*Moreover, those big companies all promise things that they don't keep at all*". Moreover, it is indicated that large companies see sustainability *"as a kind of marketing, proclaiming that they are sustainable, but are not at all (ID_3)"*

This phenomenon is also referred to as greenwashing in the literature. "Greenwashing is the selective disclosure of positive information without full disclosure of negative information so as to create an overly positive corporate image"(Lyon & Maxwell, 2011, P. 9). A well-known example of this is H&M, this company communicates to the outside world that they are the number two user of organic cotton in the world, while the percentage of organic cotton was only 14.6 percent of the total consumption in 2018 (Peters & Simaens, 2020).

Several studies confirm that greenwashing has a negative effect on customer purchase intention (Goh & Balaji, 2016; Zhang et al., 2018). Furthermore, greenwashing ensures that consumers, who would like to buy more sustainably, no longer know whether something is sustainable or not (Brouwer, 2016). In addition, Wang et al (2020) argues that greenwashing causes a "spillover effect", this means that when several companies are guilty of greenwashing, this has a very negative effect on the purchasing behavior of consumers for other sustainable clothing brands. Beside this, it is unfortunately a fact that the number of greenwashing cases has increased in recent years (Gregory, 2021).

Therefore, consumers do not trust information about sustainability in the clothing industry. Moreover, several consumers think that it is a marketing tool for large companies to ask for extra money for the clothing. This opinion is underlined by interviewee (ID_2): *"There are many shops that just stick a sustainable label on it and then charge 30 euros more for it. While it is not so sustainable as they pretend it is"*. This reduces confidence in sustainable products and has a negative effect on clothing retailers who do sell sustainable clothing or want to start selling sustainable clothing.

As a result, it can be concluded that the deception of large companies is a restraining force in making the fashion industry more sustainable.

4.2.2.2 Consumers have too little knowledge about sustainability

Besides the fact that there are consumers who do not care about sustainability, there are also consumers who know little about sustainability. During the interviews it emerged that the retailers indicated that they think that there are (too) many consumers who have too little knowledge about sustainable clothing, as ID_6 elaborated: *"I also think that it really has to do with the lack of knowledge of the customer who do not know what choices they can make"*. Moreover, retailers from my sample indicate that there are customers who know absolutely nothing about sustainability in de fashion industry, as quote by ID_11 illustrates: *"I think that there are consumers who are completely unaware of sustainability in the fashion industry"*

Individuals might have limited knowledge or awareness regarding certain behaviors that have detrimental effects on the environment. They may be unaware of the environmental consequences associated with their actions, often due to a lack of access to information or insufficient education on the subject matter (Moon et al., 2015). In addition, customers may know that their actions have a negative impact on the environment, they may lack a clear understanding of the precise nature of these impacts. As a result, they may not know what to do to reduce their environmental impact (W. Young et al., 2010). Furthermore, some consumers may have awareness of the negative environmental impact of a particular behavior but struggle to translate this knowledge into actionable changes. They may lack the knowledge, skills, or resources necessary to modify their behavior in a way that promotes environmental sustainability (R. De Young, 2000).

Furthermore, a lack of knowledge about sustainability causes consumers to have a negative mindset about sustainable clothing. This point is emphasized by the following quote: *"Some people also still think that sustainable clothing is ugly, that it has no shape (ID_1)"* Moreover, state (ID_2) that "*there are undoubtedly still plenty of people who associate sustainability with dusty"*. Finally, there are people who think second-hand clothes are dirty, as (ID_11) explained: *"Some people find the idea of second-hand clothing disgusting."*

As a result, it can be concluded that too little knowledge among consumers is a restraining force for making clothing retailers more sustainable.

4.2.2.3 Time pressure

This force recurred frequently in my data. In many different interviews, retailers indicated that they often had too little time to talk to customers about sustainability. As ID_5 described: *"We need to be more aware and actively communicate that we sell sustainable clothing. That is sometimes difficult, because it just takes a lot of time"*. This point is confirmed by ID_1, who indicated that: "*The greatest challenge is to communicate the sustainable story to customers, to tell customers about the background of the products due to time pressure"*.

This part is a force that only sustainable retailers experience. However, time pressure can also prevent clothing retailers that are not yet sustainable from becoming more sustainable. For clothing retailers, it can take a lot of time to implement a sustainable transition. Owners/managers will have to put in a lot of time to make their product range sustainable, for example, they will have to research which clothing they want to offer. This could be a reason for clothing retailers to not implement sustainable practices (Schmitt et al., 2018). This is also emphasized by the data I have: *"It also takes a lot of time for a retailer to have sufficient knowledge about sustainability (ID_3)"*.

Because retailers may not have enough time to discuss sustainability with customers and/or have too little time to acquire sufficient knowledge about sustainability, time pressure can be a restraining force towards sustainability.

4.2.2.4 Lack of sustainable concern

This force can be divided into two parts (1) lack of sustainable concern among consumers and (2) lack of sustainable concern among retailers. In this section, I will further explain this restraining force towards sustainability.

The data showed that clothing retailers experience a lack of urgency from customers. This is emphasized in the following example: *"Moreover, there are also many people who do not care at all about sustainability (ID_10)"*. In addition, (ID_4) indicated that: *"Some people simply do not care, despite having the knowledge"*.

However, this contradicts what is discussed in section 4.1.2.3, where retailers indicate there that consumers are showing more interest in sustainability and that this group is growing. However, fashion consumers are not a homogenous group and therefore have different concerns about the consequences of environmental problems (Kaur & Anand, 2018). As a result, consumers will deal differently with the choices they make and a lot of fast fashion will still be bought (Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009; Kim et al., 2013). Moreover, different levels of concern can be found among consumers who do care about sustainability. Some consumers are prepared to make radical choices, while some consumers only make sustainable choices if it is easy for them (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

In addition to the fact that customers have a lack of sustainable concern, this can also apply to owners of non-sustainable clothing stores, as ID_1 explained: "*Non sustainable clothing retailers just not wanting or don't care enough to become more sustainable*". Unlike large companies, the environmental performance of an SME is strongly dependent on the owners' intention to become more sustainable (Gadenne et al., 2009; Ghazilla et al., 2015). As a result, lack of sustainable concern among clothing store owners can also ensure that a retailer does not become more sustainable.

4.2.3 Lack of transparency in the supply chain

The clothing industry is known for its complex supply chain (Masson et al., 2007; Şen, 2008). This is because a lot of clothing is made worldwide, and the majority thereof is produced in countries that are still developing - partly because of the low wages - it is financially very attractive to have the clothing produced there. Because of this development, almost no clothing is produced in developed countries anymore (Niinimäki et al., 2020a).

It is very difficult for retailers to know how a garment has been produced and whether it is fully sustainable, an example of this is retailer (ID_4) who indicated the following: *"Moreover, it is sometimes difficult to really find out whether a brand is completely sustainable or not."* Similarly, (ID_1) argued: *"It's also, say, then not always clear of how the product is made from, well, starting point to end point, so maybe a little bit of a lack of transparency across the chain"*. This is partly due to the fact that there are so many different chains present, as retailer (ID_8) elaborated: *"But it is also a complicated chain, if you look at a simple product such as a t-shirt, there are so many steps to develop and sell it from A to Z"*.

This shows that it is very difficult (even) for sustainable clothing retailers, who already try to deal with it very consciously, to know exactly how their products are made. As a result, they run the risk of also selling products that are not at all as sustainable as they think. This is confirmed by the following statement: *"I've had a long time where products said, for example, this is made with eco-cardboard, but that meant at that time that it actually only contains 40 percent eco-cardboard and then another 60 percent of something that we don't even know existed (ID_9)"*.

Due to all the factors mentioned above, it can be concluded that lack of transparency in the supply chain is a restraining force.

4.2.4 Standards and regulations

One of the most unexpected findings was the current standards and regulations. Since I had expected in advance that this would be a force that would stimulate sustainability. However, many respondents believe that there is currently too little legislation and regulation, as a quote by (ID_9) illustrates: "*In the fashion industry, almost no direction is really given in any area and there are still too few rules that people must adhere to, which I also find objectionable*". In addition, retailer (ID_4) indicated that they "*do not feel any political pressure or laws that should make us or the industry more sustainable"*.

As can be read in the quotes, retailers believe that there is insufficient guidance and that they do not feel any pressure from legislation and regulations to become more sustainable. As a result, retailers who do not operate sustainably will also experience too little pressure to become more sustainable. Moreover, companies can become demotivated in the absence of laws, regulations, and government support, because they believe that sustainability is not industry-friendly and experience a lack of benefits for implementing sustainability (Balasubramanian, 2012). This is also supported by the data I have: *"We always have to prove* *that we are really sustainable, while large companies are allowed to emit whatever they want, should not it be the other way around?" (ID_1)"*.

As a result, it can be concluded that the current standards and regulations are a restraining force in making clothing retailers more sustainable.

4.3 Force Conflicts

Besides the driving forces towards sustainability and the restraining forces towards sustainability, my interviewees also experience force conflicts. These force conflicts eventually merged into two broader aggregate dimensions, namely (1) conflicts between sustainable values and financial viability and (2) Effort allocation conflicts (see figure 3, area 'Force Conflicts').

4.3.1 Sustainable values and financial viability conflicts

This dimension is formed from two force conflicts that are closely related to each other. I will explain these two force conflicts below.

4.3.1.1 Lack of consumers because retailer becomes more sustainable

This force conflict emerged during the analysis of the interviews. During the interviews, the retailers explicitly named the factors below and clearly indicated that this force conflict exists. This force conflict can be categorized as a force conflict between driving forces.

As can be seen in figure 2, intrinsic value towards sustainability is a driving force towards sustainability. However, the model also shows that financial considerations are a restraining force. In this type of force, parts of these dimensions collide with each other, causing a force conflict. The conflict arises between the sustainable values of the retailer and the financial considerations associated with offering sustainable clothing. In this case, the driving force is the intrinsic value of the retailers and employees to become more sustainable and implement sustainable practices. However, the restraining force is the potential loss of customers due to the increased prices associated with sustainable clothing.

The retailers in my sample are partly driven by their intrinsic value towards sustainability. However, during the interviews it also emerged that when a retailer chooses to become more sustainable, potentially can lose (a part) of their consumers. In certain cases, retailers operate within the lower segment of the market, typically offering a wide range of clothing at affordable prices. However, when these retailers decide to introduce sustainable clothing into their product offerings, it ends up in a completely different segment, as (ID_5) explained: *"If your store is not equipped for a higher segment, you will simply lose your customers and then the question is whether you will get other customers in return"*.

Moreover, there may be customers who would like to pay extra for sustainable clothing, but who simply cannot afford it. I also found this in the data: *For the people who are aware and interested, price is often the threshold (ID_5)"*. In this scenario, there are customers who value sustainable clothing and are willing to pay more for it. However, these customers may face economic constraints and be unable to afford sustainable clothing.

Previous research has also shown that there are customers who, even if they can afford it, do not want to pay more for more sustainable clothing (Joergens, 2006). As a result, the retailer that does not change can benefit from this group of people, while a retailer who wants to become (more) sustainable is not able to attract these types of consumers.

As a result, retailers face the conflict between an internal driving force, their intrinsic motivation for sustainability and the opposing external driving force of consumer preferences and willingness to pay for sustainability. Therefore, a retailer can attach strong belief in the importance of sustainability but face the challenge of finding a balance between their sustainability values and the purchasing behavior of their consumers.

4.3.1.2 Being non-sustainable is financially more attractive

This force conflict has been discovered by analyzing the findings. By considering the driving forces towards sustainability and the restraining forces, this force conflict has been interpreted, based on the model created.

As can be seen in the model (figure 2), intrinsic values about sustainability is a driving force towards sustainability. While financial considerations is a restraining force towards sustainability. Components of financial considerations are: (1) higher purchase price and (2) sustainable clothing too expensive for consumers. Based on that, I conclude that it is financially more attractive not to be sustainable as a clothing retailer.

In this case, the driving force is the intrinsic value of the retailers and employees to become more sustainable and implement sustainable practices. However, the desire to maximize profitability by selling non-sustainable clothing represents another driving force. This driving force originates from the financial considerations and the higher profit margins that non-sustainable clothing has. It is still the case for many clothing retailers that the more clothing they sell, the more profit they make. In addition, it is also a fact that there is a higher profit margin on fast fashion products (Sull & Turconi, 2008a).

This means that it is financially more attractive to sell non-sustainable clothing, since you can then sell more with higher profit margins as a retailer. The statement "It still pays to sell as much as possible" indicates that maximizing sales (a disagreeable practice) promises an attractive reward. Therefore, it can be concluded that an undesirable practice (selling as much as possible) promises an attractive reward (higher profit). This makes this a conflict between a negative and a positive valence.

4.3.2 Effort-allocation conflict

This force conflict emerged during the analysis of the interviews. During the interviews, the retailers explicitly named the factors below and clearly indicated that this force conflict exists. This force conflict can be categorized as a force conflict between a positive and negative valence.

This conflict arises from the fact that becoming (more) sustainable as a clothing retailer requires a significant investment of time and effort, whereas maintaining non-sustainable may appear to be a simpler and less resource-intensive option, as (ID_1) explained: *"We have to put in a lot of time to prove that we are sustainable, while the rest can just continue without having to prove anything"* Moreover, it takes a lot of time to know the stories about sustainable clothing, as a retailer (ID_7) mentioned: *"To really know the story behind sustainable products you have to invest a lot of time, you cannot spend this time on other things"*.

Changes often require research, investment, training, and collaboration with suppliers and stakeholders (Condon, 2004; Starkey & Madan, 2001). Consequently, the retailer needs to allocate additional time and effort to successfully implement these sustainability measures. On the other hand, by choosing to stay unsustainable, the retailer can continue operating without making substantial changes to its current practices.

This conflict arises because a clothing retailer can have a desire to become more sustainable (positive valence) but to become that they have to invest a lot of time and can therefore experience a higher workload (negative valence). This is in contrast to retailers who maintain selling non-sustainable clothing.

5. DISCUSSION

In this section I will provide an overview of the contributions to the literate. Furthermore, this section elaborates on the practical implications of this study. In addition, the limitations and future research directions will be discussed.

5.1 Contributions to the literature

In this study, the objective was to comprehensively identify and analyse the forces involved in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers in the Netherlands. The aim was to provide a comprehensive mapping of these forces, shedding light on the dynamics of sustainability transitions in the clothing retail sector. Finally, the aim was to enrich the current knowledge about Lewin's Field Theory.

First, this study suggests that intrinsic values about sustainability are positively related to whether clothing retailers sell sustainable clothing. This applies to both the owners of a clothing store and the employees. This aligns with previous research from Battisti & Perry (2011) and Collins et al (2011) who state that among SMEs, an owner's personal attitude towards sustainability has a strong influence on how sustainable a business operates. Moreover, Horlings (2015) state that personal motivation is an important driver of change towards sustainability. In addition, previous research has shown that employees are regarded as one of the most important factors for sustainability (Kucharčíková, 2014; Lorincová et al., 2019). By highlighting the importance of intrinsic values, my study confirms the substantial influence of intrinsic values on the adoption of sustainable practices.

Secondly, this study implies that knowledge about sustainability has a positive effect on making clothing retailers more sustainable. My study suggests that both consumers and retailers who have knowledge about sustainability are more likely to engage in sustainable practices. This finding supports prior research of Heeren et al (2016a) and Kimuli et al (2020) who indicates that knowledge and awareness of sustainability among owners ensures that they are more likely to demonstrate sustainable behavior. In addition, my findings indicate that consumer awareness has increased over the years, and this ensures that customers are more looking for sustainable clothing. This finding is supported by Gazzola et al (2020) who argues that consumer awareness has become an important force in consumers' purchasing behavior. Furthermore, retailers indicated that they are actively committed to informing consumers about sustainable clothing. Prior research indicates that educating customers about more sustainable

clothing products causes customers to purchase more sustainable clothing (Lee et al., 2012; Wiese et al., 2015). This shows that knowledge about sustainability of both retailer and customer is an important driving force for implementing sustainable practices.
Therefore, this finding contributes to the existing literature by emphasizing the role of knowledge in driving sustainability transitions.

Thirdly, I have found evidence that technological developments in the fashion industry play an important role in making the industry more sustainable. This supports the finding of Niinimäki & Hassi (2011b) who argues that technological developments have a major impact on the sustainability of the entire fashion industry. Therefore, this study confirms prior research by recognizing the impact of technological developments.

Furthermore, I have found that financial considerations are a restraining force towards sustainability. As previous research has shown the price of a product is the most important thing for a customer (Nilssen et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there are also consumers who are willing to pay more for sustainable clothing, but who cannot afford it. This is line with earlier findings of McNeill & Moore (2015) who state there are consumers who have the desire to purchase sustainable clothing but may face financial constraints that prevent them from affording it. Moreover, I have found that suppliers exert negative pressure on retailers, making it more difficult for them to become more sustainable. This finding can be explained by the fact that established companies are not inclined to change successful business models to more sustainable business models (Chesbrough, 2010). By confirming and extending existing research on the influence of financial considerations, the study emphasizes the negative impact of this force in shaping sustainable practices.

Fifth, my study suggests that behavior and time constraints is a negative force for clothing retailers in becoming more sustainable. This finding is in line with Schmitt et al (2018) who argues that sustainability takes a lot of time and that this can discourage retailers from doing so. Moreover, I have found that there are also consumers who are not interested in sustainability and therefore do not want to know anything about it. This is in line with earlier findings of Dickson (2000) and Kim et al (2013) who state that a lack of sustainable concern ensures that consumers do not buy sustainable clothing. In addition, my research shows that a lack of knowledge about sustainability causes consumers to have a negative mindset about sustainable clothing. Therefore, my study supports the finding of Han & Chung (2014) who state that too little knowledge can lead to a negative attitude towards something. Overall, this finding highlights the negative impact that behavior and time constraints has. Therefore, my result contributes to the literature by extending current insights on the negative impact of this force.

Sixth, this study contributes to the understanding of the negative impact that lack of transparency in the supply has on implementing sustainable practices. It has also been noted in the literature that the supply chain is so complex that it is impossible to know for sure that every step is taken sustainably (Harris et al., 2016c). This makes it extremely difficult, especially for smaller clothing retailers, to know where raw materials come from, how they are produced and under what conditions (Blas Riesgo et al., 2022; Niinimäki et al., 2020b). By shedding light on this force, my study contributes to the existing research.

Next to that, the results of this study confirm the negative impact of standards and regulations. Due to the current standards and regulations, retailers who do not want to become more sustainable will feel no pressure at all to become more sustainable and the status quo will be maintained. This finding is supported by Peters & Simaens (2020) who argues that lack of governance and regulations pressure can be a barrier preventing retailers from becoming more sustainable. Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature by confirming the negative impact of lack of governance and regulations pressure.

Besides this, my study suggests that there are also force conflicts at play in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers. The first one is a conflict between sustainable values of a retailer versus financial viability. The conflict arises because the retailer that aims to become more sustainable faces the challenge of potentially losing customers due to the increased prices associated with sustainability. Moreover, there may be customers who would like to pay extra for sustainable clothing, but who simply cannot afford it. As a result, retailers face the conflict between their intrinsic motivation for sustainability and the opposing external driving force of consumer preferences and willingness to pay for sustainability.

In addition, it is financially more attractive to sell non-sustainable clothing, since you can then sell more with higher profit margins as a retailer (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; Sull & Turconi, 2008a). Therefore, it can be concluded that an undesirable practice (selling as much as possible) promises an attractive reward (higher profit). This makes this a conflict between a negative and a positive valence.

By uncovering these conflicts, my study highlights the challenges experienced by clothing retailers. The revelation of this conflict adds to broader literature that examines the challenge between sustainability and profitability (Van der Byl & Slawinski, 2015). Furthermore, this finding contributes to the broader literature on sustainability transitions.

Next to that, this study implies that a conflict arises because a clothing retailer can have a desire to become more sustainable (positive valence) but to become that they have to invest a lot of time and can therefore experience a higher workload (negative valence) This conflict is called effort-allocation conflict. By uncovering this conflict, my study emphasizes the resource constraints that clothing retailers face in order to become more sustainable. This finding contributes to the sustainability transitions literature, which highlights the need for support mechanisms, especially for smaller retailers, to facilitate sustainability transitions (Litvinenko et al., 2020).

In summary, the identified driving, restraining, and conflicting forces in this study contribute to closing the research gap. Because the forces were identified, an overarching model containing all the relevant forces that are at play in the sustainability transition of clothing retailers in the eastern part of the Netherlands could be created. Therefore, this study makes a valuable contribution to sustainability transition research in the context of clothing retailers by providing a comprehensive understanding of the driving, restraining, and conflicting forces that shape these transitions.

Finally, for identifying the relevant forces at play in the sustainability transitions of clothing retailers in the Netherlands, this study made use of Lewin’s field theory (Kump, 2023; Lewin, 1943). However, Kump (2023) state that Lewin's field theory provides a broad conceptual framework and therefore requires empirical instantiation. Hence, my study answered this need by employing empirical data to enrich and deepen the understanding of Lewin’s field theory. Thereby makes this study a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

5.2 Practical implications

This research has several practical implications for various stakeholders involved in sustainable fashion. The insights derived from this study can inform evidence-based decision-making and strategic interventions aimed at accelerating sustainable fashion consumption in the Netherlands.

To start with, I have a number of practical implications for clothing retailers.

Retailers should recognize the growing consumer awareness and interest in sustainability. This group is currently growing in the Netherlands, but my research shows that there are still many consumers who do not yet know enough about sustainability. Retailers can ensure that the growing consumer awareness and interest in sustainability continues to grow by educating consumers about sustainability. A number of retailers are already actively working on this, but if you want to get the most out of it, it is important that as many retailers as possible contribute to this.

In addition, retailers must ensure that they attract staff who have a positive personal attitude towards sustainability. When individuals have a strong intrinsic value for sustainability, they are also more motivated and willing to actively seek information and knowledge about sustainability. (Pagiaslis & Krontalis, 2014). Their intrinsic motivation drives them to learn more about how they can contribute to sustainability efforts. This can result in a continuous pursuit of knowledge and a commitment to staying informed about the latest developments in sustainability.

Furthermore, it is very important for retailers to keep abreast of the latest trends and developments regarding sustainability in the clothing industry. By recognizing the problems at hand and having confidence in their ability to address them, individuals are more likely to engage in behaviors that promote positive environmental change (De Groot & Steg, 2009; Nordlund & Garvill, 2003). Therefore, it can be stated that as individuals gain knowledge about sustainability, they become more aware of the environmental and social challenges our world faces The more individuals learn about sustainability, the more likely they are to develop a deep-rooted belief in its significance and make it a personal value (Bolderdijk et al., 2013).

Moreover, I would recommend retailers to communicate clearly about the sustainable products they sell. Consumers today have become more skeptical about sustainable clothing due to the rise of greenwashing (Brouwer, 2016). As a result, clothing retailers who sell sustainable clothing will have to actively communicate that the clothing is sustainable.

For policymakers I have the following practical implications.

I think that politicians should actively ensure that people in the Netherlands gain more knowledge about sustainability. This is especially important in the youngest generation(s), as previous research has shown that the most important predictor of environmental concern (Gifford & Nilsson, 2014; Palmer, 1993). That is why I believe that politicians should focus strongly on education in which sustainability plays a role. So that the future administrators of our country are ready to face the ecological challenges.

However, this is mainly focused on the future, while the world needs changes that are happening now. In addition, having knowledge about sustainability does not necessarily mean that it is actively acted upon (Heeren et al., 2016b). Moreover, price is still the most important driver for the customer (Nilssen et al., 2019). This ensures that many customers, despite knowledge about sustainability, still do not opt for sustainable clothing. Moreover, it is not financially attractive for a retailer to become more sustainable and established companies are not inclined to change successful business models to more sustainable business models (Chesbrough, 2010). As a result, I see a necessary role for policymakers. The first steps are being taken in this regard, as politicians are busy creating international laws and regulations against greenwashing. [16] Policymakers can collaborate on the international stage to create and enforce agreements and regulations that combat greenwashing and ensure truthful and transparent sustainability claims. By establishing international standards and frameworks, policymakers can protect consumers from misleading information and facilitate fair competition among businesses.

Beside this, policymakers should develop and implement comprehensive regulations and standards that promote transparency in the supply chain. By enforcing transparency requirements, policymakers can ensure that businesses are accountable for their environmental and social impacts, thereby fostering a more sustainable and responsible fashion industry.

Furthermore, policymakers can support the adoption of sustainable practices by providing financial incentives, such as tax benefits or grants, to businesses that prioritize sustainability. These incentives can help offset some of the financial constraints associated with sustainability initiatives and encourage more businesses to invest in sustainable practices.

[16] https://fashionunited.nl/nieuws/mode/nieuwe-eu-regels-tegen-greenwashing-laten-ook-de-denimwereld-niet-onberoerd/2022042553314

5.3 Limitations and future research

Besides the implications of the study, there are also several limitations. First, the sample in this study was limited to the Netherlands, and therefore the findings may not be generalizable to other countries. In addition, I only interviewed clothing retailers located in Overijssel (partly since I received almost no response/rejection from other parts of the country. As a result, retailers from other areas in the Netherlands may experience different forces than retailers from Overijssel. To overcome this limitation, future research could include a more diverse sample of clothing retailers from various parts of the country.

Moreover, the data is obtained from a sample of 11 interviews and this amount may be on the low side. While qualitative research focuses more on in-depth understanding rather than statistical representation. Future research could increase a larger sample size beyond the 11 interviews I conducted. This can provide a more diverse perspectives and increase the robustness of my findings.

In addition, I used a sample of which all retailers either sold second-hand clothing or are (partially) sustainable. As a result, the results may not be fully generalizable to apparel retailers outside this scope. Therefore, future research could include a broader scope of retailers, including for example fast fashion retailers

Furthermore, the apparel industry is a very complex industry, and my research has explored the perspective of apparel retailers, especially SMEs. However, it is also interesting to map the perspectives of different stakeholders. Think of consumers, clothing brands and policymakers. Future research could explore the viewpoints of other stakeholders and thereby provide insights into the broader sustainability landscape of the clothing industry.

To conclude, this paper responded to a request from Kump (2023) who argued that Lewin's field theory was not yet sufficiently developed, and that future work was needed to develop different models containing the relevant type of force that are at play for incumbents in sustainability transitions. This paper has contributed to this by doing this for the apparel industry, however future research could be devoted to doing this for other industries.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview guide- Dutch version

Doel: Het doel van het onderzoek is om erachter te komen waarom in Nederland gevestigde moderetailers (MKB) wel of niet deelnemen aan de duurzaamheidstransitie. Het doel van dit interview is om erachter te komen welke 'krachten' er in het veld spelen. Deze krachten kunnen verandering tegenhouden of verandering stimuleren. Door de relevante krachten in kaart te brengen kan ik begrijpen waarom moderetailers wel of niet meedoen aan duurzaamheidstransities.

<u>Sectie 1: Algemene vragen over persoon/bedrijf</u>

- Wie ben je en waar werk je?
- Wat is uw functie binnen het bedrijf?
- Hoe lang werkt u al in het bedrijf?
- Welke rollen vervulde u voor uw huidige functie?
- Wat is jouw opleidingsachtergrond?
- Hoe lang zit je al in de mode-industrie?
- Kun je iets vertellen over het bedrijf? (Grootte, soort klanten, segment)
- Wanneer is het bedrijf opgericht?
- Hoeveel werknemers heeft het bedrijf?

<u>Sectie 2: Vragen over persoonlijke drijfveren over duurzaamheid</u>

- Wat is uw persoonlijke houding ten opzichte van duurzaamheid? Wat betekent dat voor u?
- Is uw persoonlijke houding ten opzichte van duurzaamheid in de loop der jaren veranderd? Zo ja, waarom en hoe is dit veranderd?
- Is er een verschil tussen uw eigen kijk op duurzaamheid en het duurzaamheidsbeleid van het bedrijf?
- Voel je een persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid om als moderetailer duurzamer te zijn?

<u>Sectie 3: Algemene trends op het gebied van duurzaamheid in de branche</u>

- Wat is uw begrip van de Duurzame Ontwikkelingsdoelen van de Verenigde Naties en hoe verhouden deze zich tot uw bedrijf?
- Kent u duurzaamheidscertificeringen of -normen voor moderetailers? Zo ja, welke? En hoe verhouden deze zich tot uw bedrijf?
- Zijn er andere soorten veranderingen (bijvoorbeeld regelgeving) die momenteel van invloed zijn op duurzaamheid in de mode-industrie?

Sectie 4: Relevante krachten die spelen binnen duurzaamheidstransities

- U heeft al veranderingen aangebracht in de richting van duurzaamheid. Kun je ze kort omschrijven?
- Wat was de trigger voor deze veranderingen? Hoe zijn de ideeën ontstaan?
- Wat was de rol van klanten/medewerkers bij deze veranderingen?
- Heb je trends in consumentengedrag opgemerkt die duiden op een groeiende interesse in duurzame mode?
- Wat weerhoudt klanten ervan om duurzamere kleding te kopen?
- Heeft u negatieve of positieve feedback ontvangen van klanten, belanghebbenden of andere spelers in de sector met betrekking tot uw duurzaamheidspraktijken? Zo ja, wat was de feedback en hoe reageerde u erop?
- Hoe ben je ermee omgegaan? Wat heeft u gemotiveerd/aangemoedigd om ondanks deze feedback de veranderingen door te voeren?
- Bij het doorvoeren van de verandering: wat waren de grootste uitdagingen? Hoe ben je hiermee omgegaan en wat motiveerde je om door te gaan?
- Wanneer had u het gevoel dat de verandering succesvol was doorgevoerd en ingebed in het bedrijf?
- Omgekeerd, wie is erbij betrokken als een fashionretailer wil verduurzamen? Wat betekent dat voor leveranciers etc.?

Sectie 5: Algemene strijdkrachten in het veld

- Wat zijn de drijfveren/beïnvloedende factoren, waar liggen de barrières die verduurzaming van de gehele mode-industrie in de weg staan?
- Wie zijn de belangrijkste spelers als het gaat om 'verduurzamen' als geheel? Ik denk bijvoorbeeld aan belangenorganisaties, opleidingsinstituten...
- Hoe kan samenwerking tussen verschillende belanghebbenden in de mode-industrie (bijv. merken, leveranciers, consumenten) helpen om de krachten die aanwezig zijn te overwinnen?
- Wat hebben bedrijven nodig om duurzamer te worden?
- Zijn er economische of financiële factoren die het voor bedrijven moeilijk maken om te verduurzamen? Zo ja, geef een beschrijving.
- Welke initiatieven/financiering zouden nuttig zijn?
- Is er op dit moment voldoende aanbod van groene producten en hoe kan dit aanbod vergroot worden?
- Als u politicus was, wat zou u dan veranderen?

Sectie 6: Vragen om mee te eindigen

- Hoe zou je nog duurzamer kunnen worden? En wat heb je daarvoor nodig en wat houd je op dit moment tegen?

- Is er een verschil tussen uw eigen kijk op duurzaamheid en het duurzaamheidsbeleid van het bedrijf?
- Kent u moderetailers die a) momenteel overwegen om te veranderen, b) er middenin zitten, d) succesvol zijn veranderd?
- Ben ik iets vergeten te vragen of wil je iets toevoegen?

Appendix B: Interview guide – English version

Aim: The aim of the research is to find out why fashion retailers (SMEs) based in the Netherlands do or do not participate in the sustainability transition. The objective of this interview is to find out which 'forces' are at play in the field. These forces can hold back change or push change. By mapping out the relevant forces I can understand why fashion retailers participate in sustainability transitions or not.

Section 1: General questions about person/company

- Who are you and where are you working?
- What is your position within the company?
- How long have you been in the company?
- Which roles did you fulfill before your current role?
- What is your educational background?
- How long have you been in the fashion industry?
- Could you tell something about the company? (Size, type of customers, segment)
- When was the company founded?
- How many employees does the company have?

Section 2: Questions about personal motivations about sustainability

- What is your personal attitude towards sustainability? What does that mean to you?
- Has your personal attitude towards sustainability changed over the years? If so, why, and how has it changed?
- Is there a difference between your own view of sustainability and the company's policy on sustainability?
- Do you feel a personal responsibility to be more sustainable as a fashion retailer?

Section 3: General trends of sustainability in the industry

- What is your understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and how do they relate to your business?
- Are you aware of any sustainability certifications or standards for fashion retailers? If yes, which ones? And how do these relate to your business?
- Are there any other kinds of changes (e.g., regulations) that currently affect sustainability in the fashion industry?

Section 4: Relevant forces at play within sustainability transitions

- You have already made changes towards sustainability. Can you briefly describe them?
- What was the trigger for these changes? How did the ideas come about?
- What was the role of customers/ employees in these changes?
- Who brought that in? Were there any contradictions/votes against? Were there "forces" against the changes? What pressure was felt here? For example, from the side of the supervisory board, customers, NGOs...
- Have you noticed any trends in consumer behavior that suggest a growing interest in sustainable fashion?
- What prevents customers from buying more sustainable clothing?
- Have you received any negative or positive feedback from customers, stakeholders, or other industry players regarding your sustainability practices? If yes, what was the feedback and how did you respond to it?
- How did you deal with it? What motivated/encouraged you to implement the changes despite this backlash?
- In implementing the change: what were the biggest challenges? How did you deal with this and what motivated you to continue?
- When did you feel that the change had been successfully implemented and embedded in the company?
- Conversely, who is involved when a fashion retailer wants to become more sustainable? What does that mean for suppliers etc.?

Section 5: General forces in the field

- What are the drivers/influencing factors, where are the barriers that stand in the way of making the entire fashion industry more sustainable?
- Who are the key players when it comes to becoming 'more sustainable' as a whole? I am thinking, for example, of interest groups, training institutes...
- How can collaboration between different stakeholders in the fashion industry (e.g., brands, supplier, consumers) help to overcome forces working ag
- What do more companies need to become more sustainable?
- Are there any economic or financial factors that make it difficult for companies to become more sustainable? If yes, please describe.
- What initiatives/funding would be useful?
- Is there currently enough supply of green products and how could this supply be increased?
- If you were a politician, what would you change?

Section 6: Questions to end with

- How could you become even more sustainable? And what do you need for that and what is holding you back at the moment?
- Is there a difference between your own view of sustainability and the company's policy on sustainability?

- Do you know some fashion retailers that a) are currently considering changing, b) are in the middle of it, d) have successfully changed?
- Did I forget to ask something, or do you want to add something?