

**Beyond the Statement: Assessing the Impact of Brand Credibility,  
Environmental Concern, and Greenwashing Perception  
On Consumers' Purchasing Intentions in Fashion**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – In an era increasingly defined by environmental consciousness, the corporate world, particularly in the fashion industry, finds itself under intense scrutiny regarding its sustainable claims and practices. This scrutiny often centers around ‘greenwashing’ – the practice where companies misleadingly advertise their products as environmentally friendly. Despite the growing discourse around greenwashing, there remains a gap in empirical research concerning its impact on stakeholders, most notably consumers. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the relationship between brand credibility and consumer purchase intentions with the fashion sector. It further delves into the roles that environmental concern and greenwashing perception play in moderating this relationship. Building on studies that highlight the need to understand the effects of greenwashing, this research seeks to uncover how sustainable marketing impacts consumer decisions in the fashion industry.

**Method** – The study employed a quantitative research methodology. A pre-test involving 30 participants and six fashion brands was conducted to refine the questionnaire. The main questionnaire included 212 responses.

**Results** – This study reveals the critical importance of brand credibility in enhancing consumer intentions to purchase within the fashion sector. It emphasizes the essential need for brands to authentically incorporate sustainability into their identity to meet consumer expectations and ethical standards. The influence of environmental concern varies among brands with different reputations for sustainability efforts. Brands perceived as having a weaker commitment to sustainability show that environmental concerns do not significantly alter how brand credibility affects purchase intentions. Conversely, brands recognized for their strong dedication to sustainability witness a significant strengthening in the relationship between brand credibility and intention to purchase. Furthermore, for brands with a solid reputation in sustainability efforts, the perception of greenwashing significantly weakens the positive influence of brand credibility on purchase intentions. However, for brands seen as having weaker commitments to sustainability, greenwashing perceptions and brand credibility appear to influence consumer behavior independently.

**Conclusion** – The findings show that for brands recognized for their strong sustainability efforts, alignment between environmental values enhances credibility and encourages purchases. Also, the perception of greenwashing can significantly reduce the intention of consumers to make a purchase. Conversely, for consumers of brands perceived as less committed to sustainability, other factors might outweigh the importance of the brand’s sustainability efforts. This suggests that consumers may often place higher value on factors like affordability and style rather than a brand’s sustainability efforts, reflecting the common attitude-behavior gap in sustainable fashion consumption.

*Keywords: Brand Credibility, Environmental Concern, Greenwashing Perception, Consumer Purchase Intention, Sustainability, Fashion*

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## **1. Introduction**

In the current era of widespread awareness about environmental issues, the need for businesses to adopt sustainable practices has become increasingly important (Watson et al., 2023). The growing understanding of how textile production affects the environment has driven businesses across the world to reevaluate their operations with a focus on sustainability (Niinimäki et al., 2020). The fashion industry is a major example of this change (Fletcher & Grose, 2012). The environmental impact of the fashion industry is significant, involving concerns like resource use, waste production, and greenhouse gas emissions. The industry's response to these challenges has been multifaceted, ranging from the adoption of more sustainable materials and production processes to initiatives aimed at circularity and waste reduction (Niinimäki et al., 2020). However, the journey towards true sustainability is complex and filled with challenges. One such challenge is the issue of greenwashing, where brands make unproven or misleading claims about the environmental credentials of their products, complicating consumer decision-making and undermining trust in sustainable fashion (Laufer, 2003). The role of brand credibility in this context becomes increasingly critical. Brand credibility refers to how believable a brand's information is, based on consumers' willingness to accept this information as true (Erdem & Swait, 1998). When a brand is perceived as credible and aligned with sustainable values, it not only enhances its brand equity and reputation, but also strengthens consumer purchase intentions (Wang et al., 2020). In this approach, companies show a positive attitude towards environmental issues or act as if they care about the environment (De Jong et al., 2018). Yet, what they say and what they do, may be different (Gatti et al., 2019). Ultimately, this directly and indirectly negatively affects organizations, consumers, and brands (Santos et al., 2023).

### **1.1. Research Gap**

Although the dynamics of brand credibility and consumer purchase intentions have been explored extensively, the literature lacks an integrated approach that combines these concepts with the growing consumer awareness of environmental issues and the skepticism surrounding greenwashing. For instance, research of Erdem et al. (2002), Kemp & Bui (2011) and Baek et al. (2010) have explored brand credibility's impact on consumer behavior. Brand credibility has been shown to significantly influence consumers' purchase intentions (Chin et al., 2020). However, the evolving consumer awareness regarding environmental issues and sustainability practices has introduced new dimensions to this relationship (Santos et al., 2023). The rise of environmentally conscious consumers, who prefer products and brands that align with their environmental values (Gleim et al., 2013), suggest a potential shift in how brand credibility impacts purchase intentions. So far, no research specifically addresses how environmental concerns might moderate this relationship. Consequently, Chen et al. (2019) and Ahmad & Zhang (2020) recommend the incorporation of environmental concern as a variable in future research exploring the impact of greenwashing on consumers' purchase intention. Furthermore, research of Hameed et al. (2021) advocates for including individual aspects like consumer trust in researching the impact of greenwashing on consumers' purchase intention. Similarly,

while the phenomenon of greenwashing and its impact on consumer trust and purchase intentions have been acknowledged in general terms (Akturan., 2018; Braga et al., 2019; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Seegebarth et al., 2016), there is a notable gap in research that specifically investigates how greenwashing perceptions might moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. Therefore, the phenomenon of greenwashing introduces a further complication (Santos et al., 2023). Existing literature has explored the concepts of this study across various industries. For instance, in the food and beverage sector, the impact of greenwashing on consumer behavior is well-documented (Braga et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2020). Similarly, in sectors like automotive and technology, concepts as environmental concerns and brand credibility has been a subject of study, focusing on how consumers perceive and react to environmental claims by brands in these sectors (Akturan, 2018; Leonidu & Skarmeas, 2015). Given the fashion industry's ongoing struggle with sustainability issues (Fletcher, 2014) and the increasing consumer awareness regarding ethical and environmental aspects of fashion (Niinimäki et al., 2020), incorporating the fashion industry would significantly broaden the scope of research in this field. Consequently, this thesis aims to fill this research gap by examining the possible moderating effect of environmental concern and greenwashing perception on the relationship between brand credibility (in which consumer trust will be measured) and consumers' intentions to purchase within the fashion industry.

## **1.2. Research Question**

Aligned with these insights and building upon the current body of research, this study aims to fill the identified gaps, particularly the limited research on brand credibility, consumer purchase intentions, and the moderating effects of environmental concerns and greenwashing perception in the fashion industry. Drawing from existing literature, this research seeks to expand the understanding of how the concepts shape consumer behavior in the increasingly conscious and environmentally sustainable focused fashion market. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the following research question:

*"To what extent does brand credibility affect consumers' intention to purchase? And to what extent do consumers' environmental concern and greenwashing perception moderate this relationship?"*

## **1.3. Theoretical Implications**

This research bridges a significant gap in understanding the relationship between brand credibility and consumer behavior, specifically within the context of environmental concerns and greenwashing perceptions in the fashion industry. The study extends established theories of brand credibility (Erdem & Swait, 2004) into the realm of environmental consciousness, an area that has gained increasing importance in consumer behavior studies (Gleim et al., 2013). By combining these areas, the study offers new insights into how consumers respond to brand credibility in the fashion industry, especially when they are aware of environmental issues and greenwashing practices. While the concept of brand credibility and its impact on

consumer choices is well-documented (Baek et al., 2010; Kemp & Bui, 2011), the influence of environmental concerns and greenwashing perceptions in this relationship has not been explored in the fashion industry context. Therefore, the study expands current research on how modern consumer concerns modify the established understanding of brand credibility's influence on purchasing decisions.

#### **1.4. Practical Implications**

For managers in the fashion industry, the findings of this study are particularly valuable. Brand managers can use these insights to develop marketing strategies that align with the increasing consumer emphasis on environmental ethics (Erdem & Swait, 2004; Seegebarth et al., 2016). Understanding how brand credibility is affected by consumer perceptions of environmental concerns and greenwashing can lead to more effective communication and branding strategies. The research also has implications for supply chain managers. It highlights the importance of adopting sustainable and ethical practices, responding to the growing consumer demand for responsible fashion. This understanding can lead to changes in supply chain operations, ensuring they align with the ethical expectations of consumers (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study's findings can inform public policy decisions in the fashion industry (Gleim, 2013). By demonstrating how environmental concerns and perceptions of greenwashing impact consumer behavior, the research provides empirical support for policies promoting transparency and sustainability in the fashion sector.

#### **1.5. Structure Of The Thesis**

This thesis is structured as follows. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 offers the theoretical framework. The sections examine the existing literature on sustainability in the fashion industry, brand credibility, consumer purchasing intentions, and the concept of greenwashing. Chapter 3 details the research methodology. It thoroughly describes the quantitative research approach, including the pre-test, questionnaire design, sample selection, and data collection process. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the results from the questionnaire conducted. In Chapter 5, there is a discussion of the results and interpretation of the data. Furthermore, it discusses the implications of the study's findings and considers the main contributions of the research. Lastly, it acknowledges its limitations and suggests avenues for future research.



## **2. Literature Review**

This section aims to synthesize findings, inconsistencies, and highlight unexplored areas in the existing body of research from relevant fields. It begins with an introduction into sustainability and green marketing. The research areas that are reviewed include the credibility of brands, the purchasing intentions of consumers, environmental concern, and the concepts of greenwashing and its perception. During the chapters, hypotheses are formulated, and a conceptual model is developed.

### **2.1. Sustainability And The Fashion Industry**

Businesses stand a significant responsibility in terms of sustainability practices, and the demand for eco-friendly solutions is extensive. Sustainability is a crucial element in the corporate world and a key issue for businesses globally (Neumann et al., 2020). Discussing sustainability within the context of the fashion industry is especially relevant due to its status as a major contributor to pollution globally (Garcia-Torres et al., 2019; Legere & Kang, 2020). The fashion sector extensively utilizes natural resources and heavily relies on chemicals for fibre manufacturing and colouring processes, which continuously cause damage to both the environment and humanity (Pal & Gander, 2018). Frequently, a significant level of transportation is involved due to the manufacturing of garments in countries where labor costs are lower, followed by their distribution to markets in the United States and Europe. This trend of relocating production facilities to areas with more affordable labor often goes hand in hand with concerns about insufficient or absent rights for workers (Nayak et al., 2019). Additionally, the widespread adoption of fast fashion and the acceleration of fashion cycles have altered consumer behavior, leading to a substantial increase in clothing purchases. This trend has consequently resulted in an increase of waste, with numerous garments being discarded in landfills (Mcneill & Moore, 2015).

However, a growing number of stakeholders and the broader society are pressuring businesses to act in a socially responsible way. In this context, the practice of sustainability reporting has gained prominence (Garcia-Torres et al., 2022). This trend towards transparency and shared best practices in sustainability can be effective if various parties are committed to specific objectives (Brozovic et al., 2020). In their research, Brozovic et al. (2020) highlight that companies are making significant efforts to involve more participants in sustainability initiatives, promoting a consensus on values and facilitating the pooling of resources. Companies can further enhance sustainable practices by publishing common standards and openly communicating the outcomes of sustainability efforts. However, research by Stacchezzini et al. (2016) points out that certain companies may withhold information on their sustainability performance, especially when their social and environmental impacts are less favourable. The issue of transparency remains a challenge, leading to either inadequate implementation of these practices or instances of greenwashing, where companies may overstate their environmental actions to appeal to consumers. Fast fashion companies, particularly large ones, drastically affect both the ecosystem and societies. The fashion sector ranks as the second most significant environmental impactor, trailing only the oil and gas sector. This

prominence is due to its considerable carbon footprint, the employment of toxic chemical colorants, its substantial consumption of water resources, and its non-adherence to sustainable water management methodologies (Pedersen & Andersen, 2015). Despite numerous sustainable initiatives that suggest progress, several businesses engage in ambiguous and deceptive reporting, resulting in a notable absence of transparency (Maas et al., 2016).

## **2.2. Green Marketing And Communications**

In today's dynamic market, the increasing awareness of consumers about sustainability requires that businesses strategically place and express their sustainability initiatives. This is imperative to influence consumers' loyalty, purchasing decisions, and to reinforce their intent to repurchase (Amoako et al., 2020; Taufique et al., 2019). In the context of contemporary marketing strategies, green marketing represents a tactical method focused on communicating and maintaining sustainability initiatives to consumers, aimed at fulfilling marketing objectives (Kumar, 2016). It was initially presented by Lazer (1969), who characterized it as a marketing strategy that emphasizes the conservation of environmental resources. Green marketing focuses on a suite of practices that ensure all marketing-related activities, from sourcing to product distribution, are conducted in an environmentally conscious manner (Sharma & Kushwaka, 2019). This approach to marketing takes into consideration the societal and environmental implications of marketing endeavors without sacrificing profitability.

Numerous studies have highlighted a positive correlation between sustainable marketing strategies and business profitability (Mukonza & Swarts, 2020; Maziriri, 2020; Sutduean et al., 2019). This underscores the importance for companies to invest time and resources in these practices. By doing so, they not only contribute to environmental preservation but also enhance their brand image and customer loyalty, which in turn can lead to increased profitability (Schaltegger & Burrit, 2010). Keller (2001) and Ottman (2017) emphasize that effective communication can significantly influence consumer perceptions, attitudes, and buying behavior, particularly in the context of green marketing. This involves informing and educating consumers about the environmental benefits of a product or service, thereby influencing their purchasing decisions. Effective communication about a company's environmentally friendly product or service offerings can establish the organization as an eco-friendly brand. This positioning significantly impacts consumer behavior, awareness, and intentions related to sustainable purchases (Amoako et al., 2020; Ottman, 2017).

To disseminate information about their sustainable practices effectively, businesses employ a variety of channels. These include yearly sustainable reports, official corporate websites, and increasingly, social media networks (Bürklin et al., 2019; Castillo-Abdul, 2022). The utilization of digital platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, allows for rapid information distribution and opportunities for direct interactions between companies and consumers (Lyon & Montgomery, 2013). Leonidou et al., (2011) highlight that environmental advertising, as part of a broader green marketing strategy, can influence consumer beliefs and attitudes towards sustainability, encouraging environmentally responsible behavior. This strategic

communication is not only vital in influencing consumer loyalty and purchasing decisions but also in reinforcing their intent to repurchase.

Effective green marketing communication strategies thus have profound implications for companies. They lead to brand differentiation and competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006), enhance corporate reputation and trust (Eccles et al., 2014), increase profitability and market share (Peattie & Crane, 2005), ensure regulatory compliance and risk management (Bansal & Roth, 2000), build long-term consumer relationships (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012), and foster a culture of sustainability within organizations (Bhattacharya et al., 2008). Information about sustainability aimed at consumers is typically presented in two main ways: firstly, through labels verified by independent third parties for sustainability, and secondly, through sustainability communication that is not governed by strict regulations, often used in marketing (Turunen & Halme, 2021). The second, free-form or unregulated nature of these communications, indicates that their authenticity is not confirmed by external entities, but rather are statements from the brands about their own offerings (Henninger, 2015; Turunen & Halme, 2021). This unregulated approach companies take in their sustainability communication and marketing strategies, is often filled with an overabundance of environmental terms that lack comparability.

So, as organizations become increasingly aware of the criticality of their public perception, reputation, and legitimacy, there exists a tendency for them to overstate, embellish, or misrepresent their external communications pertaining to sustainable initiatives (Kim et al., 2017). This is often executed with the objective of cultivating a favorable public image (Chen et al., 2014). Consequently, organizations may portray themselves as environmentally conscientious or engage in positive green communication, which might not accurately reflect their actual environmental practices (De Jong et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019). The divergence between an organization's professed and actual environmental behaviors leads to greenwashing (Pizzetti et al., 2021).

### **2.3. Brand Credibility**

To attract consumers and foster their loyalty, corporations can leverage branding to create and communicate a distinctive identity that sets them apart from the competition (Soltani et al., 2018). In situations where consumers face uncertainty regarding brands and the market exhibits asymmetric information, wherein firms possess more knowledge about their products compared to consumers, brand credibility becomes particularly crucial (Rieh & Danielson, 2007). Brand credibility represents the combined effect of the reliability inherent in each marketing initiative executed by a brand (Erdem et al., 2002). It is characterized by the perceived believability of the product information associated with a specific brand (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Furthermore, a brand's credibility is contingent upon a company's capability and readiness to fulfill its promises to consumers (Erdem et al., 2002). This aspect of brand credibility is significant for businesses as it influences their perceived value (Haig, 2015). In the realm of influencing consumer behavior and other stakeholder perceptions, the credibility of a brand is a crucial element. This is because credibility serves as a foundational principle in the art of persuasion (Haig, 2015). Variables such as purchase intention, the

brand's credibility itself and the attitudes towards the brand are key indicators in understanding the effectiveness of persuasive efforts (Baek et al., 2010). Brand credibility consists of two components and refers to the extent to which an individual places trust in the expertise and trustworthiness of a brand. This necessitates consumers' perception that the brand possesses both the inclination (i.e., trustworthiness) and capability (i.e., expertise) to consistently fulfill its promises (Erdem & Swait, 2004). Park & Lee (2013) suggest that understanding the relationship between a brand and its consumers is enhanced by focusing on brand credibility. Essentially, when a brand reliably fulfills its promises, it tends to have a stronger relationship with its consumers. Therefore, a brand's credibility plays a key role in building and maintain positive relationships with its customers.

However, in contemporary business practices, there is a significant emphasis on a company's values (Arvidsson, 2005) and social responsibility initiatives (Pratihari & Uzma, 2018). As people grow more concerned about the environment, consumers are increasingly seeking environmentally responsible products (Chen, 2007). Individuals interpret brand meanings by examining their consistent offerings, which convey information about the firms' value delivery and claims (Mansoor & Paul, 2022). Consequently, this facilitates consumers in comparing and distinguishing environmentally conscious brands from conventional ones (Adnan et al., 2018).

Green brand credibility reflects individuals' confidence in the authenticity of an organization's claims regarding environmentally friendly features in their products or services (Kumar et al., 2021). Within the realm of green brand credibility, trustworthiness can be defined as the extent to which a brand serves as a dependable source of information regarding environmental concerns. Expertise, in this context, signifies the brand's proficiency in integrating environmentally friendly elements into its strategic branding initiatives (Kumar et al., 2021). To effectively engage in sustainability initiatives, it's crucial to build credibility through the clear explanation of these activities. This approach not only improves the perceived honesty of the company but also significantly affects stakeholder trust and corporate reputation (Du et al., 2010). Schmelz (2012) further elaborates that transparent communication, highlighting both the ethical and operational strengths of a firm in its sustainability efforts, can noticeably increase consumer loyalty and support. Therefore, a strategic and transparent communication framework for sustainability initiatives is essential in enhancing the overall success of sustainability campaigns.

#### **2.4. Consumers' Purchase Intention**

Certain consumers aim to make purchasing decisions by considering a corporation's societal impact and its commitment to environmental responsibility (Marin et al., 2009; McEachern et al., 2007). Consequently, the "green market" is expanding (Hartmann & Ibáñez, 2006). The growth of the sustainable market suggests that numerous consumers have embraced a favorable stance towards environmental concerns and demonstrate a readiness to integrate information about the environment into their choices regarding consumption (Vermillion & Peart, 2010). The intention of consumers to make a purchase can serve as a valuable indicator of their future buying behavior, essentially functioning as a predictor for whether a

purchase will be made (Wu & Chen, 2014). Purchase intention refers to “*the sum total of cognitive, affective and behavioral towards adoption, purchase, and use of the product, service, ideas or certain behaviors*” (Dadwal et al., 2019, p. 70). Hence, it refers to the inclination or willingness of individuals to obtain a particular product in the future (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

The (fast) fashion industry creates a large variety of clothing suitable for various seasons. Consumers are attracted to these clothes because they resemble luxury fashion but are available at lower prices (Joy et al., 2012). However, this leads to excessive production, which negatively impacts the environment. The materials used in fast fashion are inexpensive, resulting in products that are not durable for long-term use (Joy et al., 2012). This encourages frequent changes in fashion styles and trends among consumers (Hall & Boorady, 2017). Research indicates that consumers place less importance on sustainability in the fashion industry compared to other sectors (Henninger et al., 2019; Min Kong & Ko, 2017). A key factor influencing their willingness to purchase is their awareness and understanding of the product (Henninger et al., 2019). Specifically, better knowledge about sustainability and eco-friendly products increases the likelihood of consumers buying sustainable fashion (Sinha et al., 2022). Research of Kumar et al. (2021) shows that consumers frequently exhibit a willingness to pay premium prices for products that claim to be environmentally sustainable, as they seek to acquire goods that are less harmful to the environment. However, a study focusing on Iran revealed that even environmentally conscious consumers are not prepared to pay extra for greener fashion products (Farzin et al., 2023). Furthermore, existing research indicates that given the prevalence of deceptive claims regarding corporate environmental commitments, consumers’ trust in such companies’ promotional claims and overall brand image significantly influences their decision to make environmentally conscious purchases (Chen et al., 2010; Lin & Zhou, 2022).

#### **2.4.1. Brand Credibility and Purchase Intention**

In daily life, consumers encounter many brand options for the products they use and consume, both global and local. The choice of products and brands is influenced by behavioral intentions. A key factor in deciding to buy is the credibility of a brand (Suhud et al., 2023). Research conducted by Jeng (2016) found that individuals who trust a company’s commitment and capability to meet its obligations are more likely to engage in the purchase of the company’s goods and services. Additional research of Wang and Yang (2010) indicates that the credibility of a brand has substantial and favorable influence on consumers’ intention to purchase that particular brand. It has been observed that brand credibility has a positive correlation with consumers’ inclination to purchase a specific brand. The heightened credibility of a brand is associated with an increased intention among consumers to make a purchase. Brands with a higher level of credibility tend to elicit a stronger purchase intention from consumers (Wang & Yang, 2010). Mansoor & Paul (2022) argued the fundamental role of brand credibility in influencing consumer purchasing decisions, highlighting that highly credible brands tend to achieve greater sales compared to less credible counterparts. Bickart & Ruth (2016) further supported this notion, asserting that highly credible brands foster positive emotions among

consumers, leading them to prefer and purchase such brands. Consumers perceive brand credibility as a trustworthy repository of information regarding products, serving as a precursor to their trust in product claims. Consequently, brand credibility reduces anticipated expenses associated with the collection, processing, and clarification of information, concurrently enhancing perceived product value (Martin-Consuegra et al., 2018). Assisting consumers in reducing the mental effort associated with product selection enhances the probability of making a purchase. When consumers perceive a brand as both willing and capable of being trustworthy and dependable, their inclination to buy products is heightened (Bougoure et al., 2016). Building upon this foundation and recognizing the substantial impact of brand credibility on consumer behavior within the realm of brands, the present study posits that brand credibility positively influences consumers' purchase intention. Consequently, the hypothesis is proposed as follows:

**H1.** *Consumers' brand credibility positively affects consumers' purchase intention.*

## **2.5. Environmental Concern**

More consumers are now aware of the environmental and social problems linked to the fast-fashion industry. The industry is currently recognized as the second biggest source of pollution, right after the oil industry (Gwozdz et al., 2017). Their problems range from large amounts of textile waste, overproduction, toxic dye use, water pollution, to the depletion of natural resources (Gwozdz et al., 2017). In response, fast-fashion companies are launching new product lines – such as Zara Join Life, H&M's Conscious line, and ASOS Green Room – that target ethically concerned customers. Environmental concern encompasses an individual's beliefs, stance, and the extent to which they worry about the environment (Said et al., 2003). The adoption of environmental concern has resulted in an increased recognition of environmental issues. This heightened awareness has subsequently influenced shifts in consumer behavior, prompting individuals to choose products that align with these environmental concerns (Ogiemwonyi et al., 2023). Consumers have identified the acquisition of environmentally conscious products as a variable means of expressing their environmental concern (Gomes et al., 2023). In a broader sense, environmental concern relates to an individual's attitudes regarding various environmental matters (Zimmer et al., 1994).

Given the increasing significance of sustainability in our daily lives, it is crucial to comprehend how environmental concern influences sustainable behaviors. Recent research indicates that a heightened environmental concern among young adult consumers is leading them to abstain from purchasing environmentally harmful products (Nguyen et al., 2018). Environmental-conscious consumers show less brand loyalty and shop more cautiously (Spack et al., 2012). When consumers exhibit a high level of environmental concern, they tend to favor environmentally responsible corporations and brands, expressing a positive attitude and intention to purchase their products or services (Sony & Ferguson, 2017). Additionally, individuals who understand environmental concerns and their consequences tend to feel more obligated to protect the environment and emphasize the necessity for sustainable development (Fryxell & Lo, 2003). Such individuals demonstrate an enhanced ability to evaluate the environmental consequences of

conventional products and may express a greater intent to purchase sustainable products as a means of fulfilling their environmental responsibilities (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). This presents a potential for businesses to leverage environmental considerations to distinguish and strategically position their products. Furthermore, it enables them to secure market share in emerging environmentally conscious markets (Chen & Chang, 2012). However, these consumers are becoming more knowledgeable about the marketing of environmentally friendly products. This might be because they understand how specific brands or products can harm the environment (Chen & Chang, 2013). Marketers should understand that not every customer cares about the environment. Some studies show that customers who aren't worried about environmental issues don't like brands that are eco-friendly (Akturan, 2018). Also, Kronrod et al. (2012) discovered that strong messages about the environment only work on customers who already care about these issues. For those who aren't as interested in environmental matters, it is necessary to first make them see why it is important before using strong language (Kronrod et al., 2012).

The complexity of consumer behavior in this context becomes more comprehensible when viewed through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Proposed by Ajzen (1991), TPB posits that a person's behavior is significantly influenced by their intentions, which in turn are shaped by their attitudes, the social norms they perceive, and their belief in their ability to perform the behavior. The increasing environmental concern among consumers can be seen as a shift in attitudes. This shift, in turn, influences their intention to purchase sustainable products. Furthermore, the growing social norms (Soopramanien et al., 2023) around environmental responsibility and the perceived control or ease (Straughan & Roberts, 1999) of assessing sustainable products also play a crucial role. For example, when consumers recognize brands like ZARA's Join Life and H&M Conscious line, they not only see environmentally friendly options but also perceive a social norm and feasibility in making sustainable choices. This aligns with the TPB's framework, where attitudes (environmental concern), subjective norms (perception of what is socially acceptable or expected), and perceived behavioral control (ease of making sustainable choices) come together to shape consumer behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

### **2.5.1. The Moderating Role of Environmental Concern**

Consumers today are presented with a plethora of choices when acquiring goods or services. The emerge of brand extensions with an ethical marketing approach, targeting consumers who prioritize ethically manufactured products, has added a layer of complexity to the decision-making process. Individuals are increasingly seeking products and services that align with their values, especially in the context of sustainability (Stringer et al., 2020). The entire lifecycle of products, spanning from the sourcing of materials to the manufacturing of goods, and finally, to their consumption and disposal, gives rise to various significant environmental considerations affecting both businesses and consumers. These concerns resonate across diverse brands and their offerings (Stringer et al., 2020).

Moderation, in statistical terms, occurs when the strength or direction of the relationship between two variables depends on a third variable, known as moderator (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In this context,

environmental concern functions as a critical third variable, potentially altering the relationship between brand credibility and consumer purchase intentions. The impact of environmental concern on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions can be explained through the lens of values-based decision making (Gleim et al., 2013; Schwartz, 1992). Consumers with high environmental concern are likely to scrutinize brands more rigorously, evaluating whether their practices align with sustainability values (Lee et al., 2023). This scrutiny is particularly relevant in the context of brands with varying degrees of sustainability reputations. For brands with a strong sustainability reputation, a high level of environmental concern among consumers can amplify the positive relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. These consumers view such brands as congruent with their values, thereby enhancing the credibility of the brand and, in turn, their intention to purchase (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). In this situation, environmental concern serves to amplify and enhance the positive views and intentions. A study by Gallo & Christensen (2011) supports this, finding that sustainable business practices significantly influence consumer perceptions and buying decisions, similar to the positive impact observed by McNeill & Moore (2015) in their CSR-focused research. Further, Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012) discuss how environmental concern strengthens consumer loyalty towards brands perceived as environmentally friendly. Similarly, Leonidou & Skarmeas (2017) emphasize that consumers who are more environmentally conscious often have stricter standards for assessing a brand's sustainability efforts, which in turn affect their buying decisions. Furthermore, research by Eng et al. (2022) highlight that consumers are more likely to support companies with strong sustainability commitments, as these commitments align with their personal values and ethical standards. This alignment is particularly strong among environmentally conscious consumers, who tend to perceive these brands as more trustworthy and socially responsible (Mohr et al., 2001).

Conversely, for brands with a weaker sustainability reputation, the same level of environmental concern might weaken the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. Schmeltz (2012) illuminates the concept of corporate hypocrisy, where companies with a history of unethical behavior yet engaging in sustainability initiatives are often viewed with scepticism. This scepticism can affect consumer trust and purchase intentions, particularly among those with high environmental concerns (Cheah et al., 2011). Furthermore, research by Gleim et al. (2013) highlights that sustainability initiatives by companies with affected reputations are often met with cynicism. This scepticism can lead consumers to perceive these brands as less trustworthy or as failing to meet their sustainability standards, thus diminishing their intention to purchase from them (Amandi, 2023). Additionally, Luo & Bhattacharya (2006) suggest that the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives in improving consumer perceptions varies greatly based on the authenticity and consistency of a company's effort in this area. For brands with a weaker reputation in sustainability, ineffective or inconsistent practices can lead to negative consumer perceptions, undermining the potential positive impact of brand credibility on purchase intentions (Du et al., 2010). Finally, Cronin et al. (2011) argue that the credibility and reputation built through sustainability initiatives are vital for corporate brand equity. In cases where these efforts are perceived as lacking credibility, especially for companies with weaker reputations in sustainability, this can negatively influence consumer perceptions and purchase intentions (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017).



The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and its successor Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) enriches the understanding of this concept and suggests that an individual's behavior is influenced by their intention to engage in that behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). This intention stems from their attitude towards the behavior and the subjective norms surrounding it (Ajzen, 1991). Within this framework, environmental concern is part of the subjective normative belief, which shapes the attitude towards buying products from brands of different credibility levels (Schwartz, 1992). In the context of consumer behavior towards brands with varying degrees of sustainability credentials, TPB provides a valuable lens through which to view the decision-making process. Consumers form attitudes towards purchasing from a brand based on their beliefs about the brand's commitment to sustainability practices (Ginsberg & Bloom, 2004). These attitudes are shaped not only by direct knowledge or experiences with the brand, but also by broader environmental concerns that act as subjective norms (Gleim et al., 2013). For instance, a consumer with a high level of environmental concern is likely to have a positive attitude towards purchasing from a brand known for its strong commitment to sustainability. This positive attitude is influenced by the belief that purchasing from such a brand aligns with their personal values and contributes to a greater societal good (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). The environmental concern, in this case, forms a critical part of the subjective norms, reinforcing the consumer's positive attitude and increasing their intention to purchase (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008). On the other hand, when considering brands with weaker sustainability reputations, the same environmental concern might lead to a negative attitude towards purchasing from these brands. The subjective norm, in this case, creates a dissonance between the consumer's environmental values and the perceived sustainability practices of the brand (Connolly & Prothero, 2008). As a result, the intention to purchase from such brand is likely to be lower, as the consumer's attitudes and subjective norms are not in alignment (Yoon et al., 2006). This should result in the assumption that environmentally focused consumers should express a greater willingness to buy from brands with strong commitments to sustainability compared to brands with weaker or less transparent sustainability practices. Consequently, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H2.** *A high level of consumers' environmental concern will negatively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention for brands with a weak sustainability reputation.*

**H3.** *A high level of consumers' environmental concern will positively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention for brands with a strong sustainability reputation.*

## **2.6. Greenwashing**

Increasing environmental concern among consumers has prompted a heightened demand for more sustainable alternatives (Duong et al., 2022; Nekomahmud & Fekete-Farkas, 2020). The adaption of green marketing has emerged as a distinguishing factor within the market landscape, with businesses' sustainable performance shown to influence consumers' purchasing intentions (Grimmer & Bingham, 2013; Kahraman

& Kazançoğlu, 2019). These dynamics exert pressure on businesses to substantiate their commitment to the environment and their practices (Berrone et al., 2017). Nevertheless, when businesses fail to align with their proclaimed “green” initiatives, the issue of greenwashing becomes a prominent concern (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Akturan, 2018). The term “greenwashing” encompasses various interpretations, generally referring to the use of misleading claims about a company’s environmental practices or the sustainability of a product or service (Dutta-Powell et al., 2023). Numerous scholars have embraced the definition put forth by TerraChoice (now Underwriters Laboratories): “Greenwashing is the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (Underwriters Laboratories, n.d.). These claims, as noted in literature (Parguel et al., 2011), either lack validation or actively provide misleading information.

Greenwashing entails both thoughtful and unintended deception of consumers (Dutta-Powell et al., 2023). Typically, companies undertaking such actions have the objective of establishing a favorable brand image in the eyes of consumers (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). Companies can employ a strategy to misguide consumers, taking advantage of information asymmetry by using deceptive environmental communications as a signal of their environmental practices. This allows them to effectively convey positive environmental values to consumers, irrespective of their actual commitment to such values (Seele & Gatti, 2017). By relying on this misleading information, consumers are led to falsely believe that they have valid motives to purchase products from these companies (Chen & Chang, 2012). However, when consumers are aware of the occurrence of greenwashing, it instills a sense of doubt, leading to skepticism not only regarding the product in question, but potentially extending to the overall category of environmentally friendly products as well (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Akturan, 2018). Greenwashing pertains to environmental claims that lack specificity, are overstated, or outright false (Nguyen et al., 2019; Parguel et al., 2011). Consequently, many consumers frequently struggle to recognize deceptive environmental marketing messages related to the sustainable endeavors of businesses and their products or services (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Urbanski & Haque, 2020). As an illustration, corporations have the potential to employ environmental language such as environmentally friendly, natural, or non-toxic (Krafft & Saito, 2015; Do Paço & Reis, 2016), along with vague, ambiguous, or unsubstantiated claims regarding their products or services. These claims frequently exploit consumers’ limited knowledge or comprehension of the environmental language (Borin et al., 2013).

Several scholars (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017; Do Paço & Reis, 2016; Townsend, 2017) have pointed out the growing challenge consumers face in distinguishing between authentic and deceptive green marketing assertions. Greenwashing has been explored in various sectors, including tourism (Self et al., 2010), oil and gas (Scanlan, 2017), banking (Khan et al., 2021), and the fashion industry (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Prominent fast-fashion corporations like H&M and ZARA have been found to emphasize their environmentally friendly practices, all while engaging in activities that have adverse effects on the environment (Munir & Mohan, 2022). Dissemination of misleading information regarding the environmental aspects of products undermines consumers’ intention to make sustainable purchases and their trust, thereby contributing to a negative perception of the sustainable fashion sector (Nyilasy et al., 2014).

## 2.7. Greenwashing Perception

The concept of greenwashing perception relates to how consumers react to whether the eco-friendly claims in advertising align with a company's real actions towards the environment (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Simply put, greenwashing perception refers to how a consumer thinks about whether a business is falsely presenting its environmental efforts. This means that the consumer is trying to figure out if the company is not being honest about its true sustainable practices (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Research shows that when companies falsely claim to be environmentally friendly (known as greenwashing), it can have harmful impacts on consumers (De Jong et al., 2018). This includes harming their trust in green products (Chen et al., 2014), decreasing their intention to buy green products (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014), and reducing their positive word-of-mouth about such products (Chen et al., 2014). To solve this, businesses need to make clearer and more honest claims about their environmental efforts (Leonidou & Skarmas, 2017). Brouwer (2016) and De Jong et al. (2018) further argue that greenwashing not only exploits but also confuses consumers, leading to a general skepticism towards all green products, thereby impacting future purchase decisions. Shabana & Ravlin (2016) discuss the unethical practices of companies that claim to be environmentally and socially responsible, while in reality, they engage in greenwashing. This form of selective disclosure is further examined by Seele & Gatti (2017), who highlight that brands tend to selectively share positive information while hiding negative environmental impacts. Such practices not only mislead consumers but also raise serious ethical questions about the transparency and accountability of corporate entities in their communication strategies (Okbagaber, 2023).

Researchers have studied how the perception of greenwashing impacts various concepts. Banerjee et al. (1995) were among the pioneers in exploring the implications of greenwashing perception. Their study focused on how perceived greenwashing could damage a corporation's image, suggesting that when consumers perceive a disconnect between a company's environmental claims and its actual practices, it leads to a negative corporate image. Jones (2019) examined the contradictions between a company's environmental claims and its actual environmental record. Such inconsistencies not only damage the credibility of a company's environmental initiatives, but also impact the overall brand image negatively. Zhang et al. (2018) conducted a study that linked the perception of greenwashing to a decrease in consumers' purchase intentions. Their research provided empirical evidence that when consumers perceive a company as engaging in greenwashing, their likelihood of purchasing products from that company diminishes significantly. Studies by Aji & Sutikno (2015), Chen & Chang (2013), and Kahraman & Kazançoglu (2019) highlight the dynamics of consumer skepticism and trust in response to greenwashing practices. Aji and Sutikno (2015) found a direct relationship between greenwashing perception and green consumer skepticism, suggesting that as consumers become more aware of greenwashing, their skepticism towards environmental claims increases. Building on this, Chen & Chang (2013) explored the degradation of consumer trust caused by greenwashing. They discovered that when consumers perceive greenwashing, it significantly diminishes their trust not just in the specific environmental claims made by the company but in the company's overall commitment to environmental stewardship. Kahraman & Kazançoglu (2019) further

underscored the long-term implications of greenwashing on consumer trust and brand relationships. They emphasized that misleading environmental claims can fundamentally undermine the trust consumers place in a brand, which is essential for long-term relationships. Javed (2022), Akturan (2018), and Szabo & Webster (2021) each provided insights into different aspects of how greenwashing perception impacts brand-related factors. The study of Javed (2022) underscores the concept that brand credibility is significantly undermined by perceived greenwashing, as it damages consumers' trust and perception of the brand. When consumers perceive a gap between a brand's promoted environmental claims and its actual practices, it decreases brand credibility (Javed, 2022). Furthermore, Javed (2022) addresses the broader implications of diminished brand credibility resulting from greenwashing. The impact extends beyond the immediate product or service in question, potentially damaging the overall corporate reputation. This broader damage can lead to a decrease in overall brand equity and may even threaten long-term success (Javed, 2022). Akturan (2018) explored how perceptions of greenwashing can detrimentally affect a brand's value in the eyes of environmentally conscious consumers. Szabo & Webster (2021), on the other hand, investigated how greenwashing influences overall brand and product perceptions. Their study reveals that consumers' recognition of greenwashing practices leads to a more negative perception of both the brand and its products. Guerreiro & Pacheco (2021) further emphasized the negative impact of greenwashing on consumers' green purchase intentions. Their study found that as consumers become more aware of greenwashing practices, their willingness to engage in green purchases decrease.

### **2.7.1. The Moderating Role of Greenwashing Perception**

Greenwashing poses an important problem to green marketing initiatives, as it weakens the integrity of environmental activities and cultivates consumer skepticism towards sustainability efforts (Chen & Chang, 2013; Silva et al., 2020). A growing number of consumers are advocating for corporate adherence to environmental and social responsibility standards. In the realm of self-published sustainability reports, numerous companies appear to profess ethical practices. However, these assertions often lack independent third-party verification (Fieseler et al., 2010). This dissonance between advertised values and real-world actions is not only ethically questionable but also has the potential to influence consumer behavior in detrimental ways (Jones, 2019).

While research directly examining greenwashing as a moderating factor is still emerging, similar studies provide significant understanding. For example, Wagner et al. (2009) show how consumer skepticism, a concept closely related to the perception of greenwashing, can significantly moderate the effectiveness of marketing communications. This is echoed in the findings of Xu & Han (2021), who argue that perceptions of insincerity in corporate communications can dramatically alter consumer responses. Similarly, Vlachos et al. (2009) examined how consumer perceptions of corporate motives (altruistic vs. profit-driven) moderate the impact of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives on consumer trust. The study found that when consumers perceived a company's CSR initiatives as driven by altruistic motives, these initiatives were more likely to build trust. Conversely, when CSR initiatives were perceived as

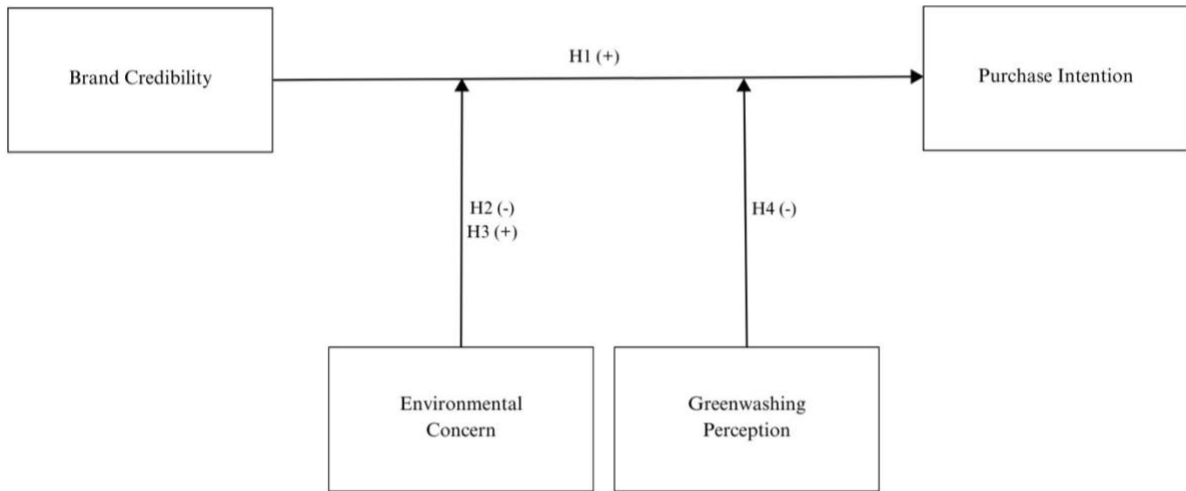
primarily profit-driven, their effectiveness in building consumer trust was significantly reduced. Additionally, research by Parguel et al. (2011) provides insights into how greenwashing can undermine the credibility of honest environmental marketing efforts. They argue that greenwashing increases consumer skepticism, thereby weakening the otherwise positive impact of authentic environmental marketing. In a situation where there is a strong perception of greenwashing, a brand's credibility might be significantly undermined by consumer doubt, even if the brand's claims are true. This doubt can be so intense that it weakens the impact of the brand's credibility on buying choices (Chen & Chang, 2013). Furthermore, Schmeltz's (2012) research suggests that a strong perception of greenwashing can result in adverse word-of-mouth, which further undermines the credibility of a brand and impacts consumer purchase decisions. This becomes especially pertinent in the digital era, as consumers possess various platforms to voice their opinions and disseminate their experiences broadly (Kovacova et al., 2021). Conversely, in scenarios where greenwashing perception is low, the credibility of a brand can significantly impact consumer purchase intentions. In these contexts, consumers are more likely to take a brand's environmental claims at face value, positively influencing their purchasing decisions. This correlation is highlighted by Cheah & Phau's (2011) study, which found a link between reduced skepticism about sustainability claims and an increase in the likelihood of purchasing. Furthermore, when there is little perception of greenwashing, a brand's credibility has a greater influence on forming purchasing intentions, since there is considerably less skepticism (Aji & Sutikno, 2015).

The Attribution Theory in marketing provides a theoretical framework for understanding this moderating effect (Ellen et al., 2006). According to this theory, consumers are likely to make attributions about a company's motives based on their perceptions. When greenwashing perception is high, consumers may attribute manipulative or deceptive motives to a company's environmental claims, thus altering the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. Similarly, The Cognitive Dissonance Theory further enriches the understanding of this concept (Festinger, 1957). This theory posits that individuals strive for internal consistency, and when faced with conflicting information or beliefs, they experience psychological discomfort. In the realm of marketing, when consumers face inconsistencies between a brand's environmental claims and its perceived actions, they experience cognitive dissonance. This dissonance can lead to a reevaluation of the brand's credibility and influence their purchasing decisions (Cooper, 2007). Lastly, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) offers a framework to understand how the level of greenwashing perception influences the processing route of persuasive communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In high greenwashing scenarios, consumers are likely to engage in the central route of processing, adopting a detailed approach in evaluating the truthfulness of environmental claims. Conversely, in contexts with low greenwashing, the peripheral route may dominate, where brand credibility plays a more significant role in persuasion. Based on the analysis and in accordance with the presented theories, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H4.** *A high greenwashing perception negatively moderates the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention.*

## 2.8. Conceptual Model

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of brand credibility on consumers' purchase intentions, considering the potential moderating role of consumers' level of environmental concern and consumers' greenwashing perception on the relationship. The conceptual framework depicting the research of this paper is illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model

### **3. Method**

Chapter three outlines the research methodology employed to explore the relationship between brand credibility, consumer purchase intention, and the moderating variables. This chapter outlines the quantitative research approach, the pre-test, the main questionnaire design, and the implementation of the main questionnaire.

#### **3.1. Research Approach**

As this study explores the extent to which brand credibility influences consumers' intentions to engage in purchases, and how their environmental concern and perception of greenwashing moderate this relationship, a quantitative approach appears suitable for this research. The research method enables the collection of information from a broad range of consumers, examining the connections among the previously mentioned variables. Utilizing a quantitative research method facilitated this, as it allowed for the aggregation of generalized beliefs about the targeted respondents (Payne & Wansink, 2011). Additionally, studies focusing on brand credibility and its impact on consumer behavior often employ quantitative methods (Akturan, 2018; Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021; Javed, 2022; Szabo & Webster, 2021). Similarly, research into consumer environmental concerns and greenwashing has predominantly taken a quantitative approach (Bañares et al., 2021; Bulut et al., 2021; Darnéus Ekeröth et al., 2020).

##### **3.1.1. Research Design**

In this master's thesis, the primary aim is to examine the relationship between brand credibility (IV) and consumers' purchasing intentions (DV) in the context of fashion brands' environmental statements. This research investigates whether consumers perceive these statements as genuine sustainable commitments or as mere greenwashing, significantly influencing their purchasing decisions. To understand this relationship, the study first explores how the credibility of a brand affects these intentions. After, the study introduces two moderating variables (MODs) – environmental concern and greenwashing perception. These moderators are hypothesized to influence the strength and direction of the relationship. The methodology incorporates a questionnaire, targeting a broad audience without specific demographic constraints, and uses established scales to assess the different variables. Participants are presented with statements about the environmental initiatives of two brands, ZARA, and The North Face, to assess their perceptions. The statistical analysis aims to uncover significant relationships between brand credibility, purchase intention, environmental concerns, and perceptions of greenwashing.

### **3.2. Pre-Test**

The initial phase of the study focused on evaluating sustainability claims made by a group of six fashion brands. This evaluation was conducted through a questionnaire distributed to a convenient available sample of thirty participants. This pre-test questionnaire evaluated the brands' statements regarding sustainability and measured participants' perceptions of greenwashing on a seven-point Likert scale (Chen & Chang, 2012; Nyilasy et al., 2014). The statements of these six brands are detailed in Appendix 1. Subsequently, the main questionnaire was refined based on the pre-test findings. One specific question, originally part of the greenwashing perception variable, which focused on the visual or graphic representation of environmental attributes, was removed. The inclusion of a question focused on visual elements was found to be inconsistent and confusing for participants.

#### **3.2.1. Brand Selection Pre-Test**

The selection of the fashion industry and specific brands is crucial because they serve as a means to examine the relationships in this study. The fashion industry is widely recognized as a significant factor in environmental damage (Bailey et al., 2022), making it a key area to study the relationship between a brand's credibility and consumer buying choices, and potentially moderating effects. In addition to the enduring connections that customers already have with fashion brands, the significance of sustainable associations is growing more important (Pedersen et al., 2018). In the process of choosing brands, two key factors were considered. Firstly, the brands needed to be internationally recognized. Secondly, each brand should offer a unique viewpoint on sustainability. This means that one brand was recognized for its positive associations with sustainability, whereas the other was noted for weaker or more negative associations with sustainability. A pre-test was designed to assess participants' views on different fashion brand statements. Six distinct fashion brands (H&M, ASOS, ZARA, The North Face, Patagonia and VEJA), selected from the Good On You website, were presented with statements highlighting their sustainable initiatives. This choice of source ensured that the brands under consideration were already examined for their sustainable efforts to varying degrees. Good On You is known for its transparent rating process, and it evaluates companies based on their treatment of people, environmental practices, and animal welfare. This made it a good choice for selecting a variety of brands to study. Participants were encouraged to evaluate whether the statements truly reflected genuine commitment to sustainability, or if they suggested greenwashing – a misleading practice where brands exaggerate or falsely claim to be environmentally friendly (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020).

#### **3.2.2. Results Pre-Test**

The pre-test including the statements of the six fashion brands are detailed in Appendix 1. In research, a pre-test with a minimum sample size of 30 respondents is considered adequate for initial data gathering and analysis, as it provides a sufficient range of responses for preliminary insights without overwhelming resources (Perneger et al., 2015). Finally, 31 participants participated in the pre-test, of which 30 responses



were fully completed. Following data collection, the reliability of the greenwashing perception scale was measured using Cronbach’s Alpha (Field, 2017). Table 1 represents the Cronbach’s Alpha values for the greenwashing perception scale across the six brands. In this study, the greenwashing perception scale consisted of multiple statements assessing respondents’ view on the sustainability claims made by each brand (e.g.: ‘*The company omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are*’, ‘*The company’s green claims are vague or unprovable*’).

**Table 1.** Cronbach's Alpha Scores

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Cronbach’s Alpha</b>
<b>H&amp;M</b>	0.849
<b>Patagonia</b>	0.878
<b>ASOS</b>	0.859
<b>ZARA</b>	0.865
<b>The North Face</b>	0.837
<b>VEJA</b>	0.865

Across all brands, the Cronbach’s Alpha values ranged from 0.837 to 0.878, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7 for good reliability (Field, 2017). This indicates that the statements used to assess greenwashing perceptions for each brand were consistent in measuring the same underlying construct. Furthermore, the average score on greenwashing perceptions across all dimensions were calculated for each brand. From Table 2, it can be observed that among the six brands, ZARA has the highest mean perception score of 4.73, suggesting it was perceived less favorably in terms of sustainability by the respondents. Conversely, The North Face has the lowest mean score of 2.81, indicating it was perceived most favorably. Detailed results of the pre-test can be found in Appendix 2.

**Table 2.** Overview Scores Brands

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>H&amp;M</b>	4.21	1.690
<b>Patagonia</b>	3.55	1.901
<b>ASOS</b>	4.58	1.918
<b>ZARA</b>	4.73	1.608
<b>The North Face</b>	2.91	1.537
<b>VEJA</b>	3.47	1.961

### **3.2.3. The Statements**

Both ZARA and The North Face have made public claims regarding their commitment to environmental sustainability. The statements originate from the brands’ official websites (Zara.com, n.d.; Vfc, n.d.). The statements provide practical examples of how greenwashing can manifest in corporate communication. The

first statement from ZARA is presented below. After the statement, a critical examination of their language and claim supported by academic literature, reveals patterns consistent with greenwashing practices.

*“Join life represents a process of continuous improvement, always questioning what we should do to move towards a more sustainable model. We are aware that the path is complex, but we believe in the industry's power of transformation. That is why our social and environmental goals have become more demanding, in order to be able to continue improving.*

*We work on the different stages of our value chain with a holistic approach, from how we design our products, choosing the materials or producing the garments, to logistics or the design and management of our warehouses and stores. All of this, helping to extend the life of the garments through repair, resale and used clothing donation programmes. Meeting our sustainability goals presents a challenge that demands close collaboration with our supply chain partners, environmental experts, international organizations, trade unions and NGO's. Our aim is to foster genuine change within the industry. While we may not be perfect, we are dedicated to continuous improvement.”*

ZARA's statement, under its “Join Life” initiative, shows a typical example of corporate communication utilizing green buzzwords. The statement is filled with phrases like ‘sustainable model’, ‘continuous improvement’, and ‘holistic approach’. These terms are often used to create an illusion of a company's commitment to environmental sustainability without providing substantive evidence of such efforts (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Furthermore, the statement uses a vague and non-specific language. The claim of working on ‘different stages of our value chain’ and ‘extending the life of the garments’ through various programs is a strategic use of ambiguity, which is a common tactic in greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015). ZARA's emphasis on ‘collaboration with supply chain partners, environmental experts, and NGO's’ can be seen as an attempt to gain legitimacy through association (Laufer, 2003). However, with the absence of concrete examples or data, such assertions are largely speculative. The North Face's sustainability statement, as indicated by pre-test respondents, appears to have generated more positive green brand associations. The statement from The North Face is presented as follows:

*“We are committed to making the best products on earth—and keeping Mother Nature, our communities and the future in focus. Nature is at the heart of what we do. It's why we created four actionable commitments guided by science-based targets set by our parent company, VF.*

***Complete the circle.***

*Circularity means giving old gear new life. We're flipping the status quo of how we make gear and how you can dispose of it more responsibly. By revolutionizing our materials, processes and supply chain through a new vision of circularity, we can work together to turn old gear into new adventures.*

***Make the best better.***

*100% of our top materials (polyester, cotton and nylon) are expected to be recycled, responsibly-sourced renewable or regeneratively grown. We're making progress toward achieving this goal for apparel by 2025, and footwear and equipment by 2030.*

***Extend our reach.***

*We're committed to reducing our supply chain greenhouse gas emissions by partnering with key suppliers to help them cut their Scope 1 and 2 emissions in half by 2030. These efforts will have a positive impact on the industry as a whole, beyond The North Face.*

***Rethink packaging.***

*We're working to eliminate single-use plastic packaging by 2025. For other forms of packaging (including both plastic and paper), we're reducing where possible and ensuring new materials used are more recyclable."*

Terms like 'circularity', 'responsibly-sourced renewable', and 'regeneratively grown', while typical of green marketing strategies (Schmuck et al., 2018), also reflect a growing trend in the industry towards more sustainable practices. The North Face's commitment to 'circularity' and 'revolutionizing materials and processes' suggests an ambition to innovate in product lifecycle management. This approach, while potentially covered by complex jargon (Seele & Gatti, 2017), does point towards a proactive stance in reducing waste and promoting sustainability in their products. Their long-term goals for 2030 and 2050 – though lacking in immediate accountability – demonstrate a forward-thinking approach in line with sustainable development (Ramus & Montiel, 2005). While The North Face's statement does contain elements common in greenwashing narratives, it also reflects a growing industry awareness and effort towards sustainability. In contrast to ZARA's statement, The North Face's sustainability commitment includes quantifiable targets which adds a layer of credibility to their environmental claims. For instance, their goal to have 100% of their top materials (like polyester, nylon, and cotton) be regeneratively grown, responsibly-sourced renewable, or recycled by specific years (2025 for apparel and 2030 for footwear and equipment) provides clear, measurable objectives.

### **3.3. Main Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire was designed using Qualtrics. The aim was to assess consumer perceptions on sustainability, especially concerning popular fashion brands. The questionnaire was divided into multiple sections, each serving a specific purpose, and can be found in Appendix 1. The cover page described the study's objective and main focus area. Furthermore, the cover page outlined the anonymity of the questionnaire. Previous studies have emphasized the importance of maintaining respondent privacy, especially when addressing potentially sensitive issues like sustainability and consumption habits (Annelin

& Böstrom, 2022; Latif & Sajjad, 2018). Section 1 addressed purchasing habits and brand familiarity, aiming to better understand participant's relationship with fashion brands. Questions regarding how often purchases are made and the awareness of brands are crucial in assessing the initial knowledge of the participant about the topic. Section 2 explored further into the environmental concerns of the participant. By using a Likert-scale, the questionnaire aimed to understand the depth of environmental concern among respondents. Section 3 introduced the statement from ZARA about their sustainable activities. After this, participants' brand credibility and greenwashing perception were measured. Section 4 continued this approach, but now for The North Face. This allows for a comparative analysis between the two brands, based on identical questionnaire constructs. In section 5, demographic details, including gender, age, and occupation, were collected. Lastly, section 6 included a page dedicated to final reflections, featuring an open-ended question accessible in English and Dutch. Participation in this section was voluntary, offering participants a chance to elaborate on any aspect of the questionnaire. It was communicated to them that their responses, if provided, might serve as empirical data (Hadler, 2023).

### **3.4. Measures**

The concepts in the questionnaire were developed using validated measures drawn from prior research. The study utilized a seven-point Likert scale to assess the variable questions for environmental concern, brand credibility, greenwashing perception, and purchase intention. The scale ranged from 1 representing 'Strongly Disagree', 4 representing 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', to 7 representing 'Strongly Agree' (Kim, 2010).

#### **3.4.1. Brand Credibility**

Brands are not just providers of products or services; they are entities that consumers form relationships with. Central to this relationship is the brand's credibility (Spry et al., 2011). The concept of brand credibility is grounded in two key components, expertise, and trustworthiness. This suggests that a brand gains credibility when it is perceived by consumers as both capable (expertise) and willing (trustworthiness) to deliver on its promises consistently (Erdem & Swait, 2004). In the assessment of brand credibility, measures from the brand signaling theory have been applied (Erdem & Swait, 2004). The following set of seven items covering both expertise and trustworthiness aspects were employed in a seven-point Likert scale evaluation: '*This brand reminds me of someone who's competent and knows what he/she is doing*', '*This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises*', '*This brand delivers what it promises*', '*This brand's product claims are believable*', '*Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less*', '*This brand has a name you can trust*', and '*This brand doesn't pretend to be something it isn't*'. In revising the statement '*Over time, my experiences with this brand have led me to expect it to keep its promises, no more and no less*', '*no more and no less*' was removed. This was aimed at simplifying the language and making the assertion more direct and clearer. This was important because the statements and questionnaire were in English, which was not the first language of the majority of participants.

### **3.4.2. Environmental Concern**

In assessing the environmental concern of participants, this study adapted elements from the Environmental Attitudes Inventory (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010). This concept aimed to quantify the degree of concern individuals have regarding various the environment. Respondents were presented with four statements and asked to express their level of agreement on a 1-7 scale. The four statements included *'I am concerned about the impacts of climate change'*, *'More needs to be done to protect and preserve the natural world'*, *'Controls should be placed on industry to protect the environment from pollution, even if it means that things will cost more'*, and *'I think that it is important to buy products and services from companies that are environmentally friendly'*. Participants' responses to these statements were averaged, with higher scores indicating greater environmental concern. Furthermore, the final statement *'I think that it is important to buy products and services from companies that are environmentally friendly'* offers a direct insight into participants' value alignment with sustainable consumption.

### **3.4.3. Greenwashing Perception**

The concept of greenwashing perception focuses on the consumer's ability to judge the truthfulness and dependability of environmental claims made by businesses (Dutta-Powell, 2023). The assessment of greenwashing perception is crucial as it influences consumer decisions and attitudes towards a company's green initiatives. In order to accurately measure the variable, a set of specific metrics is adopted from Nyilasy et al. (2014) and Chen & Chang (2013). The questions used to measure greenwashing perception include: *'The company omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are'*, *'The company is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes'*, *'The company is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes'*, *'The company's green claims are vague or unprovable'*, and *'The company exaggerates the reality of its green features'*. In both the pre-test and the main study, every question was tailored to the brands being investigated. One particular question, *'The company is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes'*, was removed from the questionnaire. This decision was driven by two factors. First, the questionnaire primarily utilized statement-based metrics to assess greenwashing perception. The inclusion of a question about visual or graphic elements deviated from this format, creating a mismatch between the provided statement and the questionnaire item. Second, the pre-test phase of the questionnaire, which was crucial for testing the effectiveness and clarity of questionnaire items, provided insightful feedback regarding this question. Participants indicated that the question was somewhat unusual or challenging to answer. The feedback suggested that this question did not resonate well with the statement provided, which could potentially lead to confusion or less reliable results (Jamieson et al., 2023). The adjustment to remove the question aims to improve the overall quality and reliability of the data collected on greenwashing perception, ensuring that it accurately reflects consumers' perceptions and judgements of a company's environmental practices.

#### **3.4.4. Purchase Intention**

The concept of purchase intention refers to the likelihood of consumers to buy a specific brand or product (Dodds et al., 1991). Dodds et al. (1991) introduced the development of this scale, focusing on the effect of brand, price, and store information on consumer perceptions and intentions. Akturan (2018) further build upon this by examining the impact of greenwashing on green brand equity and purchase intention. Therefore, the following multiple-item scale was adopted: *'If I were going to purchase a ... product, I would consider buying this brand'*, *'If I were shopping for a ... brand, the likelihood I would purchase this ... brand is high'*, *'My willingness to buy this ... brand would be high if I were shopping for ....'*, and *'The probability I would consider buying this ... brand is high'*.

#### **3.4.5. Demographic Control Variables**

Several demographic control variables were included to accommodate potential variables that might affect the research outcome. Different age groups have varying levels of exposure to environmental campaigns, education, and media narratives. Older generations might have a different understanding of environmental issues compared to younger ones due to changing educational programs and global events (Dunlap et al., 2000). Similarly, gender-based differences in environmental consciousness have been highlighted in various studies. For instance, research has consistently showed that women, on average, are more environmentally conscious and may thus have a heightened sensitivity to greenwashing than men (Shahsavari, 2020; Zelezny et al., 2000). Lastly, the nature of one's profession can influence their exposure to green initiatives or corporate ethics. For example, individuals in some professions might make them more aware of green practices and greenwashing than others (Jones & Gettinger, 2016). Given the potential influence of these demographic variables, at the conclusion of the questionnaire, participants are asked to provide their gender (options include Female, Male, Non-binary/Third gender, Prefer not to say), age, and current occupation (choices being Student, Employed, Self-Employed, Unemployed, Retired, or Other with an option to specify).

### **3.5. Sampling**

Prior to the publication of the questionnaires, ethical approval was obtained from the BMS Ethics Committee (Appendix 3). No specific criteria were set for participation, as these issues are relevant to the general public. Recruitment was multifaceted. Personal networks were first utilized to share the questionnaire, followed by leveraging social media in two distinct ways. Initially, the questionnaire was distributed through various digital platforms – such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and WhatsApp – to increase its reach. Subsequently, specialized social media groups dedicated to academic surveys were approached for additional participant recruitment. Furthermore, participants in the study were encouraged to share the questionnaire link with others. Before starting the questionnaire, all participants were required to review and

acknowledge the informed consent terms. The studies were conducted confidentially in light of the sensitive topic of sustainability and consumer habits (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). Given the resource constraints of this particular study, a target sample size of 200 was considered suitable (Malhotra, 2010). This size is deemed sufficient to achieve the necessary statistical power to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions effectively. Furthermore, this sample size is consistent with sample sizes used in similar academic studies in the field of marketing and consumer behavior, typically ranging from 150 to 250 respondents (Malhotra, 2010).

### 3.5.1. Demographics Participants

In this study, a total of 296 participants agreed to participate in the questionnaire. However, after removing 84 incomplete responses, the final count of complete and usable responses was 212. Demographically, the participant pool consisted of 76 males (35.8%), 134 females (63.2%), 1 non-binary/third gender individual (0.5%), and 1 participant (0.5%) who preferred not to share their gender. In the study, participants were distributed as follows: 105 participants (49.5%) aged between 17-25 years, 58 (27.4%) aged between 26 and 35 years, 17 (8.2%) were between 36 and 45 years, 26 (12.3%) aged between 46 and 60 years, and 6 participants (2.8%) were above 60 years old. Lastly, the largest occupational groups in the sample are the employed and students, with 44.3% and 42.9% representation, respectively (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Overview Demographics Participants

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	<i>Male</i>	76	35.8%
	<i>Female</i>	134	63.2%
	<i>Non-binary / Third Gender</i>	1	0.5%
	<i>Prefer not to say</i>	1	0.5%
<b>Age</b>	<i>17-25</i>	105	49.5%
	<i>26-35</i>	58	27.4%
	<i>36-45</i>	17	8.0%
	<i>46-60</i>	26	12.3%
	<i>Above 60 years</i>	6	2.8%
<b>Occupation</b>	<i>Student</i>	91	42.9%
	<i>Employed</i>	94	44.3%
	<i>Self-Employed</i>	18	8.5%
	<i>Unemployed</i>	2	0.9%
	<i>Retired</i>	1	0.5%
	<i>Other</i>	6	2.8%

### 3.6. Reliability Analysis

In empirical research, the analysis of reliability offers a critical evaluation of the consistency in a measurement instrument (Field, 2017). In this study, reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, a statistic that measures internal consistency or how closely related a set of items are as a group (Cronbach, 1951). A higher Cronbach's Alpha indicates greater internal consistency and, thus, reliability of the scale. The scales employed in this research are Environmental Concern, Brand Credibility, Greenwashing Perception, and Purchase Intention. The results are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Summary Cronbach's Alpha Scores

Scale Category	Brand	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
<b>Environmental Concern</b>	-	0.862	4
<b>Brand Credibility</b>	ZARA	0.913	7
	The North Face	0.938	7
<b>Greenwashing Perception</b>	ZARA	0.909	4
	The North Face	0.888	4
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	ZARA	0.958	4
	The North Face	0.915	4

In accordance with the evaluative criteria defined by Gliem & Gliem (2003), the reliability assessment of the various scales employed in this study reveal a favorable outcome. The scales exceeded the established benchmarks for 'good' to 'excellent reliability' (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Specifically, the Environmental Concern scale, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.962, and the Greenwashing Perception scale of The North Face, scoring 0.888, fall within the 'good' category. In contrast, the remaining scales, which encompasses Brand Credibility for both ZARA (0.913) and The North Face (0.938), as well as Purchase Intention for both brands (ZARA at 0.958 and The North Face at 0.915), are categorized as 'excellent'. This indicates a high level of internal consistency within the items of each scale, affirming the reliability of the measurements used in this study.

#### 3.6.1. Comparative Analysis Of Reliability Scores Across Brands

In the context of this research, a comparative analysis of the reliability scores across both brand scales is essential for a deeper understanding of brand perception and consumer behavior. First, the reliability of the Brand Credibility scales for ZARA and The North Face is explored (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Brand Credibility Comparison

Brand	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
ZARA	0.913	7
The North Face	0.938	7



The Brand Credibility scale for The North Face exhibits a slightly higher Cronbach's Alpha (0.938) compared to ZARA (0.913). This marginal difference suggests a stronger internal consistency in how consumers perceived the questions about The North Face's brand credibility. Factors influencing such perceptions could be brand reputation and consumer engagement (Keller, 1993). Interestingly, the Greenwashing Perception scale for ZARA shows a higher reliability score (0.909) than The North Face (0.888) (see Table 6). This indicates a more consistent consumer perception regarding ZARA's greenwashing practices. The relatively high consistency in responses in ZARA's environmental practices can be interpreted through several lenses. First, it may signify a heightened public awareness and examination of ZARA's environmental claims (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011). This examination could be attributed to the increasing public concern over sustainability practices in the fashion industry (Niinimäki et al., 2020). Niinimäki et al. (2020) discuss the growing consumer demand for transparency and sustainability in fashion.

**Table 6.** Greenwashing Perception Comparison

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
ZARA	0.909	4
The North Face	0.888	4

Furthermore, the consistency may also reflect the influence of media and marketing on public perception (McCright & Dunlap, 2011). As McCright & Dunlap (2011) note, the role of media in shaping public opinion on environmental issues cannot be understated. The portrayal of ZARA in media, whether positive or negative, could significantly influence consumer perceptions, leading to a more unified view of the brand's environmental practices. Finally, the Purchase Intention scale for ZARA demonstrates exceptionally high reliability (0.958), surpassing that of The North Face (0.915) (Table 7). In the context of Consumer Behavior Theory, the uniformity in purchase intention can be attributed to several factors. First, it may reflect the successful alignment of ZARA's brand image with consumer expectations and desires. According to Keller (1993), a strong brand image is a vital component in shaping consumer behavior and attitudes towards a brand. Moreover, this finding aligns with the concept of consumer-brand relationships. Fournier (1998) argues that the strength of the relationship between consumers and brands can significantly impact consumer behavior, including purchase intentions. The high Cronbach's Alpha score for the Purchase Intention scale may thus be reflective of a strong, positive relationship between consumers and the ZARA brand.

**Table 7.** Purchase Intention Comparison

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Number of Items</b>
ZARA	0.958	4
The North Face	0.915	4

### 3.7. Assumptions

An assumption functions as a foundational condition that validates the efficacy of the analytical methodology. For this study, the assumptions include Additivity and Linearity, Normality, Homoscedasticity, and Independence (Field, 2017).

#### *Additivity and Linearity*

The Additivity and Linearity assumptions are fundamental conditions when conducting linear regression analyses (Field, 2017). Scatterplots were employed to visually assess the linearity assumption. For ZARA, the brand credibility was plotted against the purchase intention for the brand. Similarly, for the North Face, the brand credibility was plotted against the purchase intention. In neither plot did the data points align perfectly on a straight line, suggesting some deviations from strict linearity (Appendix 4). To provide more insight into the strength and direction of the relationships, a correlation and regression analysis is performed. For ZARA, the ANOVA test yielded an F-value of 30.747, which was significant at  $p < .001$  (Table 8). For The North Face, the ANOVA produced an F-value of 47.931, which was also significant at  $p < .001$  (Table 9).

**Table 8.** ANOVA-test ZARA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	77.412	1	77.412	30.747	< .001
<b>Residual</b>	528.717	210	2.518		
<b>Total</b>	606.130	211			

**Table 9.** ANOVA-test The North Face

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	71.796	1	71.796	47.931	< .001
<b>Residual</b>	314.563	210	1.498		
<b>Total</b>	386.359	211			

The scatterplots reveal deviations from a linear trend, suggesting that the relationship between Brand Credibility and Purchase Intention is possibly influenced by other factors. However, the significant F-values from the ANOVA-tests indicate a significant relationship.

#### *Normality*

The Normality assumption was examined by assessing the distribution of the residuals. This was accomplished through two graphical methods: the P-P plot and the histogram. For both brands, the data points in the P-P plots closely aligned with the diagonal, indicating residuals' conformity to the expected normal distribution. The histograms depict residual frequency distributions. For both brands, the residuals

appear roughly normal. No prominent outliers were detected, supporting the regression models' validity (Appendix 4).

#### *Homoscedasticity*

In linear regression, Homoscedasticity implies consistent residual variances across the independent variable levels (Field, 2017). Heteroscedasticity breaches this, affecting regression accuracy. The North Face's residuals are largely homoscedastic, while ZARA shows minor deviations (Appendix 4). For ZARA, the slight variations may suggest the need for additional predictor. However, it can be concluded that the assumption of Homoscedasticity is met for The North Face, and largely met for ZARA with some minimal deviations.

#### *Independence*

A crucial assumption in linear regression is the independence of residuals, which posits that the residuals (errors) from the regression model are not correlated (Field, 2017). The Durbin-Watson test is a commonly employed test to detect the presence of autocorrelation in the residuals from the regression analysis. The test statistic ranges from 0 to 4. A value of 2 suggests that the residuals have no correlation. If the value exceeds 2, it points to a negative correlation among consecutive residuals. Conversely, a value under 2 implies a positive correlation. As a rule of thumb, values below 1 or above 3 should raise concern (Field, 2017). The Durbin-Watson statistics for both brands (Zara = 2.007, The North Face = 1.927) are close to the ideal value of 2. This provides evidence that the residuals from the regression models are independent.

It can be concluded that most assumptions required for linear regression are acceptably met in this study. Although the Additivity and Linearity assumption shows some deviations from strict linearity, the significant F-values for both ZARA and The North Face suggest a significant relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. The Normality assumption is supported by the P-P plots and histograms. Homoscedasticity is largely met, especially for The North Face, with ZARA showing small variations. Finally, the Durbin-Watson tests for both brands are close to 2, supporting the Independence assumption. Therefore, despite some minor deviations, the regression models appear valid and reliable for analyzing the relationships.

## 4. Results

This section presents the analysis of the data gathered from the questionnaire conducted as part of this study. It presents the findings, offering a detailed understanding of how the variables interact and influence each other. Specifically, the results of the Regression and Hayes PROCESS analyses are described.

### 4.1. Correlation Analysis

Correlation analyses were conducted using Pearson's R to investigate the relationships between the primary concepts and control variables in the study. This analysis aims to determine the strength and direction of the linear relationships among these variables. The correlation coefficient Pearson's R typically ranges from -1 to 1. A value close to 1 implies a strong positive correlation, close to -1 indicates a strong negative correlation, and around 0 suggests no correlation (Field, 2017). Table 10 provides an overview of the mean and standard deviation for each of the primary variables.

**Table 10.** Overview Mean and Standard Deviation Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Brand Credibility (ZARA)	3.63	1.26
Brand Credibility (TNF)	5.17	1.02
Purchase Intention (TNF)	4.31	1.35
Purchase Intention (ZARA)	3.86	1.69
Greenwashing Perception (ZARA)	4.87	1.31
Greenwashing Perception (TNF)	3.31	1.16
Environmental Concern	5.27	1.24
Gender	1.66	0.52
Age	30.75	12.10
Current Occupation	1.80	1.01

A significant moderate positive correlation was observed between brand credibility and purchase intention for ZARA  $r(212) = .357, p < .001$ . Similarly, the brand credibility for The North Face also revealed to be positive and significant  $r(210) = .431, p < .001$ . When examining the relationship between brand credibility and environmental concern, ZARA's brand credibility was found to be negative and significant  $r(212) = -.176, p = < .010$ . However, the correlation for The North Face was found to be not statistically significant,  $r(212) = .050, p = .471$ . The correlation between environmental concern and purchase intention for ZARA was found to be negative and significant,  $r(212) = -.413, p < .001$ . Conversely, the correlation between environmental concern and purchase intention for The North Face was found to be positive,  $r(212) = .141, p = .040$ . The correlation between environmental concern and greenwashing perception for ZARA was found to be moderately positive and significant,  $r(210) = .395, p < .001$ . However, for The North Face, the relationship between environmental concern and greenwashing perception is not statistically significant  $r(212) = .012, p = .868$ . The correlation between greenwashing perception for ZARA and brand credibility

for ZARA was found to be negative and significant,  $r(212) = -.147, p = .032$ . However, for The North Face, the correlation between greenwashing perception and Brand Credibility was found to be negative and significant,  $r(210) = -0.595, p < .001$ . Furthermore, for both brands, there is a negative correlation between greenwashing perception and purchase intention (ZARA =  $r(210) = -0.325, p < .001$  and The North Face =  $r(210) = -0.245, p < .001$ ). In the analysis of the control variables, gender had a minimal positive correlation with environmental concern ( $r(210) = .184, p = .007$ ). However, its association with brand credibility and perceptions of greenwashing for both ZARA and The North Face was not statistically significant. Age showed consistently small and insignificant correlations with the main variables. Similarly, current occupation showed an insignificant relationship with all primary variables. These findings suggest that demographic factors have minimal influence on the main variables being studied. Therefore, these demographic variables will be excluded from further analysis in this research.

#### 4.2. Impact Of Brand Credibility On Consumers' Purchase Intention

The first hypothesis hypothesizes that brand credibility positively impacts consumers' purchase intention. A linear regression model was used to understand how much brand credibility can predict purchase intentions for each brand. The results are interpreted at the 5% significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ) (Table 11). For ZARA, the regression model revealed that brand credibility accounted for 12.8% of the variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = 0.128$ ). In simpler terms, this means that brand credibility plays a role in about 12.8% of a consumer's decision to purchase from ZARA. The relationship is significant with a value ( $\beta = 0.357; p < .001$ ). Similarly, for The North Face, the regression model provided an  $R^2$  value of 0.186, indicating that brand credibility explained 18.6% of the variance in purchase intention. The relationship was statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.431; p < .001$ ). This underscores that consumers are more inclined to buy products from The North Face when they consider the brand as credible. Consequently, the hypothesis that consumers' brand credibility positively affects consumers' purchase intention is for both brands supported.

**Table 11.** Results Hypothesis 1

Metric	ZARA	The North Face
$R^2$ (Variance Explained)	12.8% (0.128)	18.6% (0.186)
Correlation Coefficient (R)	0.357	0.431
Beta Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	0.357	0.431
Significance (p-value)	< 0.001	< 0.001

#### 4.3. Consumer Environmental Concern vs. Buying From Less Sustainable Brands

Hypothesis 2 proposed that a heightened level of consumers' environmental concern would negatively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention, especially for brands with a weaker sustainability reputation. For this hypothesis, the brand ZARA is used. A moderation analysis

was conducted using centered variables to assess the impact of brand credibility, environmental concern, and their interaction on purchase intention. To test the hypothesis, the PROCESS model by Hayes (2017) was employed. Overall, the combination of brand credibility, environmental concern, and their interaction predicted 26% of the variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = .260$ ,  $F(3, 208) = 26.937$ ,  $p = < .001$ ). The unstandardized regression coefficients are presented in Table 12. Environmental concern demonstrated a significant negative relationship with purchase intention ( $\beta = -.473$ ,  $t(208) = -5.540$ ,  $p = < .001$ ). The negative coefficient underscores that as consumers' environmental concerns increase, their intention to purchase from ZARA reduces. However, the interaction term between brand credibility and environmental concern was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .076$ ,  $t(208) = 0.972$ ,  $p = .332$ ). This implies that the influence of brand credibility on purchase intention remains consistent, irrespective of the degree of environmental concern exhibited by consumers for ZARA. In conclusion, while environmental concern does influence purchase intention negatively, it does not significantly moderate the effect of brand credibility on purchase intention for ZARA. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

**Table 12.** Results Hypothesis 2

Variable	$\beta$	t-value	p	95% CI	
				Low	Up
(Constant)	3.879	36.706	.000	3.671	4.088
Brand Credibility ZARA	.404	4.514	.000	.227	.580
Environmental Concern	-.473	-5.540	.000	-.642	-.305
Interaction Term (Brand Credibility ZARA * Environmental Concern)	.076	0.972	0.332	-.078	.229

#### 4.4. Consumer Environmental Concern vs. Buying From Highly Sustainable Brands

Subsequently, for the third hypothesis, a centered variable moderation analysis was carried out to assess the influence of brand credibility, environmental concern, and their interaction on consumers' purchase intentions. The third hypothesis proposed that consumers with a high environmental concern would be more likely to buy from brands with a strong sustainable reputation when they perceive those brands as credible. For this hypothesis, the brand The North Face is used. Utilizing the PROCESS framework by Hayes (2017), the combined effect of brand credibility, environmental concern, and their interaction explained 24.7% of the variability in purchase intentions ( $R^2 = .247$ ,  $F(3, 208) = 26.437$ ,  $p = < .001$ ). The details of the unstandardized regression coefficients can be found in Table 13. The brand credibility of The North Face revealed a positive relationship with purchase intention ( $\beta = .548$ ,  $t(208) = 7.544$ ,  $p = < .001$ ). This indicates that an increase in the perceived brand credibility of The North Face is associated with a concurrent rise in purchase intentions. Furthermore, environmental concern showed a positive relationship with purchase intention ( $\beta = .164$ ,  $t(208) = 2.601$ ,  $p = < .010$ ). This suggests that as consumers become more environmentally conscious, there is a slight tendency to be more inclined to purchase from The North Face, contrary to the trend observed for ZARA. Crucially, the interaction between brand credibility and

environmental concern was found to be statistically significant ( $\beta = .208$ ,  $t(208) = 5.015$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This means that the relationship between brand credibility of The North Face and purchase intention is indeed moderated by the degree of environmental concern shown by consumers. Given these results, Hypothesis 3 is supported.

**Table 13.** Results Hypothesis 3

Variable	$\beta$	t-value	p	95% CI	
				Low	Up
(Constant)	4.299	53.601	.000	4.141	4.458
Brand Credibility TNF	.548	7.544	.000	.405	.691
Environmental Concern	.164	2.601	.010	.040	.288
Interaction Term (Brand Credibility TNF * Environmental Concern)	.208	5.015	.000	.126	.290

#### 4.5. The Impact Of Greenwashing Perception On Brand Credibility And Purchase Intentions

For the fourth hypothesis, again the PROCESS analysis using centered variables was executed to explore the possible moderating effect of greenwashing perception on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. This hypothesis proposed that a high perception of greenwashing would negatively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention. First, ZARA is examined. The collective impact of brand credibility for ZARA, its associated greenwashing perception, and the interaction of these variables explained 15.8% of the variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = .158$ ,  $F(3, 208) = 13.830$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The brand credibility of ZARA is positively associated with purchase intention, as indicated by a coefficient of .343, which was statistically significant ( $\beta = .343$ ,  $t(208) = 3.109$ ,  $p = .002$ ) (Table 14). This suggests that higher perceived credibility of ZARA leads to increased inclinations to purchase. The greenwashing perception of ZARA demonstrated a negative relationship with purchase intention, with a coefficient of -.263, which was statistically significant ( $\beta = -.263$ ,  $t(208) = -2.431$ ,  $p = .016$ ). This implies that heightened perceptions of greenwashing associated with ZARA could discourage potential purchases. However, the interaction term between brand credibility and greenwashing perception was not statistically significant ( $\beta = -.024$ ,  $t(208) = -.394$ ,  $p = .694$ ). This indicates that, for ZARA, the greenwashing perception doesn't significantly moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention. Given these findings, Hypothesis 4 is not supported for ZARA.

**Table 14.** Results Hypothesis 4 | ZARA

Variable	$\beta$	t-value	p	95% CI	
				Low	Up
(Constant)	3.839	31.999	.000	2.603	4.076
Brand Credibility ZARA	.343	3.109	.002	.125	.560
Greenwashing Perception	-.263	-2.431	.016	-.477	-.050
Interaction Term (Brand Credibility ZARA * Greenwashing Perception)	-.024	-.394	.694	-.143	.095

The analysis now focuses on The North Face. The collective influence of brand credibility for The North Face, greenwashing perception, and their interaction accounted for 20.6% of the variance in purchase intention ( $R^2 = .206$ ,  $F(3, 208) = 35.476$ ,  $p = < .001$ ). Examining the individual predictors, the brand credibility of The North Face portrayed a positive association with purchase intention ( $\beta = .524$ ,  $t(208) = 5.028$ ,  $p = < .001$ ) (Table 15). This reflects that a higher level in the perceived credibility of The North Face correlates with an increase in the purchase intentions of consumers. In contrast, the greenwashing perception of The North Face yielded a coefficient of .045 and was not statistically significant ( $\beta = .045$ ,  $t(208) = .496$ ,  $p = .620$ ), indicating that the greenwashing perception doesn't play a pivotal role in shaping purchase intentions for The North Face. The interaction term between The North Face's brand credibility and the perception of greenwashing emerged as statistically significant ( $\beta = .101$ ,  $t(208) = 2.570$ ,  $p = < .011$ ). This finding supports the hypothesis that perceptions of greenwashing moderate the relationship between The North Face's brand credibility and consumer purchase intention for the brand. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 is supported for The North Face.

**Table 15.** Results Hypothesis 4 | The North Face

Variable	$\beta$	t-value	p	95% CI	
				Low	Up
(Constant)	4.383	51.760	.000	4.216	4.550
Brand Credibility TNF	.524	5.028	.000	.319	.730
Greenwashing Perception	.045	.496	.620	-.133	.222
Interaction Term (Brand Credibility TNF * Greenwashing Perception)	.101	2.570	.011	.023	.178

#### 4.6. Overview Hypotheses

Table 16 presents a comprehensive overview of the findings related to the hypothesized relationships between the variables in this study.



**Table 16.** Hypotheses Overview and Findings

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>Findings</b>
<b>H1</b> Consumers' brand credibility positively affects consumers' purchase intention.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H2</b> A high level of consumers' environmental concern will negatively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention for brands with a weak sustainability reputation.	<b>Rejected</b>
<b>H3</b> A high level of consumers' environmental concern will positively moderate the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention for brands with a strong sustainability reputation.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H4</b> A high greenwashing perception negatively moderates the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intention.	<b>Rejected   ZARA</b> <b>Accepted   TNF</b>

## **5. Discussion**

This discussion chapter first examines the impact of brand credibility on consumer purchase intentions. It then explores the moderating influence of environmental concern and the effects of greenwashing perception on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. The aim is to provide an interpretation of the findings within the context of sustainable consumerism. After that, the theoretical and managerial implications of the study are given. Finally, limitations are addressed and suggestions for potential areas of exploration in future studies are proposed.

### **5.1. Discussion Of Findings**

The findings of this study support Hypothesis 1 that brand credibility significantly influences consumer purchase intentions. This finding is in line with existing literature on brand management and consumer behavior (Bickart & Ruth, 2016; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Jeng, 2016; Mansoor & Paul, 2022; Martin-Consuegra et al., 2018; Suhud et al., 2023, Wang & Yang, 2010) and indicates brand credibility serves as an essential factor that reduces consumer uncertainty and risk perception, thereby enhancing the likelihood of purchase decisions. Furthermore, research highlights the growing importance of sustainability in consumer decision-making processes. For instance, Luchs et al. (2010) discuss how sustainable product attributes can significantly influence consumer perceptions of brand credibility. They argue that consumers are more likely to purchase from brands that demonstrate genuine commitment to sustainability, as this aligns with their personal values and ethical considerations. As Huang et al. (2020) suggest, the closer consumers feel to a brand in terms of shared values and identity, the more likely they are to trust the brand and make a purchase. Similarly, Cheah & Phau (2011) found that consumers' perceptions of a brand's environmental responsibility directly influence their trust in the brand and, consequently, their purchase intentions. Moreover, the desire for distinctiveness can also play into sustainability (Puzakova & Aggerwal, 2018). Consumers seeking to express their uniqueness through their purchases may have a preference towards brands that not only offer distinctive products but also embody distinctive values, such as strong commitment to sustainability. This suggests that sustainability claims, when communicated effectively and authentically, can significantly enhance a brand's credibility and attractiveness to consumers aiming to express their ethical stance through purchasing decisions.

In response to this growing importance of sustainability, examining environmental concerns offers a further explanation on how consumer priorities, with a focus on sustainability, interact with their views on brands, influencing their buying choices. Environmental concern captures the extent of consumers' awareness, emotions, and behaviors towards environmental sustainability and has been increasingly recognized as an important factor influencing consumer decision-making in the broader context of sustainability efforts (Hunter, 2007; Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Testa et al., 2015). Consumers' environmental concerns can significantly affect their evaluation of brands and products, acting as a filter through which brand messages and sustainability efforts are interpreted (Schmeltz, 2012). Hence, this moderating role is

crucial, as it underscores the need to align brand credibility with sincere efforts towards environmental sustainability to positively influence consumer purchase intentions. Contrary to the hypothesized outcome, the findings for Hypothesis 2 indicate that while environmental concern has a direct negative effect on purchase intention, it does not significantly moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention for ZARA. This contradicts the hypothesis that environmental concern would negatively moderate the relationship, especially for brands with weaker sustainability reputations. The result may imply that the credibility of a brand like ZARA retains its influence on purchase intentions regardless of environmental concerns. This may suggest that consumers also take other factors into account (beyond sustainability) when buying from a brand perceived as less committed to environmental responsibility. For example, research of Farzin et al. (2023) suggests that while certifications and sustainable practices are important, the prevailing consumer trend is towards buying inexpensive, high-quantity clothing, highlighting the significant influence of price and availability over environmental concerns. Furthermore, a study of Chaturvedi et al. (2022) highlights the attitude-behavior gap in the purchase of eco-fashion. Despite a positive attitude toward environmental protection, consumers may be less willing to buy eco-fashion due to factors like high prices, limited color options, and design variety. Furthermore, social influences, such as peer pressure and social media trends, play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). This aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes the role of subjective norms in guiding behavior, suggesting that the social environment can significantly impact purchasing decisions, sometimes even overriding individual environmental concerns (Ajzen, 1991). Additionally, economic factors, including pricing strategies and perceived value for money, are pivotal in consumer decision-making (Monroe, 2012). The concept of Perceived Value explains how consumers weigh the benefits against the costs of a product, which includes not just the price but also ethical considerations like environmental impact (Zeithaml, 1988). Also, the role of fashion trends and the desire for novelty cannot be overlooked (Crane, 2012). Consumers might prioritize staying fashionable and trendy over environmental sustainability. This demonstrates the power of Consumer Identity and Self-Concept in shaping purchasing behaviors. Consumers' pursuit of self-congruity through fashion choices can lead them to prioritize brands that align with their desired self-image, even when it conflicts with their environmental values (Sirgy, 1982). Therefore, despite consumers' concern for the environment, their purchasing decisions regarding a brand perceived as less committed to sustainability can be influenced by a variety of factors.

Conversely, this study found support for Hypothesis 3. The findings show that environmental concern not only positively influences purchase intention, but also significantly moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. This suggests that consumers with high environmental concern perceive the credibility of a brand committed to sustainability as even more influential in their purchasing decisions. The results are in line with research by Schaltegger and Wagner (2011), who argue that a company's sustainable practices, when perceived as credible and aligned with the consumer's personal values, can significantly enhance the consumer's evaluation of the brand. Similarly, it echoes the findings of Luchs et al. (2010), who suggest that when a brand's sustainability claims are congruent with consumer environmental values, the relationship between brand image and purchase intention is strengthened.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 assumed that a high perception of greenwashing negatively moderates the relationship between brand credibility and consumers' purchase intentions. Although a brand's credibility usually helps to build consumer trust and encourages positive actions towards the brand, the suspicion of greenwashing can damage this trust. This skepticism may lead consumers to doubt the brand's claims about being good for the environment (Chen & Chang, 2013; Nyilasy et al. 2014; Seegebarth et al., 2016). This, in return, can negatively influence their purchase decisions (Delmas & Burbano, 2011). Again, for ZARA, while a high greenwashing perception negatively influences purchase intentions, the anticipated moderating effect of a high greenwashing perception on the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intention was not supported. While credibility and greenwashing perceptions independently affect consumer behavior, the interaction between these factors may not be as influential as hypothesized. The way consumers view a brand's trustworthiness and their skepticism about greenwashing involves more than just the environmental promises a brand makes (Leonidou et al., 2014). According to the heuristic-systematic model, people process persuasive messages in two ways. First is a systematic approach, which is detailed and thoughtful, and a heuristic approach, which uses simple shortcuts or cues (Chaiken, 1980; Trudel, 2019). In the context of ZARA, customers might depend on quick judgements based on the brand's reputation or their own past experiences to decide if they believe the brand's claims, potentially overlooking deeper issues related to sustainability and greenwashing. Furthermore, research by Carrington et al. (2014) examined the multifactorial nature of consumer behavior, suggesting that while consumers may express a desire for sustainable products, their purchasing decisions are influenced by a broader set of considerations. Therefore, the results may suggest that greenwashing's direct negative impact on purchase intention can exist independently of its influence on the brand credibility-purchase intention relationship. This implies that consumers may separately evaluate the credibility of a brand and their perception of greenwashing, with greenwashing perception directly diminishing purchase intentions due to skepticism or perceived dishonesty, even if the brand's credibility in other domains remains intact (Akturan, 2018; Nyilasy et al., 2014; Sun & Shi, 2022; Qayyum et al., 2023). However, the findings for The North Face did find significant evidence for supporting Hypothesis 4. This result is consistent with earlier studies that suggest when sustainability initiatives are perceived as profit-driven among consumers, it increases their skepticism, which directly negatively influences purchase intentions (Amran et al., 2014; Cheah & Phau, 2011; Galbreth et al., 2013; Leonidou et al., 2014; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001). Hence, Hypothesis 4 is rejected for ZARA and accepted for The North Face.

## **5.2. Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the extent to which brand credibility affects consumers' intention to purchase and how consumers' environmental concern and greenwashing perception moderate this relationship. This research specifically investigated the following research question: *"To what extent does brand credibility affect consumers' intention to purchase? And to what extent do consumers' environmental concern and greenwashing perception moderate this relationship?"*. The study's results clearly show that if a brand is

seen as credible, consumers are more likely to buy its products. Brand credibility plays a pivotal role in consumer decision-making, with credible brands being more likely to attract purchases. This is supported by studies indicating that credibility enhances consumer confidence and perceived safety, encouraging purchasing behaviors (Bickart & Ruth, 2016; Erdem & Swait, 2004; Martin-Consuegra et al., 2018). Additionally, a brand's commitment to sustainability significantly boosts its credibility and appeal (Luchs et al., 2010; Cheah & Phau, 2011), underscoring the importance of genuine sustainability initiatives.

Furthermore, this study shows differences in how environmental concern moderates the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions for brands with varying sustainability reputations. Brands with a strong sustainability reputation are often those that have integrated sustainable practices into their core business strategies, transparently communicate their sustainability efforts, and actively engage in genuine environmental stewardship (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2004). Conversely, brands perceived to have a weak sustainability reputation – often due to inadequate sustainability practices, lack of transparency, or instances of greenwashing – face significant challenges in attracting and retaining environmentally conscious consumers (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Ramus & Montiel, 2005). The literature suggests that while consumers are increasingly aware of and concerned about sustainability issues, their purchasing decisions may not always align with these concerns due to the attractiveness of fast fashion's affordability and trendiness (Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Farzin et al., 2023). This discrepancy, often referred to as the attitude-behavior gap, indicates that consumers' stated preferences for sustainability do not always translate into their purchasing behavior, especially when other factors are deemed more immediately relevant to their decision-making process (Carrington et al., 2014). This gap can be attributed to various factors, including the appeal of non-sustainable alternatives due to cost, convenience, or style preferences, which can overshadow sustainability concerns (Chaturvedi et al., 2022; Farzin et al., 2023). Moreover, the role of social norms and identity in sustainable consumer behavior cannot be understated. As Van der Werff et al. (2013) highlight, when sustainability becomes integral to a consumer's social identity, it significantly influences their purchasing decisions. This finding is particularly relevant when considering the impact of a brand's sustainability reputation. Brands perceived to have a weak sustainability reputation might struggle to connect with consumers who prioritize environmental values, as these consumers may view such brands as incongruent with their personal and social identities. Furthermore, consumers' skepticism about the impact of their individual choices on broader environmental issues can lead to a reluctance to prioritize sustainability in purchasing decisions. Conversely, for brands with a strong sustainability reputation, the alignment between the brand's values and consumers' personal environmental values can significantly enhance brand credibility and trust, leading to increased purchase intentions. Consumers are more likely to support and advocate for brands that they perceive as sharing their values, particularly regarding environmental sustainability (Hartmann & & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012).

In conclusion, the research suggests that consumers' skepticism towards greenwashing can significantly impact their purchasing decisions, regardless of the brand's overall credibility. This skepticism arises when consumers perceive sustainability initiatives as inauthentic or merely profit-driven, underscoring the importance of genuine environmental efforts. Such consumer attitudes align with the heuristic-systematic

model, indicating that consumers process information about a brand's sustainability efforts in two ways (systematic or heuristic) (Chaiken, 1980; Trudel, 2019). The independent effects of brand credibility and greenwashing perception on purchase intentions imply that consumers evaluate a brand's environmental claims separately from its overall reputation. This suggests a complex decision-making process where the authenticity of sustainability claims is critically assessed (Nyilasy et al., 2014; Sun & Shi, 2022). Therefore, the broader implications of these findings extend beyond the specific cases of ZARA and The North Face, highlighting critical factors that influence consumer behavior in the context of sustainability. These include the perceived authenticity of sustainability efforts, the transparency of environmental claims, and the broader societal and environmental impacts of a brand's operations (Carrington et al., 2014; Leonidou et al., 2014; Qayyum et al., 2023). To foster positive consumer behavior towards sustainability, brands must ensure that their sustainability initiatives are genuine, transparent, and aligned with broader environmental and societal goals. This approach not only enhances brand credibility but also mitigates the risk of greenwashing perception, thereby positively influencing purchase intentions (Akturan, 2018; Amran et al., 2014; Cheah & Phau, 2011).

### **5.3. Theoretical Implications**

This study offers valuable contributions to academic research. Firstly, this research supports and extends the conceptualization of brand credibility within the context of consumer purchase intention in the fashion industry. It underscores the necessity for brands to maintain high levels of credibility, especially when consumers are faced with making decisions in increasingly saturated markets. Furthermore, this research responds to the previously unexplored area of how environmental concerns might moderate the relationship between brand credibility and purchase intentions. By delving into this, the study fills a research gap identified by Chen et al. (2019) and Ahmad & Zhang (2020), providing empirical evidence on the role that environmental concern and perceptions of greenwashing play in the fashion industry, depending on the brands sustainable reputation. Furthermore, while previous research has acknowledged the general effects of greenwashing, this study's specific focus on its moderating role provides novel insights into the ways through which greenwashing perceptions can undermine or alter the influence of brand credibility in consumer decision-making processes (Akturan, 2018; Braga et al., 2019; Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017). By situating the research within the fashion industry, known for its sustainable challenges, this study not only broadens the scope of research in this field but also offers industry-specific insights that can guide brands in navigating the increasing consumer demand for environmental responsibility.

### **5.4. Managerial Implications**

Additionally, the findings from this study offer critical insights for managers, brand strategists, and policymakers in the fashion industry. For brand managers, the significant influence of brand credibility on purchase intentions underscores the importance of cultivating a strong, trustworthy brand image. Managers

should integrate sustainability into the core narrative of their brand identity, ensuring that sustainability efforts are not just add-ons, but integral components of the brand's value proposition (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011). Furthermore, considering the moderating effect of environmental concerns and greenwashing perception, managers should prioritize transparency and authenticity in their environmental claims (Lock & Seele, 2016). It is important to develop and implement marketing strategies that clearly communicate the brand's commitment to environmental sustainability, leveraging certifications, and endorsements from credible third-party organizations to strengthen brand credibility (Seegebarth et al., 2016). Furthermore, engaging with consumers through social media and other platforms to educate them about the brand's sustainability initiatives can positively help fostering a community of informed and engaged consumers, who can advocate for the brand based on shared environmental values. Additionally, policymakers could consider the development and enforcement of regulatory frameworks that mandate transparency in environmental claims and the verification of such claims through independent audits. Governments and NGOs can also play a crucial role in promoting sustainability in the fashion sector by providing support for innovation in sustainable materials, manufacturing processes, and business models (Peleg Mizrachi & Tal, 2022).

## **5.5. Limitations**

While this study provides valuable insights, it is crucial to acknowledge its limitations. First, ZARA (n = 196) is more familiar among respondents of the questionnaire than The North Face (n = 156). The conclusions drawn about consumer perceptions and behaviors related to these brands, might therefore be influenced by the differential brand awareness. Consumers' perceptions and attitudes towards a brand they are familiar with can be different than those towards a brand they are less familiar with. This can introduce bias in the responses. Similarly, familiarity with a brand can influence purchase intentions. Consumers are generally more inclined to purchase from brands they are familiar with, given the trust and recognition associated with them. Second, the focus on two specific brands within the fashion industry, namely ZARA and The North Face, raises questions about the generalizability of the findings to other brands and industries. Brands across different sectors might exhibit varied dynamics in how their credibility affects consumer purchase intentions. Erdem et al. (2004), who explored brand equity across diverse industries, suggest that consumer perceptions and priorities can vary markedly based on the industry context. Therefore, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution when generalizing to other brands and industries. Further research should encompass a broader spectrum of brands and industries, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of how brand credibility, environmental concern, and greenwashing perception impact consumer behavior in diverse market contexts. Third, while the research utilized official brand statements to assess perceptions of sustainability, these statements do not capture the overall picture. For example, it does not include information about scandals, such as those faced by ZARA in the past (Allam et al., 2020). Such events could influence public perception and potentially skew the respondents' reactions to the provided statements. Fourth, while the final sample size was 212, which is reasonably robust, it still might not capture the diversity of views presented in a larger population. Moreover, the sample's demographic distribution,

such as a higher portion of females, might influence the results, given potential gender differences in environmental concerns and purchasing behaviors. A further limitation of this study pertains to the language of the survey, which was conducted exclusively in English. This presents a concern given that the predominant demographic of respondents were Dutch speakers, thereby introducing a potential language barrier. Consequently, to mitigate any misunderstandings or ambiguities, there was avoidance of complex terminology and phrases throughout the survey. Lastly, the complexity of sustainability as a topic, made more challenging by the pressure to conform to dominant societal norms, may lead to discrepancies between the respondents' stated attitudes and their actual behaviors or beliefs (Terlau & Hirsch, 2015). This discrepancy can be attributed to the social desirability bias, wherein respondents are inclined to provide answers that are perceived as socially acceptable (Bell et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a possibility that respondents felt pressured to respond to the survey in a manner that aligns with what they believe to be the expected or appropriate response. To mitigate this bias, explicit assurances of anonymity were provided at the beginning of the survey. While this approach does not guarantee the complete elimination of such bias, it is reasonable to assert that it likely reduced its impact.

## **5.6. Directions For Future Research**

The findings of this study also open several avenues for future research. These are not only important for better academic understanding, but also for informing practical applications in the realm of sustainable fashion marketing and brand management. Future research should consider a deeper exploration of how the identified relationships vary across different sectors within the industries, such as slow fashion versus fast fashion. Investigating these dynamics can provide nuanced insights into how sustainability practices and consumer perceptions are shaped by the specific context of each segment (Joy et al., 2012). Furthermore, for ZARA, this study suggests that consumers may weigh other factors, such as quality, price, and accessibility, more heavily in their purchasing decisions, despite their awareness of greenwashing or environmental concerns (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Future research could explore the interplay of these various factors and how they collectively influence consumer decision-making. Also, given the global nature of the fashion industry, understanding the cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior towards brand credibility and sustainability can offer valuable perspectives. Future studies could explore how cultural values influence perceptions of sustainability and greenwashing, potentially uncovering unique market-specific strategies for brand positioning (Deirmentzoglou et al., 2024). Additionally, engaging in longitudinal studies to track changes in consumer perceptions over time can offer insights into the evolving nature of consumer attitudes towards sustainability and brand credibility. This could be particularly relevant in understanding the long-term effects of greenwashing and the sustainability trends in the fashion industry. Moreover, with the increasing role of digital media in shaping consumer perceptions, future research could focus on understanding how online platforms contribute to or mitigate the effects of greenwashing. This includes examining the role of social media influencers, consumer reviews, and online platforms like TikTok or Instagram in influencing brand credibility and consumer purchase intentions. Lastly, greenwashing research



should not be limited to consumer perspectives. Investigating the perceptions of other stakeholders, such as employees, or B2B relationships, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of greenwashing's impact (Gatti et al., 2019).

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## **Appendix 1: Pre-Test Questionnaire And Main Questionnaire**

### **Pre-test Green Communication of Brands**

#### **Informed Consent**

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in this pre-test for my questionnaire. My name is Cheryl Uitslag, and I am a master's student in Communication Science and Business Administration at the University of Twente. Your feedback in this pre-test questionnaire is crucial in understanding how consumers perceive and interpret sustainability from various fashion brands. Please read each question carefully and answer the following questions. This pre-test will take about 5 minutes to complete.

The collected data from this pre-test will be used for scientific research only and will be processed anonymously. Remember that there are no wrong answers, and you are free to end this questionnaire at any time.

If you have any questions with regard to this pre-test or study, feel free to contact me via [c.uitslag@student.utwente.nl](mailto:c.uitslag@student.utwente.nl).

Thank you for your help!

Best regards,  
Cheryl Uitslag

**I have read the information above and understand that my data will be anonymously used for academic purposes.**

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

#### **1. Brand Familiarity**

**From the list provided below, please mark all the brands you're familiar with. (Multiple answers can be selected)**

- H&M
- ASOS
- ZARA
- The North Face
- Patagonia
- VEJA

#### **2. Frequency of Purchase**

**How often do you purchase fashion items in general?**

- Every week
- Once every two weeks
- Once a month
- Just once in a while
- Other (please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)

### 3. Sustainability Statements

Next, we will show you sustainability statements by different fashion brands. Please take your time and read them carefully. The first one is by H&M.

---

#### **H&M: "CONSCIOUS CHOICE PRODUCTS"**

*"We feel you. It can be super tricky to know if you're making environmentally-friendly shopping choices. But we want to make it easier! So, our aim is for all our products to be made from recycled or other sustainably sourced materials by 2030. This actually already applies to 80% of the materials that we use.*

*We also have Conscious choice: pieces created with a little extra consideration for the planet. Each Conscious choice product contains at least 50% of more sustainable materials — like organic cotton or recycled polyester — but many contain a lot more than that. The only exception is recycled cotton where we accept a level of at least 20%. The quality of recycled cotton makes it tricky to include a higher amount. But we're hoping to change that! With new technological solutions and innovations, we're continually working to make our range even more sustainable.*

*Conscious choice can be found across all our departments, all year round. Just look for the green hangtag!"*

---

**Considering the statement, do you believe that...**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
H&M omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H&M is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H&M is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H&M's green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
H&M exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The next statement is by Patagonia. Please take your time to read it carefully.

---

## **PATAGONIA**

*"For decades, Patagonia has demonstrated that caring for our planet is not in conflict with running a successful business. We are always looking for ways to further reduce our manufacturing footprint, including our company's reliance on fossil fuels. We also fund grassroots environmental organizations by giving away 1% of our sales. To date that amount totals \$74 millions.*

*But during a difficult and divisive time, we felt it was important to go further and connect more of our customers, who love wild places, with those who are fighting tirelessly to protect them. This we know: If we don't act boldly, severe changes in climate, water and air pollution, extinction of species and erosion of topsoil are certain outcomes. The threats facing our planet affect people of every political stripe, of every demographic, in every part of the country. We all stand to benefit from a healthy environment—and our children and grandchildren do, too. (Marcario, 2016)".*

---

**Considering the statement, do you believe that...**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
Patagonia omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Patagonia is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Patagonia is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Patagonia's green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Patagonia exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

The following statement is from ASOS. Please take your time to read it carefully.

**ASOS**

*“Fashion is about self-expression and empowerment. It helps to give all of us the confidence to be whoever we want to be, whether that’s our customers or our people at ASOS. So, who does ASOS want to be? We want to continue to give our customers the fashion they want, when they want it. At the same time, we want to be a business that cares for people, while working to reduce our impact on the planet. Achieving these aims together is a huge challenge, but it is not impossible. We can and must do both, as we believe that there can be no future for fashion without sustainability.”*

**Considering the statement, do you believe that...**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
ASOS omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ASOS is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ASOS is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ASOS' green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ASOS exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Next up is a statement from ZARA. Please take a moment to thoughtfully read through their statement.

---

## **ZARA**

*“Join life represents a process of continuous improvement, always questioning what we should do to move towards a more sustainable model. We are aware that the path is complex, but we believe in the industry's power of transformation. That is why our social and environmental goals have become more demanding, in order to be able to continue improving.*

*We work on the different stages of our value chain with a holistic approach, from how we design our products, choosing the materials or producing the garments, to logistics or the design and management of our warehouses and stores. All of this, helping to extend the life of the garments through repair, resale and used clothing donation programmes. Meeting our sustainability goals presents a challenge that demands close collaboration with our supply chain partners, environmental experts, international organizations, trade unions and NGO's. Our aim is to foster genuine change within the industry. While we may not be perfect, we are dedicated to continuous improvement.”*

---

**Considering the statement, do you believe that...**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
ZARA omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA's green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



This statement is from The North Face. Please read their statement carefully.

---

## **The North Face**

*“We are committed to making the best products on earth—and keeping Mother Nature, our communities and the future in focus. Nature is at the heart of what we do. It’s why we created four actionable commitments guided by science-based targets set by our parent company, VF.*

### **Complete the circle.**

*Circularity means giving old gear new life. We’re flipping the status quo of how we make gear and how you can dispose of it more responsibly. By revolutionizing our materials, processes and supply chain through a new vision of circularity, we can work together to turn old gear into new adventures.*

### **Make the best better.**

*100% of our top materials (polyester, cotton and nylon) are expected to be recycled, responsibly-sourced renewable or regeneratively grown. We’re making progress toward achieving this goal for apparel by 2025, and footwear and equipment by 2030.*

### **Extend our reach.**

*We’re committed to reducing our supply chain greenhouse gas emissions by partnering with key suppliers to help them cut their Scope 1 and 2 emissions in half by 2030. These efforts will have a positive impact on the industry as a whole, beyond The North Face.*

### **Rethink packaging.**

*We’re working to eliminate single-use plastic packaging by 2025. For other forms of packaging (including both plastic and paper), we’re reducing where possible and ensuring new materials used are more recyclable.”*

---

**Considering the statement, do you believe that...**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The North Face omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face's green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Finally, a statement of VEJA is presented. Please take your time to read it carefully.

**VEJA**

*"Our VEJA sneakers cost 5 times more to produce than those of other brands. This is because we use fair trade and organic raw materials, ensuring a more equitable economic approach for all stakeholders in the production chain. Additionally, we invest in research and new technologies.*

*We asked a Chinese factory to provide a cost estimation for producing a VEJA style.*

*A VEJA would cost approximately 4 times less to produce. In the VEJA factories in Brazil, 25€. In a Chinese factory, 5.3€. But they wouldn't be made with socially and environmentally responsible materials and processes."*

**Considering the statement, do you believe that...**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
VEJA omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VEJA is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VEJA is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VEJA's green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VEJA exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### **4. Final Thoughts**

Feel free to use this open text box to provide additional comments or elaborate on your questionnaire responses. Your participation in this is entirely optional. If you decide to share your thoughts, please note that any comments used in the analysis will be kept anonymous. You can express your views in English or Dutch.

## Main Questionnaire

### Informed Consent

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. My name is Cheryl Uitslag and I am a master's student in Communication Science and Business Administration at the University of Twente. Your response will help me to better understand the effect of green claims on consumers choice (not) to purchase sustainable fashion. This questionnaire will take approximately 7-10 minutes to complete.

The collected data from this questionnaire will be used for scientific research only and will be processed anonymously. Remember that there are no wrong answers, and you are free to end this questionnaire at any time.

If you have any questions with regard to this questionnaire or study, feel free to contact me via [c.uitslag@student.utwente.nl](mailto:c.uitslag@student.utwente.nl).

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,  
Cheryl Uitslag

**I have read the information above and understand that my data will be anonymously used for academic purposes.**

- Yes, I consent
- No, I do not consent

#### 1. Introductory questions

**Did you buy any products from fashion brands (such as clothing, shoes, or bags) within the past year?**

- Yes
- No
- I don't remember

**How often do you purchase fashion items?**

- Every week
- Once every two weeks
- Once a month
- Just once in a while

**Which (fast)-fashion brand do you find yourself buying from most frequently?**

- H&M
- ZARA
- ASOS
- The North Face
- Patagonia
- VEJA

**Do you purchase the 'green' or 'sustainable' versions of brands, if they are available?**

- Yes
- No

## 2. Environmental Concern

Below are statements related to environmental concerns. On a scale from 1 to 7, please indicate your agreement with each of the following statements. Select a number where 1 represents 'Strongly Disagree', 4 represents 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree', and 7 represents 'Strongly Agree':

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
I am concerned about the impacts of climate change (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More needs to be done to protect and preserve the natural world (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Controls should be placed on industry to protect the environment from pollution, even if it means that things will cost more (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think that it is important to buy products and services from companies that are environmentally friendly (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 3. Statements, Brand Credibility, and Purchase Intention

**You will now read two statements from two brands about their Corporate Social Responsibility activities related to their fashion products. Please take your time to read the first statement carefully.**

---

#### **ZARA**

*“Join life represents a process of continuous improvement, always questioning what we should do to move towards a more sustainable model. We are aware that the path is complex, but we believe in the industry's power of transformation. That is why our social and environmental goals have become more demanding, in order to be able to continue improving.*

*We work on the different stages of our value chain with a holistic approach, from how we design our products, choosing the materials or producing the garments, to logistics or the design and management of our warehouses and stores. All of this, helping to extend the life of the garments through repair, resale and used clothing donation programmes. Meeting our sustainability goals presents a challenge that demands close collaboration with our supply chain partners, environmental experts, international organizations, trade unions and NGO's. Our aim is to foster genuine change within the industry. While we may not be perfect, we are dedicated to continuous improvement.”*

---

**This statement was from ZARA. Please keep this in mind for the following questions. On a scale from 1 to 7, please share what you think about ZARA after reading the statement. Select a number where 1 represents ‘Strongly Disagree’, 4 represents ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’, and 7 represents ‘Strongly Agree’:**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
ZARA omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA’s green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Considering the statement from ZARA you read above, please rate your agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
ZARA omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA its green statement is vague or unprovable (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ZARA exaggerates the reality of its green features (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Below is another statement from a brand regarding their environmental effort. Please read it carefully.**

---

### **The North Face**

*“We are committed to making the best products on earth—and keeping Mother Nature, our communities and the future in focus. Nature is at the heart of what we do. It’s why we created four actionable commitments guided by science-based targets set by our parent company, VF.*

#### ***Complete the circle.***

*Circularity means giving old gear new life. We’re flipping the status quo of how we make gear and how you can dispose of it more responsibly. By revolutionizing our materials, processes and supply chain through a new vision of circularity, we can work together to turn old gear into new adventures.*

#### ***Make the best better.***

*100% of our top materials (polyester, cotton and nylon) are expected to be recycled, responsibly-sourced renewable or regeneratively grown. We’re making progress toward achieving this goal for apparel by 2025, and footwear and equipment by 2030.*

#### ***Extend our reach.***

*We’re committed to reducing our supply chain greenhouse gas emissions by partnering with key suppliers to help them cut their Scope 1 and 2 emissions in half by 2030. These efforts will have a positive impact on the industry as a whole, beyond The North Face.*

#### ***Rethink packaging.***

*We’re working to eliminate single-use plastic packaging by 2025. For other forms of packaging (including both plastic and paper), we’re reducing where possible and ensuring new materials used are more recyclable.”*

---

**This statement was from The North Face. Please keep this in mind for the following questions. On a scale from 1 to 7, please share what you think about ZARA after reading the statement. Select a number where 1 represents ‘Strongly Disagree’, 4 represents ‘Neither Agree nor Disagree’, and 7 represents ‘Strongly Agree’:**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The North Face omits or hides important information to make its statement sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face's green statement is vague or unprovable (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face exaggerates the reality of its green features (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Considering the statement from The North Face you read above, please rate your agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
The North Face omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face its green statement is vague or unprovable (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The North Face exaggerates the reality of its green features (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### 4. Purchase Intention

Considering everything you have read and responded to, please indicate your likelihood of purchasing from ZARA (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
If I were going to purchase a clothing product, I would consider buying ZARA (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were shopping for fashion, the likelihood I would purchase from ZARA is high (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My willingness to buy from ZARA would be high if I were shopping for fashion items (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The probability I would consider buying from ZARA is high (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Considering everything you have read and responded to, please indicate your likelihood of purchasing from The North Face (1 = Strongly Disagree, 7 = Strongly Agree):**

	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (3)	Neither agree nor disagree (4)	Somewhat agree (5)	Agree (6)	Strongly agree (7)
If I were going to purchase a clothing product, I would consider buying The North Face (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were shopping for fashion, the likelihood I would purchase from The North Face is high (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My willingness to buy from The North Face would be high if I were shopping for fashion items (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The probability I would consider buying from The North Face is high (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Based on the statement you read, do you believe that ZARA genuinely cares about its environmental impact?**

- Yes
- No

**Based on the statement you read, do you believe that The North Face genuinely cares about its environmental impact?**

- Yes
- No

## **5. Control Variables**

**What is your gender?**

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

**What is your age?**

- Open question

**What is your current occupation?**

- Student
- Employed
- Self-Employed
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Other

## **6. Final Thoughts**

Feel free to use this open text box to provide additional comments or elaborate on your questionnaire responses. Your participation in this is entirely optional. If you decide to share your thoughts, please note that any comments used in the analysis will be kept anonymous. You can express your views in English or Dutch.

## Appendix 2: Pre-Test Results

### 1. Brand Familiarity

Brand	N
H&M	28
ZARA	28
The North Face	25
ASOS	19
Patagonia	13
VEJA	8

### 2. Mean Scores Brands

#### 2.1. H&M

Evaluation Criteria	Mean Score
H&M omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are	4.20
H&M is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes	4.00
H&M is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes	3.63
H&M's green claims are vague or unprovable	4.47
H&M exaggerates the reality of its green features	4.77

*Total Mean Score H&M = 4.214*

#### 2.2. Patagonia

Evaluation Criteria	Mean Score
Patagonia omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are	3.80
Patagonia is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes	3.30
Patagonia is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes	3.13
Patagonia's green claims are vague or unprovable	3.60
Patagonia exaggerates the reality of its green features	3.90

*Total Mean Score Patagonia = 3.546*

#### 2.3. ASOS

Evaluation Criteria	Mean Score
ASOS omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are	4.90
ASOS is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes	4.50
ASOS is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes	4.00
ASOS's green claims are vague or unprovable	5.03
ASOS exaggerates the reality of its green features	4.47

*Total Mean Score ASOS = 4.58*

#### 2.4. ZARA

Evaluation Criteria	Mean Score
ZARA omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are	4.97
ZARA is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes	4.60
ZARA is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes	4.07
ZARA's green claims are vague or unprovable	5.10
ZARA exaggerates the reality of its green features	4.93

*Total Mean Score ZARA = 4.734*



## 2.5. The North Face

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
The North Face omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are	2.93
The North Face is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes	2.77
The North Face is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes	2.70
The North Face's green claims are vague or unprovable	2.97
The North Face exaggerates the reality of its green features	3.17

*Total Mean Score The North Face = 2.908*

## 2.6. VEJA

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
VEJA omits or hides important information to make green claims sound better than they are	3.47
VEJA is misleadingly literal about its environmental attributes	3.33
VEJA is visually or graphically misleading about its environmental attributes	3.20
VEJA's green claims are vague or unprovable	3.33
VEJA exaggerates the reality of its green features	3.53

*Total Mean Score VEJA = 3.372*

### **Appendix 3: Ethical Approval BMS**

The BMS ethical committee / Domain Humanities & Social Sciences has assessed the ethical aspects of your research project. On the basis of the information you provided, the committee does not have any ethical concerns regarding this research project. It is your responsibility to ensure that the research is carried out in line with the information provided in the application you submitted for ethical review. If you make changes to the proposal that affect the approach to research on humans, you must resubmit the changed project or grant agreement to the ethical committee with these changes highlighted.

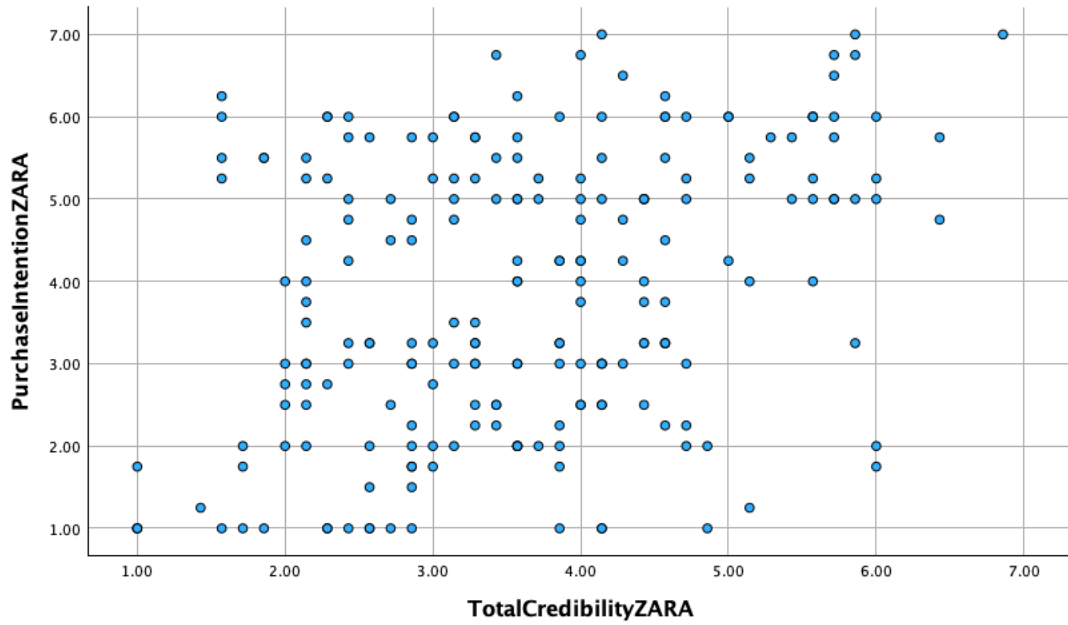
Moreover, novel ethical issues may emerge while carrying out your research. It is important that you reconsider and discuss the ethical aspects and implications of your research regularly, and that you proceed as a responsible scientist.

Finally, your research is subject to regulations such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Code of Conduct for the use of personal data in Scientific Research by VSNU (the Association of Universities in the Netherlands), further codes of conduct that are applicable in your field, and the obligation to report a security incident (data breach or otherwise) at the UT.

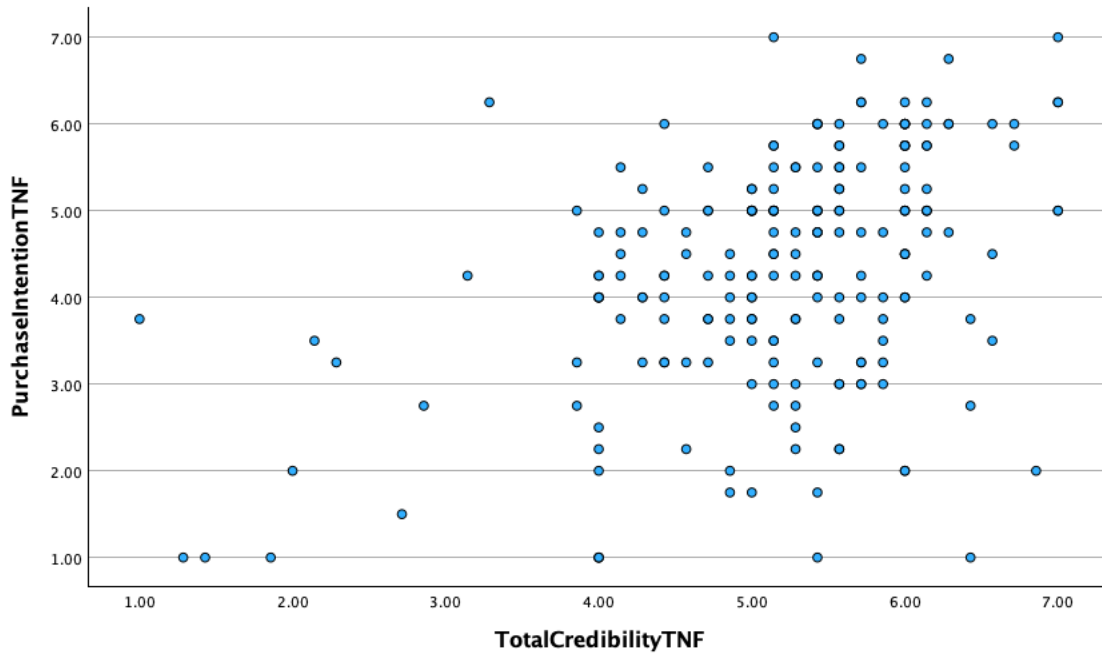
## Appendix 4: SPSS Outcomes Assumptions

### *Additivity and Linearity*

Scatterplot of Total Credibility vs. Purchase Intention for ZARA:

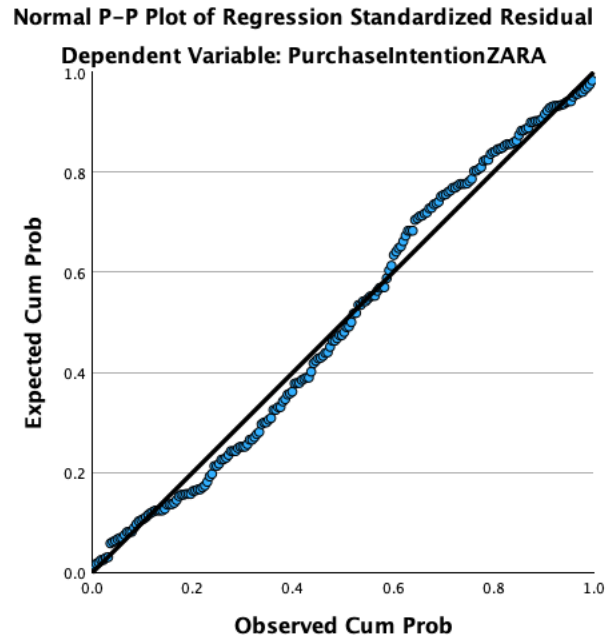


Scatterplot of Total Credibility vs. Purchase Intention for The North Face:

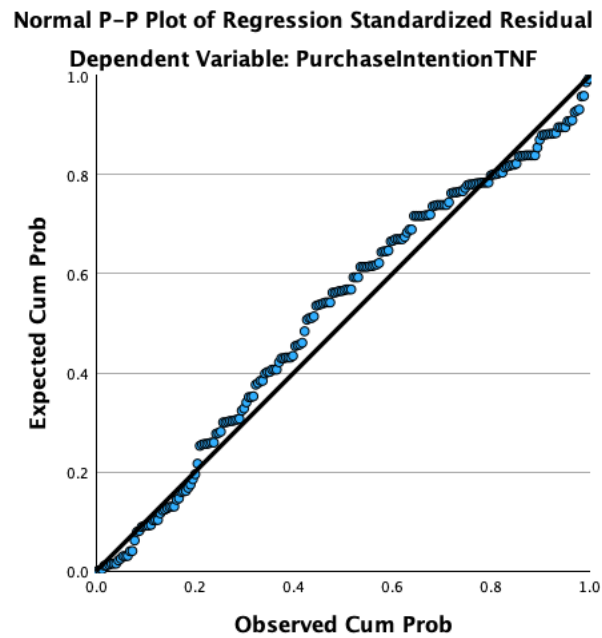


*Normality*

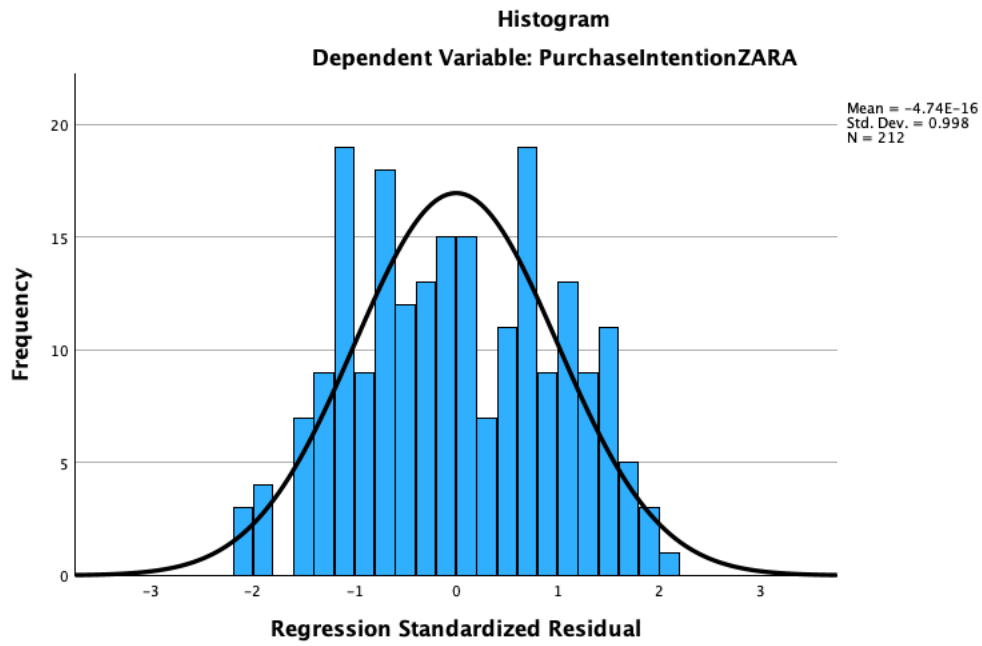
P-P plot of Regression Standardized Residual for Purchase Intention for ZARA:



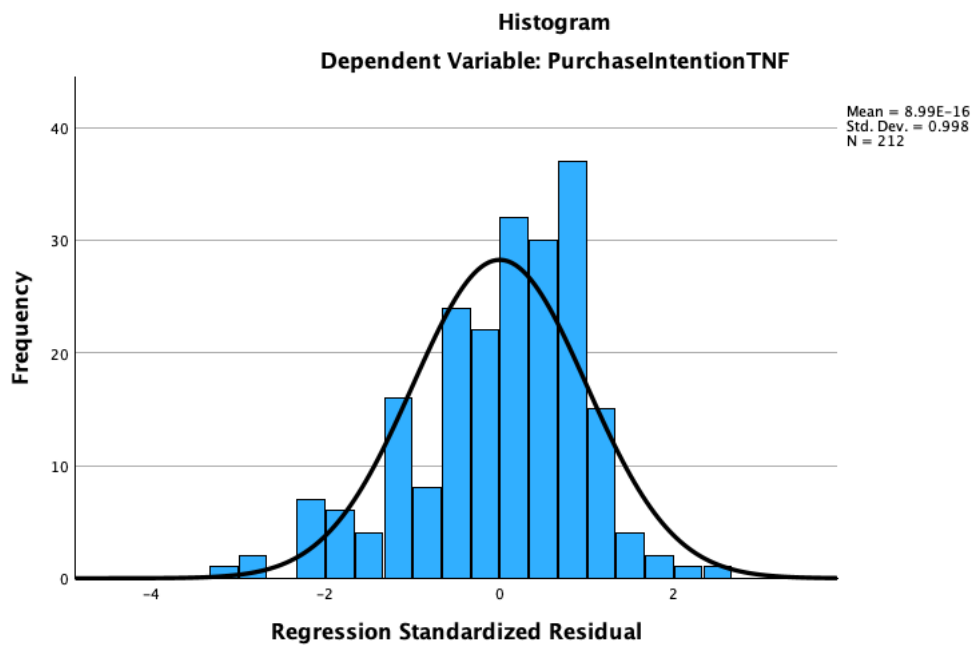
P-P plot of Regression Standardized Residual for Purchase Intention for The North Face:



Histogram of Regression Standardized Residual for Purchase Intention for ZARA:

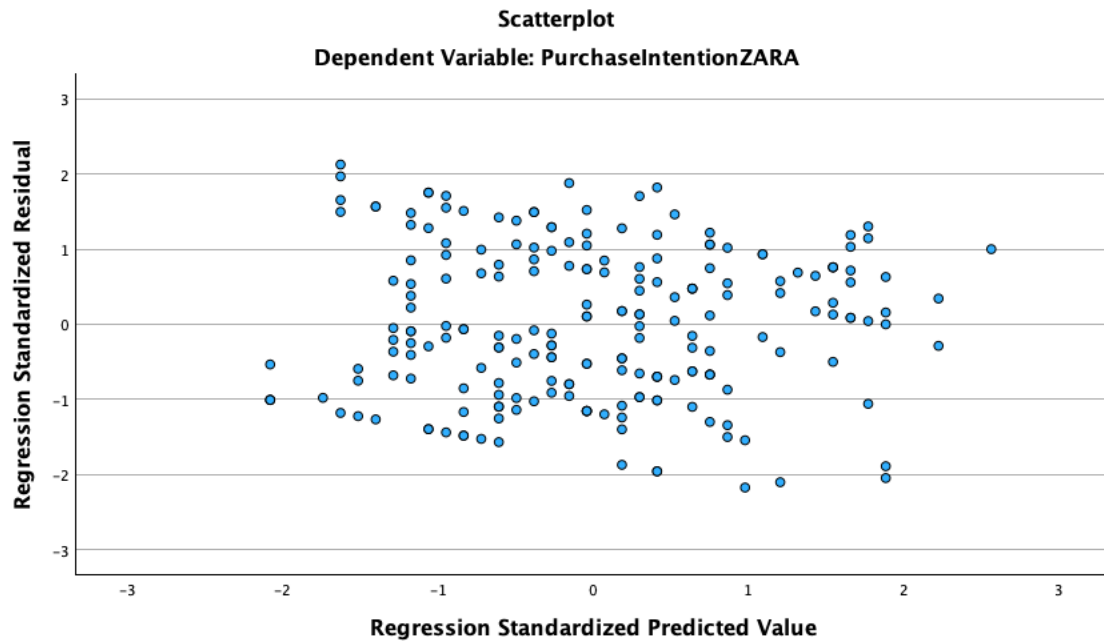


Histogram of Regression Standardized Residual for Purchase Intention for The North Face:



*Homoscedasticity*

Scatterplot of Regression Standardized Residual vs. Regression Standardized Predicted Value for ZARA:



Scatterplot of Regression Standardized Residual vs. Regression Standardized Predicted Value for The North Face:

