Design for change -

Generation Y consumers’ perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry

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Abstract

Title: Design for change – Generation Y consumers’ perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry

Research Questions: “What knowledge do Generation Y consumers’ have about sustainability in the fast fashion industry?” and “How do the factors of the attitude-behavior gap influence the Generation Y consumers in their decision making for fast fashion clothes?”

Problem Formulation: Sustainability as a topic has regained great attention over the last couple of years. Generation Y consumers’ demand for more sustainable actions, especially in fast fashion, puts increasing pressure on the industry. As the biggest consumer cohort, it is important for fast fashion companies to meet their needs and demands for more sustainable actions to stay competitive.

Purpose: The purpose of this thesis is to explore the perception of sustainability of Generation Y consumers’ in the fast fashion industry by looking at eight factors that influence the attitude-behavior gap, namely Price Sensitivity, Ethical Obligation, Lack of Information, Subjective Norm, Quality, Inertia, Cynicism and Guilt. Additionally, the previous knowledge about sustainability in the fast fashion industry of this generation will be investigated by using the triple-bottom line approach of economic, environmental and social aspects.

Methodology: This thesis utilized a qualitative methodology by conducting semi-structured interviews. The research consists of 6 participants from the Generation Y. The interviews were performed personally face-to-face.

Findings/Conclusions: The findings indicate that the factors of the attitude-behavior gap still influence Generation Y consumers’ in their purchase decisions for fast fashion brands. They are more hesitant to invest in acquiring clothes from fast fashion retailers, as they see them as violating to the society and the environment. Therefore, Generation Y consumers would rather purchase sustainable clothes from sustainable companies that are behaving and producing their clothes in a right, sustainable and ethical way. Hence, their attitude indicates to be similar to their potential purchasing behavior. Furthermore, Generation Y consumers’ hold a broad, detailed knowledge about sustainability of all three parts of the triple bottom line.

Keywords: Generation Y, Millennials, sustainability, attitude-behavior gap, fast fashion, knowledge
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1. Introduction

The introduction chapter includes the background, the problem statement, the research purpose, research questions and the outline of the thesis.

1.1. Background

Sustainability is a topic that has regained great attention over the last couple of years. Considering the Climate Change as a megatrend (Retief, Bond, Pope, Morrison-Saunders & King, 2016), several industries are influenced and forced to respond to environmental challenges, such as constrained resources, greenhouse gas emissions or plastic waste (Bonini & Görner, 2011; Retief et al., 2016; Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes & Ghezzi, 2017). Companies which are implementing sustainable business practices within their supply chain and inside as well as outside of their organization are gaining competitive advantage and hence secure their survival in the business environment (Lubin & Etsy, 2010; Macchion, Da Giau, Caniato, Caridi, Danese, Rinaldi & Vinelli, 2018; Berns, Townend, Khayat, Balagopal, Reeves, Hopkins & Kruschwitz, 2009). Moreover, consumers’ demand for more sustainable actions, especially in the fast fashion industry, puts increasing pressure on companies, making the consumers and other stakeholders, such as employees, competitors or the society to the drivers for sustainable actions of organizations (Berns, Townend, Khayat, Balagopal, Reeves, Hopkins & Kruschwitz, 2009; Remy, Speelman & Schwartz, 2016; Macchion et al., 2018). Today’s society is becoming more and more environmentally conscious (Pasricha & Kadolph, 2009; Taken Smith, 2012). Especially the young Y consumers labelled Millennials are very dynamic and willing to take actions in order to bring positive changes to the environment (Pasricha & Kadolph, 2009; Han, Seo & Ko, 2016). One example is the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, which is an environmental activist known for the ‘Fridays of Future’ movement and the ‘School strike for the Climate’. She states:

“If we are to take the ipcc’s latest report even the least bit serious, we must immediately start acting as if we were in the crisis that we are in. And the least we can do, starting today, is to stay on the ground, stop eating meat and dairy and promote a shopstop movement.”

Greta Thunberg, October 2018
Millennials are born between 1980 and 2000 (Lang & Danielsen, 2017). Their expectations towards businesses which are acting in a sustainable way are high (Remy et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016; Bernardes, Ferreira, Marques & Nogueira, 2018). Furthermore, the Cone Communications Corporate Social Responsibility Study (2017) revealed that 88% of the Millennial consumers are more willing to be loyal to companies which are supporting social and environmental issues (Butler, 2018) and thus are more willing to pay for green products, services or brands (Lu, Bock & Joseph, 2013). Hence, this consumer group is keener to protect their status and values by their purchasing decisions and their brand affiliations (Barton, Koslow & Beauchamp, 2014).

Sustainability has been defined in many different ways over the last three decades, but it is still lacking a standard definition (Moore, Mascarenha, Bain & Straus, 2017). However, the most common definition of sustainability is the one of the Brundtland Commission, which was published in their report “Our Common Future” in 1987:

“Sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

United Nations General Assembly, 1987, p. 43

The sustainability concept composes three aspects namely the social, environmental and economic aspects - also known as people, planet and profit (Kenton, 2019), also known as the Triple-Bottom-Line. People, planet and profit in the Triple-Bottom-Line imply that companies should run their businesses in a way that secure their long-term economic performance by at the same time avoiding short-term behavior that is socially or environmental harmful (Porter & Kramer, 2006; Høgevold, Svensson, Rodriguez & Eriksson, 2019).

Notwithstanding sustainability, the fashion and apparel industry will be the second largest polluter in the world (Conca, 2015). The negative impact that the fashion industry has on the global environment becomes visible when looking at the different stages that a fashion items’ life cycle comprises; starting from fiber growth and production, dyeing and printing over transportation and selling, towards the end of the garments’ life, the disposal (Hill & Lee, 2012; Pasricha & Kadolph, 2009).
The fashion business is a very resource-intensive industry (Todeschini et al., 2017), using huge amounts of water and chemicals and emitting a significant amount of greenhouse gases (Pasricha & Kadolph, 2009; Remy et al., 2016). Especially cotton, which accounts for 30% of all textiles, needs a lot of water, pesticides and fertilizer to grow (Remy et al., 2016). Besides the environmental issues, also social issues arise. Low wages and the exploitation of labor work (Clark, 2008), as well as safety within the workplace, are social issues which are caused by the fast pace of the industry (Winter & Lasch, 2017; Macchion et al. 2018). Through the globalization of the supply chain and the outsourcing of the production of clothes, those environmental and social issues and their impact are continuing to grow proportionally and globally, as more and more clothes and garments are produced (Winter & Lasch, 2017; Remy et al., 2016).

The fast fashion industry plays its part to this huge rise of clothing consumption. Kalinin (2013) and Bruce and Daly (2006) characterize fast fashion by low prices, limited durability and quality, basic cuts, and up-to-date colors, textiles and details. Furthermore, fast fashion clothes have a very short product life span and have often global fragmented supply chains. As this is not a new phenomenon, fast fashion nevertheless jeopardizes and challenge environmentally sustainable practices (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Macchion et al., 2018). Fashion retailers like Zara or H&M offer 12 to 24 clothing collections every year, some of them are refreshed weekly (Remy et al., 2016). Shorter production and lead times and low prices on the one hand, gave clothing companies the opportunity to introduce new lines more frequently and on the other hand, fueled the rapid consumption behavior of consumers (Cao, Chang, Kallal, Manalo, McCord, Shaw & Starner, 2014; Remy et al., 2016). The industries’ threats are negatively affecting the global environment and raise social issues (Kozlowski, Bardecki & Searcy 2012; Ditty, 2015). While yet especially consumers of the Millennial generation become increasingly interested in eco-fashion, they are more opting for social and environmentally responsible purchase decisions (Khandual & Pradhan, 2018). Hence, they go for products and brands, which are environmentally conscious and have a ethical production process (Khandual & Pradhan, 2018).

1.2. Problem Statement
The millennial generation is driven by fashion consumption (Williams & Page, 2011) and their volatile product desires are challenging companies, making it hard for them to assess the demand (Solka, Jackson & Lee, 2011). Millennial fashion consumers expect a constant change
and thus new products have to be available on a regular basis (Bruce & Daly, 2006). The Generation Y outperforms every consumer generation before, since they have an enormous market size and are three times bigger than the Generation X, which is born between 1960 and 1980, they are the second largest consumer group since the Baby Boomers, which were born between 1943 and 1959 (Valentine & Powers, 2013. They account for one quarter of the world’s population and with spending’s of nearly $200 billion per year, their purchasing power is huge (Fournier, 2017).

Therefore, it is important for companies to understand the huge market potential this generation provides (Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014). This is especially important for the fashion industry, as the Millennials represent the main target group (Colucci & Scarpi, 2013; Yarrow and O’Donnell, 2009). Furthermore, the Generation Y consumers are one of the best educated generations, which are likewise well informed about sustainability issues (Taken Smith, 2014).

Nevertheless, research states that Millennials are not aware of the negative impact that unsustainable production and consumption of fast fashion can cause (Park & Kim, 2016). The study of Morgan & Birtwistle (2009) revealed that young fashion consumers are mostly not aware about how and where clothing items are disposed, how the items have been made and what environmental issues the production process evokes. Other studies investigated the lack of consumers’ awareness of sustainable fashion (Shen, Richards & Liu, 2013). Furthermore, Hill and Lee (2012) found out that consumers have little knowledge about the sustainability concept itself, besides their lack of information about negative consequences caused by the clothing industry (Henninger, Alevizou & Oates, 2016). One example of such a negative consequence is the tragedy of the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in Bangladesh in 2013, where more than 1.100 people were killed (Kozlowski, Searcy, & Bardecki, 2015). Due to such tragedies and other environmental and social issues, the fashion industry has faced vast criticism (Kozlowski, Searcy, & Bardecki, 2015), making it hard to link sustainable practices to fast fashion.

Consumption tendencies of young consumers are difficult to understand and their level of awareness concerning sustainable consumption behaviors is hard to determine (Bulut, Çimrin & Dogan, 2017). However, awareness of environmental and social issues does not necessarily lead to a change in the consumption behavior of young consumers. The demand for green products and services among Millennials is not as high as expected (Gleim, Smith, Andrews & Cronin, 2013; Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). This becomes evident particularly in the fast
fashion industry, where the desire for the latest-trend products, in order to impress peers (Connell, 2010) and to satisfy emotional needs through the purchase (Cao et al., 2014), is still higher than the desire to buy sustainable fashion, as this is often perceived as unattractive or unfashionable (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). This phenomenon is addressed in literature as the “attitude-behavior gap” or “ethical purchasing gap” (Han, Seo & Ko, 2017; Antonetti & Maklan, 2015; d’Astous & Legendre, 2009; Bray, Johns & Kilburn, 2011). The attitude-behavior gap implies that there is “[...] a significant difference between what consumers say about the importance of consumption-related ethical issues and their actual behavior [...]” (d’Astous & Legendre, 2009, p. 255).

In order to change the consumption behavior and raise the awareness of Generation Y consumers towards sustainable fashion, it is important for fashion retailers to communicate their sustainable actions in an appropriate way. Sustainable fashion is described in literature as ‘green fashion’, ‘eco-fashion’ or ‘ethical fashion’ (Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017; D’Souza, 2015; Henninger et al., 2016). The concept of sustainable fashion implies that the production of clothes should not jeopardize the society or the environment by producing garments made from ecological or recycled materials, such as organically grown cotton or corn fibers (D’Souza, 2015; Henninger et al., 2016). Also, an eco-friendly production process, which is transparent and traceable as well as fair working conditions and the usage of natural dyes are important aspects in the idea of sustainable fashion (D’Souza, 2015; Henninger et al., 2016). Likewise, the minimization of waste and an ‘after-life’ of fashion items, such as second-hand or cloth swapping is associated with sustainable fashion (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; Rigos & Brodde, 2017; D’Souza, 2015; Peirson-Smith & Evans, 2017). Utilized upcycling, recycling and craftsmanship are further components brought into relation with the long-term perspective of sustainability in fashion (Henninger et al., 2016). Summed up, sustainable fashion are clothes which are unique, have a character and express an identity (Henninger et al., 2016).

As indicated above, there is a scarcity of research regarding the perception of generation y consumers concerning sustainability. This is supported by Hill and Lee (2012), who state that the perception of sustainability in this generation is of importance because those consumers will experience the consequences of their sustainable or unsustainable behavior. The call for further investigation into the perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry is further supported by McNeill and Moore (2015). According to previous studies, sustainability communication is often ineffective, and consumers receive only insufficient information about a
product (Hill & Lee, 2012). This fuels the need for an in depth understanding of the dilemma considering sustainability in fashion among Generation Y consumers. Furthermore, Sheth et al. (2011) state that in most sustainability driven commercials the consumer as a stakeholder is not in the focus of interest and thus is not being addressed adequately. This being said, they also observed that a lack of focus on the consumer leads to inefficiency and ineffectiveness concerning the communication of sustainable actions. Even though many consumers would like to make environmentally friendly choices, they mostly do not have enough background information to assess if a product is sustainable or not (Fulton & Lee, 2013). This lack of information is often related to the avoidance of buying green fashion products (Fulton & Lee, 2013). Besides that, sustainable intentions are positively influenced by the perceived importance of sustainability (Singhapakdi, 2004). Thus, it is important to understand how consumers perceive a company’s sustainable actions, in order to give them the opportunity to inform the consumer about their actions and provide them with an understanding about their fashion items (Hill & Lee, 2012; Fulton & Lee, 2013). Therefore, firms need to follow a customer-centric sustainability (CCS) approach, where the consumer and the business are both considered (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Sheth et al. (2011) state, that marketing communication is the fundamental business function to reach consumers and the communication actions are the most important drivers for a CCS approach. In order to achieve relevant CCS outcomes, such as consumption and disposal of green products, successful green marketing communication is needed. Nevertheless, green communication activities often fail to raise trust to the brand and green messages often fail to reach the consumer when unsuitable communication channels are chosen (Lam, Lau & Cheung, 2016; Kärnä, Jusli, Ahonen & Hansen, 2001). Another point is that some green advertisements are of low perceived credibility concerning environmental claims, which is why companies are often accused to greenwash their appearance (Saha & Darnton, 2005; Chan, 2004). According to Delmas and Burbano (2011) greenwashing can be defined as “poor environmental performance and positive communication about poor environmental performance” of a firm (ibid, p. 4). Which means that companies’ environmental claims that are advertised are not justified and the companies do not have an eco-friendly image, which then give rise to mistrust of customers due to their previous consumption experience (Chan, 2004).
1.3. Research Questions
From the background and the problem statement the following research questions are derived:

*R1: What knowledge do Generation Y consumers’ have about sustainability in the fast fashion industry?*
*R2: How do the factors of the attitude-behavior gap influence the Generation Y consumers in their decision making for fast fashion clothes?*

1.4. Research Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to explore the perception of sustainability of Generation Y consumers’ in the fast fashion industry by looking at eight factors that influence the attitude-behavior gap, namely Price Sensitivity, Ethical Obligation, Lack of Information, Subjective Norm, Quality, Inertia, Cynicism and Guilt. Additionally, the previous knowledge about sustainability in the fast fashion industry of Generation Y consumers will be investigated by using the triple-bottom line of economic, environmental and social aspects. Thus, a holistic picture about Generation Y consumers’ perception of sustainability, their awareness and thus their intended consumption behavior is given.

1.5. Outline of the Thesis
This thesis is structured into five chapters, which are shortly described in the following.

*Chapter 1*
In this first chapter the background for this research and the problem formulation is described. Moreover, the research questions and the purpose of this research are extracted and developed from the background and problem formulation. The outline of the thesis ends this chapter.

*Chapter 2*
The second chapter reviews the theoretical framework. In the theoretical framework different studies and the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) theory are presented and discussed. The conceptual model derived from the theoretical framework concludes this chapter.
Chapter 3
This chapter includes the methodology used for this research. The research methodology clarifies how the research was conducted as well as how the collection of data and its analysis has been executed.

Chapter 4
Chapter four consists of the data collection and analysis. Therefore, the empirical data collected is stated and then a comparison to the previous stated studies and theories from chapter 2 are used to analyses the material on similarities and differences.

Chapter 5
Chapter five is an overall conclusion of the research and its results. This chapter includes critical reflections, contributions and implications. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research.
2. Theoretical Framework

The chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study, starting with the generation y and the fast fashion industry in general and continuing with the explanation of sustainability and going on with green marketing communication. Lastly the sustainable consumer behavior in the fashion industry will be displayed.

2.1. The Triple Bottom Line

Sustainability is shaped by three interrelated aspects. Those three aspects form the triple bottom line (TBL), which is also known as ‘people’, ‘planet’ and ‘profit’, or as social, environmental and economic pillars (Elkington, 1998). Businesses should find a balance between these three pillars, even though they are mostly concerned with increasing their profits (Venkatraman & Nayak, 2015). However, in this study the TBL model will be applied in order to measure consumers’ perceived sustainability of fashion brands (Park & Kim, 2016). The three pillars will be applied from a customer-centric approach, which puts the customers in the center and at the same time consider the viability of businesses (Park & Kim, 2016; Sheth et al., 2011). A customer-centric approach is important, as previous studies have shown that a firm-centric approach is often lacking a long-term perspective and a serious approach for societal and environmental issues (Park & Kim, 2016). The current study will use the triple bottom line model to assess the perception of sustainability of the Generation Y consumers in the fast fashion industry.

2.2.1. Planet

The environmental pillar addresses the negative effects that consumption has on the environment, such as consequences for the environmental welfare and the human health and well-being (Sheth et al., 2011). The pillar indicates that there is a negative impact on the living and natural systems, containing ecosystems, air, land and water (Fulton & Lee, 2013). Therefore, the environmental sustainability deals with long-term resource usage (Park & Kim, 2016), the consumption of energy and water, and other aspects such as emissions, effluents and waste as well as products and services (Fulton & Lee, 2013). Environmental sustainability seen from a customer-centric perspective (CCP) involves making responsible decisions that will reduce the negative effects of businesses on the ecological environment (Park & Kim, 2016). The fast fashion industry started to use more sustainable fibers, i.e. organic cotton, bamboo and post-
consumer recycled fabrics, due to ongoing criticism in the past (McNeill & Moore, 2016). Nevertheless, companies need to educate their consumers about sustainable issues and the right behavior, such as how fashion products can be disposed in the long-term (Fulton & Lee, 2013; Hill & Lee, 2012).

2.2.2. People

The social dimension of sustainability combines the community and sustainable development in that it highlights cooperation and concern for others (Park & Kim, 2016). This pillar relates to the impact that consumption has on the personal welfare of the consumers and the community (Sheth et al., 2011). According to Fulton & Lee (2013) social sustainability ranges from labor practices, human rights and fair trade to society and product responsibility. Waage, Geiser, Irwin, Weissman, Bertolucci, Fisk, Basile, Cowan, Cauley & McPherson (2005) state, that on a micro-level, the social pillar discusses how the product and its production processes affect people’s lives, whereas on a macro-level, it addresses how society as a whole is impacted by businesses. Related to the fashion industry, fair trade and ethical sourcing practices, because human right issues for instance sweatshops, child labor and poor working conditions are still the main problems (Park & Kim, 2016).

2.2.3. Profit

The last pillar is the economic sustainability. It deals with the fact that organizations should contribute to the sustainability of a larger economic system and not only focusing on their individual financial success (Park & Kim, 2016). Furthermore, it is about how companies can be sustainable by at the same time being profitable. From a customer-centric view this dimension is dealing with the impact of consumption on the economic well-being of consumers, which is related to debt-burden, earning pressures and work-life balance (Sheth et al., 2011). This sustainable element stands for a dynamic economy, which continues for a durable period of time with providing long-term employment (Park & Kim, 2016). A customer-centric and sustainable consumption approach can prevent companies from latent costs, such as non-economic advertising or over-production of fashion items (ibid.). Concerning the sustainable consumption, the quality of a product that firms offer is most important (Hanss & Böhm, 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015). A low quality gives support to the consumers for a faster disposal of the fashion item (Park & Kim, 2016). This is also supported by a study of Birtwistle and Moore (2009). Additionally, consumers’ associate sustainability with a high quality of a product.
Therefore, if fashion companies offer high quality products, they not only encourage consumers’ sustainable consumption, but also communicate their contribution to sustainability (Fulton & Lee, 2013). Therefore, it is important to consider consumers’ perception of quality in the economic dimension of customer-centric sustainability of the fast fashion industry (Joy et al., 2012; Park & Kim, 2016).

2.3. Consumption behavior in the (fast) fashion industry

In today's society, the consumption behavior is influenced by the human desire to express the own meanings and identity across several product categories (McNeill & Moore, 2015). This is especially the case when it comes to fashion, because clothes are used to express meanings about oneself towards others (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Furthermore, consumers are longing to create an individual identity by wearing fashion items in order to fit in social norms (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Hofstede (1991) shares this view by stating that in many cultures people have the desire and the need to be part of a group or society. Therefore, individuals want to feel accepted by the specific culture and thus assimilate to the respective social norms and values.

Expressing the own identity is of high importance for many fashion consumers, which is the reason why dressing oneself fashionable often outweighs other aspects, such as acting in an ethical or sustainable way (McNeill & Moore, 2015). According to Birtwistle and Moore (2007) this behavior is often a result of the lack of consumer knowledge about the negative effects that the fast fashion industry has on the environment. McNeill and Moore (2015) add, that the discrepancy between consumer beliefs and behavior is the result of other factors which are playing a more important role in determining the purchasing behavior. These factors are encompassing price, value, trends and brand image, and they are especially relevant to fashion consumption. People purchase fashion items in order to fill emotional or basic needs, satisfy psychological needs, buy up-to-date items or impress their peers, family and friends (Cao et al., 2014). The fast fashion phenomenon fuels the pressure to buy and gather a huge amount of clothes (Cao et al., 2014), as information and trends are circulating around the globe, leading to consumers’ ability to have more options and thus to purchase more often (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Additionally, Farias & Farias (2010) add that nowadays improvements in technology give rise to the consumers’ desire to own the latest fashion products. This encourages rapid as well as unnecessary and unwanted fashion consumption; buying of clothes one may never wear and the disposing of clothes which are still usable (Cao et al., 2014; Farias & Farias, 2010) or functionally intact, but which are meant to be discarded (Sheth et al., 2011), resulting
in waste and pollution (Farias & Farias, 2010). Sheth et al. (2011) identified this often psychological phenomenon as ‘fashion obsolescence’, where the consumer perceives new fashion substitutes as more appealing, because of cost-efficiency, cosmetic-stylistic changes or neglectable feature-performance improvements. The fashion consumers have a need for uniqueness, which, together with changes of sociocultural factors such as lifestyle, puts pressure on the fast fashion retailers to renew their clothing lines constantly (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010). Furthermore, the consumers have varying demands, which leads to the replication of the latest famous designs and styles in a small quantity, but with a higher turnover in the release of fashion items (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010; McNeill & Moore, 2015). The changes in fashion consumers’ attitudes and demands is resulting in an impulsive buying behavior (McNeill & Moore, 2015), fueling the overconsumption of clothes. Nonetheless, the consumption behavior and the perception of fast fashion varies among different consumer generations. The young consumers, the Generation Y, prefers low-quality fashion items in a higher amount, as well as cheap, fashionable clothes (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2010) and therefore they coincide with the consumption behavior described in this section.

New sustainable fashion trends, entailing sustainable consumption, are on the rise. For example, the second-hand trend is becoming more and more popular among younger consumer generations. Second-hand is about selling or donating apparel, which is no longer been used to other consumers (Todeschini et al., 2017). This trend goes along with reusing and reducing the own demand for items which are completely new manufactured, and it raises awareness for the own consumption of natural resources (Todeschini et al., 2017). A second trend is the fashion library or clothing library, which is a service where the customer does not possess the clothes but can access and wear them for a certain amount of time (Todeschini et al., 2017). Such a sharing system ensures that fashion items, which would only be used for a few times, reach a larger crowd and therefore preventing the demand for new clothes (Todeschini et al., 2017). Collaborative consumption is another popular movement in which fashion items are exchanged, swapped, bartered, shared, lend and donated between people that do not know each other before (Todeschini et al., 2017).

2.4. Sustainable consumption behavior and its dilemma in the (fast) fashion industry

Seyfang (2006) defined sustainable consumption as a concept, which aims to make a better life quality possible, protect natural resources, minimize waste and protect the health and safety of
the consumer. Therefore, the sustainable consumption concept is associated with aspects, such as avoiding consumption, creating alternatives by decreasing consumption, creating more sustainable products and services as well as increasing environmental awareness (Bulut et al., 2017). Sustainable consumption behavior furthermore describes an approach in which regaining of the balance between consumption and production in the daily life is in the focus (Bulut et al., 2017). There is a need to shift the attention to the limited resources and the environmental impact of raising consumption (Farias & Farias, 2010). As the protection of natural resources becomes more difficult, it is important to consume in a more conscious way (Bulut et al., 2017).

Sustainable consumption behavior includes aspects of consumer behavior, such as the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phase (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009). Furthermore, it encompasses the environmental perception and consumption patterns of individuals (Bulut et al., 2017). Sustainable consumption behavior practices are for example the adoption of eco-friendly products, environmentally responsible purchasing, eco-innovativeness and recycling (Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Connell, 2010). Moreover, in environmentally responsible consumption the environmental impact of purchasing, using and disposing products or services is considered (Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Connell, 2010). Consumers perceive sustainable consumption in different ways and their perception in turn depends on the individual’s attitudes concerning the importance of values, effectiveness for impacting the environment or society and their perceived losses and gains (Song & Ko, 2016). In order to consider the different perspectives of consumers concerning sustainable consumption and in order to avoid limiting the focus only on the environmental and social perspective of sustainability, a broader perspective of sustainability containing the triple bottom line of environmental, social and economic dimension needs to be considered (Song & Ko, 2016).

Nevertheless, consumers who are engaging in sustainable consumption must make a compromise, as they must be willing to pay premium prices or search for retailers with a specialization in eco-friendly fashion (Song & Ko, 2016). Besides that, fashion consumption is complex, and clothes have other tasks to fulfill besides the functionality, environmental performance and basic needs such as warmth or body protection (Song & Ko, 2016). Fashion is, also about aesthetic design, quality and style (Song & Ko, 2016). The fashion consumption behavior of Generation Y consumers described in section 2.3 already indicates a dilemma, which also has consequences regarding sustainability. According to Bulut et al. (2017) many previous studies showed that the young generation of consumers tend to show less commitment to sustainable consumption behavior but are more attached and interested in the environment. While on the
other hand older consumers are more oriented towards actual sustainable consumption behavior (Bulut et al., 2017). For the younger generations fashion consumption is a symbol of social status and they want to gain reputation by consuming clothes (Bulut et al., 2017). McNeill and Moore (2015) additionally state that even those consumers who express a strong concern about environmental and social issues concede to frequently engage in the consumption of fast fashion items in order to satisfy their desire for the latest fashion trends.

This is the point where the dilemma of sustainable fashion consumption takes off. Fast fashion is threatening the environment, as a huge amount of microplastics, shed from synthetic textiles, such as polyester, are washed into the ecosystem and thus into the oceans, making it a huge contributor to the ocean plastic pollution (Bick et al., 2018; Rigos & Brodde, 2017). The consumption of synthetic fibers of fast fashion chains, such as Zara, H&M or Primark, has exploded from 8.3 million tons in 2000, up to 21.3 million tons in 2016 (Rigos & Brodde, 2017). Besides the washing of clothes also other aspects, such as the amount of textile waste or hazardous production processes are threatening the environment (Bick et al., 2018). According to Rigos and Brodde (2017), choosing cotton garments over synthetic clothing on the other hand would not solve the problem, it would rather shift the ecological impact, as cotton is produced under high water usage, the usage of large quantities of pesticides and the fact that most cotton planted are genetically modified. Furthermore, organic cotton or viscose would be a better alternative, as they have a better eco-balance (Rigos & Brodde, 2017). Nevertheless, the organic cotton production does not cover the global cotton demand and viscose, which is made out of wood, is also produced under use of heavy chemicals, energy and exploitation of labor work, endangering the workers’ health (Rigos & Brodde, 2017). Also, the recycling of clothes, where different cotton garments are teared up and mixed with virgin materials to create new clothes, is not a final solution because dyes, applications, zippers and fiber blends makes it hard to recycle the garments (Rigos & Brodde, 2017).

This all leads to the realization that there is no sustainable way to satisfy the current world's demand for fashion. The only way to stop the pollution is simply to consume less textiles (Rigos & Brodde, 2017). A shift from “fast fashion” to “real fashion”, which is valued, maintained and repaired, is necessary (Rigos & Brodde, 2017). Therefore, consumers and especially the young generation, should do its part, by buying high-quality clothing, which is good looking and timeless for many years, shop at second-hand stores or swap clothes and buy from fashion retailers with a transparent supply chain (Bick et al., 2018; Rigos & Brodde, 2017). Then the
question of which fiber is used for the fashion production is not this vital (Rigos & Brodde, 2017).

2.5. The Ethical Consumption Gap

The aforementioned chapters indicate that there is a dilemma in the fashion consumption and that the demand for sustainable fashion still remains low among Generation Y consumers, even though their expectations of companies acting in a sustainable way are high (Gleim et al., 2013; Remy et al., 2016; Han et al., 2016; Bernardes et al., 2018). Park and Kim (2016) additionally state, that young consumers still enjoy stylish and cheap fashion items and not necessarily reduce their fast fashion consumption, even if they would be aware of the negative impacts caused by the industry. This demonstrates a gap between the attitude towards and the actual ethical consumption behavior of Generation Y consumers. The study of Cowe and Williams (2000) shows that 30% of the consumers in the UK have the intention to buy ethical products, whereas only a small part of 3% in the end actually purchases them. This shows that regardless of the widespread consumer concerns about sustainable issues, only few consumers are actually engaging in the purchase of sustainable fashion (Song & Ko, 2016). Within literature, this gap is called the ‘attitude-behavior gap’ or ‘ethical consumption gap’ (Han et al., 2017; Antonetti & Maklan, 2015; d’ Astous & Legendre, 2009; Bray et al., 2011). The factors which are responsible for this gap will be discussed in the next section.

2.6. Factors affecting Ethical Consumption

The study of Bray, Johns & Kilburn (2011) found key themes which are influencing the ethical purchasing gap. They developed a framework out of different studies and as a result found that Price Sensitivity, Personal Experience, Ethical Obligation, Lack of Information, Quality, Inertia, Cynicism and Guilt are the main factors, which have an influence on ethical purchase decisions. Additionally, the study of Joshi and Rahman (2015) found similar factors, which influence the ethical purchasing gap or attitude-behavior gap. In this study a mixture of factors from both studies will be outlined, namely Price Sensitivity, Ethical Obligation, Lack of Information, Subjective Norm, Quality, Inertia, Cynicism and Guilt.

2.6.1. Price Sensitivity

Price sensitivity implies that financial values are more important to consumers than ethical values (Bray et al., 2011). This means that a higher price outweighs the consideration to buy
the ethical alternative (Connell, 2010; Gleim et al., 2013; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Even if the ethical product is chosen, a post-purchase dissonance resulted from the higher price can lead to the avoidance of buying ethical items (Bray et al., 2011). That is because consumers believe that sustainable products are more expensive compared to ‘normal’ products (Lea & Worseley, 2005; Magnusson, Arvola, Hursti, Åberg & Sjödé, 2001). A higher price sensitivity thus is negatively affecting green purchasing behavior of consumers (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). However, an absence of economic resources is another reason why the price becomes more important and thus acts as a barrier to purchase green products (Connell, 2010). On the other hand, a low price sensitivity influences the green purchase behavior in a positive way (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Consumers’ who care about ethical issues are willing to pay a price premium for green products, but only as long as they have an added value or tangible reward from it (Bray et al., 2011). A price premium is the extra price that consumers are willing to pay on top of the ‘normal’ price. Therefore, if consumers do not gain anything from purchasing a sustainable product it is less likely that they will pay more for it (Ritch, 2015). Yet, some consumers’ do not perceive environmental benefits as an added value, which is in turn dependent on the type of consumer and if the person is informed about environmental and social issues or not.

2.6.2. Ethical Obligation

The ethical obligation is concerned with consumers’ personal values about purchasing ethically in order to make a difference (Bray et al., 2011). This factor deals with the feeling of consumers to have an obligation in contributing to solve a sustainable issue by engaging in ethical consumption behavior (Bray et al., 2011). Moreover, it is about the consumers’ feeling to which extent their consumption behavior can make a difference in the overall problem (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Thus, consumers are more willing to engage in the purchase of sustainable products when they have the feeling that their actions could make a difference (Bray et al., 2011; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). This is also called internal locus of control (Forte, 2004). Au contraire, when the consumers have the feeling that a change in or their actual consumption behavior does not have an impact, it is called external locus of control (Bray et al., 2011). An external locus of control is often used to legitimize unsustainable or existing purchasing behavior (Bray et al., 2011). In the end it must not be forgotten, that the perception of what is ethical varies from consumer to consumer.
2.6.3. Lack of Information

According to Bray et al. (2011) individuals need to be informed in order to be able to make effective ethical purchase decisions. The public domain holds enough information relevant to ethical consumption (Jones et al., 2007). Nevertheless, some consumers lack information about sustainable practices (Bray et al., 2011), which in turn can negatively affects green purchasing behavior (Connell, 2010). Furthermore, the lack of information can influence the consumers’ perception of the sustainability of a product. Availability of information about environmental issues thus can positively influence the consumers intention and the actual ethical purchasing behavior (Josh & Rahman, 2015), because environmental knowledge provides people with the opportunity to know how to behave in order to protect the environment. This is also shown in the study of Pookkulangara and Shephard (2013), where information about sustainable issues such as global working conditions and sustainable materials, positively affected consumers’ attitudes towards sustainable fashion brands. On the other hand, the study of Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002) revealed that even if consumers have detailed information’s, they did not increase their sustainable consumption behavior. These contradictory findings imply that the relationship between ecological knowledge and behavior is complex, but also that information and knowledge is an important factor in the decision-making process. Bray et al. (2011) found in their study that the lack of information is also related to the avoidance of unethical products or companies that have a bad reputation because of their unethical actions. However, some participants of their study revealed that without communication of such issues, the lack of knowledge would continue to limit their ethical consumption behavior (Bray et al., 2011). Thus, more information leads to an increased consumer knowledge and therefore has the ability to strengthen consumers’ trust in green products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

2.6.4. Subjective Norm

Subjective norm or social norm is the influence that peers, family, reference groups or others which have a close relationship to the consumer, have on the purchase intention or actual purchase behavior (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). More precisely, the perceived social pressure, where a person has the feeling to need to act in a certain way, is meant (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norm has a strong influence and therefore a positive correlation on consumers’ green purchase intention and the actual green purchasing behavior (Liu, Wang, Shishime & Fujitsuka, 2012; Welsch & Kühling, 2009; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Contrary to that, the studies of Connell (2011) and Lee (2010) found that subjective norm has no impact on the purchase intention or actual buying
behavior. Overall, it can be said that there is a relationship between consumers’ purchase behavior and subjective norm (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

2.6.5. Quality
Quality is one of the most important attributes influencing consumers’ decision making, intention and actual purchase of green products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Therefore, if a green product is perceived with high quality it influences the purchase decision positively, whereas a low perceived quality of a green product influences the purchase decision negatively (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). Bray et al. (2011) state, that quality perception can take two views, either ethical products are perceived as poorer in quality, or they are perceived as better in quality. A loss in quality is not accepted by consumers only to buy ethically. Another point is that consumers often equate the term ‘ethical’ with the term ‘legal’, means that consumers think if they act within the law that this is adequate and the same as acting in a ethical way. With this, the thought of consumers goes along, that sustainable products which are passed on by the government to be sold are not harmful to their health (Bray et al., 2011). From the above stated it becomes clear that sustainable products, which are high in quality, influence the consumers’ green purchase behavior positively, whereas green products which are made out of poor or lower quality, can lead to a clash between consumer’s personal needs and their feeling for sustainable responsibility (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). The least mentioned could be a reason for the divergence between attitude and actual buying behavior (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

2.6.6. Inertia
Preventing any consideration of change in ones’ consumption pattern is called purchasing inertia (Bray et al., 2011). In the study of Bray et al. (2011) it was found that consumers’ which are very loyal to a certain brand are less likely to switch their consumption patterns towards an ethical alternative. A similar result was found by Joshi & Rahman (2015), they state that habit has a negative influence on green consumption patterns and is even seen as a barrier for the purchase of green products. This indicates that habit and past behavior of consumers influences and directs consumer choices and desires and in the end their purchasing behavior, which makes it hard for them to change (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). According to Bray et al. (2011) even if consumers were attached to one certain brand, it was not automatically considered as the ethically right behavior.
2.6.7. Cynicism

Cynicism is a phenomenon, which is expressed by the consumer about ethical claims of companies. It is often used to legitimize the consumers unwillingness to purchase in a more ethical way (Bray et al., 2011). Those ethical claims of retailers can lead to the perception of consumers that they only promote them for marketing purposes or to request higher prices in order to take advantage of consumers’ goodwill (Bray et al., 2011). Consumers may doubt ethical issues raised by companies or marketing campaigns and only seem to believe them when there are fundamental trustworthy values (Bray et al., 2011). Joshi and Rahman (2015) agree with those findings and state that consumers lack of trust in ethical claims and characteristics of sustainable products is an obligation to the purchase of green products. Furthermore, consumers are aware about the growing trend to promote ethical practices or products in order to gain competitive advantage (Bray et al., 2011). Consumers are concerned that the price premium they pay for ethical products will not receive the end beneficiary (Bray et al., 2011). Cynicism or lack of trust is also connected to a lack of information about the advantages of ethical practices or products and the surplus of information about unethical practices (Bray et al., 2011). If the beliefs or expectations about environmental performance is not met, this lack of trust or cynicism can hence lead to a barrier of purchasing green products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

2.6.8. Guilt

Guilt is an emotion that can directly influence consumers purchasing behavior and thus can drive them towards the choice of buying sustainable products (Joshi & Rahman, 2015). This goes along with the emergence of a sense of guilt for the exploitation of groups (Hall, 2007), for example for workers in the garment industry. According to Bray et al., (2011), guilt is a feeling that manifests itself when an unsustainable purchasing decision was made instead of choosing a sustainable alternative. Contrary, Steenhaut and Van Kenhove (2006) state, that guilt is an early part of the decision-making process. The feeling of guilt can furthermore appear when doubts about whether a purchase would have made a difference, are expressed (Bray et al., 2011).

2.7. Conceptual Model

The conceptual model has been adapted and developed from the framework of Bray et al. (2011), the study of Joshi & Rahman (2015) as well as the triple bottom line framework of Elkington (1998). The model describes the research topic and what it seeks to achieve. The
study focuses on the Generation Y and how they perceive sustainability within the fast fashion context. Studies found that information or knowledge about sustainable aspects in the fast fashion industry, more detailed the three concepts of the triple bottom line people, planet and profit, are rare among Generation Y consumers (Hill & Lee, 2012; Fulton & Lee, 2013; Henninger et al., 2016). There are furthermore other factors identified in the studies of Bray et al. (2011) and Joshi & Rahman (2015) that influence the purchase decision making of ethical products. Those eight factors and their influence of the consumption behavior is looked at through the lens of the Generation Y. The whole framework is looked at within the borders of the fast fashion industry.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model - Factors influencing Generation Y’s perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry and their influence on the attitude-behavior gap.
3. Methodology

The methodology chapter includes the research philosophy, the research approach, the critical review of choice of theory and sources and the time horizon in which the research was conducted. Subsequently, the way data collection has been conducted and how the collected data is analyzed, is explained.

3.1. Research Philosophy

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012) describe that the term research philosophy is related to the development of knowledge in a specific field. Under research philosophy two major aspects of thinking are discussed, the ontology and the epistemology. The chosen aspect which is embraced by the research shows how the researcher perceives the world (Saunders et al., 2012).

The ontology is concerned with the different assumptions made about the way in which the world operates. Within the aspect of ontology two positions, namely objectivism and subjectivism, are comprised. Objectivism considers how the world and social entities exist in a reality outside from social actors (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Subjectivism on the other hand refers to that social actors and their perceptions and actions create social phenomena (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). This research perceives the world from a subjectivist point of view and the research questions indicate that the Generation Y consumers operate dependent on their perceptions and consequences of actions from the social actors and the world around them. Therefore, this research rejects an objectivism philosophy approach.

Epistemology is concerned with the question of what is or should be seen as acceptable knowledge in a field of study (Saunders et al., 2012, Bryman & Bell, 2015). Depending on the discipline which is studied, and the knowledge developed in the respective discipline, the acceptable knowledge can account for one of three different categories: positivism, interpretivism and realism (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Positivism is concerned with imitating the natural sciences and it is connected to knowledge that can be rooted by senses (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 27) describe positivism through the following sentence: “The role of research is to test theories and to provide material for the development of laws”. Interpretivism is the contradiction to positivism. It deals with the social world which reflects humans as social actors and how those social actors are distinctive.
from each other (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The empathic understanding of human behavior, rather than the forces which are acting on the behavior, is in the center of an interpretivist approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The last category, realism, considers the human interpretation and what the mind of social actors interprets of situations combined with senses, is their reality (Saunders et al., 2012).

From an epistemological point of view, this research follows the interpretivism approach in order to try to understand human actions. As interpretivism is concerned with research of humans to understand human differences in the role as social actors (Saunders et al., 2012), this approach fits well to the topic of this study. Since consumers are unique and complex, especially those from the Generation Y, interpretivism is an appropriate philosophy for this research, because it focuses on actors and their perceptions and decision making concerning the sustainable fashion products and the related purchase decision-making in the fast fashion industry. Positivism on the other hand is not suitable, as the research does not focus on forces which are acting on the human action, but it rather focuses on the actual human perception and action. Besides that, realism is also not suitable for this research, because the decision-making is not dependent of the human interpretation of human mind and senses.

3.2. Research Approach

There are three different main research approaches which can be used: the deductive, inductive (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and abductive (Saunders et al., 2012) approach. The deductive approach represents the relationship between theory and research (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It deals with the testing of theories, meaning that theories and hypotheses are developed and tested within a research (Saunders et al., 2012). The inductive approach refers to making sense out of data through the development of alternative hypothesis that concerns the importance of informal social relationships (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In the inductive research approach the elaboration of empirical data leads to theory building (Saunders et al., 2012). The last approach is the abductive approach, it is a combination of the inductive and deductive research approach. Abduction can be used to lower the risk of the two approaches by combining them (Saunders et al., 2012).

A purely deductive approach is not fitting for this study, as the research questions are “What knowledge do Generation Y consumers’ have about sustainability in the fast fashion industry?”
and “How do the factors of the attitude-behavior gap influence the Generation Y consumers in their decision making for fast fashion clothes?”, which implies a qualitative method and thus, subjective interpretation of the data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, a deductive approach has the aim to test a strongly defined theoretical model, which is also not the case in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012). On the other hand, a purely inductive approach is also not appropriate, as it is difficult to locate a starting point without using literature (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). The theoretical framework emerged out of previous research, but it intends to explore rather than to explain (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this study an abductive approach was chosen, as existing literature is used to back up the topic and empirical data is used to build up new theories.

3.3. Research Methodology

The research methodology encompasses quantitative and qualitative research methodologies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Quantitative data is based on numeric results and diagrams to analyze the data, and the quantitative method is associated with research strategies such as surveys and research methods such as questionnaires (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It has the advantage that the research appears to be based on objective laws rather than of the researchers own values (Saunders et al., 2012). Quantitative research also provides creditability through statistical meaningful tests and can be measured and controlled, which gives it a strong foundation (Saunders et al., 2012). Disadvantages are that it is important to have the right research foundation, as the input of quantitative data reflects the output, the quantity of data can be overwhelming and can be just too much to be analyzed adequately, and finally the data can be an overview / summary of the research and that can lead to hasty conclusions (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The noun what and how used to state the research questions and the research purpose of the study indicate that it is appropriate to use the qualitative methodology, as a deeper understanding of how Generation Y consumers perceive sustainability in the fast fashion industry is gained. This means the study seeks to unveil the underlying reasons for or against the purchase decision of sustainable clothes in the fast fashion industry. A qualitative methodology is well suited for research which intends to explore (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Bryman and Bell (2015) state that qualitative research contains the creation of theory rather than the testing of such (i.e. “how” and not “how often”). Therefore, qualitative data is based on word expressions, and non-
standardized data (Saunders et al., 2012). This methodology is linked to research methods such as interviews, documents, and observations. The qualitative methodology is used because it allows to investigate in-depth understanding and its focus is on the individuals’ interpretation and creation of a changing social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.4. Critical Review of Choice of Theory and Sources

The literature used in this study was extracted from peer-reviewed scientific articles. They were derived from the database “Summon” of Kristianstad University and Google Scholar. Furthermore, some actual internet sources were used to formulate the introduction chapter. The quality of the used scientific articles can be assessed by the academic guide provided by ABS (the Association of Business Schools). The ABS rating list is based on peer review process, publications and evaluation of content of each journal. The five different grades given by ABS assesses the quality of the journals. For this thesis the latest rating list from 2015 was used. The five grades of rating are as follows:

- 4* Journals of distinction (world elite journal)
- 4 Best-executed research (top journal)
- 3 Well executed research (Highly regarded journal)
- 2 Acceptable standards (well regarded journal)
- 1 Modest standard (recognized journal)

In this study 71 scientific articles were used, 44 of them are listed in the ABS ranking. Furthermore, 7 books and 12 internet sources were used. The rest of the articles are not listed in the ABS ranking, which can be because the journals qualify is not covering the criteria of ABS or the articles are from journals, like journals in higher education sociology. The table below shows the articles used and their ranking according to ABS:
Table 1. ABS Ranking

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<th>ABS Ranking 2015</th>
<th>Numbers of cited articles</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not included in the ABS list</td>
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<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>71</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.5. Time Horizon

There are two dimensions of time horizons within a research, the cross-sectional studies and the longitudinal studies (Saunders et al., 2012). Cross-sectional studies access a study of a specific phenomenon in a specific period of time and are mostly undertaken for academic research, since they are naturally time constrained (Saunders et al., 2012). Contrary, longitudinal studies are used to investigate the study’s change and development over an extended amount of time (Saunders et al., 2012). This study was conducted in between the time frame of the 1st of April and the 7th of June 2019. Due to the limited research time of 9 and a half weeks it is evident that the cross-sectional studies are most suitable, as it is conducted in less than two months and only provides a ‘snapshot’ (Saunders et al., 2012) of the current situation. Therefore, cross-sectional studies are more feasible than longitudinal studies.

3.6. Research Strategy

Saunders et al. (2012) names eight different research designs which are: experiment, survey, archival research, case study, ethnography, action research, grounded theory and narrative inquiry. Those designs are either connected to an inductive or deductive research approach. The first two designs are connected to quantitative research, whereas design number three and four
are connected to a quantitative and qualitative approach. The last four approaches are only used within qualitative research.

Most suitable for this study is a case study design, as a case study design is open and has a holistic approach and it is commonly used to research a specific phenomenon in a qualitative context (Saunders et al., 2012). A case study is used in order to explore a research topic or phenomenon within its context, or within a number of real-life contexts, in order to get a rich understanding of the context and the included processes (Saunders et al., 2012). It is basically an in-depth study of a particular situation and is used to narrow down a broad field of research into an easily researchable topic by testing theoretical models in ‘real’ world situations (Saunders et al., 2015). Moreover, this strategy is capable of generating answers to ‘why’, ‘what’ or ‘how’ questions (Saunders et al., 2012) and is therefore well suited concerning the research questions and the research purpose of this study. Thus, the case study design can give an insight (Bryman & Bell, 2015) about how Generation Y consumers perceive sustainability in the fast fashion industry.

There is a difference between single and multiple case study designs. A single case study design encompasses a holistic approach, whereas the multiple case study design encompasses an embedded approach and unit of analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). The latter means that an equivalent is incorporated by analyzing more than one unit of analysis (Saunders et al., 2012). In this research the focus will be on the perception of sustainability among Generation Y consumers in particular, therefore on one single case. This means that this research will make use of a single case study design with holistic approach. Also, in order to gain a deeper insight in the single cases perception of sustainability in the fashion industry.

3.7. Sample Selection

The participants of this research are Generation Y consumers from six different countries. The participants are a sample which is meant to reflect a smaller part of the whole population and is therefore essential for the research (Saunders et al. 2012). Two sampling techniques exist, namely probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Saunders, et al., 2012). When probability-sampling technique is used, the researcher selects the participants randomly, whereas non-probability sampling technique the researcher selects the participants according
to certain criteria that are selected in advance (Saunders et al., 2012). A non-probability sampling technique is mainly used when collecting qualitative data, since the researchers are able to use various criteria, which are mainly based on subjective judgment (Saunders et al., 2012).

For this research volunteer sampling as a sub-point of non-probability sampling is used (Saunders et al., 2012). More specifically snowball sampling is used in order to get access to Generation Y respondents, which are hard to reach as the researcher is an international student studying in a foreign country (Saunders et al., 2012, Bryman & Bell, 2015). In the snowball sampling the researcher makes a first contact with a case (person) or a small group of people, and this case will identify further members of the population, which then makes again contact with other members until the sample snowballs (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). In this research friends were asked to ask friends if they would participate in the interviews of this study. After a first contact was established, the telephone numbers of the potential participants were forwarded to the researcher and time and place for the interviews were arranged. Potential research days were Monday, the 20th of May 2019 and Tuesday, the 21st of May 2019. All participants stated day and time which suited them best and based on this information an interview schedule was created. Five of the six respondents immediately agreed upon the participation in the interviews, only the last initial participant couldn’t take part due to personal time constraints. Another, new participant was identified and thus all six interviews could be conducted.

The disadvantage of snowball sampling is that it is mostly unlikely that the sample is representative for the population (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, such samples have a problem of being too biased, as the chosen persons are likely to identify other potential persons who are similar to themselves, which then results in a homogeneous sample (Saunders et al., 2012).

However, as this is a qualitative study the snowball sampling provides a good possibility to identify persons from the Generation Y consumer population (Saunders et al., 2012). In order to secure the reliability and the validity of this research, the participants were selected under consideration of the criteria of age. Therefore, participants should be in the age frame of the Generation Y in 2019. The age was set between the years of 1980 and 2000 (Lang & Danielsen, 2017), so everyone between the age of 19 and 39 was suitable to interview for this study. The interview sample consists of three female students aged 20, 22 and 27, and three male students aged 21, 26 and 33.
3.8. Data Collection

In this research a qualitative research methodology is used, thus the method to collect data which is most suitable is the mono-method. The mono-method refers to the usage of one single data collection technique and its corresponding analysis technique (Saunders et al., 2012). Thus, the primary data in this study will be collected by running semi-structured interviews with Generation Y consumers as data collection and coding will be used in order to analyze the collected data. Since the purpose of this study is to explore how Generation Y consumers perceive sustainability and what previous knowledge they have about sustainability in the fast fashion industry, semi-structured interviews are an appropriate data collection approach, as they provide a more in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2012). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are a well-suited because they help to investigate how people think, feel and act, and the possibility to use follow-up questions and therefore to investigate underlying values and feelings is given (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Therefore, a questionnaire would not have been an appropriate method of gathering data, as it would have meant interpretation of quantitative data provided by participants that potentially misunderstood questions and thus, missing key expressions and subtle tells that could have been pursued with follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Nevertheless, the researcher must be careful to not push the interviewee towards a positive or negative reflection of the topic by guiding the person into an uplifting happy path of thought or a path of failure and deceit (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Additionally, caution must be given to not drift off course and ask too many questions or fear silence. Showing a genuine interest and trying to avoid provocation of respondents are other aspects the interviewer has to consider (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Five of the six interviews were conducted in a beforehand booked meeting room at the Kristianstad University campus, which assures that the interviews can be executed in a familiar and undisturbed setting for the participants, as they are all students enrolled at the respective university. Only one interview was conducted at the participants home, as the respective person could not make it to the university. Additionally, the setting of a university suggests that there are no issues concerning the problem of limited intelligence and articulation (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015). Thus, the need to define language and find a common frame of
reference to enable a productive conversation is redundant (Saunders et al., 2012; Bryman & Bell, 2015).

Moreover, the interviews were operated face-to-face, since the personal contact between the researcher and the respondents provides the opportunity to vary from the interview guideline in order to react to the responses given and at the same time avoid standardized responds, so explore the phenomena in depth (Saunders et al., 2012). The personal conduction of interviews is also important to gain trust to the participant in order to gather valuable data (Saunders et al., 2012). Also, a focus on nonverbal communication and clues is possible due to a face-to-face interview (Saunders et al., 2012).

Since the interviewee is able to provide his or her personal opinion, the interview could lead into different directions even though the same set of questions are asked. The open interview questions were developed in advance and provide a guideline in order to cover the research questions, however the interviewee is able to lead the conversation in a direction that could not be discovered in another way. The interviews varied in length between 21 minutes (shortest) and 44 minutes (longest). A total of six interviews were conducted. However, in order to reduce the risk of bias, the interview is audio recorded, with the permission of the respondent. The respondents are informed that the information received is handled confidential.

3.8. Operationalization / Interview Guide

The interview guide has been set up beforehand, which included open-ended questions and follow-up questions of the core concept that have been covered during the interviews. The predetermined core concepts were namely, pre-knowledge of sustainability using questions regarding the triple-bottom line and questions regarding the factors that influence the attitude-behavior gap. The participants were invited to reflect openly about their sustainability knowledge, the triple-bottom line and the factors influencing the attitude-behavior gap.
## Table 2. Conceptualization Tree

<table>
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<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Core Concept</th>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Sub-Aspects</th>
<th>Sub-Codes</th>
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<td>R1: What knowledge do Generation Y consumers’ have about sustainability in the fast fashion industry?</td>
<td>Sustainability in general</td>
<td>General Knowledge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sustainability in the fast fashion industry</td>
<td>Environmental sustainability (Planet)</td>
<td>Disposal / Waste</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Social sustainability (People)</td>
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<td>Economical sustainability (Profit)</td>
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<td>R2: How do the factors of the attitude-behaviour gap influence the Generation Y consumers in their decision making for fast fashion clothes?</td>
<td>Generation Y consumers’ perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry</td>
<td>Lack of Information</td>
<td>Non-Shopaholic</td>
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<td>Price Sensitivity</td>
<td>Information / Promotion</td>
<td>Trust</td>
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<td>Snowball-Effect</td>
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The interview guide is based on the conceptualization and it consists of 26 questions grouped into three topics, namely: Sustainability in general, Sustainability in the fast fashion industry, and Factors of the attitude-behavior gap. Prior to the interview, the respondents receive information about the purpose of the interview and a brief content of the questions. During the interview open questions are asked, about the core concept’s aspects and sub-aspects, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perception of Generation Y consumers about sustainability in the fast fashion industry. After the interview, the respondent gets the opportunity to receive the full research once it is finalized.

In the interview guide, direct question containing “why” questions can be seen as intrusive by the participant and were thus used coupled with “how” questions in order to not offend the respondent (Saunders et al., 2012). The format of semi-structured interviews was followed by including a few broader questions accompanied by follow-up questions (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012). Respondents could reflect openly without the risk of being judged by the interviewer, who could convey the impression of being superior in subject knowledge (Saunders et al., 2012). One interview guide was utilized for the Generation Y consumers. The questions encompassing the interview guide are guiding lines rather than mandatory questions. This means that the interview guide has the purpose to be “a brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered” (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 473). In other words, the questions represent the information of interest but depending on the respondent, general flow of the conversation, the familiarity and sense of comfort from the respondent, the questions were modified and not necessarily asked as they were stated in the interview guideline.

Moreover, the concept of start, middle and end of an interview is also important throughout the interview. As the start of an interview is used to familiarize and get comfortable with each

<table>
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<th>Subjective Norm</th>
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other, the middle is where the questions the researcher wants to get answered are asked, and in the end the participant can invite to give additional information or revise some of the provided answers (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012). The researcher followed the interview guide but switched some questions in order to keep up the natural atmosphere of the conversation. Some questions were left unasked, as they were already answered by the respondents in their answers to other questions before. The interview guide and the motivations for the questions can be found in the Appendix 1: Interview Guideline.

3.9. Data Analysis

Scapens (2004) states that the case description must be understood by the theory and subsequently display a theoretical understanding from the researcher. The constant referring to theory however is not necessary, as the data is related to the theoretical framework with help of suitable subheadings (Scapens, 2004), using the method of thematic analysis. The collected audio data was transformed into transcripts of every interview in order to provide a strong base for and guide the categorization of the analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). During the interviews the possibility to take notes was low, as the researcher wanted to concentrate on the conversation and the answers for what has been really said. The fact that the interviews were recorded lessens the need for detailed notes (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and thus allowed the researcher to focus on the information given, preventing her from becoming disconnected from the conversation. Moreover, no external help was utilized to transcribe the interviews, which reduces the level of errors and misinterpretations of what have been said by the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Coding technique is used in order to break down the transcripts of the interviews into specific fragments, with a specific name, label or code. The codes are based on the research model of the theoretical framework. Due to the usage of coding as a data analysis method, conclusions can be drawn as well as data can be analyzed (Saunders et al., 2012). The data collected is divided into conceptual units, which then are divided into labels or names (Saunders et al., 2012). Finally, the same labels or names will be given to similar parts of data (Saunders et al., 2012). The aim of this coding technique is to focus on the collected information. The coding was conducted with help of the test version of the coding program “Maxqda”. In order to follow
the research approach of abduction, the findings are presented in line with the theoretical framework and ‘new’ findings are presented in the analysis. The data is presented by using the codes and new codes or emerging themes as topics.

Furthermore, a thematic analysis was conducted, which is per Bryman & Bell (2015) and Saunders et al. (2012) more a thematic interpretation as the information is important and not the words themselves even though they represent the information. The analysis and interpretation should be in balance and the data should be thematically organized with the theoretical framework in mind, followed by the reduction of material and lastly by the argumentation for the conclusions. This will provide the reader with an interesting qualitative analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Saunders et al. (2012) refers to the method more specifically as pattern matching and explains that, despite an exploratory purpose, pattern matching is a valid and appropriate method of analyzing the empirical data, given that the concepts are clearly defined.

**Codes**

The codes used for the analysis encompass: General Knowledge and Triple-Bottom Line, Lack of Information, Price Sensitivity, Ethical Obligation, Subjective Norm, Quality, Inertia, Cynicism and Guilt. Those are the codes which are based on the theoretical framework of this study. Some of those codes contain sub-codes, which were identified while collecting and coding the empirical data. They are listed in Table 1 above.

### 3.10. Reliability, Validity and Generalizability

Reliability is given when two different factors are taken into consideration and are fulfilled, firstly when the study is repeatable and secondly when the study executed by another researcher leads to the same results (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Those two kinds of reliability are called external reliability and internal reliability.

The external reliability deals with the ability to repeat the results and it is dependent on the fact if the same respondents would participate a second time, as this study is based on humans and their personal characteristics and actions (Saunders et al., 2012). As Bryman and Bell (2015, p. 395) recognize “it is impossible to ‘freeze’ a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study”. In order to be able to gain similar results, another researcher would need to execute the
same procedure and communication as it was used in this study. Otherwise what a second researcher sees and hears in replicating the study, will not be comparable to the original results (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

The *internal reliability* concerns the fact if another researcher executing the same study would come to the same results and would agree upon them (Bryman & Bell, 2015). By explaining the procedure and methodology of this study as detailed as possible and working in a transparent way, the researcher tries to increase the internal reliability of this study in order to make it possible for other research to judge the study of themselves and repeat it, if they wish to do so (Saunders et al., 2012).

Validity on the other hand refers to the fact if the researcher is really observing, identifying or measuring what the research says he or she would do (Bryman & Bell, 2015). There are two forms of validity, namely the *internal validity* and the *external validity*.

*Internal validity* refers to whether or not the researchers’ observations and the theoretical ideas developed in the study fit together (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The internal validity is especially a strength of qualitative research because spending time with the participants makes it possible to ensure a high level of congruence between the theoretical concepts and the observations (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

*The external validity* deals with the degree to which the findings can be generalized in a social context (Bryman & Bell, 2015). External validity in qualitative research represents a problem because of the likelihood of such research to operate case studies and rather small samples (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

In this research the internal validity is reflected in the questions of the interview guideline. The questions are reflecting what the research had as intention to investigate. The motivation for all questions and the intention behind them is presented in *Appendix 1: Interview Guideline*. The concrete procedure on how the theoretical framework was used in order to utilize it in the interview guideline is explained in the conceptualization / interview guide and the data collection. However, as this research explores and involves human actors and their perceptions, the external validity of this study is rather uncontrolled, as it is difficult to measure other human actors perceptions and generalize them to a greater population. Every human being is different
and acts in a different way and for different reasons. Therefore, generalizability cannot be fully given in this research.

3.11. Ethical Consideration

The purpose of this study is to explore how Generation Y consumers perceive sustainability in the fast fashion industry, their awareness and thus their intended consumption behavior. In other words, this research deals with human perception based on human affairs.

In order to conduct an interview, the interviewer and the interviewee have to make an agreement. Ying (2014) provide a checklist, which should be considered in order to meet the ethical considerations for this study and protect the interviewees; points which are included are: gaining informed consent, avoiding deception, privacy and confidentiality, protection of vulnerable groups and selecting respondents equitably. Information about the participation, as well as information about the ability to cancel the interview at any time, was provided to the interviewee. Moreover, the participants were informed about the research aim and purpose as well as the research content (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2012). This should minimize the risk of approval to take part in the interview based on disinformation of the participant. Anonymity was assured to all the participants, their names will not be mentioned in this study, instead they receive Letters from A to F, as a abbreviation. Furthermore, the participants were not chosen based on ethnicity, sexual orientation or political views, which ensures that the respondents were chosen in an equitably way, since no participant was excluded or included based on specific, unfair requirements.

Lastly, the questions in the interview guideline are mostly stated open-ended in order to give the participant the opportunity to explain and talk about what he or she thinks is important and valuable. This makes the interview less offensive and intrusive. Summed up, the following points were communicated to the participants before the beginning of the interview: Background information about the students, purpose of the interview, topics discussed during the interview, duration of the interview, usage of information, information will be treated confidential, information about recording the interview, expression of gratitude to the interviewee for his/her time, information about recording the interview and let interviewee decide whether he/she agrees or not.
4. Results and Analysis

This section presents the empirical data collected and its analysis. It is divided into nine categories and their emerged subcategories. The different categories are analyzed and linked to the theory.

4.1. General Knowledge and Triple-Bottom Line

In this category, the general knowledge and three pillars of the triple-bottom line (Environmental, Social, Economical) are analyzed, since those points are also closely linked to the degree of information about sustainability of Generation Y consumers.

The degree of information or knowledge differed from participant to participant. When they were asked about sustainability in general and what comes to their mind when they hear this word, every participant could mention aspects to what seems most important to them. Some of those aspects were the engagement of companies in improving the current situation of the environment and society, eco-friendly, recyclable as well as shareable products with a long lifetime that are not jeopardizing the environment or the society. Constantin, one of the participants explicitly stated that for him sustainability is about social, environmental and financial issues, and therefore he touched upon the three pillars of the triple-bottom line. The fact that all participants could mentioned some aspects of sustainability shows that there is a basis of awareness regarding sustainability in general and therefore no lack of knowledge.

The triple-bottom line is an important basis in assessing the knowledge of Generation Y consumers about sustainability in fast fashion. First of all, the participants were asked about environmental issues that the fast fashion industry evokes. All six could mention a lot of aspects considering this issue. Among others, they mentioned that the fast fashion industry is creating a huge amount of clothes within a very short timeframe and thus natural resources are being overused within the production process. Massive water usage or the usage of a huge amount of raw-materials such as cotton, where some of the examples communicated. Also, the use of hazardous chemicals during the production and therefore a harmful production process was mentioned. Moreover, the respondents were aware that also the transport of the clothes evoke the release of a high amount of carbon-dioxide and fuels into the air, harming the environment. Another interesting point mentioned was the energy which is needed during the production
process or in the stores where they sell the clothes. This knowledge of the respondents about environmental issues is in line with the aspects addressed by Fulton and Lee (2013) and Park and Kim (2016).

An interesting sub-category emerged, when the participants were asked after environmental issues in fast fashion. Four of them were talking about the disposal of fashion clothes and the waste which is caused by the industry due to this behavior. According to them, the nature of fast fashion implies that clothes, which are not sold during the season or which are becoming out-of-style are disposed or thrown very quickly. Therefore, Bella states:

“I know that fashion is unstable, so it changes all the time and probably you make a lot of clothing products, but afterwards new fashion comes out and you have to throw those clothes away.” - Bella

This quote indicates that a fast disposal cycles lead to a huge amount of waste and harm to the environment. Moreover, Bella acknowledges that burning those clothes in the landfills brings also huge damage to the environment. At the same time, all participants were aware of the fact, that such fast disposal needs to be avoided by recycling clothes or hand them on to family or friends in order to avoid fast disposal of fashion items:

“I never throw clothes away, never! If I wanna get rid of them, we give them to nephews to give the clothes a second life, or we give them away to friends.” - Andreas

Hill and Lee (2012) and Pasricha and Kadolph (2009), also found that the fast disposal of fashion items is one of the reasons why the fast fashion industry has a negative impact on the environment. Therefore, the findings of this study concerning the environmental issues are in line with theory.

The participants seem to have a broad understanding also about the social issues concerning the fast fashion industry. The exploitation of workers in sweatshops or chop shops, child labor or the pressure on suppliers and producers were mentioned foremost. Other concerns like a gap between the genders regarding wages, but also the differences in wages between workers and other employees, such as the CEO of a company, were addressed. The bad labor conditions of
garment workers, their helplessness because of their little power in labor unions and the associated safety conditions in factories were addressed by Finn and Bella:

*It needs to be a company where you have to have like certain reglementations that need to be respected like, fire hazards and stuff like that (...). - Bella*

*It’s like inspection for safety, you make sure that the fire extinguisher is in place, if there is nothing there and no one is inspecting. Of course it varies from country to country, how powerful the labor union is and if they’re in force or not, ja. - Finn*

In the statement of Finn it becomes clear that an inspection is needed in order to guarantee better working conditions for the garment workers, whereas Bella is concerned about reglementations within the company that guarantees safe working conditions for the workers. Furthermore, one participant claimed that animals are sometimes also harmed in the process of producing fast fashion clothes. One point addressed by Finn is the bad treatment of workers and the violation of human rights. He states, that fast fashion retailers rely on cheap labor by outsourcing the manufacturing processes to developing, foremost Asian, countries. The social dimension in the fast fashion industry is affected by different threats mentioned above, those findings are aligning with the findings of Park and Kim (2016), which state that human right issues, sweatshops, child labor and poor working conditions are still the main problem of the fast fashion industry.

The last point in the triple-bottom line is the financial or economical aspect. Here surprisingly the participants could mention some aspects that are, in their opinion, standing in relation to sustainability or the fast fashion industry. Andreas for example stated:

*I think it would make more sense, if you would just increase the price of every product and use that money for sustainability.* - Andreas

For him the financial aspect concerns the money that the fast fashion companies make with selling their cheap clothes. His statement implies, that companies should use their profits in order to maintain the nature and to invest in the overall sustainability actions of the companies. In the perception of Bella and Constantin fast fashion companies are buying their clothes very cheap from their supplier or producer in order to gain more profits and therefore they agree
with the perception of Andreas. Interestingly all five participants, besides Andreas, agree that the profits of a company are closely related to either, or both, the social or environmental dimension of the triple-bottom line:

“(...) it’s kind of a dilemma, I think, in the cheap clothing industry. (...) I think that economically they make a good job for their own company, because I think they buy their clothes very cheaply and I think they have a good margin probably. So I think they are economically sustainable, but if it’s also the same for the supplier? I don’t think so. Because they are always under pressure that they are able to sell it to these fast cloth companies.” - Constantin

“Well yeah, that’s the dilemma that the corporation usually face, it’s the compromise because sometimes you use cheaper materials, makes them gain more profit, but on the other hand you can harm the environment or even the customers in the long term.” - Finn

Those two statements imply that, in the perception of the participants, the environmental and social part of the triple-bottom line will always be sacrificed by fast fashion companies for the gain of profits. Constantin and Finn call this sacrifice a “Dilemma” and therefore point out that in their opinion there is no way for companies to be sustainable and profitable at the same time. Only Finn admits that companies should be satisfied with less profits in order to be more sustainable. Interestingly also Emilia shares a similar thought to Constantin’s:

“(...) they have to make different products in a very short period time. That also means they, well use the fabric or the materials a lot. So I think it would be hard for them to make money and at the same time make the environment better, ja.” - Emilia

This statement also implies, that the huge material usage and the more working hours for employees in order to maintain the fast fashion pace, making it hard for companies to be profitable and sustainable at the same time. For Bella the economic aspects of firms are often times “hidden” and thus it is not easy to have access to such information. Furthermore, in her opinion if companies would engage more in the social and environmental aspects, the profits would follow. This means that for her it is possible to be sustainable and profitable at the same time. Also, Finn later-on admits, that “companies should be satisfied with less gain of money” in order to prevent the environment and the society from harm. Constantin at the same time said that for him the clothes are simply too cheap, which makes it nearly impossible to be sustaina-
ble in this business. In Diana's perception, the reason why companies do not engage in sustainability is because it costs them more to engage in the research for sustainable alternatives and some fashion companies can’t simply not afford to do so. On the other hand, she admits:

“Personally, I think that it shouldn’t be more expensive, even though it cost more money to make the products, they make profit out of it anyhow.” - Diana

Her statement implies that sustainable clothes produced by fast fashion retailers shouldn’t be more expensive, because they make their profit out of it anyway. This is also related to the section of “Price Sensitivity”.

Comparing the findings of this study with the theory, it becomes clear, that Generation Y consumers’ do not see the overall contribution of companies to the larger economic system instead of focusing on their individual financial success, as it is stated by Park and Kim (2016). Furthermore, none of the participants mentioned quality as an aspect of the financial aspect, as it was addressed by Fulton and Lee (2013).

Summarizing, Generation Y consumers have a broad knowledge about sustainability.

4.2. Lack of Information
All participants of this study seemed to have basic knowledge about sustainability issues in the fast fashion industry, as the chapter “General Knowledge and Triple-Bottom Line” already indicated. This is in line with Bray et al. (2011), who stated that it is important to be informed in order to be able to make effective purchasing decisions. The participants stated that they get most of their knowledge from the internet, which include the company’s websites or google as well as social media channels such as Twitter. Also, word-of-mouth seems to be one of the most used ways to gain information about sustainability of fast fashion companies, besides classical media such as newspapers and TV. Four of the participants mentioned that they have the majority of their sustainability knowledge gained through school or university projects. Moreover, NGO’s or other organization, such as Human Rights Watch, but also symbols, such as sustainability labels, were mentioned as channels of knowledge gaining. Bella stated that she has most of her knowledge from her father, who is working in the fashion industry. Constantin on the other hand has most of his knowledge from his professional education, since he worked as a wholesaler in the textile industry. This indicates that all the participants are well
informed and that there is no lack of information about sustainability practices as stated by Bray et al. (2013). Interestingly, even though the participants mentioned a lot of issues and presented their knowledge about sustainability in the fast fashion industry, all of them acknowledge that they, in their own perception, do not have enough knowledge about those issues or the industry. This on the other hand is align with Bray et al.’s (2011) statement, that a lack of information can be related to the avoidance of unethical companies, as some of the participants stated, that they are not really engaged in shopping of fast fashion brands or in shopping in general. The participants made their statements in the context of the fast fashion industry and the industry's unethical behavior. Therefore, Bray et al.’s (2011) before stated assumption is supported by this study.

Concerning the importance of informing oneself about sustainability issues before going for a shopping trip, Finn, Bella and Andreas stated that it is very important for them to inform themselves. For Finn it is related to the point of ‘power to the consumer’ in the section “Ethical Obligation” as he mentioned that we as consumers have the possibility to boycott or support the companies with our purchase decisions. Bella on her behalf thinks that it is important to be informed, as people in general start to think more about sustainability and that sustainability and the environment are important aspects of our lives. Interestingly Emilia and Constantin perceive it as less important to be informed about such issues before making a shopping decision. Emilia therefore stated that if she would like to know more about a brand, she could easily look for information. Diana on the other hand has another view, she stated:

“I think it is more important than what I do myself. Because I actually don’t do it, but I think I should look into the sustainable aspect of where I’m buying my clothes and what does that company actually do to help the environment more. Because, you know, we’re the ones that are making sure that they make the profit and we could at least check in what they do with that money. So I think it needs more attention than I’m giving it.” - Diana

This indicates that she herself knows that she should pay more attention to be informed about sustainability aspects in the fast fashion industry. In her statement also the ‘power to consumers’, mentioned in section “Ethical Obligation”, is addressed.

Another finding of this study is that even though some of the participants stated that it is not important to be informed before going shopping, they all would engage in the purchase of
ethically produced fashion products, due to their before stated knowledge about the issues in the industry. Diana said that she would for sure have a look into the information’s about more sustainable clothes and would also consider buying them, if she would have the budget, here is a relation to the point “Price Sensitivity”. The same accounts for Constantin who said that he would engage more in ethical clothes, if he had the money for it. Bella’s motivation for engaging in the purchase of more sustainable clothes is related to the ‘social issues’ in the point “General Knowledge and Triple-Bottom Line”, since she wants to avoid that people get harmed during the production process, when she engages in the purchase of sustainable clothes from fast fashion retailers. These findings are in line with the findings from Josh and Rahman (2015) and Pookulangara and Shephard (2013), who found out, that the availability of information about issues in the fast fashion industry can have a positive effect on ethical purchasing behavior of clothes.

Furthermore, four of the participants wished that the fast fashion companies would promote or inform their consumers more about their sustainability efforts. Finn for example thinks, that fast fashion companies should be more transparent in their production process, making it possible for independent companies and concerned third parties to conduct audits (random inspection):

“I think a lot of efforts are in order, like the corporates tend to be more transparent. I think a regular, a random inspection might be in need. Like some of this critical organisations, that are critical and focus on sustainability. (...) I think, in fashion business, they might need to be more open for this, in like the factories or something. They should allow us, they should have more the flexibility to allow us to go.” - Finn

Emilia on the other hand would prefer detailed information about eco-products of fast fashion companies, because in her opinion most of the products are still not sustainable. The wish for more information and communication is also shared by Bella and Andreas:

“I definitely think when a company has decided to be more sustainable than it needs to- like show it. Not just by the products but communicate well about it.” - Bella
“I think at least every companies should contribute somehow and promote this too. So they can, like show the world that they are trying, that they are doing some efforts to set their foot in the whole sustainability adventure.” - Andreas

From those statements it is visible that the concept of trust plays also an important role in the promotion of sustainability actions. Only when the companies also promote and inform their customers they can trust the corporation and therefore engage more in the purchase of sustainable clothes at fast fashion retailers. This finding is supported by the study of Joshi and Rahman (2015), which say that only an increased consumer knowledge leads to a more ethical purchasing behavior. Furthermore, the study of Bray et al. (2011) is supported by these findings as well, since a lack of communication of sustainability efforts or issues would also limit the engagement in purchasing sustainable products, in this case, sustainable clothes. All in all, Generation Y consumers have a broad knowledge and therefore no lack of information about sustainability issues.

4.3. Ethical Obligation

The interviews revealed that all participants are engaged and concerned about sustainability in the fashion industry. For Andreas, Bella, Emilia and Finn sustainable consumption can be more compared to an overall “lifestyle”, which they are attracted to live. This also includes shopping in second-hand shops or selling the clothes to designer, which make a whole new fashion product out of it. Emilia even stated that it is attractive for her to buy sustainable fashion, because she then has a special product, which distinguish her from others. This is also linked to the point ‘individuality’, which emerged during the empirical analysis and is a sub-point of “Subjective Norm”. When the participants were asked after how they reflect over buying sustainable clothes from fast fashion retailers in order to solve the issues in the industry, the six participants agreed that this would only be a first step and that more actions are needed. Constantin and Bella for example have a very similar view on this:

“I mean, that is a first step you can do it, but, yeah you also have to consider other- yeah your whole habits in the life, how you consume things, not only clothings.” - Constantin
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“I think, it doesn’t completely solve everything. I think there is not just like fashion that needs to be addressed, but also other things that need to be addressed in sustainability, environmentally friendly and everything like that. But I do think it is a big part of it, because clothes, fashion is something that is important, everybody wears clothes.” - Bella

Both statements imply that sustainability must be seen from an overall perspective, changing one’s habits and actions towards are more sustainable life in general, not only in fashion consumption. Bella also recognized that clothes play an important part in the sustainability issues, as everyone wears them. Finn sees it even as an obligation from society to engage more in the consumption of sustainable clothes. All six participants stated that they think that the purchase of sustainable clothes might not be enough to solve the issue, but there might be the opportunity to convince others to also engage in the purchase of sustainable clothes in order to have a bigger impact on the industry. Their idea is that the consumers have the power over the companies with their purchasing decisions. Because if more people would start to buy sustainable clothes from fast fashion retailers, other companies will get aware of the demand for more sustainable clothes. Therefore, a changing purchasing behavior from the consumers could have a “snowball effect”, making other companies and the fast fashion companies in general aware to this demand. Emilia and Finn even stated that they would support eco-fashion producing companies by engaging in the purchase of their sustainable clothes in order to show them that they are on the right way. When asking if the participants would engage in the consumption of more sustainable clothes at fast fashion retailers if they know for sure that is has a positive impact, all of them answered with a “yes”:

“Yeah, definitely. ja. I think it is something that we need to think about and if it’s a positive aspect than I have no problem about that.” - Bella

Only Constantin admitted that the retailers also have to show their sustainable efforts in order to be trustworthy. This is also closely related to “Information / Promotion” in the section” Lack of Information”.

Overall those findings are in line with the findings from Bray et al. (2011), Joshi and Rahman (2015) and Forte (2004) which state, that ethical obligation is concerned with the consumers’ personal values about purchasing ethically in order to make a difference, the feeling of consumers to have an obligation in order to solve sustainable issues and the engagement in the
purchase of sustainable products if they have the feeling that it makes for sure a difference. Generation Y consumers feel an ethical obligation about making sustainable purchasing decisions in order to solve social and environmental issues in the fast fashion industry.

This point showed that living a sustainable life and consuming sustainable products can be seen as a “lifestyle”. Therefore, shopping in second-hand shops also accounts to this lifestyle. Most of the participants agreed that buying sustainable clothes from fast fashion retailers will not solve the problems of the industry itself and is thus only a first step. Instead investing more in sustainability in every area of life, not only but also in clothing is important, because consumers exert power over the companies with the purchase decisions they make. Therefore, more support for sustainable companies is needed in general.

4.4. Price Sensitivity

All of the participants stated that they would consider buying a t-shirt which is more sustainable or eco-friendly, but which is also higher in price than the regular one. Andreas and Finn think that sustainability is more important than price. Whereas Constantin, Bella and Diana stated that for their current situation as a student the price is more important than the sustainability aspect. Also, Emilia agrees with them that especially as a student the price might be more important, as they don’t have enough resources to always buy the sustainability variant:

“(…) I think also the fact that we are students (...) affects us quite more like price-range, because like right we can’t spend too much on clothes, because we also only have the budget for a week, for the month, for the year. So, of course, price when we’re students is always the- in the back of your mind and always a bit more present than sustainability.” - Bella

Such similar statements were also made by Constantin, Diana and Emilia. It shows that there is a certain ‘money constraint’ for students, which leads to considering price more than sustainability, even though the participants would really like to engage more in the purchase of sustainable clothes. This means that the findings from Bray et al. (2011) considering price sensitivity, that consumers value the financial part more than sustainability can be supported on the one hand. A higher price only affects green purchasing decisions in fashion negatively, if the consumer has constraint resources such as it is in this study, therefore they have a higher price sensitivity. Thus, the findings from Joshi and Rahman (2015), Connell (2010) and Bray
et al. (2011) concerning price sensitivity, after which the absence of resources and a higher price influences the ethical purchase decision negatively, are approved.

Moreover, Bella, Constantin and Finn also acknowledged, that they would even more consider buying the expensive, sustainable shirt, if it fits their taste and has a higher quality than the regular one. This is in line with the findings from Bray et al. (2011) of price sensitivity, where consumers are only ready to pay a price premium for ethical products, if they see an added value or reward from the purchase. Ritch’s (2015) finding, which implicates that consumers which do not gain any reward from an ethical purchase are also less eager to pay more for a sustainable product, could not be supported per se, as it was not subject of this study.

Overall, it seemed that the participants perceived sustainable fast fashion clothes as more expensive. Diana explicitly stated that in her perception sustainable clothes are mostly very expensive, which coincides with Lea and Worseley’s (2005) and Magnusson et al.’s (2001) findings. They found that sustainable products are often perceived as more expensive compared to ‘normal’ products. Concluding it can be said, that Generation Y consumers have a higher price sensitivity, at least those of them which are studying.

4.5. Subjective Norm

Subjective norm, as stated by Joshi & Rahman (2015), is concerned with the influence, which people, that have a close relationship to the consumer, have on the purchase intention or purchase decision of the consumer. Surprisingly, all the participants first mentioned that they are not influenced by friends, family, peers or classmates. After asking them in detail again, Emilia, Bella and Diana said that they are either influenced by friends, the father or the mother when they give their opinion about the outfit that they wear, but not about their actual purchase decision. Andreas also got influenced by his friends, concerning the shopping in second-hand shops, but not for the actual purchase decision itself. Furthermore, all participants admitted that it is not important for them to “fit in” their social environment. At this point Emilia and Constantin added that it is only important to “fit in”, if certain occasions occur, such as graduations, or within the job environment. Furthermore, two participants stated:

“(...) it’s everyone’s own choice what to wear and how long to wear and also from which brand. So I mean, we are old enough that we don’t only look on brands. I think it is more for teenagers or something, the status.” - Constantin
“Oh not important. No. I buy what I like, even if somebody tells me that it looks good, if I don’t like it then I don’t buy it.” - Diana

The statement from Constantin implies that the age plays an important role on how Generation Y wants to be perceived by others. This might also be a reason for the answers of the participants that the social environment does not have an influence on them, since the participants are already “grown-out” of teenager age and thus do not think much of what their surroundings say. Therefore, Joshi and Rahmans (2015), Liu et al.’s (2012) and Welsch and Kühling’s (2009) findings by which subjective norm has a very strong influence on consumers green purchase intention and behavior, are rejected by this study. Contrary, the findings from Connell (2011) and Lee (2010), which found that subjective norm has no impact on the purchase decision or intention, is supported.

Furthermore, the statement from Diana shows an opinion all other participants had as well. They all stated that they wear what they want and that they only buy what fits their taste and style. This indicates a certain kind of ‘individualism’, which all participants perceived as important. Andreas also specified that he does not fold under social pressure concerning the latest fashion trends:

“But in general I really don’t buy that much stuff and certainly not if it’s like a new trend - I would never go to a shop and like “Oh I have to have this now because everybody has it” - fuck that, no. I’m totally not that kind of guy.” - Andreas

This proposition also rejects Ajzen’s (1991) assumption to what social pressure urges the consumers towards a certain way of acting. Subjective Norm, thus is not influencing the students in their ethical purchase decisions.

4.6. Quality

When the participants were asked what aspects, they consider when buying a fashion item, quality was on the top of those aspects. This became also clear when the participants stated that they want their clothes to be durable, to be used for a long period of time and thus do not need to be disposed too fast. Only Andreas mentioned price to be the most important aspect to him.
Concerning the perceived quality of sustainable clothes from fast fashion retailers, the participants had different perceptions. Andreas stated that he is rather skeptical about the quality, since he thinks that those lines are produced in the same factories as the normal clothes of fast fashion retailers. Nevertheless, Andreas and also Constantin perceive the quality as medium:

“Can I go for mediocre? I think we are far away from a like - really much higher quality, even if it is sustainable or non-sustainable. We live in a society where making profits is more important than making good quality stuff, so.” - Andreas

With this statement he expresses that for him the fast fashion retailers have a long way to go to improve the quality of their sustainability lines. Whereas Constantin on the other hand tends more to believe that those sustainability lines are higher in quality:

“Medium I would say. (...) I don’t really know I estimate that they have probably a higher quality in their sustainable products than in their regular lines.” - Constantin

He also links that the higher quality is related to the better working conditions, better education of the workers and the better materials. Therefore, a link to the ‘social issues’ in the section “General Knowledge and Triple-Bottom Line” is visible.

Bella stated that eco-friendly clothes of fast fashion retailers might last her longer and therefore perceives them as higher in quality. In accordance, also Diana stated that she perceives those sustainable clothes as higher in quality. Emilia and Finn on the other hand perceive them as lower in quality. Interestingly, Finn pointed out that for him it doesn’t matter if the clothes are low or high in quality, as long as they are sustainable made, he would always engage in the purchase of them.

As in the sections “Lack of Information” and “Ethical Obligation” already stated, all participants would engage in the purchase of sustainable clothes. Joshi and Rahman’s (2015) assumption, that high perceived quality in sustainable products influences the purchase decision positively and low perceived quality negatively, is partly supported by the findings of this study. Since all participants have a mixed perception of high and low quality of those products, they all would still engage in the purchase of sustainable clothes of fast fashion lines. Thus, only
Joshi and Rahman’s (2015) assumption that a high-quality perception influences the purchase decision towards more sustainable products positively, is supported.

Furthermore, Joshi and Rahman’s (2015) finding that there is a clash between the consumers’ personal needs and their obligation for sustainable behavior can be seen as supported, since Bella stated:

“It is an interesting point actually. Because when I buy my basics I don’t actually think about sustainability. (...) So yeah, maybe I should think more about my basics and maybe I should be careful more about it, but yeah.” - Bella

Here she indicates, that she might need to pay more attention to sustainability when she is buying her basic clothes.

As a last point the results of the study from Bray et al. (2011), after which consumers see the term ‘ethical’ and ‘legal’ as equal, can be turned down. Even though the majority of the participants stated that they think that clothes which are passed on by the government are not harmful to their health, from their statements it became clear that they do not equate the terms ‘legal’ and ‘ethical’. For most of them it is about trusting the government to do the right thing. Therefore Bray et al.’s (2011) assumption that ethical products which are passed on by the government are seen as less harmful, can be supported. Quality is for all participants an important aspect when they purchase sustainable clothing.

4.7. Inertia

All six participants said that they would change their purchasing behavior towards another brand in order to purchase more sustainable and support better working conditions. This neglects Bray et al.’s (2011) finding concerning Inertia, according to which consumers are preventing any consideration to change their consumption pattern. Also Bray et al.’s (2011) and Joshi and Rahman’s (2015) assumption concerning Inertia, were after brand loyal consumers are not eager to switch their consumption patterns towards an ethical alternative, can be turned down, as it can be seen in the following statements:

“I have this kinda addiction to some brands I really like, that I keep on buying (...). If I find out that it is very bad (...) than I would change the brand.” - Andreas
Moreover, Joshi and Rahman’s (2015) finding about Inertia, which shows that it is hard for consumers to change because of habit and past behavior can be approved, since Bella was indicating that she would maybe change the brand, if the other one is doing an equal job. Furthermore, she stated that it might take her a while to move completely towards a different brand. Changing towards another brand in order to purchase in a more sustainable way is no problem for the Generation Y, that is why inertia does not account for this Generation.

4.8. Cynicism

Andreas, Constantin and Finn doubt that ethical claims of fast fashion companies are true. Andreas states:

“(…) if I would see advertising or if I would see this kinda stuff, I think like - control of correct information is important in our western society. So I think I would be more eager to believe in what they are saying, if their advertising is not being ‘polished’ in the media, if it is like considered ‘true’, then I would listen to it.” - Andreas

His statement implies that he is rather skeptical towards those claims, as he believes that a lot of times companies ‘polish’ their appearance and their sustainability claims and therefore conduct some kind of greenwashing. Constantin has a similar view, as he also thinks that the fast fashion companies only want to receive a higher price for their sustainable line, which in the end is similar to their normal fashion lines. Therefore, Constantin and Finn would not purchase the sustainable clothes from fast fashion retailers. Andreas on the other hand would take a purchase in consideration, if the claims would really convince him and he could trust them.

Those findings are in line with the finding of Bray et al. (2011) concerning cynicism. They state that consumers doubt ethical claims of companies and only believe them when they have a real fundament for their trustworthiness. Furthermore, it is in line with the results of Bray et al. (2011) concerning cynicism, that consumers believe that companies only promote ethical claims because of marketing reasons and to request a higher price. In addition, also Joshi and
Rahman’s (2015) findings about cynicism, that the lack of trust in ethical claims also keeps the consumer from buying the ethical product, is confirmed by this study.

On the other hand, Bella, Diana and Emilia answered that they believe in the ethical claims, but they would want the companies to proof what they promise by, for example, making the journey of the ethical produced clothes transparent. Hence, Bella and Emilia would take the purchase of those ethical lines at fast fashion retailers into consideration. Contrary, Diana stated that she believes the claims, but that she is sure that they do not have an influence on her purchasing decision.

From this it can be assumed, that the findings from Bray et al. (2011) concerning cynicism, that consumers are aware of the growing trend of companies to promote their ethical practices, is true. Joshi and Rahman’s (2015) results whereupon cynicism leads to the avoidance of purchasing ethically produced products is on the one hand confirmed. Cynicism seems to occur among the Generation Y consumers, especially when the fast fashion companies are not able to proof their claims about sustainable actions.

4.9. Guilt
In this point five of the six participants agreed, that they would feel guilt, if they would buy a ‘normal’ produced t-shirt over the sustainable alternative. The foremost reasons for this feeling was, that they all know that the t-shirt would be produced under bad working conditions, harming the environment at the same time. Finn stated that for him it is immoral to only consider buying the ‘normal’ produced shirt, as it would mean a trade-off between the own moral and the environment. He sees it as harming oneself or people in ones surrounding, because even such daily decisions in the end have an impact on everybody. Therefore, he would feel guilt to buy the unethical fashion item. Emilia stated something similar, that she wants to help the people which had to work on the t-shirt, even if she can’t change much she would feel guilt if she would buy the unsustainable t-shirt. At the same time, she said that if she had no alternative but buying the unsustainable product, she would buy it, but at the same time she would look for a sustainable alternative. Interestingly, Bella stated:

“So, like if it’s like - if it’s like a complete basic, a white t-shirt, there is no problem with that, but well I feel less impacted, if it’s like one white t-shirt, which is probably really bad from me. I don’t know the basics is just - a small basic - I don’t know, yeah.” - Bella
Here it seems like Bella does not expand her sustainable actions towards a basic white t-shirt, even that she knows that people suffer producing this t-shirt. Still, she stated that she would feel guilt if she would buy unethically or unsustainable fashion items. Only Diana admitted that she feels pretty okay with buying the cheaper, unsustainable t-shirt. It did not seem to affect her at all guilt-wise.

These findings are confirming the findings of Bray et al. (2011), Joshi and Rahman (2015) and Hall (2007). According to them, guilt can lead the customers towards the purchase of sustainable products. Furthermore, the exploitation of groups like garment workers, can lead to the feeling of guilt. Finally, the findings from Bray et al. (2011) are approved, that guilt can emerge when an unsustainable purchase decision is made over choosing the sustainable alternative. Hence, guilt is a feeling which occurs among Generation Y consumers, when they purchase unethically fashion clothes over the sustainable alternative.
5. Conclusion

The last section presents the conclusion of the entire research. Moreover, the section provides critical reflections, contributions and implications of the research which are discussed. As a result, future research suggestions are given.

5.1. Conclusions

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the perception of sustainability of Generation Y consumers’ in the fast fashion industry by looking at the eight factors that influence the attitude-behavior gap, namely Price Sensitivity, Ethical Obligation, Lack of Information, Subjective Norm, Quality, Inertia, Cynicism and Guilt. Additionally, the previous knowledge about sustainability in the fast fashion industry of Generation Y consumers was investigated by using the triple-bottom line approach of economic, environmental and social aspects.

In order to answer the research questions of this study, 6 Generation Y consumers were interviewed. The participants were from six different nationalities indicating that their cultural background and therefore their perceptions and opinions differ. As the answers of the participants were quite similar to each other, it can be said that generational cohorts display equal behavioral characteristics, as it was found by Soares, Zhang, Proença and Kandampully (2017). The results of this study provide a holistic picture about Generation Y consumers’ perception of sustainability, their awareness and thus their intended consumption behavior.

The triple bottom line framework was used as it gives an overview over sustainability and how it is shaped by the three aspects of ‘people’, ‘planet’ and ‘profit’ (Elkington, 1998). In this study the triple bottom line was used to measure Generation Y consumers’ perceived sustainability (Park & Kim, 2016) explicitly in the fast fashion industry. The results reveal that Generation Y consumers are well informed about social, environmental and economic issues in general and within the (fast) fashion industry. They have a broad knowledge, mentioning different environmental issues such as overuse of natural resources, use of hazardous chemicals, harmful production processes jeopardizing the environment, such as the release of carbon-dioxide, and the people who produce those clothes. Interestingly, this generational cohort is also aware of the disposal habits of their generation and that this is huge threat towards the environment. Social issues, such as bad working conditions, the bad wages or issues in gender equality...
were also mentioned. Surprisingly, the participants could state their view of the economic issues concerning the fast fashion industry. This included the gain of money by sacrificing social and environmental aspects and the perception of the participants of a “dilemma” in which fast fashion companies cannot be sustainable and profitable at the same time.

Looking at those findings concerning the general knowledge and the triple bottom line the first research question: What knowledge do Generation Y consumers’ have about sustainability in the fast fashion industry? was answered. Therefore, Generation Y consumers’ hold a broad, detailed knowledge about sustainability and all three parts of the triple bottom line.

The eight factors influencing the attitude-behavior gap were analyzed in detail and it was found that only the point “Inertia” is not supported by Generation Y consumers. Therefore, all six participants would change their purchasing behavior towards a sustainable brand. The other factors, namely Price Sensitivity, Ethical Obligation, Lack of Information, Subjective Norm, Quality, Cynicism and Guilt, were supported by findings of this study. Therefore, the demand for sustainable fashion raised among Generation Y consumers, which rejects the findings from Gleim et al. (2013), Remy et al., (2016), Han et al. (2016) and Bernardes et al. (2018). Generation Y consumers furthermore still enjoy to engaging in the purchase of stylish fast fashion items, but their consumption behavior is changing towards considering more sustainable alternatives in order to work against the negative social and environmental effects of the industry. Thus, it is also outpacing the results of the findings from Park and Kim (2016), where after this generational cohort is not willing to change their consumption behavior even if they are aware of the bad effects the industry evokes.

Thus, the second research question: How do the factors of the attitude-behavior gap influence the Generation Y consumers in their decision making for fast fashion clothes? is answered, as shown in the following. It was found that the factors of the attitude behavior gap, besides Inertia, influence the consumers in their decision making of buying fast fashion clothes in different ways, as shown in the following.

The point ‘Lack of Information’ revealed that participants are well informed about the issues in the industry, because they have access to information via the internet at all times. There is no lack of information about sustainability, even though some participants stated that they feel that they are not enough informed about this topic. To be informed about environmental and
social issues seemed to be important for most of the participants and therefore they wish for more promotion and information about sustainable efforts of fast fashion companies and companies in general. Since only when the companies also promote and inform their customers they can trust the corporation and therefore engage more in the purchase of sustainable clothes at fast fashion retailers.

The findings of the point ‘Ethical Obligation’ confirmed, that Generation Y consumers feel an ethical obligation about making sustainable purchasing decisions in order to solve social and environmental issues in the fast fashion industry.

‘Quality’ revealed that quality and durability of clothing is important for Generation Y consumers when considering the purchase at fast fashion retailers. Some of the participants were skeptical about the quality of sustainability lines of fast fashion retailers. Other participants perceived them as high in quality. Therefore, there are mixed opinions about engaging or not engaging in the purchase of such lines at fast fashion retailers. Interestingly some participants don not include the aspect of sustainability in their train of thought when purchasing pieces of basic pieces of clothing.

Under the headline ‘Inertia’ it became clear that all the participants would change their purchasing behavior towards a more sustainable brand in order to act more sustainable and support better working conditions, even if that change would take some time because of persisting habits. This finding shows that inertia has no influence on Generation Y consumers.

‘Cynicism’ was found to be very present among Generation Y. Ethical claims made by fast fashion companies were doubted by the participants, because they often see those companies as to be trying to ‘polish’ their appearance. All participants agree that companies have to follow their sustainable claims by acting accordingly in order to be trustworthy.

The last point ‘Guilt’ exposed that the participants would feel guilty if they chose to buy clothes over the sustainable alternative, since they know that a piece of clothing – in this case a t-shirt - was made under bad working conditions and harmful production processes for the environment. Interestingly, for basic purchases the Generation Y consumers seemed to feel less guilty, as it is “only” a t-shirt they are purchasing.
Summarizing, the study findings show that Generation Y consumers are more hesitant to invest in the purchase of sustainable clothes and normal clothes from fast fashion retailers, as they see them to be violating social and environmental aspects and believe that they are produced in the same way as the ‘normal’ clothing lines. They would rather purchase sustainable clothes from companies operating in a sustainable manner, where the consumers know for sure that the fast fashion companies are behaving and producing their clothes in a right, sustainable and ethical way. This indicates that their attitude is similar to their potential purchasing behavior. Thus, it is clear that the factors of the attitude-behavior gap have the same influence on Generation Y consumers as they have on consumers belonging to other generations. Concluding it can be said, that the studies of Bray et al. (2011) and Joshi and Rahman (2015) are supported by this study. Except ‘inertia’ which was found to show that Gen Y consumers are not hesitant to change towards a more sustainable brand.

5.2. Critical Reflection

In this study 6 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted. The number of participants interviewed could have been increased if the research period would have been longer and another researcher would have participated in conducting the interviews. Nevertheless, this study sought to reveal underlying beliefs, perceptions and opinions of the participants, as well as allowing new ideas to be brought up, which is why interviews were chosen over a focus group. While in focus group interviews, the speaking time of participants is often unevenly distributed, regular one-on-one interviews provide enough speaking time of each interviewee.

Furthermore, the opinion of Generation Y participants is of high importance, however, in order to give an even more holistic overview of Generation Y consumers’ perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry, interviews with participants of a higher and a lower age range within the Generation Y should have been chosen. Moreover, only students were interviewed within this study. For a holistic picture of Generation Y consumers however, the opinions of people who are already working or who are still in school, needs to be displayed.

Lastly, the articles selected for this study, which were used to build up the theoretical framework and the literature review, could have been chosen more carefully concerning the ABS ranking. Some sources were extracted from the internet, possibly decreasing the quality and reliability of the research.
5.3. Contributions

The theoretical framework shows, that there is a knowledge gap concerning the actual knowledge of Generation Y consumers about sustainability in the fast fashion industry and the knowledge the literature demonstrates the have. Moreover, there is a knowledge gap of how the factors of the attitude-behavior gap influence the Generation Y consumers’ in their purchase decision for fast fashion clothes. Both knowledge gaps, which are visualized in the theoretical framework model, were answered within this research, contributing with its findings to the existing theory. This research provides theoretical contributions by making an attempt to explain how big the actual knowledge of the triple bottom line of Generation Y consumers is and how the eight factors of the attitude-behavior gap influences their purchasing decision, all seen from the context of the fast fashion industry.

With the theoretical framework used in this research, the thesis contributes to the overall research area of sustainability pertaining Generation Y fast fashion consumers. While other research primarily focused on the perception of consumers of sustainability in the fashion industry in general, this research puts emphasis on the understanding of the purchase decision and the knowledge of sustainability in fast fashion of the Generation Y in particular.

Lastly, the conceptual framework, which was extracted from analyzing various studies concerning the factors that influence the attitude-behavior gap and the triple bottom line theory, seen through the lens of the Generation Y, contributes to the research in this field. This research broadens existing knowledge by investigating on Generation Y consumers of several nationalities and therefore provides insight into their decision-making regarding the purchase of fast fashion clothes. Furthermore, it provides insight into the actual knowledge that this generation holds concerning sustainability in the fast fashion industry.

5.6. Implications

The trend is going towards a more sustainable lifestyle of the Generation Y. Thus, the fast fashion industry and other companies need to change their production processes towards the usage of more environmentally friendly materials and fair working conditions. As this generational cohort is well-informed and has access to information at all times, they are also requiring more sustainable information and promotion from the companies. They have realized that they
have the power to support or boycott a company as measured by their actions. Therefore, it is not enough for fast fashion retailers to only provide one sustainable fashion line besides their normal produced clothes. They need to change their overall mindset and production processes to be more sustainable and therefore provide all their clothes produced with sustainability on the core. Even if those processes might cost more in the beginning, Generation Y consumers are eager to invest more money in ethical and sustainable produced clothes, because they want to avoid harm to others and the environment, suffering from their purchasing behavior.

5.7. Future Research
On the base of the research of this study, future research suggestions can be made. First of all, for a more reliable research, a bigger sample of Generation Y consumers, maybe in combination with focus groups, should be interviewed to gain a broader insight into their sustainable knowledge and their decision-making processes concerning the factors of the attitude-behavior gap. Moreover, the sub-codes, which emerged from the empirical data in this study can be investigated more in-depth. Also, a quantitative study with a higher scope of participants can give interesting insights into Generation Y consumers perception of sustainability in the fashion industry. Furthermore, a broader age-range of the Generation Y consumers in different life situations, from school to university and the job, could provide an even more in-depth understanding of this cohort. A last suggestion is the investigation of the perception of sustainability within the Generation Z, as those are the young adults which for sure will experience the dimension of our current behavior.
Reference List


Appendix 1: Interview Guideline

Preparation
• Prepare recorder, battery, memory space, sound check
• Addressing responsibilities in the interview

Introduction
➢ Thank the participant for taking time
➢ Introduction of interviewers
➢ Discuss the reason for the interview and topics to be discussed
➢ Propose the structure of the interview
➢ State time duration: between 30 - 60 minutes
➢ Ethical considerations:
  • Recording
  • Anonymity
  • Value of participant’s own opinion, honest answers, detailed explanations when required
  • Possibility to refuse a question or finish the interview

Demographic Data
First I would like to ask you some questions about yourself:
❖ Age
❖ Gender
❖ Nationality
❖ Native Language
❖ Education / Job Background (i.e. studies, education level)
❖ Relationship Status (Single / In a Relationship / Married)
❖ What is your income level per month?
Questions

Sustainability in general
1. What comes to your mind when you hear the word sustainability? Could you mention some sustainability aspects you know of in general?
• Feelings, definition, ideas
• areas, economic, social, environmental

Motivation: Provide free thinking and a warm-up for the themes which are about to be addressed. Furthermore, gain an insight about the general knowledge Generation Y consumers have about sustainability.

Sustainability in the fast fashion industry / TBL
2. What do you think is sustainability in fashion?
• Name aspects
• Degree of importance

3. How do you reflect about fast fashion companies and sustainability?
• Do you see any efforts concerning sustainability?
• Do you think fast fashion companies can’t / can be sustainable?

4. What are your reflections concerning the social issues in the fast fashion industry?
• Do you know any fast fashion brands that behave unethically in terms of violations of human rights?

5. What are your reflections over the environmental issues in the fast fashion industry?
• Fabrics, organic material, fabric waste, shipping, hazardous dying, waste of water

6. How is the economic part related to sustainability? What aspects do you think can be linked to the economic part and sustainability?
7. How important is sustainability for you personally, when you purchase fashion items?

**Motivation:** Gain fundamental knowledge of Generation Y consumers perception of sustainability in the context of fast fashion, especially the elements of the triple-bottom line are addressed from a consumer-centric perspective in order to enhance the understanding of what knowledge the participants have about the three parts of the triple bottom line. Get an insight about the importance of sustainability in the purchase decision of Generation Y consumers. Creating a base for further discussion.

**Attitude-behavior gap**

8. What aspects do you consider when you buy clothes?

**Lack of Information**

9. We talked about environmental, social and economic issues in the fast fashion industry before, can you tell me where you gained information about it from?

10. How important is it in your opinion to inform yourself about such issues before buying a fashion item (regarding the item / company)?

11. Where / hoe do you inform yourself to get more knowledge about environmental and social issues in the fast fashion industry?
   • For example, Google, comparisons between or within stores

12. Now that you know about sustainable issues in the fast fashion industry, would you rather buy ethically produced clothes?
   • Why? / Why not?

**Price Sensitivity**

13. Would you rather buy a basic t-shirt, which is made of ecological cotton and costs 10 Euros or one that is made of “normal cotton” and costs 6 Euros?
   • Is there a limit to which price you would buy t-shirt for? (e.g. organic t-shirt is double the price)
• How important is the aspect of sustainability compared to price?

Ethical Obligation
14. How do you reflect over buying sustainable clothes in order to solve the environmental and social issues in the fast fashion industry?
• Why? / Why not?

15. What do you think, what effect does it if you purchase sustainable clothes from fast fashion brands?
• Do you think it makes a difference in the whole sustainable issue of the industry?
• Why / Why not?

16. Would you engage more in the purchase of sustainable clothes, if you know for sure that it has a positive impact on the social and environmental issues?

Subjective Norm
17. How do you think does friends, family, peers or classmates have an impact on your shopping decision?
• How?
• Why do you think they are a reason to influence your shopping decision?

18. How important is it to you to buy clothes in order to “fit in” your social environment? / be accepted?
• Why? / Why not?

Quality
19. How do you reflect over the quality of sustainable clothes at fast fashion retailers?
• For example, conscious collection at H&M

20. Follow-up question if 19 is not answered: Do you perceive sustainable clothes as low or high in quality?

21. In your opinion, do you think that sustainable clothes which are passed on for sale by the government, are having an impact on your health?
• Negative or positive impact

Inertia
22. Would you change your purchase behavior towards more sustainable fashion, maybe even towards another brand?
• Why? / Why not?

Cynicism
23. What do you think about sustainability claims of fast fashion retailers and their ethically produced fashion products?
• For example, H&M claims that they use old plastic bottles to turn them into fashion
• Why? Why not?

24. How does those claims influence your purchase decision for sustainable fashion products of fast fashion companies?

Guilt
25. How do you feel if you buy a “normal” produced fashion item over the sustainable alternative?
• Why? / Why not?

Motivation: Provides an in depth understanding of how the eight factors of the attitude-behavior gap have an influence on the Generation Y consumers’ decision making to buy from sustainability lines of fast fashion retailers. It should also provide an in depth understanding for why Gen Y consumers’ do not behave in sustainable fashion consumption the way they are claiming to do so.

Free-thinking question
26. Do you have anything to add? Any topic you like to tackle, which has not been addressed in the interview?

Motivation: The last question leaves free room for the respondent to elaborate on his/her own opinion or indicate information that has not been asked previously, but the respondent feels strongly about.