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Dress with less:

Consumers' engagement in Slow Fashion

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Dedicated to my parents, sister and boyfriend.

Title: Dress with less: Consumers' engagement in Slow Fashion

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Abstract

The Fast Fashion phenomenon has become one of the biggest threats to the environment in current times, consuming abnormal amounts of water and energy, as well as producing tons of greenhouse gases and waste. Slow Fashion has then emerged as the responsible alternative to consumers who started to demand change and raising awareness to Fast Fashion's harmful impact. This paper studies the online community behind Slow Fashion, looking at its behaviors and attitudes, as well as the main advantages, challenges and complaints consumers have when adopting this lifestyle. Netnography has been chosen to conduct this research, as it is the fittest method. Results show there is high willingness to change habits among consumers and they are starting to adopt strategies to reduce their environmental footprint. As to maintain a positive brand image, companies should focus on tailoring their operational strategies so that they enable might eco-friendly material sourcing and mitigate landfilling and unsold product incineration, therefore appeasing the increasingly demanding consumers. The desired movement requires, however, a structural change in today's society and Social Marketing and governments are the cornerstones to achieve this circular economy.

Key Words: Slow Fashion, Environment, Adoption, Perceptions, Behaviors, Netnography.

Título: Vestir com menos: O envolvimento dos consumidores em *Slow Fashion*.

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Resumo

O fenómeno da *Fast Fashion* tornou-se, atualmente, uma das maiores ameaças ao ambiente, consumindo quantidades anormais de água e energia e produzindo toneladas de resíduos tóxicos e de gases com efeito de estufa. A *Slow Fashion* surgiu, desde então, como a alternativa responsável aos consumidores que, sensibilizados pelo efeito nocivo da *Fast Fashion*, começaram a exigir mudanças. O documento aqui apresentado, estuda a comunidade online por detrás da *Slow Fashion*, analisando os seus comportamentos e atitudes, bem como as principais vantagens, desafios e queixas que os consumidores têm quando adotam este estilo de vida. A Netnografia foi a metodologia usada na investigação, por a considerarmos a mais adequada neste tipo de trabalho. Os resultados mostram que existe uma grande vontade de mudança de hábitos por parte dos consumidores, os quais começam a adotar estratégias para reduzir a sua pegada ambiental. No sentido de manter uma imagem de marca positiva, as empresas devem concentrar-se na adaptação das suas estratégias operacionais, de modo a potenciar a obtenção de materiais ecológicos e a mitigar a deposição em aterro e a incineração de produtos não vendidos, apaziguando assim os consumidores cada vez mais exigentes. O movimento desejado exige, no entanto, uma mudança estrutural na sociedade atual, onde o Marketing Social e os governos terão papéis essenciais no atingimento desta economia circular.

Palavras-chave: Slow Fashion, Ambiente, Adoção, Perceções, Comportamentos, Netnografia.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problem definition and Relevance

Today, Fast Fashion is amongst the biggest environmental issues of society. This sector is accountable for 20% of the industrial water pollution globally, corresponding to the second largest water consumer (McFall-Johnsen, 2019). This increasing phenomena occurred due to the growing population, thriving economy and higher living standards (Minghua et al., 2009). In fact, between 2000 and 2014, there was a 60% increase of garments purchased. Just in 2015, the textile and clothing industry consumed 79 billion cubic meters of water, produced 1715 million tons of CO₂ emissions and 92 million tons of waste. These numbers were estimated to increase by 50% or more in the next fifteen years if nothing was to change (Kerr & Landry, 2017). The mass production of clothes and its shorter lifespans severely contributed to the aggravation of the situation (Minghua et al., 2009). This quick response and great flexibility encourages an overconsumption tendency, harming the environment and the industry's stakeholders (Caniato, Caridi, Crippa, & Moretto, 2012). Additionally, the fashion industry has been highly associated with resource and human exploitation (Beard, 2008). Fast fashion corporations resort to overseas manufacturing to pay less for labor force. In order to get fast and cheap clothing items, corporations end up overlooking and disregarding human rights, by employing children, incurring in forced labor practices, offering precarious and underpaid working conditions, with no safety regulations.

The beginning of the Slow Fashion movement, whose goal is to encourage ethical and self-sustainable fashion processes, arose from the consumers' growing desire to put an end to all the negative impacts of fast fashion (Fletcher, 2007). Thus, the growing concern and willingness to follow ethical consumer behaviors, coupled with consumers' increasing awareness and desire to buy eco-conscious clothes, has led to the appearance of the Slow Fashion market. The adopters aim to support businesses that share the same environmental and social ideals as them, even if that means paying more for the same product, yet made from sustainable materials (Amed et al., 2018). Social marketing campaigns have been adopted by sustainable brands to communicate eco-friendly products and services benefits, in order to raise consumers' awareness.

Consumers play a crucial role in changing the practices of industries. On today's society, environmental and social concerns are topics commonly discussed online. Members are

increasing their connections within communities by sharing more knowledge, beliefs, concerns and experiences. That leads to the growing presence of companies in social media to learn more about their clients and simultaneously to share their products and get instant feedback. Given the rapid diffusion of online information, consumers are becoming increasingly aware and, consequently, changing their purchasing habits, adopting sustainable and ethical consumption behaviors (Davies, Lee, & Ahonkhai, 2012).

Previous researchers, taking into account the continuous change in consumer decisions, have already focused on different perceptions of ethical fashion and associated shopping behaviors. Yet, companies must have profound insights of the targeted consumers so that they can develop valuable bases to tackle the market. So far, limited offline studies have analyzed customers and the motives that make them engage (or not) in Slow Fashion. Due to the rapid changing nature of industry and its variety of consumer preferences, it is important to study the Slow Fashion theme with an online approach in order to obtain a global scale, as the offline approach is limited to geographic locations.

1.2 Objective and Research Questions

This thesis aims to delve into the influence that environmental concerns have on consumer behaviors through the study of the Slow Fashion¹ online community and on consumer motivation for a sustainable industry. The dissertation will therefore cover the practices, drivers and barriers of eco-conscious consumer communities, who aim to fight Fast Fashion companies in order to reduce the trend of overproduction currently in place, thereby preserving natural resources and protecting workers.

The netnographic approach was chosen as fittest methodology for the research, considering that the online communities under analysis are actively discussing the Slow Fashion movement. The derived research questions that ground the reasoning behind the selected topics which were addressed within this paper are as follows:

¹ The term Slow Fashion can be shortened to “SF” throughout this dissertation.

RQ1: What do cyber community' members perceive of slow fashion? What are the common behaviors?

The first research question addresses the definition that community members have of Slow Fashion. The goal is to collect data about the main values and behaviors of SF adopters.

RQ2: What barriers may prevent consumers from adopting the movement?

The second research question aims to explore the reasons that discourage online community members from adopting Slow Fashion's practices.

RQ3: What motivations do consumers have to engage in Slow Fashion? What are the advantages after adopting this lifestyle?

The last research question means to present the reasons behind the adoption of the lifestyle and the positive outcomes that adopters have experienced.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis splits into six different sections. It starts by defining the problem, describing the significance of the researched topic and presents the questions that the in-depth analysis purposes to respond. Then, it covers the existing studies related to sustainable fashion (definition, drivers and obstacles, practices and perceptions) and online communities. Afterwards, it presents the methodology selected, netnography, emphasizing the steps of data collection, the use of grounded theory and the consistency with the ethical standards. Subsequently, it includes a thematic analysis and the ethnographic themes identified (meaning, adoption and advantages). The next chapter provides the answers to the research questions and presents the main implications. Finally, the finishing chapter reveals the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for the next investigations that may be conducted.

2. Literature review

Reviewing previously done work in this field, this section explores the concept of Slow Fashion and what characterizes it. Such presents a theoretical foundation to establish a base for the empirical analysis.

2.1 Slow Fashion Movement

2.1.1 Definition and contextualization

The Slow movement is not an isolated action. The term was first introduced in the food industry in response to the growing popularity of the Fast Food lifestyle (Clark, 2008). This Slow trend promoted the pleasures of cooking and eating healthy food and endorsed the use of local and seasonal products, ultimately making people reconnect to their origins, supporting local farmers at the same time (Fletcher, 2010).

Similarly to the food sector, Fast Fashion constitutes the popularization of mass-production and standardization of clothes. On one hand, Fast Fashion companies follow an effective and efficient business strategy, linked to very well structured supply chain management. In this case, the definition of “efficient” corresponds to the overproduction and quick reaction to customer demand with enriched design and competitive prices. (Štefko & Steffek, 2018). On the other, however, it is also linked to extreme overtime work hours, intense time pressure, unhealthy labor conditions, workers forced to part from their families, harassment, depression and workers extremely underpaid on the companies’ foreign fabrics (Štefko & Steffek, 2018).

With the intention of maximization profits, garments of today are cheap, made of low-cost materials and of easy production processes (Fletcher, 2010). Fast fashion targets consumers with higher disposable income, by offering instant satisfaction of temporary identities through updated and trendy articles of clothing (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang & Chan, 2012). Agreeably, Tokatli (2008) reiterates that Fast Fashion is destroying the meaning of glamour, uniqueness and luxury by offering “*massclusivity*” and planned spontaneity to its consumers.

Massclusivity, created by Tokatli (2008), combines the terms “mass” and “exclusivity”. Today, the action of buying clothes is becoming normal, since garments are now widely abundant and available, with shops aiming to reach the masses by offering a sense of exclusivity (tasteful and rare). As an illustration, brands such as Mercedes and Ralph Lauren who originally positioned

themselves as high-end companies to capture niche markets within the most luxurious segments, have now begun to expand their target to the masses while still producing the same premium items.

Slow Fashion aims to bring sustainability, organic and fair trade to the world of fashion, one of the most polluting sectors in the globe, being responsible for water and energy overconsumption, CO2 emissions and waste producer (Pedersen & Gwozdz, 2014). Some of the current global system worst aspects may be mitigated if consumers adopt slow fashion's approach, by purchasing clothes made of eco-conscious materials, thus impacting the design, production and consumption of the industry (Nakano, 2009).

Slow and Fashion are not oxymoron concepts, but instead they constitute as a different approach that will lead towards the redefinition of fashion and thus an ecological future (Clark, 2008), discontinuing the practices used today, by changing the infrastructure and reducing the amount of resources spent (Fletcher, 2010). The goal is not to slow the supply chain down, it is supposed to force companies to create a sustainable process that will consist on design planning, production, sourcing and consumer education (Clark, 2008; Fletcher, 2010).

Johansson (2010) states that if every person bought clothes directly from the producer, each garment would have its own narrative and customers would build fewer yet deeper connections with their clothes. According to Holt (2009), Slow Fashion is for fashionistas what slow food is for gourmets, less in quantity but more in quality and with less environmental impact. Fletcher (2007) states that consumers need to change their mentalities into valuing quality instead of quantity. Agreeably, Štefko and Steffek (2018) defends that the Slow Fashion movement has emerged to reestablish the standard of quality, durability and long-term value, increasing the life span of garments and reducing the amount of waste discarded in landfills.

2.1.2 Drivers and Barriers

Though clothing has been classified as a basic human need, the choice of clothes is motivated by individuals' need for identity, expression and esteem (Max-Neef, 1992; Maslow, 1943). This has been identified within several ranges of age: the youth express themselves through style as an essential social tool, as for the older generations, clothing represents an important lifestyle product (Harris et al., 2016). Fast Fashion revolutionized the fashion industry's availability and affordability, with new lines introduced more times a year and with shorter life-span. As a

result, consumers are now valuing quantity over quality, especially amongst the younger generations, who prefer to buy more products at a lower cost rather than one upper quality item, but at a higher price. (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009).

According to Hiller Connell (2011) there are internal and external barriers when adopting a sustainable clothing consumption. The internal ones can be, for example, indifference towards the environment, lack of information about the effect of clothes overconsumption, demographic causes (age, geography and education). Regarding the external ones, the author noted that the sustainable clothing's price is an issue, as well as the lack of infrastructure.

However, the pressure made on businesses to incorporate eco-friendly, environmental, socially concerned and other processes into their strategy is at its highest, with consumers increased awareness and knowledge on environmental and social issues (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013). Indeed, the burst of social media platforms have positively contributed to the intensification of awareness amongst consumers (Štefko & Steffek, 2018).

Additionally, in a fast fashion led industry, retailers struggle to deliver superior garment quality while maintaining low costs, resorting to unethical practices (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013), which constitutes a big motivation for consumers when adopting slow fashion, who prefer to pay a premium demanding with that better conditions for the workers and prevent environment damages (Gam, Cao, Farr, & Heine, 2009; Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

2.1.3 Practices

Reusing, recycling and repurposing are the values of the economic model which has been progressively adopted by fashion. This model intends for the garments to be retained, reused and recycled efficiently, therefore preserving material resources in the system.

The process of reusing in fashion in the second-hand market is a circular principle of slowing down consumption and increase garment's lifespan (Machado, Almeida, Bollick & Bragagnolo, 2019). For instance, vintage is a way for the fashion market, among other markets, to legitimize the entry of used products into the manufacturing and distribution channels of new goods (Marzella, 2015). It instigates consumers to denounce the trend driven mass production fashion, opting to acquire less but more durable garments (Machado et al., 2019).

The circular principle in fashion seeks restorative and regenerative procedures that narrow, slow and close the resource and energy flows (Bocken, De Pauw, Bakker & van der Grinten, 2016). The holistic values of circular fashion facilitate the retention of greater value from the original garment through design, maintenance and long-term repair (Geissdoerfer, Savaget, Bocken, & Hultink, 2017). As an example of the circular principle in fashion is the second-hand market, as previously mentioned. By reselling and reusing a garment, consumers are slowing down fashion consumption and increase its lifespan (Machado et al., 2019). As another example, there is the cult of vintage fashion. The two practices have been increasing considerably, due to the growing consumer awareness (Beard, 2008).

Slow fashion is associated with anti-consumerist ideology of rejection, reduction and reuse. Despite the ecological drivers, these practices uncover a web of identity claims and responsibilities (Cherrier, 2009). The environmentally motivated choice discloses subjective individualistic needs such as independence, quality or value for money (H Cherrier & Black, 2008). Contrasting to the consumerism prevalent in western society, an increasing segment of consumers is now questioning their own contribution and impact on society as a whole diverging from capitalistic values (Beard, 2008).

2.1.4 Perceptions

Delay in adaptation – or even rejection – of sustainable-fashion behaviors may come from limited knowledge when making decisions and/or from scarce eco-conscious products available for purchase. Therefore, and even though the lack of concern and awareness towards slow fashion has been more and more mitigated, it is essential for consumers to be conscious of the concept in order to better embrace the movement.

In consumers' mind, according to (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2011), slow fashion means spending more in buying non-trendy clothes. Moreover, studies have shown that the criteria followed by consumers at the time of purchase are price, quality and style, whereas ethical concerns take second place (Joergens, 2006).

On the contrary, studies have shown that consumers take into consideration the ecological and social impact of their purchase (Dickson & Littrell, 1996; Jägel et al., 2012). According to Haytko and Thompson (1997), consumers make their purchase decisions based on their values, disregarding any social pressure towards fast consumption. An informed and aware consumer

is more likely to make the decision of purchasing a pricier but eco-conscious, versatile and with higher quality garment, rather than a cheaper yet pollutant fabric (Watson & Yan, 2013).

There are, however, a considerable amount of consumers that, despite having strong convictions towards eco-conscious consumption, have not yet adopted the slow fashion practices and are still struggling in translating feelings into actions (Carrigan & Attalla, 2001).

So far, previous studies have addressed the perceptions and designations of concepts, drivers and barriers related to the slowness of fashion. Also, most of them started by gathering consumers to conduct focus groups and interviews. With that in mind, and considering the importance of understanding consumers from a netnographic perspective, the goal of this thesis is to assess consumers interest in Slow Fashion, conducting research through online communities, aiming to capture their real feelings and opinions, on a natural context.

2.2 Online Communities

The current digital age has revolutionized the way people communicate. The chat rooms and forums have been replaced by social media domains. With the evolution of internet based on technology, the emergence of online communities was facilitated, where users could communicate and forge relationships (Rheingold, 1993).

According to Balasubramanian (2001), there are five conditions for the constitution of an online community: the accumulation of several different individuals; rational people; cyberspace interactions; social exchange process; a common goal, identity or interest between users. Additionally, Kim (2000) presented five motives for members to engage in online communities: clear purposes; flexible, small-scale premises; roles of the users; leading stands of community moderators; both online and offline events. Furthermore, Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo (2004) defend that the values of engaging in online communities rely on:

- *Purposive value*, meaning “*the value derived from accomplishing some pre-determined instrumental purpose (including giving and receiving information) through virtual community participation*” (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 244). Also, includes the completion of particular tasks, like problem solving, creating ideas, validating decisions or influencing others about a certain product or experience. This value focuses on utilitarian concerns.

- *Self-discovery* value implicates “*understanding and deepening salient aspects of one’s self through social interactions*” (Dholakia et al., 2004, p. 244). The authors refer two important aspects behind this value, both primarily involved and suggesting to one’s individual self: firstly, the importance of interacting with others, accessing social resources and helping to achieve targets for the future (McKenna and Bargh, 1999); secondly, these interactions enable individuals to create, outline and elaborate their own predilections, tastes and values. It concentrates on the inner insecurities.
- With the main goal of cyber communities of uniting people with similar interests, *maintaining interpersonal connectivity* suggests the social advantage that a person draws from creating and preserving contact with other people in the community. For example, social support, friendship and intimacy. Authors like McKenna & Bargh (1999) and Wellman & Gulia (1999) defend that when joining such online communities, many participants are mainly focused in dispelling their loneliness, finding individuals who think alike and receiving companionship/social support.
- *Social enhancement value* refers to the feeling of belonging, acceptance and approval by the community users. Members connect with cyber communities to interact, providing additional information in order to feel recognized and validated by their peers (Hars & Ou, 2002).
- *Entertainment value*, deriving from “*fun and relaxation through playing or otherwise interacting with others*”. McKenna and Bargh (1999) defend that some participants join virtual communities merely for the entertainment in exploring different characters and in solving online challenges.

Even though members possess different reasons to be involved in online communities, within those communities, members are also influenced by other users’ decisions and behaviors. According to Kelman (1958), these are the processes of influence that effect members’ conduct in cyber communities:

- *Compliance* occurs when an individual agrees with the views of legitimate members, not because the user believes in its content, but in hope to gather a favorable reaction and approval.
- *Identification* is associated with the feeling of acceptance, where the individual establishes or maintains a satisfactory relationship to another user or a group. It is

different from the *compliance* process of influence, since the individual actually believes in the responses adopted, however its content is considered to be irrelevant.

- *Internalization* comes from the acceptance of a group's point of view by an individual, as it coincides with his/her own principles and values.

Due to the fact that the fashion sector produces 10% of all humanity's carbon emissions, the industry has been subject of wide discussions throughout the online world (in online groups, blogs, social media platforms). The increasing levels of awareness are being mirrored online, with more people sharing their insights, behaviors and views regarding Slow Fashion (Cervellon & Wernerfelt, 2012). According to Thomassey and Zeng (2018), in the fashion world, the opinions of a blogger are considered as high relevance, since they are seen as influencers that can create a shift in consumer's minds and actions. In addition, Instagram, one of the leading social media domains amongst the younger generations, is very important since it can influence the new generations' consumption habits and purchases.

2.2.1 Slow Fashion

The variety of user-knowledge among the online spaces – from learners to early adopters –, as well as the diversity of backgrounds and cultures found, contributes to the richness of information attained when compared to studies conducted in offline fields (Kozinets, 2002). Even though each member may express different perspectives regarding slow fashion – in terms of definition, practices, perceptions, motivations and barriers – the outcome of the present study depends on the information acquired and the interactions of the members of virtual communities (Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006).

Technology, innovation and sustainability are the major drivers in today's fashion industry. The industry's dynamics are changing vividly, forcing fashion brands to adjust and arrange new business models so that corporations can reach a more challenging, aware and digitized consumer. As an example, Instagram, one of the most popular social media platforms amongst younger generations, is revolutionizing consumer's clothing choices and purchases, as well as the brand's choice in terms of channels of promotion and sale. Its personalized features enable customers to visualize content, through pictures and videos, and make instant purchases, harmonizing the interaction of fashion companies with their clients (Moatti & Abecassis-Moedas, 2018).

Due to the yet limited stream of studies regarding Slow Fashion, this dissertation aims to broaden the existent academic literature. So far, previous studies have been more focused on offline environments, making this field an interesting one to study among online communities.

3. Methodology

This section addresses the chosen methods that were used in the researcher's demand to answer to the research questions. The criteria for the scope of online communities researched and the data collection procedure are also presented in detail.

3.1 Introduction to Netnography

A netnographic research was chosen to collect data from Slow Fashion online communities, for the purpose of having a better understanding of the perceptions and behaviors associated with it. Netnography can be described as a qualitative research approach that studies the interactions within the online community members.

The method was coined by Robert Kozinets who described it as "*an online marketing research technique for providing consumer insights*" (2002, p. 61). The source of information that is essentially based upon the observation of textual dialogues or commentaries derives from consumers inserted in groups, brought together due to a shared interest, habit, diversion, passion for something, like a product or a service (Kozinets, 2002). Valuable information about perceptions, values, behaviors and lifestyle of members from online communities can be acquired through data collected.

Due to the digital age currently in place, consumers face themselves constantly cyber connected, through several platforms, making the younger generations more prompt to express their thoughts and experiences (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018). Hence, since 2008, netnography has become more relevant than ever (Rokka, 2010), with a growing trend of netnography articles being published in the marketing field, being therefore recognized as a renowned qualitative method (Heinonen & Medberg 2018).

In contrast to focus groups and personal interviews, the netnographic approach is more flexible and adaptable, since it allows the researcher to observe community members' everyday lives (Giesler & Pohlmann, 2003), as well as unobtrusive and naturalistic, meaning that the insights are being taken from consumers on regular circumstances, instead of the artificial settings arranged by the host. This method will help the researcher to better understand the expressions, thoughts and motivations regarding the topic, without any artificial effects surrounding them. Also, online data is often plentiful and easy to obtain (Kozinets 2002). Netnography is considered to be less time consuming, easier to collect information and cheaper than the

traditional ways of ethnography (Kozinets, 2002). In addition, the researcher may use this method alone or use a combination of online and offline approaches, if he considers it relevant to use offline social conducts (Costello et al. 2017).

Using a netnographic approach can be an ideal tool to capture consumer involvement in Slow Fashion, providing Fashion companies with executive conclusions not only in how to adapt to consumer values, but also in how to help them increase their profitability by adjusting their strategies and business models.

Six steps are listed as fundamental when leading a netnographic research if one wants to have it be successful. Said list is captured within the section.

3.2 Research Planning

Firstly, considering the qualitative nature of netnography, it is important to outline the study's research questions. Then, search queries like "*Conscious Fashion*", "*Eco-friendly Fashion*" and "*Slow Fashion movement*" were explored on Google and social networks, where Instagram, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, Twitter and Pinterest were consulted, so that Slow Fashion's virtual communities could be identified. By analyzing a wide range of social networks and media platforms, it is possible to find several perceptions and reflections on some issues of consumer lifestyle. This is a reliable source of data since it reduces the risk of analyzing biased results. Prior assessment of the slow fashion online presence is critical for the researcher to gain deeper knowledge of each interaction, its community and individual members. Throughout the study and following Kozinets' recommendations (2015), the selected communities were appropriate, dynamic, important, interactive, insightful and data-intensive.

As environmental awareness grows, Slow Fashion has become a "hot topic" due to its ability to mitigate waste generation, therefore shaping what is to be the future of the fashion industry. With that, several online communities were selected on the following domains that were finally selected, proving to be reliable sources of insight: Reddit, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. Twitter and Pinterest interactions were considered too short in substance (with extreme use of tags and symbols) and therefore eliminated from data set.

3.3 Entrée

Prior to the data collection process and following Kozinets (2002) references, there are significant features of the chosen online communities one should be aware of. YouTube, Reddit, Instagram and Facebook were the leading platforms selected to conduct research. In this particular case of Slow Fashion, community members resort to these online spaces to educate themselves or to obtain inspiration from established knowledgeable communities. Moreover, these platforms are considered the best domains by users due to the fast and honest reply system and rich visuals. Visual content is believed to be very important in fashion and that was considered upon the selection of the communities.

In YouTube's communities, interactions can go beyond one-sided video watching as creator-subscriber contact is generated through feedback from subscribers in comments and Questions&Answers-themed videos, for example. The following YouTube channels were selected due to the great quantity of commentaries and descriptiveness of the messages, as these cover individuals' experiences with the SF adoption process and report the benefits of struggles associated with such adoption:

- Alyssa Beltempo provides environmental fashion recommendations on how to be wiser when shopping, on discovering personal style and on embracing slow fashion in order to attain a closet that reflects the owner's awareness. On her YouTube channel, started in 2011, which surpassed this year the 86K subscribers mark, Alyssa has a playlist of videos named "Shop Your Closet", where she encourages viewers to rediscover and reuse garments lost in their closets, aiming to fight the urge of buying unnecessarily.
- My Green Closet, a YouTube channel started in 2011 by Erin with over 75K subscribers now, focuses on slow fashion, living a more conscious life and building an eco-friendly and ethical wardrobe, by shopping less yet more mindfully. Erin has since created a blog, an eBook and a Facebook group to discuss how to quit fast fashion.
- Use Less, created in 2011 by Signe, with over 185K subscribers, aims to inspire woman to buy in a more responsible way. Signe is a 29 year-old sustainable fashion and lifestyle blogger and youtuber from the Southern Part of Denmark that has since created a Facebook group where she posts news about eco-friendly brands and sustainable outfits.

- Jean Bookishthoughts, created in 2012, was also analyzed. Even though the content creator shares mostly her favorite books and authors, she also publishes the eco-conscious second-hand purchases she makes. With this in mind, Jean Bookishthoughts' YouTube channel was considered important due to the distinct audience it attracts, contributing to the dataset enrichment.

Due to its high levels of engagement to the visual content and ongoing interactions between members, the Instagram account 'fash_rev' was analyzed. This account was created by the non-profit global movement named Fashion Revolution on April 2013 as an instant reaction to the collapse of a garment factory building named the Rana Plaza, in Bangladesh. The incident could have been avoided since large structural cracks had been found in the building the day before the crash. Stores on the lower floors closed immediately upon the issued warnings; however garment factories' owners operating in the upper floors ignored them. As a result of management pressure, from the 3638 garment workers who were not allowed to leave, 2500 were injured and 1138 were killed, turning it into one the largest industrial disasters in history. Since then, Fashion Revolution, a worldwide platform that allows the community to question and share opinions aiming to increase awareness, has been fighting for a secure, clean, fair, transparent and accountable fashion system. It is now operating in more than 100 countries. With 429K followers and 2589 posts, fash_rev provides valuable information and doubt clarification on Slow Fashion, encouraging the engagement to the movement.

The online community named <r/ethicalfashion> present on Reddit, where users share the most trustworthy eco-conscious brands, talk about the conversion process of Slow Fashion (addressing drivers, struggles and attitudes), clarify specific or general doubts and give feedback on certain behaviors, was analyzed. Even though the community is only composed by 17K members, it offers interesting results that complement the research due to the particularity and intensity of the users' communications. Agreeably and following Kozinets' (2002) thoughts, valuable knowledge may be gathered from a small number of interactions if it possesses great descriptive value and if it is subject to substantial detailed and analytical interpretation.

Lastly, the Facebook group selected for the analysis was "Sustainable Fashion – Eco Fashion | Slow Fashion | Upcycle | Recycle". It started in December 2017, with two administrators and 6,063 members. To measure the level of interest of potential members to join the group, three questions are asked and then evaluated. Thus, it is possible to exclude people who are not really

committed to contributing on relevant topics. Aggressive or commercial posts are removed by the moderators and the original poster is automatically excluded from the group, ensuring that all posts are related to sustainable fashion, respectful and free of unnecessary advertising. Also, it reduces the possibility of biases from a non-illustrative sample.

3.4 Data Collection

According to Kozinets (2002), the researcher has at least two possible methods when collecting data from online community: the first one is copying directly the content created by the users and the second one is registering the comments, its users, connections and overall significance.

The netnographic methodology relies on archival data, field notes data and elicited data (Kozinets et al., 2014). Archival data can be defined as any material that the researcher finds directly from the internet without being involved with its expression in any way or form, since it represents a portrait of the community prior to the research (Kozinets et al., 2014). Field notes constitute the researchers' notes on unanticipated findings for the purpose of research recording, reflection and analysis. These should document the researcher's process from being a stranger to an insider cultural member (Kozinets et al., 2014). Researchers should start to take field notes for reflection as soon as possible in the research process in order to capture in moment impressions and experiences, which illustrate the introspective analysis (Kozinets et al., 2014). Elicited data is deliberately co-created by the researcher along with members of the online media community through social interactions (Kozinets et al., 2014).

3.4.1 Collection of Archival Data

Throughout a period of 3 months, starting in February 2020 to May 2020, around 50 postings were chosen for the present study, in order to keep the amount of information in a manageable scope. The posts chosen were in written (commentaries) or visual format, i.e. pictures and video. In total, over 250 comments were carefully read and analyzed, considering their significance to the subject. The content selected from the communities, that allowed a better understanding of the members and their interactions, was posted between 2013 and 2020. The most valuable posts were those where members revealed not only logic behind their reasoning, but also deeper emotions in their thoughts when explaining certain topics. In addition, understanding the data during its collection has simplified the process of its analysis. Comments containing adds, self-promotions or tags were cut out from the study for not being significant

for the research. On Reddit, posts linked to the research questions were analyzed, for example “*A more ethical approach to fashion*”, “*What are the biggest challenges living the sustainable fashion life?*”, “*Can we talk about Fast Fashion?*” or “*New to Ethical Fashion. Advices?*”. In the Facebook group, the same strategy as in Reddit was followed, and posts such “*When did you first realize that you were overconsuming?*” or “*Is it even possible to be a 100% Slow Fashion user?*”. Furthermore, the following YouTube videos were examined:

- 1) “*It’s Time to QUIT FAST FASHION*” by My Green Closet with 9552 views and 37 comments;
- 2) “*Slow Fashion Mistakes and How To Avoid Them | Easy Tips & Tricks*” by Alyssa Beltempo with 35209 and 248 comments;
- 3) “*Quitting Fast Fashion | how I transitioned to a sustainable wardrobe without \$\$\$ & why*” by Sedona Christina, with 219770 views and 517 comments;
- 4) “*Changing My Relationship with Fast Fashion | Sustainable living*” by Jean Bookishthoughts, with 4457 views and 46 comments;
- 5) “*How to shop GREENWASHING Brands*” by My Green Closet, with 17847 views and 107 comments.

An in-depth comprehension of the messages of cyber communities can certainly provide companies with valuable data so they can adapt and redesign their strategies according to the values and perceptions of their customers. Besides that, it can offer additional information to individuals with interest in the topic, given the high volume of posts related to behaviors, actions and fast fashion substitutes.

3.4.2 Ensuring Ethical Standards

Despite its unobtrusive and observational nature, ethical procedures were followed when conducting the netnographic study. There are four ethical procedures recommended by Kozinets (2002) that the researcher should follow: (1) guarantee full disclosure of the researcher’s presence, affiliations and intentions; (2) assure privacy and confidentiality of the members of the community under analysis; (3) seek and include feedback from those members; (4) attain informed authorization from members to incorporate quotations in the study.

Bearing this in mind, the researcher presented herself to the online communities, explaining the goal of the study and methodology being used. The author contacted the administrators of

“Sustainable Fashion – Eco Fashion | Slow Fashion | Upcycle | Recycle” and [ethicalfashion](#) and provided an agreement form, so it would be possible to include quotations. The chosen cyber communities were either public or semi-private. However, all user’s names or nicknames were kept anonymous and all the data collected was saved in a password-protected computer. Nevertheless, it was assured that all the gathered insights from comments, interactions or interviews would only be used for this study.

3.4.3 Member Checks

Member checks consist of the presentation by the author of the final results with the members of the community under study in order to collect the reactions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Kozinets, 2002). According to Kozinets (2002), this procedure is considered to be very important because it can lead to error checking or to more specific insights of consumers’ meanings.

With that in mind, three member checks were made. First participant was the administrator of the YouTube channel ‘My Green Closet’, who was contacted via email, the second was one of the moderators of the Reddit community [ethicalfashion](#), contacted through the platform’s chat, and finally, the third was one of the admins from the Facebook group “Sustainable Fashion – Eco Fashion | Slow Fashion | Upcycle | Recycle”, who was contacted via Facebook’s chat. Additionally, interactions were made with communities by asking relevant questions through posts, thus triggering three more respondents who answered the queries in the commentary section. This procedure helped clarifying some debatable aspects identified throughout the research.

3.5 Research Representation and Analysis

The author used an inductive research method resorting to grounded theory, a “*general method of comparative analysis*” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1), to examine the selected data. The “*raw data*” collected was carefully converted into codes, grouped into categories and consequently inserted in themes (Spiggle, 1994).

According to Kozinets Dolbec and Earley (2014) the researcher may choose to use softwares (e.g. ATLAS.ti or NVivo) to serve assistance in coding, searching, classifying and organizing data instead of doing it manually. However, Kozinets et al. (2014) alerts that the information available online often contains large quantities of noise, spam or just unusable material. With

that in consideration and in order to avoid an arbitrary selection of data and to have a better understanding of the culture embedded, manual coding was the selected method for the present study.

After the data was downloaded, discussion topics were coded, which were clustered into different categories. Subsequently, the categories were grouped into themes so that theories could be created. Finally, code discussions were held among colleagues to gather diverse viewpoints, ensuring at the same time that the codes, categories and themes were designated accurately. Consequently, a thematic network was developed (present in appendix 9.1).

4. Empirical Analysis: Ethnographic Themes

The present section carefully focuses on the data collected from the qualitative netnographic study, using Grounded Theory. It will focus on the central theme – Slow Fashion Lifestyle – and its sub-themes of Meaning, Adoption and Advantages. Members' awareness throughout online communities will be illustrated by the data extracted, which will be crucial to understand their actions and decisions when engaging in Slow Fashion.

4.1 Slow Fashion Meaning

The first theme to emerge throughout research was Slow Fashion Meaning, a result of the will expressed by cyber communities to shop more consciously. This theme explores three dimensions interrelated: what users perceive of slow fashion, their values and behaviors. From the data collected, it is possible to state that community members associate slow fashion principles with terms such as “*lifestyle*”, “*movement*”, “*journey*”, “*sustainable*”, “*circular economy*”, “*second-hand market*”, “*vintage*”.

As already mentioned, the slow fashion movement appeared as a result to the embedded fast approach that took place in society. Joining the slow fashion lifestyle is commonly perceived as a passage of progressively purchasing eco-conscious and sustainable clothes. Member (1) complained about the time-consuming and expensive process of transitioning to a slow fashion adoption practice. Moreover, member (2) makes a similar claim, worrying about the social pressure and influence by fast fashion influencer's which can lead to a bigger temptation to buy fast-fashion and give up on sustainable options. Members reinforce the importance of thinking that small steps lead to great impact, appealing to the perseverance of other members, which is in line with academic research on the long way to go to achieve the transformation of society.

According to Kozinets (1999), cyber communities actively contribute towards member's awareness and education on the topic, by engaging in discussions that advise and influence other users about products/services and brands. Slow fashion movement appeals to a mindful and conscious way of shopping and to move away from excessive consumption habits. There are 6 guiding principles of Slow Fashion that heavily influence the behaviors towards the industry sustainability. The community does follow these principles as they end up shaping their daily actions and behaviors. Defined by Alyssa Beltempo (Beltempo, 2019), they are:

1. Quality over quantity: *“appreciate quality and invest in it – whether secondhand or new, well-made items are a better investment as they last for many seasons”*;
2. Versatility: *“choose items that will serve multiple occasions, seasons and outfit combos”*;
3. Functionality & Fit: *“invest in stylish pieces that fit your body well, and are comfortable”*;
4. Personal Style: *“become intimate and confident with your personal style to make purchases that reflect you”*;
5. Repurpose: *“get creative with giving your items a second life – mend, patch, alter, or pass on to someone special”*;
6. Need vs Want: *“always know what you’re missing in your closet so that your purchases are deliberate”*.

Agreeably with Beltempo’s principles (2019), members believe that the process of transition may be *“slow”*, however adopters should focus on finding the styles, colors, and types of clothing that they actually want or need, then clean up their closets. Identify what clothing is wearing out fastest, or that will need replacement, and shop around to find an ethical and/or organic replacement. Users underline that there is more planning and info-gathering behind every purchase. Member (3) shared his efforts on reducing his wardrobe size, even though he sometimes feels attached to a need of keeping enough variety in his items. Relating to that, member checks reiterate that it is essential for people to appreciate what they already own instead of always keeping an eye out for something better, which turns up being a never ending quest. The insights collected from cyber communities concur with the academic research that ethical fashion incorporates the values of quality, durability and ecological, instead of quantity (Štefko & Steffek, 2018).

Even though the desire to join the Slow Fashion movement is due to the growing consumer awareness regarding the environment, there are a large number of complex issues related to the fashion system, which require consumers to reflect on them. Members point out how crucial it is to have their priorities straight, as finding garments that check all the requirements is extremely difficult, they need to weigh their needs and wants.

Member (4) builds on that, suggesting the community to define priorities according to: *“1. The country’s climate; 2. The job (if your profession requires you to present yourself with a fashion-forward image); 3. The tastes (if you’re a minimalist or extravagant kind of person); 4. Wealth;*

5. *One's attitude towards repetition*". Member (5) agrees with this perspective, even though there is a remark that climate-constraints sometimes have her constantly thinking about new blouse options.

The stated values shared by slow fashion advocates are reflected in their practices which are environmental and ethically driven. Shopping second hand is always preferred as opposed to acquire new eco-conscious clothes. Additionally, members believe that by buying in second-hand markets, consumers are making a statement of disagreement with how fashion companies are conducting their businesses. Users often call on others to show that they do not tolerate slavery and slave labor by taking responsibility for what they buy and how they buy it. Member (6) comments in accordance *"The bottom line is, why support an industry that causes pain/suffering in any way, when you have a simple choice to not do so? It's not that hard to avoid it if you buy second hand clothes"*.

Accordingly, the findings go in hand with the conclusions from Shaw and Newholm (2002). Like eco-friendly simplifiers, slow fashion adopters opt to purchase in second-hand markets, or to make new clothes out of old ones they possess, minimize consumption as low as possible or even cut completely and donate worn out clothes in order to reduce waste.

4.2 Slow Fashion Adoption

Several online discussions on barriers and motivations leading to the adoption of lifestyle-related values and behaviors were found, leading to the following theme, Slow Fashion Adoption.

The author found several motivations that lead to the engagement of SF. Some members started by witnessing their parents who were brought up with anti-consumer values of reducing, second-hand shopping and who were used to take their clothes and turn them into up-to-date clothing. A pattern was also identified in the analyzed comments where users mentioned that human rights and sustainability are the core motivators that make consumers so willing to adhere to Slow Fashion.

There has been an increased willingness to modify the fashion industry by cyber communities, since this sector is among the most harmful. Members share their concerns, explaining that the main reasons behind the movement adoption were the poor laboring conditions that the overseas fast fashion workers are enforced to endure. Users refuse to be associated with any form of

slavery and reject all sorts of association to fashion brands that overlook human rights to increase profits, reinforcing their humanitarian concerns. Member (7) admits that *“I stopped buying fast fashion garments because of the unfairly payments that make it impossible for workers to make a living. My clothes aren't worth that much”*.

Aside from social issues, the community also condemns the fashion sector for the environmental harm created. Members acknowledge that the industry is amongst the world's largest water consumers, CO₂ emitters and waste creators. They identified this sector as unresponsive, with the lack of respect and accountability towards the environment. Many adopted SF behaviors after having children, worrying about how their current actions would influence the welfare of future generations, hoping that by leading by example, their children would be more aware and therefore, make better choices.

Several members claim that the desire to conserve and reduce useless shopping came from their kindergarten classes and basic education about the environment, saying they were shocked after being taught about millions and millions of used clothes rotting in landfills and dumps.

Users stress that privilege (of time, money, accessibility) seems to be a requirement in order to fully adopt this lifestyle. It constitutes as an obstacle when attempting to join the movement. Members believe that one must possess financial resources to afford the most sustainable clothes and that inevitably SF adopters of lower means will eventually give into fast fashion since often low-waste items cost two to four times more than the wasteful alternatives. It should also be mentioned that it is troublesome to find a wide array of sizes when shopping for clothes and shoes in second-hand shops/markets, which adds another obstacle to the fact that eco-friendly materials and low-waste clothing are not affordable to those with less disposable income.

Users characterize the lack of accessibility and availability in shops as another obstacle to adopt the lifestyle, especially since amongst online communities, shopping online is discouraged due its carbon footprint and packaging waste. Member (8) comments that it can be very complicated to find suitable outfits since *“I'm a tricky size (very short, the yet big hips and little feet), which can make thrifting difficult, and kids' sections don't really suit someone in their mid-30s. Also, going into a second-hand store with stroller is not an stress-free task, as the corridors tend to be quite small. When I go to Zara, it takes less than one hour to find everything I need. But in thrift shops, one hour is spent just looking for something that I would wear, and another looking*

for the right size. I would just order online but... carbon footprint". Member checks have also shown that consumers feel they are entitled to better and unique clothing, in all sizes available in second-hand markets, that perfects their unique sense of personal style, instead of the fast fashion looks that are all identical.

Those who have already embraced the SF lifestyle also complain about the barriers faced while trying to stay true to the ideals. Users declare that it is difficult to follow SF completely throughout times of crisis or misfortunes. One member confessed that during the crisis of 2008, it was easier for her to buy the clothes she needed by taking advantage of good deals from fast fashion companies. Generally, members reveal how during times of need, they prefer to save money even if it means risking the what they have done so far. Member checks confirmed this claims. A slow fashion mother mentioned how she did not possess the economic means to buy from sustainable brands and, at the same time, refused to buy second-hand clothes for her newborn son.

Some members state to feel some temptation and social pressure while being SF and declare that these feelings can be an *"emotional burden"*. They confess that the slow fashion lifestyle can at times become mentally tiring, feeling like they're being tested. Users admit that it takes too much effort, and that it requires a lot of motivation, perseverance and endurance.

Additionally, members complain about the lack of cooperation, going from government policies, manufacturers and companies to family and friends, and that sometimes being SF can cause tension and conflict with them. Member (9) discloses *"It is very frustrating to have arguments with some friends of mine. They proudly state to take advantage of all the low prices from Zara or Pull & Bear, because if it was really that of a big deal, regulations would exist"*. In fact, the conducts of ethical fashion consumption have been linked to consumers' sense of self-identity while, at the same time, setting themselves apart from others (Black & Cherrier, 2010).

4.3 Slow Fashion Advantages

Users often share with cyber communities the positive feelings felt since joining the Slow Fashion movement. Besides sharing their expected advantages that resulted from the lifestyle, members also discuss the unforeseen ones, giving rise to the third and last theme: Slow Fashion Advantages.

Members claim that regarding the expected advantages, they experienced positive feelings after starting their journey, such as “*pride*”, “*sense of community*”, “*happiness*”, “*triumph*” and “*empowerment*”. Additionally, members also highlight the development of other skills, such as manual skills, since they learn how to sew to make and transform their clothes, in order to avoid buying new ones. Members enjoy and feel encouraged when they start to create and wear their own clothes. Other advantage recognized by adopters is the reduction of clothe waste. Members confess that prior to the adoption, they would buy and throw away/donate lots of clothes.

Regarding the unexpected perks, members recognize the improvement of personal skills, like communication skills. They mention that it can be hard to address the topic of overconsumption and spread the ideas and behaviors of fast fashion without looking “*preachy*”. Resistance and perseverance were also mentioned as members find themselves tempted by nice and cheap clothes. Furthermore, critical thinking was stated as SF adopters start to evaluate which materials are good or bad for the environment, and what they can do with their outdated clothes to turn them into wearable outfits.

Finding people with the same ideals and behaviors was also an unpredictable benefit identified. Members state that online communities can bring up one’s spirit, since they do not have to shake away the feelings of hopelessness alone. Members claim to feel happy and less alone when they connect with like-minded people. It was common to observe supportive interactions with users who shared frustrations and negative thoughts, reinforcing values and congratulating their ability to stay focused on the goal.

Despite the common belief that Slow Fashion lifestyle is more expensive, members surprisingly claim that on the long run they actually manage to save money. Although members agree that most eco-brands are more expensive, this ultimately forces them to refrain from impulsive shopping. And when an item is absolutely necessary, some SF adopters choose to buy in second-hand markets, thus saving money. Those who prefer to buy first-hand end up spending more, but still agree that in the long run they save up.

Lastly, member checks revealed positive reactions from non-slow fashion adopters as another unanticipated advantage. One member claimed that, even though most of his friends and family did not join the movement, which he confesses to be very frustrating, they applauded him for his staying true to his values and encouraged him to pursue his beliefs.

To sum up, the better understanding of online communities was possible due to the netnographic research conducted. Several valuable insights were gathered, namely the meanings and values, the drivers and barriers and the advantages of the eco-conscious fashion consumers. The level of awareness has been rising at a very rapid rhythm, with more people asking for change, making corporations bound to adapt to these requests. In the following section, managerial and theoretical conclusions were drawn, based on the insights collected.

5. Conclusions and Implications

This segment aims to close the study and disclose the main theoretical managerial implications, by responding to the research questions proposed in the initial chapter.

Naturalistic by orientation, Netnography proved to be the best method to study the online communities, being less obtrusive and captures a richer, more honest and culturally diverse context. Several cyber communities (such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Reddit) were chosen for the investigation, thus providing a wider view of the online interactions regarding the topic of slow fashion. Based on the online insights collected, the number of consumers changing their behaviors and adopting the slow fashion movement, in order to reduce their environmental, is growing. Moreover, member checks revealed valuable to clarify doubts and expand knowledge regarding some of the controversial topics identified. Based on these findings, conclusions and answers to the research questions have been drawn.

RQ1: What do cyber community' members perceive of slow fashion? What are the common behaviors?

Findings demonstrated a diversity of insights stating different definitions of Slow Fashion, being however consistently associated with terms such as “*movement*”, “*lifestyle*”, “*journey*”, “*sustainable*”, “*circular economy*”, “*second-hand market*” and “*vintage*”. Adopters act and consume in accordance with the 6 SF principles summarized by Alissa Beltempo (2019), who aimed to portrait the behaviors one adopts when joining the movement. Thus, ethical shoppers value quality over quantity, opt for clothes that serve multiple occasions and seasons, invest in stylish garments that will fit them well and comfortably, make smarter purchases that truly reflects them, do not throw their clothes away, but instead either mend, patch, alter or pass on/sell to someone, and prioritize their needs instead of their desires.

Slow fashion adopters attempt, as much as possible and more than anything, abstain from acquiring new products. However, if it is unavoidable, buying second-hand, one for one exchange, upcycle garments or renting are the chosen practices.

RQ2: What barriers may prevent consumers from adopting the movement?

Concerning the obstacles, it is believed that privilege (money and accessibility) is a requirement for the adoption of SF lifestyle. Also, due to the amount of time and effort consumers put into

it (in part because of the lack of options available), joining the SF movement is considered to be very exhausting.

Additionally, members stress how frustrating it can be to stay one hundred percent dedicated to SF if their needs are not always satisfied (e.g. thrift shops and/or eco-friendly clothing stores often fail to provide plus size clothes, shoes and underwear). Further, they complain about the lack of support and cooperation they get from their inner circle (family members and friends).

RQ3: What motivations do consumers have to engage in Slow Fashion? What are the advantages after adopting this lifestyle?

The most common reasons that motivate consumers to adopt SF were identified. Online users mentioned sustainability and human rights as the underlying drivers, followed by shocking documentaries that were watched, ethical behaviors adopted by close family members, climate change and pollution increase witnessed throughout the last years.

The advantages that arose after the adoption of the lifestyle, these can be divided into the expected and the unpredicted ones. Regarding the anticipated advantages, these include positive feelings (of “*personal pride*”, “*happiness*”, “*empowerment*” and “*satisfaction*”), reduction of clothe waste and development of other skills (like manual, for sewing garments).

A sense of community and belonging on behalf of ethical fashion adopters and positive reactions from non-slow fashion adopters were identified as feelings that arose unpredictably, as well as the unexpected money savings.

To sum up, the Slow Fashion lifestyle is a growing trend with more consumers putting a bigger effort into buying consciously. However, governments, legislators, and manufactures are indicted by online communities as the key entities currently stifling true change in this paradigm.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Even though authors like Clark (2008) and Fletcher (2010) have already provided designations on the topic of Slow Fashion, or authors such as Lundblad & Davies (2016) and Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik (2015) have previously studied the values and drivers behind eco-conscious fashion consumption, and others have elaborated about the obstacles and challenges faced

(Harris et al., 2016), they did not consider the collection of data through observation and exploration of online communities.

Also, there is limited academic research focusing on SF movement as a lifestyle (such as common practices, behaviors or thoughts) from the adopters' perspective. The notion of SF appeared to better designate the movement against mass-production and standardization of clothes, adopted by consumers whose goal was to reconnect with eco-conscious and differentiated sense of style. Therefore, this dissertation aims to distinguish itself by considering an extensive variety of fashion overconsumption cutback behaviors (that go beyond not buying and/or second-hand buying), perceptions and feelings of consumers.

According to the results of the dissertation, the drivers to join the movement may be explained by the willingness of potential adopters to be responsible. Nevertheless the high complexity of the subject might hamper the process of adopting Slow Fashion. The thesis' findings demonstrate the expressions of online consumers among certain online communities.

Today, as individuals are more likely to be well-informed and to offer useful data about their purchasing patterns and manners, the knowledge acquired in online groups can be very rich. Besides, the motivation of users to get involved in cyber communities fosters deep interactions between members, which results in extensive comments and thoughts around a particular subject. Therefore, the online communities are progressively affecting consumers' actions and influencing them to embrace new products. Since the Slow Fashion movement is a recent one, it would be possible to assume that an eager consumer today may have valuable knowledge to provide for an unaware consumer tomorrow. On the other hand, as Kozinets (2002) states, consumers can also express on online channels their discontentment or disappointment towards a product or a service, which constitutes as an useful tool for marketers.

The managerial implications that are presented below constitute as useful insights drawn from the analysis of the selected online communities.

5.2 Managerial Implications

From the extensive review of the SF virtual communities, management implications for governments and corporations were drawn.

The study revealed that the SF customer segment is not easily fooled by businesses' commercial promotions. Users believe that large companies often use marketing campaigns to manipulate their customers into thinking that they are more ecologically conscious and responsible than they actually are. Certainly, SF adopters frequently use online communities to protest the way certain companies take advantage of ecological issues only to sell more and thereby increase their revenues. Since the SF movement focuses on changing fashion consumption practices and purchasing mentalities to more sustainable habits, social marketing is more adequate to promote ethical practices and to target the problem of fast fashion generation.

Social marketing aims to raise awareness over a given problem or cause, persuading an audience to modify their harmful behaviors (Huhn, 2019). Indeed, changing consumer behaviors is at the core of sustainability. (McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). Following McKenzie-Mohr's statements on sustainability, there are two types of barriers that may hinder a consumer from changing his/her behaviors: internal and external. Internal barriers result from a lack of knowledge about how to carry out an activity (e.g. recycling) and external barriers such as structural changes needed to make behaviors more convenient (e.g. increasing the number of thrift shops and its accessibility).

Huhn (2019) states that social marketing aims to modify certain behaviors of a society, not to benefit a brand directly, unlike commercial marketing. It is most frequently executed by non-profitable organizations, charities or companies from the public sectors. Social marketing has proven to be a successful tool in educating consumers and creating positive impact (e.g. campaigns on recycling practices) (Kotler & Lee, 2008).

In this perspective, social marketing should play an essential role in educating society about the negative impacts of over-consumption of fabrics, addressing the issues of pollution, poor laboring conditions for workers and abuse of developing countries by fast fashion corporations. In addition, campaigns could increase acceptance of certain overlooked practices and contribute to the elimination of the stigma associated with second-hand clothing. They could also highlight the advantages of re-using clothes, such as turning existing garments into a valuable item.

So far, some efforts have been done by environmental organizations, like Greenpeace and WWF², to increase awareness. However, eye-opening campaigns could be set up to raise

² World Wildlife Fund – number one organization in nature conservation and endangered species.

consumers' awareness of the impact of their behavior. One cannot question the influence held by green organizations when it comes to tarnishing big multinationals' reputation. That exerts pressure on the second party to change their production methods. For example, Greenpeace Detox My Fashion campaign, aiming to stop corporations from contaminating rivers and oceans with toxic substances used in their production (Appendix 9.2). Greenpeace, by gathering signed petitions and by creating a social media movement against companies that refused to decrease their toxic chemical levels, managed to get 80 companies, which represent 15% of all global clothing production, fully committed in eliminating all dangerous chemicals from their supply chain by the year of 2020. As another example, Greenpeace made a campaign targeting luxury brands like Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, Versace, Hermes, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton and Marc Jacobs, claiming to have found traces of extremely water polluting chemicals in children's clothing and shoes. Greenpeace activists raised a banner at the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II (Appendix 9.3) during Fashion Week in Milan, with the words "Beautiful Fashion, Ugly Lies" and "The King is Naked"³ in it.

The education received by their parents, grandparents and teachers proves to be of extreme importance, as the results have shown that slow fashion adopters are strongly influenced by education. Fast Fashion education programs should be implemented in schools, universities and companies. School, for example, could include informational documentaries during classes on the harmful and extreme conditions in which workers find themselves or about what happens to the clothes when individuals throw them away. These initiatives would make individuals wonder where their clothes come from, who made them, in what environment they have been created and what happens to them when they are sent away.

In addition, to increase society's adoption to sustainable practices, further development of government policies is required (Ilić & Nikolić, 2016) and, as such, strict policies should be implemented. First, textile landfilling or incineration are practices that should be taxed, using a PAYT⁴ system. Thus, instead of destroying unsold items, high-end fashion brands would be forced to adopt substitutes to landfilling and incineration. Legislation should force corporations into responsible behaviors like the eco-design and safe elimination of their products.

³ "The King is naked" refers to a short tale named "The Emperor's New Clothes", written by Hans Christian Andersen.

⁴ Pay-as-you-throw, meaning a pricing model based on usage for disposing waste. It is charged a rate based on how much waste is presented for collection to the municipality or local authority.

Additionally, local municipalities ought to ensure that clothing donation facilities are of easy access to all.

Social marketing campaigns must instruct consumers on the importance of buying second-hand, reusing clothes and, above all, avoiding overconsumption. These campaigns should emphasize the benefits of these practices, highlighting not only the financial advantages to customers themselves but also the ecological ones. These should provide graphic elements, with the use of educational videos and informative shocking pictures being suggested. Examples of a visual representation of data created by BBC News to educate the consumer about the waste associated with the fashion industry along with two pictures of the effects of clothing overconsumption and production can be found in appendices 9.4 and 9.5.

Moreover, according to Kotler and Lee (2008), lack of adequate access is an impediment to change. Currently, easy accessibility and time efficiency are highly valued by users and behavior modification can only be attained when the process of finding slow fashion options easily is guaranteed. In fact, the results show that being SF is said to be very strenuous due to limited access to second-hand clothes or environmental friendly material options. Members of online communities often protest with the time wasted going to multiple places to meet their necessities. With these results in mind, second-hand clothing stores should invest in providing more options to their clients. This would make the purchase of environmental friendly clothing much more convenient and therefore accessible to a wider public. In appendix 9.5 the main reasons, pointed by online community members, not to buy second-hand can be found.

Community members believe that efforts should also come from manufacturers. Studies showed that 10% of all humanity's carbon emissions come from the fashion industry, damaging the reputation of the sector and therefore its corporations. Additionally, it was also deemed that fashion industry workers overseas often work in poor conditions and are underpaid. As such, companies should compromise by redesigning their production strategies, improving their workers' laboring conditions and sourcing sustainable materials for their fabrics. Indeed, and taking into consideration that many consumers are not aware of the importance of what composes clothes' materials and the levels of pollution resulting from its production, garment labels should include this type of relevant information. This might drive customers into buying eco-friendly clothes, as their impact is now more tangible. In addition, they should also contain information on the importance of clothes donations, thus reducing the size of textile landfills.

Another suggestion would be for clothing manufacturers to abstain from using cotton, leather, polyester, synthetic fibers, wool, bamboo and cashmere, as most of them need a lot of water and energy to be transformed into clothing. Also, most of them are not renewable, made of GMOs⁵, contain harmful chemicals, are not biodegradable, contribute to the destruction of tropical forests, soil erosion and cruelty to animals. Manufacturers must replace these materials with environmentally friendly fibers whose production process has a low impact on the environment and which meet at least half of the criteria listed below in appendix 9.6.

Finally, several clothing companies already sell their products made from sustainable materials, for example Patagonia. As such, not only as a way of rewarding them, but also to encourage other companies to take the same measures, they could be given tax breaks⁶.

⁵ Genetically Modified Organism, such as GMO cotton which is modified insect resistant transgenic crop designed to combat pests.

⁶ A tax break is a savings on a taxpayer's liability. By giving a tax break to an organization, a government reduces the amount of tax it will have to pay by the end of the fiscal year or changes the tax system in a way that benefits the organization (Investopedia, 2018).

6. Limitations and Future Research

Although extensive set of useful findings were provided, there are a few limitations associated with the conducted netnographic study that must be addressed.

First, the challenge of the generalization of results outside the community sample, such as the reliance on online communities, the lack of information regarding the online user and the quality of the researcher's interpretive skills (Kozinets 2002). Secondly, the sample size could be bigger, but that revealed to be impracticable due to the time limitations of the study. Kozinets (2002) mentions that the amount of information accessible online can be astounding and as a result, netnographers should react calmly to data overload. Also, the study was limited to a number of carefully chosen Slow Fashion online communities, therefore the finding of the research may not be certainly generalized to other groups. At last, the privacy of online members may lead to uncertainty of the presence of biases in several variables, such as demographic indicators of study participants.

With that being said, future research could analyze how demographic data (like age, sex, nationality, educational background, income, etc.) may influence the predisposition to adopt this lifestyle. Also, it could be interesting to explore casual relationships between anti-consumerism and, for example, zero waste, minimalism and veganism, assessing whether they could instigate prompt slow fashion adoption. The potential study could explore whether vegans are more likely or not to convert to slow fashion compared to people that do not follow the trendy restricted diet. Or, it could be interesting to run a regression investigation, evaluating which variables are more likely to constitute as obstacles towards the adoption of SF (e.g. time, money, convenience and second-hand stigma), and which ones weigh more heavily in the decision of adopting the lifestyle. Additionally, since lack of cooperation was one of the barriers members mentioned, further investigation could be performed to examine the impact that embracing the lifestyle has on personal relationships. At last, users state that the lack of financial means constituted as a barrier to adopt SF lifestyle, while others defended that after they adopted it, they managed to save money. Therefore, due to these opposite views, an analysis of the financial impact of adopting SF could be conducted.

To conclude, the academic literature of the SF topic will for sure increase, due to the growing awareness of the future of the world's environment. Studies have demonstrated the urgency of taking action to avoid overconsumption and expansion of waste production. This reality is

frightening and for the past years environmentally-aware consumers have been taking ecologically-conscious purchasing behaviors to mitigate their resource usage.

However, real change comes from a multi-stakeholder engagement where governments, public sector agencies and corporations come together under a common set of measures and regulations that effectively enables everyone's contributions towards the common goal which is to sustainably grow the economy without doing so at the expense of scarce resources, environmental issues and unethical labor practices.

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8. Glossary

GMO Genetically Modified Organism

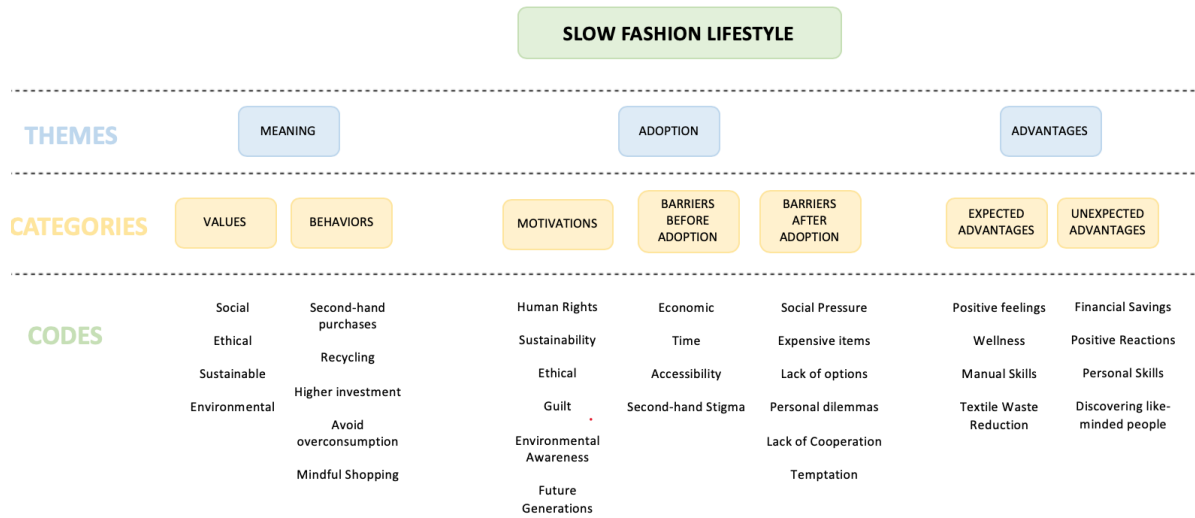
SF Slow Fashion

PAYT Pay-as-you-throw

WWF World Wildlife Fund

9. Appendices

9.1 Thematic Network



9.2 Greenpeace Campaign: Detox My Fashion



The Tullahan river in Manila, Philippines, has developed a violet-colored residue from the soap used in the dyeing industry.

9.3 Greenpeace Campaign: The King Is Naked



9.4 BBC News' infographic about Fast Fashion consequences

Impacts of fast fashion

26.7kg

UK consumption of new clothing per head in 2010 (highest in Europe)

235m items of clothing sent to landfill per year

700,000 fibres released in a single domestic wash

1.2bn tonnes of carbon emissions produced by global fashion industry (2015)

3,781 litres of water used from growing cotton to manufacture and consumer care of a pair of jeans

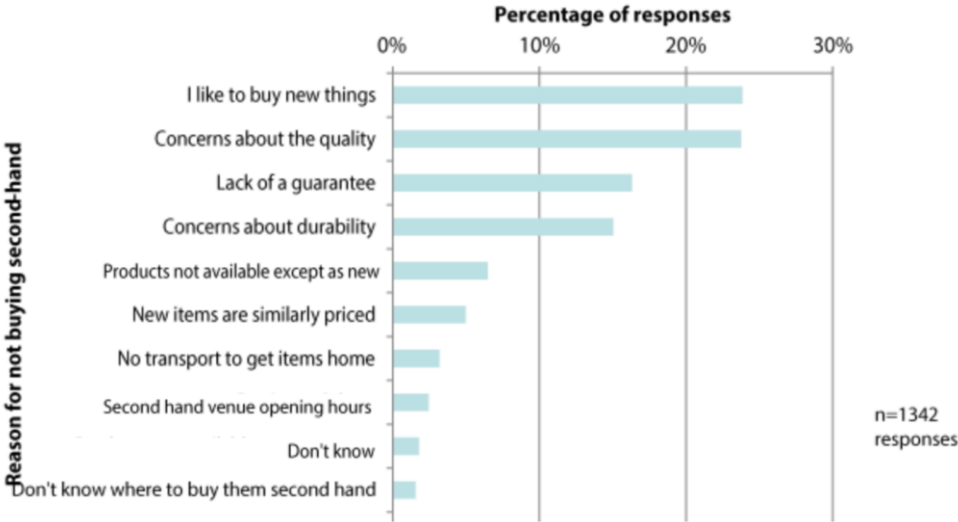
Enviro Audit Committee submissions











9.5 A truck unloading clothing waste in a dump in Beirut, Lebanon



9.6 Study on consumer behavior to identify the reasons for not buying second-hand



9.7 Recommended eco-friendly fibers

 Low WATER need made with waste material	 Low ENERGY need with low environmental impact	 Made of WASTES with low environmental impact	 From renewable resource produced in sustainable way	 Chemicals control produced in sustainable way	 No GMO produced in sustainable way	 No SOIL erosion with low environmental impact	 Biodegradable with low environmental impact
RECYCLED POLYESTER	ORGANIC COTTON	ALPACA	LYOCELL/TENCEL®				
RECYCLED NYLON	LINEN	SILK	ORANGE FIBER				
RECYCLED COTTON	HEMP	RESPONSIBLE WOOL	PINEAPPLE FIBER				
RECYCLED WOOL	RAMIE	RESPONSIBLE CASHMERE	REFIBRA™				
		RESPONSIBLE LEATHER	SUSTAINABLE BAMBOO				