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# Sustainability in Fashion: The Impact of collaborative strategies between Fashion Brands and Non-Profit Organizations on Consumers' Preferences

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## ABSTRACT

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This research investigates consumer preferences regarding sustainable fashion brands and the influence that individual factors, of consumers' sustainable behavior, have on the purchasing process. Specifically, the objective is to investigate consumers' preferences regarding different collaborative strategies between non-profit organizations and fashion companies for sustainable brands, specifically partnerships or co-ownership.

To achieve this goal, an experiment was conducted in the form of an online questionnaire. The data collected, in order to draw the results, were analyzed through SPSS statistical software.

The results show that the majority of consumers prefer to buy products from a co-owned brand as opposed to a partnership between non-profit organizations and fashion companies. In addition, the activation of individual factors (psychological factors, personal attitude, awareness, belief, values, perception, habits, experience, lifestyle, and socio-demographics) was shown to play a key role in satisfaction, happiness, and purchase intention. While it does not affect willingness to pay, which is always higher for co-owned brands.

In summary, the research results show that consumers are interested in sustainable fashion brands and tend to prefer a co-owned brand. However, the influence of individual factors on the choice of sustainable brand should be considered by companies when developing their marketing strategies.

**Title:** Sustainability in Fashion: The Impact of collaborative strategies between Fashion Brands and Non-Profit Organizations on Consumers' Preferences.

**Author:** Vincenzo Verga

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Fashion Brand, Consumer Behavior, Sustainable Behavior, Co-ownership, Partnership, Willingness to Pay, Purchase Intention, Patagonia, Non-profit Organizations, Consumer Preferences.

## ABSTRACT

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A presente investigação explora as preferências dos consumidores em relação às marcas de moda sustentáveis e a influência que os factores individuais, do comportamento sustentável dos consumidores, têm no processo de compra. Especificamente, o objectivo é investigar as preferências dos consumidores relativamente a diferentes estratégias de colaboração entre organizações sem fins lucrativos e empresas de moda para marcas sustentáveis, especificamente parcerias ou co-propriedade.

Para atingir este objectivo, foi realizada uma experiência sob a forma de um questionário online. Os dados recolhidos, para a obtenção dos resultados, foram analisados através do software estatístico SPSS.

Os resultados mostram que a maioria dos consumidores prefere comprar produtos de uma marca em co-propriedade em vez de uma parceria entre organizações sem fins lucrativos e empresas de moda. Além disso, a activação de factores individuais (factores psicológicos, atitude pessoal, consciência, crença, valores, percepção, hábitos, experiência, estilo de vida e dados sociodemográficos) demonstrou desempenhar um papel fundamental na satisfação, felicidade e intenção de compra. No entanto, não afecta a disponibilidade para pagar, que é sempre mais elevada para as marcas de propriedade conjunta.

Em suma, os resultados da investigação mostram que os consumidores estão interessados em marcas de moda sustentáveis e tendem a preferir uma marca de propriedade conjunta. No entanto, a influência de factores individuais na escolha de uma marca sustentável deve ser considerada pelas empresas ao desenvolverem as suas estratégias de marketing.

**Título:** Sustentabilidade na Moda: O impacto das estratégias de colaboração entre Marcas de Moda e Organizações Sem Fins Lucrativos nas Preferências dos Consumidores.

**Autor:** Vincenzo Verga

**Palavras-chave:** sustentabilidade, marca de moda, comportamento do consumidor, comportamento sustentável, co-propriedade, parceria, disposição a pagar, intenção de compra, Patagonia, organizações sem fins lucrativos, preferências do consumidor.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

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Sustainable fashion is becoming increasingly important to consumers around the world. In recent years, attention to the environmental and social impact of fashion products has grown exponentially, and many companies are trying to improve their sustainable reputation. According to a survey conducted in 2021 by market research firm YouGov (YouGov, 2021), 65% of consumers said sustainability was an important factor when choosing clothing. Another survey conducted by the fashion website Lyst (Lyst Insight, 2022) revealed that 48% of consumers actively seek out sustainable fashion products. In addition, according to a 2021 study by market research firm Nielsen (Nielsen, 2021), 73% of consumers globally say they will change their shopping habits to reduce their environmental impact.

This change in shopping habits is partly due to the fashion industry's growing awareness of the environmental impact of fabric and clothing production. In response to this concern, many companies are trying to become more sustainable by adopting new production techniques and sustainable materials. According to the Global Fashion Agenda's "The Pulse of the Fashion Industry 2021" report (Global Fashion Agenda, 2022), 75% of fashion companies have introduced sustainable practices into their supply chains. However, there is still much to be done to make the entire fashion industry more sustainable.

The sustainable fashion industry also represents a great economic opportunity. According to a 2021 study by McKinsey & Company (McKinsey & Company, 2021), the sustainable fashion market could reach a value of \$150 billion by 2025. In addition, many fashion companies are trying to reduce their environmental impact through waste reduction and the use of sustainable materials. For example, the Swedish fashion brand H&M launched a collection called "Conscious Collection" that uses sustainable materials such as organic cotton and sustainable viscose (Conscious exclusive A/W20, 2020).

In conclusion, sustainability has become an increasingly important factor in consumers' choice of clothing. Fashion companies are trying to become more sustainable through the adoption of new production techniques and sustainable materials. This change also represents a major economic opportunity for the fashion industry.

In September 2022, Yvon Chouinard, the owner of Patagonia, donates his corporate shares to several non-profit organizations, creating the first fashion company wholly owned by non-profit

organizations. This groundbreaking decision naturally raises questions about how consumers perceive the company. This paper seeks to answer these questions by examining whether consumers prefer a sustainable fashion brand owned by non-profits over the more conventional partnership models adopted by most fashion brands. The focus of this thesis is on consumers' perspectives and preferences, rather than on the managerial or financial aspects of this strategic choice. The aim is to gain insights into how consumers perceive and respond to sustainable fashion brands owned by non-profits. By shedding light on consumers' attitudes toward this innovative business model, this research can provide valuable information to fashion industry stakeholders and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable business practices.

The question of how consumer perceptions of co-owned sustainable fashion brands might differ from other partnership formats is a crucial aspect to explore in this research. Specifically, it raises inquiries into whether consumers concerned with sustainability will perceive higher value in brands owned by non-profit organizations or if they will exhibit a more negative attitude towards this unique partnership model. On one hand, consumers who prioritize sustainability may perceive higher value in co-owned brands due to the alignment of their values. Non-profit ownership signifies a commitment to social and environmental causes, which resonates with sustainability-conscious consumers. They may view these brands as more trustworthy and authentic, perceiving their ownership structure as a genuine reflection of the brand's commitment to sustainability. This alignment of values could result in positive attitudes towards co-owned brands and a willingness to support them through their purchasing decisions. On the other hand, the unconventional nature of co-owned brands might trigger a more negative attitude among some consumers. The unfamiliarity of this ownership structure could lead to skepticism or confusion, raising questions about the transparency and accountability of the brand. Consumers may be uncertain about how the profits generated by these brands are utilized and whether they are truly directed toward social and environmental causes. These concerns may result in a more suspicious outlook and a reluctance to fully embrace co-owned brands. It is also possible that consumer perceptions of co-owned sustainable fashion brands may vary depending on their individual levels of knowledge and understanding of sustainable business practices. Consumers who are more informed and actively engaged in sustainability-related issues may have a better grasp of the potential benefits of the co-owned model and may therefore exhibit more positive attitudes toward it. Conversely, consumers with limited knowledge of sustainable fashion or those who are less engaged in sustainability may be more likely to harbor negative attitudes toward co-owned brands. Exploring these potential

differences in consumer perceptions is crucial for understanding the acceptability and market viability of co-owned sustainable fashion brands. By investigating whether sustainability-conscious consumers perceive higher value or show more negative attitudes towards this collaboration format, this research can provide valuable insights for fashion industry stakeholders and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable business practices. It is important to note that individual consumer responses may be influenced by various factors, including personal values, prior experiences, and sociocultural contexts. Therefore, conducting empirical research to gather consumer perspectives and attitudes towards co-owned brands will provide a more comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and shed light on the potential challenges and opportunities associated with this innovative business model.

This research on consumer preferences regarding sustainable fashion brands could be relevant to the fashion industry. With an increasing number of companies looking to adopt sustainable practices to reduce the environmental and social impact of their products, this research aims to provide valuable information to companies in the industry who seek to create sustainable products that align with consumer preferences. Specifically, the research would contribute to the understanding of how co-owned brands can influence consumer preferences and differ from brands born as partnerships. This understanding could help companies develop new partnerships and collaborations that meet consumer needs and contribute to the sustainability of the fashion industry. In addition, the research would bring a greater understanding of the factors that influence consumer choices about sustainable fashion brands. This understanding could help companies develop more effective marketing strategies to promote their sustainable products and create value for consumers.

In the following section, a brief overview will be provided of the remaining chapters of this thesis, outlining the key topics that will be addressed in each chapter. Chapter II will describe scientific research aimed at exploring the issues on which this paper is based. Specifically, it will analyze the case of Patagonia, describe the strategies that companies most used to develop products aimed at sustainable consumers, attempt to explain what sustainable fashion is and why people buy it, and finally, describe the research question and the hypotheses that will be tested. Chapter III will describe the methodology of the experiment, the dependent and independent variables, the sample, and the structure of the questionnaire with the respective questions designed to test the hypotheses. In Chapter IV, the collected data will be analyzed and the obtained results will be presented through the verification of their respective hypotheses. In Chapter V, the research findings will be presented from a more practical

perspective to provide actionable recommendations for companies operating or intending to operate, in the sustainable fashion sector. Specifically, the findings will be analyzed, and the key factors influencing consumer preferences for sustainable fashion brands will be identified. In the final chapter, Chapter VI, the limitations of the study will be discussed. This section aims to provide a critical evaluation of the research process, highlighting any potential limitations or weaknesses in the study design or data collection methods.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

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The purpose of this chapter is to outline the scientific literature reviewed in order to structure and formulate the research question of the following paper. Then to answer the research question, hypotheses were formulated, taking into consideration what was learned from the literature.

### ***PATAGONIA Inc.***

Patagonia is a well-known outdoor clothing and gear company that was founded in 1973 by Yvon Chouinard. Since its inception, the company has been known for its commitment to environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical business practices.

According to the company's website, Patagonia became a Benefit Corporation in 2012, which means that it has "a legally defined mission to create a positive impact on society and the environment." This designation reflects the company's commitment to using business as a force for good, and not just for profit. In fact, Patagonia's mission statement reads: "We're in business to save our home planet." (Patagonia, 2023).

Patagonia's ownership structure, starting from 2022, is unique in the corporate world. According to their website 100% of the company's voting stock is owned by the Patagonia Purpose Trust, created to protect the company's values; and 100% of the nonvoting stock by the Holdfast Collective, a nonprofit dedicated to fighting the environmental crisis and defending nature (Patagonia, 2023).

As noted in Gwendolyn M. et al. (2019) research paper, the company has been able to make decisions that prioritize sustainability over short-term profit because it is not beholden to outside investors. For example, in 2011, Patagonia launched its Common Threads Initiative, which encouraged customers to reduce consumption and recycle their old Patagonia clothing. This initiative was controversial because it was seen as potentially hurting the company's sales, but in the end, was a successful campaign that raised brand awareness among consumers and increase the association between sustainability and the brand. At that time this campaign was possible mostly because of Mr. Chouinard, who completely owned the company, and wants to prioritize sustainability and good practice over short-term profit.

In conclusion, Patagonia's ownership structure is a key factor in its success as a sustainable and socially responsible company. The company's commitment to using business as a force for good is reflected in its Benefit Corporation status and its mission statement. Additionally, its unique ownership structure has allowed it to make bold moves in pursuit of its environmental goals, while still remaining profitable. Patagonia is a shining example of how a company can prioritize sustainability and ethical business practices while still being successful in the marketplace.

Patagonia is just one example of creating a product targeted at responsible consumers. Its strategic choices have proven to be successful and have enabled the company to stand out over time.

### ***SUSTAINABLE FASHION***

Sustainable fashion is an approach to the design, production, and marketing of clothing and accessories that seeks to reduce the environmental and social impact of the entire supply and production chain. The concept of sustainable fashion is based on three basic pillars: environmental, economic, and social (Henninger C. et al, 2016). These three aspects are considered interconnected and all important for the creation of a sustainable fashion industry.

Specifically, the environmental pillar focuses on reducing the fashion industry's environmental impact by using sustainable materials, reducing production waste, and implementing sustainable production processes. The economic pillar, on the other hand, concerns the creation of a sustainable and profitable fashion industry that enables the creation of fair and valuable jobs for all actors in the supply chain. Finally, the social pillar focuses on creating a fashion industry that respects human rights, fosters social inclusion and diversity, and promotes corporate social responsibility.

Mukendi A. et al. (2019) highlight some of the main factors influencing the sustainability of the fashion industry, such as the use of sustainable materials, sustainable waste management, ethics and transparency in the supply chain, reduction of climate impacts, and adoption of circular economy practices. In summary, the concept of sustainable fashion requires a holistic view of the production chain and an integrated approach that takes into account social, economic, and environmental impacts. Thus, fashion sustainability is a complex issue that requires the commitment of all actors involved in the supply chain and the continuous search for new sustainable solutions and technologies.

## ***STRATEGIES FOR TARGETTING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMERS***

In the fashion world where the theme of sustainable fashion has increasingly emerged in recent decades, Patagonia has stood out with its unique strategy. There are numerous fashion companies nowadays that are increasingly active in sustainability, but each with its own different strategy. There is no research or academic article that precisely and structurally lists possible strategies aimed at producing, marketing, and targeting the sustainable consumer and thus offering a sustainable product, but as a result of research, it was possible to identify the most widely used strategies:

- **Sustainable Supply Chain:** Developing a sustainable supply chain involves working with suppliers who prioritize sustainability and ethical practices, such as sourcing raw materials responsibly and reducing waste. The Australian company UGG sources all its materials from companies belonging to the Leather Working Group, which certifies the sustainability of its materials. (UGG, 2023).
- **Partnership with NGOs:** Partnering with NGOs or non-profit organizations that align with your brand's values and mission can help increase visibility, promote sustainability initiatives, and support relevant causes. Luis Vuitton X UNICEF could be an example, where Louis Vuitton contributes to UNICEF's work of bringing life-saving support to vulnerable children all over the world (Luis Vuitton, 2023).
- **Carbon Offsetting:** Carbon offsetting involves investing in initiatives that reduce greenhouse gas emissions to balance out your brand's carbon footprint. Gucci is the first luxury brand that is accountable for the total GHG emission generated by their activities (Gucci, 2023).
- **Product Innovation:** Creating products with a focus on sustainability, such as using renewable materials, reducing energy consumption, or minimizing waste, can help establish a sustainable brand image. Levi's with its "water<less" process, capable of greatly reducing the water consumption required for production, is one of the leading companies in manufacturing process innovation in the fashion world (Levi's, 2023).

## ***WHY CONSUMERS BUY SUSTAINABLE CLOTHES***

Questioning the motivations leading up to the process of purchasing a good has always been a subject of study by companies. Specifically in the world of sustainable fashion of particular relevance is the research conducted by Zang X. and Dong F. (2020). The researchers in their paper analyzed numerous past studies on consumer motivations in purchasing sustainable

products, attempting to provide a broader view of this topic. The authors in their research divided the main factors influencing the purchase of sustainable products into three main clusters:

- Individual factors: psychological factors, personal attitude, awareness, belief, values, perception, habits, experience, lifestyle, and socio-demographics (Khare and Sadachar, 2017; Sharma et al, 2019; Trivedi et al, 2018).
- Product attributes: brand, product quality, packaging, origin, and marketing (Chekima et al, 2016; Jacobs et al, 2018; Park and Lin, 2020).
- Social Influence: social norms and social capital (Woolcock, 2004).

The analysis showed that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is another important factor influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. This means that consumers choose to buy sustainable clothes because they believe that sustainable clothing manufacturers are adopting socially responsible practices, such as respecting workers' rights and promoting decent working conditions.

Another important reason for consumers to choose sustainable clothes is a concern for personal health. In fact, consumers are increasingly concerned about the materials used in clothing production and want to wear clothes made from natural and non-toxic materials. In addition, Zhang and Dong (2020) found that the availability of information about the fashion industry's environmental impact can influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Consumers are more likely to choose sustainable clothes if they are informed about the environmental damage caused by the fashion industry and the need to reduce environmental impact through sustainable consumption choices.

Finally, research has shown that the price of sustainable products is another important factor influencing consumers' purchase decisions (Mobrezi and Khoshtinat, 2016). However, consumers are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable products if they are convinced that the purchase is a responsible and positive action for the environment and society (Wei et al, 2018).

In summary, the motivations behind purchasing sustainable clothes are multiple and include concern for the environment, corporate social responsibility, concern for personal health, availability of information, product price, and the product itself. These motivations influence

consumer choice in purchasing sustainable clothes and drive the fashion industry to develop sustainable products and adopt responsible and socially sustainable practices.

Also of particular note is the study conducted by Caruana R. et al. (2017), where the authors emphasize the role of pleasure in driving consumers' choices to purchase sustainable products. They suggest that contrary to the common understanding that sustainable choices involve sacrifice or giving up, the purchase of sustainable products can involve gratification through the experience of personal pleasure and well-being. This is referred to as "alternative hedonism," or alternative pleasure that is not based on the satisfaction of material needs, but on values such as authenticity, community, health, and environmental awareness.

In addition, the authors suggest that the purchase of sustainable clothes may be motivated by the pursuit of positive social status. Specifically, consumers may buy sustainable products to enhance their reputation by demonstrating that they are responsible people who care about the environment. According to Griskevicius et al. (2010), this motivation can be viewed as a type of "conspicuous consumption," in which consumers seek to show their social status through consumption choices that are visible and recognizable by society. This process is also confirmed by Manner et al. (2005), in their research the researchers explore the concept of functional projection and its impact on interpersonal perception. The authors argue that people tend to project their own motivations and goals onto others when interpreting their behavior and vice versa.

Dunning D. (2017) explores the role of self-image in driving consumer choices. According to the author, consumers can choose sustainable clothes to maintain a positive self-image consistent with their personal values. Specifically, consumers may choose sustainable clothes to protect their self-image as environmentally conscious and responsible people. This type of motivation can be regarded as an example of "sacrosanct beliefs," that is, a set of deeply held beliefs that influence consumer behavior. In summary, in addition to concern for the environment, consumers can be motivated by alternative pleasure, social status, and self-image. These motivations can be useful for the fashion industry to develop sustainable products that meet consumer needs and desires while providing a positive impact on the environment and society.

## ***RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS***

As previously described, according to Zhang and Dong (2020), one of the key factors influencing the purchase of sustainable products is the characteristics of the product, specifically the brand. The following research will be based on the Brand, in particular on the collaboration between the non-profit organization and the fashion brand. On one side there will be the “partnership”. As already stated, a partnership is a collaboration between two or more organizations working together to achieve a common goal. The fashion company and the non-profit organization work together to create a sustainable brand. However, the fashion company remains the owner of the brand and the non-profit organization is only involved in defining the sustainable strategy and carrying out specific activities such as researching sustainable materials or promoting the brand. Co-ownership, on the other hand, implies that the fashion company and the non-profit organization both become owners of the created sustainable brand. In this case, both parties have a financial interest in the success of the sustainable brand and share responsibility and strategic decisions.

After a careful review of the scientific literature, taking into consideration researchers’ observations, analyzing the history of Patagonia, considering the lack of scientific research regarding the type of relationship between a non-profit organization and fashion company, the following research question was formulated:

*RQ: Do consumers prefer a brand born as a partnership between a fashion company and a non-profit, or do they prefer a brand born as a co-ownership between a fashion company and a non-profit?*

In the research conducted, it was found that individual factors play a key role (Zhang and Dong, 2020; Caruana R. et al, 2017; Dunning, 2019) so in the experiment that will be described in the next chapter, one of the independent variables that will be manipulated is whether these individual factors are activated. The purpose of this manipulation is to see if there are differences in preference in respondents when individual factors are active. In addition, the propensity toward sustainable behaviors of each individual will be measured, in order to ensure that individuals with greater propensity are more willing to purchase sustainable products (confirming what Zhang and Dong have shown). In order to investigate in depth and give a detailed answer to the research question, taking into consideration what emerged from the literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hp1: *Consumers prefer to buy a co-owned brand over a brand created as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hp2: *Consumers consider themselves happier and more satisfied by owning a product of a brand in co-ownership than a brand born as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hp3: *Consumers feel more ethical and prouder by owning a product of a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hypotheses 2-3 will investigate the respondent's self-considerations, whether they should own a product from the brand, this in order to see if their considerations should be more positive if the brand is co-owned.

Hp4: *Consumers perceive a co-owned brand to be more sustainable than a brand created as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hp5: *Consumers perceive the commitment to the sustainability of a co-owned brand more than a brand born as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hypotheses 4-5 will investigate consumer brand perceptions in order to see whether a co-owned brand would result in stronger brand perceptions.

Hp6: *Consumers are willing to pay more for a product from a co-owned brand than a product from a brand born as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hp7: *Consumers recommend a product of a co-owned brand more than a product of a brand born as a partnership, when their sustainable behavior is activated.*

Hypotheses 6-7 will investigate consumers' willingness to pay and recommendation, in order to investigate whether a co-owned brand leads consumers to pay more for the product and recommend it more.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

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The methodologies utilized to look into consumer preference regarding the type of collaboration between a non-profit organization and a fashion company to create a sustainable fashion brand are summarized in this chapter. The present research uses experimental research methods to test whether the different types of collaborations lead to different perceptions and judgments of sustainable fashion brands among consumers.

The study aimed to answer the following research question: “Do consumers prefer a brand born as a partnership between a fashion company and a non-profit, or do they prefer a brand born as a co-ownership between a fashion company and a non-profit?”

### ***PARTICIPANTS***

A sample of 138 individuals ( $M_{Age} = 36.72$ ;  $SD_{Age} = 16.182$ ; Gender = 18,9% identified as Male, 81.1% identified as Female) took part in the study. Convenience sampling was used to choose the study sample, and the online survey platform Qualtrics was utilized for data collection. Participants were chosen from the researcher's network, which includes friends, relatives, coworkers, and those who follow the researcher on social media. Volunteers made up the entire group. Galloway A. (2015) defined convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling technique in which participants are chosen based on their accessibility and desire to participate in the study. This indicates that, as opposed to being chosen at random, the sample is chosen based on accessibility and convenience. The questionnaire was active for a duration of 3 weeks.

### ***MATERIALS***

#### **INDEPENDENT VARIABLES:**

The independent variables are:

- Type of collaboration between the fashion company and the non-profit organization
  - o Partnership
  - o Co-owned

- Consumer Sustainable Behavior (C.S.B.)
  - o C.S.B. active
  - o C.S.B not active

Each respondent has been randomly assigned to one condition for each independent variable. The following shows how the variables were shown to the respondents:

- C.B.S. active: The respondent was asked to dwell on three magazine cover pages regarding environmental sustainability and was asked to choose one.
- C.B.S not active: The respondent was asked to dwell on three magazine cover pages regarding fashion and was asked to choose one.
- Partnership: The brand shown to the respondent was created as a partnership between the fashion company and the nonprofit organization, also the meaning of partnership was explained.
- Co-owned: The brand shown to the respondent was born as a co-owned partnership between the fashion company and the nonprofit organization, also the meaning of co-ownership was explained.

Specifically, the “C.S.B”. variable plays the role of moderator, as previously explained it could influence the effect of manipulating “type of collaboration” on the dependent variables.

In terms of how the experiment was run, the participant was initially instructed to consider several magazine covers (Appendix A). These covers for “C.B.S. active” dealt with environmental sustainability, whilst those for “C.B.S. not active” focused on the fashion industry. The respondent was then asked to picture themselves in the act of shopping and to consider purchasing a T-shirt from the new brand "Life" (imaginary brand), which was created in the case of “partnership” as a partnership between a non-profit organization and a fashion company and in the case of “co-owned” as a brand that was co-owned by the two organizations (Appendix B). The definitions of partnership and co-ownership, as well as descriptions of the two companies (Appendix C), were also provided to the responder to ensure that they fully understood the experiment (specifically, H&M and the non-profit Fashion Revolution were chosen as the organizations).

### DEPENDENT VARIABLES:

There are 15 dependent variables in the experiment (of which two control variables and one manipulation check). Excluding the control variables and the manipulation check the remaining can be divided into three clusters: self-analysis of consumer perceptions, brand perception, and intention to purchase and recommend. Starting by the first cluster "self-analysis of consumer perceptions" has been measured the consumer's perception of themselves if they owned the product, the variables that were measured are: customer satisfaction, customer happiness, self-ethicality, and self-proudness due to a possible purchase of the product. The second cluster "brand perception" has been measured consumers' perception of the brand, the variables measured are: brand ethicality, brand sustainability, brand pro-social orientation, and brand perception of commitment. For the third cluster "intention to purchase and recommend " has been measured the intention to purchase and recommend the product, the following variables were measured: likelihood to buy, purchase intention, willingness to pay, and lastly likelihood to recommend the product.

With the first cluster "self-analysis of consumer perceptions" has been tried to verify hypotheses 2-3:

- Hp2: Consumers consider themselves happier and more satisfied by owning a product of a brand in co-ownership than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.
- Hp3: Consumers feel more ethical and prouder by owning a product of a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

Whit the second cluster "brand perception" has been tried to verify hypotheses 4-5:

- Hp4: Consumers perceive a co-owned brand to be more sustainable than a brand created as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.
- Hp5: Consumers perceive the commitment to the sustainability of a co-owned brand more than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

Whit the third cluster "intention to purchase and recommend" has been tried to verify hypotheses 1-6-7:

- Hp1: Consumers prefer to buy a co-owned brand over a brand created as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

- Hp6: consumers are willing to pay more for a product from a co-owned brand than a product from a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.
- Hp7: consumers recommend a product of a co-owned brand more than a product of a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

All survey questions were set on the basis of Likert scales with seven values as responses in order to facilitate data analysis and to allow better understanding to respondents. No labels were used in the central values so as to contain the subjectivity of responses.

Starting with the first set of variables, "consumer self-perception," the following questions were formulated:

- (A) CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: Please indicate how SATISFIED you will be if you had a "Life" T-shirt, on a scale from 1 (not satisfied at all) to 7 (extremely satisfied).
- (B) CUSTOMER HAPPINES: Please indicate how HAPPY you will be if you had a "Life" T-shirt, on a scale from 1 (not happy at all) to 7 (extremely happy).
- (C) SELF-ETHICALITY: Please indicate how ETHICAL you will feel wearing a "Life" T-shirt, on a scale from 1 (not ethical at all) to 7 (extremely ethical).
- (D) SELF-PROUDNESS: Please indicate how PROUD of yourself will you feel wearing a "Life" T-shirt, on a scale from 1 (not proud at all) to 7 (extremely proud).

For the second set of variables, "brand perception," the following questions were formulated:

- (E) BRAND ETHICALITY: Please indicate to what extent you feel "Life" is an ETHICAL brand, on a scale from 1 (not ethical at all) to 7 (extremely ethical).
- (F) BRAND SUSTAINABILITY: Please indicate to what extent you feel "Life" is a SUSTAINABLE brand, on a scale from 1 (not sustainable at all) to 7 (extremely sustainable).
- (G) BRAND PRO-SOCIAL ORIENTATION: Please indicate to what extent you feel "Life" is a PRO-SOCIAL brand, on a scale from 1 (not pro-social at all) to 7 (extremely pro-social).
- (H) BRAND PERCEPTION ON COMMITMENT: Listed below are statements about "Life" commitment. For each one, please indicate your belief on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (definitely). Statements: Life understands its customers, Life is a brand I feel

good about it, Life has a strong value system, Life act for the good of the community, Life supports good causes, Life is only interested in making profit.

The first three questions were previously used by E. Cho et al (2014) while the fourth was adapted from Becker-Olsen et al (2011) in their research on measuring perceived CSR.

The last block of dependent variables, "purchase intention," on the other hand, includes the following variables and respective questions:

- (I) LIKELIHOOD TO BUY: Please indicate how LIKELY would it be for you to purchase a "Life" T-shirt, on a scale from 1 (not likely at all) to 7 (extremely likely).
- (L)PURCHASE INTENTION: Please indicate your intention to buy a "Life" T-shirt, on a scale from 1 (not intention at all) to 7 (definitely intended to buy).
- (M) WILLINGNESS TO PAY: Considering the price you usually pay for a regular H&M T-shirt, how much more would you be willing to pay for a "Life" T-shirt?
- (N) RECOMMENDATION: Please indicate if you will recommend a "Life" T-shirt to a friend, on a scale from 1 (not recommended at all) to 7 (definitely recommended).

The first three questions were previously used by M. Laroche et al (2001) while the fourth is being formulated by the researcher following Farris et al (2010).

Two control variables, "belief about collaboration's motivation" and "individual environmental attitude" were tested, to investigate whether the possible responses given by the participants were due to external correlations. The first variable measures the respondent's level of belief about the possible underlying motivation for collaboration between the non-profit organization and the fashion company. The reason is that if the respondent after being subjected to different stimuli presents different assumptions about possible motivations then the same motivations may be an alternative cause for the respondent's different responses. In order to measure this effect, the following question was asked:

(O) Please indicate if you think the following motivations are possible reasons for the collaboration between "H&M" and "Fashion Revolution" for the creation of "Life," on a scale from 1 (not a reason at all) to 7 (definitely a reason). Where the reasons were:

- Social responsibility: The fashion company may want to demonstrate its commitment to social responsibility.

- Brand awareness: Partnering with a non-profit organization can help the fashion company increase its visibility and reach a new audience.
- Fundraising: The fashion company may partner with a non-profit organization to raise funds for a specific cause or charity.
- Enhance the fashion company's reputation.
- Greenwashing: a marketing tactic that involves false, misleading or untrue action about the positive impact that the product has on the environment.

This question was adapted and formulated taking into consideration the main reasons why companies collaborate with nonprofits, following the theories outlined by A. Mukendi et al (2019).

The variable, being made up of five different values (each associated with a possible motivation), was first recoded following the researchers' methodologies (A. Mukendi et al, 2019). By doing so the values could be analyzed together (specifically, the order of the values of motivations 4-5 was reversed). Having a Cronbach alpha of 0.934, a new measure, resulting from the average of the individual participant's responses, was computed.

The second control variable, "environmental attitude," is to investigate individual propensity toward sustainable behavior (individual factors) as explained in the previous chapter. The reason for this control is that people with high pro-environmental orientation may be influenced differently by stimuli than subjects with low pro-environmental orientation. In order to measure this variable, the following question is posed to participants, adapted from the research of R. E. Dunlap (2000):

(P) Listed below are statements about the relationship between humans and the environment. For each one, please indicate whether you agree or disagree. Where the statements were:

- Humans have the right to modify the natural environment to suit their needs.
- Humans are severely abusing the environment.
- The earth has plenty of natural resources if we just learn how to develop them.
- The balance of nature is strong enough to cope with the impacts of modern industrial nations.
- If things continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.

The variable "individual environmental attitude", being made up of five different values (each associated with a possible relationship between humans and the environment), was first recoded following the researchers' methodologies (Dunlap, 2000). By doing so the values could be analyzed together (specifically, the order of the values of motivations 1-4 was reversed). Then a new measure, resulting from the average of the individual participant's responses, was computed. The measure expresses whether consumers' judgment about the motivation is perceived "ethically" as positive or negative.

Lastly regarding the manipulation check, based on the stimulus received (partnership or co-owned) the participant was asked to check the truthfulness of a construct. If the participant was presented with the Partnership variable at the beginning of the experiment, the economic understanding of the term "partnership" (definition provided to the participant at the beginning of the questionnaire) was checked, and vice versa with the Co-owned variable. Participants have to select on a scale of 1 to 7 the truthfulness of the sentence (where 1 corresponds to true and 7 false). The questions were shown as follows:

(Q) Partnership: "Life" is a partnership between "Fashion Revolution" and "H&M", which means that both parties have agreed to collaborate on a specific project or initiative that aligns with their respective goals and values. Please indicate whether this statement is true or false on a scale from 1 (definitely true) to 7 (definitely false).

(Q) Co-owned: "Life" is a co-owned brand between "Fashion Revolution" and "H&M", which means that each entity has a stake in the ownership and decision-making of the brand. Please indicate whether this statement is true or false on a scale from 1 (definitely true) to 7 (definitely false).

For the subsequent data analysis, only participants who answered this question correctly will be considered, so those who have correctly undergone the manipulation.

#### PROCEDURE:

Participants were provided a consent form and were told they would be participating in a study about consumer perception of sustainable fashion brands, and there was possible to select the preferred language for the survey between English and Italian. Participants were then randomly assigned to one condition for the independent variable "type of collaboration" and one for the independent variable "Consumer Sustainable Behavior". They were first asked to focus and

pick one of the magazine cover pages (Appendix A) and then to read the brand and product description (Appendix B). Afterward, participants filled out scales A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, L, M, N. Subsequently, participants were asked O to control for the role of "belief about collaboration's motivation" and P to control the role of "individual environmental attitude". Then, were asked P as a manipulation check for the independent variable "type of collaboration". Lastly, demographics were collected.

*DESIGN:*

The experiment, consisting of two independent variables of two levels each and can be classified as a 2 "type of collaboration" (partnership, co-owned) x 2 "Consumer Sustainable Behavior" (C.S.B. active, C.S.B. not active) between-subject design since each group of participants is subjected to only one condition. A 2x2 between-subject design is a type of experimental design that involves two independent variables, each with two levels, and different groups of participants are assigned to each condition. This design is useful for examining the main effects and interaction effects of the independent variables.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS ANALYSIS

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This chapter will be given a detailed description of the type of data collected and how those are analyzed in order to test the research hypotheses, as well as the methodologies used for the analysis. To test the truthfulness of the hypotheses formulated in the research has been used SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a software for statistical data analysis. To ensure the reliability of the results, a significance level alpha ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05 was adopted in order to establish the probability of error in hypothesis testing.

During the first phases of data analysis, any limitations, or sources of error in data collection were also considered in order to ensure the accuracy of the results. In summary, the analysis chapter is a key step in the research, as it enabled a thorough and rigorous evaluation of the collected data to be carried out, as well as the extraction of useful and meaningful information.

Once the data were collected through the Qualtrics software, data were exported to Excel to carry out a data “pre-processing” phase to ensure the reliability and validity of the results.

In this data "cleaning" phase, incomplete or invalid responses that could have compromised the quality of the sample and analysis were eliminated. In some cases, it was also necessary to recode some variables to make them uniform and compatible with the analysis techniques used. Only following this data pre-processing phase, the data were imported to SPSS to conduct the relevant analyses, which allowed for testing the hypotheses formulated and obtaining meaningful and reliable results. Specifically, of 228 responses recorded on Qualtrics, 138 were complete. Of these 138 responses, 95 passed the manipulation check and thus were deemed suitable for analysis.

### ***DEMOGRAPHICS:***

Data on the distribution of demographic variables will be presented below. These data are crucial for a better understanding of the characteristics of the population under investigation and to assess the generalizability of the results obtained.

- Age: (Mean: 36.72, St. deviation: 16.182)

- Educational level: (Less than high school degree: 3.2%, High school graduate: 25.3%, Some college but no degree: 3.2%, Bachelor's degree in college: 23.2%, Master's degree: 36.8%, Doctoral degree: 3.2%, Professional degree: 5.3%)
- Employment status: (Working (paid employee): 22.1%, Working (self-employed): 24.2%, Not working (not looking for work): 8.4%, Not working (looking for work): 3.2%, Not working (retired): 5.3%, Not working (student): 35.8%, Prefer not to answer: 1.1%)
- Gender: (Male: 18.9%, Female: 81.1%)
- Income: (Less than 25000 Euros per year: 15.8%, 25.000 - 49.999 Euros per year: 23.2%, 50.000 - 99.999 Euros per year: 15.8%, 100.000 - 199.999 Euros per year: 4.2%, More than 200.000 Euros per year: 7.4%, Prefer not to say: 33.7%)
- Country: (Italy: 77.9%, Portugal: 8.4%, Germany: 1.1%, France: 1.1%, Philippines: 1.1%, Spain: 1.1%, Switzerland: 1.1%, UK: 3.2%, USA: 5.3%, Venezuela: 1.1%)

### ***MANIPULATION CHECK:***

The "manipulation check" consists of analyzing the data collected during the experiment in order to assess whether the manipulation of the independent variables had the desired effect on the dependent variables. It checks whether the manipulations implemented produced the intended effect on the participants' responses. To ensure the reliability of the experiment results, participants who failed the "manipulation check" will not be considered in the hypothesis testing. The exclusion of participants who failed the "manipulation check" does not affect the reliability of the results obtained, as it is a practice to ensure the internal validity of the experiment. In other words, it is a necessary precaution to avoid including inconsistent data in hypothesis testing and to ensure the correct interpretation of the results obtained.

Of the 138 participants who completed the questionnaire, 95 passed the test. Specifically, the manipulation performed through IV "type of collaboration" (partnership - co-owned) was tested. Participants who selected, on the DV "manipulation check", values between 1 and 4 (on a scale of 1 to 7) as answers were considered valid.

### Partnership

- Manipulation passed: 52 participants
- Manipulation failed: 25 participants

## Co-owned

- Manipulation passed: 43 participants
- Manipulation failed: 18 participants

### **CONTROL VARIABLES:**

The first control variable "belief about collaboration's motivation", has been tested using the t-test. No significant differences were found between "partnership" ( $M = 4.21, SD = 0.86$ ) and "co-owned" ( $M = 4.18, SD = 0.89$ ) groups for the control variable ( $t(93) = 0.146, p = .884$ ). Thus, it can be inferred that the respondent's level of belief about the possible underlying motivation for collaboration between the nonprofit organization and the fashion company is not different between the two groups.

The second control variable "individual environmental attitude" has been tested using the t-test. No significant differences were found between "C.B.S. active" ( $M = 4.16, SD = 0.51$ ) and "C.B.S. not active" ( $M = 4.17, SD = 0.57$ ) groups for the control variable ( $t(93) = -0.045, p = .964$ ). Thus, it can be inferred that individual propensity toward sustainable behavior (individual factors) is not different between the two groups.

### **HPI:**

"Consumers prefer to buy a co-owned brand over a brand created as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated".

After realizing that the two reference dependent variables - "likelihood to buy" and "purchase intention" - were essentially similar, a decision was made to combine them into a single measure as a way to test the hypothesis. By obtaining a Pearson index of 0.845, it became feasible to calculate a new measure derived from the average of the two variables, thereby validating the decision made retrospectively.

An ANOVA 2 "type of collaboration" x 2 "C.S.B." revealed a significant main effect of IV "type of collaboration" ( $F(1, 94) = 2.52, p = .025$ ) indicating that the "co-owned" group leads to higher levels of DV ( $M = 4.03, SE = 0.235$ ), than the "partnership" group ( $M = 3.465, SE = 0.267$ ). Has also been found a significant main effect of IV "C.B.S." ( $M$  "C.B.S. active" = 4.099,  $SE$  "C.B.S. active" = 0.228;  $M$  "C.B.S. not active" = 3.396,  $SE$  "C.B.S. not active" =

0.274;  $F(1, 94) = 3.912, p = .05$ ). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F(1, 94) = 2.162, p = .145$ ).

To further the analysis, the data were filtered using the independent variable “C.B.S.” as filter, and then the variable “type of collaboration” was tested again.

- “C.B.S. active”: Significant differences were found between “partnership” ( $M = 3.556, SD = 1.174$ ) and “co-owned” ( $M = 4.643, SD = 1.574$ ) groups for the dependent variable ( $t(53) = 2.428, p = .019$ ). It means that when the brand was co-owned participants revealed a significant preference to buy the product than when the brand was in a partnership.
- “C.B.S. not active”: No significant differences were found between “partnership” ( $M = 3.417, SD = 1.592$ ) and “co-owned” ( $M = 3.375, SD = 1.927$ ) groups for the dependent variable ( $t(38) = 0.075, p = .946$ ). It means that there is no significant difference between the two groups (“partnership” and “co-owned”) regarding preference to buy the product.

In conclusion, the hypothesis is verified. Consumers prefer to buy a brand in partnership, as opposed to one in co-ownership, when sustainable behavior is active. It should be highlighted that this preference cancels out when sustainable behavior is not activated.

### **HP2:**

“Consumers consider themselves happier and more satisfied by owning a product of a brand in co-ownership than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated”.

After realizing that the two reference dependent variables - "customer happiness" and "customer satisfaction" - were essentially similar, a decision was made to combine them into a single measure as a way to test the hypothesis. By obtaining a Pearson index of 0.806, it became feasible to calculate a new measure derived from the average of the two variables, thereby validating the decision made retrospectively.

An ANOVA 2 “type of collaboration” x 2 “C.S.B.” revealed a significant main effect of IV “type of collaboration” ( $F(1, 94) = 3.106, p = .034$ ) indicating that the “co-owned” group leads to higher levels of DV ( $M = 4.616, SE = 0.211$ ), than the “partnership” group ( $M = 4.055, SE =$

0.239). Has been found a significant main effect of IV “C.B.S.” ( $M$  “C.B.S. active” = 4.655,  $SE$  “C.B.S. active” = 0.204;  $M$  “C.B.S. not active” = 4.016,  $SE$  “C.B.S. not active” = 0.244;  $F$  (1, 94) = 4.039,  $p$  = .047). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F$  (1, 94) = 1.156,  $p$  = .285).

To further the analysis, the data were filtered using the independent variable “C.B.S.” as filter, and then the variable “type of collaboration” was tested again.

- “C.B.S. active”: Significant differences were found between “partnership” ( $M$  = 4.204,  $SD$  = 1.739) and “co-owned” ( $M$  = 5.107,  $SD$  = 1.125) groups for the dependent variable ( $t$  (53) = 2.96,  $p$  = .026). It means that when the brand was co-owned participants revealed significantly more happiness and satisfaction towards the product than when the brand was in a partnership.
- “C.B.S. not active”: No significant differences were found between “partnership” ( $M$  = 3.906,  $SD$  = 1.705) and “co-owned” ( $M$  = 4.125,  $SD$  = 1.505) groups for the dependent variable ( $t$  (38) = 0.427,  $p$  = .672). It means that there is no significant difference between the two groups (“partnership” and “co-owned”) regarding happiness and satisfaction towards the product.

In conclusion, the hypothesis is verified. Consumers consider themselves happier and more satisfied by owning a product of a brand in co-ownership than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated. It is noteworthy that this preference cancels out when sustainable behavior is not activated.

### ***HP3:***

“Consumers feel more ethical and prouder by owning a product of a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated”.

After realizing that the two reference dependent variables - "self-ethicality" and "self-proudness" - were essentially similar, a decision was made to combine them into a single measure as a way to test the hypothesis. By obtaining a Pearson index of 0.857, it became feasible to calculate a new measure derived from the average of the two variables, thereby validating the decision made retrospectively.

An ANOVA 2 “type of collaboration” x 2 “C.S.B.” did not reveal a significant main effect of IV “type of collaboration” ( $M$  “partnership” = 4.570,  $SE$  “partnership” = 0.237;  $M$  “co-owned” = 4.486,  $SE$  “co-owned” = 0.269;  $F(1, 94) = 0.055, p = .816$ ) and neither a significant main effect of IV “C.B.S.” ( $M$  “C.B.S. active” = 4.754,  $SE$  “C.B.S. active” = 0.230;  $M$  “C.B.S. not active” = 4.320,  $SE$  “C.B.S. not active” = 0.275;  $F(1, 94) = 1.588, p = .211$ ). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F(1, 94) = 0.003, p = .955$ ).

In conclusion, the hypothesis is not verified. Consumers do not feel more ethical and prouder by owning a product of a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

#### **HP4:**

“Consumers perceive a co-owned brand to be more sustainable than a brand created as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated”.

After realizing that the three reference dependent variables - "brand ethicality," "brand sustainability," and "brand pro-social orientation" - were essentially similar, a decision was made to combine them into a single measure as a way to test the hypothesis. By obtaining a Cronbach Alpha of 0.925, it became feasible to calculate a new measure derived from the average of the three variables, thereby validating the decision made retrospectively.

An ANOVA 2 “type of collaboration” x 2 “C.S.B.” did not reveal a significant main effect of IV “type of collaboration” ( $M$  “partnership” = 4.805,  $SE$  “partnership” = 0.226;  $M$  “co-owned” = 4.814,  $SE$  “co-owned” = 0.256;  $F(1, 94) = 0.001, p = .979$ ) and neither a significant main effect of IV “C.B.S.” ( $M$  “C.B.S. active” = 4.955,  $SE$  “C.B.S. active” = 0.219;  $M$  “C.B.S. not active” = 4.663,  $SE$  “C.B.S. not active” = 0.262;  $F(1, 94) = 0.731, p = .395$ ). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F(1, 94) = 0.719, p = .399$ ).

In conclusion, the hypothesis is not verified. Consumers do not perceive a co-owned brand to be more sustainable than a brand created as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

**HP5:**

“Consumers perceive the commitment to the sustainability of a co-owned brand more than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated”.

The dependent variable "brand perception on commitment" was used to test this hypothesis. An ANOVA 2 “type of collaboration” x 2 “C.S.B.” did not reveal a significant main effect of IV “type of collaboration” ( $M$  “partnership” = 4.675,  $SE$  “partnership” = 0.197;  $M$  “co-owned” = 4.560,  $SE$  “co-owned” = 0.224;  $F(1, 94) = 0.148, p = .701$ ) and neither a significant main effect of IV “C.B.S.” ( $M$  “C.B.S. active” = 4.731,  $SE$  “C.B.S. active” = 0.191;  $M$  “C.B.S. not active” = 4.503,  $SE$  “C.B.S. not active” = 0.229;  $F(1, 94) = 0.582, p = .447$ ). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F(1, 94) = 0.252, p = .617$ ).

In conclusion, the hypothesis is not verified. Consumers do not perceive the commitment to the sustainability of a co-owned brand more than a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

**HP6:**

“Consumers are willing to pay more for a product from a co-owned brand than a product from a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated”.

The dependent variable "willingness to pay" was used to test this hypothesis. An ANOVA 2 “type of collaboration” x 2 “C.S.B.” revealed a significant main effect of IV “type of collaboration” ( $F(1, 94) = 8.524, p = .005$ ) indicating that the “co-owned” group leads to higher levels of DV ( $M = 5.262, SE = 0.356$ ), than the “partnership” group ( $M = 3.788, SE = 0.404$ ). Has been found a significant main effect of IV “C.B.S.” ( $M$  “C.B.S. active” = 5.344,  $SE$  “C.B.S. active” = 0.345;  $M$  “C.B.S. not active” = 3.693,  $SE$  “C.B.S. not active” = 0.413;  $F(1, 94) = 9.463, p = .003$ ). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F(1, 94) = 0.307, p = .581$ ).

To further the analysis, the data were filtered using the independent variable “C.B.S.” as filter, and then the variable “type of collaboration” was tested again.

- “C.B.S. active”: No significant differences were found between “partnership” ( $M = 5.328, SD = 2.536$ ) and “co-owned” ( $M = 4.359, SD = 2.746$ ) groups for the dependent

variable ( $t(54) = -0.43, p = .966$ ). It means that there is no significant difference between the two groups (“partnership” and “co-owned”) regarding the willingness to pay the product.

- “C.B.S. not active”: No significant differences were found between “partnership” ( $M = 3.379, SD = 1.966$ ) and “co-owned” ( $M = 4.006, SD = 3.016$ ) groups for the dependent variable ( $t(38) = -0.798, p = .430$ ). It means that there is no significant difference between the two groups (“partnership” and “co-owned”) regarding the willingness to pay the product.

In conclusion, the hypothesis is not verified. Consumers are willing to pay more for a product from a co-owned brand than a product from a brand born as a partnership, regardless of whether sustainable behavior is activated or not.

***HP 7:***

“Consumers recommend a product of a co-owned brand more than a product of a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated”.

The dependent variable "recommendation" was used to test this hypothesis. An ANOVA 2 “type of collaboration” x 2 “C.S.B.” did not reveal a significant main effect of IV “type of collaboration” ( $M$  “partnership” = 4.241,  $SE$  “partnership” = 0.258;  $M$  “co-owned” = 4.235,  $SE$  “co-owned” = 0.292;  $F(1, 94) = 0.000, p = .988$ ) and neither a significant main effect of IV “C.B.S.” ( $M$  “C.B.S. active” = 4.632,  $SE$  “C.B.S. active” = 0.250;  $M$  “C.B.S. not active” = 3.844,  $SE$  “C.B.S. not active” = 0.292;  $F(1, 94) = 4.094, p = .056$ ). Yet is not found a significant interaction between IV “type of collaboration” and IV “C.B.S.” ( $F(1, 94) = 1.296, p = .258$ ).

In conclusion, the data is not consistent with the hypothesis. consumers do not recommend a product of a co-owned brand more than a product of a brand born as a partnership, when sustainable behavior is activated.

## CHAPTER V: GENERAL DISCUSSION

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The results of hypothesis testing show that consumers have well-defined preferences when it comes to buying a partnership or co-owned brand. The results show that consumers prefer to buy a brand in co-ownership, as opposed to one in partnership, only when sustainable behavior is activated. This preference is not observed when “consumers' sustainable behavior” is not activated. In addition, consumers feel happier and more satisfied owning a product of a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, when “consumer sustainable behavior” is activated. This preference also cancels out when sustainable behavior is not activated. However, consumers do not feel more ethical and prouder by owning a product of a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, and also, they do not perceive co-owned brands as more sustainable or committed to sustainability than brands born as partnerships. It has been shown that consumers are willing to pay more for a product from a co-owned brand than a brand born as a partnership, regardless of whether “consumer sustainable behavior” is activated or not. Finally, consumers do not recommend a product from a co-owned brand more than a product from a brand born as a partnership.

The hypotheses tested in this study on consumer preference for partnership or co-owned brands in relation to active sustainable behavior were influenced by Zhang and Dong (2020) theory of individual factors. The researchers state that consumers' individual factors are influenced by their motivation to support sustainability, their capabilities, and their access to information. It has been found that consumers prefer to buy products from co-owned brands rather than partnership brands when their sustainable behavior is active (thus individual factors are awakened). In addition, it was found that consumers are happier and more satisfied with owning a product of a co-owned brand when active sustainable behavior is present. This can be attributed to Zhang and Dong (2020) theory, in that consumers motivated by individual factors tend to be more satisfied when they perceive that the nonprofit company is directly involved in the creation of the product. However, further research is needed to explore the role of other variables in consumers' perceptions of company and product sustainability, particularly focusing on the involvement of the non-profit organization in the production process.

The research findings have practical implications for companies seeking to target sustainable consumers. First, companies should consider investing in co-owned brands with non-profit companies rather than creating partnerships in order to increase sales, this could be possible by

selling (at a fair price) or donating some of the brand shares to non-profit organizations. Especially if the communication used by the brand is one aimed at activating consumer sustainable behavior, such as by showing the environmental impact of the sustainable product compared to an equal non-sustainable product through POS advertising, or through events that could be held in-store, or finally through social media marketing campaigns in collaboration with the non-profit company. Businesses can take advantage of these consumer preferences and promote their sustainability through the creation of new brands. Second, businesses should consider the importance of promoting sustainable behaviors among consumers. Research has shown that consumers are more satisfied and happy when they purchase products from a brand that promotes sustainable behaviors through a co-owned brand. Therefore, companies should promote the sustainability of their products and business philosophy to gain consumer loyalty. This could be done through a variety of activities, such as by including "thank you" cards, where is described the brand-owning non-profit, and its impact on the world, or by creating a customer engagement program aimed at contacting the customer through email subsequent to purchase to demonstrate the non-profit's activities.

Finally, companies might consider offering products from a co-owned brand at a higher price. Research has shown that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for this brand's products. This could allow higher revenues to be invested in different operational areas such as along the supply chain to implement sustainable production processes, or in communication programs to develop campaigns aimed at educating consumers' sustainable behavior and activating it (since active sustainable behavior brings greater happiness, satisfaction and especially purchase intention).

In addition, the results obtained could provide a solid basis for future research that can delve into the dynamics of sustainable consumer behavior and the best marketing strategies to promote co-owned brands. Evaluation of marketing strategies is an area of research that could be developed further to investigate the effectiveness of marketing strategies used by companies to promote co-owned brands. This research could help determine which strategies are most effective in generating consumer interest and engagement with sustainable brands. For example, it might be interesting to examine the effect of using different marketing platforms, such as social media, online advertising, or traditional TV and print advertising. In addition, the effectiveness of using testimonials or influencers to promote co-owned brands could be evaluated. This research could also examine the effect of using different communication techniques to convey messages related to sustainability, such as the use of symbols or images

that evoke sustainability, or the use of messages focused on the importance of respecting the environment and the world we live in. Moreover, there are some possible future researches that can help to explore the beforementioned topics, some interesting topics could be: the perceived authenticity of the brand, investigating how much people believe the non-profit is involved in the whole product creation process, or lastly better investigate how to active consumer sustainable behavior and how it affects their perception.

In summary, more in-depth research on the effectiveness of marketing strategies for partnership and co-owned brands could provide companies with valuable information on how to effectively promote the sustainability of their brands, activate their sustainable behavior, and thus improve consumer perception and interest in sustainable products and brands.

## CHAPTER VI: LIMITATIONS

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The present research attempted to assess the impact of collaborative strategies between fashion companies and non-profit organizations, however, there are some limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results.

The first limitation concerns the price of the product. As indicated in the research, no price for the product was provided to the participants during the experiment. This was done because identifying the price for the product was not possible. The lack of a specific price may have influenced participants' purchase intentions. According to the theory, price is one of the most important factors in choosing a product to purchase, so the lack of a specific price may have affected participants' purchase behavior.

Second, the product used during the interview was a simple white T-shirt. Although this could be considered a basic product, the participants' personal tastes might have influenced their responses. This could lead to results that are not representative of the general population. For this reason, it would be appropriate to use a range of different products to assess the effect of sustainable collaborations on a wider range of products.

Third, during the interview, the brand was described to the participants. However, the brand does not exist, and participants did not have the opportunity to learn more about it. This may have affected the brand's credibility as sustainable and its ability to influence participants' purchase intention. Participants did not have the opportunity to get in touch with all the elements that constitute the brand image, such as the brand's history, product quality, and reputation in the market. These factors can have a significant impact on consumers' purchase decisions and can influence the effect of sustainability on their purchase intention. Therefore, using a real brand might be more effective in assessing the effect of different collaborations on consumers' purchase decisions.

Another possible limitation of the present study concerns the choice of H&M as the brand name to be used in the experiment. H&M is a well-known and popular brand in the fashion industry, which implies already existing associations in the minds of consumers. These associations may influence the perception of the environmental sustainability of the brand and could have an impact on the purchase intention of the participants. As H&M is a widely known brand, participants may have formed pre-existing opinions or stereotypes about the brand's

environmental sustainability. This may have affected their judgments during the interview and may have compromised their ability to neutrally assess the effect of environmental sustainability on consumer purchasing behaviour. Therefore, in future research, it might be useful to consider choosing less well-known brands or brands less associated with environmental sustainability in order to avoid the influence of pre-existing associations on the participants' evaluation.

A further possible limitation of the present study could arise from the choice of magazine covers used to manipulate C.S.B. activation. The selected covers may not have been pre-tested to assess their specific effect on the individual variables considered in the study. Consequently, there may be variability in the response of individuals to the different covers used. This lack of pre-testing could affect the validity of the measurements of the individual variables and could limit the generalisability of the results. To address this limitation in the future, it would be advisable to conduct accurate pre-tests on the magazine covers in order to select those that generate the desired effect on the individual factors considered in the study. This would help to ensure greater internal validity and reliability of the results obtained.

Finally, the sample of participants used in this study consisted mainly of women. Although 138 complete responses were collected, only 95 of them were considered valid for analysis. Therefore, it may be necessary to use a more representative sample of the general population to evaluate participants' responses.

In summary, although the results of this research provide important information on the relationship between environmental sustainability and purchasing behavior, there are some limitations that need to be considered when interpreting the results. It would be appropriate to consider these limitations in the future in order to develop more representative and comprehensive research.

## APPENDIX

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### *Appendix A:*

Cover magazine used to manipulate condition W, consumer sustainable behavior (C.S.B).

### C.S.B Active



- 1) Time Magazine (1980). Toxic Waste.
- 2) British Vogue (2020). Samana Bay.
- 3) National Geographic (2018). Planet or Plastic.

### C.S.B Not Active



- 1) Marie Claire (2017). Taraji Penda Henson.
- 2) Bazaar India (2013). Priyanka Chopra.
- 3) Vogue America (1964). Americana Issue.

## ***Appendix B:***

Description used to manipulate condition X, type of collaboration.

### *PARTNERSHIP*

#### **THE BRAND**



"LIFE" is a new fashion line of clothes born as a partnership between H&M and the non-profit organization Fashion Revolution. The line has the goal of creating sustainable and ethically produced clothing that promotes transparency and accountability in the fashion industry. A partnership between a fashion company and a non-profit organization means that both parties have agreed to collaborate on a specific project or initiative that aligns with their respective goals and values. In the context of the fashion industry, partnerships between fashion companies and non-profit organizations often focus on promoting sustainability, ethical production practices, and social responsibility.

#### **THE PRODUCT**



Materials: 100% Sustainable Cotton

Description: This white cotton t-shirt is a classic wardrobe staple that never goes out of style. Made from soft and breathable sustainable cotton material, this t-shirt offers both comfort and style.

## CO-OWNED

### THE BRAND



"LIFE" is a new fashion brand born as a co-owned brand between H&M and the non-profit organization Fashion Revolution. The brand has the goal of creating sustainable and ethically produced clothing that promotes transparency and accountability in the fashion industry. A co-owned brand is a brand that is jointly owned by two or more entities. This could include non-profit organizations, fashion companies, or individuals. In a co-owned brand, each entity has a stake in the ownership and decision-making of the brand.

### THE PRODUCT



Materials: 100% Sustainable Cotton

Description: This white cotton t-shirt is a classic wardrobe staple that never goes out of style. Made from soft and breathable sustainable cotton material, this t-shirt offers both comfort and style.

*Appendix C:*

“H&M” and “Fashion Revolution” introduction.



**H&M:** H&M is a Swedish multinational clothing-retail company. The company offers a wide range of clothing, accessories, and home decor items at affordable prices.

**Fashion Revolution:** Fashion Revolution is a global non-profit organization that aims to create a more sustainable and ethical fashion industry. Fashion Revolution campaigns for greater transparency and accountability in the fashion industry. The organization also advocates for systemic change in the industry, promoting the adoption of sustainable and ethical practices and policies.

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