Social media influencers' impact on consumers' sustainable fashion consumption

A qualitative study on post-millennial consumers

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Preface

First and foremost, we would like to direct the greatest thank you to our supervisor Lena Hansson for the continuous support throughout this whole process.

Additionally, we would like to thank our respondents for their participation and willingness to share valuable insights and thoughts, which contributed to the possibility of conducting this research.

Abstract

The continuous growth of sustainability awareness is shaping the consumption patterns of modern consumers. However, the fashion industry is facing challenges regarding the adaptation towards more sustainable practices due to consumers' demand for fast-paced fashion cycles. This could be related to consumers being more influenced by social aspects, in comparison to sustainability aspects, when consuming fashion. Furthermore, social media influencers, operating on digital platforms, have proven to be distinct drivers of social aspects such as trends and norms. This suggests that influencers are in position to shape fashion consumption among consumers, which could provide the opportunity to influence a more sustainable consumption behavior. This study investigates the two fields of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption and aims to develop a deeper understanding of how consumers' sustainable consumption behavior can be affected by the use of influencer marketing. This study undertook a qualitative research approach by focusing on the post-millennial generation from a consumer perspective. Five focus groups were conducted with a total of 28 respondents. The findings showed that social media influencers could be seen as a complex driver of post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption. Four themes were identified being knowledge, social influence, responsibility and credibility, which contributes to an understanding of influencers' role in affecting sustainable fashion consumption behavior. This research provides valuable insights of a relatively unexplored subject which is arguably relevant for businesses, social media influencers and the society.

Keywords:

Sustainable consumption, Sustainable fashion, Influencer marketing, Social media influencer

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Introduction

For the past couple of decades, sustainability awareness has been integrated into the mindset of society (Carrington, Neville & Whitwell, 2010). The increased awareness of environmental issues has further driven consumers to pursue and seek more sustainable products (Chen, Ghosh, Liu & Zhao, 2019). As a result, sustainable consumption has become a central focus of consumers' purchasing decision-making process (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). However, McNeill and Moore (2015) highlight that the change in demand for sustainable products is implemented to a greater extent in some sectors in comparison to others. The authors claim that one industry that is struggling to make the adaptation towards more sustainable practices is the fashion industry, mostly due to consumers' demand for fast-paced fashion cycles. In order for the transition to be achievable, the market needs to support and demand sustainable fashion (ibid). Furthermore, as the consumption of fashion is highly related to social identity, consumers tend to overconsume in pursuit of the ideal (McNeill & Venter, 2019). This is particularly the case of younger consumers who are considered to be more exposed to the social aspects (ibid).

In contrast, previous research has shown that the younger generation, especially the millennials, are a target group that could be distinguished by their purchasing behavior as they are considered to have an interest in sustainable products (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018). Due to the growth of the internet, Bedard and Tolmie (2018) state that millennials have been able to develop an understanding of ethical issues which in turn has shaped their consumption habits. This since the internet and digitalization has provided these consumers with information related to sustainability and environmental issues, making them more knowledgeable and aware (ibid).

As the younger generation are affected by the growth of the internet, they are also frequent users of social media platforms (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). This has forced companies to rethink their business models (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker & Bloching, 2013), in order to be present on these channels (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarrowhere, 2020). Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarrowhere (2020) state that companies' social media advertising activities are increasing with over 20 percent per year, where the use of social media influencers is considered to be a central part. Influencers are seen as individuals with a huge network of followers (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2016), who have the ability to influence consumption on a daily basis (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarrowhere, 2020). These individuals have become an essential link between companies and their followers, where the influencer is able to share and influence trends, lifestyles and communicate directly to the consumers (ibid). Branded content created by influencers can be found on various social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and Snapchat (Glucksman, 2017). Influencer marketing is further related to reliability and has been proven to engage and affect more consumers than other marketing activities (Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017). Sudha and Sheena (2017) suggest that modern influencers are able to affect consumers' consumption behavior and purchasing decisions as they are perceived as experts in specific fields. As a result, customers are turning to influencers in order to stay updated on certain trends and to communicate personal styles, as some examples (Weinswig, 2016). Furthermore, Bakka (2018) highlights that influencers are more common in certain industries than others, especially those related to fashion, beauty and life-style products.

Problem discussion

When addressing influencer marketing in relation to sustainable consumption, it could be questioned whether a conflict could arise between the two areas. This since the objective of influencer marketing is to encourage consumption, which could be seen as problematic from a sustainable point of view. It is argued that the younger generation is in position to make more sustainable choices and that sustainability awareness is closely related to age (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018; Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). However, when investigating how influencer marketing could increase sustainable awareness among millennials, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) found that awareness is increasing with age and that young millennials are more likely to be influenced by social aspects. Based on this, it could be argued that young consumers' exploration of social aspects in combination with their extensive usage of social media could

make them more receptive to influencer marketing (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018; Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarrowhere, 2020).

Furthermore, McNeill and Moore (2015) highlight that consumers' increased concern for environmental issues does not consistently reflect their behavior, especially in relation to fashion consumption. As consumers are trend sensitive and have a desire to keep up with norms (Chetioui, Benlafqih & Lebdaoui, 2019), social aspects related to status and trends are often seen as more important than prioritizing sustainability when consuming fashion items (McNeill & Moore, 2015). With this in mind, it could be interpreted that including social aspects when advertising sustainable fashion brands is equally important. However, as previously mentioned, it could be indicated that influencers' role in communicating sustainable fashion could be seen as a dilemma as the influencer advocates sustainability through the advertisement of consuming products. How the consumers in turn respond to the advertisement of sustainable fashion could depend on numerous factors such as type of collaboration, identity of the influencer, how the products are communicated and so forth (Berne-Manero & Marzo-Navarro, 2020). A question that arises is thus by which means social media influencers could encourage consumers to engage in sustainable fashion consumption.

When reviewing previous research, it became evident that researchers has investigated the phenomena of influencer marketing and its impact on consumption behavior (Sudha & Sheena, 2017; Lim et al., 2017; Chetioui et al., 2019), primarily due to the rapid development affecting businesses and the transformation of marketing objectives (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2013). Researchers within the field of sustainability have focused on what drives sustainable consumption (Schaefer & Crane, 2005), and how marketers are able to shift consumers to behave more sustainable (White, Habib & Hardisty, 2019). Within the fashion industry, researchers state that consumption is highly related to aspects such as social identity and self-concept (McNeill & Venter, 2019) and that consumers are not fully embracing the responsibility of sustainable fashion consumption (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Research also provides evidence on how fashion consumption among the younger generations is highly impacted by influencer marketing (Chetioui et al., 2019). Furthermore, there is existing but limited research which has touched upon the phenomenon of social media in relation to sustainable consumption (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018), as well as how the age-dilemma may be an important aspect when discussing how influencer marketing may increase customers' sustainability awareness (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). However, to the best of our knowledge there is a distinct gap in previous research regarding the combination of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. This includes how influencer marketing could affect sustainable consumption behavior, especially among younger generations. This aspect becomes important considering that younger consumers have been proven to relate to social media influencers to a higher extent (Bakker, 2018), and that this is a constantly developing phenomenon. Derived from the identified gap in previous research, the purpose of this study is to develop a deeper understanding of how consumers' sustainable consumption behavior can be affected by the use of influencer marketing. In order to fulfill the purpose, the following research question has been formulated:

- *How can consumers' sustainable fashion consumption be affected by social media influencers?*

Based on previous research and the problem discussion related to younger consumers' sustainable consumption, this study will be conducted by focusing on Generation Z, also named post-millennials, as they are less researched within this field and grew up with society's digital developments (White, 2015). In this study, post-millennials will be referred to individuals born between 1995 and 2005 (White, 2015; PrakashYadav & Rai, 2020). Furthermore, this study will be conducted by focusing on the fashion industry and consumers' sustainable fashion consumption. The fashion industry was considered an appropriate choice due to its relevance in the fields of sustainable consumption and influencer marketing (Bogliari, 2019; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

This study will contribute to a development of theoretical research by combining two relevant research areas, being influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. The study will further contribute with a consumer perspective of influencers' role in affecting consumers' sustainable consumption behavior. Regarding the practical implications, our research can assist future marketers, and companies using influencer marketing as a strategy, to understand how the use of influencers may encourage consumers to purchase more sustainable products. This study could further provide valuable insights for both businesses and social media influencers by creating an understanding of consumers' motives for engaging in sustainable consumption.

In the following chapter, the *Theoretical framework* will be presented. This is based on two main building blocks, being influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. These building blocks will include concepts related to influencer marketing in relation to consumption behavior, sustainable influencer marketing and sustainable consumption among younger consumers. This is followed by a *Methodology* chapter, which aims to account for and describe the study's methodical choices and the data collection method being focus groups. Furthermore, in the *Result and Analysis* chapter an analysis of the empirical data collection in relation to the theoretical framework will be presented. The structure of the analysis will be based on four identified themes, being knowledge, social influence, responsibility and credibility, and aims to address the purpose and research question. This is followed by a *Conclusive discussion*, presenting the main findings and contributions of this study.

Theoretical framework

In order to develop an understanding of how influencer marketing could affect post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption, there is a need to understand how young consumers relate to sustainable fashion consumption as well as how they relate to social

media influencers. Based on this, the theoretical framework will firstly address influencer marketing from a consumer perspective, followed by the concept of sustainable influencer marketing. By gaining an insight into consumers' relationship with social media influencers, one can further develop an understanding of how influencers can affect consumption behavior. Thereafter, sustainable consumption is outlined and elaborated on from the perspectives of younger consumers, their social media usage and the fashion industry.

Influencer marketing

Digitalization and the rise of social media channels has provided enhanced ways of communicating with different stakeholders, where the opportunity to develop a dialogue with consumers has arised (Bakker, 2018). In accordance with this, Evans et al (2017) claim that it becomes more common for companies to engage with consumers on social media platforms, by the use of influencer marketing. Besides allowing access to other forms of communication and engagement with the target audience, influencer marketing can increase companies' brand awareness through the commitment of a larger crowd of new and potential consumers (De Veirman et al., 2016). In line with this, Bakker (2018) defines influencer marketing as "*a process in digital marketing where opinion leaders (influencers) are identified and then integrated into a brand's brand communication on social media platforms*" (p. 80). Influencer marketing has emerged from previous marketing strategies involving celebrity endorsers (Glucksman, 2017), which means that companies invest in individuals that customers perceive as likable and trustworthy (Erdogan, 1999). However, De Veirman et al (2016) state that what differs social media influencers from the former concept of celebrity endorsers is that influencers are considered "*accessible, believable, intimate and thus easy to relate to as they share the personal, usually publically inaccessible aspects of their life with their followers and interact with them in flesh*" (p. 801). Furthermore, Evans et al (2017) claim that influencer marketing is a constantly growing marketing strategy due to influencers' ability to communicate a message to a huge number of followers. The reason behind this success is considered to be highly related to consumers' ability to trust an influencer more in comparison to a normal advertising campaign (Evans et al., 2017).

Influencer marketing in relation to consumption behavior

Bakker (2018) argues that influencers have become an important part of consumers' decision-making process, where the influencers are able to encourage consumers to purchase certain products. Apart from influencing the decisions-making process, influencers have also been proven to affect consumers' purchasing behavior and attitudes towards certain products or brands (De Veirman et al., 2016; Evans et al., 2017). Consumers have always appreciated other individuals' opinions, which could be why some are more affected by influencers than others (De Veirman et al., 2016). Social media and influencer marketing enables consumers to be inspired by other individuals as well as to share their own thoughts about certain areas (ibid). However, Sheldon and Bryant (2016) argue that the power of influence could differ between the genders, where women have been proven to be more interactive on social media platforms and use it as an opportunity to flourish personal relationships.

In order to be influenced by social media influencers, consumers have to develop trust in the influencer and its communication (Bakker, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Bakker (2018) further claims that influencers' posts have to be authentic and creative as well as be perceived as genuine for the message to affect consumers. For instance, if an influencer communicates genuine appreciation towards a certain product, they are more likely to enhance positive responsiveness related to that product which may increase consumers' purchase intentions. This by combining regular advertising activities with their everyday life communication (ibid). In relation to this, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that trust for an influencer might also be developed through specialization in specific areas, where consumers visualize them as personal experts.

Moreover, in order to be perceived as authentic, Glucksman (2017) states that an influencer is required to be open and honest with their followers, as well as to flourish the relationship and personal bond. This is further elaborated on by Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020) who claim that influencers with less followers, so called micro-influencers, have been proven to generate a deeper and greater engagement with their followers while bigger influencers are considered more desirable. Thus, while consumers might be more easily persuaded by a macro-influencer, they may still perceive micro-influencers as more friendly and genuine (ibid). This highlights the importance for companies to choose the right influencer for their marketing strategy (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017).

Furthermore, Evans et al (2017) state that influencer marketing has faced criticism since consumers have little or no understanding of what is advertising and what is not, especially when it comes to social media platforms. De Veirman et al (2016) elaborate on this topic by arguing that since influencers' statements are highly personal, it may lead to consumers perceiving them as opinions and become more easily persuaded. Studies related to this area have shown that consumers trust the opinion of an influencer as much as they trust the opinion of a close friend (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Johnstone and Lindh (2017) presents an example related to this topic, which showed that customers find it easier to remember a product that has been communicated by an influencer because they are able to relate it to the individual itself.

When addressing influencer marketing in relation to the fashion industry, Chetioui et al (2019) state that influencers' ability to affect consumption behavior has increased rapidly over the past years. This mainly due to the fact that consumers are becoming more trend-sensitive in relation to their fashion consumption, and that influencers are considered to be in the front-line in the development of new fashion trends. Due to this, consumers of the millennial or the post-millennial generations are particularly sensitive towards fashion influencers since they value their opinion more than others and are perceiving them as friends. The researchers further claim that fashion influencers can affect consumers' attitudes towards a certain brand or item but also increase consumers' purchase intentions.

Sustainable influencer marketing

Apart from traditional beauty and fashion influencers, there are also individuals who display a sustainable engagement by promoting green products and encouraging environmentally-friendly behavior on social media platforms (Chwialkowska, 2019). The objective is to normalize sustainable products, which influencers could accomplish by supporting claims with research as well as being transparent and communicating the benefits of a sustainable life-style. Sustainable influencers might also address existing concerns regarding sustainable products in order to increase the products' credibility. Chwialkowska (2019) further explains that influencers who engage in sustainable communication mainly do so by focusing on personal benefits with green behavior in comparison to the actual impact sustainable consumption may have on the environment. Thus, influencers' sustainable communication is related to information-rich content (ibid). In accordance with this, Lou and Yuan (2019) argue that influencers' informative value will have a positive impact on their followers' purchase intentions.

Furthemore, Berne-Manero and Marzo-Navarro (2020) claim that advertising on social media usually has more commercial objectives than sustainable objectives. Thus, customers will be influenced in different ways depending on what type of influencer they engage with (ibid). Johnstone and Lindh (2017) elaborate on this topic by suggesting that companies may be able to increase consumers' sustainability awareness, by the use of the right influencer and message. When investigating the millennial generation, the authors further claim that sustainability awareness is higher among the older span of consumers in comparison to younger ones, while the impact of social media influencers is considered to be greater for younger millennials. Thus, sustainable influencers can be used to increase knowledge and awareness of sustainability issues among consumers by normalizing the behavior and reason for acting environmentally-friendly. This since consumer behavior mainly is shaped by social norms and acceptance, in which influencers have a distinct persuasive ability. Furthermore, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) state that an influencer's followers do not necessarily have to be interested in environmental concerns in order for them to become susceptible to sustainability awareness communicated by the influencer.

Sustainable consumption

Sustainability and consumption have often been viewed as two contradictory elements considering that consumers' consumption patterns could be seen as drivers of environmental problems (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). Sustainable consumers are primarily motivated by attitudes towards environmental values, but aspects such as product quality, price and availability are also of importance. However, consumers that usually do not engage in sustainable consumption may be motivated by other factors (ibid). Schaefer and Crane, (2005) claim that previous research has found that consumption behavior is closely related to an individual's psychological and social identity, which might indicate potential challenges for increased engagement in sustainable consumption. Based on previous findings, the authors further argue that *"more sustainable consumption patterns will be achieved through consumer demand for more environmentally benign goods and services, motivated by their*

individual and cultural beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes and thought to make product and other consumption choices accordingly" (Schaefer & Crane, 2005 p. 79). Due to this dilemma, Borusiak, Szymkowiak, Horska, Raszka and Żelichowska (2020) suggest that a shift in consumption behavior is essential for increasing sustainable engagement.

While addressing the shift towards a more sustainable behavior, White et al (2019) state that the pro-environmental engagement is likely to increase when the context or the communication is directed towards psychological factors. The authors have further broken down these factors into social influence, habit formation, individual's self, feelings and cognition and tangibility. By understanding these factors one may also develop a deeper understanding of the attitudinal-behavior gap, which is commonly addressed in relation to sustainable consumption. In short, this means that even though consumers develop positive attitudes towards sustainable engagement and alternative products, their actions do not usually correspond to this. Accordingly, Schaefer and Crane (2005) claim that a reason for why consumers decide not to engage in pro-environmental activities may be due to limited environmental knowledge and the importance of consuming a sustainable product over a regular one, but also that consumers feel powerless and that their actions alone are not the solution for sustainable issues.

Sustainable consumption among younger consumers

Naderi and Steenburg (2018) found that younger consumers, often referred to as millennials, show an awareness and concern for environmental issues and thereby an interest in brands that are perceived as environmentally-friendly. However, previous research further suggests that this segment of consumers most often find themselves attitudinal green rather than behavioral green. The authors claim that this could be due to green products being related to aspects such as increased costs, low performance and inconvenience, meanwhile the millennial consumers are demanding availability, affordability and quality. When profiling the green consumers, Diamantopolus, Schlegelmilch, Sinkovics and Bohlen (2003) referred to in Naderi and Steenburg (2018) argue that socio-demographic variables in terms of age, gender and education become highly relevant. However, these variables alone could contribute to limited value in the process of understanding sustainable consumption behavior. Hence, previous research suggests that alternative variables, such as psychographic ones, have more explanatory power (ibid).

Naderi and Steenburg (2018) further suggest that younger consumers' motivation to engage in sustainable consumption is highly influenced by psychographic characteristics such as altruism, frugality, risk aversion and time orientation. The authors found that consumers' environmental commitment was more influenced by rational and self-oriented drivers such as frugality and future-orientation. Due to millennials' limited resources in terms of both financial and physical assets, the decision-making process will be built on economic motives (ibid). Based on this, Naderi and Steenburg (2018) argue that "*millennials' purchase habits are shaped both by strong eco-friendly ideals combined with an economizing mind-set*" (p. 284). Additionally, being future-oriented will cause this segment of consumers to engage in

sustainable consumption with the objective to reduce future consequences. In other words, these consumers will prioritize achieving long-term goals rather than receiving immediate gratification. Based on these findings, the authors argue that younger consumers are more likely to contribute to environmental change if it affects their self-interest.

Furthermore Lu, Bock and Joseph (2013) state that consumers are not willing to accept the lack of certain product attributes in order to become more sustainable. The authors found that younger consumers fail to engage in sustainable consumption due to various reasons. Apart from the economic perspective and millennials' perception of sustainable products being expensive, these consumers have difficulties in distinguishing between green and non-green products. This indicates that there is a need for improving the communication between consumers and businesses. Lu et al (2013) state that "*providing clear communication that allows consumers to easily distinguish between green and non-green products is likely to yield increased awareness of the difference between these products and consequently, increased consumer demand for green products*" (p. 9). Moreover, this particular segment of consumers have been found to distrust sustainable products and their quality which negatively impacts the sustainable engagement (ibid).

Sustainable consumption in relation to younger consumers' social media usage
Bedard and Tolmie (2018) highlight that the growth of social media has contributed to new and innovative ways of communicating sustainable products where the consumers are becoming more engaged and cooperative during the purchasing process. The authors further claim that since consumers generally turn to social media for gathering information about products, the firm's ability to be present online will impact the purchase decision significantly. Furthermore, consumers' trust in sustainable brands are expected to increase with frequent and positive encounters with that brand on social media channels (ibid). When investigating millennial consumers' green purchase intentions in relation to social media usage, Bedard and Tolmie (2018) found that social media usage had a positive relationship with the intention to purchase sustainable products. Based on this, firms are in position to drive sustainable consumption among younger consumers by increasing the awareness of green products on their social media platforms (ibid). In accordance with this, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) argue that "*younger generations who lack confidence will allow other determinants to guide their behaviour intentions*" (p. 130). As a result, actors on social media are suggested to have the power to influence this segment of consumers, especially those who lack knowledge about sustainability (ibid). Furthermore, Bedard and Tolmie (2018) found that millennials' purchase intentions of green products is positively related to online interpersonal influence, indicating that interaction through the digital format could foster sustainable consumption among this target group. Hence, sustainable consumption could benefit from firm's abilities to create interaction opportunities for the consumers such as taking part in digital dialogues and reviews for example. The authors suggest that this could create a sense of a community which in turn facilitates positive online interpersonal influence.

Sustainable fashion consumption

When addressing sustainability, the fashion industry often constitutes one of the main players contributing to social and environmental problems (McNeill & Venter, 2019). This has further driven the industry to provide alternative offerings that could reduce the environmental impact (ibid). In recent years, sustainable fashion has emerged as part of a solution to these issues (Park & Lin, 2020). McNeill and Venter (2019) highlight that fashion consumption is highly related to consumers' way of expressing their identity in social settings. Thus, an understanding of how consumers construct their identity is essential for understanding the motivations behind consuming fashion (ibid). McNeill and Moore (2015) elaborate on this topic by stating that *"given the importance of identity construction to many consumers, drivers to be 'fashionable' often outweigh drivers to be ethical or sustainable"* (p. 212). Moreover, the authors highlight consumers' perception of sustainable produced fashion is most often associated with unattractiveness. This aspect, along with other factors such as lack of knowledge, financial resources, norms and availability, has contributed to a restrainment of developing positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion consumption (ibid).

Furthermore, Park and Lin (2020) state that *"ethics might be secondary to other decision factors such as a perceived conflict between making sustainable choices and fashionable choices"* (p. 624). The decision-making process is rather influenced by individual characteristics, product characteristics and socio-demographic variables. Although the younger consumers are considered to be the most aware of sustainable fashion, they represent the group that are consuming a low level of ethical products. The authors suggest that the reason behind this behavior is related to consumers' desire to express self-identity through their fashion consumption where fast-fashion could provide variation at the expense of sustainable products. However, despite the previous statements, young consumers are still considered to regard fashion in terms of a price-quality perspective and thus understand the importance of sustainable fashion being a reasonable alternative to fast-fashion (ibid). In accordance with this statement, McNeill and Moore (2015) argue that consumers' understanding of the complex relationship between cheap, fast-fashion and a sustainable commitment is vital in achieving a change in consumption behavior. The authors further highlight that this lack of understanding is especially common among young females who do not realize the social impact of their clothing consumption by being highly demanding of new fashion items. This is supported by McNeill and Venter (2019) who state that young females compose the most fashion-conscious consumers and thereby constitute an important role in shaping fashion identities.

As consumers are becoming more aware of sustainability issues, new solutions are emerging within the fashion industry in order to meet newly formed demands (Park & Lin, 2020). The growth of the second-hand clothing industry, especially in the west, could be seen as one example of the development towards collaborative consumption (Park & Lin, 2020; McNeill & Venter, 2019). McNeill and Venter (2019) state that consumers' motivation to engage in alternative consumption is driven by factors such as economic benefits, enhanced satisfaction, the uniqueness of products and personal style. Environmental benefits have been

found to be less motivating in relation to a shift in consumption behavior. However, when analyzing the application of alternative consumption models, the authors found that sustainability ethics are strong drivers of collaborative consumption alternatives, meanwhile others argue that collaborative consumption is rather motivated and influenced by subjective norms. McNeill and Venter (2019) further highlight the barriers with collaborative consumption models by indicating that the lack of ownership as well as the limitations of second-hand goods in terms of style and size could prohibit the engagement of alternative consumption. Moreover, it has to be acknowledged that subjective and personal norms are not only in position to influence individuals to comply with a certain behavior, but also to prevent behaviors due to pressure in the social environment (ibid). Based on this acknowledgement, McNeill and Venter (2019) state that "*social pressure from peers may outweigh personal feelings of moral obligation (such as sustainable behaviour) in circumstances heavily weighted towards ego development*" (p. 371).

Methodology

In the beginning of the methodology chapter, the choice of conducting a qualitative research approach will be motivated, which refers to the opportunities of obtaining new knowledge regarding the relatively unexplored subject. This is followed by an explanation of the data collection method being focus groups, which was considered relevant for this study partly due to the possibilities of creating in-depth discussions. The sampling process will be described followed by an explanation of how the five focus groups were conducted. Moreover, a description of the three-step coding-process and the conduct of analysis will be presented, along with the study's limitations and a discussion regarding quality and trustworthiness.

Research approach

This research undertook a qualitative approach due to the aim of obtaining new knowledge and a deeper understanding of post-millennials' sustainable consumption behavior and how it can be affected by influencer marketing. A qualitative method was considered appropriate due to the ability to provide nuance and different perspectives regarding the chosen subject. This study aims to expand the theoretical field regarding how consumers identify influencers' role in affecting their purchasing behavior of sustainable fashion items, which a qualitative method can account for (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The choice of method was further based upon the ability to analyze in-depth information collected from a smaller sample size (ibid). This is done through interpretation of words that provides an understanding of the respondents' different values and behaviors (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Derived from the choice of a qualitative research approach, qualitative interviews were used as a method for collecting empirical material for this research. This considering that the aim of this study is to create an understanding of a consumer behavior, which Bryman and Bell (2017) claim to be one of the main advantages with qualitative interviews. More specifically,

the empirical material was collected through the focus group method. This mainly due to the possibility to evoke a discussion in order to interpret common feelings and evaluations among the respondents. According to previous research, the focus group method could provide the research with a deeper understanding of respondents' thoughts and feelings, since it enables an openness regarding a predetermined choice of subject (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Jacobsen, 2017).

Data collection
Focus groups
Conducting focus groups was considered to be a valuable choice of data collection method for this research due to a number of reasons. First and foremost, the focus group method provides the respondents with opportunities to discuss the subject and question statements made by other participants. Thus, the main objective of using this method was to reach a certain level of understanding and in-depth discussion including different aspects and opinions, that would not have been possible to obtain otherwise. Considering that this study is focused on the post-millennial generation, it could also be argued that inducing young adults to participate in a group interview with like-minded respondents is more feasible than conducting one-on-one interviews. The choice of data collection method was further based upon the ability for an exploration of a specific subject rather than several research questions (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In accordance with this, Kitzinger (1995) states that "*the idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview*" (p. 299).

Furthermore, considering that this study aims to investigate a relatively unexplored subject, the focus groups were intended to provide new and useful insights that could be beneficial for the research area. This goes in line with Morgan (1997) who argues that focus groups are considered to be especially useful when investigating a research topic that has not been widely discussed before. Kitzinger (1995) adds to this discussion by claiming that focus groups can provide valuable insights to a subject, where the discussion might result in unexpected implications.

Sampling
In this study, five focus groups were conducted with five to six respondents in each group, resulting in a total of 28 respondents. This was based on the discussion of quantity and saturation regarding the sampling process (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Kitzinger, 1995). To assure relevancy for this research, all respondents had to fulfill a number of criterias, in terms of being active on social media channels, follow fashion influencers on these platforms and have a thorough understanding of the concept of sustainable consumption. Furthermore, due to the focus on the post-millennial generation, the respondents had to be between the ages of 15 and 25. The participants are thus derived from a specialized population, meaning that they can relate to the subject in similar ways and contribute to a more comfortable discussion (Morgan, 1997). This is further elaborated on by Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), who argue that accessibility and suitability for the specific research is considered to be important aspects

when selecting respondents in a qualitative study. A common trend in qualitative research is further to aim for homogeneity in order to be able to share experiences and thoughts (Kitzinger, 1995). Moreover, it is stated that like-minded respondents could provide an understanding of group norms and cultural values (ibid).

Regarding the previous statements, the focus groups were composed based on factors such as age and gender. Individuals around the same age participated in the same focus group in order to create an atmosphere for safe discussions where the respondents could relate to each other as well as the topic. Furthermore, all respondents were from Sweden. As a result, the focus groups were organized in Swedish in order to keep the interaction as natural as possible and prohibit the risk of limiting the participants' abilities to engage in the discussions. Some of the respondents knew each other from beforehand, which suggests that the sampling process is related to a convenience procedure and not a systematic sampling technique (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Potential respondents were asked to answer a few questions regarding their social media usage and sustainable consumption behavior, in order to ensure their relevance. Furthermore, the respondents were asked if they had any like-minded contacts who would be willing to participate in a focus group. This was not only considered appropriate for the convenience of the respondents but also since the aim with qualitative research is not related to making statistical generalizations (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Thus, the sampling process of this study resulted in a combination of convenience-sampling and snowball-sampling.

Moreover, both men and women were part of the sampling where women constituted the majority of the respondents. This is supported by Sheldon and Bryant (2016) who found that women are more active on their social media channels in comparison to men, when investigating college students' underlying motives for using social media. Additionally, womens' activity on visual platforms are considered to be more interactive where personal relationships become central for their social media usage (ibid). However, men were included in the sampling based on their ability to contribute with additional points of views as their social media patterns could be seen as somewhat different in comparison to women, which is supported by Sheldon and Bryant (2016). Thus, the researchers hoped to obtain a deeper discussion regarding the specific subject by adding this dimension. Nevertheless, due to the sampling process being used in combination with the developed criterias for participation, the male respondents only came to represent a small percentage of the overall sampling. A list of focus groups respondents are presented in *Table 1*.

Group and date	Respondent	Age	Gender
Group 1 March 3rd 18:00	Elsa	19	Female
	Emelie	23	Female
	Ida	25	Female
	Lovisa	23	Female
	Stina	23	Female
	Victor	23	Male

Group 2 March 4th 17:00	Alva	20	Female
	Alva	19	Female
	Evelina	20	Female
	Helen	19	Female
	Ida	20	Female
Group 3 March 9th 18:00	Emma	19	Female
	Erika	18	Female
	Jonna	19	Female
	Lisa	19	Female
	Maja	19	Female
	Moa	18	Female
Group 4 March 10th 19:00	Cajsa	23	Female
	Evelina	23	Female
	Ida	25	Female
	Rickard	23	Male
	Simon	23	Male
	Viktoria	23	Female
Group 5 March 22nd 15:00	Erik	25	Male
	Johanna	24	Female
	Jon	24	Male
	Lisa	25	Female
	Oscar	24	Male

Table 1. List of focus groups respondents

Conducting the focus groups

Due to the ongoing pandemic of Covid-19, all five focus groups were held through online-meetings via Zoom. Digitized interviews were primarily arranged in order to ensure and respect all individuals' safety and health, but were also considered convenient due to the geographical distance between the participants and the researchers. All respondents were invited to the digital meeting seven days prior to the occasion with the information that they only were in need of a computer with a stable internet connection in order to participate. The respondents were able to participate in the focus group from a comfortable environment, such as within their home setting and through their own computer, which goes in line with Kitzinger (1995) who advocates relaxed sessions. In accordance with obtaining a comfortable environment, the respondents were also informed about the subject but were not given any specific information about the study's purpose or research question. Furthermore, the respondents were informed that the interview was expected to last for approximately 90 minutes. This assumption was based on previous research (Bryman and Bell, 2017; Kitzinger, 1995), and turned out to be accurate.

Conducting the focus groups via Zoom further provided the ability to record each group interview. According to Bryman and Bell (2017), recording the focus groups could be seen as beneficial for the researchers for various reasons. First and foremost, as several respondents

will participate during the same interview it could be challenging to determine who said what without documenting the interaction with recordings. Thus, all respondents were asked to have their cameras on during each session. Furthermore, one of the main reasons for using focus groups as a method is to observe how co-value is created among the respondents, which could be difficult to study while taking notes (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The recording further facilitated the transcription of the interviews.

During the focus group sessions, the researchers themselves took the role as moderators but kept an unstructured role while making sure that the respondents maintained a consistent discussion, which is supported by Bryman and Bell (2017). Furthermore, this study was based on a semi-structured interview technique, which means that the discussion topics were derived from the theoretical framework. The semi-structured interviews will be presented in the form of an interview-guide, which can be found in the appendix. The questions were categorized into four different themes being *sustainable consumption*, *sustainable fashion consumption*, *influencer marketing* and *influencer marketing in relation to sustainable consumption*. This structure aimed to ensure that the discussions covered relevant theoretical aspects as well as remained consistent to the specific subject. The last theme, influencer marketing in relation to sustainable consumption, included a number of examples in order to provide the respondents with practical cases that allowed them to reflect upon what type of content that could have an affect on their consumption behavior. The respondents were also given the opportunity to share their own examples during this part of the focus group. However, due to the nature of the focus group method, where both the moderator and the respondents had the opportunity to deviate from the predetermined discussion points (Bryman & Bell, 2017), every session turned out to be quite unique and provided various interesting discussions.

Conduct of analysis

As a qualitative research approach is characterized by an extensive and unstructured amount of empirical material, a method of analysis is essential for being able to interpret and create an understanding of the gathered information (Bryman & Bell, 2017). In this study, the analysis differentiated between individual statements and opinions shaped by the group discussion. This is further supported by Kitzinger (1995), who explains that empirical data collected with the focus group method is highly dependent on the interactions between respondents as well as the overall group dynamic. Moreover, the author states that analyzing focus groups is similar to the process of analyzing other qualitative research, in terms of discussing and identifying different themes and connecting them to relatable variables.

Before conducting the analysis, the collected material from all focus groups had to be transcribed in order to develop an overall understanding of the empirical discussion. The researchers further discussed and read through the transcribed material several times, to make sure that there were no confusions or uncertainties regarding the collected data. Furthermore, in order to facilitate the research process, each focus group was transcribed and discussed after each session. This also enabled opportunities for improvements for upcoming sessions.

When all five group discussions had been fully transcribed, the empirical material was coded into different themes to facilitate the analysis process. An example of this process is referred to in *Table 2*. At the initial stage of the coding process, direct quotes were broken down into words which is referred to as open-coding (Denscombe, 2007). The second stage involved axial coding where the researchers identified links between the open coding in order to combine the material into elements. Lastly, the elements were linked together to form a theme which is referred to as selective coding (ibid). When processing the material it was found that several elements could be related to one another. As a result, some elements will be covered and discussed in relation to multiple themes. The identified themes are; *knowledge*, *social influence*, *responsibility* and *credibility*. Furthermore, the study's theoretical framework functioned as a lens from which the empirical material was analyzed in relation to. This was done in order to be able to conduct an analysis based on theoretical research which in turn would lead to relevant conclusions.

Direct quote	Open-coding	Elements	Themes
Influencers have to be more genuine in their communication and basically 'walk the talk'. This would probably make me trust them more, and thus they would have a bigger influence on me.	More genuine communication; Walk the talk; Bigger influence.	Authenticity increase influence	Credibility
Sustainability does not have an impact on my fashion consumption behavior. I would simply not choose a sustainable fashion product over another more trendy, better looking shirt.	Sustainability does not affect consumption; Would not choose sustainability over appearance	Trends; Fashionable outweighs sustainable	Social influence

Table 2. An example of the coding process

After identifying the themes, the analysis process was further divided into two different parts. In order to develop an understanding of how influencer marketing could affect the sustainable consumption behavior among post-millennials, it was considered important to initially comprehend the opportunities as well as the potential barriers of post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption. Thus, the first part of the analysis process aimed to create an understanding of post-millennials' relationship to sustainable fashion consumption, by solely

focusing on the consumer perspective. Thereafter, the most important insights were used to conduct the second part of the analysis process, which aimed to answer the study's purpose and research question.

Issues of quality

One of the main objectives in qualitative business research is to provide research defined by quality and trustworthiness (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Hence, maintaining a critical approach when collecting data is essential (ibid). In this research, the level of quality and transparency was increased by adopting four evaluation criterias being dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability. In order to ensure dependability, the research process has been thoroughly documented and is therefore considered traceable, which goes in line with Eriksson and Kovalainen's (2008) definition of the concept. Furthermore, a replication of this particular study could be considered possible with equal circumstances. However, it should be acknowledged that the fashion industry is somewhat trend sensitive, indicating that consumers' motives, perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable fashion consumption could be shifting to some extent. In terms of credibility, this study could encounter some issues of quality due to the number of respondents who participated. However, when all focus groups had been conducted, it could be seen that the discussions addressed similar elements where the same line of thoughts were expressed. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008), this indicated that a level of saturation was reached. Additionally, in order to ensure credibility, all material has been conducted from primary sources and is therefore reflecting authentic feelings and thoughts towards the subject (ibid).

Considering the level of generalization for future research, Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman (2016) argue that qualitative studies are not usually generalizable due to a relatively small sample size, where reasonings and discussions are seen as more important than a high number of respondents. Thus, in order to regard transferability, Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) put emphasis on the importance of placing the research in relation to previous research, to demonstrate a connection and relevance. Since this study aims to provide a new perspective on consumers' sustainable consumption by adding the element of influencer marketing, it could be argued that this research ensures transferability in those areas, in accordance with Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008). However, considering that the sampling in this study solely consists of respondents from Sweden within the same age group, the results could be somewhat restrained. Furthermore, it could be argued that influencer marketing is relatively well-developed in Sweden, which in turn could have an impact on the consumers' relationship with influencers and thereby the probability of being influenced by them. Although these are important aspects to have in mind, it is still arguable that the findings of this study could provide valuable insight of how influencer marketing can affect sustainable fashion consumption among Swedish post-millennials.

Lastly, confirmability relates to the trustworthiness of the research by ensuring that the information that is being presented is a representation of the collected data (Eriksson & Kovalianen, 2008). Thus, the researchers were solely responsible for distinguishing relevant

information derived from the interviews. In order to maintain the level of accuracy in the result and analysis, the empirical findings were therefore based on the transcribed material which is presented through a combination of summaries and direct quotes.

Ethical considerations

The application of ethical considerations was highly important for this research. Bryman and Bell (2017) state that ethical concerns are somewhat similar among all qualitative research. However, Sim and Waterfield (2019) argue that there are distinct ethical challenges to consider when using focus groups as a method. Consent, a central ethical principle in research involving humans, becomes even more important when conducting focus groups as the respondents are not only vulnerable for the researchers but also for other participants (ibid). At an initial stage, all respondents were informed about the subject of this research prior to the interviews which provided them with an insight of what they were signing up for. All respondents have further been giving their consent to participate in this study. At the beginning of each focus group, all respondents were informed that the participation was voluntary and that they had the opportunity to leave at any time. With regards to confidentiality and anonymity (Sim & Waterfield, 2019), the respondents were asked if they would like to be anonymous or if they could be addressed by their first name, age and gender which they accepted.

In order to create a safe environment and thereby reduce the risk of harm (Sim & Waterfield, 2019), the focus groups included participants with similar social backgrounds who were considered to be somewhat like-minded. Some of the respondents even had previous relationships with one another, which fostered the discussion due to the participants' willingness to speak more freely. This is supported by Sim and Waterfield (2019) who state that participating in a focus group could create a public vulnerability among the respondents which in turn could impact the authenticity of the discussion. Moreover, the group session circumstance could pressure a respondent to be performative as well as confirmative in proximity of other respondents (ibid). It could be argued that this sense of pressure could be reduced while interacting with individuals that you have an existing relationship with, which was considered to be beneficial for this research.

Result and analysis

This chapter aims to develop an understanding of how consumers' sustainable fashion consumption can be affected by social media influencers. Brought from the empirical data collection, we identified four themes that could provide an insight into the complex merger between the fields of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. The identified themes being knowledge, social influence, responsibility and credibility will compose the structure of this chapter. First, knowledge will be related to the opportunities of engaging consumers in sustainable fashion consumption by spreading awareness and information on

*social media channels, where influencers could have a central role. Thereafter, influencers'
ability to affect social aspects such as trends, norms and consumers' attitudes will be
analyzed. This is followed by a discussion of influencers' responsibility in relation to
sustainable fashion consumption and how they could motivate consumers to take more
responsibility. Lastly, it will be discussed how credibility is a driver of influence and how
consumers' sustainable fashion consumption are more likely to be influenced by social media
influencers who appear authentic and genuine.*

Influencers' role in increasing knowledge of sustainable fashion consumption

While discussing sustainable consumption, it became prominent that the majority of the
respondents experience a lack of knowledge regarding sustainable consumption, both in
terms of how to engage in sustainable consumption as well as the impacts of acting
unsustainable. During the focus groups, the majority of the respondents stated that they had
little or no ethical considerations while purchasing fashion items. This was mostly due to the
respondents' lack of understanding of both the social and environmental impacts when
consuming non-sustainable products such as fast-fashion items. During the third focus group,
Erika expressed that: "*Even though you are aware of sustainable issues to some extent, while
being in the store the desire for a specific clothing item is stronger than your concern for the
environment*". This could be related to Schaefer and Crane (2005), who argue that
pro-environmental activities could be negatively affected by consumers' limited
environmental knowledge.

During the focus groups, the respondents further expressed that increased knowledge and
information could shape their consumption behavior towards more sustainable choices. In
accordance with this, Bedard and Tolmie (2018) argue that younger consumers' sustainable
consumption behavior could be encouraged by increasing the awareness of green products on
social media platforms. Most often, younger consumers who lack confidence and knowledge
regarding various subjects will turn to other incentives for guiding their behavior (Johnstone
& Lindh, 2017), which creates an opportunity for social media influencers to shape
sustainable fashion consumption behaviors. This by sharing informative and educational
communication on their social media platforms with the objective to support consumers'
decision-making processes. However, it should be acknowledged that the findings further
revealed that despite having prior knowledge, some respondents do not act in a sustainable
way, which indicates that the barriers of sustainable fashion consumption might be related to
additional aspects as well.

Furthermore, the empirical material showed that one of the main reasons for why some
post-millennials do not purchase sustainable fashion items is related to availability. A
common opinion during all focus groups was that the respondents found it difficult to know
how to purchase sustainable fashion. For example, during the fourth session Evelina stated
that: "*Sometimes it might not be about the lack of knowledge regarding the understanding of
sustainable consumption, but rather a lack of knowledge regarding where to find sustainable*

fashion products". Based on this statement, the respondents further argued that social media influencers could encourage sustainable fashion consumption by sharing content regarding how, where and what to purchase. This was highly discussed during all focus groups where the respondents claimed that influencers are in the position to drive sustainable fashion consumption by spreading awareness and providing practical examples on how to behave. In accordance with this, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) state that by the use of the right influencer and message, sustainability awareness is likely to be increased among consumers. During the first session, Ida shared an example of this when stating that:

"I follow two twins that have a mutual influencer account on Instagram where they really push for second-hand consumption and the importance of being environmentally concerned. They have educated me in various aspects and most importantly teached me how and where to search for sustainable fashion through second-hand which has increased the availability for me personally."

This quote demonstrates that influencers are able to reduce the barriers to sustainable fashion by being informative on their social media platforms. The respondent's former perception that sustainable fashion was difficult to locate have changed due to the influencers' support and means. However, the common opinion when discussing influencers ability to drive sustainable fashion consumption was that the respondents recognized a lack of engagement among the majority of influencers. For example, during the fourth session, Evelina stated that: *"I follow Veganskmatlåda on Instagram and they have really nice outfits and I know for a fact that they only purchase second-hand clothing, so clearly there is a possibility of finding nice items on second-hand, I just struggle to know how to find them"*. Based on this quote, it could be interpreted that the respondent becomes aware that attractive fashion could be purchased via second-hand, however, the influencer fails to inform or educate the consumer on how to find these products. Hence, it could be argued that this type of information could increase the awareness of sustainable fashion, which goes in line with Johnstone and Lindh (2017), but be unsuccessful in increasing the consumption of sustainable fashion as a result of not navigating the consumers in how to purchase these products.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest that knowledge could be deeply rooted in habits as the respondents expressed that they do not reflect upon how they consume fashion and thereby find it difficult to transform their consumption behavior on their own initiative. For instance, the respondents who do not usually purchase sustainable fashion acknowledged that they do not consider second-hand consumption as an option due to the lack of experience of this consumption habit. This indicates that influencers have an opportunity to inspire new habits driving fashion consumption towards more sustainable alternatives by displaying sustainable patterns in their own consumption behavior. In accordance with this statement, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) suggest that influencers who act sustainable have the power to develop consumers' knowledge by normalizing sustainable behavior and communicating the reason for having a sustainable commitment. However, one could argue that in order for consumers to adapt this knowledge, collaborative efforts among influencers are needed to be able to change the environment. The findings showed that the respondents individually have a

wide landscape of influencers who they follow on social media and in order for influencers' impact to be effective, this consistency might have to be applied on multiple scales. Thus, it could be questioned whether one influencer alone could normalize sustainable behavior, especially since post-millennials are being influenced to consume in most interactions with social media influencers.

Another element that became central during the focus group discussions was that the majority of the respondents find it difficult to distinguish between a green product and a non-green product, which in turn negatively affects their sustainable consumption. In several cases, the respondents speculated that this could be due to lack of information regarding sustainability measurements in relation to fashion items. Victor spoke for the rest of the respondents while stating that: "*It is not always very clear that a fashion item is sustainable. Different companies within the fashion industry use different criterias for what should be considered to be sustainable and not, which is quite a contrast to the food industry, for example*". This indicates that post-millennials find it difficult to actively make sustainable choices when the communication is unclear. As a result, consumers' demand for sustainable products could be seen as restrained (Lu et al., 2013). It could be argued that consumers' difficulties in distinguishing between a green and a non-green product could be reduced by increased awareness on social media channels, where influencers could play a crucial part. During the second focus group, Alva stated that: "*I think it is important for influencers to show the difference between not purchasing a sustainable product versus purchasing a non-sustainable product, and what the potential consequences might be. If influencers were more informative about this, I would start thinking about it more*". This quote illustrates that influencers could affect consumers' purchase intentions by being informative, which correlates with Lou and Yuan's (2019) findings of a positive relationship between influencers' informative value and their followers' purchase intentions.

Brought from the findings and the discussion regarding the respondents' knowledge of sustainable fashion consumption, it could be interpreted that post-millennials do not have the preconditions to make sustainable choices, which could have a negative impact on their sustainable fashion consumption. The findings further implied that social media influencers have the opportunity to increase sustainable fashion consumption by spreading more awareness and information as well as increasing the availability of sustainable fashion products, which in turn could reduce the barriers between post-millennials' and sustainable fashion consumption. However, the discussion remains whether an influencer has the ability to encourage sustainable fashion consumption by solely increasing the knowledge among post-millennials, especially since this study provides indications that other factors may be of importance when investigating sustainable fashion consumption. This will be discussed further in the next parts of this chapter.

Influencers as drivers of social influence

During the focus groups it became clear that the respondents value elements related to social influence more than sustainability aspects, when consuming fashion. This could be related to

Lu et al (2013) who state that consumers could find it difficult to accept the lack of specific product attributes in order to be more sustainable, which could arguably be referred to social aspects such as attractiveness and trends, considering that these aspects are prominent in relation to fashion consumption. In accordance with this, Ida stated during the fourth focus group: "*Honestly, I would not choose a sustainable fashion product over a non-sustainable fashion product that I find more attractive, just because of the sustainable aspect*". This was supported by the majority of the respondents who further expressed that the sustainable aspect is not a decisive factor when purchasing a sustainable clothing item. Thus, the findings indicate that being fashionable outweighs being sustainable among post-millennials in today's society. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that the respondents had different attitudes towards sustainable fashion, which became specifically apparent when discussing collaborative fashion consumption. The respondents with a more negative attitude towards collaborative fashion stated that they do not associate second-hand clothing with social aspects such as trends, norms and attractiveness, resulting in a restrainment of sustainable fashion consumption. The findings further showed that the minority of the respondents who are purchasing second-hand clothing, are mainly driven by social aspects and pressures from their external environment. For instance, brought from the empirical material it could be seen how pro-environmental activities performed by friends and family induced a sustainable consumption behavior among these respondents. Based on this, one could argue that there might not be a contradiction between social aspects and sustainable fashion consumption in some social networks where sustainable fashion consumption is supported.

The focus groups further showed that post-millennials perceive that purchasing newly produced fashion items is a great part of modern society's trends and norms. In line with this, theoretical research suggests that influencers' ability to affect consumers' fashion consumption behavior has increased (Bakker, 2018; Chetioui et al., 2019), and that the reason could be consumers' increased sensitivity towards trends (Chetioui et al., 2019). One example of this can be related to a discussion within the second focus group, which can be summarized by Helen's statement: "*I feel like everytime there is a new trend that I do not really like, I usually change my mind when I see an influencer I follow wearing that item*". Derived from this quote, it can be interpreted that social media influencers could affect the respondents' fashion consumption behavior, as they could be considered drivers of new fashion trends. The findings of this study further showed that one of the main reasons for why some of the respondents do not engage in sustainable fashion consumption is due to sustainable fashion not being part of the norm. Thus, it can be suggested that influencers could increase post-millennials' consumption of sustainable fashion by normalizing this purchasing behavior and making it part of the trend.

Previous research highlights that some consumers are being more affected by influencers than others, as some consumers are more conscious of other individuals' opinions (De Veirman et al., 2016). This was supported by the findings of this study as only a few participants admitted that they are being influenced by social media influencers. Furthermore, a common assumption, especially among the older span of respondents who were in their mid-twenties, was that influencers surely have the ability to influence younger consumers as they are

considered to be more receptive of influencers' communication. However, it could be questioned whether this assumption truly reflects the reality or if the older respondents are equally exposed to the power of influencer marketing. Oscar was one of the participants that recognized that this might be the case, while he explained that:

"My first instinct is to say that the choices of what clothes to purchase are not affected by any social media influencer, but when I think more about it I am not so sure. As a consumer, I come across a lot of fashion products and brands everyday and even if I am not convinced at that single moment, I will probably still remember the product and the influencer unconsciously. So when I actually want to purchase a fashion item, that ad might be the first thing that comes to my mind."

This quote suggests that post-millennials could find it difficult to recognize and acknowledge that social media influencers have a direct impact on their consumption pattern. However, the majority of the respondents discussed that their fashion consumption is highly related to social influences in terms of trends, norms and social acceptance. Thus, it could be argued that influencers might have an indirect impact on consumption behavior and thereby have the ability to influence sustainable fashion consumption, especially as social media influencers are considered to be important drivers of social aspects (Chetioui et al., 2019). Accordingly, Johnstone and Lindh (2017) argue that remembering a product communicated by an influencer is easier because consumers are able to relate the message to the individual itself.

Furthermore, the respondents claimed that influencers' consumption habits are contributing to making overconsumption part of the social norm. During the third focus group, Lisa expressed that: *"Fashion influencers are publishing multiple posts each week with new collaborations or fashion purchases. I feel like this communicates that you also have to change your wardrobe and purchase new clothes all the time, in order to keep up with trends"*. Thus, it could be argued that influencers' frequent collaborations with fast-fashion brands as well as their own fashion consumption behavior are shaping unsustainable norms, which in turn could restrain post-millennials' ability to consume more sustainably. Previous research has acknowledged that so-called sustainable influencers can be used to highlight green products (Chwialkowska, 2019) and increase knowledge about sustainability issues among consumers, which could make them more aware (Johnstone & Lindh, 2017). However, the overall perception brought from the focus groups in this study is that there is a lack of sustainable influencers on social media platforms, which the respondents believed could negatively affect their sustainable fashion consumption behavior. Nevertheless, derived from the findings in this study it is possible to argue that influencers who are considered trend-setters and more fashionable could be able to drive sustainable fashion consumption more successfully among the post-millennial generation, by focusing on the right aspects. For example, the respondents did not associate sustainable fashion with attractiveness and quality, which suggests that influencers might need to put emphasis on these attributes. Moreover, the findings further demonstrated that the majority of the respondents perceive that sustainable products are expensive, and that they would not be willing to pay more for a sustainable product in comparison to a non-green product. This indicates that influencers could increase

post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption by displaying cheaper alternatives of sustainable fashion, such as second-hand.

Influencers' ability to increase sustainable engagement was further discussed during the focus groups, where Emelie suggested that influencers need to repeatedly inspire their followers to purchase sustainable fashion. She argued: "*If an influencer is constantly communicating sustainable fashion consumption, more consumers will take after their behavior and consume more sustainably*". While previous theoretical research suggests that social media channels could increase consumers' sustainable behavior (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018), the majority of the respondents within this study agreed that influencers should be in the front-line of this development. This could be summarized by Ida's comment during the forth focus group:

"*I believe that it is important that fashion influencers are communicating sustainable consumption in order to normalize the behavior. Even though it might not make that big of a change initially, more and more followers will be influenced which will result in a newly developed trend that advocates consuming more sustainable fashion.*"

Considering that the findings in this study demonstrated that the respondents do not regard ethical considerations to be a predominant driver when consuming fashion, it could be suggested that the advertisement of sustainable fashion might be ineffective if the communication is solely focused on sustainability. During the focus groups, the respondents were introduced to an example of two different influencers who advertised the same second-hand app, TISE, by the use of different means. One of the influencers promoted the app with the use of keywords such as trendy and fashionable, while the other influencer focused on bringing attention to the environmental benefits of consuming second-hand fashion. While being presented with these two examples, the majority of the respondents expressed that their purchase intentions were most likely to be enhanced by the former alternative. During the first session, Ida spoke for the majority of the respondents when stating that: "*There is probably a greater chance that you download the TISE-app if an influencer advertises it as trendy and fashionable because that is what becomes important for us when consuming fashion*". Based on this, it could be interpreted that influencers have the opportunity to motivate the consumption of sustainable fashion products unconsciously by marketing it as any other fashion collaboration. However, it should be acknowledged that consumers' attitude towards a certain influencer could affect the influencer's ability to influence different individuals and thus, have an impact on their sustainable consumption behavior. This was discussed in the majority of the focus groups, where the respondents expressed that their attitude towards an influencer will have an impact on how they respond to that influencer's communication. Some respondents were more critical to certain influencers than others, where the critique was mainly directed towards the influencer's background, including previous statements and actions.

Influencers' responsibility in relation to sustainable fashion consumption

All of the focus groups discussed that responsibility is considered to be highly important when addressing influencers' ability to increase consumers' sustainable fashion consumption behavior. During the first session, Emelie argued: "*Influencers have a huge opportunity to really influence and inspire consumers, but they need to take these obligations seriously, which is kind of a huge responsibility itself*". In accordance with this, Rickard stated: "*Even though influencers have been around for a long period of time in different ways and formats, the range of social media and the huge amount of followers that these individuals are able to reach today makes their responsibility more considerate and important*". These quotes indicate that the respondents consider social media influencers to have greater opportunities to communicate ethical behavior, than so-called previous influencers and celebrities have had.

Furthermore, a common discussion during all five focus groups was that the respondents are feeling powerless in terms of their individual actions and tend to question why they should engage in sustainable fashion consumption. During the focus groups, some respondents further acknowledged that they occasionally communicate sustainable commitment without actually engaging in sustainable consumption. For example, this was suggested by Lisa during the fifth session: "*I believe that it is easier to talk about sustainability issues and to claim that you are consuming sustainably. But in the end I think that you will always choose to prioritize yourself and your own needs and wants, even if that is not how you communicate your self-image to the society*". This quote reveals that it is important for some respondents to be seen as environmentally-friendly, but that they do not translate this image into actual behavior, which could be due to the prioritization of other aspects such as social influence and individual self. This could further be related to White et al (2019), who state that the so-called attitudinal-behavioral gap is linked to psychological factors. Thus, it could be argued that influencers could use their ability to communicate and inspire their followers to act more responsible and reflect upon their consumption behavior. For example, influencers could function as guides to show how to behave more sustainable as well as shape sustainable fashion trends and norms. This especially since the focus groups showed indications that the respondents are heavily affected by social influence and have a lack of knowledge regarding how to engage in sustainable consumption, which has been discussed in previous parts.

Even though the respondents argued that social media influencers do have a responsibility of increasing sustainable fashion consumption, they struggled with the arising dilemma regarding that the role of an influencer is strongly connected to consumption. This was mainly due to the fact that the majority of the respondents consider consumption to be an unsustainable practice, and that the more sustainable alternative would be to encourage consumers to decrease their fashion consumption. However, it is possible to argue that although influencers' role is to promote consumption, different consumption habits have different impacts on sustainability issues (McNeill & Venter, 2019). Thus, encouraging consumers to purchase more sustainable fashion may in turn influence them to change their

consumption habits and choose better alternatives in the future. Johanna highlighted an example of this:

"*I do not think that the influencer profession would be the same without them encouraging consumption. But when I think about it, there are of course better and worse consumption choices that a consumer can make and that an influencer can promote. For example, there is an influencer who started this clothing brand called 'Djerf Avenue' which I consider more sustainable. Even if they still encourage consumption, it provides better alternatives to fast-fashion.*"

Furthermore, the majority of respondents agreed that influencers might be able to foster sustainable consumption, by being more selective regarding which brands to collaborate with. The findings further advocated that influencers need to be more transparent, both in terms of how consumers could act more sustainably, but also with regards to their collaborations with fashion brands. The common viewpoint among the respondents was that there is a lack of transparency when influencers advertise fast-fashion brands which tends to overshadow the sustainability issues that these brands contribute to in the industry. During the fourth session, the respondents discussed this very topic, and Cajsa stated that: "*In the same way as influencers are obligated to label their posts as advertisements, I think that they should be bound to be transparent regarding the sustainability aspect of the collaboration as well*". Based on this statement, it is suggested that transparency could support post-millennials in developing an understanding of the negative impacts of fast-fashion, and thereby reduce part of the persuasion.

The importance of influencers' credibility

The findings suggest that the respondents' sustainable fashion consumption behavior is more likely to be affected by an influencer who is perceived as authentic and genuine. This highly relates to the brand image of the influencer, both in terms of being true to their identity and their collaborations. During all of the focus groups, the respondents were in agreement when expressing that credibility is a strong driver of influence. In other words, this factor was considered to be vital for increasing their purchase intentions. While discussing influencers' credibility, Lovisa stated that: "*When an influencer you follow never spends time at the gym and all of a sudden makes a collaboration with the sportswear fashion brand Stronger, the influencer immediately loses some authenticity*". This quote demonstrates that it is important that the influencer's brand image align with the brand that he or she collaborates with. This further goes in line with the theoretical statement that effective and influential messages need to be authentic and creative (Bakker, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Thus, it could be interpreted that an influencer might not be in the position to encourage sustainable fashion consumption if there is a misalignment with the brand image.

The findings further showed the importance of allowing sustainability to be part of the influencer's brand image in order to be influential in sustainable fashion consumption. Many respondents found it problematic that some macro-influencers define themselves as

sustainable influencers while at the same time having frequent collaborations with fast-fashion brands. The common argument among the respondents was that influencers have to walk the talk in order to establish credibility that in turn could be a driver of sustainable fashion consumption. In accordance with this, during the first session, Ida stated that: "*If an influencer communicates that they only purchase second-hand clothing and advocates that one should have a wardrobe with a few selected items, there is an importance of maintaining that very approach in order to be influential*".

During all focus groups, factors such as expertise, inspiration and transparency became central when discussing credible communication of sustainable fashion. The findings illustrate that the communication is most likely to be effective and influential if the information is being presented in a transparent manner. Additionally, Lou and Yuan (2019) state that the credibility and trust for an influencer also could be enhanced by being specialized within a certain area, which was partly confirmed by this study. Derived from the empirical material, it could be seen that the majority of the respondents claimed that they were more likely to be influenced by an individual that has profound knowledge about a specific product or industry. During the fifth session, Lisa shared an example of this by stating that:

"*There are influencers who I trust blindly when they promote certain products. For example, LeyGlow, she is a dermatologist and knows pretty much everything about skin care, so when she promotes a specific brand of a product that I am in need of, I would simply buy it.*"

This suggests that an influencer that is perceived as an expert in certain areas has a higher possibility to impact consumption behavior. However, Lisa's statement was criticized and questioned by the men in this focus group who expressed that even though the influencer has the expertise, the authenticity of the message could be somewhat reduced due to the post being sponsored. This perception could originate from the proposition that men do not relate to social media in the same way as women (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016), which signify that credibility is a complicated element, partly as a result of consumers' awareness of paid advertisements. When addressing credibility, the influencer Therese Lindgren was also brought up as an example by all focus groups as a result of her ability to strengthen the credibility of her communication with the support from external actors with an expertise within the relevant field. This suggests that an influencer does not necessarily need to have expertise to be considered credible, but could influence and shape consumption behavior with the use of external sources that contribute to trustworthy communication.

Furthermore, during the first focus group, Emelie acknowledged that there could be a dilemma when relating influencer marketing to sustainable fashion consumption, and stated that:

"*When an influencer promotes sustainable fashion by referring to second-hand websites, such as Sellpy where they sell clothing items from their own closets, you can not help but think that the intention is to make profit rather than to be environmentally-friendly. Even though it*

fosters sustainable fashion consumption in some ways, I am a bit divided towards these types of collaborations as it drives the consumers to consume while the influencer gets paid."

This quote demonstrates that consumers are likely to develop negative attitudes towards influencers' collaborations of sustainable fashion if it is perceived as inauthentic, which could be referred to a sense of a hidden agenda as well as a lack of engagement regarding the sustainability perspective. Lou and Yuan (2019) suggest that influencers could be able to increase consumers' purchase intentions by showing a genuine interest in a product with the combination of paid marketing and everyday life communication. Accordingly, several respondents claimed that their interest in sustainable fashion was most likely to be heightened when an influencer displays an item in a more casual everyday post. The respondents expressed that lifestyle posts provide an indication that the influencer genuinely likes the product, in contrast to a paid advertisement. Thus, it could be interpreted that how an influencer chooses to communicate with the consumers becomes a central factor where the influencer's role in marketing products and encouraging consumption could constitute a great part of the dilemma. This further indicates that there is an importance of being genuine and transparent in the collaboration with sustainable fashion brands.

During the focus groups, the respondents were encouraged to discuss different examples of influencers promoting sustainable fashion consumption on their social media channels with the objective to evaluate the credibility of the message. The findings illustrate that messages of the same nature could be perceived differently by the consumers depending on the source. In accordance with this, Emelie stated that "*It is perceived differently as you have a strong idea of the individual beforehand, therefore it does not matter if they have the exact same message*". This quote suggests that some influencers might have a greater opportunity to influence sustainable fashion consumption in comparison to others. Based on this, it could be argued that there is an importance for sustainable fashion brands to collaborate with the right type of influencers in order to increase consumers' purchase intentions.

Conclusive discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of how consumers' sustainable consumption behavior can be affected by the use of influencer marketing. This was generated by focusing on younger consumers, within the post-millennial generation, and the fashion industry. In order to fulfill the purpose of this study, the research question was formulated as: *how can consumers' sustainable fashion consumption behavior be affected by social media influencers*?

This study has identified four different themes that could contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the complex merger between the fields of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption. First and foremost, this research has shown that post-millennials have a lack of *knowledge* regarding sustainable fashion consumption which in turn prohibits

their ability to consume sustainably. This provides an opportunity for influencers to educate and inform consumers regarding the impacts of sustainable fashion, with the objective to enhance their sustainable commitment. Additionally, influencers could increase the availability of sustainable fashion by communicating where and how to find these products. The findings further illustrate that post-millennials believe that social media influencers could increase their consumption of sustainable fashion by, for example, drawing more attention to the impacts of purchasing a green versus a non-green item. However, this study further indicated that the consumers who had prior knowledge of sustainability issues still did not show any indications of consuming more sustainable fashion. Thus, even though knowledge has proven to be an important driver for sustainable fashion alternatives, it is arguable that this factor alone might not be able to increase sustainable fashion consumption. As a compliment, additional elements such as trends, social aspects and communication could be seen as essential. Thus, it can be concluded that influencers could motivate post-millennials' sustainable consumption behavior by communicating sustainable fashion with the use of elements more related to *social influence,* which this study has found to be more persuasive in comparison to sustainability ones. It should be acknowledged that this might not be a long-term solution for increasing the sustainable commitment among post-millennials, due to the continued lack of knowledge. However, as this study demonstrates, communicating sustainable fashion by the use of social aspects could be successful in encouraging post-millennials to purchase more sustainable products. Furthermore, considering that previous research has shown that influencers are in the front-line in the development of new fashion trends (Chetioui et al., 2019), influencers have the opportunity to make sustainable fashion part of the trend and social norms, which in turn could increase consumers' purchase intentions.

Regarding influencers' role in affecting post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption, this study further found that *responsibility* is an essential aspect in order to influence and motivate an ethical behavior. The findings demonstrated that post-millennials do not feel responsible for engaging in sustainability commitment. Thus, it could be argued that by communicating sustainable fashion in a transparent and inspiring way, influencers could educate consumers and thereby drive a sustainable consumption behavior. The findings of this study further highlighted that influencers need to be more selective in what types of collaborations they do as well as how they are displaying their consumption habits in relation to fashion. For example, this study showed that today's social media influencers are normalizing overconsumption, which negatively affects post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption. Furthermore, this study confirmed previous theoretical research stating that influencers who are transparent, inspiring and authentic in their communication have a higher possibility to affect consumers (Bakker, 2018; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Thus, it can be concluded that *credible* communication regarding sustainable fashion is more likely to be influential, which highlights the importance for influencers to be well-informed about the advertised product as well as being perceived as a credible individual. The findings also concluded that the advertisement of sustainable fashion has to be aligned with the influencers' brand image in order to be influential, which suggests that all influencers might not be in position to influence sustainable fashion consumption successfully. Additionally, how influencers are

communicating with their followers has proven to be a critical element when looking into their opportunity to affect consumers' sustainable consumption behavior.

Brought from this study, it is evident that post-millennials' relation to sustainable fashion consumption is somewhat complex. This primarily relates to consumers' tendency to value social aspects rather than sustainability aspects when consuming fashion, which becomes problematic since the majority of post-millennials do not associate sustainable fashion with social aspects such as trends, norms and attractiveness. The complexity further increases as influencer marketing could be seen as a complicated driver of consumers' sustainable consumption behavior. The findings demonstrated that consumers could be somewhat reluctant towards paid advertising on social media channels which in turn could have a negative impact on influencers' ability to encourage any type of consumption behavior, including sustainable consumption. Thus, in order to be able to increase sustainable fashion consumption among post-millennials in today's society, influencers have to focus on the right aspects of influence.

To conclude, this research has shown that in order for consumers' sustainable fashion consumption behavior to be affected by influencer marketing, there has to be an alignment between the four identified themes. Consequently, solely focusing on one of these aspects could be seen as ineffective. For example, only increasing consumers' knowledge of sustainable fashion will most likely not result in an increased sustainable fashion consumption behavior. This due to the importance of other influencing aspects such as the impact of social influence, influencers' responsibility in relation to sustainable fashion and the importance of credible communication. Furthermore, it could be argued that a development within the entire social media setting could be seen as crucial in order for consumers to adapt to a more sustainable behavior. This development requires a collaborative effort made by social media influencers where there has to be a distinct support of sustainable garments and practices. As previously mentioned, sustainable actions made by one single influencer risks being overshadowed by the majority of influencers who continuously promote fast-fashion.

This study contributes to theoretical research of sustainable consumption by integrating the perspective of influencer marketing, and investigating influencers' role in affecting consumers' sustainable consumption behavior. Separately, the two fields have gained a lot of attention in previous research. However, theoretical research combining sustainable consumption and influencer marketing is relatively unexplored. Considering the growth of social media influencers (Lim et al., 2017) and the increased importance of sustainability engagement (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018), extended knowledge within this area is arguably needed. Our research has identified *knowledge, social influence, responsibility* and *credibility* as four factors that contribute to an understanding of how influencers could affect sustainable fashion consumption behavior. Furthermore, this research complements previous studies by providing extended knowledge regarding what potential factors that could drive or prohibit consumers to purchase sustainable fashion. This by investigating the post-millennial

generation from a consumer perspective, which is fairly absent in previous theoretical research.

Managerial and societal implications

The findings of this study provides an understanding of post-millennials' motives for engaging in sustainable consumption. This could cause social media influencers and businesses to shape their communication strategies and marketing activities in order to increase their influence and affect this consumption behavior. From a business perspective, the knowledge brought from this study could be used in the process of establishing relationships with social media influencers. Derived from the findings, it could be seen how different collaborations could be more influential than others, depending on the identity of the source. Considering that social media influencers have the potential to increase brand awareness and be great sources of income (De Veirman et al., 2016), choosing the right influencer to collaborate with could be seen as essential for preventing businesses' from operating inefficiently. The findings further suggest that businesses hold a responsibility in acknowledging the power of influencer marketing and its ability to increase purchase intentions. This study implies that there is an under-representation of sustainable fashion collaborations on social media, which indicates that there is room for improvement in this area. Thus, businesses that are offering sustainable products and services could benefit from increasing their use of influencer marketing activities.

From a social media influencer perspective, the findings of this study could contribute to an understanding of their followers' consumption behavior, which in turn could be supportive in the process of reinforcing the level of engagement among post-millennials. This includes the understanding of sustainable consumption, since previous studies show that consumers are becoming more demanding of sustainable alternatives due to the growth of sustainability awareness (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018). Even though this could be questionable due to the findings in this study, the growth of sustainability awareness still becomes an important aspect to acknowledge when discussing the society at large. Thus, social media influencers could still profit from taking responsibility by doing more sustainable collaborations. However, this study implies that influencers are required to communicate sustainable consumption by the use of the right means in order to have an effective impact on consumers' sustainable consumption behavior. Furthermore, social media influencers could benefit from the findings by gaining an insight of consumers' perceptions of advertised communication and the importance of being authentic. This knowledge could be used to strengthen influencers' relationships with their followers as well as their brand image.

Furthermore, this study contributes to societal implications in terms of creating an understanding of the practice of consuming fashion as well as what could transform consumers' unsustainable fashion consumption behavior. The importance of not only increasing awareness of sustainability issues but also encouraging consumers to take more responsibility for the society and the environment becomes essential. This study showed that the post-millennial generation feel a lack of responsibility to engage in sustainable fashion

consumption, primarily due to other factors outweighing the importance of having a sustainable commitment. However, in order to normalize sustainability engagement, every actor needs to take individual responsibility, which includes companies, social media influencers as well as consumers of all generations. Given the extent and complexity of this transformation, it is possible to argue that a societal development towards more sustainable consumption behaviors will be both time consuming and require a lot of resources. Nevertheless, one could argue that this process could be supported by society with the means of educating, informing and making sustainable alternatives more available.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Due to the complex nature of this phenomenon, expanded research combining the two areas of influencer marketing and sustainable consumption is needed to develop a more in-depth understanding of this perspective. This study is limited to the consumer perspective while investigating how consumers' sustainable consumption could be affected by social media influencers. For future research, it could be suggested to examine this phenomenon by using a business perspective. Previous research illustrates that young consumers tend to be attitudinal green rather than behavioral green (Naderi & Steenburg, 2018), which suggests that there is a desire to be perceived as environmentally committed. With this in mind, it could be questioned whether consumers are fully transparent while discussing their relation to sustainable consumption, resulting in a somewhat biased result. Thus, conducting a similar study but from a business perspective could provide more information whether consumers actually purchase sustainable products and what marketing activities that have been proven to be most effective, and thereby contribute to a greater understanding of this phenomenon.

Furthermore, the sampling of this study could be seen as a limitation from various aspects. First and foremost, this study is bound to investigate the impact of influencer marketing on post-millennials' sustainable fashion consumption. Considering that this subject is relatively unexplored, future research could broaden the findings by exploring the impact on other segments of consumers. As previously mentioned, post-millennials were considered to be an interesting sample due to their extensive relationship with social media channels. However, it could be argued that social media usage is increasing among other target groups as a result of the society becoming more digitized. This suggests that supplementary segments could provide additional perspectives and develop the understanding of the subject. Moreover, the sampling could be seen as limited in terms of the sample size as well as geographical location. This study only investigates the impact of influencer marketing on sustainable fashion consumption by focusing on post-millennials located in Sweden. Future research could benefit from extending the sample size as well as analyzing consumers' sustainable consumption behavior on a global scale. This would be particularly interesting since influencer marketing has developed differently and thereby has various implementation levels around the world.

Lastly, this study is limited in terms of exclusively studying influencer marketing's impact on sustainable consumption in relation to the fashion industry. Thus, it would be interesting to

examine if the result could be different in relation to other industries. The fashion industry was considered an appropriate choice due to its relevance in the fields of sustainable consumption and influencer marketing (Bogliari, 2019; McNeill & Moore, 2015). However, this study found that social aspects are outweighing sustainable ones, which is highly related to consumers' relation to fashion consumption. Based on this, one could suggest that consumers' sustainable consumption behavior could differ depending on the context, specifically in situations where social aspects in terms of social identity, trends and norms are not as persuasive. Future research could therefore expand the knowledge of this subject by focusing on sustainable consumption from another perspective, such as for example the food industry. Furthermore, this study showed indications that consumers have different attitudes towards different forms of sustainable fashion consumption. Thus, it could be interesting to solely focus on specific aspects of sustainable fashion, for example second-hand consumption, in order to expand this knowledge and investigate if there could be other influencing elements related to specific subjects.

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Appendix

Interview guide

Part 1. Sustainable consumption

Theoretical foundation	Question	Sub-question
	What is your perception of sustainable consumption?	
Sustainable consumption behavior	Do you purchase sustainable products?	How often?
Information, price, trends, social influence, habit formation, responsibility, future orientation, frugality & availability	What becomes important for you when purchasing sustainable products?	What would make you (more) likely to buy sustainable products? What could be the reasons for not purchasing sustainable products?
Attitudinal-behavioral gap	Young consumers often find themselves attitudinal green rather than behavioral green, meaning that their environmental attitudes rarely translate into behavior. Discuss.	

Part 2: Sustainable fashion consumption

Theoretical foundation	Question	Sub-question
Consumption behavior, social identity, social norms, trends & social influence	What does your fashion consumption look like?	What drives your fashion consumption behavior?
Attractiveness, price & quality	What becomes important for you when purchasing a fashion item?	

Complex relationship between sustainable commitment & fast fashion. Fashionable VS. sustainable	Discuss your opinions regarding sustainable consumption within the fashion industry.	Do you ever reflect upon the environmental impacts of your fashion consumption?
Collaborative fashion consumption, uniqueness, ethical and environmental aspects & personal style	How do you engage in sustainable fashion consumption?	In what ways? And why?
Subjective and personal norms, knowledge, financial resources, norms, availability & attractiveness	What would make you (more) likely to buy sustainable fashion products?	

Part 3: Influencer marketing

Theoretical foundation	Question	Sub-question
Influence factors & drivers of influence	What type of influencers do you follow on social media?	And why?
Attitudes	What is your opinion of social media influencers?	
Trust, authenticity, credibility, knowledge & expertise	How credible are social media influencers to you?	Could you give any examples of influencers that you perceive as (not) credible, and why?
Influencer marketing in relation to consumption behavior	Discuss how you think that influencers are able to affect consumption behavior and in what ways.	Do you believe that your consumption behavior is affected by influencers? Could you give any examples?
Creators of trends, trust & credibility	Discuss how you think that influencers' promotion of fashion items could affect consumption behavior.	Do you believe that your fashion consumption behavior is affected by the promotion of fashion items? If not, by what means could an influencer be able to

		affect your fashion consumption behavior?

Part 4: Influencer marketing in relation to sustainable consumption

Theoretical foundation	Question	Sub-question
Sustainable influencer marketing	Do any of the influencers you follow on social media promote sustainable fashion products?	Examples. What is your opinion regarding these examples and what could potentially make you more engaged in sustainable fashion consumption?
Sustainable influencer marketing	What is your definition of a sustainable influencer?	And why?
Knowledge, communication & trend-sensitiveness	Do you have any examples of when you have purchased a sustainable fashion item based on an influencer's communication?	
Social norms, trends, status etc. VS. ethical consideration	If you were to purchase a sustainable fashion item based on a recommendation or inspiration of an influencer, what factors would underlie this purchase?	
	In what ways do you believe that an influencer could affect your consumption behavior towards more sustainable fashion consumption? Discuss.	

Lastly

Do you have any additional comments or thoughts related to the subject that was not addressed or discussed during the focus group? Thank you!

Practical examples used in the focus groups

Example 1
The influencer Alexandra Norling did an Instagram-story in collaboration with the second-hand application TISE. In this story, the influencer shared information regarding the application and its primary service to sell and purchase second-hand clothes. The application is further described as a combination between Blocket and Instagram. Above all, the influencer advocated the environmental benefits of purchasing second-hand items and that everyone should start to consume more sustainable fashion. The influencer further compared this with the consumption of fast-fashion, and highlighted why consuming fast-fashion products is both less practical and less environmentally-friendly. To conclude, the influencer explained that sustainability has become a more important subject and that it should be discussed more in the social media setting.
Example 2
The influencer Therese Lindgren did a Youtube-video in collaboration with the second-hand application TISE. In this video, the influencer cleaned out her personal closet and presented several items of clothing that were to be uploaded on the application within a short period of time. Furthermore, the influencer talked about how TISE has become a more trendy way to purchase clothes, since they have a strong focus on fashion-trends and what items that are considered desirable for consumers. While displaying clothes that were going to be available on the application, the influencer highlighted that she will be missing some of the garments but that they surely will look better on one of her followers instead.