



THE SWEDISH SCHOOL
OF TEXTILES
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Social or environmental labelling

- Consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences

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Abstract

In the recent years the Swedish fashion retailers have increased their range of various social or environmental labels on their garments which in return has created confusion amongst the fashion consumers. Currently, there are approximately fourteen different third-party labelling standards in Sweden and a diverse range of self-controlled labelling standards. The reason for this increase can partly be explained by the increasing pressure from various actors to act more sustainably and ethically, and companies having realized a competitive advantage by adopting sustainable strategies.

This study provides a preliminary exploration into the types of social and environmental labels that are available on the Swedish market and consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding these labels. Based on two focus group discussions held at two different occasions, respondents indicated that environmental labelling of clothing could influence their purchase decision positively if product related attributes (design and quality) have the same standard as non-sustainable clothing. Although consumers' knowledge about the social or environmental labels is relatively low, they have an increased interest to learn more about the various labels and the potential environmental impact the fashion industry may cause. However, the growing involvement of taking social or environmental issues into consideration does not always lead to consumers actually purchasing eco-friendlier clothes, and thus these two "identities" are not yet compatible with each other.

Additionally, consumers respond differently to positive and negative labelling, where negative labelling seems to have a stronger effect on their feelings and may influence their purchase decision. When it comes to the design of the label, visual and verbal communications are additives and a label should also have a numerical rating system, which states how sustainable a garment is in comparison to other garments. Furthermore, the logo should be more coherent with the fashion industry in terms of colours and illustrations.

Moreover, consumers think that there is a lack of information at the point of purchase regarding the social and environmental labels and this should be addressed with either QR-code or by providing a simple brochure.

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Keywords: labelling, social or environmental labelling, eco-labelling, sustainability, transparency, fashion consumer, visual/verbal communication, consumer buying behaviour, green consumerism.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter provides a background into labelling and a brief background into consumers' perspective on sustainable fashion. The chapter ends with the purpose of the study, the research questions, and delimitations.

1.1 Background

The Scandinavian citizen has long been one of the most enthusiastic purchasers of social and environmental products, and governments have supported this activity by ensuring to fully implement various certified standards. The first industry to implement this practice in the Nordic countries was the food industry, which did so by embracing various ecologically and environmentally friendlier labelling standards. However, the clothing and textile industry, the main actor of this research, has taken more time to adapt such practice (Tosti, 2012). Perhaps this can partly be explained by the fact that fashion consumers have not previously questioned their consumption practices, leading to producers not finding the need to show transparency. Another reason to this can be the fact that the fashion industry is not traditionally associated with health problems or environmental issues, and therefore the issue never gained the same attention as in the food industry (Beard, 2008).

Due to the negative environmental impacts of the present fashion consumption behaviour, there is a rising concern of sustainability issues within the fashion supply chain (Carter and Rogers, 2008; Niinimäki, 2012). Thus, improving sustainability within the fashion industry has gained more importance than ever before, and today there are various organisations that are working on achieving a more socially and environmentally friendly fashion industry. An increased interest can particularly be found in the industry, government, academia and NGO's which try to find ways and tools to create a more sustainable fashion industry and to promote sustainable fashion (Beard, 2008; Fletcher 2011). Part of the challenge in achieving a more sustainable fashion industry is to get the consumers to purchase more sustainable textiles. To achieve this, the most common method has so far been the use of labels on textiles.

The aim of these labels is to inform the social or environmental property of the garments in order to facilitate the search for both consumers and companies (Sifo, 2013; Boström and Klintman, 2008; Grankvist et al., 2004).

There are approximately fourteen different textile labelling standards in the Swedish fashion and textile industry. These are standards that have been created by a labelling organisation, which sets various social or environmental criteria, a sort of “seal of approval”. Companies can simply apply for these standards from a labelling organisation if they meet the requirements. One example of a labelling organisation is the Nordic Swan. Besides this, there are self-controlled labels, which are sometimes called own brand labels. These labels are part of a brand and based on a third-party evaluation of a certification agency. For instance, H&M organic cotton label is a self-controlled label (Eco-textile labelling guide, 2012: Klintman et al., 2008; Tang et al., 2004).

The emergence of new labelling standards does not seem to fade, quite the opposite. The recent edition of Eco-Textile Labelling Guide, published by Eco-Textile News, reports an addition of twenty new social or environmental labels within a time frame of two years (Eco-textile labelling guide, 2012). Simultaneously, retailers and brands continue to introduce their own in-house self-controlled labels. To name a few examples of these retailers, Lindex, Kappahl, Åhlens, Indiska and Polarn O. Pyret, have all launched their own organic cotton label during the last years.

However, it seems that the enthusiasm for launching new social or environmental labelling standards, both third-party and self-controlled, creates consumer confusion. A survey done by the Norwegian National Institute for Consumer Research (Sifo) indicates that the Norwegian consumers find it difficult to understand what each label stands for (Sifo, 2013). In addition, retailers, brands and textile manufacturers find it difficult to navigate through the growing number of various standards (Eco-textile labelling guide, 2012). One way to reduce the confusion is to harmonise the various labelling standards for textiles. However, harmonising all of them is not achievable at the present due to each of these approximately fifty different national and international textile standards aiming for different criteria. For instance, some standards focus solely on social responsibility whereas others focus on material or textile processing (Eco-textile labelling guide, 2012).

Nevertheless, harmonisation is already taking place, especially with textile standards having similar aims, such as Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), which is an international organic cotton standard emerged and harmonised by various organic cotton labelling standards from Britain, the US and Germany (GOTS, 2013).

More harmonised standards might emerge in the future, especially when more textile standards are constantly entering the market. Maybe this rapid growth of new standards will ‘force’ the labelling organisations to collaborate and emerge in order to successfully reach consumers. Both new and existing textile standards will probably need to find new ways to communicate and reach their fashion consumers because of the current low awareness and commitment towards these labels. Thus, there is certainly a need to strengthen the marketing and communication strategies and to understand consumers’ behaviour towards social and environmental labels in order to be able to contribute to a more sustainable fashion industry (Sifo, 2103; Eco-textile labelling guide, 2012). It is important to examine what kind of information and what actually captures consumers' attention on a label, which lead to a higher impact on the purchase decisions. Tan et al. (2004) also pointed out that given the 26 years of history, (today in 2013 35 years) since the first eco label “Blue Angel” was introduced in 1978, surprisingly, there is still little research that has been done on the effect of different approaches of eco-labelling design and on consumer purchasing behaviour towards these labels.

1.2 Consumers’ knowledge, attitudes and preferences

Very little research has been conducted, within the textile sector, on how to actually communicate social or environmental labels to consumers in terms of visual and verbal communication. In Sweden, there is no research on consumers’ knowledge, attitudes and preferences towards labelling on garments. There are a few researches within the food industry especially based on visual and verbal communication of eco-labelling. One research was based on testing positive versus negative labelling in order to see if consumers respond differently towards these two alternatives. Results show, that consumers reacted differently towards positive and negative labelling depending on their general approach to sustainability (Grankvist et al., 2004).

Another research was based on the visual and verbal designs of eco-labelling to see if consumers prefer just a visual logo or a combination with written text. The conclusion was that a logo in combination with text was preferred over plain visual logo (Tang et al., 2004). In terms of attitudes on social or environmental labelling of textiles, there has been a lack of research in the field. Majority of the research is based on consumers' attitudes towards social or environmental matters, which show that consumers do have a positive attitude towards it but they do not always apply such attitude at the point of purchase (Niinimäki 2010; Solomon and Rabolt, 2004; Tang et al., 2004). Beard (2008) argues that consumers are increasingly more concerned about the negative impact but still comfortable with continuing purchasing fast fashion and trend-led clothing. This can partly be explained by prior studies that show consumers to be interested in purchasing social or environmental products but they are not ready to personally sacrifice something, such as paying a higher price (Chan & Wong, 2012). Thus, there seems to be a gap between attitudes and actual purchase behaviour, and in combination with a low knowledge regarding social or environmental labelling the gap probably becomes even greater. In order to contribute to a more sustainable fashion industry it is important to minimise this gap. One way of doing it is to improve the communication strategies for labelling on textiles. By understanding consumers' knowledge and attitudes it becomes easier to understand their preferences. Understanding consumers' preferences may provide a basis for creating labelling standards, which actually have an impact on the purchase decisions optimistically contributing to a sustainable pattern of consumption.

1.3 Social and environmental labelling within this context

Within textiles and garments there are several labelling standards, for instance fair trade, organic cotton and other labels, which guarantee that the fabric is tested for harmful substances. There is also a myriad of descriptions of these labels and scholars and the industry uses various words to communicate different labelling standards as well. Words such as eco-labelling, organic-labelling, social-labelling and ethical-labelling are commonly used both within the academic and the professional world. Social or environmental labelling within this context includes eco- labelling, organic labelling, social labelling and ethical labelling. Thus, social or environmental labelling is the term that will be used in this thesis when discussing generally about all the labelling standards.

1.4 Purpose

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding social and environmental labelling of textiles and to illuminate their attitudes and preferences. Additional goal was to acquire a more thorough understanding of how consumers react to different labels' layout and how this might influence their purchase decision. This paper also aims to provide recommendations for the textile industry on how to communicate social and environmental labelling on textiles. The author believes that the textile and fashion industry is an attractive industry to study since the social and environmental impact is relatively large whereas the consumer's awareness is relatively low. Furthermore, by trying to understand consumer preferences regarding labelling, the study might facilitate the development of how to communicate a label in a better way, which in turn may contribute to a better environment, provided that the label influences their purchase decisions.

1.5 Delimitations

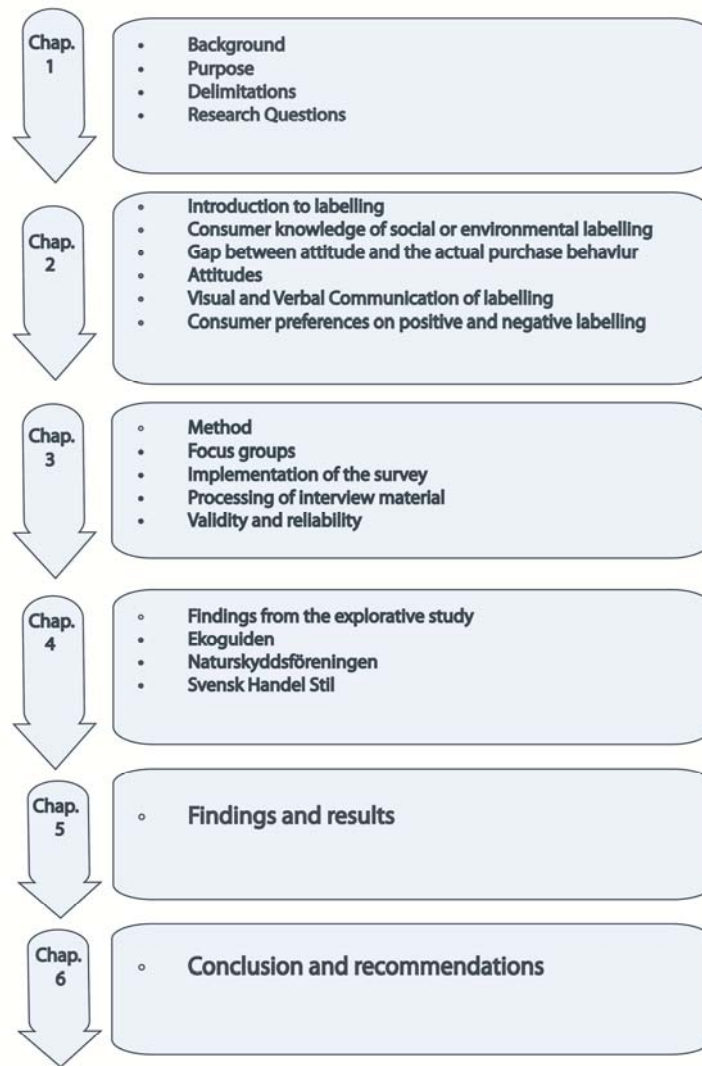
To make the thesis relevant in the given period of ten weeks, there are limitations to the study. The author has chosen to limit herself to social and environmental labels occurring in the Swedish retail sector. Furthermore, the study is delimited to consumers who lived in Borås when the focus group interview was conducted.

1.6 Research Questions

- I. *What knowledge do fashion consumers' have about social or environmental labelling of textiles?*
- II. *What attitudes do fashion consumers' have about social or environmental labelling of textiles?*
- III. *What are the fashion consumers' preferences regarding social or environmental labelling of textiles?*

1.7 Disposition

Figure 1.1 Disposition of the thesis



The above figure illustrates the disposition of this thesis. *Chapter 1* presents the background to the subject studied and previous research about social or environmental labelling. *Chapter 2* presents the theoretical framework which was applied to this study. *Chapter 3* discusses the method which has been used for this thesis and also the validity and reliability of this study. *Chapter 4* presents the explorative study which was conducted in order to form the basis of the study. *Chapter 5* presents findings and the analysis of this thesis followed by *Chapter 6* which ends the thesis with conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter presents the theoretical framework, starting with a brief background of labelling followed by consumers' knowledge and attitudes. The chapter ends with a discussion of positive and negative labelling followed by a summary of the chapter.

2.1 Introduction to labelling

A social or environmental label is a voluntary market based consumer oriented instrument which is used on products in the form of symbols, pictures or graphics with the aim to communicate social or environmental property of that specific product (Sifo, 2013; Hwang et al., 2010; Tang et al., 2004; Boström and Klintman, 2008). According to Tang et al., (2004) labelling on products can be a promising approach given that consumers respond positively to environmental claims.

According to Subrata (2008) social or environmental labels can achieve several goals:

- Improving sales or image of a labelled product or brand
- Motivating consumer awareness about environmental impact of products
- Improving the quality of the environment and encouraging the sustainable management of resources.

However, the overall goal of social or environmental labelling is to support the demand and supply of those products that cause less harm to the environment, thereby stimulating the potential for market-driven social and/or environmental improvement (Subrata 2008).

Consumers today have the opportunity to choose from a large variety of products and they often have to make quick buying decisions. Additionally, 70 to 80 percent of purchase decisions are made in the retail shop and it is therefore increasingly important for brands to communicate their products well in the store (Berglund & Boson, 2010).

Labels have become an important tool for consumers to use once they are out and shopping. It facilitates the navigation of the myriad of choices and also smoothen the process of shopping by saving some time. Thus, labelling can be viewed as a shortcut for consumers to find the right product (Hwang et al., 2010).

Social or environmental labelling can also be an indicator which enables consumers to have some reflections on how products are produced and which environmental impact it has (Grankvist, 2002). According to Thøgersen (2010) social or environmental labelling is also an important resource to increase transparency and for consumer to trust in environmental claims. Grankvist (2002) also discusses that consumers only pay attention to social and environmental labels if they trust them, and thus it very important to gain the consumers' trust towards a labelling scheme.

Furthermore, social and environmental labelling is a tool which can be used for improving sustainable consumption patterns without compromising consumers' freedom of choice. Labelling can also be used for competitive advantage which will hopefully lead to more environmentally friendly products being produced and introduced to the market (Thøgersen, 2002).

2.2 Background to social and environmental labelling standards

Labelling on textiles is not a new phenomenon, it has its roots in the eco-fashion movement first commencing in the '70s where the movement was characterised by being against mainstream commercial activities and having values in favour of an alternative lifestyle with homemade and handcrafted fabrics. Since then various attempts have been done by brave fashion retailers mainly in the 1990s, where eco-fashion was enthusiastically introduced. Unfortunately it was a short-lived trend rather than something lasting that would change the industry (Black, 2008).

Eco-fashion has now once again gained importance and many fashion companies, both small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and multinational corporations, have not only reintroduced various social or environmental labels on their clothes, but also created entire collections. Some brands have even taken a step further by trying to fully function as environmentally or socially friendlier company (Black, 2008, Sifo, 2013).

The world's oldest eco-label is the Blue Angel (Blauer Engel), which was introduced in 1978 in Germany and is today the world's leading labelling standard with around 11,700 certified products, all from electronic devices to household products (Blauer-engel, 2013; Tang et al., 2004). Since then many different labelling standards have emerged, with their own criteria and symbols. For instance, the Swedish Swan was introduced between 1989 and 1992, the European Commission established the EU Flower, which later became the EU Ecolabel and today is the official environmental label in the EU (Sifo, 2013). The majority of these labelling standards are mainly for food and household products, but recently some of these labelling organisations also developed standards for textiles. These standards usually focus on the full life cycle "cradle to grave" approach, such as the EU Ecolabel, Blue Angel and the Nordic Swan.

There are also labelling standards that only niche to certifying textiles. These standards can either be focused on textile processing, such as Öeko-Tex, others on raw materials, such as Soil Association, or social responsibility, such as Fair Wear Foundation. Besides this, there are various tools that primarily focus on the life cycle approach of clothing products, such as the Higg Index and the Nike Tool (Eco-textile labelling guide, 2012). These tools are environmental management systems and unlike a labelling standard, they only specify on procedural requirements, while a labelling standard places specific requirements as established by an independent party (Klintman et al., 2008).

As mentioned previously in the introduction chapter, some retailers have chosen to use self-controlled labelling and over the past few years it has increased radically amongst the Swedish fashion retailers. Many retailers have decided to create their own self-controlled labelling standards due to majority of them finding it difficult to find a relevant labelling standard. Additionally, by setting up their own codes of conduct, self-controlled labelling and other environmental requirements might limit the future pressure from the government or other regulatory bodies (Sifo, 2103).

2.3 Consumer knowledge of social or environmental labelling on textiles

There is very little research done on consumers' knowledge regarding social or environmental labelling on textiles. Most of the studies focus on consumers' concerns regarding the ecological impacts of textile production or how labels can influence their purchasing decisions (Niinimäki, 2010; Sifo, 2012).

However, there is research conducted on eco-labels which shows that most consumers distrust the environmental claims of a label and are confused by the wide range of claims in the market-place (Eden, 1994; Sifo, 2012).

Consumers also seem to have a relatively narrow picture of what each label stands for, and the fact that the number of labels has only increased over the recent years must even aggravate this situation (Sifo, 2013). Too many different labels can thus have a negative impact since consumers find it even more difficult to distinguish a label from another. Too broad variation can even create frustration and complicate the whole process, and in worst case, lead to consumers feeling that it is pointless to even try to understand the labels (Thøgersen et al., 2010).

The reasons why many companies choose to use a label as a reference is that it is a proven method for communicating to and influencing the consumer at the point of purchase (Roe and Levy, 1999). The majority of consumers lacking awareness regarding the various textile labels is unfortunately a problem and should be resolved in order to support the environmental claims.

2.4 Gap between attitude of social or environmental products and the actual purchase of such products

Research shows that there is a gap between the positive attitude of a social or environmental product and the actual purchase of such product (Ellen, 1994; Morris et al., 1995; Walley & Whitehead, 1994). This can partly be explained by the higher price, which usually comes along with environmentally friendly products, as well as the reluctance to change buying habits, and also the lack of societal pressure to push the change for more sustainable living (Tang et al., 2004; Chan & Wong, 2012).

Additionally, a troubling aspect of many researches on green consumerism is that the results may be method-bound since social desirability and other biases may lead to that the respondents express themselves as more environmentally enlightened than they would actually be at the point of purchase (Tang et al., 2004).

Besides this, consumers are not willing to purchase a product which has disadvantages in either quality or design. Thus, they only prefer environmentally friendlier products if it manifests equally to the products they would normally purchase. However, a “green” product that has a similar price and performance and is more or less equal to the non-green alternative should have an instrument that clearly signals such environmental attributes to potential consumers (Tang et al., 2004; Chang & Wang, 2013). Thus, product-related attributes (e.g. product design, quality, and price) are factors that seem to influence consumers’ decision of purchasing socially or environmentally friendlier products.

Other aspects that might influence the gap can be based on habits. Habits control a large part of consumers’ behaviours and the choice of products are often guided automatically by habits. Individuals who have strong habits show less attention to contextual information and therefore are not always open, for example, to new labels or products at the point of purchase (Grankvist, 2002). Thus, people who are characterised by a strong habitual behaviour might miss out on social or environmental labelling and continue purchase what they are used to purchase.

However, consumers that do actually purchase environmentally friendlier products are for the most part guided by their interest in environmental protection and if they think that social or environmental labelling is a useful tool to achieve their aspired environmentally friendlier lifestyle (Grankvist, 2002).

2.5 Attitudes

The concept of attitudes has been defined many times during the history. For instance W. Allport (1935), who wrote the Handbook of Social Psychology, dealt with approximately sixteen different definitions of the term ‘attitude’ before presenting his own:

"An attitude is a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related" (p. 810).

However, an attitude can be defined as a personal evaluation of an object, thus how favourable or unfavourable, or how positive or negative a person's view is of an object. The term "object" is either abstract or concrete which somehow is represented in our thoughts and memory (Ekstöm et al., 2010; Weiner et al., 2012). In a consumer environment, this is more related to consumers' attitudes in the experience of having either bought or used a product or service (Solomon, 2009). Homer and Kahle (1988) argue that consumer attitudes are based on values, beliefs that go beyond specific situations and are used to resolve conflicts or make decisions.

The history of attitude research has its core roots in social psychology. The study of consumer attitudes took off in the 1950s focusing on products and services and the issues, people, communication, situations and behaviours related to them. Since then, many different research approaches on theoretical families has dominated, such as *consistency theories of attitudes*, where the assumption is that people strive for consistency in the way they think and feel about his or her life, and the objects, issues and people that are important to them (Ekstöm et al, 2010).

Another family of theories which emerged in the 1960s is the *multi attribute approaches*, which represents attitudes in terms of the attributes that people perceived that an object has. Thus, a person's attitude is weighed against an object and where he or she evaluates the attributes of that object and then forms an attitude towards it (Fishbein, 1963; Ekstöm et al., 2010).

In the beginning of the 1980s there was a major shift in social psychological theorising and this resulted in a new generation of attitude theories, namely *social cognition*. Social cognition approaches differ from earlier attitude approaches by not viewing attitudes as being homogeneous or latent. Attitudes are rather something that can change and shift depending on our memory systems and by activation processes (Wyer and Srull, 1986).

The following sections will go deeper into the dissonance theory, which belongs to the theoretical family of consistency theories of attitudes, and the network representation of attitudes and associative propositional model of evaluation (APE), which belongs to the theoretical family of social cognition.

2.5.1 Dissonance theory

Dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) highlights people's strategies on how they try to resolve inconsistencies and how they consider a range of phenomena that might be responsible for these inconsistencies. The theory of cognitive dissonance has its origin in social psychology and is based on humans having a sense of duty to decrease their dissonance by changing their attitudes and beliefs or by blaming or denying a phenomenon. Hence, a person always strives to reach cognitive balance and try to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). It is essentially a theory about how people try to make sense out of their beliefs, their environment and their behaviour. Thus, they try to live their lives that are in their own minds reasonable and meaningful (Aronson, 1997).

To exemplify this: A person who sees himself as a supporter of ethical and environmental issues and also lives up to these conditions would feel uncomfortable if he would have purchased something that does not live up to these ideals. For instance: it is easier to purchase milk in the neighbourhood store but if they do not sell organic milk, then the option is to go to the biological store which is a bit further away. The argument to not go to the biological store could be that it is more inconvenient or time consuming. Thus, as an ethical and environmental person you would feel uncomfortable if you every now and then make the decision of not making the effort of walking the extra kilometres to the biological store. To oppose the guilt, you think that you will continue to purchase the non-organic milk at the neighbourhood store, especially when you are short on time, until they decide to sell organic milk.

The above scenario according to the dissonance theory would be a *dissonance reduction strategy*. The dissonance theory assumes that it is the proportion, and not the amount, of dissonant elements that are responsible for the intensity of psychological anxiety. Thus the above scenario would therefore be likely to protect the inconsistencies between attitude and behaviour rather than what motivates the change of the behaviour (Ekstöm et al., 2010).

Hence, dissonance theory proposes that it is emotionally disturbing and unpleasant to hold an inconsistent attitude or to behave inconsistently (Festinger, 1957). Therefore, the desire to avoid dissonance is to create a drive to behave consistently (Thøgersen, 2004). However, as mentioned above the drive to behave consistently does not necessarily mean a change in behaviour, a person can change just his attitude towards the phenomena and thus continue in his usual way, for instance, to purchase non-organic milk.

Although, one classical study shows that dissonance can create environment-friendly adjustments in behaviour. In this case, the dissonance was produced by increasing the prominence of the difference between a person's behaviour and his or her standards for environmentally friendly behaviour, by inducing a sense of "hypocrisy". Dickerson et al. (1992) proved this by using cognitive dissonance to encourage water conservation through a field experiment by collecting college students' signatures for an application to conserve water in the campus recreation facility. The study was designed to make those students feel like "hypocrites" when they signed the application by confronting them of their showering habits which were sometimes wasting too much water and that they could reduce this by direct behaviour change by taking shorter showers. The result shows that the students, who took part in this study and were confronted with hypocrisy, took significantly shorter showers after the confrontation.

Thus, dissonance occurs as an unpleasant feeling, but the unpleasantness is sometimes needed in order to behave in an environmentally responsible way. Most people resolve the dissonance by changing their behaviour or attitudes, while others simply choose to live with their perceived behavioural consistency (Festinger, 1957; Thøgersen, 2004).

2.5.2 Network representation of attitudes

Research on the network representation of attitudes shows, that the strongest and most accessible attitudes are created through diverse, repeated and direct experiences with an object or service (Ekstöm et al, 2010; Fazio, 2007).

Briefly, the theory of attitudes is associations between a given object and a given summary evaluation of the object-associations, which may vary in strength and depend on the availability of the memory.

Thus, attitudes are defined as summary evaluations. It may be that an object evokes emotional responses, or some attitudes are based on one's past behaviours and experiences with the object, or it can also be based on a combination of all these or other potential sources. From this point of view attitudes is then a form of knowledge-evaluation represented in the memory just as any other knowledge is (Fazio, 2007).

For instance: a customer's relationship with a fashion brand is rather dynamic and therefore the attitude also becomes rather complex. The attitude, that the customer creates, depends on different variables such as design, style and quality of the clothes, the marketing strategy of the brand, the things they encounter in the store when they purchase the brand, and the characteristics of the physical environment. As diverse as the object is, the evaluation of the attitude is also diverse. Thus, there is no such thing as a single attitude as attitudes are rather constructed depending on the particular pattern of evaluative memory content that a customer activates and the thoughts they engage in when they reflect on their experience (Ekstöm et al., 2010; Schwarz, 2007).

Therefore an attitude is not a single latent variable, but a rather diverse variable of many attitudes that become activated as patterns of relevant memories are connected. Thus, a consumer's attitude can change either positively or negatively during time depending on diverse experiences with the object.

2.5.3 Associative- propositional model of evaluation

Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2007) argue that people's responses should be understood in terms of their underlying mental processes: *associative* and *propositional reasoning* processes.

Associative- propositional model of evaluation (APE) describes the attitude structure, its activation and attitude change mechanisms. The attitude *structure* and its *activation* are based on two systems views of the human mind (Ekstöm et al., 2010).

- *Associative system*: the first, evolutionary older system is associative, processes information in a fast, automatically and effortless manner. It learns slowly and evaluates by “hot” affects.
- *Propositional reasoning system*: the second, evolutionary newer system is rule-governed, processes information slowly in a controlled and effortful manner, learns flexibly and evaluates by “cold” judgment.

To simplify these two systems, one can say that the associative system is more connected to our primitive animal system and the reasoning system is what makes us specifically human. These two systems are not isolated from each other but they rather provide mutual inputs to each other (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007).

However, the associative system is always engaged at first because of the quick automatic way it works. Therefore the associative system will always generate immediate response in reaction, provided that the stimulus is similar to an exciting representation in our memory (Ekstöm et al., 2010).

Thus, the *associative system* is characterised by plain activation, independent of subjective truth or falsity. The *reasoning system* checks the validity and appropriateness of our affective reaction. Thus, it transforms the outputs of the associative processes into a propositional format (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007).

To exemplify this: say that a consumer is looking to purchase a new pair of jeans, the first thing he sees when entering the retail shop is a pair of jeans of a well-known popular brand that happens to have a special offer that day. The first reaction may be that the consumer purchases the jeans on impulse. This represents the *associative system*, thus responding immediately to the input stimuli in the given situation. The direct response is also referred to *implicit attitudes*. But say if, just when the he is about to purchase the jeans, he suddenly hesitates and wonders if he really is going to purchase them just because they happen to be a well known popular brand and on special offer. He remembers that from the beginning he was set on purchase another brand, since before he went to the retail

store, he thought through the jeans that he wanted to purchase. This is when the *reasoning system* takes over. However, it can be that the *reasoning system* did not have time to kick in, as he might have been busy with the shop assistant or some friends who also happened to be in the shop admiring the special offer jeans. In this case, the *reasoning system* might not have had enough processing resource to question the input it received from the *associative system* and therefore might have led to a typical impulse purchase. This tells us that the *associative system* is not always overruled by the *reasoning system* (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007).

As previously mentioned in the headline of *dissonance theory*, people try to resolve inconsistencies by decreasing their dissonance by changing their attitudes and beliefs or by blaming or denying a phenomenon. The same inconsistencies can occur in the APE model.

For instance, if an inconsistency is detected in the *reasoning system* it may make an attempt to overrule the *associative system* (“*I will not purchase the jeans*”) or find a convenient excuse that allows the purchase of the jeans (“*It's okay to purchase the jeans, after all, it's a well known brand and on sale, next time I will purchase the jeans that I actually desire*”). This is a sort of an evaluation judgement, where a person tries to measure attitude with the help of his *reasoning system* to find proportional state; this is also referred to as *explicit attitudes*. Thus, the associative system and the reasoning system provide input for each other, given the fact that the reasoning system has the ability to appear (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007).

The above analysis has now gone through how attitudes are structured as well as the basic activation of attitudes. Moreover, attitudes are also connected to behaviour changes. According to the APE model, there are different cognitive processes that operate in the two systems, the associative system and reasoning system, providing mutual input for each other, when it comes to the mechanism of *attitude change* (Ekstöm et al., 2010).

The *associative system* is controlled by two processes:

- *Changes in the associative structure*: new associative is formed, based on associative learning processes.
- *Changes in pattern activation*: a slightly different context enables a slightly different pattern of existing associations.

A change in the *associative system* might take place if a consumer tries to like a new product or is exposed to repeated advertising. These changes are incremental but relatively permanent, special with a direct experience of a product (Berger & Mitchell, 1989; Fazio; 1995). A change in the pattern activation is relatively fleeting and the results form differences between the situations in which the consumer encounters the product. For instance, it is different to see a product through an advertisement or the internet than at a retail shop. The attitude towards the same product will probably change depending on how the consumer encounters the product (Ekstöm et al., 2010).

The *reasoning system* is controlled by three processes:

- *Changes in the associative structure*: new input from the associative system than changes the reasoning system.
- *Changes in the proposition considered relevant*: new facts or beliefs considered to be relevant for the evaluation judgment.
- *Changes in strategies used to achieve consistency*: inconsistency propositions rejected or found a new proposal that could solve inconsistency.

Thus, mechanisms that might influence a behavioural attitude and change are either caused by a change in the associative system, a recommendation from family and friends (new facts or beliefs), or a person simply starting to rationally compare different alternatives to solve inconsistencies (Ekstöm et al., 2010).

The importance aspect of attitudes is that they can influence a person's behaviour. By identifying consumer's attitudes, the process on how to design and communicate a label can be facilitated leading to an actual purchase of a sustainable garment. There may be different ways to approach consumers depending on the knowledge and attitude that they have of a label.

2.6 Visual and Verbal Communication of labelling

Since the current labelling scheme of social and environmental labelling in textiles is communicated through a visual logo with or without a verbal text, it might be relevant to look on previous research done within this field.

In the framework of cognitive psychology, many researches have shown that pictures (visual communication) are more easily recalled or memorised than words (Kaplan et al., 1968; Paivio, 1969; Sampson, 1970). Visual communication has therefore been extensively applied in the design of print advertisement to increase memory recall and to change consumers' perceptions towards a product (Tang et al., 2004). Some researchers have questioned the superiority of photos over words. Lutz and Lutz (1977) argue that in some contexts, a written word may perhaps be absorbed as pictorial information, given that the verbal message is concrete. For example, the word "apple" is associated by most individuals to a pictorial memory of how an apple looks like.

Several researches have looked at the design of drug labels, which have both visual and verbal communication on the label. The conclusion was that both visual verbal designs not only increase the understanding of product information but may also increase product purchase behaviour (Grahn, 1979; Holt et al., 1990; Morrell et al., 1989). Another qualitative research conducted by Teisl et al. (2002) shows similar results. Teisl et al. (2002) wanted to investigate if the combination of visual and verbal communication of eco-labelling design had an effect on consumers' attitudes and/or purchase behaviour. This research was limited to forest products (paper industry). The results showed that the effects of visual and verbal communication are additives, and thus the consumer prefers a visual logo in combination with text.

Participants liked labels containing either a numerical rating or a graphic rating the best, as long as the labels also had a reference for comparison. Tang et al. (2004) conducted a similar research based on a quantitative method, where the aim was to investigate the influence of visual and verbal communication in eco-label designs on consumers' purchasing behaviour.

This research also showed that both visual and verbal communication had significant additive effects on the purchase.

Most of the current social and environmental logo designs are based on visual communication in combination with small input of text which states the name of the certification organisation or the attributes of the label. Since the fashion industry has a different target group than the food, wood or drug industries, it is important to grasp what a fashion consumer prefers when communicating social and environmental labelling on textiles.

2.7 Consumer preferences on positive and negative labelling

Grankvist (2004) argues that consumers respond differently towards positively labelled and negatively labelled products. To exemplify positive and negative labelling, Grankvist (2004) took tomatoes packages as an example, where two tomatoes packages look equally the same but one of them had a higher price.

Normally a consumer would go for the cheaper one, but if this tomato package would have a red eco-label (which would mean worse for the environment) while the more expensive one would have a yellow eco-label (less harmful for the environment), then according to Grankvist (2004), most consumers would move their preferences away from the cheaper alternative but not necessarily choose the more expensive one. Studies show that consumers with an intermediate interest in environmental issues choose products which are negatively marked over the positive ones, and consumers who have a weak interest in environmental issues are unaffected, whilst consumers with high concern about environment matters responded equally to both negative and positive labelling.

In addition, there are studies that show that negative events do have a greater affect on people than positive ones, and that negative information is remembered for a longer period than positive information (Grankvist et al., 2004).

So far in textiles there exists only positively labelled products where the majority of the labels have a rather positive symbol in the colours of green, blue or yellow. It is hard to predict if negative labelling on textiles would work out since the textile supply chain is rather complex with lot of different stages to take into account. This makes it far more challenging to create a good measurement tool to base a label on.

There have also been marketing campaigns where the message is based on fear, but for the campaign to be successful, the message has to be clear for the target audience and also provide a solution to the frightening fear. For example, many anti-smoking campaigns usually show a picture of what actually happens to your body if you smoke, combined with information on how a smoker can get help with their addiction provided (Evans et al., 2008). This is probably not applicable for a label in textiles, but an interesting issue to reflect over that marketers are also using negative messages in their communication in order to gain the attention from their target group.

The British national daily newspaper The Guardian (2013) also highlighted that the tactics to achieve a more sustainable fashion industry should take a different approach than anti-drugs and anti-smoking ads, since if people are threatened with scary consequences, they go into denial and instead continue with their usual habits. According to the Guardian (2013) “the best way to promote behaviour change is not to use scare tactics but to make the alternative seem more appealing.”

To round up this chapter: labelling can be viewed as a shortcut for consumers to find the right product and it is an important tool which can be used for improving sustainable consumption patterns without compromising consumers’ freedom of choice. Consumers have a limited knowledge about social or environmental labelling, although there is an increased willingness to purchase more sustainable fashion garments. Attitudes have a strong influence on people’s choices of products and these attitudes have a basic stable structure, which is still possible to change. Prior studies show that the visual and verbal communication had significant additive effects on purchase behaviour. Furthermore, consumers react differently towards negative and positive communication, while a negative message seems to have a stronger effect than a positive message.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the method that has been chosen for this thesis. The chapter also presents validity and reliability, implementation of the study, and the chapter concludes with source criticism.

3.1 Research approach

A prior study has been conducted in order to get an insight of independent organisational opinions and thoughts regarding labelling on textiles and about sustainability within the fashion industry. The literature review sought to gain a deeper understanding of consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences of social or environmental labelling. A deductive approach has been applied, thus, the researcher has first gathered information from theory, articles, newspapers, journals, websites and preliminary studies to use as a frame of reference which would help to form a conclusion of the topic that has been studied. The method used for this thesis is qualitative. An explorative approach has been used, which is often selected when a research area is relatively new and unexplored (Patel & Davidson, 2003).

3.2 Information gathering

Data was first collected through store visits and relevant websites of labelling organisations. In addition, a small preliminary study was conducted with Naturskyddsföreningen, Ekoguiden and Svensk Handel Stil. The aim of the preliminary study was to get an insight of the actors' view on social or environmental labelling within the textile industry. The interviews of the preliminary study were carried out via email, which gave the respondent time to think through their answers and the questions which also minimised the risk of misinterpretation. The questions were based on open questions that covered the topics of how to communicate sustainability and consumer attitudes and purchasing behaviour towards green consumerism. In addition to the theory, it was interesting to get Swedish actors' approach to sustainability in the fashion industry as it benefited to the goal of creating a broader understanding of the subject studied. According to Holme and Solvang (2007), a preliminary study which is carried out in the first stage of an investigation can form a basis for the main study.

Since the research area was relatively new and unexplored within the fashion industry a small preliminary study was necessary in order to get an insight into the current situation.

Data was collected later on through literature, reports, articles, newspapers, and websites. The frame of reference was built on further research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the subject studied. The empirical data was gathered through a qualitative approach based on a focus group which was further analysed and interpreted.

3.3 Target population

According to Christensen (1998), a target population represents the individuals of whom the researcher is interested. The target population consists of Swedish and international consumers, both men and women, in the age range of 20-35 years who regularly shop for clothes. Both Swedish and international consumers were selected in order to create a diverse focus group and to gain a broader view on consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding social or environmental labelling. The target population was limited to individuals who currently lived in Borås and the majority was studying at the Swedish School of Textiles. Wibeck (2010) argues that if a focus group is used as research method, the selected individuals should have more or less the same socio-economical background, knowledge and education. Thus, the intention of the study was to gather detailed and in-depth information rather than a broad picture of the consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences.

3.4 Focus groups

Focus group is a research technique, where a specific topic is selected by the researcher and the data is mainly collected through group interaction. A focus group discussion is more spontaneous compared to other data collection methods since the moderator's role is to observe and gently guide the focus group while participants freely discuss the chosen questions (Wibeck, 2010). This allows space to create group dynamic which can bring out aspects that perhaps would otherwise be left out if a personal survey would have been carried out (Christensen, 1998).

A focus group study makes it possible to find out how consumers reason and why they act in a certain way. It also encourages respondents to question what others say. This is particularly interesting when the topic studied is about attitudes and behaviour, as this is a subject that otherwise is easy to get around by not explaining why you act in a certain way. Focus groups are more or less forcing the participants to reflect on their own and others' statements.

The result of the discussion will be a nuanced picture of what the group is more or less agreeing up on (Christensen, 1998). Thus, unlike individual interview participants, the participants of a focus group have the advantage of asking questions from each other and jointly develop the group's philosophy. Another advantage of a focus group is that the researcher has the opportunity to study how individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon. It is also seen as a more naturalistic approach since normally a social phenomenon occurs during interaction and discussion with others (Bryman, 2006). The aim of choosing a focus group for this study is to reveal the respondents' proposed solutions on how the fashion industry should communicate labelling but also to gain a deeper understanding of their attitudes and preferences.

Before forming a focus group, there are various important factors to take into consideration, such as participants, atmosphere and environment. The phenomenon of "group cohesiveness" was defined by Svedberg (1992) as "the degree of affinity or affiliation which an individual feels to a group or the strength of the desire to belong to it". This feeling has to be strong as it is an important factor in creating a group. Therefore, it is important that the team members in a focus group can feel connected and belonging to each other. Hence, interpersonal factors play an important role once setting up a focus group, and aspects, such as an individual's personality and various demographic variables, have to be taken into account. It is important that the team members feel connected for several reasons, and one of the most important factors is that they should share a similar background and attitude. A too diverse group with different opinions may create problems. However, this does not mean that a focus group must be composed of individuals who are too similar and agree upon everything, but it is important to find a good balance between personalities, who more or less share the same socio-economical background, knowledge and education, simply because it facilitates interaction (Wiebeck, 2010).

To create the right balance of individuals and reach group cohesiveness, the researcher decided to combine both men and women, national and international consumers, who had a similar background, knowledge and education. It is also important to decide how many team members a focus group should have and there are various opinions about this.

However, the majority of researchers seem to advocate for smaller groups since for every individual it will be easier to feel a connection and cohesion between the other members of the group (Wiebeck, 2010). Hence, a smaller group gives a more a personal contact and more stable structure than a larger group. A larger group simply makes it more difficult for each individual to take a place and to speak out, and the influence of peers on each person is minimised. Another advantage with a smaller focus group is that it is also easier for the researcher to later process the feedback and to analyse the data in depth.

Nevertheless too small groups are neither representative, because then the stronger characters might play out others or too big groups can create subgroups which can form their own islands. Wiebeck (2010) advocates that “an appropriate participants range in a focus group should not be less than four and not more than six“. Therefore, the researcher decided that for this study the focus group should consist of 4-5 members in each focus group. The number of focus groups depends mainly on the time frame and the resources of the study. A focus group method also generates a larger amount of pages of transcripts and this has to be taken into account. Since the time frame for this thesis was two months, the number of focus groups had to be kept to a minimum due to the labour-intensiveness of the focus group method. Thus, this study had two focus groups which consisted of 4-5 members.

The physical environment is also an important factor and can have a strong influence in group interaction. Furthermore, size of the location, acoustics and the atmosphere also play an important role. Smaller locations usually create a more dynamic interaction than larger locations. Participants should feel comfortable in the environment; it should be in a natural or familiar environment (Wiebeck, 2010).

Thus, a familiar environment in a smaller place facilitates the focus group to feel more comfortable and open for discussion. Therefore the chosen location for this study was at the Swedish School of Textiles in Borås.

3.4.1. The selection of focus group

The participants have been selected through purposive sampling, which is a strategic selection, where participants are selected according to the project's goals in order to gain further insight and in-depth information of what the people have to say of the particular issue (Christensen, 1998). The disadvantage with such a strategy could be that is not representative, which means that it is not possible to draw general conclusions.

However, as mentioned previously, the intention of the study is to gather detailed and in-depth information, rather than a broad picture, of the customers' attitudes and preferences. The selection process of participants initially took place via social media, e.g. Facebook, where approximately 20 possible participants were invited. A brief background was attached to present the idea and the time and place of the focus group study. This was followed by a snowball sampling technique, where the researcher could later choose the relevant participants who would meet the criteria to form a suitable focus group (Bryman, 2006).

3.4.2 Implementation of the survey

A semi-structured interview, which is an interviewing method standing between structured and unstructured interviews, was carried out in the focus group session. It is a relatively open and flexible approach, where the moderator guides the participants smoothly through the interview session. It allows for a relatively free conversation and the participants can openly bring up questions during the interview. Semi-structured interviews usually have a framework of themes, which are being explored during the session (Bryman, 2006).

In order to guide the focus group interview session, an interview guide was created, which would help the moderator to facilitate the session (Wibeck, 2006). The interview guide was first introduced with introduction questions, which gave the respondents an insight into the subject and also a chance to get to know each other and create group cohesiveness.

The introduction questions are a way of introducing the subject after which the participants have the possibility to reflect on their own experiences and how they look at the phenomenon studied (Wibeck, 2006).

The number of key questions is usually between two to five questions, and these are usually the most important questions for the whole analysis. In the final phase the moderator asks some final questions in order to be sure that the subject was depleted and that the respondents did not have anything more to add (Wibeck 2010).

The questions were aiming at understanding consumers' knowledge, attitudes and preferences. A good view of the participants' knowledge was gained by the primary understanding of their knowledge and how it could influence their attitudes and preferences on labelling. Additionally, the questions were designed to better understand consumers' relations towards labelling and their view on sustainable fashion and how their purchase behaviour affects their choice of sustainable clothing. Moreover, the questions aimed at understanding the consumers' preferences on how they would like to be approached when communicating the social or environmental property of clothing.

3.4.3 Processing of interview material

After conducting the focus group interviews, the author listened to the material to try to capture the essence of each interview. Audio recording and personal notes were used in each interview, which the author later listened and read through carefully in order to detect patterns and key issues. After listening and reading through the material, the author worked on trying to bring out highlighted patterns and keywords to later present them in the analyses. Transliteration began the day after the last focus group interview and took about four days to complete.

3.5 Validity and reliability

Validity describes the credibility of a study, which means how well the research and the results correspond with the initial intention of the study. Hence, validity claims test whether the study measures what it says it will measure. It also describes if the study can be generalised, and to which extent the results can be generalised into other study situations. This is often defined as external validity. In order to achieve high validity, the same study should be able to be implemented by other researchers and achieve similar results (Ejvegård, 2009).

The interview questions used in the main study followed an interview guide. To improve the external validity, the author has provided a presentation of the study's practical implementation and methodology.

Focus group interview is a useful technique to use in order to develop a qualitative understanding about complex aspects such as consumer attitudes and preferences. However, this method does not generate statistical data. Thus, the results of this study are not based on statistical conclusions, and therefore cannot be generalised to a broader range of consumers. However, the results offer preliminary impressions of the attitudes and ideas of consumers, and their preference of social and environmental labelling.

Reliability describes to which extent the research can be repeated in case the study is implemented in an identical environment using the same measurement method. A high reliability means that the result of a same study would be the same over and over again. The human involvement in qualitative studies makes it more difficult to achieve the same result twice if the study is repeated as humans are not constant but rather changing objects (Ejvegård, 2009). To limit the risk of misinterpretations, the author recorded and transcribed the interviews, which according to the author contributes increasingly to the reliability of the study. The interview guide increasing the reliability of the study is presented in the Appendices (see Appendix 1).

3.6 Source criticism

To strengthen the credibility of the thesis, the author made use of material from different sources and fields related to the subject studied. The author took use of the references of the research papers studied, and collected data also from the referral materials. The goal regarding electronic sources has been to use information only from trusted public sources, such as government agencies, department's authorities and international journals.

Chapter 4: Findings from explorative

This section presents the results of the explorative study which has later been used in the analysis.

4.1 Exploratory study

Since the research area was relatively unexplored within the fashion industry, the researcher decided to contact various independent organisations within the fashion and labelling sector to expand the study and to gain new insights of the topic. Holme and Solvang (2007) argue that a preliminary study, which is carried out in the first stage of an investigation, may form a basis for the main study. The aim of the preliminary study was to gain an insight of the actors' view on social and environmental labelling in the textile industry and to further use this material in the final analysis of the thesis. The interviews were carried out via email giving the respondents enough time to think through their answers, which also minimises the risk of misinterpretation. The preliminary study included the following actors of Ekoguiden, Naturskyddsforeningen (SSNC) and Svensk Handel Stil. All three actors operate in different fields and therefore can provide interesting angles of their views on social and environmental issues within textiles.

4.2 Exploratory studies with Ekoguiden

Ekoguiden is a voluntary organisation with the aim of raising awareness of environmental and social consumption for both consumers and industries. They want to act as a network, where they can inspire each other to make conscious consumption decisions from an environmental and fair perspective (Medveten konsumtion, 2013).

Jennie Johansson is a project leader at Ekoguiden in Stockholm and she finds that there are some problems with the communication of sustainable apparel. Consumers already have preconceptions of what sustainable clothing should look like and they also lack the actual knowledge of the production process. Thus, unfortunately they do not understand the devastating problems that the fashion industry is facing, and this means that consumers do not always follow a social or environmental purchase behaviour.

“The concept of sustainability has a slightly corny and dull clang. The general consensus is that they think that sustainably produced garments look a certain way. The customer also has no knowledge of how clothes are made and therefore no understanding of the need for a change.”

Johansson also states that the reason for the low consumer demand for organic or recycled fabrics is partly due to the fact that consumers do not ask for it or they have not understood the actual environmental problems. Another reason is that fashion retailers are not creating the best exposure for organic or recycled fabrics. Additionally, Johansson believes that consumers do not always purchase social or environmental friendlier clothing since changing buying habits requires time.

“To change behaviour is a long process. The biggest reason why people say they are willing to change their buying behaviour but in the end don't, is because the products are not adequately available in the store. The products would need to be exposed more and the information about the products must be clearer, through signage, hangtags and labels.”

Finally, Johansson adds that Ekoguiden has seen consumers taking an increased interest in sustainability and social issues in the recent years.

“We notice an increase in traffic to our website where consumers can both find advice and tips. We have also noticed a greater interest in our distance learning program "environment, consumption and ethical trade" whose participants have increased by about 50% from fall 2012 to spring 2013.”

4.3 Exploratory studies with Naturskyddsföreningen

Naturskyddsföreningen is a non-profit and non-political association and the most influential environmental organisation in Sweden. They mainly work with creating environmental reports, campaigns, books, debates and conferences, and also have the power to influence legislation (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2013).

Weronika Rehnby is a project leader at Bra Miljöval Textil (Good Environmental Textiles) in Gothenburg and she finds that the communication of social and environmental labelling has to be more credible. There is also a lack of a proper label standard which is easy for the consumer to use as too many choices have unfortunately led to increased consumer confusion.

“The communication must be credible and the problem is that there are so many different labels and the fact that companies have also been developing their own labels makes it even more confusing. The number of labelling standards that look at the entire production chain from fibre to finished product and which is also reviewed by an independent party is less than ten, but there are several hundred other textile-related labels. It would probably be easier for a consumer to rely on one certified label.”

Furthermore, Rehnby explains that the amount of clothing and textiles, which is being sold, is a problem since there are so many companies who do not work with sustainability in general. Hence, the practical side of working within sustainability is not just talking about it. It is also important that companies are credible and transparent with their information, and find good ways for consumers to find them. Rehnby states that the reason for the low sales of organic or recycled clothing is that there mainly is a lack of consumer knowledge.

“Many consumers think that just because you can buy a product at the store, it is also controlled and thus poses no danger to either health or the environment, especially for health. This means that many do not see the importance of buying eco-labelled clothing and textiles or second hand. Another reason may be that, as with many of the products we buy, we do not know how they are produced and what chemicals are used. This makes it difficult to understand the benefits of having independent labelling organisations that set up requirements to make sure they are followed.”

Furthermore, Rehnby says that the reason for the gap between consumers' positive attitudes for social and environmental clothing and their actual buying behaviour is the price. The price represses many consumers, who do not actually know the real story of the products and lack the knowledge about the risks of chemical or poor labour conditions. Finally, Rehnby adds that she has seen an increased interest to purchase more social or environmental textiles, and Naturskyddsforeningen receives many questions regarding chemicals and textiles from both media and consumers.

4.4 Exploratory studies with Svensk Handel Stil

Svensk Handel Stil is a part of the Swedish Trade association for companies that operate in wholesale and retail. The organisation's primary mission is to create favourable conditions for trade companies. In addition, the organisation works with member service, counselling and disseminate knowledge and information about the industry (Svenskhandel, 2013).

Linda Hedström is the head of the office at Svensk Handel Stil and has also recognised the problem of the large variety of labels and consumers finding it confusing to distinguish between these various labelling standards.

“Generally speaking, consumers do not know what sustainability actually stands for and it's easy to become confused about what all the different labels stand for: where is the raw material coming from- is the raw material organic? What about the colours- do they contain chemicals? Under what circumstances have the manufacturing been done - is it Fairtrade?”

Furthermore, Hedström's view of organic textiles is that it is mainly appealing for consumer groups, who are especially interested in health-related issues, such as the risks of allergies and the chemical content of the garment. The greatest demand for "organic textiles", according to Hedström, is in lingerie and children's wear. Hedström also provides a brief historical background into organic textiles and states that the previous attempts to introduce organic garments in the 70's, 80's and 90's have concerned a certain type of clothing that was more conservative with the colours and had a very basic fashion. In addition, Hedström explains that the reason for the gap between consumers' positive attitudes of social and environmental clothing and their actual purchasing behaviour can be explained by the majority of consumers going to the store only to buy clothes and not organic clothing.

“Organic does not seem to be an effective sales pitch. It's probably more about the selection, design and price. It is not possible for consumers to have all their sights set on all the parameters when they go out and shop. Consumers do not go out to buy "organic" clothing, but to find a pair of black pants or a certain type of shirt, top or dress. The range is not that big of social and environmental clothing, and the design is not always so attractive. Prices can sometimes be considerably higher.”

“That's partly also the reason why many brands have decided to simply "build in " ecological materials in their collections, so that customers get it for free, whether they want it or not. If you manage to form a strong brand based on sustainability principles, well then you might become successful. Such as H&M with their Conscious Collection, it can not only be conscious, it needs also to be trendy, very stylish and at the right price.”

Furthermore, Hedström states that an increasing demand for social and environmental clothing is taking place, but companies themselves should drive the movement and educate their customers.

“Yes, of course it's growing, but mostly it is organizations that have increased their commitment - Greenpeace, Naturskyddsföreningen, Clean Clothes and others. Companies see the benefits from sustainability but they must also drive the interest and "educate" their customers.”

Chapter 5: Findings and results

This section presents the results from the qualitative study, which were analysed using the theoretical framework and the explorative study, and the chapter finally ends with a summary of the results and analysis.

5.1 Introduction

The qualitative research for this study included two different focus groups, and altogether, eight persons were interviewed on these two occasions. The first focus group session was conducted on Monday the 13th of May 2013, and the second session was conducted on Tuesday the 14th of May 2013 at the Swedish School of Textiles in Borås, Sweden.

The respondents of both groups were engaged and had a lot of thoughts and opinions of how to achieve a more sustainable fashion sector and communicate this to the consumers, who according to the focus groups did not have much knowledge yet about the various issues the fashion industry is currently facing. Furthermore, the moderator perceived that both focus groups were honest in their thoughts and opinions and did not influence each other. Everyone seemed to have the courage to express their thoughts independently from the opinions of others.

The discussion revealed that respondents' thoughts and opinions chimed with the theoretical framework, and both groups raised their own ideas for possible solutions for the communication of social or environmental labelling. The focus groups were first introduced with two questions, presented on the next page, in order to introduce the participants with the subject and create group affiliation. These two questions were followed by the *introduction questions*, which highlighted consumer knowledge of social and environmental labelling. The ending questions were the *key questions*, which focused on consumer attitudes and preferences.

Figure 2: Introduction questions

**WHAT DOES SUSTAINABLE FASHION
MEAN FOR YOU ?**

QUALITY
LONG LASTING
SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTION
GARMENTS MADE FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES
ENVIRONMENTAL FRIENDLY
NATURAL
GOOD WORKING CONDITIONS
CRADLE TO CRADLE
NOT SO FASHIONABLE
NATURAL COLOURS

**HOW SHOULD SUSTAINABLE FASHION BE
COMMUNICATED?**

CLOTHING TAG
HARMONIZED LABEL
TRUSTED CERTIFICATION
MORE COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION
TRANSPARENCY
MORE CREATIVE COMMUNICATION
STORY TELLING
MAKE SUSTAINABILITY PART OF THE BRAND AS
NUDIE JEANS DOES

5.2 Consumers' knowledge of social or environmental labelling

The author wanted to first understand the focus groups' knowledge of social and environmental labelling of textiles before exploring their attitudes and preferences. By doing so, the author could gain a proper insight of their awareness, which could help in understanding their attitudes and preferences. It became evident in both focus group sessions that the participants had quite low knowledge of social or environmental labelling of textiles. The participants also expressed the confusion about the existing labels and that they did not exactly know what each label stands for. Moreover, the participants felt that there are too many labels, and some respondents even expressed that they did not really trust all labels. For example, the majority of the respondents thought that an organic cotton label only contains a very low amount of organic cotton whilst in reality a certified organic cotton label mainly contains up to 98% or even 100% organic cotton.

Additionally, the moderator perceived that the participants had a very narrow understanding of what each label actually stands for. As Thøgersen (2010) argues, too wide of a variety in labelling can lead to frustration and complicate the process of actually using social or environmental labels. There was no direct frustration with the focus groups towards the various labels. However, it was evident that the large variation between the different labels has led to complications as the participants clearly found labelling very confusing.

The survey conducted by Sifo (2013) also showed that the Norwegian consumers had a relatively narrow view of what each label stands for. Furthermore, Eden (1994) highlights that consumers distrust the environmental claims of labels and they are confused by the wide range of claims.

The respondents of the focus groups also expressed that they do not trust the labels, which can be interpreted as an indication of the decreasing validity and purpose of labelling. However, the participants scepticism towards labelling can ideally be reduced with the right communication approach, which adds to their knowledge of sustainability and social or environmental labelling.

As already mentioned in the theoretical framework, the function of labels is to demonstrate the social or environmental impact of a garment, facilitate the navigation and improve the sales of social and environmental products (Subrata, 2008; Hwang et al., 2010; Tang et al., 2004; Boström & Klintman, 2008). It seems that the current certified labels have not managed to penetrate the market and have thus unfortunately become “wallflowers” that are not noticeable for the public. This is one of the underlying reasons why the focus groups had such a low knowledge of labelling and felt confused by the various labels.

The following example supports this claim. The majority of the respondents recognised OEKO-TEX®, where 20% had either seen it on a label or tag. Moreover, 24% recognised Fairtrade International (FLO). The majority of the respondents also trusted these labels since they had seen them via various media channels, such as newspapers, magazines, internet or TV. However, FLO was mainly recognised from the food industry and not from textiles. Bearing in mind that these two labels were the most recognised ones by the participants, 20% and 24% recognitions are still quite low numbers.

Grankvist (2002) also states that consumers only pay attention to social and environmental labels if they trust them. This was also a discussed topic in both focus groups.

Woman (A) explained her confusion with the various labelling:

“OEKO-TEX® says something about the materials that are used, for instance, that they are free from some chemicals, but nothing about the working conditions, while Fairtrade International says something about the conditions, but nothing about the materials. The organic cottons label tells something about the cotton that is used, but nothing about the working conditions or any other raw material. There should not be so many labels, this is confusing and you don't know what each label stands for. Better to aim at one label or maximum three labels which you can trust.”

This is consistent with the thoughts of Linda Hedström from Svensk Handel Stil about consumers' knowledge and confusion of sustainable labelling. Hedström expressed that consumers do not know what sustainability actually stands for and it is easy to become confused over what all the different labels mean. Where is the raw material coming from? Is the raw material organic? What about the colours? Do they contain chemicals? Under what circumstances is it manufactured? Is it Fairtrade?

Of all the labels discussed, the respondents had the lowest awareness of the Soil Associations Organic Standard (SAOS) and the EKO Organics Exchange (EKO). This could partly be explained by the fact that SAOS and EKO are mostly used in the United Kingdom and have slowly been harmonising with The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) in the recent years. Furthermore, the Organic Exchange standard (OE) is a global standard mainly used in the business to business sector of raw materials, and is therefore not often seen on finished apparel.

GOTS also received a low recognition of only 8%. GOTS is a global standard, which was introduced in 2006. Thus, the standard is still quite new and probably needs more time to thoroughly establish itself in the market. The Swedish standards (Svanen, KRAV and Bra Miljöval) were quite well recognised (12%), although not from textiles but from the food industry.

The majority of the respondents did not have a Swedish background, and therefore it was an interesting observation that the Swedish labelling standards

were quite well recognised by the participants. An explanation to this can be that Svanen, KRAV and Bra Miljöval are all well intergraded standards within the food industry and their logos can be found on many of the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods products in the Swedish market.

In addition, both the Fare Wear Foundation (FWF) and the EU Ecolabel received low recognition among the participants. The reason why the EU Ecolabel had low awareness could partly be explained with its recent change in its appearance in 2010. FWF was already introduced to the market in 1999, but for some reason only 12% of participants were aware of the label. FWF is originally a Dutch labelling organisation, which is quite well known in the Netherlands. Only two out of eight participants were from the Netherlands, which might explain the low awareness of the FWF label.

The respondents also thought that the labelling organisations probably have good intentions with their labelling standards, but they have difficulties in trusting the organisations. The respondents thought that it is difficult to control the complete garment process of the textile supply chain, and therefore it is difficult to guarantee that a garment is actually socially or environmentally friendlier. Woman (B) explains:

“Transparency is needed, it is difficult to know who controls these labelling organisations so that they actually meet the requirements that they state. Also if you see a label on garment and say that you haven’t been exposed to it before, then you don’t trust it and it is not so likely that you go home to search on the internet what the label stands for. You simply want to have quick and smooth information at the point of purchase. Maybe by a Quick Response Code (QR code) which you could scan with your mobile and get directly the information from the webpage.”

The above words from Woman (B) show that consumers want to refer to a credible source. If they find the source reliable and credible, they will trust the information given. This also shows that people in general have a fear for change, especially when faced with new information, and therefore it is important to provide the consumers with information they feel comfortable with to try a new product.

The respondents of both focus groups wished to receive more information behind the labels and expressed their interest and willingness to learn more. However, it is difficult to find information at the present and going to the websites of each labelling organisation is simply too time-consuming. The respondents also thought that the governments should be more involved with labelling to increase consumer trust towards the various labelling organisations.

As already mentioned, Weronika Rehnby from Naturskyddsföreningen also expressed that the communication must be credible for the consumer. The current problems with labelling are the wide variety of labels and companies developing their own labels, which makes it even more confusing for the consumer. Therefore, it would probably be easier for the consumer to rely on one certified label.

Thus, the low awareness of different labels seems to create mistrust. Various strategies can be implemented to overcome this mistrust. As the respondents already suggested, more information should be provided in order for the consumers to trust the different labels. Since the knowledge of the labels is currently relatively low, it is not enough with just a simple label on a garment. Thus, other marketing and communication strategies, aiming to reach the consumer via various different channels, should be implemented. Examples of these communication channels are a scannable QR-code in combinations with a label or a small booklet of film providing more information at the point of purchase. Although a small booklet might sound old-fashioned or something a consumer will not notice or pick up, the respondents of the focus groups found the booklet as a useful tool to provide the consumers more information.

Many of the respondents also raised the “issue of time” in the focus groups sessions, and thus it is an important aspect to take into account. Generally, consumers are exposed to many different temptations once in a retail environment. As already mentioned in the theoretical framework, a label can be viewed as a shortcut for consumers to find the right product (Hwang et al., 2010).

This “shortcut” can only be efficient if consumers recognise and trust the label. If consumers do not recognise and/or trust the label, but are willing to know more, they need to seek for additional information, which usually means consumers spending more time in the retail environment. As the respondents pointed out, they are not willing to put an extra effort in searching for this additional information.

The information should simply be easily distributed at the point of purchase and/or provided beforehand via various marketing and communications channels. Thus in this context, a label is not per se a “shortcut” for finding the right product, unless a consumer is familiar with and/or trusts the label.

5.3 Consumers’ attitudes of social or environmental labelling

When the moderator asked the first question:

*“What is your opinion and how do you generally perceive labelling on textiles?
(Keywords: image, icon, colour, information, reaction, emotions)”*

The respondents immediately expressed their views on the colour and design of the labelling logo. Both focus groups seemed to put strong emphasis on the appearance of social or environmental labelling, and this seemed to influence their attitude towards the various labelling standards. The moderator interpreted that the majority of both focus groups felt that the labelling logos were not appealing to the fashion industry. According to both focus groups, social or environmental labels looked too similar with each other making it difficult for the consumer to distinguish between them. The respondents also stated that the green colour is a bit too dull. The colour of the label logo should be more fashionable in order to fit nicely into the fashion industry.

Woman (C) explains:

“The green colour is so often related to environmental issues, and people relate this often with a bohemian hippie style and therefore fashion companies should stay away from the green labels. There are so many amazing logos and colours, so why do they not use one of these instead of the current boring labels.”

The respondents of the second focus group added that green might be a dull colour, but on the other hand it is still a good indicator, since it is automatically

connected with something that is better for the environment. Maybe another colour, such as pink, would create scepticism and confuse the consumer even more.

Woman (F) explains:

“The Fairtrade International label has good colours with the fresh green and blue combined with black, it feels more modern than others. Green and blue are probably good colours to use since consumers automatically connect it with sustainability. But maybe it is good to also work on the logo and make it more appealing so that it will stand out, the current ones look too similar and they are also a bit old fashioned.”

Thus, the respondents’ attitude shows that they place great emphasis on the visual appearance of the logo, and this also seems to affect their attitudes towards the different labelling standards. It is interesting to observe that the logo seems to have such a big influence on how consumers perceive a label and how it relates to it. The respondents thought it was important that the labels blend in well within the fashion industry, both visually and colour-wise. This view can be explained by the fashion industry focusing on aesthetics in comparison to other industries, such as the food industry, which is more focused on the health aspects of products. Thus, the logo and the communication channels labelling organisations use to reach their target group should be made aesthetically attractive by designing and communicating them in accordance to the characteristics of the fashion industry.

The majority of the respondents thought that labelling is a useful tool, but once shopping, they do not actively think about searching for social or environmental labels. However, at the moment, social or environmental labels are the only way to distinguish a sustainable garment from a less sustainable garment. The label should be easy to understand and include relevant information. Woman (E) explains:

“It should come easy and it is nothing that you want to search for. For instance if I want to purchase fairtrade pasta then I will not go home to Google it, no I want to read it in the supermarket and choose right away if I want it or not.”

As mentioned previously, Hwang et al. (2010) argue that labelling is an important tool for consumers to use once they are out shopping, and that labelling can be viewed as a shortcut for consumers to find the right product. The respondents from both focus groups stated that labelling is an important tool, but the labels often lack relevant information.

The respondents clearly expressed that there should be more information available in the retail environment. A tag is not sufficient enough to provide additional information, and the information should be available without having to put a lot of effort in searching for it. Woman (C) explains:

“If you are in a shop and say you get intrigued by a logo then you of course want to know more and if the shop lady can’t provide you with that information then you don’t take the effort to later look it up at home.”

According to Thøgersen (2010), social or environmental labelling is also an important resource to increase transparency and consumer trustworthiness. Transparency was a word that circulated a lot in both focus group discussions, and most of the respondents thought that the labelling organisation should incorporate more transparency in their activities in order to make the label more trustworthy.

Woman (D) explains:

“IKEA used to have this chocolate bar for sale and by typing in the barcode number on their internet webpage you could follow the history of that chocolate bar, how it was produced and shipped to the store, this for me gives extra value to a product.”

Male (A) adds to it:

“Yes I like that, is like storytelling and is fun to know the complete story behind the product.”

Woman (C) adds to it:

“Not so long ago I saw a bag that had a label with a picture and a brief story about the one that had produced it. For me, this doesn’t contribute to a better environment; it rather feels more like a promotion trick.”

The focus group sessions strengthened the conception that a gap between positive attitude towards social or environmental labelled products and the actual purchase of such products exists. The respondents stated that the product-related attributes (design, quality or price) of clothing are important factors they take into account once purchasing fashion. If some of these factors is lacking on the apparel, for instance the lack of a good design, the consumer will most likely not engage in purchase behaviour. Thus, although the focus groups expressed their interest in the social aspects and the environmental impact the clothing industry, the purchase decision is not solely based on sustainable attributes.

The following examples reflect the respondents' attitudes regarding the impact of price on their purchase behaviour of apparel that is labelled to be socially or environmentally friendlier.

Woman (F) explains:

“The less money you have the harder is it to be sustainable, with more money it is easier to be sustainable, because then you have the opportunity to choose.”

Woman (E) from the second group adds:

“It depends on my financial situation, if I have less money then I go for the cheaper option but if I have enough to spend than I would go for the greener label.”

When the moderator asked if the respondents would choose the environmentally-friendlier garment if they were faced with a scenario, where they had two identical garments but one of them had a social or environmental label and was 20% more expensive, woman (H) explains:

“Yes of course, I also do it when I buy food ... If I had to choose between organic milk and regular milk then I take organic milk, it's after all just 4kr more expensive.”

Male (A) adds:

“It depends on the quantity and on the price; if I have to purchase large quantities then I go for the cheaper price and if the product is then 20% more expensive it will be quite a lot of money, so I unfortunately would than go for the less environmental friendlier product in order to save some money.”

Woman (C) adds:

“It also has to be durable, because if you purchase something expensive you want it to last for some years. So it can not just be sustainable but it also has to be long lasting and if it is that, well then I can purchase it for 20% more.”

Chang and Wong (2012) also highlight that the reluctance to change buying habits might be an additional explanation on why consumers do have a positive attitude for social or environmental labelled products but do not always apply that behaviour at the point of purchase. The moderator perceived that the consumers' habits play an important role in their purchase behaviour, because the majority of respondents were not “used to” or really seeking to purchase social or environmentally friendlier labelled garments.

The following explains Ekoguiden's project leader's Jennie Johansson's thoughts of consumer habits and behaviours:

“To change behaviour is a long process. The biggest reason why people say they are willing to change their buying behaviour but in the end don't, is because the products are not adequately available in the store. The products would need to be exposed more and the information about the products must be clearer, through signage, hangtags and labels.”

As Grankvist (2002) points out, habits control a large part of consumers' behaviours, and the choice of products is often guided automatically by habits. This statement is also consistent with the statements of the focus groups' participants. The focus groups' habits seem to be based on shopping for clothes that they find fashionable and/or appealing.

Thus, their habits are not per se based on how sustainable the clothing is, but rather on the complexity of various factors, such as trends, social identity, group affiliation, desired identity, product-related attributes and various hedonistic motives. The respondents do not go and specifically shop for sustainable clothes but they rather purchase what they have in mind. If the garment happens to be sustainable, then it is just an extra value.

Woman (A) explains:

“If I would like to purchase a garment, I first need to like it and if I like it then I purchase it. If it is produced in Bangladesh it would influence my purchase decision to negative. But I would not want it more because it is fairtrade labelled but my negative attitude would probably change to the more positive attitude.”

Male (A) has another view on it:

“I can honestly say that it would not give me any extra value if the garment would be sustainable, I don't really care so much. It is anyway difficult to control the whole supply chain, because it is made in China it doesn't automatically mean that it is produced in sweatshop. If I go to purchase something I do it because I first got inspired from either a magazine or via the internet and then I purchase it. I would never say that I purchase this only because it is sustainable. No not at all, I would rather say that I purchase it because it is fabulous.”

This is consistent with the statement of Linda Hedström from Svensk Handel Still, who expressed her thoughts of communicating sustainability in the fashion sector. Hedström thinks that organic is not an effective sales pitch and consumers do not go out to buy "organic" clothing, but to find a pair of black pants or a certain type of shirt. That is the reason why many brands have decided to simply "build in" ecological materials in their collections, and if a company manages to form a strong brand based on sustainability principles, well then you might become successful.

When linking this to the theoretical framework of attitudes, the dissonance theory by Festinger (1957) explains people's strategies to resolve inconsistencies and how they consider a range of phenomena that might be responsible for these inconsistencies.

The theory explains that humans have a sense of duty to decrease their dissonance by changing their attitudes and beliefs or by blaming or denying a phenomenon. Hence, a person always strives to reach cognitive balance and avoid cognitive dissonance. The focus groups of this study seem to have an inconsistency between their attitude towards social or environmental labelled clothing and their actual purchase behaviour. One could say that they try to resolve this inconsistency by a dissonance reduction strategy. Thus consumers, as this study demonstrates, would more likely protect the inconsistencies between attitude and behaviour than motivate the change of the behaviour.

Additionally, this research shows that product attributes affect consumers' attitudes and behaviour. As mentioned earlier, the focus group expressed that they do have concerns about the environmental and/or social aspect of the fashion supply chain, but they do not seem ready to personally sacrifice quality or design. Thus, the drive to behave consistently does not necessarily mean a change in purchase behaviour. An individual can just change his or her attitude towards the phenomenon and continue the behaviour. As Linda Hedström suggested, it is probably better to "build in" ecological materials in the collections since it is not enough, at present, with just labelling a garment as more sustainable. As mentioned previously consumers do not shop garments because it is labelled to be sustainable, they rather shop what they have in their mind, which is based on factors such as fashion, trends, design quality or price.

The theory of network representation of attitudes shows, that the strongest and most accessible attitudes are created through diverse, repeated and direct experiences with an object or service (Fazio, 2007). Briefly, this theory of attitudes means that associations between a given object and a given summary evaluation of the object-associations may vary in strength and depends on the availability of the memory.

Since sustainable friendlier fashion is often related with lack of design, quality or higher price, it affects the attitude and consumer behaviour towards sustainable friendlier fashion. This is usually based on previous emotional responses of consumers' past behaviour and experience with sustainable friendlier clothing and/or based on other potential sources, such as "negative" input from family or friends.

As long as this will be available in their memory, they will continue to have “negative” attitude towards sustainable friendlier fashion and thus not change their purchase behaviour.

Associative-propositional model of evaluation (APE), which describes peoples’ responses, should be understood in terms of their underlying mental processes. In this model, the attitude structure and its activation are based on two systems views of the human mind: *associative system* and *propositional reasoning system* (Gawronski and Bodenhausen 2007). The *associative system* is characterised by plain activation (implicit attitudes), independent of subjective truth or falsity, and the *reasoning system* checks the validity and appropriateness of the affective reaction (explicit attitudes). Thus, it transforms the outputs of the associative processes into propositional.

One could say that consumers’ attitudes towards social and environmental labelled fashion are primarily based on their *implicit* attitudes. Meaning that one of their first reactions is that environmentally friendlier fashion has either lack of product attributes (design, quality or price) and/or that it is not “fashionable” in the same sense as fashion is perceived. These attitudes could be based on either contemporary experience or past behaviour experience. This study also shows that consumers’ *explicit* attitudes of social and environmental fashion is often weighed against the product attributes (design, quality or price) and/or how “fashionable” the garment is. Thus, as mentioned in the *dissonance theory*, consumers try to resolve inconsistencies of “*yes I am concerned about the negative impact which fashion garments might have on either social issues or the environment*” by decreasing their inconsistency by denying it at the point of purchase “*but I am not willing to sacrifice either design, quality or price once I am shopping apparel*”.

The APE model suggests that there are different cognitive processes that operate in the two systems providing mutual input for each other when it comes to the mechanism of *attitude change*.

The *associative system* is controlled by two processes:

- *Changes in the associative structure:* new association is formed, based on associative learning processes.
- *Changes in pattern activation:* a slightly different context enables a slightly different pattern of existing associations.

The *reasoning system* is controlled by three processes:

- *Changes in the associative structure:* new input forms the associative system than changes the reasoning system.
- *Changes in the proposition considered relevant:* new facts or beliefs considered to be relevant for the evaluation judgment.
- *Changes in strategies used to achieve consistency:* inconsistency propositions rejected or found a new proposal that could solve inconsistency.

As mentioned earlier, consumers seem to have a perception that social or environmental fashion lacks good quality and/or design and therefore they are not always willing to engage with such a product. It is therefore important to change this by either influencing their associative system by, for instance, creating same attributes as “non-sustainable” fashion and/or raising the marketing communication strategies so that the consumers can gain more information which could lead to attitude and/or behavioural change. Thus, new facts and beliefs could influence both the associative system and the reasoning system.

Additionally, if a labelling organisation or a fashion company wants to reach out to fashion consumers with their sustainable friendlier garments, they need to seek for marketing strategies that go beyond the label itself, since labelling on textiles has not so far been a successful method. Additionally, it is probably not enough to just label a product as a sustainable friendlier alternative since a consumer wants to gain more information. They seem to have curiosity towards transparency and this curiosity goes beyond a label, they simply want to know what is behind that label.

Thus, attitudes are dynamic and therefore rather complex since the objects are usually diverse. Hence, sustainable friendlier clothing is not just referred to as a piece of clothing that might be better from an ethical or environmental perspective. In the mind of the consumer, it is connected to various variables such as design, quality, price, the brand itself and past history. Additionally, sustainable friendlier clothing has often been connected with something dull and/or unfashionable, and this unfortunately still seems to affect consumers' attitudes towards sustainable friendlier fashion.

Thus, there is no such thing as a single attitude. Attitudes are constructed by various patterns of evaluation and memories consumers carry when they reflect on their experiences.

The following explains Jennie Johansson's thoughts of consumers' attitudes regarding sustainable friendlier fashion:

“The concept of sustainability has a slightly corny and dull clang. The general consensus is that they think that sustainably produced garments look a certain way. The customer also has no knowledge of how clothes are made and therefore no understanding of the need for a change.”

Weronika Rehnby from Naturskyddsföreningen also expressed that many consumers think that just because you can buy a product at the store, it is also controlled and thus poses no danger to either health or the environment, especially for health. This means that many do not see the importance of buying eco-labelled clothing and textiles. In addition, many consumers do not know how the garment is actually produced and what chemicals are used. This makes it difficult for consumers to understand the benefits of purchasing social or environmental labelled garments.

Thus, there seems to be a combination of consumers' lack of knowledge and a complex set of various attitudes that influence the consumers' attitudes and behaviour towards sustainable friendlier labelled apparel.

5.4 Consumers' preferences of social or environmental labelling

In the previous headline, consumers' knowledge and attitudes towards social or environmental labelling was explained. In this section consumer preferences on how to communicate the sustainable values through a label will be analysed. Although labelling has not worked so well so far given the low awareness the consumers have, it still can be used as a strategy, amongst many other strategies, in order to distinguish a sustainable friendlier garment from a non-sustainable garment. Thus, it is important to gain knowledge on how consumers prefer labelling in order to reach their attention, and preferably influence their attitude and purchase behaviour. In the section, the respondents were tested on “negative labelling”, where the author wanted to gain an understanding of how the respondents would react to the labels.

The label represented below was chosen, because it is an interesting label to test due to its strong elements and its clarity in terms of communication.

5.4.1 Negative labelling

Both focus groups were told that they should not focus on the design, text or at the images of the two children. The respondents should rather focus on the circle with the diagonal line and think how it would affect them if they saw such label on a textile.

Figure 3: Negative labelling



The majority of the respondents thought that the label was quite provoking and that they would certainly react on it, maybe even more than on positive labelling. They thought that they would remember a negative label longer than a positive one.

Woman (F) in group 2 explains:

“It would scare me and I would be like, wow, what’s this about? It is like a stop sign which says stop and think for awhile. I would definitely buy the garment which has a negative label if I have to choose between an unlabeled and a negative labelled product.”

Woman (J) in group 2 explains:

“This label would affect my purchase decision, I would simply buy clothes that carry this label and question all other garments that did not have this label.”

Woman (D) adds:

“We do actually remember negative things more than positive things so this is then probably a good way to communicate labelling.”

As Grankvist (2004) argues, consumers respond differently towards positively and negatively labelled products, which is also consistent with the focus group participants’ thoughts and feelings around the negative label above, where most of them would move their preferences away from an identical garment without such a label. According to Grankvist (2004), consumers with an intermediate interest in environmental issues would rather choose products which are negatively marked over the positive ones, and consumers who have weak interest in environmental issues are unaffected whilst consumers with high concern about the environmental matters responded equally to both negative and positive labelling. In both focus groups, the majority of the respondents had an intermediate interest in environmental issues and this further strengthens Grankvist’s (2004) assumption that a consumer with intermediate interest in environmental issues would rather choose products which are negatively marked over the positive ones. Additionally, one of the participants in the focus group pointed out that negative events do have a greater effect on people than positives ones, and that negative information is remembered for a longer period of time than positive information (Grankvist et al., 2004).

5.4.2 Positive labelling

In the section below, the respondents gave their opinion on “positive” labelling, meaning labels, which do not have any negative elements. The author wanted to gain a deeper understanding about their perception of these labels in order to understand their preferences. The labels used in this study were Kappahl's label, H&M's label, a random label, GOTS- and Öeko-Tex -label.

- *Kappahl's label* was chosen due to its natural look and its design. The author thought it would be interesting to see how consumers would react to such a label.
- *H&M's label* was chosen since it is a well-known company and that they have invested in various sustainability marketing strategies during the last years. The author thought it would be interesting to see if consumers' credibility was higher for this label since they might be more familiar with it.
- *The random label* was chosen to see if consumers would be more sceptical towards the label, since it was unknown, and if more information was required to overcome any scepticism.
- *GOTS and Öeko-Tex label* were chosen to see if the respondents would prefer visual, verbal and factual information on a label and to see if that could raise the credibility of the label.

5.4.3 Kappahl's label

The moderator explained that respondents should express their opinions freely regarding Kappahl's organic cotton and organic linen labels.

Figure 4: Kappahl's label



The majority of the respondents thought that the labels were rather neutral and that they would not react so much if they saw this on a garment, maybe not even reflect over the fact that it actually is an organic cotton label. According to Grankvist (2004), this would probably be a positive label with no direct warnings on the label as it has rather inviting colours and images and neutral words. Apparently this label did not evoke so much feelings or reactions as the previous negative one. However, in this case the author thinks it is more about the design of the label than about positive or negative communication. It is not so surprising if the previous label received more attention than this one due to the provoking nature of the previous label.

Woman (A) explains:

“It is not a clear label, it is also a bit old fashioned and I think many people would not recognise that it actually is an image of a cotton plant. This label doesn’t convince me and you really have to read it to be able to understand what it actually stands for.”

Woman (D) in group 1 explains:

“I would not reflect over this, it also feels more commercial and it is not convincing for me.”

The label above from Kappahl is both visual and verbal as the image of a cotton plant and the green and white colours represent sustainable values. The text also states exactly what it is: organic cotton and organic linen. Research has shown that pictures (visual communication) are more easily recalled or memorised than words (Kaplan et al., 1968; Paivio, 1969; Sampson, 1970). However, this perhaps does not apply to this label since everybody does not know how an organic cotton plant looks like. Additionally, as Lutz and Lutz (1977) argue, in some contexts perhaps a written word may be absorbed as pictorial information, given that the verbal message is concrete. The verbal message of this label is "organic cotton" and "organic linen", and the consumers probably compare this to garments that are better for the environment but not per se to an organic cotton plantation. Thus, this label is quite weak and the research shows that consumers do not give as much attention to either the verbal or the visual elements of this label.

5.4.4 H&M label

The moderator explained that the respondents should express their opinions freely regarding H&M's cotton mix label. They were also told to not take the text “cotton mix” into account since the moderator could not find the 100% organic cotton label by H&M but only the blended version.

Figure 5: H&M label



The majority of the respondents thought that the label looks good and the design is also appealing; Woman (G) explains:

“It is nice design, but the label should have a bit more information, in general H&M does a good work when they communicate sustainability.”

Woman (E) adds:

“H&M screams their sustainable message through their webpage and marketing campaigns where words such as organic recycle and sustainability are heavily used. So you cannot miss out on it. By doing so, you kind of trust the label since you already were exposed to the information.”

As Linda Hedström from Svensk Handel Stil mentioned, H&M has really succeeded in communicating their sustainable values by simply "building in" the ecological materials in their collections. The H&M Conscious Collection is successful as it is not only environmentally friendlier, but also trendy, stylish and has the right price. The reason why the majority of the participants in both focus groups were more positive with H&M's logo than Kappahl's, can probably be explained by the fact that H&M has created marketing strategies that go beyond the label. Thus, H&M has "built-in" sustainable values in their brand.

5.4.5 Random label

The moderator explained that the respondents should express their opinions freely regarding a random label. They were also told that they should not focus on the design, text or at the images. The respondents should rather focus on the content that highlights the sustainable value, in this case, less water, less energy and fewer chemicals. Additionally, the moderator told that other criteria could be used such as better labour conditions and reduced carbon footprint etc. Most importantly, the moderator wished to investigate whether the consumers found it practical to use a system which highlights the sustainable value with the help of a symbol and text using a kind of a signpost system.

Figure 6: Random label



Woman (G) explains:

“I like it because the label states clearly what sustainable values the garment has, however it should be measured with hard facts such a percentage; we use 20% less water etc.”

Woman (A) adds:

“Minimum water use is quite blurry since it depends which criteria it is measured against. I mean how much water they used before; maybe they even use more than an average factory.”

Male (A) in group one adds:

“Well it is good that they try to state what they do but I would like to have numbers. It is not enough to state that “we use less water” you have to measure it against something. Like in the food industry you a can read the nutritional information, why not also apply this on textiles?”

The majority of the respondents had a sympathetic view on this label, although they mentioned that they would like to have more facts, such as percentage of how much “less” water they do use etc. It is interesting to note that the respondents did not question the H&M logo, but when they where confronted with a logo that they had never seen before, they were immediately more sceptical and they began questioning the logo. Evans et al. (2008) argue that credibility plays a large role and if a consumer can refer to a credible source, then he or she is more likely to purchase the garment. In this case, H&M might be the credible and trusted source, and therefore the respondents accepted the logo more easily.

5.4.6 GOTS and Öeko-Tex label

The moderator explained that the respondents should express their opinions freely regarding GOTS and Öeko-Tex label. The main point was to investigate if the respondents found the logos more useful with both the visual and verbal communication, and if these were additive.

Figure 7: GOTS and Öeko-Tex label



The participants in both focus groups thought that the added text was relevant since it provided factual information which helped them to gain trust. Thus, factual information, such as percentage or license number, helps to build confidence towards the logos. Tang et al. (2004), Grahn (1979), Holt et al. (1990) and Morrell et al. (1989) argued that both the visual and verbal communication had significant additive effects on the purchase. This seems to also be consistent with this study since consumers seemed to have more confidence towards these labels which could ideally lead to a purchase.

Woman (E) explains:

“This is good because it actually says in percentage how much organic cotton is being used so basically you know what you purchase. That they also say the license number actually gives you more confidence and trust.”

Women (H) in group one ads:

“The text gives more credibility because the logos are still relatively new. As we become more familiar with a logo it increases our confidence and perhaps this leads to that we later only need the logo.”

5.5 Positive and negative labelling

The positive and negative label was chosen due to the author wanting to understand if consumers would be interested to have a grading system which would indicate how sustainable a garment is, and also to see if this would have any effect on consumers’ preferences in choosing a garment with such a label.

Both focus groups were told that they should not focus or judge on the design of the half-moon label. They should rather judge on the concept, meaning, if a half-moon label would be a useful tool for them to use when searching for sustainable friendlier garments. The colours would gradually shift depending on how sustainable the garment is. The green colour would indicate the garment to be most sustainable, yellow less sustainable and red not sustainable.

Figure 8: Positive and negative labelling



The majority of the respondents in both focus groups thought that the label was a simple and straightforward communication method. However, the participants expressed that more information would be needed regarding the colours and maybe connect the label with a website, where you can see exactly how the company's using the label measure the colours.

Woman (E) explains:

“It is straightforward and it is easy to understand, I like it and would take this in account if I was out and shopping for clothes”.

Woman (G) adds:

“I think this could work well because say if the half-moon label had a lot of the red colour in it, then I would immediately question: So what does the red stand for? Is it bad working conditions or chemicals or transportation?”

Woman (A) adds:

“Well maybe all the clothes we purchase nowadays are “red”; actually we don't know this and that is kind of scary for me. A star concept would also be good idea, that you would gain a star for each sustainable effort or a thermometer label.”

Woman (H) in group one explains:

“I found it a good idea since it is like a scale which measures how sustainable a garment is; it feels more honest for me.”

Grankvist (2004) researched positive and negative labelling by using tomato packages as an example; two tomato packages looked exactly the same but one of them had a higher price. Normally a consumer would go for the cheaper one, but if the tomato package would have a red eco-label (which would mean worse for the environment) while the more expensive one would have a yellow eco-label (less harmful for the environment), then according to Grankvist (2004), most consumers would move their preferences away from the cheaper alternative but not necessarily choose the more expensive one. This fits well with what the respondents from both focus groups expressed that they would rather move their preferences away from the garment that would be worse for the environment.

They were overall positive towards the concept and they thought it was an honest way to indicate the sustainable value of a garment. Some of the respondents even expressed that they would be willing to pay more for a garment that had such a logo with a high sustainable value.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations that have emerged from the analysis. The chapter ends with suggestions for further research in the area.

This report studied the knowledge, attitudes and preferences regarding social or environmental labelling on textiles from a consumer perspective. The empirical base consisted of two focus group studies that illustrated this theme. The focus group discussions were based on participants' own personal thoughts, and how they think about labelling on textiles, their attitudes and preferences when it comes to sustainable friendlier labelled clothing. The following section will analyse and discuss the results of the study.

6.1 Consumers' knowledge of social or environmental labelling

Similar to previous studies, such as Sifo (2013), this study showed that consumers have low awareness of the various social and environmental labels. Thøgersen (2010) argues that too wide of a variety can lead to frustration and complicate the process of actually using social or environmental labelling. This study shows that consumers are not yet frustrated, but they are confused over the myriad of labels available in the market and find it difficult to understand what each label actually stands for. Thus, labelling does not meet its main purposes e.g. to be a navigational tool to make it easier find sustainable friendly garments. The reason why consumers are not frustrated regarding the myriad of labels can probably be explained by them not per se searching for sustainable friendlier labelled garments to purchase. Thus, there is no reason for frustration if they are not even using the labels as a navigation tool.

The confusion was greater amongst third-party labels than the self-controlled labels. One explanation to this may be that self-controlled labelling is often included in overall brand strategies, such as H&M's Conscious Collection. H&M has more or less created a concept out of sustainability where labelling is just one part of the overall strategy plan.

A third-party label is often just a logo on a tag or package and it is up to the labelling organisation or the independent retailer to promote it. Thus, the majority of the third-party labels have a low market penetration and they have become “wallflowers” in the market instead.

Additionally, consumers have a fairly low confidence in the various labels and one explanation to this could be that they are unfamiliar with the existing labels. Moreover, this distrust is mainly based on the lack of available information at the point of purchase and the labelling tags lacking relevant information. The low awareness may also result in consumers creating their own ideas of what each label stands for, and this interpretation may not always be compatible with the original message.

This study has also demonstrated that consumers think that the food industry has come further with providing information on the sustainable attributes of a product, and the fashion industry should use it as an example. Moreover, transparency e.g. the desire to learn more about the product's origin, how it was produced, by whom and what environmental impact it may have, was a subject that was discussed in-depth. This indicates that consumers are open for more information and curious to know more about the clothing they purchase.

Additionally, the participants of the focus groups thought that a labelling organisation should provide more transparency regarding the labels. The questions that were raised were for instance: In which way is it Fairtrade, what are they actually supporting? Do employees receive a minimum wages, are the working conditions good? Do they have any labour rights? etc. The word Fairtrade, is a pretty broad statement according to the consumers, they seem to mistrust the claim and find it confusing what a Fairtrade label actually means. This once again indicates that consumers have little knowledge regarding the labels, and this could perhaps be tackled by raising awareness of the various labels. However, this may not result as a change in their purchase behaviour.

The additional information on the label should be easily accessible and not complicated to reach. Consumers do not have the patience or time to look up information at the point of purchase or after the purchase. Examples of solutions that could provide quick access to information could be a QR-code on the label which links to a webpage, where the information could be easily reached, or by providing a simple brochure at the point of purchase that consumers can read and/or a short film that gives the information in a more visual way.

However, if labelling organisations want to reach their consumers through a label, it is probably not enough, at present, to present a label visually and/or verbally on a garment. Additional marketing and communication strategies should be created so that messages can be widely distributed over different channels. This can be done for instance by creating advertising campaigns both online and offline, which would communicate the story behind a label. This way the label would just be used as navigation tool in a shopping environment, where the consumer would automatically refer the label to the overall message of these marketing and communication campaigns.

6.2 Consumers' attitudes of social or environmental labelling

Similar to previous studies (Ellen, 1994; Morris et al., 1995; Walley & Whitehead, 1994), this study has also shown a gap associated with the consumption of sustainable friendlier labelled clothing, e.g. a gap between consumers' concern for the environment and their actual behaviour. This indicates that consumers do not necessary "need" more information on the negative effects that clothing might have on the environment in order to get them act more environmentally friendlier, but they rather need to be approached from different angles that allow consumers to act more environmentally friendly.

The study has enabled to discern a pattern in how consumers think and act when they are shopping for clothing. Consumers say that they are willing to learn more about social and environmental labelling, they aspire to act more environmentally friendly, they demand companies to become more transparent and they wish for more information to be available in the retail store regarding the social or environmental impact that clothing might have.

However, the majority of the respondents are basing their purchasing decisions on product related attributes and not on the sustainable attributes. One explanation to this may be that a consumer often links sustainable friendlier fashion with either a lack of design, quality, trendiness or with a higher price. This weighs negatively against the purchase decision and therefore sustainable friendlier clothing often gets omitted.

Nevertheless, the price does not seem to be the most important factor, it is rather the quality and design which steers the choice. Thus, consumers are willing to pay a higher price if the product has the same quality and an attractive design. Therefore, sustainable fashion needs better aesthetics. This reaction is maybe not so surprising; the best way to promote behaviour change is not by offering something which has inferior attributes but to make the alternative seem more appealing. Additionally, consumers seem to lack platforms which offer appealing ethical or environmental friendlier products. Thus, this limits their choices and to avoid the complicated chase after sustainable friendlier fashion, they would rather shop in places which are more convenient for them.

It is important to keep in mind that to change habits is a relatively long process and to “act” more sustainable or “think” more in sustainable terms, regarding fashion, is a rather new phenomenon. Since habits are usually routines based on certain behaviour that are repeated regularly and which tend to occur subconsciously, it is not so easy to change or to break them. Clothing manufacturers have also, in recent decades, been more focused on delivering trend-led fast fashion and therefore it is not surprising that consumers have not previously questioned the social or environmental consequences the fashion industry may have. Thus, we cannot expect that consumers will immediately embrace this new phenomenon by taking social and environmental aspects into consideration when buying clothing.

After all, habits control a large part of consumers’ behaviour and the choice of products is often guided automatically by these habits (Grankvist, 2002; Evans et al., 2008). One could say that one part of consumers’ habits, once purchasing fashion, are focused on trend-led fast fashion and the desire of fulfilling the need to be fashionable by owning the latest trend.

However, the growing involvement of taking social or environmental issues in consideration indicates that these two “identities” are not yet compatible with each other.

Since sustainable friendlier fashion is often labelled with a social or environmental label describing the sustainable friendlier property of the garment, it also affects the consumers’ attitudes and purchase behaviour towards social or environmental labelled clothing.

Consumers’ attitudes are mainly based on previous emotional reactions from past experience with sustainable friendlier garments that are related to lack of design, quality or trendiness. As long as this will be available in their memory, consumers will continue to have "negative" attitudes towards sustainable friendlier labelled fashion and thus do not change their purchasing behaviour. Thus, labels which inform the social or environmental property of a garment are unfortunately not sufficient enough to persuade the consumers to purchase environmental friendlier clothes. Additionally, there are many other factors that steer a consumer’s choice to purchase clothes, such as trends, social identity, group affiliation, desired identity, hedonistic motives, and also the relation which the consumers has with the brand itself. Thus, there is no single attitude, but attitudes are rather constructed by various patterns of evaluative memory consumers carry when they reflect on their experiences. Hence, attitudes are dynamic, and therefore the attitudes are rather complex since objects are usually diverse.

Clothing manufacturers or labelling organisations should not only focus on the social and environmental characteristics, but also keep a good design, quality and keep up with the 'trends'. As in the food industry, consumers do not purchase organic food just because it is organic; it also has to taste good. The same goes for the fashion consumer; one does not buy clothes just because it is better for the environment, but also because they want to please themselves or fill a need, for example, by feeling beautiful or enhance their social identity.

6.3 Consumers' preferences of ethical and social or environmental labelling

The study shows that consumers in general think that a label should be tailored to the fashion market. The colours that should be used on a label is green and/or blue, because these are automatically linked with sustainability. However, the majority of the respondents thought that the label should also be combined with other colours in order to avoid a too "green" look.

This study as well as previous studies by Tang et al. (2004), Grahn (1979), Holt et al. (1990) and Morrell et al. (1989) show that both the visual and verbal communication had significant additive. Consumers seemed to have more confidence towards labels which are visually and verbally communicated and also, preferably, numerically rated with a percentage, which grades the sustainable value of the clothing, for instance, 20% less water has been used or 100% organic cotton.

The visual and verbal communication should be relevant to products in question, meaning that the visual part should have an abstract connection to a product so that consumers can easily connect the visual picture to something abstract. Even though consumers do not recognise some of the labels used in this study, they do connect them with environmentally friendlier values, but they cannot locate exactly in which way they are environmentally friendlier.

Regarding consumer preferences for social or environmental labelling, the author concluded that negative labels have a stronger impact on consumers than a positive label. A negative label raises questions on how the other garments are produced and which environmental impact they actually have etc. Majority of the focus group participants also stated that a negatively labelled garment would probably influence their purchase behaviour by moving their preferences away from a positively labelled garment.

When the focus groups saw the example of a labelling system with three different colours, which indicated the degree of sustainability of the garment, where a green colour indicated the garment being sustainable, yellow less sustainable and red non- sustainable, they thought it was a good way to communicate and grade the

garment's sustainable impact. Additionally, they thought that it was a good tool to use; they also started immediately to question the unsustainable value of the garment and compare it with other garments which did not carry such a label. This indicates that a positive label does not have the same stimuli as a negative label at first place. If consumers see a positive label, they do not start to question it or to compare it with other garments which do not have a label.

Consumers rather just acknowledge that it is a social or environmental label. In contrast to a negative label, consumers immediately react and most of them would move their preferences away from the less sustainable garment. Additionally, the participants also pointed out that they would remember a negative label longer than a positive one because of the stronger reactions.

However, to label clothing with a negative label is not a straight forward strategy, since the fashion supply chain contains so many different steps varying from chemical and water use to working conditions and transparency.

To use a negative label, that states for instance "non" or "less" chemicals, could in first place create a reaction in the consumers and move their preferences away from a non-negative labelled garment, but not necessary lead to a purchase or change in their habits. After all, product related attributes will be considered, and if there is lack of design or quality, then probably the label would not be so effective. Negative labelling has also been previously used in other industries, for instance in anti-drugs and anti-smoking ads, where people have been threatened with scary consequences but without any significant improvements in changing their habits. Thus, even if the reaction is strong, and they state that it would have an impact on their purchasing behaviour, it does not mean that the consumer would in fact purchase it. If negatively labelled clothing would have the same attributes as a non-labelled garment, then it would probably affect the purchasing behaviour by consumers choosing the sustainable friendlier option.

The recommendation for the textile industry concerning labelling is to make use of a system that, for instance, has a colour system, point system or a thermometer system, which clearly indicates the sustainable values of a garment, since consumers seem to ask for more transparency and factual/verbal information on the label.

The label itself should be more adapted to the clothing industry in terms of colours and visual communication. This could also be a competitive advantage for those companies that choose a transparent labelling system because they want to concretely distinguish the garment from the non-sustainable garments, and consumers would then probably move their preferences away from the non-sustainable garments.

However, as pointed out earlier, it is better to build in the sustainable values in fashion and then promote them by various marketing and communication channels so that the sustainability becomes an added value to the already fashionable garments.

6.4 Summary of conclusions and recommendations

Social and environmental labelling is still in an early phase in the fashion industry, and that is one explanation to why consumers have a relatively low awareness of the various labels. Despite this, there is a growing interest in learning more about the various labels and sustainability, but consumers find it difficult to find relevant information. Consequently, it is important for labelling organisations and other stakeholders to collaborate in order to raise awareness. Although, raising awareness is not enough to get consumers to purchase more sustainable clothing, because it does not per se lead to a behavioural change, meaning to consumers purchasing more sustainable friendlier clothing as the product attributes (design and quality in relation to price) are factors that strongly influence consumers' purchasing decisions. In other words, sustainable friendlier garments require similar attributes to "unsustainable" garments. Thus, it is not enough to just be sustainable in fashion - "it's got to be cool".

Additionally, consumers want to have more transparency, and story telling is becoming increasingly important as well. Consumers want to know where the garment is produced, by whom and what the overall impact is on the environment. This information should be easily accessible on the label itself or via additional information channels, such a mobile applications, QR-code which links to a webpage, or by simply providing a brochure at the point of purchase.

Additional marketing and communication strategies should be implemented in order to create attention and knowledge around the labelling organisation, so that in the shopping environment, labelling is just used as a navigation tool.

When it comes to the design of the label, it should be appropriate for the fashion industry with a creative touch. The colours of green and blue are good to use, but should be used in combination with other colours in order to avoid a too “green” look. They should also contain factual information which indicates how sustainable a garment actually is, since this would raise consumers’ confidence towards a label.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

There have been many different thoughts and ideas during the time of writing this thesis and new ideas and perspectives have arisen as the author gained more knowledge. The first suggestion is to further conduct a research on why third party labelling organisations have barriers to reach the retail industry and its end consumers. The Scandinavian retailers do not think that these labelling standards are so relevant to use and therefore the industry has to create its own self-controlled labelling system. In the food industry, you can find both self-controlled labels (I love eco ICA) and third-party verified labels (Fairtrade International), but in the Swedish fashion industry, most of the labels are self-controlled labels. It would be interesting to conduct a case study to see the benefits of choosing self-controlled labelling over third party labelling.

Moreover, it would be interesting to do a study on whether consumers really are willing to purchase sustainable fashion, and if so, to what extent does the product related attributes steer their purchase behaviour. It would be interesting to investigate which factors actually control this action and what triggers consumers to purchase sustainable fashion. After all the aim is to achieve a more sustainable fashion industry, where the consumers’ purchase decisions have a big influence in achieving this goal, and therefore it is important to understand the thoughts, habits and behaviour of consumers.

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Appendix I: Interview guide for the explorative study

Respondants:

- Jennie Johansson (Ekoguiden)
- Weronika Rehnby (Bra Miljöval)
- Linda Hedström (Svensk Handel Stil)

1. What is your opinion regarding on how to communicate sustainability within the fashion industry and have you experienced any concerns regarding sustainable communication?

2. Do you think that consumers have a positive attitude towards sustainable fashion, if so do they always act according to this attitude?

3. Has consumers' interest of social and environmental matters increased during the recent years and, if so, how?

Appendix II: Interview guide for focus group interviews

Respondents: 8 anonymous men and women

Knowledge

- What is your knowledge of these various labels?
- Do you know what each label stands for?
- How did you obtain the information of the different labels?

Attitude

- What is your opinion and how do you perceive each label? (Keywords: image, icon, colour, information, reaction, emotions)
- Do you find these labels as a useful tool once searching for sustainable friendlier garment?
- Do find the labels credible?
- Do you take socially or environmentally friendlier matters in account once you are purchasing clothes?
- What criteria is important for you once purchasing clothes? (Keywords: brand, price, trend, quality, fashion, availability, image)
- If you would face the option of two identical garments but where one of them was more sustainable than the other but 20% more expensive which one would they then choose?
- What image do you have of sustainable friendlier fashion?
- Is there something that has affected you to not purchase sustainable friendlier clothes?
-

Preferences

- How would you like that social or environmental labelling would be communicated (Keywords: image, icon, colour, information, text, logo)
- Which other ways can social or environmental values be communicated besides the labels.

The last questions of consumer preferences were implemented in combination with the different images in which respondents could freely talk about their opinion and perception of each label. Follow-up questions were not done by the moderator since she wanted the respondent would talk freely about their feelings and perceptions.

Appendix III: which labels do you recognise?



Bra Miljöval



Appendix IV: Social and environmental labelling



Soil Association Certification is the UK's largest organic certification body. As a member of the Global Standard GmbH, the managing body of the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS), the Soil Association now uses the GOTS certification for all new textile. Products: clothing and textiles.



IVN (International Association Natural Textile Industry) is an organization that has guidelines for the cultivation and production of organic textiles and issues its own certification. Just as GOTS includes the whole chain.



The Organic Exchange brings together brands and retailers with their business partners and key stakeholders to learn more about the social and environmental benefits of organic agriculture. At the same time they develop new business models and tools that support greater use of organic inputs such as organic cotton. The Organic Exchange also works to help increase consumer awareness of organic cotton products.



Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is an international labeling for clothing and textile covering both social and environmental requirements. GOTS aims to make it easier for consumers to choose textile products where a holistic approach taken with respect to both environmental and social responsibility throughout the chain. Products: clothing and textiles.



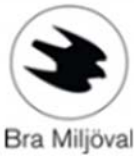
Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) is an international control system that is focused on improving labor conditions in various types of textile production worldwide. FWF is a so called multi-stakeholder initiatives involving companies, unions and organizations come together to find sustainable solutions and improved working conditions in producer countries. FWF works with companies that produce clothing and other sewn products and that claims to want to take on social responsibility throughout its supply chain. Since FWF only works with the working conditions in the production are not many rules for environmental. Products: clothing and textiles.



Fairtrade is an independent product label that aims to contribute to improved working and living conditions for farmers and workers in developing countries. Growers and employees get improved economic conditions by criteria for wages, a minimum price that exceeds the cost of production and long-term trade. Produkter: Fairtrade certifierar produkter som t ex kaffe, te, kakao, frukt and clothing.



EU Eco-label, formerly known as the EU Flower, is the official Ecolabel. Ecolabelling Sweden is responsible for the EU Ecolabel in Sweden. The work done on behalf of the Government. EU Eco operates similarly as the Swan. The products are examined from a life cycle perspective, from raw material to waste. Products must meet environmental, functional and quality requirements. The requirements will be increased continuously. There are seven different product and 28 product categories such as cleaning, hygiene products, consumer electronics, clothing and lodging.



Bra Miljöval wants to achieve a society in balance with nature. The label indicates that the product meets the requirements of the Society criteria. Good Environmental Choice criteria are diverse areas, which means that the requirements are different. All the criteria are based on the same reasons: to conserve natural resources. Materials to be returned to nature, reused or recycled. Products: Today, there are criteria for the following goods and services: heat energy, cooling, electricity, textiles, chemical products, freight, passenger, car and house insurance, grocery, flower shop and paper.



KRAV marking is a good environment, animal welfare, good health, and social responsibility. KRAV meets the EU regulation on organic production, but has some own rules beyond this. The main difference between CLAIM and EU rules, the requirements for animal husbandry, where KRAV have a higher nivå. Produkter: food but also as soil, fertilizer, pet food and textiles.



Swan is the official ecolabel operated on behalf of the Government, non-profit organization. The marking examines the environmental impact of products and services throughout their life cycle from raw material to waste. Label sets climate, environmental and functional requirements and quality. Swan's vision is a sustainable society with sustainable consumption. Products: Swan available on 65 different product lines and thousands of products / services including textiles and clothes.



Oeko-Tex ® 100 is a worldwide health labels for textile raw materials and finished products. The label must ensure that the finished product does not cause allergies or other health problems. Oeko-Tex ® Standard 100 for the finished product and the brand ensures that no unhealthy chemicals remain in the fabric. As a complement, there is Oeko-Tex ® 1000, which in addition to the basic requirements do not allow any use of environmentally harmful dyes or aids during production, and touches even social conditions. products Textiles and clothing.



The Sustainable Apparel Coalition was founded by a group of sustainability leaders from global apparel and footwear companies who recognize that addressing our industry's current social and environmental challenges are both a business imperative and an opportunity. Through multi-stakeholder engagement, the Coalition seeks to lead the industry toward a shared vision of sustainability built upon a common approach for measuring and evaluating apparel and footwear product sustainability performance that will spotlight priorities for action and opportunities for technological innovation.



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