

The College of Wooster

Open Works

Senior Independent Study Theses

2021

Breaking News: Sustainable Fashion is In and Fast Fashion is Out; Constructions of Sustainable Consumption in Fast Fashion Advertising

Camryn Eve Rosenstein

The College of Wooster, crosenstein21@wooster.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openworks.wooster.edu/independentstudy>



Part of the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Mass Communication Commons](#), [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), and the [Speech and Rhetorical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rosenstein, Camryn Eve, "Breaking News: Sustainable Fashion is In and Fast Fashion is Out; Constructions of Sustainable Consumption in Fast Fashion Advertising" (2021). *Senior Independent Study Theses*. Paper 9596.

This Senior Independent Study Thesis Exemplar is brought to you by Open Works, a service of The College of Wooster Libraries. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Independent Study Theses by an authorized administrator of Open Works. For more information, please contact openworks@wooster.edu.

© Copyright 2021 Camryn Eve Rosenstein



THE COLLEGE OF
WOOSTER

BREAKING NEWS: SUSTAINABLE FASHION IS IN AND FAST FASHION IS OUT;
CONSTRUCTIONS OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN FAST FASHION
ADVERTISING

by
Camryn Rosenstein

An Independent Study Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Course Requirements for
Senior Independent Study: The Department of Communication Studies

March 12, 2021

Advisor: Dr. Nii Kotei Nikoi

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the pivotal role advertising plays in fast fashion consumption and shaping young consumers ideas and values about the fashion industry, fast fashion, sustainable consumption, and sustainability. This study contributes to limited research into greenwashing and consumer perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable consumption. Moreover, this study highlights the increased relevance of the sustainable fashion movement in mainstream society. The researcher recruited 30 college students to participate in focus group sessions and individual interviews. An H&M advertisement and a video clip from a documentary, *The True Cost*, were shown to participants, so the researcher could examine how participants evaluated the advertising message about sustainability and what their interpretations revealed about their perceptions and attitudes of sustainability and sustainable consumption. In addition, the researcher performed a rhetorical analysis on the same H&M advertisement to illustrate the rhetorical devices H&M used to greenwash. Major conclusions of this research include the finding that while all young consumers had strong environmental values and comprehension of sustainability, engagement in sustainable habits and behaviors were gendered. In addition, the participants understanding of capitalism and corporate structures, suggest that greenwashed advertisements may be unsuccessful in persuading young consumers of sustainable claims made by fast fashion brands.

Keywords: greenwashing, advertising, sustainability, sustainable consumption, sustainable fashion, fast fashion, consumer perceptions, consumer attitudes, gen z

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Though this was not the Senior year I was looking forward to, I truly believe that writing my IS remotely allowed me to engage with the material on a level I may have not been able to reach at Wooster. Looking back on my first semester at Wooster, I can see that I have grown tremendously not just as an adult, but as an academic, a scholar, a social scientist, and a writer. Though I was not appreciative of it at the time, I could not be more grateful for my Wooster professors who challenged me to take a second look, to take a different approach, and to write with intention, not with fluff.

Working with Dr. Nikoi over the last year has been one of the highlights of my time at Wooster. I am so grateful that Dr. Nikoi has always shown enthusiasm and genuine interest in this topic because it made our weekly conversations informative and enjoyable. At the beginning of the Fall semester, I had a specific idea and plan of how things were going to go, the order they would go in, etc. Dr. Nikoi's approach was much more organic than the restrictive one I had laid out for myself. He always said leave room for reflection and yes you can put reflection paragraphs in any section. Dr. Nikoi's advice allowed me to really infuse the Camryn into this thesis. Dr. Nikoi, thank you for your on-going support, endless enthusiasm, and consistent effort to make this experience just as great online.

I cannot imagine this year without my weekly meeting with my writing tutor, Lynette. I think Dr. Nikoi, and Lynette have seen me grow the most over this year from my writing skills to the evolution of my understanding of sustainability. I have always been someone who asks a lot of questions and does not hesitate to sign up for office hours. Our weekly meetings allowed me to talk through all my ideas and thoughts, so I could get a better sense of them myself. Lynette,

thank you cannot be to describe how grateful I am for the immense patience, care, and enthusiasm you have shown me over the last eight months.

Mom, though I haven't physically been with you during this process, you have been by my side every day. Whether you sent me a recipe to make, a podcast to listen, or a picture of Evanston full of snow, Fran was always with Cam. Thank you is not merely enough to express my immense, immense gratitude for you. I love you to Alderaan and back.

Lastly, to my Pi Kappa Peanut Sisters, thank you for making Wooster a second home.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	4
Rationales.....	5
Definitions.....	9
Description of Method	9
Conclusion	11
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Sustainability.....	12
Sustainable Consumption.....	14
Sustainable Fashion	16
Advertising.....	19
History of Advertising	19
A Critical Approach to Advertising.....	21
Advertising in Fashion.....	24
Gendered Rhetoric in Advertising	24
Using ELM to Measure the Persuasiveness of Advertising Messages	25
Greenwashing	26
Corporate Social Responsibility	29
Conclusion	32
CHAPTER III: METHOD	33
Methods.....	33
Focus Groups	33

Semi-Structured Interviews	34
Rhetorical Analysis	35
COVID-19 Impact	36
Participants.....	37
Procedures.....	37
Limitations	41
Personal Reflection	43
Conclusion	44
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS	45
Rhetorical Analysis.....	45
Violates Sins of Greenwashing.....	47
Other Rhetorical Devices Used to Greenwash.....	51
Focus Group Sessions.....	58
Message was Vague.....	58
Message was False or Untrustworthy	59
Message Moralizes Consumption.....	61
Defining Sustainability	65
Semi Structured Interview Sessions.....	70
Personal Habits Around Sustainability	70
Using ELM to Identify H&M’s Values	73
Conclusion	78
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION	80
Major Conclusions	80

Implications of the Research Findings.....	83
Limitations	85
Recommendations for Future Research	86
Final Thoughts	87
REFERENCES	91
APPENDIX A: Focus Group Questions	99
APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Questions	101
APPENDIX C: Recruitment Email.....	102
APPENDIX D: Human Subjects Research Committee Approval.....	103
APPENDIX E: Form of Consent	104
APPENDIX F: Focus Group Preliminary Survey	106
APPENDIX G: Focus Group Exit Survey	107

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Main Concept of Conscious Collection Fall 2019 [Screenshot]	49
Figure 2: The Crushing and Falling Of Water Bottles [Screenshot]	51
Figure 3: A Group of Women At a Bar [Screenshot]	53
Figure 4: Two Women Having a Conversation in a Meadow [Screenshot]	53
Figure 5: Women Being Social on a Rooftop [Screenshot].....	55
Figure 6: H&M is For Women [Screenshot]	56

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I always knew I loved fashion, and I always knew I had expensive taste. Growing up in Highland Park, Illinois, an affluent suburb of Chicago, I was constantly surrounded by nice things. When I was five, I remember discussing the 2004 Gucci runway show with my best friend's mom. She had the most amazing closet, filled with multiple Hermes Birkin Bags, Manolo Blahnik pumps, and Prada Chelsea boots. My favorite thing to do in the closet was try on the Manolo Blahnik heels and close my eyes and imagine I was Carrie Bradshaw walking past Bergdorf Goodman in New York City. Ten years later, I was walking past Bergdorf Goodman, but not in Manolo Blahnik pumps. Between the ages of 5 and 15, I had gotten many chances to develop my passion for fashion. I took fashion illustration and design courses at the Art Institute; for two summers I attended fashion programs in New York City, I started my own fashion blog, and I even got to attend a runway show at New York Fashion Week. All I ever wanted to do was work in a clothing store, but I had to wait until I was 18. While I was waited, I spent time getting to know the manager at the store I wanted to work at, so by the time I turned 18, it only made sense for the manager to hire me.

For over 3 years, I worked at Madewell; an expensive fast fashion retailer, known as the more bohemian version of J. Crew. Over those three years, my conceptions of the fashion industry and environmental sustainability shifted. When I began working at Madewell in 2017, I was not fazed by the massive amounts of plastic, paper, and cardboard used nor the sheer amount of product being sold in a single day's work. At the beginning, I always wanted to sell the most. I remember feeling super excited after working with a customer who spent over \$1,000; a sale that large was like a rite of passage in the retail world. I wanted to keep having this feeling, so I would go through three different stacks of jeans to find the right size; I would take apart the

staged clothing displays and mannequins if it meant finding the thing the customer wanted, and even if the customer just wanted to look at a bag, I would climb up a ladder and get it for them. Eventually, this insatiable need to please customers consumed me. That is when I realized that my actions were completely contradictory to my environmental beliefs. I was supporting fast fashion consumption; I was encouraging it. When I realized this, I decided that it would be my last seasonal shift at Madewell. Last January (2020), I left and have not regretted the decision since.

Fast fashion retailers appeal to a large consumer population because they offer very inexpensive trendy and classic garments for all ages and genders. Fast fashion addresses the Western need for quantity. Fast fashion retailers are aware of their audiences' desire for volume and newness, so they launch new collections or pieces every week at the same low prices. Fast fashion has normalized buying a t-shirt for the price of a Whopper. Retailers can provide low costs for their consumers because the garments are being made at the lowest cost possible. Yet the clothing costs come at a high moral price.

Fast fashion survives and thrives by abusing cheap labor laws in Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka for starters. Textile factories in these countries have extremely poor infrastructure, yet factory owners tightly pack their factories with thousands of adults and children, so they can fulfill their employer's needs. If a fast fashion retailer has a current contract with a factory but finds a different factory that can produce their garments for less, retailers will stop production and move it to the other factory leaving the factory owner and workers with no paycheck. The textile factories' inhumane working conditions became visible to the world on April 24th, 2013. When a factory owner of Rana Plaza (Dhaka, Bangladesh) noticed an issue in the building's foundation, they dismissed it since they were on a deadline for their employer. The next day the

factory collapsed in on itself, killing over 1,100 factory workers (Clean Clothes Organization, 2013). This devastating exploitation of the Global South¹ and its people illustrates the troubling cost of Western consumption.

Fast fashion has created a multitude of problems for the environment. Solene Rauturier (2020) explains that fast fashion brands such as Forever 21 perpetuate harm on the environment by using cheap, toxic, resource intensive materials such as polyester and textile dyes and conventional cotton which requires resource intensive production. In Elizabeth Cline's (2013) Overdressed, she says that fast fashion brands like Forever 21 and H&M get daily shipments of product, while Topshop is digitizing 400 new products every week. With consumer studies showing that people only wear 20% of the clothes in their closet (Smith, 2013; Elven, 2018), why do they continue to buy more? Fast fashion prices have allowed consumers to engage in a throw-away culture where they can buy more and throw away more. American hyper-productivity normalizes fast fashion's methods and consumers discarding behaviors. Understanding what sustainable practices are and how to partake in them will help shift consumer perceptions from viewing their clothes as disposable.

Engaging in conscious consumption can combat the issues of the fast fashion system. One strategy of conscious consumption is to take good care of your clothing, so you do not have to buy new things all the time. Another option may not be accessible to everyone, but if you can afford to buy higher quality products made with good materials, they will last a long time.

¹ "The phrase "Global South" refers broadly to the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including "Third World" and "Periphery," that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized. The use of the phrase Global South marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power. It references an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained," (Dados and Connell, 2012, p.12-13).

Anything wool is great because it does not have to be washed as much as cotton. A third option could be to do some research to find stores that are transparent about their sustainable practices by outlining their labor methods, materials, and supply chain on their websites. Shopping from vintage shops, thrift shops or online marketplaces can be a good alternative because it can be an accessible way for people to consume something new at a low cost that does not involve fast fashion consumption. Throw a clothing swap party with your friends where you all bring clothes to trade with and each leave with a whole new outfit for free. Lastly, learning how to sew will allow you to make clothes last longer and if you want something new you can make it yourself. With modest changes, we all can participate in helping to turn around our planet's climate issues.

Yet, many questions remain unanswered. In an age of oversaturation how are young consumers supposed to understand the difference between fast fashion and sustainable fashion in advertising messages? Why is it important to understand how consumers interpret messages? What are the consequences of greenwashing? How is greenwashing shaping consumer behavior? These are the focal points of my Senior Independent Study, in which I aim to learn about fast fashion's greenwashing and to understand how young consumers interpret the branded messages about sustainable fashion consumption.

Purpose Statement

This study investigates how fast fashion companies advertise sustainability and explores how these advertisements circulate ideas, values, and beliefs about sustainable clothing consumption. Specifically, I will use an advertisement from H&M's Fall 2019 Conscious Collection to examine how young consumers evaluate the campaign's message and what their interpretations reveal about their perceptions and attitudes of sustainability and sustainable consumption.

Rationales

Last summer, I finally began to understand the complexities of sustainable fashion and the consequences of the fast fashion industry. I took an online course about the fashion industry and sustainability which focused heavily on the human costs of fast fashion. We looked at several fast fashion brand advertisements that used greenwashing² to promote their sustainability. This class lit a fire in me, I had to show people that their favorite retailers were lying to them. I wanted to educate people on the complex, interwoven factors that encompass sustainability. Even though I knew my study was not going to get the whole world to change or even one person to change their habits or values, I had to try. Through this research, readers will begin to understand how the fast fashion industry is redefining the meaning of sustainability through commodification and false projections of the freedom to choose.

This study contributes to the existing research of corporations' use of environmental messages in their advertising, known as greenwashing. Recent communication scholarship from Byrum (2019) focuses on the green marketing that is used in social media campaigns (p.210). Byrum (2019) analyzed how social media is used as a tool by many companies to increase consumer motivation and cultivate positive consumer attitudes by incorporating tropes that reflect environmentally responsible purchasing (p.210). It is necessary for communication scholars to examine and bring awareness to how fast fashion retailers use sustainable ideas, sustainable initiatives, or green imagery in their advertising because currently greenwashing is causing more environmental harm to our planet than good. Richard Dahl (2010) sheds light on the main issue of greenwashing which is that it creates aesthetic looking campaigns that deflect

² *Greenwashing* denotes corporate communication that promotes positive environmental performance by withholding negative information to mislead consumers about a brand's sustainable practices (Delmas and Burbano, 2011, p.65; Lyon and Maxwell, 2011, p.9).

images of unethical production standards, radical transparency, and corporate accountability (p. 250a). Furthermore, freelance writer, Sharlene Ghandi (2019), expands on Dahl's points by discussing the recent fast fashion retailers (H&M, Zara, and Primark) that have commodified the term sustainability in their marketing campaigns to follow consumers' recent interest in sustainable fashion. As Ghandi points out, the marketing may say that a retailers' products are made from recycled polyester or organic materials, but the fashion retailer continues to run their company with no fundamental changes to their manufacturing process. In No Logo, Naomi Kline (2003) uses the example of the Nike paradigm to introduce the idea of greenwashing (p.11). Nike advertisements told their consumers that Nike were the ones making their shoes, but Nike did not make their shoes. Nike went to Asia to source their products at the lowest price.

Nike first had a factory in Japan, but when it got too expensive, Nike found cheaper options in Korea and Taiwan. When the workers in Korea and Taiwan tried to unionize, the brand jumped ship (Kline, 2003). Throughout all of this, hundreds of thousands of people lost their jobs, not based on performance, rather, a result of a corporation's selfishness and greed. Thus, the Nike paradigm exposes fast fashion retailers' lack of ethical standards or values. Even with the oversaturation of advertising and accessibility of information, many consumers are unaware of their favorite retailer's greenwashing advertisements. Despite capitalist structures, there is a small likelihood of disappearing in the near future, corporate transparency needs to change.

This study is important because it has real implications for consumers' ability to be environmentally conscious in a media dominated, consumption-hungry society. The younger generations of consumers have grown up with a constant influx of mediated messages. Consumers must show a willingness to sift through the products' shiny exterior to discover the

truth behind their problematic fast fashion origins. To understand how companies persuade their customers, psychology scholars, Richard Petty, and John Cacioppo's (1986), Elaboration Likelihood Model argues there are two routes to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route (p.3). When consumers see advertisements, they will either use the central route or the peripheral route to process the message. Those using the central processing route will utilize mental cognition to address the meaning and motive behind the advertisement's message. People using the peripheral route, however, will use surface level cues to understand the basis of the claim. Peripheral processing may lead to impulsive consumption habits; therefore, it is vital for consumers to utilize central route processing when viewing fast fashion campaigns. Applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model in this study will reveal how young consumers perceive and assess sustainability messaging from fast fashion brands.

Advertisements challenge a consumer's ability to see through the pleasant visuals and sounds and their own emotions evoked from the advertisement. In Andrew Morgan's (2015) documentary, The True Cost, Morgan shows the many ways fast fashion is intertwined within everyone's daily life from the manufacturing of the clothing to the disposing of the clothing (2015). *The True Cost* unmasks the destructive nature of Western fashion retailers' manufacturing and production models which have normally been shielded by positive, approachable advertising. Modern society has placed a large part of their trust into the media and news, blurring the lines between real and fake for many consumers. Professor Sut Jhally (2017) takes a critical approach to advertising by delving into how Western society has become unduly influenced by advertising. Jhally believes that advertising means to fetishize commodities, so consumers will only see the aesthetically pleasing aspects of the product. The fetishization of the product removes the meaning and hides the social injustices used to make such products.

Through the works of Morgan and Jhally-both challenge their audiences to question an advertisement's credibility. If more people begin to question the messages behind advertisements, then they are more likely to re-evaluate their own beliefs and make changes in their own lives.

This study has practical value because it can be used to educate young consumers on the stark realities of the fashion industry's dark impact on its makers and the environment. Due to overconsumption and non-environmental production methods, the fashion industry has become the number two polluter of the Earth's ecosystem. Nonetheless, international fashion retailers continue to market their sustainability by telling consumers to continue shopping from them. No fashion retailer has marketed the idea of reducing consumption because it would obviously decrease their profits. However, reducing society's material consumption habits would help the state of the environment significantly. With increased education on-and societal conversations about-the human cost of fast fashion, sustainable consumption habits, and the importance of environmental conservation, young consumers may begin to understand the honest nature of the fast fashion industry and show greater awareness to their own consumption habits and values.

Several fast fashion retailers use 'transparency' in their greenwash discourse to describe their sustainable practices. Unfortunately, these retailers are far from transparent when it comes to the unethical standards and human rights for their factory workers. This is not just an environmental issue; this is a human rights issue. International corporations continue to profit off the backs of the global South without a bat of the eye. Learning about the realities of the fashion industry is not going to give one the power to change the entire system, but it will give them the tools to bring greater awareness to the very thing that may kill us all.

Definitions

There are five key terms that are integral to comprehend this study: sustainable fashion, greenwashing, sustainable consumption, fast fashion, corporate social responsibility. *Sustainable fashion* refers to clothing made from ethical production methods (Joergens, 2006, p.361; Joy et al., 2012, p. 290) which meet consumers needs without harming the needs of the environment (Joy et al., 2012, p.274). *Greenwashing* denotes corporate communication that promotes positive environmental performance by withholding negative information to mislead consumers about a brand's sustainable practices (Delmas and Burbano, 2011, p.65; Lyon and Maxwell, 2011, p.9). Jay Westerveld, an American environmentalist, coined the term "greenwashing" in 1986 (de Freitas Netto et al.,2020, p.2). *Sustainable Consumption* demonstrates intentional consumption habits which serve to minimize environmental imbalance and destruction and maximize the quality of life (Cadenasso & Pickett, 2018, p.6). *Fast fashion* refers to inexpensive, high-street fashion made with toxic, resource intensive materials and made under inhumane working standards (Rauturier, 2020). The function of fast fashion fulfills consumers' hyper-productivity. *Corporate Social Responsibility* is a company's or brand's way of demonstrating an intention to engage in ethical behavior, improve employees' lives (GAEA, 2018; Bednarik, 2019, p.46), promote loyalty among consumers, show competence, and increase profitability (Byrum, 2019, p.210).

Method

For this study, I utilized a qualitative method including a series of focus group sessions, individual interviews, and a rhetorical analysis. My sample population was made of College of Wooster students. I had 30 participants across four focus group sessions, I showed participants two videos: an H&M Conscious Collection video advertisement and a clip from a documentary,

The True Cost, illustrating the exploitation involved in the fast fashion industry. The same two sets of questions were posed to all focus groups after each video to encourage personal reflection of the advertisement and its claim of sustainability. I chose to hold focus group sessions so that I could get instantaneous, honest participant observations and reactions to the videos I showed and the questions I asked. In addition, I wanted to observe the natural conversations that emerged within the groups.

Several days after the focus group sessions, I held seven follow-up interviews with individual participants who volunteered to continue the conversation. In these interviews, participants addressed their definitions of sustainability, ideas, and habits regarding sustainable consumption, as well as their interpretation of the H&M advertisement shown during the focus groups. I performed follow-up interviews to obtain more rich, robust responses and to allow participants to expand on their original ideas after they had time to reflect.

Lastly, I conducted a rhetorical analysis on the same H&M Conscious Collection advertisement. This analysis permitted me to demonstrate how the advertisement is an example of greenwashing by outlining the specific rhetorical strategies used to mislead consumers. It provided me with a point of comparison so that I could understand the participants' ability to identify specific persuasive strategies employed by this company to create an illusion of sustainability. My qualitative study seeks to gain information about how young consumers perceive sustainability messaging in a fast fashion retailer's advertisement and what their perceptions and attitudes indicate about their environmental awareness and consumption habits.

Conclusion

Chapter I has introduced a purpose statement that explains the goal of my study, three rationales that justify the significance of this study, definitions of key concepts, and the method used to conduct the research. In Chapter II, I will be reviewing literature from communication, psychology, advertising, science, business, and fashion scholars on sustainability, advertising, greenwashing, and corporate social responsibility. The goal of my literature review is to understand the complex, multidimensional nature of sustainability as it relates to the fashion industry and how advertisements broadcast specific values, ideas, and attitudes to the consumer about sustainability, fast fashion, and sustainable fashion consumption.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

My independent study aims to understand how advertising plays a pivotal role in fast fashion consumption and shaping young consumers ideas and values about the fashion industry, fast fashion, sustainable consumption, and sustainability. In this chapter, I first lay out several different definitions of sustainability to understand why sustainability is a complex concept made of multiple layers. I follow up with works from business and communication scholars to explain the rationales for sustainable consumption and how it has been manifested in sustainable fashion.

Next, I will summarize scholarship on advertising and its function in relation to consumerism. In addition, I highlight studies that indicate a connection between advertising and consumption. Greenwashing marketing strategies are analyzed within current fast fashion advertisements. Presenting scholarship about fast fashion advertising not only lays the groundwork for the foundations of the study but facilitates the understanding of advertising's presence on consumer perception and behavior.

Sustainability

The first time I heard the term sustainability was in 2015 while shopping at the fashion boutique, Reformation. Sustainability was explained to me as any fashion brand using organic, recycled materials and production methods that follow ethical labor standards. I became intrigued by Reformation's mission and wanted to see if there were other sustainable fashion brands. At that time, my conceptualization of sustainability was so narrow. However, as more sustainable fashion brands emerged and resale clothing apps became popular, I noticed other components to sustainability. I started thinking about the continuous consumption cycle of buying to wearing to discarding. Last summer, when I was taking an online class about

promoting sustainability in fashion, I was introduced to the eco-design tool. The eco-design tool emphasizes the six parts that make up a garment's life: take, make, use, sell, move, and discard. This tool could measure a product's sustainability by analyzing how the material was made, who made the material, how was the garment marketed to consumers, among other elements of production and design. The eco-design tool allowed me to develop a stronger, more rich understanding of sustainability; the complexity of the term underscores the shallow claims that many fast fashion retailers use to imply eco-consciousness.

Sustainability is a hard term to define because it is not straightforward and leaves space for contrasting interpretations. The term 'sustainable development' was first introduced in the 1987 Brundtland Report from the World Commission on Environment and Development. The Brundtland report states that, "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland Commission, 1987, p.37). Recent scholarship from M.L. Cadenasso and S.T.A. Pickett (2018) builds upon the Brundtland Report's original definition, "Sustainability is founded on ecological principles of mass balance in systems, of conservation of limiting resources in ecosystems, and of allocation of assimilated resources in closed systems. It is about improving the quality of human life within the limits, of resources and otherwise, imposed by the supporting system" (Cadenasso and Pickett, 2018, p. 6) Although Cadenasso and Pickett's interpretation is technical and concise, Cadenasso and Pickett believe that sustainability is a very complex idea that is multidimensional and open to different perspectives. Moreover, Gary Holthaus (2008) claims many people view longevity as a ubiquitous to sustainability, which he believes is wrong. Holthaus argues, "Longevity is the result of a process. Sustainability is not a state we reach but something we work toward forever" (p.125-126). Holthaus's interpretation

emulates a key point of sustainability which is thinking about how one's current action will impact the nature of the future. Understanding sustainability allows consumers to re-evaluate their current habits and initiate thoughtful changes such as buying fewer clothes and re-wearing old clothes.

Scholars' and consumers' vague understanding of sustainability makes it easier for fast fashion retailers to promote their sustainable efforts with no additional transparency or disclosure about the product and its production method. In an article from *The Times*, Clark (2005), argues that sustainability is rather a trivial adjective that serves no useful purpose and yields many interpretations. Furthermore, Clark believes the concept fails to acknowledge current unsustainable economic growth and that it deflects the current call to action for social and political change. Sustainability is still an evolving term that may never receive a single permanent definition, but it is still important to take note of the various meanings of sustainability as they will help to illuminate the messages and values embedded within fast fashion retailers' advertisements about sustainability.

Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption is an oxymoron, one word represents sustenance and the other represents depletion. Business and economic scholar, Weng Marc Lim (2017), approaches sustainable consumption with seven requirements (p.71). Lim believes that sustainable consumption is a form of consumption in which a consumer's actions do not harm nor deplete the current and future needs of Earth's ecosystem. Additionally, Lim says sustainable consumption should avoid consumerism and hyper consumption. This statement acknowledges the contradictory nature of sustainable consumption while also suggesting that less consumption is a practice of sustainable consumption.

Joshi and Rahman (2017) examined what factors lead to sustainable consumption including the impact of subjective norms, peer influence and social values on the choice to purchase sustainably (p.110-120). For example, Sally and Sandra both hold strong environmental values and are always looking to be more eco-conscious. When Sally suggests they go to Forever 21 to buy prom dresses, Sandra is surprised. Sandra questions the proposition because she knows Forever 21 uses unethical mass production and low-quality fabrics. Sally said Forever 21 is cheap, and it is all she can afford as a high school student. Sandra told Sally about a local vintage shop that sells beautiful second-hand dresses for under \$20 and explains that shopping secondhand would support Sally's environmental values. The next day Sandra and Sally go to the vintage shop, and Sally is pleasantly surprised to find many affordable dress options. After Sally's vintage shop experience, she recognizes that shopping secondhand allowed her to enact her environmental values by prolonging the lives of perfectly good garments that otherwise may have ended up in landfill. Now, Sally shops exclusively from vintage and thrift stores. In this example, Sandra questioned Sally's social values about sustainable consumption. However, when Sandra gave Sally a suggestion, peer influence led Sally to engage in pro-environmental behavior, similar to the findings from Joshi and Rahman's 2017 study.

When it comes to purchasing a new piece of clothing, shoes, or accessories, consumers have many things to consider before making their final decision. Research has shown that many consumers tend do not think about the environmental impact of their consumption. Henninger and Singh (2017) compare their findings to the works of Joergens (2006), Pookulangara and Shepard (2013), and Jung and Jin (2014), which indicated that younger consumers preferred to keep up with the latest trends in fashion and neglect the ethical implications of shopping from mass produced fast fashion retailers (2017, p.119). Younger consumers often put cost before

quality when purchasing clothing, so sustainable fashion brands' high prices limit many young consumers ability to partake in eco-conscious fashion. Diekmann and Preisendoeref (1992) found that people are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior when it was at a low cost to them, showing that economic accessibility was a factor for people to participate in sustainable consumption (Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p.252). For instance, Caroline was scrolling through Instagram one day and found a dress she liked from Reformation, an ethical and sustainable fashion brand. However, Caroline bought a similar dress from Forever 21 because it was much more affordable for her budget. In another study, Lai, Henninger, and Alevizou (2017) found that while environmental concern had increased in consumer attitudes, it did not motivate consumers to engage in environmentally friendly shopping (p.89). The finding from the scholars' study may be a result of sustainable fashion brands' expensive garments.

Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion has been performed by the fashion industry through various manifestations of circular and sharing economies. The last ten years has seen an emergence of "sustainable fashion brands" which claim to use organic, recycled textiles and human production methods. The markers of sustainability for these brands can be identified by a certification from the B Corporation, Fair Trade Certified, Fairwear Foundation, or PETA, to name a few. To be certified by the B Corporation, businesses must, "meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose" (B Corporation.com, 2021). Some of the newer sustainable brands that are B Certified include: Allbirds and Kotn. Kotn was founded in 2015 with the goal of creating simple quality basics out of Egyptian cotton (Kotn, 2021). In 2017, Kotn was certified by B Corporation for their continuing efforts to preserve Egyptian cotton and its producers. However, there are

certified B Corporation fashion brands that did not start out as sustainable fashion brands but have more recently made fundamental changes in their business model to be more environmentally conscious such as VPL, Patagonia, and Eileen Fisher. VPL was certified as a B Corporation in 2016. VPL continues to fight fast fashion by using slow fashion methods and producing small batches of their products to decrease over consumption and excess production (VPL, 2021). B Certified fashion brands continue to work diligently to bring awareness to the current state of the fast fashion industry.

At the same time, the sustainability certifications were being awarded to forward thinking companies, fast fashion brands found themselves scrambling to keep up with consumers interests and demands for sustainable clothing. Sustainable fashion, in some form has been embraced by household name international brands like Nike, Adidas, H&M, and Marks & Spencer. These brands have shown their ability to evolve with societal trends by changing their business models to incorporate better environmental practices and human labor standards. The changes include switching to organic cotton, using recycled polyester from PET bottles, and paying their workers a fair living wage. To evaluate their sustainability, several fast fashion retailers have created their own sustainability reports. However, Fashion Revolution, a self-proclaimed ‘global movement’ fighting for cultural change, industry change, and policy change within the fashion industry created their own report to analyze brands’ sustainability. Fashion Revolution’s, Fashion Transparency Index measures the amount of information a brand disclosed about their social and environmental policy and commitments, governance, supply chain traceability, supply chain due diligence and remediation, and working conditions (Fashion Revolution, 2021). The index ranks the brands based on their results of disclosure. This past year, the Fashion Transparency Index reviewed 250 fashion designers and retailers. Some of the highest-ranking brands for this year

include: H&M Group, Adidas, and Marks & Spencer. Although these brands are not B Corporations, they are making strides to building better, more environmental, and socially conscious clothing.

Second-hand clothing consumption is another form of sustainable fashion because it resists the throw-away culture by reusing and prolonging garments lives. As consumers continue to buy more, they throw out more, second-hand shopping can help save billions of carbon dioxide, water, and toxic landfill (ThredUp, 2020). Buying and selling old clothing enables consumers to engage with their environmental values. With the digitization of online thrift shopping, consumers can shop from their dorm room to their living room. There are large online consignment sites that offer clothes at a fixed price such as ThredUp and TheRealReal. However, mobile applications like Depop and Poshmark make it possible for consumers to sell and shop for clothing with the ability to negotiate price and the shipping method. Secondhand shopping can empower young consumers to make more conscious consumption decisions.

Fashion yields an everlasting presence in consumers' daily life; they are constantly surrounded by it. By buying sustainable items from time to time, consumers may notice the importance and impact of their own consumption. Sustainable fashion seeks to inform consumers on the personal and universal benefits of conscious consumption.

Sustainable fashion goes beyond the clothes to address the deep seeded environmental and human rights issues buried within the current fashion system such as over-consumption, large amounts of pollution, and unethical labor standards and wages. For instance, the B Corporation Brand, Kotn, uses ethical labor standards to preserve the well-being of cotton

farmers in Egypt. ThredUp uses their massive media presence on social media platforms to withstand fast fashion and the disposable nature it has created for clothing.

Making intentional consumption decisions can often be difficult and sometimes time consuming. Sometimes I take at least three weeks to decide whether I really need an item. If the clothing is from a sustainable brand, I tell myself well at least you are not buying from a fast fashion retailer but is that really a good enough justification? Whenever I take my week or few weeks to consider my purchase, seeing the item in advertisements or on Instagram often intensifies my need for the thing. My desire for admiration and favorable comments from others overtake my environmental values when making my final decision.

Advertising

Advertising is used by retail brands to convey ideas and values about sustainability as it pertains to the brand. Through paid marketing messages, retailers can commodify consumer values to promote their products, driving consumption decisions. This section will present an overview of some of the vast scholarship surrounding aspects of advertising, including its history, critical approaches to its function, utilization for fashion marketing, likelihood to produce multiple consumer interpretations, and its use of gendered language to target specific audiences.

History of Advertising

Advertising has been and continues to be critical to the success of consumer culture in the Western hemisphere. Post WWII, the booming economy and new industries allowed Americans to have access to desirable material products such as a television (Scott & McDonald, 2007). Television made it easier for the consumer public to learn about products and companies because

of the consistent flow of advertising messages during television programs. In addition, television advertising allowed companies to reach larger and more rural audiences. Since the early 1950s', television advertisements have become a main platform for corporations to market their products and services. When Apple released the first Macintosh computer in 1984, a new era of advertising emerged: online advertising. Within a matter of years, desktop computers became a middle-class household staple. Ten years later the first online advertisement was published on *HotWired*, now known as *Wired*. AT&T paid *HotWired* \$30,000 for a banner advertisement to run on their website for three months (OKO Ad Management, 2019). AT&T's banner advertisements performed so well, it encouraged other companies to create online advertisements of their own. When the Google Search Engine was developed in 1998, online marketing became highly targeted and highly personalized.

In 2007, when Apple released the iPhone (1st Generation), digital advertising went from an informational resource to a relentless devil on your shoulder that will not go away. The iPhone allows consumers to access their email, search Google, and listen to music, all in a small cellular device they can fit in their pocket. Three years later, the first photo-sharing social networking application launched, called Instagram. With Instagram, a new age of digital marketing strategy dominated the consumer sector. Brands using Instagram would have a leg up on competitors because it allows brands to engage with their consumers while simultaneously reaching broader audiences at no cost extra. By 2015, influencer marketing was beginning to surface as more users were leveraging their digital platforms as a space to build a brand around themselves. Brands pay Instagram influencers to post images or videos of themselves using the products or wearing the clothing. An Instagram influencer has at least 100K followers, so this method makes it easy for brands to reach targeted, large consumer audiences. Currently, social

media advertising continues to be the baseline for retailers to get their messages to resonate with consumers.

A Critical Approach to Advertising

The pervasiveness of modern advertising has inspired several critiques of its function in society. Professor Sut Jhally takes a critical approach to advertising by using Karl Marxist's concept of "fetishism of commodities" to reinforce his own argument that advertising places meaning on products that have lost their original meaning.

The function of advertising is to refill the emptied commodity with meaning.

Indeed, the meaning of advertising would make no sense if objects already had an established meaning. The power of advertising *depends* upon the initial emptying out. Only then can advertising refill this void with its own meaning (Jhally, 2000).

Essentially, Jhally, wants his readers to understand that advertising commodifies experiences and products to elicit an ideal meaning for consumers to buy into. Similarly, Michael Shudson (1984) uses a narrative of capital realism to interpret the functions and principles of advertising. Shudson chooses to align his comprehension with the UNESCO MacBride Commission's definition of advertising: "[advertising]tends to promote attitudes and life-styles which extol acquisition and consumption at the expense of other values" (Shudson, 1984, p.1). This definition points to the power that advertising has over consumers; Consumers are willing to put their faith in the advertisements messages and disregard their personal values. Among all reviewed definitions on the function of advertising, the same basic principle reigns true: advertising transmits meaning.

Advertisements have become an integral part of daily life as people live in a constant state of mass media oversaturation. Naomi Kline (2003) uses the concept ‘brand bombing’ in the documentary: *No Logo* to explain that consumers do not have a choice when to turn off advertisements, advertisements are everywhere. Advertising scholars Richards and Curran (2002) argue “Advertising is a paid nonpersonal communication from an identified sponsor, using mass media to persuade or influence an audience” (p.70). Richards and Curran’s definition provides a simplistic understanding of how brands communicate messages to consumers. For example, professional sports teams are often sponsored by athletic brands (i.e., Nike, Adidas, Under Armor). The sports teams must always wear the brand’s products during their games. Product placement as a retail strategy increases brand awareness amongst consumers, driving product sales and acquisition.

While product placement is an expensive marketing strategy for companies, it will often lead to a pay-out worthwhile. Product placement stems from the oversaturation of mixed media marketing and it serves to remind consumers of products through mediated messages and visuals. For example, when Hersey’s placed Reese’s Pieces in the film *E.T.*, company profits increased 65% after the film’s release (Accion, 2021). Product placement permits brands to activate and affirm initial consumer desires and personal opinions on the product. This form of embedded marketing may influence consumer consumption behaviors.

Personally, product placement plays a big part in how I experience television or movies. I always pay close attention to the clothes, shoes, and accessories on the screen. However, product placement has the strongest impact on me when I am thinking about the product and then see it in a television show, or movie. Seeing the product onscreen brings added excitement and reminds me of my desire to consume the product, a feeling that may impact my ability to make

conscious consumption decisions. My emotional reaction to the advertised product supports Lears T. Jackson's concept of modern advertising. Jackson says, "The new role of advertising is to evoke desire, excitement, need from the consumer. Advertisers create ads that are meant to spark consumer emotions" (1983, pp. 4,21). Jackson's point reinforces the notion that advertising is essential to consumption. Advertising designates value and meaning to products, so consumers have reasons to buy them.

At the moment, there has been minimal scholarship on advertising and sustainable consumption habits, so to illustrate the link between advertising and consumerism, I will describe two studies that looked at subject's food and alcohol consumption in relation to their exposure to advertisements about food or alcohol. Past scholarship studying the relationship between advertising and consumerism focuses heavily on children's' food consumption and alcohol consumption. In *Public Health Nutrition*, Dalton et al. (2016) performed a study to see if child targeted fast food television advertisements are connected to children's fast-food intake. The study revealed the positive relationship between children's fast-food consumption and their exposure to TV ads about the fast-food restaurants. Siegel et al. (2015) investigated the association between brand-specific advertising and brand-specific consumption in under-age drinkers. The results indicated that underage drinkers' exposure to brand-specific alcohol advertisements on television made the underage drinkers five times as likely to buy the advertised alcohol. As advertising plays an integral role in consumers' daily lives, consumers must constantly navigate between the powerful messages and their personal values when choosing how to consume.

Advertising in Fashion

Fashion retailers use advertisements to promote products through messages and images that reflect their brand values while simultaneously demonstrating their awareness of their customers' values. When retailers think of how to advertise their products, they must think about their ideal audience. Fashion advertisements mean to illustrate the brand's understanding of their ideal customer (Aagerup, 2011, p.486). Fashion advertisements project the ideal customer to be skinny, tall, and beautiful through their campaigns featuring skinny models. According to Bissell and Rask (2010), women and girls are heavily influenced by fashion advertising imagery depicting paper thin models which results in low self-esteem and negative effects on their health (p.643-644). However, in recent years fashion brands have diversified the makeup of their models to appeal to the social good. For instance, Aerie of American Eagle Outfitters, launched a campaign about body positivity and used a variety of female models ranging in size and race to promote acceptance, self-love, and inclusivity. Similarly, in H&M's Fall 2019 Conscious Collection advertisement, the models are mostly women of color to demonstrate that H&M values diversity and inclusion. Representation is an ever-present issue in society, so this advertisement is H&M's way of acknowledging the lack of equal representation in fashion advertising. Fashion brands position themselves with the social good to capitalize on young consumers moral values, so the company can benefit financially.

Gendered Rhetoric in Advertising

Brands that promote sustainability using gendered rhetoric in their advertisements perpetuate the green feminine stereotype (Brough and Wilkie, 2017). On Inc.com, Amy Nelson (2019) reported that 70-80% of consumer purchasing is done by women; thus, fashion brands tend to target their campaigns towards women. However, by using female gendered rhetoric, it

projects the message that sustainable consumption is unmanly and emasculate. In a study with over 2,000 participants from America and China, scholars Brough and Wilkie (2017) found a psychological link between pro-environmental behavior and perceptions of femininity which they called the 'green-feminine stereotype'. Their finding suggests that the 'green-feminine stereotype' discourages men from engaging in conscious behavior, so they can avoid feeling feminine. (Brough & Wilkie, 2017). Utilizing a gendered narrative when advertising sustainability may have adverse effects for the retailer.

Using ELM to Measure the Persuasiveness of Advertising Messages

A communication theory from two psychology scholars facilitates the investigation of consumers' ability to be persuaded. The Elaboration Likelihood Model is a dual-process theory that can be applied to understand attitude formation in consumers on messages in advertisements or branded campaigns. Elaboration Likelihood Model is a communication theory developed by Richard T. Petty and John Cacioppo. In ELM, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) argue that there are two routes to persuasion (p.3). The central route uses cognition and mental processing to evaluate the argument (p.15-16). The peripheral route uses no processing method to evaluate an argument but rather uses superficial, peripheral cues to shape their attitude on the argument (p.18, 21). ELM is often used to investigate processing activities and attitude formation in individuals.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model has been used in academic studies to examine how consumers interpret and process advertisements. Oh and Jasper (2006), applied the ELM framework in their experimental study to determine how people comprehend and develop attitudes of a product from apparel advertisements (p.15-32). One's involvement level (high or low) is significant to understanding how advertisements can influence ones' attitude on the

product or brand. The level of involvement someone has with the product or brand can be indicative of their ability to be persuaded by the advertisement's message. Furthermore, the framework of ELM allows us to see how and why people process and understand the messages of advertisements differently.

Greenwashing

Greenwashing is a form of rhetorical persuasion retailers use to promote sustainability. There is an increasing number of brands that are using greenwashing tactics to mislead consumers about their brands' environmental values or practices. It is important to discuss greenwashing because it plays a large role in shaping consumers' attitudes and ideas toward fast fashion and sustainable fashion brands.

The term greenwashing was first introduced in the late 1980s by an American environmentalist, Jay Westerveld (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020, p.2). Since then, scholars across multiple disciplines have examined greenwashing. Delmas and Burbano (2011) believe greenwashing to be "poor environmental performance and positive communication about environmental performance" (p.65). According to Delmas and Burbano, greenwashing allows companies to advertise their environmental initiatives regarding better and safer manufacturing methods without having to show how the initiative was implemented. By using strong, positive discourse about the company's environmental activity, companies can feed into the consumers' environmental values to evoke consumer loyalty and favorable corporate images. The scholarship of Lyon and Maxwell (2011) take Delmas and Burbano's definition a bit further with their own conception, "selective disclosure of positive information about a company's environmental or social performance, while withholding negative information on these dimensions" (p.9). Both definitions emphasize the use of purposeful deception in brand

advertisements and campaigns. Greenwashing serves to deflect all negative images of a brand from consumers. As Jhally says, “advertising fills”, which holds true for the purpose of greenwashing. Greenwashing takes away the corporate images of poor manufacturing and unethical labor standards and fills the advertisement with images of lush grass meadows.

Corporate retailers use complex, nuanced language in their advertisements to deceive and mislead consumers. Terra Choice Environmental (2009) developed seven green marketing claims to identify the ways advertisements enact greenwashing tactics.

1. *Sin of the Hidden Trade-Off*: Committed by suggesting a product is “green” based on an unreasonably narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues (e.g., paper produced from a sustainably harvested forest may still yield significant energy and pollution costs).
2. *Sin of No Proof*: Committed by an environmental claim that cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification (e.g., paper products that claim various percentages of postconsumer recycled content without providing any evidence).
3. *Sin of Vagueness*: Committed by every claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer (e.g., “all-natural”).
4. *Sin of Irrelevance*: Committed by making an environmental claim that may be truthful but is unimportant or unhelpful for consumers seeking environmentally preferable products (e.g., “CFC-free” is meaningless given that chlorofluorocarbons are already banned by law).

5. *Sin of Lesser of Two Evils*: Committed by claims that may be true within the product category, but that risk distracting the consumer from the greater health or environmental impacts of the category as a whole (e.g., organic cigarettes).
6. *Sin of Fibbing*: Committed by making environmental claims that are simply false (e.g., products falsely claiming to be Energy Star certified).
7. *Sin of Worshipping False Labels*: Committed by exploiting consumers' demand for third-party certification with fake labels or claims of third-party endorsement (e.g., certification-like images with green jargon such as "eco-preferred")³.

Greenwashing has become an important advertising strategy for brands that want to acknowledge consumers' environmental concerns but do not want to make any substantial changes to their company infrastructure. For example, the H&M Conscious Collection campaigns utilizes images of natural fibers, green landscapes, and thoughtful craftsmanship. In conjunction with the metaphoric visuals, H&M includes a voice over narrative explaining H&M's sustainable efforts in the collection such as the use of PET bottles. Some of the words in H&M's Fall 2019 Conscious Collection campaign include: "flip it, if it's being dumped pick it up, resurrect it, care for it, wear it and wear it again" (H&M, 2019). The campaign uses language associated with conscious behavior to highlight the brand's supposed environmental values. This advertisement is an example of greenwashing because it violates the sin of no proof. The campaign makes a specific green claim, "at least 50% of the collection is made with recycled plastic PET bottles or other materials that have less impact on the environment" (H&M, 2019)

³ (TerraChoice Environmental, 2009).

but does not include any further evidence in the advertisement to support their declaration. However, simply seeing and hearing “made with recycled plastic bottles” is often enough to convince people that H&M’s Conscious Collection is sustainably made.

H&M uses selective disclosure to withhold significant information from consumers in their ‘A Conscious Denim Story (2018)’ advertisement. This advertisement uses rain drops, flowers in a meadow, and other scenes of nature to symbolize the environmentally friendly materials used and emphasize the sustainability of H&M’s Conscious Denim Collection. This campaign violates the sin of the hidden trade off and utilizes greenwashing marketing methods by promoting the jeans showing imagery of organic fibers and nature yet fails to discuss the negative environmental and social burden of their manufacturing methods.

The H&M Conscious Collection advertisements use the greenwashing tactic, selective disclosure, to protect H&M’s public image by failing to disclose their environmentally unfriendly production processes, their unethical labor standards, and their supply chain. H&M Conscious Collection campaigns and advertisements gesture toward sustainability but continue to lack genuine public transparency. These campaigns are salient examples of greenwashing that continue to yield power over consumers’ understanding of sustainability.

Corporate Social Responsibility

Fashion designers and retailers use corporate social responsibility to communicate their corporate commitment to sustainability to their consumers. The mass media scholar Bednarik (2019) supplies one of the most frequently used definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). According to Green Alternative Energy Assets: “CSR is a continuous commitment by businesses to behave ethically, contribute to permanently sustainable economic growth, while

being instrumental in improving the quality of the lives of the employees, their families, as well as the local community and society as a whole” (p. 46). Corporate social responsibility allows companies and brands to show their concern and acknowledgment of environmental issues through a creative and informative message, website, or campaign. CSR is incorporated into a company’s business model to increase profitability, rebrand the company, show competence, or promote loyalty among consumers (Byrum, 2019, p.210). Eileen Fisher is a women’s cult classic brand that has always supported the sustainability movement. For example, Fisher’s buyback program recycles old pieces to create new ones and last year, Fisher announced a “Waste No More” initiative, in which artists and architects used recycled clothing and fabric scraps to create a large-scale art installation. Fisher’s “Waste No More” initiative is meant to increase consumer awareness about the massive amounts of clothing thrown out on an annual basis. The example of Eileen Fisher’s initiative offers a better understanding of why and how companies engage in CSR.

More recently scholars have looked at how the communication of a company’s CSR is promoted through social media platforms. Byrum (2019) argues that to increase green purchasing habits, companies need to not only share messages about CSR on social media but also encourage their consumers to promote CSR messages and campaigns on their personal social media accounts (p.212-213). For instance, a company could post a CSR message on Instagram with a unique hashtag and encourage viewers to repost the message on their story for all their followers to see. Once a viewer reposts the message, their followers may decide to repost the CSR message and hashtag on their story as well. For example, Sally is scrolling through Instagram stories and sees that one of her favorite fashion brands, Eileen Fisher, has a special message on their Instagram story. The message uses a hashtag, #WASTENOMORE, to

create a buzz in the media about the “Waste No More” initiative. Sally decides to repost this message on her Instagram story so that she can spread the message to her friends and followers. This allows for greater exposure of the company’s mission as well as potential to both engage with the brand and its environmental messages.

Corporate Social Responsibility messages and campaigns are most effective when brands understand their audience. Past scholarship from Coombs and Holladay (2009) on CSR messages focused on how strategic communication has been used to understand the consumers of CSR messages (p.95). Coombs and Holladay believe two-way communication is necessary for effective CSR campaigns and messages because two-way communication helps companies change their behavior to accommodate their consumers’ values. For example, the popular department store Nordstrom recently partnered with Terracycle to develop a new recycling program for used beauty products: Beautycycle. Beautycycle is meant to appeal to the consumers’ environmental concerns and values (Andrews, 2020). The circular beauty initiative permits consumers to bring their old or used makeup containers to a Beautycycle bin in their local Nordstrom store. From there, the recycled products are brought to a Terracycle facility to be cleaned and melted down into new plastic for picnic tables or park benches. Nordstrom’s implementation of the Beautycycle program enabled them to demonstrate their corporate social responsibility values and goals to customers. Corporate social responsibility is an integral way for retailers to communicate their comprehension of consumers’ environmental values. In addition, CSR initiatives empower retailers and brands to meet their consumers halfway and communicate that they [the consumers] do not have to bear the weight of saving the planet by themselves.

Conclusion

The scholarship in this chapter provides essential context to understand my study on how fast fashion retailers advertise their sustainability efforts and how fast fashion brand's sustainability messaging circulate ideas, values, and attitudes to young consumers about sustainable consumption. In my literature review, I was able to parse several definitions of sustainability and explain how those definitions shape the way different fashion brands conceptualize, commodify, and communicate sustainability to their consumers. In addition, I provided a framework for the way advertising has been and continues to be used in consumerism. In Chapter III, I detail the method used for my study to examine how young consumers interpret the messages of fast fashion advertisements about sustainability.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This study ventures to understand how young consumers evaluate sustainability messages in a fast fashion advertisement and what their interpretations reveal about their understandings of sustainability and sustainable consumption. In this chapter, I will outline the methodology I used to conduct my study by justifying my chosen method of research, explain the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the facilitation of my study, describe the demographics of my participants, provide a thorough description of my procedures, and discuss the limitations to my chosen research method.

Methods

The advantages of my qualitative approach are numerous. My goal was to collect qualitative data, so I could understand young consumers' interpretations of sustainability messaging in fast fashion campaigns. For this study, I first led focus group sessions, followed by semi-structured individual interviews, as well as performed a rhetorical analysis of the same artifact my participants responded to, an H&M Conscious Collection video advertisement.

Focus Groups

Through my focus groups, I aimed to hold discussions of several people each to observe themes and patterns among participants' perceptions and ideas related to sustainability in fast fashion. According to Casey and Krueger (2009), focus groups are used by social scientists to gather perceptions and attitudes from a set group of people on a specific topic chosen by the researcher. Focus groups are typically made of five to ten people and are led by an interviewer who uses prepared questions to guide the participants' discussion. These conversations are meant to occur in an inviting environment to communicate a relaxed nature so participants can feel

more comfortable expressing their opinions and thoughts to the group (p.2). Focus groups allow for researching a specific demographic, in this case, young consumers. I chose to use focus group sessions, so that I could observe participants' real-time perceptions of the advertisement showed during the focus group. I used a set of prepared questions (see Appendix A) to probe participant responses and follow-up conversations. Focus groups seek to obtain participants' responses so researchers can analyze them to find patterns and themes (Casey and Krueger, 2009, p.7).

Through the focus groups, I was able to trace the evolution of participants' thought processes about, and responses to, a specific topic. In addition, the focus groups allowed participants to reflect on their own environmental values throughout the conversations and ideas brought up by fellow group members.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Along with leading focus groups, I conducted individual follow-up interviews with self-select participants to develop a better sense of the different ways they interpreted the advertisement based on their personal environmental values and prior knowledge of the fashion brand. I held seven semi-structured interviews with preset open-ended questions to guide the conversation (see Appendix B). These questions were targeted towards understanding individuals' perceptions and behaviors as well as to build on the questions asked during the focus groups. In a semi-structured interview, an interviewer asks open-ended questions to encourage participants to respond based on their own experience and point of view. Furthermore, these questions are designed to generate responses that build upon existing disciplinary knowledge (Galletta and Cross, 2013, p.45).

The semi-structured interviews enabled people to speak freely without judgement, to tease apart the nuances and group dynamics on the topic and provide answers that yielded depth

and insight. Bryman (2015) argues that the interviewer must pay careful attention to how their interview participant understands and frames the topic, idea, and artifact in question. Moreover, the interviewer must ask questions that promote participants to identify what they see as important while explaining their interpretations and opinions (p.468). These semi-structured interviews were valuable to my research because they brought more sincere yet divergent responses than the focus groups' insights. The individual interviews required people to think for themselves rather than risk falling into groupthink, which can skew honest answers. The focus group sessions and individual interviews added to my research by providing primary accounts that strengthened and humanized my research.

Rhetorical Analysis

In addition to my focus groups and semi-structured interviews, I conducted a rhetorical analysis of the H&M Conscious Collection Fall 2019 advertisement. "In rhetorical analysis, the objects of study are symbolic acts and artifacts (Foss, 2009). Foss describes acts as language and performances that are executed toward an intended audience and artifacts as the transcribed content of these acts" (Engstrom et al., 2017, p.339). A rhetorical analysis seeks to unpack the different rhetorical discourses within an artifact by viewing them as symbols. Symbols are major forms of communication; a rhetorical criticism aims to understand how particular symbols are being employed in artifacts and what the symbols are communicating to audiences. I chose to perform a rhetorical analysis so I could identify the rhetorical devices an H&M advertisement (my artifact) used to mislead audiences on the sustainability of the products and the brand.

In my rhetorical analysis of the H&M Conscious Collection advertisement, I was most interested in finding symbols of nature and the environment to demonstrate how these particular symbols were used to communicate green rhetoric. A rhetorical analysis relies upon interpreting

symbols and understanding the symbol's function(s) within the discourse (Foss, 2009, p.7). In conducting my analysis, I used TerraChoice Environmental's (2010) seven sins of greenwashing as a framework to identify rhetorical strategies utilized in the advertisement. I tried to understand how the spoken and written text in the video aligned with its visual rhetoric to give the impression of sustainable practices.

In order to explore how fast-fashion advertisements circulate ideas, values, and beliefs about sustainable clothing consumption, performing a rhetorical analysis was essential. While the focus groups and individual interviews provided a sense of how young consumers evaluated the advertisement, a rhetorical analysis made way for in-depth observations and detailed examination of the advertisement's rhetorical strategies and techniques. The ability to watch the video numerous times (something my participants were unable to do) helped me dissect the content for the intentional ways the symbols were being used to communicate H&M's environmentally friendly values. Moreover, It was important to me that my study clearly defined what greenwashing is and how to identify it. I wanted to give readers the tools to identify greenwashing so that they may be better equipped to recognize this type of misleading content in other real-world settings. Therefore, the rhetorical analysis permitted me to comprehensively examine the H&M advertisement and gain a better understanding of how it shapes young consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and ideas about sustainable consumption.

COVID 19 Impact

As a result of COVID-19 restrictions, I was unable to conduct interviews and focus group sessions in person. I had to pivot my initial plans to allow for participants to join in the study from a variety of locations, so I found a substitute platform, Microsoft Teams, to conduct my study. Microsoft Teams is connected with participants' Office 360 and Moodle accounts, which

simplifies scheduling meetings, sharing documents, and collaborating in an online format.

Within a Microsoft Teams virtual meeting, one can record the meeting and share one's screen to show videos, images, etc. The ability to share media with the focus group participants allowed me to control the presentation of the message and standardize the experiences of the focus groups. Although everyone was not physically together, Microsoft Teams helped to create focus group sessions that provided meaningful data.

Participants

Qualitative research often works well with a small demographic because it can be easier to gather data with depth and sincerity. To attain sample participants, I sent out an email with a short description of my study and a sign-up form (see Appendix C). The email was distributed through to the entire school, so it was more likely that people chose to participate because of an interest in environmentalism and/or sustainable fashion. My participants were all current College of Wooster students, I had ten male participants and twenty female participants. The study had 25 Caucasian identifying students, 2 African American identifying students, and 3 Asian/Pacific Islander identifying students. In my purpose statement, I identify young consumers as the group of people I am investigating. I chose to focus on this demographic because young consumers are the most avid consumers. According to a 2017 report from Business Insider Intelligence, the US consumer population born between 1998 and 2016 is growing rapidly and is projected to be the largest US consumer population by 2026 (Kearney, 2017).

Procedures

Before I could begin collecting data, my project had to be approved by the Wooster Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. Once I decided how I wanted to perform human subjects research, I put together a protocol document. The protocol document

outlined this study's reasons for using human subjects and included a thorough plan of how I would execute the research. I received confirmation that my research plans were approved by the Review Board on October 1st, 2020 (see Appendix D).

While writing my protocol, I had to decide which media artifacts I wanted to utilize during my focus groups. I looked over several H&M advertisements before choosing an advertisement from the Fall 2019 Conscious Collection, which claims that H&M used recycled plastic in all the Conscious Collection garments. I chose this video because it uses performative language and visuals to make a strong environmental claim without any substantiating evidence. The second video was a clip from the documentary, *The True Cost*, which provides a brief explanation of the environmental impact and human cost of fast fashion. This video helps break down the walls of an industry that continues to shield its malfeasance with glamour and allure. Initially, I considered showing the video from *The True Cost* before the H&M advertisement; however, if I had shown the clip from *The True Cost* before the H&M advertisement, I could have received biased participant responses regarding H&M and their values. Showing the H&M campaign first eliminated the likelihood of skewed participant interpretations. After selecting the videos, I wrote out the questions I would ask during focus groups. I made sure not to include questions that would yield yes or no answers; rather I created questions that had potential to be drawn out into longer conversations. In addition, I wrote a different set of questions for the individual interviews; these questions were meant to elicit reflective responses.

I chose to use current College of Wooster students for my sample because they were readily accessible and met the criteria of my sample population, young consumers. After deciding on my participant demographic, I composed an email to recruit students. The email gave a brief explanation of my project and the participation guidelines. Also, students interested

in participating were told to fill out a Google form with their availability. I created a Google Form to keep track of all the interested participants and their availability. I recruited participants through multiple email blasts from myself and Dean Bowen. The email explained what the focus group sessions would require from participants (1 hour), the virtual nature of the sessions, and the subjects that would be addressed. In addition, a link to the Google Form I created was included at the bottom of the email so readers could sign up easily. The Google Form asked participants to check all the times they were available over a two-week period. The times were by the hour since I had planned for each focus group to take 60 minutes. Although I received 50 Google Form responses, I was only able to use 30 participants.

The 30 participants were split up into four separate focus groups based on each participant's availability; however, it is important to note that the groups were not assigned all at the same time. At first, I was focused on finding a day and time that worked for many people, so I could have a large group and collect more data. After my first focus group, which had 15 participants, I realized that I needed to cap my next three sessions at seven people. Smaller groups would allow all participants the opportunity to share their ideas and thoughts. My second group had seven participants who were all selected because they were available on a specific day and at a specific time. The final two groups each consisted of four people because four was the largest number of people with similar availability. I used a non-probability sampling method because of my limited access as an undergraduate student. All participants were assigned to their respective focus groups solely based on availability. To thank the participants for taking the time to be in my study, I entered all of them in a raffle for a \$20 gift card of their choice.

I performed the focus group sessions in Microsoft Teams. The focus group sessions were structured as follows: when participants joined the meeting, they were told to fill out an informed

consent form (see Appendix E) and a preliminary survey (see Appendix F). The survey was meant to prime participants' minds on sustainability and clothing consumption habits. When participants finished the survey, I began recording the session and proceeded to show the first artifact. The video was the 30-second H&M advertisement about their Fall 2019 Conscious Collection featuring PET plastic bottles. After watching the video, I began asking the participants my pre-set questions about the video.

During the group sessions, I would ask a question and give all the participants the opportunity to respond if they chose; I did not want the participants to feel restrained by the social norms of a classroom setting. Once I got through all the questions or the discussion had reached twenty-five minutes, I shifted gears to show the second clip from *The True Cost*. This video was about five minutes and included a brief explanation on fast fashion, snippets of interviews with fashion industry professionals, and demonstrated the dangerous truths of fast fashion. After finishing the second clip, I began asking my second set of pre-set questions.

After going through all my questions, I stopped recording and sent all the participants an exit survey (see Appendix G). This survey helped to determine which participants wanted to participate in an individual interview. Though many participants indicated an interest in partaking in an individual interview when I emailed them all to follow up about scheduling an interview time, only seven people responded. In the end, I interviewed four females and three males. During these interviews, I asked new pre-written questions that were designed to encourage participants' personal reflection. The interviews were semi-structured because I wanted the conversation to be as organic as possible to receive genuine answers from participants.

Once I finished the focus group sessions and individual interviews, I watched the recordings to find themes and patterns that emerged. I re-watched several of the recordings two or three times, so I would not miss anything valuable. I transcribed most of the interviews and focus groups on a document, so I could keep all the quotes in one place and categorize them based on similar interpretations or themes. In my analysis section, I use the quotes and themes I found in the interviews and focus groups to expand up and support key findings. In addition, I perform a rhetorical analysis to illustrate the rhetorical strategies used in the H&M advertisement to greenwash audiences. Upon the conclusion of this study, all recordings and documents with identifying information were destroyed.

Limitations

Qualitative research offers many benefits, but with any type of research comes limitations. A major limitation that I came across in my research was my ability to hold back personal perspectives and attitudes during the focus group sessions and interviews. I tend to get overly intense during conversations about sustainability because I am so passionate about it. It was more difficult to resign my feelings during the interviews since it was in a more intimate setting between the participant and myself. I found it especially hard to not respond to participants' answers.

It was not until recently that I noticed my privilege and ignorance had limited parts of my analysis. I say that individual choice is integral to engaging in sustainability, but not everyone has a choice. My personal privilege that allows me to decide where I buy clothes from and my ignorance of many people's inability to choose to engage in sustainability may have influenced the conversations to an extent.

The main reason I chose to hold focus group sessions was so I could get instantaneous reactions and responses from participants. It was important to have diverse focus groups because a common limitation to sessions is the potential for groupthink to arise. Groupthink often occurs in small group communication when group members agree with one another based on personal alliance or to avoid ruining the group harmony. Groupthink can contribute to generalizability in results. Another limitation to focus group sessions is the lack of comfortability participants may feel during the sessions. This could have contributed to participants choosing not to speak or to a set of disingenuous responses. Although this may not have occurred for all participants it is an important factor to consider when choosing to hold these sessions.

I held individual interviews in addition to focus group sessions, so I could create a more comfortable space for participants to respond and the chance for participants to expand on their initial responses. The noticeable limitation I came across in performing individual interviews was the ability for my personal bias and comments to steer participant responses. Another limitation to individual interviews was the amount of interpretation and critical thinking the participants chose to use in their responses; some gave thorough responses and others one or two-word answers.

I decided to conduct a rhetorical analysis after I had begun writing chapter four because I wanted to identify the greenwashing strategies used in H&M's Fall 2019 Conscious Collection to inform my readers. Additionally, I sought a better understanding of how fast fashion advertisements circulate ideas, values, and beliefs about sustainable clothing consumption. The major limitation to performing a rhetorical analysis was that I only analyzed one H&M Conscious Collection advertisement. Therefore, my scope was very narrow, and my findings were limited to the interpretation of one artifact. Despite the methodological limitations, the

study was able to derive strong participant interpretations of sustainability messaging used in fast fashion advertisements.

Personal Reflection

Though the process overall was strenuous, the decision to hold both focus group sessions and individual interviews was the right one because it resulted in rich, robust qualitative data. Since I had never held a focus group prior to this study, nor participated in one myself, I was not sure what to expect. After five minutes of my first focus group session, I realized that 15 participants were too many. I had convinced myself that the more participants I had, the stronger my results would be. Yet, that was not the case for focus group sessions. After my initial session, I had three more with eight or less participants. With a smaller number of people in each group, I was able to gather more thoughtful, full-bodied responses.

After sending the research study sign-up email to friends and classmates, I asked Dean Bowen to send a schoolwide email blast. Between my own efforts and the boost from Dean Bowen, I was able to gather 50 potential participants. However, I could only utilize 30 out of the 50 participants due to scheduling conflicts. As a result, my sample was not as diverse as it could have been regarding racial demographics. Maybe if I had sent separate emails to the various cultural clubs on campus, I could have gotten a more racially diverse sample. Nonetheless, I think my sample was representative of my intended sample population, young consumers.

The focus group and interview sessions were informative. It was very interesting to see how the participants responses compared to my interpretations. I knew my feelings and ideas about the topic going into this, but I was not sure how my participants felt about the matter. I enjoyed holding the focus group sessions because it was exciting to observe each participant's

reactions. I had always assumed that my peers from Wooster cared about sustainability, but after my study, I had hard-core proof. My participants observed the ad through a critical lens which gave me hope that more young consumers had done the same. Alternatively, it is possible the people who volunteered for the study were already environmentally conscious. I was glad that I chose to do individual interviews in addition to the focus group sessions because the interviews warranted responses with more depth and richness.

Using Microsoft Teams and Streams gave me a hassle-free way to collect qualitative data. Teams allowed me to record the sessions, so I could go back to the recordings to write down specific quotes. The ability to record was a huge asset because if I had held the meetings in person, I probably would not have thought to video tape them. However, even if I did record them with a video camera, compiling and storing the files would have been time-consuming; whereas Microsoft Teams automatically saves, and stores recorded videos on Microsoft Stream. The downside to Microsoft Teams was that it changed the levels of engagement. The environment in Teams does not allow for natural conversations since people are unable to see others body language and general countenance which may change the way participants engage and converse with one another. In addition, Teams allows people not to engage since social pressure to talk is not as strong as it might have been if the session were conducted in person.

Conclusion

Now that I have laid out my methodology, I present and discuss the findings from my study. In Chapter Four, I highlight key themes and patterns from the focus group sessions and individual interviews and explain the normative implications of these findings.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Now that I have laid out the reasoning for exploring the complex relationship between advertising and sustainable consumption, the scholarly expertise to illuminate the main concepts of this study, and a thorough explanation of my method for gathering data, I utilize the literature from Chapter 2 to analyze the results of this study. In addition, I perform a rhetorical analysis of the H&M advertisement shown to my participants to provide readers a clear interpretation of how the advertisement engages with the concept of sustainability

In the rhetorical analysis, I use scholarship on sustainability principles, the function of advertising, and the gendering of eco-conscious consumption to argue that H&M's effort to promote their sustainable clothing line in the advertisement is an example of greenwashing. Following my rhetorical analysis, I utilize scholars' definitions of sustainability to ascertain my participants personal understandings of sustainability. This analysis has a dual focus: the ways in which the participants' definitions align with the scholars' ideas and the normative implications of the gendered divided definitions.

The next section evaluates interview participants' responses to two questions, one about personal sustainability habits and one about H&M's values. This section features an interesting gender analysis about conscious consumption habits. In addition, I apply the Elaboration Likelihood Model to show that the H&M advertisement did not persuade the participants' opinions about H&M.

In the final section, I look exclusively at the participant responses from the focus group sessions. I found three prominent interpretations of the advertisement that provide intriguing insights about young consumers and their ideas about sustainable consumption. By the end of

chapter four, readers will understand how young consumers think about sustainability, why they choose to engage or not engage in sustainable practices, and how they evaluate fast fashion advertisements promoting sustainability.

Rhetorical Analysis

For a fashion brand to promote sustainability, it must consider the following: how ethical their production methods are, what materials are being used in the products, the materials' environmental impact when disposed, the number of resources needed to launder the product, the number of resources needed to create the product, and the carbon footprint of the product, among other considerations. Due to consumers' strong interest in sustainability, many large, international fashion brands have had to pivot from their fast fashion practices. However, it can be difficult to trust a brand that has disregarded its environmental impact for years and then, seemingly overnight, embraces sustainability.

The key text in my study, H&M's Fall 2019 Conscious Collection advertisement, is an example of greenwashing. Greenwashing refers to a company's purposeful use of deceptive messaging (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011, p.9) to hide their weak environmental performance so they can highlight their positive sustainable efforts (Delmas and Burbano, 2011, p.65). As sustainability has grown to be a significant trend in the fashion industry, many fast fashion brands such as H&M, have capitalized on the opportunity to commodify sustainability. However, H&M and retailers alike disregard transparency in their advertising campaigns to manipulate and mislead their audiences of sustainable claims. This rhetorical analysis aims to identify and understand the rhetorical strategies H&M uses to greenwash customers.

To understand how H&M promotes sustainability in their advertising, it is important to acknowledge how the brand defines their commitment to sustainability and environmentally friendly practices. “To lead a change towards a circular and more climate positive fashion industry, while being a fair and equal company across our entire value chain” (H&M Group Executive Summary, 2019).

H&M’s video campaign promotes sustainability by using an informative statement and corresponding statistics to outline the theme of their Fall 2019 Conscious Collection. The advertisement begins with two models walking in a field, an exhilarating background song, and on-screen text broken up in two sentences. The first message has noticeably larger font than the second message and says, “Fashion made from recycled PET bottles” (H&M, 2019). In a much smaller font below the text reads, “At least 50% is made from recycled PET bottles or other materials that have less impact on the environment” (H&M, 2019). This message and statistic take up less than 10% of the entire video advertisement, three seconds out of the thirty-three second campaign. Though the advertisement addresses H&M’s claim to be more climate positive, it fails to elaborate on this claim within the video and it does not mention or illustrate any other claims from their corporate definition.

Violates Sins of Greenwashing

In trying to display the brand’s sustainable mission, H&M violates three of the seven ‘Sins of Greenwashing’ outlined by TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. TerraChoice Environmental developed the Seven Sins of Greenwashing to “help consumers identify products that made misleading environmental claims” (TerraChoice Environmental, 2009). The advertisement violates the sin of no proof, the sin of vagueness, and the sin of the hidden trade off. Firstly, the statistic violates the sin of no proof, “Committed by an environmental claim that

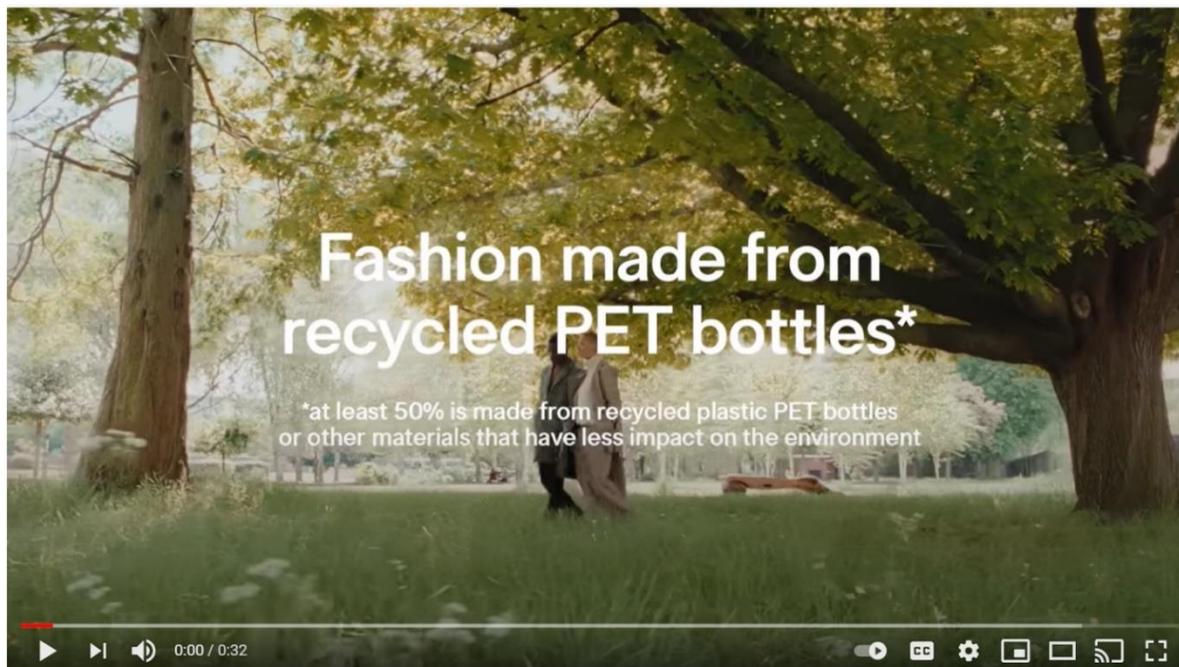
cannot be substantiated by easily accessible supporting information or by a reliable third-party certification (e.g., paper products that claim various percentages of postconsumer recycled content without providing any evidence)” (TerraChoice Environmental, 2009). H&M’s campaign violates the sin of no proof by using a statistical claim about the collection garments and the identity of the materials that cannot be proven without including proper reliable third-party data. The advertisement does not offer any follow-up nor demonstration of the claim in practice. It appears H&M chose to include this statistic to promote their goal of transparency. Yet, when they try to promote transparency, H&M ends up contradicting their efforts by writing an extremely vague sentence to follow the statistic. If the fast fashion retailer and others alike continue to project pro-environmental behavior falsely, young consumers will grow more skeptical of the authenticity of H&M’s claims. However, if H&M disclosed reliable data and visual evidence of their sustainable efforts, the brand could see an increase in young consumers brand loyalty and trust.

The second instance H&M uses greenwashing in their advertisement is when the text states, “At least 50% is made from recycled PET bottles or other materials that have less impact on the environment,” (H&M, 2019). This statement violates the sin of vagueness, “Committed by every claim that is so poorly defined or broad that its real meaning is likely to be misunderstood by the consumer (‘e.g., “all-natural’)” (TerraChoice Environmental, 2009). H&M shows their effort to achieve their environmental goals with a statement and a statistic which violate the sin of vagueness in two ways. The first way is by utilizing the phrase ‘at least’ prior to the statistical figure. Though ‘at least’ is considered a quantifier, it does not suggest nor produce

a definitive number. Since ‘at least’ is not conclusive, H&M can make a broad claim with just enough detail to convince their consumers of the brand’s on-going work to be sustainable.

Figure 1

Main Concept of Conscious Collection Fall 2019



Note. Male and female actors walk through a park in the first scene and an informative message is used to introduce the advertisement’s theme. Copyright H&M Group.

The second way the campaign shows vagueness is by failing to explain the scope of materials used in Conscious Collection other than the PET bottles. The advertisement says, “other materials that have less impact on the environment” (H&M, 2019). Other is an extremely ambiguous word capable of sparking infinite interpretations. When the ad says, ‘less impact’, it is creating a comparison against nothing—less impact than what, exactly? This lack of precision may result in more consumer mistrust because H&M does not provide a baseline for consumers to compare their claim to. If H&M is legitimately taking steps to be eco-friendly, then where is the complete transparency? For example, why does their messaging lack a precise list of the other materials used in the garments—or at least a link to where that information could be found?

When a brand chooses to use vague language in a mediated message, it can cause consumers to question the motive behind the message and to develop a skeptical perspective towards the brand.

The third and final way H&M employs greenwashing in their campaign is by violating the sin of the hidden trade-off, “recycled PET bottles and other materials that have less impact on the environment” (H&M, 2019). The sin of the hidden trade-off, “Committed by suggesting a product is “green” based on an unreasonably narrow set of attributes without attention to other important environmental issues (e.g., paper produced from a sustainably harvested forest may still yield significant energy and pollution costs)” (TerraChoice Environmental, 2009). In this case, the advertisement imparts positive attributes to describe H&M’s Conscious collection. The statement violates the sin of the hidden trade-off by highlighting the optimism of using recycled plastic in a part of the production process to distract consumers from considering the overall negative impact of the final product. The sin of the hidden trade-off questions the product’s entire life cycle. Using recycled plastic to create recycled polyester may be less of a burden on the environment in that stage of the product’s life cycle, but the trade-off is that microplastics will be released from garments made from recycled plastics when they are being washed (Resnick, 2019). Therefore, excess plastic will end up in a body of water all the same.

The sin of the hidden trade-off committed by H&M completely disregards the circular nature of products and disputes their own eco-conscious goals mentioned on their website. On H&M’s ‘Sustainability’ web page, there is messaging that emphasizes their goal to be circular, “Let’s close the loop.... Our sustainability work focuses on circular & climate positive” (H&M, 2020). H&M contradicts their claim of sustainability when they chose to promote the use of recycled PET bottles for their Fall 2019 Conscious Collection. Although recycled PET bottles can

be melted down to create recycled polyester for a more eco-conscious alternative to man-made polyester, there are environmental consequences for the garment later in its life. When recycled polyester is laundered, it releases tiny microplastics into the water (Resnick, 2019). Rather than fast fashion products immediate assault to the environment, recycled polyester garments produce a slower, more gradual attack to the ecosystem. By contradicting their own sustainable efforts in the first place makes me question the genuineness of H&M's goal to be sustainable and climate positive.

Figure 2

The Crushing and Falling Of Water Bottles



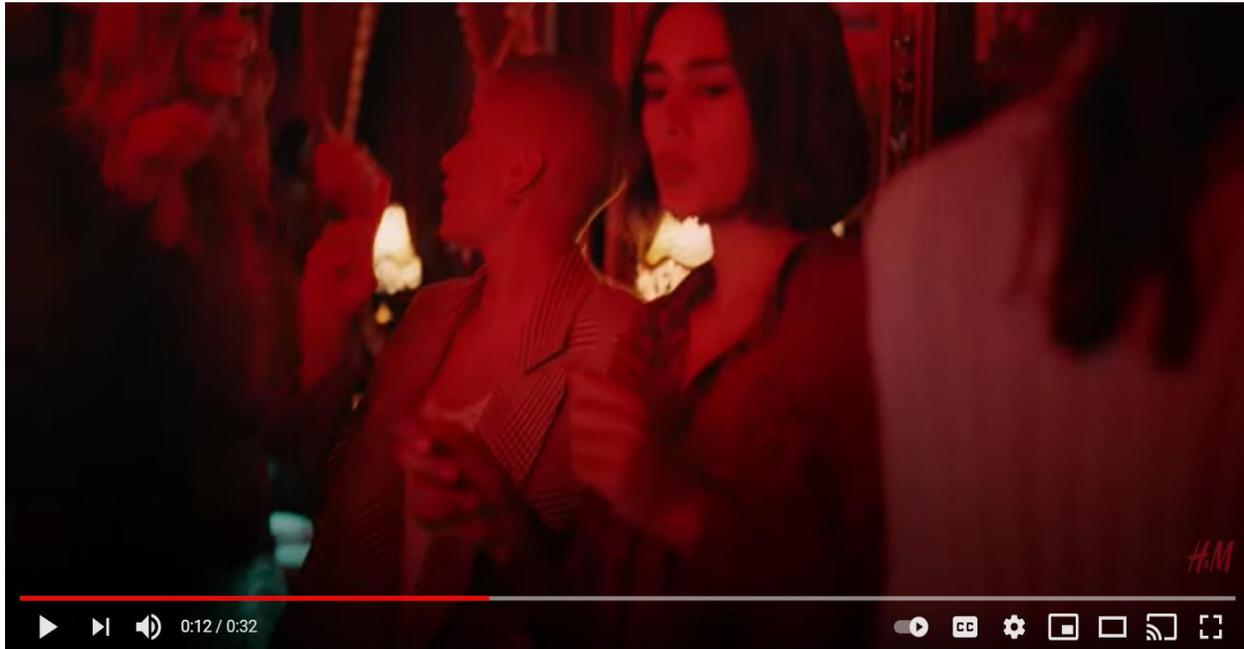
Note. Copyright H&M Group.

Other Rhetorical Devices Used to Greenwash

H&M promotes its claim of sustainability by utilizing selective disclosure in their advertisement's messaging to mislead consumers of the brand's environmental performance.

Selective disclosure refers to the purposeful withholding of negative information from a company when making a statement about said company's environmental enterprises (Lyon and Maxwell, 2011, p.6). In H&M's definition, they highlight being a fair and equal company, so consumers deserve transparency from the brand (H&M Group, 2019). The initial message with the statistic lacks transparency on two occasions: how the brand is executing their goal and the identity of the other materials used in the collection. By saying, "materials that have less impact on the environment" (H&M, 2019) provides minimal yet adequate detail to support their environmental claim and assuage consumers of the authenticity of their sustainable efforts. With this form of selective disclosure positioning from the brand, H&M expects no further questions from their customers regarding the exacting details of their environmental policies and goals. H&M can relay truthful efforts of their sustainable practices while hiding any given tradeoffs that could hinder the brand's ability to communicate positive pro-environmental behavior. Since selective disclosure uses duplicity to intentionally withhold the information regarding the brand's negative environmental performance, selective disclosure qualifies as greenwashing.

Figure 3

A Group of Women At a Bar

Note. Copyright H&M Group.

Figure 4

Two Women Having a Conversation in a Meadow

Note. Copyright H&M Group.

This advertisement seeks to portray a convincing sentiment of H&M's engagement with sustainable practices by using declarative statements and distinct buzz words about eco-consciousness in their campaign messaging. Lears T. Jackson (1983) said that the function of modern advertising is to exploit the audience's emotions and desire (p. 4,21). I think this advertisement uses depth of narration and declarative statements to evoke consumers' emotion and to hold their attention. The video begins with word phrases about consumerism and gradually transforms into phrases connected to sustainable consumption:

Crave it. Have it. Spin it. Flip it. Keep it chilled. Shake it. If it's being dumped, pick it up. Leave it where it belongs. Resurrect it. Care for it. Wear it. And wear it again (H&M, 2019).

Though these sentences are incomplete, they pack a punch. These sentence fragments are declarative statements that are being used as calls to action (CTA) by the marketers to increase consumer engagement. The call to action is intended to leverage consumers' personal and social responsibility values to make the consumers feel like it is their responsibility to consume from this collection. With declarative statements, marketers can convince consumers that buying from H&M will fulfill their moral obligation to care for the planet. In this case, the message elicits a strong emotional desire to engage in pro-environmental behavior by buying clothes from H&M's Conscious Collection. Moreover, by tokenizing sustainability, H&M can show consumers that they can offset their personal environmental guilt by consuming sustainably from H&M. Throughout the video, H&M is trying to sell the idea that they are engaging in sustainable practices themselves, so it is only right for their consumers to practice sustainability as well by purchasing these products.

Though it is not uncommon for fashion advertisements to center around women, there is clearly a reason for this decision. Many fashion retailers use gender as a marketing tool because they know that women make up much of their audience. According to Amy Nelson's (2019) article from Inc.com, 70-80% of consumer purchasing is done by women. However, there are two serious implications of H&M's strategy of solely focusing on women to promote a sustainable collection.

Figure 5

Women Being Social on a Rooftop



Note. Copyright H&M Group.

The first implication of promoting sustainable consumption through gendered rhetoric is that it enforces the idea that sustainable consumption is binary. This advertisement emphasizes stereotypical female behavior such as girls' night out and ladies who lunch to present images of ideas and values that resonate with female customers. It is important to note that the brand chose

to use mostly POC models to make them look more progressive which adheres to their sustainability initiative. Not only are they trying to appeal to diverse audiences; they are trying to appeal to young, progressive women in general. This may contribute to H&M's active work on diversity and inclusion goals, or this may be a sales angle to relate to racially diverse populations; either way it comes off as an unauthentic effort. Moreover, H&M uses gendered rhetoric via daily activities to suggest that sustainable consumption can easily be added into any woman's daily routine.

Figure 6

H&M is For Women



Note. Copyright H&M Group.

The second implication of using gendered rhetoric to advertise sustainable consumption is that it diminishes men's awareness of environmental issues while failing to form sustainable

consumption decisions. H&M's female-centric advertisement uses the green-feminine stereotype (Brough & Wilkie, 2017) to communicate to men that they need not be bothered to participate in conscious consumerism, but that they should still have an awareness of the environmental impact of fashion. However, being a bystander is simply not enough to fix the planet. In a study with over 2,000 participants from America and China, the data displayed a psychological link between pro-environmental behavior and perceptions of femininity, resulting in a "green-feminine stereotype" (Brough & Wilkie, 2017). The researchers suggest that the "green-feminine stereotype" discourages men from participation in sustainable consumption, so they can save face and avoid feeling feminine (Brough & Wilkie, 2017; Milton, 2019). By choosing to center the advertisement around women, H&M epitomizes the green-feminine stereotype and continues to discourage men from shopping consciously.

This advertisement is a representation of H&M's realization that when they are advertising sustainability motifs, it is optimal to use women for the storyline in the campaign. As mentioned earlier from Nelson's (2019) article, females shop more than their male counterparts, so it is more practical for H&M to target women in their promotional materials. However, by prioritizing profits, H&M will continue to create feminine-centric campaigns that perpetuate the green feminine stereotype in society and steer more men away from engaging in pro-environmental behavior.

H&M's Fall 2019 Conscious Collection video advertisement uses rhetorical strategies such as statistical data, personal and social responsibility, imagery, buzzwords, and feminine motifs to promote their sustainable efforts; however, their attempt resulted in violating three of the seven sins of greenwashing, among other deceptive persuasive techniques. Therefore, the campaign uses greenwashing by including unreliable data, vague language, contradiction,

selective disclosure, declarative statements, and gendered rhetoric. To promote sustainability correctly, fashion brands and retail corporations must ask themselves why they are promoting it in the first place.

Focus Group Sessions

To gather more qualitative data, I held four focus group sessions over Microsoft Teams. During these sessions, I showed the participants two videos, the 2019 H&M Conscious Collection advertisement, and a brief documentary clip about the problematic nature of fast fashion. I was most concerned with how they would interpret the message of the first video, the H&M advertisement. The following analysis focuses on three main themes that were prevalent among focus group participants: the message was vague, the message was false or misleading, and the message was moralizing the consumption of H&M.

Message was Vague

Many participants of the study made a point to comment on the advertisement's lack of explanation or elaboration on how the PET bottles are being recycled to make the clothing for the collection. H&M makes their sustainability claim at the beginning of the video with a statement and a statistic. However, there is no follow up to the claim besides a short scene of plastic water bottles being crushed. The advertisement was unsuccessful in convincing my participants that H&M's claims about sustainability were genuine because they saw that there was no follow-up to the claim and that the visual components in the video representing the claim were not enough to serve as reasonable evidence. One participant observes the crushing of water bottles as unrelated to the claim and questions if it equates to environmentally friendly behavior.

You know its aesthetically pleasing; I see why they put it together, but it does raise like a lot of questions. Like if you are environmentally friendly and environmentally conscious, then why are you only showing this aesthetically pleasing video of water bottles falling? I wish you would go into more detail about you know what is it about these clothes that are you know better? (Participant A-1).

Participant A's quote supports my claim in my rhetorical analysis arguing that H&M violates the sin of vagueness in their video campaign for the Fall 2019 Conscious Collection. The participant questions the rationality of using falling water bottles as evidence for H&M's claim because they argue it does not accurately represent the brand's environmental consciousness. The response questioning the brand's choice to purposely withhold information confirms existing scholarship that selective disclosure as a form of greenwashing, (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011, p. 6).

Participant B specifically recognizes H&M's conscious intent to market eco-consciousness, yet realizes they fall short in their effort.

Because companies are aware that consumers care about this kind of thing, they're making an effort to seem like they're doing the right thing and it can end up being performative. The advertisement doesn't actually tell us what they're doing, (Participant B-1).

The participant shows their personal awareness of the recent mainstreaming of sustainability in the current consumer culture. By acknowledging the commodification companies have put on environmental consciousness, the participant is left viewing the ad as an inauthentic display of sustainability. Similarly, to the previous participant, this participant points out the complete lack of transparency regarding the brands' claimed sustainable methods within the video. Since the

participant knows that H&M's motive for promoting sustainability is profit-oriented, they are not persuaded by H&M's sustainability messaging.

The preceding two quotes highlight the imprecise information used by H&M when promoting their Conscious Collection, whereas the following two quotes question the lack of clarity in H&M's branding and positioning regarding their sustainable practices. Participant C said:

Do they want to be known as you know H&M the trendy cheap brand or do you want to be known as like the environmentally friendly brand which then raises the question for me like if they don't want to be the environmentally friendly brand, why is that? What is so bad about being known as environmentally friendly that you aren't necessarily projecting it all the time, (Participant C-1).

This participant questions how H&M chooses to position itself in terms of its branding and messaging. Positioning is important for any company, no matter the size because the positioning is how the brand presents itself to their audience and prospective customers. A brand's positioning must be straight-forward and transparent to gain a consumers' loyalty. This participant uses their prior experience with H&M's advertising to determine that H&M's messaging is vague and confusing compared to the other campaign messaging they have seen from H&M. Specifically, the participant uses the central route of processing to judge what the message says about the brand (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p.3). Furthermore, this participant recognizes that the statement violates the sin of vagueness from its inconsistent messaging and positioning that is more than likely to confuse and mislead consumers.

Participant D thought H&M did not include enough information in their claim making the claim too generalizable to be genuine.

I think it was a loophole, I'm sure that 50% of garments from that specific line are made with reusable materials, but what about all their other clothes, are they coming from ethically sourced manufacturers. What about stuff that's not made with plastic, how are they ensuring ethical sourcing of that. There's so many ways to get around a declaration like that, (Participant D-1).

With access to so much information, it is easy for young consumers to question the integrity of mediated messages because they can fact check almost anything on the internet. This participant is especially not inclined to believe the claim because they are aware of the different factors that contribute to a garment's sustainability. My participant explains that the statement's generality could cause consumers to be misled about the eco-friendly nature of H&M's other clothing collections. Moreover, the participant's response shows how H&M's message violates the sin of vagueness by creating a claim that is likely to be misinterpreted by consumers because of the nebulous language used.

Message was False or Untrustworthy

My participants mistrusted H&M's message because of their prior knowledge of H&M's history and their understanding of how the fast fashion system works. It is important to note that the following quote is from the only person from my sample population to describe the video as greenwashing or to use the word greenwashing.

It makes me think of like Greenwashing, where a company that has a history of you know not being environmentally friendly throws out like one product and then it's like we're eco-friendly and it's like yeah but what like that's not very consistent with what your message has been previously, (Participant E-1).

Participant E does not trust the brand's message because they have had enough experience with the concept of greenwashing to know when it is present. The participant also uses their prior knowledge of H&M to evaluate the integrity of the statement. Similar, to some of the other participants, this participant points out that H&M's messaging and positioning is inconsistent with what the brand has projected in the past. H&M has made its reputation on its fast fashion practices, so when it creates a separate collection that contradicts its traditional practices, it sparks confusion and misinterpretations. This participant was able to recognize the inconsistency that the ad delivered to be a form of greenwashing. The following participant's response supports my claim that the H&M advertisement is an example of greenwashing.

It appears that some consumers are unphased by H&M's troubled past and present because the company's practices did not directly affect them. However, my participants have found it difficult to separate H&M's historical fast fashion tropes from the knowledge of H&M's history and their personal understanding of the brand. This awareness of H&M's scandals has left some consumers wary of the truthfulness in their claims.

Having shopped at H&M and knowing its history, it makes me more skeptical of the claims they are making. One of those brands that exemplified fast fashion. I would like to know more information behind their claims, (Participant F-1).

This participant acknowledges that their comprehension of H&M's history contributes to their skepticism and lack of trust in the message. One of H&M's most publicized scandals was the Rana Plaza tragedy, in which over 1,100 factory workers were killed in Dhaka, Bangladesh because of a garment factory owner's decision to disregard a crack in the foundation, so they would not have to delay any orders. H&M was one of the many brands using Rana Plaza to produce their clothing (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013; Kasperkevic, 2016). H&M and others

alike chose Rana Plaza for its capability to churn our product quickly and inexpensively even though the working conditions were deadly. Whether this participant was referring to this specific event or not, there was not enough information in the advertisement for them to be persuaded. A common thread among the participants is a recognition of H&M's contradictory messaging, and actions.

The next quote makes the most straight-forward observation amongst the three participants in this section. The participant uses their knowledge of the garment industry, capitalist structures, and motives, to come to their interpretation. Participant G classifies the company's claim as inextricably false, "There's no way that the sustainability practices of recycling water bottles could fit into the narrative of cheaper clothing for more." Participant G shows their familiarity with the concepts around sustainability and the fashion system, which allowed them to not be fooled by H&M's shallow claims of environmentally conscious behaviors. Their knowledge of fast fashion and sustainable fashion brands permit them to make such a bold statement. The participant uses the central route of persuasion of the Elaboration Likelihood Model to evaluate their stance on H&M's claim; in this case, the participant is certain in the claim's falsehood. Though the other participants in this section were aware of the fallacies and deceptive messages within H&M's advertisement, this participant was the only one to perceive it as an outright lie.

Message Moralizes Consumption

My participants are aware of the link H&M is trying to sell between social and personal responsibility and consumption choices. H&M can play on their consumers' sense of social responsibility to use as the compelling motivator. The following participants explain how the

advertisement leverages consumers' moral values to increase their chances of participating in consuming the Conscious Collection. Participant H said:

I think the way they created that ad made it seem like they were just trying to make the consumer feel good about what they were buying and maybe motivate people who are environmentally friendly, who purposefully don't buy from H&M because of sustainability issues but now they want to send the message that they're doing better, you really don't know what's going on under the surface.

The participant describes how H&M engages with their consumers' environmental concerns by moralizing the consumption of H&M's Conscious Collection by promoting it as sustainable consumption. Through this moralization, H&M can shift environmental responsibility from themselves (H&M) onto the consumers, contributing to a moral tension between consumers' sustainable values and knowledge of H&M's ambiguous history.

Participants were also conscious of H&M's goal to commodify confidence and ethical convictions. H&M was able to commodify conviction by taking consumers' environmental values and selling their beliefs in the form of Conscious Collection pieces. The brand was able to commodify confidence by showing the confidence one could embody by wearing Conscious Collection garments. Further, H&M takes both confidence and conviction to sell the Conscious Collection garments as acquiring confidence for having strong environmental convictions.

Participant I highlight how the advertisement exploits consumers' moral convictions about the environment to induce strong emotional responses of guilt by not consuming from the Conscious Collection.

It kind of wanted to bring the confident side of the viewer. So, like I felt like I had this kind of weird duty to be like yes, I will buy those clothes because I do not want to kill the

planet. It was trying to play on like the confidence and kind of protective role of a person in society rather than like this is only fashion, (Participant I).

Participant I pointed out how the H&M advertisement uses consumers' social and personal responsibility values to encourage the consumption of their collection. I think that the participant's reference to confidence is a response to the advertisement's curation of the model's body language and countenance, which reproduces images of self-awareness, sophistication, and boldness. H&M utilized their knowledge of consumers' environmental concerns and personal social responsibility to create messages that framed shopping from their Conscious Collection as a way to enact their personal responsibility for the environment. When the participant says the advertisement 'plays on a protective role of a person in society', they are cognizant of H&M's messaging strategy to incentivize customers with moral fulfillment.

Based on the analysis of the focus group conversations, the participants overall were not persuaded by the greenwashing rhetoric in H&M's advertisement. When I looked at the participants' responses to the preliminary survey, 90% said the sustainability of a product was important (varying from slightly to extremely important) to them when purchasing an item. Since participation in the focus group sessions was voluntary, the strong consensus may be a result of participants interest in the subject. This provides sound evidence to justify participants interpretations of the H&M advertisement; moreover, it suggests that young consumer audiences are less likely to be persuaded by greenwashing tactics in fast fashion advertisements.

Defining Sustainability

Sustainability is a nuanced term to scholars, experts, and consumers alike. In all my one-on-one interviews, my first question was, "How do you define sustainability?" Respondents were free to answer in any way they chose. The reason behind this question was to get a sense of how

the participants thought about sustainability, if they thought about it at all. Understanding the participants' definitions will provide additional insight into how young consumers comprehend sustainability and engage with sustainable consumption.

Before looking at the participants' interpretations, it is helpful to restate the existing definitions from scholars. Although, Cadenasso and Pickett's (2018) definition is the most complex definition of sustainability by far, it gets at the most vital ideas of the concept.

Sustainability is founded on ecological principles of mass balance in systems, of conservation of limiting resources in ecosystems, and of allocation of assimilated resources in closed systems. It is about improving the quality of human life within the limits, of resources and otherwise, imposed by the supporting system (p .6).

Cadenasso and Pickett's definition acknowledges the environmental and the human rights aspects that contribute to executing sustainable practices in real time. Although Cadenasso and Pickett take an ecological scientific approach to define sustainability, they can make it relevant to a larger audience by emphasizing the values consumers hold today about sustainability such as ensuring ethical treatment of garment workers or consuming less and taking care of old clothes more.

Comparatively, Gary Holthaus (2008) defines sustainability in a more pragmatic fashion than Cadenasso and Pickett, "Longevity is the result of a process. Sustainability is not a state we reach but something we work toward forever" (p.125-126). Holthaus points out that sustainability is not something that can be acquired overnight, it is something obtained through consistent efforts over time. In his text, Holthaus explains that longevity is a result of individual choices; furthermore, Holthaus uses longevity synonymously to sustainability to show that sustainability is made up of individual choices. Holthaus's definition carries relevance to young

consumers by criticizing their fast-paced fast fashion consumer habits of present and explaining that more individual efforts are needed to work towards a more sustainable society.

Among the interview participants' responses, two main themes surfaced, and they were divided by gender: individual choices and willful ignorance. Despite this difference, all participants provided sufficient definitions that showed their comprehension of the term. The following three responses come from three female participants.

Generating the least amount of waste and causing the least amount of harm both in terms of what materials are used, the cost of shipping, and then how the workers are being treated, (Participant A-2, Female).

Producing or consuming in an ethical way. Being ethical relates to the materials being used and the energy you are using, labor and environmental impact, (Participant B-2, Female).

You have to be able to maintain this way of living in order for the earth to keep producing resources that you need, (Participant C-2, Female).

The participants evaluate their definition of the word "sustainability" by emphasizing their personal responsibility and the relevance of their individual actions to achieve sustainable efforts. The female participants recognized how sustainability affects them in their day-to-day life, so they were aware of the attachment they each have to sustainability. All three quotes emphasize the relationship intention has with sustainable efforts; they can see how being intentional in their individual choices will make an impact to reaching a state of environmental sustainability. For instance, the first participant used the active verbs 'generating' and 'causing' to refer to the conscious efforts an individual could make to generate the least waste or cause the

least harm. When the second participant said, “consuming in an ethical way,” they refer to the actions taken by an individual to seek out products that are considered ethical, efforts backed by purposeful intent. The third quote used ‘you’, ‘able’, and ‘maintain’ to demonstrate the individual intentional choices that are crucial to maintain the environment’s current state of being. The female participants acknowledge their personal responsibility as a possible solution, but it is important to acknowledge the limits of personal responsibility one person has. Large clothing corporations have produced much of the worlds’ pollution; therefore, one person should not feel that the burden of environmental sustainability rests on their shoulders solely. Additionally, the limits of personal responsibility speak to the durability of the broader idea in mainstream culture, sustainable consumption.

Their responses drew on concepts from both Cadenasso and Pickett’s (2018) and Holthaus’s (2008) definitions of sustainability. From Cadenasso and Pickett’s (2018) definition, the participants call attention to “mass balance, conservation of limiting resources, and improving human life,” confirming that to achieve mass balance, conservation of limited resources, and improving human life, daily individual consumption choices must be considered thoughtfully (p.6). The responses draw on Holthaus’s (2008) ideology of longevity by recognizing the individual choices that are to be made to maintain and conserve Earth’s resources (p. 125-126). These participants are aware of the relationship they hold with sustainability, but what if someone was unaware of their link and connection to sustainability? This was the case for the male participants. The next two definitions come from two male participants and display willful ignorance when defining sustainability.

The ability for eco-systems to live and thrive and organisms to live together without harming the ability to live and survive as organisms, (Participant D-2, Male).

Trying to not use synthetic fibers from fossil fuels because it's destroying the environment as well as like the amount of water and other materials that they use every year, (Participant E-2, Male).

By focusing on large-scale systems, they distanced their actions from their comprehension of the concept, the male participants were unaware of how their individual actions play a larger role than they think. The first participant uses a big picture definition, couched in scientific language, to explain his comprehension of the term. However, this participant utilizes Cadenasso and Pickett's (2018) main point of mass balance in their definition to describe its role to sustain an equilibrium between environments and their inhabitants. Despite supplying correct information, the participant the participant is completely oblivious to seeing himself as part of his definition.

The second quote explains sustainability regarding the production methods used to create the garment, such as the amount of water used. Similarly, this participant drew upon Cadenasso and Pickett's (2018) definition to highlight the significance of conserving limited resources in sustainable efforts. Though the male participant addressed a fundamental factor contributing to sustainability, he does not see sustainability as something in which he has a personal stake. This disconnect could have unfavorable effects on male participation in individual eco-friendly consumption decisions and habits.

All participants displayed adequate knowledge and comprehension of the term sustainability; no response was wrong. As depicted in the participant responses, the concept is quite malleable, and objective based on its author. In the female participants definitions, they all acknowledged themselves and their individual choices as a part of sustainable efforts, whereas the male participants definitions showed a strong disconnect between themselves and their

actions as a part of sustainability. My participants' gender-divided interpretations support existing research indicating that women tend to have a stronger emotional involvement with the environment (Grob, 1991; Lehmann, 1999) and are thus more likely to engage in sustainable efforts (Grob, 1991; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002, p.254). Furthermore, the participants' definitions may inform insight into how they interpret the H&M advertisement message.

Semi-Structured Interview Sessions

The interview sessions I performed yielded richer and more robust data than the focus group sessions. The interviews were one-on-one versus one-on-four or more people, so I was able to get more thoughtful answers to my questions. Overall, I interviewed seven people who had all participated in one of the four focus group sessions, four females and three males. There were many interesting themes that came up, but two I found to be most relevant. The results present an interesting gender analysis that provides insight into male and female sustainable consumption habits. In the following paragraphs, I analyze my participants' responses to separate questions about personal sustainable habits and H&M's values.

Personal Habits Around Sustainability

One of the first questions I asked my interviewees was, "Do you consider yourself to be environmentally conscious?" To me, to be environmentally conscious is to be mindful and intentional when it comes to your decisions around consumption, transportation, discarding any tangible items, etc. and acknowledging that all your actions contribute to something bigger than yourself. I asked this question to get a better idea of the participants' habits around sustainability and sustainable consumption. Their own habits around sustainability may inform how they interpreted the advertisement's message.

When I try to do something, whether it's like getting food or purchasing an item or clothing, I try to look at like the best, most sustainable way to do that, (Participant A-2, Female).

I'm making conscious decisions about where I shop and I'm lucky enough sometimes to be able to have the to be more intentional about where I shop and making sure that I shop at places that are transparent about the materials they use and where their factories are, (Participant B-2, Female).

I use reusable water bottles, but as it pertains to clothes, sustainability is like I can't lie to myself and say that's like one of the main things I think when I'm buying clothing, I'm hoping to get there, (Participant F-2, Male).

I don't really read into the materials I'm buying. I shop from Hollister; I get stuff from H&M cause it's a lot for a small price. But to be honest, I don't really know what my option are, (Participant D-2, Male).

The gender-divided responses fall in line with the research on the green-feminine stereotype, which poses highly detrimental impacts to the environment. The female participants express meaningful engagement in conscious consumption, whereas male participants show interest in being environmentally conscious but admit it does not dictate their clothing consumption decisions. In my rhetorical analysis of the advertisement, I pointed out that the feminization of sustainability in advertising potentially contributes to men not engaging in pro-environmental behavior. However, neither male participant said anything about femininity in their responses. Rather, both male participants emphasize that they do not consider sustainability when buying clothing at this point in their lives. My male participants' responses support existing research that

indicates men do not consider sustainability as much as women do in their consumption decisions, (Lai et al., 2017, p.91-95). When collecting my data, I noticed, but did not get to follow up on convenience/efficiency as a possible motivating factor leading males to engage or not engage in sustainable consumption. This observation may lend to existing research on gender behavior in sustainable consumption.

Looking at the male participants' definitions of sustainability, it is clear they understand the concept to an extent. Compared to their female counterparts, they do not incorporate individual actions, such as consumption choices, into their definition of sustainability which may help to understand why it does not factor into their decision making. One male participant says he is unsure of his options; he does not know how to engage with sustainability when he is purchasing clothing. While he provided an adequate definition of sustainability, he did not acknowledge himself to be a contributor to sustainable efforts. Because he implies no connection between his actions and sustainability, it makes sense that his clothing purchases are not made with sustainability in mind.

The lack of knowledge men have about sustainable consumption could be a result of retailers like H&M targeting women when advertising an eco-friendly collection. Comparatively, the female participants expressed increased knowledge and understanding regarding sustainable consumption by explaining the time and effort they take to make intentional decisions and to be as eco-conscious as possible. Female participants may have a more thorough comprehension of what sustainability looks like in practice than their male counterparts because the marketing is targeting them directly. H&M may choose to target women as a rhetorical choice to show that they know their consumer audience well; yet by using gendered rhetoric they are cutting out

millions upon millions of potential customers in addition to perpetuating the green-feminine stereotype.

Another reason that male and female sustainable consumption habits are different could have been a result of how each gender defines the term sustainability. The main conflicting factor between the two definitions was the person's relationship to sustainability and pro-environmental habits. Research from Grob (1991), and later Lehmann (1999), found that women displayed greater emotional involvement with environmental concerns which would often result in some form of pro-environmental participation (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002, p. 254). Scholars Kollmuss and Agyeman (2002), view emotional involvement to represent the affective relationship a human has with the natural earth (p.254). The female participants were able to find the direct link between their individual actions and the environment, so engaging in conscious consumption made sense to them. The female participants used themselves as part of their definition of sustainability which speaks to the females' comprehension of the connection their individual actions have on the environment. Moreover, the responses from my female participants support the existing research indicating a gender gap in perceptions and involvement. Conversely, the male participants described their understanding of sustainability through large-scale scientific systems. This shows a major disconnect in male consumers on the connection between the environment and individual actions. For there to be real change, male actors need to acknowledge that their consumption habits have environmental implications, so they can convert their environmental values into sustainable habits.

Using ELM to Identify H&M's Values

All my participants attend the College of Wooster, where liberal values are the majority among students, which may contribute to why participants' responses were particularly critical

of an international fashion conglomerate. During the interview, I asked participants, “What do you think are H&M’s values?” The responses were uniform: H&M values money, not their consumers. In the following section, I apply the Elaboration Likelihood Model to show how my participants used prior knowledge and preconceived opinions to view H&M through a critical lens.

H&M intended to encompass environmentalist values in its branding of the Fall 2019 Conscious Collection. Specifically, the video campaign used voice-over narration of declarative statements to illustrate the brand’s engagement with sustainable consumption practices. Despite this display, the participants, representing young consumers, did not identify environmentally friendly values with H&M after viewing the advertisement because these consumers questioned the authenticity of the message. My participants thought the environmental claim in the video was too vague because there was no clear evidence in the campaign showing specifically how the brand was using sustainability in their manufacturing methods. Additionally, they were highly critical of H&M’s claim because they saw the brand as a big corporation with capitalist ideologies. Therefore, the advertisement was not persuasive, and young consumers still associate the brand primarily with being corporate/profit-driven, rather than environmentally conscious. By applying Petty and Cacioppo’s, Elaboration Likelihood Model (1986), I can show how the campaign did not change the participant’s perception.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model has two routes of persuasion, the central route, and the peripheral route (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986, p.3). The ELM framework seeks to understand how people formulate their opinion on a matter—through peripheral cues or mental cognition. The participants use the central route to evaluate the argument of the advertisement with their cognition. A Gallup poll from 2018 indicated 70% of adults between the ages of 18 and 36 to

view global warming as an issue important to them on a personal level (Reinhart, 2018). Therefore, it makes sense that the participants considered their individual levels of ego-involvement in eco-consciousness in addition to their prior knowledge of H&M when constructing their opinions about H&M's values. Participants used their attitudes towards H&M to evaluate their interpretation of the advertisement's sustainable claim. They also considered the socially constructed ideologies they held about corporations and capitalism to question the content and integrity of the argument.

Initially, H&M set out to advertise their new Conscious Collection as a trendy, eco-friendly collection made from sustainable practices; however, my participants were not convinced that H&M's claim was the truth. They were not neutral observers; they were very quick to make the connection between the message and the motive. As a result, my participants' hyper-awareness and critical thinking led them to see the argument as vague and unreliable.

When I think of them, I think it's like a big corporation that's just sort of like producing material as quickly as possible to get more money. I view them as a big corporation that doesn't value anything other than the consumption of their goods, (Participant A-2, Female).

Most stores, including H&M, because of the way they are set up and because we live in a capitalist country, I think their values are pretty exclusively tied to money, (Participant B-2, Female).

I think it's tough to convince people who know how capitalism works. H&M values like obviously their own profits cause they're a huge corporation. You can't separate that from the fact they're a big business trying to make more money, (Participant F-2, Male).

My participants' inclination to criticize big corporations made it easy for them to identify what they understood to be H&M's core values. All the participants answered the question using their personal narratives about the power structures dominant in society today. The two female participants were quick to make resolute judgements and show their instinct to criticize big corporations for being money hungry. They acknowledged their knowledge of the way capitalism works and their awareness of capitalistic structures present in society today, such as corporations and big fashion brands.

The male participant (#3) directly noted their own and their peers' understanding of private enterprise to hinder their ability to believe a big corporation engaging in environmental practices with no additional profit-based motives. Moreover, the participant acknowledged their conscious bias present when answering the question. All three participants used the Elaboration Likelihood Model to evaluate their position because they used their cognition and preconceived ideas about H&M and corporations to inform their answers (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p.3).

The data from the preliminary survey reveal that participants' environmental concerns and behaviors do not wholly align. Since I performed my qualitative analysis first, I expected the survey data to show a significant relationship between female participants' environmental attitudes and consumption habits; however, I found a much more complicated relationship. The survey results show that well over half of the female participants said the sustainability of a product was very important (4) or extremely important (5) to them when buying clothes; the female participants also considered themselves environmentally conscious. The average of the male responses to the same question was 3.5 which confirms the qualitative data showing that the female and male participants hold substantial environmental values. Although there were only 8 male participants, 5 of the 8 reported engaging in sustainable fashion consumption,

(62.5%), whereas 7 of the 22 female participants said they shopped sustainably (32%). That leaves 15 of the 22 female participants shopping exclusively from fast fashion retailers, 68% of the female participants. These results complicate my initial qualitative findings on the gender gap on attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable habits, which indicated females were more likely than males to engage in pro-environmental behavior.

If female participants see themselves as environmentally conscious humans—who are not easily persuaded by greenwashing tactics, then why do they continue to shop from fast fashion brands? As I stated in my rhetorical analysis, fashion advertisements tend to target women because they make up a large majority of the consumer population (Nelson, 2019). Fast fashion advertisements, such as the one observed in this study, target women by telling them that these clothes will make them feel whole, more confident, and more beautiful. Therefore, women with environmental values may feel more inclined to shop from fast fashion stores because of the brand's strong messaging commodifying desirable attributes.

At the same time, H&M targets consumers whose choices are limited based on circumstances. H&M's Conscious Collection means to show consumers that they have the freedom to choose to be sustainable, yet H&M contradicts this narrative of freedom to choose because they target people who do not have unlimited choices. One of the interview participants made this remark about H&M's business model, "When you have prices that low and like certain people need to purchase things at a lower price just cause of like where they are in life, it literally forces the hand of the consumer to purchase those fast fashion clothes." H&M encourages consumers to believe they have the freedom to choose sustainability by shopping from H&M's Conscious Collection and simultaneously exploiting their ability to enact said freedom.

Affordability and accessibility factors may be a reason for fast fashion consumption; past scholarship from Diekmann and Preisendoerfer (1992) tell us that people are more likely to participate in conscious consumption when it is at low cost to them (as cited in Kollmuss and Agyeman, 2002, p.252). The findings from Henninger and Singh (2017) reveal that consumers may prioritize the need to keep up with the latest fashion trends over engaging in ethical consumption (p.119). Another layer that touches on both reasons of accessibility and personal style is the relationship between racial stereotypes and social norms regarding how women present themselves. Women, especially women of color, must be strategic about the way they dress because it may negatively impact their chances at opportunities. Recent scholarship from Pitcan, Marwick, and Boyd (2018) highlight extant research on respectability politics and how it may dictate what women, especially women of color, choose to buy and wear so they may be perceived by others as respectable (p.165). For example, a woman shopping for an interview with a limited budget is more likely to prioritize the presentation of the clothes over the sustainability of the clothes even if they hold strong environmental values. It makes more sense for the woman to purchase a ‘nice-looking’ outfit from H&M than to buy an outfit from a thrift store that may not present the woman as ‘well’ and impact her upward mobility.

The qualitative findings may have shown more significant environmental attitudes and behavior because the interview participants had a stronger interest in the subject. The results of the preliminary survey also offered insight into female consumers’ environmental values and consumption habits.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I use a rhetorical analysis and my qualitative data from my focus group sessions and individual interviews to examine a video campaign from H&M’s Fall 2019

Conscious Collection. This research determined that the ad had elements of greenwashing in it. H&M engaged in greenwashing by using selective disclosure to withhold information regarding negative environmental performance, vague messaging, unreliable data, and providing misleading information about the garments. My participants' responses indicated that they were not persuaded by the H&M ad. They thought the claim was too vague and the advertisement did not include sufficient information regarding the sustainability of the garments. Also, the participants' knowledge of H&M's past scandals made it easier for them to not trust the brand's claim. It is important to note that my participants demonstrated a gender disparity among their responses regarding sustainability and sustainable consumption. Female participants were more likely to have a stronger personal stake in sustainability and intentional consumption than their male counterparts. Chapter five will present the major conclusions from this study and identify other avenues for research related to promoting sustainability in fashion.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This project sought to understand how H&M promoted sustainability and sustainable consumption in a 2019 advertisement for their Conscious Collection, what ideas and values H&M's advertisement circulated about sustainable consumption, and how young consumers interpreted H&M's sustainability claim. Results indicated that the advertisement used greenwashing tactics to promote sustainability; sustainable consumption is feminine; and participants saw the advertisement as vague, misleading, and untrustworthy. This chapter will present major conclusions, implications, and limitations of the study, in addition to recommendations for future research and final thoughts on how my attitudes and values on fashion and sustainability have changed over the last year.

Major Conclusions

I answered the first and second research questions through my rhetorical analysis, and I answered the second and third research questions through an analysis of the participant responses. My rhetorical analysis of the Fall 2019 H&M Conscious Collection advertisement identified the various greenwashing rhetorical strategies and values H&M used to promote their claim of sustainability. From my analysis of the individual interviews and focus group sessions, I discovered the participants' ideas about sustainable consumption and their interpretations of the Fall 2019 H&M Conscious Collection advertisement.

Based on my rhetorical analysis and my sample participants' interpretations of H&M's Conscious Collection video advertisement, I found that H&M does in fact use greenwashing techniques to promote sustainability in this campaign. In my rhetorical analysis, I used TerraChoice Environmental's (2009), seven sins of greenwashing, to measure how H&M's

advertisement utilized greenwashing. H&M violated three of the seven sins of greenwashing in their advertisement: vagueness, no proof, and the hidden trade-off. The advertisement used ambiguous language, uncertified data, and selective disclosure to persuade the viewers to believe H&M's claim of sustainable production. My rhetorical analysis also identified the rhetorical strategies of contradictory and declarative statements used by H&M as greenwashing tactics. However, my participants were not persuaded by the advertisement to believe H&M's claim because they found the message to be vague and untrustworthy. They found the message to be vague because of the brand's failure to provide any follow-up details or demonstration of how they were executing their sustainability in practice. The participants' prior knowledge and understanding of H&M's past scandals assisted them to evaluate the message as misleading.

Furthermore, H&M's advertisement used gendered rhetoric to feminize sustainability and sustainable consumption. The brand made an intentional choice to use mostly female models for their campaign and depict stereotypically feminine behaviors to target women consumers. By using gendered rhetorical strategies about sustainable consumption, H&M perpetuates the green-feminine stereotype that engaging in sustainable consumption is unmanly (Brough & Wilkie, 2017). The advertisement reinforces the notion that sustainable consumption characterizes femininity; therefore, H&M is telling male consumers that conscious consumerism is for women and not men. This strategy discourages men from participating in sustainable practices and from educating themselves on sustainability and pro-environmental behavior. In my analysis of the participants' responses to their habits around sustainability, there was a clear gender gap between men's and women's answers.

The young consumers in my study showed interest and concern in environmental issues, yet young female consumers were more likely to perform pro-environmental behaviors than their

male counterparts. I found several reasons to explain the gendered behavior; the first was that males did not consider the sustainability of a product when shopping, which supports extant research indicating that men do not consider eco-consciousness as much as women in their consumption decisions (Lai et al., 2017, p.91-95). The second reason was because the male participants appeared uneducated on sustainable consumption. Their lack of knowledge on how to engage in pro-environmental behaviors may be a direct result of the gendered rhetoric used in H&M's advertisement.

Young female and male consumers both have a strong comprehension of sustainability; however, each have different interpretations. In the female definitions, they recognized their individual relationship with the environment, showing a personal stake in sustainability. For instance, they perceived individual choices to be a necessity to achieve maintenance and conservation. The male responses offered narrow definitions that presented a disconnect between their actions and the environment. More specifically, they approached their definitions by thinking about sustainability in a big picture kind of way focusing on large-scale systems. Though the male participants offered adequate definitions, their ignorance of their personal decisions may decrease their likelihood to engage in conscious habits around consumption.

Young consumers' fundamental knowledge of capitalism and inherent need to critically analyze makes them less likely to be persuaded by fast fashion brands promoting sustainability. By applying the Elaboration Likelihood Model, I understood how the participants evaluated their opinions on H&M's claim (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). I found that the participants' underlying knowledge of H&M's negative history with their attitudes about big retail corporations led them to see H&M's message as vague and misleading. This suggests that the greenwashing strategies in the advertisement may be unsuccessful with young consumers.

Implications of the Research Findings

My research findings have three major implications related to both consumers and fashion brands. The implications include: 1) fast fashion companies perpetuate a cycle that continues to mislead consumers about their sustainable practices; 2) advertisements may become considerably less persuasive to young consumers (a target audience), and 3) gendered rhetoric used in advertisements about sustainability may result in an insufficient number of men participating in sustainable consumption.

If fast fashion retailers continue to use greenwashing tactics to promote sustainability, consumers will continue to hold misinformed ideas about sustainability, and the brand will diminish any real transparency with its consumers. With incomplete or dishonest information being provided, consumers will continue to make ineffective consumption decisions. Greenwashing advertisements will blur the lines between fast fashion and sustainable fashion for consumers and increase ambiguous definitions and interpretations of sustainability. As fast fashion retailers continue to commodify sustainability through their clothing collections, the term will eventually be emptied of its meaning and importance; in fact, they will be encouraging more unsustainable consumption. Sustainability will become nothing more than a popular fashion trend in the early 21st century. Consumers must be educated properly, and the first way to do that is for retailers to create honest advertisements. It is vital that fast fashion brands are transparent when advertising sustainability so that consumers may continue to have a clear comprehension and relationship with the phrase.

Brands and consumers alike can benefit from transparency in mediated messages promoting sustainability. With the ability to fact check anything in a matter of seconds, young consumers seem less likely to be persuaded of an environmental claim from a large fashion

retailer, which could negatively impact a brand's integrity and profits. Young consumers' tech-savviness and skepticism may make it easier for them to identify when a fashion retailer is using greenwashing in an advertisement. For instance, young consumers have shown their ability to perceive when campaigns fail to offer sufficient information about a sustainability claim. This awareness could contribute to a growing population of young consumers who are not persuaded by fast fashion brands' messaging about sustainability. Brands could lose their consumers' trust and loyalty because of their failure to be transparent. If a brand claims to use sustainable practices, then they must include sound evidence that is accessible to their consumers and a thorough follow-up that addresses the fine print of the claim. To retain their consumer audiences, fast fashion retailers must be honest about their practices even if they are not environmentally friendly.

Brands that use gendered rhetoric to advertise their sustainable practices deter male consumers from participating in sustainable consumption by perpetuating the green-feminine stereotype to show that sustainable consumption is unmanly (Brough and Wilkie, 2017). If a brand purposefully uses only women in a campaign about sustainability, then it is actively labeling sustainable consumption as feminine. Designating pro-environmental behavior to women will limit men's engagement with it while also placing the burden on women to be sustainable. The brand is making the decision for the male consumer. If the fashion advertisements continue to designate sustainability as a feature exclusive to women's apparel, it will become entrenched in gender roles. Sustainability is not a trait; it is a way to live. The gendered rhetoric distorts the word's original meaning and uses the advertisement to resonate with their target audience by demonstrating that sustainability is feminine. Moreover, men will continue to refrain from displaying sustainable actions to perform masculinity. Therefore, with

only women partaking in eco-conscious habits, environmental progress will move at a slower rate.

Limitations

This study contains two primary limitations: the time constraint and the presence of COVID-19 during data collection. The seven-month timeline limited the scope of the study. If I had more time, I could have diversified my sample to be more representative of young consumers. I would have liked to interview non-college students or a more demographically diverse sample of young consumers. With more time, I also could have analyzed other fast fashion retailers' sustainability video ads, or I could have used print campaigns from the fast fashion retailers. The participants may have responded differently to the print advertisements than the video advertisements. Given more time, I may have been able to do a comparative analysis between a fast fashion brand's sustainability advertisement and a sustainable brand's advertisement, focusing on how each promotes sustainability and how consumers respond differently to these advertisements.

Secondly, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the nature of the field study focus group sessions and individual interviews. All participant interactions were held over Microsoft Teams, which limited the depth of the participants' responses, specifically for the focus groups. If the focus groups had occurred in person, the flow of the conversation might have been smoother and more dynamic. In addition, if I had been on campus, I might have been able to recruit a more diverse group of participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study contributed to extant research on environmental advertising by focusing on greenwashing rhetorical strategies and consumers' attitudes and perceptions related to these advertisements. With more retailers using a green-advertising or greenwashing approach, more research is needed to bring the significant implications of greenwashing to a head.

My first suggestion for further research is to diversify the sample population. It would be interesting to use financial demographics to analyze the attitudes from two or more different sample populations ranging in annual income. Moreover, looking at the attitudes from several points on the financial spectrum could produce a rich comparative analysis. Using two different generations for the sample populations could show meaningful data about each generation's attitudes about consumption and sustainability. Lastly, creating a study with racially diverse sample populations may yield thoughtful responses about brands using an all-encompassing approach to diversity, inclusion, and sustainability.

My second recommendation for future research is to examine the reasons behind why people shop from fast fashion retailers if they care about the sustainability of a product. I think a study that explores the different societal inequalities which may limit consumers ability to engage in pro-environmental behavior would be informative for both retailers, consumers, and environmental activists.

My third research suggestion is to use the factor of accessibility to understand attitudes and behaviors towards sustainable consumption across multiple demographics. When I looked at individual female responses to the survey question about where they shop, it appeared that people who held strong environmental values may not have the accessibility to partake in

sustainable fashion. For a large part of the American population, engaging in sustainable consumption is not an option, so I think investigating unaligned attitudes and behavior around sustainability would offer significant findings.

The fourth recommendation for future research is to explore the gender gap among young consumers on engaging in sustainable practice through an identity lens. Asking the participants, the words they associate with sustainability and sustainable consumption to see if the green-feminine stereotype was present. Asking questions about motivation could provide insight to participants' personal values. Additionally, it would be valuable to look at the motivation and behavior connection.

The last suggestion for further research is to look at the social values around sustainability. Young consumers hold strong environmental values so exploring the dynamics among friend groups or among peers around sustainability would be interesting for looking at attitude formation and influence. One of the participants in my sample acknowledged that environmentally unfriendly behavior is becoming stigmatized, so if someone is not being sustainable then they are cast aside. I think it would be interesting to examine stigma and sustainability and see if stigma can change behavior.

Final Thoughts

Though 2020 may have been an awful year, it offered something priceless—the ability to slow down and reflect. It seems that the fashion industry is finally beginning to reckon with their environmental burden. Even if H&M Conscious Collection is not entirely sustainable now, there is hope that one day the collection could be. Many participants in this study displayed their consideration about their consumption habits and environmental consciousness which offers hope that more college students are experiencing a similar reckoning with their environmental

actions. Just days following the call of the 2020 election, Cori Bush, a Democratic Congresswoman from Missouri, tweeted, “The reality of being a regular person going to Congress is that it’s really expensive to get the business clothes I need for the Hill. So, I’m going thrift shopping tomorrow” (Bush, 2020). The next day Bush posted several pictures and videos of herself thrift shopping which went viral. It was no surprise that the series of tweets and Bush’s transparency resonated with many of her followers. Plus, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and other congresswomen responded to Bush’s tweet expressing similar feelings and even provided Bush advice (Petrarca, 2020). Bush’s tweet emphasizes underlying societal issues many women face in the workplace such as gender bias, racial bias, and access to income. Moreover, Bush acknowledges how ‘business’ clothes have been important for women’s upward mobility in the workplace. In addition, Bush’s photos, and videos, she destigmatized secondhand clothing and was able to show thousands of consumers how secondhand shopping was an accessible way to find ‘nice looking business attire’. The more public conversations people have about alternative ways to shop, the question of accessibility, and environmental consciousness, the more people will begin to shift their behaviors.

Fashion has been, and will always be, a part of my identity, but since I have embarked on this independent study, fashion and sustainability are inextricably linked in my mind. When I was reading over Chapter 1, which I drafted in September, I noticed that my explanation of ways to engage in sustainability revolved around consumption in some form. What I have realized over the last seven months is that environmental sustainability and conscious consumption are not as simple as shopping from a vintage store.

I think a major turning point for my understanding of sustainability was when I began writing Chapter 4. Writing the rhetorical analysis allowed me to reflect on my initial attitudes

and perceptions of sustainability which had been quite simple. During that time, I had the ability to view sustainability through simple terms and making sustainable choices was easy for me; however, I have now come to realize that it is not as straightforward for my peers. My personal privilege narrowed the lens through which I understood sustainability. Once I began engaging with the scholarship and research materials in September my lens began to widen. Now, I use sustainability as a lens to look at other societal inequalities such as people's access to fresh foods, historically stagnant incomes in the United States, among others.

My interpretation shifted again after recognizing the limits of personal responsibility. A few weeks ago, in one of my classes we were discussing sustainability and individual choice, and I made the case that people have the ability to make individual choices. The next day I was thinking about this conversation and felt very embarrassed because I saw that my privilege and ignorance got in the way of seeing the whole picture. I do not have to shop at H&M or Target; I can make the choice to shop from a sustainable brand or from a thrift store. Many people do not have the flexibility to make individual choices—the choices are already made for them. What are the mechanisms that limit peoples' choices to consume sustainably? There is a complex set of interwoven factors that make sustainable consumption inaccessible, such as geographical location, financial barrier, and size exclusivity. I need to take some of the onus upon myself to recognize how my privilege has shaped my attitudes and behavior towards sustainability and pro-environmental behavior. However, the limits of my personal responsibility can only go so far. What the environment needs is for the fashion industry and corporations to take responsibility for their past histories and to make monumental changes on a global scale, starting with domestic and foreign policy. Sustainable consumption is a terrific way to enact your

personal commitment to social and environmental responsibility but remember the weight of the world does not only rest on your shoulders.

REFERENCES

- Aagerup, U. (2011). The influence of real women in advertising on mass market fashion brand perception. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 15(4), 486-502. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/13612021111169960>
- Andrews, R.A. (2020, October 1). *It just got easier to recycle beauty products from every brand*. Vogue. <https://www.vogue.com/article/nordstrom-beautycycle-beauty-products-recycling>
- Bagnall, D. (2019, July 19). *The history of online advertising*. OKO Ad Management. <https://oko.uk/blog/the-history-of-online-advertising>
- Bednarik, J. (2019). Change of Paradigm in Personnel Strategy – Corporate Social Responsibility and Internal Communication. *Communication Today*, 10(2), 42–57.
- Bissell, K. and Rask, A. (2010). Real women on real beauty: self-discrepancy, internalization of the thin ideal, and perceptions of attractiveness and thinness in Dove’s Campaign for real Beauty. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(4), 643-68. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2501/S0265048710201385>
- Brough, A.R., Wilkie, J.E.B. (2017, December 26). *Men resist green behavior as unmanly*. Scientific American. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/men-resist-green-behavior-as-unmanly/>
- Brundtland Commission. (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryman, A. (2015). *Social research methods*. ProQuest eBook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.wooster.idm.oclc.org>
- Bush, C. [@CoriBush]. (2020, November 10.). *The reality of being a regular person going to Congress it that it’s really expensive to get the business clothes*. [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/CoriBush/status/1326345538871156738?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctw

[camp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1326345538871156738%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.thecut.com%2F2020%2F11%2Fcongresswoman-cori-bush-on-thrift-shopping-her-d-c-uniform.html](https://www.thecut.com/2020/2/11/congresswoman-cori-bush-on-thrift-shopping-her-d-c-uniform.html)

Byrum, C. (2019). Hey Friend, Buy Green: Social Media Use to Influence Eco-Purchasing Involvement. *Environmental Communication*, 13(2), 209-221.

DOI:10.1080/17524032.2017.1308404

Cadenasso, M.L., & S. T. A. Pickett. (2018). Situating sustainability from an ecological science perspective: Ecosystem services, resilience, and environmental justice. In Julie Sze (Ed.), (pp.29) NYU Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12pnp5c.4>

Casey, M. A., Krueger, R. A. (2009). Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. India: SAGE Publications.

Clark, R. (2005, October 29). *What issustainability?* The Times.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/what-is-sustainability-xmtckmskjv0>

Clean Clothes Campaign. (2013). Rana Plaza. Clean Clothes Campaign.

<https://cleanclothes.org/campaigns/past/rana-plaza>

Cline, E. (2013). *Overdressed: The Shockingly High Cost of Cheap Fashion*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Coombs, W., T., Holladay, J., S. (2009) Corporate Social Responsibility: Missed Opportunity for Institutionalizing Communication Practice? *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 3(2), 93-101. DOI: 10.1080/15531180902805445

Dados, N., & Connell, R. (2012). The Global South. *Contexts*, 11(1), 12–13.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504212436479>

- Dahl, R. (2010). Greenwashing: Do you know what you're buying? *Environmental Health Perspectives*, 118 (6), 242a-252a. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.118-a246>
- Dalton, M., Longacre, M., Drake, K., Cleveland, L., Harris, J., Hendricks, K., & Titus, L. (2017). Child-targeted fast-food television advertising exposure is linked with fast-food intake among pre-school children. *Public Health Nutrition*, 20(9), 1548-1556.
doi:10.1017/S1368980017000520
- de Freitas Netto, S. V., Sobral, M.F.F., Ribeiro, A. R. B., & Soares, G. R. da L. (2020). Concepts and forms of greenwashing: a systematic review. *Environmental Sciences Europe*, 32(1), 1-12. <https://doi-org.wooster.idm.oclc.org/10.1186/s12302-020-0300-3>
- Delmas, M. A., & Burbano, V. C. (2011). The Drivers of Greenwashing. *California Management Review*, 54(1), 64–87. DOI: <https://doiorg.wooster.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/cm.2011.54.1.64>
- Elven, M. (2018, August 16). *People do not wear at least 50 percent of their wardrobe, says study*. Fashion United. <https://fashionunited.uk/news/fashion/people-do-not-wear-at-least-50-percent-of-their-wardrobes-according-to-study/2018081638356>
- Engstrom, C. L., Petre, J. T., & Petre, E. A. (2017). Rhetorical Analysis of Fast-Growth Businesses' Job Advertisements: Implications for Job Search. *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 80(3), 336–364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329490617723117>
- Foss, S. K. (2017). *Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice*. Waveland Press.
- Galletta, A., & Cross, W. (2013). The Semi-Structured Interview as a Repertoire of Possibilities. In *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication* (pp. 45-72). New York; London: NYU Press. Retrieved April 20, 2021, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qgh5x.7>.
- Ghandi, S. (2019, December 3). *How fast fashion is greenwashing*. Sense and Sustainability.

<https://www.senseandsustainability.net/2019/12/03/how-fast-fashion-is-greenwashing/>

Henninger, E.C., Singh, P. (2017) Ethical Consumption Patterns and the Link to Purchasing Sustainable Fashion In C. Henninger, P. Alevizou, H. Goworek & D. Ryding (Eds.) *Sustainability in Fashion* (pp.103-126). Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan.

H&M. (2019). [Main concept of Conscious Collection] [Screenshot] *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGIc&ab_channel=Prada.

H&M. (2019). [Falling and crushing water bottles] [Screenshot] *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGIc&ab_channel=Prada.

H&M. (2019). [A group of women at a bar] [Screenshot] *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGIc&ab_channel=Prada.

H&M. (2019). [Two women in a meadow] [Screenshot] *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGIc&ab_channel=Prada.

H&M. (2019). [Women being social on a rooftop] [Screenshot] *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGIc&ab_channel=Prada.

H&M. (2019). [H&M is for women] [Screenshot] *YouTube*.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4HuQsNHGIc&ab_channel=Prada.

H&M Group. (2020). *Sustainability Reporting*. H&M.com.

<https://hmgroupp.com/sustainability/>

Holthaus, G. H. (2008). *Learning native wisdom: What traditional cultures teach us about subsistence, sustainability, and spirituality*. (pp.125-126). University Press of Kentucky.

Jackson, L. T. (1983). From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of Consumer Culture. In T. Jackson Lears and R. Fox, (pp.4,21) Pantheon.

Jhally, S. (2017). Advertising at the edge of the apocalypse. Sutjhally.com.

<http://www.sutjhally.com/articles/advertisingatheed/>

Joergens, C. (2006). Ethical fashion: Myth or future trend? *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 10(3), 360–371. DOI: 10.1108/13612020610679321.

Joshi, Y., Rahman, Z. (2017). Investigating the determinants of consumers' sustainable purchase behavior. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 10, 110-120.

Joy, A., Sherry, J. F., Venkatesh, A., Wand, J., & Chan, R. (2012). Fast fashion, sustainability, and the ethical appeal of luxury brands. *Fashion Theory*, 16(3), 273–296. DOI: 10.2752/175174112X13340749707123

Jung, S., & Jin, B. (2014). A theoretical investigation of slow fashion: sustainable future of the apparel industry. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 38(5), 510-519.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12127>

Kasperkevic, J. (2016, May 31). *Rana plaza collapse: workplace dangers persist three years later, reports find*. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/may/31/rana-plaza-bangladesh-collapse-fashion-working-conditions>

Klein, N. (1999, 2003). *No Logo: Taking aim at the brand bullies*. Picador USA.

Kollmuss, A., Agyeman, J. (2002). Mind the Gap: Why do people act environmentally and what are the barriers to pro-environmental behavior? *Environmental Education Research*, 8(3), 254. DOI: 10.1080/13504620220145401

Lai, Z., Henninger, E.C., Alevizou, J.P. (2017) An Exploration of Consumers' Perceptions Towards Sustainable Fashion – A Qualitative Study in the UK in C. Henninger, P.

- Alevizou, H. Goworek & D. Ryding (Eds.) *Sustainability in Fashion* (pp.81-101). DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-51253-2_5
- Lim, W., M. (2016). A Blueprint for Sustainability Marketing: Defining Its Conceptual Boundaries for Progress. *Marketing Theory*, 16(2), 232–249.
DOI:10.1177/1470593115609796
- Lyon, T.P., & Maxwell, J.W. (2011). Greenwash: Corporate environmental disclosure under threat of audit. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, 20(1), 3-41. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1530-9134.2010.00282.x>
- McDonald, C., & Scott, J. (2007). A brief history of advertising. In G. J. Tellis, & T. Ambler *The SAGE handbook of advertising* (pp. 17-34). SAGE Publications Ltd,
<https://www.doi.org/10.4135/9781848607897.n2>
- Morgan, A. (2015). *The True Cost* [Film]. Untold Creative, Life is My Movie Entertainment, and Bullfrog Films.
- Nelson, A. (2019, July 17). *Women drive majority of consumer purchasing and its time to meet their needs*. Inc. <https://www.inc.com/amy-nelson/women-drive-majority-of-consumer-purchasing-its-time-to-meet-their-needs.html>
- Oh, H., & Jasper, C. R. (2006). Processing of Apparel Advertisements: Application and Extension of Elaboration Likelihood Model. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 24(1), 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X0602400102>
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J.T. (1986). *Communication and persuasion: Central and peripheral routes to attitude change*. Spring-Verlag.
- Petrarca, E. (2020, November 24). *Congress is Getting Another Expert Thrift Shopper*. The Cut.

<https://www.thecut.com/2020/11/congresswoman-cori-bush-on-thrift-shopping-her-d-c-uniform.html>

Pitcan, M., Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2018). Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 23(3), 163–179. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmy008>

Pookulangara, S., & Shephard, A. (2013). Slow fashion movement: Understanding consumer perceptions—An exploratory study. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 20(2), 200-206. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2012.12.002>

Product Placement: Why it matters and how to get it. Accion. Retrieved February 8, 2021. <https://us.accion.org/resource/product-placement-why-it-matters-and-how-get-it/>

Rauturier, S. (2020, May 10). *What is Fast Fashion?* Good on You. <https://goodonyou.eco/what-is-fast-fashion/>

Reinhart, R. (2018, May 11). Global warming age gap: young Americans most worried. Gallup.com. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/234314/global-warming-age-gap-younger-americans-worried.aspx>

Resnick, B. (2019, January 11). *More than ever, our clothes are made of plastic. Just washing them can pollute the oceans*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2018/9/19/17800654/clothes-plastic-pollution-polyester-washing-machine>

Richards, J., & C. M. Curran. (2002). Oracles on "Advertising": Searching for a definition. *Journal of Advertising*, 31(2), 63-77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4189215>

Siegel, M., Ross, C. S., Albers, A. B., DeJong, W., King, C., 3rd, Naimi, T. S., & Jernigan, D. H. (2016). The relationship between exposure to brand-specific alcohol advertising and brand-specific consumption among underage drinkers--United States, 2011-2012. *The*

American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse, 42(1), 4–14. <https://doi-org.wooster.idm.oclc.org/10.3109/00952990.2015.1085542>

Smith, R. (2013, April 17). *A closet filled with regrets*. Wall Street Journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887324240804578415002232186418>

TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. (2009). *The seven sins of greenwashing: Environmental claims in consumer markets*. TerraChoice Environmental Marketing.

<http://sinsofgreenwashing.org/findings/greenwashing-report-2009>

APPENDIX A: Focus Group Questions

After watching the H&M Fall 2019 Conscious Collection advertisement, the following questions were posed to the participants.

1. What did you think of the advertisement? What emotions did this advertisement evoke?
How did the advertisement make you feel?
2. What is the takeaway from this advertisement? How do you understand the message? Do you trust this message? Do you think it is authentic? Why or why not?
3. What is your prior knowledge of H&M? What are your thoughts of H&M? Based on this advertisement, what do you think H&M values as a brand?
4. Does this make you think about H&M differently, if so, how?
5. What do you think sustainability is, how do you understand it?

After watching a selected clip from the documentary, The True Cost, (05:15-09:40), the following questions were posed to the participants.

1. What did you think of the video clip? How did the video clip make you feel?
2. What is your main takeaway from this video? Do you agree or disagree with the message?
3. How does this video clip make you feel about the previous H&M advertisement? How does this video clip make you feel about the fashion industry, fashion brands and retailers, shopping for clothes, and consumption?
4. How does this video make you think about your own consumer habits? How does this video make you feel about your own consumer habits?

5. How do you think we can address the environmental problems of the fashion industry?

Do you think if other young consumers had more awareness of the fast fashion industry, they would change their consumer habits?

APPENDIX B: Individual Interview Questions

The following questions were posed to each interview participant.

1. How frequently do you shop for new clothes? What do you do with your old clothes?
How often do you donate your clothes?
2. Where did you first hear the term sustainability? What do you think sustainability means?
3. Do you consider yourself to be environmentally conscious? If yes, how so? What do you think an environmentally conscious person is?
4. What do you think about H&M? Have your thoughts about H&M changed since watching the videos from the focus group?
5. What do you think about H&M's Conscious Collection? Do you think H&M's conscious collection is an example of sustainable fashion? If you do, can you explain why you think it is sustainable? If you do not, can you explain why you do not think it is sustainable?
6. Since the focus group session, have you considered changing your consumption habits?

APPENDIX C: Recruitment Email

Dear fellow Wooster students,

I writing to you to request your participation in my Senior I.S. research project. The purpose of my independent study is to investigate how fast fashion companies advertise their sustainability efforts and to explore how these advertisements circulate ideas, values, and attitudes directed at consumers. I have chosen to use a qualitative method of researching by holding two focus group sessions and individual interviews. Each focus group session will be held over Microsoft Teams and last approximately one hour. Individual interviews will occur a week or two after the focus group sessions. Your participation in the study will be completely voluntary and all your responses will be kept confidential. I understand that I am asking you to take out a large portion of time in your day to participate in my research, so to express my appreciation all participants will be entered into a raffle for a \$20 gift card of their choice. If you are interested in participating, please fill out the interest form below.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/12RAa-oacXf-tbKQfEdImKnKDtd4Lez43QBHBfEPOKQ/edit>

Additionally, I must mention that one of the video clips I will be showing during the focus group sessions has sensitive content in it.

Professor Nii Nikoi is my I.S. advisor. If you have further questions, you may email Professor Nikoi (nnikoi@wooster.edu) or myself (crosenstein21@wooster.edu).

Thank you,

Camryn Rosenstein

APPENDIX D: Human Subjects Research Committee Approval

College of Wooster IRB

Protocol Exemption Notification

To: Camryn Rosenstein
From: Heather Fitz Gibbon, HSRC Chair
Subject: Protocol #2020/09/20
Date: 10/01/2020

The protocol **2020/09/20. Tentative Title: Our clothing may kill us all!** has been verified by the College of Wooster HSRC as **Exempt** according to 45CFR46.101(b)(2): (2) Tests, Surveys, Interviews on 10/01/2020.

Please note that changes to your protocol may affect its exempt status. Please contact me directly to discuss any changes you may contemplate.

The only change I request at this time is that in your recruitment email, please include your advisor's name.

You are free to begin the research.

Thanks,

Heather Fitz Gibbon,
HSRC Chair
hfitzgibbon@wooster.edu

APPENDIX E: FORM OF CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

Fast Fashion Advertisements and Message Interpretation in Young College Consumers

Principal Investigator: Camryn Rosenstein

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study. I am investigating how young consumers interpret fast fashion advertisements.

Procedures

If you decide to volunteer, you will complete a short survey about yourself at the beginning of the session. I will show two videos, after each video I will ask the group a series of questions about each video. Participants are required to talk, but it is highly encouraged. The questions aim to facilitate meaningful discussion about interpretations and feelings about the videos. Additionally, upon the end of the focus group, I will ask all participants to fill out an exit survey. The exit survey's purpose is to see which participants would like to take part in an individual interview. If you decide to volunteer for the individual interviews, you will be asked a series of questions about interpretations and feelings toward advertisements and personal opinions about the environmental and fast fashion.

Risks

Some of the material shown in the focus group includes sensitive material, specifically images and videos of the Rana Plaza tragedy.

Benefits

A personal benefit for participants is the potential to become a more conscious consumer. An indirect benefit is that we learn how young consumers understand green marketing campaigns and messages.

Compensation

All participants will be entered into a raffle for a \$20 gift card of their choice.

Confidentiality

Any information you give will be held confidential. Unique name/number codes will be stored on a password-protected Microsoft Word file. This file will be destroyed once all data is collected. Thus, all data will become anonymous at the conclusion of the study. Video and audio recordings will be stored securely on a password-protected computer and destroyed after they have been transcribed.

Costs

There is no cost to you beyond the time and effort required to complete the procedure described above.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw _____ You
may refuse to participate in the study. If you decide to participate, you may change your mind about being in the study and withdraw at any point during the experiment.

Questions _____

If you have any questions, please ask me. If you have additional questions later, you can contact me by email at crosenstein21@wooster.edu. You may also contact my advisor, Professor Nii Nikoi at nnikoi@wooster.edu.

Consent _____

Your signature below will indicate that you have decided to volunteer as a research subject, that you have read and understand the information provided above, and that you are at least 18 years of age. Signature of participant _____ Date _____

You will be provided a copy of this form.

APPENDIX F: Focus Group Preliminary Survey Questions

For the following statement, please indicate the degree of importance to you.

	Not Important				Extremely Important
How important is the sustainability of a product to you when you are buying clothing?	1	2	3	4	5

Answer the following question as it pertains to you.

How often do you buy new clothing? (New clothing does not include buying clothes from thrift/vintage/secondhand stores)

1. Once a week
2. Once a month
3. Once every weather season
4. Once a year
5. Once every five years

For the following statement, please fill in your answer.

What clothing stores do you shop from?

- a. Click to write

APPENDIX G: Exit Survey

All focus group participants were told to fill this survey out at the end of the session.

1. What is your name?
 1. Click to write
2. Would you like to participate in an individual interview? Select yes or no.
 1. Yes
 2. No