



SOCIAL INFLUENCE MOTIVATING MIDDLE-AGED GERMANS TO PURCHASE SUSTAINABLE CLOTHES

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Abstract: This research aims to analyze the social influence motivating middle-aged Germans to purchase sustainable clothes. In this qualitative research, the respondents were divided into two groups. The first group is determined as individuals being interested and the second group not being interested in sustainable clothes. The independent sample *t*-test shows that there is a significant difference between the two analyzed groups in terms of the influence of social forces on the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes. The esteem needs are the most influencing, and the confirmation needs are the least influencing social forces. However, all three independent variables have great influence on the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes. The findings also highlight that 60.7 % of the respondents are interested in sustainable clothes. However, although the majority of respondents are interested in sustainable clothes, only 16.0 % of the respondents were able to mention a certification label for sustainable clothes. This concludes the assumption that there is a lack of popularity of certification labels.

Keywords: social influence, motivation, sustainable clothes, Germans

1. Introduction

In many countries, there is a growing trend for fair produced and sustainable products. It started with the United Nations, which formed the goal in 1987 and published a concept to reach sustainability (Johnston, Everard, Santillo, & Robèrt, 2007). The proportion of renewable energy constantly increased in the last years, and more and more fairly produced and organic food products can be seen in the stores to date. The fashion industry takes its place in the importance to reach sustainability as well. In 2014, private households spent around 73 billion euros for the consumption of clothing (Maxwill, 2015). Especially, the production process and the global transport network of clothes cause massive damages to the environment (Upadhyay & Deodya, 2011). Therefore, it is essential to promote sustainably produced fashion to reach a sustainable living and to decrease the harm to current and future generations. Derived from the definitions of sustainable development, sustainable clothes can be defined as fashion products that have the least negative influence on the environment now and in the future. As many works already analyze production methods, new kinds of sustainable fiber materials and the reconstruction of supply chains, this research targets to take a closer look at the consumer's consumption. In the literature, there is a gap of knowledge about the motivation driving consumers to purchase sustainable clothes. The goal of this paper is to create a better understanding and to contribute to the science of social motivation in terms of the consumption of sustainable clothes and products.

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2. Overview of the study

The fashion industry takes its important role in reaching a path of sustainability. This research puts consumers in its focus and how they are motivated to purchase sustainable clothes. Existing qualitative works analyze this topic in general. Among others, the results show that social forces play an important role in the consumer's motivation. These findings are combined with social motivation theories in the literature review to discover the main social forces that drive consumers to purchase sustainable clothes. A conceptual framework with three independent variables is developed, which leads to several hypotheses tested in an online survey. The main research question of this study is:

How do social forces influence middle-aged Germans to purchase sustainable clothes?

The data gathered from the conducted research is analyzed using Excel and SPSS to provide statistical proofed data. The goal is to create a better understanding of social forces motivating consumers to purchase sustainable clothes.

Besides the social forces on motivation, this research provides information about the trend for sustainable clothes in Germany. The respondents are asked if they are interested or if they have already bought sustainable clothes. The results indicate if there is a trend to purchase sustainable clothes in Germany. Also the popularity of certifications, which label sustainable produced clothes, is analyzed in this research. The results are listed and discussed in this study. Finally, this paper includes recommendations for all significant persons and institutions. These recommendations should help to increase sustainable consumption and to push forward the trend and the popularity of certification labels.

3. Significance of the study

Several political leaders in the world set the goal for their strategic plans to reach sustainability. The fashion industry and its following key players contribute significantly to reach this goal.

Consumers and society: Consumers play an essential role for promoting the consumption of sustainable produced clothes. The demand determines the supply. Research found out that the buying behavior of German consumers is influenced by the idea of sustainability (Schmitz-Hoffmann & Schwesig-Simac, 2014). This trend needs to be spread within communities and societies.

Companies: More and more companies put a sustainable business model into their account (Jung, 2011). Nevertheless, there are still a lot of things to do to accomplish the ambitious goal to reach sustainability. Managers and marketers need to understand their consumers to satisfy their social needs.

Politics: Governments and politicians worldwide set the goal to decrease the carbon footprint, to stop climate change and to reach sustainability (European Commission, 2016). By understanding the consumer's motivation and the social forces that influence them to purchase sustainable clothes, a legal base can be formed to support this path.

Science: Research need to be conducted to create a better understanding of social motivation. This is a very complex phenomenon and researchers need to increase their effort to form a knowledge describing social motivations.

4. Objectives of the study

This research aims to provide knowledge about the social motivation to purchase sustainable clothes. Social forces on the motivation are explored and the importance of each social dimension is measured.

In addition, a trend for sustainable clothes in Germany is analyzed. The goal is to find out how many respondents are interested in or have ever purchased sustainable clothes. Furthermore, the popularity of certifications, which label sustainable clothes, is identified.

A conclusive research is conducted and the gathered data is analyzed. The goal is to fulfill the objectives of this research and to answer the scientifically relevant questions according to social motivation, a trend for sustainable clothes and the popularity of certifications labeling sustainable clothes.

5. Literature review

Trend for sustainable clothes

In the literature review, the trend for sustainable clothes in Germany is analyzed. Several indicators show that in Germany and in other countries in the world a trend is going on in that direction. An increasing number of companies put sustainable aspects into their account (Focus, 2014). Popular brands are willing to concern more about environmental and ethical issues (Confino & Muminova, 2011). Established global players like Adidas and H&M introduced sustainable materials in their product lines. Furthermore, in Germany, the company Hessnatur, which generated annual sales of around 73 million euros, focuses on natural and ecological materials and fair wages for all workers in the production chain (Löwenstein, 23). These are only some examples of companies that realized the trend for sustainable clothes and target to satisfy the demand.

The demand also provides an indicator for a growing trend. More and more search requests have been made on the Internet, searching for sustainable clothes. In addition, the research found out that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable clothes (TextilWirtschaft, 2011). The sustainable idea takes place in their consumption behavior. Also, press and media bother about this topic, and sustainability takes its place in the life of many Germans.

The rising number of certifications that label sustainable clothes also point out that there is a trend for sustainable clothes worldwide and in Germany. Certifications like Fairtrade, Blauer Engel and Blue Design label sustainable clothes and provide criteria to fulfil sustainable standards.

The research target is also to proof if there is a trend for sustainable clothes in Germany and if the findings go hand in hand with the knowledge gathered from the literature review. Nevertheless, a lot of certifications exist, which can be seen as an indicator of the popularity of sustainable clothes, and the goal of this study is also to test how many respondents know such kind of certifications labelling sustainable clothes. Derived from the definitions of sustainable development, sustainable clothes can be defined as fashion products, which have the least negative influence on the environment as possible, as well as on current and future generations.

Individual needs and motivations for sustainable clothes

The literature review opposes several motivation theories and highlights the social needs of those theories influencing human and consumer motivation. In the motivation theory by Maslow, the two stages—social needs and esteem needs—can be filtered out as social forces (King, 2009). The social needs or needs for belonging describe that individuals act in a certain kind of way to belong to a group or others they identify themselves with. The esteem needs stand for self-esteem, status, recognition and respect of others.

This goes partially hand in hand with the Two-factor theory of Herzberg. He also found out that among others the needs for status, recognition and responsibility drive individuals for achieving the satisfaction of their social needs. While Maslow analyzed the human motivation in general, Herzberg conducted research about the motivation of employees and workers within an organization or company. Nevertheless, both theories can be applied to social aspects of motivation theories.

Later, social motivation theories have been developed in the science of motivation theories. Higgins and Tajfel created well-known social motivation theories. Higgins came up with the self-discrepancy theory. The idea behind is that individuals have a current picture of themselves and an ideal picture of what they want to be. The gap in between is called discrepancy. Individuals try to close this gap to meet their own ideal. Therefore the theory points out different kinds of self-concepts of what an individual is and of what it wants to be. This is a result of what people think about themselves and the perceptions of what other people think about someone (Jackson, 2005). From these results and the inferred social needs in Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's motivation factors, it can be assumed that satisfying those needs is highly related with the individual's social surrounding.

Henri Tajfel contributed to the field of social motivation theory as well. He came up with the identification theory. Individuals act in a certain kind of way to identify with a group or society (McLeod, 2008). This is reflected in the social needs or belonging needs by Maslow. Consequently, the review of the four social motivation theories leads to the assumption that belonging, identification, esteem needs and the confirmation an individual receives from others are the major social influences on consumer's behavior toward purchasing sustainable clothes.

Also, recent studies contribute to the social forces motivating Germans to purchase sustainable clothes. Several explorative works have been conducted to create knowledge about what in general motivates consumers to purchase sustainable clothes. Different patterns were created, which show the motivation for the consumption of sustainable fashion: less buying, the self, health, the environment, accomplishments and social justice (Lundblad & Davies, 2015).

Especially, *the self*, which contains self-esteem and self-expression, must be highlighted concerning the focus of this research. Combined with accomplishments and social justice, these aspects show the importance of the social influence on consumer motivation to purchase sustainable fashion. Another study also points out that students consume fashion to express themselves and to show group conform. The need is to receive confirmation from a group someone identifies with or belongs to. Another research found out that consumers purchase ethically produced clothes to create a certain image and to express their identity in a group or society and to finally receive confirmation (Jägel, Keeling, Reppel, & Gruber, 2012). This matches to the results of Kim and Damhorst (1998).

The findings contain motives and values like looking good, assuming responsibility, acting as an ambassador and avoiding feelings of guilt. Also, social recognition and uniqueness were part of the results (Jägel, Keeling, Reppel, & Gruber, 2012). More and more the assumption confirms that the society plays a major role in the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes.

From these findings and the results of the motivation theories, it can again be assumed that the perception of an individual about what others think about someone (self-esteem, expression, status and reputation) and the group (group identity and conformity) someone belongs to needs to be considered for creating a conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework derives from the forces influencing the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes.

- 1) Individuals create an image of how other people perceive them to satisfy esteem needs.
- 2) Individuals identify with a group by adapting attitudes or values to satisfy social identification needs.
- 3) Individuals receive confirmation from social units by belonging to a group and to satisfy confirmation needs.

For each social force (independent variables), sub-items are set up, which derive from the literature review.

- Esteem needs:
 - Self-esteem and expression
 - Status and reputation
 - Respect of others
- Belonging needs:
 - Acceptance
 - Affection
 - Identification
- Confirmation needs:
 - Verbal confirmation
 - Non-verbal confirmation
 - Expected confirmation

These independent variables influence the dependent variable “the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes”. The conceptual framework and its independent variables lead to

hypotheses. For each variable, an H1 and H0 hypothesis is developed, assuming that it has influence or it has no influence on the social motivation to purchase sustainable clothes. Hypotheses are set up and tested with an online survey, which is analyzed using SPSS and Excel.

6. Research methodology

This study is based on existing exploratory works and uses a conclusive research design which allows researchers to verify or to falsify existing findings and hypotheses (Parasuraman, Grewal, & Krishnan, 2007). The goal is to prove and to show that the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes is highly influenced by social forces. An online survey, which consists of three parts, is distributed to middle-aged Germans. In this research, middle-aged Germans are defined as German citizens of the age between 18 to 40 years. A sample size of 271 respondents is calculated for the online survey.

After the first 50 respondents answered the questionnaire, a Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to verify the internal reliability. A value of 0.961 indicates a high level of internal consistency of the scale within the conducted survey.

To conduct the online survey, a nonprobability sampling technique is used. "The procedure of selecting a sample without using any probability mechanism is termed as nonprobability sampling." (Singh & Mangat, 1996, p. 7) The target population is people living in Germany aged 18 to 40. A mixture of judgment sampling and snowball sampling is used. The judgment sampling is used when the researcher selects the samples. The researcher chooses persons who have a relevance to the research and fulfil the criteria of the target population (Egan, 2007). The distribution of the online survey uses the judgment and snowball sampling method.

The online survey is sent via email and social media channels to respondents who fulfil the criteria of the target population. The goal is to achieve a response rate of 80 % or higher.

The goal of this research is to identify the social influence on consumer's motivation to purchase sustainable clothes. Therefore, the respondents are split into two groups.

Group 1: Respondents who are motivated to purchase sustainable clothes

In this case, all respondents who are motivated to purchase sustainable clothes can be considered as the ones who already bought sustainable clothes and respondents who are interested in purchasing sustainable clothes in the future.

Group 2: Respondents who are NOT motivated to purchase sustainable clothes

This group comprises of the respondents who are not interested in sustainable clothes. The facts that these respondents never bought or do not plan to purchase sustainable clothes in the future are indicators for belonging to this group.

An independent sample *t*-test is conducted with SPSS to analyze if there is a significant difference between those two groups. In addition, the gathered data is used to create a frequency distribution and to calculate means. Each question is answered by a 5-point Likert-scale. The results show the distribution of each question, and the calculated means help to

create a mean for each hypothesis. Thus, the following hypotheses concerning the independent variables can be verified or falsified.

- **Trend for sustainable clothes**
 - H₁: There is a trend for sustainable clothes rather than conventionally produced fashion.
 - H₀: There is no trend for sustainable clothes rather than conventionally produced fashion.
- **Social forces on the motivation**
 - H₁: Social forces influence consumer's motivation to purchase sustainable clothes.
 - H₀: Social forces do not influence consumer's motivation to purchase sustainable clothes.
- **Popularity of certifications**
 - H₁ Hypothesis: Many people know the certifications which label sustainable clothes.
 - H₀ Hypothesis: Not many people know the certifications which label sustainable clothes.

7. Results

After the online survey was conducted, the gathered data was imported into SPSS and Excel. A total of 267 respondents filled out the questionnaire to provide statistically relevant data. Consequently, a response rate of 98.5% was achieved.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents who are interested and who are not interested in sustainable clothes

Opinion	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	162	60.7	60.7	60.7
No	105	39.3	39.3	100.0
Total	267	100.0	100.0	

60.7 % of the respondents answered that they already bought or that they are interested in sustainable clothes. This finding goes hand in hand with the literature review and verifies the H₁ hypothesis testing a trend for sustainable clothes:

There is a trend for sustainable clothes rather than conventionally produced fashion.

Besides, the social influence on the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes can be proofed.

Table 2. Comparing groups' mean values according to independent variables

Independent variables	Mean (\bar{x}) Group 1	Mean (\bar{x}) Group 2
Esteem needs	1.1	-0.3
Belonging needs	0.9	0.1
Confirmation needs	0.7	-0.4

The results clearly show that people who are interested in sustainable clothes are highly influenced by social forces. In opposite, the respondents who have less social influences driving them to purchase sustainable clothes are less interested in such a kind of products. This assumption can be verified by the conducted independent sample *t*-test. The results show that there is a significant difference between the two groups. This verifies the H1 hypothesis, which tests the social influence on the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes:

Social forces influence consumer's motivation to purchase sustainable clothes.

In this research, the social forces were divided into three independent variables. The online survey tested if purchasing sustainable clothes can satisfy the esteem needs, the belonging needs and the needs for confirmation. The analyzed data shows that not only social forces influence individuals to purchase sustainable clothes. People who buy such a kind of products try to satisfy their esteem, belonging and confirmation needs. This finding is underlined by the calculated significant difference, with a *p*-value less than 0.05 between the two groups. In conclusion, three H1 hypotheses which test the independent variables can be verified:

1. Consumers are motivated to purchase sustainable clothes to satisfy their esteem needs.
2. Individuals aim to belong to a group or society by purchasing sustainable clothes.
3. Individuals are motivated to purchase sustainable clothes to receive a confirmation by others.

This research also puts the popularity of certifications which label sustainable clothes into its account. The literature review shows that there are a lot of certification companies and institutions already. The assumption that there is a trend for sustainable clothes in Germany leads to the question how popular those certifications are.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of the popularity of certifications

	Fair Trade	Öko Tex	Blauer Engel	GOTS	Blue Design	TOTAL
Frequency	21	11	6	4	1	21
Percent	7.9	4.1	2.2	1.5	0.4	16.0

In total, only 16.0% of the respondents were able to mention a certification which labels sustainable clothes.

- Fair Trade: 21 respondents
- Öko Tex: 11 respondents
- Blauer Engel: 6 respondents
- GOTS: 4 respondents
- Blue Design: 1 respondent

The frequency distribution shows that Fair Trade and Öko Tex enjoy the highest popularity among certifications labelling sustainable clothes. In conclusion, the H_0 hypothesis according to the popularity of certifications can be verified:

Not many people know the certifications which label sustainable clothes.

8. Discussion and conclusion

The results of this research show that social forces influence middle-aged Germans to purchase sustainable clothes. Consumers buy such a kind of clothes to satisfy their esteem, belonging and confirmation needs. Besides, the analyzing also indicates that there is a trend to purchase sustainable clothes in Germany. The fact that certifications which label sustainable clothes are not well known by the consumers is a problem to push forward the trend in the direction of sustainability.

The findings of the literature review go hand in hand with the results of this research. The four motivation theories analyzed in the literature review show that social forces influence individuals to act in a certain kind of way. This study reflects these assumptions to the field of sustainable consumption. It needs to be mentioned that the surrounding and society influence people who are interested in or bought already sustainable clothes.

In addition, the social forces detected by recent explorative works can be proofed to be relevant in a consumer's buying decision to purchase sustainable clothes. Individuals, within a group or society, influence each other to act in a certain kind of way or to change and adapt their attitudes and behaviors. This is a constantly repetitive process (Mason, 2007). It can be assumed that the trend of sustainable clothes is pushed forward when individuals share their beliefs and talking about those kinds of products with others.

It can be assumed that there is a trend for sustainable clothes in Germany. However, not many people know certifications which label sustainable clothes. Therefore, it is essential to create a better knowledge of those certifications through several taken actions to promote sustainable clothes. Among others, this contradiction leads to recommendations for participating parties within a society.

9. Recommendations

In the introduction of this study, it is mentioned that this research is significant for consumers, the society, companies, politics and science as well. Therefore, in this part, the recommendations resulting from the findings and the created knowledge are listed.

Consumers and societies

The consumers have the responsibility to inform themselves for example on the Internet or other media and should purchase clothes which are labelled with certifications they want to support. In addition, consumers can share their interest for sustainable clothes to influence

others. Of course, each consumer and the society should be open in return for social influence by others.

Companies

Companies should increase their offer and supply of sustainable clothes and invest more in R&D to improve processes in the value-added chain towards sustainability. It can also be recommended that companies try to achieve certifications which label sustainable clothes to utilize sustainability for business and marketing. Moreover, companies can educate consumers and create a growing need to purchase sustainable clothes. This results in pushing forward the trend to consume sustainable clothes.

Politics

For politics, it can be recommended to encourage companies and consumers to produce and to demand sustainable clothes (e.g. by incentives or tax reductions). The investment in education needs to increase, and individuals should be thought about the advantages of sustainable products. Furthermore, certification institutions can be promoted with funds, or the government can create an own uniform and transparent label. Also, the science needs to be supported with financial benefits to increase the knowledge in the field of sustainable consumption.

Science

Scientists are requested to expand their research to improve all steps in the product life cycle in the direction of sustainability. Most important, sustainable clothes need to become more competitive due to cost, price and quality. Additionally, it can be recommended to study the popularity of certifications which label sustainable clothes to increase its significance. The question is how these certifications can be communicated better to the consumers and how more transparency can be developed.

The goal is to push forward a sustainable way of life. Therefore, all members of a society should help by setting visions and taking necessary actions to push forward the trend for sustainable clothes.

Limitations of this study

This research does not claim to detect all forces influencing the motivation to purchase sustainable clothes. Further research needs to be conducted to cover all aspects of motivation theories. In this study, the focus is set on the social forces influencing the consumer to purchase sustainable clothes.

As it is conducted in Germany, it cannot be claimed to be applicable for other countries and cultures as well. It provides a base for further research in other regions of this world, but it

cannot be all-embracing. The same needs to be mentioned for differences in various research fields. Other industries differ from the textile industry; and, therefore, the findings can provide indicators but do not claim to be applicable to other industries and markets.

It needs to be mentioned once more that this research analyzes the consumer perspective and not the supply chains and production methods of companies. The research field is deliberately delimited to ensure accurate and detailed results.

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