

FASHION MARKETING'S ROLE IN PURCHASE PRESSURE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relation between online communication in marketing and customers' purchase pressure. We further examine if the customer's perception of the brand's authenticity and genuineness affects the perceived purchase pressure. This will be examined within sustainable brands that have a focus on changing customers' consumption patterns, with the assumption that they do not wish to create purchase pressure from a sustainability standpoint. By examining what causes purchase pressure we intend to contribute to developing the academic definition of the term. This is done by using an exploratory, inductive research design in which a qualitative research method has been applied. A qualitative content analysis was conducted to give insight in how sustainable brands marketing communicated contributes to the phenomenon of purchase pressure. Purchase pressure in the context of sustainable fashion is inherently negative as it indirectly is connected to overconsumption. Different cues have been revealed in this study to contribute to customers' purchase pressure, as well as that the authenticity and genuineness of a brand plays a role in the perceived pressure.

Keywords: Fashion, Purchase Pressure, Marketing Communications, Overconsumption, Sustainable Branding.

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1 Introduction

In this section, an introduction and the background to the selected research area regarding sustainable brands' contribution to customer's purchase pressure, where the purpose is to investigate where it may occur is described. The section will also describe the study's problem statement regarding how purchase pressure contributes to overconsumption, as well as the research gap and the two research questions followed by delimitations to the scope of study.

“Don't buy this jacket” follows the tagline of one of Patagonia's most debated marketing campaigns (Allchin 2013). Bringing awareness to customers of what they really need seemed to resonate as Patagonia's sales rose by 30% the following year after the anti-consumption advertisement (Stock 2013). However, the brand's intention of trying to alter consumption patterns based on Patagonias values and mission of decreasing consumption failed as it had the opposite effect. This, and situations alike, raised our interest in how sustainable fashion brands build marketing strategies that push on overconsumption by creating pressures to buy. It made us ponder on what situations this can happen and in what ways marketing strategies increase purchase pressure.

Purchase pressure is the term we have decided to use to describe the common Swedish proverb “köphets”, as there is no direct translation as well as no generally accepted definition. “Hets” translates to bait, hound, press or instigate, it can also refer to a kind of frenzy. Amipur and Benlian (2015) studied signaling limited time and limited product availability cues used to boost sales in online environments, and discussed these purchase pressure cues as environmental signals that act as a stimulus that affects the physiological mediation process where the customer perceives stress or value. In turn this affects the response in the form of a buying decision. Combining the definition of purchase pressure as a cue, as suggested by Amipur and Benlian (2015), and the proverb of “köphets” which points towards an individual and societal pressure to buy, the definition of purchase pressure in this study refers to both external pressure cues, societal and individual pressures to buy. Consumption frenzy is not a newly developed term; it has its roots back in renaissance Europe (Llewellyn 2015). Ardent or passionate consumption was regarded as “sins of excess,” and customers with this behavior were seen as sinful selves or gluttons. Their behaviors were often connected with social advancement, “to climb the social ladder” cited by Llewellyn (2015, p.3). Similar consumption behavior is present in contemporary society, but it regards purchasing and, therefore, we have referred to it as purchase pressure.

Purchase pressure can come from both external and internal factors. Cruceanu (2016) studied the difference between a customer's real needs and the social pressure. The study explains buying as a sort of a purchase fever of needing to have everything that is also driven by businesses' different seller strategies or manipulation techniques. Customers' have-to-have-it experiences is caused by their sense of staying up to date in their social surroundings, and can be managed by brands' marketing (ibid). This pressure has increased with the years, causing stress for customers being targeted with excessive marketing and societal expectations. Additionally, purchase pressure is largely connected with events such as Christmas or Black Friday when it is socially expected that customers should buy, not out of necessity, but in combination with the occasion (Goodwin, Smith, & Spiggle 1990). With the increase of marketing campaigns, along with increased seasons within fashion (Rousso & Ostroff 2018), this phenomenon is never-ending.

Looking at sustainable fashion brands is particularly interesting because of the paradox of a brand communicating sustainability whilst encouraging customers to buy more. There is a need to examine how brands that try to alter consumption patterns still impact consumers' purchase pressure and, in extension, contribute to overconsumption. Marketing in combination with sustainability has been discussed more in fast fashion than varieties of sustainable fashion. It is essential to highlight that while purchase pressure coming from sustainable brands could be inauthentic and ingenuine as it contradicts their mission and values, purchase pressure may stand out more and have a more considerable consequence for the brand than for other fashion brands for this reason.

1.1 Background

The World Commission on Environment and Development described sustainability in 1987 as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UN WCED 1987). One way to operationalize sustainability is through the triple bottom line approach, where sustainability emerges when balancing environmental, economic, and social dimensions (Elkington 1998). The definition of a sustainable business is somewhat vague; to create value that extends beyond the economic values and balances the three dimensions of the triple bottom line approach (Seuring & Mueller 2008; Todeschini, Cortimiglia, Callegaro-de-Menezes & Ghezzi 2017). What characterizes sustainability is complex, as what is considered sustainable today might not be it tomorrow, because the development of more sustainable options constantly moves forward (Todeschini et al. 2017). Instead, businesses have tried to push the sustainable value proposition and create sustainable competitive advantage in different ways, either through integrating sustainable supply chain management or through product's characteristics (Seuring & Mueller 2008; Todeschini et al. 2017).

A sustainable product is defined by its aim to gain a competitive advantage in the market through an improved environmental and social quality, which has been related to environmental and social standards (Seuring & Mueller 2008). The definition of sustainable supply chain management is "Management of activities that flow up and down the supply chain, through collaboration between partners, to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage" (ibid, p.1700). The vague definition of what characterizes a sustainable business enables interpretation, which opens up different approaches and integrations of practices to support a business statement of being a sustainable business. Many have focused on sustainable branding to bring forth emotional and functional characteristics that enable customers to put forward their preferences, style, attitude, and personality, creating additional value (Sharma, Kaur & Syan 2021). By intertwining sustainability into the brand identity, a company can improve the brand perception by those who value sustainability as they link the brand to sustainability concerns, thus improving its competitive advantage. Sustainability branding usually involves "developing and maintaining the identity of a particular service, product or business process that has a value addition in terms of ecological and social benefits to the customer. This also differentiates them from the competitors" (ibid).

Todeschini et al. (2017) and Pal and Gander (2018) are two studies which have used the business model canvas perspective to investigate businesses' sustainability approach and how they integrate it into the business. They found different perspectives and trends that impact the components in the business model canvas, for example, working with a circular economy,

lowsumerism, or slowing down the use of resources throughout the textile value chain (Todeschini et al. 2017; Pal & Gander 2018). Because the interest in sustainability has increased among stakeholders, more businesses try to differentiate their value proposition to be more sustainable and penetrate the green market with changed marketing strategies (Chen & Chang 2013). The importance of the marketing communications of the company to effectively spread their message of sustainability is no longer just about informing the customer, but a necessary factor in their selling point to stand out from others with similar positioning. In the fashion industry, it is common to communicate about production processes or the components of a garment to gain a competitive advantage. That has also called for marketing the achievements of sustainability (ibid). Unfortunately, some businesses communicate themselves to be more sustainable than they actually are as they want to take advantage of the rising green trend and claim that their products are sustainable (Grove, Fisk, Pickett & Kangun 1996). That has also become a problem for businesses regarding customers' trust in green products, as they start questioning what is truly sustainable (Chen & Chang 2013).

Studies have shown an increase in customers' willingness to purchase green products (Gazzola, Pavione, Pezzetti & Grechi 2020; Choi & Cheng 2015). This contradicts Todeschini et al.'s (2017) findings that fewer customers find sustainable fashion products appealing as they are often compromised on the design due to meeting sustainable values. It creates a conflict for fashion brands branding themselves with sustainable products whilst balancing customers' desire to look good (Bandyopadhyay & Ray 2020; Todeschini et al. 2017). Scholars have questioned whether fashion can be sustainable through the high speed of fashion trends and the manufacturing of products (Choi & Cheng 2015; Solér, Baeza & Svärd 2015). It is a vicious circle created by both businesses and customers and a paradox for sustainability issues, where the trends phase is determined by businesses' ability to meet customer behavior changes and customers' fear of missing out on trends (Bandyopadhyay & Ray 2020).

Due to the vicious circle, which contributes negatively to sustainable development (Bandyopadhyay & Ray 2020), more businesses have focused on the customer relationship component in the business model canvas (Todeschini et al. 2017; Pal & Gander 2018). It is an approach that builds customer relationships that would enhance customers' attention and awareness of the unsustainable behavior of their consumption patterns (Todeschini et al. 2017). The demand for fashion clothes increases, and consumption is predicted to increase further (Seara & Chalmer 2017). By encouraging customers to be conscious of their consumption patterns, brands hope to shift the industry's negative impacts on sustainability (Bandyopadhyay & Ray 2020). What is interesting is if those several brands' marketing strategies are enough for customers not to experience that they need to have it, i.e., a pressure to buy. This is, to our knowledge, not examined in academic literature, and is the gap that this thesis fills.

1.2 Problematizing sustainable fashion

The paradox that exists for many fashion brands is that despite branding themselves as a sustainable brand, they must partake in components of the fashion industry that do not reflect their values, to stay competitive within a dynamic and saturated market (Moore & Fairhurst 2003). There is a complexity in the fashion supply chain meaning suppliers have to adapt to fashion brands' lead time and price pressures because of the fear of missing out on an order. Fashion brands have to adapt to different timelines when the production line is available at a supplier. The most pressure on the production line is in connection with new seasons, as fashion brands do not want to risk producing products that do not follow the upcoming trends (Foerstl,

Azadegan, Leppelt, & Hartmann 2015; Köksal & Strähle 2021). This means that even if sustainability is intertwined in the brand's identity and practices, the conflict is that the business model of a sustainable fashion brand stays similar as any other as it is part of a fixed system, which relies on brands continuously releasing new collections.

Despite justifying why sustainable brands must act traditionally, their marketing activities still are formulated in a way that pushes customers to consume more, contributing to overconsumption. The question arises whether a business can find a balance between marketing, economic growth and sustainability, meaning operate in a sustainable manner, communicate it and grow, without contributing to customers' overconsumption. Constant pressure on customers to consume deriving from brands that promote sustainability is hypocritical as, according to Persson and Klintman (2021, p.515), "...environmental non-governmental organizations have an important role in promoting sufficiency-oriented lifestyles and culture."

Previous research has mainly focused on what companies can gain from using sustainable practices, for example, competitive advantages and targeting environmentally conscious customers (Seuring & Mueller 2008; Todeschini et al. 2017; Sharma, Kaur & Syan 2021). Previous studies have also examined positive and negative reactions to a growing consumer culture with outcomes such as consumer resistance and anticonsumption (Humphery 2019; Ah Fook & McNeill 2020). Amipur and Benlian (2015) examines the customer perspective on how purchase pressure cues on websites influence customers' deal choices. However, few have examined how sustainable brands' marketing contributes to purchase pressure that may lead to customers' overconsumption. To our knowledge, there is a gap in English and Swedish written literature concerning the relationship between sustainable fashion brands' marketing practices and customers' pressure to buy more constantly. Specifically for those brands that incorporate sustainability into their brand identity.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the relation between online communication in marketing and customers' purchase pressure. This study refers to communication as all strategic messages and media used by an organization to influence its perceived brand value (Keegan, Moriarty & Duncan 1992). This will be examined within sustainable brands that have a focus on changing customers' consumption patterns, with the assumption that they do not wish to create purchase pressure from a sustainability standpoint. The paradoxical situation that would occur is hypocritical as purchase pressure can be a factor in overconsumption as it stimulates consumption. By examining what causes purchase pressure we contribute by continuing to academically define the term.

1.3.1 Research questions

RQ1 will investigate how online marketing communication may contribute to purchase pressure. RQ2 tests the brands authenticity and genuineness as a factor to purchase pressure. With authenticity we refer to how the brand is true to its values and ethos regardless of the pressure to act otherwise. If the brands take responsibility for their actions and words. Genuineness is different as it implies the intention behind their actions and words, if they are sincere.

RQ 1: HOW CAN ONLINE MARKETING COMMUNICATION CONTRIBUTE TO THE PHENOMENON OF PURCHASE PRESSURE?

RQ 2: IN WHAT WAYS IS THE PURCHASE PRESSURE AFFECTED BY THE AUTHENTICITY AND GENUINENESS OF THE BRANDS COMMUNICATION?

1.3.2 Delimitations

To narrow the scope of study, delimitations have been made. As this study is built to analyze brands from the perspective of identifying purchase pressure and contradictions in terms of communication from sustainable brands, we recognize that the identified brand identity and purpose of their marketing by us may not align with the chosen company's view of the brand. This as it has been studied from the outside whilst brand identity is an insider construct that is not always communicated as that is the brand image (Nandan 2005). The selected brands descend from Europe (Sweden, Denmark and England) and The United States of America, meaning that the results of the study primarily looks at a western approach to sustainability, and therefore may not be globally applicable. The literature referred to in this study is limited to research published in English and Swedish.

2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter will give the reader an overview of marketing communication, and customer behavior. The relationship between these fields of research is significant in this study because purchase pressure is felt by the customer and therefore this perspective needs to be incorporated to explain the complexity of the phenomenon in how marketing contributes to it. Because this study focuses on the purchasing phase and not the consumption phase, the second part of this chapter will focus on customer behavior. However, most literature refers to consumer behavior because the most common intended purpose of fashion products are bought and used by the same individual.

2.1 Theory to understand marketing communication

Marketing's general role is to target customers and increase the demand for a company's products and services (Miklós-Thal & Zhang 2013). Therefore, a company's sales are determined not only by the brand's position in the market but also by how well the marketing grasps the psychology and behaviors of its target customers (Luo et al. 2021). To help customers recall and remember the brand, marketers communicate visual and verbal information in different ways, channels, and media, referred to as marketing communication (Kim & Lennon 2008). For the communication to be efficient and effective, the content of the communication needs to be in the desire of the target audience or that it creates a desire (ibid). All marketing is just information before the customer uses its cognitive processing, in which customers will react and have emotions regarding the information (Luo et al. 2021).

Marketing communication can be expressed online in different ways and channels (Kim & Lennon 2008), like websites, social media, e-mail and advertisements. The selection of channels is crucial to grasp the right target audience, and selecting the appropriate message for a chosen communication tool is a large task for when planning a marketing communication campaign (Hongcharu 2019). There are two different types of message variations. A cosmetic message variation means that the message is consistent with minor variations such as fonts, background colors or illustrations (Schumann, Petty & Clemons 1990). The contrary, substantive message variation, is when the message differentiates substantially between one another such as themes or features of the products to provide variety for the target audience (ibid). The choice of one single communication tool or multiple communication tools also has an impact on the message being communicated (Hongcharu 2019). The message variation and choice of communication tool(s) can impact the customer in a different way than they do alone. When using multiple communication tools the expectation is a synergistic effect and is more commonly known as integrated marketing communication (ibid).

A concept within marketing communication is content marketing, which is the process of creating content in genres that the target group finds appealing (Wall & Spinuzzi 2018). Content marketing is an indistinct concept, but it is a set of widely occurring marketing practices, especially online, of a company's communication. The focus of content marketing is not to sell a specific product or service but collectively create a sense which will influence a later purchase decision. It is free, informational, or entertaining content and gives brands the ability to have sovereignty over the customer. Customers may sense that they consume on their own merits. However, because the content is distributed across a wide variety of platforms, customers are

constantly in contact with the brand, which increases the probability of a purchase with the brand. Customers consume information about products and services without being told to purchase directly (ibid).

Because customers frequently use social media, it is easy for a business to promote their products, have closer relationships, and increase brand awareness and trust among customers, which further positively influences purchase intention (Hasan & Sohail 2021). Customers' interaction with social media can emphasize their perceived value of fashion products and enable them to purchase products more continuously (Hewei & Youngsook 2022). Social media, like Instagram, has enabled a new market platform for business which in literature is called "social e-commerce." Functions such as viewing products, adding to carts, and purchasing are similar to conventional e-commerce, but with the ability of customers to complete transactions through social media (Hewei & Youngsook 2022).

E-mails serve as an active, interactive, and personalized communication channel between a brand and its customers. It is suggested that e-mail marketing is the most powerful tool to increase sales, as the customers have already shown interest in the brand and subscribed to its newsletter (Hartemo 2016). The brand selects which type of content is included in the newsletters that they send to their subscribers. However, sometimes the customer can select which types of e-mails they want to receive from a company. They have the power to unsubscribe when they sense the marketing is irritating and irrelevant. A problem for marketers is intrusive unsolicited commercial e-mails (spam), which contributes to customers' sense of the channel becoming irritating with too many irrelevant newsletters (ibid). Spam has decreased the acceptance and e-mail marketing performance (Heinonen & Strandvik 2007), making e-mails an uncertain tool regarding how well marketing is received. The relevance of what is communicated determines the customer's response: the higher relevance the customer experiences, the more response (Micheaux 2011). Although frequency calls for a response, it also calls for customer resistance. Micheaux (2011) found that the more e-mails the customer received from one company, the less likely it was for the customer to open the following e-mail. The perceived pressure in frequency is, however, individually for customers. However, a company can only control its communication, not the overall volume in a customer's inbox (ibid).

2.1.1 Marketing communication to influence purchasing decisions

The behavior and psychology of a company's target customers has a central role in how the marketing communications are executed (Luo et al. 2021). Several strategies by brands consciously contribute to customers' feeling of "must-have" (Cruceanu 2016). One example is through limited product availability or using the phrase "buy now, gone tomorrow" (Amirpur & Benlian 2015; Courty & Nasiry 2016). Retailer sales tactics often raise customers' level of anxiety as many marketing strategies are built to pressure customers to buy and buy now (Workman & Lee 2019). By reducing customers' negative emotions (e.g. anxiety, distrust), and giving focus to encouraging attention to positive social or personal benefits of products, retailers could find benefits in more positive outcomes (ibid). In the online fashion retail environment using tools to influence purchasing decisions have become an innate component (Basu 2021). Financial tools such as buy-now-pay-later have become a standard, enabling customers to take higher risks regarding a purchase, as well as personalized recommendations (Ah Fook & McNeill 2020; Basu 2021).

Time pressure is usually considered a stress factor that can be used as a marketing strategy to change how customers behave regarding decision-making (Kim & Kim 2008; Basso et al. 2019; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016). While time pressure is theoretically defined as the perceived cost of time scarcity, this relies on subjective perceptions and how time pressure is induced (Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016). Time pressure induces stress and decreases the customer's information process, but the subjective pressure is dependent on the type of decision. Therefore, different types of time pressure may impact differently on customer behavior (Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016). Time pressure constraints can come in multiple forms; opening hours, promotion deadlines, or even the possibility of product stock out. Time pressure may cause customers to feel pressure to decide, and the amount of information they can process decreases (Iyer 1989). Restriction in time is a time pressure that may alter customers' preferences and behavior in which the customer might make quick decisions that do not satisfy their needs (Javed & Javed 2015).

A strategy to impact the decision making of customers is to put time pressure and limit their choice (Dhar & Nowlis 1999). The amount of information and choice overload can lead to decision avoidance and a delay in purchase (Ackerman & Gross 2003). Therefore, by limiting the choice and putting time pressure is a strategy to increase the likelihood of a purchase (Dhar & Nowlis 1999; Ackerman & Gross 2003). The lack of sufficient time to evaluate the options or the high perceived risk of regretting a purchase can also be a cause of a delay in purchase (Basso et al. 2019). As the increase of options in terms of variety have become virtually endless online and options continue to grow, customer decision-making becomes a demanding task. A limited amount of time with a more extensive assortment makes the customer's choice more difficult and constrained than having an extended amount of time with fewer choices. The amount of choice also impacts the level of satisfaction, and more excellent alternatives may provide customers with the feeling of less satisfaction (Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016). Choice overload when the time is restricted may generate the feeling of having rushed the evaluation of alternatives which can call for regret (Inbar, Botti & Hanks 2011). However, if the customer deems that situation offers enough time to choose despite the time limitation, deferral may decrease (Lin & Wu 2005). If the assortment is highly attractive, time pressure may cause the reversed effect on deferral (Dhar & Nowlis 1999).

Stock-out threats can create a quicker decision-making process when there are stock-out products in the assortment, but this can also happen with just a warning of stock-out (Ge, Messinger & Li 2009). Stock-out scenarios create an urgency to decide and a feeling of being forced to take action (Sloot, Verhoef & Franses 2005). This can be feeling forced to replace already chosen items that have sold out or canceling or deferring from the purchase altogether. Time pressure and stock-outs are different in the customer decision-making context at the deferral stage. Stock-outs increase deferrals as the sold-out product is perceived as superior to other available items. Time pressure scenarios such as set deadlines for sales have shown that these conditions increase buying intentions (Krishnan, Dutta & Jha 2013). Both stock-out threats and time pressure as marketing strategies have extreme effect in urging decision making in complex decision making such as large assortments (Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016).

To signal impending stockouts and influence demand some online retailers may display messages such as "limited availability" or "4 left in stock" (Park, Rabinovich, Tang & Yin 2019). The purpose of these messages are to provide customers with inventory information, and is common in inventory reductions where discounted products for limited time show inventory level to induce sales by showing customers that they could miss out on a product. By sharing inventory levels decreasing with customers significantly increases the frequency of purchase

(Cui, Zhang & Bassamboo 2019; Calvo, Cui & Wagner 2018). This is however not applicable to all online retail sales, and depends on the nature of the product. If the product is available for infinite time and is replenished compared to products that are not will attract bargain hunters that want to take advantage of the discounted price (Park et al. 2019) and are more likely to purchase if the inventory is low (Ferreira, Lee & Simchi-Levi 2016; Sodero, Rabinovich, Aydinliyim & Pangburn 2017).

A way for a business to increase its sales, provide information or bring attention to a product or a service is to communicate a promotion. Such could for example be free shipping, free returns or a discount code (Luo et al. 2021). Promotions can impact customer behavior, shorten decision-making time and judgment. The more threatened a customer's freedom of an action is, the more attractive the action is. Marketers can constrain customer decisions to motivate customers to take action, i.e. purchase, as the availability may be blocked (Devlin, Ennew, McKechnie & Smith 2007). However, that is only effective when the promotion is of interest by the customer (Luo et al. 2021). Free shipping can be used for businesses to increase their sales, because it encourages customers to take riskier purchases. It is a risk premium for customers compensating them for potential returns, as it does not cost anything to regret the purchase made online (Shehu, Papiés & Neslin 2020). However, to offer free shipping is not a premium for increased sales for the business. The return rate increases along with riskier purchases (ibid) and to offer free shipping at a certain purchase value increases the strategic returns, because customers strategically place more value in the order to get free shipping and then return the extra products (Lepthien & Clement 2019).

2.1.2 Marketing communication regarding sustainability

A study by Yan, Hyllegard and Blaesi (2012) found that customers formed positive attitudes towards apparel brands when an advertising message contained explicit information about environmentally friendly products. Explicit meaning in messages is essential, such as information about materials or production practices, as without it, customers are left confused about the validity of the marketing claims. However, it was also found that too much information may distract the customer from evaluating an advertisement (ibid). A message communicated through a marketing communication tool can have different persuasive strengths of argument, meaning argument quality, which plays a vital role in the receiver's perspective (Bhattacharjee & Sanford 2006; Coulter & Punj 2004). The argument must be strong for a message to generate favorable cognitive responses. A post full of inappropriate content, broken links, non-related topics, and ads can cause a pessimistic vision for receivers (Coulter & Punj 2004).

Sustainable brands must position themselves as authentic players in the green market as customer perceptions of the relationship between environmental sustainability and the brand is critical (Kim & Hall 2015). How the brands environmental strategy is communicated along their current brand image plays an important role whether customers will accept it as a good fit, and therefore the believability of the brand positioning as authentic (Kim & Hall 2015). If it seems authentic and sound to the customer, sound sustainable branding increases trust and brand loyalty (Kim & Kim 2008). However, sustainable brands must also distinguish themselves in the marketplace from other sustainable brands in order for customers to view the brands as distinctive (Kim & Hall 2015). This is important as customers are frequently being faced with sustainable marketing communication where the validity of the claims are confusing and unverifiable (Bonini & Oppenheim 2008; Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi 2012). As well as

customers being confused by sustainability marketing, sustainable businesses are still built as a generating company. So while delivering value in terms of creating sustainable products or having sustainable processes, they must also be a competitive player that generates revenues and profits for the company (Teece 2010).

In some cases where the validity of the communication comes to question the brand can be called out for greenwashing. De Freitas Netto, Sobral, Ribeiro and Soares (2020) studied the main concepts of greenwashing as there is no general definition due to its multidisciplinary characteristics. Greenwashing can but doesn't have to separate social and environmental issues. The main definitions of greenwashing involve deliberate corporate action of misleading elements. Genuine green companies can be called out for greenwashing for using unsubstantiated accusations and marketing. Greenwashing can also refer to product-level claims to firm-level claims (ibid).

2.2 Theory to understand customer behavior

Stress in combination with customer decisions can be experienced before and after consumption (Mick & Fournier 1998). Stress can occur through various stages in customer decision making where there are discrepancies between the customer's desire and the actual state of the stage (Moschis 2007). Stress can come from conflicts of needs (Mick & Fournier 1998). When shopping their desire to be sustainable may be in conflict with their wants, as the sustainable products may be less appealing as they are often compromised on the design due to meeting sustainable values (Todeschini et al. 2017). In the information seeking stage stress can be caused from feeling that there is not enough information or perceived lack of ability to choose wisely (Schwartz 2004; Viswanathan, Rosa & Harris 2005). However, too many options or information overload can increase the level of stress in the evaluation phase (Schwartz 2004). Stress that comes at the purchase stage may be related to product unavailability or payment of the products (Sujan, Sujan, Bettman & Verhallen 1999; Viswanathan, Rosa & Harris 2005). Stress can even be found at the post purchase stage from unexpected product performance or uncertainty of the product choice due to exposure to dissonant information (Duhackek 2005; Schwartz 2004). Moschis (2007) suggests that the greater the level of stress experiences at each stage of the decision process would increase the customer's engagement with the product or purchase.

2.2.1 Customers need and their view of self

Not only are customers purchasing decisions based on their need in having clothes to get dressed, but customers' need of being popular and their view of self has a positive influence on purchasing decisions of how and when fashion is purchased (Cengiz 2017; McNeill & Moore 2015). Customers with a high tendency to enhance their self-image tend to purchase new clothes more frequently than customers with less focus on the self (McNeill & Moore 2015). Consumption symbols can express an individual self, but they can also indicate group identity and express belonging to a group, examples of these symbols are clothes, cars and accessories. Groups, subcultures and human selves, and more, are in various ways defined by consumption objects (Belk 1988). In these various settings, the self can maintain multiple levels, in which the self construct is between an individual versus collective conception of self. In other words, by sharing the same consumption symbols, one expresses or defining group membership. The individual can still define an individual sense of self through other personal possessions, such

as clothing, and still be a member of a group (ibid). The need to be popular among customers, and their connection to purchasing of fashion apparel is not restricted towards one generation, but is present in all different age groups (Cengiz 2017).

The view of self regards humans self-image and how they would explain who they are. Belk (1988) explains that the view of self is largely connected with the view of the extended self, and it is sometimes hard to differentiate between what is extended and not. In the extended self, body parts, objects or places are viewed as a part of self and who they are, “We are what we have and possess” (ibid, p. 1). The identity of a human being may sometimes lie more in the extended self than in the unextended self. Having an object can sometimes allow humans to do things they otherwise would not, therefore, objects can be seen as a part of the extended self. The extended self is not limited to objects, but places and other persons can be included. It is not just about the view of “me” but also “mine” and how objects can either be controlled by or controlling human beings. The greater control an individual has over objects and possessions, the closer they are allied to the self. Making objects part of the extended self is a way for customers to enter a new chapter of life and make them something they were not before, (Belk 1988) “knowing who we are by observing what we have” (ibid, p.10). Attitudes towards money largely affects customers’ decision making process and purchase evaluation (Workman & Lee 2017). Money is a multifaceted symbol with implications such as social status, power, success to which the consumer can have complicated relation to. It has been found that trendsetters have scored higher in tendency to regret not purchasing something (ibid).

2.2.2 When marketing communication meets customer behavior

The impact fashion advertising has on customers is diverse. Advertising as a communication tool can help brands share their values (Lai & Perminiene 2020). The ideological values of the brand are often disguised in visually pleasing scenarios that create a perceptual reality that is related to individuals’ lives and become a contemporary ideological form (Rose 2001). The consumer storytelling theory suggests that people naturally think narratively as the mind stores large amounts of data which is accessed in episodes (Woodside, Sood & Miller 2008). Catharsis is another way customers interpret fashion advertising where customers experience the narratives and relive them by retelling the given stories (ibid). This means that by using narrativity that arouses emotion and memory through fashion advertising can have a framing effect on individuals that eventually shapes larger viewpoints of one's reality and influences behaviors (Lai & Perminiene 2020). While it was mentioned that fashion advertising is often attractive and persuasive, customers have built the act of receiving information through ads as a routine, and therefore are not seriously engrossed in the deep assumptions inside the advertisements (Rose 2001).

Customers spend a large amount of time on their smartphone devices and using different applications (apps). Using smartphones is a way for customers to relax or have something to do while waiting (Fuentes & Svingstedt 2017). A smartphone and its technology allows customers to have social interaction and to shop wherever they are (McLean, Osei-Frimpong, Al-Nabhani & Marriott 2020; Fuentes & Svingstedt 2017). The simplicity of reaching a retailscape through the phone can cause stress and anxiety for customers, but also customers overconsumption. It is connected with the possibility of continually being connected and the “fear of missing out” (Fuentes & Svingstedt 2017).

3 Method

The marketing communication's contribution to customer's purchase pressure has been investigated using a qualitative content analysis to fulfill the purpose of this study. An inductive approach has been used to ensure that the theoretical framework is relevant for the research area, which has made it possible to form the theory from the findings. The selection of data sources, data collection and analysis process is further described in this chapter.

The goal of this study is to describe and explain how online communication of sustainable brands contributes to purchase pressure, and by that also to contribute to continue to academically define the term. For that reason, an exploratory, inductive and qualitative approach has been used. While purchase pressure has been researched from a customer perspective as separate and individual emotions and reactions such as stress (Mick & Fournier 1998) and anxiety (Workman & Lee 2019), few theories acknowledge the company perspective and how the communication and marketing of sustainable brands affect the pressure. Therefore, the inductive approach is relevant for this study because of the young field where there are few established theories (Locke 2007). Theories in an inductive approach are built from the captured data. This study uses a qualitative research method because it enables the researchers to gather in-depth insights on topics that are not well understood. It is appropriate as one can capture meanings, emphasis, and themes of messages (communication and marketing) to understand the organization and process of how they are presented (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). It is essential to understand that the disadvantage of inductive research, and the small sample size of this research, is that they can lead to an association with uncertainty regarding the generalizability of the research (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2010). Therefore, it is important that future studies further explore the field and phenomenon in which this study was conducted.

3.1 Data sources and collection method

A list of sustainable apparel brands was created by searching the web on “sustainable apparel brands” and looking at fashion magazines’ and industry ranking lists. Brands that did not actively communicate about sustainability were removed. After this process, six brands were purposely chosen because of their approach and involvement in consumption behavior. After data collection, one of the brands was deselected due to the nature of its products, to give this study a focus on fashion brands. There are many sustainability-oriented shapes and different ways to influence customers’ attitudes and behaviors. The selected brands focus on consumer behavior in two ways; either to influence customers to consume less or to communicate about consuming better alternatives. The phenomenon under examination is based on brands creating constant pressure to buy more, which is why the selected brands to examine have an approach to sustainability based on buying less. Buying better is relevant as the basis of this approach is that the garments should be kept and worn longer instead of frequently replaced, which is why this approach is also included.

The importance of influencing consumer behavior is motivated due to the complexity and paradoxicality of communicating a change of consumption behavior but still marketing towards customer behavior and pushing for consumption. Because the research context already was in mind, purposive sampling can provide an understanding of a phenomenon of interest and find

accurate answers to the research questions (White & Marsh 2006; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim 2016). The small sample size is motivated as the study aims to reach depth in understanding of the phenomenon (Palinkas et al. 2015). The five brands and data sources are presented in table 1, and an extended introduction can be found in appendix 1.

Table 1. The selected brands and their data sources

Brand	Instagram	Website (www.)	Account website	Newsletter subscription
<i>Asket</i>	@asket	asket.com/se/	-	x
<i>Ganni</i>	@ganni	ganni.com/sv-se/home	x	x
<i>Reformation</i>	@reformation	thereformation.com	x	x
<i>Stella McCartney</i>	@stellamccartney	stellamccartney.com/se/en/	x	x
<i>Vivienne Westwood</i>	@viviennewestwood	viviennewestwood.com/en/	x	x

The data is driven by a web-based qualitative content analysis of the brands' marketing channels: websites, newsletters, and Instagram accounts. While collecting data, the material has been saved, described or recorded for safekeeping, as we noticed before collecting the data that several brands delete or change their material regularly. On Instagram, only posts and bios have been used for data collection, as it is challenging to secure and be sure all data is captured between the collection period from other types of content. During the data gathering, we identified that all brands except one had the function of creating an account on their website. As that can reveal important data, we created accounts on those websites.

E-mails were received in one inbox, which both researchers used to analyze. The accounts at websites were created with the same e-mail address concerning capturing data, which both researchers had access to. Instagram was visited through our personal Instagram accounts, and websites were visited through our personal laptops. Because both of the researchers' computer settings were in Swedish, online cookies and settings on websites can affect the data. Websites in this context are the only platform where the settings can be arranged differently depending on these components (Light, Burgess & Duguay 2018).

Content analysis reveals meanings and concepts embedded in verbal, written, or visual messages (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). It is a flexible method as the meaning of the messages could either be examined individually or in a combination (White & Marsh 2006). For this study, it was essential to analyze them both separately and together, as it could reveal essential data. McMillian (2000) explains that content analysis can be executed with online content found on the world wide web. Still, the processes must be more carefully conducted to analyze and interpret data, as online content is not constant and may change. The data collection and analysis period occurred between 7th and 28th March 2022.

3.2 Analytical process

The content analysis was carried out in three phases. Phases one and two were conducted individually, and phase three was conducted together to unite the data. The coders used the same method, looking at the same type of channel on the same day to ensure that both gathered

and interpreted the same kind of data. The data was put in a separate sheet, shared in phase three.

The published content and functions were analyzed in the first phase to identify themes, and the channels were visited several times under the analysis period to reveal if any content had been changed. The second phase involved open coding, with several steps of taking notes and writing headings. In phase three, the individual findings were merged and compared to generate concepts for the formulation of a general description of the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs 2008; White & Marsh 2006). In phase three when the findings were compared between the researchers, it was found that the findings were interpreted in the same way, which increases the trustworthiness of the results (Krippendorff 2011).

4 Findings and Analysis

This chapter provides the findings from the collected data where it has been analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework. The section is divided to discuss the two research objectives of the study.

Many marketing strategies are designed to pressure customers to buy and buy now which causes customers' level of anxiety to increase (Workman & Lee 2019). Cruceanu (2016) also stated that some strategies are consciously built to contribute to customers' feeling of "must-have-it." Workman and Lee (2019) found that retailers might benefit from reducing negative emotions such as anxiety and distrust and bringing focus to positive aspects of their products. Based on these theories, under the pretense that purchase pressure is a negative emotion for the customer, it might be beneficial for retailers to bring attention to. This could be exemplified in Asket's marketing strategies across all examined channels, they brought little attention to customers needing to buy which can create negative pressures. Instead they used their communication channels to shed light on explicit qualities of their products such as material compositions or company practices, which Yan, Hyllegard and Blaes (2012) explain creates positive attitudes.

It could also be argued that different customers may be more susceptible to negative emotions when faced with a purchase decision. Workman and Lee (2017) found that customers' tendency to regret a purchase in their post purchase evaluations is related to their attitudes towards money and a factor that plays a role in the decision to purchase or not. What could be implied is the relation between regret and purchase pressure, that the fear of regretting not purchasing something may be felt by the customer as a pressure to buy. Their study found that trendsetters scored higher in their tendency to regret not purchasing something (ibid). That could mean that certain shoppers may be more exposed to purchase pressure based on their relation to fashion. Trendsetters could sense more purchase pressure based on their need to be fashion forward. Reluctant adopters may either not be as susceptible to purchase pressure based on that they do not feel the need to wear the latest fashion, or they might feel it later than trendsetters as they feel that they are pressured into following society as new trends become more widely accepted.

Research objective 1: How online marketing communication could contribute to the phenomenon of purchase pressure.

Content distribution

The findings that emerged from analyzing three different communication channels, indicate that it was common for all brands to distribute the same content or theme across one or more channels. An example of publishing the same theme over a short period of time on a single communication tool was Stella McCartney that consecutively posted runway images of their AW2022 collection on Instagram. The other identified type of content distribution was when two or more channels were synced which all brands utilized, indicating that the brands work with integrating their marketing communication tools to create a synergistic effect (Hongcharu 2019).

The distribution of content over the same or different channels can be drawn to Wall and Spinuzzi's (2018) argument that content marketing builds awareness around the brand or a product, and Micheaux (2011) argues that its frequency ensures that the message is received. Reformation frequently used the same terminology and slogans across its channels, which is a

way to make customers more aware of the brand and likelihood to recall brand or products (Kim & Lennon 2008; Wall & Spinuzzi 2018; Hasan & Sohail 2021). Receiving large amounts of information on, for example, social media on a smartphone, can cause stress and pressure to purchase, due to the accessibility to the retail scene and always being connected due to fear of missing out (McLean et al. 2020; Fuentes & Svingstedt; Schwartz 2004). This could indicate that following many fashion brands on social media and subscribing to different newsletters could have a connection to purchase pressure as viewers are continuously being exposed to the same campaigns, products and imagery whilst the level of accessibility plays a role simultaneously (Hongcharu 2018; McLean et al. 2020; Fuentes & Svingstedt). Micheaux (2011) also argued that the level of acceptance of information is dependent on each individual. This means that the level of purchase pressure perceived is directly affected by the individual acceptance of information.

There could also be a point in that if the brand creates a synergistic effect through integrated marketing communications (Hongcharu 2019), could increase purchase pressure. During the data collection period, Stella McCartney consecutively posted runway images of their AW2022 collection on Instagram, as often as seven posts in one day, with each post containing more pictures per post than the last. This type of message variation falls under cosmetic message variation which means that there are minor visual variations between each post (Schumann, Petty & Clemons 1990), which makes it easier for customers to recall (Kim & Lennon 2008), but also is an extremely consistent communication that could have an impact on the customer in a negative way by causing stress from too many choices and information overload (Schwartz 2004). They also sent clothing from the collection for the audience to wear at the event and shared images of this on Instagram. This means that followers could be exposed to the collection on multiple platforms and possibly multiple profiles of content creators on the same platform, creating multiple dimensions of the marketing strategy. This could make the viewer feel like they are hounding them, as Wall and Spinuzzi (2018) argues that by using the same kind of content on multiple channels increases customers' awareness of the brand.

The display of newness

Along with how content is distributed through channels, the frequency in how newness is encouraged could be a factor that influences purchase pressure. Connecting this to content distribution, creating content with the same theme but a variety of products, indicates the desire to build awareness of several different products (Wall & Spinuzzi 2018). On the other hand, using the same content could be a strategy to not contribute to creating new needs. Vivienne Westwood only posted one picture per post on Instagram, and frequently posted the same outfit multiple times compared to other brands that nearly always posted new things. This creates accountability for sustainable brands not creating new needs. Therefore, how often newness is presented could contribute to purchase pressure based on the pretense that exposing customers to new products will make them desire them. One finding connected to purchase pressure was creating content across channels to inform about when new products are available. An example:

“Every week we put out new, limited-edition collections.” – Reformation

Not only does Reformation have 52 releases per year, they also offer products of limited availability which can cause stress for the customer (Sujan et al. 1999). Every week the customer gets presented with newness and might feel stressed that they might miss out on a product they want. To present newness is one way for brands to stay relevant in the fashion industry, as trends and customer behaviors change (Bandyopadhyay & Ray 2020). However,

the frequency of presenting it also impacts how fast customers' behavior changes. By simply constraining the frequency of newness, the less business would impact the phase of changes in customer behavior, which would lead to less purchase pressure as customers would sense less need of newness (Cengiz 2017; McNeill & Moore 2015).

Another way to encourage customers to buy something new is to send reminders of certain occasions. In those situations, the content is essential to how purchase pressure is perceived (Micheaux 2011). An e-mail sent by Reformation implying that customers should buy new clothes for the weekend with a link labeled "in case of weekends" by using the citation below:

"You have weekend plans now, spend some quality time with these, invite people to join or don't,"

Connecting this to customers' view of self and individuals' needs of being popular (Belk 1988), encouraging customers to buy something new for the weekend can be stressful (Goodwin, Smith, & Spiggle 1990) and cause internal purchase pressure as proposed by Cruceanu (2016) as they want to be "up-to-date." However, it is dependent on each individual.

All brands after two weeks had their websites checked to see if they had been updated, and all brands had updated their landing pages displaying new products from the last visit. Websites could have a new arrivals page or mark products which are new, making it easier for the customer to be oriented with which products are new for the season. Another way to facilitate newness is a filtering function of how customers view products; different product pages could be sorted by newness or popularity/bestsellers, which gives the customer further indications of what is new or popular in the season. Ganni also indicated if a product was new by placing a symbol signaling if it was new on each product image. Examples of how the brands promote newness:

"New Arrivals, New Generation." - Stella McCartney

"You probably need something new." - Reformation

If customers have high involvement in fashion, the way businesses select to present their new releases could contribute to internal purchase pressure. The brand uses external cues to influence the internal pressure of their need to stay updated (Belk 1988; Cruceanu 2016). The level of involvement as well as relation to fashion may also affect how customers browse products. For example, trendsetters might wish to scroll amongst new arrivals as they desire to stay updated, and therefore are more willing to spend time looking compared to those that are shopping per necessity. Displaying what is new through filtering functions or pushing new arrivals pages compared to not making new arrivals accessible and categorizing products by use can have different effects on how the website is navigated. That appeared with the brand Asket; instead of pushing newness, they named their product page "the permanent collection" and categorized it by gender and items as well as it was not possible to filter products by their arrival. The example with Asket, shows that other businesses which use the filtering function can be attempting to influence the internal purchase pressure among customers in the way they select to present their new products, not just on social media, but in the way they facilitate newness through functions.

Customers' relation to fashion and clothes is sometimes more than just getting dressed. Belk (1988) explains that it can be used to express themselves, either their individuality or as members of a group. The way businesses use marketing communication to target different

customers and groups could be implied to play on the extended relationship of expressing themselves, i.e. influencing the internal purchase pressure. The higher involvement in specific contexts an individual is could influence how they choose to express themselves (Cengiz 2017; McNeill & Moore 2015), as mentioned earlier with trendsetters. The trendsetter may sense that they need to wear the latest fashion as they view themselves or as part of a fashion-forward group. One finding relating to this is how brands dress guests of a fashion show in pieces shown on the catwalk, which are later shared on social media. The guest who is wearing them could be a person who is seen as a fashion-forward, and people who view themselves as the same might feel that they need to have this garment (Belk 1988; Cengiz 2017; McNeill & Moore 2015). In this context, the practice executed by a brand to dress guests and hope for them to share it on social media could contribute to customers' internal purchase pressure.

Rhetorics in marketing communication

Businesses can try to induce purchases by impacting decision making through using time pressure, and change the way consumers behave by creating stress (Dhar & Nowlis 1999; Kim & Kim 2008; Basso et al. 2019). Findings indicate that using the phrase "shop now" compared to "shop women" could be a way to manage customers' subjective perceptions of time and stress customers' fear of missing out. As in relation with Godinho, Prada and Garrido (2016) findings, influencing customers' subjective perceptions of time, is a way to add stress as a factor in customer's decision making. Two examples where Reformation used time pressure rhetorics in their communication:

"products sell out super fast", - Reformation
and

"they usually sell out in two seconds so maybe start shopping". - Reformation

Using the word now or indicating limited product availability or product choice impacts customers' subjective perception of time and the sense that they need to decide quickly (Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016; Iyer 1989; Dhar & Nowlis 1999; Park et al. 2019), which further can be argued to influence external purchase pressure. Sharing information of inventory levels decreasing significantly increases the frequency of purchase (Cui, Zhang & Bassamboo 2019; Calvo, Cui & Wagner 2018). These findings could further be connected to Schwartz (2004) and Viswanathan, Rosa and Harris (2005) results that companies use these strategies to affect the rational thinking process of what customers need. Because customers feel that time is constrained, the amount of information they can process decreases (Iyer 1989).

All brands' Instagram accounts were linked to Instagram's social e-commerce function. It is a function that enables businesses to tag products in posts that customers can purchase directly through the function (Hewei & Youngsook 2022). There was different type of terminology regarding the urgency to shop and how purchasing functions were used in these situations. For example, if the wording was related to the present, there were often functions to purchase available, such as Instagram's banner "view store." In situations where the wording was related to the future, the communication related more to the preparation of purchase. Comparing these examples, there is a difference in how the urgency of time is related to customer behavior and their fear of missing out (Amirpur & Benlian 2015; Courty & Nasiry 2016). When businesses emphasize and facilitate the use of purchasing functions for customers, that could be argued to be an external factor influencing purchase pressure.

The exposure and use of purchasing functions

The use of the social e-commerce function and stressing language revealed a pattern regarding reminders to buy. By regularly using the e-commerce function and in combination writing “shop now” as a caption, customers get reminded to purchase as they are exposed more frequently to purchasing functions than before this function was developed (Hewei & Youngsook 2022), which could have an influence on purchase pressure. Asket was the brand that most regularly used purchasing functions through their Instagram. Each of Asket’s photos in a post showcasing a product was tagged with a link to their Instagram e-commerce. Asket drew much more attention towards using the function to purchase compared with Reformation. During two weeks, Reformation only utilized the social e-commerce function at three posts containing multiple photos but used the function on the second or fourth photo. The frequent use of the social e-commerce function in combination with the brand’s intention with the platform could influence purchase pressure (Kim & Lennon 2008; Luo et al. 2021).

The payment methods offered can also affect how a brand can create a time pressure. All brands had the option to buy through a third party payment provider that offers a “buy now, pay later” function. This means that the brand enables the customer to buy things immediately, rushing the need to own something that they pay for later. This supports Ah Fook and McNeill’s (2011) statement that financial tools with “buy now, pay later” are common in the online fashion retail environment. This type of tool enables customers to make higher risk and impulse purchases more often, and the tendency of purchasing is greater compared with the customers who do not use such a tool (Ah Fook & McNeill 2020). The availability of financial tools may also increase the purchase pressure when used in combination with limited availability or a stock out threat. This is because online marketing activities that promote the availability of financial tools which act on customers impulsive purchasing combined with different indicators such as “low stock” or “1 item left” creates a greater likelihood of customers purchasing products as they do not want to miss out on an offer. The marketing regarding expenses increases the possibility for purchasing even more, since customers keep track of expenses in which they can save money (Fuentes & Svingstedt 2017). It could also be used to decrease the stress that may arise at the purchasing stage when paying for products (Viswanathan, Rosa & Harris 2005).

Creating a sense of urgency through limited availability, stock out threats and through time limits

The findings revealed that all fashion brands inform about stock availability on the website. When the customer is about to select the size of a garment to put in the shopping cart, different ways of informing about size availability were found; only stating limited availability, when there is just one left, or specifying the quantity from five and down. One way was to visualize this with the standard view of product pages when selecting sizes. Another way was to inform about it when selecting a size. As mentioned before, limited availability can create a stock-out scenario where the customer feels an urgency to decide and feels forced to act (Sloot, Verhoef & Franses 2005). Stock-out-threats can create a quicker decision-making process when there are stock-out products in the assortment, but this can also happen with just a warning of stock-out (Ge, Messinger & Li 2009). In this scenario, when there is an external factor (showing limited availability or threat of stock-out) causing pressure for the customer, it can be argued being an external purchase pressure.

Stock-outs can create a feeling of being forced to replace already selected items that have sold out or canceling or deferring from the purchase altogether (Krishnan, Dutta & Jha 2013). Time pressure and stock-outs are different in the customer decision-making context at the deferral

stage. Stock-outs increase deferrals as the sold-out product is perceived as superior to other available items. While time pressure scenarios such as set deadlines for sales have shown that these conditions increase buying intentions (ibid). Both stock-out threats and time pressure as marketing strategies have extreme effect in urging decision making in complex decision making such as large assortments (Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016). It can be argued that how and when the limited availability is visualized can affect the level of purchase pressure. A brand that does not inform limited availability until the customer presses a size may not create an urgent pressure to buy compared to showing the availability of all sizes as a standard view, as the customer evaluates the product in their own time without any influence of stock-availability. If the customer is reminded of the limited availability while evaluating the product, they might be influenced to decide quickly. On the other hand the customer may feel stress due to not having enough information to make a decision, such as wondering if they will miss out if they do not purchase immediately as they do not know the exact meaning of limited availability (Schwartz 2004).

Another example is how the information follows the customer through the shopping experience. It was found that stock availability can be reminded of while proceeding to the shopping cart and the checkout page. These reminders can cause stress in the purchasing process, as they fear they will lose the product (Sloot, Verhoef & Franses 2005). However, as mentioned before, it might be different if the product has been reserved. This could indicate that brands that do not inform about product stock may not be contributing to purchase pressure as Ge, Messinger and Li (2009) mentioned that just a warning of stock-out can create a quicker decision-making process. Because the customer already has evaluated the purchase before it sold out, it does not contribute to purchase pressure. Previous literature has found that time pressure in combination with choice overload might cause stress, as well as if the customer feels that there is not sufficient time to evaluate their purchase they might feel a loss or future regret over a quickly made choice (Ackerman & Gross 2003; Basso et al. 2019; Inbar, Botti & Hanks 2011).

Another way of influencing the sense of urgency for customers was found when businesses used time limits. An example of this situation was when adding products to the shopping cart at Ganni's website; the customer got notified about a 15-minute reservation of the products added. As mentioned, communicating a time limit is a way to alter customers' preferences and behavior (Javed & Javed 2015; Dhar & Nowlis 1999). Either the customer could sense an urgency to decide as they might lose the product after 15 minutes and the time pressure creates a scenario where the customer convinces themselves that they like the product (Iyer 1989; Javed & Javed 2015), or they could sense that they are given time to think through the purchase as being affected during the time limit by a potential stock-out is unlikely due to the product being reserved (Sloot, Verhoef & Franses 2005; Lin & Wu 2005). Creating a calmer shopping experience for the customer could decrease perceived purchase pressure. A scenario where a reservation could create a sense of less stress is when the customer adds the last available size in their cart, and therefore the purchase pressure decreases as the time to evaluate the purchase increases. However, if the customer might feel that the reservation time is too constrained to decide, that could instead lead to purchase pressure from feeling that they might lose the product if they do not decide within the reservation time.

Javed and Javed's (2015) study found that restriction in time is a time pressure that may alter customers preferences and behavior in which the customer might make quick decisions that do not satisfy their needs. To put this into perspective, if time pressure affects what the customer prefers at the moment of purchase, for example a sale with limited time, the customer makes a quickly made decision and when they get home they realize that they regret their choice. It

could be said that the manipulation of the situation by the brand pressured the customer to purchase as the variation of pressure cues creates a situation that the customer can not handle, as experiencing stress at multiple stages of the decision making process may increase the involvement with the product or purchase (Moschis 2007). The point being that the marketing strategies of these situations are responsible for the purchase pressure felt by the customer, i.e. external purchase pressure, whilst the customer feels guilt as they are the ones that bought something that they might not like and therefore not use, making the purchase unsustainable. The sense of urgency to decide in combination with time limits could be connected to Basso et al.'s (2019) findings, where this kind of situation could instead lead to deferral. The deferral affects the customer's sense that the purchase could be a future regret because of insufficient time to evaluate the purchase.

The pressuring effect of reminders and how it can reverse deferral

One finding that could cause external purchase pressure is the e-mails received following abandoned shopping carts. These were direct personal reminders of what had been left in the carts and were found where accounts were created at the websites and baskets had not been reserved. Businesses send these kinds of e-mails in the hope of selling products that a customer has already shown interest in (Hartemo 2016).

“A little reminder from Vivienne Westwood, We noticed you still have some items left in your basket and left our site without completing your purchase.” - Vivienne Westwood

“Forget something? These items are still waiting for you in your basket. Complete your order now to make sure you don't miss out.” - Stella McCartney

With the nature of e-commerce, the company often does not know why the customer left without finishing the purchase. However, as Luo et al. (2021) argues, being reminded of products one has shown interest in increases the likelihood of proceeding with the purchase because the customer might feel that they otherwise will lose products they were interested in. As a contrary; Ganni did not send reminders, and that can be as they only saved the cart for 15 minutes, and Asket saved the cart at the device from which the website was visited but did not send reminders. This could be a way for brands to avoid influencing purchase pressure as whilst subscribers have consented to e-mail marketing, the channel can become an irritation for the consumer if the content does not match the expectation of the subscriber (Hartemo 2016). Despite that e-mail marketing has shown to be effective, the acceptance of e-mails have decreased due to spam (Hartemo 2016; Heinonen & Strandvik 2007).

Another form of identified reminders, except the e-mails sent to remind about the cart, were consented reminders. Those were received following a request to get a notification about when a product is available. All brands offered to send such reminders in combination that the product would be available soon or out of stock. Such notification is sent upon customers' request. However, it can cause stress for the customer as their subjective feeling of pressure increases because of the limited availability and their fear of the product going out of stock again (Ge, Messinger & Li 2009; Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016). The function could be seen as an external factor which influences purchase pressure. An example Asket does to calm customers' fears of losing a product is offering to notify them when size is back in stock as well as information when the product is expected to be restocked. Such information extends the decision process and decreases customers' subjective feelings of pressure (Javed & Javed 2015; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016).

Frequency is not just about how often brands push marketing activities but how they facilitate them. Facilitation of frequency can come in the form of functions, which has been discussed as an external factor which influences purchase pressure. For example, creating an account or a wishlist that makes it easier to return to a product. Vivienne Westwood and Reformation create the opportunity to like products already on the browser page. In comparison to Stella McCartney, where one must enter the product page to add a product to the wishlist, the viewer has to engage with the product more to create a way to return to the product later. Ganni and Asket did not offer a wish list. The location of the function may also play a role in influencing purchase pressure. Stella McCartney not only offered the function to like an item on the product page but also added the same function in the shopping cart. Here the brand creates an opportunity for the customer to decide not to purchase the product but add it to their wishlist where they can return to the product later.

The effect promotions have on the message

The location of promotion is one context found that could impact the purchase pressure of customers. Several websites used the top of page location to inform customers about a promotion. One example is Stella McCartney, which displayed “free shipping on all orders” at the top of the website and in every newsletter. To make sure customers do not miss out on this information, they also include it throughout the shopping process. The informational text changes the further the customer continues the shopping process. Once the customer gets to the shopping cart and check-out page, they are informed of “free shipping and free returns.” Reformation tends to increase customers’ fear of losing a product because of their limited availability and language in reminding customers that they are limited (Devlin et al. 2007). The tagline “easy come, easy go” next to their free shipping and free returns information are examples of such strategies to constrain and narrow customer decisions (ibid). Luo et al. (2021), however, also argues that these types of promotions are only effective when it is of interest to the customer.

The promotion in this scenario, i.e. free shipping, can cause purchase pressure for the customer. Customers use free shipping as a way to compensate for potential returns; as they have not paid something for the shipping, they can purchase something and have a more extended evaluation process with minimum risk of losing the product they ordered (Devlin et al. 2007; Shehu, Papies & Neslin 2020). Customers assess risky choices drawing on both cognitions and feelings (Shehu, Papies & Neslin 2020). Limited availability might block the customer’s freedom of purchasing a product they want, which motivates customers to take action (Devlin et al. 2007). The promotion of free shipping can shorten decision-making time and judgment, as they are given more time to evaluate the purchase as it is shipped home and can make riskier purchases (Devlin et al. 2007; Shehu, Papies & Neslin 2020).

Brands can also offer free shipping when their purchase value has reached a specific value. Such an offer may increase customers’ overconsumption to reach the level as they did not plan to purchase some products but do not want to miss out on the offer (Shehu, Papies & Neslin 2020). In those situations, the company is acting on customers’ fear of missing out, which has been mentioned before as an external factor to purchase pressure. However, offering free shipping is not premier for increased sales for the business, as customers might send back the products strategically purchased to reach the level of free shipping (Lepthien & Clement 2019). Therefore, one way for companies to decrease the strategic returns is to offer free returns. If not reached the specific purchase value, the customer is not taking any high risks of regretting the

purchase (ibid). Customers can easily purchase products they fear missing out on, with minimum risk in potential returns. Promotions have in marketing served as a tool for providing information and attracting attention toward customers (Luo et al. 2021). Stating free shipping and sending reminder e-mails in combination is most likely to be effective and influence the purchase decision if the interest in the products reminded about is still there. The data analysis found that especially when connected to the feeling of getting something for free could impact the amount of purchase pressure this type of communication causes.

Several situations were found where brands use alarming colors to enhance the information. An example of this was in combination with informing about limited availability or time limits, red or yellow on the text was used. For the brand to use contrasting colors, or ways where information stands out can be connected to Mahmood, Go and Sismeiro (2016) arguments that it increases the possibility of the customer not missing it. Furthermore, it is a way for brands to hope for customers' response. If the information is of high relevance for the customer, the more response (Micheaux 2011).

An example of a situation where the message stands out from the other information is by using "pop-up boxes". Ganni placed a sizable yellow square in the bottom left corner of every webpage with "Want 10% off?" as a promotion to generate more subscribers to the newsletter. The box covered website content, meaning the viewer had to engage with the promotion, either clicking on or down the box, to continue viewing the site fullscreen. The location regards not only where it is placed on the page, but how it is a reminder throughout the shopping process, being visible at different locations if the viewer does not discard the message. The frequency of this alert message may either be annoying for the customer, or as a positive reminder of a promotion which can be used if the customer intends to purchase something (Luo et al. 2021). Signing up for e-mail for free shipping, could be a task that the customer does after they have decided to purchase something, and performs this task to save money (Luo et al. 2021; Shehu, Papies & Neslin 2020).

Research objective 2: How purchase pressure is affected by the authenticity and genuineness of the brands communication.

All companies, sustainability interested or not, must make a profit and have the general goal to grow (Teece 2010). However, if a brand makes unsubstantiated and misleading marketing claims about its sustainability characteristics they may be called out for greenwashing (de Freitas et al. 2020). But, if a brand makes supported claims regarding sustainability practices they are still marketing to sell and make money. So if this is the case, there may be situations where the authenticity of the communication can be questioned as having economic priorities. There were several situations that arose in the findings where the relevance for the communication could be questioned.

Relevance of marketing

Relevance of marketing was derived from analyzing marketing communication that did not fit the story. An example of this was Reformation; they sent out a promotional e-mail labeled "wear some jeans" with different denim looks throughout the e-mail except at the bottom, where it seems as if they had almost filled the blank space with a small section of "spring shoes." The relevance of marketing refers to the bigger picture of what is appropriate. Relevance can be discussed as the strength of argument, meaning that communication in marketing can have

different persuasive strengths which affect the recipient's perspective (Bhattacharjee & Sanford 2006; Coulter & Punj 2004). The previously mentioned e-mail could be an example of a weak argument from the brand, and therefore may seem random and irrelevant by customers. If the communication seems ingenuine, the customer may question if the brand is staying true to their values or if they are solely seeking economic profit (Lai & Perminiene 2020). It can be pointed out that spam e-mail decreases the acceptance and performance of e-mail marketing (Heinonen & Strandvik 2007). What that could mean is that if the relevance, or strength of argument, is so low that the customer doesn't agree that they signed up to receive that type of information, then the authenticity of the brand could be compromised. This is because the brand could be perceived as an aggressive marketer which the customer does not relate to and therefore it could have an effect on purchase pressure, the pressure coming from a point of view that the customer feels like the brand is provoking them with irrelevant information.

What could be an attempt to strengthen the argument and create content of relevance is Ganni having two different Instagram accounts. While Ganni's official account focuses on brand awareness and product content, they shared their sustainability report and frequently discussed sustainability in their post captions. Their bio was "Confidence, Community, Responsibility #GANNIGirls likeshop.me/ganni." Their other account, @ganni.lab, is more information-heavy in their sustainability work and targets a customer willing to accept more information, therefore having a higher level of relevance and forming positive attitudes. This is because customers form positive attitudes towards apparel brands when an advertising message contains explicit information about environmentally friendly products (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi 2012). As Ganni had a separate dedicated account for their sustainability work, creating an opportunity for explicit messages in their communications, such as information about materials and production practices, this raises the genuineness of their marketing claims at the same time as Ganni stays away from making strong statements and uses words such as responsibility instead of sustainability, as seen in the quote below. This type of sound branding increases customer trust and brand loyalty (Kim & Hall 2015). At the same time, the information does not distract the customer from evaluating an advertisement. They keep a lower amount of information on their official account and low-level product advertisements on their @ganni.lab account (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi 2012).

"We don't identify as a sustainable brand, because at its core fashion thrives off newness and consumption, which is a major contradiction to the concept of sustainability. That's the honest truth. Instead, we're focused on becoming the most responsible version of ourselves."
- Ganni

Another example where a brand's communication fits the brand image that supports them as an authentic sustainable brand, was Stella McCartney which rarely linked products on the Instagram posts to purchase and used a language that was informative about the products instead of a rhetoric to sell (Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi 2012). To exemplify the rhetoric, when referring to specific products, they wrote "link in bio," meaning the customer must actively go and look if they are interested. This allows the customer to choose, compared to offering multiple options to purchase immediately.

The relevance of marketing can also be connected to the genuineness of their ethos. As previously stated, a brand's frequency of newness focuses on bringing sustainability into its brand identity. When there is a disconnect between what they say and do, it may become confusing for the customer (Kim & Hall 2015). The disconnect is based on the credibility of their claims and the brands' success in positioning themselves as authentic players in the

“sustainable” brand market (Kim & Hall 2015). An example of this was on the landing page at Vivienne Westwood’s website, where the quote below appeared next to new arrivals:

"I'm a fashion designer and activist. You all know what i'm up to, I use fashion as a vehicle for activism to stop climate change and mass extinction of life on earth" - Vivienne Westwood

While this contradicts the point they are making by trying to sell new items, this is the brand’s way of storytelling and a communication tool to share their values. Looking at how customers could view this, fashion advertisements are often attractive and persuasive. However, the act of looking at advertisements is routine for customers, and they often are not deeply engaged with the meanings behind advertisements (Rose 2001). Customers naturally think narratively (Woodside, Sood & Miller 2008) and will pick up what is being bluntly said before acknowledging the relation between newness and sustainability. This means that even if certain strategies can be built to create purchase pressure cues, it is not certain that customers will feel the purchase pressure as they are not deeply engaged with the communication or only picking up narrative stories. As argued by Woodside, Sood and Miller (2008) customers will register the brand’s communication of the quote before its irony. Therefore the relevance of the marketing for brands engaged in bringing sustainability into their brand identity or storytelling depends on the engagement of the brand’s customers.

There is also a point to not engaging customers too much with marketing of sustainable achievements as it has been shown that customers too frequently receive sustainability-marketing communication, which makes them question the validity of the claims (Bonini & Oppenheim 2008; Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi 2012). To be successful, a sustainable brand must distinguish itself in the marketplace from other sustainable brands which also can be seen as the brand’s ability to be perceived as original (Bonini & Oppenheim 2008; Yan, Hyllegard & Blaesi 2012). Originality is important for authenticity as originality could be interpreted as a brand that creates, and doesn’t just follow. Not being a follower refers to their commitment to being true to their values regardless of the pressure to act otherwise. If the brand is original it also shows that they may be perceived as sincere by standing by their word, creating credibility to their genuineness.

Attempt to sell other items than of relevance

Attempt to sell items other than of relevance was another factor found in multiple spaces that could be an external factor influencing purchase pressure. For sustainability brands, selling items other than of relevance may be paradoxical as they are creating new needs rather than satisfying existing ones. As previously mentioned in RQ1, an experiment of leaving products in the cart unattended, resulted in brands sending reminder e-mails about the unfulfilled order. Communicating “you might also like” or “model is wearing” has a relevance for the customer as the viewer has shown interest in the product, this was done by all brands. Personalized recommendations have become an integral part of the online shopping scene, and customers may benefit from this function as it may aid their shopping experience (Basu 2021). To exemplify, a customer may press a product image of a top as they liked the skirt the model is also wearing, where personalized recommendations can direct them to the skirt. This has been shown that personalized recommendations significantly increase sales (ibid).

Besides reminding of the products placed in the cart via e-mail, Vivienne Westwood also included pictures of other products not placed in the cart as “other products you might like.” While it has been argued that it could be perceived as of relevance, it could also be argued to

be the opposite. The brand's intention with this could be argued to try to sell more products than what the customer had planned to buy. Suppose these other products seem like inappropriate content, ads, or non-related topics, the customer can build a negative perception of the brand (Coulter & Punj 2004). If the customer perceives the message as inappropriate, that may impact the purchase pressure because the customer does not experience a "must-have" (Cruceanu 2016). However, if the argument of the communication generates favorable cognitive responses (Coulter & Punj 2004), that may be an external factor which influences the purchase pressure. To communicate "other products you might like" is paradoxical in the case of Vivienne Westwood because their approach to sustainability is to encourage customers to consume less, see citation below. The customer had not tried to buy these products, or expressed interest in them so by communicating this way they compromise their authenticity by going against their values and break their genuineness by consciously trying to sell more.

*"We want to build a model company with sustainability at its core.
Buy less, choose well, make it last." - Vivienne Westwood*

Awareness of product availability

In an attempt to imitate customers' evaluation process websites were visited multiple times during the data collection process, e-mails that linked new products were double checked for product availability on their websites. The e-mails had storytelling following the lines of "new products" or "this just landed." The first check was when the e-mail was received, and the second time after a week. Out of all products that were included, there was a large number of products in which some sizes were out of stock or which showed "limited availability," "low in stock," and "x left in stock" at the second check. A customer familiar with how fast the products sell out might experience a sense of urgency if they find something of interest and a decrease in their evaluation process (Devlin et al. 2007). However, such a stock-out-scenario and how it affects customers' purchase pressure have been discussed in regards to RQ1, but not how the authenticity and genuity of these brands' changes purchase pressure. The strategy in marketing products is to increase customers' demands (Miklós-Thal & Zhang 2013; Park et al. 2019). From a sustainability standpoint, it is positive that products that already have been produced are being sold and consumed, but frequently marketing new products contributes to creating new needs, which could be seen as unsustainable (Viswanathan, Rosa & Harris 2005). In turn, this could discredit the brands authenticity of marketing and genuity of sustainability branding. One could also question the motives behind marketing new products that sell out within two weeks and say that by making the consumer aware of this, even marketing of newly released products creates fears of missing out and pressures to buy. This argument could be an external factor influencing purchase pressure.

The genuity behind their strategy could have two explanations. Either they show their inventory level to induce sales by creating a fear of missing out (Cui, Zhang & Bassamboo 2019; Calvo, Cui & Wagner 2018). The other motive could be showing the transparency of the inventory level. The effect of sharing inventory is relative to the nature of the product. As Reformation focuses on selling limited edition pieces, showing low stock could significantly affect purchase pressure more than Asket, which frequently replenishes its items. Products frequently replenished with low inventory combined with a sale could attract bargain hunters and are more likely to purchase if the inventory is low (Ferreira, Lee & Simchi-Levi 2016; Sodero et al. 2017). Reformation is open with the nature of their products having limited availability and sees it as their product value and therefore are genuine about their communication of low inventory. As a made-up scenario, if Asket did combine a sale with low inventory, it could be

a case where purchase pressure could occur, but also a situation without it but an opportunity for bargain hunters to take advantage of the price reduction. However, it could be argued that the bargain hunter also would feel purchase pressure as revealing low inventory levels increases the likelihood of a purchase. To conclude, the nature of the product can vary within fashion, and the brand's selling strategies can affect the level of purchase pressure felt by the customer. If it is a replenishable item, it most likely has a low effect, and a non-replenishable item could affect it. Combined with a sale, both increase purchase pressure and extend the brand's intuition by creating sales by stressing consumers. As what was mentioned in RQ1, the connection between time pressure and purchase pressure, adding a time constraint when none exists in a situation of making the customer aware of low inventory when there, in fact, is inventory is a way to create purchase pressure as such example will create a stressful shopping experience and create fear of missing out (Dhar & Nowlis 1999).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The final chapter answers the two research questions of the study and the purpose of this study. The results are connected to previous research. Furthermore, theoretical and managerial implications and future research opportunities are described. The discussion and conclusion chapter presents the role of marketing communication in customer's purchase pressure.

This study aimed to reveal if and how online communication of sustainable brands contributes to customers' purchase pressure, and the role of the brands' authenticity and genuineness plays in this. Purchase pressure in the context of sustainable fashion is inherently negative as it indirectly is connected to overconsumption. This is as it nudges customers to buy more by creating "must-have" feelings (Cruceanu 2016). The effect purchase pressure has on sustainable brands customers also has a relation to the perceived authenticity and genuineness, as well as engagement in the communication. The marketing strategies identified in several examined sustainable brands indicate towards creating pressures to buy and "must-have" feelings, which contradicts the goal of encouraging customers to be conscious of their consumption patterns and strive to shift the industry's negative impacts on sustainability (Bandyopadhyay & Ray 2020).

5.1 Answering the research questions

The first research question presented in the early stage of this thesis stated:

1. *How can online marketing communication contribute to the phenomenon of purchase pressure?*

Purchase pressure has been connected to several communication strategies. A brand can use promotions as a strategy to enhance customers' fear of missing out, either the promotion or a product (Devlin et al. 2007; Shehu, Papiés & Neslin 2020), to constrain and narrow customers' decisions (Devlin et al. 2007). Another communication strategy that can have an effect on purchase pressure is the way content is distributed. Distributing the same content across the same channel could contribute to purchase pressure as it is exposed to the same type of content frequently, which could be stressful for the customer (McLean et al. 2020; Fuentes & Svingstedt). Publishing the same content across different channels is a way to create a synergistic effect. However, building a synergistic effect could also increase the purchase pressure (Schumann, Petty & Clemons 1990) due to the customer's feeling of being hounded, especially if the content is not of interest to them (Wall & Spinuzzi 2018).

How a brand relates to newness, and the frequency that they display content containing newness, in their marketing communication may be a contributing factor to purchase pressure. Showing the same products repeatedly could increase purchase pressure as the viewer is exposed to the product multiple times, if it is more information than the customer wants to accept it can be perceived as aggressive marketing (Wall & Spinuzzi 2018). How strongly a customer may be affected by newness depends on their relation to fashion, if they have high involvement they may feel purchase pressure more strongly as they already have an internal pressure to stay updated with fashion trends (Belk 1988; Workman & Lee 2017).

Purchase pressure can be built when the language and formation of words in marketing communications are created to contribute to customers' subjective perceptions of time and stress their fear of missing out (Ge, Messinger & Li 2009; Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016). Using wording that relates to decreasing or limited time affects the rational thinking process of what customers need (Schwartz 2004; Viswanathan, Rosa & Harris 2005). Because customer's sense that time is constrained, they skip to proceed with information to make a quicker decision (Iyer 1989), which is to put pressure on a purchase. As time was found to have a relation to purchase pressure, the language related to purchasing something immediately could also be pressuring.

The frequent exposure and use of social ecommerce purchasing functions can have an effect on purchase pressure as customers are regularly in contact with purchasing opportunities in a setting they might not consider a shopping situation (Hewei & Youngsook 2022; Kim & Lennon 2008; Luo et al. 2021; Workman & Lee 2019). Other purchasing functions, such as buy-now-pay-later tools can also be contributing to purchase pressure as it enables customers to make higher risk and impulse purchases more often compared to when not facilitating this kind of tool (Ah Fook & McNeill 2020). The availability of financial tools may also increase the purchase pressure when used in combination with limited availability or a stock out threat.

How and when marketing communication is used to visualize the limited availability of products could contribute to purchase pressure. The more exposed the limited availability is throughout customers' purchasing process, the more it affects fear of missing out which has an effect on their sense of urgency (Sloot, Verhoef & Franses 2005), which further could have an effect on purchase pressure. However, it could be argued that the use of time limit reservations could calm down the decision making process and decrease the purchase pressure. That is, however, dependent on each customers individual experiences; either they sense that they are given enough time to evaluate and complete the purchase as the product is being reserved, or they sense that the time is too constrained to have time to evaluate and finish the purchase (Iyer 1989; Sloot, Verhoef & Franses 2005; Lin & Wu 2005).

Brands' intention with using reminders in their marketing communication is to attempt to convince customers to return to a purchase they previously decided to not fulfill. Trying to convince customers to buy something they actively had decided not to purchase can be a form of purchase pressure. Reminding e-mails regarding abandoned carts include products that the customer already has shown interest in and can cause fear of losing something they want, which increases the purchase pressure (Hartemo 2016; Luo et al. 2021). Customers asking to be reminded when sizes come back in stock is an pressure that has been requested, but may feel like a new pressure when the reminder comes due to the knowledge of limited availability and chance of another stock-out (Ge, Messinger & Li 2009; Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016).

The second research question stated:

2. *In what ways is the purchase pressure affected by the authenticity and genuineness of the brands communication?*

The level of purchase pressure a customer perceives could be related to how well the brand's marketing communication is connected to the brand's authenticity and genuineness. When there is a disconnect between what a brand says and what they actually do, there is a negative repercussion to the brand's authenticity and genuineness. The actual marketing from a brand can be perceived as inauthentic. For example, a customer that experiences a weak argument in a communication message may not resonate with it and experience a purchase pressure (Bhattacharjee & Sanford 2006; Coulter & Punj 2004). However, if the customer experiences the information as having a strong argument and accepts it (Bhattacharjee & Sanford 2006; Coulter & Punj 2004), the customer might build positive emotions regarding the information which will decrease the perceived purchase pressure. Therefore, the way the information is accepted has a connection to if the customer views the brand as authentic, which has an effect on purchase pressure.

The way the marketing communication is executed, if it has its roots in the company's ethos and how well it fits the brand image, supports them as an authentic brand. What products the brand is communicating about may influence the brand's authenticity. Trying to sell items other than of what has relevance for the situation may be paradoxical for sustainability brands as they are creating new needs rather than satisfying existing ones. This could be perceived as ingenuine because of customers' sense of being hounded and pressured to buy more from a sustainable brand which does not correlate with the brand ethos. The relevance is based on if the communication seems appropriate to the customer (Coulter & Punj 2004). If the brand is perceived as ingenuine, the customer may build a negative perception of the brand (ibid). However, how the ingenuity affects purchase pressure may differ, the customer feeling an external, irrelevant purchase pressure coming from the brand trying to convince them to buy more may increase purchase pressure, and a decrease of purchase pressure may occur if the customer does not experience a "must-have" as the message has a low strength of argument (Cruceanu 2016; Bhattacharjee & Sanford 2006; Coulter & Punj 2004). The customer's awareness of a strategy may also affect the brand's genuineness. The genuineness depends on how the customer perceives the strategy (Coulter & Punj 2004). If they view the communication as a personal benefit, the brand may be seen as transparent. If they view the brand as trying to manipulate them, their genuineness is compromised. Therefore, the level in which the customer perceives the brand as authentic and genuine could affect the perceived purchase pressure

5.2 Defining Purchase Pressure

Different factors have been revealed in this study to contribute to customers' purchase pressure. Cruceanu (2016) revealed that customers' "must-have-feelings" contributes to customers' own pressure to buy, which could be referred to as an internal purchase pressure. As the customer could by itself contribute to purchase pressure, referred to as internal purchase pressure, external factors could influence the individual in which they believe that the pressure emerges from an internal purchase pressure. In terms of what pressures come internally from customers, it is difficult to determine as customers might themselves not be able to differentiate between reactions and emotions if felt at the same time. By using theory regarding customer behavior

and the extended self, this study could connect certain factors in marketing communication that would influence the internal purchase pressure. These factors are referred to as external factors and cues influencing the internal purchase pressure.

Previous studies have examined the effect of stress (Mick & Fournier 1998), anxiety (Workman & Lee 2019), fear of missing out (Ge, Messinger & Li 2009; Godinho, Prada & Garrido 2016; Mahmood, Go & Sismeiro 2016) on customers, but not in relation to how it contributes to the pressure to buy and by that also overconsumption. What this study proposes is an umbrella term for these situations; external purchase pressure cues. Because the pressure emerges from different executions of marketing communication used to pressure customers to buy, it is an external pressure for the customer. To summarize, this study has extended the definition of purchase pressure as both an internal and external pressure the customer could experience, and that different factors could influence its perceived level.

5.3 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study may be useful to academics, industry professionals and sustainable fashion brands. It provides insight into how different marketing strategies could contribute to customers' purchase pressure, and therefore also customers overconsumption. It may benefit sustainable fashion brands which do not wish to contribute to customers' overconsumption. It has been mentioned by Workman and Lee (2019) that retailers might benefit from reducing negative emotions such as anxiety and distrust and bringing focus to positive aspects of their products. Yan, Hyllegard and Blaesi (2012) found that brands that communicate explicit messages regarding information about environmentally friendly products resulted in consumers forming positive attitudes towards the brands. Kim and Hall (2015) found that sustainable brands must position themselves as authentic players in the sustainable market as customer perceptions of the relationship between environmental sustainability and the brand is critical. This study has concluded that increasing purchase pressure, and therefore supporting their customers to form negative emotions as well as using strategies to increase sales by stressing their consumers, supporting overconsumption, are creating hypocrisy in their goal of selling less. Therefore, it should be noted that sustainable brands that try to alter consumption by encouraging buying less or better should bring light to the importance of explicit communication, and importance of authenticity and genuinity of their marketing strategy, and that increasing purchase pressure by strategies that increase purchase pressure may not bring positive attitudes towards their brands.

5.4 Suggestions for future studies

The aim of this study was not to analyze which brands contributed more or less to the phenomenon, but to bring light to marketing practices which could contribute to purchase pressure and in what ways. There were indications that the level of purchase pressure could differentiate between different marketing communications and combinations, but to reveal how different communication can be felt by customers must be investigated from the customer perspective and hence it is further suggested to future studies. Interesting connections between how marketing communication points towards customers' "must-have" feelings has been found and are further referred to factors which could influence the internal purchase pressure. Different pressure cues in marketing communications have been revealed and are referred to external purchase pressure. By connecting purchase pressure to theory regarding customers

emotions, the study has been able to reveal that customers' different emotions could influence the level of perceived purchase pressure. The involvement of customers' emotions in perceived level of purchase pressure is further suggested as a future study.

Theory regarding how positive emotions are built up was connected to marketing communication strategies that makes customers themselves feel that they need to buy, as it convinces the customer that they want something and is related to their own sense of needs. By this, purchase pressure as a positive influence could depend on the evaluation of purchase. If purchase pressure makes customers act on a purchase that they wanted to buy, and after the purchase still is happy, then the purchase pressure is what made the customer act on what they wanted and if not, it could be perceived as a "marketing trick", but that needs to be further investigated. Positive purchase pressure can turn into negative purchase pressure if, for example, the customer feels that they can not afford what they want (Workman & Lee 2017). A marketing communication strategy that creates negative emotions related to purchase pressure are designed to pressure customers to buy and buy now which causes customers' level of anxiety to increase (Workman & Lee 2019). We propose future research to study if consumers have the ability to separate different negative emotions felt from marketing pressuring consumption further, to see if there is support for our theory that using purchase pressure as an umbrella term would encompass more complex situations. We also view our study as a development on existing definitions to continue to academically explain the term purchase pressure which can be further developed by considering more aspects of marketing communications, such as purchase pressure from physical shopping environments as well as non-shopping environments such as friendships and holidays.

Thank you!

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Appendix 1

Presentation of the five brands selected as data sources.

Asket

Asket was founded in 2015 by August Bard Bringéus and Jakob Dworsky. It is a Swedish fashion brand focusing on slow down the fashion industry and change the way it manufactures, markets and consume clothing¹. Their approach towards sustainability can be argued to focus on changing consumer behavior to consume less. Their brand value and mission can be found at their website:

“Our promise is to create only meaningful essentials. We’re restoring the value and appreciation of clothing by creating only the garments we need, and uncovering and telling their stories: A permanent collection of zero-compromise pieces, made under full transparency and with lifecycle responsibility. We can’t live without clothing, but we can live with a lot less and a lot better clothing, by making the pieces we choose to invest in count.” - Asket²

Ganni

Ganni was established in Denmark by Ditte Reffstrup and Nicolaj Reffstrup in the year 2000. Their mission is to offer clothes in a more responsible way to their customers which they feel more confident and capable of doing anything. Although they are careful using the word sustainability when marketing themselves, they are a brand which focuses on minimizing social and environmental impact and “to be a more responsible version of ourselves everyday”³. Their approach towards sustainability can be argued to focus on communicating to consume better alternatives. They have also stated following in their responsibility report of 2021:

“Honesty is part of GANNI’s DNA – they know the impact that the fashion industry has on people and the planet and they’ve long been open about their own part in that. But GANNI are also committed to making more and more responsible choices in their supply chain, and we’re excited to help them share the progress they’re making with evidence-backed sustainability content and product supply chain transparency.”⁴

¹ Asket LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/asket/> [2022-05-15]

² Sustainability approach description Asket: <https://www.asket.com/se/about-the-pursuit-of-less> [2022-04-04]

³ Ganni LinkedIn Profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/ganni-a-s/about/> [2022-05-15]

⁴ Ganni responsible report 2021 <https://responsibilityreport2021.ganni.com/female-goals/> [2022-04-04]

Reformation

Reformation was established in 2009 in Los Angeles, North America⁵. Their mission is to offer sustainable clothes that are limited-edition because they make them from low-impact materials, rescued deadstock fabrics, and repurposed vintage clothing. They use the statement “Being naked is the #1 most sustainable option. We’re # 2.” to describe their sustainability approach.⁶ What needs to be considered is that they are aware that they release new limited edition collections every week, which can be seen as fast fashion. To this study, their approach is argued to focus on communicating to consume better alternatives, due to communicating about sustainability issues and trying to educate their consumers. They further describe their sustainability commitment as:

“We are a future focused organization and our commitment to sustainability is less about selling social good and more about ensuring that there is a future to look forward to. We are committed to the belief that the problems facing our planet and society can be solved through innovation, common sense and education—and we help people look good while doing it.”⁷

Stella McCartney

Stella McCartney launched their first collection in 2001, and is a London based luxury fashion house founded by the designer Stella McCartney. Their mission is to bring conscience to the industry through shared values and activist non-conformity.⁸ For this study, their sustainability approach is argued to influence consumers to consume better alternatives. They describe their sustainability work as:

“A lifelong vegetarian, Stella McCartney does not use any leather or fur in our designs and we’re committed to operating a business and maintaining a supply chain that respects the planet as well as its inhabitants. As a brand we believe that sustainability can take the form of beautiful, modern clothing and accessories. Core collections include women’s ready-to-wear, accessories, lingerie, eyewear, fragrance, and kids.⁹

We strive to create the most beautiful, desirable products with the least impact on our environment. Our conscious values are also the inspiration behind our innovation. As industry leaders, we endeavour to create the most cutting-edge materials and animal alternatives, continuing to push towards circularity and being fully transparent by developing tools to measure and report our impact.”¹⁰

⁵ Reformation LinkedIn Profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/reformation/about/> [2022-05-15]

⁶ Reformation sustainability approach: <https://www.thereformation.com/sustainability/oh-hi.html> [2022-04-04]

⁷ Reformation LinkedIn Profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/reformation/about/> [2022-05-15]

⁸ Stella McCartney LinkedIn Profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/stella-mccartney/about/> [2022-05-15]

⁹ Stella McCartney LinkedIn Profile <https://www.linkedin.com/company/stella-mccartney/about/> [2022-05-15]

¹⁰ Stella McCartney Sustainability Approach <https://www.stellamccartney.com/se/en/sustainability/sustainability.html> [2022-04-04]

Vivienne Westwood

Vivienne Westwood was founded by the designer Vivienne Westwood in the beginning of the 1970s. They are a London based fashion brand which describe themselves as “one of the last truly independent fashion companies within the international arena”. They produce four clothing labels, leather goods, jewellery and a range of other accessories, fragrances and homewares.¹¹ This study has looked at their marketing communication as one brand, but have not considered the marketing regarding homewares as it has a fashion clothing focus. Their approach towards sustainability is argued to communicate to customers to consume less, this due to the statement:

*“We want to build a model company with sustainability at its core.
Buy less, choose well, make it last.”¹²*

They further describe their sustainability approach as:

“We use our brand voice to raise awareness of the environmental impact of overconsumption, urging people to buy less and buy better quality clothes while creating collections that meet this standard.”¹³

¹¹ Vivienne Westwood LinkedIn profile: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/vivienne-westwood/about/>
[2022-05-12]

¹² Vivienne Westwood Sustainability approach <https://www.viviennewestwood.com/en/our-approach/>
[2022-04-04]

¹³ Vivienne Westwood Sustainability approach <https://www.viviennewestwood.com/en/our-approach/>
[2022-04-04]



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