Bachelor thesis

Sustainable Chic
- A cross-cultural study on Millennials' perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry

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Abstract

Globalisation has led to a rising need for sustainable efforts, not least in the fast fashion industry which is associated with unsustainable procedures in order to meet consumers’ needs and desires. In the fast fashion industry, collections of ecological fabrics, fair working conditions as well as higher quality are examples of sustainable actions. Additionally, the increasingly globalised world has created a demand to comprehend how the deeply rooted national culture affects consumers in the international fast fashion industry. The main target segment of the fast fashion industry is the Millennial generation and should thereby be further emphasised. The relevance of these topics led to the formulation of following research question: How does national culture affect Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry?

The literature review introduces the five identified themes which are considered relevant in relation to the area of research; the Millennials, sustainability, fast fashion, sustainable consumer behaviour and culture. To finalise the literature review, a conceptual framework is presented which explains the connection between the themes. Furthermore, the thesis adopts a qualitative research method with an abductive approach. Therefore, four cross-cultural focus groups of 28 Millennials with seven different nationalities are conducted. This method is considered the most suitable for this thesis’ research area and purpose.

Further, the empirical findings and the analysis are combined into one chapter which creates a discussion between the literature review, especially Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture, and the gathered data. Finally, the conclusion includes the answer to the research question, theoretical and practical implications, limitations and suggestions for further research. The results of this thesis indicate that national culture affects the perception of sustainability and the intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry in a complex manner, since the impact of national culture depends on the combination of dimensions. Furthermore, certain dimensions appear to be more dominant and decrease the impact of others.

Keywords

Cross-cultural, Fast fashion, Intended buying behaviour, Millennials, National culture, Perception of sustainability, Sustainability, Sustainable consumer behaviour
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1 Introduction

The following chapter includes a background of the chosen area of research in order to provide the reader with fundamental knowledge. Thereafter, a practical problematisation will be presented followed by the scientific research gaps. Finally, the research question proceeded from the research gaps will be defined as well as the purpose and outline of the thesis.

1.1 Background

Globalisation is the process where barriers between nations are diminished and thereby a more approachable world develops (Hamilton and Webster, 2015). The phenomenon stimulates international trade and an increasing number of firms have parts of their business abroad to gain competitive advantages. The fast-paced globalisation has also led to higher demand for resources and therefrom for sustainability (ibid). From this development, companies have been pressured to increase their sustainability work which has resulted in corporate social responsibility and code of conduct efforts, not least in the fast fashion industry. Subsequently, fast fashion companies are working on decreasing the social and environmental negative impact of their business (Remy, Speelman and Swartz, 2017).

Today, sustainability is more topical than ever and an increased concern of companies as well as well-debated in governments and media (Berns et al., 2009). In the Boston Consulting Group report on sustainability, Berns et al. (2009) indicate that the demand and pressure of consumers are drivers for companies’ sustainability work. Moreover, the society of today is believed to be more sustainably conscious and particularly the young consumers (Taken Smith and Brower, 2012). Very (2016) agrees with the increased interest of sustainability of young consumers, i.e. Millennials, which is the generation born between 1982 and 2002 (Howe and Strauss, 2000).

Sustainability has been explained in various ways during the years, emphasising different aspects. However, most definitions stress the long-term orientation and maintaining resources to protect the future (Beattie, 2017). Furthermore, during the 2005 World Summit, the United Nations (UN) introduced the three pillars of sustainability, including economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability (General Assembly of the United Nations, 2005). All three pillars of sustainability will be considered in this thesis even though social and environmental issues are of most concern in the fast fashion industry (Joergens, 2006). In this thesis, the term sustainable fashion will be used, however, this is occasionally defined as ethical fashion (Ethical Fashion Forum, 2017).

Fast fashion regards serving the market with trendy items for a convenient price in a short amount of time (Fernando, 2017), which is particularly attractive to Millennials (Yarrow and O'Donnell, 2009). In contrast to more luxurious fashion retailers, fast fashion companies provide new items each week instead of each season. Thereby,
consumers want to purchase new items more frequently which is advantageous for the fast fashion companies (Fernando, 2017). During the last twenty years, the clothing industry has grown due to more efficient processes and increased consumer spending emerging from higher living standards. To exemplify, the yearly buying of fashion pieces rose with 60 percent between 2000 and 2014, a beneficial development for the high paced fast fashion industry. Large fast fashion chains release new collections on a regular basis, e.g. Zara with 24 lines per year as well as H&M with 12 to 16 and both retailers update with new items in store each week (Remy, Speelman and Swartz, 2017).

However, the downsides of the efficient and easy accessed fast fashion have become more and more distinct during the 21st century’s era of consumption. The fast fashion industry has been associated with ethical dilemmas including social and environmental sustainability (ibid). The fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries worldwide according to the Danish Fashion Institute (Kruse, 2013) and is connected to unfair working conditions in production facilities in emerging markets (Ditty, 2015). Due to the low prices of fast fashion companies, in many cases, the companies work with suppliers located in low cost countries such as China or Bangladesh to gain competitive advantages (Bédat, 2015). According to Bédat (2015), low cost indicates low regulation of the production facilities, hence of working conditions and environmental factors.

Lately, fast fashion companies have been seen putting more effort into environmental friendly collections and marketing campaigns focusing on fair conditions. In 2011, H&M launched “the Conscious Collection” created from sustainable material (H&M, 2017) and Zara presented their first sustainable line in 2016, called “Join Life” of eco-friendly material (Wallwork, 2016). Moreover, both companies and most fast fashion retailers provide thorough information about their work with sustainability on their websites. Sustainable fashion is explained to be a new trend within the industry (Marie Claire, 2017). Nevertheless, the fast fashion industry’s low prices stimulate increased consumption and thereby higher environmental and social impact (Gibson and Stanes, 2011). Additionally, Gibson and Stanes (2011) argue that the normalised over-consumption of fashion has developed from more accessible fashion and the constant launching of new items, encouraging unsustainable consumer behaviour.

On the other hand, a sustainably conscious consumer purchases items which are manufactured under fair conditions and not dangerous for the environment or humanity (The Guardian, 2001). An explanation which can be seen frequently, however a more specific pattern of the consumer behaviour is hard to find. Newholm and Shaw (2007) argue that consumers’ beliefs and personalities affect the decision process which is distinctive in sustainable consumption. Sustainable consumption is difficult to pattern since sustainable items appeal values and principles and might not agree with rational thinking which might favour price, quality or appearance (Purt, 2014).

Further, consumer behaviour and in particular personal values, attitudes and lifestyles, are influenced by the cultural aspects of a consumer’s home country (de Mooij and
Hofstede, 2002). Consumers from different cultures behave differently and need to be met accordingly to create a successful relationship. The national culture shapes the consumers and the specific culture’s characteristics need to be understood for companies to involve consumers and encourage their buying behaviour (Klepic, 2014). Leo, Bennet and Härtel (2005) agree and state that the cultural belonging affects the consumer behaviour and the buying decision process itself and therefore an increased need of understanding the different worldwide consumers has occurred (ibid). By understanding national culture, companies are able to influence consumers, both in their own interest but also for the sake of the society (Rowley, 2011). The items people choose to buy and the reason behind it originate from national culture since both social and psychological manners are influenced. The social manners lead consumer behaviour and include needs, motivation and buying motives whilst the psychological manners include perceptions and thoughts which create the base for the consumer’s behaviour (de Mooij, 2010).

1.2 Problem discussion

1.2.1 Practical problematisation

Millennials challenge companies worldwide with their volatile product desires, which makes the demand hard to assess (Solka, Jackson and Lee, 2011). Companies need to face this problem and increase their understanding of the generation because of the huge market potential they create (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014). This is demonstrated by their increasing degree of spending (Hill and Lee 2012; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014), and the tremendous market size since the Millennial generation is defined as three times bigger than Generation X, born 1961-1981, and the biggest consumer group since the Baby boomers, born 1943-1960 (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Valentine and Powers, 2013). To realise the full potential of this market segment, companies need to meet the consumers righteously, particularly within the fast fashion industry since the Millennials represent the main target group (Yarrow and O’Donnell, 2009).

During recent years, consumers worldwide displayed increased interest and awareness of sustainable issues (Tsarenko et al., 2013). However, their buying habits barely become more sustainable since other factors such as price and quality are favoured due to individual preferences (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Joshi and Rahman, 2017). This makes it hard for companies to implement sustainability efforts successfully, since consumers’ attitudes and behaviour appear to be contradictory. A first step to solve this company-related knowledge gap is to gain a truthful understanding of a consumer's perception of sustainability in a buying context since consumers do not seem to fully understand the meaning of the concept sustainability which creates a problem for fashion companies (Hill and Lee, 2012; McPherson, 2014). Especially Millennials lack understanding of sustainability in fashion which must be considered by companies, even though the attitudes towards sustainability generally seem positive (Hill and Lee, 2012). If companies comprehend consumers’ sustainability attitudes, they may educate the consumers, leading to them buying in a more sustainable way (Birtwistle and Moore,
Simultaneously, the efforts can become rewarding for the companies themselves since consumers with a deeper knowledge are more likely to buy sustainable items when they possess more knowledge (Fulton and Lee, 2013; Shen et al., 2012).

Further, the internationally operating fast fashion companies have a major problem understanding how the perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour are affected by national culture (Belk, Devinney and Eckhardt, 2005). The understanding of this is essential since both the perception of sustainability (Joshi and Rahman, 2017) as well as intended buying behaviour (Muralidharan, Rejón-Guardia and Xue, 2016) derive from attitudes and values which are deeply rooted in national culture (de Mooij, 2010/2015). Companies’ lack of understanding on how cultural differences affect consumers, leads to the wrong assumption that there is a uniform global consumer (Hofstede, Pedersen and Hofstede, 2002). Therefore, companies fail to address the consumers effectively, by incorrectly standardising marketing efforts (de Mooij, 2003).

Hence, companies need to understand how national culture affects consumers’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in order to find suitable business strategies, particularly within marketing yet not limited to this area. Thereby, companies may encourage Millennials’ loyalty as well as a more conscious consumer behaviour (Bucic, Harris and Arli, 2012).

1.2.2 Scientific research gaps
The Millennials are one of the best educated groups in the society and have a better understanding of sustainable issues than other consumer groups (Taken Smith, 2014). However, research states that Millennials lack knowledge regarding sustainability in the clothing industry (Hill and Lee, 2012). There is a shortage of research concerning Millennials’ perception of sustainability, which is supported by Hill and Lee (2012), who state that Millennials’ perception of sustainability is of importance since the generation will experience the consequences of being sustainable or unsustainable. This consumer view on sustainability is a rather new approach called customer-centric sustainability (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011), which puts the consumer in centre and attempts to consider both consumers and businesses (McNeill and Moore, 2015). Until the 1990s, studies mainly focused on the corporate side which created a lack of studies from a consumer’s perspective (Schlegelmilch and Öberseder, 2009).

The growing number of consumers who are concerned about sustainability have not left the fashion industry unaffected (Joergens, 2006). Even though consumers demand sustainable fashion, this is not reflected in their intended buying behaviour. Personal needs and style preferences are prioritised, which leads to an intention-behaviour gap (ibid). Moreover, even if consumers take sustainability into consideration when they buy fashion, this does not automatically decrease the consumption (Joy et al., 2012). This especially applies for fast fashion (ibid), which is known for encouraging over-consumption and offering disposable pieces (Park and Kim, 2016). Therefore, previous studies indicate a lack of research concerning consumers’ perception of sustainability in
the fast fashion industry, hence further investigation is needed to fill the existing gap (McNeill and Moore, 2015).

Furthermore, research increasingly acknowledges the demand for further cross-cultural examinations of national culture’s impact on consumers’ perceptions and behaviour (Maheswaran and Shavitt, 2000). National culture can be analysed with Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture which show the national culture’s impact on the individuals through; power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation and indulgence (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). De Mooij and Hofstede (2011) explain that the dimensions display similarities and differences from one culture to another which contribute to a better understanding of consumers. It is crucial to understand similarities and differences as culture affects the perceptions and the decision-making process and therefore consumer behaviour overall (Kim and Johnson, 2013; Muralidharan and Xue, 2016; Ng and Lee, 2015). Additionally, de Mooij and Hofstede (2002) as well as Rawwas (2001) indicate that even though consumer behaviour is believed to become more uniform due to globalisation, it does not since consumers’ core values remain, which derive from national culture. In her research, de Mooij (2003) displays there is a lack of understanding on how consumers with different nationalities should be addressed correctly. Hence, national culture’s effect on consumers is an important research area, as it is crucial to investigate the degree of diversity or uniformity among consumers (Babakus et al., 2004; de Mooij, 2003; de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Rawwas, 2001).

In the context of this thesis, the first research gap has been identified concerning Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in a cross-cultural context. There are previous cross-cultural studies focusing on sustainable consumers in general (e.g. Ling-Yee, 1997; McCarty and Shrum, 2001) as well as Millennials (Bucic, Harris and Arli, 2012). However, these studies investigate general consumer perceptions and buying behaviour, not related to a specific industry. Since the general perception of sustainability and the intended buying behaviour are not automatically valid in a fashion context, a clear gap has been distinguished (Joy et al., 2012).

Furthermore, a second research gap has been discovered regarding Millennials’ perception of sustainability combined with intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry. Park and Kim (2016) researched fast fashion consumers’ perception of sustainability and looked at general consumer attitudes, but not focused on Millennials. On the other hand, Hill and Lee (2012) focus on young Millennials’ perception of sustainability in the apparel industry, yet not on the fast fashion industry specifically. Further, McNeill and Moore’s (2015) study investigates fashion consumers’ attitudes and intended buying behaviour regarding sustainable items but the perception of sustainability is limited and there is no focus on Millennials. Nevertheless, these three studies are not conducted in a cross-cultural context, which highlights the need for a cross-cultural investigation in this combined area of research; the Millennials, sustainability, fast fashion, sustainable consumer behaviour and culture.
1.3 Research question
The background as well as the problem discussion lead to the development of following research question to be answered in this thesis:

*How does national culture affect Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry?*

1.4 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how national culture affects Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry. To gain a deeper understanding of the research area, this thesis has an exploratory nature and will be conducted with cross-cultural focus groups. In order to comprehend the influence of national culture, seven nationalities represented by 28 Millennials will be examined. Furthermore, this thesis aspires to provide implications for fashion companies and in particular fast fashion companies on how Millennials’ perceptions and intentions in relation to sustainability are influenced by national culture in order to target them properly. This consumer knowledge intends to facilitate decisions regarding business and especially marketing strategies on an international level.
Figure 1 Outline of thesis (Own, 2017).
2 Literature review

The chapter presents previous research while introducing the main themes of the thesis; the Millennials, sustainability, fast fashion, sustainable consumer behaviour and culture. Additionally, a conceptual framework has been developed, explaining the relation between the themes. Thus, this chapter provides knowledge useful for conducting the analysis as well as answering the research question.

2.1 The Millennials

The Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are difficult to characterise (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009; Valentine and Powers, 2013) since there is limited research about the generation (Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). Additionally, it is challenging to define the time scope of the Millennials since research disagrees on between which years the generation is born (Bolton et al., 2013). However, this thesis will use the definition of Howe and Strauss (2000) who define Millennials as the age group born between 1982 and 2002. The definition is used since Howe and Strauss are considered generation experts and their work is frequently cited by other researchers (e.g. Bolton et al., 2013; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014).

The positive rise in the economy during recent years has increased the buying power of Millennials (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Martin and Turley, 2004), making them important and active consumers on the market (Hill and Lee 2012; Pomarici and Vecchio, 2014). However, Solka, Jackson and Lee (2011) suggest it is challenging to identify needs and demands of the generation since product wants and buying motivations are unpredictable. Millennials are also characterised as impulsive buyers which can be connected to them prioritising the present rather than embracing a long-term perspective (Viswanathan and Jain, 2013). Furthermore, Noble, Haytko and Phillips (2009) state that people of this generation are alike and share characteristics, attitudes and values. This is supported by Muralidharan, Rejón-Guardia and Xue (2016) who say Millennials’ style and preferences have become more similar. Contradictory to that Solka, Jackson and Lee (2011) suggest there are differences within the Millennials generation and what they value in life.

Overall, Millennials are characterised as an outgoing and courageous generation who feel more positive towards consumption than previous generations and influence the buying decision of friends and families (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). Additionally, they desire to keep up with the latest trends and styles which increase their interest in fashion, especially the younger Millennials (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009). Thus, Millennials support the expression “hot today, boring tomorrow” which is representative of the fast fashion industry (Yarrow and O'Donnell, 2009, p.43). Further, Millennials express themselves and wear whatever they want by creating personal styles and not imitating others (Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). The reviewed studies agree that Millennials buy products and support brands they can
identify themselves with in order to reflect their personalities (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010; Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009; Valentine and Powers, 2013).

Moreover, the generation is continuously improving its knowledge of items they buy to make individual choices and not get influenced by others (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009). However, previous research argues it is hard to define whether the Millennials are an individual-oriented or group-oriented generation, since they possess traits in both directions. On one hand, Millennials want to be independent and make own decisions (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009; Valentine and Powers, 2013), but also be part of groups to feel connected to others (Ng, Schweitzer and Lyons, 2010; Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009; Valentine and Powers, 2013). Additionally, Millennials want to contribute to the society by doing good deeds (Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008). Smith (2010) argues that Millennials are highly educated and thereby see the importance of sustainable issues. Contradictory, Hill and Lee (2012) argue the generations’ knowledge about sustainability is limited.

2.2 Sustainability

The definition of sustainability often derives from Brundtland’s United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development report (1987) and includes social, environmental and economic concerns with the aim to preserve our planet for future generations. With a focus on fashion, Joergens (2006, p.361) defines sustainability as “fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton”. However, the definition of sustainability remains rather vague which leads to companies enforcing sustainable regulations in various ways (Hill and Lee, 2012).

Past research displays that a company’s attempt to communicate its sustainable efforts repeatedly was ineffective and consumers received insufficient information (Hill and Lee, 2012). In many cases, the lack of knowledge prevents consumers from purchasing sustainable fashion items (Fulton and Lee, 2013; Shen et al., 2012). Further, Singhapakdi (2004) identifies that sustainable intentions are positively influenced by the perceived importance of sustainability. Hence, understanding how consumers perceive a company's sustainability efforts is crucial as this allows the company to educate consumers and increase their understanding of sustainable fashion items (Hill and Lee, 2012). Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas (2011) developed a customer-centric sustainability approach to increase the efficiency of a company’s efforts regarding sustainable products and marketing actions. This view on sustainability attempts to consider the consumers’ as well as corporations’ perspective (McNeill and Moore, 2015). A customer-centric approach is beneficial compared to the traditional firm-centric view which often has been criticised of lacking a long-term orientation and honest intentions concerning social and environmental values (Molthan-Hill, 2014). Past research claims that sustainability outputs are the consequences of the consumer-oriented behaviour of a company and its operations (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011).
Comprehending sustainability is often done by dividing the term into different aspects, which focus on the impact of sustainable efforts. Those aspects are described as the three distinctive pillars, which represent the social, environmental and economic pillars of sustainability (General assembly of the United Nations, 2005). It is crucial to understand how the pillars are linked to each other to understand their dependencies and interactions (Grosskurth and Rotmans, 2005). From a consumer perspective, each pillar investigates the impact of consumption on the well-being of the pillar (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). Over the years, various tools and models to assess sustainability have been developed (Ness et al., 2007). For instance, Grosskurth and Rotmans (2005) originated the Social, Environmental and Economic model (SCENE) as a conceptual approach towards examining the different aspects of sustainable development. Another more institutional model to measure sustainability was created by Elkington (1999), who combined the three pillars of sustainability into the Triple Bottom Line model (TBL).

Previous research successfully applied the TBL model to gain a better understanding of a consumer’s perception of sustainability in the matter of fashion (Park and Kim, 2016). If companies understand the consumer’s perception of sustainability, they are able to act accordingly, hence influence future attitudes and behaviour of the consumers (McNeill and Moore, 2015; Park and Kim, 2016). In their study about the consumer-centric view on sustainability in fast fashion, Park and Kim (2016) clearly identify that it is crucial for a firm to integrate all three pillars of sustainability into business activities. Otherwise, a brand’s image and consumer’s perception of the company’s sustainability efforts might be negatively impacted (ibid). Nevertheless, Fulton and Lee (2013) display that companies within the apparel industry mainly focus on the social and environmental aspects of sustainability and the economic pillar is the least common to be addressed.

2.2.1 The social pillar

The social pillar of sustainability refers to consumption’s influence on people and the community's general welfare (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). This pillar covers a wide range of aspects including labour practices, salaries, human rights and socio-economic factors (Waage et al., 2005). To exemplify, socio-economic factors are; working health and safety, job training and education as well as equal opportunities (Fulton and Lee, 2013). Hence, social sustainability is not limited to the compensation people get from their employers but rather includes the impact on people’s lives in general. According to Waage et al. (2005), social aspects of sustainability in a broader perspective look at a macroeconomic level and consider how the entire society is impacted by business operations. In the fashion industry, the social pillar mainly focuses on fair trade, labour conditions and human right issues which are particularly problematic within this industry (Fulton and Lee, 2013). According to Park and Kim (2016), child labour, sweatshops and insufficient labour-conditions are the predominant human right issues in the apparel industry.
2.2.2 The environmental pillar

According to Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas (2011), the environmental pillar reflects consumption’s effect on the environmental welfare. This requires the use of resources in a way that guarantees long-term health of humans and the natural system including air, land and water. Aspects considered include reused materials, water and energy consumption, carbon dioxide emissions as well as products and services (Fulton and Lee, 2013). From a customer-centric perspective, this refers to choosing more sustainable product alternatives which diminish the negative effects of companies on the environment (Park and Kim, 2016).

The fast fashion industry is continuously criticised for its lack of being sustainable, however companies have started to use sustainable fibres, e.g. organic cotton, recycled fabrics and hemp. Yet, consumers seem to have poor knowledge of sustainable practices, for instance the usage of sustainable material, providing recycling opportunities and ethical working conditions in fashion production (McNeill and Moore, 2015). This lack of knowledge together with the fact that consumers are unaware of the negative impact of disposal habits are problematic for the fashion industry (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007), in particular for the fast fashion industry (Fulton and Lee, 2013). To face the issue, it is essential for companies to educate their consumers (Hill and Lee, 2012). For instance, by suggesting ways on how to dispose unwanted fashion items in a more sustainable way (Fulton and Lee, 2012).

2.2.3 The economic pillar

The economic pillar illustrates the association between consumers and financial aspects. However, contradictory to many beliefs, the pillar includes more than financial profitability (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). Fulton and Lee (2013) suggest that economically sustainable efforts should contribute to a greater economic system than solely the company and include the firm’s indirect economic impact. The economic aspect from a consumer’s point of view, is described as their economic welfare (Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011).

Park and Kim (2016) suggest that the economic pillar of sustainability in fast fashion, concerns the lower quality’s effect on the consumer’s perception of items, encouraging fast disposal. While conducting focus groups of young female consumers, Birtwistle and Moore (2007) discovered that compared to more luxurious pieces, a main reason why fast fashion clothes get discarded quickly is the lack of quality. This indicates that if companies start selling fashion items of higher quality, consumers might buy more sustainable (Fulton and Lee, 2013). McNeill and Moore (2016) mean that offering higher quality is essential in order to make sustainable consumption easier since quality is an aspect considered while buying fashion and is often linked to sustainability. Particularly in the fast fashion industry, this is important since the items have a poor reputation connected to quality (Joy et al., 2012).
2.3 Fast fashion

Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006, p. 259) refer to fast fashion as “a business strategy which aims to reduce the processes involved in the buying cycle and lead times for getting new fashion product into stores, in order to satisfy consumer demand at its peak”. Hence, fast fashion companies regularly update the assortment to constantly provide consumers with the latest trends and styles for a convenient price (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006; Byun and Sternquist, 2008). Furthermore, Gabrielli, Baghi and Codeluppi (2013) describe fast fashion as an opportunity to connect and interact with consumers, where retailers adjust the assortment after consumers’ requests. However, fast fashion companies do not only influence but are also influenced, since different ways of living and various cultures are considered when presenting the trendy collections (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) as well as Byun and Sternquist (2008) mean that a major factor contributing to consumers supporting fast fashion, is the possibility to buy fashion items reflecting who they are, hence expressing personal identities. Additionally, the fast fashion industry makes the consumers feel positively towards their purchases, promoting impulsive buying behaviour (ibid). Cook and Yurchisin (2017) developed Byun and Sternquist’s (2008) research further and agree on the positive relation between fast fashion and impulsive buying behaviour. Also, a consumer with a positive attitude for the industry as a whole is more likely to become an impulsive buyer (Cook and Yurchisin, 2017; Joo Park, Young Kim and Cardona Forney, 2006). Subsequently, the impulsive buying behaviour makes the fast fashion industry perceived as increasingly unsustainable, already being characterised by over-consumption and disposable pieces (Park and Kim, 2016).

The fast fashion industry is considered highly disposable since the items are most often used for a limited time before going out of fashion or becoming unusable due to poor quality (Birtwisle and Moore, 2007). Collett, Culver and Chen (2013) argue that the low quality makes consumers aware of not being able to use the products for a long time. Yet, this consequence is often ignored since the price offered is considered more important than the items’ lifetime (ibid). Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2010) agree that fast fashion consumers are aware of the poor quality and short-lived products. Even so, they are prepared to give up on higher quality in order to create their own personal style (ibid).

Furthermore, the fast fashion industry’s high speed supports unsustainable manufacturing methods in order to meet the demand of consumers, provide a low price and gain profits (McNeill and Moore, 2015). However, Shen et al. (2012) state that during the last decades, consumers have increased their awareness of sustainability in the fashion industry, which increased the demand for sustainable items. Collett, Culver and Chen (2013) stress that the growing demand for sustainable products is connected to consumers increased knowledge and information-seeking of the items they buy. However, Joy et al. (2012) discovered that although consumers are concerned about
social and environmental aspects, their fast fashion consumption remains high, since the consumers strive for trends (McNeill and Moore, 2015). This behaviour creates the base for the fast fashion paradox, which concerns the conflicting relationship between fast fashion and sustainability (Park and Kim, 2016).

2.4 Sustainable consumer behaviour

In consumer behaviour studies, regardless of industry, aspects such as attitudes and values but also knowledge are taken into consideration (Tanner and Wölfing Kast, 2003). Milfont and Markowitz (2016) as well as Newholm and Shaw (2007) especially stress the significance of beliefs and attitudes when it comes to developing sustainable consumer behaviour. Not solely on an individual level but on several levels resulting in the final individual consumer behaviour (Milfont and Markowitz, 2016). The authors argue that attitudes influencing sustainable consumer behaviour arise from the levels of home country, region, household and the individual (ibid).

Kozar and Hiller Connell (2013) present results supporting a positive relation between attitude, knowledge and consumer behaviour, both regarding social and environmental sustainability. Yet, the results show that consumers were more conscious of environmental aspects than social. However, Joergens (2006) provided contradictory results within the fashion industry, presenting social issues to be of higher concern than environmental ones. Furthermore, Kozar and Hiller Connell (2013) found education and knowledge to be significant factors of impact on sustainable consumer behaviour whilst Joshi and Rahman (2017) argue that values and attitudes have more impact than knowledge. Additionally, research by Tanner and Wölfing Kast (2003) stresses the large impact of attitudes, values and beliefs on consumer behaviour and particularly on the anticipated consumer behaviour.

Moreover, Joshi and Rahman (2017) present results showing that previous sustainable experiences influence future attitudes. Thereby, the authors suggest that by engaging consumers in sustainability, companies and organisations may affect and increase sustainable behaviour since experiences and former behaviour influence the future intention and behaviour. Additionally, it is argued that increased sustainable behaviour is correlated with relationships’ impact on the individual person. Group belongings influence attitudes and thereby a joint behaviour occurs (ibid) which can be connected to the previously mentioned Milfont and Markowitz’s (2016) view on sustainable consumer behaviour.

In the context of this thesis’ field, a consumer behaviour pattern or process have been hard to define regarding both sustainable consumption (McDonald et al., 2009) and fast fashion consumption (Byun and Sternquist, 2008), subsequently also when being combined. Instead, previous research concerns different aspects of consumer behaviour, yet no well-recognised models or frameworks are found due to limited research within the combined area of sustainable fast fashion consumer behaviour.
2.4.1 Sustainable consumption

Mont and Plepys (2005, p.15) state that sustainable consumption is “a term for issues related to human needs, equity, quality of life, resource efficiency, waste minimisation, life cycle thinking, consumer health and safety”. Yet, there is no agreed universal definition since various aspects are considered (ibid). McDonald et al. (2009) investigated sustainable consumption with five products of different sectors to see differences and similarities as well as explore if a pattern could be recognised. However, such a pattern was not discovered and a consumer could manifest sustainable consumer behaviour in one sector but not in another one (ibid). Hence, the research provides support of the difficulty to model and generalise sustainable buying behaviour. Furthermore, Connolly and Prothero (2003) argue that sustainable consumption and its effects mainly in relation to social and environmental issues have been significantly avoided, which represents another reason why an accepted model or course of events have not been identified.

Instead, Gilg, Barr and Ford (2005) claim that the sustainable consumer’s buying behaviour is connected to lifestyle and the values influence the way of living. Consumers act in a more sustainable way if they see that their actions have an impact. The authors also state that consumers react positively when information about sustainable consumption’s influence is considered close to home or have direct effect on their lives (ibid). On the other hand, unsustainable patterns, originating from social and behavioural aspects in culture, are deeply rooted and prevent further development of sustainable consumption (Pogutz and Micale, 2011). Therefore, the consumers’ attitudes need to change considerably to promote sustainable consumption. Even though consumers’ awareness of the issues related to sustainability has improved, damaging ways of consuming remains. Thereby, Pogutz and Micale (2011) mean that changed attitudes lead to more modest lifestyles, lower pressure on resources and thus more sustainable consumption. Vermeir and Verbeke (2006) agree and add that a positive attitude developed from engagement encourages sustainable consumption. Additionally, Xiao and Li (2010) suggest that sustainable consumption is correlated with positivity and well-being in consumers’ lives. Subsequently, by involving consumers and providing information concerning social and environmental issues, companies can influence the degree of sustainable consumption (Vermeir and Verbeke, 2006).

Furthermore, elements of sustainable consumption regard re-usage, recycling or disposal behaviour of a consumer concerning fashion items (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007). In their study, Birtwistle and Moore (2007) displayed that consumers are uninformed regarding the necessity to recycle fashion items and possess limited knowledge about the consequences of their disposable habits. Moreover, McNeill and Moore’s (2015) study reveals different ways how consumers deal with unwanted fashion items. The authors display that the majority of fashion items are brought to second-hand shops or given away to others in order to be re-utilised.
2.4.2 The intended buying behaviour

Darley, Blankson and Luethge (2010) developed an extended version of the EKB Buying Decision Process; problem recognition, search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision and purchase outcomes, which will be used to explain the intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry. The behaviour can be described as the decision part of the EKB Buyer Decision Process model. The decision part refers to the stages; search and alternative evaluation which are both affected by external aspects, e.g. lifestyle, motives and culture (ibid). The two stages result in a purchasing decision and are thereby of huge importance to understand since the purchase itself leads to sustainable or unsustainable consumer behaviour (Young et al., 2009).

In the search stage, companies encourage consumers to purchase by providing significant information about products as well as the company itself. Moreover, the alternative evaluation is the stage examining product characteristics in relation to personal preferences, subsequently leading to a decision whether to purchase or not (Butler and Peppard, 1998). In addition to external factors; beliefs, attitudes and intentions are the main influencers of the alternative evaluation stage, hence the intended consumer behaviour (Darley, Blankson and Luethge, 2010). It is important to differentiate between intended consumer behaviour and actual consumer behaviour, as several studies in the field of consumer research display that intentions do not always translate into purchases (Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010). This phenomenon is known as the intention-behaviour gap (Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2010) or attitude-behaviour gap (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000) which also can be identified in sustainable consumer behaviour. The gap explains an increased desire to behave in a sustainable way, however other factors such as price and quality tend to take over due to individual preferences (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Joshi and Rahman, 2017).

The study of Bray, Johns and Kilburn (2010) provides knowledge about influencers of sustainable consumer behaviour for a better understanding of the intention-behaviour gap. During focus group discussions, factors for sustainable attitudes, intentions and actions were discussed. Price was found an important aspect for the participants as well as a reason for not going through with a sustainable buying decision even though the ambitions and intentions were to do so. Additionally, a higher post-purchase discontent of a sustainable product was described if the price was higher than for alternative products (ibid).

Moreover, consumers have difficulties relating to the consequences of sustainable or unsustainable buying decisions since these are most often not directly visible (Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2010). Hence, people question the meaning of their own behaviour, greating the intention-behaviour gap further due to lack of knowledge (Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2010). Joergens (2006) supports this and presents a large degree of egoism when it comes to sustainable consumer behaviour in the fast fashion industry since consumers tend to consider own desires instead of additional sustainable factors. People struggle to understand consequences of sustainable or
unsustainable consumer behaviour in fashion and have a more short-term view, focusing on the actual purchase and not what lays behind it (ibid). Thus, the intention-behaviour gap can particularly be seen in the fast fashion industry (Joy et al., 2012).

2.5 Culture

Personal values and the individual lifestyle are impacted by culture, which is reflected in consumer behaviour (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2002). Broadly, culture is defined by addressing its two key characteristics; shared and learned (Fischer, 2009). Based on that, Schwartz (2006, p. 138) defines culture as “the rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms, and values prevalent among people in a society”. This indicates that culture is shaped as a system of shared meaning (Fischer, 2009; Schwartz, 2006) or in other words as collective programming of a nationality or group (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004). Thereby, values are the main components, as essential part of mental programming and they have a predominating focus from society (Fischer, 2009; Schwartz, 2006).

Within the last decades, globalisation and the increasing number of organisations having operations abroad, tremendously increased the importance of culture for international business, (de Mooij, 2003; Leung et al., 2005). However, not only business operations but also several aspects of consumer behaviour are heavily shaped by national culture (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2011; Maheswaran and Shavitt, 2000). Despite some academics such as Levitt (1983) predicted that due to the technological development, consumer markets would become more homogenous and consumers would demand more standardised products, this did not occur. Until today no such “global village” has emerged nor is expected to in the next 50 years (de Mooij, 2010/2015; Hofstede, Pedersen and Hofstede, 2002). One reason is that culture and value systems are not significantly impacted by modern changes as human core values, which are a main aspect of culture, remain (de Mooij, 2003; de Mooij and Hofstede, 2002; Rawwas, 2001). This makes culture a critical factor for research and businesses in studies regarding consumer behaviour (Mehta and Dixit, 2016).

2.5.1 National culture and consumer behaviour

The connection between culture and characteristics of people living in the specific context, i.e. country, is called national culture (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Hofstede and McCrae (2004, p. 58) define it as “collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another”. The concept refers to values, beliefs, norms as well as behavioural patterns occurring in a society (Leung et al., 2005). National culture aspects create cultural differences which impact consumer’s reaction to information, perception, decision-making and buying behaviour (Kim and Johnson, 2013; Ng and Lee, 2015; Schwarz, 2003). Therefrom, de Mooij (2003) argues that companies fail to address their consumers in a right way, by wrongly standardising operations and marketing efforts to a uniform global consumer. Hence, understanding national cultures’ impact on consumer values is important in global marketing, to
comprehend how to standardise or adapt marketing strategies towards consumers (Babakus et al., 2004; de Mooij, 2003; de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Rawwas, 2001).

As cultural divergences in consumer behaviour are stable or becoming even more distinctive (de Mooij, 2003), cross-cultural consumer studies have been conducted. Particularly in the context of sustainability, national culture seems to matter. Even among societies that acknowledge the importance of sustainability, the approach and perception of the issues are different (Scholtens and Dam, 2007). In their study, Forsyth, O’Boyle and McDaniel (2008) show that especially the environmental and social pillars of sustainability are affected by consumers. Therefore, the authors argue it is crucial to understand people’s perception of morals and ethics to implement sustainable efforts. This is supported by other authors, arguing that distinctive characteristics of cultural dimensions influence the sustainable consciousness and sensitivity of consumers regarding sustainable issues (Ling-Yee, 1997; McCarty and Shrum, 2001).

Bucic, Harris and Arli (2012) discovered comparable results investigating Millennials and ethical consumption. Even though there are similarities between Millennials from various countries, notable divergences between cultures occur, in particular concerning the perception of sustainable issues (ibid). Research even discovered that the nationality of consumers explains the variation of unsustainable consumer behaviour better than other socio-demographic characteristics (Babakus et al., 2004). For instance, the tendency of impulsive buying decisions, which lead to unsustainable behaviour are higher in some cultures than in others (Kacen and Lee, 2002; Zhang, Winterich and Mittal, 2010). Also, other aspects like fashion preferences, influencers of buying-decisions and style are affected by culture (de Mooij, 2010; de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010).

To analyse the impact of culture on consumer behaviour, diverse cultural frameworks can be applied. Several researchers have used Hofstede’s dimensional framework for their studies and could display that depending on the context of the research, some or all dimensions influence consumer behaviour (e.g de Mooij and Hofstede, 2002/2011; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Husted, 2005; Kacen and Lee, 2002; McCarty and Shrum, 2001; Swaidan, 2012).

2.5.2 Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture
Since 1945, the impact of national culture has been researched, leading to the introduction of Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture in the 1970’s (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). According to de Mooij and Hofstede (2010, p.86) national culture describes “the differences of the concepts of self, personality and identity”. Over the years, two dimensions; long-term orientation (LTO) and indulgence (IND) have been added to the original dimensions; power distance (PDI), individualism (IDV), masculinity (MAS) and uncertainty avoidance (UAI) (ibid). Ng and Lee (2015) suggest that examining the cultural context through these dimensions can provide researchers knowledge to comprehend how consumer behaviour is shaped by culture. Nevertheless,
Hofstede’s model has been criticised for creating over-generalised stereotypes. Critics argue that an entire population cannot truthfully be classified in the same way due to differences in individual personalities (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Jenner et al. (2008) mean that contemporary values are more interconnected and dynamic than stable. Further, the researchers suggest that changes such as technology, immigration or economic crises could impact national culture. Other authors accuse the model of being outdated since the original dimension were introduced in the 1970s (Sivakumar and Nakata, 2001; Soares, Farhangmehr and Shoham, 2007).

However, Hofstede (2001 cited in Soares, Farhangmehr and Shoham, 2007, p.281) opposes and stresses that culture is so deeply-seated that changes would not be noticeable for another 100 years. De Mooij (2010/2015) supports this statement and argues that criticism on the model is irrelevant since core values are deeply rooted and stable over years, which was demonstrated by Søndergaard’s (1994) replication of Hofstede. In addition, de Mooij (2015) as well as Magnusson et al. (2008) suggest that Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture provide a better understanding of cultural differences than more recent cultural frameworks. However, the two newer dimensions LTO and IND have less coverage in literature and are seen as less comprehensive (Lim, Makhija and Shenkar, 2015).

2.5.2.1 Power distance (PDI)

PDI is concerned with the inequality of people which to some extent exists in any nation as habitants do not have the same amount of power, e.g. capital, willpower or status. It measures the respect of and adaption to other individuals as well as to which degree people accept the inequality of power (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

Zhang, Winterich and Mittal (2010) argue that PDI is the main influential dimension on consumers’ impulsive buying. A society with low PDI shows a higher degree of impulsive consumption due to worse self-discipline and resistance of allurements (ibid). Moreover, PDI influences people's style and the way they dress (de Mooij, 2010), which makes it an important dimension for fast fashion. People in low PDI societies seem to care less about appearance and luxury brands (ibid). Further, Swaidan’s (2012) research about consumer ethics displayed that low PDI leads to a higher avoidance of unethical actions since people with low PDI try to behave more ethically. Low PDI societies leave more space for debates, thus have a greater appreciation to sustainable concerns such as environmental (Husted, 2005; Park, Russell and Lee, 2007). Those societies are also concerned about people’s welfare and demand equality and fair conditions for workers, whereas high PDI cultures accept inequalities (Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001).

2.5.2.2 Individualism (IDV)

The dimension relates to the dependency of an individual in a group in a certain society. It regards the personal freedom which is important to high IDV cultures whereas in a low IDV nation, people tend to have a more set place in the society (Hofstede, Hofstede
and Minkov, 2010). Therefore, low IDV is described as a social pattern of individuals who define themselves as parts of various groups existing within a nation (Triandis, 1995). Additionally, in low IDV cultures, trust and relationships are essential whereas flexibility and pace is favoured in high IDV cultures (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). This dimension enables cross-cultural researchers to investigate culture’s impact on values, communication and consumers as well as social behaviour (Triandis and Gelfand, 1998).

Moreover, Katz, Swanson and Nelson (2001), Ling-Yee (1997) as well as McCarty and Shrum (2001) argue that a low IDV mind-set is closely connected to environmental consciousness, hence also sustainable consciousness. This is supported by Swaidan (2012) which indicates low IDV cultures reject unethical behaviour more than their high IDV counterpart. A low IDV society’s connection to sustainability may come from their effort of “doing the right thing” and the responsibility towards the society whilst high IDV countries act for more personal reasons (McCarty and Shrum, 2001; Triandis, 1995). This is also reflected by Kacen and Lee (2002) who suggest that the tendency of impulsive buying behaviour is higher in high IDV cultures. Even though low IDV cultures also display characteristics of impulsive buying behaviour (ibid), they put the own desires aside to act in favour of the society (Triandis, 1995). However, there are contradictory studies which state that high IDV countries acknowledge environmental issues more (Husted, 2005). Pro-environmental groups are more often found in high IDV societies (Katz, Swanson and Nelson, 2001), since low IDV cultures focus on official groups activities rather than voluntary organisations (Husted, 2005).

2.5.2.3 Masculinity (MAS)

MAS applies to behaviour related to confidence and modesty but also different values of what is important in life. A high MAS society has clear gender roles and men are seen as strong and focused, with a focus on money and success whilst women prioritise family and are more affectionate. However, in a low MAS society, gender roles are vague and both genders have more feminine characteristics (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Thereby, de Mooij and Hofstede (2010) state there are larger differences in a high MAS society than in a low MAS.

Due to the desire to succeed and prove yourself worthy through accomplishments in a high MAS society, materialistic aspects are used. For instance, by showing of luxury products or brands (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). On the contrary, in a low MAS society, people prioritise products for the home and do more things themselves, e.g. sewing a dress. Hence, less status products are purchased and people do not focus on impressing other people (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Regarding consumer ethics, research revealed that nations scoring a low MAS perceive unethical behaviour more problematic than people with high MAS (Swaidan, 2012). Furthermore, low MAS countries have a higher degree of environmental sustainability and awareness (Park, Russell and Lee, 2007) as their values constitute the quality of life and to take care of others (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010). Husted (2005) supports this, stating that
low MAS demonstrates a greater responsiveness to green or sustainable values. Therefore, consumers from low MAS societies care more about the labour and they support the conservation of the nature (Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001). High MAS societies tend to only take sustainable aspects into consideration when an economic output can be realised by the pro-sustainable actions, i.e. a win-win situation (Husted, 2005). This derives from the consumers’ focus on monetary aspects during his purchase (Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001).

2.5.2.4 Uncertainty avoidance (UAI)

The dimension measures how a society deals with the future and the unknown. High UAI often develops to anxiety and mistrust which can be faced with help from technology, law and religion (de Mooij, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) since these provide structure and guidance (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). A nation with low UAI accepts a more unstructured life and enhances change and modernisation (ibid).

Low UAI is stated to choose convenience over authenticity and purity which is reflected in the consumer behaviour. Additionally, low UAI societies spend more money on shallow products whilst a society with high UAI prioritises basic products. Also, people in high UAI countries are more likely to buy second-hand items than in low UAI countries (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Swaidan (2012) connects high UAI to more ethical considerations among consumers and argues this is due to low UAI societies being less risk-averse. This correlation between risk, a key characteristic of the UAI dimension (de Mooij, 2010), and having lower ethical values is supported by Rallapalli et al. (1994) study of consumers’ ethical beliefs and personality traits. Similarly, Katz, Swansons and Nelson (2001) suggest that high UAI leads to higher political demand to implement policies which reduce the risk of environmental damage. On the other hand, low UAI societies generally show more willingness to participate in protests and fight actively for their pro-sustainable beliefs (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

2.5.2.5 Long-term orientation (LTO)

Determination, movement and focus on the future characterise a high LTO society whilst the past, habits and stability are prioritised by low LTO societies (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). High LTO cultures have a holistic view on time and consider both the past and future in their decision-making (Bearden, Money and Nevins, 2006). The faster the economic growth, the higher the LTO of a society (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

Consumers originating from a low LTO society display the tendency to spend now, opposite to high LTO cultures which are saving for tomorrow and therefore are more careful with resources (de Mooij, 2011; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Further, research indicates that LTO influences the way a society handles natural resources which can be linked to sustainability and high LTO indicates more environmental protection (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). In general, societies with a
high LTO are more focused on finding sustainable solutions and display a higher willingness to sacrifice their desires for a set goal. On the contrary, low LTO societies search for quick solutions and attention lies on social concerns and obligations (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

2.5.2.6 Indulgence (IND)

IND measures the degree of well-being and happiness in a society. Additionally, the control of life is considered and how people are able to control their lives, i.e. wants and impulses through degree of freedom and choices. A high IND society has a rather weak degree of control compared to a low IND society which is characterised by a high degree of control (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

Reflecting consumer behaviour within this dimension, it displays that consumers from a low IND society only purchase products if needed, whereas high IND indicates consumers’ willingness to pay more for quality and the aspiration for new gadgets and trends (de Mooij, 2015). Further, high IND societies distinguish from low IND societies by the possession of optimistic attitudes, the higher importance of free time and the urge to spend money as desired. Low IND societies one the other hand, are rather pessimistic and consider themselves limited by social norms (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

2.6 Conceptual framework

The five topics of the research were investigated in the literature review; the Millennials, sustainability, fast fashion, sustainable consumer behaviour and culture. Further, the five topics are developed into three major themes; national culture, Millennials’ perception of sustainability and Millennials’ intended buying behaviour. The themes are investigated in the context of the fast fashion industry, where the Millennials represent the main target group, and their connection is presented in figure 2. The conceptual framework shows the coherence of the research and provides a base in order to assess the research question.

Firstly, the conceptual framework displays that national culture impacts Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour individually. The impact is crucial to understand since both the perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour is connected to lifestyle which derives from values, beliefs and attitudes which are deeply rooted in national culture. The perception of sustainability is influenced by national culture due to its impact on sustainable consciousness and how consumers identify and meet sustainability issues, including social, environmental and economic factors. Additionally, the intended buying behaviour is influenced since national culture shapes preferences, wants and demands, leading to the buying decision. Secondly, the Millennials’ perception of sustainability affects the intended buying behaviour even though it might not affect the actual buying behaviour.
Figure 2 Conceptual framework (Own, 2017).
3 Methodology

The methodology chapter presents the research approach and research method, followed by research design and data collection. Additionally, more specified content in relation to this thesis is presented through the operationalisation and method of data analysis. Lastly, the methods for providing quality by validity and reliability are discussed. Throughout the chapter, each part shows relevance to the subject and motivations for the choices of methods in order to collect valuable data.

3.1 Abductive research approach

The main challenge researchers face today is how to interrelate theory and reality. Three different research models can be used to explain how theory and empirical findings are related; induction, deduction and abduction (Patel and Davidson, 2011). The abductive approach, which is the systematic combining of induction and deduction (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Patel and Davidson, 2011), is the most appropriate for this thesis as it is often connected to exploratory research design (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

In this thesis, the researchers move back and forth between the literature review and empirical findings which creates a deeper understanding of the research area (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). This facilitates the identification of valuable patterns which is essential for this thesis in order to explain how national culture affects the perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour (ibid). After conducting the focus groups, some literature parts appeared more important than previously expected and additional information was added. Another reason for the abductive approach is the demand and lack of cross-culture studies in this combined research area as well as the need to contribute with new results to fill the research gaps (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Since this thesis explores a rather new research area, there is a need for systematic combining and not make conclusions only based on theory or empirical findings. This thesis uses literature to investigate the different themes, and empirical findings from focus groups to gain further knowledge in order to answer the research question (Dubois and Gadde, 2002)

Further, an inductive approach derives from empirical data of the researched topic, where the identified connections are considered reality (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008), formulating a new theory solely based on gathered empirical findings (Patel and Davidson, 2011). Since this thesis not aims to generalise, the inductive approach is unsuitable (ibid). On the other hand, the deductive approach derives from theory (Patel and Davidson, 2011), where findings are explained by existing theories (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2008). Due to limited existing research of the combined topics in this thesis as well as the reliance on discussion and analysis to identify similarities and differences of the gathered data, the deductive approach is unsuitable.
3.2 Qualitative research method

There are two different methods of research used to collect data: quantitative and qualitative where the choice depends on the research question/s (Holme and Solvang, 1997). The quantitative research analyses the context evolved from statistics (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016), conducting surveys or standardised interviews to collect data and involves a high number of individuals (Olsson and Sörensen, 2011). On the other hand, the qualitative method analyses words and images (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) and collects data through social interaction such as interviews and observations, involving a limited number of people (Olsson and Sörensen, 2011). The method makes it possible for participants to bring forward their own thoughts, knowledge and former experiences regarding the discussed topic which cannot be achieved with a quantitative method (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, the qualitative method collects information for a deeper understanding of the research area (Olsson and Sörensen, 2011) and is considered more flexible (Kumar, 2014).

As this cross-cultural thesis aims to get a better understanding of Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour within the fast fashion industry, a qualitative research is the most appropriate method. The reason for adopting a qualitative method is that the researchers can engage participants as well as observe behaviours and reactions of participants which is useful for the analysis of the empirical findings (Olsson and Sörensen, 2011). Another argument supporting a qualitative research method is the possibility to gain a deeper understanding due to the large amount of collected information (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Therefore, a qualitative method is suitable since it opens the possibility to gather in-depth data about the research area of this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis investigates several themes aiming towards understanding how they are connected in order to answer the research question. Since the qualitative method is considered less structured than the quantitative, it is considered more exploratory as there is a need for further research to provide a deeper understanding of the research area (Malhotra and Birks, 2007).

3.3 Exploratory research design

Churchill and Iacobucci’s (2005, p. 74) define research design as follows: “framework or plan for a study, used as a guide to collect and analyse data”. It aims to designate the specifics of the obligatory process to collect the information needed to structure and solve a research problem (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). The chosen research design must be suitable for the qualitative approach of this thesis. Thereby, to select the research design, the researchers need to consider which is the most appropriate design to obtain the right empirical data to answer the exploratory research question (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Broadly classified, there are two distinct types of research designs; exploratory research and conclusive research (Malhotra and Birks, 2007). As this thesis aspires to explore how national culture affects Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry, the conclusive research design is unsuitable as this design aims to measure a certain phenomenon rather than explore it (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Malhotra and Birks, 2007). Therefore, an
An exploratory research design is appropriate to gain a better understanding of the context of this thesis.

Firstly, the design is chosen as there is a lack of research in this area and especially in the unique context of the combination of the different research areas which makes it interesting to obtain more knowledge. Secondly, an exploratory research design allows the researchers to identify or further develop the comprehension of perceptions and behaviour (Malhotra and Birks, 2007), which is one of the main goals of this thesis. Finally, Knittel, Beurer and Berndt (2016) successfully applied this design in their study with a similar starting point and the use of focus groups in marketing research, which supports the applicability of this design. The choice of this design may lead to hypotheses for further quantitative research (Malhotra and Birks, 2007).

3.3.1 Cross-cultural study

This exploratory thesis is conducted in a cross-cultural context, as it aspires to get a comprehensive understanding of cultural differences. The usage of a qualitative explorative research design highlights the ability to interpret and be flexible regarding the analysis of cross-cultural issues which is crucial in this context (Colucci, 2008; Liamputtong, 2010). Cross-cultural research is applied when a study investigates two or more countries and often aims to examine consumers’ perceptions and behaviour. This provides valuable information for a company on how to address their consumers (Haghirian, 2009). However, cross-cultural studies are challenging since the researchers must find suitable research methods that are applicable for all nationalities (Haghirian, 2009; Triandis, 1994). As this thesis is based on a qualitative research, following methods can be applied; in-depth interviews, focus groups, life experience, observations of participants and reflective journaling (Liamputtong, 2010). The explorative nature of this thesis and its unique context make focus groups a suitable method since they provide the researcher a base to explore and obtain insights about attitudes, perceptions and intentions of participants (Colucci, 2008).

A research with cross-cultural focus group can choose between the emic and etic approach to compare the countries (de Mooij, 2010; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). The etic approach looks at universal elements whilst the emic approach focuses on more culture-specific elements (Triandis, 1994). Focus groups are usually closer to the emic approach as the participants contribute with own inputs and perceptions of the subject (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). However, when diverse cultures are compared, it is closer to the etic approach (Triandis, 1994). Therefore, both the emic and etic approach are considered in this thesis which seem suitable as most research is a mixture of the methods and not completely emic or etic (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

3.3.2 Convenience sampling

To gather the primary data, the focus group participants are chosen through a sampling process. Firstly, after defining the purpose of the thesis, a sampling frame is identified (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). The sampling frame
consists of Millennials in their twenties who are university students and currently reside in Kalmar. Also, the participants of the focus groups need to be citizens of the country they represent and have lived most of their lives there. This frame limits the influence of other socio-demographic variables e.g. age or education and allows to primarily investigate national culture’s impact. The next step of the sampling process concerns the sample procedure, broadly classified as non-probability or probability sampling (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Malhotra and Birks, 2007; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative nature of this thesis makes non-probability sampling more suitable, where the selection relies on the researcher (Malhotra and Birks, 2007; Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Further, qualitative research does not lead to statistical generalisations of a population, which suggests inapplicability of probability sampling (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

This thesis uses convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling technique to select the participants, since it allows to recruit voluntarily participants from the researchers’ surrounding, in this case; students (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005; Malhotra and Birks, 2007). Further, for focus groups, convenience sampling is considered the cheapest and the most time efficient technique (Malhotra and Birks, 2007; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Convenience sampling does not only have benefits but is criticised for not knowing if the participants represent the targeted population (Churchill and Iacobucci, 2005). However, since this thesis aims to explore rather than generalise, convenience sampling is an accepted sampling technique (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015), which was successfully applied by previous consumer behaviour research (e.g. Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2010; Knittel, Beurer and Berndt, 2016).

The in-person recruitment of the sample is made via social media with help from the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) Facebook group and participants who agreed to participate. Due to relevance for this thesis; China, France, Germany, Netherlands, Russia, Sweden and the United States are selected. The aim during the sampling process is to get a variety of cultures involved by recruiting participants from different continents. However, Europe is represented by five countries since due to the large number of countries in this continent, culture differs. Further, the United States, China and Russia represent three of the largest consumer markets worldwide, thus of great importance and interest for companies. Additionally, since the thesis adopts convenience sampling, the availability of different nationalities among students is considered.

Totally, 28 students with the age between 20 to 27, born 1990-1997, are recruited, whereas each country had four representatives, two males and two females, expect from Germany. Due to the lack of male volunteers from Germany, the country is represented by three females and one male. In the empirical findings and analysis, the participants will be named with the first letter of their home country followed by the number of the focus group they participated in. For instance, the participant from Netherlands in the first focus group will be referred to as N1 etc. Table 1 shows the division of the focus groups, including the participants’ nationality, age, gender and level of education.
### Table 1 Participants of focus groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Focus Groups 1 2017-04-26</th>
<th>Focus Groups 2 2017-04-27</th>
<th>Focus Groups 3 2017-04-27</th>
<th>Focus Groups 4 2017-04-28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>24, male, master</td>
<td>25, female, master</td>
<td>25, female, master</td>
<td>24, male, master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>22, male, master</td>
<td>25, female, master</td>
<td>24, male, master</td>
<td>21, female, bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>25, male, bachelor</td>
<td>26, female, master</td>
<td>20, female, bachelor</td>
<td>25, female, master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>24, female, bachelor</td>
<td>25, male, master</td>
<td>24, female, bachelor</td>
<td>21, male, bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>21, male, bachelor</td>
<td>23, male, master</td>
<td>26, female, master</td>
<td>22, female, master</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>22, female, bachelor</td>
<td>25, male, master</td>
<td>23, male, bachelor</td>
<td>22, female, bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States</td>
<td>21, male, bachelor</td>
<td>20, female, bachelor</td>
<td>22, female, master</td>
<td>20, male, bachelor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Own, 2017)

### 3.4 Data collection

Data presents information gathered in the researchers’ or previous researchers’ surroundings and can be tangible as well as intangible (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The compiling of data leads to the aim of a research; to answer the research question/s (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). The choice of methods for collecting data depends on the themes and purpose of a study and is selected by the researchers with their interests and preferences taken into consideration (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The data can be divided into two groups based on the method of collection; primary data and secondary data (Kumar, 2014). Primary data is collected by the researchers themselves whilst secondary data provides information collected from other researchers (Olsson and Sörensen, 2011).

#### 3.4.1 Primary data collection

Primary data is compiled by the researchers’ themselves from observations, interviews or questionnaires (Kumar, 2014). However, the most used method for collecting primary data in a qualitative research is by conducting interviews. The interviews can represent the entire data collected but also a part of the data if combined with other primary or secondary sources (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Primary data is the major source in this thesis and is collected through four focus groups. However, two focus group participants had to cancel on short notice due to illness and sudden obligations outside of Sweden. Therefore, participants R2 and R3 answered the questions individually afterwards. In this thesis, compiling data through focus groups provide an understanding for the subject in a cross-cultural context since the focus groups are conducted through discussions, including participants with different nationalities. In order to gain a deep understanding and answer the research question’s “how”, primary data is vital since the main function of this data is to provide valuable information for answering the research questions compiled for the specific study (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005).

#### 3.4.2 Secondary data collection

Data collected from a secondary source can include documents such as government publications, previous research (Kumar, 2014) and surveys (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Moreover, the secondary data can be divided into internal sources and
external sources. Internal sources are companies’ own information and publications whilst external sources are journal articles and books (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Secondary data comprises both qualitative and quantitative data and are mainly used in a research which is descriptive and explanatory but can also be a useful complement to primary data in an exploratory study, e.g. a cross-cultural study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Since this thesis is exploratory, the main source for the analysis is primary data. However, secondary data is used for support and deepen the analysis further. The used secondary data is external since a consumer perspective is applied and hence Hofstede’s six dimensions of national culture as shown in appendix A, figure 4 are considered useful.

3.4.3 Structure of focus groups

Interviews are crucial to gather information and gain knowledge in a subject when the researcher wants to enter peoples’ mind and grasp feelings and thoughts which cannot be done through observations, hence interaction is needed (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). There are two different kinds of interviews and the most used method is interviews between two people referred to as one-to-one interviews. The other method is one-to-many interviews, i.e. group interviews, which are beneficial when conversation and discussion is valued (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). This thesis aims to create a discussion to gather valuable data and thereby reach the participants genuine opinions which leads to one-to-many being the suitable choice. A kind of group interview is focus groups which are conducted in this thesis. Focus groups are characterised by providing in-depth data and are suitable when the goal is to identify attitudes, motives and preferences of consumers (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). The research question of this thesis regards perceptions and intended buying behaviour of consumers which is why data from focus groups suits this kind of research.

An aspect which distinguish focus groups is the social dimension since the discussion creates a social interaction which may affect opinions and understandings. Hence, this method reflects the real life where group pressure is present and people influence each other (Holme and Solvang, 1997). However, in this thesis, the most crucial questions will before the discussions also be answered individually on paper to avoid and detect answers influenced by fellow participants. Additionally, focus groups are suitable for this thesis’ data collection since the topic is neither significantly personal nor sensitive which would kill the conversation and create an unpleasant atmosphere. Focus groups are convenient when the subject is regarded as something people would have no problem talking about but they do not, which subsequently rises the need for research (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Furthermore, there are three different ways to structure interviews; structured, semi-structured and unstructured, and the choice depends on the aim of the interview and the interviewers’ experience (ibid). However, a structured interview is more applicable in quantitative research and will thus not be used in this thesis. Unstructured and semi-structured interviews are suitable for qualitative methods and may be applied in group
interviews as well as focus groups (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Due to the interviewers’ level of experience and the topic of this thesis, semi-structured focus groups are the better choice to provide valuable and qualitative data since unstructured interviews require an exceptionally experienced interviewer (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Furthermore, semi-structured focus groups are conducted due to suitability to the thesis’ subject and exploratory research design since this research design is most appropriate with unstructured or semi-structured methods (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016).

Additionally, by conducting semi-structured focus groups, it is possible to adapt the questions’ order and add follow-up questions according to the specific conversation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). It is also the most natural choice to create a flow in the discussion but also for the participants to be able to ask each other follow-up questions (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). The four focus groups are conducted in English since the participants consist of American, Chinese, Dutch, French, German, Russian, and Swedish Millennials, yet who all study courses in English at a university level. Thereby, they can be assumed to have a high enough level of English to express opinions and feelings regarding the subject of this thesis in a righteously way.

3.5 Operationalisation

Table 2 describes the operationalisation in which the themes from the literature review of the thesis are converted into interview questions (Patel and Davidsson, 2011). Moreover, the interview guideline in appendix B, table 3 derives from the research question and is developed to guidance the moderators, i.e. interviewers, during the focus groups (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

Table 2 Operationalisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 1: Sustainability</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability in fashion</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>To gain fundamental knowledge of Millennials perception of sustainability in the context of fashion. Get an insight in their present knowledge about sustainable fashion and sustainable fashion brands. This creates a base for further discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability in fast fashion (three pillars of sustainability)</td>
<td>3-7</td>
<td>First the general perception of sustainability within the fast fashion industry will be discussed. To understand what is important and which issues they perceive as the most critical. Also, Millennials present knowledge about sustainability of fast fashion brands will be discovered. The deeper discussion of the three distinctive parts of sustainability from a consumer-centric perspective enhances the understanding what knowledge the participants have about the three pillars of sustainability. This should give a better understanding of why they perceive some parts of sustainability more important than others. Further, the questions should identify which issue is perceived as the most important in their home country and if sustainability in fashion is considered a critical issue. This knowledge creates a base for analysing the impact of national culture on the perception of sustainability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Questions</td>
<td>Reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part 2: Intended Buying Behaviour in Fast Fashion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended buying behaviour in fast fashion</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>Here the focus lies on Millennials’ decision and intended buying behaviour in fast fashion, which indicates the essential values of Millennials when buying their clothes. Also, the intended buying behaviour when directly comparing sustainable vs. non-sustainable fashion choices is examined. This should help to analyse which significance the aspect sustainability has compared to other attributes. Questions 9 and 10 are related to consumption, overconsumption and impulsive buying behaviour in Millennials home countries. Impulsive buying behaviour is connected to Millennials, the fast fashion industry, sustainability and culture, and therefore of significant importance for this thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information search and knowledge</td>
<td>11-13</td>
<td>The questions show how well informed Millennials are before buying a fashion item and if there are more group-oriented or make individual choices. This is important since the intended buying behaviour is connected to values, attitudes and knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention-behaviour gap</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>These questions combine the two research areas. Further it provides indications for a possible intention-behaviour gap and what the factors are for this gap.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Own, 2017)

3.6 Method of data analysis

For the data to become valuable, interpretation and analysis is needed. In a qualitative research, the analysis is partly conducted simultaneously with the data collection, especially when follow-up questions are used (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). In this thesis, due to subject and research area the method of data analysis is combined, including content analysis and cross-cultural techniques. Concerning focus groups, the data is analysed using a content analysis since it is the most suitable for an in-depth analysis (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). Additionally, in a research including several focus groups, a content analysis is useful for a comprehensive view of the collected data (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). The analysis in a cross-cultural study is complicated since several aspects are considered however, the main attention lies on what is between the participating countries instead of within a country. Two aspects are presented in this type of data analysis, analyse the data of a nation and identify similarities and differences concerning the nations (ibid).

The content analysis in a cross-cultural way regards coding the data, divide it into themes as well as identify patterns and trends (Wibeck, 2010) and includes three stages; unitising, sampling and recording (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015). In the unitising step, the unit/s of analysis/analyses are decided. The two units of analysis will be complete dialogues of the research’s main subjects for answering the research question; the perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry. In focus groups, complete unitising is complex due to the large amount of data. Thereby, the interview content is sampled for the analysis’ aim, creating subcategories, i.e. themes. Lastly, the recording step includes the usage of categorised content from the unit of analyses yet remain the meaning of what was said (ibid). The content used
comes from the recordings of focus groups which are transcribed and the transcriptions are thereafter studied (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2005). Apart from interpretations of what is said, the authors’ notes on the non-verbal communication from the focus groups are taken into consideration (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

3.7 Quality of research

Even though the quality of qualitative research is not as easily measured as in quantitative research, the verification of quality is needed (Denscombe, 2016). Regardless of area, research should always provide valid and reliable information in order to become a trustworthy source and influence the future. In a qualitative study, the research should be thoroughly conducted and described before finalising with a logical conclusion and subsequently present quality (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

3.7.1 Validity

In a qualitative research, it is not possible for the researchers to prove correct conclusions have been reached since it is based on assumptions of reality. However, qualitative researchers can establish the validity concerning the data collection and that it has been compiled and controlled in a qualitative way (Denscombe, 2016). Hence, validity can be described as the trustworthiness of the researchers’ interpretations of the findings (Silverman, 2013). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) validity can be divided into two groups; internal validity and external validity. In summation, internal validity shows how well the findings of a research go with the real world and external validity regards how much the findings can be useful in other areas than the one studied (ibid). Hence, external validation regards generalisation and is therefore not applicable in this thesis since the goal is not to generalise but to understand the research context and mediate the knowledge further.

In order to strengthen the internal validity, triangulation can be useful which is the combination of several methods, data sources, investigators or theories which provides a higher degree of validity. In this thesis, internal validity is improved due to several respondents but also multiple researchers who together collect and analyse the data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The degree of validity is also increased through respondent validation, meaning that the preliminary findings are controlled by participants from the focus groups. If the participants would disagree with the interpretations, the material can thereby be revised and improved before published (Denscombe, 2016). In this thesis, the preliminary findings are sent out to one of the participant from each focus group with the task to verify the interpretations made, hence representing that specific focus group. After reading the preliminary findings all representatives agreed and no adjustments were needed.

3.7.2 Reliability

In research, the reliability of a study refers to its capability to contribute to consistent or similar results when the study is conducted repeatedly under similar conditions (Kumar, 2014). As mentioned, this thesis adopts a qualitative method that is characterised of
being less structured, which creates a challenge for the researchers to achieve consistency (Holme and Solvang, 1997). Further, it is difficult to achieve consistency through focus groups since participants’ behaviour vary due to different personalities (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Yet, reliability is also connected to how accurate the researchers are processing the gathered information (Kumar, 2014). In this thesis, the information from both literature and empirical findings is thoroughly gathered to increase the reliability further.

Furthermore, a higher degree of reliability can be provided by saving the gathered information for later availability in order to avoid the risk of discarding the content. Thus, to both record and transcribe the focus groups is considered the most successful combination to conduct a truthful analysis (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). In order to ensure high reliability in this thesis, one researcher observes while the other two moderate and conduct the focus groups. The focus groups are recorded and transcribed to accurately include everything discussed in the analysis. Moreover, all participants are discussing the same themes and subjects during the focus groups which provides a high reliability. However, even though the main questions are predetermined, the questions vary due to the semi-structured focus group approach. Additionally, questions alter since participants differ and hence also the answers and follow-up questions, which are considered in the analysis.
4 Empirical findings and analysis

The chapter presents the collected secondary and primary data and the authors’ analysis in order to show the importance of the findings in relation to the literature review and to answer the research question. The secondary data, primary data and analysis are combined and divided into three parts; perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour, followed by a combination of the two themes into clusters, providing indications of a potential intention-behaviour gap.

4.1 Perception of sustainability

Overall, the focus group participants provided examples of their perception of sustainability connected to all three pillars of the TBL model (Elkington, 1999) from a customer-centric perspective (Park and Kim, 2016; Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas, 2011). When being directly questioned about sustainability in fashion, environmental aspects appeared predominant. Inconsistently with McNeill and Moore’s (2015) research on fast fashion consumers, the participants possess knowledge about companies' sustainable intentions and can provide examples, e.g. recycling opportunities, sustainable clothing lines made of organic cotton, improving working conditions and implementing rules against child labour. Nevertheless, the empirical results confirm Hill and Lee's (2012) findings that Millennials lack more specific knowledge. The participants recognise their lack of knowledge concerning the sustainability of fashion companies, as they find it hard to define fashion companies which operate sustainable. Instead, participants mention specific collections such as H&M's "the Conscious Collection" or similar sustainable clothing lines from Zara, GAP, Uniqlo and G-Star Raw. Others associate only small local stores with sustainability. Generally, across all nationalities, participants were torn on the question if fast fashion companies can be sustainable or not. Only the Americans agreed with each other and stressed it is not the aim of fast fashion companies to be sustainable. Further, some participants perceive companies' sustainability efforts solely as marketing strategies. Based on the discussion about sustainability in fashion and fast fashion, five themes have been identified. Since not each country is connectable to every theme, only the relevant countries will be elaborated.

4.1.1 Environmental-friendly

In accordance with previous studies on Millennials (Hill and Lee, 2012; Kozar and Hiller Connell, 2013), environmental aspects were the most frequently mentioned regarding sustainability in the fashion industry, since all countries addressed this aspect, at least briefly. However, this is contradictory to Joergens (2006) who stated that in fashion, people are more concerned about social issues. A possible reason could be that environmental issues are more noticeable in the participants' home countries; thus, they can relate better (Gilg, Barr and Ford, 2005). The participants' comments regarding environmental sustainability in fast fashion are in line with the UN Brundtland (1987) definition of sustainability, as they highlighted the need to take care of the environment and resources, i.e. preservation and conservation for the future.
The Chinese highly stressed materials and particularly the chemicals used for the fabrics as negative impacts on the human and environment. As emphasised by C2 "I also think about the materials they use, whether they are healthy for people, because they are very close to our skin [...] the materials they use are maybe not good for humans". Those concerns express the significantly low IDV mind-set which is connected to environmental consciousness (e.g. McCarty and Shrum, 2001) and concern for humans (Triandis, 1995). The environmental care and interest in the kind of resources used further reflect China's high LTO (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Also, Germany's high LTO is shown in the Germans’ perception of sustainability in fast fashion however opposite to the Chinese, their focus is on "closing the loop", i.e. recycling used clothing items. This attitude becomes evidence for their high UAI and the desire to reduce the risk of environmental damage by implementing regulations (Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001), such as banning certain materials as mentioned by G1.

Also, France scores high in LTO and UAI and the French demand less shipping to reduce the pollution from fast fashion production. Further, the French as well as the Swedes bring up the need to respect the nature. For the French, it is important to be economical with natural resources whereas the Swedes mainly request fabrics which do not harm the nature. The awareness of the environmental issues in fast fashion of both countries could be linked to low MAS, which explains the obligation they feel towards the environment (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Similarly, the Dutch possess low MAS and show high awareness of environmental sustainability. This was stressed by N4 "We are quite aware of all the environmental issues" who expressed their main concerns in regard to sustainable fast fashion include “non-toxic colouring and use of clothing and no wasting in colours and chemicals and the use of more organic cotton products”. The Dutch emphasise the high relevance of environmental protection for their country due to the increasing sea level. This can be connected to the high IDV since they are immediately affected by this issue and therefore take it into consideration for personal reasons (McCarty and Shrum, 2001; Triandis, 1995). Moreover, the high LTO is in line their attitudes about the environment.

The Americans’ perceptions of environmental sustainability in fast fashion are fairly distinct from each other. They relate aspects as recycling, conserving the earth's resources and limiting the waste to the concept. However, the discussions revealed that environmental concerns are rather individual and not reflected by the society. This could be seen as a manifestation of the significantly high IDV, which indicates they were raised to take care of themselves (Hofstede centre, 2017e; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Triandis, 1995). The Americans indicate that even if sustainability is kept in mind, usually people do not consider it for fast fashion purchases. U4 stressed “You are just buying, you know - whatever is the cheapest or whatever looks good. That is what matters at the time and you have a lot of problems going on so... I guess you don’t really want another one to think about”. Therefore, the Americans as part of a high IDV society generally appear less environmentally concerned (Ling-Yee, 1997; McCarty and Shrum, 2001), yet U3 hint that some people care but it is individual (Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001). U2 highlights the less sustainable concerns by stating “At
one point in time almost everyone was involved with American Apparel and buying clothes from there, because it seemed to be trendy, and like really big fashion but also pretty sustainable”, however she continued that now, no one is buying there since it is not seen trendy. In contrast to the other countries, the United States have low LTO, which is reflected in their perception of sustainability.

Contradictory to the other countries, concerns about sustainability in fast fashion but also in general are limited in Russia as highlighted by R1 "In Russia, nobody cares" and R4 “I don’t care that much about sustainability, maybe it’s a bit selfish but I care about what is more comfortable for myself and not for the environment”. Findings from the focus groups indicate that sustainability is not significantly discussed in Russia which can be connected to the high PDI. It appears that the high PDI leaves no place for discussion about sustainable issues, thus such problems are less considered (Husted, 2005; Park, Russell and Lee, 2007). This rather unsustainable attitude could be seen inconsistent with the low IDV mind-set. However, this is not the case since sustainability is not topical in Russia and low IDV societies tend to only support activities and movements considered by everyone (Husted, 2005). As supported by R2 "It could be very much accepted among Russian people if this trend is mentioned and talked about more". Although their current interest in sustainability within the fast fashion industry is limited, the Russians possess an idea of the concept which they mainly relate to environmental aspects and fabrics as well as procedures should not harm the nature, which can be connected to the high LTO.

4.1.2 Social issues
The discussion about sustainability brought up social concerns which the participants have with practices in the fast fashion industry. In line with Joergens’ (2006) definition of sustainability in the fashion industry, the participants mainly addressed the importance to abolish sweatshops, i.e. provide fair working conditions and acceptable wages for the workers. This displays that the nationalities which considered social issues; the French, Germans, Dutch, Swedes and Americans, are aware of the most problematic issues occurring in the fast fashion industry (Fulton and Lee, 2013; Park and Kim, 2016).

The French primarily refer social issues to working conditions but also the place of production when social aspects of sustainable fashion are discussed. They see social issues in the fast fashion industry as exemplified by F1 “There is one shop in which I do not wanna go and that is Primark, because it is so cheap that can't be normal”. The French stress the importance of people's well-being in the production facilities and all workers should be rewarded with a fair wage and be treated respectfully, which they do not see fulfilled today. F2 emphasises "The way the clothes are produced is kind of modern slavery [...] They work all day for nothing in the end and there have been factories that collapsed in Bangladesh and no one cares". This high degree of concern for the workers can be related to France's low MAS, since these societies tend to perceive ethical issues more problematic (Swaidan, 2012) and care more about
employees (Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001). Further, the French perceive the low standards of the production facilities as a social issue leading to an indefensible environment, which fast fashion companies are to blame for. As the factories are located far away it is hard for companies to control them, therefore the French suggest production closer to home would increase the working conditions. This way of thinking relates to the high LTO as it reflects thoughts about the future and openness to change (Hofstede centre, 2017b; Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010).

Similar to the French, the Dutch and Swedes are concerned about conditions in the fast fashion production facilities. N4 said following about social issues “A big part are fair wages and working conditions in the production countries”. Moreover, the Dutch briefly touch upon animal’s welfare as well as child labour. The social concerns are also reflected by N2’s statement “I think G-Star is quite sustainable, but I think it is only produced in the Netherlands actually. In a way, for me it seems sustainable since there are labour laws to protect the employees in the Netherlands”. On the other hand, the Swedes particularly consider child labour and the importance of eliminating social issues relating to conditions in the factories. S3 emphasises “Companies need to have a good reputation and good rules for not having child labour”. Even though the central aspect of concern slightly differs between the Swedes and French, their values can be connected to the MAS dimension, which is significantly low for both countries.

Also the Germans are aware of poor labour conditions in fast fashion production facilities and consider these social issues which they exemplify with treatment of workers and low wages. Their focus is on questionable conditions in the factories in developing countries and mention the importance of fair production. However, the Germans feel rather detached from social issues related to fast fashion, as highlighted by G2 "Factories are practically falling down and the people inside are dying and then always of course I feel “oh God, that is bad and we are bad people” but it is so disconnected for me". This confirms Gilg, Baar and Ford's (2005) findings that consumers mainly tend to consider issues close to home. To increase the concern about social issues in Germany, G3 suggests "People have to understand and see what is happening there. Otherwise, they don't give a shit about sustainability".

Contradictory to the close to home effect by Gilg, Baar and Ford (2005), the Chinese did not mention social issues and seem rather surprised by this discussion. C4 mentioned regarding fast fashion items “We know actually most of them are made in China, so we never question where they are from”. However, these values are greatly representative of China’s high PDI since the Chinese would not question the system and accept a certain degree of inequality (Hofstede centre, 2017a; Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010). This relates to Husted (2005) as well as Park, Russell and Lee's (2007) research, that in significantly high PDI societies, there is less space for discussion. The Russians further supports this view, as they do not consider social issues in regard to fast fashion problematic. R4 stressed "We don't care about production and how it was produced, and usually companies don't allow us to know, because they know that there
is no sense to spend money to inform us, because we don’t care basically”. Further, R4 mentioned that consumers only care about the visible parts of a product.

The Americans’ perspective of social issues differs from the other countries. Indeed, some mention it is important to provide fair wages and equal benefits to all employees of a fast fashion production facility. However, during discussions about the social aspect, they mainly refer to national issues with an attention on economic and social inequalities within the United States. Thereby, they focus on the positive aspects of the low-priced, hence affordable items from fast fashion companies. This is highlighted by U3 “It's not obvious who the poor people are or who the rich people are [...] I think that socially, it has done actually some good for the more developed countries, but I think it is the opposite in developing countries probably”. Those values are connected to the low PDI, which shows their principles of liberty and justice within the United States (Hofstede centre, 2017e; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). This is a more macro-economic view on sustainability in fast fashion, focusing on the society rather than solely the workers in the factories which was suggested by Waage et al. (2005).

4.1.3 Quality

The importance of quality was mentioned by the majority of the countries, but its significance varied among them. Contradictory to Viswanathan and Jain (2013), the findings show that the Millennials from China, Germany and Netherlands do prefer quality products, since they stressed quality as one of the most crucial factors during the sustainable fashion and fast fashion discussions.

The Chinese primarily perceive quality as durability of style and desire long-lasting fashion items which will remain fashionable, opposing Yarrow and O’Donnell’s (2009) research. Additionally, quality is considered high if the fabric is considered good, yet the durability of style is the main quality priority and is related to sustainable fashion. These attitudes are in line with China's high LTO (de Mooij, 2011) as they emphasise the future by desire long-lasting and timeless clothes (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). As stressed by C4: “I do not think that trendy styles are sustainable since every year people need to catch up with the fashion styles [...] companies need social responsible styles. This is a durable way to make the fashion industry sustainable”. Instead, the Chinese relate high quality and hence sustainable fashion to luxurious brands’ classical and timeless items. Furthermore, C3 stresses that low prices and poor quality result in short-lived items which make the fast fashion industry highly unsustainable. This is supportive of Collett, Culver and Chen’s (2013) as well as Park and Kim’s (2016) research who state that the lower quality affect consumers’ perception of fast fashion. The desire for quality can be connected to China’s high MAS, since according to Husted (2005), these societies seek further benefits like high quality when choosing sustainable items, as confirmed by the Chinese.

The Germans agree with the Chinese; quality is an important aspect of sustainability in fashion, but they have a different perception of quality. The Germans connect quality to
the fabrics and long-lasting items which will not be worn out quickly and can be washed repeatedly. This view, as with the Chinese, can be connected to the significantly high LTO (de Mooij, 2011; Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Additionally, G2 and G4 stress the importance of how the items feel when they are worn. The quality of fabrics is the Germans’ major concern and they want to invest in basics which can be worn for years. As clearly emphasised by G2 “I have to admit that when I buy clothes I do not think of shipping and waste. I think about the materials, washing and long-lasting”. The Germans associate sustainable fashion with quality, however it is the quality itself that is of importance, not the sustainability aspect which only is considered an additional benefit. These values can similar to the Chinese be connected to high MAS (Husted, 2005). Furthermore, the Germans’ values can be explained by the high IDV (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) as G4 mentioned that they search for authentic and pure items which is not related to fast fashion.

Similar to the Chinese and Germans, the Dutch explain quality and durability to be important and related to sustainability in the fashion industry. Attitudes which can be connected to Netherlands’ high LTO, as they desire clothes they can use for a longer time (de Mooij, 2011; Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). However, their definition of quality differs somewhat since they consider the feeling of the fabric towards the skin a measurement of quality, hence sustainability. The importance of how the fabric feel can be explained by Netherlands’ high IDV, which relates to the Dutch want to fulfil their own desires (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Triandis, 1995). Even though quality matters, it is not of the highest importance.

4.1.4 Responsibility
The focus group participants brought up different attitudes regarding responsibility of sustainability in the fast fashion industry. Throughout the discussions, the French put the sustainability responsibilities on fast fashion companies and blame them for unsustainable consequences. As emphasised by F2 “They can’t pretend like “oh I did not know”” and F1 “These companies are really really bad at being sustainable and I don’t know if you read some articles but I did and they are really really bad and that is the point and today they don’t want to prove the way they get some cheap prices [...] and that’s crazy” The attitudes can be connected with France’s high UAI since they are suspicious towards and mistrust the companies, confirming research by de Mooij (2010) as well as Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010).

Moreover, the French explain that in France, consumers did not buy from H&M after a scandal associated with child labour which support the exposed attitudes in the area. This scandal can be considered an impact on their values and motives leading to the boycott and instead choosing other alternatives (Darley, Blankson and Luethge, 2009) which may be more socially sustainable. However, the French are also aware of companies which do take sustainable responsibility and exemplify with small national sustainable brands. The awareness and concern can be seen influenced by the low MAS since these societies care more for fellow humans (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov,
2010) and perceive ethical issues more problematic (Swaiden, 2012). All statements stress that companies carry the main responsibility of sustainability in fast fashion, which is supported with both good and bad examples of company efforts.

Similar to the French, the Swedes are influenced by the low MAS, however they stress that fast fashion companies take their responsibility and make efforts. As emphasised by S1 “I get this that, like H&M what I have heard, they are doing stuff to change the working conditions in Taiwan [...] they can’t like make the wages higher all of a sudden because that would make the economy all weird. So, they have to work with the bigger picture, and in the bigger picture I think they’re kind of working with sustainability or doing something” as well as S3 “They are trying to like for example, for every shirt you buy we plant a tree or something like that. They make something good for the environment and also for the world as well”. Consequently, the Swedes expose that there are not much more companies can do, hence additional attempts are out of their control as expressed by S2 “You can’t have anyone working in the company checking it out every now and then, so when they are not visiting, child labour is used and I think that is kind of, it is very hard for companies to actually check that. I think that you need to keep that in mind”.

The statements indicate credulity and show a rather defensive approach of the companies and their daily efforts for sustainable fast fashion. This trust of the companies and what they communicate can be related to Sweden’s low UAI (de Mooij, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). They anticipate honesty and good intentions, leading them to not question the fast fashion companies. During the discussions, the Swedes’ credulity was questioned by the French which further supports the score of UAI. Contrary to the Swedes, the French possess high UAI, which enhances their mistrust, thus they challenge the authenticity of the companies’ intentions and were surprised by the Swedes’ perceptions.

On the other hand, the Dutch mainly consider the consumers responsible for sustainable improvements of the fast fashion industry, not solely companies. In the discussion regarding if fast fashion companies can be sustainable, N2 even interrupted and contradicted S2 and stressed it would be possible if consumers’ attitudes changed. N2 emphasised “If we all go to the sustainable company, then all the other ones are losing out and they will need to start changing their strategy, so I think of course, it is possible but it needs to be a change in mind-set”, which confirms Vermeir and Verbeke’s (2006) view on the relationship between companies and consumers. N2’s statement was further supported in a different focus group by N3 “It’s about small things but when everybody think of it [...] we might make a lot of effort for the world”. Additionally, this supports Newholm and Shaw (2007) as well as Milfont and Markowitz (2016) who state that attitudes develop into sustainable actions.

The strong focus on the people and what they can accomplish is reflected by the high IDV, low MAS and low PDI which indicate a pro-active sustainable attitude and willingness to engage in this movement, confirming research by Husted (2005) as well
as Katz, Swanson and Nelson (2001). Additionally, compared to the other nationalities, the Dutch are optimistic and believe sustainability in fast fashion is doable when the society is united and contributes in various ways, which agrees with the high IND (Hofstede centre, 2017c; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) and reflects the view that consumers are just as responsible as companies.

The Russians and Americans differ from the other countries and present two distinct opinions of who is responsible for sustainability in the fast fashion industry. In Russia, since neither consumers nor companies put much effort into sustainability and other aspects are in the centre of attention, the discussions indicated that no one feels responsible. R2 pointed out “In Russia, big brands do not draw public’s attention to these things”. This view on responsibility of sustainable fast fashion can be reflected through Russia's national culture. The high PDI and low IDV indicate that Russians tend to not question companies’ actions and trust them (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Thus, if the fast fashion companies do not consider sustainability, neither will the society. Further, the high UAI displays that the Russians would need guidance to consider sustainability and time is needed to implement such thoughts in the mind-set (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). These three dimensions outweigh the power of the high LTO and low MAS, which suggests people take responsibility and do something for sustainability (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Husted, 2005).

Furthermore, the Americans expose a doubtful attitude towards the possibility to be sustainable as a fast fashion company, and thereby it is not seen as the responsibility of anyone as indicated by U2 “Undoable is a good word, I think some companies are way too far over their heads in order to trying to take on a sustainable method” and U3 “I really am sceptical of the brands that actually come to my mind when I think of sustainability cause I think that actually sustainable brands are probably smaller companies that create high-quality products”. Attitudes which support the United States’ high MAS which according to Husted (2005) as well as Swaidan (2012) indicate a more negligent and less responsible view of sustainability. Additionally, U4 means that the point of fast fashion is not related to sustainability and expresses that “everybody knows that if you are buying from H&M and Zara, it’s not gonna be the most humane stuff”. This statement confirms Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov’s (2010) view on low UAI and LTO as this encourage convenience and the present.

4.1.5 Re-using fashion items

In each focus group, the conversation about sustainability in the fast fashion industry led to someone bringing up re-usage of clothes such as second-hand items or recycle items as sustainable actions which resulted in additional directions of the discussions. Some participants indicated that if more fashion items were re-worn or re-cycled, the unsustainable disposal behaviour would be reduced. This contradicts Birtwistle and Moore's (2007) study that consumers are unaware of the necessity to re-use respectively
recycle clothes. However, in line with Birtwistle and Moore (2007), the focus groups revealed that the participants have different approaches to re-use and recycle clothes.

In particular, the Americans frequently mentioned second-hand stores as sustainable alternatives to the otherwise favoured fast fashion and highlighted concerns about recycling. U2 sees second-hand as a way to keep up with trends and be sustainable “I do a lot of thrift-shopping too [...] sustainable and second-hand clothes are definitely a way that I can keep up with my urge of getting fast fashion, keeping up with what I like in my fashion taste”. As the United States possesses low UAI, this contradicts Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) who connect low UAI to the probability to buy second-hand. However, the Americans’ attitude clearly reflects the high IDV and MAS. The IDV is displayed as second-hand items are purchased for personal reasons to be trendy (Triandis, 1995). The attitudes indicate that second-hand is primarily bought to keep up with fashion trends and the sustainable aspect is just an addition, which is in line with the high MAS (Husted, 2005).

Also, the French, Germans and Dutch stress that re-wearing and recycling fast fashion can significantly contribute to act more sustainable. N1 mentioned "In the Netherlands you see a lot of upcoming events to hand in the clothes and exchange clothes with other people". Similarly, G3 highlights "If you can't wear it anymore you can give it back and not throw it away, like in H&M you can give it in a bag and they do more stuff". Further, the French criticised the number of collections per year as F3 stated "Fast fashion companies have to produce 5-6 different fashion trends a year, which is a lot". Regarding this, F2 suggests "They should try to avoid to create that much collections in a year", and she indicates this would encourage sustainability and re-usage. This mentality goes along with the three countries’ high LTO as well as France’s and Netherlands’ low MAS, which enhance the concerns about sustainability (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Even though Germany’s sustainable consciousness seems contradictory, due to high MAS, research shown that these societies will consider sustainability when a win-win situation appears (Husted, 2005; Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001). This was clearly displayed by the Germans as they highlighted the need to consider style and quality already during the fast fashion purchase, to guarantee longer usage.

High MAS is further reflected by the Chinese, who related re-wearing clothes to quality. C3 emphasised "I can pay for the higher priced clothes, so those qualities are good and I pay lots of money for it, so I don’t want to throw it away quickly. Actually, I start to keep it for a longer time and realised that the quality is related to the price", which again displays the high LTO (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). However, the participants mentioned that re-usage as buying second-hand items is out of question. In China, second-hand is considered something ugly and C1 stressed "We do not get used to wear second-hand clothes, even though it has been washed in I don’t know some anti-bacterial procedure, we are not going to wear that!". Similar reflections were made by the Russian R1 "If you buy some clothes at second-hand stores, you are not human, you are just like nothing. Because for example in my home town, we're one million people but we only have two second-hand stores for the whole city". For both
countries, this attitude reflects the significantly high PDI. Status is an important part in those cultures and does not agree with second-hand purchases (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). In the case of China, the PDI outweighs the low UAI which usually would enhance the chance to purchase second-hand items (Hofstede centre, 2017a; Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010). On the other hand, in accordance with Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) Russia's significantly high UAI supports the Russians’ negative attitude towards second-hand. Further, the high PDI prevails the high LTO and low MAS, since the demand for status results mainly shape the high PDI (Hofstede centre, 2017d).

4.2 Intended buying behaviour
The focus groups provided insights into the participants’ intended buying behaviour in fast fashion and if sustainability is part of it. To distinguish personal preferences and country patterns, direct questions as well as follow-up questions related to friends and fellow students in their home countries were asked. In accordance with previous research (Muraldiharan, Rejón-Guardia and Xue, 2016; Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009), the discussions revealed there are similarities concerning Millennials’ intended buying behaviour. Nevertheless, also differences were detected between the participating Millennials’ intended buying behaviour which support Solka, Jackson and Lee’s (2001) study. The differences also can be connected to the influence of national cultural, confirming de Mooij’s (2003) research. Five themes related to the intended buying behaviour in fast fashion have been identified based on what the participants indicated to be important in regard to their fast fashion purchases and will be presented below. Since not each country is connectable to every theme, only the relevant countries will be elaborated.

4.2.1 Style
Noble, Haytko and Phillips (2009) as well as Yarrow and O’Donnel (2009) express that Millennials want to keep up with current trends and styles which can be supported by the findings from the Russians, Swedes, Americans as well as French females, F2 and F4, which all perceive style as essential during a fast fashion purchase. The same nationalities are frequent fast fashion buyers which supports Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) who stress that fast fashion companies constantly update the assortment to always provide consumers with the desired latest trends and styles. However, all nationalities contradict Sullivan and Heitmeyer’s (2008) research which states that Millennials create a personal style without imitating other. Through the focus groups, the nationalities who prioritise style also indicated the importance to follow trends, hence not an individual style. Likewise, the remaining representatives with less interest in style; Dutch, Germans, Chinese as well as French males, F1 and F3, neither showed an interest in personal or unique style but rather no or limited interest.

The Russians stated style and being fashionable as key factors concerning the intended buying behaviour of fast fashion. R4 expressed “My friends and I usually just care about the look and not much more” which relates to the high PDI which de Mooij
(2010) means indicates bigger concerns about appearance. Moreover, the Russians stated there are unwritten rules regarding how your style is supposed to be which R1 verifies with “That’s just how it is”. Russia’s extremely high PDI approves with the accepted norms regarding style and what fast fashion items to wear since the higher the PDI, the more hierarchy and higher acceptance of predetermined places in society (ibid). The high PDI is also reflected in the desire for brands which was detected a preference and connected to style. The Russians consider brands as status symbol which in turn is rooted in national culture (Hofstede centre, 2017d; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). R1 specifically said he searches for certain brands when he buys fashion and R4 related brands with social class, “People from higher social class prefer brands and care about the stores where they can buy it”. The importance and favouritism of brands instead of fast fashion were not discussed by any other nationalities which can be seen as a result of Russia’s significantly higher PDI.

Style is also central for the Swedes, particularly the latest trends of fashionable styles are essential and the Swedes show the highest concern of what is “hot or not” compared to the other countries. Additionally, they underline the fitting, i.e. how the items suit you, as a main aspect during buying decisions of fast fashion and S3 says “I want it to fit flawless”. The Swedes’ focus on the fit is agreed by the other nationalities who have noticed this during their time of residence in Sweden. This style-orientation and eager to be trendy oppose the influence of the low PDI which de Mooij (2010) means indicates less importance of appearance. However, the high IDV could be seen as a trigger due to the focus on “me, myself and I” (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) which would suggest a desire to look good and focus on oneself in relation to appearance. Additionally, the high IND indicates the importance to follow own desires which in this scenario equals trend and style (de Mooij, 2015; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). The parallel between fixation on appearance and high IDV as well as IND is also topical concerning the United States as the Americans tend to follow trends and spend money in fast fashion stores. The Americans displayed a habit to desire stylish yet cheap clothes where quality is considered secondary. Nevertheless, the Americans’ want to follow style and trends differed from the Swedes’ since they perceived this as buying the latest items whereas the Swedes focused on the actual appearance. Even though U2 and U3 explained that their desire for new fast fashion items have decreased, U2 stated “I am weak for fast fashion” and U3 “I don’t wanna look super cheesy wearing this in a year”. The desire to buy new items can relate to the United States’ low LTO which research by de Mooij (2011) connects with the tendency to spend instantly instead of saving.

Concerning the French, gender differences were observed and several dimensions of national culture can be seen influencing the genders. The French females, F2 and F4, identified style and design as crucial factors of the buying behaviour in fast fashion whilst the French males, F1 and F3, try to avoid fast fashion and do not consider trends nor style important. France high PDI and high IDV support the females’ view whilst the high UAI and LTO supports the males in accordance with Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010). High UAI signifies a more modest buying behaviour and thereby
authentic products not sensitive to trend nor style changes are favoured. Additionally, the high LTO indicates fashion and style to be of less importance since a more long-term view is applied which contradicts the needs and wants of following trends.

4.2.2 Status
During discussions connected to intended buying behaviour of fast fashion, the Chinese and Russians distinguished from the remaining countries and brought up status-related aspects. The Chinese’ and Russians’ status- and norm-influenced view was reflected in discussions of second-hand items as previously mentioned but also in further subjects. China and Russia have the lowest IDV of the represented countries which can be reflected in this status theme. Triandis (1995) argues that low IDV indicates the significance of adapting to a group which accordingly were discovered true regarding the Chinese and Russians. A concern of being excluded if the norms and unwritten rules of the society are not followed was detected and the Chinese and Russians exposed the importance of being socially accepted, even in relation to fast fashion purchases.

Throughout discussions, the Russians indicated that luxury, brands and to show off are important aspects, affecting their intended buying behaviour of fast fashion. R1 and R2 means Russians seek respect through brands and R1 stated “In Russia, people want to show themselves as they’re rich even if they get 500 dollars per one month. Even they have some Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, just something like that”. Additionally, according to R4, the shopping experience as a whole is considered an essential part of buying fashion, in fast fashion as well as luxurious fashion, as people want to show off shopping bags and items. Thereby, the Russians’ opinions are supportive of de Mooij (2010) who means people in countries with high PDI put more focus status-related aspects (Hofstede centre, 2017d).

Also China represents high PDI which can be seen as an influencer for their status-related behaviour, yet in a more modest way than expressed by the Russians. The importance of showing wealth and not expose the low-priced fast fashion consumption were indicated by the Chinese. On the other hand, these aspects can also be related to China’s high MAS in addition to the high PDI as Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov’s (2010) research suggests a high MAS society to focus on money. C3 stated that Chinese will not go to stores such as H&M or the similar when they become richer and people want higher quality which equals luxurious brands. This confirms de Mooij and Hofstede’ (2010) findings that in a country with high MAS, you show your worth through material aspects and it is important to display this to fellow inhabitants. However, the connection between high MAS and status contradicts the Russians’ attention on material aspects since Russia is classified a low MAS society. Yet, this can be explained by distinctively high PDI is said to have stronger influence on the society than low MAS (Hofstede centre, 2017d).

Furthermore, the Chinese appear to relate sustainable fashion, not with fast fashion, but with more luxurious brands and fashion houses such as Chanel or Armani with their
timeless and classical items. These garments are considered of high quality which are kept for a long time. Additionally, R1 agreeable to the Chinese, relates luxurious brands from France and Italy as sustainable fashion. This divergent view on sustainable fashion is supported by the significantly high LTO in both China and Russia which implies a tendency to focus on tomorrow (Bearden, Money and Nevins, 2006; de Mooij, 2011; Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). To a large extent, sustainable fashion is by the Chinese perceived as something you can save for a long time and remain in style and of value, instead of solely connect it to the pillars included in the TBL model (Elkington, 1999). Hence, you can see why the parallel to luxurious fashion brands and their timelessness is recurrently mentioned. No other countries touched upon luxurious brands nor status.

4.2.3 The importance of price
Price frequently appeared as a topic of conversation during the discussion connected to intended buying behaviour within the fast fashion industry. It is rather distinct that the right price is an important part since all nationalities mention it at some point, yet to different extent and directions. The focus on price supports Bray, Johns and Kilburn’s (2010) research where price is stated a major factor, influencing the decision to buy sustainable or not. In China, price is related to the value of a fast fashion item and they want to feel that items’ attributes correspond to the money spent, i.e. that the purchase was worth it. C4 express “How it feels is important, and if it is a higher price it should feel better in some way since I sacrifice my money”. This approach can be associated with China’s high MAS which Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) relate to a strong focus on money. The Chinese also indicated they are willing to spend more money on high-qualitative clothes and particularly the feeling of the fabric towards the skin is meaningful when they buy fashion. Hence, fast fashion is most often avoided since they do not relate it to qualitative fabrics. These aspects can be linked to the high LTO which de Mooij (2010) suggests goes together with the desire to save for tomorrow, hence not sacrifice money on unnecessary purchases but estimate the value and attributes beforehand. The Chinese seem similarly influenced by the low IND, which represents a manner of only buying if needed (de Mooij, 2015). Additionally, in China, spoiling oneself is considered shameful (Hofstede centre, 2017a). The impact of the low IND is supported by C4 stating: “If it is not good quality, although it is cheap or good looking for me, I wouldn’t buy it”. However, the Chinese contradict Howe and Strauss’ (2000) research of Millennials, which state Millennials see consumption as something positive.

The Germans are quality-conscious and repetitively stress the correlation between price and quality, e.g. by G1: “It is about a scale of quality versus price”. They invest in clothes with a good quality, durability and not significantly distinctive so it may be worn in numerous combinations. Aspects which support Germany's particularly high LTO, high MAS as well as low IND for the same reasons as in regard to China. Moreover, the Germans consider price secondary and an aspect considered after the high quality has been assured. Thus, price is never the main factor of a fast fashion buying decision but always relevant since it is compared to the degree of quality which
can be related to the high UAI. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) mean that a society with high UAI favour authenticity which can be seen in the Germans constant search for quality which is prioritised in relation to price.

France and Netherlands also have high UAI which is noticed in the French’ and Dutch’ behaviour, yet not as distinctive as in the Germans’ which can be explained by Germany scoring even higher UAI than both France and Netherlands. Nevertheless, the relationship between price and quality is supported by F3 saying “The quality is not what I will find, it is more about the cheap prices” and N4 saying “If I go to H&M, it is only because it is cheap, but I usually go to other stores where I can get good quality since I like the feeling of cotton”. Uniformed by the French and Dutch, low prices are important within fast fashion but not in small and more unique store outside of the fast fashion industry which is considered providing higher quality.

The Swedes do not see price as a factor which determines the purchase regarding fast fashion and it is only mentioned briefly by participants, as by S2: “In fast fashion, price differences are not going to affect me that much”. Other attributes discussed become predominant and when price is mentioned, it is not given much attention. The limited focus on money proves accordance with the extremely low MAS since monetary and success focus belong to a high MAS society (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010, de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001). The Americans on the other hand are undeniably price-oriented in the context of fast fashion which confirm the high MAS’ focus on money. They relate fast fashion stores to distinctively low prices and expect the possibility to buy several items for a very small amount as expressed by U3: “Consumers want to buy cheap, be fashionable and don’t spend much money” which supports McNeill and Moore’s (2015) research. Throughout discussions, the Americans show the most support for the fast fashion industry and a main factor is the low prices. Additionally, U2 mentioned the ability for all people, poor and rich, to buy the same fast fashion items which agrees with the low PDI and equality of the population (Hofstede centre, 2017e; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Further, the findings from the Americans can relate to the United States’ low LTO which approve de Mooij (2011) who states societies with low LTO spend today instead of saving for tomorrow.

4.2.4 Influential aspects
The influential aspects of a buying decision of fast fashion were discussed and several different factors appeared important. However, aspects related to a more or less sustainable choice was never brought up when they were asked about their current buying behaviour in fast fashion with one exception. G3 answered that following aspect impacted her buying behaviour of fast fashion “The look, the fit and if I can live with that choice to buy it. Like going to H&M for example, I think if I really need to buy it, since I know what they are doing so I try to avoid it”. Yet, this can be seen connected to her current bachelor programme in Environmental Science which would support Milfont and Markowitz (2016) and Joshi and Rahman (2017), meaning that sustainable
buying behaviour derives from your surroundings which leads to a more uniform behaviour. No other participants are studying a corresponding programme.

Nevertheless, the Dutch somehow distinguished since they seem to be influenced by the environmental situation in the country, leading to them being more modest and thoughtful regarding their fast fashion purchases. Even though no one expressed this impact when they were directly asked, it was exposed in other parts of the focus groups. Netherlands’ high LTO agrees with this since the participants focused on the future and express a holistic view of the environmental situation, affecting the buying behaviour. Additionally, N2 explains that opinions of the government have influenced people’s intended buying behaviour since previously, people have been encouraged not to buy from certain fast fashion companies after scandals. Both examples confirm Darley, Blankson and Luethge (2010) who mean that in addition to beliefs and attitudes, external aspects influence a sustainable or unsustainable buying behaviour.

Further, the most repetitively discussed influential aspect was people in the participants’ surroundings, most often expressed as friends and family. Confirming research by Noble, Haytko and Phillips (2009), both individual- and group-oriented characteristics were expressed by the participating Millennials. Even so, most participants proved they are influenced by friends and family when they buy fast fashion items. Although some first stated themselves individual decision-makers, they were shown influenced by others later in the discussions. They are searching for approval of the intended fast fashion purchase and are expressing a doubt to go through with it otherwise. For instance, as expressed by G4 “Whenever I buy, I ask my friends and want their confirmation” and C3 “I am more influenced by my friends since I usually go shopping with my friends so if they for example take me to brands that they like, I want that too”. Additionally, the majority considered themselves more influential than influenced. These findings contradict research stating that only low IDV societies are influenced by others and search for the surroundings approval since all represented countries except from China and Russia are classified with high IDV (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Triandis, 1995). Nevertheless, the Americans differed to some extent, showing a more unaffected attitude towards other people’s opinions and felt secure with their own decision. This exuded self-confidence can be related to the independency of other people which is stated to come from significantly high IDV since the United States is classified one of the highest IDV countries worldwide (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).

The Swedes differs from the other nationalities as the only ones who collect information before a purchase, yet not regarding sustainability, and they use the internet to compare different fast fashion items which subsequently affects the intended buying behaviour. Sweden’s high IND can be an underlying influential aspect of this behaviour. Sweden has the highest IND of the investigated countries which indicates that the Swedes constantly aim to buy the latest and most trendy fast fashion items which was confirmed by all participating Swedes. By browsing the internet before a purchase, their intended buying behaviour can be approved by comparing trends shown by fast fashion
companies and other style icons, e.g. bloggers as expressed by S1 “I wear what my favourite bloggers are wearing”.

Also the Russians express different sources of impact since norms are influential and applied as unwritten rules on how to dress which consequently affect the intended buying behaviour of fast fashion. An aspect which can be connected to Russia’s low IDV since these societies want to identify with the group and thereby follow the set norms and do what is expected from you (Triandis, 1995). A connection which was exemplified by R1 “If Russia, you have slim fit it means that you are gay so you cannot wear it […] It is really stupid I know”. The statement also supports Russia’s high UAI which de Mooij and Hofstede (2010) mean leads to the society seeking structure and guidance through rules to avoid anxiety and hence alienation.

4.2.5 Spontaneity

Millennials are generally considered pro-consumption and impulsive buyers (Sullivan and Heitmeyer, 2008; Viswanathan and Jain, 2013) which the findings partly contradicted except from the Swedes who all exposed behaviour in accordance with the previous research. Yet, the varied findings support Kacen and Lee (2002) as well as Zhang, Winterich and Mittal (2010) who state that impulsive buying behaviour which lead to unsustainable behaviour is more common in certain cultures than others. The Swedes strongly show impulsive buying behaviour, expressing they buy frequently and whatever they want which agrees with the low PDI of Sweden. The low PDI equals worse self-discipline according to Zhang, Winterich and Mittal (2010) and was proved by S2 “I am very spontaneous, me and my friends are like “oh, we are going out for a kebab” and then we come home with lots of different big bags”. Additionally, the findings are in accordance with Sweden’s high IDV since Kacen and Lee (2002) state high IDV societies behave more impulsive since they prioritise the own desires. Moreover, the low UAI agrees with de Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) since it indicates the tendency to favour convenience which is connected with impulsive buying as well as fast fashion. As expressed by S1 “Every time I go downtown I like, I go through shops and like look for clothes and maybe I was just looking but I end up buy stuff and it is the same online because I am like always looking at blogs and just for fun looking at Asos, Zalando, H&M and so on. So, then I end up buying stuff”. Additionally, the statement with examples supports Byun and Sternquist (2008), Cook and Yurchisin (2017) as well as Kim, Choo and Yoon (2013) that the fast fashion industry itself encourages impulsive buying behaviour. Lastly, the Swedes seem to be influenced by the significantly high IND as they follow their desires which encourage impulsive fast fashion buying instead of planned and needed purchases (de Mooij, 2015).

Similar to the Swedes, the Germans express an uninformed mind-set yet in another direction as they exposed a planned intended buying behaviour and buy items when needed. However, G2 and G3 occasionally buy items unplanned, for instance when they
walk home from university, yet less commonly. The more planned behaviour can contradictory to Sweden not be seen influenced of PDI and IDV since Germany score conflicting to what would motivate impulsive buying behaviour (Kacen and Lee, 2002; Zhang, Winterich and Mittal, 2010). However, the Germans can be seen influenced by the high UAI, high LTO and low IND. The high UAI indicates a need of structure which shapes a methodical mind-set and hence planned buying behaviour (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010). Of the participating countries, Germany is one of the most long-termed societies which agrees with de Mooij’s (2011) research, stating that a society with high LTO save with the future in mind. Additionally, the Germans’ behaviour confirms de Mooij’s (2015) view on a society with low IND to only buy if needed and consider the purchase back and forth before realising it as expressed by G4 “I am really conscious of what I buy, I think of will I wear it? How many times will I wear it? Or is it just a one occasion thing?”.

In accordance with the Germans, the Russians presented a planned buying behaviour which confirms the influence of all the applicable dimensions (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). Russia has high PDI, UAI and LTO as well as low IDV and IND which all are associated with planned manners as explained for the Swedes and Germans (de Mooij, 2011; de Mooij, 2015; de Mooij and Hofstede, 2010; Kacen and Lee, 2002; Zhang, Winterich and Mittal, 2010). As emphasised by R1 “I plan what I want to buy and then I just go and buy it, that’s all” as well as R4 “Shopping in Russia is more of real shopping, we don’t have this only as activity, we don’t go shopping without buy something”.

Nevertheless, in other countries, another socio-demographic factor seems to influence the impulsiveness of fast fashion purchases more than national culture. The French, Dutch and Americans exposed gender differences regarding this aspect where the males tend to be planned buyers and the females more impulsive buyers. As emphasised by F3 “I do not want to judge women, it is just a feeling or I don’t know, but men try to buy less clothes but with better quality” and N4 “I would say we have this stereotype going on where all the women like to shop and all the guys kind of do it only when it needs and that is to certain extent kind of true”. The males; F1, F3, N2, N3, U1 and U4 explain that they only go shopping when they need something and never for pleasure. Subsequently, they explain that these purchases are planned as stated by F3 “I would not go spontaneous, if I have a bad pair of jeans I go for new ones and maybe look months before, and when I find the good one I will buy it”.

The French females, F2 and F4 express that fast fashion shopping is a social activity and tend to buy impulsively as said by F2 “If you need a white t-shirt you go to the store but end up buying the white t-shirt but also additional items. Sometimes maybe not even the white t-shirt you were looking for in the first place”. The Dutch and American females; N1, N3, U2 and U3 exposed more impulsive behaviour then the males from the concerning countries yet not as impulsive as the French females, F2 and F4. However, the differences may also support Solka, Jackson and Lee (2011) who argue it
is difficult to determine Millennials’ buying motivations and describe them as an expressively unpredictable generation.

4.3 Clusters
The findings in regard to the Millennials’ perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry base the investigation of indications for the existence of an intention-behaviour gap. The nationalities which throughout the discussions of the focus groups demonstrated similarities are grouped into clusters which are presented below.

The French, Germans, Dutch and Swedes all show a great understanding of the concept of sustainability in relation to fast fashion and display a rather high degree of awareness and concerns about sustainability in general. This is related to the high LTO which hints the existence of the willingness to under certain conditions sacrifice own needs to be more sustainable for the future (Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov, 2010). However, the discussion revealed a possible intention-behaviour gap since during a fast fashion purchase, other aspects receive a higher priority than sustainability. This can be deduced from the high IDV which means people tend to act in a way that will fulfil their own desires (Triandis, 1995). To prefer the own needs over sustainable concern is in line with Joshi and Rahman’s (2017) explanation of the intention-behaviour gap. Even though all four countries indicate the presence of a gap, the countries display different approaches on how to deal or limit this gap.

Overall, the Dutch and French demonstrate the highest degree of awareness and concerns about sustainability and provide the broadest understanding of sustainability in fast fashion, which can be seen as a reflection of their low MAS (Park, Russell and Lee, 2007). Further, the participants of the two countries clearly argue the need to be sustainable and are strongly expressing their opinions. All French and Dutch acknowledge that in the presence they do not necessarily buy as sustainable as they would like to. However, participants try to do good deeds by being selective regarding where to purchase fashion items and avoid stores which they associate with questionable procedures and operations, which shows a high degree of sustainability in the intended buying behaviour. Furthermore, as reflected in previous discussions, also for the intention-behaviour gap, gender differences could be identified by the French. For the males, F1 and F3, the gap appears smaller than for the females, F2 and F4. F1 and F3 favour companies which are more sustainable and express they are doing the best they can for the time being as students. However, F2 and F4 express they unquestionable buy fast fashion but consider buying less in the future with a better financial situation.

The Germans’ view on sustainability is rather distinctive from the Dutch and French. They are aware of sustainable issues and the negative aspects of them. To handle the current problems and to reduce the gap between intentions and behaviour, the Germans have a special strategy on how they personally can do something good, since they admit
for instance that social issues are too far away from them, which agrees with Gilg, Baar and Ford’s (2005) close to home effect. Their way to cope with the increased call for sustainability is to reduce their fast fashion consumption and purchase clothes with higher quality. Besides the high LTO and IND, this reflects Germany’s high MAS, which stresses that these societies are more willing to contribute to sustainable movements if a win-win situation is created, such as keeping the garments for longer and receive higher quality (Husted, 2005).

The Swedes presented a great understanding of the concept of sustainability and could relate it to fast fashion, which is a clear reflection of the high LTO and low MAS (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010). However, generally their willingness to translate these concerns into the intended buying behaviour of fast fashion is less than for the French, Germans and Dutch which suggests a tendency for an intention-behaviour gap. In fast fashion, the Swedes are mainly focused on style and fit as reflected in the high IND (de Mooij, 2015). Further they are aware of this gap between perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour, yet they do not act upon it.

The significantly high IDV of the United States is already noticeable in the perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry and not just regarding the intention-behaviour gap. The discussion clearly indicated that the Americans are focused on “I” and always point out that it is individual. The Americans express there are individuals who care and act, but regarding the society, they do not see a sustainable consumer behaviour pattern, in fast fashion as well as general. Moreover, the discussions revealed that overall, other issues are prioritised. This is supportive of the combination of the high IDV, high MAS and low LTO, which indicate less concern about sustainability (Husted, 2005). The high IDV which is reflected in the differences of awareness and concerns about sustainability make it hard to determine a general intention-behaviour gap. Nevertheless, among the Americans who seem more concerned, a gap is indicated since for all American participants, fast fashion is mainly about personal style for a convenient price.

The Chinese’ perception of sustainability is rather distinctive from the other nationalities and their definition of sustainability is mainly future-oriented. In line with Brundtland’s (1987) definition, they mention the preservation of the nature, however they do not consider the social aspects. Other important parts of their definition in fast fashion are the durability of style and additionally high-quality clothes. Today they buy items with lower quality than they desire due to their financial situation. Those attitudes further reflect a strong focus on the economic pillar of sustainability, which can be connected to the high LTO and MAS (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Katz, Swansons and Nelson, 2001). Taken the perception of sustainability into consideration and compare it with the intended buying behaviour, there are indications for an intention-behaviour gap.

The discussion has revealed that the Russians possess the least awareness and concerns about sustainability, as sustainability is not a topical subject in Russia. The Russians’
view reflects the combination of the high PDI and low IDV, which outweigh other dimensions which would indicate awareness and concerns about sustainability (Hofstede centre, 2017d; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Husted, 2005). Since sustainability generally is not considered in a fast fashion purchase, there are no indications of an intention-behaviour gap as presently they do not care and other aspects are prioritised. However, the Russians exude potential to change in the future if sustainability receives more public attention. This is in line with the high LTO connected to the low IDV (Hofstede and Minkov, 2010; Husted, 2005).

In conclusion, as in line with previous literature (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000; Bray, Johns and Kilburn, 2010; Carrington, Neville and Whitwell, 2010), there are signs of an intention-behaviour gap in fashion (Joergens, 2006; Joy et al., 2012). Participants of countries which displayed rather high awareness and concerns about sustainability did not consider these to the same extent in regard to their intended buying behaviour in fast fashion. As suggested by Bray, Johns and Kilbrun (2010) as well as Joshi and Rahman (2017) other factors like price and quality tend to take over sustainability in the intended buying behaviour, due to individual preferences. However, in accordance with Kozar and Hiller Connell (2013), the focus groups indicated that attitudes and knowledge positively influence the sustainable consumer behaviour, since nationalities which present a higher degree of awareness and concerns about sustainability displayed a higher degree of sustainability in the intended buying behaviour.

The combination of the Millennials’ perception of sustainability and Millennials’ intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry results in clusters as shown in figure 3. The perception of sustainability is in figure 3 reflected by the degree of awareness and concerns about sustainability. Further, the degree of sustainability in the intended buying behaviour reflects if the participants consider sustainability during their purchases and to which extent.

Figure 3 Clusters in sustainable fast fashion (Own, 2017).
5 Conclusion

The conclusion presents how the scientific research gaps have been filled by answering the research question with knowledge gained from previous chapter. Furthermore, the conclusion suggests theoretical and practical implications, followed by the thesis’ limitations as well as suggestions for further research.

5.1 Answering the research question

In an increasingly globalised world, companies need to understand the influence of national culture to meet the consumers' demand properly. The relevance of the relationship between consumers and national culture is further proven since national culture is deeply rooted in a society and not sensitive to changes, e.g. regarding technology and economy. The comprehension of how national culture affects consumers' perceptions and intended buying behaviour is particularly important for the fast fashion industry, which is characterised by large retail chains operating worldwide. Additionally, the Millennials are the fast fashion industry’s main target group which leads to an increased need to understand how national culture impacts this segment.

Further, globalisation leads to an increased demand to consider sustainability in international business. Especially in the fast fashion industry, since it is accused to motivate actions leading to unsustainable consequences, both from consumers and companies which creates a vicious circle. Therefore, the difficulties fast fashion companies face is to understand how Millennials’ from different nationalities perceive sustainability in regard to fast fashion and if sustainable fast fashion is desired. By investigating Millennials in cross-cultural focus groups, the authors were able answer the predefined research question:

*How does national culture affect Millennials' perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry?*

In regard to the first part of the research question, the thesis unveils that national culture affects the perception of sustainability in the fast fashion industry through the degree of awareness and concerns about sustainability. The empirical findings demonstrate that the perception of sustainability is greatly influenced by national culture, primarily through PDI, IDV, MAS and LTO. The national culture proved to impact the Millennials’ awareness and concerns in regard to the three pillars of sustainability; social, environmental and economic, as well as the view on responsibility of sustainability efforts.

Firstly, high awareness and concerns about sustainability were indicated by a combination of three or more of the dimensions; low PDI, high IDV, low MAS and high LTO as proved by the Dutch, French, Germans and Swedes. They all displayed a great understanding of all three pillars of sustainability and are aware of consequences from unsustainable behaviour within the fast fashion industry. Additionally, they were able to
provide suggestions on how sustainable issues could be confronted. Furthermore, the Millennials from high MAS countries are primarily focused on the economic pillar of sustainability in fast fashion, as shown by the Americans, Chinese and Germans, yet in different ways. The Chinese’ and Germans’ combination of high MAS and high LTO is proved to favour the economic pillar in the form of quality. However, the Americans’ combination of high MAS and low LTO prioritise low price and convenience, hence they are aware yet not highly concerned. Further, the awareness and concerns about sustainability were proved limited by high PDI together with low IDV as exemplified by the Chinese and Russians. Secondly, the responsibility of sustainability efforts in the fast fashion industry is mainly affected by, MAS and UAI and was displayed by the French, Swedes, Dutch and Americans. The low MAS indicates the need to take responsibility for the world’s well-being and the combination of UAI and low MAS put the responsibility on others, as shown by the French and Swedes. In contrary, the combination of UAI and high MAS together with low LTO indicates that no one is responsible as confirmed by the Americans. On the other hand, the Dutch stressed each individual responsible due to Netherland’s combination of all dimensions with scores indicating pro-sustainable attitudes.

In regard to the second part of the research question, the thesis unveils that national culture affects the intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry. The national culture influence the Millennials’ preferences and considerations of what is important for a fast fashion purchase. There are different aspects affecting the intended buying behaviour within fast fashion but the most crucial were discovered to be style, price, and impulsiveness. Firstly, the Swedes and Americans showed that style is favoured in a country with high IDV, high IND and intermediate or low LTO. The Russians also considered style but mainly status, which also applies for the Chinese and display that the combination of high PDI and low IDV perceive fashion as a status symbol to be socially accepted.

Secondly, the combination of LTO and high MAS showed focus on prices, whereas low MAS has less attention on money as strongly emphasised by the Swedes. The low LTO together with high MAS of the Americans lead to the desire of low-priced fast fashion whilst the Chinese’ and Germans’ high LTO together with high MAS expose the want to get value for money. Additionally, UAI is influential when the price is considered correlated with quality as proved by the Germans, Dutch and French. Thirdly, impulsive buying behaviour is strongly associated with both unsustainability and the fast fashion industry and the main indicators were discovered to be UAI and IND. Low UAI and high IND encourage the Swedes’ spontaneous buying behaviour whereas high UAI and low IND impacted the Germans’ and Russians’ planned buying behaviour. However, gender differences appeared with the Americans, Dutch and French where the females are spontaneous buyers and males are planned buyers. Finally, other rather country-specific aspects displayed to influence the intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry, further highlighting the importance of national culture. However, as these appear to be significantly individual, no patterns are identified.
By combining the perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry, indications for an intention-behaviour gap have been unveiled. The majority of the Millennials did not directly bring up sustainability during the discussions about the intended buying behaviour in fast fashion. However, one participant directly addressed sustainability as an important factor of the fast fashion purchase, yet this may be related to her education. Despite the intention-behaviour gap, the empirical findings and analysis show the tendency that a high degree of sustainability in the intended buying behaviour is positively connected to a high degree of awareness and concerns about sustainability, i.e. perception of sustainability. In conclusion, the results underline that national culture affects the perception of sustainability and the intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry in a complex manner, since the impact depends on various combinations of the dimensions. Additionally, it is displayed that for the different countries, certain dimensions are predominant and diminish the impact of others. In line with the conceptual framework, the results confirm the relation between national culture, Millennials’ perception of sustainability and Millennials’ intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry which influence the desire to be sustainable chic.

5.2 Theoretical implications
The field of national cultures' effect on Millennials' perception of sustainability and intended buying behaviour in the fast fashion industry is a non-exploited combination of research areas in academic research, which indicates scientific research gaps. This thesis aspired to provide further knowledge on the impact of national culture yet in a rather unexplored context. From the usage of cross-cultural focus groups, the authors were able to obtain a new view of Millennials’ perceptions and intentions which provides research with valuable insights about national culture’s impact on this generation.

This study agrees that Hofstede's dimensions of national culture (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010) is a useful tool for investigating cultural differences. Further, it was clearly displayed that it is frequently the combination of the dimensions which needs to be considered to analyse consumers’ perception and intentions. In particular, the IDV dimension seems to affect consumers in both ways. For instance, high IDV could enhance the importance of sustainability combined with low MAS and high LTO whereas high IDV in combination with high MAS and low LTO decrease the importance of sustainability, which should be considered by future research. Additionally, the analysis suggests that the fifth and sixth dimensions should be further considered by academic research since it affects the Millennials’ perception of sustainability as well as intended buying behaviour. IND seems particularly useful as an indicator for the unsustainable impulsive buying behaviour and has previously been rather neglected in consumer behaviour research.

Moreover, the results of this thesis imply it is reasonable to focus more on the customer-centric view of sustainability, for instance through the usage of the TBL model. Further,
the results suggest that the economic pillar should be given more attention in regard to fast fashion, as it particularly reflects a high MAS society's perception of sustainability.

5.3 Practical implications
The fast fashion industry operates in a global marketplace and should address consumers originating from various cultural backgrounds righteously, particularly the main target group Millennials. Thereby, it is essential to understand the impact of national culture on consumers’ perceptions and intended buying behaviour. The implications of this thesis are beneficial for fast fashion companies and in particular marketers as they provide beneficial information about the Millennials. Moreover, the results of this thesis may provide helpful insight for fast fashion companies in order to improve and maintain sustainable efforts whilst simultaneously keep consumer loyalty and sustain profits. Companies are able to successfully invest in and adapt sustainable actions when they know their consumers and their desires better. Thereby, the consumer satisfaction raises and is contributing to the continuous success of fast fashion companies. Nevertheless, the outcome of this thesis is not solely limited to the fast fashion industry, but other fashion companies can benefit from the given implications as well. This particularly relates to fashion companies who operate internationally or have Millennials as a target group.

The results of this thesis highlight that even though there are similarities between Millennials, fast fashion companies should not expect the existence nor the emergence of a global uniform consumer within the near future. For instance, the empirical findings and analysis clearly show there are fundamental differences in the understanding of the concept of sustainability, hence their degree of awareness and concerns of sustainable fast fashion. Thus, fast fashion companies need to modify their focus when addressing consumers from different cultures. Additionally, fast fashion companies may use this thesis’ results for educating consumers worldwide and increase the overall awareness and concerns as well as encourage sustainable buying behaviour. Finally, in already sustainably conscious countries, there are indications for an intention-behaviour gap. To reduce this gap as well as reach less sustainable countries, fast fashion companies can use the results of this thesis to adapt their business strategies for different consumer markets. Especially, for the decision on standardisation and adaptation of marketing efforts in order to meet nationalities with different degrees of awareness and concerns about sustainability in the most efficient way.

5.4 Limitations
Throughout the process, limitations have occurred which may affect the quality of the thesis. Firstly, the number of investigated countries is limited to seven and represented by four participants each, thus conclusions and generalisations of entire nationalities should not be drawn. Secondly, any convenience sample causes drawbacks for the external validity. To reduce this limitation in terms of the sampling, the recruited nationalities of the focus groups are as culturally diverse as possible. However, due to the limited availability of students from Africa, Australia and South America residing in
Kalmar, these continents are not included in this thesis. Further research should consider this and recruit a more diverse sample and in particular include the three lacking continents.

Thirdly, two limitations appeared regarding the conduction of the focus groups. Germany was represented by three females and one male due to limited availability of male Germans, instead of an equal gender distribution. Moreover, two Russian participants had to cancel on short notice but were interviewed separately on a later occasion. Finally, the use of the qualitative method limits the conclusions' generalisation and transferability to a wider population. Nevertheless, due to limited pre-existing studies of the combined research area and explorative nature of this thesis, helpful implications can be provided.

5.5 Suggestions for further research

Based on the analysis and the limitations, the authors have developed suggestions for future research. To increase the validity of the thesis’ results, future research should consider quantitative testing of the results. A quantitative study facilitates the opportunity to reach a larger population of Millennials as well as cover a wider age range and different education levels. Additionally, this would provide a better understanding of the complex connections between Hofstede's dimensions of national culture and enable statistical testing on how the dimensions affect each other.

Further, researchers should consider investigating other socio-demographic variables in addition to culture, e.g. gender or economic situation in a country. Moreover, a suggestion is to conduct a longitudinal comparative study and observe actual buying behaviour over time since this thesis examined intended buying behaviour. The observation of actual buying behaviour would provide fast fashion companies with valuable information and understanding of their consumers.
References

Books


**Scientific articles**


**Online references**


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Appendices
Appendix A Hofstede's dimensions of national culture index

Figure 4 Hofstede’s dimensions of national culture index (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010).
Appendix B Interview guideline

*Table 3 Interview guideline.*

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<th>Concept</th>
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<th>Reasoning</th>
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<td><strong>Part I: Perception of sustainability in fast fashion</strong></td>
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| Sustainability in fashion | 1. What is sustainability in fashion?  
  • Name aspects on paper  
  • Degree of importance  
  2. What kind of sustainable fashion brands do you know?  
  • How do you know them? (Are they present in your home country)  
  • What makes them sustainable? | To gain fundamental knowledge of Millennials perception of sustainability in the context of fashion. Get an insight in their present knowledge about sustainable fashion and sustainable fashion brands. This creates a base for further discussion. |
| Sustainability in fast fashion (the three pillars of sustainability) | 3. Do you agree or disagree that fast fashion companies can be sustainable?  
  • Which sustainable efforts did you see?  
  • Why do you think they can be sustainable?  
  4. How do you reflect over social issues in fast fashion?  
  • Animals and human beings well-fare.  
  • Child labour, sweatshops and the insufficient labour-conditions = human right issue in the apparel industry  
  5. How do you reflect over environmental issues in fast fashion?  
  • Fabrics, organic material, fabric waste, shipping,  
  6. Are you aware of the economic part of sustainability? What aspects of economic sustainability do you know?  
  • How do you reflect over quality in fast fashion?  
  7. In fashion, which kind of issue related to sustainability receives the most attention in your home country (e.g. in media, marketing) and why do you think that is the case?  
  • How important is sustainability in fashion in your home country? | First the general perception of sustainability within the fast fashion industry will be discussed. To understand what is important and which issues they perceive as the most critical. Also, Millennials present knowledge about sustainability of fast fashion brands will be discovered.  
  The deeper discussion of the three distinctive parts of sustainability from a consumer-centric perspective enhances the understanding what knowledge the participants have about the three pillars of sustainability. This should give a better understanding of why they perceive some parts of sustainability more important than others.  
  Further, it should identify which issue is perceived as most important in their home country and if sustainability in fashion is considered a critical. This creates a base for analysing national cultures’ impact on the perception of sustainability. |
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<td><strong>PART II: INTENDED BUYING BEHAVIOUR</strong></td>
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| **Intended buying behaviour in fast fashion** | 8. What do you consider when buying fast fashion items?  
• Name aspect (on paper)  
• Going to a store and there are two basic t-shirts no significant difference in appearance but one is made of ecological cotton costs 80SEK the other made of “normal cotton” costs 50SEK thinking about your friends and fellow students in your home country which one would most of them buy?  
• If yes where is the limit (e.g. organic t-shirt is double the price).  
• How important is the aspect of sustainability compared to others like price/quality?  

9. In your home country, how often do you/your friends buy fashion items without planning?  
• Do you only shop when you need something?  
• Do you consider yourself an impulsive buyer?  
• Does it matter if you buy your clothes online or in a physical store  

10. How long do you and your friends use a fashion item?  
• Does it matter if the items come from for example from fast fashion or another more luxurious brand?  
• How often to you go shop new clothes? | Here the focus lies on Millennials’ decision and intended buying behaviour in fast fashion, which indicates the essential values of Millennials when buying their clothes.  
Also, the intended buying behaviour when directly comparing sustainable vs. non-sustainable fashion choices is examined.  
This should help to analyse which significance the aspect sustainability has compared to other attributes.  
Questions 9 and 10 are related to consumption, overconsumption and impulsive buying behaviour in Millennials home countries. Impulsive buying behaviour is connected to Millennials, the fast fashion industry, sustainability and culture, and therefore of significant importance for this thesis. |
| **Information Search and Knowledge** | 8. Do you have a lot of knowledge before buying an item (regarding the item / company)?  
9. How do you and your friends inform yourself to get more knowledge?  
• How? For example, Google, comparisons between or within stores,  
10. Do friends and families impact your shopping decision / Do you impact their buying-decision? How? | The questions show how well informed Millennials are before buying a fashion item and if there are more group-oriented or make individual choices.  
This is important since the intended buying behaviour is connected to values attitudes and knowledge. |
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| Intention Behaviour Gap     | 11. After having this discussion about sustainability and fashion do you feel your shopping pattern goes well with your opinions and thought in this area?  
• If no, why do you think that is?  
• If yes, how to the go well together | These questions combine the two research areas. Further it provides indications for a possible intention-behaviour gap and what the factors are for this gap. |

(Source: Own, 2017)