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THE ROLE OF GREEN BRANDING IN FINNISH UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S CONSUMER BEHAVIOR WITHIN THE FASHION APPAREL INDUSTRY

Bachelor's thesis

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Supervisor: Kristel Kaljund, PhD

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis independently

and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors

have been properly referenced and the same paper

has not been previously presented for grading.

The document length is 8354 words from the introduction to the end of conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

Environmental issues are more evident than ever, yet consumers consume fashion unsustainably, which positions the fashion apparel industry among the more polluting industries. This study investigates how green branding influences Finnish university students' consumer behavior within the fashion apparel industry and their attitudes towards the environment and green products. Semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with six students. Thematic qualitative content analysis was performed to answer the three research questions related to the problem. The results show that green branding is currently seen as an added value for the products. The attitudes towards green products and the environment are positive. These results suggest that students, despite their positive attitude towards green products, do not actively seek them. The role of green branding is relatively low. However, since it has no adverse effects, it should be utilized when possible.

Keywords: Green branding, consumer behavior, green products, green marketing

INTRODUCTION

Climate change and global warming are among the main challenges now and in the immediate future. These issues have already shaped many industries towards more sustainable ways of operating. The same trend has also spread to the fashion apparel industry. More and more sustainable options are available for consumers and producers. But still, according to the European Parliament (2021), 10 % of global greenhouse gas emissions are caused by clothing and footwear production. For context, this is more than maritime shipping and international aviation combined. Textile production is also responsible for 35% of the microplastics released into the environment. In February 2021, a resolution was passed by the European Parliament to reach an environmentally sustainable circular economy by 2050 (Ibid.), which strongly implies that the future of the fashion apparel industry is green.

The author's motivation for this research comes from his observations among his acquaintances and interest in environmental issues. As the industry's future is heading towards a green direction, it is more important to acknowledge the factors influencing consumers from their standpoint to succeed in the future.

The research problem of this study focuses on consumers' behavior towards green products, given that there are sustainable options available for consumers. Still, they are not preferring these products enough. Yadav and Pathak (2016) studied young adults' intentions. Lin and Huang (2012) studied choice behavior through theory of consumption values. Still, green branding in consumer behavior within the fashion apparel industry has not been studied widely.

Therefore, this research aims to fulfill this gap in knowledge. This thesis aims to provide valuable insight into Finnish university students' attitudes towards the environment and green products and further determine the role of green branding on Finnish university students' consumer behavior in the fashion apparel industry. The objective is to conduct in-depth interviews to gain qualitative insight into Finnish students' attitudes and behavior in relation to previously mentioned matters. The research questions were formed to address these aspects and are as following:

- What are Finnish students' attitudes towards green products?
- What is the role of green branding in Finnish students' consumer behavior?
- What are Finnish students' attitudes towards the environment?

The paper consists of three main parts: theoretical framework, research methodology, and research results. The first part starts with explaining critical concepts related to the paper: green marketing, greenwashing, ecolabelling, and a description of the fashion apparel industry. Then, branding is defined in the context of greenness. The theory of planned behavior is discussed in detail to provide a solid theoretical basis for the thesis. The second part focuses on the methodology used in the research, specifically how the research was designed, the sample, the data collection method, and the description of the analysis used. The third part includes the analysis and the results of the study. The paper ends with the conclusion, where the main findings are concluded, and recommendations for future research and businesses are presented. Arguments about the limitations of the paper are also included in the conclusion part.

Furthermore, the author wants to thank his supervisor Kristel Kaljund for the guidance and help throughout the process, his family and friends for support, and all the interviewees for their time and interest in this research. Without whom, this research would have been impossible to conduct.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The first chapter presents the thesis's theoretical framework, gathered from academic literature and published research papers. This chapter provides relevant concepts and explanations for the reader. The theory of planned behavior is explained in detail.

1.1. Green marketing, greenwashing, ecolabelling, and industry

In this section, the author will explain the concepts of green marketing, greenwashing, ecolabeling, and the fashion apparel industry. To understand how green products are marketed and what might influence consumers' image of green products, the definitions of these concepts must first be acknowledged.

1.1.1. What is green marketing?

Consumers are aware of climate change and concerned about environmental issues (Semenza et al. 2008, 479). This awareness makes consumers conscious about the negative impact of the products they use on the environment (Bhatia, Jain 2013, 1). For example, green product availability increased by 73% between 2009 and 2010 (Szabo, Webster 2020, 1). Because of consumers increased interest in ecological products, green marketing is a popular promotional strategy (Bhatia, Jain 2013, 2). Polonsky (1994, 1) defines green marketing as more than just advertising products with environmental attributes. It includes several activities such as product modification, production process changes, packaging changes, and advertising changes.

Green marketing can be utilized on consumer goods, services, and industrial goods (Ibid.). Using green marketing is a way to meet consumers' environmental concerns and build a solid consumer base (Bhatia, Jain 2013, 2). Green marketing is a concept that makes companies follow green and ethical practices with their customers, employees, and other business partners such as suppliers

and dealers; for companies to succeed in green marketing, they must be committed to operating in environmentally responsible ways. (Bhatia, Jain 2013, 2).

Green marketing is not a new or recently found concept. Previously green marketing has been referred to as ecological marketing in the 1970s. Moreover, green marketing started to be recognized in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Peattie 2003, 727). Critical concepts of green marketing, including sustainability and holism, seem simple but are extremely challenging to translate into action because traditional management is founded on economic principles that consider environmental resources unlimited and free (Peattie 2003, 728).

1.1.2. What is greenwashing?

Where green marketing is considered to follow green and ethical practices, greenwashing is the opposite. Defined by Delmas and Burbano (2011, 66) as the act of making the consumers have the perception of environmentally friendly products or services, essentially misleading them. Firm-level greenwashing is also present; it means that companies lead consumers to believe that they act environmentally when they are not (Delmas, Burbano 2011, 66). Greenwashing is performed through marketing communications and primarily by advertising (Akturan 2018, 811). Greenwashing devalues legitimate green advertising and makes it harder for consumers to distinguish what they can trust (Szabo. Webster 2020, 1). It also influences potential investors negatively regarding environmentally responsible companies (Delmas, Burbano 2011, 64-65).
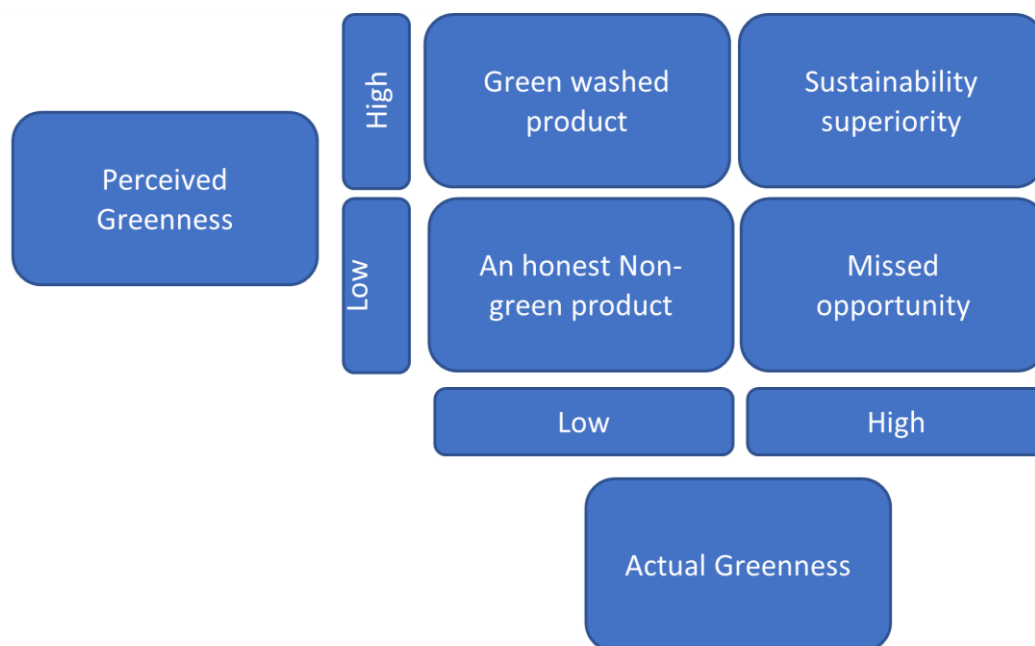
Figure 1. The greenness matrix
Source: Simula and Lehtimäki (2009, 340)

Greenwashing companies combine two behaviors: positive communication about environmental performance and inadequate environmental performance (Delmas, Burbano 2011, 67-68). Simula et al.'s (2009) greenness matrix demonstrates how a greenwashed product differs from a green marketed product labeled "Sustainable superiority" (see Figure 1). Figure 1 also shows how a greenwashed product can become a green marketed one, and vice versa. According to research by Chen and Chang (2012, 489), green trust is directly negatively affected by greenwashing.

1.1.3. Ecolabelling

It is important to acknowledge how consumers can differentiate products that are green and not greenwashed. If provided, known ecolabels are a safe and convenient tool to recognize a green product or service. Ecolabels are used to make it easier for consumers to distinguish products that are produced more environmentally. Ecolabelling is also one of the major tools used in green marketing. (Rex, Baumann 2007, 567)

They are also used to give unbiased information about the products and drive production and consumer behavior towards a more sustainable direction (Ministry of the Environment 2013). For companies, ecolabelling is often a tool to gain advantages over competitors (Rubik, Frankl 2005)

To European Union, ecolabelling was introduced in 1992 by the European Commission and is represented by the EU Ecolabel. European Commission describes it as a label of environmental excellence, given to products and services following environmentally responsible processes across their life cycle. Ecological criteria for the labels are set by experts. The requirements are different for individual products and services. It is designed to impact on stages where the environmental impact is at its highest. For example, in manufacturing textiles, the ecological impact is most significant when the fabrics are printed, dyed, and bleached. The EU Ecolabel has criteria set to minimize the environmental impact on the manufacturing stage of the textiles. (European Commission n.d.)

Another known ecolabel is the Nordic Swan Ecolabel, the official ecolabel of the Nordic countries. The ecolabel was created in 1989 by the Nordic Council of Ministers. In essence, the Nordic Swan Ecolabel works in the same manner as the EU ecolabel. However, it is designed to be used in the

Nordic countries Iceland, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, covering 60 different product groups, over 200 other product groups, and more than 25000 different products (Nordic Ecolabelling n.d.). The Nordic Swan and EU Ecolabel are among the ten most recognized ecolabels globally (Ministry of the Environment 2013).

1.1.4 Fashion apparel industry

According to Major (2020), fashion is simply the styles that groups of people use, represented by clothes and accessories. Furthermore, the fashion industry is a broader concept consisting of manufacturing, distribution, designing, marketing, retailing, advertising, and promoting clothing and accessories; the apparel industry is traditionally described as an industry of ordinary clothes (Major 2020). Today the gap between the fashion and apparel industry is hard to distinguish; thus, the author uses the term "fashion apparel industry." The fashion apparel industry was chosen since individuals have to purchase new clothing and accessories, therefore researching this particular industry is essential.

The fashion apparel industry and the textile production related to it are liable for greenhouse gas emissions, polluting water, and filling the landfills (European Parliament 2021). One of the main trends in the industry is called fast fashion, which is highly unsustainable. In fast fashion, new styles are constantly produced and sold at a meager price. This business model has created a situation where low-quality clothes and apparel are consumed in large quantities and usually thrown away fast. According to the European Parliament (2021), Europeans use almost 26 kilograms of textile, and nearly half of it is discarded every year.

Furthermore, half a million tonnes of microfiber is released into the ocean each year, which accounts for 35% globally. Manufacturing only one t-shirt uses 2700 liters of water, which accounts for enough drinking water for two and a half years for one person. (Ibid.) However, despite the apparent sustainability issues, signs for growth in sustainability have emerged within the industry. Fashion giant H&M for example, has pledged to only utilize recycled or sustainable materials in production by 2030 (CB Insights 2021). In February 2021, the European Parliament implemented a resolution to reach an environmentally sustainable circular economy by 2050. (European Parliament 2021)

1.2. Green branding and green brand equity

As this thesis researches the role of green branding, it is necessary first to have a broader understanding of branding and brand equity. Thus, the concept of a brand must first be acknowledged.

A brand is defined by Aaker (1991) to be a distinctive name or symbol which helps consumers to recognize one seller's goods and services from those of competitors. Although there have been many definitions from different marketers and literature over time, its essence has remained the same. When a company or a person creates a new logo, symbol, or a name for a new-found product, they have created a brand (Keller 2002, 151-152). Kotler et al. defined four levels of meanings a brand can provide: attributes, benefits, values, and personality. (Cohen, Harris 2002, 133)

These levels of meaning are essential when branding green products. For example, an attribute of a green product a brand could have in a consumer's mind could be ecological, sustainable, and durable. Companies must find a way to translate these attributes into buyable benefits to succeed. (Ibid., 133).

Brand equity is described by Aaker (1991) as a set of assets and liabilities related to a brand (see Figure 2.) His model shows that brand equity consists of five dimensions, brand loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary brand assets. The model also demonstrates the provided value brand equity creates for customers and firms. Kotler et al.'s (2001) definition further support this model. Consumers usually perceive brand equity as how much value the brand and other distinctive features add to a product (Ibid., 134).

Figure 2. Brand Equity Model
Source: Aaker (1991)

According to Wang and Horng (2015, 20), little attention has been paid to green branding in empirical studies. However, past studies have focused on green brand equity in the context of green branding (Lin et al. 2017, 134). Based on Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993) definitions, Chen (2010, 313) define green brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities about green commitments and environmental concerns linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service." As consumers are the basis for brand equity, it is essential to consider it in this study and the brand equity model's dimensions. These aspects affect consumer attitudes, satisfaction, and trust. Brand equity and concepts associated with it, such as brand trust, brand image, and consumer satisfaction, are considered in terms of green products (Deniz, Onder 2017, 5) for this thesis. These concepts are the drivers for green

brand equity. Green satisfaction, green brand image, and green trust are positively associated with green brand equity, according to Chen (2010) (see Figure 3.).

First, it is essential to understand the concepts of brand image, consumer satisfaction, and brand trust. Keller (1993) defines brand image as perceptions that consumers have about the brand, including brand associations that consumers have in their memory; these brand associations refer to the information the consumer has linked to the brand in their memory. Giese and Cote (2000) describe consumer satisfaction based on a literature review to have three components:

1. Consumer satisfaction is a cognitive or emotional response.
2. It is constructed to assess standards regarding products, previous experiences with products, and some characteristics related to purchasing, such as the person selling.
3. It is always expressed when researchers ask about the product or related traits.

Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) defined brand trust as the following: "Feeling of security held by the consumer in his/her interaction with the brand, that it is based on the perceptions that the brand is reliable and responsible for the interests and welfare of the consumer." They state that brand trust consists of five relevant factors. First, consumers put themselves to risk when relying on the promises the brand makes. Second, two feelings: confidence and security, define brand trust. Third, expectations are present in brand trust. Fourth, positive outcomes are related to it. Fifth, dispositional attributions are involved.
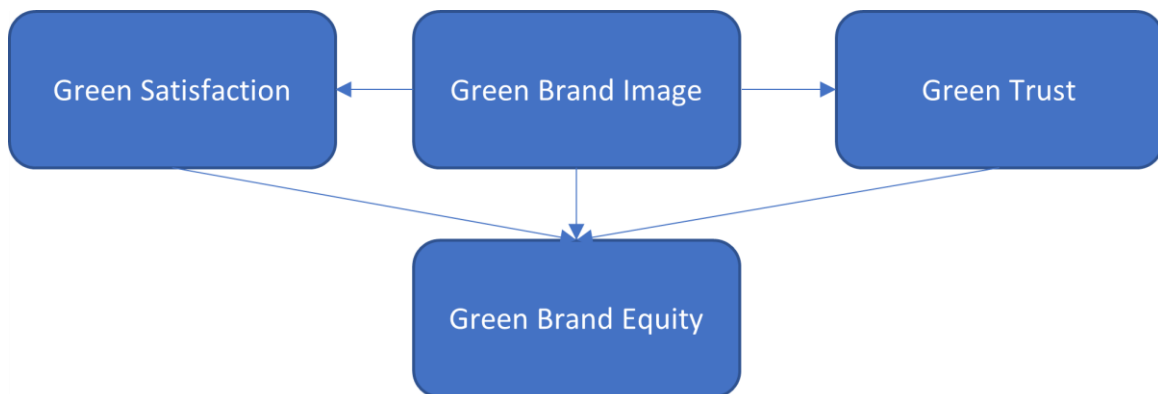

Figure 3. Drivers of Green Equity
Source: Chen (2010)

Green brand image is defined as consumers' perceptions of environmental commitments and environmental concerns linked to a brand. Chen describes green satisfaction as a "pleasurable level

of consumption-related fulfillment to satisfy a customer's environmental desires, sustainable expectations, and green needs." Green trust is defined by Chen as "a willingness to depend on a product, service, or brand based on the belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and ability about its environmental performance." (Chen 2010, 312)

1.3. Theory of planned behavior

This thesis utilizes the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the main theoretical framework since TPB is a clearly defined model used to understand and predict behaviors.

The author reviewed two studies conducted by Yadav and Pathak (2016) and Liobikienė et al. (2016). Both utilize TPB successfully studying green purchasing behavior. Yadav and Pathak (2016) state that TPB has been helpful in pro-environmental behavior prediction. As this thesis explores green branding factors that influence consumer's purchase intentions and decision-making processes, TPB is the most suitable theory to use. For example, when consumers intend to buy a new piece of clothing or accessory, does green branding influence consumers' behavior to change the intention of purchasing a non-green product to buy a green product? TPB has been one of the most influential and used frameworks for studying human behavior (Ajzen 2002, 665)
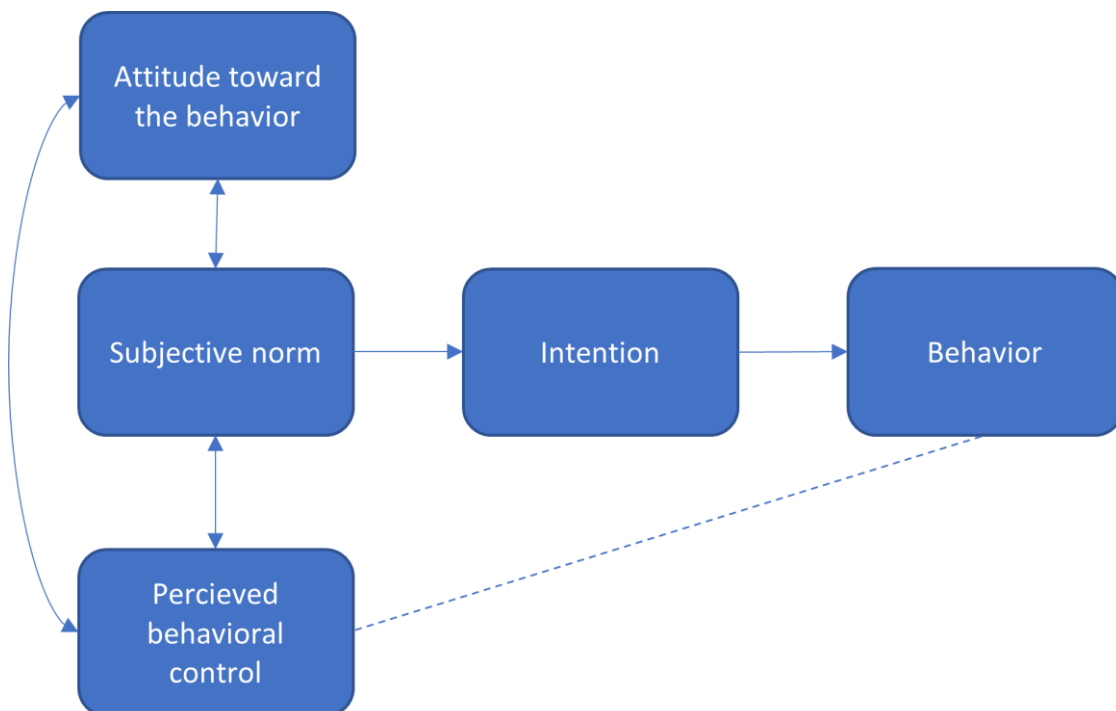
Figure 4. Theory of planned behavior
Source: Ajzen (1991)

To better understand TPB, it is essential to acknowledge the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the antecedent theory. TRA was introduced by Fishbein and Ajzen in 1967, and it was developed to comprehend connections between attitudes, intentions, and behaviors (Montaño, Kasprzyk 2015). TRA predicts that attitudes and subjective norms cause out behavioral intent (see Figure 4). Attitudes are individuals' perceptions of whether a behavior is positive or negative; they are determined by individuals' behavioral beliefs. Subjective norms are determined by an individual's normative beliefs.

Whether or not other individuals approve or disapprove of the behavior, they are affected by the individual's motivation to behave accordingly (Montaño, Kasprzyk 2015).

TPB is an extension of TRA. A central factor in both theories is the individual's intention to execute a particular behavior. TPB adds perceived behavioral control to the theory, representing an individual's ability to engage in a specific action. Usually, the stronger the intention, the more likely it is for an individual to engage in a behavior. (Ajzen 1991; Montaño, Kasprzyk 2015) TPB is conceptualized in Figure 4.

As seen in Figure 4, the basis of TPB consists of three independent elements of intention. The first one is the attitude towards behavior. In short, it means if the person has a positive or negative attitude towards a given action. The second element is called the subjective norm, the social component of the TPB. It suggests that if a person has perceived social pressure to act in a certain way. In some cases, the perceived social pressure can be supplemented with a person's own personal feelings, such as a moral obligation or responsibility to perform a given behavior or not. These emotional feelings are expected to impact intentions together with other elements. (Ajzen 1991)

The third and final element is how individuals perceive the given behavior to perform, easy or challenging. It is called perceived behavioral control. It also takes into account past experiences and possible difficulties. Suppose a person has a positive attitude and a positive subjective norm combined with high perceived behavioral control. In that case, the person's intention to perform

the behavior should be more substantial. (Ajzen 1991) Not all three are always needed; in some cases, only one or two elements are required to predict one's intentions (Ajzen 1991, 188).

1.4. Summary

This thesis's theoretical framework consists of three chapters. The first chapter relates greenwashing and ecolabelling to green marketing and green marketing to green branding. In the second chapter, the concept of green branding and green brand equity is overviewed and described through branding and brand equity. In the third chapter, the theory used in the thesis, Theory of Planned Behavior, is explained in detail. The use of this specific theory is justified. It is essential to acknowledge factors that might build trust towards green brands, such as ecolabelling and green marketing. Equally important is to recognize elements that create uncertainty and distrust among consumers, such as greenwashing.

The first chapter talks about green marketing relations to green branding, referring to attributes such as packaging and advertising changes. Ecolabelling is related to green marketing positively since ecolabelling can guide consumers towards more sustainable buying preferences and build trust towards green products. Misleading consumers to perceive a brand or a green product when the actual greenness is low is called greenwashing, which negatively affects green branding. This research aims not to raise awareness between greenwashing and green marketing. Still, they are essential to link to green branding to understand how green branding influences consumer attitude and behavior.

The second chapter of the theoretical framework ties together concepts presented in the first chapter. Brand and brand equity is defined at the beginning of the chapter to build a base for their green variants. Green branding in the past studies has been referred to in the context of green brand equity, and the same applies to this research. Figure 3 represents drivers of green brand equity, which are green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust. Concepts discussed in the first chapter of the framework influences these drivers of green brand equity. For example, green trust is directly negatively affected by greenwashing and positively impacted by ecolabelling. Green marketing aims to fulfill consumer's environmental desires and so influences green satisfaction. Green brand image is related to green marketing actions positively or negatively depending on the activity.

The third chapter focuses on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The use of the given theory is justified through arguments regarding the intended usage of TPB, studying human behavior. TPB is also often used when studying green consumer behavior. The elements of intention were defined in detail to better understand the theory and its purpose. These elements are linked to attitudes towards environment, subjective norms about greenness, and to perceived behavioral control in environmental behavior. A clearly defined and widely recognized model provides a strong basis and an essential structure for the analysis and approach to the interviews' results later in the research. These three chapters together form the theoretical basis to be used in the discussions.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The second chapter first introduces the research plan, research design. Later, data collection methods and data analysis methods are introduced. Also, the sample for the study is presented.

2.1. Research design and plan

This research aims to gain insight into male Finnish university students' attitudes toward green products and the environment and determine the role of green branding in student's consumer behavior. As the research aims to study Finnish students' attitudes, opinions, and behavior, qualitative research methods were used. Qualitative research methods allow us to understand people's beliefs, motivations, and behaviors (Hennink et al. 2020). These traits are also hard to measure with quantitative research methods.

The interview was designed to give answers to the research questions. The interview framework took the Theory of planned behavior into account in the design. First, the topics for the interview questions were created in order to structure the discussion logically. Then the questions were assigned to specify each topic. Once the interview plan was finished, suggestions were gathered from the supervisor to further enhance the interview's quality. The interview framework consists of 29 open-ended questions. These questions form four main topics to give a clear and in-depth picture of Finnish students' attitudes and behaviors and to enable smooth analysis. The first topic is the general knowledge of environmental issues and the current consumer behavior of the interviewees, which also measures the subjective norms of the participants. The interviewees´ attitudes towards green products and the environment are covered by the next topic that also measures the interviewees' attitudes towards the behavior. The third topic is about the role of green branding in influencing students purchasing decisions. The fourth and final topic covers interviewees' suggestions and hopes for the future. The last two topics facilitate the identification of the perceived behavioral control of students.

Because of the strict pre-selected criteria for the interviewees, a nonprobability sampling method, namely convenience sampling, was selected. In convenience sampling, it is possible to choose members of the target population that are easily accessible and meet specific criteria (Etikan 2016). This sampling method allowed to reach the right persons for the research. The sample of this research consists of six Finnish male university students. The interviewees were contacted via the author's personal connections.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

Only primary data was used in the research. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to reach a deeper level of understanding of interviewees' attitudes and behaviors as an in-depth interview gives the interviewer access to rich personal data and tools to understand an individual's motivations and context (Morris 2015). The interviews were carried out online through the Zoom platform with cameras in the solemn belief that interviews conducted other than face-to-face can be effective (Ibid.). The interviews were recorded and transcribed for qualitative content analysis. The interviews were held in the Finnish language to keep the interview as natural as possible and to mitigate the data loss when using a second language. Interviews lasted for 20 to 25 minutes each. The interviews were semi-structured; thus, all the interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order, and explanatory questions were asked when seen necessary. Before the interview, participants were informed that there are no right or wrong answers, their anonymity is granted, and that the recording will be terminated after transcribing the data.

In order to analyze the transcribed interview texts, a thematic qualitative analysis was conducted with the aim to identify key themes within the interview data. First, the data was reviewed, and codes were identified. The data was divided into categories with the help of codes. Last, key themes were recognized and interpreted to structure the knowledge gained and answer the research questions. The data was inserted into a table to identify codes, categories, and themes evident to make the analysis systematic and organized.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following chapter presents the thematic qualitative analysis of the interview data and discussion of the results.

3.1 Thematic analysis

To further understand and decode students' attitudes and behavior towards green products and determine the role of green branding, qualitative in-depth online interviews were carried out with six Finnish men. Interviewees were informed that green branded products and green branding were in the context of clothing and apparel. Names of the interviewees were changed to comply with the promise of anonymity. The six interviewees were named Timo, Sami, Juho, Toni, Jani, and Niilo.

As at the time of conducting the interviews, COVID-19 was still strongly present in Finland, thus the interviews were carried on through the online platform Zoom with cameras. The interviews were held in Finnish since all the interviewees speak Finnish as their native language and to minimize data loss when using a second language. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The resulting text was divided into seven categories according to different aspects of the interview questions and found codes. Each category's role is to find and distinguish critical themes and understand the interviewee's attitudes and behavior to conduct a thematic analysis. With the help of these categories, three key themes emerged that support the systematization of the results and offer further understanding to set research questions. These themes are environment, consumer behavior, and hope for sustainable consumption.

Category 1: General knowledge of environmental issues
Category 2: Attitudes towards the environment
Category 3: Current consumer behavior
Category 4: Attitudes towards branding
Category 5: Attitudes towards green products
Category 6: Role of green branding influencing purchasing decision
Category 7: The perception of future

THEME 1: ENVIRONMENT

Category 1: General knowledge of environmental issues

The general knowledge regarding environmental issues is high among the participants. It is also clear that Finnish students believe firmly in climate change. As Timo states when asked if he believes in climate change: *"I believe, very strongly."* Interviewees also have a good perception of the term responsible consumer. Juho says that a responsible consumer: *...gets acquainted with the products and makes responsible choices, thinking about other people and the planet"* and Jani says: *"Considers what impacts shopping has and thinks if there are better options available."* The basis for environmental knowledge comes from *"having a good common knowledge and how you were raised, "* says Niilo.

Category 2: Attitudes towards the environment

Finnish student's attitudes towards environment are positive and concern for the environment is high, says Juho: *"I'm concerned because consumption will only increase and we should leave a better planet for our children."* When talking about interviewees perception on whether one's own actions makes a difference, there is a clear theme. Finnish students feel that their actions can make a difference in Finland but not globally. Participants commented on this topic in the following way: *"I do believe, there is often a lot of talk about how behavior in such a small country can affect on a large scale in relation to emissions of China's big factories, for example."* (Timo); *"I believe that yes, especially on a Finnish scale. If everyone did small things, it would have a big impact."* (Sami); *"In the big picture, I don't think that my own choices matter, but at the Finnish level, for example yes."* (Toni). Acting in a certain way and setting an example can also affect the people around and create a snowball effect, says Timo: *"I still believe that my actions matter, while not directly reducing emissions, but also indirectly affects other people. For example, by creating pressure on other people. Kind of like a snowball effect. Awareness on these matters reflects on other areas of life as well. My little brother's example influenced me, for example."*

SUMMARY OF THEME 1:

There is a good basis for sustainable consumer behavior in Finnish students since high concern towards the environmental issues is present, and the attitude towards the environment is positive.

Another factor that implies a reasonable basis for sustainable consumer behavior is the belief that interviewees think their own actions matter, at least in Finland. Good general knowledge of environmental issues further supports the claim.

THEME 2: CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Category 3: Current consumer behavior

The central theme regarding Finnish students' consumption habits is the search for quality. They buy products when they need them. Timo says when asked about his consumer behavior: *"Practical shopping, I buy for need, if I need something I will buy the best and the price doesn't matter so much, no impulse decisions but rather reasoned shopping,"* which also implies that quality is also an important aspect when making a purchase decision. Despite recognizing the characteristics of a responsible consumer, participants' knowledge does not always apply to their consumer behavior. When asked if participants consider to be responsible consumers, Sami says: *"No, might be because of my laziness and I do consume fast fashion for example, even though I know it is not sustainable."* and Timo tells: *"To a certain degree yeah, but not as much as I would like. I believe my income level affects my purchases because I am a student. I often think about responsibility. But it doesn't always translate into purchasing decisions,"* which indicates that the thought about responsibility is present, but it doesn't directly translate into decisions. Participants refer to their own laziness and current level of income as existing barriers to not be responsible.

Category 4: Attitudes towards branding

The interview included questions that address the interviewees' views and preferences, first regarding brands and branding in clothing and then about clothing branded as green. It is essential to find the interviewee's attitudes towards branding in general before examining green branding. A brand, in general, is perceived as a critical factor when Finnish students buy clothing and apparel. Finnish students recognize familiar brands from their quality and durability over lesser-known brands. Theme regarding brands and branding is tied to quality. *"It matters, I like quality clothes and certain brands produce more durable and higher quality clothing,"* says Toni and *"Yes, somewhat, a major role in fact, certain brands are more durable than others and lasts longer,"* Juho expresses.

Other factors that are considered to have an impact regarding to brands and branding are social factors, *"I find some brands socially accepted and I use them,"* says Sami and the added value that a brand brings to the product, *"It matters, the brand creates value for me, and it matters a lot,"* Niilo answers. Finnish students are curious about new brands bringing new products to the market but does find comfort in the reliability and the feeling of security when buying proven brands. Timo says: *"There are certain brands that I prefer, in sportswear it has been Nike and Asics for a long time, but now they are replaced by new interesting brands, which have brought something new to the market,"* and Sami states that *"It is influenced by the reliability of the brand and the sense of security created by the awareness,"* when asked about why he prefers one brand over another. Overall, the attitude towards brands and branding was positive.

SUMMARY OF THEME 2:

The current consumer behavior of Finnish students, despite the positive associations with the environment, is not sustainable. Sustainability is acknowledged but not actively pursued. The most essential characteristic for students is quality. The consumption frequency of clothing and apparel is tied to need. Branding influences students' choices significantly. Brands distinguish themselves to students by perceived quality and reliability. Social factors also influence student's decision-making.

THEME 3: HOPE FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Category 5: Attitude towards green products

Students were asked to think of words, which come to mind when they think of a green branded product. It turns out that green branded products are mainly associated with positive words, such as future, recycling, trendy, environment, ecological, organic, responsible, and fresh air. It is seen trendy to be involved with green branded products. Timo answers: *"Future, recycling, climate change, trendy, responsibility. Nowadays, it is "in" to be aware of these things."* Negative words were associated with the perceived expensiveness of green products, *"Expensive, responsible production is certainly more expensive than not sustainable,"* says Juho. Overall, students have exceedingly positive associations with the word. Finnish students are aware of the greenwashing phenomenon, but still perceive green products as positive and beneficial, as Sami says: *"Good thing, but there is also a lot of deceiving, but still generally a good thing. "* Students also think that green products have a positive impact on future regarding consumption and production of clothing. Juho says when asked to share his opinion on green products: *"Very positive, it has a big impact on our future, and the more durable clothes I buy, the less I consume."* and Jani encapsulates his opinion as: *"Basically good, thinking about the earth, it is good to think about alternative ways to produce stuff and clothing."*

Despite the positive associations and favorable opinions on green products, Finnish students do not actively prefer green products over regular products. They only prefer them when there is an opportunity presented. They will not go looking for green products. It is seen as an added value or a bonus. As Timo presents his view on his preference: *"If possible then yeah, but there is not always a possibility. I am not going to search for these products. The greenness of the product alone does not influence the purchase decision, but I think about it and see it as a bonus on top of the product."* Reasons for not preferring green products conflict with student's attitudes towards the environment and green products. Toni says that: *"I do not prefer, there has not been a situation that I felt necessary to buy these products.",* or Niilo's comment: *"No, I see that they are on par with normal products."*

Buying a green product makes Finnish students feel good for themselves, especially right after the purchase, says Toni: *"Well, if I do, it will be a good feeling at the time of purchase to try to take the environment into account."* The feeling is based on the sense of doing the right thing, but

participants do not feel bad if the product is not green. Again, greenness is seen as an added value or bonus. Greenness should also be subtly visible in the products, Timo mentions: *"In clothing I like that a product shows that it is a green product, e.g., in clothing the label that shows that it is produced sustainably, makes me feel good. The fact that it is highlighted in the product, but not too flashy."* and *"I don't really know, but it is kind of a bonus, yeah it feels good, but if the product doesn't have it, it doesn't matter, creates positive feelings all in all."*

It is clear for the participants that green products are available in the market but there are not enough compared to non-green products says Toni: *"Maybe not currently in relation to non-sustainable products."* Students would like to see green products more accessible, and they are also confused with the brands communications and would like to have more clarity and more information about green products, Timo says: *"Yes, but they should be highlighted more. I have the motivation to act environmentally friendly, but often I don't know if I'm doing so. It is difficult for me to distinguish if brands are doing so or not, I would like clarity,"* and Jani replies: *" There is certainly enough available, but awareness of them is not at the level it certainly should be."* It is clear that green products are rather easy to find, if you want to find them, as Juho states: *"There are, especially when buying online, and if you are looking for them."* and Sami concludes that *"Yeah, especially if you want to buy them."* Finnish students would prefer a green product if they perceived that the product is on a same level with non-green product regarding to quality. They would also prefer that the products would be easily accessible and would not differ much in price. Toni says that: *"The fact that if I bought a green product it would be high quality and affordable, then there would be no reason not to buy them."* and Timo says: *"If the green product is at the same level quality wise. I don't buy a worse product because of ecology. If products are equally good then I choose more environmentally friendly one. Clear communication and a really good product that I will not miss out on anything when buying a green product but rather get more out of it."* The fifth category's central theme is that students have a positive attitude towards green products, but do have barriers, such as perceived quality, availability, and price regarding green products.

Category 6: Role of green branding influencing purchasing decision

As stated before, Finnish students are affected by brands and branding significantly, but green branding is not as straight forward for the students. Overall, it was a difficult task for the students to think about a brand that offers green products. Sami says: *"Probably all brands, but no specific*

ones comes to mind,", and Toni says: *"I'm not sure, but for example GANT comes to my mind, I use it myself, I perceive it as high quality and durable brand."* Timo said the following: *"For example, Adidas had a shoe campaign where the shoes were made of plastic collected from the oceans and it was branded so strongly and well, so it left a really responsible image of Adidas. I don't remember other ads from Adidas and whether there has been anything sustainable, but the one campaign has left a feeling that they are more sustainable than Nike or Puma etc. Makia is a brand that does good in Finland, I do use these brands."* Adidas launched its green brand Adidas X Parley over five years ago and it still affects the brand image in student's minds, so a successful green branding has a long-term positive influence on participants. Domestic brands such as BilleBeino and Makia are distinguished for their green efforts in Finland. Juho says: *"Billebeino, I use the brand myself because it is domestic, green and uses a lot of recycled materials."*

Eco-labelling, a form of green branding is not seen as an important aspect when buying clothes and apparel, Niilo says that: *"What matters more to me is the look and feel of the material."* Finnish students still sometimes end up checking the labels and it can leave a positive feeling and strengthen the buying decision, as Timo states: *"For example, I bought a jacket two months ago and it was green labeled and it stuck in my mind. It strengthened the buying decision."* Participants green trust is on a high level but is very fragile. Greenwashing phenomenon is acknowledged but not experienced. Timo states that: *"I trust, it is a concern that if such branded or marketed products turned out to be a scam, but I have not come across it."* Sami says that: *"I want to trust, but I am also aware of greenwashing."* and Toni says: *"Yes, I trust that advertisers will not lie about these things."* Even when the green trust is on a high level, students wants to see more information regarding to the process and how the product differs from a non-green one. Toni says: *"I would like to know how the product is made and how it differs from a non-green product, there should be other information than just that it is an environmentally friendly product."*

The central theme regarding the role of green branding on consumer behavior is that it either positively influences the participants or has no influence. In the case of positive influence, it creates a good and responsible image of the product and ensures that it has been produced ethically. Niilo says that: *"It affects, it creates a responsible image that no child has produced the product for example"* and Juho says: *It has a positive effect, creates a good image,"* but Sami gives opposing opinion: *"I think it has no influence, I have not thought about that*," and Jani states: *"I would say that it doesn't matter to me."*

Category 7: The perception of future

Participants have a good sense of what they would like to see in the future regarding to green branding and green branded products. The central theme is about adding more information about the products and the process. Finnish students would also like to see green products to become normalized and more accessible. Sami describes his suggestions as following: "Consistently highlighting the process and explaining why it is a green product," Jani says: *"I think more could be said about the process. It would be interesting to see if it would have an impact on me."* and Niilo´s opinion is: *"Transparency about where and how the product is made, how the product is green, and normalize green products that there is no difference in quality and other features of non-green products."* Smaller changes, for example to the packaging materials can make it seem that the company behind the brand cares, says Timo: *"For example, small things like changing plastic in packaging to paper or cardboard creates the impression that the brand cares."* Finnish students also would like to see green brands to do more collaborations with public persons and athletes, who care for the environment. *"Combining brands with athletes and public figures who supports and talks about environmental issues,"* and *"Collaborate with organizations and celebrities who talk about this and drive it forward. If they support this in some way. Businesses often have the opportunity to do this but may often choose not to. The goal should be to get your name combined with sustainability through word of mouth,"* says Timo.

Interviewees recommend to check what you are buying and search for more information related to green products if someone wishes to become more responsible consumer in Finland. Juho says: *"Look for as much information as possible about products and responsible consumption"* and Jani complements: *"Learn more about the matter and for example, write your goals down and try to stick to them."* For the companies who produce and offer clothing and apparel, they should: produce locally, add more advertising of green brands, try to impress your on-the–edge-customers and add more information. *"They should brand more products through green branding and advertise about it,"* Toni says. *"Trying to please the customer base who could possibly buy these products and increase the awareness,"* Jani comments. *"Do not manufacture products in eastern concentration camps but rather in Europe,"* concludes Niilo.

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SUMMARY OF THEME 3: HOPE FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

Attitudes towards green products are exceedingly positive, therefore according to the interviewees, Finnish student's attitudes and actions are in conflict. Student's positive feelings and associations towards the environment and green products do not always translate into actions. Perceived quality of green products and accessibility are the main obstacles to overcome. Green branding has no negative influence, but either a positive influence or no influence at all on students. However, students do already have a reasonable basis for sustainable consumption, which indicates that there is hope for sustainable consumption in Finnish students, and it should be utilized.

3.2 Discussion

This research is aimed to identify Finnish students' attitudes towards the environment, attitudes towards green products, and how green branding influences students' consumer behavior. The study also aims to further understand Finnish students' values and current consumer behavior and offer suggestions for improvement. This research provided insight into the formerly mentioned research questions based on the thematic analysis of the data.

The first theme, environment, provides answers on the attitudes towards the environment and indicates a reasonable basis for sustainable consumer behavior in Finnish students. The environmental concern is high, and the attitudes towards it are positive. The second theme, consumer behavior, shows that Finnish students are not as sustainable as their attitudes. Sustainability is currently acknowledged but not pursued actively. Students also acquire new clothing and apparel for need. Quality is the most essential aspect they search for in these products. The third theme, hope for sustainable consumption, gives insight into the last two research questions. Opinions on green products are overall positive, but the perceived lower quality, higher price, and worse accessibility are seen as the main obstacles. Buying a green product makes students feel good about themselves. Green branding is seen as an added value for the product; it has a positive influence or no influence. There's potential and hope for sustainable behavior in Finnish students. Finnish male students also do not buy clothes and apparel often, but when they do, they are willing to spend to achieve the desired quality in the products, which makes them a key target group for green products.

The results support the Theory of Planned Behavior. Student's attitudes towards green products and the environment are positive. When looking at the subjective norm of the students, they do not have an intense social pressure to act environmentally. Last, students felt like green products are not easily accessible, so the perceived behavioral control is weak. According to TPB, at least one of the two missing components should be addressed. Based on this and the interview data, it is first recommended to make acting environmentally straightforward. This means that if there is a green product, make it as accessible and easy to obtain as possible. Second, the subjective norm can be influenced by adding more information available and making the products match the non-green products in quality. However, changing one's subjective norm can take time and effort.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to identify Finnish students' attitudes towards the environment and green products and provide insight into how green branding influences Finnish students' consumer behavior. The fashion apparel industry creates more greenhouse gas emissions than aviation and maritime shipping combined. At 10% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, it is one of the more polluting industries in the world, so something needs to change in the industry. In European Union, these issues have been addressed, and the future looks greener. The emerging trends of green products will strengthen in the future, so it is necessary to provide the industry with an insight into consumers' attitudes and behaviors. To further provide this insight, in-depth interviews were conducted to achieve this. These interviews provided answers to the three main research questions: 1) What are Finnish students' attitudes towards green products, 2) What is the role of green branding in Finnish students' consumer behavior, and 3) What are Finnish students' attitudes towards the environment?

Based on the thematic qualitative analysis of the interview data, the research questions were answered. It can be concluded that Finnish students have an exceptionally positive attitude towards the environment; furthermore, the attitudes towards green products are positive, although perceived worse quality and accessibility are seen as the obstacles to overcome in student's minds. Green branding is seen as an added value and influences students only positively or does not influence them at all. The results suggest that there is a reasonable basis for sustainable behavior in Finnish students. With adjustments in perceived quality and accessibility of the products, this can be utilized.

As for recommendations for businesses, they should focus on making the green products as easily available as possible and clearly inform consumers regarding the product and its benefits. Also, strengthening the positive feeling associated with a green purchase is recommended. More minor changes such as substituting plastic packaging with paper can leave customers feeling positive about the company. If a business offers green products, it is recommended to exploit green branding as much as possible since it builds added value for the products. Businesses should also

consider providing more green products in the future. Finnish university students are looked up to and possibly seen as role models in society. They also will be in leading positions in the future, so the sample for this research is in a vital position.

Further research is required to determine a clearer understanding of the attitudes and opinions of people with different educational backgrounds and demographic profiles. Future studies should consider utilizing focus groups as a data collection method since it can provide more opinions and provocation from the discussion.

Some limitations for the research emerged during the process. The generalizability of the results is limited by a particular sample. Also, the convenience sampling method used to reach Finnish university and college students does not represent the whole population. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews had to be organized online, which can create different circumstances compared to in-person interviews. There is also a probability of interviewer bias where the interviewer's remarks, tone, or non-verbal behavior might affect the interviewees. However, the results do represent the specific sample, male Finnish university or college students.

Overall, the findings of this research are a valuable insight for companies providing or considering shifting to providing green products into the attitudes and behaviors of the interviewees since the results show that there is a reasonable basis for sustainable consumption in Finnish students. The research also provides suggestions and tools for businesses to further implement green branding and green products to their products to influence the consumer behavior of Finnish university students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview plan

1. Demographic questions
2. What is your educational background?
3. What do you think, Are you concerned about the environment or rather not? Why yes/no?
4. Do you personally believe in climate change or rather not? Can you explain?
5. Do you think that your actions make a difference or rather not? Why yes/no? If yes: in which way?
6. How would you describe yourself as a consumer? Why that?
7. How would you describe a responsible consumer? Why that?
8. Do you consider yourself as a responsible consumer or rather not? Why yes/no?
9. How often do you buy new clothes? Have you ever thought about buying less often or you have never thought about that? If yes, why?
10. When buying new clothes, does the brand matter to you or rather not? Why yes/no? What do you think, How much?
11. Do you prefer one brand over others in some matters or rather not? In what matters? Reasons behind?

12. What words come to your mind when you think of the words "green product/sustainable product"? Can you explain more?
13. What is your opinion about green products? Why that?
14. Do you prefer a green product over a regular one in any matters or rather not? Why, why not? In which areas can you think of a green product that you prefer? Why that?
15. What characteristics do you like about green products? Dislike? Can you explain?
16. Does making a green choice make you feel good or it does not matter? Can you explain?
17. Do you have the habit of checking the label of the product before purchasing it or rather not? Why, why not? Can you think of any products in which case you do it?
18. Does the labelling have any influence on your purchase or rather not? Can you explain?
19. Can you name brands that offer green products? Do you buy these brands yourself or rather not? Why yes/no? How come you have heard of them?
20. How do these brands stand out to you?
21. Does green branding make a difference for you or it does not matter? Can you explain?

22. Do you trust advertisements about environmental benefits of products or rather not? Why, why not?

23. What kind of communication would you prefer from brands about their greenness? (Advertisements, packaging…?) why that?

24. Do you think there are enough green products available on the market? Why yes/no?

25. Are they easy to find in your opinion or rather not? Why yes/no?

26. What characteristics would you like to see associated with green products in the future? Why those?

27. What would make you choose a green product over a regular one? Why that?

28. If someone wants to become a more responsible consumer in Finland, what would you suggest?

29. Same question from the other side: if someone wants to become a more responsible producer in Finland, what would you suggest?

Appendix 2. Transcription of qualitative in-depth interviews

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vZp0TeMx7qOEPYPAPAA0urEETZZVN6TYw1AVzvRZ-Fc/edit?usp=sharing

Appendix 3. Thematic analysis table

Themes	Category	Codes
Environment	General knowledge of environmental issues	concerned for envirnoment, climate change, knows terms well
Environment	Attitudes towards the environment	Concerned, future, can make difference locally
Conusmer behavior	Current consumption habits	Quality,buy for need, convinience,

Consumer behavior	Attitudes towards branding	Important, quality, durability, brand image, brand awarness, trust
Hope for sustainable consumption	Attitudes towards green products	Future, added value, opportunity, barriers: quality and price, good feeling
Hope for sustainable consumption	Role of green branding influencing purchasing decision	Added value, good feeling, positive impact, doesnt matter, trust
Hope for sustainable consumption	The perception of future	transparency, information, care, knowledge, quality

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