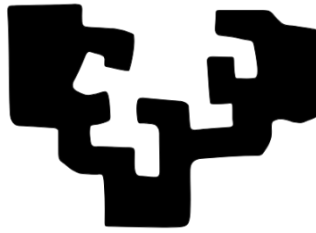


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**The influence of conspicuous motives on sustainable
clothing consumption behavior**

Manoela Costa Policarpo

Doctoral Dissertation

Supervisor:

Dr. Vanessa Apaolaza

Co-supervisor and tutor:

Dr. Patrick Hartmann

Ph.D. Program in Business Management, Knowledge and Innovation

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Extended abstract

The apparel industry has adopted the fast fashion business model, marked by current trends sold at bargain prices and using low-quality materials, which has led to a significant surge in the overconsumption of clothes and a decrease in the longevity of these goods. Consequently, the fashion sector has emerged as a key impediment to sustainability due to the requisite disposal of garments at dumpsites. Examining the antecedent factors leading to consumers' purchasing of sustainable fashion helps yield a greater understanding of this subject, unveiling valuable insights for clothing brands in promoting such products. The present thesis argues that the search for sustainable fashion items is partly driven by consumers' desire to express their personal attributes within their social environment. The act of publicly exhibiting altruism and/or wealth through the consumption of sustainable goods is propelled by conspicuous motives. Thus, acquiring sustainable clothing can serve as a means for consumers to signal a pro-social and pro-environmental image to their peers and broader social circles. The objective of this research, therefore, is to understand how conspicuous motives influence consumers' sustainable fashion buying behavior and to evaluate theoretical structures with the antecedents of this type of consumption. The specific objectives are: i) to analyze how the price of the sustainable product is related to the status motive and the self-expressive benefits; ii) to investigate the extent to which conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived consumer efficacy, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and the perception of greenwashing exert influence on the purchase of sustainable clothing; and iii) to develop a theoretical framework that elucidates the impact of social cynicism as a personality trait on consumer trust in sustainable fashion clothing brands. These objectives were achieved through two quantitative studies. To understand the influence of price on the acquisition of sustainable products, a factorial type 2 experimental study (high- vs. low-status motives) x 2 (high price vs. low price) was conducted with Brazilian consumers. Subsequently, an additional study employing an online sample of 600 respondents representing the Australian population was conducted to examine two theoretical frameworks. This experimental study identified that individuals were more inclined to buy sustainable clothing when they have a high-status motive. Furthermore, when the price of clothing is higher, consumers with a status motive tend to perceive greater social advantages, which then increases their purchase intention. On the other hand, consumers with a low-status motive only exhibit an increase in their purchase intention when the price of clothing is lower. The results revealed that consumers motivated by status trend towards purchasing more expensive sustainable clothing, suggesting that product price signals one's access to resources and prosocial behavior. Additionally, the data gathered from

the Australian sample demonstrated that consumer efficacy had a positive moderating impact on the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on consumers' purchasing of sustainable clothing. Specifically, this effect was stronger when perceived efficacy was high (i.e., when the individuals believed their actions could have a tangible impact on the environment and that other individuals felt the same), a prerequisite for the delivery of the established motivational effect of conspicuous consumption. These findings highlight the relevance of conspicuous consumption as a reason for consumers to switch to sustainable clothing in addition to the equally important role of perceived consumer efficacy, a threshold condition for this effect. The results also corroborated the significant positive influence of environmental concern and consumer trust in sustainable clothing brands, and, conversely, the negative influence of perceived greenwashing, on consumers' adoption of sustainable clothing. In regard to personality traits, the results confirmed the effect of social cynicism in that it was observed to negatively affect participants' trust in the green brand, with an increase in their perception of greenwashing found to explain this effect. To summarize, conspicuous consumption motives positively moderate the indirect negative relationship between social cynicism and consumers' trust in clothing products promoted with sustainability claims mediated by perceptions of greenwashing by clothing brands. Furthermore, it was discovered that conspicuous consumers are less susceptible to the negative effect of greenwashing on trust as their primary motivation for consumption is the social image projected by their sustainable brand clothing rather than its actual environmental impact. Overall, this thesis presents, based on the results, both theoretical implications relevant to the field of consumer behavior and managerial implications for sustainable fashion executives. Finally, the insights developed in this thesis help close some of the present gaps in consumer theory surrounding the factors that drive sustainable consumer behavior, specifically the purchasing of new sustainable clothing products.

Resumen extendido

La industria de la moda ha adoptado el modelo de negocio de la moda rápida, caracterizado por tendencias actuales a precios de ganga y materiales de baja calidad, lo que ha llevado a un aumento significativo en el sobreconsumo de ropa y una disminución en la longevidad de estos bienes. En consecuencia, la forma actual en que la industria de la moda opera está creando problemas para lograr un equilibrio ambiental sostenible, principalmente debido a la gran cantidad de ropa que termina siendo desechada en vertederos. El análisis detallado de las causas y factores previos que motivan la compra de moda sostenible nos ofrece una comprensión más amplia y profunda de este fenómeno. Al hacerlo, se descubren perspectivas importantes que pueden ser útiles para fomentar el consumo de estos productos más ecológicos y responsables, revelando así conocimientos e ideas valiosas para promover dichos productos. Esta tesis sostiene que la búsqueda de artículos de moda está parcialmente impulsada por el deseo de los consumidores de expresar sus caracteres e identidades personales dentro de su entorno social. El acto de exhibir públicamente el altruismo, la concienciación con el medioambiente y/o el estatus a través del consumo de bienes sostenibles está impulsado por motivos conspicuos. Por lo tanto, adquirir ropa sostenible puede servir como un medio para que los consumidores señalen, y puedan comunicar a otros, una imagen de sí mismos prosocial y proambiental. El objetivo de esta investigación, por lo tanto, es comprender cómo los motivos conspicuos influyen en el comportamiento de compra de moda sostenible y plantear y testar un modelo comprensivo con los antecedentes de este tipo de consumo. Los objetivos específicos son: i) analizar cómo el precio del producto sostenible se relaciona con el motivo de estatus y los beneficios auto-expresivos, ii) investigar hasta qué punto los motivos de consumo conspicuo, la preocupación ambiental, la eficacia percibida del consumidor, la confianza en las marcas de ropa sostenible y la percepción de greenwashing ejercen influencia en la compra real de ropa sostenible, y iii) desarrollar un marco teórico que esclarezca el potencial impacto del cinismo social como rasgo de personalidad en la confianza del consumidor en las marcas de ropa de moda sostenible. Estos objetivos se lograron a partir de dos estudios cuantitativos. Para comprender la influencia del precio en la adquisición de productos sostenibles, se realizó un estudio experimental factorial tipo 2 (motivos de alto vs. bajo estatus) x 2 (precio alto vs. precio bajo), involucrando consumidores brasileños. Posteriormente, se ejecutó un estudio adicional para examinar dos marcos/modelos teóricos y dar respuesta a los objetivos ii) y iii), a través de la realización de una encuesta online a una muestra representativa de 600 consumidores australianos. El estudio experimental identificó que los individuos están más inclinados a comprar ropa sostenible cuando tienen un motivo de estatus. Además, cuando el precio de la

ropa es más alto, los consumidores con un motivo de estatus tienden a percibir mayores ventajas sociales, aumentando así su intención de compra. Por otro lado, los consumidores con un motivo de bajo estatus solo muestran un incremento en su intención de compra cuando el precio de la ropa disminuye. Los resultados revelan que los consumidores motivados por el estatus se inclinan hacia la compra de ropa sostenible más cara, sugiriendo que el precio del producto señala el acceso a recursos y comportamiento prosocial. Además, los datos recopilados de una muestra representativa de la población australiana demostraron que la eficacia percibida del consumidor tuvo un impacto moderador positivo en el efecto de los motivos de consumo conspicuo en la compra de ropa sostenible. El efecto de los motivos de consumo conspicuo fue más fuerte cuando la eficacia percibida era alta, es decir, cuando los participantes del estudio creían que sus acciones podían marcar una diferencia tangible en el medio ambiente y que otros sentían lo mismo, lo cual es un requisito previo para que el consumo conspicuo produzca el efecto motivacional esperado. Estos hallazgos resaltan la relevancia del consumo conspicuo como razón para cambiar a ropa sostenible, así como el igualmente importante papel de la eficacia percibida del consumidor como variable moderadora del efecto positivo del consumo con motivos conspicuos en el comportamiento de compra real de moda sostenible. Los resultados corroboran la influencia positiva significativa de la preocupación ambiental y la confianza del consumidor en las marcas de ropa sostenible, mientras que la percepción de greenwashing es una barrera para la adopción de ropa sostenible. Asimismo, los resultados confirmaron que el cinismo social, como rasgo de personalidad, afectó negativamente la confianza en las marcas de ropa sostenible, y que un aumento en la percepción de greenwashing puede explicar este efecto. En concreto, los resultados demostraron que los motivos de consumo conspicuo moderan positivamente la relación negativa indirecta entre el cinismo social y la confianza en las marcas de ropa sostenible, a través del efecto mediador de la percepción de greenwashing. Así, se descubrió que los consumidores con altos motivos conspicuos son menos susceptibles al efecto negativo del greenwashing en la confianza en estas marcas debido a que su motivación principal para el consumo de moda sostenible es la imagen social proyectada, en lugar de su impacto ambiental real. Esta tesis presenta, además de estos resultados, las implicaciones teóricas relevantes para el campo del comportamiento del consumidor y las implicaciones gerenciales para los ejecutivos y gestores de marcas de moda sostenible. Finalmente, esta tesis incita hacia la comprensión de algunas lagunas en la teoría del consumidor en torno a los factores psicológicos que promueven el comportamiento del consumidor sostenible. Específicamente, busca identificar y comprender los elementos que motivan a los consumidores a adoptar nuevos productos de ropa sostenible.

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PART I. SYNTHESIS

1. Introduction

One of the most formidable challenges impeding the advancement of sustainability is the current state of the fashion industry. The production phase of this industry is characterized by the manufacturing of synthetic fabrics obtained from fossil fuels, which creates hazardous waste. Though some enterprises have resorted to organic raw materials, the bleaching and dyeing processes still require the utilization of insoluble resources and heavy metal products (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). In the consumption stage, fast fashion, which is predicated upon low prices and frequent releases of new, trendy clothing collections, has triggered excessive demand and a reduction in the lifecycle of these products, leading to an increased volume of waste in this sector. As a consequence, this industry, currently accountable for approximately 8–10% of global carbon emissions, is not conforming to the durability principles of sustainability and thus needs to undergo some significant transformations to diminish its detrimental impact on the environment (Quantis, 2018; Niinimäki et al., 2020).

The concept of sustainable fashion constitutes a significant subset of the slow fashion movement and directly opposes the current system production predominant in the fashion industry, which has been exhibiting an increasing trend toward using disposable products (Laitala, 2014; Diddi et al., 2019). Sustainable fashion entails the conscientious production and marketing of clothing—with an emphasis on the ecological and socio-economic implications—in addition to reducing the utilization of resources as well as mitigating deterioration and contamination throughout its lifespan. This segment promotes high-quality, seasonless, and durable garments alongside fair labor practices, local manufacturing, and engaged consumers who strive to comprehend the provenance of their clothing (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

Conscious consumers who recognize that choosing more sustainable standards can reduce environmental damage attempt to align their consumption behavior with sustainable development (Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2021; Siraj et al., 2022). Research shows that there is a growing number of consumers who choose products with reduced environmental impact over conventional products (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Kautish & Khare, 2022). In this context, consumption behavior regarding sustainable clothing is the act of buying, using, reusing, and disposing of clothing in a way that is minimally harmful to the planet. Accordingly, research in the marketing field of sustainable fashion has focused on deciphering the factors that impact consumption behavior to overcome the intention–behavior inconsistency (Jalil & Shaharuddin, 2019; Park & Lin, 2020).

Encouraging change in clothing consumption behavior is a complex task since many factors influence this decision-making process (Cho et al., 2015; Diddi et al., 2019). The

literature indicates that there are a variety of factors that influence consumers to minimize their environmental impact when it comes to their clothing consumption decisions.

Most studies analyze these factors from an environmental perspective, such as consumer environmental concern (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Kumar, Garg, & Singh, 2022), perceived environmental knowledge (Cowan & Kinley, 2014; Harris et al., 2016), awareness of sustainable fashion (Gam, 2011; Kautish & Khare, 2022), and perceived effectiveness (Kumar et al., 2022; D'Souza et al., 2015). Others examine purchase intentions from the perspective of brand attributes. For example, consumer trust (Dhir et al., 2021) and greenwashing (Diddi et al., 2019) are variables that predict consumer purchase intentions. However, there are few works that analyze the social dimension of this consumption behavior (Han et al., 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015). For example, self-expressiveness (Park & Lin, 2020) and subjective norms (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021) are factors measuring an individual's consumption signaling and the social pressure exerted on them to engage in sustainable consumption behavior, including the purchasing of sustainable clothing.

Park and Lin (2020) state that social factors are relevant drivers of behavior change. They argue that consumers seek fashion products to express themselves, which is why social norms influence sustainable clothing consumption behavior. In other words, clothing products are visible, symbolic products capable of communicating the consumer's characteristics to their environment. According to Griskevicius et al. (2010), consumers motivated to display their pro-environmental attitudes to other individuals may buy green products to identify themselves to others as pro-environment individuals. Informed by this, the argument presented in this thesis is that the purchase of green clothing is a mechanism for consumers to signal their pro-social behavior concerning environmental protection to their social circle.

Thus, this thesis understands that the purchase of sustainable clothing is influenced by conspicuous motives driving the consumer to signal their desired social image. Conspicuous behaviors in the context of the purchase of green products can be understood through Costly Signaling Theory (CST) and Social Identity Theory (SIT).

CST (Zahavi, 1977; Grafen, 1990) proposes, from the perspective of evolutionary psychology, that humans engage in behavior that is "costly" for themselves but ultimately benefits others as a way of signaling positive information about themselves. In the realm of consumer behavior, research has shown that the purchase of green products is expensive for consumers, who allocate financial resources to demonstrate desirable aspects to their peers, such as environmental awareness and access to resources (Delgado et al., 2015). In turn, SIT (Turner & Oakes, 1986) suggests that individuals will develop similar intergroup attitudes and

seek to maintain a positive self-image. Based on this perspective, this thesis focuses on the effort of consumers to maintain a pro-social image through the purchase of sustainable clothing.

Conspicuous consumption refers to the consumption of goods motivated by social aspirations related to publicly displaying wealth and success (Veblen, 1899; Beall et al., 2021). Recent studies exploring the connection between conspicuous consumption and sustainable consumption have suggested that conspicuous motives can encourage the purchase of green products (Dastrup et al., 2012; Sexton & Sexton, 2014). Hammad et al. (2019) identified that conspicuous motives may drive sustainable consumption due to the perceived status associated with green products (i.e., sustainable clothing), as they are usually more expensive than conventional ones. Additionally, consumers are aware that purchasing sustainable clothing may signal a desire to spend their resources on products that benefit society and the environment and thus strive to attain the associated social benefits.

The pro-social reputation and other benefits resulting from the conspicuous purchase of green products are understood as self-expressive benefits, as they allow consumers to experience social benefits, such as signaling their preferences and practices related to environmental concern to observers (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2015).

The present thesis posits that conspicuous consumption plays a significant role in promoting sustainable clothing purchases. However, few works analyze conspicuous motives as antecedents of green buying behavior, as this relationship was only recently identified in the literature (Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Delgado et al., 2015; Park & Lee, 2016; Mishra et al., 2023). Therefore, the following section will describe the connections between conspicuous consumption and purchasing sustainable clothing from which the thesis' research questions were derived. It should be noted that this thesis is written in the "thesis by published papers" modality, with each research question corresponding to a separate paper.

1.1 Research questions and their justifications

One of the contributing factors associated with conspicuous consumption is the desire for social status. This desire, as highlighted by the works of Dastrup et al. (2012) and Sachdeva et al. (2015), refers to the motivation that compels individuals to attain higher status within the social hierarchy. The concept of status can be comprehended as a social distinction that confers prestige and influence upon individuals, thereby granting them enhanced accessibility to coveted experiences (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Nevertheless, it should be noted that status does not arise as an inherent trait individuals can develop independently; rather, it functions as a

reward bestowed by others as a means of indicating an individual's possession of valuable attributes and their willingness to employ these attributes in aiding others (Ridgeway, 1982; Barkow et al., 1975; Anderson et al., 2015; Klabi, 2020).

One of the fundamental conjectures posited by CST is that any action deemed a costly signal must entail a considerable expenditure of energy or resources by the individual in question (Smith & Bird, 2000). Thus, it is assumed that the desire for status in the purchase of green products is associated with higher-value items. Given this perception, research endeavors have uncovered that individuals desiring status are more probable to choose more expensive green products to signal environmental concern and financial resources (Dastrup et al., 2012; Park & Lee, 2016).

Griskevicius et al. (2010) found that increasing the price of a green product can potentially enhance its appeal to those driven by the desire for status, as these consumers associate higher prices with wealth (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Garvey, Blanchard, & Winterich, 2017; Berger, 2019).

Research on the relationship between green consumption and conspicuous consumption has thus far only been carried out in industrialized countries (Hammad et al., 2019). Thus, there is a need for further investigation into whether green consumption intentions function as a mechanism for securing social status in countries that are in the process of late industrialization. Sustainable consumption in newly industrialized countries is in its nascent stages and is more commonly utilized for utilitarian purposes, such as cost reduction. In contrast to their industrialized counterparts, where the act of consumption has been linked to political activism and environmentalism, in newly industrialized countries, the identification of differing markets represents a first step in the quest to gain a deeper understanding of the purchasing behaviors in these nations. Overall, the proposition, as mentioned earlier, will uncover significant insights for emerging nations regarding the promotion of a thriving marketplace for sustainable goods while simultaneously reducing the adverse environmental impacts.

According to Ozdamar-Ertekin et al. (2020), consumers commonly perceive sustainable clothing as being associated with a high price. This perception can pose a significant challenge for marketers aiming to promote this type of product in the market. However, from the perspective of CST, the price of sustainable clothing could function as a distinguishing factor for customers who are eager to attain self-expressive advantages. According to Kautish and Khare (2022), the endorsement by societal groups, such as environmental organizations and community leaders, plays a pivotal role in motivating consumers to purchase green clothing. While they may be more expensive, sustainable clothing items can also signal the purchaser's

abundant financial resources and social status to their peers. Hence, it is essential to investigate whether consumers from emerging countries, like their counterparts in industrialized nations, have purchase intentions for more expensive clothing items to achieve social distinction. In this context, the first inquiry is: **How does the price of green products relate to the consumer's status motive and self-expressive benefits?**

Understanding how the price of sustainable clothing impacts purchasing behavior is of significant importance in discerning the underlying factors that motivate consumers to buy higher-cost items. Within this context, the cost of sustainable clothing could be associated with values that are indicative of the symbolism of consumption, given that consumers who espouse sustainability as a core value may be more inclined to pay a higher price for clothing that reflects their environmental beliefs. Understanding the symbolic value of clothing is critical for clothing brands and marketers to effectively promote the purchase of sustainable clothing.

The literature has identified concern for one's social image as significant in promoting sustainable fashion (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Park & Lin, 2020); however, conspicuous and sustainable motives are frequently perceived as being in opposition, as the influence of materialism is considered to hinder pro-social behavior and environmental efforts (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Hammad et al., 2019). Despite this, studies have revealed that conspicuous motives can, in fact, stimulate the procurement of sustainable products, given that the desire to attain an elevated status is an inherent component of the human social experience (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Park & Lin, 2020).

According to the findings of Ki and Kim (2016), consumers in the luxury market are exhibiting a shift in their attitudes toward applying their evolving values to their purchasing behavior. This example demonstrates that the luxury market, which is by its very nature conspicuous, also has a demand for products that incorporate social and environmental values. Consequently, an increasing trend has been observed among clothing brands to cater to the needs of the luxury market's target audience. It is essential to acknowledge that conspicuous motives are not limited to the luxury market. In the context of sustainable clothing consumption, conspicuous motives are the driving force of consumers who aspire to present a pro-environmental and social image, signaling their engagement by spending their resources on products that benefit society and the environment. Therefore, this thesis advocates conspicuous motivations as crucial factors impacting the adoption of sustainable clothing practices.

Understanding the real motivations and barriers that consumers face when selecting sustainable clothing can help identify the factors most affecting sustainable fashion purchase

behavior. While conspicuous motives can serve as a motivator, greenwashing, on the other hand, can constitute a significant barrier to the purchase of these products.

Despite there being little previous research on greenwashing in sustainable fashion (Kaner, 2021; Adamkiewicz et al., 2022), as consumers become increasingly knowledgeable and conscious of environmental concerns, they may become more skeptical of brands' sustainability claims and more demanding of evidence of sustainable practices. For instance, upon discovering that a particular brand is disseminating false information about their sustainability, consumers may start to adopt a more vigilant approach to uncovering instances of greenwashing across the entire sector (Wang et al., 2019; Szabo & Webster, 2021). In this sense, greenwashing can reduce the acquisition of sustainable clothing and undermine trust in sustainable clothing brands. Consequently, the work a brand puts into establishing consumer trust with the goal of securing heightened consumer fidelity, a process that entails a considerable amount of effort and time, can be swiftly damaged, producing a profound impact on the industry.

Consumers of sustainable products feel the need for their behavior to yield a positive influence on both the environment and society. The attitudinal variable that comprises this belief is perceived consumer efficacy (PCE). Nguyen and Pervan (2020) identified that consumers who believe their behavior can reduce environmental problems are more predisposed to buy products produced with sustainable responsibility. Theories such as Reasoned Action Theory, Behavioral Control Theory, and Social Dilemma Theory postulate that PCE promotes sustainable purchasing behavior when an individual believes that an environmental problem can be minimized by their development of a certain behavior (Jaiswal & Kant, 2018; Taufique & Vaithianathan, 2018; Higuera-Castillo et al., 2019). In light of this, PCE can be considered as driving the demand for sustainable clothing, which can positively impact the fashion industry (D'Souza et al., 2015).

It has been observed, however, that this belief in their purchasing behavior positively influencing the environment will only be active if the consumer is concerned about the environment—in essence, if the consumer obtains some degree of awareness regarding environmental problems and a readiness to solve them (Yadav & Patahk, 2016; Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Saari et al., 2021). In this way, the second study aims to investigate the impact of several antecedents of sustainable fashion purchases that have not yet been examined collectively or yielded conclusive findings. Thus, the second research question of this thesis is: **To what extent do conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived**

consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing trigger the purchase of sustainable clothing?

In addition to obtaining an enhanced understanding of the factors that motivate consumers towards embracing sustainable clothing, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is a significant intention–behavior gap the purchase of sustainable products. A notable proportion of consumers claim to care about the environment, but most do not change their consumption habits (Wei et al., 2017; Diddi et al., 2019). One of the ways to close this gap is to understand how people behave towards sustainability and adapt marketing strategies accordingly. In developing this understanding, the role of social axioms should be considered, as they can elucidate individuals' differential reactions to environmental concerns and ultimately influence their choices, particularly in regard to purchasing sustainable clothing.

According to Leung et al. (2002), social axioms are shared and generalized existing beliefs of a society or culture about people, social groups, social institutions, the physical environment, and the spiritual world that govern human interactions and influence perceptions and social behavior. Understanding these axioms may aid the identification of communication and social interaction patterns that impact consumers' sustainable purchasing decisions. In this vein, Chan and Tam (2021) presented empirical evidence emphasizing that social axioms can affect sustainable purchasing behavior.

In this thesis, we will investigate the impact of social cynicism, a social axiom that entails a prejudiced perspective regarding certain groups of individuals. This perspective fosters a perception of others as being untrustworthy and complacent with authority (Singelis et al., 2003; Aqueveque & Encina, 2010). In the context of environmental preservation, social cynicism is associated with a skeptical stance regarding the necessity of minimizing environmental issues (Gronewold et al., 2012; Abraham et al., 2015). Consequently, it can be inferred that this particular personality trait will impact consumers' trust in designed products.

However, the impact of social cynicism on the acquisition of sustainable products has been insufficiently explored and may serve as an important determinant in understanding the precursors of green trust. For this reason, this thesis will verify the effect of consumer trust in sustainable clothing fashion brands. Accordingly, the present study endeavors to construct a conceptual framework to verify the relationship between social cynicism and the consumer's trust in the sustainable clothing brand—a relationship that has not yet been addressed in previous research.

In addition to consumers' personality traits, this thesis will investigate the adverse impact of greenwashing on the relationship between social cynicism and consumer trust.

Moreover, it intends to examine the moderating role of conspicuous consumption motives in the negative association between social cynicism and trust in the clothing brand. It is hypothesized that consumers who exhibit stronger conspicuous consumption motives are less affected by social cynicism, leading them to prioritize the social function of clothing over its environmental sustainability. Thus, the third research question that will guide this thesis is: **How do conspicuous motives affect the relationship between greenwashing and consumer trust in green clothing brands, where greenwashing mediates the effect of social cynicism on trust?**

1.2 Research objectives

GENERAL OBJECTIVE: To understand how conspicuous motives influence sustainable fashion buying behavior and evaluate theoretical structures with the antecedents of this type of consumption.

To answer these research questions and achieve the general objective of this thesis, the following specific objectives were developed, each corresponding to the main objective of its corresponding paper.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 1: To analyze how the price of the green product relates to the consumer's status motive and the self-expressive benefits in the context of an emerging country.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 2: To analyze the degree to which conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing trigger consumers' purchasing of sustainable clothing.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3: To analyze the effect of social cynicism as a personality trait on consumer trust in sustainable fashion clothing brands, as well as the role of conspicuous consumption and perceived greenwashing in this relationship.

2. Theoretical background

This chapter outlines the theoretical foundation that underpins the main arguments presented in this thesis. Its purpose is to provide support for the papers and the methodological approaches that have been adopted. This chapter aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field and demonstrate the rigor and thoughtfulness that have gone into the research.

2.1 Green purchasing behavior

Environmental issues, such as climate change and global warming, are largely influenced by greenhouse gases that arise from human activities, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide (Peters et al., 2021; Trudel, 2019). As per Trufel's (2019) research, the concentration of carbon dioxide has increased by more than 33% owing to activities such as deforestation, automobile emissions, industrial activities, and the burning of fossil fuels. Additionally, the utilization of fertilizers in cotton production elevates the levels of nitrous oxide, whereas the decomposition of waste in landfills intensifies methane levels. Therefore, identifying strategies to improve more responsible consumption practices is crucial for the sustainability of the planet, as the consumer has the decision-making power regarding what to purchase, how much to consume, and how to dispose of the products consumed (Sun et al., 2022; Trufel, 2019; Young et al., 2010).

One way to reduce environmental degradation is by shifting consumption from conventional products to sustainable alternatives (Amatulli et al., 2019; Sachdeva et al., 2015; Peters et al., 2021). One of these alternatives is green consumption, which involves the use of products developed with consideration of their environmental impact throughout their life cycle. This approach prioritizes renewable sources and sustainable methods during the acquisition of raw materials. During the production process, there is a conscious effort to reduce the use of natural resources and minimize the emission of waste and pollutants. Furthermore, the products are designed to enhance their durability and reduce energy consumption during their use. Finally, there is consideration of facilitating proper disposal and, if possible, simplifying recycling.

In this context, it is understood that green consumption denotes a form of sustainable consumption, wherein the consumer opts for environmentally responsible products—that is, green products. Despite the growing availability of such products in the market, the literature has described some concerns regarding the green intention–behavior gap. This phenomenon refers to the inconsistency between what consumers declare regarding their sustainability values

and their actual sustainable behavior, as positive attitudes and intentions often fail to translate into actual green purchasing behavior (ElHaffar et al., 2020; Park & Lin, 2019; Groening et al., 2018). Currently, research on this topic has focused on explaining and overcoming this phenomenon by understanding the cognitive and sociocultural factors underlying purchasing behavior (Duong, 2022; Joshi & Rahmanb, 2017; Tawde et al., 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to enhance our understanding of how to motivate consumers effectively to embrace green products (Khalid et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019).

There is a line of research that suggests that individuals are more inclined to contribute to the environment, which includes the consumption of green products, when their actions are advertised to their social circle or when the product is conspicuous (Dastrup et al., 2012; Delgado et al., 2015; Van Vugt, 2006). For instance, Berger (2019) found that incorporating a signaling benefit could raise consumer willingness to pay for green products. In the study, it was discovered that when purchasing decisions (expensive green products versus cheap non-green products) are publicized, a greater number of consumers are willing to pay a premium price compared to when their purchasing decisions are private. These results are consistent with the findings of Griskevicius et al. (2010), who revealed that the activation of status motives encouraged people to select green products over more luxurious non-green products as a means of signaling environmental concern to their social group.

In this sense, when individuals purchase green products to signal their concern about the environment and society, their consumption is motivated by conspicuous factors. In the context of environmental conservation, this altruistic signaling can be called conspicuous conservation (Barkemeyer et al., 2023; Sachdeva et al., 2015). This term, which is a modification of the more common term “conspicuous consumption,” refers to public and costly actions taken to signal environmental awareness (Sexton & Sexton, 2014). Green consumption is associated with conspicuous conservation, as, in many cases, it involves the purchase of visible and more expensive products with the aim of achieving social benefits.

The reason why individuals aspire to signal their green consumption stems from the altruism that is associated with this type of purchase. Signaling altruism can lead to an increase in one’s prosocial status and reputation while also demonstrating the ability and willingness to contribute to the common good (Elliot, 2013; Van Vugt et al., 2007; Roberts, 1998). According to Berger (2019), consumers tend to purchase green products with the intention of increasing their reliability in society, which in turn leads to more favorable treatment during social interactions. As a result, conspicuous motives play a significant role in promoting the purchase of green products. The following section will delve deeper into how this relationship occurs.

2.1.1 Conspicuous consumption in green purchasing behavior

The conspicuous motives associated with green consumption are characterized by consumers seeking to obtain status and other social benefits by signaling to others their concern or involvement with a socially responsible issue via their consumption (Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Griskevicius et al., 2010). When this happens, green consumption aligns with the meaning of conspicuous consumption. This term was introduced by sociologist and economist Veblen (1889) and refers to the consumption of goods and services with the intention of signaling one's wealth and increasing social status rather than consuming to fulfill functional needs.

Consumption has an important role in communicating the identity and social distinction of consumers. Products possess symbolic value separate from their functional utility, and they can be utilized to communicate an individual's image to others (Veblen, 1899). When purchasing certain products, consumers often aim to express their values, aspirations, and social affiliations (Berger & Heath, 2007). In doing so, green consumption can aid in creating a pro-social and pro-environmental image of an individual.

As previously mentioned, some studies argue that conspicuous consumption and sustainable consumption are contradictory (Kilbourne & Pickett, 2008; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). On the one hand, the consumerism behind conspicuous consumption is seen as an intense search for the possession of goods and is thus associated with egocentrism. On the other hand, sustainable consumption is perceived as promoting limited possessions and being associated with collective-oriented values (Hammad et al., 2019). Yet, we understand that this opposing view may be simplistic, as it disregards the fact that people have a wide variety of values and priorities, and sustainable choices can often relate to individual needs and lifestyles. The literature emphasizes the existence of consumers who opt for sustainable choices as a genuine manifestation of their personal identity (Niinimäki, 2010; Papaoikonomou et al., 2016). This thesis highlights the significance of acknowledging the various motivations driving consumers to embrace more sustainable consumption habits while also recognizing that striving for a higher social status can result in unbridled consumerism. In the latter scenario, conspicuous motivations may impede the creation of a sustainable society.

The relationship between conspicuous consumption and sustainable consumption as presented in this thesis is based on recent studies that suggest its positive role in promoting sustainable consumption in general (Areiza-Padilla & Manzi Puertas, 2021; Beall et al., 2021; Talukdar & Yu, 2020). It is a well-known fact that green products are often more expensive than conventional ones and may not always be readily available. Therefore, purchasing them reflects a determination and ability to bear inconvenient additional costs for the betterment of

nature and society (Hammad et al., 2019). CST explains that this effort is one of the necessary requirements for achieving a higher social status. From the perspective of this theory, altruistic acts in favor of the environment are associated with status because they demonstrate both an individual's willingness and ability to self-sacrifice for the public well-being. According to Sexton and Sexton (2014), society rewards those who perform actions that are beneficial to society with status, as long as these actions are visible. Therefore, for consumers who wish to achieve a higher status, green consumption becomes a path to this objective.

The discussion regarding conspicuous consumption and sustainable consumption is best explained based on an understanding of CST. This theory posits that conspicuous behavior, represented here by the purchase of sustainable clothing, can be seen as having a negative impact on individuals, as they expend significant amounts of energy, time, and money on activities of an altruistic nature. On the other hand, this behavior may represent an advantage by benefiting the signaler when they announce a desired underlying quality that is costly to acquire. This, in turn, increases the probability of their selection as a leader, partner, or ally within their social circle (Palomo-Vélez et al., 2021; Zahavi, 1995). Therefore, altruistic behavior can benefit observers by providing useful social information about the consumer. This thesis understands that conspicuous consumption in sustainable clothing purchasing behavior should not be regarded as a disadvantage, as it offers signaling benefits for consumers despite the resources they expended. This argument will be elaborated in the following section, where the concept of CST will be introduced in the context of sustainable consumption behavior.

2.1.2 Costly Signaling Theory

CST has its origins in evolutionary biology and evolutionary psychology, and it was developed based on observations of the animal world to understand, for instance, the motive behind acts of charity, such as philanthropic donations, where the donated amount is not returned (McAndrew, 2021; Zahavi, 1995). This theory posits that costly behavioral signals are executed to communicate truthful information, thereby benefiting both the signalers and the recipients of their signals (Smith & Bird, 2000). Accordingly, organisms frequently engage in behaviors that are detrimental to themselves but advantageous to others in order to signal desired positive information.

Based on this understanding, the literature employs this theory to comprehend the costly signal of altruistic behaviors within various contexts, including the previously mentioned philanthropic donations (Johnson & Park, 2021; Mocos & Scheuring, 2019), romantic

strategies (Griskevicius et al., 2007; Palomo-Vélez et al., 2021), and, primarily, sustainable consumption, such as the purchase of green products (Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020).

To qualify as costly, a behavior must meet four characteristics of costly signaling, as identified by Smith and Bird (2000). First, the behavior must be easily visible to outside observers. Second, it must demand a significant cost from the individual, whether in terms of financial resources or personal energy. Third, the signal must efficiently convey a characteristic of the signaler, such as access to resources or altruism. Finally, it should provide some advantage to the signaler, such as increased status or reputation.

In the context of this thesis, we understand that the consumer purchasing sustainable clothing meets the four necessary characteristics of costly signaling. The first factor is when clothing is an item of visible use or the purchase is carried out in a public space (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Bennett & Chakravarti, 2009). The second factor involves investing time and financial resources in a product that is typically more expensive than its conventional competitors (Okada and Mais, 2010). The third factor is that the product serves as a signal of environmental awareness and resource availability (Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Dastrup et al., 2012). Finally, the consumption of the product leads to self-expressive benefits and a higher social status (Hartmann & Apaolaza, 2012, Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020).

The act of attributing status entails assigning a person a higher social position within its social group (Anderson et al., 2015). It is a well-established fact that a person's status is determined by the perceptions and evaluations of those regarding them (Ridgeway, 1982). According to the literature, individuals who hold a higher social status are more likely to receive positive social attention, excessive rewards, rights and privileges, and influence over joint decisions along with better access to scarce resources (Berger et al., 1972; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). It is argued that the yearning for status is an inherent human drive. Research indicates that despite variations in cultures and time, individuals have started to exhibit actions that communicate information concerning their actual or aspired status within a social hierarchy (Choi & Seo, 2017).

The status hierarchy has important social functions, as it provides a set of rewards for members who contribute to the group and encourages others to follow suit. Status motives can stimulate generosity and selflessness among individuals and drive them to contribute to the betterment of society (Anderson et al.; 2015; Kenrick et al., 2010). Consequently, positive influence from one's social circle establishes social norms that can inspire individuals to embrace environmentally responsible conduct, such as green consumption.

According to Brown and Cody (1991), comprehending status can be categorized into three distinct ways: status by definition or attribution, which refers to the status attributed or designated to a person based on intrinsic characteristics, such as professional position, title of nobility, academic title, or belonging to a certain group. Realization status refers to the recognition of personal merit, denoting exceptional individual accomplishments, competencies in a particular domain, or noteworthy contributions. In this thesis, however, our focus is on status through consumption, which pertains to the social status that one derives from the possession, usage, or consumption of goods and services.

The acquisition of green products, despite their potential higher costs, entails numerous challenges. Notably, customers are confronted with varied green labels and find it arduous to assess the credibility of a specific green label. The variety of green products is seen as limited, and sustainable options to replace conventional products are not always easily accessible. They may only be found in specialized stores that could require additional time and effort to access (Caniëls et al., 2021; Pelsmacker et al., 2005). Therefore, the acquisition of these items requires persistence and cognitive exertion on the part of consumers. Consequently, sustainable fashion consumption can be viewed as a mechanism through which individuals strive to attain a higher status, as engaging in acts of generosity or cooperation showcases an individual's capacity to make selfless sacrifices for the betterment of others. Thus, individuals, when considering the multiple advantages associated with status, invest resources, such as time or money, in this type of consumption with the aim of attaining an elevated social level (Konuk & Otterbring, 2024; Delgado et al., 2015).

To conclude, CST provides an explanation for the influence of conspicuous consumption on sustainable purchasing behavior. This can be attributed to the underlying motivation to attain a superior social status and other associated benefits by means of signaling green purchasing behavior. SIT is another theoretical framework that reinforces the arguments presented in this thesis. SIT is used in the context of marketing to help comprehend the impact of individuals' identification with their social groups and brands on their purchasing decisions and actions. The upcoming section will explain the correlation between SIT and conspicuous behavior in sustainable consumption.

2.1.3 Social Identity Theory

When investigating the phenomenon of sustainable consumption behavior, SIT stands out as one of the commonly adopted theoretical frameworks (Jiang et al., 2022; Kuswati et al., 2021). This theory, which was developed by social psychologists Tajfel and Turner (1979),

suggests that individuals have a tendency to classify themselves and others into social categories (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The categorization of individuals within a social group, based on similarities, is sufficient for individuals to perceive others as either belonging to the group or outside it (Laffan, 2021; Malecka et al., 2022). In this sense, SIT attempts to explain when and why people identify with and behave as part of a group.

According to this theory, individuals possess an inherent need to belong to social groups. When individuals identify with groups that place value on sustainability, they may experience positive social pressure to adopt environmentally conscious behaviors. In addition to this pressure, the desire to belong and the expression of shared values within these groups can play a significant role in consumption choices, shaping individuals' behavior towards more sustainable practices.

SIT explains the drive of individuals to enhance their self-concept by conforming to the norms of their respective groups. Consequently, they receive social approval as a reward (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Recent literature emphasizes the importance of SIT in analyzing sustainable behavior and suggests that individuals endeavor to uphold a positive social identity, which boosts their self-esteem, leading to favorable comparisons between their group and other relevant external groups (Brown, 2000). By using SIT, the study conducted by Papaoikonomou et al. (2014) argues that consumers communicate their shared social identity through various consumption practices. These practices include deliberately avoiding brands or symbols that embody the values of a consumerist society. In turn, Malecka et al.'s (2022) study contributes to the social identity theory by demonstrating that an environmentally conscious social identity significantly influences consumers' collaborative consumption intentions. These studies demonstrate that various forms of sustainable consumption can serve as a deliberate manifestation of social identity, thus reinforcing the idea that individual decisions are influenced by the social environment in which they are made.

Through an understanding of SIT, conspicuous green consumption can be interpreted as a manifestation of the desire to conform to pro-environmental group norms, both among peers and in society at large, where sustainable consumer behavior is increasingly regarded as a predominant norm. Thus, consumption of sustainable clothing with conspicuous motives can serve as a way to build a positive image in society and reinforce one's social self-concept (Abdulrazak & Quoquab, 2018; Kuswati et al., 2021).

Johnson et al. (2018) identified that the purchase of conspicuous prosocial products is positively related to both prosocial self-concept and the need for status. These relationships are

moderated by prosocial self-concept and the fear of negative evaluation. Additionally, research has shown that individuals engage in conspicuous prosocial behaviors to attain status within any desirable social group. In general, SIT explains that individuals feel the need to identify with a group in society, and to achieve this identification, they will develop behaviors that conform to the social norms of such groups. From the perspective of social identity theory, purchasing sustainable clothing is not just a consumption choice, but also a way to communicate and reinforce an individual's social identity through the expression of shared values, belonging to like-minded groups, and differentiating from other groups. Social identity theory suggests that people are partly defined by their membership in various social groups. Thus, buying sustainable clothing can be a way to align with a group that values sustainability and environmental awareness. This not only helps the consumer feel like a part of a community with shared values but can also enhance their self-concept and self-esteem by being associated with a positively perceived group. Furthermore, choosing sustainable clothing allows individuals to express their personal and ethical values. This aligns with the idea that our social identity is influenced by the principles and beliefs we hold important. By choosing sustainable clothing, a consumer is communicating a stance on environmental issues and social responsibility.

After explaining the two leading theories that support the arguments of this project, the next topic will address the object of study, which is the consumption of sustainable clothing. We will delve into the various influences and factors that drive sustainable fashion, particularly from a social standpoint.

2.2 Antecedents of purchasing sustainable clothing

Sustainable fashion has emerged as a response to the environmental damage caused by the fashion industry. The interest in sustainable clothing has stimulated the market to develop pieces that meet the demands of the new public. For example, Stella McCartney, a British designer known for refusing to use leather or fur in any of her pieces, launched her first clothing line at the beginning of the century (Lundblad & Davies, 2015). Currently, this designer and several brands, including Patagonia, are continuously seeking innovative and sustainable materials. This shift in mindset and culture among both companies and consumers has led to the growth of the sustainable fashion market.

Given the increasing number of conscious consumers (Jain et al., 2018; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009), comprehending the motivations underlying sustainable fashion behavior has become crucial. However, this area remains largely unexplored, particularly concerning the

social aspects (Diddi et al., 2019; Jain et al., 2018). Despite representing a basic need, clothing has also evolved into a socially acceptable way of differentiating oneself from others. Simultaneously, it enables consumers to experience a sense of belonging with and similarity to others (McNeill & Venter, 2019; Thompson & Haykto, 1997).

Fashion, as a symbolic product, experiences constant changes dictated by time, with its meaning under its influence (Armstrong et al., 2015; Kaiser, 1990). For a new style of clothing to be considered fashionable, it must be adopted by a majority group. This style is later systematically rejected when time deems a new trend more relevant (Yurchisin & Johnson, 2010). That is why, for many people, the choice of clothing is motivated by the need for identity and esteem, in addition to enabling the construction of social definition through the coded meanings of items (Harris et al., 2015). As such, clothing becomes a social tool that provides a means of self-expression and a way of signaling one's preferences.

According to Cowan and Kinley (2014), American consumers' intention to purchase sustainable fashion is strongly influenced by social pressure to behave in an environmentally friendly way. In addition, McNeill and Venter (2019) have identified that opportunities for the expression of individual identity are the most sought-after benefits as motivators for young women's involvement in sustainable fashion. These studies have demonstrated that understanding the impact of social norms and the construction of identity in social environments is essential to identifying the drivers of sustainable fashion consumption.

We argue that consumers are more likely to adopt sustainable fashion when they recognize the social pressure to engage in it and understand the underlying meanings. It is understood that they may adopt group behavior, such as purchasing sustainable clothing.

2.2.1 Price in sustainable fashion

The cost of sustainable products is frequently greater than that of their conventional counterparts (Sana, 2020; Yang et al., 2021). When green products are priced higher than the average price of high-quality products, this difference in value can be considered a price premium in the context of value pricing. This phenomenon occurs when prices generate profits higher than the average while the products provide green value to consumers.

In recent decades, the literature has increasingly investigated consumers' willingness to pay for green products (Chekima et al., 2016; Narayanan & Nair, 2013). For instance, the study by Eze and Ndubisi (2013) demonstrated that the price of green products does not necessarily have a negative correlation with consumers' purchase intentions, particularly when the acquisition of such products enables them to signal their status. In the same sense, Delgado et

al. (2015) identified that 4.5% of the overall value of the Prius, a low-emission hybrid car, is attributed to status signaling. Similarly, Chekima et al. (2016) observed that the price premium does not negatively affect the purchasing intentions for green products, refuting its role as one of the principal obstacles for consumers. This indicates that consumers' responses differ about those products considered green. As a result, consumers tend to pay a higher price for products with a lower environmental impact. Thus, consuming these types of products yields not only utilitarian benefits associated with the environment but also social benefits related to status (Dastrup et al., 2012; Sachedeva et al., 2015).

In this thesis, it is understood that the price of green clothing can play different roles in purchasing decisions, as consumers can perceive it as a sacrifice, a sign of quality, or both. In sustainable fashion, high-priced clothing items may be interpreted as a sacrifice consumers are willing to make due to environmental issues. Simultaneously, high prices can symbolize status, access to resources, and even quality.

To support this understanding, CST regards the product's price as a symbol of sacrifice. Here, the buyer needs to invest, spend, or dispose of something material to benefit from something considered greater and more important. Therefore, when it comes to a higher price of a product, it is necessary to consider the desire for status that is involved. Consumers would abdicate a lower-value product as a form of self-sacrifice to promote the betterment of society and the environment.

In this sense, it is important to note that fashion serves as a tool to communicate one's ambitions and express their social identity (Ozdamar-Ertekin et al., 2020). The high cost of sustainable fashion can make these items more appealing to consumers who aspire to attain status, as price is often seen as a significant indicator of wealth (Elliot, 2013; Hammad et al., 2019). On the other hand, it is understood that the high price may act as a barrier for consumers who are only looking to protect the environment and do not have status motives, given that they have concerns about the environmental problems caused by the fashion industry. In this regard, the forthcoming topic will introduce the cognitive measure referred to as environmental concern, which precedes attitudes toward environmental issues and, in turn, influences behavioral intentions.

2.2.2 Environmental concern

Environmental concern is a variable that is understood as an individual's degree of awareness regarding the threat posed to the environment by pollution or the excessive use of resources (Franzen & Meyer, 2010; Vainio & Paloniemi, 2014). Individuals with a higher level

of environmental concern are more likely to engage in various sustainable behaviors. Thus, this cognitive measure represents an integral part of the formation of beliefs and attitudes about environmental issues. For this reason, it is highly important in predicting sustainable behavior in marketing research (Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Saari et al., 2021).

Typically, environmental concern is associated with a willingness to sacrifice or pay a premium price for more sustainable products (Meyer & Liebe, 2010), ecologically responsible behavior (i.e., recycling; Jekria & Daud, 2016), and purchase intentions (Ahmed et al., 2021; Barber et al., 2010). For instance, Há and Kwon (2016) discovered that engaging in prior recycling behaviors enhances environmental awareness in consumers, which in turn results in their purchase of environmentally friendly clothing. Similarly, the study conducted by Park and Lin (2020) discovered that environmental awareness was significantly associated with the intention to acquire recycled fashion products. Thus, the stronger the values an individual holds, the more they will consistently behave in alignment with those values, regardless of context (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2003).

Even though individuals' environmental concerns have increased in recent years, this trend does not necessarily correlate with an increase in sustainable purchases. According to Abeliotis et al. (2010), even though 80% of consumers acknowledge environmental concern as a fundamental factor in their purchasing decision and express a willingness to pay extra for eco-friendly products, only 20% of them are willing to alter their consumption behavior to reduce their negative environmental impact on a daily basis.

Research shows that there are various reasons as to why environmental concerns may not be effective in guiding pro-environmental actions (D'Souza et al., 2015; Gardner & Stern, 1996). For instance, Park and Lin (2020) argue that purchasing decisions frequently incorporate multiple motivations, making it challenging to understand specific cases. Additionally, the literature gap is associated with individuals' selfish interests, as most consumers purchase products to fulfill their personal needs or desires. Hence, it is crucial to incorporate environmental concerns and other variables into sustainable behavior studies to diminish the considerable disparity between attitude and behavior when procuring sustainable products.

Taking this into consideration, the next section of this thesis will deal with perceived consumer effectiveness, since it directly predicts environmentally conscious behavior and measures how consumers can impact the environment through their actions and self-evaluations (D'Souza et al., 2015).

2.2.3 Perceived consumer effectiveness

In the context of green marketing research, PCE is the belief that an individual's efforts can contribute to the reduction of environmental problems (Ellen et al., 1991; Higuera-Castillo et al., 2019). Kinnear et al. (1974) were the first to use PCE and explore it as a personality variable to presume environmental concern. Based on the results of this pioneering study, consumers who perceive their role as essential in reducing pollution exhibit a higher level of concern for the environment. Moreover, since then, PCE has become an essential behavioral antecedent to denote behavioral control and self-efficacy in examining consumer engagement with environmental issues (Ellen et al., 1991; Jaiswal & Singh, 2018).

From this construct, it is apparent that when individuals perceive that their behavior can contribute to solving a particular problem, PCE can affect their behavior as consumers (Ghvanidze et al., 2016). Therefore, high levels of PCE are necessary for consumers to express their positive attitudes toward purchasing ecological products (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). This phenomenon occurs because individuals are motivated by their expectations to demonstrate, through their consumption, that ethical and environmental issues are crucial components in all scenarios, including consumption. In their study, Dang et al. (2020) discovered that the PCE has a positive effect, which is partially mediating, on the correlation between the retailer's social responsibility and the consumer's behavior in terms of citizenship. The findings suggest that consumers are more inclined to prefer and associate themselves with socially responsible retailers. Furthermore, when consumers identify themselves as members of such socially accountable retailers, they tend to exhibit consumer citizenship behavior that ultimately benefits the traders.

In the context of purchasing sustainable fashion, this thesis understands that consumers are more likely to consider the impact of their purchases and are more inclined to exchange conventional clothing for sustainable clothing when they feel that their behavior can reduce the environmental impact caused by the fashion industry. The study conducted by Kang et al. (2013) found that PCE affects the attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control of young consumers in the USA, South Korea, and China regarding the consumption of sustainable textiles and clothing. Similarly, Kumar et al. (2022) identified that PCE has a strong and significant positive influence on the intention to purchase sustainable clothing among educated young Indians. Therefore, if consumers believe they can truly impact the environment through their individual consumption behavior, they tend to develop positive attitudes toward sustainable fashion consumption.

Trust in sustainable clothing brands is another important variable in studying sustainable fashion behavior. Trust is a crucial factor, as customers of sustainable products often lack the experience, knowledge, and other resources to adequately comprehend the characteristics that differentiate these products from conventional ones. Therefore, the following topic of this thesis chapter will provide a better explanation of what constitutes this construct.

2.2.4 Consumer trust

Trust can be defined as the degree of inclination to believe that the other party will act as anticipated (Ganesan, 1994; Hart & Saunders, 1997). It is formed by three beliefs: integrity, capacity, and benevolence (Chen & Chang, 2013; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985). According to Rotter (1971), trust can be measured by the extent to which a party maintains an expectation to rely on another party's words, promises, or statements without the ability to supervise or control them. In this sense, various factors influence consumer trust, including the company, the brand, the seller, and the environment. Therefore, trust will impact consumers' attitudes, perceptions, and behavior toward products.

In the context of consuming sustainable products, trust is commonly referred to as green trust. According to Wang et al. (2018), green trust is grounded on the belief that the product or service has a lower environmental impact. This variable is an important predictor for the intention to purchase green products (Asif et al., 2022), green loyalty (Martinez, 2015), green brand equity (Deniz & Onder, 2017), and green repurchase intention (Lam et al., 2016). For this reason, building consumer trust is extremely important to bring positive results when purchasing the product (Diallo & Lambey-Checchin, 2017).

In the sustainable fashion industry, a misleading or ambiguous marketing campaign can increase consumers' skepticism and undermine their trust in the product. Therefore, it is necessary to reduce ambiguity and improve the cognitive clarity of information in order to enhance trust. While consumers tend to respond positively to companies they trust and perceive as taking action against environmental issues, they often have anti-corporate biases and are skeptical of advertising claims (Szabo & Webster, 2021; Zinkhan & Carlson, 1995). As per Dhir et al. (2021), trust in a sustainable clothing brand is a crucial factor that helps to alleviate skepticism resulting from greenwashing practices. In this regard, when verifying consumer confidence in a study, it is essential to analyze the perception of greenwashing in the particular context in which the study is being conducted. This analysis helps understand how this factor can adversely affect the intention to purchase green products. To better comprehend the concept of perceived greenwashing, the following topic will discuss this construct in greater detail.

2.2.5 Perceived greenwashing

The term 'greenwashing' refers to the misleading use of green marketing to communicate environmental efforts and project an environmentally responsible image in order to portray an overly positive public image and promote a sustainable reputation (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Greenwashing practices may occur through companies that conceal negative information about their impact or disclose this information only partially, as well as others that use false advertisements claiming that they are ecologically responsible (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Martínez et al., 2020; Szabo & Webster, 2021).

In recent years, greenwashing has become a main investigation focus due to its increasing relevance in society (Bowen & Aragon-Correa, 2014; Siano et al., 2017). As a result, the perceived concept of greenwashing has been widely utilized to identify the extent to which consumers are suspicious of misleading information propagated through green marketing. Due to consumers' uncertainty regarding the information disclosed, their concerns about greenwashing can have a negative impact on their purchasing behavior. Consequently, greenwashing practices have the ability to harm market demand and create confusion among consumers, leading to suspicion about green products in general (Chen & Chang, 2013a).

After consumers realize that certain green products present false information, a reputation for greenwashing is established. This, in turn, makes consumers more cautious, which subsequently increases their inclination to discover negative information about other brands within the sector (Chen & Chang, 2013a; Wang et al., 2019). According to studies, consumers with greater awareness of ecological issues tend to be more skeptical of advertising claims (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Hence, companies must provide as much information as possible to justify the increase in the sustainability of their products in order to avoid the perception of greenwashing.

In sustainable fashion, many companies use seals and labels to highlight real sustainable practices throughout the production chain. The more factual information associated with the product, which compares the environmental impact with conventional clothing products, the lower the risk of perceived greenwashing. For this reason, the literature suggests that to combat greenwashing practices, it is necessary to demonstrate with real evidence that garments fulfill the environmental claims they promote in order to minimize consumer skepticism.

One of the factors related to greenwashing is cynicism. It is understood that individuals with higher levels of social cynicism may be more likely to be suspicious of or perceive greenwashing. This is because it increases consumers' suspicions about the congruence

between companies' genuine motives and sustainability principles. The next topic will delve more comprehensively into this variable.

2.2.6 Social Cynicism

Cynicism can be defined as the conviction that idealism and involvement yield few rewards. For cynical individuals, social distance and emotional detachment are considered superior ways of life (Li et al., 2011). According to Leung et al. (2010), to better understand social cynicism, it is necessary to comprehend that it is one of the five dimensions of the social axioms. Using data validated in 40 cultural groups from around the world, Leung and Bond (2004) demonstrated that there are five universal dimensions of social axioms: reward for application, social cynicism, social complexity, control of destiny, and religiosity. According to these authors, social axioms represent a comprehensive understanding of how individuals perceive the world operates. Moreover, they are acquired through social learning, personal experiences, and indirect experiences through the media, literature, and cultural myths, and are supported by social discourse (Alexandra et al., 2015).

In this thesis, our focus is on social cynicism, which refers to the factor of social beliefs and corresponds to a negative view of human nature. It presents a biased view against certain groups of people and a distrust of social institutions. In accordance with the literature, individuals who possess stronger social cynicism beliefs are prone to being more distrustful of others (Singelis et al., 2003), experiencing less satisfaction with life (Lai et al., 2007), and exhibiting a higher likelihood of being petty and less helpful (Chen et al., 2006). Additionally, they are less inclined to adopt a collaborative conflict-resolution style (Bond et al., 2004).

According to Groneworld et al. (2012), cynical individuals are more skeptical about environmental problems and are inclined to deny the existence of these problems. Consequently, this thesis argues that consumers with higher cynicism are more prone to question companies' environmental claims (Chan & Tam, 2021) and, more specifically, are more likely to distrust the sustainability claims made by sustainable fashion brands.

As previously noted, consumers with high social cynicism are likely to have a critical view of corporate behavior. Therefore, a socially cynical consumer is more inclined to believe that companies use sustainability claims as a superficial facade to attract eco-conscious customers, without making substantial changes to their practices. This belief stems from a general mistrust in the ability of corporations to prioritize societal or environmental well-being over profit. They may perceive sustainable clothing brands as part of a broader system where ethical claims are often used to mask underlying unethical practices or to divert attention from

other areas where the company might be causing harm. Thus, a consumer with high social cynicism is likely to trust sustainable clothing brands less, partly due to a heightened perception of greenwashing. This stems from a broader mistrust of corporate motives and a critical view of marketing strategies, leading them to scrutinize sustainability claims more rigorously than a less cynical consumer might. Hence, this thesis investigates the relationship between social cynicism, a specific personality trait, and the consumer's perception of greenwashing and how this ultimately impacts their trust in sustainable clothing brands. The following chapter will address the development of the hypotheses presented in the papers of this thesis.

3. Research propositions and hypotheses

3.1 Hypothesis formulation

To achieve the first specific objective of this thesis, four hypotheses were proposed. The first paper of this thesis focuses on the status achieved through altruism and consumption. As explained earlier, altruism (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006) is understood as having behavior that benefits others but is costly to oneself. Taking into account this premise, studies in the field of consumer behavior suggest that one way to become altruistic is to adopt sustainable behavior (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Van der Wal et al., 2016). For example, Delgado et al. (2010) identified that people attribute status to consumers of ecological products because this purchase identifies that the buyer is willing to obtain a product that benefits not only them individually but also the environment, even if it involves a personal cost. Thus, consumers tend to allocate their financial resources to achieve their personal goals by consuming ecological products (Anderson et al., 2015; Kenrick et al., 2010).

In the same sense, Choi and Seo (2017) identified that individuals who aimed to achieve a higher status exhibited a high level of prosocial behavior when their conduct was noticed by others, compared to those who had no interest in seeking status. For this reason, individuals with high-status motives may strive to attain higher status through their purchasing behavior, demonstrating their willingness to make sacrifices to help others (Sexton & Sexton, 2014).

According to Johnson et al. (2018), individuals consume sustainable products for altruistic reasons and to achieve social status and prestige. Therefore, the need for social status is positively related to the consumption of green products. We understand that activating status motives can affect consumers' attitudes toward environmentally responsible products. Based on this understanding, consumers with activated status motives will experience a greater attitude towards green products and, consequently, a greater intention to purchase. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1 (Article 1). The activation of status motives has a positive effect on the consumer's (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention toward green products.

Consumers often purchase specific products motivated by aspects that go beyond their functional uses. They look for products that meet their needs for expression and provide emotional and symbolic benefits (Sahin & Nasir, 2021; Mazzocco et al., 2012). These benefits arise from the individual's signaling of information in behaviors that reveal traits and

preferences to observers and are referred to as self-expressive benefits. In this sense, these benefits have mainly been associated with the concept of symbolic consumption, which implies that individuals primarily purchase specific products to uphold their social identity or express themselves (Judge et al., 2019; Mishra et al., 2021).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the four necessary characteristics of green consumption with costly signaling is achieving self-expressive benefits derived from the purchase. For this reason, experts such as Chernev et al. (2011) attempted to link consumers' self-expression to their preferences for lifestyle items and sustainable consumption (Kronrod et al., 2012; Schaefer & Crane, 2005). For instance, Hartmann and Apaolaza (2012) identified that consumers ought to experience psychological benefits when signaling their prosocial orientation and ability to sacrifice to contribute to the environment. These self-expressive benefits could be more significant when purchasing green products as they expose prosocial traits and preferences.

In the field of sustainable fashion, Mishra et al. (2021) identified that self-expression positively affects consumer behavior concerning ecological clothing. Therefore, the self-expressive benefits that arise from the purchase of sustainable fashion items will likely increase purchase intention, as these products can signal the consumer's social and personal characteristics. Based on this, we suggest that self-expressive benefits mediate the relationship between status motives and the tendency to purchase green products.

H2 (Article 1). The effect of status motives on the consumer's (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products can be explained by the mediating influence of environmental self-expressive benefits.

The value of being recognized for prosocial behavior is relevant to explain when such behaviors are more or less likely to occur, depending on the types of people and conditions involved (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006). In the literature on the consumption of green products, it is understood that individuals who have a greater need to achieve social status are more likely to purchase relatively more expensive green products than their non-green counterparts (Griskevicius et al., 2010).

De Silva et al. (2021) identified that British consumers perceive the most expensive green products as a symbol of social status. By paying more for these products, consumers incur costs that benefit society and, as a result, the environment. Additionally, it is more probable that these consumers will attain a higher social status within their circle by signaling their

altruistic nature (Delgado et al., 2015; Park & Lee, 2016). According to Berger (2019), consumers who purchase expensive green products are treated more favorably in social interactions. Therefore, price is understood in the literature from different perspectives. On the one hand, high prices can indicate status, excess buyer resources, and product quality (Lichtenstein et al., 1993; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011). On the other hand, they can reflect a sacrifice and a barrier to expansion and increased demand for sustainable products (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2015). It is worth noting that this barrier can be overcome when consumers understand the benefits of green products (Muller & Ruffieux, 2011). In summary, when consumers purchase more expensive green products, they can signal both prosocial behavior and evidence of wealth (Johnson et al., 2018; Talukdar & Yu, 2020). In this regard, we propose the following.

H3 (Article 1). Product price (high vs. low) has a positive moderating influence on the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits. For a high (vs. low) price, the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits is strengthened (vs. attenuated).

Given the importance of price and status variables in studies on consumers' purchasing behavior of sustainable products, many studies have related them to attitudes and green purchasing behavior (De Silva et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2018). For example, the study conducted by Ali et al. (2019) revealed that materialism and cultural values positively moderate the relationship between status motive and the intention to purchase a green luxury car. The study further suggested that consumers intend to consume to display their position in relation to others. It extended the findings of Griskevicius et al. (2010) in a real-world shopping context, showing that the need to achieve status leads people to signal their sustainable behavior.

According to Sahin and Nasir (2021), there exists a positive relationship between income, status, and conspicuous purchasing behavior. In this context, status is considered a symbol of social acceptance that can act as a form of capital separate from monetary capital (Sweet, 2010). Thus, the acquisition of status and social acceptance can be as crucial as financial capital in specific contexts. In the context of sustainable fashion, individuals who purchase sustainable clothing can be perceived and socially accepted not only based on their purchasing power but also based on their commitment to environmental practices, which can act as a form of social capital.

Furthermore, according to Abeele and Roe (2013), consumers who exhibit consumption tendencies linked with high status motive may consider purchasing symbolic products, such as

sustainable clothing, as a means of identifying themselves with a high status. For this reason, the price associated with the status motive influences the consumer's perception of self-expressive benefits, since the product's high price can signal access to resources and the willingness to incur higher costs in acquiring a product for the common good. Moreover, status-motivated consumers may perceive greater value in sustainable products, as these products allow them to communicate a pro-social image and attain a higher status. Based on this, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H4 (Article 1). The indirect effect of status motives on the consumer's (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products, mediated by self-expressive benefits, is moderated by product price (high vs. low). For a high (vs. low) price, the indirect effect of status motives is strengthened (vs. attenuated).

These previous hypotheses provided a clear direction for the first paper of this doctoral thesis. The following six hypotheses to be discussed were formulated to respond to this work's second specific objective. The second paper aimed to analyze to what degree conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing trigger the purchase of sustainable clothing. To achieve this, we begin with the understanding that conspicuous consumption is an essential driver of sustainable consumer behavior (Areiza-Padilla & Manzi Puertas, 2021; Hammad et al., 2019).

Conspicuous consumption involves intentionally choosing to acquire and use products that have not only functional but also symbolic value, which can communicate a distinct self-image to others (Chaudhuri et al., 2011). This type of consumption often requires acquiring symbolic products that present a sign of abundance and underlying characteristics to the consumer. For example, ecological T-shirts are similar in terms of versatility and comfort for the user when compared to common T-shirts. In reality, they symbolize a reduction in environmental impact and are often more expensive. Visually, these T-shirts may differ from each other with brand logos or visibly sustainable fabrics. Moreover, purchasing from physical stores, as opposed to e-commerce, presents much more prominent signaling aspects (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Hence, even t-shirts with few signs of differentiation can hold significant signaling value, depending on how the user showcases them to others (Berger, 2019). Conspicuous consumption, in this sense, serves more hedonistic and symbolic reasons than functional needs (Perez-Truglia, 2013).

Individuals' differentiation based on green symbolism obtained through the acquisition of sustainable products in an era of excessive consumption, where emphasis is placed on the acquisition of conspicuous products, reaffirms to others their commitment to environmental causes. Therefore, while this consumption behavior can signal environmental values, it also demonstrates the power and wealth of consumers who devote their time and resources to activities to minimize environmental impact.

These benefits associated with conspicuous consumption, for example, as SIT explains, indicate that the impulse to demonstrate conformity with pro-environmental group norms, whether from an individual's peer group or society, can motivate consumers to choose green products instead of non-green alternatives. Specifically, when it comes to sustainable fashion items that are mainly conspicuously consumed, consumers may be motivated by conspicuous consumption to purchase sustainable clothing brands as it can improve their image within their social group. Taking this into account, the first hypothesis of the second paper was developed.

H1 (Article 2). Conspicuous consumption motives have a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

Although conspicuous consumption is often driven by individualistic reasons, there are also altruistic causes that motivate people to purchase sustainable clothing. According to Sexton and Sexton (2014), the necessity to exhibit a commitment towards environmental conservation actions is contingent upon the beliefs of the consumer or the group they are concerned about. Therefore, even in a conspicuous context, environmental concern can significantly impact the attitudes of consumers towards ecological products (Beall et al., 2021; Qiao & Dowell, 2022).

Environmental concern is fundamental to boosting green consumption, and several studies have analyzed the relationship between environmental concern and purchase intention (Chen & Zhang, 2021; De Canio et al., 2021). The research of Kumar et al. (2021) found that environmental concern has a direct impact on individuals' attitudes towards ecological clothing. Furthermore, increasing this factor enhances the pro-environmental knowledge base and strengthens consumers' intention to purchase green clothing. Thus, given the growing availability of sustainable options in the market that contribute to consumer awareness, we hope this concern will be activated in green purchasing contexts, thereby making consumers increasingly aware of the environmental impact of clothing. With this in mind, hypothesis H2 of the second paper was established.

H2 (Article 2). Consumers' environmental concern has a positive effect on their purchase of sustainable clothing.

According to Adamkiewicz et al. (2022), there exists a lack of consumer trust in the sustainability standards of the fashion industry specifically. Perceived brand reputation plays a crucial role as an indicator of trust that encourages more favorable purchasing decisions. In the current context, consumers have increasingly sustainable options available to them. However, the responsibility of assessing whether sustainability claims are true falls upon them. Consumers frequently perceive a label that highlights the environmental sustainability of a product as simply a strategy for the brand to charge a higher price or a tactic by the marketing department. This phenomenon is also called "greenwashing perceptions" (Neumann et al., 2021). Therefore, brands must establish a trusting relationship with their audience to address these perceptions.

Neumann et al. (2021) identified that trust in the sustainable clothing lines of two fast fashion brands positively influenced consumers' purchasing intentions. According to this paper, positive appreciation of the two brands' social responsibility efforts not only directly shapes consumers' attitudes about these brands but also plays a crucial role in strengthening consumers' trust. Therefore, brands must communicate environmental sustainability more openly in order to further increase trust.

Furthermore, brands are increasingly investing in adopting seals, labels, and certifications to gain customer trust and minimize doubts generated by greenwashing tactics, which are still present in the current context (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). This reinforces the idea that trust in sustainable clothing brands can increase the consumption of sustainable clothing, leading to the following hypothesis:

H3 (Article 2). Trust in sustainable clothing brands has a positive effect on the consumer's purchase of sustainable clothing.

Although there are several strategies to increase consumer confidence in fashion sustainability standards, many schemes function as superficial sustainability attractions for brands. This means that these schemes allow brands to appear environmentally friendly without making substantial changes, thereby enabling a widespread practice of greenwashing. This phenomenon is characterized by a lack of transparency, exaggerated claims, and a lack of accountability (Adamkiewicz et al., 2022). Some studies indicate that the existing regulatory

measures are insufficient to prevent greenwashing and promote truly sustainable fashion. However, consumer awareness will lead them to ensure their own safety (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Szabo & Webster, 2020).

Due to consumer uncertainty regarding clothing brands, the perception of greenwashing will affect their attitudes towards purchasing these products. For example, Rausch and Kopplin (2021) examined the concern that greenwashing negatively moderates the relationship between attitude and purchase intention for sustainable clothing. In this sense, consumer skepticism may result in a negative bias towards purchasing sustainable clothing, so we expect:

H4 (Article 2). Perceived greenwashing has a negative influence on the consumer's purchase of sustainable clothing.

Consumer awareness regarding green brands and products will not only influence their skepticism but also cause them to consider the impact of their purchases. Based on this understanding, the importance of PCE stands out as one of the most significant factors associated with individual awareness to predict socially responsible consumption (Dang et al., 2020; Kang et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2022). PCE reflects individuals' judgment regarding their ability to impact and improve environmental and social problems. Therefore, consumers with high PCE will likely search for products, including sustainable clothing, that align with their values and can contribute to sustainable causes.

The more consumers realize the direct connection between their purchasing behavior and the reduced environmental impact generated by the fashion industry, the greater the tendency to actively consider sustainable alternatives to conventional clothing. Park (2015) found that PCE positively influenced the confidence and purchase intention of South Korean university students concerning upcycling fashion items. Similarly, Soto et al. (2022) discovered that PCE has a favorable impact on consumers' purchase intentions regarding ecological clothing promoted through influencer marketing in Peru. These studies suggest that PCE is positively associated with the intention to buy sustainable products in different cultural and marketing settings. Based on the findings of these studies, it seems that in different cultural and marketing contexts, PCE is positively associated with the intention to purchase sustainable products. However, this variable has not been thoroughly investigated in the existing literature regarding its potential to predict consumers' actual purchasing behavior of sustainable clothing. For this reason, based on Neumann et al. (2020), we have come to understand that the more importance consumers attach to their individual purchases, the greater the likelihood of their

choosing sustainable clothing. This in turn enables them to play an active role in addressing environmental issues. Consequently, hypothesis H5 was formulated.

H5 (Article 2). Perceived consumer effectiveness has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

PCE affects purchasing behavior and can also play a moderating role in the effect of evident consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing. Consumers with high PCE tend to show a strong tendency to show socially responsible attitudes and behaviors (Dang et al., 2020; Tucker & Lewis, 1978). Therefore, the moment individuals believe that purchasing sustainable clothing will significantly impact the environment, the greater the likelihood that they will think that others share this same perception. In order for conspicuous consumption to produce the desired outcomes, it is imperative that individuals believe that others perceive their contribution to sustainability as being authentic rather than insignificant or false. Therefore, we understand that when a consumer realizes that the effective environmental impact of sustainable clothing is minimal, their motivation to express their environmental commitment when purchasing these products will be reduced. We suggest that the desire to signal status and identity through consumption can be compatible with environmental sustainability, particularly among consumers who believe in their ability to make a difference. Taking this into consideration, the hypothesis of PCE moderation in the relationship between conspicuous consumption motives and purchasing behavior is presented below:

H6 (Article 2). Perceived consumer effectiveness positively moderates the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing. For consumers with high (low) perceived consumer efficacy, the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing will be stronger (weaker).

The following hypotheses, which will be explained, served as the basis for guiding this thesis dissertation's third and final paper. The objective is to examine the impact of social cynicism and its correlation with the purchasing behavior of green clothing. We understand that social axioms, mainly social cynicism, can explain the variation in consumers' reactions toward buying sustainable clothing. Thus, in light of the increased promotion of environmental awareness in the fashion industry, we seek to understand how personality traits influence consumers' trust in these brands.

Consumers need to trust the source claiming sustainability information when purchasing sustainable fashion due to the lack of details provided by many brands. Several environmental labels present confusing truths that require more detailed information about the real environmental attributes of their products (Baum, 2012). According to Schmuck et al. (2018), one of the main difficulties for consumers is verifying the environmental claims of ecological products. Numerous individuals lack the technical knowledge and expertise required to validate the accuracy of claims made about environmental attributes, even after utilizing products that claim to have such sustainable characteristics. Consequently, trust plays a pivotal role in motivating individuals to make purchases of sustainable clothing (Liu et al., 2021; Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

When consumers perceive a lack of transparency or encounter difficulties in verifying environmental claims, it can lead to a reduction in trust in the brand. Several studies in the literature have highlighted that a lack of trust can negatively impact the consumption of green products (Cheung et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021). According to Leonidou and Skarmeas (2017), distrust and ecological skepticism lead to a reduction in purchasing intention. Similarly, Liu et al. (2021) highlight that the lack of trust in the fashion industry can negatively affect consumers' attitudes and intentions to purchase ethical fashion products.

Individuals who exhibit high levels of social cynicism due to their negative attitudes toward institutions are more likely to cast doubt on the environmental claims made by sustainable fashion. Consumers with a cynical disposition may possess a greater inclination toward seeking transparency and may exhibit distrust toward the information provided by manufacturers (Indibara & Varshney, 2020). Cynicism will make consumers less open to marketing strategies due to their suspicion of brands' motives. According to Tran et al. (2021), this phenomenon occurs because cynicism is a moralized attitude that suggests that the actions promoted by companies are misleading. In this sense, the distrust of environmental claims would be significantly greater among cynical individuals, and this could result in an additional barrier to the adoption of green clothing, as they may be hesitant to believe the environmental claims of fashion brands. Therefore, we predict that:

H1 (Article 3). Social cynicism has a negative relationship with consumer trust in clothing brands claiming sustainability.

Honest and transparent practices regarding environmental initiatives can strengthen trust and lead to a more positive reputation with consumers. In contrast, greenwashing practices

can potentially undermine the credibility of sustainable brands. According to Martínez et al. (2020), greenwashing has had a negative impact on consumers' trust in advertising. This is because consumers often rely on corporate advertising information to make purchasing decisions. Consequently, they may experience a higher likelihood of making errors and poor purchasing choices, leading to dissatisfaction.

When greenwashing is perceived, consumers no longer rely on the brand or its products for their purchasing decisions (Chen & Chang, 2013). This perception can potentially result in product boycotts and reputational damage to the brand's reputation. The literature emphasizes that if consumers become aware of being deceived or if the company's actions do not align with its claims, the consumer purchase intentions, green trust, and credibility of the brand will be negatively impacted (Akturan, 2018; Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021; Ng et al., 2014; Szabo & Webster, 2021). For example, Rausch and Kopplin (2021) found that concern regarding greenwashing negatively moderates the relationship between attitude and intention to purchase sustainable clothing. In this sense, we understand that clothing brands that adopt greenwashing practices can potentially compromise the sector's purchasing behavior, as the skepticism generated can undermine consumer trust and the effectiveness of legitimate sustainability initiatives.

Based on this understanding, we comprehend that socially cynical individuals are more prone to perceiving higher levels of greenwashing. This is due to their belief that companies manipulate the disclosure of important environmental information, as suggested by Li et al. (2022). High social cynicism can diminish trust in sustainable clothing brands, due to an increased perception of greenwashing. Consequently, we suggest that the association between social cynicism and consumer trust in green clothing brands can be explained via a mechanism whereby the perception of greenwashing is a mediating variable.

H2 (Article 3). The negative relationship of social cynicism with trust in apparel brands featuring sustainability claims is mediated by an increase in the perceived greenwashing of fashion brands.

Since social cynicism can negatively affect trust in green clothing and generate a greater perception of greenwashing, the literature needs to understand the aspects capable of minimizing the effect of social cynicism. In this thesis, we assume that factors that place less emphasis on the real environmental impact of products can potentially mitigate the adverse impact of social cynicism on consumer behavior toward green products. That is, consumers

with more conspicuous consumption motives will tend to consume less green clothing due to sustainability itself and will purchase much more due to the social signaling function. As a result, this type of consumer is probably less susceptible to social cynicism. This phenomenon may occur due to the fact that, despite doubts surrounding the credibility of sustainability claims made by these brands, the benefits of self-expression that these brands convey to their consumers will remain prominent. We suggest that conspicuous consumption motives do not just directly influence behavior but also modify how other psychological factors (such as social cynicism and greenwashing perceptions) interact to affect trust in sustainability claims. Specifically, in the presence of strong conspicuous consumption motives, the pathway from social cynicism through greenwashing perceptions to diminished trust is weakened. This moderating effect implies that the negative impact of perceived greenwashing (stemming from social cynicism) on trust is less pronounced among those highly motivated by conspicuous consumption. This challenges the assumption that cynicism and greenwashing perceptions invariably lead to reduced trust, suggesting that under certain conditions (i.e., strong conspicuous consumption motives), the dynamics change. We suggest that the impact of cynicism on trust, mediated by greenwashing perceptions, is not uniform across all consumer segments but varies depending on individual motives and values.

Thus, we propose that consumers with higher (or lower) levels of conspicuous consumption will be less (or more) susceptible to the influence of social cynicism on brand trust regarding green apparel. More conspicuous consumers will be concerned with the image that green clothing projects to their social circle rather than its actual environmental impact. Therefore, they will be less affected by the trust-decreasing influence of perceived greenwashing, which is triggered by their social cynicism.

H3 (Article 3). Conspicuous consumption motives positively moderate the indirect negative relationship between social cynicism and consumer trust in clothing brands making sustainability claims, as mediated by greenwashing perceptions, through the moderation of the influence of perceived greenwashing on this trust.

3.2 Questions and hypotheses addressed in each paper

Table 1. Questions and hypotheses

How do conspicuous motives influence sustainable fashion buying behavior? Proposed research models and hypotheses aim to understand the antecedents of this type of consumption.	Question	Research hypotheses
	<p>Paper 1 How does the price of the green product relate to the status motive and the self-expressive benefits?</p>	<p>H1. The activation of status motives has a positive effect on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products.</p> <p>H2. The effect of status motives on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products can be explained by the mediating influence of environmental self-expressive benefits.</p> <p>H3. Product price (high vs. low) has a positive moderating influence on the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits. For a high (vs. low) price, the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits is strengthened (vs. attenuated).</p> <p>H4. The indirect effect of status motives on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products, mediated by self-expressive benefits, is moderated by product price (high vs. low). For a high (vs. low) price, the indirect effect of status motives is strengthened (vs. attenuated).</p>
	<p>Paper 2: To what extent do conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing trigger the purchase of sustainable clothing?</p>	<p>H1. Conspicuous consumption motives have a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.</p> <p>H2. Consumers' environmental concern has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.</p> <p>H3. Trust in sustainable clothing brands has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.</p> <p>H4. Perceived greenwashing has a negative influence on the purchase of sustainable clothing.</p> <p>H5. Perceived consumer effectiveness has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.</p> <p>H6. Perceived consumer effectiveness positively moderates the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing. For consumers with high (low) perceived consumer efficacy the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing will be stronger (weaker).</p>
	<p>Paper 3 How do conspicuous motives affect the relationship between greenwashing and trust in green clothing brands, where greenwashing mediates the effect of social cynicism on trust?</p>	<p>H1. Social cynicism has a negative relationship with trust in clothing brands featuring sustainability claims.</p> <p>H2. The negative relationship of social cynicism with trust in apparel brands featuring sustainability claims is mediated by an increase in the perceived greenwashing of fashion brands.</p> <p>H3. Conspicuous consumption motives positively moderate the indirect negative relationship between social cynicism and trust in apparel promoted with sustainability claims mediated by greenwashing perceptions, through the moderation of the influence of perceived greenwashing on trust.</p>

4. Research method

This chapter describes and explains the methods and procedures used to develop the three articles. From there, it is possible to understand how we handle data, from collection to analysis. Furthermore, the methodological choices that led to the validity and reliability of the results obtained are identified.

4.1 Epistemological orientation of the research

The research articles developed within the scope of this doctoral dissertation adhere to the post-positivist paradigm. According to Crossan (2003), post-positivism describes reality as multiple, subjective, and mentally constructed by individuals. This approach allows researchers to discuss participants' reactions and interpret the intertwined ideas and questions they raise (Kankam, 2019).

Post-positivism is a suitable approach, especially when investigating the behavior of individuals. For this reason, this paradigm is adequate for understanding and predicting phenomena in marketing and consumer behavior studies as it facilitates the interpretation and in-depth analysis of empirical research (Aguiar, 2016). According to Creswell (2009), post-positivism allows data collection to be carried out adequately in a short period and helps the analysis of statistical data to be applied accurately. Considering this, we aimed to understand the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption in sustainable clothing purchasing behavior through the development of numerical observation measures. This research conducted the three studies presented here with the necessary impartiality of the researchers in developing the data collection, and analysis instruments.

4.2 Research method

Achieving the general objective of this doctoral dissertation involved obtaining empirical evidence to test the hypotheses of the three studies proposed here. All studies followed a quantitative approach. The first had a between-subjects 2 (status: high vs. low) x 2 (green product price: high vs. low) factorial design, with a final sample of 241 Brazilian consumers (72.19% female, $M_{age} = 28$). The sample was considered adequate both in terms of profile and size. According to Campbell and Stanley (1979), studies with an experimental design must use at least thirty participants per condition. Furthermore, some studies indicate that young adults with a higher level of education tend to understand the consumption phenomenon more easily and can respond to research more appropriately (Chan & Lau, 2002; Jaiswal & Kant, 2018). The second and third papers corresponded to a survey with a nationally

representative online sample of Australian consumers, totaling 600 participants (58.7% female, $M_{\text{age}} = 47.84$).

The data collection for all three articles of this thesis was conducted through online surveys. Data from the experimental article were collected through a questionnaire made available from the academic community of Brazilian universities across wide-ranging student social networks. The link to access the questionnaire was distributed to each university group, and each participant was then randomly assigned to a scenario depending on the link they received. Participants could only take the survey once to ensure that respondents were influenced just by the stimuli of their corresponding experimental group.

The data from articles 2 and 3 corresponded to a representative online sample of consumers aged 18, enabling generalizable results and achieving external validity. Participants were recruited via Qualtrics and received a monetary incentive for participating in the study. In order to obtain a diverse and representative sample, the population quotas in terms of age, sex, family income, and education were programmed to be approximately representative. Qualtrics' internal data control ensured that responses were reliable and sampling bias-free. The platform identified and eliminated participants who responded quickly or consistently with extreme values. These participants were replaced with new respondents before analysis. Data was checked for consistency and missing values. No sample units were removed. The data obtained was downloaded from Qualtrics and then analyzed using statistical techniques in SPSS.

Initially, the online questionnaire for these two studies presented text stating that many fashion brands are marketed as sustainable fashion. However, the questionnaire did not provide information about any specific fashion brands or styles. The questionnaire aimed to assess participants' actual purchases of sustainable clothing and attitudes toward fashion marketed as sustainable. All measurement items referred to generic consumption of sustainable clothing. It is important to highlight that all items in the three research articles in this thesis were evaluated using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "completely disagree" (1) to "completely agree" (7).

4.3 Article 1 – Experimental study

The following methodological explanations refer to the first article of the thesis published as a chapter of the book entitled “The Role of Green Product Pricing in Conspicuous Green Consumption Behavior—A Brazilian Perspective.” The experimental study included three dependent variables, self-expressive benefits, attitude, and purchase intention, and manipulated two independent variables, namely status motive and green product price. To manipulate status motive, we relied on the study by Griskevicius et al. (2006), which presents

two texts, each containing 700 characters. In one of them, the research participant feels motivated to achieve a higher status after reading it. However, in the low-status motive condition, the text did not include any elements that stimulated the individual's motivate to seek a higher status.

Regarding price manipulation, the price differed by approximately 50%, as according to Berger (2019), the willingness to pay a higher price for a green product in a status scenario is around this value. The average price of sustainable shirts was surveyed on the website of a Brazilian company, RecicleUse®, which specializes in sustainable clothing. Thus, the prices of the shirts in both conditions were low (R\$39.99) and high (R\$75.99).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of four scenarios. They were instructed to read the text referring to the scenario in which they were allocated and to place themselves as the main character. After being informed that questions about the story would be asked at the end of the procedure, the respondents read the purchase context, which involved choosing between a sustainable organic cotton t-shirt priced at R\$39.99 or R\$74.99, and subsequently completed the survey consisting of measurement scales of the constructs. Finally, the participants answered questions designed to evaluate the internal validity of the experiment concerning the manipulation of the status motive and price.

Participants answered attention questions about the text that was read in the first stage to ensure the experiment's reliability. We checked the status motive manipulation based on two statements in the study by Griskevicius et al. (2010). To check the respondents' level of price perception according to the scenario, we used a statement from Kukar-Kinney and Grewal (2007).

Regarding the measurement of dependent variables, we adapted three items from the scale used by Hartmann and Apaolaza (2012) to measure self-expressive benefits, three items based on Chan (2010) to measure attitude, and three items adapted from Grewal et al. (2003) to measure purchase intention regarding green products. All items were translated into Brazilian Portuguese using back-translation.

Table 2. Variables and measurement items

Constructs and items	Mean	SD	α
Attitude (Chan, 2001; Taylor & Todd, 1995)	5.61	1.43	0.907
<i>I have a favorable opinion regarding the purchase of this product</i>			
<i>I like the idea of buying this product</i>			

<i>Buying this product seems like a good idea</i>			
Product purchase intention (Grewal et al., 2003)	5.78	1.53	0.925
<i>Most likely, I would buy this product if I had the resources</i>			
<i>I would be willing to buy this product if I had the resources</i>			
<i>I would consider purchasing this product if I had the resources</i>			
Self-expressive benefits (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012)	4.29	1.80	0.908
<i>With this product, I can express my environmental concern</i>			
<i>With this product, I can demonstrate to myself and my friends that I care about environmental conservation</i>			
<i>In possession of this product, my friends would realize that I am concerned with the environment</i>			
Manipulation check: status (Griskevicius et al., 2010)	7.80	4.05	0.836
<i>Did you wish to have a higher social status in the company?</i>			
<i>Were you motivated to achieve greater prestige?</i>			
Manipulation check: pricing (Kukar-Kinney & Grewal, 2007)	3.77	1.87	–
<i>This price is likely higher than average market prices for this kind of product</i>			

After inspecting the dataset, some cases were excluded due to inconsistent responses, incorrect answers to the attention question, and missing data, resulting in a final sample of 241 respondents. To validate the experiment, Student's t-test was applied to verify the manipulation of the status motive (activated vs. not activated) and the price of the green product (high vs. low). Cronbach's alpha confirmed the reliability of all scales, as all values were above the recommended limit of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010).

Initially, the analysis of the results relied on Student's t-test to analyze the H1 hypothesis (H1a and H1b) and verify the relationship between status motive and the dependent variables (attitude and purchase intention). This analysis was necessary to examine whether the relationship was significant before we performed the mediation analysis. To introduce self-expressive benefits as a mediating variable, we used Hayes PROCESS model 4 and tested hypothesis H2 (H2a and H2b). A model is considered a mediation model if there is a reduction in the strength of the relationship between the predictor variables and the dependent variable with the entry of the mediator variable (Hayes, 2017). The standard error of the indirect effect on the mediator variable in the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was estimated using bootstrap confidence intervals with 10,000 samples. The bootstrap interval indicates the lower and upper limits of the bootstrap confidence interval (Boot LLCI: bootstrap lower limit confidence interval, Boot ULCI: bootstrap upper limit confidence interval). When

the corresponding bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero, the significance of the mediation index is confirmed. In turn, for the analysis of moderation and moderated mediation, model 7 was used to test hypotheses H3 and H4. This analysis verified the moderating effect of price on the relationship between status motives and green buying behavior.

The concept of mediation is rooted in causal inference, which is concerned with understanding the causal relationships between variables in a system. Mediation analysis provides a framework for understanding the underlying causal mechanism through which an independent variable (IV) influences a dependent variable (DV). This understanding can be used to inform interventions and policies aimed at changing the values of the IV or mediator to achieve a desired change in the DV (Hayes, 2017). Moderated mediation analysis extends mediation analysis and is used to examine how the strength or direction of the indirect effect of an IV on a DV through a mediator variable may vary depending on the level of a moderator variable. A moderator is a variable that affects the strength or direction of the relationship between the IV and DV, or between the mediator and DV. Moderated mediation analysis first estimates the indirect effect of the IV on the DV through the mediator and then estimates the moderation effect of the moderator variable on the relationship between the IV and DV, and the relationship between the mediator and DV. Moderated mediation analysis then determines the conditional indirect effect of the IV on the DV through the mediator at different levels of the moderator variable (Hayes, 2017). In summary, while mediation analysis seeks to explain the mechanism through which one variable affects another, moderation analysis examines the conditions under which this relationship is modified or affected.

4.4 Article 2 – Online survey

The subsequent methodological explanations pertain to the research article “Sustainable Clothing: Why Conspicuous Consumption and Greenwashing Matter.” For this research, we used six variables. The reasons for conspicuous consumption presented seven statements extracted from research on symbolic consumption, status consumption, and conspicuous environmental conservation (Eastman et al., 1999; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Lewis & Moital, 2016; O’Cass, 2000; O’Cass & McEwen, 2004; Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Solomon, 1983). The PCE in the context of sustainable clothing purchasing was adapted from the scale by D’Souza et al. (2015). Environmental concern in the context of sustainable clothing used four items extracted from the study by Rausch and Kopplin (2021), which had adapted from the scales by Lee (2008) and Dunlap et al. (2000). To measure consumer trust in sustainable clothing brands, we extracted two items from Chen (2010) and Chen and Chang (2013b).

Perceived greenwashing used five items from previous studies (Chen & Chang, 2013a; Mohr, 1998; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Schmuck et al., 2018). Finally, the dependent variable, sustainable purchasing behavior, was measured using two items from Rausch and Kopplin (2021), which was based on Lee (2008) and Schlegelmilch et al. (1996).

The questionnaire contained items for consumers to assess the extent to which they frequently purchased sustainable clothing and whether they had purchased it at a higher price. Cronbach's alpha confirmed the reliability of all scales, as all values were above the recommended limit.

Table 3. Variables and measurement items with mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha

	M	SD	α
Conspicuous consumption motives	3.97	1.62	.91
I think that buying sustainable clothing ...			
...fosters popularity among friends and colleagues.	4.01	1.58	
...means wealth.	3.77	1.67	
...enables people to show off, to be noticed.	3.84	1.62	
...enables people to feel more important.	4.09	1.59	
...enables people to improve the image of themselves that they project to others.	4.15	1.56	
...sustainable clothes are social status symbols.	4.10	1.66	
...sustainable clothes are a symbol of success and prestige.	3.83	1.68	
Environmental concern	5.00	1.62	.92
I am concerned about the state of the environment.	5.03	1.57	
I am concerned about the long-term consequences of unsustainable behavior.	5.12	1.62	
I often think about the degradation of the environment.	4.74	1.61	
I am concerned that humanity will inflict permanent damage on the environment.	5.13	1.70	
Perceived consumer effectiveness – PCE	4.50	1.52	.89
I think that by buying from these sustainable clothing brands ...			
I can positively influence society and the environment.	4.24	1.51	
I can help to create a more sustainable and caring society.	4.48	1.47	
I can help to reduce the problem of global warming.	4.45	1.59	
I can reduce my carbon footprint.	4.84	1.53	
Trust in sustainable clothing brands	3.90	1.34	.83 (.77 ¹)
The environmental concern of these clothing brands' meets my expectations.	3.87	1.35	
I feel that the environmental reputation of these clothing brands is generally reliable.	3.93	1.33	
Perceived greenwashing	4.75	1.40	.90
I think most of these products/brands are ...			
...not completely produced from environmentally friendly materials.	4.86	1.32	
...not always manufactured under sustainable conditions.	4.86	1.41	
...making green claims that are vague or seemingly unprovable.	4.65	1.40	
...omitting or masking important information, making their green claims sound better than they are.	4.67	1.45	
...exaggerating the actual green functionality of the product.	4.71	1.45	
Purchase behavior	3.47	1.71	.86 (.76 ¹)

I regularly buy sustainable clothing.	3.46	1.74
I frequently buy sustainable clothing even if they are more expensive than conventional clothing.	3.48	1.70

¹Note: a Pearson correlation coefficient.

The average variance extracted (AVE) ranged from 0.65 to 0.76, and the composite reliability (CR) from 0.84 to 0.92, well above the minimum recommended level of 0.5 for AVE and 0.6 for CR (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). In this way, convergent validity was guaranteed. In Table 4, it is possible to view the validity of discrimination. Furthermore, a single factor overall measurement items explained 26% of overall variance, significantly less than the 50% threshold for standard method variance concern, providing evidence against significant common method variance.

Table 4. Discriminant validity (correlations < square roots of AVE)

Variables	CC	EC	PCE	GT	PG	PB
Conspicuous Consumption (CC)	.83					
Environmental Concern (EC)	.24***	.87				
Perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE)	.35***	.60***	.83			
Green Trust (GR)	.34***	.05	.23***	.85		
Perceived greenwashing (PG)	.12**	.31***	.16***	.23***	.81	
Purchase Behavior (PB)	.50***	.38***	.52***	.34***	0.2	.87

Note: Square roots of each construct AVE in the diagonal. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$.

Regarding data analysis, we performed a multiple linear regression analysis to determine the individual effect of each of the five independent variables on the purchase of sustainable clothing. The regression model was globally significant ($p < .001$) and explained a significant proportion of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .42$). During the testing of assumptions, it was observed that the normal probability (P-P) plot of the standardized regression residuals almost aligned with the diagonal, confirming that the errors were distributed approximately normally (Durbin-Watson = 1.90). Finally, multicollinearity was discarded, as detection tolerance values ranged from 0.58 to 0.82 and were well above the recommended tolerance > 0.10 to 0.20, while variance inflation factors (VIF) ranged from 1.21 to 1.69 and were below the threshold, $VIF < 5$ to 10. All data in this research article were analyzed in SPSS 26.

4.5 Article 3 – Online survey

The forthcoming methodological explanations pertain to the paper “Social Cynicism, Greenwashing, and Trust in Green Clothing Brands.” The sample and collection procedure correspond to those in the previous article. For this third article, we used four items adapted from the Social Axioms Survey to assess social cynicism (Leung et al., 2002) and the constructs already used: perception of greenwashing, conspicuous consumption, and trust in green garment brands. Table 5 shows the mean, standard deviation, factor loadings, average variance extracted, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.078) confirmed an acceptable measurement model.

Table 5. Social cynicism and measurement items.

	Mean	SD	F.L.	AV	CR	α
Social cynicism	5.12	1.07		.50	.79	.79
Powerful people tend to exploit others.			.85			
Power and status make people arrogant.			.83			
The various social institutions in society are biased toward the rich.			.58			
One has to deal with matters according to the specific circumstances and one's interests.			.51			

The results support convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity was obtained with both AVE and CR values above the minimum recommended level (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Discriminant validity is upheld, as the square root of AVE ($\sqrt{0.50} = 0.71$) was more significant than its correlation value with the other constructs, which varied between -0.19 to 0.46. The data analysis continued with correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis via PROCESS by Hayes (2017). PROCESS model 14 was used to test moderated mediation.

5. Summary of results

This chapter aims to summarize the analysis of the main results from the articles. The data is organized according to the proposed hypotheses, and at the end of each topic, a table displays the results of the hypotheses for each article.

5.1 Results – Article 1

Initially, we conducted a t-test to examine the impact of manipulating status motives on the dependent variables: attitude and purchase intention. Our analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the means of the status activation and control scenarios concerning consumers' attitude ($M = 5.83$ for the activated status motive, $M = 5.36$ for the control, $t = -2.55$, $p = 0.01$). This result supported hypothesis H1a. We verified that status activation also had a positive effect on purchase intention. For the status scenario, the average was higher than the control scenario ($M = 5.97$ for the activated status motive, $M = 5.57$ for the control, $t = -2.00$, $p = 0.04$), supporting hypothesis H1b. Following these findings, we proceeded to the mediation analysis.

To verify the mediation effect of self-expressive benefits on the relationship between status motive and green consumption behavior (attitude and purchase intention), we used model 4 of the SPSS PROCESS macro. For this model, we first analyzed the total effect of the independent variable (status motive) on attitude, without the mediator. The result was positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.11; 0.83], $t = 2.59$, $p = 0.01$), but without the mediator, the model explained only 2.73% ($R^2 = 0.03$). After inserting the mediator, the independent variable and self-expressive benefits increased the attitude variance to 24.66% ($R^2 = 0.25$). With the mediator, the direct effect of the status motive on attitude, controlled for self-expressive benefits, was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.27$, IC 95% [-0.05; 0.59], $t = 1.68$, $p = 0.09$). This result implies that the effect of the status motive on attitude is indirect and occurs through self-expressive benefits. Thus, the mediation effect is significant ($\beta = 0.20$, IC 95% [0.02; 0.39]), supporting hypothesis H2a.

The same result was found for the relationship between status motive and purchase intention. Without the mediator, the relationship was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.40$, 95% CI [0.01; 0.79], $t = 2.03$, $p = 0.04$), but the mediator explained the relationship between status motive and purchase intention by 54.57%. Furthermore, we identified a significant mediation effect ($\beta = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.04; 0.43]), which supports hypothesis H2b.

After verifying the mediation effect of self-expressive benefits on the relationship between status motive and attitude and purchase intention, we began to analyze the moderation

of product price on the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits. For this, we used Hayes PROCESS Model 7, which confirmed a significant positive interaction of the effect of status motive with the product price on self-expressive benefits ($\beta_{\text{status} \times \text{price}} = 0.91$; $SE = 0.47$, $t = 1.94$, $p = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.02, 1.83]). However, as seen in Table 6 with the results of the moderated mediation model, hypothesis H3 is only supported at the 10% significance level. Therefore, for a high price, the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits is strengthened, which indicates that price has a positive moderating influence. We calculated 95% confidence intervals using Bootstrap with 10,000 samples, analyzing Bootstrap lower limit confidence interval (Boot LLCI) and Bootstrap upper limit confidence interval (boot ULCI).

Table 6. Results of the moderated mediation model

	β	SE	p	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Constant	4.47	0.28	0.00	3.92	5.03
Status	-0.03	0.36	0.92	-0.75	0.68
Price	-0.73	0.35	0.04	-1.42	-0.39
Status \times price	0.91	0.47	0.05	-0.02	1.83

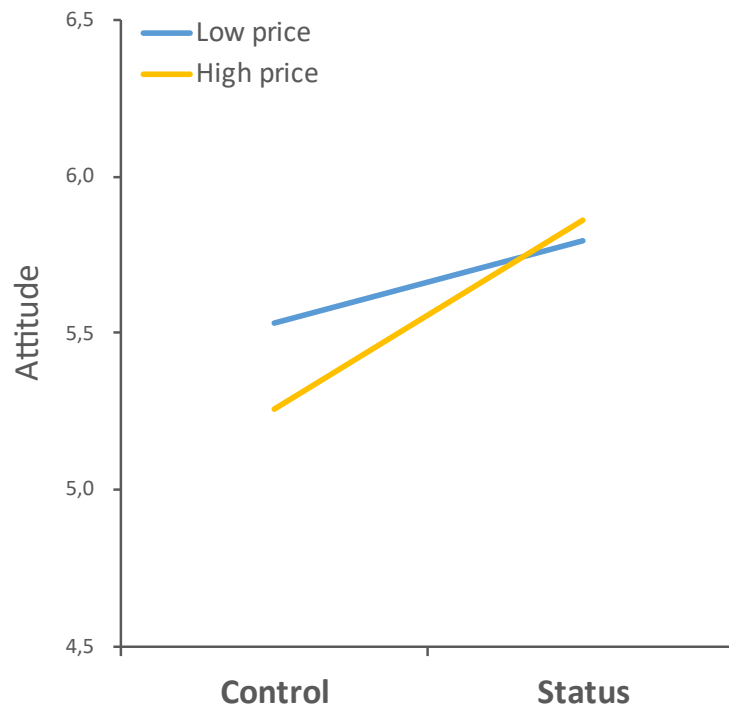
Once price moderation was identified, the next step corresponded to testing the moderated mediation model to identify whether the indirect effect of status motives on the dependent variables (attitude and purchase intention), mediated by self-expressive benefits, was moderated by price. The moderated mediation index was significant for attitude (Mod. med. Index = 0.34; $SE = 0.18$; 95% CI [0.00, 0.72]) and for purchase intention (Mod. med. Index = 0.37; $SE = 0.37$; 95% CI [0.01, 0.79]), indicating that the effect of status motive strengthens as the price increases.

In the analysis of the conditional indirect effect, it was found that the indirect effect of the status motive on attitude mediated by self-expressive benefits was positive and significant in high price ($\beta_{\text{ind}} = 0.33$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.61]), but not significant and close to zero in the low-price group ($\beta_{\text{ind}} = -0.01$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [-0.26, 0.23]), providing support for H4a.

The result highlights a significant effect of the interaction between status motive, self-expressive benefits, and price on the consumer's attitude towards green products. With this understanding, when observing the Figure 1, consumers with activated status have a greater attitude towards the green product, especially when its price is higher. In contrast, in the low status scenario, the attitude towards green products with lower prices was greater. These results

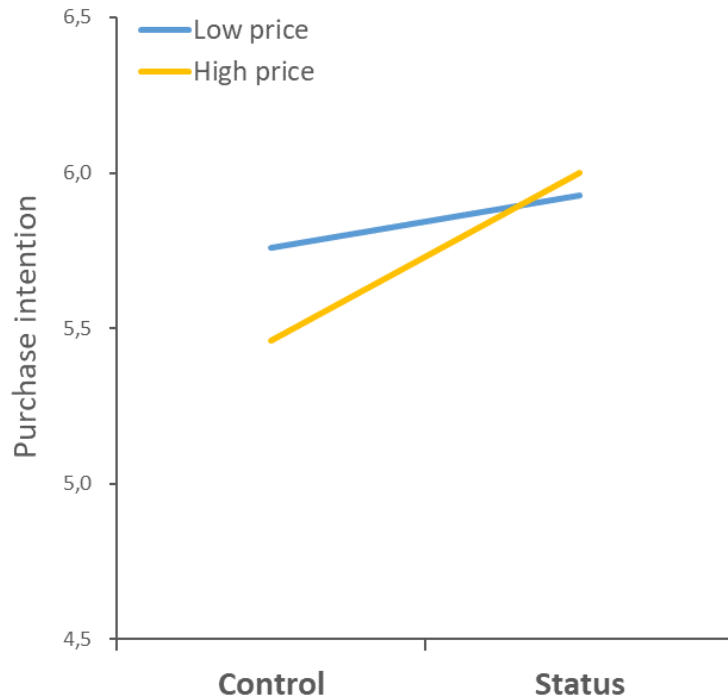
indicate that a high price increases the indirect effect of status motive on attitude; that is, consumers with status motive will perceive greater self-expressive benefits in purchasing the green product and, consequently, their attitude towards it will be stronger.

Figure 1. Effects of interaction on consumer's attitude



Similarly, this indirect effect of status motive was also found for purchase intention. The purchase intention of the group with the high price was stronger for those who had an activated motivation status ($\beta_{\text{ind}} = 0.36$, $SE = 0.14$, IC 95% [0.10, 0.66]). On the other hand, a low price did not change the status effect on green purchasing behavior ($\beta_{\text{ind}} = -0.01$, $SE = 0.14$, IC 95% [-0.29, 0.24]), supporting hypothesis H4b. Figure 2 visualizes the interaction between status motive, self-expressive benefits, and product price on purchase intention.

Figure 2. Interaction effects on consumer’s purchase intention



From these results, we found that consumers searching for status have a greater perception of the traits and preferences that the product will reveal to observers, especially for more expensive green products. Thus, the results of this first article confirm that the status signaling when purchasing green products is linked to the product’s price. In Table 7, it is possible to objectively visualize the hypotheses of this first research article and its results.

Table 7. Research outcomes of the Article 1

Hypothesis	Result
H1. The activation of status motives has a positive effect on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products.	Hypothesis supported. A) ($M = 5.83$ for the activated status motive, $M = 5.36$ for the control, $t = -2.55$, $p = 0.01$). B) ($M = 5.97$ for the activated status motive, $M = 5.57$ for the control, $t = -2.00$, $p = 0.04$).
H2. The effect of status motives on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products can be explained by the mediating influence of environmental self-expressive benefits.	Hypothesis supported. A) $\beta = 0.20$, IC 95% [0.02; 0.39]. B) $\beta = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.04; 0.43].

<p>H3. Product price (high vs. low) has a positive moderating influence on the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits. For a high (vs. low) price, the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits is strengthened (vs. attenuated).</p>	<p>Hypothesis supported. $\beta_{\text{status}} \times \text{price} = 0.91$; $SE = 0.47$, $t = 1.94$, $p = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.02, 1.83].</p>
<p>H4. The indirect effect of status motives on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products, mediated by self-expressive benefits, is moderated by product price (high vs. low). For a high (vs. low) price, the indirect effect of status motives is strengthened (vs. attenuated).</p>	<p>Hypothesis supported. A) $\beta_{\text{ind}} = 0.33$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.61] B) $\beta_{\text{ind}} = 0.36$, $SE = 0.14$, IC 95% [0.10, 0.66]</p>

5.2 Results – Article 2

Initially, we conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to identify the individual effect of each of the five independent variables (perception of greenwashing, trust in sustainable clothing brands, environmental concern, PCE, and conspicuous consumption motives) on the purchase of sustainable clothing. We found that conspicuous consumption motives positively and significantly affect purchasing ($\beta = 0.32$, $SE = 0.04$; $t = 9.18$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H1. This variable individually had the strongest positive effect on the purchase.

The next step was to verify the effect of environmental concern on the purchase of sustainable clothing. We identified a positive and significant result ($\beta = 0.13$, $SE = 0.05$; $t = 3.25$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis H2. The results of the following hypothesis (H3) were also supported, with a direct influence of trust in sustainable clothing brands ($\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -2.27$, $p = 0.02$) on consumer purchasing behavior. In turn, the perception of greenwashing ($\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -2.27$, $p = 0.02$) directly and negatively influenced purchasing behavior, which supports hypothesis H4. Contrary to the positive influence of PCE ($\beta = 0.31$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 7.66$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for hypothesis H5.

After verifying the direct interactions with purchasing behavior, we examined the moderating effect of PCE on the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on purchases. To this end, we inserted an interaction term (conspicuous consumption \times PCE) in the regression model. The regression coefficients of all variables, except conspicuous consumption and PCE, showed subtle variations, with slight increments that did not reach statistical significance. The

strong interaction term confirmed the moderating influence ($\beta = 0.51, SE = 0.02, t = 3.81, p < 0.001, IC\ 95\% [0.25, 0.77]$), which supports hypothesis H6. Furthermore, non-overlapping confidence intervals confirmed that the interaction of conspicuous consumption with PCE had the strongest influence of all the variables on sustainable apparel purchasing. Regarding the conditional effect, we found that the effect of conspicuous consumption on purchase was lower at one standard deviation below the PCE mean value ($M - 1SD = 3.17, \beta = 0.28, t = 5.33, p < 0.001$) than at the mean value ($M = 4.50, \beta = .40, t = 9.25, p < .001$) and higher at one standard deviation above the mean ($M + 1SD = 5.84, \beta = 0.51, t = 9.78, p < 0.001$). In Table 8 it is possible to check the results of all hypotheses in article 2.

In addition to the hypotheses, we conducted a supplementary analysis that included the variables of gender and age to ensure more robust results. Thus, we identified that only age has a negative effect on purchases ($\beta = -0.06, t = -2.04, p = 0.04$). Both covariates did not interact with the effects of the other variables. In sum, the overall results varied only marginally with introducing covariates.

Table 8. Research outcomes of the Article 2

Hypothesis	Result
H1. Conspicuous consumption motives have a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.	Hypothesis supported. $\beta = 0.32, SE = 0.04; t = 9.18, p < 0.001$
H2. Consumers' environmental concern has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.	Hypothesis supported. $\beta = 0.13, SE = 0.05; t = 3.25, p < 0.001$
H3. Trust in sustainable clothing brands has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.	Hypothesis supported. $\beta = 0.13, SE = 0.05; t = 3.80, p < 0.001$
H4. Perceived greenwashing has a negative influence on the purchase of sustainable clothing.	Hypothesis supported. $\beta = -0.08, SE = 0.05, t = -2.27, p = 0.02$
H5. Perceived consumer effectiveness has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.	Hypothesis supported. $\beta = 0.31, SE = 0.05, t = 7.66, p < 0.001$

<p>H6. Perceived consumer effectiveness positively moderates the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing. For consumers with high (low) perceived consumer efficacy the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing will be stronger (weaker).</p>	<p>Hypothesis supported. $\beta = 0.51$, $SE = 0.02$, $t = 3.81$, $p < 0.001$, IC 95% [0.25, 0.77]</p>
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5.3 Results – Article 3

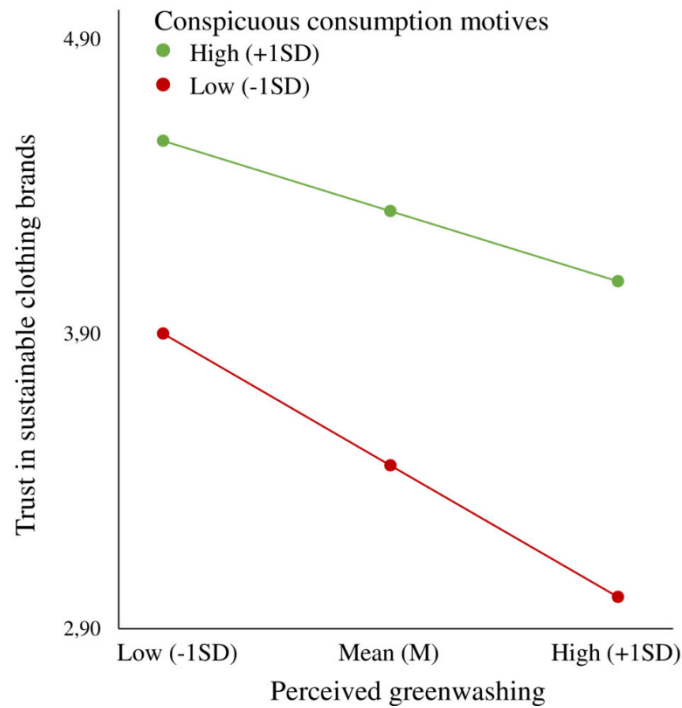
We began analyzing the data from the Article 3 by checking the correlations of the constructs. To review the results for hypothesis H1, we identified a positive correlation between social cynicism and the perception of greenwashing ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.001$) and a negative correlation between brand trust regarding green garments and greenwashing ($r = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$). After analyzing these correlations, we started multiple regression analysis with Hayes' PROCESS. We observed that a negative relationship between brand trust regarding green garments and social cynicism was confirmed ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.05$, $R^2 = 0.02$, $F = 10.72$, $p < 0.001$). With this result, hypothesis H1 was supported.

Hypothesis H2 proposes a mediation, so we conducted a bootstrapping analysis with PROCESS. We confirm that the negative relationship between social cynicism and trust in clothing brands with sustainability claims is mediated by an increase in the perception of greenwashing by fashion brands from the influence of social cynicism on trust indirectly through greenwashing (indirect effect: $b = -0.10$, $BSE = 0.03$, 95% BCI [-0.16, -0.05]; direct effect remaining: $b = -0.05$, $BSE = 0.05$, 95% BCI [-0.15, 0.05]; total effect: $b = -0.15$, $BSE = 0.05$, 95% BCI [-0.24, -0.06]). These results support hypothesis H2.

For hypothesis H3, we applied PROCESS model 14 to investigate moderated mediation. In the regression analysis, we found a significant effect of social cynicism on the perception of greenwashing ($b = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$). From this result, we verified that when greenwashing was introduced into the equation, the effect of social cynicism was replaced by the mediator, with a significant effect of greenwashing ($b = -0.53$) as well as the greenwashing–conspicuous consumption interaction ($b = 0.07$) on consumer brand trust. This result indicates a significant effect of greenwashing, which replaces the effect of social cynicism, providing support of a mediating influence, with social cynicism indirectly affecting trust through its effect on the

perception of greenwashing. Figure 3 shows the significant effect of the greenwashing–conspicuous consumption interaction, indicating that conspicuous consumption motives moderate the relationship between greenwashing and trust.

FIGURE 3. Moderating effect of conspicuous consumption motives



Furthermore, moderated mediation analysis confirmed that greenwashing mediated the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust, and conspicuous consumption motives moderated this indirect effect ($b_{\text{modmed}} = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, BCI [0.01, 0.06]). This confirms the proposed mediation between social cynicism and brand trust through greenwashing and the indirect effect moderated by conspicuous consumption. Table 9 presents the hypotheses and results in Article 3.

Table 9. Research outcomes of Article 3

Hypothesis	Result
H1. Social cynicism has a negative relationship with trust in clothing brands featuring sustainability claims.	Hypothesis supported. ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.02$, $F = 10.72$, $p < .001$)
H2. The negative relationship of social cynicism with trust in apparel brands	Hypothesis supported. (indirect effect: $b = -0.10$, $BSE = 0.03$, 95% BCI [-0.16,

featuring sustainability claims is mediated by an increase in the perceived greenwashing of fashion brands.	-0.05]; direct effect remaining: $b = -0.05$, $BSE = 0.05$, 95% BCI [-0.15, 0.05]; total effect: $b = -0.15$, $BSE = 0.05$, 95% BCI [-0.24, -0.06]).
H3. Conspicuous consumption motives positively moderate the indirect negative relationship between social cynicism and trust in apparel promoted with sustainability claims mediated by greenwashing perceptions, through the moderation of the influence of perceived greenwashing on trust.	Hypothesis supported. $b_{modmed} = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, BCI [0.01, 0.06].

In the next chapter, the results of the hypotheses introduced in this chapter will be discussed in the context of existing literature. This analysis will identify significant connections and contrasts with prior research findings.

6. Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the three articles based on their contributions to theory and managerial decisions in the context of the sustainable fashion sector. Furthermore, limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

6.1 Theoretical contribution

The theoretical findings of this thesis make a significant contribution to the literature on consumers' consumption behavior of green products, particularly sustainable clothing. The Article 1, published as a book chapter, suggests that status plays a crucial role as a driver of green consumption. This article identified that the indirect effect of status motives can increase consumers' attitudes and purchasing intentions. From this result, it is understood that for consumers who wish to achieve a higher social status through consumption, this motivation will lead them to have a greater attitude and purchase intention towards green products (H1a and H1b). The results of this study support previous research indicating that conspicuous consumption influences sustainable purchasing behavior based on the motivation to achieve a higher social status (Berger, 2019; Sexton & Sexton, 2014; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Policarpo & Aguiar, 2021). This study provides evidence that conspicuous consumption in the purchase of sustainable products can be an effective strategy for promoting these products in emerging countries, given that previous studies had only been conducted in developed countries.

The innovative result of our Article 1 involved identifying the mediating role of self-expressive benefits in the relationship between status and purchasing behavior (attitude and intention). This implies that when consumers aspiring to achieve higher status perceive the benefits associated with signaling the purchase of green products, they are more inclined to purchase them. By understanding that the effect of status motives is indirect on purchasing behavior and occurs through self-expressive benefits, it can be argued that status motives are capable of activating consumers' perception that sustainable clothing is a means that provides self-expressive benefits. This in turn leads consumers to demonstrate positive prosocial behavior and fulfill their needs for social approval. This result aligns with research on the benefits of self-expression in green consumption (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020) and contributes to understanding the antecedents of this purchasing behavior.

In addition to the previous results, we have found that consumers of green products are influenced by price. In contrast to traditional approaches that indicate price as a barrier to green consumption, our work identifies that when the product price is higher, individuals seeking

status have a greater purchase intention than those not motivated by status. For status-seeking consumers, more expensive green products stimulate more positive responses, as price signals access to resources and prosocial behavior. In this sense, studies indicating that the price of green products can negatively affect purchasing behavior (Hsu et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016) are valid for explaining non-conspicuous purchasing contexts.

In the first article, we confirmed that the price of the green product is a pertinent moderating variable in consumers' green purchasing decisions. Specifically, the price of a green product moderates the indirect effect of status motives on purchase intention, which is mediated by self-expressive benefits. At a high price, the indirect effect of the status motive is reinforced as the consumer perceives the purchase of the green product as a means of achieving a higher status. Furthermore, as green products require a sacrifice in spending more resources to obtain them, consumers with desires to achieve higher status interpret them as a way of presenting their desired image to their social environment.

Our findings on the increase in product price enhance the understanding of this variable in the green apparel literature. This study demonstrates that a high price can differentiate those who wish to signal pro-environmental behavior. Ultimately, these results support the understanding of CST, which proposes the product's price as a sign of sacrifice. In this context, the buyer needs to invest, expend, or provide something material to benefit from something considered greater, such as environmental and/or social issues. Thus, we contribute to the literature, which indicates that the price of a green product is related to social benefits and status (Delgado et al., 2015; Eze & Ndubisi, 2013).

The Article 2 of this thesis highlights the importance of conspicuous consumption as a motivator for adopting sustainable clothing, alongside the crucial relevance of effectiveness perceived by the consumer. Initially, we confirm the effect of all proposed antecedents (conspicuous consumption, environmental concern, perceived consumer efficacy, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing) on sustainable clothing purchasing behavior, highlighting conspicuous consumption motives and perceived efficacy of consumers as the most significant influencers on purchases in comparison to others.

This study innovates by identifying the moderation of perceived consumer effectiveness in the relationship between conspicuous consumption and sustainable clothing purchasing behavior. In other words, for conspicuous consumption to yield the expected benefits, the individual must believe that others perceive a significant contribution to the environment rather than an unrealistic or false contribution. Therefore, when consumers perceive the real environmental impact of sustainable clothing as insignificant, they are unlikely to be motivated

to purchase it. Consequently, for consumers with a high perception of consumption efficiency, the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on purchasing sustainable clothing will be stronger. Thus, our study contributes to the literature on conspicuous consumption as a driver of sustainable consumption behavior (Ali et al., 2019; Amatulli et al., 2018; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hammad et al., 2019). In addition to confirming the relevance of PCE as discussed in the literature (Ellen et al., 1991; Jaiswal & Singh, 2018; Kinnear et al., 1974; Niedermeier et al., 2021).

Our findings highlight PCE as a critical factor influencing sustainable clothing purchases. The results indicate that the more consumers believe that purchasing sustainable clothing brands helps to combat environmental problems generated by the fashion industry, the more likely they are to consume sustainable clothing. This belief impacts purchases and establishes a boundary condition for conspicuous consumption motives. In other words, consumers are only motivated to demonstrate their environmental commitment by purchasing sustainable clothing when they notice its real environmental impact. This result is new and significant for advancing the literature on conspicuous consumption in the context of purchasing green products.

One of the most relevant theoretical implications is that environmental concern had a significantly weaker influence than conspicuous consumption and perceived consumer effectiveness. Based on this result, we emphasize the necessity to reevaluate the importance of environmental concern as a behavioral antecedent, given that most research highlights this variable as one of the most significant antecedents of ecologically sound purchases (e.g., Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009; Park & Lin, 2020; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). This finding aligns with the perspective of this doctoral thesis, that factors relating to the social perspective (e.g., conspicuous consumption, self-expressive benefits, and status) can exert a strong influence on green consumer behavior—even more so than those related to the environmental perspective and economic advantage. This research perspective in the context of green consumption is consistent with the works by Johnson et al. (2018), Hammad et al. (2019), Sexton and Sexton (2014), and Wang (2014).

We also emphasize conspicuous consumption as one of the most significant antecedents of sustainable clothing purchases. By its nature, fashion is more strongly associated with the image benefits the consumer wishes to convey. Sustainable clothing allows consumers to signal their contribution to improving the environment to their social circle since clothing can be visible and stand out from others by displaying their tastes and preferences. In this context, the results of this article support the concept that the consumption of sustainable clothing is strongly

associated with meaning and social values (Diddi et al., 2019; Jacobs et al., 2018; Şener et al., 2019).

Another significant contribution of this work corresponds to the importance of trust in the sustainability claims of sustainable clothing, its impact on purchasing behavior, and the negative effect of the perception of greenwashing. The present study extends the research by Neumann et al. (2020), who established that trust serves as an antecedent of purchase intention in the fast fashion sector. Additionally, our findings corroborate the work of Dhir et al. (2021), demonstrating that trust positively influences sustainable clothing purchasing behavior. On the other hand, purchasing behavior is negatively affected as consumers perceive misleading or improbable claims and develop doubts about marketing information from companies that may be practicing greenwashing strategies, as expected. This finding suggests that consumers are aware of greenwashing practices in the context of sustainable clothing brands and are, in fact, more sensitive to distorted information in this sector. This further reinforces the importance of considering this factor in sustainable fashion literature.

Moving on to the theoretical contributions of the Article 3 of this thesis, we present a theoretical model that addresses the relationship between social cynicism and trust in apparel promoted with sustainability claims. This model explains the process through the mediation of perceived greenwashing and the moderation of this indirect influence by conspicuous consumption motives. Overall, the results enrich and enhance our understanding of consumer theory in various dimensions.

Our initial focus was on the negative relationship between social cynicism as a personality trait and consumers' trust in sustainable clothing brands. Our findings represent new contributions to the literature, as previous studies had not yet examined social cynicism in the context of sustainable consumption. Thus, this result supports the social cynicism literature by identifying that highly cynical individuals tend to disbelieve in the actions of organizations (Indibara & Varshney, 2021) and be more skeptical about environmental problems (Groneworld et al., 2012). Furthermore, the findings of this third article corroborate the work of Chan and Tam (2021), who found that social cynicism influences individuals' environmental attitudes, thus calling for the exploration of social axioms related to specific environmental issues.

The third article provides an additional theoretical implication by supporting hypothesis H2, demonstrating that greenwashing acts as a mediator in the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust. Hence, this result indicates that consumers with high social cynicism have lower trust in sustainable fashion brands because of a heightened perception of

greenwashing. More cynical consumers tend to believe that institutions are biased and tend to present a critical view of marketing strategies, which in turn reinforces the idea that companies do not fulfill their promises of environmental benefits. This contributes to the perception of greenwashing, which negatively impacts trust in the brand.

Our work introduces a new perspective to the existing literature in demonstrating that the connection between cynicism—as a social axiom—and trust can be explained by an increase in the perception that companies make false sustainability claims. Thus, we contribute to the limited literature on the impact of social axioms on companies' environmental practices and greenwashing (Chan & Tam, 2021; Lyon & Montgomery, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018).

In addition to the mediating role of greenwashing, we highlight the discovery of the moderating effect of conspicuous consumption motives. Our findings confirm that conspicuous consumption motives moderate the relationship between cynicism and apparel trust, which is mediated by greenwashing. This indicates that conspicuous consumers are less influenced by the adverse impact of greenwashing on trust, as they are motivated by the social image associated with their purchase of sustainable clothing rather than its actual environmental impact. The mediated effect of social cynicism on brand trust through perceived greenwashing becomes weaker for individuals with stronger conspicuous consumption motives. Since greenwashing perceptions mediate the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust, the trust of these individuals will be less affected by their degree of social cynicism.

The results of this study contribute to the literature on sustainable consumption behavior. We demonstrate that conspicuous consumption has the potential to influence consumer trust in sustainable brands by moderating the impact of consumer cynicism on their brand trust. This moderation occurs through its effect on the greenwashing–trust link, which mediates the influence of cynicism on trust. Our findings expand the understanding of conspicuous consumption, its antecedents, and its effects on consumers' pro-environmental purchasing behavior (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hammad et al., 2019). We emphasize that conspicuous consumption motives can potentially promote sustainable consumption and reduce consumer sensitivity to greenwashing.

The results of this thesis also indicate that conspicuous consumption is a relevant and influential variable in sustainable consumption across various cultural and economic contexts. Our initial study was conducted in Brazil, while the latter two investigations were carried out in a developed Western country, Australia. In this context, these behavioral patterns may not be directly influenced by the cultural context but rather by the human need for social acceptance and the expression of preferences through consumption.

6.2 Practical implications

The findings of this doctoral thesis yielded practical implications for marketing professionals and managers of sustainable products. The implications of these findings can be applied by sustainable clothing brands to enhance their performance and formulate strategies to address the challenges of this market, such as product price (Hsu et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016). In contrast to the traditional approach, we demonstrate that the high price of sustainable fashion can serve as a status symbol for consumers wishing to convey a pro-environmental image while also signifying access to financial resources to their social circle. On the other hand, for consumers who do not need to attain social status and therefore are not concerned with image benefits, the price can actually pose an obstacle and reduce purchase behaviors for this type of product. In this sense, the differentiation effect of green products can be strengthened through pricing strategies.

In a conspicuous purchasing context, such as apparel and other sustainable products that are visible when consumed and are often more expensive than their non-green counterparts, marketers can utilize communication strategies that highlight the social benefits consumers garner from purchasing their products. This involves leveraging advertising campaigns that label green purchases as altruistic, attributing positive qualities to the consumer, such as being an environmentally friendly person and a conscientious consumer or an altruistic individual who contributes positively to society through such purchases. Thus, green consumers can be persuaded by the benefit of social acceptance, thereby stimulating the search for status through acquiring these products. Furthermore, the purchase of green products as a sign of prestige can be easily associated with contexts of high social status, such as celebrity events. This is because green products appear to combine luxurious and altruistic contexts, signaling both environmental concern and high access to resources.

We emphasize that this impact of social status on sustainable clothing consumption is also valid in emerging places. It is well-established that displays of status as a social differentiator are prevalent in more developed economies. However, emerging countries, exemplified here by the Brazilian context, also exhibit consumption linked to the environmental movement to express individual preferences. In this sense, the price of sustainable clothing items will also motivate consumers with a desire for social status in emerging markets.

Our results are qualitatively consistent with the managerial implications of Delgado et al. (2015), Sexton and Sexton (2014), and Griskevicius et al. (2010), which suggest that policymakers and marketers exploit status signals through manipulating prices to increase

consumer interest in green products. The signaling of social status through purchasing sustainable products accounts for approximately 50% of the price premium above the typical cost of a conventional product, as proposed by Berger (2019). Higher prices may serve as a means to cultivate consumer interest in conspicuous products, particularly in the case of more expensive sustainable clothing. Likewise, communication strategies and influencer marketing can be instrumental in their use of status signals to enhance interest in green fashion brands. First, a communication policy that emphasizes the exclusivity nature of sustainable products can appeal to status-conscious consumers. For instance, endorsements from celebrities and respected figures in sustainability can enhance the perceived prestige of a brand. Secondly, leveraging influencer marketing is crucial; by collaborating with influencers who are genuinely committed to environmental causes, brands can create authentic narratives that resonate with their audience. These influencers can showcase the luxury and quality of sustainable fashion in their daily lives, thus signaling that choosing eco-friendly options is not only responsible but also fashionable and desirable. Through these approaches, green fashion brands can use status signals effectively to build desirability and drive consumer interest.

Based on the findings of the second research article, we suggest that sustainable clothing brands visually emphasize sustainability in the items they sell, whether through visible labels or brand symbols or by offering clothing lines with diverse styles. The challenge for professionals working at sustainable clothing brands is to highlight these signs of sustainability effectively in order to avoid creating the impression of greenwashing. In accordance with Article 1, we comprehend that fashion designers will need to develop distinctive fashion styles that target consumers will associate with a more sustainable lifestyle while simultaneously resonating with their fashion preferences. Consequently, the clothes will be able to convey the pro-environmental image benefits desired by consumers.

The literature highlights that using sustainability brands and labels can be perceived as greenwashing, ultimately damaging the brand. To prevent real environmental strategies from being seen as greenwashing actions, companies must provide exhaustive information that justifies the increased sustainability of their clothing items. Insufficient or baseless sustainability statements cannot be made, as consumers are sensitive to these appeals and will soon conclude that it is greenwashing. Clothing must display global sustainability labels. Although these labels are still scarce in the fashion industry, adopting existing private certification standards is recommended.

In order to address greenwashing in the fashion industry, it is important to actively regulate sustainability claims in the clothing industry to prevent consumers from being exposed

to unsubstantiated sustainability claims. For this reason, official sustainability labels, similar to the food industry's organic food labels, are essential to provide consumers with truthful information.

Given that the impact of conspicuous consumption on purchasing decisions is associated with consumers' perception of environmental effectiveness, marketers must emphasize the actual environmental impact of sustainable clothing. Once again, this emphasizes the power of environmental labels in promoting green consumption. This not only serves to avoid the perception of greenwashing but also fulfills the need for consumers to comprehend the true impact of the items they are purchasing. In addition to labels, it is important to provide information regarding the impact an individual consumer has when purchasing a specific sustainable product, for example, in terms of carbon footprint, recycled materials, or water savings, compared to less sustainable conventional clothing products. It is important to highlight that our study demonstrates that consumers must first believe they are making a significant contribution to the ecosystem before persuading others about their environmental preferences.

Having identified the importance of factors relating to products, we also emphasize that managers of sustainable fashion brands must encourage consumer confidence. In order to achieve this, it is essential to cultivate global corporate credibility by demonstrating, through reliable, fact-based corporate communication, that environmental and social sustainability constitutes a fundamental aspect of the company's values.

Based on the finding that social cynicism is negatively associated with trust in sustainable fashion apparel brands, we suggest that marketers provide clear information on their clothing product labels regarding sustainability details, such as the origin of the materials used in the garment's production and the impact of the production methods on the environment. In this manner, consumers would be able to compare various product options based on the information provided for each. These options would mitigate deceptive appearances and alleviate consumers' suspicions, as this information would help enhance consumers' familiarity with the brand (Chaouali et al., 2017; Ketron, 2016; Perera et al., 2018).

When employing any form of communication strategy to target environmentally conscious consumers, managers need to recognize that some of their prospective customers are more cynical and will react more critically to accusations of greenwashing. Therefore, retailers must establish a clear and coherent environmental positioning in all interactions with customers (Kumar & Polonsky, 2019). Also, brands must enhance their ethical credibility by transparent adherence to fair work standards (Rausch et al., 2021). This is important because unethical

behavior can lead to social cynicism among stakeholders. Managers need to develop programs to reduce consumer skepticism and strengthen the company's green management (Crane, 2005; Detert et al., 2008; Zhang et al., 2018). We also suggest that marketers develop mechanisms to obtain consumer feedback on the credibility of their sustainability claims. The perception that the company is open to involving consumers in decisions should reduce consumer cynicism. Furthermore, according to Tran et al. (2021), this strategy of involving consumers in some processes can reduce cynicism, as it diminishes the perception that the company only cares about its own benefits.

We highlight the importance of conspicuous consumption motives in influencing the propensity for the negative effects of social cynicism on trust in brands. Additionally, we stress that developing the uniqueness of environmentally sustainable products will influence status consumption (Chan et al., 2015). This implies that limited editions of unique, sustainable garments can enhance consumers' purchasing motivations because they have the potential to promote perceived status, and the pro-social reputation associated with sustainable products will become more prominent.

In addition to the practical implications suggested for managers and marketers of sustainable product brands, we also identified significant implications for consumers. Consumers must understand that they often act without fully realizing what motivates them. When purchasing sustainable clothing, individuals may not realize they are doing so to express their attitudes and beliefs to others. Conversely, they may avoid buying sustainable clothing due to their skepticism of sustainability claims. Hence, rather than consistently being suspicious of the fashion industry, consumers are encouraged to thoroughly analyze the sustainability information they are provided with. Some sustainable clothing manufacturers genuinely strive to offer more environmentally friendly products.

6.3 Limitations and further research

This section highlights certain limitations of the conducted studies and proposes some potential avenues for future investigation. We stress that in order to gain a deeper understanding of consumer behavior related to sustainable clothing, it is essential to analyze factors such as visibility and product type. So far in this thesis, the strategy of leveraging status to encourage the purchase of visible, higher-priced sustainable products is a promising line of research. However, further development is needed to avoid stagnation in unproductive debates about the ethics and effectiveness of targeting sales strategies based on social status and sustainability, as

this strategy may be ineffective in certain contexts and for consumers with a low desire for social status.

The Article 1 of this thesis, published as a book chapter, analyzed a homogeneous sample (mainly composed of undergraduate and graduate students). This may have been a limitation of the study, as it hindered the ability to generalize the results to the general population. For future research, we recommend including a more diverse sample, encompassing a range of demographic, cultural, and socioeconomic profiles, to discern the impact of status motives on sustainable fashion behavior. Based on our initial research, we particularly recommend exploring the emotional and psychological aspects that underlie status motives related to sustainable consumption. This may involve conducting studies on consumers' pursuit of social approval, their need to belong to groups associated with sustainable values, and their relationship with responsible consumption choices.

In the Article 2 and Article 3, we obtained a representative consumer sample, which supported this study's validity and external representativeness. However, the cross-sectional nature of the data limited the ability to make causal and directional inferences. Furthermore, it is also important to note that some participants may not have fully understood the concept of greenwashing when answering questions related to this topic in the questionnaires. To address this potential bias, it is recommended that future studies take a more open approach to measuring the perception of greenwashing by using open-ended questions that do not invite biased responses. Additionally, employing a mixed methodological approach that integrates qualitative interview data with quantitative analysis would further enhance this study's theoretical and practical contributions, providing more substantial insights into the relationship between status motives and green consumption behaviors.

Another point to highlight is that different brands and styles of sustainable clothing may have varying visibility, thus affecting conspicuous consumption in different ways. Our studies did not provide the participants with guidance on specific sustainable fashion brands or styles. Therefore, in future research, experiments could be conducted in which participants are exposed to specific brands of sustainable clothing. This would allow for a deeper understanding of the relationships being studied and offer insights into how consumer preferences regarding the specific style and appearance of sustainable clothing may contribute to consumers' purchasing behavior.

Based on the findings from the third article, we recommend that future research re-examine some of the variables presented in the model. Despite their statistical significance, certain variables had minor effects, such as the impact of social cynicism on trust, which, in our

analysis, only accounted for approximately 2% of the change in consumer trust. It is important to be cautious when basing suggestions on variables with minor effects. Even small effects identified in research can have significant real-life implications. We understand that sometimes individuals do not express exactly how suspicious they are for fear of what others will think. This may have affected our data. In order to gain a better understanding of how social cynicism impacts trust, it would be interesting to employ alternative techniques. For instance, ethnographic methods could be employed to gain further insight into the underlying process of connecting social cynicism and trust in brands (Perera et al., 2018). The implementation of these methods could potentially lead to the identification of other moderators.

7. References

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PART II. CONCLUSIONS

8. Conclusions

The present study aimed to understand how conspicuous motives influence consumers' sustainable fashion purchasing behavior and to evaluate theoretical frameworks with the antecedents of this type of consumption. More specifically, the thesis analyzed: i) how the price of the green product relates to the consumer's status motive and self-expressive benefits in the context of an emerging country; ii) the degree to which conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing trigger the consumer's purchase of sustainable clothing; and iii) the effect of social cynicism as a personality trait on consumer trust in sustainable fashion clothing brands, as well as the role of conspicuous consumption and perceived greenwashing in this relationship.

Accordingly, this thesis was developed in three stages, each representing a specific objective. Thus, three interdependent research studies were conducted to achieve this thesis's general objective. This thesis addresses existing gaps in consumer behavior theory concerning the factors driving consumers' actual purchasing behavior of sustainable clothing, particularly the social factors that encourage consumers to embrace sustainable fashion items (Busalim et al., 2022; Flores & Jansson, 2022; Jacobs et al., 2018).

We found that the desire for status increases individuals' inclination toward perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors that favor purchasing sustainable clothing. Motives related to conspicuous consumption are among the strongest antecedents of the consumer's sustainable clothing purchases, even when compared to their environmental concern. Furthermore, conspicuous consumers are less affected by the negative impact of greenwashing on trust because they are motivated by the social image projected by their consumption of sustainable clothing, not by its actual environmental impact.

The first objective of this thesis was investigated through experimental research, and the successful manipulation of the price variable (Article 1) allowed us to substantiate Berger's (2019) assumption that consumers in search of status are willing to pay a higher price for a green product. For green products with higher prices, consumers with a high need to achieve status in their social circle view this type of purchase as an opportunity to demonstrate that they have financial resources and are concerned about the environment. From a CST perspective, the development of this conspicuous consumption behavior brings significant benefits to the consumer. In turn, manipulating status motives through experimental study has enabled consumers to recognize that sustainable fashion can offer self-expressive benefits, assisting them in meeting their need for social approval within their environment.

Regarding the second objective, the gap identified by Busalim et al. (2022) emphasizes the necessity for additional studies on sustainable fashion from the consumer's perspective, particularly those that explore variables beyond consumers' environmental awareness. In this research, we addressed factors related to consumption's symbolic and signaling value. To date, the literature has lacked a clear perspective on the main drivers of sustainable fashion purchases. This study made a significant contribution by identifying that the consumer's perception of effectiveness moderates the effect of conspicuous consumption. The interaction of these two variables has the strongest impact on the decision to purchase sustainable clothing. Thus, this research filled an existing gap and provided valuable contributions to the literature on consumer behavior in sustainable fashion.

Regarding the third specific objective, we found evidence that more cynical individuals trust sustainable fashion clothing brands' environmental motivation and reputation to a lesser extent. We concluded that cynical individuals are more likely to perceive companies' involvement in sustainability as greenwashing, decreasing their trust in these brands. However, this study also empirically confirmed that these effects are weaker for individuals with stronger conspicuous consumption motives. In other words, individuals appear to care less about whether fashion brands actually deliver on their sustainability promises when they are showcasing their conscious consumption to others. Overall, this study was innovational in its exploration of the relationship between social cynicism as a personality trait and consumers' trust in sustainable fashion brands.

The three articles in this thesis demonstrated, in different ways, the role of conspicuous consumption motives as an antecedent of sustainable consumption. In the first article, we found that the desire to achieve a higher status influences consumers' perception of the benefits arising from the purchase of green products, which then consequently increases their intention to purchase sustainable products. For these status-seeking consumers, increasing the price of sustainable apparel results in more favorable reactions, as the price signals an access to resources and evident prosocial behavior.

The second article identified that conspicuous consumption motives are among the strongest drivers of sustainable clothing consumption behavior. Additionally, the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on purchasing behavior was found to be positively moderated by the consumer's perceived efficacy. This means that one's belief in the ability to make a difference through their consumption choices can influence the strength of the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on their purchase of sustainable products. Only when consumers realize that sustainable consumption has a real environmental impact are they

motivated to buy sustainable clothing as a way of demonstrating their environmental commitment and signaling social status and/or prestige through this type of purchase.

The third article concluded that more conspicuous individuals are less affected by the negative impact of the perception of greenwashing on trust because they are primarily motivated by the desire to signal a social image through their green consumption. In this manner, the environmental benefit takes a backseat, and the need for individuals to present a pro-environmental image to their social circle increases due to their desire to achieve the social benefits associated with cultivating an altruistic image.

In conclusion, factors related to the need for social approval are more significant than environmental factors in influencing consumers' actual purchasing behavior of sustainable clothing. This is partly due to the pro-environment signaling potential of sustainable fashion for the consumer, in addition to the expression of status and access to wealth. This thesis highlights the importance of increasing investigations related to consumer theory in the context of green consumption, which continues to grow, as they are essential to improving understanding of the area. To this end, we suggest studying social variables from different contexts as individual determinants of sustainable fashion purchases.

PART III. PUBLICATIONS

9. Publications overview

9.1 Book Chapter

Table III.1 – Paper 1

Title	The role of green product pricing in conspicuous green consumption behaviour – a brazilian perspective
Authors	Manoela Costa Policarpo, Edvan Cruz Aguiar, Aitor Marcos, Patrick Hartmann, Vanessa Apaolaza. (2022).
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-2408-8_1
Book title	Environmental Sustainability in Emerging Markets: Consumer, Organisation and Policy Perspectives
ISBN	978-9-81-192407-1
Publisher	SPRINGER
Editors	Nguyen, N.; Nguyen, H.V.; D'Souza C. & Strong, C.
Scholarly Publishers Indicators (SPI) 2018	General – ICEE: 680 (Rank 4) Economics – ICEE: 88 (Rank 2)
Contribution of the Ph.D. candidate (based on Elsevier's contributor roles taxonomy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conceptualization - Methodology - Software - Formal analysis - Investigation - Writing - Validation - Visualization - Project administration
Abstract	Encouraging green consumption behaviour by leveraging self-expressive benefits has increasingly attracted the attention of academics and practitioners. However, there has been limited evidence from emerging markets so far. Although spending money on green products reinforces the status of the individual, it is unclear which level of a conspicuous display of resources generates sufficient self-expressive benefits to influence the purchase decision. Drawing on Costly-Signalling Theory, this research investigated, with a sample of Brazilian consumers, how the price of green products is related to status motive and the self-expressive benefits obtained from such consumer

	<p>behaviour. A 2 (high vs. low-status motives) × 2 (high price vs. low price) online experimental survey was administered to 241 participants in Brazil. The results confirmed that individuals are more inclined to buy a green product when they have a status motive. Furthermore, this process is explained by the anticipated self-expressive benefits of green purchases. As a result, when the product price was higher, consumers with a status motive perceived greater social benefits, which contributes to purchase intention. However, consumers with a low-status motive only increased their purchase intention when the product price was lower. Findings show that consumers with a status motive are more likely to buy more expensive green products, suggesting that the product price signals access to resources and prosocial behaviour. Findings contribute to understanding how social factors influence the purchasing decision of green products in emerging markets and have significant implications for promoting more sustainable consumption attitudes and behaviours.</p>
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9.2 Journal Articles

Table III.2 – Paper 2

Title	Sustainable clothing: Why conspicuous consumption and greenwashing matter
Authors	Vanessa Apaolaza, Manoela Costa Policarpo, Patrick Hartmann, Mario R. Paredes, Clare D'Souza. (2022).
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.3335
Journal name	Business Strategy and the Environment
Publisher	WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY
Journal Impact Factor (Clarivate - Web of Science)	JCR: 13.4
Journal Citation Indicator	JCI: 2.52
Ranking	<p>Q1 – Business and International Management</p> <p>Q1 – Strategy and Management</p> <p>7/155 (Business (Social Science))</p> <p>5/128 (Environmental Studies (Social Science))</p> <p>7/227 (Management (Social Science))</p>
Contribution of the Ph.D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conceptualization - Investigation

candidate (based on Elsevier's contributor roles taxonomy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writing - Project administration - Methodology - Validation - Visualization
Abstract	<p>This study analyzes the degree to which conspicuous consumption motives, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing trigger the purchase of sustainable clothing. The theoretical framework was tested with a representative online sample of the Australian population (N = 600). Results showed that all proposed antecedents have a positive relationship with the purchase of sustainable clothing, with the exception of perceived greenwashing, which decreases purchase intention. In addition, perceived consumer effectiveness positively moderated the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on purchasing. Conspicuous consumption motives had a stronger effect on purchase when perceived effectiveness was high, and this influence was reduced for lower perceived effectiveness. The interaction between conspicuous consumption and perceived efficacy had the strongest effect in the model. Our findings highlight the relevance of conspicuous consumption as a motive for switching to sustainable clothing and the likewise important role of perceived consumer effectiveness, which is a boundary condition for this effect. Findings also confirm the significant positive influence of environmental concern and trust in the sustainable clothing brand, while perceived greenwashing is a barrier to the adoption of sustainable clothing. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed.</p>

Table III.3 – *Paper 3*

Title	Social cynicism, greenwashing, and trust in green clothing brands
Authors	Manoela Costa Policarpo, Vanessa Apaolaza, Patrick Hartmann, Mario R. Paredes, Clare D'Souza
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12971
Journal name	International Journal of Consumer Studies
Publisher	WILEY ONLINE LIBRARY
Journal Impact Factor (Clarivate - Web of Science)	JCR: 9.9
Journal Citation Indicator	JCI: 1.63

Web of Science Ranking	Q1 – Marketing 24/154 (Business in SSCI Edition)
Contribution of the Ph.D. candidate (based on Elsevier’s contributor roles taxonomy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conceptualization - Methodology - Software - Formal analysis - Investigation - Writing - Validation - Visualization - Project administration
Abstract	<p>This research develops a theoretical model of the effect of social cynicism as a personality trait on trust in green clothing brands. We conducted an online survey of a representative Australian sample to test the hypothesized relationships. Our findings confirmed that social cynicism affected green brand trust negatively and that this effect can be explained by an increase in perceived greenwashing. Conspicuous consumption moderates this indirect influence. This mediated influence decreased when conspicuous consumption was more salient. Findings provide important practical insights for brand managers intending to avoid a decrease in brand trust regarding garments marketed with sustainability claims.</p>

10. Book Chapter

10.1 The role of green product pricing in conspicuous green consumption behaviour – a brazilian perspective

Manoela Costa Policarpo, Edvan Cruz Aguiar, Aitor Marcos, Patrick Hartmann, Vanessa Apaolaza

Manoela Costa Policarpo | mcosta004@ikasle.ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Edvan Cruz Aguiar | edvan.aguiar@ufcg.edu.br

Federal University of Campina Grande UFCG

Aitor Marcos | aitor.marcos@ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Patrick Hartmann | patrick.hartmann@ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU |

Vanessa Apaolaza | vanessa.apaolaza@ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Introduction

Over the past decade, studies have investigated why individuals buy green products, even when these are often more expensive and sometimes underperform their nongreen counterparts (Delgado et al., 2015; Furchtgott-Roth, 2012; Jaiswal & Kant, 2018; Lea & Worsley, 2008; Young et al., 2010). A growing body of research has shown that consumers with a status motive are more likely to choose more expensive green products as a means of signalling environmental concern and access to financial resources (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Park & Lee, 2016; Rahman et al., 2020). Nevertheless, in the absence of integrative efforts, isolated studies and untested propositions about green product purchases are imperative in consumer behaviour debates. Additionally, empirical results from the consumers of emerging markets are still scarce. To address this gap, we examine the circumstances under which pricing and status

impact self-expressive benefits and, ultimately, conspicuous conservation, focusing on the Brazilian case as an example of an emerging market in which sustainable consumption is rapidly growing.

Brazil faces the challenge of integrating environmental sustainability within economic growth (Silva et al., 2017; Stoll et al., 2019), and green consumption is an important step in this direction. Brazilian consumers play a relevant role in driving growth, acting increasingly in choosing products that are more socially responsible in relation to environmental practices, and even willing to pay more (Alfenas et al., 2018; Gonçalves, 2018; Ritter et al., 2015). In response to this, several Brazilian companies are investing in eco-friendly programs and developing green products. Thus, it is necessary to understand this trend which affects the factors that influence the buying behaviour of Brazilian consumers. Therefore, this study will focus on understanding the social factors of this emerging market to bridge the knowledge gap between the increasing relevance of status motive and the scarce literature exploring these factors (Lin et al., 2017; Park & Lee, 2016).

The status motive functions as a hierarchy of rewards in which individuals of higher status have greater access to desirable things, such as respect and admiration (Griskevicius et al., 2010). Regarding green consumption, studies have suggested that status appears as a motivation to purchase green products, since this type of purchase can demonstrate one's capacity to spend resources for the common good (Elliot, 2013; Sachdeva et al., 2015). Besides, the buying behaviour of green products associated with the statusmotive resonates with the concept of conspicuous conservation, defined by Sexton and Sexton (2014) as public and expensive actions to exhibit prosocial behaviour regarding environmental protection. We argue that conspicuous conservation and status are directly associated. As long as the expensive products are purchased in public, individuals will obtain social benefits (e.g. recognition and positive reputation in the social environment) (Elliott, 2013; Griskevicius, 2008; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Such consumption behaviour is supported by Costly-Signalling Theory (CST; Grafen, 1990; Zahavi, 1977), which suggests that public forms of philanthropy and altruism are conspicuous displays of resources that reinforce the status of the individual. Thus, by spending more money, energy and time to purchase a green product, consumers signal to their social environment that they are concerned about environmental issues and have abundant resources (e.g. numerous enough to incur unnecessary costs).

Departing from this assumption, scholars argued that green consumption also involves hedonic aspects in consumers' purchasing behaviour, especially when they purchase green products to signal status and abundance of resources (Dastrup et al., 2012; Rahman et al., 2020;

Sachdeva et al., 2015; Sexton & Sexton, 2014). Moreover, given that green products are generally more expensive than their non-green competitors, it is reasonable to assume that the acquisition and use of green products provide utilitarian benefits associated with the environment and social benefits.

The aforementioned social benefits arising from signalling information about an individual when purchasing a product are known as self-expressive benefits. In the green consumption literature, self-expressive benefits have been linked to an individual's prosocial reputation (Boobalan et al., 2021; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Lin et al., 2017). Moreover, recent research has successfully explored the connection between the perceived self-expressive benefits of a green product and its purchase intention, showing that this operationalisation of a consumer's prosocial reputation is an attested antecedent of the intention to purchase green products (Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020).

Regarding the role of pricing, Griskevicius et al. (2010) found that increasing the price of a green product can make it more attractive to individuals motivated to achieve status once the consumer attaches importance to price as a sign of wealth (Chaudhuri & Majumdar, 2006; Garvey et al., 2017). Therefore, findings of pricing and self-expressive benefits research on green consumption point to a possible interaction between product expensiveness and the perception of self-expressive benefits, as it signals a prosocial reputation and abundance of resources. However, despite evidence that consumers with a status motive opt for more expensive green products (Dastrup et al., 2012; Delgado et al., 2015; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Sexton & Sexton, 2014), no integrative model explains the interplay between status motive and product price regarding green buying behaviour. Therefore, as a novel integrative exercise, our work examines whether and to what extent self-expressive benefits mediate the relationship between the desire for status and green buying behaviour, exploring the moderating role of product prices as they interact with consumers' desire for status. As a result, in this article, we aim to understand (for the case of the Brazilian consumer) how the price of a green product is related to the status motive and the self-expressive benefits obtained from green consumer behaviour.

Theoretical Framework

Green Consumption Behaviour

Green consumption behaviour comprises the consumer's decision-making process that considers the public consequences of their private consumption and tries to use their purchasing power to generate social change (Moisander, 2007). This behaviour is often measured as the

consumers' willingness to buy products with a lower environmental impact. In other words, it refers to the motivational factors that influence the consumption behaviour of this type of product (Ramayah et al., 2010).

As Joshi and Rahman (2015) interpret it, green consumption behaviour is considered a category of environmental conservation. It represents a form of ethical decision-making behaviour in which consumers are conscious of the environmental damage caused by their consumption decisions. Thus, consumers increasingly opt for green products since they satisfy their needs without harming the environment and also contribute to a more sustainable world (Shamdasani et al., 1993). These products are safer for the environment because they have a low environmental impact (Chen & Chai, 2010).

The literature suggests that green consumption behaviour is associated with sustainable development principles for two main reasons. Firstly, the consumption of green goods and services has a lower environmental impact across their lifecycle, namely in production and distribution, consumption and final disposal (Moisander, 2007; Peattie, 2010). The second principle that green consumption appeals to is self-concept: Consumers who choose green products usually have a certain level of knowledge and environmental awareness and expect their purchasing behaviour to be in line with their personal commitment to the environment. Environmental knowledge and responsibility reinforce and may alter consumer behaviour in other environmental conservation practices (Han & Yoon, 2015; Lin & Niu, 2018).

Factors that influence green consumption in developed countries such as educational level, income, culture, public policies, values and environmental awareness do not necessarily apply to the context of emerging countries (Ester et al., 2004; Vicente-Molina et al., 2013). Therefore, understanding the factors that influence the green purchasing behaviour of emerging countries provides practical implications for the promotion of sustainable behaviour in Brazil, especially within a scenario of rapid industrialisation and insertion into the consumer society. Advancing knowledge in this area is crucial since providing green products to the growing market of emerging countries can be a way to minimise the environmental impacts of increasing consumption (Mont & Plepys, 2008).

In an attempt to explain consumer behaviour, many theories have been used to understand green buying behaviour. Recently, CST has been used to examine the relationship between conspicuous conservation and green consumption behaviour, specifically in what people signal to others when choosing green products (McGuire & Beattie, 2016; Palomo-Vélez et al., 2021). Thus, advancing this research line, our work uses CST to substantiate the theoretical arguments defended here.

Costly-Signalling Theory

CST provides the necessary background to understand the relationship between conspicuous conservation and green consumption behaviour. It postulates that individuals often engage in expensive behaviours but benefit others to signal honest information about themselves (McAndrew, 2002; Zahavi, 1995). Regarding green consumption, CST explains the costly sign behind green products (generally more expensive than their counterparts), as consumers spend money to communicate their desirable characteristics, like environmental awareness and access to resources (Delgado et al., 2015; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Palomo-Vélez et al., 2021). In this regard, Griskevicius et al. (2010) suggested that when consumers opt for a green product, they seek to use their consumption practices to signal prosocial behaviour to their social environment. Therefore, this consumption practice meets the concept of conspicuous conservation, defined by these researchers as public prosocial actions. Similarly, Sexton and Sexton (2014) identified a positive relationship between conspicuous conservation and the purchase of hybrid vehicles, drawing on the costly signal characterised by the price of the green product (e.g. paying more for a green product) and by the desire to display status. More broadly, green consumption has been re-evaluated as a way to exhibit prosocial behaviour and achieve self-interest benefits through gaining status.

The Effect of Status Motives

The notion of the need to build status in a consumption context stems from the work of Veblen (1899), who postulated that people strive to achieve social status by competing with each other for material resources and comparing their status to other individuals. In other words, consumption brings status to the consumer, as it can provide signs of wealth and differentiation. Individuals of higher status receive excessive rewards, including positive social attention, rights and privileges, in addition to influencing and controlling joint decisions and better access to scarce resources (Berger et al., 1972; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Choi and Seo (2017) identified that status seekers exhibited a high level of prosocial behaviour when others recognised their behaviour compared to those who did not seek status. This relationship also tends to occur in green consumption. Thus, the demand for green products is driven partly by social desires in search of status, as these products can signal buyers' characteristics for their social group (Dastrup et al., 2012; Delgado et al., 2015; Sachdeva et al., 2015).

Similarly, when considering the various benefits resulting from status signalling, consumers tend to spend resources (such as time or money) to achieve their personal goals through the

consumption of goods and services (Anderson et al., 2015; Kenrick et al., 2010). Thus, the desire for status can be understood as motivation to achieve a high status in the social hierarchy (Anderson et al., 2015). Individuals grant status to others when they appear to have valuable characteristics and seem willing to use those characteristics to contribute to the common good (Ridgeway, 1982). From this assumption, Delgado et al. (2015) found that individuals attribute status to consumers of green products. Purchases like these indicate that buyers are willing to pay more for a product that benefits others.

Therefore, consumers with a greater status motive can strive to achieve social status by displaying their environmental concern to others through the purchase of comparatively more costly environmentally friendly products (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Sexton & Sexton, 2014):

H1 The activation of status motives has a positive effect on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products.

Yang et al. (2016) affirmed that the search for status increases the satisfaction not only of the attributes of the goods or services that are being consumed but also of the people's reaction to the displayed wealth and the social acceptance obtained. Thus, the benefits resulting from the process of signalling information about oneself (i.e. self-expressive benefits) may be greater when purchasing green products because they reveal prosocial traits and preferences.

From the perspective of conspicuous conservation, consumers are motivated to achieve social status via green consumption because they understand that purchasing green products can provide them with social benefits, which in turn emit socially relevant underlying qualities associated with green consumption. For example, Palomo-Vélez et al. (2021) identified that green buying could communicate characteristics valued in romantic partners, such as trustworthiness and altruism. Consequently, the benefits arising from conspicuous conservation are likely to drive the intention to purchase green products (Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020). Therefore, we suggest that self-expressive benefits mediate the relationship between status motives and the propensity to purchase green products.

H2 The effect of status motives on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products can be explained by the mediating influence of environmental self-expressive benefits

Green Product Pricing

The price of a product is considered an important determinant of green consumption behaviour (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017); however, the relevance of this factor depends on the role that consumers attribute to it. On its negative side, a high price means a sacrifice (i.e., spending more resources on a product favouring environmental issues) (Lin & Chang, 2012). While in its positive role, a high price can signal status (Delgado et al., 2015; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Lichtenstein et al., 1993) and quality (Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011; Völckner & Hofmann, 2007; Zeithaml, 1988).

For instance, Delgado et al. (2015) showed in an econometrical analysis that the status signal value of the Toyota Prius corresponded to 4.5% of the hybrid car's total price. Their findings suggested that policymakers interested in increasing the adoption of hybrid vehicles can exploit the status signal through pricing as a means of stimulating consumer interest in this type of product. Conversely, green consumers interpret lower prices as inferior quality, even though they want lower prices (Hughner et al., 2007). Thus, the purchase of green products is seen as a multifaceted and even paradoxical issue because even if the willingness to pay is low, the price in purchasing behaviour is strongly related to the perception of quality and status (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017; Delgado et al., 2015; Hughner et al., 2007; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2011).

The literature states that green goods and services tend to have a higher price than conventional competitors (Furchtgott-Roth, 2012; Lea & Worsley, 2008; Young et al., 2010). Consumer responses to green products differ from regular ones in that they tend to pay a higher price for products with a lower environmental impact (Aertsens et al., 2011; Eze & Ndubisi, 2013; Okada & Mais, 2010). Despite some scholars considering pricing as the main reason for a low level of green purchasing (Hughner et al., 2007; Padel & Foster, 2005; Zanolini & Naspetti, 2002), findings are still inconclusive. For example, Chekima et al. (2016) found that the higher price of a green product has no negative effect on the purchase intention. Their results served to corroborate that high prices do not necessarily constitute a barrier to green consumption. This study follows the findings of Roe et al. (2001), who found that groups of people concerned about the environment are willing to pay significantly more for green electricity when emission reductions result from increased renewable fuel dependence.

CTS can explain this last perspective because people concerned with the environment can signal their altruism linked to wealth by purchasing a more expensive product in favour of the environment (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Sexton & Sexton, 2014). Thus, self-expressive benefits

may be greater when purchasing more expensive green products because they reveal wealth and prosocial behaviour. In this regard, we propose the following:

H3 Product price (high vs. low) has a positive moderating influence on the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits. For a high (vs. low) price, the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits is strengthened (vs. attenuated).

Several studies have examined the role of price and status variables in the consumers' decision-making process, as they are associated with attitudes and behaviours of green purchasing (Delgado et al., 2015; Elliott, 2013; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Sachdeva et al., 2015). Eze and Ndubisi (2013) and Griskevicius et al. (2010) showed that price is not necessarily negatively related to consumers' purchase intentions of green products, especially when such acquisition facilitates status signalling. In addition, Chekima et al. (2016) found that high prices do not have a negative effect on the purchase intentions of green products but that attitudinal and cultural variables are important motivating factors in this consumption context. Thus, the price of the product associated with the status motive influences the perception of self-expressive benefits of the consumer since the high price of the product may signal excess resources and the willingness to incur higher costs when acquiring a product for the common good. Furthermore, consumers with a status motive can perceive a greater value in green products, as these allow them to communicate a prosocial image and a higher status. Based on these considerations, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H4 The indirect effect of status motives on (a) attitude and (b) purchase intention towards green products, mediated by self-expressive benefits, is moderated by product price (high vs. low). For a high (vs. low) price, the indirect effect of status motives is strengthened (vs. attenuated).

Method

Participants and Procedure

The hypotheses were tested with a convenience sample of Brazilian consumers recruited from universities throughout the country. The sample comprised undergraduate and graduate students (48.13% undergraduate) and was 72.19% female, 74.27% single and with an average age of 28 years. Regarding family income, 61.82% had up to four Brazilian minimum wages (R\$ 3992.00) and 29.46% between four and ten (R\$ 3992.01–R\$ 9980.00). As for the region of

residence, 47.72% were from Brazil's southeast region, and 36.92% were from the northeast region.

An experimental study with a 2 (status motive: high vs. low) \times 2 (green product price: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design was conducted. The two independent variables manipulated in this study correspond to the status motive and the price of the green product. Griskevicius et al.'s (2006, 2010) manipulation was used to manipulate the status motives. They successfully used a 700-character text to motivate participants to achieve a higher status after reading it. In the "high-status motives" story, the participants imagined themselves as graduates and on the first day of work. The story ends when readers consider that they are rising in status in relation to their peers. In the low-status condition, the scenario did not present any element that stimulated the respondent's motivation to seek superior status. Based on the information obtained from the website of the Brazilian company RecycleUse®, which specialised in the sale of sustainable shirts (it has less environmental impact in its production process and uses organic raw materials), shirt prices were defined as low price (R\$ 39.99) and high price (R\$ 74.99). In this regard, the experimental design resulted in four scenarios corresponding to the combination of the levels of each of the factors (status motive and price of the green product).

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the scenarios. The data were collected through an online questionnaire made available from the academic community of Brazilian universities across wide-ranging student social networks. The link to access the questionnaire was distributed to each university group, and each participant was then randomly assigned to a scenario depending on the link they received. Participants could only take the survey once in order to ensure that respondents were influenced just by the stimuli of their corresponding experimental group. After a brief presentation of the research objective, participants were instructed to read the text referring to the scenario in which they were allocated (high vs. low-status motive) and to place themselves as the main character. Second, respondents were informed that questions about the story would be asked at the end of the procedure. Subsequently, the participants read the purchase context (a sustainable organic cotton t-shirt for R\$ 39.99 or 74.99) and completed the survey containing the measurement scales of the constructs. Finally, the participants answered the following questions (which are related to the text read in the first step) to assess the experiment's internal validity regarding the manipulation of the status motive: (1) Besides you, how many employees were hired in the company? (2) How many months after your arrival would there be an internal promotion? This practice has been used as one of the means to guarantee the reliability of the experiment (Wu et al., 2014).

Measures

All variables were measured on seven-point Likert scales, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). The self-expressive benefits were measured with three items adapted from the scale used by Hartmann and Apaolaza-Ibáñez (2012). Three indicators based on Chan (2001) were used to measure attitude, and three items adapted from Grewal et al. (2003) assessed the purchase intention of the green product. All items were translated into Brazilian Portuguese using back-translation.

Additionally, Griskevicius et al.'s (2010) measure was used to check the manipulation of status motives, and the item "this price is likely higher than average market prices for this kind of product" (Kukar-Kinney & Grewal, 2007) was used to verify the price perception according to the corresponding price scenario. All scale properties and their corresponding items are shown in Table 1.1.

Data Analysis

After an inspection of the dataset, some cases were excluded due to inconsistent responses, lack of attention and missing data, resulting in a final sample of 241 respondents. The student's T-test was applied to verify the manipulation of the status motive (activated vs. not activated) and the price of the green product (high vs. low) to validate the experiment. This test was also used to analyse the hypothesis H1 (H1a and H1b).

Table 1.1 Variables and measurement items

Constructs and items	Mean	Std. Dev	α
Attitude (Chan, 2001; Taylor & Todd, 1995)	5.61	1.43	0.907
<i>I have a favourable opinion regarding the purchase of this product</i>			
<i>I like the idea of buying this product</i>			
<i>Buying this product seems like a good idea</i>			
Product purchase intention (Grewal et al., 2003)	5.78	1.53	0.925
<i>Most likely, I would buy this product if I had the resources</i>			
<i>I would be willing to buy this product if I had the resources</i>			
<i>I would consider purchasing this product if I had the resources</i>			
Self-expressive benefits (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012)	4.29	1.80	0.908
<i>With this product, I can express my environmental concern</i>			

<i>With this product, I can demonstrate to myself and my friends that I care about environmental conservation</i>			
<i>In possession of this product, my friends would realise that I am concerned with the environment</i>			
Manipulation check: status (Griskevicius et al., 2010)	7.80	4.05	0.836
<i>Did you wish to have a higher social status in the company?</i>			
<i>Were you motivated to achieve greater prestige?</i>			
Manipulation check: pricing (Kukar-Kinney & Grewal, 2007)	3.77	1.87	–
<i>This price is likely higher than average market prices for this kind of product</i>			

The moderated mediation model was computed with Hayes PROCESS (Hayes, 2017; models 4 and 7) and SPSS 25. Initially, the relationship between the independent variable (status) and the dependent variables (attitude and purchase intention) was examined to ensure whether this relationship was significant before we performed the mediation analysis. In the second stage, the mediating variable (self-expressive benefits) was introduced into the regression to verify whether the predictor variable was related to the mediating variable and dependent variables. According to Hayes (2017), the model will be considered a mediation model if there is a reduction in the strength of the relationship between the predictor variables and the dependent variable with the entry of the mediator variable. Moreover, the indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is significant. When testing the indirect effect, the standard error of the indirect effect on the mediator variable in the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variables was estimated using bootstrap confidence intervals with 10,000 samples. The bootstrap interval indicates the lower and upper limits of the bootstrap confidence interval (Boot LLCI: bootstrap lower limit confidence interval, Boot ULCI: bootstrap upper limit confidence interval). When the corresponding bootstrap confidence interval does not contain zero, the significance of the mediation index is confirmed. In turn, in the analysis of moderation and moderated mediation, model 7 was used. This analysis verified the moderating effect of price on the relationship between status motives and green buying behaviour. All further analyses were performed using R version 4.1.0 for Windows.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Before testing the hypotheses, a T-test was performed to verify the effectiveness of the manipulation of the two independent variables: status motive and price of the product. As shown in Table 1.2, the average value of the items that measured the status motive was higher for the activated group than for the control group ($M = 4.68$ for activated status, $M = 2.99$ for not activated, $t = -7.07$, $p < 0.001$). The verification of price manipulation indicated significant differences between the group that received the product at a high price and a low price. The high price group obtained a higher mean in the product price perception than the low price group ($M = 4.39$ for the high price product, $M = 2.87$ for the low price product, $t = 6.91$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, we confirmed that the two variables were successfully manipulated.

Table 1.2 Manipulation check

Independent Variable	Group	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Mean difference	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Status motive	High	130	4.68	1.79	1.69	-7.07	< 0.001
	Low	111	2.99	1.91			
Product price	High	142	4.39	1.78	1.52	6.91	< 0.001
	Low	99	2.87	1.61			

Main Effect of Status Motives

A *T*-test was performed to investigate the effect of the status motive manipulation on both dependent variables: attitude and purchase intention. There was a significant effect of the status motive manipulation on the consumer's attitude towards the product ($M = 5.83$ for the activated status motive, $M = 5.36$ for the control, $t = -2.55$, $p = 0.01$) and on the purchase intention ($M = 5.97$ for the activated status motive, $M = 5.57$ for the control, $t = -2.00$, $p = 0.04$), as shown in Table 1.3. The activation of status motives had a positive effect on attitude and purchase intention towards green products, supporting hypotheses H1a and H1b.

Table 1.3 Test of hypotheses of the effect of the status motive

Hypothesis	Group	Mean	SD	Df	Cohen's d	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Result
H1a. Attitude	High	5.83	1.29	214.59	0.33	-2.55	0.01	Supported
	Low	5.36	1.55					

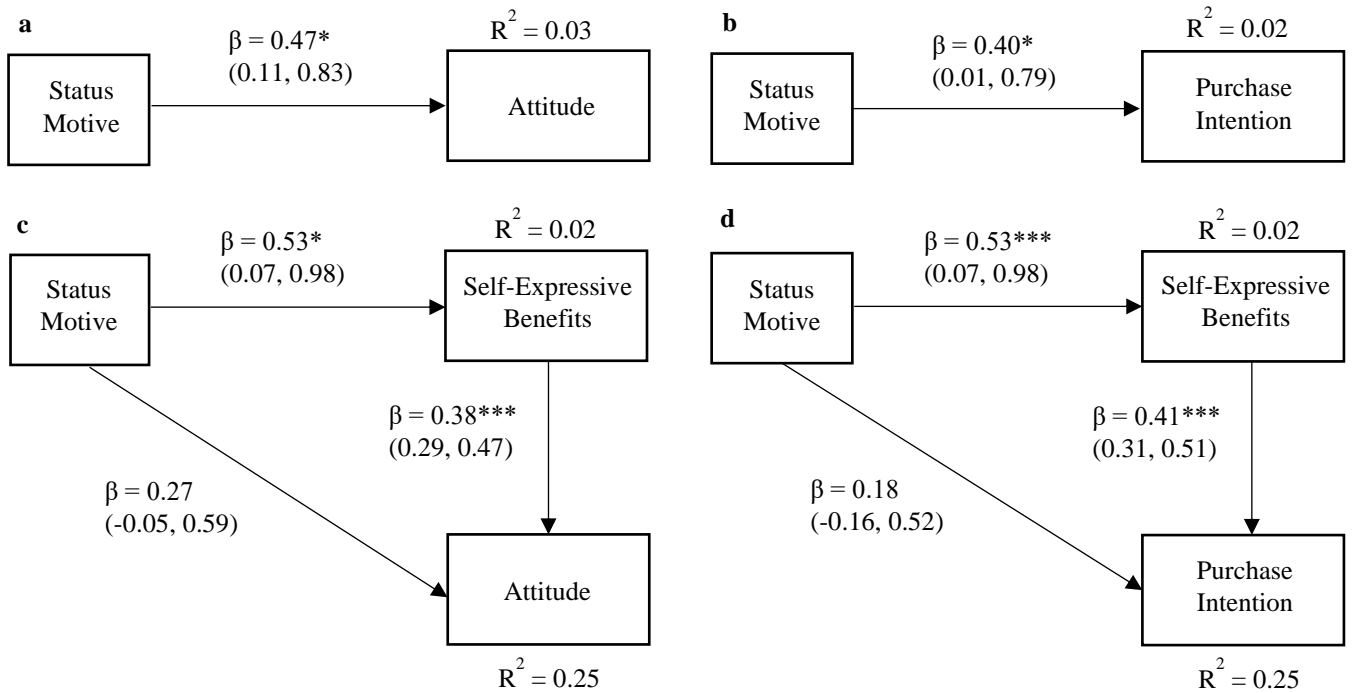
H1b. Purchase intention	High	5.97	1.38	213.25	0.26	-2.00	0.04	Supported
	Low	5.57	1.67					

The Mediating Effect of Self-Expressive Benefits

The SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017; Model 4) was used to explore the mediating effect of self-expressive benefits on the relationship between status motive and green consumption behaviour (attitude and purchase intention). The significance of the direct and indirect effects was evaluated using 10,000 bootstrap samples to create bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs; 95%). The total effect of the impact of status desire on attitude, without the mediator, was found to be positive and statistically significant ($\beta = 0.47$, 95% CI [0.11; 0.83], $t = 2.59$, $p = 0.01$). However, without the mediator, the model explains only 2.73% ($R^2 = 0.03$), as shown in Fig. 1.1. When introducing the mediator, the variables desire for status and self-expressive benefits together explain the variance of attitude towards the purchase of green products to 24.66% ($R^2 = 0.25$). With the mediator, the direct effect of status motive impacting attitude, controlled by self-expressive benefits, was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.27$, 95% CI [-0.05; 0.59], $t = 1.68$, $p = 0.09$). This result implies that the status motive effect on attitude is indirect and occurs through self-expressive benefits. Thus, the mediation effect is significant ($\beta = 0.20$, 95% CI [0.02; 0.39]), which supports H2a.

Likewise, the relationship between status motive and purchase intention, without the mediator, is positive and significant ($\beta = 0.40$, 95% CI [0.01; 0.79], $t = 2.03$, $p = 0.04$). The mediation effect is significant ($\beta = 0.22$, 95% CI [0.04; 0.43]), and self-expressive benefits mediate approximately 54.57% of the relationship between status motive and purchase intent, supporting H2b.

Fig. 1.1 The influence of status motive on attitude (a, c) and purchase intention (b, d)



Note: The relationship between status motive and attitude/purchase intention without [a, b] and with [c, d] the mediating effect of self-expressive benefits; Bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals are provided in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; $N = 241$

The Moderating Effect of Price

We used Hayes PROCESS Model 7 to analyse H3. The analysis confirmed a significant positive interaction of the effect of the status motive with the product price on self-expressive benefits ($\beta_{\text{status} \times \text{price}} = 0.91$; $SE = 0.47$, $t = 1.94$, $p = 0.05$, 95% CI [-0.02, 1.83]). However, H3 is supported only at the 10% significance level (Table 1.4). In this case, the product price has a positive moderating influence on the effect of status motives on self-expressive benefits.

Table 1.4 Results of the moderated mediation model

	β	SE	P	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Constant	4.47	0.28	0.00	3.92	5.03
Status	-0.03	0.36	0.92	-0.75	0.68
Price	-0.73	0.35	0.04	-1.42	-0.39
Status × price	0.91	0.47	0.05	-0.02	1.83

Note: 10,000 bootstrap samples for 95% bootstrap confidence intervals, boot LLCI = bootstrap lower limit confidence interval, boot ULCI = bootstrap upper limit confidence interval.

Moderated-Mediation Relationship

Next, we tested the moderated mediation model to analyse hypotheses H4a and H4b. The objective was to identify whether the indirect effect of status motives on the dependent variables (attitude and purchase intention), mediated by self-expressive benefits, was moderated by the product price. As shown in Table 1.5, the moderated mediation index was significant for the dependent variables, verifying that the status motive effect is strengthened as price increases.

Table 1.5 Moderated-mediation analysis and indirect effects

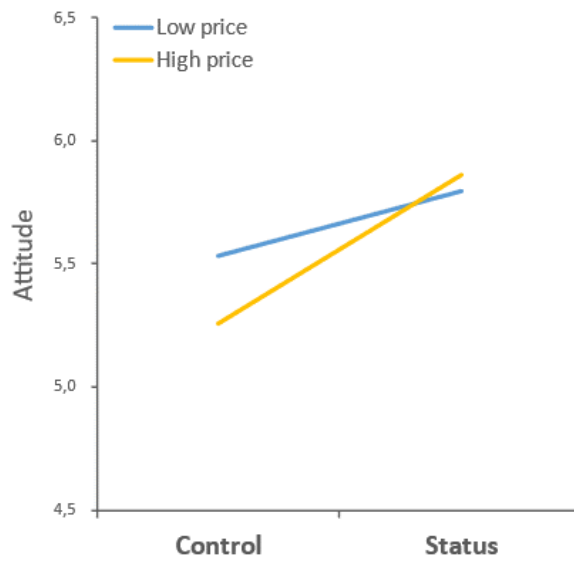
Dependent variable	Mod. med. Index (Moderator: Price)	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude	0.34	0.18	0.00	0.72
Intention	0.37	0.20	0.01	0.79

Note: Ten thousand bootstrap samples for 95% bootstrap confidence intervals, boot LLCI = bootstrap lower limit confidence interval, boot ULCI = bootstrap upper limit confidence interval

A conditional indirect effect analysis showed that the indirect effect of the status motive on attitude mediated by self-expressive benefits was positive and significant in the high price ($\beta_{ind} = 0.33$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.61]) but not significant and close to zero in the low price group ($\beta_{ind} = -0.01$, $SE = 0.13$, 95% CI [-0.26, 0.23]), providing support for H4a.

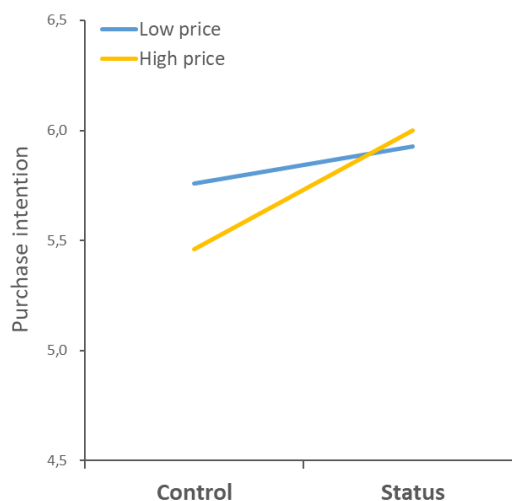
As shown in Fig. 1.2, there was a significant effect on the interaction between status motive, self-expressive benefits and price on the consumer's attitude towards the green product. This result highlights that consumers with a status motive show a greater attitude towards the green product, especially when its price is higher, supporting H4a. In comparison with the low-status scenario, the attitude was higher for the green product with a lower price. In other words, a high price boosts the indirect effect of the status motive on the attitude; consumers with status motives will perceive a heightened sense of self-expressive benefits in the purchase of the green product and, consequently, their attitude towards this product will be greater. The opposite is true for a low price, resulting in a non-significant indirect effect of the status manipulation.

Fig. 1.2 Effects of interaction on consumer's attitude



Regarding purchase intention, this indirect effect of the status motive occurs in a similar way. It is even more evident when the price of the product is higher ($\beta_{ind} = 0.36$, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.66]); that is, the purchase intention of the group with a high price was higher for those who presented an activated status motive. In contrast, a low price did not change the status effect on green buying behaviour ($\beta_{ind} = -0.01$, $SE = 0.14$, 95% CI [-0.29, 0.24]). Thus, H4b was also supported (Fig. 1.3).

Fig. 1.3 Effects of interaction on consumer's purchase intention



Therefore, it is clear that the search for status implies a more positive perception of the consumer regarding the traits and preferences that the product will reveal to observers,

especially when it is more expensive. This result confirms that the status signal when purchasing green products is linked to the product price.

Discussion

Our research corroborated (the case of Brazilian consumers) that the status motive is an important driver of green consumption. The novel aspect of our study comprised identifying an indirect effect of the status motive as responsible for increasing consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. Specifically, green consumption was linked to conspicuous consumption since its demand was motivated partly by the reach of consumer signalling benefits. Thus, the status motive can also be an effective strategy to promote green purchasing in emerging markets. However, research had provided evidence for these effects only for consumers in developed countries.

In addition, we identified that self-expressive benefits mediate the relationship between status and green buying behaviour. When they perceived the benefits arising from the signalling of this purchase, consumers with status motives were more likely to buy. Thus, we argue that achieving superior status in their social environment explains consumer attitudes and purchase intentions towards green products and the need for social signalling the purchase. Therefore, signalling prosocial reputation through green buying leads consumers to demonstrate prosocial behaviour and fulfil their needs for social approval.

Furthermore, we found that consumers are price-sensitive when it comes to green products. When the product price is higher, status seekers have a greater intention to purchase than those who are not status-motivated. For participants with high status motives, buying the most expensive green product generates more positive responses because the price contributes to the signalling of access to resources and evident prosocial behaviour. Additionally, the findings of this research are in line with studies that showed that the price of green products could negatively affect consumers' purchasing behaviour (Hsu et al., 2017; Li et al., 2016).

The findings also showed that the price of the green product is a relevant moderating variable in green purchasing decisions. Specifically, the price of a green product moderates the indirect effect of status motives on purchase intention, mediated by self-expressive benefits. Thus, for a high price, the indirect effect of the status motive is strengthened as the consumer perceives the purchase of the green product as a means of achieving superior status. Moreover, since the green product requires the sacrifice of spending more resources to obtain it, consumers with high-status motives construe it as a way of showing their desired image to their social environment.

Conclusions

Our study examined to what extent self-expressive benefits mediate the relationship between the desire for status and green buying behaviour, exploring the moderating role of product prices as they interact with consumers' desire for status. In this article, we verified the case of the Brazilian consumer and how the cost of green products is related to status motives and self-expressive benefits obtained from the purchase of green products. This study has significant theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study provides empirical evidence that substantiates an association between green consumption and conspicuous conservation (Lin et al., 2017; Park & Lee, 2016). In particular, CST proved to be adequate to explain the role that social factors play in green consumption behaviour. The study found that status motives are an important antecedent of perceptions, attitudes and purchasing behaviour related to green products. This variable explains why more expensive products are often chosen over more accessible options, especially in the case of green products, as this type of product allows consumers to signal to their peers' access to resources and environmental concerns. The success in manipulating the price variable also made it possible to substantiate Berger's (2019) assumption when stating that consumers in search of status are willing to pay up to 50% more for a green product.

As for managerial implications, marketers should use communication strategies that enhance the social benefits (prosocial reputation) of consumers who Purchase green products when they're more expensive. This way, green consumers may be persuaded with the benefit of social acceptance, thus stimulating the search for status through the acquisition of this type of product. Marketing professionals can leverage advertising campaigns that label green purchases as altruistic, conferring positive attributes to the consumer, such as being an environmentally friendly person, a conscious consumer or altruistic individual who does good to society. Regarding its communication potential, buying green as a sign of prestige can easily be associated with high-status contexts such as celebrity events, because green products seem to be able to blend luxurious and altruistic contexts to signal both environmental concern and higher social status.

Furthermore, the differentiation effect of green products can be reinforced through pricing strategies. Thus, this research supports studies such as those by Delgado et al. (2015), Sexton and Sexton (2014) and Griskevicius et al. (2010) in suggesting that policymakers and marketers can exploit status signals through pricing to increase interest in

green products. Our study shows that this effect, so far mostly evidenced through research conducted in developed countries, is also valid in emerging markets.

In summary, in order to enhance our knowledge of consumer behaviour involving green products, it is necessary to have a greater understanding of other factors of conspicuous consumption, such as visibility, type of product and consumer environmental awareness. So far, the status activation strategy in the purchase of green products associated with a higher price is a promising research line, but it needs to be developed further to avoid stagnating in unproductive debates around how sustainable it is to direct sales strategies along this path, since this strategy may be ineffective in certain contexts (Li, 2014; Li & Gong, 2005).

Sample homogeneity could constitute a limitation to this research since our sample comprises mainly undergraduate and post-graduate students. Therefore, caution is recommended regarding the generalisability of the results found in this study. This research also focused only on one type of green product. Future research should use a more diverse consumer sample. In addition, the role of status motives in green consumption behaviour should be studied under the influence of social presence or absence at the time of purchase (e.g., other consumers or family and friends). Future research should also analyse the role of status motives and self-expressive benefits in the purchase of green products of different categories (e.g., high visibility vs. low visibility). Furthermore, this research should be extended to the study of other prosocial behaviours, such as donations to charity and other forms of philanthropy, in which costly signalling and status motives may also play a significant role.

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11. Journal Papers

11.1 Sustainable clothing: Why conspicuous consumption and greenwashing matter

Vanessa Apaolaza, Manoela Costa Policarpo, Patrick Hartmann, Mario R. Paredes, Clare D'Souza

Vanessa Apaolaza | vanessa.apaolaza@ehu.eus (corresponding author)

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Manoela Costa Policarpo | mcosta004@ikasle.ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Patrick Hartmann | patrick.hartmann@ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Mario R. Paredes | mariorparedes@gmail.com

Universidad del Rosario

Clare D'Souza | c.dsouza@latrobe.edu.au

La Trobe University

Introduction

From production to purchase, the clothing industry contributes highly to environmental degradation. The extensive use of resources during production in this sector generates approximately 10% of global carbon emissions, placing it among the economic sectors responsible for most of the global emissions (Cocquyt et al., 2020; Conca, 2015; Muthukumarana et al., 2018). Fashion consumption is based on a high product turnover, resulting in a considerable number of textiles, that could have been reused or recycled, being sent to landfills (Colucci & Vecchi, 2021; Remy et al., 2016). To address these problems, part of the clothing industry is putting effort into manufacturing more sustainable clothing, which involves manufacturing processes with more environmentally friendly techniques, including the use of organic or recycled materials to produce garments designed for a more enduring use (Jacobs et al., 2018; Joergens, 2006; Sadiq et al., 2021). The sustainable clothing market has

gained significant momentum due to growing environmental awareness in the industry, changing consumer beliefs, and considerably positive consumer attitudes toward green products (Elf et al., 2022; Khare & Sadachar, 2017; Saha et al., 2021; Young et al., 2010). Sustainable product attributes (i.e., recycled materials) have been shown to positively influence consumers' purchase intentions even for luxury and fast fashion products (Grazzini et al., 2021).

To effectively promote sustainable clothing, it is necessary to identify the key drivers of consumers' motivation of transitioning to and adopting these clothing products. In recent years, there has been a growing research interest in sustainable clothing (e.g., Jacobs et al., 2018; Kim & Oh, 2020; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Appendix A provides an overview of research focusing on sustainable clothing. In a systematic review of the literature, Busalim et al. (2022) found that most of the published articles on sustainable fashion are typically not from a consumer behavior perspective but rather focus on understanding trends within sustainable fashion research, implications on the supply chain, and sustainable business models. Moreover, of those articles that address the issue from the perspective of consumer behavior, a large majority focuses on the analysis of the effect of variables linked to the green values and environmental awareness of consumers, while very few on factors related to symbolic values and signaling of consumption (Han et al., 2017; Hill & Lee, 2015; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Park & Lin, 2020). Research has also provided mixed results concerning the relationship between consumers' environmental attitudes and their adoption of sustainable clothing (Busalim et al., 2022; Diddi et al., 2019; ElHaffar et al., 2020; Jacobs et al., 2018; Park & Lin, 2020; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Consumption of fashion products may be a particularly complex phenomenon because clothing goes beyond utilitarian function and is related strongly to the individual's need to express their identity and gain social acceptance (Joy et al., 2012; Niinimäki, 2010; Preuit & Yan, 2016). According to Diddi et al. (2019), consumers engage in sustainable clothing consumption behaviors because of a commitment to sustainability, local sourcing, exclusivity, and lifestyle changes. While there exist fragmented research findings, so far, the literature lacks a clear perspective of which are the most relevant drivers of sustainable fashion purchases.

The present study addresses this gap in the literature by proposing and testing the effect of several antecedents of sustainable fashion purchases, that had not been addressed previously, or for which findings have not been conclusive. Despite the salient signaling function of clothing, previous research has overlooked the potentially significant role of conspicuous consumption motives in the consumption of sustainable clothing. Environmental psychology research has shown that conspicuous consumption motives are an important driver of green consumption (Hammad et al., 2019; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibañez, 2012; Policarpo & Aguiar,

2020). Through the consumption of sustainable clothing, consumers can project a pro-environmental and prosocial image, signaling their engagement through spending resources on products that benefit society and the environment. Conspicuous consumption is likely a significant motive for the adoption of sustainable clothing.

Greenwashing, on the other hand, may constitute a significant barrier to the purchase of sustainable clothing. To what extent do consumers perceive that fashion brands are insincere in their environmental engagement and how does this affect their purchase? Previous research on greenwashing in the case of sustainable clothing has been scarce (e.g., Sailer et al., 2022). Our theoretical framework proposes that the perception of greenwashing by fashion brands reduces purchases of sustainable clothing.

Our theoretical framework addresses the effect of these variables together with the effect of three further variables that have been popular in green consumption research: We included the effect of perceived consumer effectiveness, that is, the extent to which consumers believe that they can have actually a significant effect on the state of the environment, and we address the discussion on the environmental attitudes–behavior gap by considering the role of environmental concern. We further address the effect of consumers' trust in sustainable clothing brands, since green trust has been identified in previous research as a significant driver of green purchases.

Analyzing these five variables in one model will provide an integrative framework to the literature and will contribute to identifying which are the most relevant drivers of sustainable clothing purchases. We tested the model with a representative sample of Australian consumers who reported on their actual sustainable fashion purchases. Findings provide marketers with important insight regarding which factors to focus on when promoting sustainable fashion.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows: We first develop a conceptual framework of the drivers of sustainable clothing purchases. We then present the results of the empirical study testing this framework. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings and provide future research avenues.

Conceptual Framework

Conspicuous consumption of sustainable clothing

Conspicuous displays—whether through goods, clothing, or actions—signal the personal image individuals want to project and facilitate social relationships (Amatulli et al., 2018; Goffman, 1959). The projected personal image, whether real or perceived, may be related to character traits, religious affiliations, wealth, or social status (Johnson et al., 2018; Lewis &

Moital, 2016). Conspicuous behaviors have been explained by *costly signaling theory* and *social identity theory*. Costly signaling theory (Grafen, 1990; Zahavi, 1977) proposes from an evolutionary psychology perspective that humans engage in costly behaviors, that is, behaviors that are not immediately necessary for the survival of the individual, to broadcast to others that they have surplus genetic fitness and abundance of resources. Social identity theory explains the individual's drive to enhance their self-concept through conformity with group norms (Turner & Oakes, 1986), which reward individuals with social approval (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). The consumption of goods to subsequently project a specific image, often with the intention of exhibiting wealth and success and consequently gaining a desired social status, has been termed conspicuous consumption (Bagwell & Bernheim, 1996; Ordabayeva & Chandon, 2011; Veblen, 1899). Consumers may purchase specific products or brands to become identified with these products or brands' values, which may include immaterial values such as self-fulfillment, a sense of belonging, security, self-respect, warm relationships with others, being well respected, and a sense of accomplishment (Solomon et al., 2002). Conspicuous consumption can be a motive for unsustainable consumer behavior. Consumers can be motivated to purchase non-sustainable luxury items to indicate their financial status (Cervellon et al., 2019), and, as Mi et al. (2018) showed for the case of Chinese consumers, displays of materialism, and social status can be important triggers of high-carbon consumption.

However, conspicuous consumption can also be an important driver of sustainable consumer behavior. Consumers can be motivated to purchase environmentally friendly products to signal their environmental compromise and engagement (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hammad et al., 2019; Sexton & Sexton, 2014). Griskevicius et al. (2010) argued that conspicuous green consumption can be explained by the costly signaling theory. Because green products are often more expensive and sometimes underperform compared with their conventional counterparts, green consumers communicate their willingness and ability to bear additional costs for the good of nature and society by purchasing such products. Thus, an increasing number of studies have focused on conspicuous motives as a significant driver of green consumption (Delgado et al., 2015; Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020; Yarimoglu & Binboga, 2019).

From a social identity theory perspective (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Turner & Oakes, 1986), conspicuous green consumption can be explained by the drive to display conformity with pro-environmental group norms, either an individual's peer group or the wider society, where sustainable consumer behavior is increasingly being perceived as a general norm. Signaling environmental engagement may indeed have an evolutionary pay-off: As Palomo-

Vélez et al.'s (2021) review of evolutionary psychology research and climate change suggests, green consumers are perceived as particularly generous and attractive romantic partners.

Since conspicuous motives may drive consumers to choose green products over non-green alternatives, this may especially be the case for fashion products, because clothing—by its nature—is mostly consumed conspicuously, as these products are on public display when in use. Clothing has been shown to function as a conspicuous symbol (Lewis & Moital, 2016; Rahman et al., 2010; Woodside, 2012). Hence, when consumers opt for green clothing items, conspicuous motives may likely play a significant role, as these purchases allow them to signal their concern for the environment and willingness to contribute to the common good. In addition, conspicuous motives can induce consumers to buy sustainable clothing brands because this may enhance an individual's status and reputation.

H1. Conspicuous consumption motives have a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

Environmental concern as a driver of sustainable clothing purchase

Defined as an individual's degree of awareness of environmental problems, environmental concern can have a significant impact on the degree to which individuals are motivated to change their behavioral practices to try to minimize these problems (Mostafa, 2009; Séguin et al., 1998). Thus, one way to express environmental concern is to consume more environmentally friendly products. Environmental concern can directly influence consumer attitudes toward environmental products (Dangélico et al., 2021; Lee, 2008; Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Several studies have analyzed the relationship between environmental concern and the intention to purchase green products (Park & Lin, 2020; Prakash & Pathak, 2017). However, although consumers are concerned about the environment, some studies revealed a significant concern–behavior gap in the consumer behavior observed in green consumption, and environmental concern will not always translate into environmentally friendly behavior (Cerri et al., 2018; He et al., 2021; Landry et al., 2018). Because of the sustainable marketing activities of many fashion labels, we expect consumers to be increasingly concerned about the environmental impact of clothing, and this concern is activated in the shopping situation, where also sustainable alternatives to conventional fashion products are more and more available. We, therefore, expect that the concern–behavior gap is reduced in the case of sustainable clothing consumption and that consumers' environmental concern will have some impact on their purchase decision.

H2. Consumers' environmental concern has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

The effect of trust in sustainable clothing brands

Trust is understood to be the degree of willingness to believe that the other party will behave as expected (Ganesan, 1994; Hart & Saunders, 1997). Chen (2010) defined green trust as the willingness to depend on a green product or service based on a belief or expectation resulting from its credibility, benevolence, and skills concerning its environmental performance. Green trust is based on the belief in the product's potential to protect the environment (Wang et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2017).

In the literature on green consumption behavior, green trust has been discussed in different consumption contexts and is considered a crucial cognitive measure, especially where uncertainty is high, as is the case with green hotels, organic food, and other green products (Amin & Tarun, 2020; Ricci et al., 2018; Yadav et al., 2019). These uncertainties are primarily the result of company practices promoting products based on misleading green claims and exaggerating their environmental value. Consumers may find themselves doubting whether a specific brand of green clothes is truly sustainable or whether the sustainability claim is just a marketing trick (Neumann et al., 2020). For these reasons, trust in the sustainable clothing brand is a significant factor, as it minimizes the skepticism arising from greenwashing practices (Dhir et al., 2021; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Regarding the antecedents of trust in green fashion brands, Neumann et al. (2020) found that the perceptions of social responsibility in the sustainability efforts of the brand positively affect consumers' trust in the brand. Dhir et al. (2021) showed that green trust and environmental attitude predicted green apparel buying behavior. These studies suggest that trust in green fashion brands can increase consumption of sustainable clothing and that, on the contrary, low consumer confidence in the sustainable clothing brand is a barrier to adopting more sustainable garments:

H3. Trust in sustainable clothing brands has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

The negative influence of perceived greenwashing

To attract consumers with green purchase intentions, many companies use green marketing strategies to communicate their environmental efforts and project an environmentally

responsible image. However, not all green marketing claims reflect the true environmental conduct of the company. Some companies mask negative information about their impact or only partially disclose this information (Lyon & Maxwell, 2011; Marquis et al., 2016), while others intentionally mislead using false advertisements claiming that they are environmentally responsible when, in fact, they are not (Martínez et al., 2020; Szabo & Webster, 2021).

When consumers realize that certain green products present misleading information, a reputation for greenwashing is formed, which compels consumers to be more cautious about these products and increases their predisposition to discovering negative information about other brands in the sector (Chen & Chang, 2013a; Nyilasy et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2019). Some of the recent and extensive sustainability efforts of clothing companies may generate uncertainty regarding the veracity of the information provided. Indeed, many of the vague and unspecific sustainability claims used by the clothing industry are likely more a reflection of greenwashing practices than of genuine environmental engagement. For instance, a Swedish fashion brand has received complaints for using unfounded sustainability claims in a fashion line labeled as “conscious.” Consumers will likely react negatively to news of greenwashing in the fashion industry, combined with their awareness of the abundance of vague green claims, lacking a clear specification of the environmental or social benefits of the product. In consequence, consumers might develop a general suspicion of greenwashing in the fashion industry, which likely will negatively impact their purchases of sustainably labeled clothing products.

H4. Perceived greenwashing has a negative influence on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

The role of perceived consumer effectiveness

According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), perceived behavioral control is an important behavioral antecedent. Ajzen's perceived behavioral control dimension is based on the self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977). In green consumption behavior research, the term *perceived consumer effectiveness* (PCE) has been widely used to refer to behavioral control and self-efficacy. PCE refers to the degree to which an individual believes their efforts might be able to mitigate environmental and social problems. The construct has been as prominent as environmental concern in analyzing consumer engagement with environmental issues (Ellen et al., 1991; Jaiswal & Singh, 2018; Niedermeier et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2018). Kinnear et al. (1974) first explored PCE as a personality variable for predicting environmental

concern. Roberts (1996) identified PCE as one of the attitudinal variables that predict green consumer behavior. The more consumers feel that their behavior can reduce environmental problems, the more they consider the impact of their purchases, and the more disposed they are to purchasing sustainable products (D'Souza et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2016; Nguyen & Pervan, 2020). Several studies have shown that individuals who believe that their behavior can have a positive impact on the environment are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior (Higuera-Castillo et al., 2019; Jaiswal & Kant, 2018; Mansoor & Paul, 2022). For instance, Cojuharenco et al. (2016) found that PCE has a positive influence on consumer recycling and green purchasing behaviors. Taufique and Vaithianathan (2018) confirmed PCE as an important antecedent of green purchase intentions in young consumers. Higuera-Castillo et al. (2019) found that the effect of attitude on purchase intention regarding hybrid and electric vehicles is more pronounced among consumers with a high level of PCE. While PCE has not been studied for the specific case of sustainable clothing, in light of extant PCE research, it seems likely that a higher level of PCE will increase consumers' motivation to purchase sustainable clothing. The greater their belief that their purchases matter and that they can help mitigate the negative impact of the clothing industry on the environment, the greater will be their intention to switch to sustainable clothing:

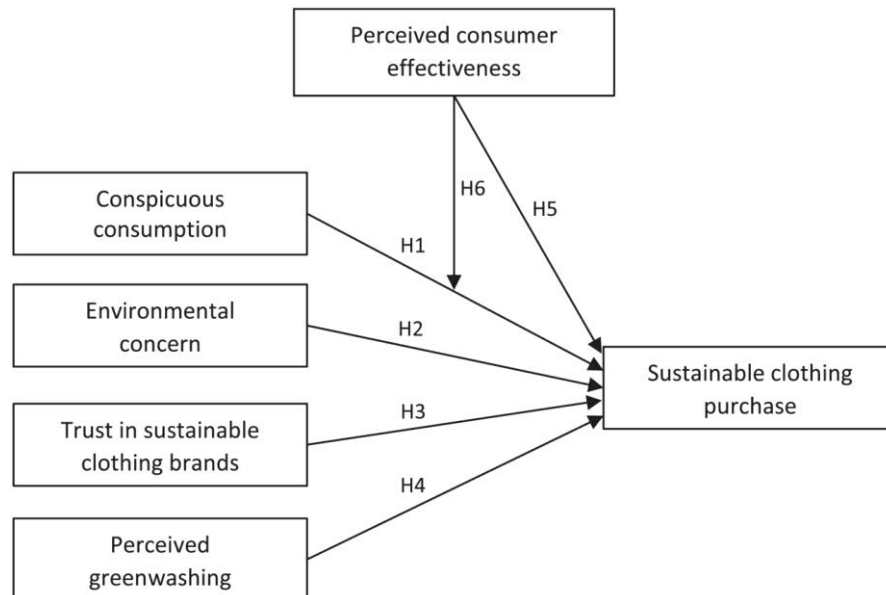
H5. Perceived consumer effectiveness has a positive effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing.

Apart from triggering purchase behavior, PCE may also moderate the effect of another driver of sustainable purchasing. Because PCE determines the impact a consumer perceives they will have on the environment, it may also moderate the influence of conspicuous consumption motives proposed in Hypothesis 1. The more the consumer believes that their action will make a real difference for the environment, the more they will also believe that others feel the same. For conspicuous consumption to provide the expected benefits, it is thus necessary that the individual believes that others perceive a real, as opposed to an insignificant or phony contribution to sustainability. When a consumer feels that the real environmental impact of sustainable clothing is negligible, they will not be motivated to display their environmental engagement by purchasing these products.

H6. Perceived consumer effectiveness positively moderates the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing. For consumers with high (low)

perceived consumer efficacy the influence of conspicuous consumption motives on the purchase of sustainable clothing will be stronger (weaker).

FIGURE 1 Conceptual model.



Method

Participants and procedure

To test the proposed conceptual framework, we conducted a nationally representative online survey of Australian consumers. Australian consumers are an adequate sample to test our framework because they show on average a significant environmental concern, and there is a large consumer segment interested in sustainable clothing. Given the impact of climate change in terms of bushfires and floods, more than half of the population (56%) reported that they are worried about climate change (Euromonitor International, 2021). Other research showed that nine out of 10 Australian consumers are likely to purchase ethical and sustainable products (Arreza, 2020). They are environmentally savvy and are keen on adopting a sustainable clothing lifestyle (Khan et al., 2022). Also, the Australian apparel market is now anticipated to increase to a value of \$21.7 billion by the end of 2025, an increase of 28.6% since 2020 (Datamonitor, 2021). We conducted a quantitative study to assess and compare the effect strengths of different antecedents of green clothing purchases in the general population. While a qualitative approach can provide a different perspective and enrich findings, a qualitative

approach alone would not have allowed a larger scale, representative assessment of the proposed model.

The survey was conducted with a nationally representative online sample of Australian consumers aged 18 years and older ($N=600$, 58.7% female, $M_{\text{age}}=47.84$, $SD=17.64$, age range: 18–85) recruited by Qualtrics. Participants received a monetary incentive to participate in the study. We instructed Qualtrics to provide an approximately representative population sample in terms of age, gender, household income, and education. The sample was drawn randomly from an online panel of Australian consumers recruited by Qualtrics and adjusted by Qualtrics to approximately representative population quotas in age, gender, household income, and education. The quotas were established by Qualtrics according to the company's information on population data (Appendix B). The quality of the sample and responses is backed by Qualtrics's internal data control. The random sampling method rules out sampling bias. Participants that show uncooperative behavior are removed from Qualtrics's panel. The data quality was further audited by Qualtrics, with fast responders and participants responding consistently with the same extreme values being removed and substituted by new sample units before the data set was provided. The data were checked for consistency and missing values. No sample units were removed. The data were further analyzed for extreme values. There were no outliers greater than 3 SD from the corresponding mean values.

The online questionnaire presented participants with an introductory sentence stating that at present, many fashion brands are marketed as sustainable fashion. Because the aim of the survey was to assess the participants' general responses toward fashion marketed as sustainable, the questionnaire did not provide any further prompts regarding specific fashion brands or styles. The questionnaire then assessed the participants' actual purchases of sustainable fashion, as well as their perceptions of greenwashing by clothing companies, trust in sustainable clothing brands, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, and conspicuous consumption motives when buying sustainable clothing.

Measurement

Because, as mentioned above, our study aimed to analyze general attitudes and responses toward sustainable clothing, all measurement items referred to the generic consumption of sustainable clothing without specifying brands or styles. Each participant, therefore, rated these items according to their individual opinion concerning sustainable clothing in general. To measure *conspicuous consumption motives*, the questionnaire included seven statements extracted from research into symbolic consumption, status consumption, and environmental

conspicuous consumption (Eastman et al., 1999; Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012; Lewis & Moital, 2016; O'Cass, 2000; O'Cass & McEwen, 2004; Roy Chaudhuri et al., 2011; Solomon, 1983). *Environmental concern* was measured using four items from Rausch and Kopplin's (2021) study, which measured this variable using scales adapted from Lee (2008) and Dunlap et al. (2000). For the measurement of the *PCE* variable in the context of sustainable clothing purchase, we adapted D'Souza et al.'s (2015) scale. *Consumer trust in sustainable clothing brands* was measured using two items from Chen (2010) and Chen and Chang (2013b). To assess *perceived greenwashing*, we used five items extracted from the scales used in previous studies (Chen & Chang, 2013a; Mohr, 1998; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Schmuck et al., 2018). All items addressing the five independent variables were rated using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

To assess whether participants had actually *purchased sustainable clothing*, we used Rausch and Kopplin's (2021) measure based on Lee (2008) and Schlegelmilch et al. (1996). Participants rated on two 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) the extent to which they frequently purchased sustainable clothing and whether they had purchased it even at a higher price. All measurement items, in addition to the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas, are presented in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha confirmed the reliability of all scales, as all values were above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). The average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability (CR) ranged from 0.65 to 0.76 and from 0.84 to 0.92, respectively, well above the minimum recommended level of 0.5 for AVE and 0.6 for CR (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). A single factor over all measurement items explained 26% of overall variance, significantly less than the 50% threshold for common method variance concern, providing evidence against significant common method variance. Table 2 presents the square roots of each construct's AVE in the diagonal showing that the square root of the AVE of each construct was greater than its correlation with other constructs—confirming discriminant validity.

TABLE 1. Variables and measurement items with mean, standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha

	M	SD	α
Conspicuous consumption motives	3.97	1.62	.91
I think that buying sustainable clothing ...			
...engenders popularity among friends and colleagues.	4.01	1.58	
...means wealth.	3.77	1.67	
...enables people to show off, to be noticed.	3.84	1.62	

...enables people to feel more important.	4.09	1.59	
...enables people to improve the image of themselves that they project to others.	4.15	1.56	
...sustainable clothes are social status symbols.	4.10	1.66	
...sustainable clothes are a symbol of success and prestige.	3.83	1.68	
Environmental concern	5.00	1.62	.92
I am concerned about the state of the environment.	5.03	1.57	
I am concerned about the long-term consequences of unsustainable behavior.	5.12	1.62	
I often think about the degradation of the environment.	4.74	1.61	
I am concerned that humanity will inflict permanent damage on the environment.	5.13	1.70	
Perceived consumer effectiveness – PCE	4.50	1.52	.89
I think that by buying from these sustainable clothing brands ...			
I can positively influence society and the environment.	4.24	1.51	
I can help to create a more sustainable and caring society.	4.48	1.47	
I can help to reduce the problem of global warming.	4.45	1.59	
I can reduce my carbon footprint.	4.84	1.53	
Trust in sustainable clothing brands	3.90	1.34	.83 (.77 ¹)
The environmental concern of these clothing brands' meets my expectations.	3.87	1.35	
I feel that the environmental reputation of these clothing brands is generally reliable.	3.93	1.33	
Perceived greenwashing	4.75	1.40	.90
I think most of these products/brands are ...			
...not produced totally of environmentally friendly materials.	4.86	1.32	
...not always manufactured under sustainable conditions.	4.86	1.41	
...professing green claims that are vague or seemingly unprovable.	4.65	1.40	
...omitting or masking important information, making their green claims sound better than they are.	4.67	1.45	
...exaggerating the actual green functionality of the product.	4.71	1.45	
Purchase behavior	3.47	1.71	.86(.76 ¹)
I regularly buy sustainable clothing.	3.46	1.74	
I frequently buy sustainable clothing even if they are more expensive than conventional clothing.	3.48	1.70	

¹Note: a Pearson correlation coefficient.

TABLE 2. Variable correlations

Variables	CC	EC	PCE	GT	PG	PB
Conspicuous Consumption (CC)	.83					
Environmental Concern (EC)	.24***	.87				
Perceived consumer effectiveness (PCE)	.35***	.60***	.83			
Green Trust (GR)	.34***	.05	.23***	.85		
Perceived greenwashing (PG)	.12**	.31***	.16***	.23***	.81	
Purchase Behavior (PB)	.50***	.38***	.52***	.34***	0.2	.87

Note: Square roots of each construct's AVE in the diagonal. *** $p < .001$. ** $p < .01$.

Results

To determine the individual effect of each of the five independent variables (perceived greenwashing, trust in sustainable clothing brands, environmental concern, PCE, and conspicuous consumption motives) on the purchase of sustainable clothing, we conducted multiple linear regression analysis with SPSS 26. The regression model was overall significant ($p < .001$) and explained a significant proportion of the variance of the dependent variable ($R^2 = .42$). Regarding assumptions testing, the normal probability ($P-P$) plot of standardized regression residuals was nearly overlapping the diagonal, confirming approximately normal distributed errors (Durbin–Watson = 1.90). Also, multicollinearity was ruled out since, with detection-tolerance values ranging from .58 to .82 and variance inflation factors (VIF) ranging from 1.21 to 1.69, indicators for multicollinearity were respectively well above and below recommended thresholds for tolerance $> .10$ to $.20$ and $VIF < 5$ to 10 .

Table 3 presents the regression coefficients of the two regression models, one without interactions and one introducing the conspicuous consumption \times PCE interaction term. In the model without interaction, all variables have a significant influence on the dependent variable sustainable clothing purchase as proposed by H1 to H5. Conspicuous consumption ($\beta = .32, t = 9.18, p < .001$) and PCE ($\beta = .31, t = 7.66, p < .001$) have individually the strongest positive effect on purchase, significantly stronger than the significantly positive effects of environmental concern ($\beta = .13, t = 3.25, p < .001$) and trust in sustainable fashion brands ($\beta = .13, t = 3.80, p < .001$), as the nonoverlapping confidence intervals of the standardized regression coefficient β confirm. Perceived greenwashing has a negative effect on purchase ($\beta = -.08, t = -2.27, p = .02$).

To address the proposed moderating influence of PCE on the effect of conspicuous consumption motives on purchase (H6), we introduced the interaction term (conspicuous consumption \times PCE) into the regression model. The regression values of all variables except

conspicuous consumption and PCE varied only marginally with small nonsignificant increases. The strong interaction term confirmed the moderating influence ($\beta = .51, t = 3.81, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.25, 0.77]$). Indeed, the nonoverlapping confidence intervals confirmed that the interaction of conspicuous consumption with PCE had the strongest influence of all variables on the purchase of sustainable clothing. Conditional effect analysis showed that the effect of conspicuous consumption on purchase was lower at one standard deviation below the PCE mean value ($M - 1\text{SD} = 3.17, \beta = .28, t = 5.33, p < .001$) than at the mean value ($M = 4.50, \beta = .40, t = 9.25, p < .001$) and higher at one standard deviation above the mean ($M + 1\text{SD} = 5.84, \beta = .51, t = 9.78, p < .001$). As an additional robustness check, we conducted the analysis by introducing gender and age as covariates. While gender did not affect purchasing, age had a small negative effect on purchase ($\beta = -.06, t = -2.04, p = .04$). Overall results varied only marginally by introducing the covariates. The effects of gender and age on purchase did also not interact with the effects of any of the other variables.

TABLE 3. Linear multiple regression analysis of antecedents of sustainable clothing purchase (regression models with and without the conspicuous consumption \times PCE interaction term)

Note: Dependent variable, sustainable clothing purchase; *B*, unstandardized regression coefficient; *SE*, standard error; β , standardized

Factors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>T</i>	Sig.	β LBCI	β UBCI	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>T</i>	Sig.	β LBCI	β UBCI
(Constant)	-.72	.31		-2.31	.02	-1.34	-.11	.85	.52		1.65	.10	-.06	.06
Conspicuous consumption	.40	.04	.32	9.18	<.001	.31	.48	.01	.11	.00	.05	.96	-.17	.18
Environmental concern	.15	.05	.13	3.25	<.001	.06	.23	.16	.04	.15	3.60	<.001	.07	.22
PCE	.38	.05	.31	7.66	<.001	.28	.48	.05	.10	.04	.53	.60	-.12	.20
Green trust	.17	.05	.13	3.80	<.001	.08	.26	.13	.05	.10	2.84	.01	.03	.17
Perceived greenwashing	-.11	.05	-.08	-2.27	.02	-.20	-.01	-.12	.05	-.09	-2.54	.01	-.15	-.02
Conspicuous \times PCE								.09	.02	.51	3.81	<.001	.25	.77
<i>R</i>²	.42							.43						

coefficient; LBCI, lower bound confidence interval; UBCI, upper bound confidence interval.

Discussion and Theoretical Contribution

This study analyzes the degree to which conspicuous consumption, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, trust in sustainable clothing brands, and perceived greenwashing contribute to explaining the purchase of sustainable clothing. This research is the first to integrate these variables into a unifying framework and to examine their effects together on reported actual purchasing behavior. The results confirmed the effect of all proposed antecedents of purchasing and showed that conspicuous consumption motives and perceived consumer effectiveness have a stronger influence on purchases than the remaining variables. Indeed, the effect of conspicuous consumption was moderated by perceived consumer effectiveness, with the interaction of both variables having the strongest effect on the purchase of sustainable clothing. As theoretically proposed, the more participants in the study believed that their action will make a real difference for the environment, the more they believed that others feel the same, which is a prerequisite for conspicuous consumption to provide the expected motivational effect. Our research provides several theoretical contributions:

First, our findings reassess the importance of environmental concern as a behavioral antecedent. Most research on sustainable consumption and green consumer behavior highlights environmental concern and consciousness as one of the most significant antecedents of environmentally friendly purchases (e.g., Fryxell & Lo, 2003; Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009; Park & Lin, 2020; Prakash & Pathak, 2017; Rausch & Kopplin, 2021; Yarimoglu & Binboga, 2019; Zhang et al., 2018). In our study, for the specific case of sustainable clothing, environmental consciousness had a significantly weaker influence than conspicuous consumption and perceived consumer effectiveness.

Second, we show that conspicuous consumption is one of the strongest drivers of sustainable fashion purchases. Thus, the purchase of sustainable clothing is more strongly associated with the benefits of a prosocial image than with the concern about the degradation of the environment. Our findings support the argument that the consumption of sustainable clothing is strongly associated with social meaning and values (Diddi et al., 2019; Jacobs et al., 2018; Şener et al., 2019). The consumption of sustainable clothing allows consumers to signal to others their contribution to the improvement of the common good environment. By showing that sustainable clothing plays a significant role as conspicuous displays, our study contributes to the stream of literature on conspicuous consumption motives as a driver of sustainable consumption (Ali et al., 2019; Amatulli et al., 2018; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hammad et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018; Policarpo & Aguiar, 2020).

Third, the moderation of the effect of conspicuous consumption by perceived consumer effectiveness is a novel finding. On the one hand, our results confirmed the relevance of PCE as described in the literature (Ellen et al., 1991; Jaiswal & Singh, 2018; Kinnear et al., 1974; Niedermeier et al., 2021; Roberts, 1996; Zhao et al., 2018). PCE is a crucial factor influencing sustainable clothing purchases. This finding indicates that the more consumers believe that purchasing sustainable clothing brands helps mitigate the environmental problems generated by the fashion industry, the more likely are they to consume sustainable clothing. On the other hand, our study is the first to propose and show that this belief does not only affect purchases directly but that it also constitutes a boundary condition for conspicuous consumption motives. Only when consumers perceive that sustainable clothing will make an actual environmental impact, they will be motivated to display their environmental engagement by purchasing these products. This finding makes a significant contribution to the literature on conspicuous consumption (e.g., Ali et al., 2019; Amatulli et al., 2018; Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hammad et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2018) because this moderation mechanism has not been proposed previously.

Fourth, the negative effect of perceived greenwashing and the positive influence of trust in the sustainability of the brand together advance our knowledge of consumer responses to the authenticity of green marketing claims. This is, to the best of our knowledge, the first study to address the effects of perceived greenwashing on reported purchases of sustainable clothing. Once consumers perceive green product claims to be vague or seemingly unlikely and develop doubts about marketing information or suspicions that the company is deploying greenwashing strategies, purchasing behavior is negatively affected. Trust in sustainable clothing brands is, therefore, a further important factor in determining purchasing behavior. This finding extends research by Neumann et al. (2020), who found that trust is an antecedent of purchase intention in the fast fashion sector.

Practical Implications

Our findings provide important insights for marketers of sustainable clothing, however, putting them into practice can be challenging. Manufacturers should highlight visually the sustainability of their clothing brand or line through style and sustainability labels but, at the same time, strictly avoid the impression of greenwashing. Making sustainable clothing more conspicuous can be achieved through differential style designs and visible sustainability labels and brands. Fashion designers will have to find differentiated fashion styles that are associated by target consumers with a more sustainable lifestyle but that, at the same time, resonate with

their fashion preferences. There are a number of sustainable fashion brands pioneering such fashion styles. Also, brands and labels can display sustainability in a symbolic way through verbal slogans and symbols (e.g., H&M's "Conscious Choice" line). However, there is a risk involved in the use of sustainability brands and labels as they may be perceived as greenwashing, ultimately hurting the brand. To avoid the perception of greenwashing, companies should at all costs avoid making false, vague, or unsubstantiated sustainability statements (e.g., "protects the climate" or "contains recycled cotton"). Companies must provide exhaustive information justifying the increased sustainability of their garments. Whenever possible, clothing should display sustainability labels. While official labels exist for instance for organic farming, they are still scarce in the fashion industry. Some private certification standards exist, however, such as the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) for organic cotton, the Global Recycled Standard (GRS) for recycled products, or Certified B Corporations, which certify the sustainability efforts of the manufacturer. Sustainable clothing companies should consider adhering to the standards of these labels.

Making sure that consumers perceive that sustainable clothing makes a real environmental impact not only counteracts greenwashing perception, but it also, as our study shows, is a prerequisite for consumers' conspicuous consumption motives to trigger purchases. Because the effect of conspicuous consumption on purchasing depends on consumers' perceived environmental effectiveness, that is, their belief that they can contribute significantly to improving the situation of the environment, it is essential for marketers to strengthen perceived effectiveness. Recognized environmental labels and detailed information on the environmental impact of the fashion product help consumers to perceive they can make an impact on the situation of the environment through their purchase. Marketers should provide information on the impact an individual consumer has by purchasing a specific sustainable product, for instance, in terms of carbon footprint, materials recycled, or water saved, in comparison with less sustainable conventional clothing products. Consumers seem to perceive that, for others to perceive their environmental commitment, they must first believe themselves that they are making a noteworthy contribution to the environment. Sustainable fashion marketers can then in addition trigger conspicuous consumption motives through advertising campaigns, highlighting the idea that wearing sustainable clothing allows consumers to show their environmental commitment to others, enhancing status and popularity among like-minded peers.

Providing trustworthy, accurate environmental information has the further effect of nurturing consumers' trust in the fashion brand. As our study shows, trust in the sustainability

of the brand also determines purchasing. Fashion marketers should, however, go a step further and, instead of concentrating only on the environmental attributes of their products, develop their overall corporate credibility by showing through fact-based trustworthy corporate communication that environmental and social sustainability, rather than just a marketing gimmick, are a central part of the company's core values.

Since self-regulation of the industry on greenwashing seems to be not sufficiently effective, consumer policymakers should engage more actively in addressing this problem. Further regulation of sustainability claims in the clothing industry is necessary to avoid consumers being exposed to unfounded sustainability claims. Official sustainability labels similar to the organic food labels in the food industry are needed to provide consumers with reliable information.

The findings of this research have also significant implications for consumers. Consumers should be aware that a significant part of their behavior may be driven by processes of which they are not immediately aware. Consumers may feel the urge to purchase sustainable clothing but may not be conscious that they are being motivated by the need to signal their attitudes and beliefs to others. They may also be motivated to abstain from the purchase of sustainable clothing because they suspect greenwashing. Instead of a general suspicion of the clothing industry, consumers should analyze carefully the sustainability information provided by fashion brands on a case-to-case basis. Some of the sustainable clothing manufacturers seem to be putting a sincere effort into creating a more sustainable product offer.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the representative consumer sample contributes to this study's validity and external representativeness, the cross-sectional character of the data limits causal and directional inferences. Also, the analysis is based on a multiple regression approach, which has some limitations compared with other analytic methods such as structural equation modeling. Future research should address these limitations through experimental designs, in particular, experimental field studies that maintain the external representativeness of results. Some of the participants may have been not aware and conscious of greenwashing before being asked to rate items related to this question in the questionnaire. To avoid such an effect, future research should intend to measure greenwashing perception with open questions that avoid prompting greenwashing. A future mixed method approach, which combines findings from qualitative interviews with quantitative survey data, may extend the theoretical and practical contributions of this study.

We did not instruct participants about specific brands or styles of sustainable fashion. We, therefore, assessed the effect of conspicuous motives in the context of how the participants perceived the impact of their consuming sustainable fashion on others. Different sustainable brands and sustainable clothing styles may be more conspicuous than others and affect conspicuous consumption. While the variables analyzed explained 43% of the variance in actual sustainable clothing purchases in the sample, there is still a significant part not explained by our model. Consumer preferences regarding the specific style and appearance of sustainable clothing may explain a further significant part of the variance in consumers' purchase of these garments. Future research should address the studied relationships experimentally, exposing participants to specific sustainable clothing brands and styles.

Also, the specific cultural context in which this study was conducted should be considered when interpreting its findings. The data were collected in a developed Western country. Conspicuous consumption may be particularly relevant as a driver of sustainable consumption in newly industrialized countries—especially among their rapidly growing middle classes (Hammad et al., 2019). Future research should replicate our findings in other cultural and international environments.

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Conflict Of Interest

None.

Appendix A: Overview of Consumer Research on Sustainable Clothing

Authors (year)	Theoretical base	Method	Samples	Main findings
Cocquyt et al. (2020)	Sharing economy	Mixed-method design; online survey using conjoint analysis	<i>N</i> = 1512 participants. Five focus groups	Sharing clothes on a platform is a new, potentially more sustainable, way of consuming clothes. Potential users prefer small clothing share platforms with the possibility of participation in decision-

				making, but without the commitment of shareholding. Women prefer platforms with dominant idealistic, non-financial, and social goals; men prefer platforms focusing on financial goals.
Colucci & Vecchi (2021)	Circular economy business model	Qualitative research, using multiple case studies	Four case studies from the Italian fashion industry: Candiani denim, WRÅD, dress you can, and Gucci	There is a beneficial relationship between sustainability and circular economy (CE). Additionally, CE practices can constitute a source of competitive advantage. Sustainable business models will replace the dominant unsustainable ones.
Didi et al. (2019)	Behavioral reasoning theory	Qualitative research	Six focus groups with 41 young adult consumers	Young adult consumers engage in sustainable clothing consumption behaviors, primarily because of perceived value, sustainability, commitment, uniqueness, and lifestyle changes. The motive for not engaging in these behaviors included a perceived lack of variety/style, budget constraints, skepticism, lack of knowledge/skills, emotions attached to consumption, perceived lack of availability, and consumers' self-indulgent behavior.
D'Souza et al. (2015)	Theory of reasoned action, social dilemma theory, and behavior control theory	Survey, PLS technique	N = 184 male consumers randomly selected	Environmental concern, sustainable pricing, and sustainable commitment, positively influence men's purchase intentions for eco-clothing. Perceived consumer effectiveness and faith in others were not found to be significant moderators.
Elf et al. (2022)	Circular economy business model	Longitudinal interview-based study	An initial screening process surveying 144 fashion	The distinctive development and use of dynamic capabilities enable micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to act in agile ways, allowing

			businesses, 48 enterprises were selected for further qualitative inquiry through semi-structured in-depth interviews	them to introduce, test, and advance circular economy solutions. SMEs working well and successfully remain open to reform, indicating a positive outlook toward the future and the ability to face changes.
Han et al. (2017)	Heider's balance theory	Multi-method participatory action research	A two-stage iterative: (i) 24 university students were assigned to four focus groups, (ii) participatory action research with eight participants	Consumers' limited awareness and knowledge about sustainable fashion products may promote negative sentiments toward sustainable fashion product consumption (SFPC). Staged experiences develop individualized competencies that may guide SFPC decisions and choices. Developing and staging consumer-centered experiences help balance the psychological imbalance occurring in the attitude-behavior gap between sustainability concerns and SFPC behaviors.
Hill & Lee (2015)	Brand-extension theory	Online survey	N = 598 participants	In analyzing consumer perceptions of a potential sustainable line extension introduced by a specific fast-fashion retailer, the results confirm that brand-cause fit and brand-extension fit significantly predicted brand extension success. The consumers' level of knowledge about the brand and its causes should also be considered when presenting sustainability as fitting with a brand.
Hustvedt & Dickson (2009)	Theory of planned behavior	Mail survey	N = 377 effective questionnaires	Consumers that use organic cotton are motivated by their beliefs about the beneficial outcomes of the purchase, for themselves, the organic industry, and the environment. They had strong self-identity as socially responsible consumers.

Jacobs et al. (2018)	The value–attitude–behavior hierarchy	Online survey	N = 1085 German women recruited via an online panel	A positive attitude toward social–ecological clothing standards, biospheric and altruistic values, as well as an affinity to online and catalog shopping enhance sustainable clothing purchases. Egoistic and hedonic values hinder sustainable clothing purchase behavior. No significant effects of the suspected barriers—fashion consciousness and price sensitivity—have been confirmed.
Joergens (2006)	Ethical fashion consumption	Focus groups as a qualitative method and questionnaires as a quantitative method.	Focus groups were conducted in Frankfurt, Germany, and Manchester, England. In Germany 64 and in England 53 completed questionnaires	Findings demonstrate little evidence that ethical issues have any effect on consumers' fashion purchase behavior. When buying fashion products, consumers are more interested in their fashion needs than the needs of others involved in the apparel supply chain.
Neumann et al. (2020)	Ethical consumerism, theory of reasoned action	Structural equation modeling; online survey	N = 216 international consumers	Perceptions of social responsibility directly affected consumers' attitudes toward sustainable fashion brands. Consumer attitude and perceived consumer effectiveness did not predict purchase intention. Consumers' trust is a powerful mechanism to affect purchase intention toward a brand's sustainable clothing lines. Although previous literature has shown general attitude could positively influence consumers' purchase intention, we failed to find support for this connection.
Park & Lin (2020)	Theory of reasoned action, brand value, signaling theory	<i>T</i> -test analysis and logistic regression analysis	N = 217 young Korean consumers	Consumer attitude is a weak or insignificant predictor of green fashion buying. Moreover, despite having the highest levels of awareness of ethical fashion, younger people have been found

				to consume fewer ethical products. Perceived consumer effectiveness or income was more related to actual purchase behavior of second-hand fashion products, while subjective norm or education played important roles in purchasing upcycled fashion goods.
Rausch & Kopplin (2021)	Theory of reasoned action	Partial least squares structural equation modeling; online survey across multiple social media channels—Qualtrics	<i>N</i> = 464	Attitude toward sustainable clothing has the highest impact on purchase intention. Consumers' greenwashing concerns negatively influence this relationship. Perceived environmental knowledge has a positive impact on purchase intention for these products. Moreover, perceived economic risk has no significant effect on the intention–behavior relation.
Şener et al. (2019)	Slow fashion consumption	Structural equation modeling	<i>N</i> = 725 students pursuing higher education in Turkey and Kazakhstan	Slow fashion supports local production. Consumers who intend to purchase slow-fashion clothing are willing to pay higher prices than for other products. Clothes that have features of localism and exclusivity are perceived as more valuable.

Appendix B: Sample Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	352	58.7
	Male	246	41.0
	Other	2	.3
Age	18–30	120	20.1
	31–40	120	20.1
	41–50	95	15.9
	51–60	78	12.9
	>60	184	30.5

Household income	\$0–\$24.000	116	19.3
	\$25.000–\$49.000	168	28.0
	\$50.000–\$74.000	124	20.7
	\$75.000–\$99.000	81	13.5
	\$100.000 or greater	71	11.8
	Prefer not to say	40	6.7
Education	Year 12	136	22.7
	Trade certificate or diploma	179	29.8
	University degree	158	26.3
	Postgraduate or higher	82	13.7
	Other	45	7.5
	Total	600	100

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11.2 Social cynicism, greenwashing, and trust in green clothing brands

Manoela Costa Policarpo, Vanessa Apaolaza, Patrick Hartmann, Mario R. Paredes, Clare D'Souza

Manoela Costa Policarpo | mcosta004@ikasle.ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Vanessa Apaolaza | vanessa.apaolaza@ehu.eus (corresponding author)

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Patrick Hartmann | patrick.hartmann@ehu.eus

University of the Basque Country UPV/EHU

Mario R. Paredes | mariorparedes@gmail.com

Universidad del Rosario

Clare D'Souza | c.dsouza@latrobe.edu.au

La Trobe University

Introduction

Consumers' awareness of sustainability issues has in recent years increased the demand for eco-friendly products across different industries. The clothing industry constitutes a major player in this trend (Perera et al., 2018; Rausch et al., 2021). However, the industry faces crucial environmental issues, since, after the oil and gas sectors, the fashion industry is considered one of the most polluting, producing around 10% of the global carbon emissions (Legere & Kang, 2020; Muthukumarana et al., 2018), making current levels of consumption environmentally unsustainable (Johnstone & Tan, 2015).

The term fast fashion denotes garments distinguished by attributes such as low prices, short life cycles, cheap labor, and several clothing collections each year. Fast fashion encourages overconsumption, leading to negative environmental consequences (Park et al., 2017; Park & Kim, 2016). Conversely, the term sustainable fashion denotes garments that incorporate features of social and environmental sustainability (Su et al., 2019). It addresses

several negative issues of the fast fashion industry, to provide the adoption and implementation of measures such as the avoidance of animal cruelty, worker exploitation, or environmental hazard through the manufacturing process, to diminish the adverse social and environmental effects (Han et al., 2017; McNeill & Moore, 2015).

However, a significant attitude-behavior gap exists with respect to the purchase of sustainable products. Consumers claim to care about the environment, but most of them do not change their current consumption habits (Grimmer & Miles, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2018; Perera et al., 2018). Researchers have called for a better comprehension of the antecedents of sustainable consumer behavior (Jacobs et al., 2018; McNeill & Venter, 2019; Wang et al., 2022), and the factors that motivate consumers to adopt new environmental products (Flores & Jansson, 2022). In particular, it is necessary to increase our knowledge of the drivers of consumer behavior with regard to green garments (Kopplin & Rösch, 2021; Rausch et al., 2021). For instance, as Busalim et al. (2022) indicated, the understanding of consumer behavior and sustainable fashion is still insufficient since most published research still does not address sustainable fashion from a consumer behavior perspective; instead, most studies have focused on business models, supply chain management and trends in sustainable fashion.

Unfavorable organizational images and lack of trust are some of the variables that have been identified as potential barriers to green purchases (Sharma, 2021). The literature has also explored different variables as antecedents of green trust; including constructs such as perceived greenwashing (Aji & Sutikno, 2015), green perceived quality (Gil & Jacob, 2018), green perceived value (Lam et al., 2016), green image and physical environment quality (Chinomona & Chivhungwa, 2019), environmental knowledge (Dhir et al., 2021), and green brand image (Chen, 2010).

The literature has highlighted the need for more research on the antecedents of green trust (Lal et al., 2017). Social axioms have received so far little attention as such antecedents. Social axioms refer to generalized beliefs about oneself, the social and physical environment, or the spiritual world (Leung et al., 2002). Why individuals react differently to environmental issues may be explained by social axioms. Recently, Chan and Tam (2021) found empirical evidence that suggests that social axioms affect proenvironmental consumer behavior.

To address this gap in the literature, we study the effect of social cynicism, a social axiom that mainly refers to a negative view of society and its establishments (Leung & Bond, 2004; Singelis et al., 2003), on brand trust regarding green garments. The present study develops and empirically tests a conceptual framework to shed light for environmentally friendly garments on the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust. Since fashion

brands now increasingly promote their environmental awareness, there is a need to understand how personality traits affect the perception of these companies' sustainability claims.

Furthermore, some studies have explored the negative relationship between consumers' greenwashing perceptions and consumer trust in green brands (Chen & Chang, 2013). However, the mediating effect of greenwashing perceptions in the relationship between social cynicism and consumer trust has not been addressed in previous studies. Thus, this study advances the literature by analyzing perceived greenwashing as a process explanation of the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust in the case of green fashion.

Finally, while the positive effect of conspicuous consumption—the need to signal status through possessions as a means of self-expression (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004)—on clothing choices and consumption (Cronje et al., 2016; Piacentini & Mailer, 2004) has been discussed in the literature, research on the link between conspicuous and sustainable consumption has been scarce (Hammad et al., 2019). Our framework studies the moderating effect of conspicuous motive on the indirect influence of social cynicism as a personality trait on brand trust regarding green garments.

Theoretical Background

Social cynicism

Social axioms are important in an individual's beliefs, and their main function is to enhance people's lives, serving them as a guide in their behavior (Leung et al., 2002). Social cynicism is a social axiom that is related to higher skepticism regarding peoples' values and motivations (Vice, 2011). Cynical persons distrust others' motives while holding the belief that people only do things to serve their own needs (Stavrova & Ehlebracht, 2016). Social cynicism has been considered a personal characteristic that may vary among individuals (Abraham, 2000; Chan & Tam, 2021). Social cynicism has been linked to lower trust in social institutions and other persons (Leung et al., 2002; Singelis et al., 2003), unethical behaviors (Alexandra et al., 2017; Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014; Detert et al., 2008), lower interpersonal trust and cognitive flexibility, lower hopefulness, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life (Bernardo & Nalipay, 2016; Lai et al., 2007). Social axioms may determine individuals' different responses to environmental issues (Chan & Tam, 2021). Social cynicism has been shown to negatively relate to environmental concerns, since cynical individuals are more skeptical of threats, and tend to deny the existence of environmental problems (Groneworld et al., 2012).

Greenwashing

Growing environmental concern among consumers has led them to demand more sustainable options (Akturan, 2018; Nekmahmud & Fekete-Farkas, 2020). Green marketing has become a differentiator in the marketplace (Kahraman & Kazançoğlu, 2019) and companies' environmental performance has been shown to affect consumers' buying intentions (Grimmer & Bingham, 2013). These factors put pressure on companies to demonstrate their green practices (Berrone et al., 2017). However, when companies do not fulfill their “green claims,” greenwashing becomes a major issue (Akturan, 2018).

Greenwashing refers to the use of misleading proenvironmental claims (Terrachoice, 2007). There is evidence that brands engage in greenwashing—a selective disclosure about their environmental performance that deceives consumers with false claims about eco-friendly issues (de Freitas Netto et al., 2020). Greenwashing practices have been shown to negatively affect the attitude toward green products (Delmas & Burbano, 2011), the evaluations of brands and advertisements (Schmuck et al., 2018), and companies' financial performance (Szabo & Webster, 2021).

Greenwashing has been studied across industries such as banking (Khan et al., 2020), oil and gas (Scanlan, 2017), tourism (Self et al., 2010), and the clothing industry (Rausch & Kopplin, 2021). Leading fashion companies, for instance, Zara and H&M, have been shown to promote their green practices, while, at the same time, performing activities that negatively affect the environment (Munir & Mohan, 2022). Misleading information about environmental product attributes diminishes consumers' trust and purchasing intentions, creating a negative view of the sustainable clothing industry (Nyilasy et al., 2014). Perceptions of practices of greenwashing negatively affect perceptions of companies' motives and actions toward the environment, diminishing green trust (Chen & Chang, 2013).

Conspicuous Consumption

Consumers display symbolic meaning to the self and others through consumption (Johnson et al., 2018; Sirgy, 1982). Individuals compete with others to demonstrate self-worth and social status. Research has demonstrated that the use of clothing brands may serve as a sign to display these characteristics to others (Cronje et al., 2016). Conspicuous consumption takes place when individuals communicate image or status to others through consumption or possessions (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004).

Conspicuous consumption motives have been positively related to consumer behaviors such as purchase decisions (Legere & Kang, 2020; Lundblad & Davies, 2016), social media

posting (Taylor, 2020), or engaging in tourism activities (Boley et al., 2018). Conspicuous motivations enhance self-image, providing social status; for such cases, literature has coined terms such as “conspicuous prosocial consumption” (Johnson et al., 2018), “conspicuous compassion” (West, 2004), “conspicuous donation behavior” (Grace & Griffin, 2006), or “eco-conspicuous consumption” (Ramchandani & Coste-Maniere, 2018).

Conspicuous consumption has been identified as a motive for proenvironmental consumer behavior (Hammad et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2022). The use or acquisition of green products can enhance social status by increasing prosocial reputation or as a sign of wealth (Kohlová & Urban, 2020). According to Palomo-Vélez et al. (2021), consuming environmentally friendly products communicates desirable cues such as generosity and attractiveness. Eco-friendly products also provide consumers with acknowledgment as sustainable or environmentally committed individuals. For instance, in exploring the antecedents of environmentalism in the setting of smart mobility, Sestino et al. (2021) identified that consumers' levels of conspicuous consumption positively moderated the effect of innovativeness on environmentalism. The authors highlight that green products allow individuals to be recognized by others for their green behaviors, enhancing their social prestige. Furthermore, Beall et al. (2021) found that conspicuous consumption was positively associated with the intention to engage in ecotourism since it could be displayed as self-promotion in social media.

Hypotheses Development

Social cynicism and trust in green fashion

When consumers evaluate a fashion product's environmental claims and features, a major purchase barrier is a lack of provided information and details to back up such claims (Tucker et al., 2012). Typically, they cannot verify by themselves the veracity of the environmental claims of the products labeled as eco-friendly (Schmuck et al., 2018) and need assistance on which consumption patterns they have to change to generate a positive environmental impact (Thøgersen, 2021). Consequently, consumers need to trust the source that asserts the sustainability of the products. Thus, branding becomes an essential element in the assessment of green claims (Hartmann et al., 2005). Trust is a significant determinant of consumer–brand relationships (Gefen & Straub, 2004). Higher levels of trust imply a more positive attitude toward and evaluation of the brand. In environmentally friendly products, green trust has been positively related to higher brand equity (Chen & Chang, 2013), word-of-mouth endorsement, and green purchase intentions (Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021).

On the other hand, when consumers experience distrust or skepticism toward a firm's green claims, enhanced risk perceptions decrease purchase intention (Leonidou & Skarmeas, 2017; Nuttavuthisit & Thøgersen, 2017). There is significant evidence in the literature that a lack of trust hinders the consumption of green products (Aertsens et al., 2009).

More cynical individuals mistrust institutions and believe that organizations lack integrity and promote selfishness (Dean Jr. et al., 1998; Singelis et al., 2003; Vice, 2011), and this leads to negative reactions to cooperation or participation in actions that benefit all actors (Chiu, 2005). More cynical individuals are more suspicious of companies' environmental claims (Chan & Tam, 2021) and will tend to distrust the sustainability claims of fashion brands.

H1. Social cynicism has a negative relationship with trust in clothing brands featuring sustainability claims.

The mediating influence of the perception of greenwashing

Building a sustainable brand largely depends on building brand credibility and consumers' trust in it (Chen & Chang, 2013). Greenwashing will diminish consumers' long-term trust in a brand, undermining their relationship with it (Kahraman & Kazançoğlu, 2019). Furthermore, greenwashing has been negatively associated with brand credibility (Ng et al., 2014), consumers' green trust (Chen & Chang, 2013), green branding equity and purchase intentions (Akturan, 2018), and product and brand perceptions (Nyilasy et al., 2012; Szabo & Webster, 2021). Higher perceptions of greenwashing affect green purchasing intentions since consumers distrust companies' green claims (Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021).

More cynical persons are distrustful and doubtful (Leung et al., 2002; Stavrova et al., 2020). Social cynicism leads to distrust of the aims of others, including companies (Aqueveque & Encina, 2010). Skeptical consumers do not trust companies' green practices (Albayrak et al., 2013). Consumer cynicism is related to perceived greenwashing because it enhances consumers' suspicions that companies' real motives do not align with sustainability (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). Therefore, more socially cynical individuals will also be more prone to have higher greenwashing perceptions, that is, they believe that companies exaggerate or omit important environmental information. This perception in turn will negatively influence these consumers' brand trust regarding green garments brands. The relationship between social cynicism and consumers' trust in apparel brands featuring green claims can therefore be explained by a process mediated by perceived greenwashing.

H2. The negative relationship of social cynicism with trust in apparel brands featuring sustainability claims is mediated by an increase in the perceived greenwashing of fashion brands.

The moderating role of conspicuous consumption motives

Previous research has shown a link between conspicuous and sustainable consumption behavior, since consuming environmentally friendly products may enhance status (Griskevicius et al., 2010). The consumption of eco-friendly products can communicate a prosocial self-image by spending resources for others (Sexton & Sexton, 2014). Assigning resources to sustainable options may enhance consumers' social position (Johnson et al., 2018). Sarkar et al. (2019) identified self-expression motives as antecedents of positive brand attitudes and buying intentions of green brands since individuals' capacity to contribute to the environment enhances their social image. For instance, consumers may be willing to spend more for the acquisition of an electric car to display prosocial behavior (Sexton & Sexton, 2014).

Recent studies highlight conspicuous motives in the consumption of green garments. For instance, Evans et al. (2022) showed an effect of secondhand fashion shopping behavior, as an alternative to fast-fashion products, on consumers' self-identity. Legere and Kang (2020) found that consumers' intentions for sustainable fashion consumption are driven by consumers' self-expression motives. By wearing fashionable clothing, consumers express themselves and show their self-worth to others (Sontag & Lee, 2004). Sun et al. (2022) and Apaolaza et al. (2023) showed that conspicuous motives are positively related to the purchase of eco-friendly fashion items, due to their symbolic and prestigious value, which helps consumers to project a positive image. Because of the generally higher cost of green garments, consumers wearing those can both display their environmental commitment and their capacity to incur in additional costs for the benefit of the environment. Conspicuous consumption is therefore not only relevant for highly-priced luxury fashion products but also for moderately priced clothing. A condition for this effect is that other consumers recognize that the garments in question are of the sustainable type, through specific design features and visible branding (e.g., Patagonia).

Furthermore, recent research has indicated that consumers' characteristics such as personality traits influence conspicuous consumption (Sun et al., 2020). Han et al. (2010) showed that individuals more sensitive to status and self-promotion engage in behaviors to promote their self-image to others. Naderi and Strutton (2015) found that highly self-centered or narcissistically oriented individuals may engage in pro-environmental behaviors, as a means

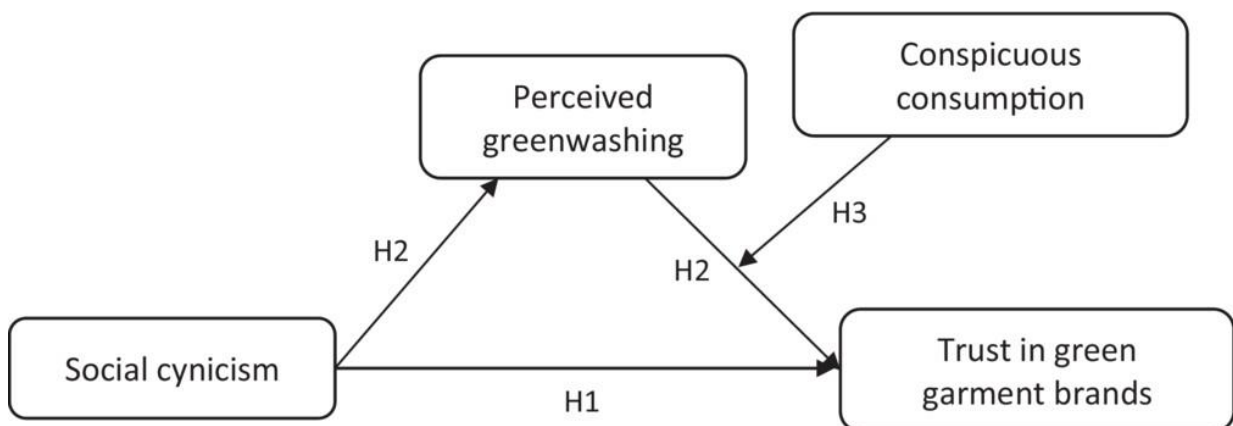
to show and demonstrate to others their capacity to afford higher expenses and their commitment to the environment, beyond their real responsibility.

Since individuals with higher conspicuous consumption motives will tend to consume green fashion products less because of their environmental impact than because of their social function, it seems likely that they will be less affected by social cynicism. Cynicism affects their attitude toward these brands less because sustainable fashion brands can still fulfill for them their function of self-representation, notwithstanding the degree of veracity of their sustainability claims. Consumers with higher (lower) levels of conspicuous consumption will, therefore, be less (more) susceptible to the influence of social cynicism on brand trust regarding green garments. Since the expected effect of social cynicism on trust is mediated by perceived greenwashing, this indirect influence will be moderated by conspicuous consumption motives, with the moderation affecting the influence of perceived greenwashing on trust. Because more conspicuous consumers prime the signaling effect of green fashion products rather than their concrete environmental impact, they will be less affected by the trust-decreasing influence of perceived greenwashing triggered by their social cynicism.

H3. Conspicuous consumption motives positively moderate the indirect negative relationship between social cynicism and trust in apparel promoted with sustainability claims mediated by greenwashing perceptions, through the moderation of the influence of perceived greenwashing on trust.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework.

FIGURE 1. Theoretical model of the indirect relationship between social cynicism and brand trust toward apparel promoted with sustainability claims



Method

Participants and procedure

A representative survey of Australian consumers (N = 600) was conducted online to study the hypothesized relationships. The sample (age range 18–85, mean age = 47.84, SD = 17.64; 41.3% male) was provided by commercial panel provider Qualtrics (Table 1). To contextualize the subject of the survey, participants read in an introduction that currently many clothing brands were promoted as sustainable garments. Participants then completed a questionnaire measuring their general perception of greenwashing by clothing companies and how much they trusted sustainable fashion brands. They furthermore answered two groups of questions that measured their level of conspicuous consumption and degree of social cynicism.

TABLE 1. Sample characteristics (N = 600)

Sample characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	352	58.7
	Male	246	41.0
	Other	2	.3
Age	18-30	120	20.1
	31-40	120	20.1
	41-50	95	15.9
	51-60	78	12.9
	> 60	184	30.5
Household income	\$0-\$24.000	116	19.3
	\$25.000-\$49.000	168	28.0
	\$50.000-\$74.000	124	20.7
	\$75.000-\$99.000	81	13.5
	\$100.000 or greater	71	11.8
	Prefer not to say	40	6.7
Education	Year 12	136	22.7
	Trade certificate or diploma	179	29.8
	University degree	158	26.3
	Postgraduate or higher	82	13.7
	Other	45	7.5

Measurement

The variables were measured with validated measures of the literature. We used four items adapted from the Social Axioms Survey to assess this personal trait (Leung et al., 2002). Participants rated each of these items on 7-point scales ranging from strongly disbelieve (1) to

strongly believe (7). All further items were assessed on 7-point Likert scales. To measure consumers' greenwashing perception, five items from Apaolaza et al. (2023) were used, adapted from Chen and Chang (2013) and Schmuck et al. (2018). Two items from Apaolaza et al. (2023) were used, also adapted from a measure developed by Chen and Chang (2013), to assess the degree to which consumers were trusting fashion brands marketed as sustainable. Finally, we used Apaolaza et al.'s (2023) seven statements measuring conspicuous consumption motives, which draws on research into symbolic and status consumption (O'Cass & McEwen, 2004) and consumption as self-presentation (Hartmann & Apaolaza-Ibáñez, 2012). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.078) confirmed an acceptable measurement model (Table 2). Table 3 shows the discriminant validity test.

TABLE 2. Variables and measurement items

	Mean	SD	F.L.	AV	CR	α
<i>Perceived greenwashing</i>	4.75	1.40		.75	.90	.90
<i>I think most of these products/brands are...:</i>						
not produced totally of environmentally friendly materials.			.66			
not always manufactured under sustainable conditions.			.75			
professing green claims that are vague or seemingly unprovable.			.84			
omitting or masking important information, making their green claims sound better than they are.			.88			
exaggerating the actual green functionality of the product.			.88			
<i>Trust in sustainable clothing brands</i>	3.90	1.34		.72	.83	.83
The environmental concern of these clothing brands' meets my expectations.			.84			
I feel that the environmental reputation of these clothing brands is generally reliable.			.85			
<i>Social cynicism</i>	5.12	1.07		.50	.79	.79
Powerful people tend to exploit others.			.85			
Power and status make people arrogant.			.83			
The various social institutions in society are biased toward the rich.			.58			
One has to deal with matters according to the specific circumstances and one's interests.			.51			
<i>Conspicuous consumption motives</i>	3.97	1.62		.61	.91	.91
<i>I think that buying sustainable clothing...:</i>						
Engenders popularity among friends and colleagues.			.57			
Means wealth.			.69			
Enables people to show off, to be noticed.			.85			
Enables people to feel more important.			.86			
Enables people to improve the image of themselves that they project to others.			.81			
Sustainable clothes are social status symbols.			.82			
Sustainable clothes are a symbol of success and prestige.						

TABLE 3. Construct correlations and discriminant validity

	SC	PG	CC	
Social cynicism (SC)	<i>0.71</i>			
Perceived greenwashing (PG)	0.46***	<i>0.87</i>		
Conspicuous consumption (CC)	0.20***	0.14**	<i>0.78</i>	
Trust in eco-clothing brands (TR)	-0.19***	-0.27***	0.35***	<i>0.85</i>

Note. In italic: square root of average variance extracted. ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Results

For the data analysis, we used correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis with SPSS 26 as well as Hayes' (2017) PROCESS. Construct correlations (Table 3) confirmed a positive correlation between social cynicism and perceived greenwashing ($r = 0.46$, $p < .001$) and a negative correlation between brand trust regarding green garments and greenwashing ($r = -0.27$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis confirmed a negative relationship between brand trust regarding green garments and social cynicism ($b = -0.15$, $SE = 0.05$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.02$, $F = 10.72$, $p < .001$), supporting 1.

To address the mediating influence hypothesized in 1, we conducted a bootstrapping analysis with PROCESS, which confirmed an influence of social cynicism on trust indirectly through greenwashing (indirect effect: $b = -0.10$, $BSE = 0.03$, 95% BCI $[-0.16, -0.05]$; direct effect remaining: $b = -0.05$, $BSE = 0.05$, 95% BCI $[-0.15, 0.05]$; total effect: $b = -0.15$, $BSE = 0.05$, 95% BCI $[-0.24, -0.06]$).

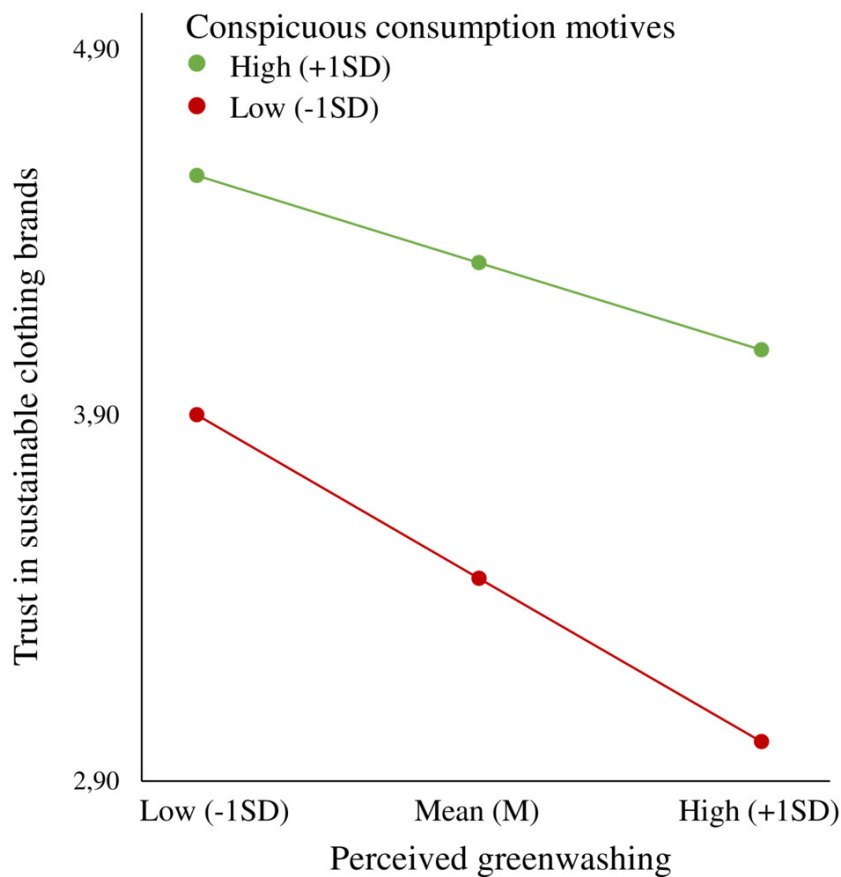
Model 14 of PROCESS was used to test 1 proposing the moderated mediation. We also report the two multiple regression analyses that Process Model 14 conducts as part of the test for moderated mediation (Table 4). The first regression analysis, addressing the influence of social cynicism on perceived greenwashing, confirmed a significant effect ($b = 0.47$, $p < .001$). The full regression on the dependent variable brand trust showed that, when introducing perceived greenwashing into the equation, the effect of social cynicism was mostly replaced by the mediator. Mediator perceived greenwashing ($b = -0.53$) and the interaction term greenwashing \times conspicuous consumption ($b = 0.07$) had a significant effect. The significant effect of greenwashing, displacing the effect of social cynicism provides initial support for a mediating influence, with social cynicism affecting trust indirectly through its effect on perceived greenwashing. The significant effect of the interaction term greenwashing \times conspicuous consumption indicates that conspicuous consumption motives moderate the relationship of greenwashing with trust (Figure 2).

TABLE 4. Linear regression analyses of effects on greenwashing (mediator) and green trust (with and without mediator and interaction term).

DV	IV	B	SE	t	R ²	F
Greenwashing	<i>Constant</i>	2.10	0.26	8.00***	0.18	33.67***
	Social cynicism	0.47	0.04	10.74***		
	Age	0.01	0.01	2.52**		
	Female	0.01	0.09	0.13		
	Non-binary	1.11	0.76	1.43		
Green trust	<i>Constant</i>	5.38	0.58	9.70***	0.21	38.33***
	Social cynicism	-0.12	0.05	-2.57*		
	Greenwashing	-0.52	0.11	-4.79***		
	Conspicuous	0.01	0.13	0.03		
	Greenw. x Conspic.	0.07	0.03	2.76**		

Note: ap < .10, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001. Greenwashing: perceived greenwashing. Green trust: trust in green garment brands. Conspicuous: conspicuous consumption.

FIGURE 2. Moderating effect of conspicuous consumption motives



Moderated mediation analysis with model 14 of PROCESS, further confirmed that the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust was mediated by greenwashing, as well as

that this indirect effect was moderated by conspicuous consumption motives (Table 5; $b_{modmed} = 0.03$, $SE = 0.02$, $BCI [0.01, 0.06]$). Therefore, the mediation of the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust by greenwashing as proposed in 1 was confirmed, as well as that this indirect influence was moderated by conspicuous consumption, supporting 1. Table 6 summarizes the verification of the hypotheses.

TABLE 5. Moderated mediation analysis of the indirect relationship mediated by greenwashing between brand trust in green garments and social cynicism

Moderator	Mediator	Values of the moderator	Conditional indirect influence	Bootstrapp SE	Bootstrapp LLCI	Bootstrapp ULCI
CC	PG	2.66 (-1SD)	-0.16	0.03	-0.22	-0.09
		3.97 (M)	-0.11	0.03	-0.17	-0.06
		5.29 (+1SD)	-0.07	0.04	-0.14	0.01

Note: Age and two gender dummy variables (female and non-binary, male gender representing the reference category) were introduced as covariates. Abbreviations: CC, conspicuous consumption; PG, perceived greenwashing.

TABLE 6. Hypotheses verification

Hypothesis	Hypothesized association	Expected sign	Result
H1	Social cynicism → trust in sustainable fashion	-	Supported
H2	Social cynicism → perceived greenwashing → trust in sustainable fashion	-	Supported
H3	Moderation by conspicuous consumption motives	+	Supported

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

Cynicism has been a construct explored in several research domains and disciplines, such as in the context of organizational justice (Kwantes & Bond, 2019), corporate behavior (Aqueveque & Encina, 2010; Stanley et al., 2005), psychology (Szymczak et al., 2020), and social exclusion (Choy et al., 2021). However, no prior study has discussed the relationship between social cynicism as a personality trait, and consumer trust in environmental products. This study provides a theoretical model addressing the link between social cynicism and trust in apparel promoted with sustainability claims and explains this process with the mediation by perceived greenwashing, and the moderation of this indirect influence by conspicuous consumption motives.

Addressing fashion consumption from an environmental perspective has become necessary because the clothing industry has a severe environmental impact (Dhir et al., 2021; Legere & Kang, 2020) and has been singled out for exploiting human rights, animal welfare, and the use of nonrenewable resources, among other practices that harm the environment (D'Souza et al., 2015). This has led in recent years to increasing pressure on companies to demonstrate green actions (Berrone et al., 2017).

Our findings contribute to the further development of consumer theory in several ways. First, the results confirm the proposed negative relationship between consumers' trust in clothing brands marketed as sustainable and social cynicism, providing new insight into the link between social cynicism and consumer trust in the sustainability context. This result provides support for the social cynicism literature asserting that this trait conditions a negative stance toward organizations (Leung et al., 2010; Singelis et al., 2003; Vice, 2011). Highly cynical individuals tend to disbelieve organizations' claims and actions (Indibara & Varshney, 2021). Findings complement the recent work of Chan and Tam (2021) who found that social cynicism influences individuals' environmental attitudes, calling for the exploration of social axioms on specific environmental issues.

Second, the greenwashing mediation-based process explanation of the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust adds a novel perspective to the cynicism-trust link. While previous research has found that greenwashing perceptions trigger mistrust of companies' environmental concerns, leading to negative relationships with the brand (e.g., Chen et al., 2014; Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021; Zhang et al., 2018), our study shows that the influence of cynicism on trust can be explained by an increase in the perception that the firm is using misleading sustainability claims. More cynical individuals tend to believe that institutions are biased, which in turn increases the perception that companies do not provide environmental benefits as they claim, negatively impacting consumer trust. This process explanation extends the so far scarce research on the effects of social axioms on consumers' trust in companies' environmental practices (e.g., Chan & Tam, 2021) and greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018) by highlighting the role of perceived greenwashing as an important mediator of the social axiom-trust link.

Third, the moderating influence of conspicuous consumption motives provides a novel perspective on conspicuous consumption behavior. Findings confirmed that the mediated effect of social cynicism on brand trust through perceived greenwashing becomes weaker for individuals with stronger conspicuous consumption motives. More conspicuous consumers are less affected by the negative effect of greenwashing on trust because they are principally

motivated by the social image projected by their consumption of sustainable fashion brand clothing, not by its actual environmental impact. Because greenwashing perceptions mediate the relationship between social cynicism and brand trust, these individuals' trust in sustainable fashion brands will be less affected by their degree of social cynicism. Prior literature on conspicuous consumption has studied its antecedents (Bronner & de Hoog, 2019; Han et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2020) and its effects on proenvironmental consumption (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Hammad et al., 2019; Podoshen & Andrzejewski, 2012). Our findings contribute to this theory because we show that conspicuous consumption can affect consumers' trust in sustainable brands by modulating the effect of consumers' cynicism on brand trust, through its moderating effect on the greenwashing-trust link, which mediates the influence of cynicism on trust. Findings have therefore significant implications for the study of conspicuous sustainable consumption behavior because conspicuous consumption motives have the potential to foster such behavior, but also to reduce consumers' sensitivity toward greenwashed sustainability claims.

Managerial implications

Our findings provide practitioners with novel insights. First, social cynicism is negatively related to trust in sustainable fashion clothing brands. Managers should provide clear and relevant information to customers to avoid appearances of deception and reduce consumers' suspicions (Ketrin, 2016). At the point of purchase, this can for instance be achieved through quick response (QR) codes, which can redirect customers to a website with further information and educate consumers about the manufacturing process (Atkinson, 2013). Another option are green mobile applications, which have been proven to have a prominent role in enabling consumers to access pertinent information about the products at any location and time (Perera et al., 2018). Online applications may allow customers to preview and interact with sustainable fashion clothing, so they can become familiar with the products, especially since increasing familiarity may reduce suspicions (Chaouali et al., 2017). Online applications can provide customers with opportunities to interact with the products before purchase decisions. In this way, consumers can have more information and the possibility to compare different options concerning the origin of the materials used to manufacture the garment and the impact of production methods on the environment.

Second, when developing specific communications to target environmental-consciousness consumers practitioners should keep in mind that a proportion of their potential clients are more cynical and will react with increased sensitivity to greenwashed claims, which

in turn will affect trust in their brand. Any suspicion of greenwashing should, therefore, be avoided. Companies should employ only certified and unambiguous sustainability claims. Retailers should establish a clear eco-friendly positioning, and consistency across all customers' touchpoints (Kumar & Polonsky, 2019), highlighting the eco-friendly and social credentials of their products and services (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014). Companies should also be committed and demonstrate to consumers social facets of sustainability such as fair working standards (Rausch et al., 2021). Since companies' unethical behavior contributes to the installment of social cynicism among stakeholders (Detert et al., 2008), managers should develop programs to increase the ethical credibility of their brands (Crane, 2005) and initiatives to reduce consumer skepticism by strengthening their “green management” (Zhang et al., 2018). They should provide credible evidence, such as demonstrating that the garments fulfill the environmental claims that they promote. Furthermore, managers should implement mechanisms to obtain feedback from consumers about the credibility of their sustainability claims.

Practitioners should furthermore be aware that their customers' conspicuous consumption motives influence the susceptibility to the negative effects of social cynicism on trust in their brands because a high conspicuous motivation lowers the negative influence of the perception of greenwashing on brand trust. Managers should intend to enhance the prosocial reputation derived from sustainable products. Products' uniqueness also influences status consumption (Chan et al., 2015), therefore, limited editions of unique sustainable garments can increase consumers' purchase motivations because they potentially enhance perceived status.

Limitations and further research avenues

Because the data on which our findings are based are cross-sectional, the results limit causal inferences. Future studies should address this limitation by testing the proposed model experimentally. These studies should also re-assess some of the coefficients of this model that, albeit significant, have small effect sizes (i.e., the direct effect of social cynicism on trust, which in our analysis explains only about 2% of the variation in trust). While practitioners should be cautious with the application of recommendations based on small effect sizes, a statistically significant effect in the present survey data, even if small, could point to a larger effect in real consumer behavior. Because of social desirability bias, consumers may be reluctant to report the true extent of their social cynicism, which may have affected the effect sizes in our data. In addition, (n)ethnographic methods could be employed to further deepen the understanding of the underlying process of the social cynicism-trust link (Perera et al., 2018). The application of

these methods could lead to identifying further moderators. For instance, consumers' independent versus interdependent self-construal (Singelis, 1994) could interact with this process. This research has focused on sustainable fashion clothing brands. However, ecological or signaling concerns may vary across categories (Kahraman & Kazançoğlu, 2019). Therefore, future research should consider the analysis of other contexts to provide a wider perspective of the phenomenon.

Conclusions

This research addresses extant gaps in consumer theory regarding the drivers of sustainable consumer behavior and, in particular, the factors that motivate consumers to adopt new sustainable products (Busalim et al., 2022; Flores & Jansson, 2022; Jacobs et al., 2018). For this purpose, this research addresses the previously unexplored relationship between social cynicism as a personality trait and consumers' trust in sustainable fashion brands. The study provides evidence that more cynical individuals are less trustful concerning the environmental motivation and reputation of sustainable fashion clothing brands. Cynical individuals are more likely to perceive companies' sustainability engagement as greenwashing, which in turn decreases their trust in these brands. However, this study also argues and empirically confirms that these effects are weaker for individuals with stronger conspicuous consumption motives. The benefit that consumers perceive from conspicuous sustainable consumption seems to be less affected by the truthfulness of a fashion brand's sustainability claims.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no competing interests to declare.

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