

Sustainable consumption or green consumerism?

A study on Dutch sustainable fashion blogging

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ABSTRACT

This master thesis aims to contribute to the broader study of opinion leaders as new media in the context of social change promotion. Scholars have been studying different aspects of positive influence of the media and the ways of making this influence, proving the effectiveness of marketing techniques for media promotion of social objectives. Despite this, opinion leaders, as members of virtual communities, are mostly examined from a profit gaining business perspective and not from the perspective of possible social change promotion. The aim of this paper is to fulfill this gap, and this has been done by studying the case of sustainable fashion bloggers in the Netherlands. In particular, the nature of the values that Dutch sustainable fashion influencers communicate when speaking of sustainable consumption and the way in which those values are communicated are examined. The results have revealed that the opinion leaders were not proved to be promoting a consumers' behavior change towards constrained consumption. Instead, they were mostly promoting green consumerism and using the specific virtual community of sustainable fashion for selfish (fulfilling the wish to become visible, popular and influential) and commercial purposes. The sustainable consumption values were mostly presented as controversial, to some extent utopic and were communicated in such a way that the audience's existing values (the values of consumerism) were reinforced. This thesis provides new insights into the understanding of influencers as media in the context of potential promotion of consumers' behavior change towards constrained consumption, as well as it outlines a way to resolve the Jevon paradox which might be examined closer by researchers in the future.

KEYWORDS: *sustainable consumption, green consumerism, voluntary simplicity, opinion leaders, virtual communities.*

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1. Introduction

1.1. The rise of social and ecological awareness in the consumer society: the case of the fashion industry

Contemporary society is known to be called the “consumer society” (Belk, 2013) – the one where people are “collecting to consume”: a lot of goods are being produced, and owning different things is seen as an advantage or even a privilege. Scholars notice that goods are promoted in such a way that people believe in getting higher social status, new traits of character or additional skills when simply buying material products. This leads to the fact that people are often convinced to get new possessions not because of obvious need (for example, someone needs to buy a new coat if it is cold outside and the person has no coat at all), but because of socially based desires, ‘like the desires to be liked, to be attractive, or to do what everybody else is doing’ (Dill, 2009, p.144). In essence, consumer society advocates the values of consumerism, which Miles (1998) calls “the religion of the late twentieth century” because this phenomenon is “ubiquitous and ephemeral” and, just like any religion, “pervades our everyday lives and structures our everyday experience” (Miles, 1998, p.1). This so-called religion is thus promoting material goods as something equal to well-being, stating that owning many things, as well as owning expensive things, is highly valued in society and can raise one’s social status. In order to follow those commandments and reach success and recognition, people consume large amounts of goods and make positive buying decisions easily and quite often, mostly without being aware of the fact that such behavior, besides bringing the so-called well-being, may also have negative sides.

This paper is focusing on the case of the fashion industry, thus the problems caused by consumerism are examined in this context. The first problem that is being brought to surface is environmental. During the previous years, several scandals involving Greenpeace have taken place, like, for example, the one from year 2012 when the organization found hazardous chemicals in the fashion items produced by Zara and other popular fashion brands (Damin, November 20, 2012). Studies have been published establishing that “consumption of apparel depletes the Earth of both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources, creates unmanageable quantities of solid waste, and emits dangerous substances into the air, water, and land” (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p.168), which means that consumption may cause danger to our planet and its’ habitants.

Another problem involving the apparel market is labor in inappropriate conditions: consumers from Wales and Northern Ireland reported in year 2014 that they have found different messages with cries for help attached to the labels of fashion items (Rustin, June 25, 2014; Henn,

June 25, 2014). Companies, in order to keep the prices low, let the goods be produced in factories situated in third world countries where human rights are disrespected, which leads to the fact that the working environment might be unsafe, the working hours might be too long and the salaries might be underpaid. It can be concluded that consumerism causes negative effects not only on the environment, but also on society.

The dark side of consuming too much is also being brought up and discussed by consumers themselves, not only by scholars or experts in the traditional media. It can be observed that groups of people have started considering owning a lot of things as overwhelming, useless and started wishing to live with less material possessions. They state that this way freedom from social pressure could be achieved. In order to connect with like-minded people, thematic communities are being organized where participants are able to share their experiences and support each other (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2018). Those communities can be not only traditional (offline, where face-to-face communication is the most common one), but also virtual since in the contemporary world, where the Internet has offered a lot of new possibilities to create and consume content, a lot of different new media outlets were born. Those outlets are giving people the possibility to consume the specific type of content that they prefer to and to share their own ideas easily and quickly on the same platforms.

1.2. Influencers as new media who advocate sustainable consumption. Research question

It is argued that only a few of the users are real content creators who actively and regularly contribute to the Web (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012, Arthur, Cunningham & Griffiths, 2014). This paper is examining influencers (or influential members of specific virtual communities, also known as opinion leaders), and those are people who use blogs as media outlets in order to draw the readers' attention to diverse topics (Archer-Brown, 2012, Uzunogly & Kip, 2014). It has been discussed that those users of the Web are mostly known for promoting different goods and services through product placement on their platforms in virtual communities (Li, Lai & Chen, 2011, Mohr, 2013, Ahmad, Salman & Rubab, 2015, Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014), and, by this, are known to support and promote the values of consumerism. But several scholars (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, Lefebvre, 2013, Weinreich, 2010, Smith, 2010, Kanter & Fine, 2010) argue that marketing strategies can also be used in order to make a positive impact on society by promoting different values than material profit, which means that opinion leaders, as a marketing tool, could possibly also be promoting social change.

As outlined before, this paper focuses on the case of the fashion industry, thus, influencers active and valued in virtual communities related to fashion are being examined. In particular, there is an amount of opinion leaders who call themselves sustainable fashion

bloggers, discuss sustainable consumption of clothing on their platforms and claim to promote new values (which are claimed to be different from the values of consumerism). This is the kind of bloggers which is studied in this paper. The activity of those opinion leaders thus seems to be a way to raise awareness of environmental and ecological problems, and their goal seems to be promotion of changes in consumers' behavior towards constrained consumption. But, on the other hand, this assumption and this claim made by the bloggers need to be proved before conclusions can be made.

The research question of this paper is: *“What is the goal that Dutch bloggers intend to achieve by communicating sustainable consumption of fashion apparel?”* In order to answer it, two sub-questions have been created: *“What are the values that Dutch bloggers advocate when communicating sustainable consumption of fashion apparel?”* and *“How Dutch bloggers communicate the values of sustainable consumption of fashion apparel?”* A qualitative content analysis of Dutch blog posts was conducted in order to understand the nature of the values that Dutch bloggers transmitted while discussing sustainable consumption and the way in which they communicated those values. This research has examined if Dutch sustainable fashion bloggers were promoting social change and a need to turn away from habitual consumer behavior or were still advocating the values of consumerism.

1.3. Social and scientific relevance

Scholars have proved that the influence of the media on peoples' minds is strong, meaningful and affects different spheres of human life. For example, Dill (2009) illustrates that, “by simply being exposed to a show in which people of different races form friendships, viewers develop more positive feelings about members of the other race and can more easily see themselves interacting with members of the other race in their own lives” (Dill, 2009, p.7). This means that the media can be an instrument for influencing peoples' minds and making social change. In the case of this paper, positive social change is seen as a change in the consumerist trend, meaning that people would reconsider their purchasing behavior and become more conscious in terms of consumption, would be aware of the negative effects that consumerism causes every time they would need to make a buying decisions and would make choices that would indirectly affect the environment and society positively.

Researchers have looked deeper into different aspects of positive influence of the media and the ways of making this influence. Kotler and Zaltman (1971) have studied how social change can be made using social marketing tools, proving the effectiveness of marketing techniques used for media promotion of social objectives; Lefebvre (2013) and Weinreich (2010) have examined social marketing strategies that could be used to make social change; Aaker and

Smith (2010), Kanter and Fine (2010) concentrated their attention purely on social media strategies. All the studies named above have a broad approach and do not specifically examine how digital influencers are communicating values that can lead to positive behavioral changes in society. In particular, when examining research on the topic of influencers and their capability of changing consumers' behavior, it can be observed that it is mostly research where influencers are seen from a pure marketing (gaining profit) perspective. Influencers are seen as business tools that can help to gain money, especially when speaking of the field of fashion where profit is seen as a main goal for business. For example, Li, Lai & Chen (2011) argue about the role of influencers for marketing in the blogosphere, Mohr, I. (2013) and Ahmad Salman & Rubab (2015) examine the impact of social media on the fashion industry from a business perspective, Cassidy & Fitch (2012) explore social media use in the field of fashion public relations, Geissinger & Laurell (2016) look into how fashion brands were integrated in user engagement expressions on social media. Hsu, Chuan-Chuan Lin & Chiang (2013) and Lu, Chang & Chang (2014) study effects of blogger recommendations on consumers' shopping behavior. In conclusion, influencers are examined from a profit gaining business perspective and are not examined as influential opinion leaders who also possibly could have the power to transmit ideas of other nature and make social change. This paper contributed to the fulfillment of this gap by looking closer into the values that sustainable fashion influencers communicate when speaking of sustainable consumption. The nature of these values as well as the way in which they are communicated have revealed if influencers could also be considered as capable and willing to make social change and transmitting values of other nature than profit gaining.

Some scholars have previously examined the values of sustainable consumption. For example, Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) have distinguished constrained consumption values (called "*voluntary simplicity*" values) when people promoted buying less as way to reach well-being. Liu et al. (2012) and Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003) have defined the values of "*green purchasing behavior*" (such kind of behavior when purchasing of sustainably made goods is valued), but those were applicable for all kinds of sustainable products, not only fashion apparel. In this paper, those values are examined in the context of the Dutch sustainable fashion blogs (in other words, it is examined how the values of sustainable consumption are communicated by digital influencers in the Netherlands), contributing to research concerning a specific geographical location. Also this research has made a contribution into the works about marketing strategies which could be used in order to make social change, concentrating attention on the personal influence theory: the question if opinion leaders from virtual communities in the field of fashion could be successfully used for influencing society in a positive way was answered.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this paper brings up the topics of personal influence theory, virtual communities and sustainable consumption values in the field of fashion. First a general understanding of the discussed field is provided by describing the environment where digital influencers exist and explaining the notions of virtual communities, prosumers and blogs. After this, the personal influence theory is presented, and it is discussed that digital influencers are not accidental and have the ability to communicate certain values and influence peoples' opinions. As the next step, the promotion of fashion through influencers is described, explaining how the transmission of values works. As last, the specific values of consumerism and sustainable consumption are introduced.

2.1. The Web and its' participatory possibilities

In this subchapter the network effects of the Internet will be discussed, as well as the attractiveness of platforms for users. Those two aspects have led to the birth of contemporary virtual communities, and a definition of this type of communities will be given as well. The new type of user who is more eager to participate in content creation and interaction with other users – the prosumer – will also be discussed and defined. As last, additional attention will be given to blogs since those are the platforms that are important for the current study (since this paper is going to examine blog posts for the analysis).

2.1.1. The network effect

Network societies are more open and more dynamic than the previous ones, although this is not the last step in society evolution. Castells (1996) has examined the notion of network societies and argues that “while the networking form of social organization has existed in other times and spaces, the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure” (Castells, 1996, p.469). This means that the difference between the old and new societies lies not in the networking process itself, but in the extent to which the networking effects penetrate society. Castells also discusses that with the birth of digital technology and communication new forms of cooperation have emerged, and these forms lead to penetration of networks into all aspects of society (including production and consumption) and – on a more global level – to transformation of society, to changes in its' structure.

Other scholars speak of a certain shift in the history of the Internet itself – the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 which has offered users even more new possibilities for interaction between users, content creation and interaction with existing content. As Blank and Reisdorf (2012)

argue, from the users' points of view, Web 2.0, just like Web 1.0, makes profit of network effects, from «the idea that some things are more valuable when more people participate» (Blank &Reisdorf, 2012, p.538). In addition to this, it has structure provided by platforms that 'create simple, reliable environments where users can do what they want' (Blank &Reisdorf, 2012, p.538-539). When those two components distinguished by Blank and Reisdorf (2012) – network and structure –are combined, "they create new content and much more, including new forms of user engagement, communication, and information gathering" (Blank &Reisdorf, 2012, p.539). Just as Castells (1996) discussed, networks have penetrated more deeply into society, leading to fundamental changes in its structure – like, for example, giving birth to new types of communities, such as virtual ones.

Virtual communities can be defined as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (Rheingold, 2000, p.5), and those are, thus, the new types of communities that have emerged with the penetration of digital networks into society. Wellman and Giulia (1999) propose that, before the Internet was created, the term ‘community’ was more associated with geographical proximity. However, technology has changed this appreciation. As Hiltz and Wellman (1997) discuss, members of virtual communities, using computer mediated communication, are interacting with other members globally, often using no face-to-face communication. They also argue that, in comparison with offline communities, “computer-supported communities tend to be larger, more dispersed in space and time, more densely knit, and to have members with more heterogeneous social characteristics but with more homogeneous attitudes” (Hiltz & Wellman, 1997, p.44). This means that such communities are often based on shared interests and no more limited by material factors. But it should be noticed that computer mediated communication differs from face-to-face communication and does not have all the traits that the face-to-face one has: Storper &Venables (2004) argue that face-to-face communication is more efficient, can make the learning process easier and it provides psychological motivation, making it “particularly important in environments where information is imperfect, rapidly changing, and not easily codified, key features of many creative activities” (Storper & Venables, 2004, p.351). This means that there can be no question that computer mediated communication has replaced the face-to-face one: it is just a different way to communicate, with different traits serving different purposes.

The process of digital networking is thus influencing traditional communities. Castells (1996) argues that in the new era of digital communication society in general is becoming more exposed to globalization, people begin to search actively for their identities which sometimes

results into (global) social movements and developments. He provides the reader with examples of political communities (which need to adapt to the new situation because they are now experiencing the danger of being hyped in the new media with an incredibly high speed) and criminal communities (which during a long time had almost no possibility for active networking but now have found new ways to network anonymously via the virtual communities). Porter (2004) also argues that virtual communities can influence peoples' perception of products and services and for this reason can be used for commercial purposes (there even exist not only member-initiated communities but also organization-sponsored communities which are specially created by organizations for interacting with consumers and, as the main goal, gaining more profit). Thus, it can be concluded that networking, as Castells (1996) argues, is indeed penetrating deep into all aspects of social life and changing the nature of interaction in all types of communities, and the changes are constantly occurring.

2.1.2. Prosumers. The "90-9-1" principle

As already discussed above, according to Castells (1996), digital technology has given birth to new forms of cooperation and communication and network effects have become an important part of all aspects of life, including production and consumption. Those two aspects will be discussed more narrowly in this subchapter. The new consumers, from passive consumers of media content, have transformed into more active players. Jenkins (2004) argues that the contemporary consumers "are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other users. They are fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture, to control the flow of media in their lives and to talk back to mass market content" (Jenkins, 2004, p.37). He also states that the new consumer is much more active, visible and socially connected in comparison to the old one. "If old consumers were predictable and stationary, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or even media" (Jenkins, 2004, pp.37-38). Thus, the network effect, by penetrating deeper into society, has influenced the processes of production and consumption, as well as the consumers' behavior itself.

Ritzer et al. (2012) argue that this new type of consumer was also discussed "in earlier work such as that of Karl Marx and later by scholars such as McLuhan and Nevitt, who wrote about the process by which the 'consumer becomes producer'" (Nevitt, 1972, p. 4). Later in 1980, the futurist Alvin Toffler has suggested a new term for identifying this type of consumer: the "*prosumer*" is both producer and consumer, and the process of producing and consuming at the same time is called "*prosumption*" (Ritzer et al., 2012, p.379). So, prosumption was

discussed by scholars in the past, but it has not gained much attention before the 21st century when the Internet has become an essential part of peoples' daily lives.

However, scholars argue that, even if presumption exists and everyone could have access to it, not everyone uses those possibilities. For example, Carron-Arthur, Cunningham and Griffiths(2014) argue that the “90-9-1” principle “describes a commonly reported phenomenon whereby the majority of content in an Internet community is produced by only 1% of the participants(referred also to as ‘*superusers*’), a minority of the content is produced by a further 9% of participants (‘*contributors*’) and 90% of people observe the content in the Internet community without actively participating (‘*lurkers*’)” (p.1). This phenomenon means that only a few of the users are real content producers who actively contribute to the Web by creating their own content.

According to Nielsen (2014), the “90-9-1” rule does not work equally within specific outlets: for example, he argues that in blogs “the rule is more like 95–5–0.1” (para.8). It means that, if in case of all kinds of virtual communities in general 90% of users are passive observers of content, 9% of users produce a minority of all content (for example, are producing not much and not often) and 1% produce most of the content, in case of blogs the percentage turns out to be 95%, 5% and 0,1%. This allows making a conclusion that influencers who are using blogs form a very small part of all the users involved in different kinds of online content creation (also taking into consideration that not every blogger is an influencer).

Although the real content creators form just a very small part of all users, it can be outlined that a certain illusion of the fact that prosumption is common and widely spread exists in society: the user-friendly interface of the blogging platforms let people think that everyone could possibly be or even is a prosumer because of the easiness with which content can be uploaded. But it can be argued that giving the possibility to share content is not enough: there are also certain divides that prevent one from active participation. Brake (2014) outlines four kinds of those divides: motivational access divides (when people “do not feel the internet offers them anything they need or want, or they feel they lack the time to adopt another medium” (Brake, 2014, p.600), material access divides (when people have limited Internet access), skills divides (since “creating and maintaining a weblog (or even writing postings on message boards or comments on others' blogs) can require at least a basic understanding of HTML” (Brake, 2014, p.601)) and usage divides (because, even having the motivation, material access and skills, one still can simply not use those possibilities “in ways that enhance their lives and life chances” (Van Dijk, 2005, p.95). It has been observed that the composition of groups of active content creators “is heavily weighted toward men, the well-educated, the relatively well-to-do, and Whites” (Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2001, p. 394). Thus, it can be concluded that the idea that

everyone is a prosumer nowadays (or could easily become one) is just an illusion and not a real statement.

In addition, some scholars argue that prosumers may not be as fully empowered as Jenkins (2004) or Toffler argue. Harrigan and Archer (1997) note that ‘it has been posited that the democratization of the internet and the power of consumers turned producers is an illusion’ (p.2). Comor (2011) writes that ‘the fantastic prosumer is indeed a fantasy’ invented by Toffler, since prosumers’ engagement mostly serves interests of figures being in power and not of the prosumers themselves, which means that prosumers are actually exploited by companies who successfully use all the content that prosumers create for them for free or for a relatively small reward.

It can be then concluded that prosumers are the minority (1%) of users of the Internet who actively participate in content creation and produce the majority of what is understood as consumer content. At least in theory, they would be doing this voluntarily and free of charge, or for relatively small rewards. It may be argued that this trait makes them independent from companies who may have certain interests in the prosumer content since the creators have more freedom in expression and are more honest with their readers (are not going to make sure their content always matches with the companies’ interests and wishes). On the contrary, if assumed that companies pay money for prosumer labor, it can be discussed that it may affect the content negatively in terms of independence and honesty and may question the fact if paid prosumers are still remaining prosumers. It can be even argued that they are exploited in this case by more powerful organizations and individuals. On the other hand, because of the new qualities of the prosumer in comparison to the consumer (being much more active, visible, socially connected), it can be discussed that the prosumer has power and this power is taken into consideration by companies.

2.1.3. Blogs: definition and role in influencing.

Such a tiny percentage of users who actively participate in content creation surely do not make them less important for this study since those are exactly the kind of new media where influencers communicate values the most often. Opinion leaders are constantly searching for new digital outlets as technology opens them and gives access to them, and blogs are the strongest in terms of how long they have lasted (and are still actively used) as a technology. Blogging as one of the forms of digital communication is defined by Schmidt (2007) as “frequently updated websites where content (text, pictures, sound files, etc.) is posted on a regular basis and displayed in reverse chronological order” (p.1409). Uzunogly and Kip (2014) argue that sometimes “it is possible to observe in current bloggers that stated characteristics of opinion

leaders, such as openness to messages”, “taking the role of a discussant” and being “influential and valued among social contacts” (p.593). This specific type of “bloggers, who frequently share their brand experiences on a regular basis” and “have an effect on the members of particular communities gathered around similar interests” (Uzunogly & Kip, 2014, p.592) can be, thus, considered as a type of influencers who use blogs as their main platform through which they communicate with their audiences. There is a difference between just sharing experiences and sharing brand experiences: brand experience is defined “as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments” (Brakus et al, 2009, p. 52). Thus, what those bloggers share is not their personal experience that they independently produced but something directly related to the brand and partly caused by the brand and its’ image and history.

Porter (2004) discusses that virtual communities, because of their ability to change consumers’ perceptions of goods and services, are often used by companies in order to promote the ones that they are selling. This means that opinion leaders are often involved in this process: companies may give them a reward in exchange to a review on a product (or, to put it differently, a brand experience), which, in case if being positive, may positively change the readers’ attitude towards the product that is being discussed. Those reviews, as it already may be obvious, are posted on the influencers’ personal blogs in the most of the cases. This makes blogs platforms that play an important role in influencing peoples’ perceptions of goods and services in particular.

2.2. Personal influence theory

2.2.1. The two-step communication model. Opinion leaders

The kind of influence that in theory can be exerted by prosumers is not a new phenomenon since it builds upon older recognitions of influence. It is discussed by scholars that the two-step communication model outlined by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), when brands’ messages are transmitted from radio and print to opinion leaders and after this the messages are transmitted through the opinion leaders to the regular members of the communities where they are active (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955, in Archer-Brown, 2012, p.36), might be “a primary theoretical underpinning of the concept of word-of-mouth” (p.38). The word-of-mouth is defined as “informal, non-commercial, oral, person-to-person communication about a brand, a product or a service between two or more consumers” and “is used when buyers lack the information necessary for a purchase or when they perceive the risk associated with the purchase as high. Consumers have been found to turn to personal contacts for reassurance and to lose contacts for

their expertise” (Pollach, 2006, p.1). In virtual communities, the communication is performed digitally and the word-of-mouth is called a digital one.

Scholars argue that a successful brand message communication can be also successfully made through artificially created personal contacts since there is also another form of contact that works as a personal one – *parasocial interaction*. Giles (2002) recalls that this term was introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) who outlined “ways in which the interaction between users of mass media and representations of humans appearing in the media (‘media figures’, such as presenters, actors, and celebrities) can produce a form of parasocial relationship, to which the user responds as though in a typical social relationship” (p.279) – in other words, as if the figure was his personal acquaintance. He also mentions that, as Scannell (1996) described, radio broadcasters in the United Kingdom during the 1940s changed on purpose the style of broadcasting from a formal style to an informal one, wherein the listener was addressed as a personal acquaintance. It can be observed that parasocial interaction is still used in the media nowadays (both traditional and new), and influencers are not an exception. Thus, it can be concluded that the two-step communication model works not only with real personal contacts, but also with parasocial interaction, and for this reason it can indeed be used to transmit messages through opinion leaders.

It is argued that in the context of digital communication, “where there is a greater bi-directional opportunity to communicate with peers”, the opinion leader has even more influential power, “both in terms of breadth of audience, as well as the availability of explicit evidence that indicates the author’s credibility and reputation” (Archer-Brown, 2012, p.38). As Phelps et al. (2004) discuss, it is known to be more influential than the traditional word-of-mouth because of its’ high speed and easy access and use, as well as because of the ability to reach large audiences; moreover, there is no pressure that may be present while delivering messages face-to-face. Thus, the digital word-of-mouth may be more attractive for influencers (and brands who intend to communicate messages through influencers) in comparison to the traditional word-of-mouth.

It can also be noticed that influencers, according to Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), may decide how the message will be portrayed and even if it will be transmitted to the audience or not. For example, if the information included in the message, according to the influencer, is not associated with the norms of the community, it may be portrayed in a negative way or even not be passed along at all. On the contrary, if the information is relevant and positive for the community, it can be communicated and maybe even made clearer to the audience (Archer-Brown, 2012, p.36). This can be seen as the power of opinion leaders which should be taken into consideration by brands when they are intending to spread a message with the help of influencers.

However, it may be mentioned that some scholars have a different opinion on the personal influence theory and how the process of influencing takes place. Watts and Dodds (2007) have looked further into the process of influencing and found out that large cascades of influence were driven not by the opinion leaders themselves, but “by a critical mass of easily Influenced individuals” (Watts & Dodds, 2007, p.441), and in homogenous networks (like, for example, special interest communities) influencers even showed no difference in cascade patterns in comparison with other (regular) community members. Thus, it is debated that full responsibility for the process of influence cannot be given to influencers themselves since the audiences also play an important role in spreading of information and communicating messages, telling each other the latest news and interpreting them. Archer-Brown (2012) justifies that this phenomenon is called “accidental influencers” (p.41). Considering this, it might possibly be argued that every user of the Internet is an influencer, but, since evidence was found that “suggests that influence is gained through focused effort and use of specific communication techniques” (p.42), it can be concluded that influencers are not accidental because they form a small percentage in comparison with regular users and they make certain efforts when they create content in order to communicate messages.

2.2.2. Persuasion and values

What are precisely the efforts that influencers make in order to communicate their messages successfully and what are the ways of gaining persuasion that influencers use? Persuasion is defined by Perloff (2003) as “a symbolic process in which communicators try to convince other people to change their attitudes or behavior regarding an issue through the transmission of a message, in an atmosphere of free choice” (p.8). Perloff (2003) mentions Roloff and Miller (1980) proposed that communications included three persuasive effects: shaping (like shaping attitudes towards a brand or a product by linking it with qualities of a celebrity who is promoting the brand), reinforcing (reinforcing a position that people already occupy), and changing responses (actually changing attitudes). Attitudes may be defined as “global, typically emotional evaluations” that are learned by society and that can influence one’s actions and thoughts: “having an attitude means that you have categorized something and made a judgment of its net value or worth. It means that you are no longer neutral about the topic” (Perloff, 2003, p.41). Values are more global than attitudes – those are goals and ideals, “conceptions of the desirable means and ends of action” (p.41). It is also argued that, because of their abstract and idealistic nature, values can conflict with each other.

In order to identify communicators, Perloff (2003) presents three characteristics – authority, credibility and social attractiveness. Authority figures, according to Perloff (2003),

occupy a high position in the social structure and are likely to persuade by appealing to power (and particular behavior or a particular belief is adopted since people think that they will get a reward or, on the contrary, avoid punishment). As an example, politicians can be perceived as authority figures. Credible communicators are seen as trustworthy experts displaying goodwill towards audience members (and persuasion is gained through violating the audience's expectation of the communicator's position on the discussed issue which is produced by a "need to view an issue in accord with the dominant views" of a social group (Perloff, 2003, p.181). It may occur in two ways – by violating the knowledge bias and the reporting bias. "A knowledge bias is the presumption that a communicator has a biased view of an issue" (p.164), when a reporting bias is "the perception that the communicator has opted not to report or disclose certain facts or points of view" (p.167). When the bias is violated and the audience expectation did not come true, the communicator gets an increase in credibility and an audience attitude change is occurring. Attractive communicators influence using "*likability*" (showing good will, giving a positive feeling to the audience) and "*similarity*" (between source and receiver), and persuasion is gained because people are admiring the communicators (for example, when good-looking charismatic celebrities give a positive feeling of good will) or are identifying themselves with them (thinking that the communicators are just like them).

Also, as already argued before, parasocial interaction is used by opinion leaders as well, so that they are addressing messages to their reader as to someone who they know in person in order to establish a better relationship with their audience. All those concepts are highly related, working together in order to persuade audiences: for example, parasocial interaction could be used in order to clearly show the influencer's openness to messages or to discuss topics better when the influencer is taking a discussant role.

2.2.3. Fashion and influencers

As argued by Jenkins (2004), the consumers of today are more active, connected, and able to show loyalty to specific media or brands using social media. The same is applicable to the specific field of fashion. Social media has allowed a constant dialogue between brands and consumers, offering consumers the possibility to give immediate feedback by liking, commenting, lurking through sites, etc. Sinclair and Vogus (2011) note that consumers in general (not only in the specific field of fashion) don't passively receive advertising messages anymore: "as a result of the widespread growth of online social networking and user-generated content sites, a shift in the balance of power is occurring" (p. 293). Agins (1999) argues that passive consumption specifically in fashion has stopped even earlier, before the launch of Web 2.0 –by the begin of the 1990s, when consumers got less interested in the fashion world, desiring

practical and mostly casual items, stopping buying very creative items suitable only for special occasions, and, doing this, they have become the ones who decided what they wanted to consume, when they bought it and how much they paid (p.8).

As already discussed above by Uzunogly & Kip (2014) and Harrigan & Archer (1997), influencers use blogs as their main platform where they communicate with their audiences. Such kinds of influential bloggers have also emerged in the field of fashion and have become very important in the fashion industry. Rocamora (2017) notices that ‘a key moment in the encounter between the collections and social media includes the presence of fashion bloggers on the front row of Dolce and Gabbana’s September 2009 collection and the live streaming, in September 2013, of Burberry’s collection across 11 social networks, on the digital screens of its flagship store as well as on outdoor screens in places such as New York’s Times Square and Hong Kong’s World-Wide House (p.509-510). Thus, it can be concluded that in the specific field of fashion influencers are also used by brands in order to communicate values and messages.

2.2.4. Influencers and transmission of fashion values

As outlined above, influencers are used by (fashion) brands to communicate certain messages, and some traits of those messages involving promotion of goods are discussed below. Bourdieu (1993) notes that a fashion item has a lot of producers of meanings and values because, besides material production that the designer performs, cultural objects have also symbolic production, “the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of belief in the value of the work” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 37). This type of production ensures “the otologic promotion and the transubstantiation” (Rocamora, 2002, p.349) of the material form of the product. Bourdieu (1975) presents the label as one of the most common examples of this transubstantiation process. The label “operates a process of transubstantiation of the material object to which it is applied, which then takes on the high value attached to the name”, it “does not change the materiality of the product, but its social characteristic” and it is “the perceptible manifestation – like the signature of a painter – of a transfer of symbolic value” (Rocamora, 2002, p.349). In other words, a new value is given to the fashion item, and this value comes not from the material object itself (for example, the fashion item that the designer produces), but from outside, from the label that is giving new additional socially important value to it.

Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) agree with Bourdieu (1975), arguing further in the context of fashion (by fashion they are also meaning mass production) “the fashion component itself adds value to basic apparel (Kunz & Garner, 2007) by creating an intangible, and sometimes illogical, desire to obtain a new product” (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p.168). Thus, what Bourdieu (1975) called the transubstantiation of values can be realized not only via the high

fashion labels, but also via other components that are desired in society. Influencers, when promoting a fashion item, recall certain qualities which are valued in their community, and those values are being transmitted to the product that they sell (in other words, they are being attractive communicators as classified by Perloff (2003)). An illusion is born that, once owning the product, the person will also automatically possess all the mentioned valued qualities. This is exactly the way how, as Roloff and Miller (1980) argued, shaping attitudes towards a brand or a product takes place: the qualities of the opinion leader are linked to the qualities of the brand.

For this research project, an influencer will be defined as a member of a specific virtual community (people interested in sustainable fashion or practicing it) who appears to be an opinion leader in this community and is transmitting specific ideas and values through this community – the values of sustainable consumption of apparel. This influencer will use blogs as main platforms in order to communicate with his audiences. It is expected that the influencer, according to this paper, will possess opinion leaders' qualities like openness to messages, taking the role of a discussant and being valued among social contacts, as well as some communicator characteristics outlined by Perloff (2003): the influencers from the sample, according to theory, are expected to be mostly attractive communicators. As Porter (2004) argued that virtual communities are often used for commercial purposes, it can be argued that influencers would be promoting goods and services (related to sustainable fashion) by sharing brand experiences, product placement and possibly using other ways of promotion. On the other hand, based on previous research (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, Lefebvre, 2013, Weinreich, 2010, Smith, 2010, Kanter & Fine, 2010) arguing that marketing strategies can be used not only for selling goods and services but also for making a positive impact on society, it might be argued that influencers, as marketing instruments, may also be used for promoting social change. In theory, sustainable fashion bloggers could be able to make a positive shift to a more sustainable and conscious consumer behavior, making people thinking more about their buying decisions in terms of how they would affect the environment and society.

2.3. Consumerism and sustainable consumption

As already mentioned before, all the aspects of peoples' daily lives are linked to consumption of goods and services, so it is unavoidable, and, if consumption is defined by scholars more as the process of consuming, consumerism is defined as a broader term that is more reflective from a sociological perspective since it includes the motives of buying (Miles, 1998, pp. 3-4). In other words, Miles (1998) argues that if consumption is an act, consumerism is seen as a way of life that is established and designed by the government and the buying decisions

are related to values that are also controlled and set up by those who are in an empowered position.

Fletcher and Grose (2012) also note that continued clothing consumption is the base on which the contemporary fashion business model is built, and this means that the fashion industry supports the values of consumerism. Thus, in the specific field of fashion, apparel is bought not because it is really needed (for example, in case if it is cold and there is a need to cover the body with fabric that will have a certain number of properties), but because additional values discussed by Bourdieu (1975, 1993) are transmitted to it. Schor (1999) argues that the media is constantly showing to audiences the lifestyle and personal belongings of rather small groups of successful people, for example, celebrities, and those groups are promoted as reference groups. The qualities of the people who form those groups are transmitted to the things they own. As a result, in order to get closer to the reference groups and their lifestyle and possess their valued qualities, people purchase unneeded goods. This process of constant consumption has led to the fact that nowadays, for example, fashion apparel is sold “in the highest quantities in history” (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p.169).

But, as previously outlined, not every consumer nowadays claims to support the values of consumerism: some of them claim to practice sustainable consumption, which “focuses on improved pacing of behavior in a manner that minimizes the depletion of Earth’s natural resources as well as reduces the use of toxins that may endanger those resources for future generations” (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p.169). This paper divides sustainable consumption into two different categories – consumption of sustainable products, defined as “*green purchasing behavior*” (Liu et al., 2012) and restricted consumption, defined as “*voluntary simplicity*” (Alexander & Ussher, 2012).

2.3.1. Green purchasing behavior

Jackson (2005) draws attention to the fundamental disagreement that scholars have on the topic of consumption in general and consumption of green goods, precisely on the question if any consumption is beneficial for society. Some scholars, for example, Russell & Wilkinson, 1979, Begg et al. (2003), “assume that increasing consumption is more or less synonymous with improved well-being: the more we consume the better off we are” (Jackson, 2005, p.19). Some researchers, on the contrary, argue “that the scale of consumption in modern society is both environmentally and psychologically damaging” (p.19). Several scholars even relate green purchasing not to just consumption but to consumerism, calling it “green consumerism” (Sandilands, 1993, Schuitema & Groot, 2015). Sandilands (1993) argues that, even if consumers are now willing to choose products that are fairly traded and not or less harmful for the

environment, companies are more masking problems than solving them, being dishonest about the real conditions under which the products were made. Thomas (2008) also draws the attention to the fact that there is imprecision in the terminology when *green purchasing behavior* (Liu et al., 2012) is discussed in the media, “and its utilization causes further confusion”, which leads to the fact that “the lack of standardization might actually work in the manufacturer’s favor, as it allows for a particular version of the issues” (Thomas, 2008, p.528). Furthermore, Schuitema and Groot (2015) have found out that other characteristics of the product, like, for example, quality, price, brand equity, safety for health, etc. are also taken into consideration by consumers. Young et al. (2010) have even argued that “if any one of these criteria is a weak or negative influence, then this may water down the influence of the green criteria on the final purchase” (Young et al., 2010, p.29). Chatzidakiset al. (2007) explain this behavior noting that consumers use neutralization techniques in order to pursue selfish goals instead of consciously buying fair trade products. Thus, it can be argued that such a kind of behavior can still be related to consumerism more than to just consumption because the buying decisions are still influenced by the values advocated by the people in power positions who gain profit from constant selling of goods and services.

What can be also observed is a gap between consumers’ wishes and actual green purchasing behavior. Young et al. (2010) define it as the ‘attitude–behavior gap’ or ‘values–action gap’ and point to the fact that “30% of consumers report that they are very concerned about environmental issues, but they are struggling to translate this into purchases” (p. 20).

Moreover, even considering the power of consumers discussed by Jenkins (2004) and the power of influencers discussed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), some scholars claim that the suggested ways of overcoming the problems caused by consumerism and consumerism itself by purchasing more environmentally friendly products to be utopian. Even if some world economies start to produce more transparently and efficiently, the negative ecological impact caused by other economies will still be increasing (Jackson, 2009). Alexander and Ussher (2012) argue that such behavior leads to the Jevons paradox since “a per unit reduction in the throughput of commodities does not actually lead to reduced ecological impact, because those efficiency improvements are outweighed by the increasing amounts of commodities that are consumed”(p.68). If making an example from the fashion industry, people might learn how to produce materials that pollute the environment less, but, because people will go on consuming more and more clothes made of these materials, the pollution will not reduce or stop.

Liu et al. (2012) suggested the following categories for analyzing *green purchasing behavior*: “purchase of energy saving products, purchase of water saving products, buy organic foods, buy recycled paper products, buy green construction materials” (p.297). Tanner and

Wölfig Kast(2003)have conducted a research on green food purchases of Swiss consumers, and the results have shown that “green food purchases are facilitated by positive attitudes of consumers toward (a)environmental protection, (b) fair trade, (c) local products, and(d) availability of action-related knowledge” (p.883).

2.3.2. Voluntary simplicity

Because of the arguments discussed in the previous section, Alexander & Ussher (2012), Jackson (2005) and Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) suggest that reduced consumption may be best way to solve the problems caused by consumerism. The decision of just to consume less in general supports the ideas of consumerism much less than the consumption of green products only. Alexander & Ussher (2012) describe the “*voluntary simplicity movement*” as a “diverse social movement made up of people who are resisting high consumption lifestyles and who are seeking, in various ways, a lower consumption but higher quality of life alternative” (p.66). Gambrel and Cafaro (2010) call the same phenomenon “*material simplicity*” and define it as “a conscientious and restrained attitude toward material goods that typically includes” decreased consumption which becomes more conscious and which leads to such benefits as ‘a more focused life in general’ and a greater appreciation for both material goods and other things besides them (p.85). In this paper, this phenomenon will be called *voluntary simplicity* and will be defined as reduced or constrained consumption of fashion apparel that allows turning from the values of consumerism to other values. Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) have studied these values conducting an analysis of blog posts, and their findings reveal different expressions of creativity that emerge when people practice voluntary simplicity in the field of fashion: forward incrementation (finding new ways of wearing old items), redefinition (like shopping for others or making new items from recycled materials) and redirection (turning from fashion to other fields) (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p.176).

3. Research design and operationalization

3.1. Method

A qualitative content analysis of Dutch sustainable fashion blog posts was conducted in order to understand the nature of the values that sustainable bloggers in the Netherlands transmit when discussing sustainable consumption and the way in which they communicate them. Such an examination was done to see if Dutch sustainable fashion bloggers were promoting sustainable consumption or were still advocating the values of consumerism. Schreier (2014) argues that this method has been chosen among other methods of qualitative research because it has specific features: it is “applied to latent and more context-dependent meaning” (p.6), which is suitable for the qualitative data of the sample (blog posts, they are all placed in a specific context that should be taken into consideration while analyzing data). He also outlines that qualitative content analysis also provides “a detailed description of the material under analysis” (p.6), and details are very important when making meaning and interpretation of existing qualitative data.

Another advantage of the qualitative content analysis is that, in comparison to other qualitative methods (which are known to sometimes add even more data to the existing one), it reduces the amount of data and makes the researcher “focus on selected aspects of meaning, namely those aspects that relate to the overall research question” (Schreier, 2014, p.2). In the case of blog posts, where meanings can seem different but still have features in common, this feature will help to find similar meanings and group them, by this reducing the amount of data and letting the researcher focus on similar patterns. Moreover, qualitative content analysis is highly systematic, and this “counteracts the danger of looking at the material only through the lens of one's assumptions and expectations” (Schreier, 2014, p.2).

This method also requires a certain number of steps that will be repeated by the researcher to modify the coding frame in the process of coding (p.2). It means that the researcher might have had some assumptions in mind before the coding (and while making the coding frame), but those assumptions do not affect the quality of research because they can be tested: if the expected pattern (for example, one discussed in the theoretical framework) does not appear often and other unexpected patterns do appear, the coding frame can be modified. So, qualitative content analysis is “flexible in that the coding frame should always be matched to the material” because it “typically combines varying portions of concept-driven and data-driven categories within any one coding frame” (p.3). This is suitable for the qualitative data analyzed in this paper, because for the chosen blog posts the categories were expected to be both concept- and

data-driven and the researcher realized that modification might be needed throughout the process of coding.

It can be outlined that “qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings” (Weber, 1990, in Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). This means that, since the amount of examined data is large and this paper is answering a specific question (and for this purpose is looking into values that influencers communicate while speaking of sustainable consumption and the way in which they communicate those values), such an approach will help to easily classify the large amount of information into several specific categories so that they clearly represent the limited amount of particular values that this paper examines. Those categories were created not only regarding the research question but also as data-driven and material based ones: it means that, because qualitative content analysis is flexible and allows the possibility to modify the coding frame in order to match the data (Schreier, 2014), some categories and subcategories were created according to previous research discussed in the theoretical framework and some categories were created along the way if the researcher noticed a new commonly emerging pattern that was not expected by him since it was not outlined in the theoretical framework. The categories of this research and their nature (data- or material based) are narrowly explained in the subchapter “Categories for coding”.

Lastly, the images from the blog posts, as well as videos and other multimedia objects will not be analyzed in this paper (visual analysis will not be conducted). This might have limitations because it can be argued that the analysis will then be incomplete without those, but this paper will focus only on the textual part of the data from blog posts.

3.2. Sustainable consumption in the Netherlands

This study was conducted in the Netherlands – a European country with a current population of 17,07 million of people (United Nations estimates, 2018). Fashion is now the leading product category for shopping in the Netherlands, accounting for 5.76 billion USD market share. It can be concluded that Dutch people have adopted the consumerist lifestyle, also in terms of fashion. But, on the other hand, this is the country where sustainable consumption is also highly promoted. It has been found that Dutch people did not wear 71% of their clothes in year 2017, and people were concerned about the problem of overconsumption (Terra, 2018). It can be therefore argued that, due to this concern and the raised awareness of how many products remain unused, the Netherlands is also becoming host to several initiatives related to sustainable consumption. For example, in summer 2018 a Slow Fashion Summer challenge was started by

the Dutch organization CollAction; according to them, more than 2600 people have made a commitment to buy completely no new clothes during the summer. Also the Fashion Revolution Movement (started by Fashion Revolution, an organization raising awareness of the fact that fashion apparel is often produced under conditions that harm the environment and society), originally started in the United Kingdom, has now a lot of Dutch followers. It can be therefore concluded that the Netherlands is a country where sustainable consumption is discussed to a relatively large extent and where different initiatives related to promotion of sustainable consumption of fashion apparel are welcomed.

Moreover, according to the Worldbank (2011), 92,1% of the population of the Netherlands are Internet users. This is a higher percentage than other European countries have (Belgium 76,2 %, Switzerland 83,0%, Germany 83,4%), so it can be argued that the Netherlands is a leader of Internet usage among European countries. According to Statista, in year 2016 7% of Internet users in the Netherlands have created a website or blog. There is no reliable source providing information about how many fashion blogs are there in the Netherlands, but it can be argued that for the reasons mentioned above the Netherlands may be considered to be a suitable country to study in terms of sustainable fashion blogging: the examined topic is sufficiently popular in society, the people living in the land are active Internet users, so there is enough data to collect in terms of sustainable fashion blog posts.

3.3. Data collection

Before starting the data collection, the researcher has acquainted herself with the sustainable fashion blogosphere inside and outside the Netherlands. This was done by following and reading different sustainable fashion blogs and reading descriptions of sustainable fashion blogs that were featured and promoted in the media. This has led to developing of an understanding of the sustainable fashion blogosphere.

To start the data collection for this paper, data was first searched using the search term "duurzame mode blog" in Google. After this, snowball sampling through blogs (searching for posts where bloggers suggest other blogs that they read and trust) and through Instagram (searching for the bloggers' and sustainable designers' accounts on Instagram and going through accounts that they follow to find suitable blogs there) was used. The blogs also needed to be considered as relevant according to the criteria mentioned below in the 'Units of analysis' section.

3.4. Units of analysis

The units of analysis were blog posts from Dutch sustainable fashion bloggers meeting several criteria that are discussed in this subchapter. Blog posts were chosen for this study because, as previously discussed in the theoretical framework (Uzunogly& Kip, 2014), they are rich sources of information and the platform where influencers communicate their messages and values with effort and will to persuade the audiences. Thus, the data that could be retrieved from these blogs was seen to be informative and useful in order to give an answer to the research question of this paper.

The bloggers whose blogs were chosen for this study needed to meet several criteria's. First, they needed to position themselves as communicating sustainable consumption and green values and needed to also, besides other posts, create posts about fashion apparel. Those bloggers could probably also blog about other themes but fashion apparel, but it should not concentrate on too many themes (based on the previous understanding of the sustainable fashion blogosphere developed by the researcher beforehand, it needed to be clear that sustainable consumption of fashion apparel was one of the main themes of the selected blog that was considered by the blogger to be important and worth promoting).

Second, authors of the posts needed to claim that they were Dutch (in their blog description, biography or some other publicly accessible online source). The language of the posts could be either Dutch or English, but it was not seen as a criterion for selecting posts since people from other countries (for example, Belgium or South Africa) could possibly also write posts in Dutch. Third, these bloggers needed to have a relatively popular and active blog (the criterion for popularity was based on the previously developed researcher's understanding of the Dutch sustainable fashion blogosphere).

Because "blog post data can be viewed as representative of the time when it was written" (Erz & Christensen, 2018, p.72), blog posts from different years and periods of time were included in the sample since the information relevant to this study that is included in those posts does not lose its' value over time. Posts written later than the 24th of April 2013 were considered as valid since it was the date when the Rana Plaza factory building collapsed, killing more than one thousand garment workers (Julfikar & Yardley, 2013) and proving the working conditions in which fashion apparel was produced to be unsafe. This is the date when, according to the researcher's previously developed understanding of the sustainable fashion blogosphere, consumers started actively discussing the social and ecological problems caused by consumerism in the field of fashion. The blogs could be self-hosted (www.) or hosted on web allowing to create rich posts with no limitations on the amount and nature of the content, so that the blogger could possibly add pictures and media files (such as audio- and video files) to his or her posts.

The amount of chosen posts was 60. From each blogger, not less than two and no more than four posts were taken into the sample. The length of the posts needed to be more than 300 words, the maximum length was not discussed: the posts needed to contain rich information on the examined topics and this could be achieved by using enough words. Blog posts with visual presentation of outfits were mostly not included in the sample since those posts were usually less than 300 words (observation made on the base of the previously gained understanding of the sustainable fashion blogosphere), but it was not a restriction: they could still be included in case if they contained information relevant to this study and more than 300 words.

The blog posts that were selected for this research must contain a reflection on the ways in which the blogger practiced sustainable consumption or suggested to live a sustainable lifestyle. Those posts were highly descriptive and full of information and details: they mostly contained explanations of how and why the blogger was practicing sustainable consumption himself and how and why other people should also draw their attention to this way of living. The ‘how’ question was answered by elaborately explaining how the influencers managed (cleaned and fulfilled) their wardrobes, made buying decisions (or refused to make them), found new ways of gaining new possessions than buying new items in the shop, combined items with each other to create new looks. The ‘why’ question was answered through giving more information about the sustainable consumption movement, the phenomenon of consumerism and the negative way in which it was affecting the environment, society and peoples’ psychological well-being. Influencers could tell as well as commonly known facts, as well as share personal stories, their own experience and their own reasons why they decided to practice sustainable consumption.

3.5. Categories for coding

As explained above, the categories were both theory- and data driven. For the category “voluntary simplicity”, the concepts presented by Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) were used as subcategories – those were “forward incrementation”, “redefinition” and “redirection” (p.176). In order to detect the values in the selected blog posts, the researcher looked for discussions about using already possessed items in a new way (forward incrementation), transforming the desire of buying new items into other desires related to fashion, like shopping for other people, making boards on Pinterest and so on (redefinition) and transforming the desire of buying new items into other desires not related to fashion, like finding new hobbies and spending more time with family and friends (redirection).

For the category “green purchasing behavior”, new subcategories were created during the process of coding since the subcategories from previous research mentioned in the theoretical framework (Liu et al., 2012, Tanner and Wölfling Kast, 2003) were applicable to all kinds of

green goods and not only to sustainable fashion apparel. The values outlined by Liu et al. (2012) (“purchase of energy saving products”, “purchase of water saving products”, ‘buy organic foods”, “buy recycled paper products”, “buy green construction materials” did not promise to be useful for this paper and the particular case of sustainable fashion apparel. The green food purchases values deducted by Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003) (“environmental protection”, “fair trade”, “local products”, “availability of action-related knowledge”) were much more similar to the values outlined in this paper, although they also could not be considered as suitable subcategories for coding since those values were argued to be applicable only for food and the “availability of action-related knowledge” could not be taken into consideration due to the aim the research (different from the aim of the research that this paper conducted). It can be therefore concluded that for this particular research the subcategories needed to be created differently and using open coding in order to suit the particular case of sustainable fashion. To detect the values in the selected blog posts, the researcher was looking for discussions about buying sustainably made products and the ways in which a product could be classified as a sustainably produced one.

The researcher was also searching for the opinion leaders’ qualities that can be observed in bloggers’ behavior discussed by Uzunogly& Kip (2014) (“openness to messages”, “taking the role of discussants” and “being valued among social contacts”) - this means that he was looking into the facts if the blogger was open to messages and how he expressed it (like, for example, how he was asking his readers for feedback or new ideas for posts), if the blogger was taking the role of a discussant and how he expressed it (like, for example, raising problems and topics, discussing and debating) and if the blogger was influential and valued among social contacts and how he expressed it (like, for example, bloggers featuring each other on social media and noting if they were featured somewhere).

Because Porter (2004) argued that virtual communities were actively used for commercial purposes, the researcher has also looked into the ways how sustainable fashion apparel and services related to it were produced. Brand experiences, product placement and other existing ways of promotion were expected also in the field of sustainable consumption. The categories were created openly.

Finally, because Alexander & Ussher (2012), Jackson (2005) and Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) argued that sustainability could not be achieved even if consuming sustainably produced fashion apparel, a separate category for different pitfalls, discrepancies and challenges was created. It was expected that the influencers would be critical about the values of sustainable consumption or might communicate them in a not enough argumented and persuasive way. Those traits were again detected in posts explaining how the blogger practiced or suggested to

practice sustainable consumption (see explanation in the “Units of analysis” subchapter). The categories were still data driven, even if concepts from the theory could be partly recognized, because a lot of new results, not presented in the theoretical framework, were expected.

The categories, like stated in Schreier (2014), meet several requirements (unidimensionality, mutual exclusiveness and exhaustiveness) (Schreier, 2014, pp.8-9) in order to, as already argued, reduce the amount of data and obtain a clear and structured answer to the research question. The final coding guide is included in the Appendix.

The coding was done in Atlas.ti. This software was chosen for its’ easy interface and the possibility to easily review the data grouped into specific categories (which makes the process of analysis easier). After the coding was done, the obtained categories were compared to the categories from the original research and it was argued if those categories were applicable.

4. Results

The aim of this research was to examine *the goal that Dutch bloggers intended to achieve by communicating sustainable consumption of fashion apparel*. The results are presented in five subsections – evaluation of the opinion leaders’ qualities in the sample, elements of persuasion, ways of advocating sustainable consumption, green purchasing behavior values and voluntary simplicity values.

4.1. Evaluation of the opinion leaders’ qualities in the sample

Uzunogly and Kip (2014) have argued that digital influencers possess a range of qualities that opinion leaders do – openness to messages, taking the role of a discussant and being influential and valued among social contacts. The concepts named above were used as categories for coding and the blog posts from the sample were coded in order to find if influencers possessed those traits.

4.1.1. Openness to messages

Bloggers in their posts they often asked their readers for feedback. It could concern some content from the original post and in this case the influencer was showing interest in the readers’ opinion on the discussed topic (or, arguably, was just showing engagement to make the conversation go on further), making a call to action for long and elaborate responses, for example: “And I am very interested in how you’re looking at this. And how you give yourself and answer to the question: ‘Are you what you wear?’”¹(Mûres, 2018), “That’s why I am very interested in your opinion! When do you consider a brand to be sustainable? Let me know!”²(Codi, 2017). Sometimes the bloggers were asking in a simpler way if the readers agreed with their point of view or not. This was done by asking closed questions or short questions (usually at the end of a post), for example: “Do you want this as well?”³(Buining, n.d.). Some of the influencers were asking for new ideas and tips for adding details and content to the current posts or as suggestions for future posts: “If you know a cool sustainable fabric that is not named

¹“En ben ik heel benieuwd hoe jij hier naar kijkt. En hoe jij voor jezelf antwoord geeft op de vraag; ‘Ben je wat je draagt?’” (Mûres, 2018)

²“Daarom ben ik heel benieuwd naar jouw mening! Wanneer vind jij een merk duurzaam? Let me know!” (Codi, 2017)

³“Wil jij dit ook?” (Buining, n.d.)

in the manual, send me an email (info@palaceofbliss.nl), then I will add it!”⁴(Noa, n.d.), “Do you have another tip about how you could sustainably wash your clothes?”⁵(Noa, 2017)

The results have also shown that in some cases influencers were not only willing to receive such messages as emails or comments regarding their posts, but to make entire conversations with their audiences that could take place on other platforms than the original blog. This way, for example, Buining (n.d.) was making a call to action in order to invite her followers to discuss voluntary simplicity in a Facebook group that she was not moderating but wherein she just enjoyed being involved:

There is quite an amount of Facebook groups where you can get a lot of support. One of the groups where I am active in called: minimialising for at an advanced level but there is also a blog group where you can find lots of cool blogs about sustainable fashion (green bloggers).⁶

All things named, the influencers’ calls to action were designed to make the reader respond to their content and react to it with feedback and expression of personal experiences and opinion. Also bloggers were known to respond to all the comments that were publicly posted (only sometimes excluding very short and simple ones): the original discussion from the post could simply go on and on in the comments (and contain more and more calls to action in order to get even more comments and interaction), also showing the influencers’ openness to messages. It should be considered that the influencers possibly also could answer through email or other different private messages, but in any case this was not publicly seen on their blogs.

4.1.2 Taking the role of discussants

This research has also found evidence of the fact that the authors of the posts were taking the role of discussants. As outlined above, opinion leaders were being active in their communities in order to raise questions and topics that they found important, in order to communicate certain messages (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). This is what the bloggers did when they were taking this discussant role, and they did this in certain ways. The most commonly occurring one was simply and clearly noting that it was his or her personal opinion on a specific question or subject:

⁴“Mocht je nou nog een toffe duurzame stof kennen die niet in de wijzer is opgenomen, stuur me dan even een mailtje (info@palaceofbliss.nl), dan voeg ik hem toe!” (Noa, n.d.).

⁵“Heb jij nog een andere tip om duurzaam je kleding te wassen?” (Noa, 2017).

⁶“Er zijn tal van Facebookgroepen waar je heel veel support uit kan halen. Een van de groepen waarin ik actief ben heet: minimaliseren voor gevorderden maar er is ook een bloggroep waar je veel toffe blogs kan vinden over o.a. duurzame mode (groene bloggers)” (Buining, n.d.).

Before I start diligently explaining the concepts from my main question and this article will look more like a more scientific piece, I will immediately tell you that this is about my interpretation and my experience. Simply; this is my answer to the question “when is clothing sustainable for me?”⁷(Mûres, 2018).

In many cases the questions were raised in such a manner that the reader was invited to think of some problems together with the influencer, which might feel like he was involved in the debate (parasocial interaction): “In fact, this is a large part of the answer for me. What do you actually think is important? And what do you prioritize? For me, for example, life in a healthy environment is the number one point”⁸(Mûres, 2018).

4.1.3 Being influential among social contacts

The analysis has shown that the fact of being influential and valued among social contacts could be observed when bloggers featured other bloggers: “Sara from the fair fashion blog When Sara Smiles tells more about this in her top 10!”⁹(Overgaauw, n.d.), “Hailey from Palace of Bliss regularly shares outfit of the day posts on her blog where she wears items from LENA. Come have a look at least once!”¹⁰(Overgaauw, n.d.). The results have revealed that the bloggers from the sample were featuring each other a rather equal amount of times, but those features were not found to be mutual: for example, “Sara” (Sarah, n.d.) and “Hailey” (Noa, 2015-2017) did not mention Overgaauw (n.d.) in their posts that were taken into the sample.

4.2. Evaluation of communicator characteristics in the sample

4.2.1. Credibility

The results have shown that bloggers tried to appear as experts: in order to prove that the apparel that was promoted in the blogs was sustainable, different quality marks were mentioned: for example, the GOTS certification (Global Organic Textile Standard) (Bravenboer, 2018, Kops, 2017, Simmonds, 2018, Signal Sustainable, 2017, Van Den Sigtenhorst, 2018, Van Leeuwen, 2017), the ÖkoTex100 certification (Simmonds, 2018), the BSCI seal of quality (Business Social Compliance Initiative) (Simmonds, 2018), the certification from the Fair Wear

⁷“Voordat ik van start ga met het ijverig uiteenzetten van de begrippen uit mijn hoofdvraag en dit artikel op een meer wetenschappelijk stuk gaat lijken, zal ik maar gelijk erbij vertellen dat het hier gaat om mijn interpretatie en mijn beleving. Simpelweg; dit is mijn antwoord op de vraag ‘wanneer is kleding voor mij duurzaam?’” (Mûres, 2018)

⁸“Eigenlijk ligt hier voor mij ook voor een groot deel het antwoord. Wat vind jij namelijk belangrijk? En waarin stel jij je prioriteit? Voor mij staat bijvoorbeeld het leven in een gezond milieu met stip op nummer één” (Mûres, 2018)

⁹“Sara van de fair fashion blog When Sara Smiles vertelt er meer over in haar top 10!” (Overgaauw, n.d.)

¹⁰“Hailey van Palace of Bliss deelt op haar blog regelmatig outfit of the day posts waarin ze items van LENA draagt. Neem vooral eens een kijkje!” (Overgaauw, n.d.)

Foundation (Bravenboer, 2018, Carleen, 2017, Kops, 2017, Simmonds, 2018), the siteRankabrand.nl (Ter Haar, 2016) and the app Talking Dress (Codi, 2017, Kops, 2017, Overgaauw, n.d.). The site of The Fashion Revolution movement was also appealed to. Bloggers claimed that all those quality marks and sources were trusted and could be appealed to in order to check if a piece of clothing was sustainable or not. Some of the influencers also advised Google as a trustworthy information source (Codi, 2017, Van Bodegraven, 2018). Pinterest (Carleen, 2017, Kops, 2017, Mevrouw Miauw, 2018, Mûres, 2018) and YouTube (Buining, n.d.) were addressed as sources for inspiration.

Influencers were also mentioning different sources which they used as a base to build their discussion on further. The documentary films “Unravel” (Carleen, 2017), “Nukuhiva” (Codi, 2017, Hermien, 2016), “The Next Black” (Codi, 2017), “The world according to H&M”¹¹(Codi, 2017) and “The True Cost” (Codi, 2017, Overgaauw, n.d.) were named as trusted information sources about the negative impact of the fashion industry and were used as start points for the bloggers’ discussion about the need and importance of sustainable consumption in contemporary society. Among books, “The Curated Closet” by Anuschka Rees (Hermien, 2018) and “The Hidden Influence”¹² by Babette Porcelijn (Overgaauw, n.d.), “Fashion for Tomorrow”¹³by Lynsey Dubbeld (Codi, 2017) and “This is a Good Guide”¹⁴ by Marieke Eyskoot (Codi, 2017, Overgaauw, n.d., Simmonds, 2018) were appealed to as to powerful sources and used as start points in the discussion about how sustainable consumption can be practices and in what ways it can be achieved.

Opinion leaders also were presenting themselves as trustworthy communicators: they were honest with their readers, admitting if they could not accomplish some goals, had some negative traits or argued that the topic of sustainability had some dark sides, too: numerous examples are presented in the “Sustainability as utopia” section.

Expressions of good will can also be found, and the influencers reached this effect by using parasocial interaction, taking the discussant role and showing openness to messages (results can be found in the previous section).

Bloggers claimed that in the beginning they were all addicted to consumerist behavior, but they have changed their opinion and are now advocating sustainable consumption:

¹¹ “De wereld volgens H&M” (Codi, 2017)

¹² “De Verborgene Impact” by Babette Porcelijn (Overgaauw, n.d.)

¹³ “Mode voor Morgen” by Lynsey Dubbeld (Codi, 2017)

¹⁴ “Dit is een Goede Gids” by Marieke Eyskoot (Codi, 2017, Overgaauw, n.d., Simmonds, n.d.)

Cheap, nice enough and with a suitable shape? Then it went home with me. Result: 3 chests of drawers full of clothes. And now when I'm typing this, I am feeling pretty much ashamed of this¹⁵ (Mevrouw Miauw, 2017).

They also stated that they still felt, just like before, the will to buy new things, but were resisting to it because consumerist behavior lead them once to unhappiness:

I also recognize that my ego speaks. This stupid ego that thinks that I want all those expensive things and that I forgot there was a time when I, as a blogger, received boxes of stuff every week as I became more and more unhappy with all the matter around me...¹⁶ (Buining, n.d.).

In order to argumentate their position, bloggers explained that the amount of consumed clothing was simply absurd and it was just not very smart to blindly and uncritically follow the consumerist ideas and values, suggesting to change their purchasing behavior and stop buying things impulsively:

The fast-fashion industry causes that clothing is being worn no more than 7 times. That is absurd! So we should get rid of this¹⁷ (Veenhoven, 2017).

I consider going with a new trend every season (and therefore having to buy, buy, buy again and again) to be big nonsense. I'd rather prefer a pair of sustainable garments of good quality, then a pile of garments that you wear only a few times¹⁸ (Ter Haar, 2017).

As a solution to the problem, bloggers introduced sustainable fashion, stating that shopping was fun, but only if it didn't harm the Earth or the people living on it:

Discussions about sustainable clothing can sometimes go far since people are quickly taking a defensive position. Because shopping is fun and you don't want to associate it with factories that are about to collapse. BAM, moral decoupling (as it is called so nicely) is striking and it does not bother you anymore. But maybe it does not have to be

¹⁵ "Goedkoop, leuk genoeg en de goede pasvorm? Dan ging het mee naar huis. Resultaat: 3 kasten vol met kleding. En nu ik dit typ, schaam ik me daar eerlijk gezegd best wel voor" (Mevrouw Miauw, 2017)

¹⁶ "Ik herken echter ook dat mijn ego dan spreekt. Die stomme ego die denkt dat ik ook al die dure dingen wil hebben en vergeten is dat er een tijd was dat ik als blogger wekelijks dozen met spullen ontving terwijl ik steeds ongelukkiger werd van alle materie om mij heen..." (Buining, n.d.)

¹⁷ "De fast-fashion industrie richt zich erop dat kleding niet vaker dan 7 keer gedragen wordt. Dat is toch absurd! Daar moeten we dus als eerste vanaf" (Veenhoven, 2017)

¹⁸ "Om elk seizoen met een nieuwe trend mee te gaan (en dus steeds weer moeten kopen, kopen, kopen) vind ik grote onzin. Liever een paar duurzame kledingstukken van goede kwaliteit, dan een berg kledingstukken die je maar een paar keer draagt" (Ter Haar, 2017)

complicated in practice, as I hopefully could have shown you with this blog post¹⁹(Ter Haar, 2016).

4.2.2. Social attractiveness

Influencers, by being open to messages and using parasocial interaction when addressing to their audiences (results presented in the previous section), were demonstrating likability. Good will was also shown when they used parasocial interaction, took the discussant role and were demonstrating openness to messages (results can be found in the previous section). The results have also shown that the bloggers were showing similarity with the audience, stating that they were regular people, just like their readers: “Just like almost every woman, I want to go through life beautifully and fashionably dressed,”²⁰ (Van Bodegraven, L., 2018).

4.3. Ways of promoting sustainable fashion

The results have shown that bloggers were describing owners of sustainable shops and other promoters of sustainable fashion as attractive communicators. For example, this is the way Ter Haar (2017) described the owner of the sustainable shop Wolf and Storm:

If you want to see a nice range of sustainable, honest and vegan clothing and accessories at the same time, you will find Marlieke’s web shop fantastic... Not entirely unimportant information: she also has a nice beagle and people with beagles are the best people anyway.²¹

Influencers also argued that famous people chose for sustainable fashion as well: “Big names such as Emma Watson, Meryl Streep and Lupita Nyong’o already performed the challenge at events such as the Met Gala and the Cannes Film Festival. All these stars were wearing pieces by well-known designers who were not only beautiful but also had a beautiful background. For example, Meryl Streep appeared in a golden evening dress by Lanvin made from eco-certified

¹⁹“Discussies over duurzame kleding kunnen weleens hoog oplopen omdat mensen snel in de verdediging schieten. Want winkelen is leuk en je wil dat helemaal niet associëren met fabrieken die op instorten staan. BAM, morale ontkoppeling (zoals dat zo mooi heet) slaat toe en het doet je allemaal geen zak meer. Maar misschien hoeft het in praktijk allemaal niet zo ingewikkeld te zijn, zoals ik je hopelijk met deze blogpost heb kunnen laten zien” (Ter Haar, 2016)

²⁰“Ik wil er net als bijna elke vrouw mooi en fashionable gekleed door het leven gaan” (Van Bodegraven, L., 2018)

²¹“Als je gelijk een mooi aanbod van duurzame, eerlijke en vegan kleding en accessoires bij elkaar wilt zien, zul je de webshop van Marlieke fantastisch vinden... Niet geheel onbelangrijke informatie: ook heeft ze een lieve beagle en mensen met beagles zijn sowieso de beste mensen mensen”(Ter Haar, 2017)

materials and Emma Watson wore a dress by Calvin Klein which met the principles of The Green Carpet Challenge”²² (Van Leeuwen, R., 2017).

Sustainability was named as one of the advantages of apparel that would make it a better buying decision than an item that was produced not sustainably:

Just like almost every woman, I want to go through life beautifully and fashionably dressed, but I absolutely do not want anyone else or the environment to suffer from this or to be deprived of something. And last but not least, I am prepared to pay a fair price for it... I have come to this point because I think there are more women who, just like me, love fashion and clothing but do not want the clothes they buy to be made by a child or to be full of chemicals about which I know nothing”²³ (Van Bodegraven, L., 2018).

Sustainable fashion was sometimes promoted even as something that would change the ecological situation in the world: “Save the ocean, buy a sustainable bikini”²⁴ (Signal Sustainable, 2017).

Some influencers argued that the new sustainable values were already accepted in society and becoming more and more common, so there was no real danger of being excluded from the reference group of fashionable people for this kind of actions: “Swapping clothes is completely hip at the moment! Search ‘clothing swap’ on Facebook and you will find quite an amount of clothing swap events”²⁵ (Veenhoven, 2017). On the other hand, influencers were also expressing concerns about being accepted in society, although stating that it was not a grave problem:

a. maybe you will not suit in there anymore or b. your surroundings will not understand your choice ... Yes, you will not be directly in the majority. That is clearly set. However, you will be encouraged. In a very short time I have already met a number of girls who also think very consciously about their choice of clothes. And my closest entourage is

²² “Grote namen als Emma Watson, Meryl Streep en Lupita Nyong’o voerden de challenge al uit op evenementen als het Met Gala en het Cannes Film Festival. Al deze sterren dragen ontwerpen van bekende ontwerpers, die niet alleen prachtig zijn maar ook een mooie achtergrond hebben. Zo verscheen Meryl Streep al eens in een gouden galajurk van Lanvin, gemaakt van eco-gecertificeerde materialen en droeg Emma Watson een jurk van Calvin Klein, welke voldeed aan de principes van The Green Carpet Challenge” (Van Leeuwen, R., 2017)

²³ “Ik wil er net als bijna elke vrouw mooi en fashionable gekleed door het leven gaan, maar ik wil absoluut niet dat iemand anders of het milieu ervoor moet lijden of tekort gedaan word. En last but not least ik ben bereid daar een eerlijke prijs voor te betalen... Ik ben ertoe gekomen, omdat ik denk dat er meer vrouwen zijn die net zoals ik van mode en kleding houden, maar niet willen dat de kleding die ze kopen door een kind gemaakt is of vol zit met chemicaliën waar ik niets van af weet” (Van Bodegraven, L., 2018)

²⁴ “Red de oceaan, koop een duurzame bikini” (Signal Sustainable, 2017)

²⁵ “Kleding ruilen is helemaal hip op het moment! Zoek op facebook op ‘kledingruil’ en je vindt zo een aantal kledingruil evenementen” (Veenhoven, 2017)

always enthusiastic. Although they may not immediately understand what I want to achieve by this ²⁶ (Mûres, 2018).

Another problem stated by the influencers was the stereotype that sustainable fashion looked old-fashioned and was making a certain statement and they used the word “geitenwollensokken” in order to describe it. The word “geitenwollensokken” is literary translated as “socks made of goat wool” and is used as a metaphor for people with alternative and nonconformist ideas (in a negative way, ideas that are not accepted in society). As this research has found, in the specific context of fashion apparel it can also refer to old fashioned items or to someone who does not want to be contemporary in a way that is accepted in society:

People do not want to be associated with something that could bring their status down. I often hear that people do not think sustainable fashion brands are cool enough. The styling of the photo shoot is always almost what it should be but still not, the largest part of the collection is too basic and boring, their Instagram is not beautiful or the website not enough fancy²⁷ (Sarah, 2018).

However, influencers were concerned about the fact that sustainable fashion might be associated with "geitenwollensokken" and tried to prove that it was not true:

Sustainability geitenwollensokken? We advise you to have a look once at the campaigns of this Danish brand. It is an underwear brand from which you actually want to have everything and it also produces sustainably. A win-win for you and nature²⁸ (Signal Sustainable, 2017).

If someone ever uses the argument that sustainability is boring and old fashioned: show the Instagram account of Salt Gypsy. Say no more²⁹ (Signal Sustainable, 2017).

Luckily there are enough alternative ways to look and sustainable, and nice³⁰ (Otur, 2017).

²⁶ “a. misschien hoor je er wel niet meer bij of b. je omgeving begrijpt je keuze niet ... Ja, je zult niet direct in de meerderheid zijn. Dat voorop gesteld. Echter, je wordt wel aangemoedigd. Ik heb in hele korte tijd best al een aantal meiden ontmoet die ook heel bewust nadenken over hun kledingkeuze. En mijn directe omgeving is altijd even enthousiast. Al snappen ze misschien niet direct wat ik ermee wil bereiken” (Mûres, 2018)

²⁷ “Mensen willen niet geassocieerd worden met iets dat hun status naar beneden zou kunnen halen. Ik hoor vaak dat mensen duurzame modemerken niet cool genoeg vinden. De styling van de fotoshoot is het altijd net níet, het grootste gedeelte van de collectie is te basic en saai, hun Instagram is niet mooi of de website te weinig fancy” (Sarah, 2018)

²⁸ “Duurzaamheid geitenwollensokken? We raden aan om eens naar de campagnes van dit Deense merk te kijken. Het is een lingeriemerk waar je eigenlijk alles wel van wilt hebben én die ook nog eens duurzaam produceert. Een win-win voor jou en de natuur” (SignalSustainable, 2017)

²⁹ “Als iemand ooit nog het argument gebruikt dat duurzaamheid saai en geitenwollensokken is: laat het instagram account van Salt Gypsy zien. Say no more” (SignalSustainable, 2017)

³⁰ “Gelukkig zijn er genoeg alternatieven om er duurzaam én leuk uit te zien” (Otur, 2017)

The sustainably-made items were often described as easy to buy, by this having an attractive price or, for example, a wide choice: “If you want to see a nice range of sustainable, honest and vegan clothing and accessories together at the same time, you will find Marlieke’s web shop fantastic!”³¹(Ter Haar, 2017), “They cost 15 euro for a pair, but if you buy two at once they are 12,50 euro”³²(Hermien, 2016)”, Under Protection has a perfect, simple web shop and the brand is even available in some shops in Amsterdam and Eindhoven”³³(Signal Sustainable, 2017). Additional services were actively promoted as well: “And in Leiden and Amsterdam they deliver for free! Super cool!”³⁴(Boender, 2017), “In our private showroom you can examine, feel and fit everything while enjoying a snack and drink”³⁵(Van Bodegraven. 2018), “The sustainable brand Patagonia even organized last year the ‘Worn Wear Tour’, so that you can repair your old items at their place. That’s what you call one more service...”³⁶(Overgaauw, n.d.). Buying for a small price was described as positive and beneficial, a good way to reach the desired reference group for a smaller price than usually: “Thanks to Goodfibrations you can also for a tiny price of 60 euro walk around in a Rains jacket. Long live the SALE!”³⁷(Veenhoven, 2017).

Bloggers also added direct product placement in the post from which it was obvious for the reader that the collaboration was commercial: “In addition, you also receive a 10% discount with the discount code ‘MaeSue10’. (Valid until 31 May 2018)”³⁸(Mûres, 2018). Sometimes it was even noted in a direct way: “I have written this blog post in collaboration with Wolf and Storm”³⁹(Ter Haar, 2017).

In some cases bloggers admitted that the clothes they were wearing made them feel like they belonged to a specific social group or just made them feel good and different: “Because when I put this dress on, I feel like the most fabulous indestructible #GIRLBOSS in the world”

³¹ “Als je gelijk een mooi aanbod van duurzame, eerlijke en vegan kleding en accessoires bij elkaar wilt zien, zul je de webshop van Marlieke fantastisch vinden!” (Ter Haar, 2017)

³² “Ze kosten 15 euro per paar, maar als je twee paar tegelijk koopt zijn ze 12,50 euro” (Hermien, 2016)

³³ “Under Protection heeft een prima, simpele webshop en het merk is zelfs verkrijgbaar in een aantal winkels in Amsterdam en Eindhoven” (SignalSustainable, 2017)

³⁴ “En in Leiden en Amsterdam bezorgen ze gratis! Super tof!” (Boender, 2017)

³⁵ “In onze privé showroom kun je namelijk onder het genot van een hapje en drankje ook alles komen bekijken, voelen en passen uiteraard” (Van Bodegraven. 2018)

³⁶ “Het duurzame merk Patagonia organiseerde afgelopen jaar zelfs de ‘WornWear Tour’, zodat je oude items bij hen kon laten repareren! Dat noem ik nog eens service...” (Overgaauw, n.d.).

³⁷ “Dankzij Goodfibrations kan je nu ook voor het zachte prijsje van 60 euro in een Rains jas rondlopen. Lang leve de SALE!” (Veenhoven, 2017).

³⁸ “Daarnaast ontvang je nu ook nog eens 10% korting met de kortingscode ‘MaeSue10’. (Geldig t/m 31 mei 2018)” (Mûres, 2018).

³⁹ “Deze blogpost heb ik geschreven in samenwerking met Wolf and Storm” (Ter Haar, 2017).

⁴⁰(Ter Haar, 2016), “After all, you feel the best when you're dressed in beautiful things from top to toe, from jacket to thong”⁴¹ (Snel, 2017).

Sometimes it was also noted that it was positive to support a beginning and small sustainably minded brand by buying an item from it: “In order to be able to begin with this project, Maarten started a crowd funding. You can support the project with any amount, but with a donation starting from € 34 you will also get such a great t-shirt made by refugees! They are currently at 77.7% and there are still 6 days to go, so they can use your help! You can donate here”⁴² (Bravenboer, 2018).

4.4. Green purchasing behavior values

The subcategories for this section were created while coding, and the results show that bloggers promoted 4 main values that purchases needed to have for meeting the sustainable standards - environmentally friendly, socially fair, previously owned and long lasting. New subcategories were created during the process of coding since the subcategories from the research used in the theoretical framework (Liu et al., 2012, Tanner and Wölfling Kast, 2003) were applicable to all kinds of green goods and not only to sustainable fashion apparel. In order to detect the values in the blog posts from the sample, the researcher was looking for discussions about buying sustainably made products and the ways in which a product could be classified as such. Those values will be discussed below in the following subsections.

4.4.1. Environmentally friendly

The results have shown that influencers were expressing concerns about the fact that apparel production was polluting the Earth and harming the well-being of animals and human beings. Fashion items that were produced in conditions that made in an environment-, people- and animal friendly manner were highly valued and influencers claimed that they felt good wearing such items: “But you feel the best if those things are made in a fair, people- and animal friendly manner”⁴³(Snel, 2017).

⁴⁰“Want als ik deze jurk aan heb voel ik me de meest fabulous onverwoestbare #GIRLBOSS ter wereld” (Ter Haar, 2016)

⁴¹“Je voelt je immers het fijnst wanneer je van top tot teen, van jas tot string, in mooie spullen gewaad bent” (Snel, 2017)

⁴² “Om dit project te kunnen beginnen is Maarten een crowdfunding gestart. Je kunt het project steunen met elk bedrag, maar bij een donatie vanaf €34 krijg je ook zo’n tof t-shirt dat gemaakt is door de vluchtelingen! Ze zitten op dit moment op 77,7% en er zijn nog 6 dagen te gaan, dus ze kunnen jouw hulp goed gebruiken! Doneren kan hier” (Bavenboer, 2018)

⁴³ “Maar het allerfijnst voel je je wanneer die spullen op een eerlijke, mens- en diervriendelijke wijze gemaakt zijn” (Snel, 2017)

This research has also found that, according to the bloggers, all materials which production could harm the environment and negatively affect the well-being of living organisms could be considered as unsustainable. This is how one of the influencers has given a definition to environmentally friendly production: “environmentally friendly production: production takes place with as little impact on the environment as possible”⁴⁴(Noa, n.d.). Some of the influencers were also communicating vegan values, claiming that the use of all kinds of natural materials should also be taken under control:

I am therefore an advocate of living as naturally as possible, reusing or recycling everything as much as possible, having as little plastic as possible at home or as waste. I even believe that we are better off using natural materials such as wool, cotton, leather, hemp and bamboo⁴⁵(Mûres, 2018).

I do not want to make impulsive purchases anymore, I want to really consciously buy new items. In addition, I do not want to buy any items of clothing and accessories that contain animal materials. So no more leather, but also no wool, cashmere or silk⁴⁶(Carleen, 2017).

They also have ‘vegan’ underwear, without silk, wool or leather included⁴⁷(Signal Sustainable, 2017).

However, the results show as well that there was critique towards the real sustainability of this kind of materials because of the use of chemicals during the production process. In this example Noa (n.d.) was admitting the fact named above, but still classifying this kind of materials as sustainable because it was long lasting:

This is an alternative to animal leather. It is often made of synthetic materials such as Polyurethane (PU), Kydex and in some cases also PVC. The production of these materials is not necessarily sustainable, but the life span of these materials is large. In addition, this material is free of animal suffering.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ “Milieuvriendelijke productie: productie vindt plaats met zo min mogelijk impact op het milieu” (Noa, n.d.)

⁴⁵ “Ik ben dan ook voorstander van zo natuurlijk mogelijk leven, alles zoveel mogelijk hergebruiken of recyclen, zo min mogelijk plastic in huis of als afval. Ik geloof zelfs dat we beter af zijn met het gebruiken van natuurlijke materialen, zoals wol, katoen, leer, hennep en bamboe” (Mûres, 2018)

⁴⁶ “Ik wil geen impulsieve aankopen meer doen, maar echt bewust nieuwe items aanschaffen. Daarnaast wil ik ook geen kledingstukken en accessoires waarin dierlijke materialen verwerkt zijn kopen. Dus geen leer meer, maar ook geen wol, cashmere of zijde” (Carleen, 2017)

⁴⁷ “Ze hebben ook “vegan” ondergoed, zonder zijde, wol of leer erin verwerkt” (SignalSustainable, 2017)

⁴⁸ “Dit is een alternatief voor dierlijk leer. Dit wordt vaak gemaakt van synthetische materialen zoals Polyurethaan (PU), Kydex en in sommige gevallen ook PVC. De productie van deze materialen is niet per se duurzaam, maar de levensduur hiervan is wel groot. Daarnaast is dit materiaal vrij van dierenleed” (Noa, n.d.)

Another blogger (Carleen, 2016) was critical about real leather and fur also because of the fact that chemicals were used in the production process (and not only because it was made of animal skin):

But the more I learn about the leather industry, the clearer it becomes that it is not so black and white. Behind leather production there is not only animal suffering, there are also many chemicals needed in order to transform the leather into a bag that are very bad for the environment. And then I'm not even talking about the people who get sick by working in the leather industry or living in the neighborhood.⁴⁹

Natural materials coming from plants were also criticized due to the fact that they still needed natural resources during production: “A disadvantage of organic cotton is that, just like ordinary cotton, it needs a lot of water to grow”⁵⁰(Noa, n.d.).

Recycled materials were also discussed as a value, and it was claimed that the process of recycling was sustainable: “By reusing our ‘waste’ or converting it into new usable products, we contribute to a healthier environment. Also biodegradable clothing can contribute into this”⁵¹(Mûres, 2018). However, this research demonstrates critic towards the real sustainability of this kind of materials as well: “A disadvantage of recycling cotton is that the cotton fibers are often shorter. At this moment it is technically possible to make good textile out of it. For this reason organic cotton is often mixed with other materials to make a solid textile”⁵²(Noa, n.d.).

4.4.2. Socially fair

For being classified as socially fair, goods needed to be produced in honest working conditions: “Because socks are clothes too, so I would like that for this part of my wardrobe as well no people are treated unfairly”⁵³(Hermien, 2016). Influencers argued that the workers should be paid sufficiently and the working conditions should be safe: “Fair wages: employees

⁴⁹ “Maar hoe meer ik over de leerindustrie te weten kom, hoe duidelijker het wordt dat het niet zo zwart/wit is. Achter leer schuilt namelijk niet alleen dierenleed, er zijn ook veel chemicaliën nodig die ontzettend slecht voor het milieu zijn om het leer te bewerken tot een tas. En dan heb ik het nog niet eens over de mensen die ziek worden door in de leerindustrie te werken of in de buurt te wonen” (Carleen, 2016).

⁵⁰ “Een nadeel van biologisch katoen is dat het, net als gewoon katoen, veel water nodig heeft om te groeien” (Noa, n.d.).

⁵¹ “Door ons 'afval' opnieuw te gebruiken of om te zetten in nieuwe bruikbare producten dragen we bij aan een gezonder milieu. Ook biologisch afbreekbare kleding kan hierin een bijdrage leveren” (Mûres, 2018)

⁵² “Een nadeel van het recyclen van katoen is dat de katoenvezels vaak korter zijn. Op dit moment is het technisch mogelijk om hiervan goed textiel te maken. Daarom wordt biologisch katoen vaak gemixt met andere materialen om er een stevig textiel van te maken” (Noa, n.d.).

⁵³ “Want ook sokken zijn kleding, dus ik wil graag dat ook voor dit onderdeel van mijn garderobe geen mensen oneerlijk worden behandeld” (Hermien, 2016)

are paid a wage from which it is possible to live”⁵⁴(Noa, n.d.), “Good working conditions: employees work under safe conditions”⁵⁵(Noa, n.d.).

This subcategory also included locally made products (produced in the Netherlands). This research illustrates that bloggers were likely to turn to Dutch brands that produced long lasting items (this subcategory will be discussed below) if they could not find a more sustainable alternative: “Finally I started looking for Dutch labels that had a good reputation when it came to quality and had timeless items in their collection”⁵⁶(Kops, 2017).

Some of the influencers also argued that a sustainable brand should be socially active and support charity: “Social enterprise: the brand is actively socially involved in the Netherlands”⁵⁷(Noa, n.d.), “Supports charity: the brand donates a part of its’ revenue to charity. NB: this criterion contributes to a fair character only in combination with one of the other criteria”⁵⁸(Noa, n.d.)

4.4.3. Pre-loved

This subcategory could also be considered as a hybrid of the socially fair and environmentally friendly subcategories, but this paper decided to make a special subcategory because it could also be considered as a self-sufficient value with its’ own peculiarities. Influencers were promoting previously owned items as sustainable ones because they claimed that this fashion apparel was already produced and for this reason it didn’t pollute the environment with chemicals or simply by being no longer used and thrown away:

The other one sees sustainable clothing only as second-hand clothing, because no new raw materials are needed⁵⁹(Ter Haar, 2016).

As you might have guessed, buying second-hand clothing is one of the most sustainable things you can do. There is indeed no need in new resources and you give an old piece of clothing a second life⁶⁰(Oveergaauw, n.d.).

By buying second-hand, you give things a second life and do not contribute to a new production process⁶¹(Mevrouw Miauw, 2017).

⁵⁴ “Eerlijke lonen: werknemers krijgen een leefbaar loon betaald” (Noa, n.d.)

⁵⁵ “Goede arbeidsomstandigheden: werknemers werken onder veilige omstandigheden” (Noa, n.d.)

⁵⁶ “Uiteindelijk ben ik gaan zoeken naar Nederlandse labels die een goede naam hebben als het gaat om kwaliteit én tijdloze items in hun collectie hebben” (Kops, 2017).

⁵⁷ “Sociale onderneming: het merk is actief maatschappelijk betrokken in Nederland” (Noa, n.d.)

⁵⁸ “Steunt een goed doel: merk staat een deel van haar opbrengst af aan een goed doel. NB: dit criterium draagt alleen in combinatie met één van de andere criteria bij aan een eerlijk karakter” (Noa, n.d.)

⁵⁹ “De ander ziet duurzame kleding als enkel tweedehandse kleding, omdat daar geen nieuwe grondstoffen voor nodig zijn” (Ter Haar, 2016)

⁶⁰ “Zoals je misschien wel had geraden, is tweedehands kleding kopen één van de duurzaamste dingen die je kunt doen. Daar hoeven immers geen nieuwe middelen aan te pas te komen en je geeft een oud kledingstuk een tweede leven” (Oveergaauw, n.d.)

Did you know that second-hand clothing is one of the most sustainable ways to shop? For your new garment a bunch of raw materials and water have been used. And let us not forget that production and transport cause a lot of CO2 emissions⁶²(Mevrouw Miauw, 2017).

With this, you're not supporting brands to make new clothing. Also, you'll be finding gems that no one else has. The second-hand clothing you buy gets a new life and will not end up in 3rd country landfills(Van Den Sigtenhorst, 2018).

It may be noticed that bloggers, while discussing the fact that second-hand items were already produced, were making accent only on the fact that it was environmentally friendly but not on the fact that bad working conditions and low paid labor were also not supported by this shopping behavior.

Also renting items in special renting services was communicated as a value for the same reason: those items were already produced and could be used by more than one person if it was no longer desired. This is how Mûres (2018) described the service offered by MUD Jeans: “With their concept 'Lease a jeans' you can rent your jeans for € 7.50 per month. After a year you choose whether you want to keep the jeans or exchange them for another one”.⁶³

Speaking of meeting social standards, this research illustrates that influencers argued that renting clothes was a manner to still meet social standards with to some extent avoiding the negative impact of consumerism: “It is your chance to make a real impression with your clothes for a small price! Without having to keep a beautiful dress in your closet for years, which you can no longer put on because you have worn it to your sister's wedding and everyone you know was or present that night or has seen the photos”⁶⁴(Boender, 2017). Some of the bloggers mentioned the fact (sometimes in an indirect way) that wearing pre-owned items actually didn't meet social standards and was considered as dirty: “Before I started the sustainable clothing challenge, I found the idea of second hand quite crazy. I thought it was a dirty idea to wear clothes from someone else”⁶⁵(Codi, 2017).

⁶¹ “Door tweedehands te kopen, geef je dingen een tweede leven en draag je niet bij aan een nieuw productieproces” (Mevrouw Miauw, 2017)

⁶² “Wist je dat tweedehands kleding kopen één van de meest duurzame manieren is om te shoppen? Voor jouw nieuwe kledingstuk is een hoop grondstoffen en water gebruikt. En laten we niet vergeten dat de productie en het transport een hoop CO2 uitstoot veroorzaken” (Mevrouw Miauw, 2017)

⁶³ “Met hun concept 'Lease a jeans' kun je je jeans voor €7,50 per maand huren. Na een jaar kies je ervoor of je de jeans wil houden of weer inruilt voor een andere” (Mûres, 2018)

⁶⁴ “Het is je kans om tegen een kleine prijs een echte impressie met jouw kleding te maken! Zonder dat je dan jarenlang een prachtige jurk in je kast hebt hangen, die je niet meer aankan omdat je die naar de bruiloft van je zus hebt aangehad en iedereen die je kent die avond aanwezig was of de foto's gezien heeft” (Boender, 2017)

⁶⁵ “Voordat ik aan de duurzame kleding challenge begon, vond ik het idee van tweedehands nogal gek. Het leek me een vies idee om kleding te dragen van een ander” (Codi, 2017)

4.4.4. Long lasting

The obtained results also outline that bloggers promoted the idea that clothes needed to be treated with respect so that they last long and are used often. For example, Hermien (2018) argued that a fashion item should be used enough times just to take all the use out of it:

All clothing that you own but do not wear can be seen as a pure waste of the energy, raw materials and of the suffering that often comes with the way clothes are made... Even if you buy clothing from sustainable materials that is made locally under fair conditions, it is eternal waste if you do not wear it often.⁶⁶

It was discussed in several posts that fast fashion items were often worn no more than 7 times, although other information about those statistics was not provided: “In addition to looking at sustainable clothing production, you can also look at the lifespan of a product. In case of cheap products from a fast fashion chain it is often assumed that the product is only worn 7 times!”⁶⁷(Boender, 2017). The suggested number of times for wearing was more than 30 (in this case bloggers were also appealing to authority and mentioning the source where this number was coming from): “You've probably heard before of the 30-Wear Rule, the promise that you make to yourself to wear a piece of clothing you add to your closet at least thirty times”⁶⁸(Hermien, 2018), “Promise yourself to wear every purchased item - new or second hand - at least thirty times, according to the 30-Wear Rule of Livia Firth”⁶⁹(Hermien, 2018).

According to the obtained results, it was also argued that impulsive buying decisions should be avoided:

Give yourself reflection time, then the chance of wrong buying decisions is much smaller... Always make sure you know what you are looking for and stick to it. This way you avoid spending money on things you do not need and a closet full of unnecessary duplicates or pieces that do not suit you... Buying second-hand has a delaying effect anyway, because it sometimes takes a bit longer to find what you are looking for. And

⁶⁶ “Zelfs als je kleding van duurzame materialen koopt, die lokaal gemaakt wordt onder eerlijke omstandigheden, is het eeuwig zonde als je het niet vaak draagt” (Hermien, 2018)

⁶⁷ “Naast kijken naar duurzame productie van kleding kun je namelijk ook kijken naar de levensduur van een product. Bij goedkope producten van een fast fashion keten wordt er vaak vanuit gegaan dat het product maar 7 keer gedragen word!” (Boender, 2017)

⁶⁸ “Jullie hebben me vast vaker gehoord over de 30-WearRule, de afspraak die je met jezelf maakt om een kledingstuk dat je aan je kast toevoegt minstens dertig keer te dragen” (Hermien, 2018)

⁶⁹ “Beloof jezelf om elk gekocht kledingstuk – nieuw of tweedehands – minstens dertig keer te dragen, naar de 30-Wear Rule van LiviaFirth” (Hermien, 2018)

that is only very healthy. Precisely because we already have so much and we can use some reflection time⁷⁰ (Hermien, 2018).

Influencers suggested buying consciously, only in case that one was sure he would wear the item often:

But I find it even more important to shop consciously. So: to buy good quality clothes after I have thought about whether I really need them. And of which I am sure that I feel beautiful in them, that they suit me and that because of this I will wear them a lot⁷¹ (Ter Haar, 2016).

A suggestion for future forward incrementation was also often made, so that it was advised to buy only the items that could be combined with the ones that a person already owned:

The capsule wardrobe is often mentioned in the same breath as sustainability. No crazy thought. Having a few clothes that are easy to combine with each other, suit you completely and last long indeed does indeed fit in the sustainable Picture⁷² (Hermien, 2018)

In addition, it was stated that quality items with a timeless design were a long lasting option:

If you choose for quality with a timeless design that suits you completely, you will enjoy the garment for a long time. And after you someone else might be happy with it.

Choosing quality is always a more sustainable choice than buying new trend items every season at fast fashion chains⁷³ (Kops, 2017).

⁷⁰ "Geef jezelf bedenktijd, dan is de kans op miskopen heel veel kleiner... Zorg altijd dat je weet waar je naar op zoek bent en houd je daar aan. Zo voorkom je dat je geld opgaat aan zaken die je niet nodig hebt en een kast vol onnodige dubbelgangers of stukken die niet bij je passen... Tweedehands kopen heeft sowieso een vertragend effect, omdat het soms wat langer duurt voor je vindt waarnaar je op zoek bent. En dat is alleen maar heel gezond. Juist omdat we al zoveel hebben en we best wat bedenktijd kunnen gebruiken" (Hermien, 2018)

⁷¹ "Maar nòg belangrijker vind ik het om bewust te shoppen. Dus: kleding kopen van goede kwaliteit nadat ik er goed over heb nagedacht of ik het echt nodig heb. En waarvan ik zeker weet dat ik me er mooi in voel, dat het bij me past en dat ik het daardoor veel zal dragen" (Ter Haar, 2016)

⁷² "De capsule garderobe wordt vaak in één adem genoemd met duurzaamheid. Geen gekke gedachte. Het hebben van weinig kleren die goed onderling te combineren zijn, helemaal bij je passen en lang meegaan sluit inderdaad wel aan bij het duurzame Plaatje" (Hermien, 2018)

⁷³ "Als je kiest voor kwaliteit met een tijdloos design dat helemaal bij je past dan zul je lang plezier van het kledingstuk hebben. En na jou is er misschien nog iemand blij mee. Kiezen voor kwaliteit is altijd een duurzamere keuze dan elk seizoen nieuwe trend-items kopen bij fast fashion ketens" (Kops, 2017)

Basic items that could serve many purposes were also valued: “They are fine for weekdays, but if combined in a specific way they are also fun for a more festive occasion”⁷⁴(Ter Haar, 2017). More expensive clothes were also considered as long lasting ones due to psychological reasons: “Clothing that is slightly more expensive is often treated better. This way you are careful not to get stains on it and you read the washing label before you wash it”⁷⁵(Veenhoven, 2017).

The results also demonstrate that some of the influencers noticed that it was important how many times a year a brand launched a new collection: “Slow fashion: brand launches a new collection at most twice a year”⁷⁶(Noa, n.d.).

According to some of the bloggers, if it is treated respectfully and worn often, an outfit needn’t be produced in sustainable conditions or sustainably owned (for those values please consult the voluntary simplicity result section). Many of the bloggers claimed to call their unfairly produced and obtained fashion sustainable because it was not an impulsive buying decision and they wear this item instead of buying even more new ones: “Sandals & Sunglasses. Unfortunately ..these are not sustainable. But I have them both during quite a time already”⁷⁷(Mûres, 2018), “Made in China, is written on the label. Not really sustainable at all. Why do I name him anyway? I bought it when I was still in high school, this shirt goes almost ten (!) summers with me and I still wear it as much as before”⁷⁸(Ter Haar, 2016).

4.5. Voluntary simplicity values

The sub-categories presented in this subsection were based on the subcategories deduced by Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015), and this research illustrates that all the above-mentioned subcategories – redirection, redefinition and forward incrementation - were all to some extent present, proving the theory to be useful. The most prevalent category was redefinition, the less prevalent one was redirection (only a few posts were containing it).

4.5.1. Redefinition

The most often occurring category was redefinition. It included swapping (exchanging) old apparel with friends or with strangers during special events: “Load the things out and swap it.

⁷⁴ “Ze zijn fijn voor doordeweeks, maar op een bepaalde manier gecombineerd ook leuk voor een meer feestelijke gelegenheid” (Ter Haar, 2017)

⁷⁵ “Kleding die ietsje duurder is behandel je vaak ook beter. Zo ben je voorzichtig dat je er geen vlekken op krijgt en lees je het waslabel voordat je het wast” (Veenhoven, 2017).

⁷⁶ “Slow fashion: merk lanceert hoogstens twee keer per jaar een nieuwe collectie” (Noa, n.d.)

⁷⁷ “Sandalen & Zonnebril. Helaas.. deze zijn niet duurzaam. Wel heb ik beiden al best een tijd” (Mûres, 2018)

⁷⁸ “Made in China, staat op het label. Niet echt duurzaam allemaal. Waarom ik hem toch noem? Ik kocht hem toen ik nog op de middelbare school zat, dit shirtje gaat dus al bijna tien (!) zomers mee en ik draag hem nog steeds evenveel” (Ter Haar, 2016)

What someone else does not know how to combine may fit you perfectly”⁷⁹(Snel, 2017), selling, giving away or donating items so that they can have a second life: “Do not throw clothing at the bulky waste, but give your clothes a last bit of love and make someone else happy with it”⁸⁰(Signal Sustainable, 2017), “It may sound crazy. Your second-hand item, a gift? But imagine that a friend would give you the shoes or chain that you secretly keep an eye on?”⁸¹(Signal Sustainable, 2017), repairing or remaking old and no longer desired items: “I think I have repaired at least once almost 20% of the items in my closet”⁸²(Overgaauw, n.d.), being involved in do-it-yourself projects making new clothes and accessories from previously owned materials: “But why would you buy something new? Hell no, this trend is perfect for a DIY”⁸³(Codi, 2016). Borrowing clothes from friends and relatives was not mentioned in any of the posts.

Another theme discussed in the posts was treating already owned clothes with respect. Influencers suggested to wash the clothes in an environmentally friendly manner, keep the clothes in order and in good shape:

An important step that is often forgotten is the treatment of your clothes after purchase. Washing has a huge environmental impact and is not good for your clothes and the same applies to the dryer. In many cases, washing can be done less often and at a lower temperature with a natural detergent”⁸⁴ (Kops, 2017).

Make sure your closet is organized, so that you have an overview of what you own. Fold everything neatly, hang on what should be hung on, iron before you hang it in the closet (you do not really feel doing that in the morning) and keep your closet clean, fresh and organized⁸⁵ (Hermien, 2018).

All things mentioned, it may be noted that influencers suggested to practice creative activities still related to fashion (swapping, sewing), but only the ones that would not involve buying any completely new items (getting second-hand items through exchange was allowed).

⁷⁹ “Stal de boel uit en ruilen maar. Wat een ander niet weet te combineren, past misschien perfect bij jou” (Snel, 2017)

⁸⁰ “Gooi kleding niet bij het grofvuil, maar geef je kleding een laatste beetje liefde en maak er iemand anders blij mee” (SignalSustainable, 2017)

⁸¹ “Het klinkt misschien gek. Jouw tweedehandse item, een cadeau? Maar stel je eens voor dat een vriend of vriendin jou de schoenen of die ketting zou geven waar je stiekem een oogje op bent?” (SignalSustainable, 2017)

⁸² “Ik denk dat ik bijna 20% van de items in mijn kast wel eens heb laten repareren” (Overgaauw, n.d.)

⁸³ “Maar waarom zou je iets nieuws kopen? Hell no, deze trend is perfect voor een DIY” (Codi, 2016)

⁸⁴ “Een belangrijke stap die nog al eens vergeten wordt, is de behandeling van je kleding ná aankoop. Wassen heeft een enorme milieu-impact en is niet goed voor je kleding en dat geldt ook voor de droger. Wassen kan in veel gevallen minder vaak en op lagere temperatuur met een natuurlijk wasmiddel” (Kops, 2017)

⁸⁵ “Zorg dat je kast opgeruimd is, zodat je overzicht hebt van wat je bezit. Vouw alles netjes op, hang op wat moet hangen, strijk vóór je het in de kast hangt (daar heb je ’s ochtends echt geen zin in) en houd je kast schoon, fris en georganiseerd” (Hermien, 2018)

4.5.2. Forward incrementation

The next aspect that this research has outlined was forward incrementation. Influencers suggested to look into peoples' own closets for different combinations and options before making the decision to buy or own something new: "Through combination of items, the outfit gets the power that it may express and each single item becomes empowered again"⁸⁶(Mûres, 2018), "For a sustainable Christmas it would of course be fantastic if you took a set from your own closet that you would wear during Christmas. Perhaps something you have never combined with each other or a piece of clothing that gives you a different twist"⁸⁷(Van Bodegraven, 2017).

Considering the emotional side of the subject, influencers argued that one should feel grateful for all the items that he already possessed: "I am also grateful for the clothing items I have and for the makers of the clothing"⁸⁸(Carleen, 2017), "Be grateful. Look at all those clothes that you own. Get it out of your closet. Photograph it or make a list. Let it affect you. Is it not a huge wealth?"⁸⁹(Hermien, 2018).

Another theme discussed in the posts was treating already owned clothes with respect. Influencers suggested to wash the clothes in an environmentally friendly manner, keep the clothes in order and in good shape: "An important step that is often forgotten is the treatment of your clothes after purchase. Washing has a huge environmental impact and is not good for your clothes and the same applies to the dryer. In many cases, washing can be done less often and at a lower temperature with a natural detergent"⁹⁰(Kops, 2017), "Make sure your closet is organized, so that you have an overview of what you own. Fold everything neatly, hang on what should be hung on, iron before you hang it in the closet (you do not really feel doing that in the morning) and keep your closet clean, fresh and organized"⁹¹(Hermien, 2018).

In conclusion, influencers suggested practicing creative activities still related to fashion, but only the ones that would not involve getting any new or second-hand fashion items into possession.

⁸⁶ "Door items te combineren, krijgt een outfit de kracht die het mag uitstralen en elk item op zich wordt weer versterkt" (Mûres, 2018)

⁸⁷ "Voor een duurzame kerst zou het natuurlijk fantastisch zijn als je een setje uit je eigen kast haalt wat je draagt tijdens kerst. Misschien iets wat je nog nooit met elkaar hebt gecombineerd, of een kledingstuk wat je even een andere draai geeft" (Van Bodegraven, 2017).

⁸⁸ "Ik ben ook dankbaar voor de kledingitems geworden die ik heb en voor de makers van de kleding"(Carleen, 2017)

⁸⁹ "Wees dankbaar. Kijk eens naar al die kleding die je bezit. Haal het uit je kast. Fotografeer het of maak een lijst. Laat het op je inwerken. Is het geen enorme rijkdom?" (Hermien, 2018)

⁹⁰ "Een belangrijke stap die nog al eens vergeten wordt, is de behandeling van je kleding ná aankoop. Wassen heeft een enorme milieu-impact en is niet goed voor je kleding en dat geldt ook voor de droger. Wassen kan in veel gevallen minder vaak en op lagere temperatuur met een natuurlijk wasmiddel" (Kops, 2017)

⁹¹ "Zorg dat je kast opgeruimd is, zodat je overzicht hebt van wat je bezit. Vouw alles netjes op, hang op wat moet hangen, strijk vóór je het in de kast hangt (daar heb je 's ochtends echt geen zin in) en houd je kast schoon, fris en georganiseerd" (Hermien, 2018)

4.5.3. Redirection

Redirection did not occur very often in the sample (was not present in many posts), but this research has found the presence of this notion as well. Owning less physical items was presented as a value that was able to save time and energy: “All those things around me create a lot of ballast. They must be cleaned, organized and taken care of. All these stuff takes energy, here in this house”⁹²(Buining, n.d.). Influencers claimed that they felt bad in clustered spaces: “My closets were full but I still felt like I did not have enough to wear. I was done with that restlessness and felt that it was time for a reality check. Since that day, minimalism has grabbed me”⁹³(Buining, n.d.).

Influencers were suggesting ways to change existing shopping habits and reduce the amount of bought items, and this should be reached by reducing one’s involvement in fashion, possibly turning to other things and finding other hobbies. For example, in some posts bloggers suggested to communicate more with real people: “Follow fun, friendly, real people on social media instead of too many companies and influencers”⁹⁴(Hermien, 2018), “Surround yourself with like-minded people. There are many Facebook groups where you can get a lot of support”⁹⁵(Buining, n.d.). It was also advised to visit shops as less as possible: “Try to find other ways of entertainment and only come into stores if you need them”⁹⁶(Hermien, 2018), “Sign off from newsletters and let the ones you want to receive arrive in a separate mailbox, where you will only have to look into if you need something”⁹⁷(Hermien, 2018).

Taking the emotional side into consideration, influencers admitted that they felt peace when they practiced redefinition: “And then I have not even mentioned the peace that I experience. Because I know my style better and I am aware of the impact of what I buy on myself and on others and on the planet, I am much less busy with the trends and what I should

⁹² “Al deze spullen om mij heen zorgen voor enorm veel ballast. Ze moeten schoongemaakt, opgeruimd en verzorgd worden. Het kost energie al deze spullen, hier in dit huis” (Buining, n.d.)

⁹³ “Mijn kasten waren vol maar toch voelde het alsof ik niet genoeg had om aan te trekken. Ik was klaar met die onrust en voelde dat het tijd was voor een realiteit check. Sinds die dag heeft het minimalisme mij gegrepen” (Buining, n.d.)

⁹⁴ “Volg leuke, gezellige, echte mensen op sociale media in plaats van al te veel bedrijven en influencers” (Hermien, 2018)

⁹⁵ “Omring je met gelijkgestemden. Er zijn tal van Facebookgroepen waar je heel veel support uit kan halen” (Buining, n.d.)

⁹⁶ “Probeer andere manieren van vermaak te zoeken en kom alleen in winkels als je ze nodig hebt” (Hermien, 2018)

⁹⁷ “Schrijf je uit voor nieuwsbrieven en laat degenen die je wel wilt ontvangen in een aparte mailbox binnenkomen, waar je alleen in hoeft te kijken als je iets nodig hebt” (Hermien, 2018)

buy to look ‘so 2018’. This alone gives peace: I no longer have to constantly have something new and experience the rush of ‘the new’”⁹⁸(Sarah, 2018)

4.6. Sustainability as utopia

This paper has found that bloggers were critical about their own behavior and the fact if the values that they wanted to follow were portrayed as realistic and achievable. For example, they claimed that sometimes they made buying decisions that could not be considered to be sustainable. In many cases the reasons for this behavior were not well presented, but bloggers empathized the things that they still did in the right way: “For example, I consider sustainable shopping to be very important, but it is not that there are no H&M’s in my closet. People sometimes find that crazy, because it does not fit with the sustainable picture of me that they have in their head. If you have already noticed: people get the jitters from inconsistency. While in my opinion you can better do 90% good and 10% less well, than 100% nothing-good. Right?”⁹⁹(Ter Haar, 2016).

Bloggers who claimed to practice voluntary simplicity and constrained consumption were also admitting that they could not make their idealistic plan completely real. For example, the influencer who claimed to practice constrained consumption in all the spheres of her life, not only in clothing, because she felt unhappy under the pressure of buying, was suddenly changing her mindset in the same blog post: “I was done with that restlessness and felt that it was time for a reality check. Since that day, minimalism has grabbed me... But do you never have the need to buy something? Well yes, I surely do have it. Especially when I see a beautiful offer of a beautiful sustainable clothing brand”¹⁰⁰ (Buining, n.d.). This feeling of need or even urge to buy was negatively perceived:

My hands then begin to itch. I would prefer to have it right away. However, I also recognize that my ego speaks. That stupid ego that thinks that I also want all those expensive things and that I have forgotten that there was a time when I, as a blogger,

⁹⁸“En dan heb ik het nog niet eens gehad over de rust die ik ervaar. Doordat ik mijn stijl beter ken en me bewust ben van de impact van hetgeen dat ik koop op mezelf én op anderen en de planeet, ben ik veel minder bezig met de trends en wat ik zou moeten kopen om er ‘zó 2018’ uit te zien. Dat alleen al geeft rust: ik hoef niet meer constant iets nieuws te hebben en de rush van ‘het nieuwe’ te ervaren” (Sarah, 2018)

⁹⁹“Ik vind duurzaam shoppen bijvoorbeeld erg belangrijk, maar het is niet zo dat er geen H&M’tjes in mijn kast hangen. Dat vinden mensen soms gek, omdat het niet rijmt met het duurzame plaatje dat ze van mij in hun hoofd hebben. Mocht het je al eens zijn opgevallen: mensen krijgen de kriebels van inconsistentie. Terwijl je naar mijn mening beter 90% goed kan doen en 10% iets minder goed, dan 100% niets-goed. Toch?” (Ter Haar, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ “Ik was klaar met die onrust en voelde dat het tijd was voor een realiteit check. Sinds die dag heeft het minimalisme mij gegrepen... Maar heb je dan nooit de behoefte om iets te kopen? Ja hoor, dat heb ik zeker. Vooral als ik weer een mooie aanbieding zie van een prachtig duurzaam kledingmerk” (Buining, n.d.)

received boxes of stuff every week while becoming increasingly unhappy with all the matter around me¹⁰¹

Every influencer practicing a constrained consumption challenge was in the end admitting that he didn't make it: "My original plan was to buy nothing at all. But that failed a bit"¹⁰²(Van Bodegraven, 2017).

It also can be noticed that in the case when influencers failed to achieve their goals and consume only the items that they planned to in the beginning of the challenges, they were admitting that constrained consumption without buying new items at all or with buying strictly only sustainable items was utopic in the conditions of contemporary society. In this case they were searching for a compromise, ready to still follow the new values and by this make steps towards change. For example, Codi (2017) could not afford to buy only sustainably produced apparel and decided to turn to constrained consumption instead:

Will I continue to buy in a strict sustainable way? I honestly admit that I will not strictly buy only sustainable clothes. What I will do is buy consciously. When I make a purchase, I will first check whether I really need something or whether it is just an impulse purchase. I prefer to buy only fair clothing. I think it's important to support sustainable companies and to feel good in fair clothing. Nevertheless, it is not always possible with my budget. From now I will combine fair with slightly less fair. Hopefully there will be more and more new, hip and affordable fair fashion shops in the Netherlands.¹⁰³

The results have also shown that the phenomenon of calling unsustainably made goods and materials still sustainable if they were worn often was very common: "Made in China, says the label. Completely not sustainable. Why do I still name it? I bought it when I still was in secondary school, so this shirt already spent ten (!) years with me and I still wear it quite a lot"¹⁰⁴ (Ter Haar, 2016), "The production of these materials is not necessarily sustainable, but the life

¹⁰¹ "Mijn handen beginnen dan te jeuken. Het liefst wil ik het gelijk hebben. Ik herken echter ook dat mijn ego dan spreekt. Die stomme ego die denkt dat ik ook al die dure dingen wil hebben en vergeten is dat er een tijd was dat ik als blogger wekelijks dozen met spullen ontving terwijl ik steeds ongelukkiger werd van alle materie om mij heen..."(Buining, n.d.)

¹⁰²"Mijn oorspronkelijke plan was om helemaal niets te kopen. Dat is alleen een beetje mislukt" (Van Bodegraven, 2017)

¹⁰³ "Blijf ik strict duurzaam kopen?Ik geef eerlijk toe dat ik niet strict alleen maar duurzame kleding ga kopen. Wat ik wel ga doen is bewust kopen. Wanneer ik een aankoop doe denk ik eerst goed na of ik iets wel écht nodig heb of dat het gewoon een impulskoop is. Het allerliefste koop ik alleen nog maar fair kleding. Ik vind het belangrijk om duurzame bedrijven te steunen en me goed te voelen in eerlijke kleding. Desondanks is het met mijn budget niet altijd mogelijk. Vanaf nu combineer ik dus fair met iets minder fair. Hopelijk komen er steeds meer nieuwe, hippe en betaalbare fair fashion shops in Nederland" (Codi, 2017)

¹⁰⁴ "Made in China, staat op het label. Niet echt duurzaam allemaal. Waarom ik hem toch noem? Ik kocht hem toen ik nog op de middelbare school zat, dit shirtje gaat dus al bijna tien (!) zomers mee en ik draag hem nog steeds evenveel" (Ter Haar, 2016)

span of these materials is large”¹⁰⁵(Noa, n.d.). This phenomenon is more elaborately discussed in the section ‘Long lasting’.

Bloggers also noticed that sometimes it was difficult to tell if a product was sustainable or not. It could happen because of a lack of trustworthy facts:

Let’s take for example a product like wool. I read very diverse opinions about the fact whether wool is sustainable or not. One person says yes, the other doesn’t. But I read almost nothing about factual information, so for example; does anyone know why we have ever started to shave sheep? And did also it happen in an animal-friendly way?¹⁰⁶ (Mûres, 2018).

Sometimes the facts were named and it just turned out that sustainable products were not really as sustainable as they were often described. For example, like in this blog post where sustainable fabrics were discussed: “A disadvantage of organic cotton is that, just like ordinary cotton, it needs a lot of water to grow”¹⁰⁷(Noa, n.d.), “A disadvantage of recycling cotton is that the cotton fibers are often shorter. At this moment it is not technically possible to make good textile from it. That is why organic cotton is often mixed with other materials to make a solid textile”¹⁰⁸ (Noa, n.d.).

It was also found that some bloggers were critical about the use of terms like “sustainable”, “fair”, “conscious”, “organic”, etc. They argued that the use of those terms was mistreated: “Sustainable, honest, conscious, fair trade, organic ... the web of idealistic terms in the fashion world is getting bigger and more complicated. And in the meantime, so many terms are thrown out - the one even more beautiful than the other - that sometimes I start to be dizzy”¹⁰⁹ (Sarah, 2018). It was also argued that the growing confusion around the terms was used by marketers to sell unsustainable goods as if they were sustainable: for example, it turned out that “the 'sustainable' collections of large fast fashion chains are made from sustainable

¹⁰⁵ “De productie van deze materialen is niet per se duurzaam, maar de levensduur hiervan is wel groot” (Noa, n.d.)

¹⁰⁶ “Neem bijvoorbeeld een product als wol. Hier lees ik zeer diverse definities over de vraag of wol duurzaam is of niet. De één zegt van wel, de ander niet. Maar ik lees bijna niets over feitelijke informatie, dus bijvoorbeeld; weet iemand waarom we schapen ooit zijn gaan scheren? En dat dit ook op een diervriendelijke wijze gebeurt?” (Mûres, 2018)

¹⁰⁷ “Een nadeel van biologisch katoen is dat het, net als gewoon katoen, veel water nodig heeft om te groeien” (Noa, n.d.)

¹⁰⁸ “Een nadeel van het recyclen van katoen is dat de katoenvezels vaak korter zijn. Op dit moment is het technisch mogelijk om hiervan goed textiel te maken. Daarom wordt biologisch katoen vaak gemixt met andere materialen om er een stevig textiel van te maken” (Noa, n.d.)

¹⁰⁹ “Duurzaam, eerlijk, bewust, fair trade, organic... het web aan idealistische termen in de modewereld wordt steeds groter en ingewikkelder. En inmiddels wordt er zóveel met verschillende termen gesmeten – de één nog mooier dan de ander – dat het me soms een beetje gaat duizelen” (Sarah, 2018)

materials, but not sustainable and fairly produced”¹¹⁰(Sarah, 2018), “Apart from beautiful, comprehensive texts about how innovative the brand is in exploring sustainable materials, I read nothing about energy use, sustainability of factories, packaging or transport. The same applies to fair working conditions, they are obviously not there”¹¹¹ (Sarah, 2018).

Some influencers noticed that the terms themselves seemed vague to them, so that every person could understand things in her own way:

What is sustainable for the one is not sustainable (enough) for the other. There are enough people who by definition do not find any new garments sustainable, because they always have to use raw materials. In that case you could only choose to buy second-hand clothing. There are also people who, so to speak, find every piece of clothing, no matter where you buy it, sustainable if you take care of the garment and wear it for years¹¹² (Carleen, 2017).

In some cases influencers themselves were not critical about their behavior or statements (or claimed not to be), but in any case the desirable sustainable lifestyle was not achieved and this was proved by facts:

I have occasionally cheated when buying socks, underwear or tops. Furthermore, in the period from January to June I did not buy any non-fair items. I am quite very proud of that¹¹³ (Codi, 2017).

From September till the last day of December I’ve bought only two non-fair fashion items¹¹⁴ (Mevrouw Miauw, 2017).

When I realized all this, I have overcome this: I do not eat dead animals, so I will no longer wear them as well. Except for 1 bag and 1 pair of shoes that I already have in my possession, I do not plan to buy and wear any more leather products¹¹⁵ (Carleen, 2016).

¹¹⁰ “De ‘duurzame’ collecties van grote fast fashionketens zijn gemaakt van duurzame materialen, maar niet duurzaam en eerlijk geproduceerd” (Sarah, 2018)

¹¹¹ “Los van mooie, uitgebreide teksten over hoe innovatief het merk is in het verkennen van duurzame materialen, lees ik niks over energiegebruik, duurzaamheid van fabrieken, verpakkingen of transport. Hetzelfde geldt voor eerlijke arbeidsomstandigheden, die zijn er namelijk niet” (Sarah, 2018)

¹¹² “Wat duurzaam voor de een is, is niet duurzaam (genoeg) voor de ander. Er zijn genoeg mensen die per definitie geen enkel nieuw kledingstuk duurzaam vinden, omdat er altijd grondstoffen voor gebruikt moeten worden. In dat geval zou je er voor kunnen kiezen om enkel tweedehandskleding te kopen. Er zijn ook mensen die bij wijze van spreken elk kledingstuk, ongeacht waar je het koopt, duurzaam vinden mits je dit kledingstuk goed verzorgd en er jaren mee doet” (Carleen, 2017)

¹¹³ “Ik heb misschien een enkele keer gecheat bij het kopen van sokken, ondergoed of hempjes. Verder heb ik in de periode van januari tot juni geen enkel niet-fair kledingstuk gehaald. Daar ben ik best wel heel erg trots op” (Codi, 2017)

¹¹⁴ “Ik heb vanaf september tot de laatste dag van december maar twee non-fair-fashion items gekocht” (Mevrouw Miauw, 2017)

¹¹⁵ “Toen ik dit allemaal realiseerde, was ik erover uit: ik eet geen dode dieren, dus wil ze ook niet meer dragen. Behalve 1 tas en 1 paar schoenen die ik al in mijn bezit heb, ben ik niet van plan nog meer leren producten te kopen en te dragen” (Carleen, 2016)

In several cases the arguments used by the influencers to prove that their behavior was still sustainable to some extent were not really persuasive. For example, Codi (2016) claimed to upcycle her outfit in a completely sustainable way without buying any new items (by this without building on the values of consumerism) but then ended by promoting unsustainable shops and the act of buying cheap items:

But why would you buy something new? Hell no, this trend is perfect for a DIY. I'll show you how! Trends like patches are fun. But fashion is far from sustainable nowadays ...

Patches can be found very cheap on the market. But these web shops also have nice ones:

Stradivarius, Etsy, Aliexpress and ByMoise. I ordered mine from Stradivarius.¹¹⁶

Sometimes influencers were even just very uncritical and not logical while promoting items that seemed sustainable to them, like in the case of cows in India that are not eaten but obviously still used as a labor force and killed if they no longer could do so: "Since cows are sacred in India and are not eaten, the skins come from cows that can no longer work due to their age or illness" (Simmonds, 2018).

As last, in order to explain why they started blogging about sustainability, influencers claimed that they wished to be like members of particular reference groups that were considered to be successful and powerful in society but expressed worries about if they were able to consume the way the chosen group does it. For example, this is how Otur (2017) told about her dream to be a blogger:

A big dream of mine was to become a fashion and beauty blogger. Full of admiration I looked at many American websites of girls who had kicked it all over the world as bloggers. In the Netherlands we were not that far yet and I wanted to be one of the first! I thought: I like fashion, I like beauty care, so I can do this as well! What was holding me back was the consumer behavior of these bloggers. As a fashion or beauty blogger you need to be up-to-date. It is essential that you have the latest trends in fashion and make-up articles at home. If you do not do that, you will lose your followers and they will follow the bloggers who do do this.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ "Maar waarom zou je iets nieuws kopen? Hell no, deze trend is perfect voor een DIY. Ik laat je zien hoe! Trends zoals patches zijn leuk. Maar fashion is tegenwoordig verre van duurzaam... Patches kan je heel cheap vinden op de markt. Maar deze webshops hebben ook hele leuke: Stradivarius, Etsy, Aliexpress en ByMoise. Die van mij heb ik besteld via Stradivarius" (Codi, 2016)

¹¹⁷ 'Een grote droom van mij was om een fashion en beauty blogger te worden. Vol bewondering bekeek ik de vele Amerikaanse website van meiden die het over de hele wereld ver hadden geschopt als blogger. In Nederland waren we toen nog niet zover en ik wilde een van de eerste zijn! Ik dacht: ik houd van mode ik houd van verzorging, dus dat kan ik ook!... Wat mij ervan weerhield, was het consumentengedrag van deze bloggers. Als fashion of beauty blogger hoor je up-to-date te zijn. De laatste trend artikelen in mode en make-up hoor je in huis te hebben. Doe je dat niet, dan verlies je volgers aan bloggers die dat wel doen' (Otur, 2017)

5. Discussion

5.1. Evaluation of opinion leaders' qualities in the sample

As outlined in the results section, bloggers were showing openness to messages (Uzunogly & Kip, 2014), and this could be observed when they were asking readers for feedback, advice and opinion. Considering the fact that they were addressing to people who they did not know personally in an informal way, like they were talking to an old friend, it may be therefore concluded that influencers were using parasocial interaction (Giles, 2002) in order to make sure that the message was well received by the audience. On the one hand, it can be argued that the bloggers needed reactions and feedback in order to know what the audience would like to read in the future or in order to receive more tips on sustainability that they later could share with their readers. On the other hand, it may be questioned if they were really interested in all the reactions: they could be just showing engagement in order to make the conversation go on further and present themselves as popular discussants with numerous reactions under their posts. If considering the fact that the bloggers did not know their readers in person, it would be hard to imagine that they were really interested in long elaborate responses about someone wearing a specific item. It can also be argued that those calls to action were a part of messages composed using parasocial interaction –they were designed to make an illusion that the reader was directly communicating with the influencer just like with a person who he knew in real life, so that the message is well-received by the audience from the virtual community. Moreover, remembering that all the comments were publicly seen under the posts, it can be stated that the influencers needed to answer them all in order to prove that they were truly open to messages from their audiences and not because the discussion under the posts was valuable in terms of adding new information. As last, the openness to valuable tips on sustainability could also possibly be not a sincere interest but just a way to make the discussion richer on the blog, by this making it more popular. All things named, it may be concluded that the openness to messages of the influencers was maybe not completely, but to a large extent a tool for self-presentation as opinion leaders and a tool for making the blog more engaged and popular among readers and not a sincere interest in the readers' opinion on the discussed topic.

If considering how the bloggers were taking the role of discussants (Uzunogly & Kip, 2014), a similar phenomenon may be observed: it can be noticed that parasocial interaction discussed by Giles (2002) was also present and the discussion was often one-way, only coming from the influencer who told his personal opinion and did not really debate with other influencers, readers or other public figures. It can be therefore argued that there was no real

discussion in terms of dialogue, it was more a personal opinion statement without other discussants being present.

The fact if the bloggers were valued and influential among social contacts (Uzunogly & Kip, 2014) could be seen when they featured each other on their blogs, inviting to read similar content from other influencers. Because all the influencers whose posts were taken into the sample were featured approximately an equal amount of times, it may be concluded that those opinion leaders were indeed considered as popular and influential. Those features were not found to be mutual, but this paper argues that it may occur due to a sample limitation (from 2 to 4 posts containing explanation of sustainable consumption values were taken from each blogger) so the mutual features could be present in other posts that were not included in the sample. Therefore no conclusions can be made about the mutuality of influencers mentioning each other.

All things outlined, it can be concluded that the opinion leaders' qualities of the sustainable fashion bloggers could be seen as features that can make them popular and more visible in the world of bloggers allowing to find more new readers, as well as communicating the message in a parasocial way so that it is well received by the readers.

5.2. Evaluation of communicator characteristics in the sample

The results have shown that the bloggers from the sample were presenting themselves as trustworthy experts in the field of fashion, appealing to different information sources, showing their interest in the topic and stating that their personal experience has brought them to the point of understanding that sustainable fashion is worth attention. Expertise and trustworthiness are communicator factors that Perloff (2003) is linking to figures who reach persuasion through credibility. It can be also argued that the openness to messages that the bloggers are demonstrating can be classified as goodwill – the third communicator factor outlined by Perloff (2003). Therefore it may be concluded that the sustainable fashion bloggers were opinion leaders who were perceived by the audiences as credible, and the way in which they communicated in order to reach persuasion may be one more proof for this.

Based on the previous understanding of the fashion blogosphere developed by the researcher, it may be stated that fashion bloggers were perceived as people who were helping consumerism to spread, who were enjoying consumption to a large extent and getting happy from all this behavior. As shown in the results, the opinion leaders were making a lot of arguments against consumerism, against buying too many unneeded goods, saying that this kind of behavior made them unhappy although some of them once were the kinds of influencers who made purchasing decisions easily and often. It can be therefore argued that the influencers violated the knowledge bias, by this getting more credibility in the eyes of the audience. The

reporting bias was also violated since bloggers were honest with their readers, telling that they, for example, did not succeed in following all the rules of sustainable fashion challenges or cheated during them, or admitted that they still felt the urge to consume a lot. It can be therefore argued that sustainable fashion influencers may be seen and considered as credible communicators according to Perloff's classification (2003) who used the violation of the knowledge and reposting biases in order to get an increase in credibility.

Influencers, being open to messages and using parasocial interaction when addressing to their audiences (results presented in the previous section), were demonstrating likability. Good will was also shown when they used parasocial interaction, took the discussant role and were demonstrating openness to messages, and it was also found that the bloggers were showing similarity with the audience (results can be found in the previous section as well). Therefore it can be stated that the sustainable fashion opinion leaders also possessed traits of attractive communicators according to Perloff's classification (2003) and could be considered as such by the audience. It can be also stated that, according to Roloff and Miller (1980), shaping attitudes towards a brands by linking it with qualities of the attractive communicator who is promoting the brand could occur.

It can arguably be stated that the influencers could be considered as authority figures because they possessed the status of fashion bloggers which is valued and admired by many people. But on the other hand the opinion leaders did not use any power in order to reach persuasion (and there was surely no question of avoiding punishment), and it may therefore be argued that they were still perceived more like credible communicators with attractive traits as well according to the characteristics outlined by Perloff (2003).

5.3. Green purchasing behavior values

Four green purchasing behavior values that the bloggers were communicating have been found – “environmentally friendly”, “socially fair”, “pre-loved” and “long lasting”. The green food purchases values deducted by Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003) (“environmental protection”, “fair trade”, “local products”, “availability of action-related knowledge”) appeared to be similar to the values outlined in this paper, although there were differences. The “environmentally friendly” subcategory was arguably the same as the “environmental protection” one in the paper written by Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003), the “socially fair” subcategory outlined in this paper included both “fair trade” and “local products” because it was argued that a more global subcategory should be created on the base of those two because they were both belonging to a wider concept – a transparent supply chain when the buyer knew who had produced the products and could check if the working conditions and paid salaries were

acceptable. The “pre-loved” subcategory, although it actually included the concepts from “socially fair” and “environmentally friendly”, was separated because it had particular features (second-hand goods were already produced and therefore included both of the values named above, still having particular traits (elaborately explained later in the correspondent subchapter). Finally, the “long lasting” category was created based on the data and showed completely new results that were not mentioned in previous research.

5.3. 1. Environmentally friendly

The results have shown that bloggers were valuing the well-being of animals and humans, as well as the preservation of natural resources – in other words, being environmentally friendly was valued. However, while explaining this value, critique towards the real sustainability of the goods produced under conditions that claimed to be sustainable was expressed: the conditions under which those materials were produced or recycled were questioned, as well as their true sustainability. A conclusion can therefore be made that this value was represented critically and the bloggers expressed the same opinion as Alexander and Ussher (2012) did, arguing that producing goods more sustainably did not mean producing them in a completely harmless or a completely sustainable manner. Therefore, there was no bias in reporting this value and it may be argued that the information was well-received by the audience.

5.3.2. Socially fair

The “socially fair” value included buying only the goods that were produced under good working conditions (which meant safe working conditions, the fact the makers of the clothing should paid enough, and the need of the supply chain should be transparent). It also included the social activity of the brand (for example, supporting charity). Goods locally produced in the Netherlands were, according to the bloggers, also claimed to be part of this value since the local Dutch designers were supported financially if one bought their product, and this approach can be criticized since in this case the bloggers were forgetting about the required transparency of the supply chain for the garments and materials and even for the workers making those clothes on the territory of the Netherlands, by this possibly inviting to support designers whose apparel was not really sustainable. To put it differently, the desire to support local products comes from the desire of raising the economy of one’s own land and not sustainability. This is the reason why an independent value was not created like by Tanner and Wölfig Kast (2003): this paper questions the sustainability of locally produced products, arguing that they are not necessarily sustainable, but it still was included in the “socially fair” value because it was outlined as such by the influencers.

It may be also argued that a bias in reporting this value may be detected: bloggers mostly covered only the positive side of the value, not being critical, for example, about the products made by Dutch designers but remaining critical about products made in other countries. Some readers could have noticed this underreportage and perceived it in a negative way, changing attitudes towards the communicators and thinking that they were less credible than they considered them to be.

5.3.3. Pre-loved

Bloggers were valuing “pre-loved” clothes – in other words, clothes that were already owned before by other people. It was discussed that those fashion items were already produced and therefore did not require any use of new materials, chemicals and did not involve any new labor. Also, as owning clothes and not wearing them was perceived in a negative way, giving a second life to a piece of clothing that did not suit someone else was highly valued.

But it can be argued that this value was quite controversial. On the one hand, bloggers perceived leasing clothes as a good way to eliminate the negative aspects of consumerism, stating that people did not need to own special occasion clothes anymore since one was able to lease, for example, a wedding dress and this piece of clothing got the chance to be used multiple times. On the other hand, influencers expressed concerns about being accepted by society and meeting social standards since wearing second-hand was known to be considered as dirty.

Considering the aspect of sustainability, it can be argued that this type of clothing can be really seen as sustainable: if remembering the Jevons paradox discussed by Alexander and Ussher (2012) which explained that producing goods more sustainably would not decrease the pollution since people would go on consuming even more and the pollution would stay at the same level or even increase, it can be stated that the phenomenon of re-selling second-hand clothes was obviously not taken into consideration by those scholars. But this research proves that pre-loved apparel does not need to be produced and for this reason does not require chemical use or involvement of new production processes, therefore it may be concluded that this way of consumption can be considered to be sustainable even after a more critical examination. But this is what makes this value controversial: for achieving consumption of pre-owned items to a large extent, some of the values accepted in society should evaluate – to put it differently, consumers should stop considering pre-owned items as something that might be dirty and unacceptable. Instead of trying to break the stereotype and stating that the perception of society and the existing values should be changed in order to achieve sustainable consumption, influencers were only expressing concerns about their own image and its’ perception – the question was if they would they be accepted by society in case of openly claiming that they consumed previously

owned goods. It can be therefore argued that bloggers considered their own image and its' ability to fit in the existing system of social values more important than the value of previously owned clothes, which means that there was not enough argumentation in order to persuade the readers. But, on the other hand, the issues were reported without biases, so the image of the communicator himself remained credible, although what he was reporting was not really a good argument in support of sustainability.

5.3.4. Long lasting

The last value – “long lasting” – can be examined as a contradictory one as well. Bloggers, as willing to avoid the pressure that the consumerism lifestyle applied to them (willing to stop buying new items so often), were claiming that one should buy apparel only in case if it was surely needed and worn very often. But, interestingly, it was not compulsory for this apparel to be sustainably produced, although bloggers themselves were presenting this feature critically (still buying unfair fashion items anyway). On the one hand, it may be argued that this value comes closer to the concept of voluntary simplicity (although it still implies buying new things) and is to some extent sustainable considering the Jevons paradox discussed by Alexander and Ussher (2012) – consuming less was discussed as an evident way to live a sustainable lifestyle. Therefore, it can be debated that this purchasing behavior might be considered as sustainable to some extent if the person really used the items very often and really chose to buy no new items (even if sustainably produced) as long as he or she had the old ones in possession and in acceptable (usable) condition. But, on the other hand, it can be stated that, in case of the bloggers from the sample, it might have been just an excuse to consume what they still wanted to consume. Arguments were chosen not in order to support sustainability, but more in order to explain their wrong choices (in a sustainable context) to the reader: for example, why they still called items from not sustainable brands sustainable if they were not such in terms of being friendly to the environment and society and why they were still indirectly promoted those brands by wearing them. Here it can be argued that, just like in the previous case, the communicators were still having a credible image but the value that they were communicating was controversial and it's sustainability could be questioned.

5.4. Voluntary simplicity values

The categories suggested in the research conducted by Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) were used for creating subcategories for coding the values of voluntary simplicity in this research. The analysis has proved those subcategories to be useful since similar results were obtained.

When communicating “forward incrementation”, bloggers suggested turning to the clothes that one already owned, trying to find forgotten items or new combinations – reusing one’s own items was valued. When arguing about “redefinition”, bloggers also suggested recycling items or giving them to another person, donating, selling, swapping, and participating in some DIY projects. In other words, the results in those two categories obtained by this research matched the results that Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) have obtained.

Although it needs to be noticed that the subcategory “redirection”, even if the results were still similar in both papers, was represented to a rather small extent in the sample. This paper debates that fashion bloggers, as people strongly involved in fashion, might not be likely to completely abandon fashion and turn to other hobbies and activities. In other words, a limitation caused by the sample might be present in the above-mentioned case.

The authors of the blogs were critical about their own behavior during constrained consumption challenges, often revealing that they failed to accomplish their goals to the desired extent. It may be remarked that none of the bloggers claimed to completely succeed in constrained consumption or in following all the terms and conditions of the sustainable consumption challenges. It can be therefore argued that Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) might have been too positive about redirection as a good working way for turning away from the values of consumerism – or, to put it clear, too positive about the extent to which redirection is possible. Influencers were indeed more likely to spend less money on items and to stop buying impulsively thinking of reference groups because they claimed that such a behavior made them unhappy, but they still went on consuming items in any case (in some cases mentioning the fact that it was not really needed, in some cases admitting that they did not really have any other options) and were themselves critical about what they were doing. It can be concluded that redirection cannot be fully achieved in a system like contemporary society where a lot of elements are designed to support consumption and make sure people consumed.

5.5. Green consumerism

As the results have shown, the bloggers were promoting sustainable fashion in a lot of different ways. They presented the promoters of sustainable fashion brands as attractive communicators, named celebrities who were also concerned about sustainability and promoting this kind of fashion, noted that it was already accepted in society and by this no “geitenwollensokken”. They stated that when buying sustainable items one was contributing to a better world and helping the environment and society. The influencers were also sharing brand experiences, presenting themselves as attractive communicators: there was a lot of product placement, open collaborations with brands when the influencer noted that it was a paid

partnership with the shop or brand. It can be observed that other factors that sustainability (like quality, price, and brand of the product) were considered to be very important when making buying decisions.

All things named, it may be concluded that this research has found evidence of the fact that consumption of sustainably made products was still related to consumerism and was actually “green consumerism” (like argued by Sandilands, 1993, Schuitema& Groot, 2015). Moreover, if considering Bourdieu (1975) and his discussion about the transmission of cultural values, it can be debated that “sustainable” is just a new value, like, using the example presented by the scholar, a new fashion label. From this point of view “sustainability” is just a new way and to some extent a new tool to make people purchase and own more.

It can also be noted that the effect that was achieved when influencers were promoting sustainable consumption was reinforcing the position on consumerism that people already occupied. By discussing that sustainable apparel was already accepted in society, that it was just as beautiful as the unsustainable one but then friendly to the environment and humanity, the bloggers were building the new values on the top of the old ones. Therefore it may be argued that, if the communicators of sustainable consumption were using consumerist values as a base and reinforced them, the nature of the “new” values is not really new: it is indeed a new fashion label designed to serve the same old purpose.

Also the fact that product placement and brand experiences were present in the posts demonstrated the bloggers as someone who was used by the sustainable brands that matched all the influencers’ values. Porter (2004) argued that virtual communities, because they could change peoples’ perceptions of products, were used for commercial purposes, and this paper has found evidence of this. Even the bloggers who claimed to produce sustainable consumption were in fact promoting consumption (not ways of avoiding it) and often they, generally speaking, crossed the consumerist line by promoting a lot of unneeded goods.

On the other hand, it can be also argued that the opinion leaders were sincere in the good intentions that they reported: it can be assumed that they really wanted to change the environmental and social situations, to consume less, etc. But the way how they reported the facts about sustainable consumption were not promoting the values to a sufficient extent: if analyzing all the green purchasing behavior values, only buying second-hand items could be critically considered as really sustainable, although it had conflicts with the need to meet social standards and being accepted by society that all the bloggers still had and considered as very important. And in case of voluntary simplicity, none of the bloggers reported that they succeeded in it. Moreover, a lot of concerns and thoughts were expressed on the topic if sustainability could really be reached: bloggers argued that it was not possible to a large extent, or were critical about

companies who were being dishonest and were masking problems instead of solving them and were presenting unsustainable fashion as sustainable (phenomenon discussed in Sandilands, 1993). It can therefore be concluded that even with good intentions in really becoming sustainable, the bloggers failed in it.

The same fact can be also examined from a different perspective: it may be argued that the bloggers were not really interested in changing consumers behavior, willing to communicate green consumerism or, most importantly, willing to become visible, popular and influential. The results have shown that the opinion leaders' qualities helped the influencers to present themselves as communicators who could make a strong (parasocial) relationship with their audiences. If assuming that influencers were communicating the values of sustainable consumption controversially and messy, admitting that they were unreachable and utopic or just saying that they wanted an unsustainably produced item so much that they bought it anyway and went on inventing excuses for it, it can be therefore argued that the bloggers just wanted to become popular in a rather small specific media outlet with not so many concurrents yet, become influential there and promote items with the "green consumerism" label, just like Porter (2004) argued. They just wanted to use this specific virtual community for selfish and commercial purposes. There was even one blogger who directly and clearly explained that she always wanted to be a famous fashion and beauty blogger but was afraid that she would never get so many items to promote and to consume, this is the reason why she has chosen the sustainable consumption virtual community and decided to be a blogger there – there were less concurrents and less goods (Otur, 2017).

6. Conclusion

This research has examined the goal that Dutch sustainable fashion bloggers intended to achieve by communicating sustainable consumption of fashion apparel. It was intended to look at the values that Dutch bloggers advocated when communicating sustainable consumption and the way how they communicated them. It was found that the influencers appeared as credible and attractive communicators (according to the classification presented by Perloff, 2003) who violated the knowledge and reporting biases in order to increase their credibility in the audience's eyes. The opinion leaders' qualities helped the influencers to be perceived as communicators who were making a strong (parasocial) relationship with the readers. The values of sustainable consumption were transmitted in such a way that the audience's existing values (the values of consumerism) were reinforced, and positive attitudes towards consumption of sustainably produced clothing were shaped. It can be therefore concluded that the bloggers were mostly promoting "green consumerism" (Sandilands, 1993, Schuitema & Groot, 2015) and using this specific virtual community for selfish (fulfilling the wish to become visible, popular and influential) and commercial purposes (Porter, 2004).

Sustainable consumption values were mostly presented as controversial and to some extent utopic ones, which may prove as well that a change in consumer behavior was not being communicated, also because the values were presented in such a way that the audience's existing values (the values of consumerism) were reinforced. All things considered, even if Kotler and Zaltman (1971), Lefebvre (2013), Weinreich (2010), Smith (2010) and Kanter and Fine (2010) were arguing that marketing strategies could be used not only for marketing purposes, but also for making positive impact on society, it might be concluded that influencers were not proved by this research to be promoting social change and, as a result, changing consumers' behavior towards constrained consumption.

The theory presented in the theoretical framework was proved to be useful for answering the research question, although the green purchasing behavior values for all kinds of products outlined by Liu et al. (2012) did not prove themselves to be useful. Instead, the values presented by Tanner and Wölfling Kast (2003) were partly adopted and successfully used, demonstrating that they could be partly applicable not only for food purchases, but for clothing purchases as well. The voluntary simplicity values introduced by Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) turned out to be very suitable for this paper and were completely adopted, similar results were obtained as well during this study. The research by Perloff (2003) has provided communicator characteristics that were very important in order to classify the influencers, and it is interesting to mention that, although it was expected by the researcher that the sustainable fashion bloggers would be

classified more like attractive communicators, it turned out that they were found to be credible communicators to a very large extent, also possessing traits of attractive communicators. The opinion leaders' qualities applicable for bloggers introduced by Uzunogly and Kip (2014) have also helped to draw the main conclusions of this paper. Roloff and Miller's (1980) shaping and reinforcement persuasion effects were also needed for the discussion about how influencers were communicating their values. Porter (2004) was valuable in terms of explaining that virtual communities might be used for commercial purposes, and the researcher's search for proof of those commercial elements in the blog posts has helped to get the obtained results and to understand the nature of the influencers' communication. A contribution to the works by Kotler and Zaltman (1971), Lefebvre (2013), Weinreich (2010), Smith (2010) and Kanter and Fine (2010) has been made, proving that influencers, unlike other marketing tools, may not be considered as promoters of social change. Additionally, this paper argues that a contribution to the research by Alexander & Ussher (2012) has been made by finding a way to resolve the Jevon paradox by consuming previously owned (already produced) goods since new production processes did not take place when one bought a previously owned item.

The method was proven to be suitable for this research and valid. The results that have been obtained were applicable for answering the research question. Although there might be some limitations considering the sample chosen. Firstly, for this investigation, only a specific kind of posts was analyzed – the minimum word count for posts was 300 words no audio or visual analysis of audio-video materials from the posts was examined. Based on the previous understanding of the Dutch blogosphere developed by the researcher, it can be argued that several kinds of bloggers were more likely to use visual materials in order to communicate with their audiences, as well as short amounts of texts as supplement to those materials (less than 300 words). Therefore, this research might have limitations and future studies might examine how bloggers communicate the values of sustainable consumption in shorter posts or using audio- or visual materials.

Secondly, "redirection" was rarely discussed by the bloggers from the sample. It can be assumed that fashion influencers, as people who were involved in fashion, might not be likely to completely abandon fashion and turn to other ways of spending time. Therefore it can be assumed that there might be a limitation caused by the selection of blog posts and future research might choose blog posts written by other kinds of opinion leaders and examine how the values of sustainable consumption were communicated in other virtual communities.

As previously argued, this research has also found that buying second-hand apparel might be considered as a way to resolve the Jevon paradox illustrated by Alexander & Ussher (2012). But, because this paper had another purpose, not much attention was paid to this finding during

the present research. Future studies might examine it closer and provide more details on this subject.

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Appendix

Coding frame

Category 1: Green purchasing behavior

Subcategory 1: Environmentally friendly

Subcategory 2: Socially fair

Subcategory 3: Pre-loved

Subcategory 4: Long lasting

Category 2: Voluntary simplicity

Subcategory 1: Forward incrementation

Subcategory 2: Redefinition

Subcategory 3: Redirection

Category 3: Evaluation of communicator characteristics in the sample

Subcategory 1: Authority

Subcategory 2: Credibility

Subcategory 3: Social attractiveness

Category 4: Evaluation of opinion leaders' qualities in the sample

Subcategory 1: Openness to messages

Subcategory 2: Discussant role

Subcategory 3: Valued among social contacts

Category 5: Ways of promoting sustainable fashion

Category 6: Sustainability as utopia