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Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion in Romania

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Abstract. The present study is an attempt at mapping the Romanian society's attitudes towards sustainable fashion. Our analyses are based on the European Commission Eurobarometer 92.4 (2019) data relevant for Romania. We have looked into ten Likert-type variables focused on consumer attitudes regarding sustainable fashion. As a first step, we created a sustainable-fashion attitude scale, followed by an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) aimed at investigating the inner structure of the variables. Thereafter, we employed a linear regression analysis in a bid to answer the question as to which are the variables that account for commitment to sustainable fashion in Romania. Inter alia, our results suggest that positive attitudes towards sustainable fashion are most enhanced by awareness about environmental issues and sensitivity to environmental protection in general and are weakened most significantly by poor financial situation measured in terms of difficulty in paying the bills. Besides gathering information on environmental protection from traditional media (the press), relying on Internet sources in this respect also increases support for the transition to a more environmentally conscious textile industry. Our analysis touches upon research limitations such as the attitude–action gap.

Keywords: sustainable fashion, ethical fashion, attitudes, factor analysis, Romania, regression

Introduction

Sustainable fashion can be understood as a new fashion paradigm that is in search of new solutions in response to the problems of the fashion industry. First of all, it was fast fashion that represented the problems along which the unsustainability

of fashion could be thematized. The meaning of fast fashion is associated with cheap clothes, technologies hazardous to the environment, underpaid labour force, fast production, and disposable, worthless items of clothing (Fletcher 2008). On the other hand, sustainable fashion endeavours to redefine fashion starting from the procurement of raw materials through design, production, and transport all the way to consumption. The business model of sustainable fashion is based on long lifecycle, which also has the effect of slowing down consumption: therefore, it needs to create high-quality, aesthetic, and durable products. Consequently, sustainable fashion may be perceived as a cultural shift (Gurova–Morozova 2016) that can be determined not only as a cultural practice going against profiteering but as a paradigm shift that assumes a new kind of creativity and a business logic entirely different from the fast fashion industry (Fletcher–Grose 2012).

The terms ethical and sustainable fashion are often encountered interchangeably. Both concepts enjoy great visibility: at the time of this writing, there are 14.8 million hits for #sustainablefashion and 5.8 million hits for #ethicalfashion on Instagram. According to Lyst's 2020 Conscious Fashion Report,[1] there has been a 37% increase in searches for sustainability-related keywords in the fashion world.

There has also been observed an increased market presence of products labelled sustainable and/or ethical (e.g. Liu et al. 2020). As indicated by Cervellon and Carey (2011), within the fashion industry, sustainable products have left the niche sector and now represent a separate branch. This statement is confirmed by Business Research Company's[2] data for the year 2020: the global ethical fashion market size reached a value of nearly $6.35 billion in 2019, and the market is expected to grow from $6.35 billion in 2019 to $8.25 billion in 2023. Having said that, there are certain insights that suggest ethical clothing sales is still carving out only a small segment of the total clothing sales (Magnuson et al. 2017) and that the road to sustainable fashion is paved with question marks. Pinnock (2022) also claims that: "if the industry continues with its existing decarbonization initiatives, emissions will be capped at 2.1 billion tons a year by 2030. That's the same level the report estimates the industry emitted in 2018, accounting for four per cent of the world's total emissions."

Hence, fashion's high-sounding sustainability efforts are also surrounded by an air of distrust. One of the reasons behind this is that we are dealing with a sector that is leaving behind serious environmental damage, and the social deficiencies (unhealthy, unethical working conditions) that arise in the course of production are equally well known. With fashion products, doubts are often raised as to whether we are dealing with de facto sustainable practices or greenwashing (Cervellon–Carey 2011, Liu et al. 2020). Under the cover of greenwashing, certain

1 https://tinyurl.com/56m2p57u (last access: 04.11.2022)
2 https://tinyurl.com/4aexdsrx (last access: 04.11.2022)

products are presented as sustainable, whereas in reality their production and marketing do not meet the relevant requirements of environmental protection and social responsibility (Niinimäki 2015).

Over and above, this sector is tasked with balancing seemingly incompatible elements such as novelty, renewal, and luxury on the one hand and durability, longevity, and sustainability on the other (Grazzini et al. 2021). Consumers have a tough choice to make: fast fashion offers the possibility of joining new trends at a relatively low price and at a breakneck pace, while sustainable fashion is rather formulated as an imperative, with environmentally conscious lifestyle gaining popularity. Crane (2016) describes the consumer of ethical fashion as someone who is actively engaged in reviewing the environmental as well as social characteristics of the products. Ethical consumers are thus conscious consumers who make cognitive efforts when judging a product and who take decisions after due deliberation, during which they confront their values, ideals, and ideology with such concrete issues as the higher price, lower availability, and occasionally less fashionability of ethical products (Niinimäki 2010).

In our research, we have committed ourselves to identify the attitudes present among Romanian citizens towards sustainable fashion. The analysis at hand made use of the database linked to the European Commission Special Eurobarometer 92.4/2019 research (European Commission 2020),[3] which adopted ten Likert-type statements in investigating how important the various ethical and sustainability criteria were for respondents with respect to items of clothing. Albeit several research studies looked into the consumption of ethical and/or sustainable fashion products, the vast majority of them were qualitative research (Jacobs et al. 2018) and with a focus on Western countries, meaning that the available data on the East-Central European population's relevant attitude and behaviour is relatively scarce (Koszewska 2013). As to our knowledge, this subject has not been dealt with comprehensively in Romania either, and but a few small-scale research projects have been conducted so far (e.g. Dabija et al. 2018, Nistor–Bálint 2021). Hence, our quantitative analysis is an attempt at bridging these gaps in the literature.

A literature review is presented below, where we cover the definitions of ethical and sustainable fashion, ethical consumption gap, and the importance of examining the various attitudes. The subsequent section discusses the methodology, questions, and hypotheses of the research. Part three of the paper contains the analyses and their discussion, and the paper ends with conclusions.

3 https://tinyurl.com/3cederd3 (last access: 04.11.2022)

Literature Review

Definitions of Ethical/Sustainable Fashion

In spite of an existing state of conceptual disarray (Csanák 2018), recent research considers that the sustainable fashion consumption concept, practice, and research have reached their maturity and expansion (Dabas–Whang 2021). The evolution of the very concept of sustainability is, however, intricate, less clear, and it can be interpreted narrowly (e.g. avoiding environmental pollution, prudent use of resources) as well as broadly, holistically (e.g. environmental, social, and economic sustainability) (Niinimäki 2015). Sustainable fashion in the broader sense often acts as a synonym for ethical fashion (e.g. Haug–Busch 2015), as in both cases a key consideration is how fairly the environment and the employees are treated by the fashion industry. Undoubtedly, there can observed certain shifts of emphasis concerning one or the other component of the concepts, but essentially sustainable as well as ethical fashion can be defined as fashion with conscience (Jorgens 2006). Both can be characterized by fairness in their approaching production, design, marketing, and consumption. Likewise, the present analysis considers the two concepts as synonyms, however, showing a preference for the term sustainable fashion. That is so because our observations have indicated that the concept of sustainable fashion is more popular than ethical fashion in the Romanian public discourse, the term *sustenabilitate* having become established as a neologism in the Romanian language.

On the practical side, several items can be listed under the designation ethical/sustainable fashion such as organic, green, sustainable, eco-, slow, etc. fashion (Niinimäki 2010). The main focus of eco-fashion is on environmental protection – products made of bio- or organic materials fall into this category. Slow fashion refers to local-scale fashion, which utilizes local labour force, traditional handicraft techniques, and local resources (Fletcher 2008, Blazquez et al. 2020). Each of these denominations aims to "highlight or correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry, including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation" (Lundblad–Davies 2016: 149).

Reimers et al. (2016) use the term ethical fashion, but their case is no exception as the adopted terminology is again a multidimensional construction pointing in the direction of environmental and social sustainability. As a rule, empirical research studies concentrate on one characteristic dimension of the concept – environmental protection, working conditions, etc. –, whereas all these dimensions coexist within the meaning of ethical fashion, as claimed by the authors who hypothesise four dimensions of ethical fashion as follows: 1) animal welfare, 2) employee welfare, 3) environmental responsibility, and 4) slow fashion. Research conducted in Australia demonstrated that these four

dimensions jointly determine the concept of ethical fashion. Evidently, the four dimensions do not make an equal contribution to the concept, as the research in question revealed, for instance, that animal welfare was the most prominent dimension among Australian consumers (Reimers et al. 2016). In a subsequent research, they found that the slow fashion dimension – i.e. the durability and longevity of the product, local resources, and fair trade – were the major determining dimensions of ethical fashion (Magnuson et al. 2017). Both research results indicate that consumers attach importance to certain dimensions of ethical fashion that are often disregarded by manufacturers or the marketing process in the narratives on ethical fashion, which may ultimately be another reason for the attitude–action inconsistencies emerging around fashion products (Magnuson et al. 2017). Koszewska (2013) found that Polish consumers tend to adopt a more restrictive definition of sustainable fashion: they take an ecological approach to sustainable fashion, wherein socio-ethical aspects and social sensitivity are less significant imperatives in selecting fashion products. Such discrepancies show that there are cross-cultural differences related to the understanding and approach of sustainable fashion and its consumption (Dabas–Whang 2021).

Overall, it can be said that the holistic approach on sustainable fashion that also stresses environmental and social responsibility can be defined as a synonym for ethical fashion. Both of them are critical concepts since they call into question the modus operandi of the fashion industry as well as the mainstream consumer practices (Gurova–Morozova 2016). At the same time, both concepts can be seen as umbrella terms that can accommodate different interpretations and specific practices (idem).

The Importance of Studying Attitudes in spite of the Ethical Consumption Gap

One of the most relevant issues in this topic is the ethical consumption gap, meaning that positive attitudes towards ethical consumption oftentimes do not materialize in concrete actions, that is, consumers do not always "wear their talk" (Carrington et al. 2010). There can be several reasons underlying the attitude–action inconsistency, one of which is social desirability. The idea of ethical fashion is gradually gaining popularity – consumers are frequently faced with messages that involve morally charged actions, thus feeling urged to respond accordingly (Carrington et al., 2010).

Other authors (e.g. Harris et al. 2016, Wiederhold–Martinez 2018) go further than social desirability and group the inhibitory factors emerging in connection with ethical consumption gap into external and internal factors. External factors include higher product prices, less readily available products, and certain structural features such as the consumer's domicile, as the wider socio-economic

environment can determine the importance of the topic. On the other hand, we can find among internal factors consumers' motivations, values, and attitudes, information on and awareness about sustainability and ethical consumption, or the lack of these, and consumers' scepticism about whether their opting for ethical products can make a real difference for sustainable fashion (see also Dabas–Whang 2021).

Other authors (e.g. Joergens 2006) emphasize the importance of awareness, knowledge, and information. Consumers are fairly sceptical and distrustful of sustainable fashion products (Cervellon–Carey 2011). Therefore, one possibility for bridging the attitude–action gap is manufacturers' transparent communication. Consumers are in need of relevant information, showing increased eagerness to know the answers for the *made by* instead of or besides the *made in* part, i.e.: who manufactured the product, under what kind of working conditions, and what raw materials/ingredients were used in the process[4] (Niinimäki 2015), so labels rich in information have a key role in this respect (Crane 2016, Wiederhold–Martinez 2018). More than that, manufacturers need to communicate their endeavours and achievements towards sustainability via advertisements, taking up different positions, and having an active media presence (Grazzini et al. 2021). Generally speaking, ethical products require more innovative technologies and raw materials with a hefty price tag, while certification is yet another factor driving up the price range. Therefore, specific information on the effective benefits of paying the price premium must also be made available to consumers (Liu et al. 2020).

As already noted, interlinking fashion and sustainability is problematic also because long-term, ethical planning emphasizes the joint responsibility of producers and consumers. Then again, fashion narratives steer us towards expressing uniqueness and the pursuit of ever-new experiences. The primary purpose of consuming fashion products is creating an own style and having a fresh appearance in line with the current trends; in other words: short-term thinking and planning (Haug–Busch 2015). In this paradoxical situation, purchasing clothing articles is not an altruistic action (Vehmas et al. 2018). Drawing on earlier studies, Hiller Connel and Kozar (2014) ascertained that approx. 41% of the consumers are willing to pay a higher price for sustainable clothes, extra payment being capped at 25%. Other researchers (e.g. Carrigan–Attala 2001, Joergens 2006, Magnuson et al. 2017) have been even more careful in their conclusions, claiming that consumers are inclined to purchase ethical products if that does not entail any extra payment on their part. Findings have also confirmed that the lower the

4 It was in response to these consumer needs that applications, such as *Good on You* (https://goodonyou.eco/), documenting and tracking the sustainability of products and brands, or QR-code-based tracking options were created (such is the case of the brand *Unrobe*, which allows for QR code scanning with a view to tracking the life-cycle of the product from the raw materials through the production phase and all the way to its shipping).

price tag on ethical fashion products, the more positive attitude consumers take to them (Magnuson et al. 2017).

However, it must be emphasized that ethical consumption often means frugal consumption, i.e. buying less and spending less on clothing products – thus skipping the high price tag of fashionable products – is not always an indicator for the reluctance to buy ethically. Consumers can choose among various alternative actions. For instance, the popularity of second-hand shops can be quoted here: one of the motivations for buying used products is a combination between austerity/frugality and environmentalism (e.g. Guiot–Roux 2010). Likewise, a previous research we have conducted in Romania revealed that consumers view second-hand shopping as a cost-effective way towards sustainability (Nistor–Bálint 2021). Niinimäki (2010) has come to the view that ethical consumption is realized when consumers are not facing external constraints, namely: no extra payment needs to be made, the selected product is no less trendy than its conventional variants, and product availability eliminates any extra effort on the customer side. The phenomenon of sharing economy, respectively the case of collaborative consumption by clothes sharing is another, increasingly popular alternative for practising sustainable/ethical fashion consumption: besides reducing the amount of clothes production, this practice may result in a favourable cost–benefit ratio for the consumers, both in terms of financial investments and self-gratification (e.g. Arrigo 2021).

Despite the ethical consumption gap, sizing up the attitudes is a major undertaking. Numerous research studies have pointed to a positive relationship between ethical-fashion-related attitudes and actions (Niinimäki 2010, Liu et al. 2020). While it is true that attitudes are not always consistent with actions, sustainable actions can be most explained by positive attitudes towards and information gathered on sustainability (Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014). Furthermore, a vast number of research papers have arrived at the conclusion that besides aspects such as norms, trust, and knowledge, attitudes towards sustainable fashion are essential components and predictors of the consumption of ethical fashion products (Liu et al. 2020).

An examination of attitudes is all-important also because the issue of ethical fashion – despite the increasingly apparent media presence of this topic – is not among every consumer's priorities (Crane 2016). However, identifying the variables that outline attitudes towards ethical fashion will enable us to determine the social segment that holds the future promise of acting in keeping with their attitudes provided that all other barriers have been done away with. Exploring the attitudes helps us pinpoint those dimensions associated with ethical fashion that truly matter to consumers, to which they exhibit a heightened sensitivity, this way becoming possible to amplify this dimension of ethical consumption during the phases of production and marketing (Wiederhold–Martinez 2018).

Methodology and Research Questions

This research has undertaken to look into the attitudes towards sustainable fashion in Romania. The analyses performed herein were based on the research carried out within the framework of European Commission Special Eurobarometer 92.4 (2019), entitled *Attitudes of European Citizens towards the Environment, Corruption, and Attitudes towards the Impact of Digitalisation on Daily Lives*, more specifically based on its database on Romania.[5] The Romanian data survey took place in December 2019 and made use of the computer-assisted face-to-face interview method. The adopted procedure was stratified probability sampling applied among the population of 15-year-olds and older. The Romanian sample size was 1,081.

Among the three topics addressed in the research, we have analysed two sets of questions on sustainable fashion production, pertaining to the QA *Attitudes of European Citizens towards the Environment* section[6] (*Table 1*).

Table 1. *The original wording of the ten items measuring attitudes towards sustainable fashion*[7]

Var. no.	Variable name	Value labels			
		1	2	3	4
QA13_1	Clothing should be made to last longer.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_2	Clothing should only be made from materials that can be recycled.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_3	Second-hand clothing should be promoted more (e.g. through tax cuts).	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_4	Brands should be required to ensure good working conditions inside and outside the EU.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_5	Clothes labelling should provide information on their environmental impact and the working conditions under which they were made.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA13_6	Clothes should be available at the lowest possible price, regardless of the environment or the working conditions under which they were made.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA14_1	There is not enough information available about environmental problems and working conditions linked to clothing.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree

5 European Commission, Brussels (2020). Eurobarometer 92.4 (2019). GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. *ZA7602 Data file Version 1.0.0*. https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13652.

6 Which is partly based on questions asked in the context of Eurobarometer 88.1 (ZA6925) and 87.1 (ZA6861).

7 For ease of interpretation, the codes assigned in the original questionnaire (1 – totally agree, 4 – totally disagree) were reversed, as seen in the table, so that increase in values can mark an increase in agreement.

Var. no.	Variable name	Value labels			
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**
QA14_2	Many products claim to be environmentally friendly, but you do not trust this is true.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA14_3	There should be stricter rules when calculating environmental impact and related environmental claims.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree
QA14_4	You are not interested in how environmentally friendly your clothes are.	totally disagree	tend to disagree	tend to agree	totally agree

Source: authors' edition

The ten statements reveal a focus on the various aspects of sustainable fashion from environmental protection and working conditions through product durability to transparency, expenditure, and availability. Two of the variables (QA13_6 and QA14_4) express points against and all the rest in support of the environmentally conscious manufacturing of wearing apparel. It has been argued in previous chapters that there are wide-ranging interpretations of ethical fashion in the literature, and empirical research has confirmed that consumers themselves tend to associate sustainable fashion with a whole range of different things. As postulated by Cervellon and Wernfelt (2012) and Koszewska (2013), consumers include here predominantly products made from organic and biomaterials, thereby defining ethical fashion more narrowly, in line with environmental sustainability. Other research has found that consumers keep in view working conditions as well – hence, issues of environmental and social sustainability are equally important to them (Reimers et al. 2016). In consideration of the foregoing, our first research question aimed to reveal the sustainability imperatives deemed important by consumers. On the other hand, we were also curious to find out to what extent the ten variables are independent of one another along the various dimensions of ethical/sustainable fashion. Given that no prior research into this subject had ever been conducted in Romania, an exploratory factor analysis was employed to study the internal structure of the variables. Finally, a regression analysis will be performed to answer the question as to which are the variables accounting for commitment to ethical fashion. For that purpose, several hypotheses were formulated.

To explain the behaviour of dependent variables, we applied variables linked with general environmental awareness (E1–E9) and sociodemographic features (S1–S11) found in the database and discussed in the literature. These are summarized in *Table 2* below.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics of the explanatory variables*

	Variables	Aggregated categories	Percentage (%)
Environmental protection (E)	Environmental protection – personal importance (E1, E2)	Very important	46.2
		Not very important	53.8
	No. of environmental protection actions in the last 6 months – summarized the 14 possible mentions (E3, E4)	Up to 3 actions	69.4
		4 actions or more	30.6
	Environmental problem tackling: change the way we produce & trade (E5)	Not mentioned	77.7
		Changing the way we produce and trade	22.3
	Environmental problem tackling: change the way we consume (E6)	Not mentioned	78.7
		Changing the way we consume	21.3
	Environmental information sources: total newspapers (E7)	Not mentioned	87.2
		Total "Newspapers"	12.8
	Environmental information sources: total social networks / the Internet (E8)	Not mentioned	71.8
		Total "Social networks and the Internet"	28.2
	Concern about environmental problems (E9, factor variable)[8]		
Sociodemographic characteristics (S)	Type of community (S1)	Rural area	39.9
		Urban	60.1
	Gender (S2)	Women	54.8
		Men	45.2
	Age (S3)	15–24 years	11.9
		25–39 years	25.2
		40–54 years	31
		55 years and older	31.9
	Age – education (age of completion of full-time education) (S4, S5)	Up to 22 years	83.2
		22 years or older	16.8
	Household composition/size (no. of persons) (S6)	One	12.2
		Two	37.1
		Three	23.2
		Four or more	27.5
	Children in the household (S7)	Without children	59.7
		With children	40.3
	Employment status (S8)	Not working	40.8
		Employed	59.2

8 Extent of agreement with 6 different negative environmental impacts (QA7 Question: 1 – totally disagree, 4 – totally agree), resulted in a one-factor solution: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis, KMO = 0.891, Approx. Chi-Square = 2,787.177, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: p = 0.000, communalities ≥ 0.250, Total Variance Explained = 61.303, Factor Loadings ≥ 0.500, Cronbach's alpha = 0.860.

Variables	Aggregated categories	Percentage (%)
Difficulties paying the bills in the last year (S9)	Almost never/never	46.2
	Had difficulties paying the bills	53.8
Social class – self-assessment (S10)	Working class	20.7
	Lower middle class	16
	Middle class	56
	Upper middle class	6.5
	Higher class	0.8
Internet use (S11)	Not almost every day	35.1
	Every day/almost every day	64.9

Source: authors' computation

Variables explaining sustainable fashion consumption were mostly investigated in the case of concrete actions. Literature explains these actions with the possession of relevant information, attitudes, habits, and contextual variables such as product availability (Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014). Information both on the environment in general and on sustainable fashion consumption in particular is an essential factor (Thøgersen 2000). Research have shown that the Internet and social media channels are the most used sources for reaching a wider public and thus enable producers and brands to communicate their sustainable initiatives (Vehmas et al. 2018). Since there is no specific variable available to us for assessing information and knowledge on sustainable fashion, we had to adopt proxy variables related to the sources of acquiring information on the environment. We have checked the roles of traditional media (newspapers) and new media (the Internet) under a common hypothesis that accounts for omni-channel media consumption:

H1: Respondents who are more intensive users of omni-channel media will hold more intense attitudes towards sustainable fashion than their peers getting information from traditional media.

Research has demonstrated that knowledge about environmentally friendly apparel is an important predictor of purchasing environmentally friendly apparel (Harris et al. 2016). In line with Koszewska's (2013) research conducted in Poland and based on cluster analysis, higher educational attainment significantly determines commitment to ethical consumption. In the light of this, our second hypothesis predicts that:

H2: Respondents with a high educational attainment will have a more positive attitude towards sustainable fashion.

A look at the impact of environmental concern yields dissimilar results in the literature. Cervellon and Carey (2011) found environmental concern to be the number one explanatory variable of sustainable fashion consumption among

customers from Canada and France. Cowan and Kinley (2014) arrived at similar results among US consumers. Likewise, other authors concluded that consumers who are more concerned about the environment are usually more engaged in pro-environmental consumer behaviours (Gam 2011, Koszewska 2013, Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014, Razzaq et al. 2018).

All the same, we can read about cases featuring environmentally concerned respondents showing preponderantly neutral or less intense attitudes towards sustainable fashion (Hiller Connel–Kozar 2014, Razzaq et al. 2018). This appears to be rooted in the specificity of attitudes, that is: positive environmental attitudes in general do not necessarily account for the more specific environmental attitudes (Razzaq et al. 2018). The complex nature of fashion products is a possible explanation for why environmental concern does not translate into intense attitudes and actions: even consumers giving evidence of intense environmental awareness may attach greater importance to the style, price range, and trendiness of a particular clothing item than to the sustainability of a given fashion product (e.g. McNeill–Moore 2015).

Several explanatory variables were adopted in analysing the impact of environmental concern. Moving from more abstract viewpoints to concrete actions, three variables were employed to assess environmental concern as follows: the importance of environmental protection (E1, E2), concern about various environmental issues (E9), and performing actions aimed at environmental protection (E3, E4). Over and above that, we have also investigated the impact of a more specific aspect to our topic, production- and consumption-related environmental concern, using variables E5 and E6 to this end.

Thus, our second hypothesis is divided into two sub-hypotheses as follows:

H3a: Attitudes towards sustainable fashion are more intense in the case of respondents showing more intense ***general*** *environmental concern.*

H3b: Attitudes towards sustainable fashion are more intense in the case of respondents showing more intense ***specific*** *environmental concern.*

Learning about the sample population's economic and social status allows us to find out to what extent commitment to sustainable fashion can be thematized as a predictor of status. Indeed, the higher price range of sustainable fashion products, the popularity and trendiness of the topic can be linked with the phenomenon of eco-chic, eco-narcissism (Griskevicius et al. 2010, Cervellon–Carey 2011). This can also be understood as the spectacle of sustainable fashion (Franklin 2011) in cases when we are building our wardrobe using a selection of clothing items labelled as sustainable, and doing so even without environmental awareness being at the core of our value system. Koszewska's study (2013) evinced that besides a high educational attainment, certain other factors significantly determine the ethical consumption segment in Poland, such as higher income status, high or medium occupational status, and living in a metropolitan area. Social status was

operationalized in multiple ways: subjectively estimated income situation (S9), subjective social status (S10); and then it was expected that:

H4: Consumers with a higher social status would be more committed to sustainable fashion.

The testing of hypotheses was done with the help of linear regression analysis.

Ethical fashion is not equally important to all consumers, as a whole series of characteristic consumer segments can be outlined from ethical hardliners to dismissive attitudes (Niinimäki 2010). In order to explore this issue, we have examined the internal structure of the variables from *Table 1*, and then we checked the hypotheses again. Studying ethical fashion consumption in Poland, Koszewska (2013) found six consumer clusters, of which two segments, the ecological conservatives and the ecologically and socially sensitive, showed commitment to sustainable/ethical fashion. The first group attached no importance to the responsible treatment of workers in the context of fashion products, showing instead sensitivity to ecological sustainability. The holistic, i.e. both ecological and social, imperative could be perceived in the latter group (cc. 16% of the consumers), where it constituted an essential touchstone of product selection. It is also our expectation that a consumer group can be outlined along our hypotheses, where the members of this category will be committed to sustainable fashion, as a result of which we can expect from these consumers in the future to perform actions that will in effect achieve sustainable fashion consumption.

Analysis and Discussions

Descriptive Statistics

In our analysis, we were first of all interested in identifying those clothing-related attitudes that respondents are more intensely committed to. Therefore, we began by studying the level of agreement with the ten statements presented in *Table 1*. *Graph 1* shows the scale means (scales 1–4) for Romania (N = 1,023–1,049) and, as the context for the interpretation of results, for the EU-28 (N = 25,647–26,799). Data suggest that the Romanian population aged 15 and over holds a relatively positive attitude towards this topic, as mean values indicate that responses clearly come under the dimension of agreement in the case of all eight statements in support of sustainable fashion. That being said, the comparison also brings to light that these values are lower for the EU-28 average score in the case of all supportive statements. The more striking discrepancy can be observed along the two variables pointing in the opposite direction: the Romanian population of the 15-year-olds and older is far more supportive of manufacturing cheap clothes

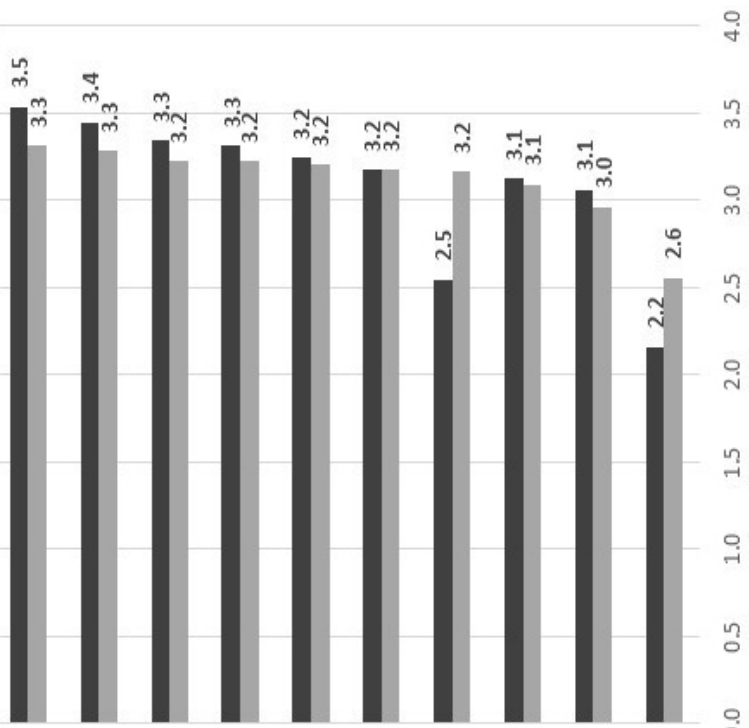
regardless of their environmental impact and the working conditions and shows somewhat greater disinterest in environmentally conscious clothing than in the case of the EU-28. Hence, there is but one difference between the two rankings that can be set up based on the mean values: supporting the manufacturing of cheap clothes regardless of their environmental impact was ranked seven in the Romanian and nine in the EU-28 context.

At first glance, it seems that, in general, components determining sustainable fashion, such as good working conditions, product durability, and more stringent regulations, are equally important for consumers. We may also conclude that respondents are sceptical and need more detailed information (Cervellon–Carey 2011). Considering both Romania and the EU-28, the highest level of agreement is with the statement claiming that clothing brands should make good working conditions an absolute necessity. In line with expectations, the least agreement is with the statement going against the principles of environmental consciousness, according to which respondents are not interested in how environmentally friendly their clothes are. These primary results are consistent with the view expressed in the literature that sustainable fashion is a popular concept, and so the answers provided are probably influenced by social desirability as well (Carrington et al. 2010).

Predictors of the Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion

Provided that the condition of internal consistency is met (Cronbach's alpha = 0.840), an environmental consciousness scale on clothing items was created for the joint analysis of Romanian attitudes towards sustainable fashion. The scale was created with the help of dummy variables. Codes 1 (totally disagree) and 2 (tend to disagree) were assigned a value of 0 – not concerned about sustainable fashion –, while codes 3 (tend to agree) and 4 (totally agree) a value of 1 – concerned about sustainable fashion. On the other hand, the two variables pointing against environmental consciousness (QA13_6 and QA14_4) were coded inversely. Values added this way allowed us to create a scale for sustainable fashion, where the value of 0 stood for an attitude totally not concerned about sustainable fashion and 10 for one totally concerned about sustainable fashion (N = 943, mean = 7.05, std. dev. = 1.982). Most of the participants scored 8 (35%) and 9 (22.2%) on the combined scales, seven obtained 10 points and two 0 points.

In the second step, the scale thus created was examined using the variables described in the subchapter on methodology (*Table 2*), performing linear regression analysis. The explanatory power of our model was 31.6%. Supporting sustainable fashion shows the strongest correlation with the factor variable "awareness about environmental issues", followed by the level of importance individuals attach to environmental protection. Therefore, hypothesis *H3a* is clearly confirmed, as we



Graph 1. *Attitudes towards different attributes of sustainable fashion in Romania and the EU-28 (mean scores based on 1–4 Likert scales)*

Source: authors' computation

have found that: *Attitudes towards sustainable fashion are more intense in the case of respondents showing more intense general environmental concern.* In view of this, it can be said that our results are consistent with literature findings that environmentally conscious respondents show the most commitment to sustainable fashion (e.g. Cervellon–Carey 2011, Koszewska 2013, Cowan–Kinley 2014, Razzaq et al. 2018). Contrastingly, hypothesis *H3b* was not confirmed, i.e. more specific environmental attitudes, such as consumption- and production-related environmental concern, have no significant influence on the dependent variable.

The study has partially confirmed hypothesis *H1*, results pointing out that acquiring information on environmental protection from newspapers increases concern about sustainable fashion, while obtaining information from the Internet shows no significant impact on the dependent variable. The outcome can be accounted for by the fact that Romanian citizens tend to read newspapers mostly on the Internet, wherefore it is conceivable that we are witnessing the merging of traditional and new media when looking at these results. Of the eleven sociodemographic variables, only one proved to be significant, namely the proxy variable for the financial situation: difficulties paying the bills result in a reduced support of sustainable fashion. This way, the partial confirmation of hypothesis H4 has been obtained. The other hypothesised status variables, such as educational attainment (H2) or subjective social status, did not prove to be significant explanatory variables.

Table 3. *The significant determinants of concern about sustainable fashion*

	Coefficients		**t-values**	**P-value (t)**	**VIF**
	B	**Beta**			
Concern about environmental problems (E9)	0.794	0.389	11.403	0.000	1.489
Environment protection – personal importance (E1)	0.419	0.166	4.887	0.000	1.469
Difficulties paying the bills in the last year (S9)	-0.644	-0.162	-5.642	0.000	1.053
Sources of information on the environment: total newspapers (E7)	0.417	0.070	2.496	0.013	1.007
Adjusted R^2	**0.316**				
F-statistic	101.946				
P-value (F-statistic)	0.000				
Number of observations	874				

Source: authors' computation

Notes: B – Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Beta – Standardized Regression Coefficient, VIF – Variance Inflation Factor. For the sake of simplicity, only variables with significant effects are presented in the table.

The Internal Structure of Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion

Principal Component Analysis was performed in order to explore the internal pattern of the attitudes towards sustainable fashion. The variable "second-hand clothing should be promoted more" (e.g. through tax cuts) (QA13_3) was left out of the analysis due to its cross-linkages with a high factor weight, wherefore the final, two-factor model consists of nine variables (*Table 4*) and explains 57.1% of the original variance. The analysis is based on the Kaiser Criterion and Varimax rotation, the KMO[9] value of the final model is 0.906, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is significant (approx. chi-square = 2,754.700; p = 0.000). The value of Cronbach's alpha is 0.86, which means that the internal consistency of the variables corresponding to the specific factors is very good.

The studied variables can be thus grouped into two factors as follows: the main component includes eight out of the nine attitudes on sustainable fashion, also comprising a variable against environmental consciousness, i.e.: "Clothes should be available at the lowest possible price, regardless of the environment or the working conditions under which they were made." At the same time, this reflects the position adopted in the literature claiming that approaches on fashion are not independent of the price criterion, consumers showing a positive attitude towards the topic in cases when sustainable fashion does not entail extra payment (Niinimäki 2010). Accordingly, the first factor variable was termed "Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion". The second factor contains a single variable, namely the attitude pointing against environmental consciousness, consisting of the statement: "Not interested in how environmentally-friendly the clothes are."

The results obtained are consistent with previous literature observations suggesting that consumers tend to associate a number of imperatives with ethical fashion (Reimers et al. 2016, Magnusson et al. 2017). Even though the variables adopted herein are different from the items studied by the various authors,[10] it also becomes apparent in our context that attributes and consumer expectations related to sustainable fashion are not in the alternative, as respondents attach importance to all of them.

9 The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test measures sampling adequacy for each variable in the model and for the complete model.

10 Compared to Reimers et al. (2016) and Magnusson et al. (2017), our items did not contain any attitudes referring to animal welfare, and even though our items are directed towards workers' welfare, environmental protection, and the impact of fast fashion, the formulations of the items are different from those used by the quoted authors.

Table 4. *Results of the exploratory factor analysis*

Factor	Item	Factor loading	Communality	Variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha
Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Clothing at Low Price	QA13_4	0.768	0.592	45.7%	0.860
	QA13_5	0.766	0.588		
	QA14_3	0.758	0.581		
	QA13_1	0.732	0.536		
	QA14_1	0.679	0.495		
	QA14_2	0.678	0.512		
	QA13_2	0.673	0.471		
	QA13_6	0.654	0.439		
Not interested in how environmentallyfriendly the clothes are	QA14_4	0.961	0.924	11.4%	–
Total Romania	**9**			**57.1**	

Source: authors' computation

As a further step, we have verified our hypotheses also for the factor variables. Once again, we made use of the explanatory variables presented in *Table 2* and the linear regression addressed in *Table 5*. Our first factor, the "Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion", includes eight out of the ten studied variables, wherefore it comes as no surprise that we have obtained only a slightly different result from the regression model of the combined scale discussed earlier (*Table 3*). The explanatory power of the model has mildly improved (35.1%), and – as already seen in the case of the combined scale – the first factor, too, shows the strongest correlation with the "awareness about environmental issues", followed by the level of importance individuals attach to environmental protection. Thus, yet again, hypothesis *H3a* has been confirmed. In addition to gathering information on environmental protection from the press, our model was supplemented by acquiring such information from online sources, whereby this way of enquiry also comes in support of the transition to sustainable fashion. Hence, hypothesis *H1* is also confirmed, allowing us to concur with literature findings claiming that the strong presence of sustainability in new media increases consumer sensitivity to the topic (e.g. Vehmas et al. 2018).

Table 5. *The significant determinants of the factor "Specific Attitudes towards Sustainable Fashion"*

	Coefficients		t-values	p-value (t)	VIF
	B	Beta			
Concern about environmental problems (E9)	0.419	0.407	12.216	0.000	1.514
Environment protection – personal importance (E1)	0.248	0.194	5.890	0.000	1.479
Difficulties paying the bills in the last year (S9)	-0.208	-0.104	-3.726	0.000	1.060

	Coefficients		t-values	p-value (t)	VIF
	B	**Beta**			
Sources of information on the environment: total social networks / the Internet (E8)	0.162	0.074	2.665	0.008	1.047
Sources of information on the environment: total newspapers (E7)	0.199	0.067	2.440	0.015	1.017
Adjusted R^2	**0.351**				
F-statistic	96.461				
P-value (F-statistic)	0.000				
Number of observations	883				

Source: authors' computation

Notes: B – Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Beta – Standardized Regression Coefficient, VIF – Variance Inflation Factor. For the sake of simplicity, only variables with significant effects are presented in the table.

Finally, we attempted to identify those explanatory variables associated with environmental consciousness and sociodemographic features that account for the second factor including the variable "Not interested in how environmentally-friendly the clothes are", which becomes markedly distinct following the analysis of the main component (*Table 6*).

Table 6. *The significant determinants of the factor "Not Interested in how environmentally-friendly the clothes are"*

	Coefficients		t-values	P-value (t)	VIF
	B	**Beta**			
No. of environmental protection actions in the last 6 months – summarized the 14 possible mentions (E3)	-0.096	-0.177	-5.487	0.000	1.007
Children in the household (S7)	-0.201	-0.099	-2.612	0.009	1.384
Household composition/size (no. of persons) (S6)	0.065	0.095	2.594	0.010	1.302
Employment status (S8)	0.173	0.084	2.524	0.012	1.071
Adjusted R^2	**0.041**				
F-statistic	10.967				
P-value (F-statistic)	0.000				
Number of observations	930				

Source: authors' computation

Notes: B – Unstandardized Regression Coefficient, Beta – Standardized Regression Coefficient, VIF – Variance Inflation Factor. For the sake of simplicity, only variables with significant effects are presented in the table.

The explanatory power of the model is low (4.1%), and we can see that the increase in the actually pursued environmental activities generates more interest in the environmentally conscious manufacturing of clothing articles – yet another

evidence backing *H3a*. Three other sociodemographic variables were found to correlate with disinterest as follows: employment status and increase in the number of household members increase, while "the number of children in the household" variable decreases disinterest in the environmentally conscious manufacturing of clothing articles. Should we attempt to connect our results with previous literature findings, we will see that, indeed, having children makes people more open to environmental protection and environmentally conscious consumption (e.g. Ščasny et al. 2012, Norum–Norton 2017). The result we have arrived at, i.e. employment status (which in principle puts us in a better financial situation) does not favour interest in sustainable fashion – which may seem strange and contrary to *H4* at first glance –, is understood as a phenomenon attributable to the low purchasing power that is characteristic of Romania. Given that employed individuals must spend more often, and thus larger amounts, on wearing apparel, which is not backed by most work organizations as such, it may be assumed that they take more price-sensitive decisions on this matter, hence opting for cheaper and less environmentally conscious clothing items. This finding reinforces theoretical observations, discussed in relation to the various factors, according to which consumers tend to hold a positive attitude towards the topic at hand when sustainable fashion does not involve any extra payment (Niinimäki 2010).

Conclusions

One of the cornerstones of the *Green Deal* programme launched by the European Commission is the textile industry, making fashion industry a sustainable sector,[11] in the light of which initiative getting to know the citizens' opinion on the matter is vital. Ten statements were adopted in the research in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of citizens' attitudes towards sustainable fashion in the Member States. The vast majority of these statements is centred on issues related to fashion production and marketing. Having said that, these questions do not revolve around the environmental footprint of fashion production and recycling exclusively, but they also cover some aspects of sustainable fashion that touch on ethical considerations such as the moral treatment of employees. This group of statements also includes items that address consumers' information needs and the pricing of sustainable fashion products, these being some of the major causes behind consumers' acting dismissive towards sustainable fashion (Niinimäki 2010, Cervellon–Carey 2011, Liu et al. 2020).

The analysis of the ten Likert-type statements shows that, in principle, the studied aspects of sustainable fashion production are important for Romanian consumers. Certainly, their answers may reflect the influence of social desirability

11 https://tinyurl.com/62sjbapz (last access: 04.11. 2022)

(Carrington et al. 2010). Given that the ten statements are coherent, we created a cumulative scale variable on the one hand and examined the items with an exploratory factor analysis on the other. In the latter case, we managed to distinguish a main component consisting of eight statements, which indicates that the aspects of sustainable fashion are not a matter of either/or for the respondents. Over and above employees' ethical treatment, product durability, recycling, environmental protection, certification, and providing consumers with transparent information, the low-priced marketing of sustainable products is not to be ignored either. This outcome points to two major directions: when compared to other research, consumers give weight to several facets of sustainable fashion (Reimers et al. 2016, Magnusson et al. 2017), which thereby means a lot more in consumers' eyes than the no-far-to-seek environmental sustainability. Secondly, sustainable fashion goes hand in hand with the preference for low product prices even at the attitudinal level.

The present research covered the attitude factor, which should be understood as one of our study's limitations by virtue of the ethical consumption gap discussed in reference to the topic at hand. A look at the concrete actions reveals that consumers are much less committed towards sustainable fashion in what they do than in what attitude they adopt (Carrington et al. 2010). Therefore, we can propose the hypothesis that the higher price range of sustainable fashion products represents a major external obstacle for the Romanian customer base to take concrete actions.

We employed a linear regression analysis to determine the variables that have significant influence over attitudes towards sustainable fashion. Several hypotheses have been formulated based on the literature, one of which has been clearly demonstrated, namely that the primary source of the attitudes towards sustainable fashion is environmental concern in the general sense. The obtained results fit into the literature trend under which environmentally conscious individuals are more committed to sustainable fashion. Curiously enough, we have failed to confirm the impact of the more specific environmental concern (*H3b*) on our dependent variable. Respondents indicating their agreement with the necessity of changing the way we produce and consume in order to properly address environmental issues did not show significantly more commitment towards sustainable fashion. These results also point out that even though consumers set store by each and every one of the studied aspects of sustainable fashion, wherefore it cannot be reduced to environmental sustainability alone, the root of these attitudes is still to be found in environmental consciousness in the broader sense.

Sensitivity to this topic is increased by environment-related information acquired from omni-channel media consumption. From a sociodemographic perspective, however, we can assign a less coherent profile to attitudes in

support of sustainable fashion when compared to other countries in our region (e.g. Koszewska 2013). Better financial situation and having children constitute the variables that drive these attitudes. It cannot be claimed that we are dealing with an attitude linked to higher status and metropolitan residence and pointing in the direction of conspicuous consumption. If we accept that our analysis functions as a predictor of concrete actions, then it can be established that the primary consumers of sustainable fashion products will be individuals who are environmentally conscious, well informed on green topics, and better off, but also those who will give preference to products with a rather low price range.

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