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Bachelor thesis

“CSR and the fashion industry, closely linked”

*CSR in the online fashion industry, opportunities and challenges:
The French example.*



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Abstract

In recent years, CSR has taken on great importance in the life of companies, which are much more aware of the existing social, economic and environmental problems. So, when E-commerce has taken an important place in the life of different industries, these companies (especially in the world of textiles) have had to adapt and understand how to exist and use CSR to stand out and enter the market.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how companies that make online sales of clothing in France can create one or more competitive advantages by using CSR, and analyze the habits and behaviors of French consumers, understand in depth the standards to which French companies face to create a competitive advantage.

The empirical results were obtained thanks to a quantitative study, and a questionnaire of ten questions that could meet the objective mentioned above. The results obtained were then collected and analyzed by the authors in order to find similarities or differences with the secondary data collected previously.

The conclusion of this thesis shows that CSR can become a real competitive advantage, and give real opportunities to online fashion companies in France provided that their implementation is done in good conditions. Customers being more and more attentive to ecological, societal and ethical issues, companies are almost obliged to implement sustainable and ethical practices in their practices, from production to distribution in order to develop.

In summary, the thesis identified consumer resentment towards these CSRs, and the benefits that French online fashion companies can derive from their implementation in the near future.

Key Words

Corporate social responsibility, online fashion industry, France, competitive advantage, consumer behavior, decision making process.

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1. Introduction

In this introduction, the authors will introduce you to the subject, CSR in the online fashion industry in France. Thus, this presentation will take the form of a quick presentation of the subject (background), followed by problematic discussions and potential research gaps in the subject. This introduction will end with the research question, the purpose, and finally the delimitations.

1.1 Background

The international retail industry faces increasing competition and challenges as more companies expand their operations globally. These challenges include cultural barriers, regulations that differ between countries and regions, or the need to adapt to different consumer preferences and buying behaviours. Additionally, the rise of e-commerce and online retailing has made it increasingly difficult for traditional retailers to compete in the global marketplace. Indeed, e-commerce has experienced incredible growth in recent years, 5 to 7 times greater than overall retail. A good example to illustrate this point is that of China, which in 2020 experienced a 14.8% increase in its annual online retail sales (Shuai, 2022). This increase is comparable to that of the majority of other countries, given the importance that e-commerce has taken on in recent years.

As a result, many retailers struggle to develop effective strategies to expand their operations internationally and reach new consumers. Understanding this issue is important for companies looking to expand their retail operations globally, as well as for policymakers and academics studying the international retail industry “*These [abilities of companies to export] are often expressed in products that other companies have difficulty following or imitating*” (Nguyen & Tuan, 2019, p.135).

Today, one of the most important retail sectors is fashion, which could be put on the same level as the food industry sector for example “*the fashion industry is one of the most important economic sectors in the world, employing millions of people worldwide*” (Aufutur, 2023). It is one of the most important sectors, due to its popularity (today, especially among young consumers, everyone wants to be well dressed, to stand out, to have the latest collections, etc.), its ease of access (whether through the Internet or the thousands of outlets available in almost every country), or its gigantic numbers (hundreds of billions of dollars spent every year).

Even though textile have been around for thousands of years, marketing around the fashion industry only really started about 20 years ago “*Fashion marketing evolved as an academic subject over the of the past 20 years*” (McCormick et al., 2014, p.247). Today, the market is characterized mainly by the presence of major producing countries, particularly in Asia, such

as China, India and Pakistan, these three countries alone representing more than 175 billion dollars in exports to the textile market, i.e. nearly 2.5 times more than the whole of the European Union combined (Statista, 2022). These figures have exploded in recent years, and large international companies have grown enormously outside their country of origin. The fashion industry is one of the largest industries in the world, with a current value of \$3.3 trillion, or 2% of global GDP (Siddiqui, 2022).

It is also possible to take the example of two countries, France and Sweden. While France has experienced an incredible increase in its market turnover, going from 40 billion dollars in 2008 to 105 billion dollars in 2021, Sweden has stagnated, finding itself at 14 billion dollars for these two years (Siddiqui, 2022).

Today, the market is getting bigger and bigger, and companies have to innovate and compete to hope to exist, even if it means selling at low prices. *“The changing dynamics of the fashion industry have forced retailers to desire [...] key strategies to maintain a profitable position in the increasingly demanding market.”* (Bhardwaj et al., 2010, p.165). This surge is partly due to a surge in global fashion demand, more and more consumers can buy designer clothes and it is becoming more common to change clothes frequently, looking for the latest collection or used clothing, by celebrities. The brands have therefore logically adapted, producing more and therefore selling more, especially in developed countries such as France.

But brands need to have a different approach (whether big or small) for each country, for each culture. The aim of every brand is to stand out and meet the demands of consumers as much as possible *“it is key to understand how cultural difference and the challenging environment of emerging markets influence the implementation process.”* (Bobek et al., 2019, p.375). Whether it is two quite similar countries, or two completely different countries, the approach must be different in both cases in order to meet the needs of the consumer.

As said before, e-commerce has taken an increasingly important part in the fashion market. Indeed, it allows consumers to buy their products much more simply, more quickly, without having to travel, and sometimes at lower prices than in physical stores. In addition, e-commerce is also very interesting for companies, because it allows them to sell in larger quantities, to reach a larger population (Taher, 2021). The fashion industry has therefore undergone a major evolution with the rise of e-commerce.

For example, in France, but also around the world, the Covid crisis has contributed enormously to the growth of e-commerce for the fashion industry (RFI, 2021). Indeed, the French being confined, they could no longer shop and therefore had to order via the Internet. However, at the end of the Covid crisis, consumers had become accustomed to this mode of consumption and continued to consume online. Only small businesses with very loyal customers and shops

offering personalized services such as makeovers have managed to overcome the Covid crisis (Blancheton, 2021). E-commerce has therefore naturally established itself in the fashion industry, and in the lifestyle of consumers, to become the only way to buy products for some.

Moreover, the fashion industry has also seen an evolution with the emphasis on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in recent years. CSR brings together all the actions carried out by companies vis-à-vis companies and the environment in which they operate (HEC PARIS, 2020).

These actions are diverse, and can be actions carried out for their employees, so that they are all equal, all included; can be the sustainable actions carried out to promote sustainable development, respectful of the environment; aim to improve the working conditions of their employees (Youmatter, 2019).

According to Zerbini (2017), Bocquet et al. (2017) and Goyder (2003), there are two CSR strategies:

First, the strategic CSR: In this type of CSR, it is the leaders and high-ranking consumers of the companies who decide how their CSR is going, what are the values of the company. They are the ones who make the important decisions for the company.

Secondly, the responsive CSR: Here, CSR decisions are made to respond to demands from parties external to the company, to have a good image and legitimacy.

Today, companies are increasingly targeted on their ability to integrate these societal and environmental actions into their development strategy (Feng et al., 2020).

These CSR actions have developed strongly in recent years, companies (and consumers) having become aware of their importance, both for themselves and for the environment. These CSRs are real tools for comparing the competitiveness and performance of companies. Today, a company without CSR cannot exist on the market, because it would be directly attacked by associations or directly by consumers.

So even if these CSRs can be expensive for companies, it is important for them to be aware of this to promote their development (Bhattacharya et al., 2010).

In addition, these CSRs have taken an even more important place in the life of French companies with the various laws that have been created. Indeed, the French government has imposed certain laws on companies, in particular to have a follow-up on their various actions and their various practices. A good example is the NER law, which requires companies to publish an annual report on their CSR, their activities, in order to know if they are respectful of society and the environment or not (Beji. et al, 2021).

In addition, it can be possible to cite other laws, such as the Grenelle laws (Vie Publique, 2019) or the laws on energy transition.

But such popularity of this sector is obviously accompanied by controversy, whether political or environmental. Each country (and therefore each government) may have a different vision of the subject, the problems, and therefore the measures taken vis-à-vis the sector. Through this degree project, the authors will also see how France act on the various problems of the sector, or on the CSR of the textile industry. Today, CSR has gone from a basic mandatory rule for each company to a real benchmark for companies to remain competitive in the market. (Financier Worldwide, 2015).

1.2 Problem Discussion

1.2.1 Theoretical Problematization

The subject of the online fashion industry in France and its CSRs has of course already been addressed, whether in terms of company rankings, consumer behaviour studies or even economic and societal issues. or environmental issues related to this industry. The fashion market being one of the largest in the world (certainly one of the largest with the food industry), it is clear that certain avenues of study have already been explored by researchers or economists/scientists.

As explained above, today, one of the most important topics related to the fashion industry is the respect of CSR by companies, and the economic and social problems related to this market. This subject has therefore obviously already been treated by researchers such as Ridge (2016), who questioned the decisions taken by the French government with regard to the regulation of French models "France recently banned what it deems to be models unhealthy and thin in the country. the fashion industry". This decision could be criticized, especially by Americans, and is directly linked to the fashion industry, since models can be a main axis for the promotion of their articles, in particular concerning brands as Saint Laurent (Ridge, 2016). These controversies affect the entire fashion industry in France, but even more so the online fashion industry, given that they require models to promote all of their products and exhibit them.

The researchers also examined the different strategies adopted by companies, strategies used to increase consumer interest and loyalty. A good example is the brand Sezane, which is committed to creating ethical and sustainable clothing (FSC, 2021).

In addition, the researchers also examined the various problems that some major brands in the fashion industry in France may have had, such as with the company Boohoo, for example. In 2020, Boohoo experienced a major scandal on the international scene, with the brand being accused of "modern slavery" (Le Parisien, 2020). Indeed, "the company is in trouble after revelations about working conditions in supplier factories" (The New York Times, 2020).

These revelations had great impacts on society, with more than a billion dollars lost. This example is just one of many, and proof that CSR actions have a direct impact on the company.

1.2.2 Managerial Problematization

In recent years, the fashion industry sector has grown enormously, both in terms of sales volume and turnover, and has also evolved in order to meet consumer demands. Indeed, companies in this industry have had to change certain things, be it their products (to satisfy customers who change their minds very quickly), as well as their approach to the various societal, environmental or social issues (Pedroso-Roussado, 2023). Today, customers care a lot more about how (and by whom) their products were made, as saw with the Uyghur problem a few years ago for some brands like Nike. Consumers are therefore closer to the traceability of their purchases than a few years ago (Economic Journal, 2019).

Today, companies have therefore evolved on market entry strategies, and have developed their CSR, in order to impose themselves in the existing competition, on distribution strategies (such as the quasi-mandatory implementation of the E-commerce for them), analysis of consumer behaviour, or finally product production strategies, but also out of respect for sustainable development (Szegeedi et al., 2023). Indeed, companies and their CSR consists in evolving for and with sustainable development, both thanks to the 3 pillars of the TBL, but also in a commercial sense (Ghosh et al., 2002, p. 147). For example, companies are much more attentive to the use of plastics (especially bags) in their stores, for environmental issues (but also societal, given that more and more consumers are concerned about ecological issues). But there are still some fairly recurrent problems for companies, in particular that of implementation in other countries. Many companies seek to set up in less developed countries, in order to reduce costs, there in particular, but this poses real CSR problems, with above all problems of respect for employees and respect for the environment (Lindgreen et al., 2009).

Research on the subject of CSR in the online fashion industry in France could help companies, organizations and consumers understand their interests, better manage different problems and find solutions more easily (Książak, 2017).

For companies, studying this subject would make it possible to understand the opportunities that CSR can bring them, as well as the impacts that the actions carried out can generate. They will thus understand the importance of highlighting their sustainable actions, concerned about the environment (Książak, 2017).

For organizations, studying this subject would encourage companies to set up sustainable practices, ecological practices, to be completely transparent vis-à-vis their customers. Moreover, these organizations can also have an impact on consumers, to make them aware of the importance of CSR and the sustainability of their products.

For consumers, studying this subject would force companies to be attentive to their actions and practices (Sen et al., 2016).

1.2.3 Research Gap

According to the research carried out, the lack of knowledge could be, for example, the lack of available data used by the companies themselves, such as their studies on consumer behavior towards CSR, knowing how their customers behave with their brands (and their competitors) in France. Knowing how companies understand the decisions made by consumers related to the fashion industry, what are the different factors that lead to a purchase rather than relying on theories could be useful.

Indeed, we have little data made available by companies concerning their relationship with customers, knowing how customers approach them, how customers interact with these brands, how they consume, because surely that each customer interacts differently depending on the brand and the company.

Another example of lack of knowledge is the lack of clarity around product sustainability tracking, anything related to the environment. Today, especially young consumers are more and more concerned about the follow-up and durability of their favorite products, and the way the item is manufactured (from its country of origin to the place of sale) is for them an important sales decision factor (Erez, 2019). In some cases, this monitoring is not available, and there remains a lack of knowledge for us.

From production to distribution, all companies face issues related to sustainability or ecology, and having more information on this part seems necessary in the current context.

Otherwise, there are not many knowledge gaps on the subject and on the fashion industry, which remains (or at least tries to be) as transparent as possible with its customers.

1.3 Research Questions

From the previous presented research and the identification of the research gap, this has been summarized into the following questions.

- What are the opportunities and challenges linked to CSR in the French online fashion industry?
 - How do young consumers in France perceive and respond to CSR initiatives undertaken by online fashion companies?
 - Can CSR norms be used as a competitive advantage in France?

1.4 Purpose

The objective of this study is first of all to study the consumption habits of young consumers in France, their relations with online fashion companies and the way they consume on this market. The authors then wish to see if CSR in this industry can become a competitive advantage for companies, and thus offer them a better understanding of consumer desires. In summary, the objective of this study is to understand the challenges and opportunities that CSR can offer to online fashion companies in France, and the place they have taken in this market.

1.5 Delimitations

Given that this thesis studies the CSR aspects of online fashion companies in France, the research area then focuses only on the consumption habits of French residents. The respondents do not necessarily have to be from the country, but are nevertheless French residents and citizens. This thesis focuses on a B2C sector and is written from a consumer's perspective, benefiting companies to adjust their marketing strategies. The study focuses only on the vision and consumption habits of an individual and therefore does not take into account the B2B business and the promotion strategies of companies towards each other.

The concept of CSR will not be discussed in more depth than previously presented in the literature review. Nor will there be any further explanation than what is presented in the literature review regarding consumer culture and behaviour. Only theories and concepts related to decision making and influencing customer choice will be considered. The respondents in this study are online shoppers and therefore they do not take into account in-store purchases. Withdrawals are, however, taken into account as the transaction takes place online beforehand.

2. Literature Review

In this chapter, the authors present the literature review on which this thesis is based on. The chapter begins with explaining the main concept of Corporate Social Responsibility and the different aspects that are related to it. In a second time, the authors will explore the research that have been made on the online (French) buyer and his consumption habits. The chapter is concluded with a summary of the literature review and how it related to the identified knowledge gap. The chapter is finalized with a conceptual framework, this to provide the reader with visualization of how the theories in the thesis are interrelated to each other.

2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility

2.1.1 Definition

The first definition of CSR that can be found is that of Bowen who defines it as *“the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society”* (Bowen, 1953, p. 6). The notion of objective then allows companies to measure the social aspect of their activities as a performance.

Saulquin rather sees CSR not as an additional legal obligation but as *“an opportunity to revisit the concept of performance”* and argues *“for a holistic (systemic) conception of performance”*. (Saulquin, 2007, p.8). The author argues here that a company's performance cannot be measured solely in terms of its financial results. Thus, by rethinking the notion of CSR, companies can then more easily identify risks to their business and create long-term shared value for all stakeholders.

Following the same trend, Battaglia argues that *“CSR is no longer conceived of as the moral “responsibility” of corporate managers for the greater social good or the discretionary expenditure of executives that could hamper a corporation’s profitability; but as a strategic resource to be used to improve the bottom-line performance of the corporation”*. (Battaglia, 2014, p.873). In other words, CSR can be leveraged as a tool to generate tangible benefits and financial outcomes for businesses. By aligning CSR initiatives with strategic objectives, companies can create a win-win situation that benefits both society and the bottom line.

CSR is a management concept whereby companies not only fully meet the applicable legal obligations, but also go beyond by extending their efforts to promote more socially responsible projects. Specifically, companies become more concerned about the protection of human rights, employees’ conditions, environmental issues, and communities’ expectations. They manage

their business according to specific ethical standards. Enhancing governance quality is also among the challenging issues in CSR (Beji, 2021). With this type of approach, it can also be observed that the most consistent work to meet the CSR criteria must be done on the governance side of the company in question.

Most theories on CSR agree that the Triple Bottom Line model is the very basis of the requirements. It implies the consideration of the “three” P’s, which stands for Profit, People and Planet. (Księżak, 2017). Profit is of course necessary for the company to survive, but this dimension of CSR is not just about making money. It is more about how money is used and in particular how it is used to satisfy the company's stakeholders and the community, at least on a local scale. It is also important that the money is used in a way that ensures the sustainability of the company (Uddin, 2008). The social dimension of CSR is a tool for developing and maintaining good relations between the people in the company. Social responsibility covers all the people affected by the company's activities or those affecting them. This part focuses on the fact that the activities of a company must not degrade the condition of the environment and therefore of the planet. It is a win-win situation where the company guarantees to have the lowest possible impact on its surroundings, thus ensuring a healthy working environment (Gupta, 2011).

Triple Bottom Line Model	CSR's 3 dimensions	Involvements
Profit	Economic	The Multiplier Effect Taxes Avoiding Actions that damage trust
People	Social	Responsibility towards: 1. Customers 2. Employees 3. Community
Planet	Environment	Environmental Impact The Win-Win of Environmental Responsibility

Figure 1: The CSR's three dimensions and their involvements. Source: own design based on Księżak (2017) and Uddin (2008)

2.1.2. CSR as a competitive advantage

Several research studies have been carried out in an attempt to determine how a company can create a competitive advantage: Kleiner (2000) states that to maintain a competitive advantage, an enterprise has to create a supportive environment for continuous efforts and strategic agility,

with sustained investments and a smart opportunities transformation. Competitive advantage may be presented under several definitions, but a common belief wants competitive advantage to be a form of idol worship. In other words, a desire to imitate the strategies that make the most successful companies successful (Christensen, 2001).

Rolland (2009, p. 259) details how a well structured and supposedly effective communication allows to establish a dialogue with equal powers and thus to set up a mutually beneficial relationship between the company's stakeholders, the company itself and society. *“To have the desired socially responsible corporate identity has now become a more achievable and strategic necessity for a company operating in a global marketplace”*.

However, some research, particularly in China, is at odds with the results presented above. Yin (2017, p. 561) details in his study the impacts of the implementation of CSR regulations within different types of companies. It appears that there is no relationship between the implementation of these regulations and the formation of competitive advantage when state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and private-owned enterprises (POEs). *“environmental sensitivity is a significant factor affecting the relationship between CSR disclosure and competitive advantage.”* On the other hand, it would appear that CSR contributes strongly to the creation of competitive advantage when comparing environmentally sensitive industries (ESIs) and non-environmentally sensitive industries (NESIs).

2.1.3. CSR in France

In addition to the CSR standards that were previously researched and mentioned for this work, in 2011 France introduced the Grenelle Act II. The latter obliges companies to include information about their environmental and social impacts in their annual report, in addition to their measures benefiting sustainable development (Hąbek, 2013).

The current CSR approach in France is a mix of national traditions and change factors that appear in most industrialized democracies. However, they also note two specificities: the role of the French State and the focus on labor issues. Ralston (2002) shows that companies in different countries hold substantially different perspectives on the importance of being perceived as socially responsible, as well as about which CSR issues are most important, such that they find significant differences among France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Finally, CSR rating agencies and thus access to homogenous French data are relatively recent in France. (Sobczak, 2007).

Following on from the work that has been done on the French consumer's view of CSR, and particularly in view of the importance they attach to workers' rights, the following hypothesis should be verified:

H1. French consumers place respect for workers' rights at the forefront of CSR priorities when buying online.

Desmoutier (2020) analyses three main themes to better understand whether consumers buy their clothes with a strong focus on sustainability issues and the role of Corporate Societal Irresponsibility (CSI). The results show that consumer awareness and sensitization are crucial steps in changing their purchasing behavior. Consumers' decisions are based on themselves rather than on society. Only sensitivity to the CSI significantly influenced the attitude-intention relationship. The author concluded that consumers have the power to change their consumption and influence the course of these companies, and that consumer awareness could have a real impact.

Following the research work of Desmoutier (2020), thus stipulating that consumers are sensitive to Corporate Societal Irresponsibility, the following hypothesis can be put forward:

H2. The more consumers are aware of CSR, the less they buy online

2.2. Online Market and CSR's Challenges

2.2.1. CSR and online sales

Corporate Social Responsibility in the French fashion industry, and more specifically in online sales, can be expressed in many ways. Several areas require careful attention from firms to ensure that their sustainability objectives are met.

Bartok (2018, p. 5) reports that CSR is, at least in the Czech Republic, a comparative advantage for online retailers. His research suggests that CSR is a real asset in increasing internet shopping. [CSR] *"is not only a comparative advantage, but also one of the ways to create sustainable business development through the use of ethical codes and transparent policies."*

According to Zhao (2018, p. 2), based on the ISO 26000 standard (which defines the main principles of Corporate Social Responsibility), CSR in e-commerce has evolved from being a good action to developing a good plan to deal with the risks that may arise in the company and finally considering CSR as a strategic opportunity. This standard also states that social responsibility should focus on seven main topics, which are: organizational governance, human rights, labor practices, environment, fair operation practices, consumer issues, community participation and development. "This involves transparent and ethical behavior committed to sustainable development, consistent with applicable laws and norms of conduct."

2.2.2. *E-consumer buying behaviour*

Previous research on the subject of online shoppers' consumption habits detail how "e-quality" influences the decision-making process of consumers. Wen (2014) indicate that there are many factors that impact on the consumer's perception of the website, making the study of the latter complex and challenging. Given the number of factors that can alter consumer decision making, Dennis (2009, p. 1131) proposes a framework to better understand the e-consumer decision-making process: *"people's behaviour is governed by their beliefs, attitudes, and intentions towards performing that behaviour"*. Their study then details that one of the main challenges for online brands is to build solid trust between the consumer and the brand. The best way to build up trust with the customers of the brand is to efficiently communicate the company's CSR engagement(s). Therefore, Dang-Van (2020) state that there is indeed a positive correlation between the online retailers CSR's exhibition and consumer purchase intention. One of the best ways to raise awareness and spread a good brand image is through word of mouth (WOM). According to this theory, consumers referring to their peers will then be more likely to perceive the brand in a way that makes them more likely to buy (Dang-Van, 2020). Due to the lack of proximity, and more precisely of direct physical contact with the customer, e-commerce based brands have to create a complicity with their online customers. Loyalty strategies can therefore reinforce the feeling of proximity and belonging between the consumer and the brand (Steven & Edwards, 2009).

All the research on how online shoppers are influenced and led to buy a particular product focuses on the decision-making process. Trust appears to be the main factor of influence whenever choosing where to buy from. Wen (2014) then proposes a framework for studying the phases of the decision-making process online that can be represented as follows:

Building on the work of the researchers set out above, notably Edwards (2009), Wen (2014) and Dang-Van et al (2020) on the notion of trust in online commerce, the authors can then for this thesis formulate the following hypothesis:

H3. Trust plays a key role in the CSR-friendly products adoption.

Phases of Decision-Making Process

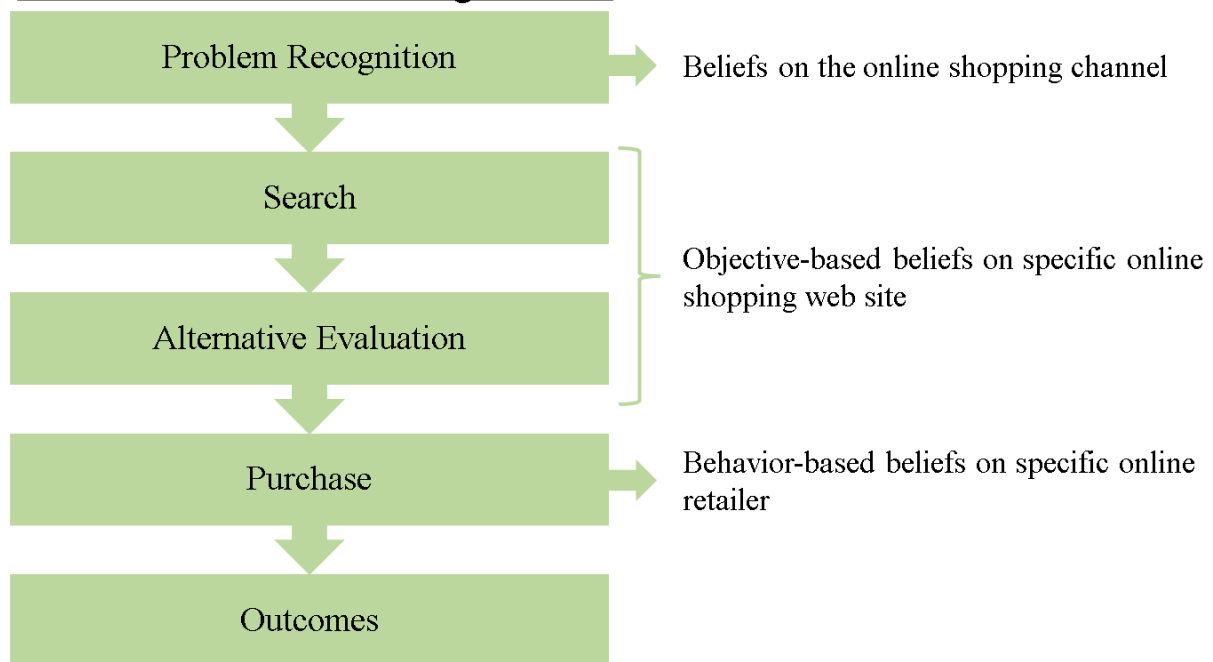


Figure 2 : *Consumers' beliefs involvement during online decision-making process. Source : own design based on Wen (2014).*

There does not appear to be any previous research on the role of CSR in the consumption habits of online shoppers. Between 2002 and 2015, companies that put effort into building sustainable trust with their consumers have also had an impact on their consumers' consumption habits. Contemporary online consumption habits are the result of shoppers' awareness, mainly motivated by issues of saving time, money and simplicity (Khurana, 2017).

2.2.3. Consumers' willingness to pay

According to Narayanan (2023), in view of the latest research on the relationship between CSR and consumers' willingness to pay, it appears that CSR has a direct and positive impact on consumption habits. Hirdue's (2011) work had already found some evidences of this correlation but stated that the main drivers of a consumption habits shift towards a more "green model" are the youth and the price. The youth can be represented as the early-adopters of any new consumption model, but their buying power remains limited, therefore cost savings is the key factor. According to the study by Biswas (2016), the main factors determining whether consumers are willing to switch to a greener consumption pattern are the price, availability and quality of the item in question. In this way, the authors indicate that the major antecedents for an increase in the number of green products on the market are price and quality (the two being highly correlated). "[Manufacturers] should thus promise a superior value-for-money through improvement in products' functional aspects as to enhance consumers' perceived value from product usage" (Biswas, 2016, pp. 213).

Kang (2011) investigate the assumed correlation between the price consumers are willing to pay for a hotel and the hotel's alignment with environmental standards. Their results show a positive relationship, as the chosen hotel appears to be a reflection of itself and the additional costs are justified by such environmental efforts. It is the consumer's image that is otherwise at stake.

According to the study by Parsa et al. (2015), most consumers are willing to incorporate a small surplus in order to support the CSR initiatives of catering establishments. From this, two types of consumers emerge, with different rates of commitment. Thus, only consumers with a lifestyle that actively participates in CSR standards will be willing to pay a premium price for a service. For the rest of the consumer mass, it appears that the social and environmental commitments of the establishment are not sufficient factors to raise the bill. Yuen (2016) then state that although consumer satisfaction is paramount, it is by no means sufficient to justify consumers paying for CSR. More individual factors come into play, such as loyalty and personal beliefs. From this research, it appears that the willingness to pay more for CSR issues is dependent on one's beliefs and, above all, one's lifestyle.

When it comes to consumers' willingness to pay a surplus for a product that has been manufactured with respect to the CSR norms, several hypotheses can arise.

H4. French online shoppers are willing to pay more for a product that has been manufactured in compliance with CSR standards.

H5. The more CSR-aware consumers are, the more they are willing to pay more for CSR-friendly products.

H6. French online shoppers are not willing to pay more for a product that has been manufactured in compliance with CSR standards.

H7. French online shoppers are only willing to pay more for certain aspects of CSR.

H8. French online shoppers are insensitive to CSR engagements.

2.3. Summary

As the research presented above demonstrate, CSR has always occupied a very important place in the French business world. Its vocation has changed a lot in almost 70 years and so has its image, whether towards companies or consumers. From a simple accounting tool to a real guide

for a more sustainable business model, it is now also a rather reliable indicator of the viability of a business (Sobczak, 2007; Battaglia, 2014; Gupta, 2011; Hąbek, 2013).

Following the general trend of awareness of major contemporary issues, especially environmental ones, it appears that, in certain environments such as hotels and restaurants, customers feel personally concerned enough to pay more if the establishment's business appears viable (Parsa et al. 2015). This suggests that this kind of consumption is seen as an extension of oneself and must therefore be perfectly in line with the image that the consumer wants of oneself. According to Dennis (2009), consumers make decisions about online shopping based largely on their personal beliefs and values. It is therefore only natural that companies selling online should build a real relationship of trust with their customers, making sure that they are properly aligned with their target audience's desires (Edwards, 2009).

Although there is an impressive amount of research that has been carried out on the major themes of this thesis separately, there is no real study on the consumption habits of French consumers online according to the CSR commitments of the online company. Furthermore, the only viable research that provides initial avenues of study for this work does not concern the clothing market, a market that is more than imposing. There is therefore a need for further research into how the French make their online purchasing decisions and whether CSR plays a real role in this process.

2.4. Conceptual framework

The literature review presented the key concepts that are relevant to understanding the role of CSR in the decision making of French online consumers when buying clothes and which then represent the basis for establishing a conceptual framework. The graph presented below helps to better visualize the consumer's decision making and which factors can then influence their thinking.

Problem recognition	Search	Alternatives Evaluation	Purchase	Outcome	
	+	Pro-CSR lifestyle		Satisfied (worth an eventual surplus)	Will probably pursue on buying from CSR-engaged companies
		Is ready to pay a surplus to support CSR engagements		Unsatisfied (quality)	Will probably buy main stream products next time
		Does not feel concerned by CSR matters			
	-				

Figure 3 : consumer decision-making process and CSR influence.

This framework works on the assumption that the consumer under study has or will buy the product of a company with strong CSR commitments, generally increasing the price of the same product.

CSR does not influence the consumer at every stage of his or her decision making. It comes into play first in the research phase. Online shoppers are likely to discuss their problem with their peers in order to find the best possible solution based on each other's experiences. Word-of-mouth then intervenes as a non-negligible means of information (Dang-Van, 2020). The company's communication on its CSR commitments will act as a showcase for the company. It is during the evaluation of alternatives that the consumer will then decide which product seems the most suitable according to his or her interest in CSR compliance (Yuen, 2016).

The company's CSR engagement communication is indeed important. Therefore, it is relevant to study the following hypothesis in order to better understand how it influences the consumer's behaviour:

H9. Companies' lack of CSR transparency leads consumers to think that they are not paying attention to these CSRs.

Once the purchase is made, the consumer, if satisfied with the purchase, will then be more likely to repeat the transaction. The opposite case is of course also valid.

2.5. Research Model

Figure 4 illustrates the research model of this thesis, with the purpose of summarizing the literature review and developed hypotheses. As described in the theoretical framework, the hypotheses are influenced by previous research and further developed to match the research questions of this thesis. By studying the e-consumer buying behavior and its affiliation with CSR concerns, the researchers were able to identify the most discussed and important factors regarding consumers decision-making and CSR awareness.

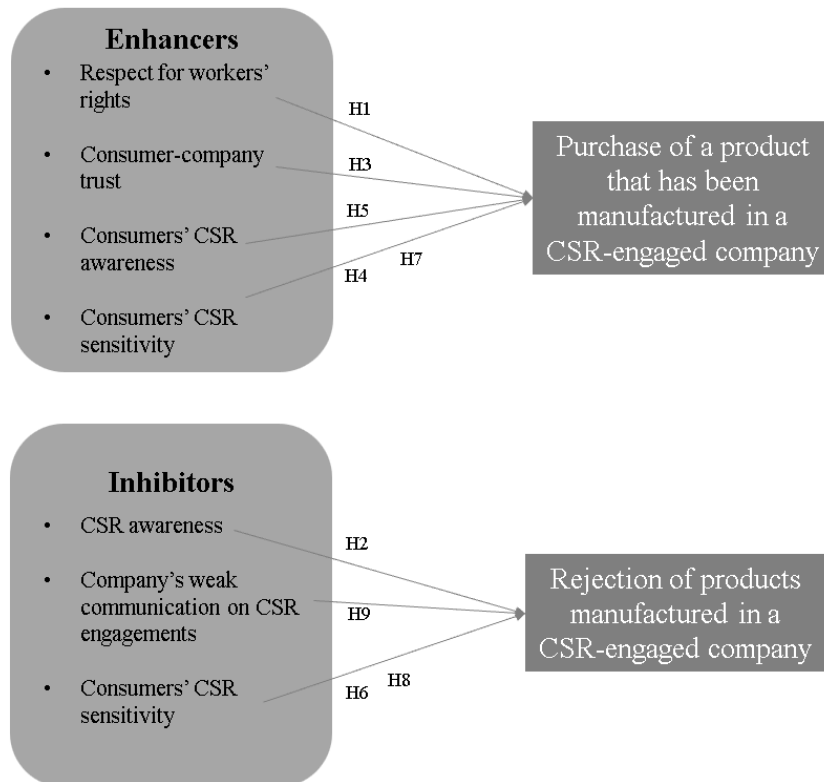


Figure 4: Research Model

The aim of this research model is to study the factors that can encourage the purchase of products manufactured in line with current CSR standards. On the other hand, it also allows us to visualize which factors can make decision-making and/or purchasing more difficult, or even avoid it.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

When conducting research, there are two research approaches; deductive and inductive (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

A deductive approach is an approach based on theories. This research method is the most commonly used according to Bryman and Bell (2011). The aim of this method is to go from the most general to the most specific. Being based on theories, the deductive approach involves the use of hypotheses, which then lead to the search for data, the use of secondary data and finally their analysis. This type of data is mainly used for so-called quantitative research (but can be used for so-called qualitative research).

On the contrary, an inductive approach is based on data. This research method starts from the data collected and analyzed by the authors to then build theories according to the results. (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This method relies on specific observations to draw more general and broader conclusions and theories (thus the opposite of the deductive approach). This type of data is mainly used for so-called qualitative research (but can be used for so-called quantitative research).

However, the deductive approach can very well use part of the inductive approach and vice versa (Bell et al., 2019).

There is also a third type of research approach: the abductive approach, by combining the inductive approach and the deductive approach in one and the same report. It is therefore a mixture of theory and researched and analyzed data.

As presented in the literature review, these sources were obtained from secondary data, including scientific articles, without using empirical research. The research approach therefore corresponds to the deductive approach, because research deviates from theory. The existing theories therefore come from secondary sources and do not come from empirical results. These theories have been validated or not thanks to the empirical results collected, which is significant of the deductive approach (Saunders, Lewis and Thornill, 2019). In addition to this justification, the deductive approach is very often used during quantitative analysis, which is the case of this study (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

These secondary data were found via books, scientific articles, newspapers... They were found via different networks and different databases, such as proquest.com, One Search, Google Scholar, using in particular the words “CSR”, “textile”, “online”, “France” as search keywords.

3.2. Research Strategy

There are two research strategies for conducting research, the qualitative strategy and the quantitative strategy (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The strategy used will depend on the research questions, the subject of the research or the different data that can be used.

The quantitative strategy generally uses raw data, in particular numerical data (therefore with figures) (Saunders et al., 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). It is a statistical strategy. It can target a large population (which must still be targeted in order to ensure a certain reliability). After having written a questionnaire or a survey, the interviewees will have to answer via closed answers, in particular yes/no or scales from 1 to 7 for example. This strategy is quite easy to analyse, as applications like Excel or SPSS can easily do it.

The qualitative strategy, on the contrary, uses more precise data, more oriented on a specific subject, in particular sentences (Saunders et al., 2009; Bryman & Bell, 2011). This strategy can provide information on preferences, opinions on a particular product/service, purchase motivations. This strategy brings more quality to the research than the quantitative strategy, because it leaves the questioned person free to answer what he wishes, and not to be restricted to yes/no. The questioned can therefore provide details on a product/service recommendation, or a criticism. However, the target is much more restricted, because it is necessary to concentrate on a precise group, to have logical answers. This implies a difficulty of analysis, because the authors must analyse each sentence of each interviewee (and cannot rely on software as for the quantitative strategy).

Again, it is quite possible to combine these two strategies, so to use a quantitative strategy and a qualitative strategy in the same report.

For the research, the authors have used the quantitative strategy, thanks to questionnaires targeting consumers. They were therefore targeting, via this questionnaire, French consumers who consume online, especially young consumers (18 - 30y). This strategy allowed them to understand how the French buy clothes online, and above all what importance they give to CSR in this industry.

In addition, through this questionnaire, they also intended to make one open question available to respondents, in order to give them the opportunity to express themselves on the subject and on their motivations. However, this open question was not mandatory for the participants, and has the sole purpose of completing a previous question, which is closed (and therefore quantitative).

As the objective of this study is to generalize the results obtained to the population, the vast majority of the study will be quantitative.

This questionnaire therefore allowed the authors to have a certain number of numerical data that they were able to use in order to validate or not the previous hypotheses and to answer the research questions.

3.3. Research Design

A Research Design is a collection framework that was created to answer the research questions of the study. This collection framework indicates that the research design lies between the research questions and the data collection (Gray, 2019) and defines the type of study. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) there are five different research designs that could be used when conducting research;

Case study, Comparative design, Cross-sectional, Experimental or Longitudinal.

3.3.1. *Cross sectional design*

As part of the study, the authors chose the cross-sectional design. This design consists of studying a sample of the target population (here consumers residing in France aged between 18 and 30) at a specific time. This method makes it possible to group together a large number of variables easily and to establish correlations between them. It can be used in many fields, whether scientific, economic, etc.

It is a simple and inexpensive way (Setia, 2016) to aggregate data and study the correlations between them. Indeed, given that the responses will only be collected during a single period, this greatly reduces the costs, but these responses can be used in several ways.

This design is mainly used via questionnaires. This method made it possible to understand the motivations and purchase intentions of consumers, by comparing the various data available.

3.4. Type of Data

For the purpose of the research, the authors can use two types of data:

The primary data: These data correspond to data that have not been analysed, and that the researchers collect themselves as part of their study to answer the various questions asked (Saunders et al., 2009). These are therefore real-time data, but this can be expensive (financially but also in time) for researchers, because the collection time is long and the organization can quickly become costly. This data can be collected in various ways, via interviews,

questionnaires, discussion groups, surveys. It is up to the researchers to define which method is the most effective for answering their research questions;

The secondary data: These data correspond to data that have already been studied in previous research, in the context of other studies (Kumar, 2018). This data can be company data, websites. They are easier to find for the authors, but can date back several years, and have therefore become erroneous information.

As part of the study, the authors used a mixture of these two types of data. Indeed, the subject having already been studied several times before, one can find useful information there, in particular old theses or scientific articles on this subject (or close to it), thanks to the various collections of sources quoted previously. These data made it possible to better understand the subject studied, and especially to know which points have already been dealt with. In addition, the authors also used primary data, through a questionnaire created and used to analyse the motivations and preferences of consumers in the textile industry. All respondents answered the same questions, under the same conditions, being anonymous and meeting the criteria mentioned (Residing in France and aged between 18 and 30).

3.5. Research Methods

Research methods group the ways in which authors collect data that will be useful to them for their studies (Saunders et al., 2009). These research methods can be questionnaires, interviews, in order to have a precise and clear answer from the person opposite. These research methods are used for both qualitative and quantitative methods, and depend in particular on the research questions.

In the context of qualitative research, the methods used can in particular be interviews (with a majority of open or semi-open questions) face to face, by telephone (Bryman & Bell, 2011), observations.

In the context of quantitative research, the methods used include questionnaires, tests, in order to see the importance of certain variables and to study the potential relationships between them. For this subject, it was therefore necessary to use quantitative methods, because the authors wanted to see if there are links between different variables of CSR in the online fashion industry in France.

3.5.1. Questionnaire

As part of the study, it is therefore questionnaires intended for consumers of the online fashion industry in France.

This method consists of a series of questions prepared in advance that respondents can answer wherever they want, whenever they want. The questionnaires aim to find out the preferences, motivations or opinions of the participants, with (in this case) closed questions.

This questionnaire is built around 10 questions, including closed answers (Yes/No, scales from 1 to 7.) but also an open question in order to give interviewees the freedom to express themselves on this subject.

The questionnaire allows certain and reliable effectiveness for the study of researchers, with a fairly low cost.

3.5.2. *Collection of Data*

The questionnaire has been shared in particular on social networks (like Instagram & Faceook) in order to have a maximum of possible answers. In addition, the questionnaire was also published on SurveyCircle, a website specializing in questionnaires. However, the questionnaire targeted young consumers, between about 18 and 30 years old, because it is this age group that is most likely to buy clothes on the Internet. Indeed, older consumers are more likely to buy only physical clothing, and is therefore not of interest for this study. The authors were very attentive to the fact that this criterion is respected, so as not to distort the results (thanks in particular to an introductory question excluding younger or older consumers). The objective of the authors was to gather between 300 and 400 answers, in order to have an optimal precision.

This questionnaire was available from April 24, for about twenty days, before collecting and analysing this data. This analysis has been done in particular via statistical applications (such as Excel or SPSS) for quantitative questions, and the authors have used graphs or summaries to explain the point of view of these consumers. In order to study possible correlations between these variables, the authors are particularly skilled in an ANOVA analysis, in order to compare two specific variables and study them.

3.6. Operationalization

After completing the different parts above (the introduction, the literature review or the methodology), the authors took an interest in writing the online questionnaire. This questionnaire was made possible thanks to the previous research, the hypothesis, the research questions as well as thanks to the advice of the supervisor (Díaz & Contell 2022). All this allowed the authors to ask the most relevant questions possible, questions that have meaning for the study. The goal was for each consumer to answer the entire questionnaire, so they had to keep it short, that they wouldn't be tempted to leave it before finishing it. The authors

therefore had to choose the best possible questions, even if it meant deleting some of them. Each consumer answered the same questions, in the same order, with the same possible answers (in the case of closed questions), or with the same possible writing space (in the case of open question). The operationalization (Appendix A) deals with the different parts mentioned in this subject, therefore in particular the opportunities and challenges of CSR. The questionnaire followed a precise order, from the most general questions to the most specific questions, with at the end specific questions about the consumer himself (such as his age, his gender or his socio-professional category). The questionnaire was in French and in English, because it is aimed not at French consumers, but at consumers living in France (hence its writing in English). It is available (Appendix B & C), and the analysis of this questionnaire and its answers will follow in the next part, Empirical Findings.

3.7. Selection of Cases

Case selection is how they select consumers for the questionnaire. These cases can be multiple, such as a set of individuals, groups, companies, events.

This selection of cases is very important, because it determines the reliability and interest of the questionnaire. Indeed, if you target a group of individuals who have no connection or knowledge of the subject, the questionnaire becomes useless. It is therefore important to find the best population to target.

This selection of cases can be carried out in several ways, in particular in a probabilistic (selective) or non-probabilistic (random) way depending on the needs of the study (Mamokhere, 2022). This selection must be explained, clear, the reasons for this selection must be given.

3.7.1. Convenience sampling method

In this study, a specific population is targeted for this questionnaire. The authors wanted answers from consumers living in France (whether they are French or not), and aged between 18 and 30, because they believed that they are the consumers most likely to buy clothes quite frequently on the Internet. Apart from these two criteria, there was no restriction, in order to have a mix of responses, as well as a significant number of responses. They therefore wished to have answers from consumers meeting these criteria, without taking into account their sex, their socio-professional category or their frequency of purchases on the Internet.

Convenience sampling implies that each member of the target population has an equal chance of being selected and interviewed for the study. This makes it possible to have a representation of the population as a whole. It is a non-probabilistic case selection, as it targets criteria specific to a specific population.

3.8. Data Analysis

Data analysis is the part that brings together the collection of data and the analysis of that data. This is the part used to answer the research questions of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, p.202). It makes it possible to know the answers of the consumers who answered the questionnaire, and thus to understand the tendencies which emerge. This analysis is necessary in view of the number of expected answers and the relevance of the questions for the subject of the study, it makes it possible to understand the point of view of consumers, their expectations towards brands and their motivations, purchase intentions.

3.8.1. *Quantitative data*

For the rapid initial collection and analysis of these data, the authors intended to use applications suitable for statistical analysis, such as Excel and SPSS. These applications made it possible to group together in one place all the answers collected, to classify them (in ascending order, according to the type of questions, etc.), and to produce a first vision of the subject. By quickly observing the responses, they could understand (or try to understand) the first trends that clearly emerge.

Thereafter, the authors intended in particular to use graphs (always generated using statistical analysis software) as well as statistical methods to analyse in detail all the answers collected, and thus to have an impression of fashion consumers in line in France. This helped to understand the behaviour of these consumers and formed a large part of the data analysis. In addition, the use of statistical models such as ANOVA was necessary for data analysis. It is this analysis model that have been used to understand the potential correlations between two variables.

3.8.2. *Qualitative data*

Regarding qualitative data, two main solutions were available to authors: grounded theory or thematic analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Grounded theory relies on continuous comparison of data, while thematic analysis analyses data to reveal themes between them.

In the case of this study, the only open question was in addition to a closed question. It gave consumers the opportunity to explain their choice of answer to the previous question. It was therefore not extremely important in the analysis of data, but could indicate trends on the previous question.

By analysing the different qualitative data, the authors wanted to highlight the relationships between them, common themes. By highlighting certain major themes of the subject upstream, the authors have been able to see if these themes stand out in their answers, and thus reinforce the theories developed previously. Since there was only one open question (and therefore only one qualitative question), the analysis of qualitative data came down to the analysis of the answers to this question.

3.9. Quality of Research

The quality of research in a dissertation is defined by how the research is valid, reliable, relevant and presented. It is notably based on two main points: reliability and validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

3.9.1. *Reliability in quantitative research*

The reliability of a research was based in particular on the collection and analysis of the data collected. This notably involved the distribution of the questionnaire. The authors had to control its distribution, and verify that it was intended for the consumers targeted by this questionnaire, and that it was not distributed to consumers outside the subject.

For the reliability of the research, given that the target population is quite substantial (several million people), the authors therefore wished to have a fairly large number of responses. For optimal reliability, the authors wanted to collect around 300 - 400 responses, to have a fairly low margin of error (around 5%) (SurveyMonkey, 2022).

3.9.2. *Validity in quantitative research*

Validity in quantitative research corresponds to the veracity of the answers collected through the questionnaire (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This validity can go through several points, such as the relevance of the questions. The authors made sure to have the most relevant questions, by deleting some of them so as not to have a questionnaire that was too long. Each question was therefore important and related to a theme that they wanted to address through this questionnaire. Moreover, these questions were totally related to the objective of the study and the research questions.

Next, the clarity of the instructions. The introduction to the questionnaire was based on a short introduction presenting to respondents the theme of this questionnaire, informing them of the use of their answers (in particular their anonymity) and of the duration of this questionnaire.

Finally, each question had to meet a specific need of the authors, with answers that were useful to them for the study and that were consistent with the subject.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in an ethical and responsible manner. The respondents in the surveys conducted have all given their prior consent to the collection of their opinions on the subject of the thesis. No one was coerced into answering the questions of this study. The informed consent of participants and the confidentiality of sensitive information were central to the study. In the same way, the authors have avoided any human exploitation or harm to the participants in this study.

The data collected throughout this study was strictly confidential and no sensitive information or information deemed private by the respondents was disclosed (Baribeau C. & Royer C 2009). This is true both within the study and in a personal capacity. Similarly, the data have been used for professional purposes only and was not to be shared privately. The authors of this thesis respected all data protection laws that apply to this research.

All work produced during this study was the pure research product of its authors. All results were justified by the sources indicated in this report and the conclusions drawn are in no way borrowed from a previous study.

No personal differences have interfered with the research work of this thesis. Its results were in no way biased by conflicts of interest between the two authors.

3.11. Sustainability Considerations

Sustainability was a central topic in the study. In this work, the authors largely dealt with CSR and its different applications in both countries. In line with this, but also responding to the political and environmental context in which they live, the authors had to ensure that this research work was conducted in a sustainable manner.

"The triple bottom line (TBL) is a brilliant and far-reaching metaphor. It has stimulated much corporate activity and has generated tools that can yield quantified expressions of triple bottom line performance." (Henriques et al., 2004). Although sometimes described as an incomplete tool for ensuring the sustainability of a project, this accounting model developed in 1996 allowed us to ensure the sustainability of the research. This is true from an economic, social and environmental point of view.

Economic: The study aimed to assist companies in their understanding of the market. Favours their establishment was definitely an asset in terms of economic performance.

Social: This study was conducted in conditions that respect the human rights of the researchers and interviewees. While respecting the confidentiality and consent of the latter. Efforts in this area have been addressed under "Ethical Considerations". Social work, however, also includes communication between the two researchers. Therefore, good communication with respect for each other was also a priority. And this, always in an environment conducive to efficient work and without external factors that could alter the quality of the study.

Environmental: The environmental impact was minimal since the research is based on 100% digital means. They do not produce any waste. Moreover, the movements were very limited since all communication is done online. All data is saved on their personal computers and it did not take up any potentially polluting storage space.

4. Empirical Findings

In this chapter, the authors will present their database and the main characteristics of the respondents, followed by the empirical data collected through this questionnaire which will be summarized within each theme identified in the operationalization table in relation to the research questions.

4.1. Database

For this thesis, as explained above, the authors wanted to have as many responses as possible from consumers residing in France and between the ages of 18 and 30. The aim was to obtain responses from consumers with diverse profiles, so that the study would represent this population as a whole, and not just a certain sample of this population (for example 18-year-old Parisians).

The authors were able to collect 350 responses, and the objective was a success, a large number of profiles responded to the questionnaire.

How old are you?

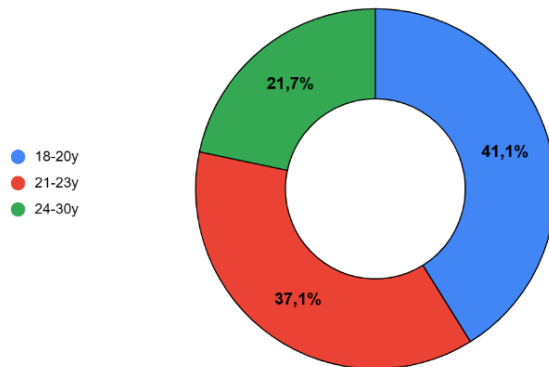


Figure 5: Distribution of participants by age group. Source: Own design (2023).

Where are you from?

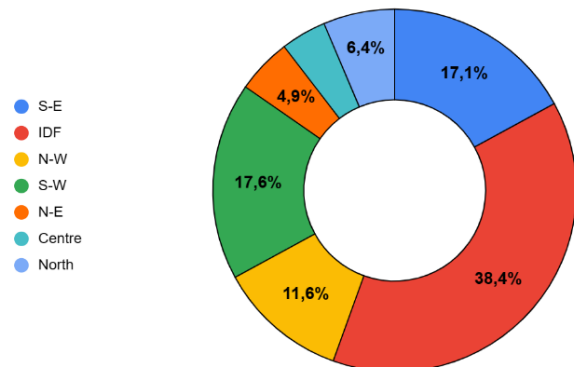


Figure 6: Geographical distribution of participants. Source: Own design (2023).

The age of the participants is very wide, with several answers of each age between 18 and 30 years old. Even if the majority of respondents were between 21 and 23 years old, the authors were able to collect responses from older and younger consumers, which makes the study and the results that will emerge more reliable. In addition, for the purposes of the study, the authors decided to separate the ages into several categories. A first group of consumers aged 18 to 20. At these ages, the majority of participants begin their higher education. Then the authors have a second group of participants between the ages of 21 and 23. At these ages, the majority of participants finish their studies, after 3 or 5 years of study. Finally, a last group of participants, aged 24 to 30, which corresponds mainly to consumers in the professional world.

The graph on the left also shows that there is a good distribution of ages, each part being fairly balanced.

In addition, participants come from all over France, with responses from South-East France (S-E:17.1%), South-West (S-W:17.6%), North-West (N-W:11.6%), the North-East (N-E: 4.9%), the North of France (North: 6.4%), the Centre (Centre: 4.0%) but especially the Paris region (IDF: 38.4%). These results are consistent, given the large population present in Paris and its surroundings.

To continue with the profile of the participants, there is a large majority of students (which is logical because the participants are young), but they also find in particular cadres and workers.

What is your profession?

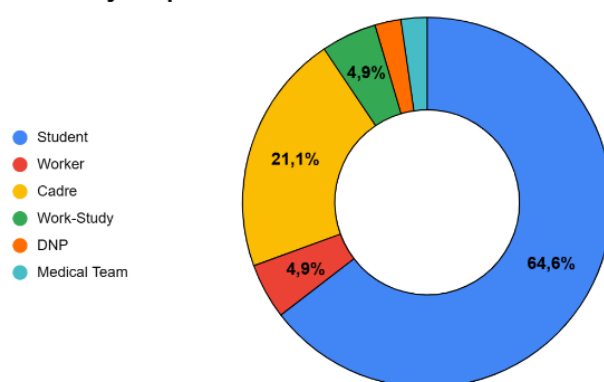


Figure 7: Distribution of participants by profession. Source: Own design (2023)

4.2. Consumer Consumption Habits

Today, consumers' consumption habits are changing very quickly, due to current fashions, environmental/societal problems or simply because they want to change. Each customer wishes to have clothes that correspond to him, whether aesthetically but also morally (especially in terms of the brand and these acts).

With the Covid pandemic, and the rise of online commerce, consumer consumption habits have changed, and customers have learned to buy online, by comparing prices, finding many products unavailable in stores, receiving them at home, etc.

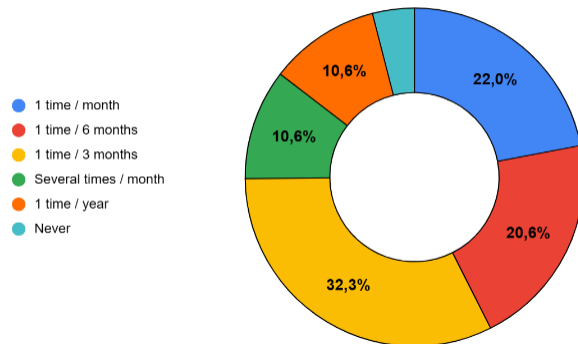
In addition, awareness of the various societal and environmental problems of companies (related to CSR) may also have had an influence on these consumer consumption habits. These different consumption trends are illustrated in the graphic differences below.

4.2.1. Purchase frequency

To begin, the authors asked participants how often they buy clothes online. The online consumption of clothing has become something recurrent among young French consumers,

aged 18 to 30. The authors therefore asked the participants their frequency of purchase, with several possible answers, in order to visualize the preferences.

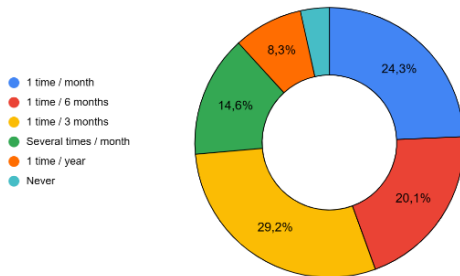
How often do you buy clothes online?



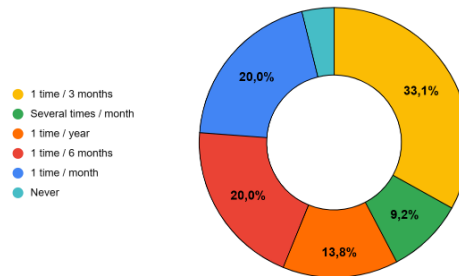
The results are quite extensive, but there is still a majority who in resort purchases once every 3 months. In general, consumers buy once every month, three months or 6 months. But are there significant differences between age groups?

Figure 8: Purchase frequency of participants. Source: Own design (2023)

How often do you buy clothes online? (18-20y)



How often do you buy clothes online? (21-23y)



How often do you buy clothes online? (24-30y)

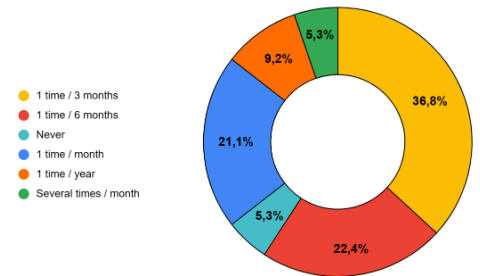


Figure 9: Purchase frequency of participants by age group. Source: Own design (2023).

The first information that emerges is the following: the younger the consumers are, the more they spend online (38.9% of 18–20-year-olds buy once or more a month, compared to 29.2% for 23–24-year-olds and 26.4% for 24–30-year-olds). In addition, 31.9% of 18–20-year-olds buy only once every 6 months or even less, compared to 37.6% and 36.9% respectively for 21–23- and 24–30-year-olds. Just with a descriptive analysis, it can imagine that age influences the frequency of purchase, and that the younger the person is, the more often they spend on the Internet. But a descriptive analysis is not sufficient to draw this conclusion.

The authors therefore chose to use a bivariate analysis, with the Pearson correlation in order to find out if there is a significant link between these two variables, age and purchase frequency.

Correlations

		FrequencyGroup	agerecoded
FrequencyGroup	Pearson Correlation	1	,118*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,045
	N	350	346
agerecoded	Pearson Correlation	,118*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,045	
	N	346	350

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 10: bivariate analysis between purchase frequency and age. Source: database (2023)

The first thing to know is whether or not there is a significant correlation between these variables. For this, the authors use a margin of error of 0.05, due to the number of participants. To know the meaning of the correlation, they must know if the Sig. value is greater or less than the margin of error. In this case, it is lower ($=0.045$). It can be concluded that the correlation between these two variables is significant. A second thing to know is whether this correlation is strong or weak. To do this, you have to look at the value of Pearson correlation links, which is 0.118 in this case. Being less than 0.3, the authors therefore conclude that the correlation is weak. Moreover, this value is positive.

They can therefore conclude that there is a weak correlation between the age category and the frequency of purchase, and that the younger the participants are, the more often they buy.

4.2.2. *Why consume on the Internet*

After asking participants about their shopping frequencies, it is interesting to know why they buy clothes online. By preference, by speed, or simply not to see people? Through this question, the authors wanted to know the motivations, the preferences of the participants when they make their purchases.

This question being multiple choice, it is normal that there are more answers than participants, because everyone was free to choose one or more answers.

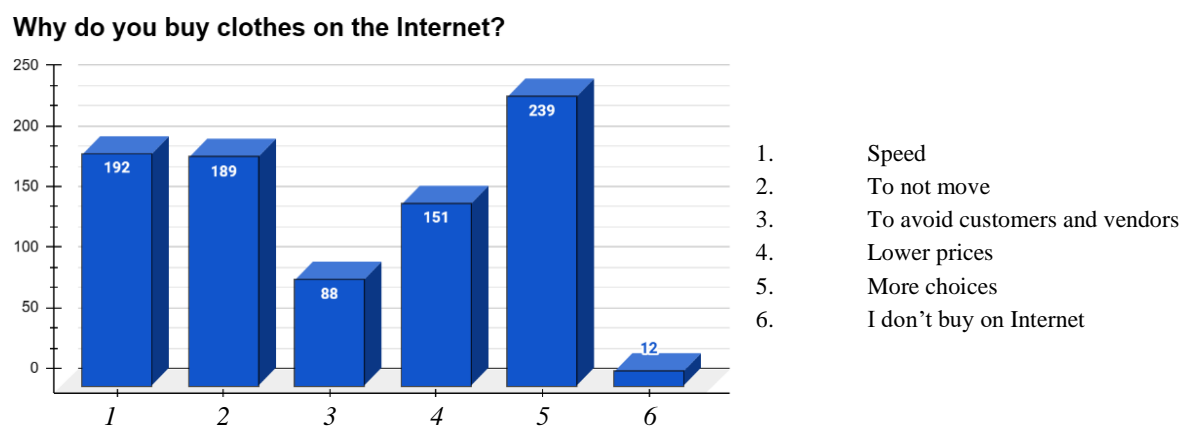


Figure 11: Motivations of participants for online purchases. Source: Own design (2023)

The main argument for participants to buy their clothes online is the greater number of choices on e-commerce stores. Whether it is the number of sizes available, the number of different colours, or simply pieces that cannot be found in stores, this is one of the main reasons for buying online according to the 350 participants. Indeed, more than 68% of participants chose this answer. Additionally, speed of purchase is also important to the shoppers, with more than half (55%) also choosing this response. In just a few clicks and minutes, it is easy for them to shop online and order, which is a huge time saver. In the same style, 54% of participants buy

online so as not to move, and therefore save time. They therefore take these three answers as the most important in the eyes of the respondents.

4.3. Consumers and CSR

Environmental, societal and economic practices have taken an increasingly important place in the current market, and this is particularly due to customers, who play the role of key player. By becoming aware of the importance of adopting sustainable and respectful practices, these customers have changed the approach of companies to CSR, but also for some their consumption, not recognizing themselves in certain products or brands.

4.3.1. Attention to CSR

The authors then focused on the place that consumers gave to CSR when shopping online. They first asked participants how attentive they were to it when shopping, via a scaled question, ranging from 1 to 7, from not at all attentive to completely attentive.

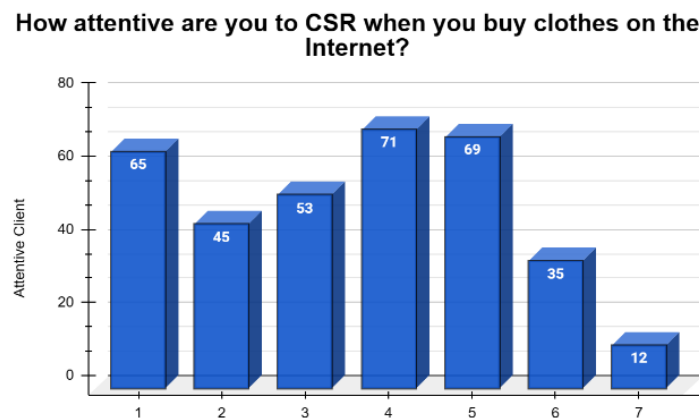


Figure 12: Level of participants' attention to CSR. Source: Own design (2023)

This graph helps to observe the importance given to sustainability, societal, environmental and economic issues by consumers. Looking at the two extremes, the authors notice very quickly that almost 20% of consumers are not at all attentive to CSR when buying clothes, compared to 3.4% who are totally attentive. In addition, 55% of consumers surveyed chose a rating between 3 and 5, so are not too attentive to CSR when buying online. There may be a real correlation between this rating, and the frequency of buying clothes online, perhaps the higher the rating, the less likely they are to buy online. The authors study the correlation between these two variables.

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
AttentiveConsumer	Based on Mean	3,258	5	344	,007
	Based on Median	2,637	5	344	,023
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	2,637	5	333,436	,023
	Based on trimmed mean	3,282	5	344	,007

Figure 13.1: ANOVA test between the level of attention to CSR and purchase frequency. Source: Database (2023).

Again, the authors start by studying the test of homogeneity of variances, based on the mean. The result being lower than the risk threshold 0.05 (0.007), the variances are therefore not homogeneous, it is therefore necessary to use the Welch test (the ANOVA test used when the variances are not homogeneous).

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
AttentiveConsumer				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	2,543	5	83,796	,034

Figure 13.2: ANOVA test between the level of attention to CSR and purchase frequency. Source: Database (2023).

Again, to know if there is a correlation or not, you have to look at the Sig. Value, here 0.034. Being below the risk threshold, they can therefore conclude that there is a correlation between these two variables. The more consumers are attentive to CSR, the less often they consume on the Internet.

After asking how important CSR is to customers, the authors wanted to ask which CSR practices are important to them, out of 3 choices (in addition to a “none” choice). The results are quite homogeneous:

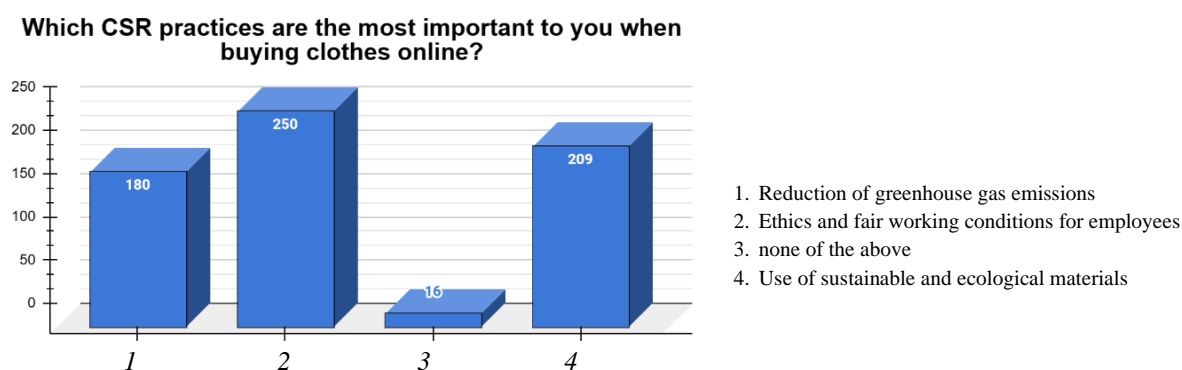


Figure 14: Priority CSR practices according to participants. Source: Own design (2023).

The most important CSR practice in the eyes of participants, with more than 71% of answers, is ethics and fair working conditions for brand employees. Today, buyers (especially young consumers) are increasingly attentive to the conditions in which employees work, and want to know if they are well treated, well paid, and also if they have the right to work (such as brands that use child labour). In addition, green practices are also highlighted by participants, including the use of green and sustainable products for companies.

In general, the results are quite homogeneous, which shows that each of the practices is important in the eyes of the participants, whether they are societal or ecological.

4.3.2. CSR habits

The awareness of the importance of CSR by customers has resulted for some in a change in consumption or opinion on certain products or certain brands. For some, CSR has taken such an important place in their consumption that they would be ready or would consider paying more for this or that product, just for its sustainable and respectful side.

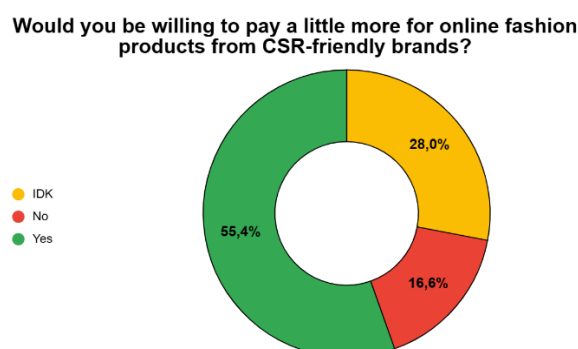


Figure 15: Willingness to pay extra for RSE-compliant brands among participants. Source: Own design (2023)

This graph follows the question “Would you be willing to pay a little more for online fashion products from CSR-friendly brands?”. There is a 55% 'yes' majority who would therefore be willing to pay more for CSR. Adding in the 28% of consumers who are hesitant, that leaves only 17% of participants who are closed to the idea of spending more money, which is a low percentage.

There is surely a link between the desire to pay more and the attention given to CSR by the online fashion industry.

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
PayMore	Based on Mean	3,927	6	343	<,001
	Based on Median	3,670	6	343	,002
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	3,670	6	255,276	,002
	Based on trimmed mean	4,508	6	343	<,001

Figure 16.1: ANOVA test between the willingness to pay more and the level of attention to CSR. Source: Database (2023).

Once again, the authors decided to follow the ANOVA method to conclude on a possible link between the two variables. A homogeneity test of the variances was also carried out, and concluded that the variances are not homogeneous. The authors therefore need to perform a Welch test.

Robust Tests of Equality of Means				
PayMore				
	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch	5,730	6	97,059	<,001

Figure 16.2: ANOVA test between the willingness to pay more and the level of attention to CSR. Source: Database (2023).

To know if the two variables have a link, you have to look at the Sig. value, which here is less than 0.001. Being less than the margin of error of 0.05, the authors can therefore conclude that there is a link between these two variables.

They can therefore deduce that the more customers are attentive to CSR when buying clothing online, the more they are likely to pay a little more for a product for its sustainable and respectful side.

To continue on the changes in consumer attitudes related to CSR, there is an even more radical point that it can mention: the purchase stoppage. Indeed, some consumers may decide to buy a specific product, or even a brand, because of CSR issues. When drafting the questionnaire, the authors took as an example the problems of Nike and Zara linked to the Uyghurs, or even Shein and its working conditions.

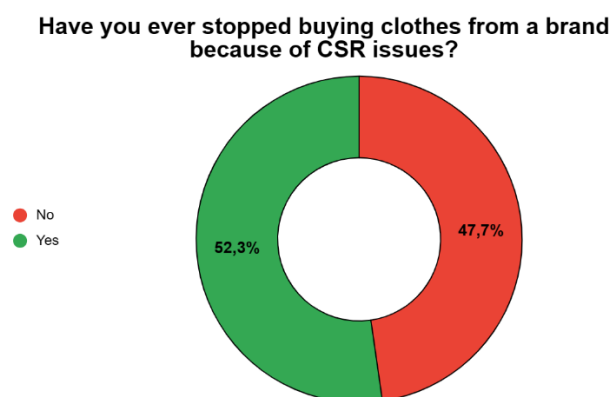


Figure 17: stop buying online for CSR issues. Source: Own design (2023)

The graph therefore shows whether consumers have already stopped buying specific products or specific brands as a result of CSR controversies. More than the half of consumers have already stop, which remains a fairly large figure (which can represent several million French people, with a certain margin of error).

Once again, a correlation test will be carried out (between whether or not to stop buying and the frequency of buying), in order to see if this variable can be influenced by another.

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
StopBuying	Based on Mean	26,504	6	343	<,001
	Based on Median	5,309	6	343	<,001
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	5,309	6	310,312	<,001
	Based on trimmed mean	26,504	6	343	<,001

Robust Tests of Equality of Means					
StopBuying					
		Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch		30,994	6	95,985	<,001

Figure 18: ANOVA test between stop shopping online and the purchase frequency. Source: Database (2023).

By doing the same analysis as the previous times, and paying attention to the test of homogeneity of variances, as well as the Welch value (both lower than the margin of error 0.05), it can be deduced that there is a link between the frequency of purchase and whether or not to stop buying controversial products. Consumers who shop online the least often are the most likely to stop buying products or brands that have had CSR issues.

4.4. Companies and CSR

This part of the empirical findings focuses on the relationship between online fashion companies and their CSRs. As said before, CSR have taken a very important place in the daily life of these companies, and they must now learn to live with it. This part will analyze the opportunities and challenges of these companies related to CSR, as well as their actions seen by customers.

4.4.1. Opportunities and challenges for companies related to CSR

The integration of CSR in the life and marketing of brands offers them certain opportunities, whether financial, environmental or social. The participants thus chose that they are for them the opportunities for companies to implement CSR in their practices. As the question is multiple choice, it is normal to have more answers than participants.

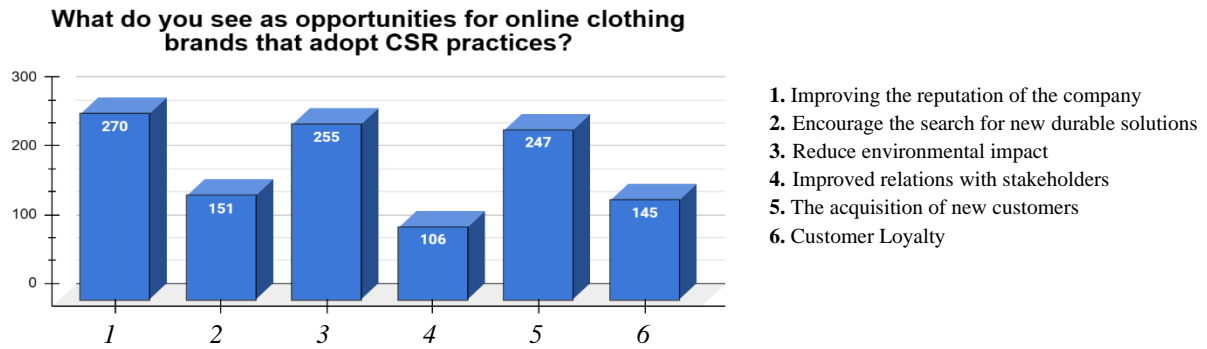


Figure 19: The opportunities seen by the participants. Source: Own design (2023)

According to the participants (77%), the main opportunity for online fashion companies by implementing CSR in their practices is to improve their reputation. Reputation is very important for a company, as it is largely responsible for the number of customers. Indeed, a very bad reputation can jeopardize the form of the business, even going as far as a potential closure, while a good reputation can bring in a number of important customers, exceeding the expectations of the company. A good reputation can therefore translate into an increase in the number of customers, but also an increase in turnover, and an improvement in its place in the competition. The main opportunity for companies is therefore social.

In addition, according to 73% of participants, a good implementation of CSR in the practices of online fashion companies can greatly reduce the environmental impact, through the use of sustainable materials, the reduction of waste. In the current situation, it is all the more important for companies to take these practices into account. The second main opportunity is therefore environmental.

Finally, there is a third opportunity that stands out in the responses, the acquisition of new customers for these companies (for 70% of participants). This is close to improving reputation. Implementing CSR in their practices can lead to customers being sensitive to these causes. The last opportunity is therefore economic.

The three main opportunities for companies therefore combine the 3 pillars of CSR, the economy, the social and the environmental.

4.4.2. Their actions seen by customers

The element that is supposed to be one of the most important points for companies is to know what consumers think of their brands and their actions. Giving importance to this can allow companies to know their strengths, their weaknesses, know what to change and what to improve in order to bring in new customers and retain old ones. And consumer opinions on brands, including their CSR actions, are unanimous:

Do you think online clothing brands take CSR sufficiently into account in their practices?

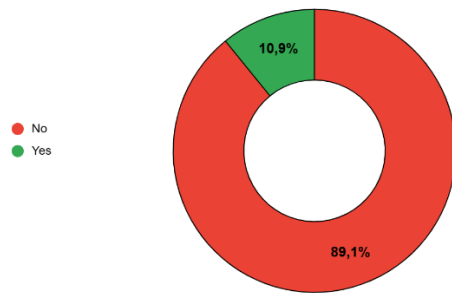


Figure 20: attention of companies to CSR seen by participants. Source: Own design (2023).

Do you think the online brands are fairly transparent when it comes to the sustainability and tracking ?

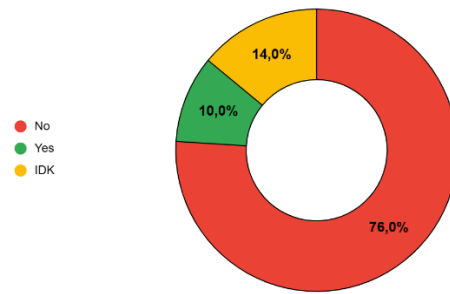


Figure 21: Corporate transparency to CSR. Source: Own design (2023).

The graph on the left represents the percentage of consumers who think that online clothing brands take CSR sufficiently into account in their practices, from production to distribution. And the result is clear: More than 89% of participants find that companies do not take CSR into account enough in their practices.

The graph on the right represents the percentage of consumers who think online clothing brands are fairly transparent when it comes to sustainability and product tracking. Once again, there is a very large proportion of no (76.0%).

Both of these charts are bad enough for companies, as a very large majority of customers are unhappy with the CSR actions of online clothing brands.

Logically, it can be observed a correlation between these two questions. Consumers who find that brands are not transparent enough also think that they do not take CSR into account enough in their practices. The correlation was once again obtained using the ANOVA method.

Tests of Homogeneity of Variances

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
AttentiveCompanies	Based on Mean	63,948	2	347	<,001
	Based on Median	20,564	2	347	<,001
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	20,564	2	227,041	<,001
	Based on trimmed mean	63,948	2	347	<,001

Robust Tests of Equality of Means

AttentiveCompanies		Statistic ^a	df1	df2	Sig.
Welch		9,599	2	57,345	<,001

Figure 22: ANOVA test between the companies' transparency and their attention to CSR. Source: Database (2023).

4.5. Conclusion

The conclusion of the empirical results of this reveals interesting opportunities and challenges facing online fashion companies in France through CSR.

On the one hand, these results allowed us to understand the consumption habits of the participants, taking into account or not CSR issues. On the other hand, the authors examined the actions of companies vis-à-vis CSR, and the opportunities that taking CSR into account can happen to them.

4.6. Hypothesis summary

Hypothesis	Results
H1 - French consumers place respect for workers' rights at the forefront of CSR priorities	Accepted
H2 - The more consumers are aware of CSR, the less they buy online	Accepted
H3 - Trust plays a key role in the CSR-friendly products adoption.	Rejected
H4 - French online shoppers are willing to pay more for a product that has been manufactured in compliance with CSR standards.	Accepted
H5 - The more CSR-aware consumers are, the more they are willing to pay more for CSR-friendly products.	Rejected
H6 - French online shoppers are not willing to pay more for a product that has been manufactured in compliance with CSR standards.	Accepted
H7 - French online shoppers are only willing to pay more for certain aspects of CSR.	Accepted
H8 – French online shoppers are insensitive to CSR engagements.	Accepted
H9 – Companies' lack of CSR transparency leads consumers to think that they are not paying attention to these CSRs.	Accepted

Figure 23: Hypothesis results

5. Analysis

In this chapter, the authors will analyse the empirical findings from the primary data collection about the different cases by connecting the findings with the literature review. The analysis will also discuss similarities as well as differences between the empirical findings and the literature.

5.1. The French Online Consuming Behaviour

The researchers wanted to understand why consumers buy clothes on the Internet. The results of this question show that almost 68% (Figure 9) of respondents buy online because there is more choice than in-store. In second and third place respectively (192 and 189 answers) were the speed of purchase and the fact of not having to move. This desire for simplicity of purchase then echoes the research of Biswas (2016), who indicated that the main factors for the consumption model to become greener were price, quality, but also the availability of items. Linking this research with the results of this survey, it is then possible to hypothesize that online shoppers would be apt to begin a transition towards consumption that is more respectful of CSR standards. As Khurana (2017) stated, the contemporary consuming habits are motivated by shopper's awareness and a need of cost and time saving.

151 consumers (Figure 9) also indicated that lower prices on online platforms motivated them to consume in this way rather than buy in-store. These results echo the work of Hirdue (2011). Indeed, this research had shown that youth was one of the major factors in adopting a mode of consumption more in line with CSR standards. They are the early adopters of new consumption models but are limited by their purchasing power.

5.2. French Online Consumers and CSR

According to this research, there is a real lack of consideration of CSR issues in France. Indeed, of those surveyed, the number of consumers who do not pay any attention to these issues is almost 6 times higher than the number of consumers who give them real importance (Figure 10). However, more than half of the consumers surveyed have already stopped buying from a particular website because of non-compliance with CSR issues. Added to this is the fact that more than half of those surveyed are willing to pay a surplus for products that are more CSR compliant. CSR does not seem to be sufficient to encourage the consumers to pay a little more than the regular price, following Parsa's (2015) research findings.

Researches by Uddin (2008), Battaglia (2014) and Księżak (2017) argue that all three aspects of CSR (economic, social and environmental) stand on an equal footing. Thus, none of these

three dimensions is emphasized over another, the aim being to address all of them together. As part of this research, the authors set out to find out which aspects were prioritized by French online shoppers. The results differ from the available literature. More than 71% of the responses obtained identified ethical issues such as good working conditions for employees as a priority. This finding may be related to the work of Ralston (2002), who noted that the French mentality was influenced by a strong labour culture and strong labour unions.

The authors of this thesis also investigated whether respondents would be prepared to pay more for products manufactured in line with current CSR standards. They found that 55.4% (Figure 13) of respondents would indeed be prepared to spend more to consume better. Research by Narayanan (2023) had shown that CSR had a direct and positive impact on consumption habits. Following Parsa's (2015) work, 16.6% (Figure 13) of the respondents are not willing to add a surplus to their expenses even if the product is manufactured in a CSR-friendly company. It appears that this fact is not enough to motivate all consumers to pay more in order to consumer more responsibly. Moreover, the consumers interviewed for this study were all between 18 and 30 years of age. In line with the research of Hirdue (2011), the survey results do indeed show a correlation between participants' age and their willingness to add a surplus to their purchases if they are produced in line with CSR standards. In fact, Hirdue (2011) had shown that the main factors in the adoption of a greener consumption model were the price of products and, above all, young consumers. The latter represent the population which is the most likely to adopt a different consumption pattern from the one currently in place.

One question in our study attempted to find out how sensitive respondents were to CSR actions and, more specifically, to companies' inactions on these issues. Thus Desmoutier (2020) had shown that only awareness of CSI (Corporate Social Irresponsibility) led to a real change in behaviour. Furthermore, this study showed that around 50% (Figure 15) of respondents had already stopped buying products from a particular brand because the brand did not live up to its CSR commitments. Following Naranayan's (2023) theory that CSR has a direct and positive impact on consumption patterns, it would seem that the opposite situation is also true. CSI therefore has a direct and negative impact on consumption habits.

5.3. Companies Communication on CSR Engagements

The authors of this thesis investigated what opportunities the respondents saw for companies when it came to adopting new measures in line with CSR standards. As a result, 270 of the 350 respondents considered the enhancement of the company's image as the main point for improvement (Figure 17). These results clash with available articles on the subject, which show that CSR is not limited to the goals chosen by the majority of respondents. Other priorities come

next, such as reducing environmental impact (255 answers) and acquiring new customers (247 answers) (Figure 17). However, according to the work of Uddin (2008), Battaglia (2014) and Księżak (2017), CSR is intended to improve the performance of the company in question, in all its aspects. The survey results support Gupta's (2011) statement that CSR helps to improve a company's environmental impact, and thus enables a healthier working environment.

Saulquin (2007), Księżak (2017) and Beji (2020), for their part, demonstrated in their research that CSR helped improve a company's internal communication and thus create a better atmosphere of trust between its various stakeholders. However, the survey results show that French online consumers do not consider a company's internal points of improvement as an important opportunity when adopting CSR commitments. Although it has been demonstrated several times that CSR does have a direct impact on CSR (Own study and Narayanan, 2023), the presented results and the articles used in this thesis also show a real lack of awareness among the French customer base. In other words, French online consumers do not know the full range of CSR's application.

Respondents could also choose consumer loyalty as an opportunity to adopt CSR standards. However, with only 154 answers (Figure 17), this does not seem to represent a significant point of improvement, at least from the point of view of the respondents to the questionnaire. And yet, the work of Edwards (2009), Wen (2014), Yuen et al (2016) and Desmoutier (2020) had shown that establishing good trust between consumers and company, especially in a digital world, was a key point in reinforcing the feeling of closeness between the brand in question and its consumer.

Nearly 90% (Figure 18) of the respondents to this study stated that they felt that French clothing companies were not taking CSR into account enough in their production and management practices. In addition, 76% (Figure 19) of respondents indicated that online companies are not transparent enough when it comes to sustainability issues and monitoring of production in line with current standards. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, there are six times more consumers who are not at all aware of CSR issues than those who are. (Bartok, 2018) argued that CSR can be used as more than just a competitive advantage, but as a real lever to create a more sustainable business. This can be achieved through the development of ethical codes and transparent policies. Based on the results and the articles, it appears that if online fashion companies communicate more effectively, the consumers would probably change their consumption patterns (Dang-Van et al 2020).

This supposed transparency can lead to several results, but the expected one is of course customer loyalty. However, it appears that the consumers surveyed are not convinced about the communication of their brands. According to the work of Yuen (2016) and Edwards (2009),

customer loyalty is key to strengthening the feeling of closeness with the brand. In the current situation, however, it appears that this is not the case in France.

In addition, participants in this study indicated that French online fashion companies did not communicate sufficiently about their CSR commitments. Following the research of Dennis, (2009) and aligning it with this study, it appears that consumers do not opt for a CSR-responsible consumption model due to a lack of trust in the brand in question. Desmoutier, (2020) indicates, however, that this same trust is hard to establish but proves to be a major asset in the affiliation and therefore the loyalty of customers, whether they are current or potential.

6. Conclusions

In this final chapter of the thesis, the conclusion will be reviewed and presented by the researchers, beginning with answering the central research question. Additionally, the theoretical and managerial implications will be discussed by the researchers. Lastly, the limitations of this research will be marked out, and recommendations for future researchers to take into account.

6.1. Answering the Research Questions

As previously mentioned, the fashion market is constantly evolving, even changing, and its CSR issues are constantly being revisited. Online sales are exploding every year and are growing at a rapid pace, leaving traditional shops to face competition that could almost be described as unfair. With the influence of fast-fashion and highly controversial, producers in this market are facing more and more consumers who are aware of contemporary problems, be they economic, but especially environmental and social. France, the capital of fashion, represents a significant market and contains a strong culture of "dressing well". It is therefore essential for companies working in this sector to better understand how they can best focus their social, environmental and economic responsibilities to encourage consumers to trust them. The aim of this thesis was therefore to understand how French online consumers view the CSR commitments of fashion companies. In other words, what is its importance and can it represent any competitive advantage. In this way, this thesis aims to answer the following questions: *What are the opportunities and challenges linked to CSR in the French online fashion industry?* As well as two sub-questions: *How do consumers in France perceive and respond to CSR initiatives undertaken by fashion companies?* and *Can CSR norms be used as a competitive advantage in France?* In order to answer the main research question, the sub-questions will be answered first to give a more comprehensive answer.

Through empirical research, it is possible to draw conclusions for both sub-questions as well as the main question.

6.1.1. *Question 1: How do consumers in France perceive and respond to CSR initiatives undertaken by online fashion companies?*

As regards French consumers' views on CSR initiatives taken by online fashion companies, the responses are fairly homogeneous. Although CSR is intended to be a tool dealing with three different dimensions, i.e. economic, environmental and social, on an equal footing, the majority of consumers surveyed are concerned with environmental and especially social issues, as shown by the validation of hypothesis 7. Certain points of CSR are more important than others in the

eyes of young consumers, in particular environmental and social issues, neglecting the economic side a little more (hence the fact that they are willing to pay a little more for certain products). France is a country with a strong labor culture and strong trade unions. Thus, decisions taken by companies must always put the well-being of workers and the respect of ethical standards first, as shown by the validation of hypothesis 1. On the other hand, consumers agree that fashion companies do not communicate enough about these same commitments. There seems to be a real lack of communication which then blocks the establishment of good trust between consumers and producers. This is shown by the validation of hypothesis 9, showing that a large majority of young consumers are not satisfied with the transparency of companies, and find that they are not attentive enough to current CSR. Consumers' responses manifest themselves in the form of cognitive dissonance. Consumers want to buy more responsibly and are even willing to spend more money, but are unable to take the step because they do not trust the company and therefore the quality of the goods or services being produced. This echoes the fact that hypothesis 5 is rejected, and that hypothesis 3 is accepted. On the contrary, young consumers are sensitive to CSR commitments, and this can slow down the purchase of products from certain brands.

6.1.2. *Question 2: Can CSR norms be used as a competitive advantage in France?*

CSR standards can indeed be used as a competitive advantage in France, but under several conditions. The first is that a real effort is made by the company to communicate its commitments. The more resources are deployed, the more likely it is that one of the company's commitments will echo the values of the "targets". The notion of value is very important in this case because, rather than simply taking responsibility for CSR, the company must be able to address the needs of its customers. Pro-CSR products do not yet have a strong enough image to increase sales. In addition, the validation of hypothesis 8 clearly shows the competitive advantage that CSRs can have for online fashion companies in France. The more CSR aware consumers are (which is increasingly the case over the years), the more they are willing to spend more on CSR friendly products.

With a population that, for the most part, will not even take the time to look for a more responsible alternative, it is on the consumer's affect and affiliation with a given value that the company will be able to make profit out of this situation. However, if the company is able to properly promote its product and match with its target customers' values and beliefs, CSR will be transformed into a competitive advantage and most consumers will then choose this company's option rather than another one's. Hypothesis 4 having been validated (and thus hypothesis 6 having been rejected), this shows that young French consumers are ready to pay more for products that are more respectful of the industry's CSR.

6.1.3. *Question 3: What are the opportunities and challenges linked to CSR in the French online fashion industry?*

The opportunities and challenges linked to CSR in the online clothing market are multiple. The use of CSR allows firstly to improve the overall performance of the company. It targets issues such as building a more sustainable business, a management in line with ethical standards and logically more efficient but also improving the carbon footprint of the company.

Now if the authors also consider the opinion of the consumer, this thesis will have shown that a company that is aligned with and delivers on all its CSR commitments will see its image drastically improve. In other words, a company that respects the three basic dimensions of CSR will be better regarded by consumers. It is an opportunity to get consumers talking about you, especially among your peers, and thus to win new customers. Of course, it should be borne in mind that in France, the effort to respect ethical standards and workers' rights must be strongly emphasised, since it is the priority of French customers. Moreover, if the company respects the points listed in the preliminary research questions above, notably to meet the customer's values as well as to communicate well on the means deployed, the adoption of CSR practices can be an asset and not only during the consumer's decision making. French buyers are willing to pay a little extra if the product seems to justify the price. So it is also a great help in terms of turnover.

In terms of challenges, it is at the level of communication that everything is done. Indeed, it is complicated to establish a communication model that is both effective and, at the same time, allows the company to enjoy a good perceived quality. The first step is to find the right marketing model to overcome these obstacles and, secondly, to ensure customer loyalty. Indeed, consumers are almost never completely convinced that they should change their consumption habits simply because the product is manufactured in a more responsible way. Customer loyalty is therefore a major tool for creating a good B-to-C relationship of trust between the company in question and its customer. Finally, hypothesis 2 shows that some consumers have been disappointed by the actions of companies, and that this has slowed down or even stopped their consumption of clothing online. A possible challenge for these companies is therefore to attract these customers again, to inform them of their awareness and to show that CSR is ultimately included in the actions of these companies.

6.2. Theoretical Implications

Although research into the consumption habits of online shoppers and the creation of competitive advantage has been previously covered in some articles, from a theoretical point of view there has been no research conducted into the link between online clothing purchases and

France and the role of CSR within the consumer decision-making process. Linking several then scattered and unconnected studies, this thesis contributed to the general knowledge on French consumption habits but also and more precisely on the awareness or not of contemporary issues by the mass of consumers. As identified in the results of this work, it is appropriate to continue this research and to consider it as a tool for companies to adjust their communication strategy towards their consumers. And especially among the most dynamic ones (the youth).

This thesis therefore contributes to a better understanding of how French shoppers perceive CSR in the online apparel market and provides guidance for any company in the field wishing to use CSR as more than just an accounting tool or management guideline (Saulquin, 2007 and Battaglia, 2014). It offers new insights into the role of CSR in the consumer purchasing process. By integrating new research, this thesis contributes to general knowledge of French consumption habits, with particular emphasis on consumer awareness of CSR and contemporary issues.

The literature review for this study has enabled us to draw up a conceptual framework (Figure 3) to better understand the role CSR plays in consumer decision-making. It appears that the notions of personal beliefs and values are decisive in the process. However, the French market is clearly subject to more important decision-making factors, such as the price barrier and whether the product in question is really worth choosing over a manufactured product without exemplary compliance with all these standards. Quality plays a more than important role, especially as perceived by the consumer during the evaluation of alternatives. Trust between the consumer and the company also plays a key role in the adoption of a new consumption model.

These first three factors are applicable to the population as a whole, and can be applied to consumption that does not echo the company's CSR. However, communicating the company's commitments can play a role in decision-making if consumers want to consume more responsibly. The results then show that, for French online shoppers, respect for human rights and environmentally-friendly activity represent the most important factor in decision-making if CSR is committed.

6.3. Managerial Implications

From a managerial point of view, this thesis contributes to an awareness of the opportunities that CSRs can bring to online fashion companies in France, and the challenges that these CSRs can create. Throughout the thesis was exposed the growing importance of CSR in the online fashion industry in France, and the benefits they can have by taking into account these different implications.

Awareness and understanding:

These companies would understand the different challenges that their implementation would require, but also the benefits that would come out of it. It can help companies better understand their environmental, social and ethical impact and encourage them to implement the various CSR practices described in this study. By understanding these implications, companies can make more informed decisions about their business practices.

Environmental, social & Ethical Impact:

Companies will gain insight into the specific challenges of implementing CSR practices in the online fashion industry. By integrating CSR into their business models, companies can reduce their negative impact on the environment, improve social conditions within their supply chains, and uphold ethical principles. This awareness can encourage them to adopt environmentally sustainable and socially responsible measures throughout their operations.

Business Benefits:

In addition to the environmental impact stated from the beginning, this would also bring a significant number of new customers (therefore an increase in turnover), better recognition and reputation from the general public, as well as future opportunities, offering opportunities for partnerships, collaboration, as well as a better market share.

Change of mentality and transparency:

These companies must therefore change their actions, but also their mentalities and their state of mind. In addition to implementing these different CSRs in their practices, companies in the French fashion industry must be more transparent and describe in more detail their actions and the monitoring of their products. This transparency builds trust with consumers and stakeholders and demonstrates a commitment to responsible practices.

In summary, by having awareness, understanding the challenges and benefits, and fostering a mindset shift towards sustainability and responsibility, online fashion businesses have the opportunity to position themselves as leaders in the industry. Adopting CSR practices can thus lead to increased customer loyalty, market share and reputation, while contributing to a more sustainable and socially responsible fashion industry.

6.4. Social, Ethical and Sustainable Implications

The development of this thesis made it possible to present the social, ethical and sustainable implications from a theoretical and managerial point of view. The study provided insights into the CSRs of the online fashion industry and the opportunities and challenges they bring, and therefore takes into account the social, ethical and sustainable implications throughout. The

thesis therefore highlights the emerging importance of CSR in this industry, known to be one of the largest (and most polluting) in the world. By taking into account these implications and issues of CSR, sustainability, companies (as well as customers) can reduce environmental impact and improve working conditions and employee ethics. This thesis therefore presents how sustainable and socially and environmentally friendly practices can be developed in the online fashion industry in France.

6.5. Limitations

While writing this thesis, some limitations were identified to affect the quality and possibility of answering the research questions.

A first limitation that can be drawn from this study is the fact that the point of view of companies was not taken into account during the empirical findings and its analysis. The authors focused on the point of view of consumers, young consumers aged 18-30, but did not collect the point of view of companies, and what they think of CSR today. This could have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the study, and to understand (or try to understand) why some companies struggle to develop concrete CSR in their practices. It could also have provided the needs of these companies, the weak points that prevent an optimal development of these CSRs and the points on which they mainly focus.

Another identified limitation of this research is the target group of this study. Indeed, even if the research questions did not say so clearly, the authors decided to focus on a certain population, consumers aged 18 to 30. This may have affected the quality of the study, because the research questions targeted the entire population, not just “young consumers”. A broadening of the target group could have allowed more thorough results and given other conclusions.

To conclude, certain limitations could therefore be identified during this study, which may have affected its overall quality and its ability to answer the initial research questions.

6.6. Suggestions for Future Research

In view of the results of the analysis and the literature found on the subject, it seems that further research is needed on why French consumers do not act in a coordinated manner with their thoughts. Indeed, the latter are relatively aware of CSR issues but do not seem to want to change their consumption habits. A mixed-method of both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The goal would be to understand the impact of cognitive dissonance on consumers' choices regarding pro-CSR products and exploring which underlying factors drive their decision-making processes. Measuring attitudes and perceptions will be key. To aim is to get

deeper insights into the consumer's thoughts. Open-ended questions would lead to a wide understanding of the consumers' needs. This research proposition will be even more relevant in upcoming years. Indeed, the environmental issues are becoming more and more serious and it would definitely be interesting to observe how the global consumer mass reacts to it. The research would be helpful for companies to better grasp their consumers' needs and therefore, adjust their communication strategies, but also for NGOs or other organizations that try to create this "green shift".

This research objective may be important for future research because it addresses the question of why there is a difference between consumer awareness of CSR and their actual habits. The research will therefore contribute to a better understanding of consumers' decision-making processes and their commitment to CSR-friendly products. This information can help the development of marketing campaigns and innovations.

The objective of this first research suggestion would therefore be to study the role of perceptions and attitudes in shaping consumer preferences for pro-CSR products.

Another suggestion for research would be the differences and/or commonalities between the consumption habits of the French online and in-store. Through this study, factors such as human contact and social pressure could be addressed. Would in-store consumers be more likely to consume products that are more aligned with CSR standards for fear of others' gaze? The clothing market remains highly relevant to this study. Indeed, undergoing constant change, it is undoubtedly one of the most dynamic sectors, especially in France, the fashion capital of the world. It would then be appropriate to look at fast fashion and whether the view of others influences the decision-making of a consumer who is more or less aware of contemporary issues.

By examining the influence of certain factors such as human contact or the gaze of others, future research on this subject would seek to understand to what extent these elements impact consumer choices and their alignment with CSR standards. Research can help companies adapt their marketing strategies and in-store experiences to leverage the influence of social interactions on consumer choices.

To sum up, these research suggestions aim to develop understanding of the consumption habits of consumers, taking into account their attitudes, their thoughts, their actions vis-à-vis CSR and modern issues. Carrying out additional research, changing the methods (doing mixed methods), changing the point of view (also looking at the point of view of companies), or changing the key factors to identify) can help to better understand the subject and better inform companies about the key importance of CSR in their industries.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A: Operationalization

Concepts	Questions	Reasoning
Buying clothes on the Internet	1-2	The authors wanted to know how much the target consumed on the Internet, to be reassured of the choice of target audience
Customer sensitivity to CSR	3-4-5-6-7	The authors wanted to know how the respondents behaved vis-à-vis CSR, and its importance for them.
Opportunities and impacts of CSR for companies	8-9-10	The authors wanted to know what respondents think of corporate CSR actions, and what they can change/improve
Questions about the person	11-12-13	The authors wished to know who were the consumers who answered their questionnaire, while maintaining their anonymity.

Appendix B: Questionnaire – French version

Introduction:

Nous sommes 2 étudiants en 3e année d'école de commerce et nous réalisons une étude pour notre projet de diplôme.

Cette étude porte sur **les opportunités et impacts des RSE dans l'industrie de la mode en ligne**.

Les informations que vous allez fournir nous aideront à mieux comprendre vos opinions, vos préférences et vos comportements sur le sujet. Vos réponses seront traitées de manière **confidentielle et anonyme**. Nous vous prions de répondre honnêtement à chaque question. Il n'y a pas de bonne ou de mauvaise réponse.

Ce questionnaire ne devrait pas vous prendre plus de **5 minutes**.

Nous vous remercions pour votre participation.

Malo DELCROIX & Louis MEYER

** : question obligatoire*

Question d'introduction :

Je certifie avoir entre 18 et 30 ans, et résider en France. *

- Oui
- Non (terminer le questionnaire dans ce cas)

Questions d'étude :

*Question 1 : A quelle fréquence environ achetez-vous des vêtements sur Internet ? ** choix unique

- Plusieurs fois / mois
- 1 fois / mois
- 1 fois / 3 mois
- 1 fois / 6 mois
- 1 fois / 1 an
- Jamais

*Question 2 : Pourquoi achetez-vous des vêtements sur Internet ? ** choix multiple

- Rapidité
- Pour ne pas se déplacer
- Prix plus faibles
- Plus de choix de vêtements
- Pour éviter les autres clients et l'attente
- Je n'achète pas sur Internet
- Autre

*Question 3 : A quel point êtes-vous attentive à la RSE de la marque lorsque vous achetez sur Internet ? (Fabrication et distribution respectueuses des employés et de l'environnement) **

La RSE (Responsabilité Sociétale des Entreprises) est un concept qui désigne l'ensemble des pratiques mises en place par les entreprises pour prendre en compte les enjeux sociaux, environnementaux et économiques dans leurs activités.

Absolument pas attentif 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Totalemment attentif

Question 4 : Selon vous, les marques de vêtements en ligne prennent-elles suffisamment en compte les questions environnementales dans leurs pratiques de production et de distribution ?*

- Oui
- Non

Question 5 : Seriez-vous prêt(e) à payer un peu plus cher pour des produits de mode en ligne issus de marques respectueuses de l'environnement et du droit des travailleurs ? *

- Oui
- Non
- Ne sais pas

Question 6 : Avez-vous déjà arrêté d'acheter des vêtements d'une marque suite à des problèmes de RSE ? (Ex : Zara/Nike et les Ouïghours, Shein et ses conditions de travail + pollution de fast fashion...) *

- Oui
- Non

Question 7 : Pour quelles raisons ?

Question 8 : Selon vous, quelles sont les opportunités pour les marques de vêtements en ligne qui adoptent des pratiques de RSE ? (max 3 réponses) *

- La fidélisation des clients
- L'acquisition de nouveaux clients qui privilégient les marques respectueuses de l'environnement et du droit des travailleurs
- L'amélioration de la réputation de l'entreprise
- L'amélioration des relations avec les parties prenantes (clients, employés, fournisseurs)
- Réduire l'impact environnemental lié à la production et distribution
- Encourager l'innovation et la recherche de nouvelles solutions durables pour l'industrie
- Autre

Question 9 : Quelles pratiques de RSE sont les plus importantes pour vous lors de l'achat de vêtements en ligne ? * choix multiple

- Utilisation de matériaux durables et écologiques
- Ethiques et conditions de travail justes pour les employés
- Respect des droits de l'homme et des normes éthiques
- Réduction des émissions de gaz à effets de serre et de l'empreinte environnementale

- Aucune de ces réponses
- Autre

Question 10 : Trouvez-vous que les marques de vêtements en ligne soient assez transparentes en matière de durabilité et de suivi de leurs produits (de la fabrication à la distribution) *

- Oui
- Non
- Ne sais pas

Questions sur la personne :

Question 1 : Quel âge avez-vous ?

Question 2 : D'où venez-vous ? (Ville ou département)

Question 3 : Quelle est votre profession ?

Question 4 : Merci à vous, si vous avez des commentaires, n'hésitez pas texte libre

Appendix C: Questionnaire – English version

Introduction:

We are 2 students in the 3rd year of business school and we are carrying out a study for our diploma project.

This study focuses on **the opportunities and impacts of CSR in the online fashion industry**. The information you will provide will help us better understand your opinions, preferences and behaviors on the subject. Your responses will be treated **confidentially and anonymously**. Please answer each question honestly. There is no right or wrong answer.

This questionnaire should not take you more than **5 minutes**.

We thank you for your participation.

Malo DELCROIX & Louis MEYER

*: mandatory question

Introductory question:

I certify that I am between 18 and 30 years old, and reside in France. *

- Yes
- No (end the questionnaire in this case)

Study Questions:

Question 1: About how often do you buy clothes on the Internet? * One choice

- Several times / 1 month
- 1 time / month
- 1 time / 3 months
- 1 time / 6 months
- 1 time / 1 year
- Never

Question 2: Why do you buy clothes on the Internet? * Multiple choice

- Speed
- To not move
- Lower prices
- More clothing choices
- To avoid other customers and waiting
- I do not buy on the Internet
- Other

Question 3: How attentive are you to the CSR of the brand when you buy on the Internet? (Manufacturing and distribution respectful of employees and the environment) *

CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) is a concept that refers to all the practices implemented by companies to take into account social, environmental and economic issues in their activities.

Absolutely not attentive 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Completely attentive

Question 4: In your opinion, do online clothing brands take environmental issues sufficiently into account in their production and distribution practices? *

- Yes
- No

Question 5: Would you be willing to pay a little more for online fashion products from brands that respect the environment and workers' rights? *

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

Question 6: Have you ever stopped buying clothes from a brand due to CSR issues? (Ex: Zara/Nike and the Uyghurs, Shein and his working conditions + fast fashion pollution...) *

- Yes
- No

Question 7: For what reasons? Free to text

Question 8: In your view, what are the opportunities for online clothing brands that adopt CSR practices? (Max 3 answers) *

- Customer loyalty
- The acquisition of new customers who favor brands that respect the environment and workers' rights
- Improving the reputation of the company
- Improving relations with stakeholders (customers, employees, suppliers)
- Reduce the environmental impact linked to production and distribution
- Encourage innovation and the search for new sustainable solutions for the industry
- Other

Question 9: Which CSR practices are most important to you when buying clothes online? *
Multiple choice

- Use of sustainable and ecological materials
- Ethics and fair working conditions for employees
- Respect for human rights and ethical standards
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and environmental footprint
- None of the above
- Other

Question 10: Do you find that online clothing brands are fairly transparent about the sustainability and tracking of their products (from manufacturing to distribution) *

- Yes

- No
- Do not know

Questions about the person:

Question 1: How old are you?

Question 2: Where are you from? (City or department)

Question 3: What is your profession?

Question 4: Thank you, if you have any comments, please feel free to text