

KJCS Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies

Special Issue “Conspicuous Consumption and Consumer Culture”

Vol. 1

Edited by

Dr. Nils C. Hoffmann (nils.hoffmann@bwl.uni-kiel.de)

Tinka Krüger (krueger@bwl.uni-kiel.de)



This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en>).

Please note that individual, appropriately marked parts of the work may be excluded from the license mentioned or may be subject to other copyright conditions.

If such third-party material is not under the Creative Commons license, any copying, editing or public reproduction is only permitted with the prior consent of the respective copyright owner or on the basis of relevant legal authorization regulations.

The electronic open access version of this work is permanently available on MACAU (<https://macau.uni-kiel.de>), Open Access Repository of Kiel University: <https://doi.org/10.38071/2022-00751-9>

Self-Publishing of Institute of Business Administration

Westring 425

24118 Kiel

Germany

marketing@bwl.uni-kiel.de

ISSN: 2752-2083

Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)
Special Issue “Conspicuous Consumption and Consumer Culture”
Vol. 1

Editors in Chief

Dr. Nils C. Hoffmann (nils.hoffmann@bwl.uni-kiel.de)

Tinka Krüger (krueger@bwl.uni-kiel.de)

Editorial	3
The Difference of Conspicuous Consumption between Gym and Home Workouts – A Netnography based on Instagram Posts Katja Döbel, Paula Gerlach, Line Ingwersen, and Christoph Reinhardt	5
Exploring the Trend: Motives behind Online Second-Hand Fashion Consumption Hevidar Demir, Jonathan Ebken, Selina Lessmann, and Lukas Wissmann	14
Conspicuous Anti-Consumption? The Motives of Anti-Consumption and their Connection to Conspicuous Consumption Lisa Effler, Marie Elwers, Luisa Leman, and Hannes Steinlein	23
Sustainable Fashion on Social Media: Ethical or Conspicuous Consumption? Chanez Hauth, Carolina Palm, Carolin Eisner, and Hassib Hamid	32
Conspicuous Consumption in the emergent VanLife Community Katharina Wichtmann, Nicholas Enders, Adrienne Wachner, and Marvin Akuetey-Doe	39
Sustainable Consumption as a Status Symbol? Drivers and Barriers of Sustainable Consumption and the Use of Car Sharing Anna Berning, Christian Kruzynski, Moritz Löttsch, and Julian Hense	47

Editorial

Special Issue “Conspicuous Consumption and Consumer Culture”

Dear readers,

in this very first issue of the newly established *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, we offer our students of our research seminar the opportunity to publish their own research work. We are proud to present six research reports that utilize qualitative research techniques and address contemporary issues of our modern consumerist society.

The thematic focus of this research seminar was rather broad. In our first meeting, we embraced contemporary research on consumer culture and conspicuous consumption to create an overarching theme that could guide and motivate the research endeavors of our students. We outlined several possible research avenues that have not been addressed by consumer researchers so far but left enough space for own ideas and thoughts. Throughout the seminar, we created opportunities for the students to engage in discussions with us or among their class to truly foster platforms for creative ideas and to introduce the students to the process of conducting consumer research.

During the seminar, we held a journal club to gather a mutual understanding of research on contemporary issues on consumer culture and conspicuous consumption. Following this first approach to those highly relevant topics, the students congregated and developed research questions and research avenues that they wanted to pursue in their own research projects. With a little methodological help from us as supervisors, the students came up with several highly innovative and interesting research ideas that they thoroughly worked on throughout the semester. Subsequently, the students conducted their research with high energy, motivation, and dedication. They did netnographic (Kozinets 2015) work and in-depth interviews (Johnson 2002) to address a variety of consumption areas that 1) add to our understanding of what constitutes consumer culture and under what conditions individuals engage in conspicuous consumption and 2) illustrate how those topics interrelate.

In the first article, Döbel et al. (2022) analyze the differences between gym and home workouts and connect their findings to literature of conspicuous consumption. By analyzing posts from Instagram via a netnographic approach, they conclude that individuals which engage in fitness workouts from home and which use those workouts as content for their social media profile differ from those individuals that engage in gym workouts and post about it on Instagram in respect to their motivation, their motives, and the shared contents.

The second article, authored by Demir et al. (2022), examines the motives behind second-hand consumption and examines the role of technological changes on cultural phenomena in the realms of consumption. The authors conclude that consumption of second-hand fashion enables to represent one's own individuality and to stand out from the crowd. Thus, it becomes visible that elements of conspicuous consumption are relevant when buying online second-hand fashion.

Effler et al. (2022) focus on the relevant domain of anti-consumption research (Lee, Fernandez & Hyman 2009). In their research report, the authors examine whether the motives for anti-consumption are identical to the motives for conspicuous consumption. Their claim is that, to a certain extent, individuals that engage in anti-consumption and refrain from certain consumption activities, are not engaging in this kind of consumption for environmental or altruistic reasons but rather for egoistic reasons that coincide with conspicuous consumption – a phenomenon that the authors coin “conspicuous anti-consumption”.

Focusing on the “sustainable fashion tribe”, the fourth article examines young individuals that engage in ecological and ethical fashion consumption and analyzes the role of social media networks in their consumption and communication activities. Based on in-depth interviews, Hauth et al. (2022)

provide evidence that individuals that feel associated with the “sustainable fashion tribe” want to inform their audiences with information about ethical consumption but also strive for reputational gains and social status.

Wichtmann et al. (2022) take a deep dive into the cultural phenomenon of “Vanlifers” and report evidence of their qualitative study. They report that the hashtag #VanLife is a current phenomenon in social media and can be largely divided into two sub-groups: Nomadic-living Vanlifers (individuals that live in their van or car) and recreational Vanlifers that use their vehicle as a mode of transportation and for vacation trips. The paper focusses on the latter and explores the underlying motivations for choosing VanLife as a vacation mode and possible connections to conspicuous consumption.

Ultimately, Berning et al. (2022) analyze whether young individuals use sustainable consumption practices as status symbols. Their qualitative study examines the drivers and barriers of sustainable consumption behavior and the use of car sharing as well as personal status symbols among the tribe of sustainable students. A special focus is placed on the question of whether status-related motives represent incentives for sustainable consumption and the use of car sharing or whether these can serve as status symbols.

In the upcoming years, we hope to establish the Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS) as a permanent outlet for our students’ research endeavors. For additional information about the papers, please see the Online Appendix of this Issue: <https://doi.org/10.38071/2023-00006-9>

Finally, we would like to thank our students for their effort and their great work!

Yours,

Nils C. Hoffmann (ORCID: [0000-0002-2849-1054](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2849-1054))

Tinka Krüger (ORCID: [0000-0003-4853-4725](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4853-4725))

References

- Berning, A., Kruzynski, C., Löttsch, M., Hense, J. (2022). Sustainable Consumption as a Status Symbol? Drivers and Barriers of Sustainable Consumption and the Use of Car Sharing. *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, 1.
- Effler, L., Elwers, M., Leman, L., Steinlein, H. (2022). Conspicuous anti-consumption? The motives of anti-consumption and their connection to conspicuous consumption. *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, 1.
- Demir, H., Ebken, J., Lessmann, S., Wissmann, L. (2022). Exploring the trend: motives behind online second-hand fashion consumption. *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, 1.
- Döbel, K., Gerlach, P., Ingwersen, L., & Reinhardt, C. (2022). The Difference of Conspicuous Consumption between Gym and Home Workouts – A Netnography based on Instagram Posts. *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, 1.
- Hauth, C., Palm, C., Eisner, C., Hamid, H. (2022). Sustainable Fashion on Social Media: Ethical or Conspicuous Consumption? *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, 1.
- Johnson, J. M. (2002). In-depth interviewing. *Handbook of interview research: Context and method*, 1.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2015). *Netnography: redefined*. Sage.
- Lee, M. S., Fernandez, K. V., & Hyman, M. R. (2009). Anti-consumption: An overview and research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 62.
- Wichtmann, K., Enders, N., Wachner, A., Akuetey-Doe, M. (2022). Conspicuous Consumption in the emergent VanLife community. *Kiel Journal of Consumer Studies (KJCS)*, 1.

The Difference of Conspicuous Consumption between Gym and Home Workouts – A Netnography based on Instagram Posts

Katja Döbel ¹, Paula Gerlach ², Line Ingwersen ³, and Christoph Reinhardt ⁴

¹ Kiel University; stu100333@mail.uni-kiel.de

² Kiel University; stu222938@mail.uni-kiel.de

³ Kiel University; stu203207@mail.uni-kiel.de

⁴ Kiel University; stu229429@mail.uni-kiel.de

Abstract

This study examines current developments of conspicuous consumption in the fitness community on social media. During the Covid-19-pandemic digital communities had to change as in-person events were canceled. This paper investigates the differences in conspicuous consumption for fitness content creators, depending on their workout location (gym vs. home workout). Through a netnography based on Instagram, posts and videos were qualitatively analyzed. While conspicuous consumption was present in both workout styles, it differed in its manifestation. Posts about gym workouts focused more unilaterally on the status of the content creator by using measurable goals, lighting, posing, and hashtags about their body parts. In contrast, home workouts focused on the status achieved through community building by showing training instructions for the followers and engaging in the comments. Social media users seem to be able to engage in conspicuous consumption with the fitness community through following content creators.

Keywords: Conspicuous Consumption; Instagram; Netnography; Home Workout; Gym

1. Introduction

Thanks to social media, it is easier than ever to find like-minded people and build communities. Tribalization has become deeply rooted in our society (Cova & Cova, 2002). The recent Covid-19-pandemic and its subsequent lockdowns have perpetuated this trend with more screen time and fewer in-person contacts (Pandya & Lodha, 2021). Hence, groups with mutual interests gathered increasingly on social media, where they began sharing their lives and lifestyles (Glucksman, 2017). So, the process to build status and identity became more technology-based. Kozinets et. al (2017) state that technology can increase the desire to consume. So, an increase in social media use could impact status-related consumerism concepts like conspicuous consumption (Efendioğlu, 2019).

In the context of status among peers, the concept of conspicuous consumption was first described by Veblen (Veblen & Mills, 1992) as a form of consumption in which consumers receive more from a good than its 'serviceability', the use, but also an 'honorific' aspect, which would provide them with status (Phillips, 2014). Conspicuous consumption, therefore, is linked to social connections, as it focuses on the comparison with others, rather than the singular consumer (Duesenberry, 1949). Trigg (2001) stated that the original theory lacked the inclusion of the concept of lifestyle as one such honorific aspect. French sociologist Bordieu addressed this gap and argued that a person can have an impact on their status and even influence the social structure surrounding them. O'cass and McEwen (2004) differentiated conspicuous consumption from status consumption in that it is only used in the context of enhancing the consumer's image in communication with others. Even when incorporating this narrower definition, the connection to social media and the sharing of lifestyle remains applicable.

While social media consumption lacks the actual good to consume, Siepmann et. al (2021) found, that seeing an experience on Instagram was perceived as a means of status building and self-actualization comparable to the actual use of a good. So, having such an experience and linking it to one's identity would build status and could present a form of conspicuous consumption (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). Following others on social media might show connections to conspicuous consumption some of its antecedents are 'identity-incompleteness' and 'commitment to identity' (Braun & Wicklund, 1989). These lead to conspicuous consumption as people try to compensate for their felt identity-incompleteness. Following content creators on social media could provide a person with this compensation, especially when they cannot fulfill this need otherwise (see lockdowns). As found by Stollfuß (2020), social media, as a means of community building (and self-representing) can provide in-group feelings, as the consumption of posts provides a sense of belonging. Following a person on social media can even have para-social tendencies, where the social media user feels a strong connection to the content creator, leading them to believe that they belong to the same group, for example, degree of fitness, although they do not exercise as much as them or at all (Sokolova & Perez, 2021).

To explain the connection to conspicuous consumption, Gonzales and Hancock (2011) found, that social networking can increase the user's self-esteem, while simultaneously lowering their self-control, possibly leading to more impulse behavior (Wilcox & Stephen, 2013) and more conspicuous consumption. This process was stronger for longer use of social media (Thoumrungrroje, 2014). So, posting on social media could present to be a form of conspicuous consumption as well. The networking effect on self-esteem could work for both the content creator and the follower.

The identity-building of conspicuous consumption is something many online tribes could have in common but is especially vital for the fitness community. Status, in-groups, and the will to present only the best of oneself links their identity closely to their social media presence (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). The connection between users and content creators becomes a way to prove their fitness to others and themselves (Lamb & Hillman, 2015). So, a large part of the research on the connection between conspicuous consumption and social media has focused on fitness. But many studies focus on differences between genders (e.g., Mujic & Frijters, 2015; Siepmann, et al., 2021) or the progress of tribalization (Lamb & Hillman, 2015; Stollfuß, 2020). However, during the recent Covid-19-pandemic, another important factor emerged: the location. During lockdowns, gyms were closed. So, fitness content creators had to adapt, and consequently, home workouts became a trend (Sandig, 2021). Research on this major change in the fitness community, its consequences for their content creation, as well as their followers' behavior, and its implications for conspicuous consumption is scarce. Therefore, this paper wants to explore the current development of conspicuous consumption in the fitness world on social media, focusing on the recent changes in workout styles.

2. Materials and Methods

For the exploration of our research question, the method of netnography was the most suitable. Through a netnography, many different parameters can be observed, analyzed, and compared with each other. In addition, it offers the possibility to study a large database efficiently.

The procedure of this method followed Bowler Jr. (2010) to perform the six steps of a netnography: research planning, entrée, data collection, interpretation, ensuring ethical standards, and research representation. After determining the research question, data collection was performed on the social media platform Instagram. It met the criteria for an online community worthy of study by providing a platform for individuals with similar interests and allowing members to build relationships and learn from one another. All researchers had access to this social network.

Data about posts and the interaction with the community were included. The selection of the posts was done manually using terms such as 'Fitnessstudio' or 'Homeworkout' via the search function. To maintain objectivity and comparability only posts from German content creators were examined to avoid cultural influences. Additionally, the profiles had to have a minimum of 100 followers, so the content creators represent a sufficient part of the community. Also, the posts had to

fulfill the following criteria: A person has to be visible, the background connects to their sports style and the post has a direct connection to a workout.

The sample included a total of 55 posts from each of the sports styles. The posts consisted of images, videos, story content, and reels. For gym posts, 29 posts from male and 26 posts from female content creators were included. Home workout posts included 10 male and 45 female content creators, as fewer male content creators could be found sharing their home workouts. Data collection was conducted through direct transcription of the studied characteristics in a table (Appendix I, II) to create a comprehensive database.

For the interpretation of the data, the characteristics not directly contributing to the research question were eliminated, such as numbers of likes, age of the content creator, and views of reels (Appendix III). Then, the interpretation was performed first by individual researchers and finally collectively as a group. All categories in the qualitative analysis were created inductively.

To evaluate the image and video footage of the Instagram posts, image elements and other salient features, such as the pose of the person, were noted. The collected findings were then compiled and grouped by topics. For example, fairy lights, plants, and sofas formed the category 'Furnishing'. It was then possible to determine which topics appeared particularly frequent in the data collection. To compare the results, three different categories were formed. These were 'Picture elements', 'Atmosphere and light', and 'The representation of the people in the post'.

When comparing the text contents, three categories formed: 'Training instructions', 'Interaction', and 'Progress/goals'. A post could contain multiple categories. The category 'Training instructions' described texts with a list of exercises. The 'Interaction' category included texts in which questions or challenges were used to address the followers. The use of the word 'you' was not sufficient to warrant this category, as it was also found in quotes that not actively involved followers and therefore did not represent interaction. The third category, 'Progress/goals', described concrete numbers related to body shape, such as weight, body fat percentage, or training form, such as the number of repetitions and weights used. The category included descriptions of the current shape as well as a desired shape in the future.

To analyze the content of the comments, different types of comments were determined and categorized. Comments with spam content were not considered in the data collection, as their meaningfulness did not contain any value to answer the research question. Distinctions between categories were defined, so that, 'compliments' express a positive reference to the post itself, while 'support' expresses a supportive and motivating attitude, and 'agreement' had to reference the text of the respective post. After recording the data, categories with little relevance to the research question were excluded from interpretation.

The used hashtags were compiled and sorted by frequency with the online tool 'Pooq' (<http://www.pooq.org/wortzahl/>). For the subsequent ranking, only hashtags used more than once were incorporated. The exclusion of singular hashtags ensured explanatory power and comparability. To better determine the differences between the two workout styles, the remaining hashtags were then sorted which culminated in 15 categories (Appendix IV). Whenever a hashtag fit multiple categories, its literal meaning was used to sort it into the most specific category possible (e.g., #fitfam refers to fitness, but was sorted into the more specific category 'Fitfam'). During the analysis, the percentages of used hashtags, as well as their differences, were compared.

3. Results

The results on picture elements were quite similar for home workouts and gym posts. Fitness items were most frequent. In the home workouts, fitness equipment such as yoga mats, hula hoops, or even medicine balls and dumbbells were present. In the gym posts dumbbells, weight benches, and larger fitness equipment appeared most often. In the home workout posts, furnishing such as plants or fairy lights were particularly frequently in the picture. Gym posts used headphones very often as an element of the post.

In terms of light and atmosphere, it was noticeable that many gym posts were heavily and recognizably processed with filters. The contrasts were often intensified, and the light and atmosphere were altered to be darker and more dramatic.

For the representation of the person in the posts, the results were similar. Both styles used many mirror selfies and people showing themselves during workout sessions. In addition, the intentional and conspicuous posing of people was particularly frequent. However, there were differences in posing. In the gym, people posed so that their defined muscles were accentuated, while in the home workout, the people posed to present the whole shape of their body.

Table 1. Content of text captions in categories.

Categories	Gym		Home Workout	
	Number of Posts	Percentage	Number of Posts	Percentage
Quotes	13	23.64%	7	12.73%
Content				
Topic "(Own) Motivation and selflove"	18	32.73%	4	7.27%
Topic „Motivation of follower“	7	12.73%	7	12.73%
Progress/Goals	10	18.18%	0	0.00%
Training instructions	4	7.27%	19	34.55%
Fun	0	0.00%	8	14.55%
Challenges (Request for interaction)	3	5.45%	10	18.18%

In the image captions were noticeable differences. 7.27% of the gym posts contained training instructions contrasting with 34.55% for the home workout posts (Table 1). In addition to the high percentage difference, there were also differences in the scope of training instructions. The instructions in gym posts were more general and did not list exact numbers of repetitions, while the training instructions in the home workout posts included such details.

The interaction was part of 5.45% of the gym texts' content and 18.18% of the home workouts' content (Table 1). In the gym posts, questions sometimes were used as a decision-making aid for the person posting, such as @leonie_bmhe who asked, whether she should rather train her legs or her back (Appendix I). In the home workout posts, the content was more about the followers. For example, @justbecyy gave her followers a stretching challenge, asked when they last stretched, as well as challenging them to do their exercises regularly (Appendix II).

The third category, progress/goals, was found in 18.18% of gym posts and none of the home workout posts (Table 1).

Beyond the three main categories, there were two other noticeable differences in the content of the texts. In 14.55% of the home workout posts the word 'fun' was used, but not in any of the gym posts. Furthermore, quotations were frequently found in both groups but were not interpretable due to their varying content.

When comparing the contents of comments on gym posts and home workout posts, relatively similar results could be found. For both styles of sport, 'compliments' (gym - 81.82% of posts/ home workout - 67.27% of posts) were the most frequently used type (Table 2). For gym posts, the second-largest category was 'questions' (12.73% of posts), followed by 'approval' (10.91% of posts). For the home workout posts, in addition to the 'Compliments' category, the 'Interaction' category (29.09% of posts) was particularly notable, which did not occur for the gym posts. Other more significant categories for the home workout posts were 'support' (10.91% of posts), 'approval' (9.09% of posts), and 'gratitude' (9.09% of posts). Additionally, it was found that the 'Criticism' category was found in

the comments for 5.45% of the home workout posts, while gym posts' were not critically commented on (Table 2).

Table 2. Proportions of comments according to content

Categories	Gym		Home Workout	
	Number of Posts with content	Percentage	Number of Posts with content	Percentage
Compliments	45	81.82%	37	67.27%
Questions	7	12.73%	4	7.27%
Answers	2	3.64%	2	3.64%
Approval	6	10.91%	5	9.09%
Gratitude	1	1.82%	5	9.09%
Interaction	0	0.00%	16	29.09%
Opinion	2	3.64%	1	1.82%
Tips	2	3.64%	0	0.00%
Joy	1	1.82%	0	0.00%
Support	1	1.82%	6	10.91%
Greetings	1	1.82%	1	1.82%
Advertisement	0	0.00%	1	1.82%
Criticism	0	0.00%	3	5.45%
Joke	0	0.00%	2	3.64%
Requests	3	5.45%	2	3.64%
Other	0	0.00%	1	1.82%

The analysis of the hashtags found for home workouts 794 hashtags (554 different), leading to an average of 14.43 hashtags per post. Gym workouts used 1009 hashtags (565 different) leading on average to 18.35 hashtags per post.

The most used hashtags for home workouts were #fitnessmotivation (16x), #homeworkout (12x) and #fitness (11x) while gym content creators used #fitness (27x), #gym (23x) and #bodybuilding (22x) most often. 481 different hashtags in the context of home workouts and 436 for gym workouts were only used once and therefore retracted from further analysis.

The largest category by far for both gym and home workouts was 'Fitness' (Table 3) with 24.27% and 21.67% respectively. For the gym, it was followed by the categories 'Motivation' (10.6%), 'Fitfam' (9.06%), and 'Home workout/Gym' (8.38%). For home workouts, the second-largest category is 'Home workout/Gym' (14.86%), followed by 'Motivation' (13.00%) and 'Exercise/Equipment' (8.67%). The greatest difference between the two styles presented the category 'Home workout/Gym' with a difference of 6.48%. The next largest differences were the categories 'Strength' (5.43% diff.), 'Exercise/Equipment' (5.08% diff.), and 'Body parts' (4.77% diff.). The smallest differences occurred in the categories 'Other' (0.66% diff.), 'Gender' (0.89% diff.), and 'Location' (0.97% diff.).

A distinction between positive and negative mental health was found, with 2.91% of hashtags for gym workouts referencing 'Negative mental health' (e.g., #gymrat, #gymfreak, #gymjunkie), whereas home workouts contained none. For 'Health' and 'Positive mental health', it was reversed. Home workouts used 3.92 % more positive-mental-health-related and 3.94% more physical-health-related hashtags.

Table 3. Results of the hashtag analysis.

Categories	Gym		Home Workout		Differences between categories (ranking)
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	
Fitness	142	24.27%	70	21.67%	2.6% (8.)
FitFam	53	9.06%	25	7.74%	1.32% (11.)
Gender	31	5.30%	20	6.19%	-0.89% (14.)
Home workout/ Gym	49	8.38%	48	14.86%	-6.48% (1.)
Location	22	3.76%	9	2.79%	0.97% (13.)
Motivation	62	10.60%	42	13.00%	-2.4% (9.)
Strength	39	6.67%	4	1.24%	5.43% (2.)
Advertisement	24	4.10%	10	3.10%	1.00% (12.)
Quotes	30	5.13%	10	3.10%	2.03% (10.)
Exercise/ Equipment	21	3.59%	28	8.67%	-5.08% (3.)
Health	15	2.56%	21	6.50%	-3.94% (5.)
Positive mental health	6	1.03%	16	4.95%	-3.92% (6.)
Negative mental health	17	2.91%	0	0.00%	2.91% (7.)
Body parts	37	6.32%	5	1.55%	4.77% (4.)
Other	31	5.30%	15	4.64%	0.66% (15.)
Sum	585	100%	323	100%	

4. Discussion

Despite similarities, the general manifestation of conspicuous consumption differs between the two workout styles. The analysis provides enough differences in the workout types to indicate an impact on conspicuous consumption. Image elements for both styles were very similar, and the deviations present could be circumstantial, as, for example, plants are everyday household objects. Also, motivation seems to be an important factor in general, as all content creators use motivational quotes in their texts and comments to encourage their followers.

However, the differences were prevalent. For example, the success, goal setting, and achievements of the content creator had great relevance in the posts from the gym. Posing, dramatic lighting, and filters are used to emphasize the visually visible successes of the sport, such as defined muscles. The results of the text and hashtag evaluation confirmed this notion. In texts, goals were numerically depicted and hashtags including body parts, measurable goals, or specifically strength-related terms were used, again focusing on a status above the competition. Lamb and Hillmann (2015) describe that such personal branding is created through the 'transformation of the body into a seductive expression of personal empowerment, attractiveness, and strength' (p.94). So, it is likely that gym content creators use this focus on power, strength, and progress as a means of identity creation to define themselves by setting them apart from others.

In contrast, home workout posts focused more on the individualization and the quality of the sport. Especially the results of the evaluation of the texts show this. The captions contain more exercise instructions and interaction with the community, so the sport itself and its' quality are in focus. This applies also to comments. More community interaction and criticism can be found among the posts about home workouts. So, the respective community pays more attention to the exercises and the quality of the sport. The hashtags support this, as it is focused on exercises and less on their outcome. Moreover, among the home workout posts, hashtags were used less repeatedly, suggesting that posts are more individualized and cater to their specific community.

Differences can also be seen in the individual mindset, motivational factors, and fun. Fun is not mentioned in any post texts about the gym but is a relevant part of the posts about home workouts. Home workouts use hashtags that promote the idea of fun while working out (*#sportmachtspaß*). Also, many of the hashtags of home workout posts include motivational quotes and words associated with mental health, giving support and possibly motivation to their followers to emulate the fitness

behavior. Gym posts, in contrast, used fewer health-related hashtags and even included ones associated with negative mental health. Although negative motivation has been proven to be an ineffective means of motivation, this could, again, represent a mindset based on surpassing others (Sekendiz, 2014). The reason for this could lie in the self-esteem- and identity-building that extreme behavior can evoke. The demonstration of one's strength and success was similarly observed in Tough Mudder events by Lamb and Hillmann in 2015. They found that participants in such events believed to prove their fitness and commitment to self-improvement by partaking. Additionally, in accordance with our interpretations of the negative hashtags, the authors emphasize that the danger to bodies and the physical risk are a pivotal part of these hypercompetitive events and the identity of their participants (Lamb & Hillmann, 2015). A reason to expose one's own body to such a risk is that 'the endangered body in extreme sports becomes a source of identification' (Stahl, 2010, pp. 61-63). As part of this identity, the feeling of superiority becomes identity-establishing. Gym content creators could try to evoke this feeling of risk and danger, so they (or others) perceive them as of high status by using dramatic lighting and hashtags like #gymfreak.

For home workouts, there was an overall focus on physical as well as mental health and well-being, which could present their identification and building of social status through health, similarly discussed by Mujcic and Fritjers (2015). According to them, conspicuous health denotes individuals that seek identity from their health status and compare it to others. The authors found that women are more sensitive to health comparisons. This matches the observation of more women doing home workouts and posting content with stronger connections to health. The focus on the whole body when posing and the use of health-related hashtags (#healthylifestyle) supports this. Also, it could give an insight into the use of plants as picture elements. They could be a way to associate the content creator with vitality and therefore health. Additionally, the use of fewer filters could appeal to a desired naturalness and add another source of identity (Smith et al., 2022). Interestingly, this gives more reason to believe that the locations are the cause for differences in conspicuous consumption rather than gender. Home workout posts had a larger female percentage but as half of gym content creators were female, it seems unreasonable to determine gender as the only cause for partaking in conspicuous health.

In Summary, conspicuous consumption shows different manifestations in the two styles of Instagram posts. For gym workouts, conspicuous consumption manifests with a focus on the content creator. They seem to gain unilateral superiority through self-presentation of their success and strength. The focus is here more on achieving definable goals. Fewer references are made to health and fun which provides insight into the mentality, that hard work and overcoming obstacles define their identity. By staging themselves and their successes they give incentive for their follower to admire their status and fitness. For the followers, this style would be only able to provide status through association and para-social identification. In contrast, posts about home workouts focus on the community. Here, conspicuous consumption occurs through networking, by feeling connected and being part of a community. The content creators build their community by involving them and letting them remotely partake in the fitness behavior. The positive motivation and interaction could improve the content creators' as well as the followers' self-esteem as the posts enable (at least seemingly) a bilateral, more equal, interaction (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). Still, followers might only gain a feeling of status by associating themselves with the content creator, like in the gym posts. The involvement of conspicuous health possibly indicates that home workout content creators also partake in a status competition, although not as intense as gym content creators.

Limitations. The prime limitation of this paper is the subjectivity of the process. The selection of the Instagram posts was done in the context of the seminar it was conducted for. Therefore, while it was an inductive approach, the prescribed topics of conspicuous consumption and tribalism could have led to a selection and sample bias. Also, the uneven distribution of gender in home workouts could lead to biases. Furthermore, the interpretation, categorization, and comparisons were done by different members of the team. Despite guidelines, an interpretation bias cannot be ruled out. Moreover, the analysis was done with Instagram and consequently is subjected to its algorithm.

While it was ensured, that every researched aspect had reached saturation, the sample size

of 110 posts is not large enough to ensure a reflection of reality. Furthermore, the raised connections and interpretations are highly subjective and prone to personal biases. Lastly, it remains questionable, if the ethical standards were kept, without contacting the content creators used for this analysis.

Theoretical and Practical Implications. To overcome some of the limitations of this study and verify its result quantitative research is needed. Also, in-depth interviews could help gain a deeper insight into the antecedents of conspicuous consumption and understanding of the reasoning of content creators. Also, other social media platforms need to be investigated to distinguish whether the properties are unique to Instagram.

In practice, this study shows, the importance of distinguishing different forms of status building and causes of conspicuous consumption. This could be especially interesting for fitness companies that advertise their products and services on social media and can utilize the differences in status. While home workout content creators might be better suited for products that motivate and focus on the fun aspect, gym content creators might be more fit to promote products that are aimed at directly enhancing goals.

Conclusion. To conclude, it can be determined that both styles show a demonstration of status but differ in the manifestation of conspicuous consumption. Content creators posting gym images seem to intend to create an identity through their unilateral superiority and idolization by their followers. Meanwhile, the content creators posting home workouts identify more through their health and the sense of community. While followers of both styles partake in a status building through association, the ones following home workouts are more included and have more possibilities to be an active part of the fitness community rather than just associating with it.

References

- Braun, O. L., & Wicklund, R. A. (1989). Psychological antecedents of conspicuous consumption. *Journal of Economic psychology*, 10(2), 161-187.
- Bronner, F., & de Hoog, R. (2018). Conspicuous consumption and the rising importance of Experiential purchases. *International Journal of Market Research*, 60(1), 88-103.
- Bowler, G. M. (2010). Netnography: A Method Specifically Designed to Study Cultures and Communities Online. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(5), 1270-1275.
- Cova, B. & Cova, V. (2002). Tribal marketing: The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*. 36. 5959-620.
- Duesenberry, James S. (1949), *Income, Saving and the Theory of Consumer Behavior*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Efendioğlu, İ. H. (2019). The impact of conspicuous consumption in social media on purchasing intentions. *İşletme Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 11(3), 2176-2190.
- Glucksman, M. (2017). The rise of social media influencer marketing on lifestyle branding: A case study of Lucie Fink. *Elon Journal of undergraduate research in communications*, 8(2), 77-87.
- Gonzalez, A. L. & Hancock, J. T. (2011). Mirror, mirror on my Facebook wall: Effects of Facebook exposure on self-esteem. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 14(1), 79-83.
- Kozinets, R., Patterson A. & Ashman, R. (2017). Networks of Desire: How Technology Increases our Passion to Consume. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43. 659-682.
- Lamb, M. D., & Hillman, C. (2015). Whiners go home: Tough Mudder, conspicuous consumption, And the rhetorical proof of "fitness". *Communication & sport*, 3(1), 81-99.
- Mujcic, R., & Frijters, P. (2015). Conspicuous consumption, conspicuous health, and optimal taxation. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 111, 59-70.
- O'cass, A., & McEwen, H. (2004). Exploring consumer status and conspicuous consumption. *Journal of consumer behaviour: an international research review*, 4(1), 25-39.
- Pandya, A., & Lodha, P. (2021). Social connectedness, excessive screen time during COVID-19 and mental health: a review of current evidence. *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 45.
- Phillips, R. J. (2014). Conspicuous consumption. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/conspicuous-consumption>.

- Sandig, M. (2021). Home-Workout: So hat sich Sport in Corona-Zeiten verändert. <https://www.kreiszeitung.de/lokales/niedersachsen/home-fitness-statt-verein-so-hat-sich-sport-mit-corona-veraendert-90479438.html> (last accessed: 04.03.2022).
- Sekendiz, B. (2014). Personal fitness trainers giving tough love: Risks and consequences. *ACSM's Health & Fitness Journal*, 18(3), 8-11.
- Siepmann, C., Holthoff, L. C., & Kowalczyk, P. (2021). Conspicuous consumption of luxury experiences: an experimental investigation of status perceptions on social media. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*.
- Smith, R. K., Yazdani, E., Wang, P., Soleymani, S., & Ton, L. A. N. (2022). The cost of looking natural: Why the no-makeup movement may fail to discourage cosmetic use. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 50(2), 324-337.
- Sokolova, K., & Perez, C. (2021). You follow fitness influencers on YouTube. But do you actually exercise? How parasocial relationships, and watching fitness influencers, relate to intentions to exercise. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 58, 102276.
- Stahl, R. (2010). *Militainment, Inc.: War, media, and popular culture*. NY: Routledge, 61-63.
- Stollfuß, S. (2020). Communitainment on Instagram: Fitness content and community-driven communication as social media entertainment. *SAGE Open*, 10(2), 2158244020919535.
- Thoumrungroje, A. (2014). The influence of social media intensity and EWOM on conspicuous consumption. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 148, 7-15.
- Trigg, Andrew B. (2001). Veblen, Bourdieu, and Conspicuous Consumption. *Journal of Economic Issues*, 35(1), 99-115.
- Veblen, T., & Mills, C.W. (1992). *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315135373>.
- Wilcox, K., Kramer, T. & Sen, S. (2011). Indulgence or self-control: A dual process model of the effect of incidental pride on indulgent choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*. 38(1), 151-163.

Exploring the Trend: Motives behind Online Second-Hand Fashion Consumption

Hevidar Demir¹, Jonathan Ebken², Selina Lessmann³, and Lukas Wissmann⁴

¹ Kiel University; stu118859@mail.uni-kiel.de

² Kiel University; stu222939@mail.uni-kiel.de

³ Kiel University; stu229547@mail.uni-kiel.de

⁴ Kiel University; stu208699@mail.uni-kiel.de

Abstract

This paper examines the motives behind online second-hand consumption and gets to the bottom of the recent second-hand trend. Using a qualitative research approach based on in-depth interviews, four overarching categories are identified into which the consumption motives can be classified: Individualism, saving expenses, sustainability and solidarity. While individualism and saving expenses were most frequently mentioned in the interviews, sustainability and solidarity motives are rather secondary for online second-hand consumption. In addition to the four above-mentioned, a further category was identified that specifically highlights arguments in favor of purchasing second-hand fashion online: Convenience. Consumers aim for the same shopping experience online that they are used to from stationary thrift shops. However, not only is this feeling transported into the digital world, but the value proposition is extended through search functions and learning algorithms. This makes clear how technology is influencing purchasing behavior and thus shaping a new consumer culture. Due to the power of second-hand fashion to represent one's own individuality and thus stand out from the crowd, it becomes visible that when buying online second-hand fashion, elements of conspicuous consumption also play a role.

Keywords: Online Second-Hand Fashion; Consumption Motives; Consumer Culture; Conspicuous Consumption

1. Introduction

"We pay more or less for the clothes depending on each brand's marketing spin, but the workers are paid a pittance and treated like dirt" (The Guardian, 2020).

The booming fashion industry with its structures, production conditions and global waste of resources is increasingly questioned critically. In this context, the so-called fast fashion industry is particularly pilloried, as these very structures become visible in their full perversion. In recent years, more and more people in the western world experienced a paradigm shift that sees second-hand fashion as an alternative to the vicious circle of producing, buying and throwing away in the fashion industry. In response to this, the market volume of second-hand clothing has heavily increased in recent years and exponential growth is still forecasted (Statista, 2022). In addition to stationary second-hand stores, the internet plays a particularly important role here. More and more big players in the fashion industry enter the second-hand business trying to secure their market position there. But what actually drives the buyers of second-hand fashion? While previous studies tended to examine second-hand purchases in stationary stores (Ferraro et al., 2016; Laitala & Klepp, 2018; Zaman et al., 2019), this paper focuses on online retail.

What are the motives behind online second-hand fashion consumption? And do these motives include elements of conspicuous consumption? Is the second-hand trend perhaps even creating a new consumer culture? These are the questions that this paper explores. After a short explanation of the theoretical background and the history of second-hand fashion, the qualitative research design of the study is presented. The identified motives are then explained and grouped before the following chapter summarizes these findings into an overall picture and provides an outlook for the future. Finally, the limitations of the research are pointed out and theoretical and practical implications are derived.

2. Theoretical Background

Second-hand consumption is the purchase of goods that were previously owned by others (Weinstein, 2014). The image of second-hand consumption has evolved over the last centuries: in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, second-hand consumption emerged and expanded, although it declined in the following century because of its stigmatization as “being worn-out, soiled, and malodorous.” (Zaman et al., 2019, p. 2)

Recently the perception of second-hand clothing has been de-stigmatized and gained renewed popularity since the early 2000s and the social stigmata have faded, so that second-hand consumption became an economic power of global scope which is not negligible (Ferraro et al., 2016).

The reasons for this shift are versatile: Not only is there a rising consumer interest in sustainability, but also more critical questioning in regard to structural exploitation of countries of the global south (Zaman et al., 2019). Otherwise, price sensitivity accounts for a decisive reason to buy clothing second-hand, although second-hand consumption was proscribed when primarily people with low budgets were purchasing used apparel (Ferraro et al., 2016). Another well-discussed reason for the emergence of second-hand fashion is the current era of social media and the self-portrayal that comes with it. The need for originality objects the fast fashion narrative, where most stores present disposable pieces and uniqueness is hardly attainable (Ferraro et al., 2016). “Something that started as a necessity of acquiring quality clothing by the poor has transformed into ‘smart’ shopping [...]” (Xu et al., 2014, p. 671) What started as a coping mechanism for less fortunate people became a trend that all economic classes revert to, especially regarding the commercialization of second-hand apparel and the spillover of second-hand supply to online platforms (Ferraro et al., 2016; Zaman et al., 2019).

As this paper aims to contribute by qualitatively capturing the motives behind the purchase of online second-hand apparel, the main consumer group needs to be further analyzed and evaluated.

Cova and Cova (2001) describe that postmodern societies are characterized by high levels of individualism and even-handedly by a desire to re-establish in communities. This paradox of modernity, which states that individuals of modernity seek to differentiate themselves in order to stand out and show off their uniqueness, while equally wanting to be part of a social group that they feel a sense of belonging to, points out what the essence of consumer culture nowadays consists of (Weinstein, 2014). Cova and Cova (2001) accordingly concluded that consumption is a strategy to find like-minded people and to then connect with them, by which they indicate that the linking element of consumption is more important than the consumption itself. The superstructure behind online second-hand shopping expresses the connecting elements which refer to the motives and reasons for people to purchase already used apparel on-line. The word tribe is used to cover a social group, in which the members are emotionally invested in the passion that links every member to the group. Shared values, rituals and signs, that need to be filled with meaning, intensify the bond within the tribe (Cova & Cova, 2001). A ritual could be, for instance, the quest for unique pieces or pieces from which the consumer knows that these would show their belonging to another social milieu. Tribes consist of people of different ages, gender and income. The one linking element is the shared passion, because individuals in that tribe no longer are only consumers but proponents and advocates (Cova & Cova, 2001).

Due to the possibility that second-hand shopping reached the middle of society, the establishment of a new consumer culture is likely. If the online equivalent has already reached the majority of society remains to be seen. But the linking elements, namely the motives and values for stationary and online second-hand shopping might be similar. Also, in terms of conspicuous consumption online second-hand shopping can be a way to signal others that individuals who purchase used goods instead of newly produced goods i.e. value ecological and ethical standards and criticize the standard quo of the fashion industry and visually set themselves apart from others in that way (Goulding et al., 2008; Weinstein, 2014).

3. Methodology

In order to conscientiously examine the motives behind online second-hand consumption, in-depth one-on-one interviews were used to collect the qualitative data from the study participants. The generation of the questionnaire was built in that way, that one could interchange the different thematic sections. This was of importance in order to disturb the flow of speech as little as possible, so that attitudes, motives, values and behaviors in regards to online second-hand consumption were as unbiased as possible. With the aid of the laddering technique, the interviewers then tried to uncover deeper values, attitudes and motives of the interviewee by pointedly asking, so that means-end-chaining could be revealed.

In reference to the literature, four deductive overarching categories were used that include the motives of stationary second-hand consumption. First, economic reasons were chosen as a category. Second-hand apparel is much cheaper than apparel that one would buy in stores, therefore the category is called "saving expenses". Second, ecological concerns about the fast fashion industry with respect to climate change were integrated, so that the category was defined as "sustainability". Third, ethical and moral concerns about the exploitation of inhabitants of countries of the global south were mentioned as the category "solidarity". And finally, "individualism" as a last deductive category in the era of social media and self-depiction was named and integrated in the process of survey creation. However, the study focuses on the motives that lie behind online second-hand shopping. Therefore, the formation of inductive categories was taken into consideration after the interviews.

The interviews were held with eight participants, all in the lower income range, equally distributed in gender. The participants were chosen out of a circle of friends and acquaintances from 24 to 28. Each interview lasted about 45 to 60 minutes. After the interviews were held, the analysis of the qualitative data was undertaken. The overarching categories were divided into subcategories that line out the single motives of online secondhand consumption. The last step of the evaluation contained a frequency analysis that put all superior categories into perspective. The frequency analysis creates an overview and a ranking list of the subcategories, which are the searched motives in this study.

4. Results

Besides the superior categories set up deductively, another one was inductively discovered through the interviews. The motives behind these categories were then examined more precisely. The results indicate that the motives behind online second-hand consumption coincide with huge parts of the motives of stationary second-hand consumption. Notwithstanding significant differences become apparent, which need to be taken into account. Collectively the overarching categories of the analysis are the following: Individualism, saving expenses, sustainability, convenience and solidarity. Within the conducted frequency analysis, it was possible to put the categories in consideration to each other and create a frequency ranking (see table 1). With 39.34%, individualism was the most frequently named category, followed by saving expenses (20.87%), sustainability (19.42%), convenience (16.55%) and solidarity (12.23%). The motives behind these categories will now be elucidated more detailed.

Figure 1. Frequency Analysis

Overarching Categories	N	Percentage	Subcategories = motives	N	Percentage
Individualism	43	39.34%	Express one's own identity	18	41.86%
			Differentiation through unique clothing	14	32.56%
			Willingness to follow trends and social change	11	25.58%
Saving expenses	29	20.87%	Following fashion trends on a budget	8	27.58%
			Bargain hunting	11	37.93%
			Small available budget for clothing	10	34.48%
Sustainability	27	19.42%	Circular use of resources	8	29.63%
			Sustainable consumption orientation	19	70.30%
Convenience	23	16.55%	The aim for facilitated access	9	39.14%
			Benefit from search and filter functions	11	47.80%
			Inspiration through personalized suggestions	3	13.05%
Solidarity	17	12.23%	Calm one's own conscience	6	35.29%
			Make your own contribution	6	35.29%
			Desire for greater social justice	5	29.41%

Within the category of individualism three different motives can be identified: the aim to “express one's own identity” (41.68%), “differentiation through unique clothing” (32.56%) and the “willingness to follow trends and social change” (25.58%).

The motivation to express one's own identity emphasizes the importance of second-hand clothing to symbolize the idea of one's own identity and personality as well as the expression norms and values followed. Furthermore, this can be affirmed by statements like: “[...] zum Ausdrücken von dem, was ich sein möchte und wie ich gesehen werden möchte.” More specific, second-hand consumption serves as a tool to express one's own reflection and understanding of fashion, which also includes searching for specific brands and styles.

Differentiation through unique clothing describes the possibility to outwardly set oneself apart from others and to extensively “hunt” unique pieces of clothes. This motivation can be emphasized by assertions like: “[...] das fand ich ganz schlimm, wenn jemand das gleiche Teil anhatte wie ich [...] Vintage Sachen die gibt es halt meistens nicht nochmal doppelt, [...] genau das Teil, das hat halt niemand anderes.” Here the desire to differentiate oneself from the mainstream by finding limited, rare clothing becomes obvious, as well as the urge to show the possession of unique clothes.

The willingness to follow trends and social change shows the aim to comply with social norms, trends and changes through second-hand consumption, which also goes along with the wish of adaption. Through statements like “[...] dass in meinem näheren Umfeld, das schon fast anerkannter ist, also viele Menschen Second-Hand kaufen [...] und es deswegen eben schon zu meinem Lebensstil gehört [...]” the influence of interpersonal and social relations is noticeable, as well as the social change regarding second-hand consumption in general. Many respondents described online second-hand shopping as an upcoming lifestyle trend: “[...] Pullover, die unsere Eltern damals weggeschmissen haben in den 80ern, (sind) jetzt [...] auf einmal zu einem hippen Lifestyle geworden.”

Saving expenses can be split into three different motives: “bargain hunting” (37.93%), “use of a small available budget for clothing” (34.48%) and “following fashion trends on a budget” (27.58%).

Bargain hunting represents finding high quality clothes from popular brands for comparatively low prices, mentioned as follows: “damit habe ich ein richtig gutes Schnäppchen gemacht. Von Hugo Boss ist der, hat nur 7€ gekostet.” Further, especially the sense of achievement within the searching process seems to be a crucial motivation “[...] dieser Nervenkitzel, wenn ich zum Beispiel ein bestimmtes Teil suche [...]. Das dann wirklich auch zu finden in meiner Größe ist immer so ein geiles Erfolgserlebnis.” The pleasure to search and find clothes with a good price-performance ratio therefore seems to be incredibly motivating.

The use of a small available budget expresses to aim to act economically in the course of possibilities. In statements like “[...] dass ich als Studentin auch an einen gewissen Preis irgendwie

gebunden bin." the dependence on a specific budget for clothing becomes apparent. This can be caused by unintentional factors or the wish to actively save money: "[...] weil es günstiger ist, als es neu zu kaufen und ich dadurch aktiv spare [...]."

Moreover, the motive to follow fashion trends on a budget expresses the fashion consciousness of the consumers by simultaneously focusing on the price of a single product. This becomes clear in statements like: "[...] ein Fashion Victim bleiben, weil man auch viele Sachen dann für einen geringeren Preis kriegst." Here the need to be "up-to-date" in terms of fashion trends but not spending too much money on clothing shows up.

Sustainability can be split into two different motives: "following a sustainable consumption orientation" (70.30%) and the "circular use of resources" (29.63%).

The motivation to follow a sustainable consumption orientation becomes visible in the idealistic conviction to counteract climate change and follow a sustainable lifestyle.

Statements like "aus idealistischen Gründen, Konsum anders denken zu wollen" confirm the intrinsic motivation to implement one's lifestyle also into the consumption of clothing. Also, the external social influence seems to play a crucial role: "[...] aufgrund der Debatte, die eben über die Welt geführt wird, was Klima angeht, was die Gestaltung des Lebensstils angeht, mit dem man der Entwicklung am besten entgegenwirken könnte, das hat mich am meisten beeinflusst." Following the social change towards a more attentive way of treating the environment and adapting the own actions seems to be a crucial motivation to buy second-hand clothing. The aim for a circular use of resources describes the desire to follow an approach of a long-lasting resource use. More specific, the waste of clothing and in particular the resources spent for these is considered as pointless: "ich fände es total schade, die Kleidung wegzuschmeißen, weil es eine Verschwendung der Rohstoffe wäre." Therefore, buying second-hand helps with the optimal use of given resources. This motivation can be affirmed by statements like "[...] das Kleidungsstück wird noch länger getragen. Kleidungsstücke wieder- und weiterzuverwenden, bis diese nicht mehr funktionieren."

Convenience as an additional category can be split into three different motives: "benefit from search and filter functions" (47.80%), "the aim for facilitated access" (39.14%) and "Inspiration through personalized suggestions" (13.05%).

A huge motivation for online second-hand consumption are the benefits of search and filter functions as the shopping experience becomes more convenient and adjusts to the "normal" online shopping experience: "wenn ich jetzt wirklich eine grüne Jacke suche [...] das dann auch finden kann und dass ich eben eine extrem riesige Auswahl habe." The interviewees indicated the advantage to more easily search for particular pieces or brands, compared to stationary second-hand shopping.

The aim for facilitated access is reflected in the strive for fast and easy access to a huge selection of clothing in a spatial and timely manner. This motivation can be seen in statements like: "[...] also eine Art von Zugänglichkeit. Auch weil viele Personen ja gar nicht in Städten wohnen." The wish to have a convenient second-hand shopping experience at home becomes visible in this motivation as well.

The inspiration through personalized suggestions is reflected in statements like: "Die Vorschläge im News Feed werden ja auch immer besser und manchmal wird man dadurch halt echt auf coole Teile oder Styles aufmerksam." Personalization through smart algorithms shapes the online second-hand shopping experience and slowly adjusts to stationary second-hand shopping and thus serves as a source of inspiration which further facilitates the searching process.

Solidarity, as the least frequently mentioned category, can be divided into three different motives: "Calm one's own conscience" (35.29%), "Make your own contribution" (35.29%) and "Desire for greater social justice" (29.41%).

To calm one's own conscience goes along with the wish to adapt the own behavior to social and personal norms and values. Through statements like "der Konsum ist für mich ein bisschen akzeptabler, als wenn ich das jetzt bei H&M neu gekauft habe" one's own knowledge and concomitantly the bad conscience about unsoldierly conditions is calmed by self-perceived small contributions towards more social justice. "Ich achte halt sehr darauf, dass ich halt nicht diese Billig-Marken kaufe, gerade so die ganz die extreme Fast-Fashion [...]."

For example, this is reflected by the avoidance of particular fast fashion chains.

The motive to make your own contributions in terms of the consciousness about bad working conditions, low wages and even child labor in the fast fashion industry causes a change in the consumption behavior. *"[...] denen ist es einfach nicht bewusst, dass man durch sein Kauf- verhalten maßgeblich an Kinderarbeit oder so beteiligt ist und dem auch entgegenwirken kann."* This aim reflects the choice to not to support the prevailing conditions. *"[...] auch ein bisschen „Solidaritätsgedanken“ auslöst. Dass man wirklich etwas bewirken kann [...] ich tue etwas gegen Kinderarbeit, ich tue etwas gegen Ausbeutung [...]."*

The third motive represents the individual motivation that more attention is paid to the precarious circumstances in the production process. The wish for a change in consumption behavior is reflected here. Thus, the desire for more attention towards social justice and exploitation through the fashion industry becomes visible, such that more people buy second- hand to avoid over and mass production.

Within the analysis five different overarching categories with several motives for online second-hand consumption were identified. Nevertheless, the choice to buy second-hand clothing online depends on an interaction of individual motives and not just on one primary motive.

Thus, the individual purchasing decision seems to be a subjective interaction of many of the above-mentioned motives, each weighted differently.

5. Discussion

The previous chapter shows that arguments for buying online second-hand fashion traced back to price sensitivity and the desire for individualism were mentioned particularly frequently. Especially the possibility to buy trendy and fashionable clothes at low prices, which often do not show that they are used, is a frequently mentioned reason why second- hand fashion is a real alternative to buying cheap clothes new. Also, in terms of individualism, second-hand fashion is very suitable for i.e. differentiating from the masses through a focus on unique second-hand clothing.

Contrary to that, there is less evidence for solidarity and sustainability motives. Even though sustainability is strongly related to second-hand fashion, it becomes clear that the respondents tend to view this category as secondary and rather subordinate. As an example, consider the following statement suggesting the ranking of the categories: *"An Second-Hand-Kleidung finde ich vor allem cool, dass die Kleidungsstücke etwas eigener sind als der Mainstream und man vor allem 'nen stabilen Preis hat. Und irgendwie ist es dann ja auch nachhaltiger."*

The convenience category points out the differences between online and offline purchases of second-hand fashion, since personalized filter, search functions and easy access to the offers are very important here. Especially large platforms such as Vinted or Zalando can stand out with high usability through mobile applications and personalized news feeds. In this context, complex algorithms present an individual compilation of suggestions to the user and thus also serve as a source of inspiration for new styles and trends. This clearly shows how much influence technology has on people's consumption behavior.

This category also addresses another frequently mentioned factor: purchasing barriers in online second-hand shops. Uncertainty about the exact fit and true condition as well as lack of trust in (private) sellers on certain platforms are the most common reasons why second-hand fashion is bought in stationary stores and not online. In particular, the uncertainty about product characteristics, is counteracted by many providers through a standardized evaluation procedure and professional and uniform product images. This increases accessibility and convenience, which has a positive effect on the buying experience.

As always with purchases on the Internet, there is the possibility of falling for a scam. Especially platforms that aim for direct communication between buyers and private sellers are affected by this problem. This was also reported by respondents: *"Ich habe [...] eine Tasche von Michael Kors [...] gefunden, die war zu einem Spitzenpreis zu haben. Und da habe ich dann direkt 50€ überwiesen [...], dann war sie halt auf einmal weg und der Nutzer gelöscht."*

This paper clearly shows that second-hand fashion in the online sector is a way of expressing a lifestyle and belonging to a certain social milieu. In this context, the purchase of second-hand fashion is often guided by motives of conspicuous consumption. Especially through sharing new fashion items and styles on social media, the feeling that the consumption of second-hand fashion triggers the individual becomes a shared social experience (Goulding et al., 2009). Therefore, individual satisfaction is transferred to others and creates new incentives for consumption. Crucial to the way in which social media drives this process is the type of network. Contrary to private networks, such as WhatsApp or Snapchat groups, public and professional networks such as Instagram or TikTok, present second-hand fashion consumption usually in a more extreme and exuberant way. Here, the target group is larger, which is why in the flood of information of the news feeds of these platforms, usually only the most extreme and exaggerated posts receive attention (Kozinets et al., 2017). Especially in the case of TikTok, this was confirmed within the interviews. *“Ganz besonders doll ist das auf TikTok, wo ich ja viel unterwegs bin. Da gibt’s viele Leute, die leben dieses Ding richtig. Das ist nochmal ein ganz anderes Ausmaß. [...] Das ist echt krass.”*

This shows that the motive of individualism is exacerbated in such networks and the people involved become more and more extreme in order to serve this role.

The second-hand trend of recent years is not only creating new target groups in social media, but is also being taken up by more companies expanding their businesses into the second-hand sector. This includes big players like H&M, AboutYou and Zalando. The marketing strategies usually focus on sustainability by suggesting that buying products from these brands is eco-friendly. While these companies, as driving forces in the fast fashion industry, seem to be concerned with ecological and social sustainability, this development is viewed ambiguously by many consumers. There is often the accusation that sustainability, which is associated with second-hand fashion, is exploited to generate new sales and thus the young generation’s awareness is commercialized. This also became clear in the interviews: *“Früher hast du bei Mädchenflohmarkt von anderen Mädels in deinem Alter gebrauchte Jacken gekauft und heute springen die großen Ketten auf diesen Zug auf und scheffeln da richtig Kohle mit diesem Nachhaltigkeitsding.”* The accusation here is that big fast fashion players like Zalando or H&M use the recent second-hand boom to greenwash their corporate image and exploit and monetize the ideals of younger generations.

Closely connected to this is the question of whether second-hand fashion can be seen as a kind of indulgence trade. On the one hand, this happens on an individual level, so that people soothe their conscience by buying some second-hand clothes and thus justify their otherwise less sustainable consumer behavior. Here, a double standard of buying second-hand fashion on the one hand and fast fashion products on the other hand plays a major role. But the phenomenon can also be observed on corporate level. As described above, many fast fashion companies try to shape their corporate identity with small adjustments to their business models, such as a second-hand sub-brand that serves the sustainability image. These are clear indications of corporate greenwashing, for which online second-hand fashion is then used as a door opener (Schmuck et al., 2018; Banerjee et al., 1995).

Finally, this paper raises the question of whether the recent online second-hand boom expresses a new consumer culture. Regarding the technical component, i.e. the online platforms on which most of the consumption takes place, it becomes apparent that large technology corporations like Meta or Alphabet are significantly influencing people’s desire to consume. Therefore, a new type of consumption behavior is emerging, resulting in a new form described as techno-capitalism. This new type of consumption also has an impact on the society and its culture and should be considered in the future (Kozinets et al., 2017).

6. Implications and Limitations

Basing on the results, there are several implications. The biggest learning managers can draw from this paper are the different consumption motives as starting points for future strategies. In particular, the strong focus on individualism that drives online second-hand fashion consumptions and subsequent exchanges on social media offer many starting points for future marketing

campaigns. But also purchasing barriers identified in the survey offer information to optimize the existing business model and to better adapt it to the needs of the target group. The influence of the second-hand boom on an emerging consumer culture is also an important characteristic, since companies will be faced with the challenge of integrating changing buying patterns of consumers into their corporate strategy in the future.

This paper also provides some starting points for future research. For example, the connection between the recent second-hand boom and the emergence of a new consumer culture should be further investigated. Therefore, for example, it would be suitable to work out and categorize the differences between the consumption motives for second-hand fashion in the online and offline sector more deeply. Another aspect is investigating the strength of individual consumption motives and the differentiation of the respective subcategories.

The research design of this paper has some limitations and offers potential for improvement in future research. Firstly, the sample size of eight can be seen as too small and for the successful validation of the identified motives the survey should be extended to a larger sample size. In addition, the results are characterized by a certain selection bias, which can be located in the homogeneous sample coming from known socio-topes. In this context, it should also be mentioned that most of the respondents came from the personal environment of the interviewers. This leads to problems regarding implementation and evaluation objectivity. In general, this study offers a first impression of the consumption motives of online second-hand fashion, but the results must be further validated and therefore no generalization is possible.

References

- Arnould, E. J. & Thompson, C. J., (2005). Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), Twenty Years of Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868–882.
- Banerjee, S., Gulas, C.S. & Iyer, E. (1995). Shades of Green: A Multidimensional Analysis of Environmental Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 24(2), 21-31.
- Cova, B. & Cova, V. (2002). Tribal marketing: The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 31(4), 595-620.
- Edbring, E., Lehner, M. & Mont, O., (2015). Exploring consumer attitudes to alternative models of consumption: Motivations and barriers. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 123(2016), 5-15.
- Ferraro, C., Sands, S. & Brace-Govan, J., (2016). The role of fashionability in second-hand shopping motivation. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 32, 262-268.
- Goulding, C., Shankar, A., Elliott, R. & Canniford, R., (2009). The Marketplace Management of Illicit Pleasure. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35, 759-771.
- Kozinets, R., Patterson, A. & Ashman, R. (2017). Networks of Desire: How Technology Increases our Passion to Consume. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(5), 659-685.
- Laitala, K. & Klepp, I., (2018). Motivations for and against second-hand clothing acquisition. *Clothing Cultures*, 5, 247-262.
- Schmuck, D., Matthes, J. & Naderer, B. (2018). Misleading Consumers with Green Advertising? An Affect–Reason–Involvement Account of Greenwashing Effects in Environmental Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 47(2), 127-145.
- Statista (2022). Marktvolumen von Secondhandkleidung in den USA in den Jahren von 2012 bis 2020. (Accessed March 13, 2022) [available at <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1244580/umfrage/marktvolumen-mit-secondhandkleidung-in-usa/>].
- The Guardian (2020). Fast fashion creates misery - and that's always a bad look. (Accessed March 13, 2022) [available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/07/fast-fashion-clothing-brands-leices-ter-boohoo-consumers>].
- Weinstein, J. F. (2014). Reframe, Reuse, Re-style: Deconstructing the sustainable second-hand consumer. Doctoral Dissertation. Wesleyan University.
- Xu, Y., Chen, Y., Burman, R., Zhao, H. (2014). Second-hand clothing consumption: a cross-cultural comparison between American and Chinese young consumers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 38, 670-677.

Zaman, M., Park, H.S., Kim, Y. & Park, S., (2019). Consumer orientations of second-hand clothing shoppers. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing*, 10, 163 - 176.

Research Report

Conspicuous Anti-Consumption? The Motives of Anti-Consumption and their Connection to Conspicuous Consumption

Authors in alphabetical order: Lisa Effler¹, Marie Elwers², Luisa Leman³, and Hannes Steinlein⁴

¹ Kiel University; stu209031@mail.uni-kiel.de

² Kiel University; stu225883@mail.uni-kiel.de

³ Kiel University; stu229589@mail.uni-kiel.de

⁴ Kiel University; stu200841@mail.uni-kiel.de

Abstract:

The conscious renunciation of different types of consumption is justified by various motives, such as the sustainability aspect. This fact suggests that motives are very different from the ones of conspicuous consumption. But is that true? The aim of the study is to examine whether the motives for anti-consumption can be found in the motives for conspicuous consumption. The research question therefore is: What motives lie behind anti-consumption, and can these motives be found in classical conspicuous consumption? As part of a qualitative study, eight in-depth interviews were conducted in order to generate a broad range of motives for different anti-consumption behaviors. In addition to previously deductively determined motives for the renunciation, the motives obtained from these interviews were then inductively summarized in a motive scheme and subsequently compared to the motives of classical conspicuous consumption. As a result, there is a connection between the motives of anti-consumption and the motives of conspicuous consumption. While the primary motives for anti-consumption are not related to conspicuous consumption motives, there are secondary motives (supporting the primary motives) for anti-consumption that can also be assigned to conspicuous consumption. This implies that some kind of “conspicuous anti-consumption” is part of today's consumer culture.

Keywords: Anti-Consumption; Conspicuous Consumption; Consumer Culture; Renunciation; Conspicuous Anti-Consumption

1. Introduction

A common understanding of consumption is that consumers purchase goods for reasons beyond the functional utility of the products (Belk et al., 1982). One related example we want to consider in this research is the concept of conspicuous consumption as part of the “theory of leisure class” (Veblen, 1899). Conspicuous consumption is defined as the behavior of a consumer to move himself from his social class to higher social classes or as signaling higher class through consumption. It is also associated with the purchase of luxury products in order to show personal image to other people (Chaudhuri et al., 2011). These goods often do not provide additional functional value compared to “lower-status-products”. The motives of conspicuous consumption rather include the desire for recognition and prestige, distinction from others, demonstration of superiority, increase of social status, impressing of the environment or admiration/envy experienced by others. Therefore, by comparing oneself with other people, a person can behave through conspicuous consumption in order to gain status, power, and exclusivity (Mazzocco et al., 2012; Chaudhuri et al., 2011). Conspicuous consumption behavior is associated with non-utilitarian, luxurious, materialistic, exaggerated, and wasteful consumption behaviors (Campbell, 1995). Consumers engaging in this behavior focus on social needs such as prestige and status as well as the physical needs they will fulfill from the products they purchase (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005).

Nowadays there is a growing wave of trends like social consciousness and environmental awareness which impacts consumer culture and consumption behavior (Hammad et al., 2019). As one consequence, more and more consumers are turning to anti-consumption (Culiberg et al., 2022) by abstaining from a particular type of consumption. In the following study, we focus on individual anti-consumption as the “intentional anti-consumption” of a particular product or service type consumed in the past, regardless of the possible consumption behavior a consumer might engage in to substitute the renunciation. Therefore, we do not focus on the understanding of “incidental anti-consumption” (Cherrier et al., 2011), which results from a choice towards a preferred alternative. Instead, there has to be a decision made not to consume something. Following our focussed understanding of anti-consumption, it is possible to “not consume” a certain product or service. We are not focussing on anti-consumers who did not consume the product in their past. The terms anti-consumption and renunciation are used synonymously in this paper. Furthermore, we use the term “consumers”, by which we mean people who are not performing a specific anti-consumption behavior. It is used here to separate potential consumers in the group of either consumers or anti-consumers.

There are multiple motives to engage in any kind of anti-consumption behavior, varying among political, personal and environmental aspects (Iyer & Muncy, 2008). Due to the focussed definition of anti-consumption, there is a lack of specific motives occurring from this perspective. One purpose of this study is to close this gap and find as many motives as possible for anti-consumption and connect them with the motives of conspicuous consumption.

Anti-consumption often tends to overlap with sustainable consumption as it plays a key role for sustainability. Consumers can actively choose not to consume certain products which they perceive as harmful for the environment. As a consequence, they reject them due to self-interested and socio-economical motivations and express their values, beliefs and overall identities (Cherrier et al., 2011). Compared to conspicuous consumption, sustainable consumption is normally seen as a contradictory behavior. This is due to the materialism aspect in conspicuous consumption which is believed to impede public-welfare and pro-social dispositions as well as efforts of sustainable consumption (Kasser & Sheldon, 2000). But recently, there is a research stream examining the relationship between sustainable and conspicuous consumption as well as the conditions under which conspicuous motives could promote sustainable consumption (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2010; Dastrup et al., 2012). Following this, we think that due to the overlap of anti-consumption and sustainable consumption, there could be motives of conspicuous consumption promoting different forms of anti-consumption behavior.

At first glance, anti-consumption and conspicuous consumption also seem to be forms of behavior that could not be more different. But simply looking at the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1970) offers insights on what they might have in common: Lower-level needs (physiological, safety and belongingness/love needs) can be achieved through consumption, but normally, consumption cannot fulfill higher needs (self-actualization and individual needs like recognition or prestige). Instead, consumer behavior like conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption may enable consumers to fulfill those needs. So why should they not be motivated in the same manner under certain conditions? Might anti-consumers not also want to seek recognition, experience admiration or even demonstrate social status through their anti-consumption behavior? We suspect an overlap of the motives of anti-consumption and conspicuous consumption, take a closer look on their possible connection and pose the following research question: What motives lie behind anti-consumption and can these motives be found in classical conspicuous consumption?

2. Materials and Methods

As conspicuous consumption in combination with anti-consumption is a new research area, we found it most suitable to follow a qualitative approach to examine the research question. This approach is highly recommended, if researchers do not have enough insights and further information on the issue they are interested in (Burns & Bush, 2003). As the specific qualitative approach of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted to serve as a base for a content analysis. Especially here,

where different motives from consumers are part of the objectives in the study, the approach of qualitative interviews with implemented “laddering” is effective. The laddering technique helps to get an in-depth understanding of the thoughts and motives participants have and provides flexibility in discussions (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

To elicit the desired information, an interview guideline (see appendix 7.1), including different deductively constructs of conspicuous consumption motives, was designed. To effectively create the guideline, we conducted a literature review and used exclusive knowledge from a university seminar. The guideline consists of a large part on self-perception (participants talking about their own anti-consumption motives) and a small additional part on external perception (participants talking about the anti-consumption motives of others).

The sample used in this study is made up of eight subjects who voluntarily participated. To guarantee their conscious renunciation of a product or service, they were asked for their anti-consumption behavior before conducting the interview. As a consequence, the anti-consumption topic was specific to the interviewee. The sample was composed of four males and four females to achieve gender heterogeneity. Their age ranges from 22 to 33 and all of them are university students. The renunciation behavior of the participants refers to meat (6)¹, all animal products (1), imported food (1), fast fashion (1), environmentally harmful transport (1), social media (1), smartphone (1) and alcohol (1).

After conducting the interviews, the audio-content was transcribed into a written form for further investigation and documentation purposes. From that, we followed the instructions provided by Kuckartz (2014) to conduct a qualitative content analysis: After identifying study-relevant parts, thematic main categories were built and text parts were assigned (coding) to the categories while going through the material. In this process, we differentiated between content expressed about oneself (self-perception) and the content expressed about others' anti-consumption behavior (external perception). Also, subcategories were built inductively. If relevant aspects were found which are not fitting in existing categories, a new category was created. After these processes, a motive scheme on the self-perception content was developed and visualized (chapter 3.1). As a next step and to answer our research question, the motives of the self-perception part were analyzed and it was independently checked by the researchers, if they also occur as motives of conspicuous consumption described by existing literature (chapter 3.2). The four assignments were compared and checked for consensus. A motive was seen as occurring in both, anti-consumption and conspicuous consumption, if at least three of the four researchers found that the motive also appears in the context of conspicuous consumption. While comparing the assignments, we checked for interrater reliability. Finally, we extended our scheme by adding the motives of external perception (chapter 3.3).

3. Results

3.1 Anti-Consumption Motive Scheme

As our main result, we developed the motive scheme on the self-perception part, which is shown in figure 1. It is structured as follows. The left column displays all 33 identified motives. These are then aggregated by similarity which results in the subcategories shown in the middle column. The subcategories are grouped and assigned to a main category. It is important to note that only items in the left column are motives while the middle and right column represent categorizations of these motives.

Our analysis has shown that the motives have different strengths of influencing the behavior of the participants. We thereby identified 6 motives to be primary motives and 27 to be secondary motives. Primary motives influence a person's anti-consumption behavior strongly. The participants state them to be the main driver of their anti-consumption decision. Secondary motives only have a supporting function. Without a complementing primary motive they would not be strong enough to trigger an anti-consumption behavior. Therefore, secondary motives rather play a supporting role for

¹ (x) = total amount of the study participants renouncing to the specific consumption behavior

the primary motives or might act as moderators. The analysis showed that the primary motives are mostly specific for the type of product that a participant renounces. Therefore, there is a wide variation of primary motives among the renunciation of different product types. The secondary motives seem to be less product type specific. Many of the secondary motives were identified in multiple different interviews for the anti-consumption of different product types.

Figure 1. Motives, subcategories and categories

Motives	Subcategories	Main categories
Being interesting		
Being respected		
Receiving positive feedback	Reputation enhancement	
Being admired		
Proving oneself to others		
Overcoming a challenge, others fail	Sense of superiority	Social reputation
Being a „better“ person than consumers		
Emulating role model		
Avoiding condemnation from anti-consumers	Sense of inferiority	
Feeling less inferior to anti-consumers		
Influencing other's thoughts	Role model	
Influencing other's behavior		
Striving for similarity with others	Sense of community	
Feeling connected		
Feeling reciprocal confirmation		Group affiliation
Feeling like belonging somewhere	Acceptance	
Satisfying other's expectations		
Being individual	Uniqueness	
Being independent		
Being ideal (self-idealization)		
Proving willpower	Pride	
Being satisfied with oneself		Self-image
Experiencing self-efficacy		
Maintaining animal welfare	Conscience	
Living sustainable		
Escaping social comparison	Self-determination	
Winning self-control		
Having more time to study	Gain of time	Efficiency
Challenging oneself		
Making new experiences	Comfort zone escape	
Creating awareness for own consumption behavior		
Improving one's mental health		Health
Improving one's physical health		

Main Category: Social Reputation

The first main category in our scheme (fig. 1) is “social reputation”. It consists only of secondary motives, starting off with “being interesting”, “being respected”, “receiving positive feedback”, “being admired” and “proving oneself to others”. All of these motives are based on the perception of oneself by others. “Receiving positive feedback” seems to be an important secondary motive, because it was mentioned in more than half of the interviews. An exemplary quote is:

„Ich habe das gemerkt so in meinem sozialen Umfeld die Leute, ja, finden das toll [...] ich merke es gibt da so ein schönes Feedback.“

The quote refers to the positive feedback received from the social environment for the renunciation behavior. All of these mentioned motives are bundled in the subcategory “reputation enhancement”. The next subcategory “sense of superiority” consists of the motives “overcoming a challenge, others fail to” and “being a better person than consumers”. The latter one is mentioned often and therefore pretty boldly stated in this quote:

„Also ich glaube, im Vergleich zu anderen Menschen fühle ich mich tatsächlich einfach als besseren Menschen.“

The participant refers to himself as a better person in comparison to others through his anti-consumption. We continue with the next subcategory “sense of inferiority”, containing the motives “emulating role models”, “avoiding condemnation from anti-consumers” and “feeling less inferior to anti-consumers”. The first motive in this lineup, “emulating role models”, means that the renunciation behavior of others is seen as a preferable consumption model, and it again is an important secondary motive. To conclude the main category “social reputation”, the last subcategory “role model” consists of the motives “influencing others thoughts” and “influencing others behaviors”.

Main Category: Group Affiliation

We continue our derived secondary motives with “striving for similarity with others” and “feeling connected”, while the latter one is an often-stated secondary motive. Both of them derive from an individual's need of a social community and are depicted in this statement:

„Auf jeden Fall Verbundenheit. [...] Also das kann ich mir schon vorstellen, weil bei Verzicht oder wenn ich jetzt auch wieder an den Veganismus denke, glaube ich schon, dass man sich da zusammen[gehörig] fühlt.“

This quote describes that there is a feeling of connection among anti-consumers, in this case in the renunciation-area of veganism. These two motives sum up to the subcategory “sense of community”. The following secondary motives “feeling reciprocal confirmation”, “feeling like belonging somewhere” and “satisfying others expectations” are reflected in the following statement:

„Es gibt einem halt ganz oft Bestätigung [...], weil eben die Denke ne sehr ähnliche ist und man dann ja sich gegenseitig bestärkt indem, was man tut.“

This quote states that there is a similar way of thinking among anti-consumers and that this leads to reciprocal confirmation. They are summarized as subcategory “acceptance”, meaning the acceptance of an individual by others. All the motives in this part can be assigned to the main category “group-affiliation”.

Main Category: Self-image

Next, we identified the secondary motives “being individual” and “being independent”. “Being individual” is based on a person’s urge to set themselves apart from others and to be different for the sake of being different. This urge can be fulfilled by the anti-consumption of a product that many others consume. “Being independent” is a motive that represents the endeavor to make choices independently from others which can lead to unconventional consumption decisions. The two motives can be attributed to the subcategory “uniqueness”. The following subcategory, “pride”, consists of the secondary motives “being ideal”, “proving willpower”, “being satisfied with oneself” and “experiencing self-efficacy”. Especially noteworthy are “proving willpower” and “being satisfied with oneself” as these two motives were identified in more than half of the conducted interviews. One participant said:

„Also in meinem Fall zumindest [ist es] einfach das Wissen, dass man das jetzt schon so lange durchgezogen hat, also die Willensstärke, die dahinter steht. Die gibt einem schon Selbstbewusstsein.“

The quote states that proving willpower by following through with one’s anti-consumption makes the person more confident and thereby shows that this can motivate a person towards further anti-consumption.

The first primary motives of the scheme are “maintaining animal welfare” and “living sustainably”. Both were described as very important motives by the participants. Also, both motives were only found in the context of animal or environment friendly anti-consumption, thus, supporting the thesis that primary motives may relate to a certain type of renunciation. Both motives are always embedded in the context of wanting to have a clean conscience. An exemplary quote shows this:

„Ich habe ein gutes Gewissen.[...] Weil ich von mir behaupten kann, dass ich nicht dafür verantwortlich bin, zumindest in dieser Hinsicht, dass andere Lebewesen leiden müssen.“

Paraphrasing, the participant stated that she has a good conscience because she knows that no animals have to suffer because of her consumption. Following this line of argumentation, the motives “maintaining animal welfare” and “living sustainably” can be assigned to the subcategory “conscience”. Two further motives are “escaping social comparison”, which is a primary motive of social media anti-consumption and “winning self-control”. The two motives show the urge to escape behavior control by others and therefore can be grouped and categorized as self-determination.

The subcategories “uniqueness”, “pride”, “conscience” and “self-determination” are related with the way a person sees themselves. They are subsumed by the main category “self-image”.

Main Categories: Efficiency, Comfort Zone Escape & Health

“Having more time to study” is a primary motive of social media anti-consumption. It is the only motive that can’t be grouped with other motives. As we suspect that conducting more interviews would result in more motives that can be associated with a gain of time or in a broader sense with efficiency, we establish these categories, nevertheless. This way the scheme aspect is easy to extend, as shown in chapter 3.3.

The subcategory “comfort zone escape” consists of the secondary motives “challenging oneself”, “making new experiences” and “creating awareness for one’s own consumption behavior”. As we can’t sum this up further, the main category is identical with the subcategory. Lastly, participants stated that motives for anti-consumption are the “improvement of physical health and the “improvement of mental health”. A participant that renounces alcohol said:

„Also ich glaube, die wichtigsten Gründe für Verzicht sind tatsächlich [...] und die eigene Gesundheit“

He clearly stated that improving his health is one of the main reasons for his anti-consumption which shows that we are dealing with a primary motive. Again, the primary motives are typical for

a specific anti-consumption type. The improvement of physical health was only identified as a motive for alcohol renunciation while the wish for improvement of mental health was only expressed by the person that anti-consumed social media. Again, we did not find a second categorization level. So, "health" covers both the subcategory and the main category level.

3.2 Classification (of Motives) in Conspicuous Consumption

In this section, we focus on the second part of the research question: "[...] can these motives be found in classical conspicuous consumption?". Our research suggests a connection between the motives of anti-consumption and conspicuous consumption. We found this by independently categorizing the motives and comparing them to motives of conspicuous consumption, based on our definition in the introduction (see appendix 7.2). The interrater reliability (Fleiss' Kappa) of this procedure was $\kappa = 0,704^{2*}$. This value states that about 70% of the assignments are equal, which shows "substantial" agreement among the independent assignments of the researchers (Landis & Koch, 1977). After this process, the motives "being interesting", "being respected", "receiving positive feedback", "being admired" and "proving oneself to others", which are motives of the subcategory "reputation enhancement", can be seen as motives of conspicuous consumption too. They all relate to the gain of a higher social status or superiority. "Being a better person than consumers" was treated similarly. It is important to mention that these motives have different implications in the context of conspicuous consumption and anti-consumption. For example, "proving oneself to others" as a motive means that conventional conspicuous consumers want to show off what they have bought and therefore achieved, while anti-consumers want to state their willpower and strength not to consume a certain asset. This shows that the motive is the same, but the actions to archive the motive are context specific.

Further identified motives in both contexts are "emulating role models", "avoiding condemnation from anti-consumers" and "feeling less inferior to anti-consumers". Whereas individuals in one context try to avoid a feeling of inferiority towards other individuals (anti-consumers) by their own renunciation behavior, individuals practicing conspicuous consumption try to avoid the inferiority towards higher status individuals. Again, we see the same motive in two different contexts.

Further, the motives "feeling reciprocal confirmation" and "satisfying others expectations" can be devoted to the issue of being admired by others for their own behavior and fitting into a certain social group. The focus on the distinction from others as part of conspicuous consumption can be found in the identified motives "being individual" and "being ideal". With conspicuous consumption, people see individuals with higher social status as ideal and try to gain this status with their consumption, while anti-consumers see a specific renunciation behavior as ideal and try to conform with that through their own anti-consumption. Their own behavior is seen as better in both contexts, whereas they have the same motive: "to be individual and to be ideal", while having an own understanding of what is ideal for them.

3.3 Motive Scheme Extension

To show an example how the motive scheme could be extended, we supplemented it by the part of external perception (see appendix 7.3). Participants were asked to consider what motives they can imagine regarding the renunciation of others, e.g., friends, relatives, acquaintances. Many of the motives mentioned in the part of the external perception agreed with those of the self-perception, which seems logical, because one can imagine motives among others, which oneself has for own behavior. These were not further identified in the motive scheme, only taken into account for the frequency of the occurrence of the motive. However, the additionally named motives were added to the scheme but colored to show the difference from self-perception. It is to be emphasized that two of the added motives "generate social media reach" and "trend participation" are motives that can also be assigned to conspicuous consumption. As the external perception part was not the main

² calculation of the value can be found in an extra excel sheet

research question and thoughts on others are not a valid way to find actual motives, this finding is just mentioned to shed some light on possible further motives which could be found in further research and extensions of the motive scheme.

4. Discussion

An important finding of the study is that primary motives are specific to the type of consumption. For example, the motive “maintaining animal welfare” always goes hand in hand with abstaining from meat. It is important to note that the primary motives of renunciation cannot be assigned to the classical motives of conspicuous consumption. Secondary motives, on the other hand, tend to be independent of the type of renunciation, e.g. the motives “receiving positive feedback” or “being a “better” person than consumers” fit in with different types of renunciation, e.g. renouncing meat, but also with social media renunciation. Also, a large part of secondary motives of renunciation can be assigned to the classical motives of conspicuous consumption. A main part of them focuses on the perception and acceptance in the society, higher level of satisfaction, individualism and the enhancement of reputation. As a consequence, it may be possible that the secondary motives are sort of positive side effects for anti-consumers. Anyway, we clearly see connections to the motives of conspicuous consumption. They may not be the main drivers for renunciation decisions as they are in the context of conspicuous consumption, but they play an underestimated supporting role in anti-consumption decision making. Secondary motives can actually work as a trigger of the renunciation behavior by building the bridge to close a potential attitude-behavior-gap as shown by this quote:

„[...] vorher wo es vielleicht ein kleiner Gedanke war, aber so richtig an der Umsetzung hat man sich nie probiert. [...] in den ersten zwei Wochen hier in Rostock [...] habe ich das dann gemacht. [...] Ich habe gemerkt, hier ist es so.“

The quote shows that the actual renunciation behavior of a participant, who mentioned animal welfare and sustainability as primary motives for his vegetarianism, was not only triggered by his attitude. External influences (secondary motives connected to conspicuous consumption) like satisfying others' expectations in his new social environment played a significant role in translating attitude into behavior.

We suggest the term “conspicuous anti-consumption” for the phenomenon we identified in this study. It refers to the role of motives found in both anti-consumption and conspicuous consumption, supporting the decision-making process of anti-consumption behavior.

5. Limitations

It must be said that there are several limitations related to the sample, situation and environment as well as the guideline which limits the validity of the study results. Regarding the sample, it must be said that the subjects were selected by us which leads to a selection bias. This is also accompanied by the fact that the demographic information of the participants is very homogeneous. Participants were quite young and exclusively students. Furthermore, the number of subjects is quite low with eight interviews conducted. In addition, there is little variance in the types of renunciation. This is because the test subjects predominantly abstain from meat. Limits also emerged regarding the situation and environment. First, actual renunciation behavior of the participants could not be observed. Thus, socially desirable answers of the particularly intrinsically motivated subjects cannot be excluded. This problem should be overcome by the external perception part. Due to the small differences in the results, it is not certain whether this procedure had the desired effect. Another limitation is given by the fact that the interviews were conducted by four different researchers with no experience in laddering. The final limitations relate to the boundaries of the guideline. This is because a high degree of subjectivity flows into the structure since it is based on the identified

definition of conspicuous consumption and its motives. Finally, the questionnaire also has limitations regarding the choice, different nature and directness of the questions.

Further studies are needed to verify the results and overcome the mentioned limitations. This could be done by exploring a broader range of anti-consumption, quantitative research methods or by field studies.

References

- Amaldoss, W., & Jain, S. (2005). Pricing of conspicuous goods: a competitive analysis of social effects. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 42(1), 30–42.
- Belk R. W., Bahn, K. D., & Mayer, R. N. (1982). Developmental recognition of consumption symbolism. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, 4 – 17.
- Burns, A. C., & Bush, R. F. (2003). *Marketing research: Online research applications*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Chaudhuri, H. Mazumdar, S., & Ghoshal, A. (2011). Conspicuous consumption orientation: conceptualisation, scale development and validation. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10(4), 216–224.
- Cherrier, H., Black, I. R., & Lee, M. (2011). Intentional non-consumption for sustainability: Consumer resistance and/or anti-consumption?. *European Journal of Marketing*, 45(11), 1757-1767.
- Culiberg, B., Cho, H., Kos Koklic, M., & Zabkar, V. (2022). The Role of Moral Foundations, Anticipated Guilt and Personal Responsibility in Predicting Anti-consumption for Environmental Reasons. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-17.
- Dastrup, S. R., Zivin, J. G., Costa, D. L., & Kahn, M.E. (2012). Understanding the Solar Home price premium: electricity generation and ‘Green’ social status. *European Economic Review*, 56(5), 961-973.
- Hammad, H., Muster, V., El-Bassiouny, N., & Schäfer, M. (2019). Status and sustainability: can conspicuous motives foster sustainable consumption in newly industrialized countries?. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*.
- Iyer, R., & Muncy, J. A. (2009). Purpose and object of anti-consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 160-168.
- Landis, J. R., & Koch, G. G. (1977). The Measurement of Observer Agreement for Categorical Data. *Biometrics*, 33(1), 159–174.
- Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., & Van den Bergh, B. (2010). Going green to be seen: status, reputation, and conspicuous conservation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(3), 392-404.
- Kasser, T., & Sheldon, K. M. (2000). Of wealth and death: materialism, mortality, salience, and consumption behavior. *Psychological Science*, 11(4), 348-351.
- Kuckartz, U. (2014). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Methoden, Praxis, Computerunterstützung*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- Maslow A. (1970). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Mazzocco, J., Rucker, D. D., Galinsky, A. D., & Anderson, E. T. (2012). Direct and vicarious conspicuous consumption: identification with low status groups increases the desire for high-status goods. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22(4), 520–528.
- Reynolds, T. J., & Gutman, J. (1988). Laddering theory, method, analysis, and interpretation. Understanding consumer decision making. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 28(1), 11-31.
- Veblen, T. (1899). *The theory of the leisure class*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Sustainable Fashion on Social Media: Ethical or Conspicuous Consumption?

Chanez Hauth¹, Carolina Palm², Carolin Eisner³, and Hassib Hamid⁴

¹ Kiel University; stu229596@mail.uni-kiel.de

² Kiel University; stu229117@mail.uni-kiel.de

³ Kiel University; stu201366@mail.uni-kiel.de

⁴ Kiel University; stu219435@mail.uni-kiel.de

Abstract

The sustainable fashion tribe is interested in ethical and ecological fashion consumption. To inform and reach various people, they use social media networks. However, as fashion consumption is often being used as a representation of wealth and status, the question arises, whether the underlying motives of the tribe to communicate on social media are altruistic or, on the contrary, promote conspicuous consumption. This qualitative study explores the underlying motives of the tribe communicating about sustainable fashion consumption on social media. The analysis of the nine interviews show, that there are four main motives: altruistic, social, egoistic and prestige-related motives. Even though the altruistic motives can be reconciled with the tribes' principal values, the results also show signs of conspicuous consumption in terms of prestige-related motives. When posting on social media the tribe wants to inform about and influence its followers to a more sustainable fashion consumption, but also wants to gain reputation and recognition for it. Still, it is concluded that conspicuous consumption of sustainable fashion on social media can promote sustainable consumption overall and having a positive effect on the environment.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumption; Fashion; Tribes; Motives; Social Media

1. Introduction

Today, there is a tendency to splurge on expensive goods and show them off. The driver of this tendency is that people are increasingly seeking the satisfaction of social needs, recognition or social affirmation. Status products that express a person's self and convey an image of prestige and wealth have become an integral part of life (Qattan & Al Khasawneh, 2020, p. 1). Veblen (1899) defined this phenomenon as conspicuous consumption, which has been a central construct in the literature on social psychology and consumer behavior (Qattan & Al Khasawneh, 2020, p.2). It describes the intentional display of expensive goods to demonstrate one's wealth and income (O'Cass & McEwan, 2004, p. 28). Since then, conspicuous consumption has become inextricably associated with luxury goods and is becoming more and more entrenched in society (Kastanakis & Balabanis, 2014, p. 2147 ff.).

At the same time, however, consumers' social and ecological awareness is increasingly influencing consumer behavior. People are trying to make their consumption more sustainable by foregoing some of their consumption or ensuring a sustainable origin (Hammad et al., 2019, p. 538f). One special consumer group focuses on the consumption of sustainable fashion. They are strongly interested in fashion and identify with it, but also want their consumption to be in line with their values regarding sustainable behavior. This paper focuses on this consumer group which will be considered as a tribe with a focus on sustainable fashion. To raise the importance of the topic of sustainability, the tribe tries to inform and reach various people through different ways. In this case, social media is often used to reach and inform others. That is, the tribe shows its sustainable consumption on social media, informs about the benefits and effects.

Based on these considerations, however, a conflict arises in the logical conclusion. As social media networks are characterized as places of self-expression used to generate attention and maintain an overall desirable perception in society, these motives conflict with the supposedly altruistic motives of the sustainable fashion tribe. It must be concluded that different motives are suspected to be the reason for communicating about sustainable fashion on social media by this very tribe. Studies already revealed that environmentally friendly behavior can serve as a status symbol, as it demonstrates that a person has the appropriate resources, like time and money, to purchase goods without exerting a negative impact on the environment (Griskevicius et al., 2010; Johnson, Tariq & Baker, 2008). However, the sustainable fashion tribes' motives to post about sustainable fashion consumption on social media have not been studied yet.

Therefore, this research deals with the question whether there are particular characteristics of the tribe of sustainable fashion and the motives for which tribe members communicate via social media. Even if sustainability includes many areas of consumption, such as food or furniture, this study focuses on sustainable fashion consumption, as fashion is one of the main products that is being used as a representative of a social status (Johnson, Tariq & Baker, 2009, p. 339). In the first step, the method of this work is presented. Then the results of the study are presented, describing the sustainable fashion tribe in more detail with its particular characteristics and examining the tribes' motives to communicate about its consumption on social media. In the last step, the obtained results are discussed as well as incentives for future research are provided.

2. Materials and Methods

Instagram was chosen to be the social media channel in the focus of this study because fashion in general is a visible feature of oneself and Instagram is a platform where the communication takes place via visual content. In-depth interviews were conducted to get a deeper understanding of the motives to communicate about sustainable fashion on social media and get a better picture of the tribe interested in sustainable fashion.

By scanning different profiles on Instagram, conducting research on blogs about inspirational Instagram accounts regarding sustainable lifestyles and fashion and using personal contacts, several accounts were contacted. People were considered as possible candidates for the interviews if they were actively communicating about sustainable fashion on their accounts. This means they had several posts in their feed or were posting stories about this topic regularly. In the end, nine participants (five male and four female) were found that were willing to be part of the interviews. The age of the interviewed people was between 23 and 40 years and the follower range of the accounts was distributed between 250 and 15.600 followers.

The interviews approximately took one hour and were recorded to be transcribed afterwards. An interview guide (see appendix) was formulated beforehand. With the help of creative techniques and the laddering method the focus was set on sustainable fashion and social media. It was tried to create an open environment where the interviewees felt safe to share their true motives. To generate information about tribe features and motives to communicate about sustainable fashion inductive as well as deductive methods were used.

The interviews were transcribed with the help of the software MAXQDA (MAXQDA, Software für qualitative Datenanalyse, 1989 – 2021, VERBI Software. Consult. Sozialforschung GmbH, Berlin, Deutschland) (see Appendix). All four interviewers then proceeded to mark the important and most telling parts in the interviews and categories were formed for the tribe features as well as possible motives for communication. It was a rather small-scaled code forming in the beginning which later was simplified by creating main categories in which the subcategories could be placed in. After that, the category-based evaluation and results were analysed.

3. Results

The results show significant characteristics of the tribe. One facet mentioned in most of the interviews was the relevance of ethical and moral responsibility felt by the tribe when communicating about sustainable fashion. One interviewee for example said: "Das wichtigste ist [...] die Bekämpfung

von nicht nachhaltigem Leben und der Weg in ein nachhaltiges Leben ist glaube ich unsere größte Aufgabe aktuell [...] dazu gehört eben nachhaltige Mode" (Interview 4), which stresses the tribes' felt responsibility of the task of change. The relevance of the longevity of the clothes was also a topic in most of the interviews and seemed very important to the interviewees. The connection to other tribes in the field of sustainability and the political act connected to the sustainable fashion consumption was mentioned as well. Here statements like "[...] wenn wir uns anschauen, warum ich eingangs angefangen habe [nachhaltige Mode zu konsumieren] ist das die Kapitalismus-Kritik. [...] Deswegen ist es auch super wichtig da Druck auf die Politik auszuüben [...]" (Interview 6) and "Ich finde es ist einfach so eine coole Gegenbewegung." (Interview 1) were made. In over the half of the interviews, creativity and in-depth knowledge about sustainable fashion were described as typical characteristics of the tribe. One proband said "Nachhaltig ist auf jeden Fall kreativ. Das habe ich auf jeden Fall gelernt bei Sachen kreativer zu denken. Was kann man mit einem alten T-Shirt machen?" (Interview 7), stating the creative process of using and reusing clothes. Another one said "Das ist mir wichtig, weil ich vor einigen Jahren herausgefunden habe, was denn eigentlich so in Klamotten drinnen ist. Was da oftmals für toxische Stoffe mitunter drinnen sein können und dass das die Haut ja auch aufnimmt." (Interview 1), showing in-depth knowledge about the toxic fabrics used in cloths. Some probands described sustainable fashion as a way to express their identity and the need to be different from the rest. One proband said: "Nachhaltigkeit gehört zu meiner Identität." (Interview 9).

Being curious about the own consumer behavior is also a characteristic of tribe members, which can be derived from statements like: "Dass man einfach sein Konsumverhalten immer wieder reflektiert, hinterfragt, das auch regelmäßig macht." (Interview 1). In one third of the interviews a certain connection of emotions and feelings with fashion was mentioned. One Interviewee for example stated: "[...] weil ich mag die Sachen von Personen, also von älteren Menschen oder vor allem von jemandem, den ich kenne, dann kommen die oft mit Geschichte und sowas. Und da habe ich dann eine Beziehung mit einem Klamottenteil (Interview 7). Also, on the one hand, it seemed to be important to be recognized as a sustainable person and to be the one who tries something new, as one proband said "Die Menschen sollen wissen, dass ich mich nachhaltig verhalte und kein ethisch kritisches Verhalten aufzeige." (Interview 8). On the other hand, statements like "Nachteil von nachhaltiger Mode sind weiterhin die Klischee Zuschreibungen, dass das Öko ist, dass das alles braun grün gedeckte Erdtöne sind, das herrscht leider immer noch vor." (Interview 3) show that the tribe members face a lot of prejudice and stereotyping they have to cope with. In a few interviews the aspects of Second-hand consumption as a need, minimalism as a lifestyle and the great time investment connected to sustainable fashion were also stated as possible characteristics of the tribe members.

The results regarding the motives of communicating about sustainable fashion on Instagram show various perspectives. Overall, 258 statements could be extracted that are related to motives of communicating. The statements are grouped to 19 different codes (Appendix, table 1). From the 19 codes, 9 categories were formed from which, in turn, 4 upper categories could be generated.

The results show that the tribe wants to inform their followers about aspects of sustainability. One interviewee said regarding the communicating about sustainable fashion on Instagram: "Wenn ich einen Beitrag erstelle, dann geht es mir auch an erster Stelle darum, dass ich Informationen verbreite." (Interview 1). This aspect was most frequently addressed by the subjects and was cited as the most important motive for the communication. To normalize sustainability is also relevant, as the interviewees made statements about how communicating on Instagram can help to make people sensitive to sustainability. Both aspects belong to the category of 'creating awareness'. Regarding the relevance of ecological commitment, one proband answered: "Ich finde es wichtig diesem Übergewicht [...] an Bildern, die von Fast Fashion kommuniziert werden [...] entgegenzuwirken, deswegen ist es wichtig über positive Beispiele in der Modeindustrie zu berichten" (Interview 3). Respondents with such statements indicate that they want to be ecologically engaged with the communication on Instagram and thus want to create an ecological benefit. Resisting fast fashion is also important for the tribe, as it states that the probands want to make a statement against fast fashion to resist it. Highlighting ecological commitment and opposing the fast fashion trend are

aspects that belong to the category of 'ecological motives', because the interviewees are acting from an ecological standpoint. Some probands said they want to influence the behavior of their followers, as one stated: "Ich konnte auch schon Menschen von nachhaltiger Mode überzeugen und gerade das macht es für mich so interessant" (Interview 9). This aspect is categorized as 'behavior changes'. This category includes motives of communication about sustainable fashion, where the interviewees aim to convince their followers to rethink and change their behavior. With the statement "Und ich finde es auch cool, wenn ich mithilfe meines Contents [...] andere Menschen inspiriere, helfen kann, unterhalten kann" (Interview 1) the respondent indicates the motive of inspiring others. This and the intent to show alternative consumption styles are grouped in the category 'inspiration'. This category encompasses the motive that the interviewees want their communication to inspire and stimulate their followers. The four previously mentioned categories 'creating awareness', 'ecological motives', 'behavioral changes' and 'inspiration' form the upper category *altruistic motives*, since these motives of the subjects are not self-interested and focus on ecological benefits. This motive was mentioned the most with 130 of 258 statements.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the tribe wants to get feedback and a reaction to their communication. One interviewee stated: „Also geht es natürlich auch um die Reichweite, also wie viele Menschen konnte ich damit erreichen und auch um das Feedback was kommt" (Interview 2). Exchanging with others was also an important part of motives, so together with the aspect of getting feedback, the category 'social exchange' has been developed. It is the most frequently mentioned category, as it includes 60 statements, and it is forming the upper category *social motives*. This upper category is second by its number of mentions including only statements that have social interactions as a background to communicate about sustainable fashion on Instagram.

Other statements were categorized as 'hedonism'. "Es hat mir ein positives Gefühl gegeben und mich bestätigt bei meiner Arbeit [...]" (Interview 1), is a statement that was categorized as having positive feelings when communicating on Instagram. Enjoying creating content about sustainable fashion, entertaining others, which states that the interviewees want to be entertaining with their contributions, as well as the communication on Instagram as a hobby, which shows that the interviewees do this for the reason to be busy in their free time thus lead to a hedonistic motive of communicating. Here the main reason to communicate on Instagram is the pleasure felt while doing so. Some of the interviewees say that they also want to emphasize sustainable brands and companies: "Die Marken bekommen vielleicht keinen Platz im Regal bei Karstadt oder können sich keinen Werbespot leisten und da ist Social Media dann aber eine sehr schöne Möglichkeit, dass auch solche Marken eine Bekanntheit kommen" (Interview 2). Additionally, the aspect of having an economic benefit was mentioned, too. These two aspects form the category 'economic motives, as the respondents gain economic benefits. 'Hedonism' and 'economic motives' are grouped to the upper category *egoistic motives*, because the subjects communicate about sustainable fashion on Instagram out of self-interest.

Among others, statements that indicate that the tribe wants to stand out and present itself on social media, were present. In response to the question what differentiates their communication on social media versus real life, one interviewee said: "Ich würde sagen, auf Social Media bin ich lauter." (Interview 1). This, as well as the presentation of identity, comprise the category 'self-presentation', because these are all motives from which the interviewee acts to present him or herself. One respondent said "Ich weiß, dass die Inhalte [...] wertgeschätzt werden, dass da Arbeit drinsteckt und dass es viele als einen sinnvollen Beitrag erachten." (Interview 2). This statement can be summarized as receiving recognition and appreciation, as the interviewees communicate about sustainable fashion to receive an expression of acknowledgement from followers. Strengthening self-esteem and receiving recognition and appreciation belong to the category 'perception from the outside' as sustainable fashion tribe members want to be recognized as such. The fourth upper category of the motives of communicating about sustainable fashion on Instagram thus consists of the categories 'self-presentation' and 'perception from the outside' and is called *prestige-related motives*. These underlying motives were, together with the egoistic motives, mentioned the least.

However, the upper category *prestige-related motives* contains motives that are now considered as conspicuous consumption, since they insist to increase a person's reputation or its status.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present research add to the understanding of the sustainable fashion tribe and the motivating factors in communicating about sustainable fashion consumption on social media. Because motives underlying consumption on social media are contrary to the tribes' purported altruistic motives for consuming sustainable fashion, a qualitative study was conducted.

The results show that the tribe can be characterized by people who are concerned with ethical responsibility and have deep knowledge about the fashion industry and subsequent environmental influences. These results can be reconciled with overall tribe-theory (Cova & Cova, 2002) as members of the tribe meet at fashion events and have rituals such as recycling clothes and engaging in activist behavior. The results are also in line with the study by Doran (2009), in which he examines that universalism values, such as world peace and protecting the environment have the strongest influence on the decision to consume fair trade products. Likewise, Karp (1996) evaluates self-transcendence and openness to change as having a positive effect on pro-environmental behavior, which stresses the relevance of the tribes' characteristics of creativity and curiosity. Moreover, the tribe of sustainable fashion can be put in contrast to traditional fashion terms with focus on low-cost production and fast changing fashion trends. Relevant characteristics shift to being different from the rest of ordinary consumers and having an activist mindset. This is consistent with other studies stating that ethically minded consumers modify their sustainable fashion consumption to resist the system and abandon traditional means, which includes incorporating concepts such as uniqueness and resistance (Bly, Gwodzd & Reisch, 2015, p. 132).

The second aim of the study was to differentiate the tribes' underlying motivations for communicating about sustainable fashion consumption on social media. The results suggest four distinct groups of motives that describe why tribe members communicate their consumption on social media: altruistic, egoistic, social and prestige-related motives. The altruistic motives for posting about sustainable fashion consumption support the overarching goal of protecting the environment and shifting consumer behavior towards more sustainable paths. Since this motive is consistent with the fundamental principles and values of the tribe, it was expected to be one of the main reasons for the tribe to communicate on social media. The tribe wants to influence others to behave in a more sustainable way by providing information and inspiration on Instagram. Further, the beforementioned activist behavior is also reflected here because the motivational intentions by posting on Instagram are also to oppose the fast fashion trend. These results can be reconciled with the study by Lundblad and Davies (2016), who examined the values and motivations underpinning sustainable fashion consumption and concluded that ethical values are shown to be important in this context.

Egoistic motives are also reasons for the tribe to post about sustainable fashion consumption on Instagram. This can be explained by the basic idea of social media being a platform where people are having fun with creating content and giving insights into their lives as well as economic offers when advertising products. Even though the tribe only promotes sustainable products, they still get incentivized for postings which stresses economical motivation processes when posting. The results show that egoistic motives tend to be of lower relevance in comparison to the others. The question whether egoistic motives that are reducing distress or altruistic motives of helping are more dominant in environmental consumer behavior has also been discussed in literature (Lee & Holden, 1999). Our results show that this tribe focuses more on altruistic than egoistic motives. The latter rather is an imperative condition on social media platforms.

Similarly, Instagram requires networking, sharing, and communicating with others. Thus, social motives such as the interaction with others and receiving feedback are also relevant for the tribe when communicating on Instagram. The primary focus of the social motives is the basic idea of having a community, which connects people within but also outside the tribe. The tribe posts on Instagram to communicate with their peers and to exchange ideas with the common goal of promoting sustainable

fashion consumption. This is in accordance with recent literature. Mishra et al. (2021) state that the social influence has a moderating effect on the relationship between ecological commitment and sustainable consumption behavior, which indicates that the tribes' behavior on Instagram is influenced by means of their peer group. In addition, Beall et al. (2021) examines that social return, as receiving feedback, is predominant when posting on social media about sustainable tourism.

Finally, addressing the basic assumption underlying this study, motivational factors regarding conspicuous consumption were found. Especially the prestige-related motives can be defined as being a part of conspicuous consumption. The presentation of the tribes' sustainable consumption behavior on Instagram in part intends to lead to appreciation by others but also in part strengthen their self-esteem in approving the correctness of their sustainable consumption style. As defined in the beginning, these motives can be reconciled with the basic concept of conspicuous consumption, as it is a demonstration of one's status. Even though prestige-related motives were not the major part of motives, the tribe wants to present themselves as sustainable individuals and receive recognition for it. These results can be reconciled with the literature in different ways. Johnson, Tariq and Baker (2008) also imply that people consume pro-social products not just for altruistic reasons but also in pursuit of achieving social status and prestige. Likewise, other studies examined that on social media the presentation of status and materialism, having a sense of accomplishment but also the demonstration of identity are factors concerning conspicuous consumption (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018; Lundblad & Davies, 2016; Qattan & Khasawneh, 2020). The results also show that the tribe wants to present its identity and stand out while communicating its sustainable fashion consumption on social media, which can be summarized as conspicuous behavior. The study adds to the literature, however, that posting sustainable fashion on Instagram brings, contrary to the basic idea of conspicuous consumption, less material prestige and more social prestige. The environmental concerns communicated, and the values being signaled are rather 'pro-socialness' (Johnson, Tariq & Baker, 2008, p. 343).

But this research is also subject to few limitations. First, as this research addresses topics that are influenced by social norms, bias due to socially desirable responding behavior can occur. Even though efforts were made to ask questions implicitly and to create a trusting environment, participants may have altered their answers to more socially accepted answers. Second, the sample size of nine is not representative for the whole tribe of sustainable fashion consumers, which can lead to bias in interpreting their answers. Third, as the interviews were conducted by different interviewers, interviewer bias can occur including any bias in results that can be traced back to the person who executed the interview. Lastly, the research was focusing on communication via the platform Instagram, thus the results of the tribes' motives are only applicable on this platform.

The study has added to the marketing literature by exploring a topic that is of current relevance. The theoretical implications of this research are various. A quantitative study could show whether the four extracted motives are representative for the whole investigated tribe. Also, more information about the distribution and intensity of the different motives can help to assess whether prestige-related motives exist predominantly or rather are peripherally represented and which of the motives mostly frame the communication on social media. Moreover, following studies can examine whether the results can be transferred to tribes that are interested in sustainable consumption of different consumer goods, like sustainable food or travelling. It is important to see whether the conflict between altruistic and conspicuous consumption behavior also occurs in similar tribes. The same is true for different social media platforms. It is necessary to assess whether the results are applicable for different social media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook.

The managerial implication of this research is to understand that conspicuous consumption also is a motive when presenting the consumption of sustainable fashion on social media, even though the fundamental reasons for sustainable consumption may be more altruistic. However, conspicuous consumption can also be seen as a driver of sustainable consumption in general, instead of opposing to it. This is also in common with the study by Hammad et al. (2019), who questioned the contradiction between conspicuous and sustainable consumption and found out that conspicuous motives can foster a shift towards sustainable consumption. Thus, instead of evaluating the prestige-

related motives of the tribe as something negative, they can be seen as a chance of influencing other people to more sustainable consumption in appealing to their own status needs. Concluding, ethical and conspicuous consumption are not necessarily contradicting, but can have positive mutual effects on each other.

References

- Beall, J. M., Boley, B. B., Landon, A. C., & Woosnam, K. M. (2021). What drives ecotourism: environmental values or symbolic conspicuous consumption? *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 29(8), 1215-1234.
- Bly, S., Gwozdz, W., & Reisch, L. A. (2015). Exit from the high street: An exploratory study of sustainable fashion consumption pioneers. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 39(2), 125-135.
- Bronner, F., & de Hoog, R. (2018). Conspicuous consumption and the rising importance of experiential purchases. *International Journal of Market Research*, 60(1), 88-103.
- Cova, B., & Cova, V. (2002). Tribal marketing: The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European journal of marketing*, 36(5), 595-620.
- Doran, C. J. (2009). The role of personal values in fair trade consumption. *Journal of business ethics*, 84(4), 549-563.
- Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., & Van den Bergh, B. (2010). Going green to be seen: status, reputation, and conspicuous conservation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 98(3), 392-404.
- Hammad, H., Muster, V., El-Bassiouny, N. M., & Schaefer, M. (2019). Status and sustainability: can conspicuous motives foster sustainable consumption in newly industrialized countries? *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 23(4), 537-550.
- Johnson, C. M., Tariq, A., & Baker, T. L. (2018). From Gucci to green bags: Conspicuous consumption as a signal for pro-social behavior. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 26(4), 339-356.
- Karp, D. G. (1996). Values and their effects on pro-environmental behavior. *Environmental and Behavior*, 28(1), 111-133.
- Kastanakis, Minas N.; Balabanis, George (2014). Explaining variation in conspicuous luxury consumption: An individual differences' perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(10), 2147-2154.
- Lee, J. A., & Holden, S. J. (1999). Understanding the determinants of environmentally conscious behavior. *Psychology & Marketing*, 16(5), 373-392.
- Lundblad, L., & Davies, I. A. (2016). The values and motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 15(2), 149-162.
- MAXQDA, Software für qualitative Datenanalyse, 1989 – 2021, VERBI Software. Consult. Sozialforschung GmbH, Berlin, Deutschland.
- Mishra, S., Malhotra, G., Chatterjee, R., & Sanatkumar Shukla, Y. (2021). Impact of self-expressiveness and environmental commitment on sustainable consumption behavior: the moderating role of fashion consciousness. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 1-23.
- O’Cass, A. and McEwen, H. (2004), “Exploring consumer status and conspicuous consumption”. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 4(1), 25-39.
- Podoshen, J.S. and Andrzejewski, S.A. (2012), “An examination of the relationships between materialism, conspicuous consumption, impulse buying, and brand loyalty”. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 20(3), 319-334.
- Qattan, J., & Al Khasawneh, M. (2020). The Psychological Motivations of Online Conspicuous Consumption: A Qualitative Study. *International Journal of E-Business Research*, 16(2), 1-16.

Research Report

Conspicuous Consumption in the emergent VanLife Community

Katharina Wichtmann¹, Nicholas Enders², Adrienne Wachner³, and Marvin Akuetey-Doe⁴

¹ Kiel University; Stu-230378@mail.uni-kiel.de

² Kiel University; Stu-202265@mail.uni-kiel.de

³ Kiel University; Stu-229189@mail.uni-kiel.de

⁴ Kiel University; Stu-219499@mail.uni-kiel.de

Abstract

As the worth of experiential consumption increases, so does the importance of experiential conspicuous consumption. Traveling is an outstanding example for experiential consumption, which resulted in increased research interest in travel as means of conspicuous consumption. The emergent VanLife community is a prime example of experiential consumption, but to this date no connection to conspicuous consumption has been made. This paper explores the underlying motivations for choosing VanLife as a vacation mode and possible connections to conspicuous consumption. For this purpose, a qualitative study was conducted. While the participants could not be directly linked to conspicuous consumption, indirect evidence of conspicuous consumption in the broader VanLife community could be found.

Keywords: Conspicuous Consumption; Traveling; VanLife, Experiential Consumption

1. Introduction

The hashtag VanLife is a current phenomenon in social media, with millions of postings on the Instagram platform alone. The exact definition of the term is still unclear, respectively the usage in the literature (Gretzel & Hardy, 2019, Rizvi et al. 2021) differs from that in the vernacular (Backof, Peter, 2017; Budde, Vanja, 2021; Kringe, Sarah, 2021). Two groups are united under the term, which can nevertheless be clearly distinguished. On one hand, the hashtag includes people who lead a modern nomadic life in their vehicle. On the other hand, there are posts about campervans and camping vacationers who assign themselves the term VanLife in the context of a trip (Gretzel & Hardy, 2019).

The characteristics of nomadic-living VanLifers and campers can complement each other. According to Gretzel et al. (2019), "VanLifers" define themselves by the type of their bus, by their individualizations when converting it, and by their brand, with retro models generally being more popular. Vacation campers, who can also be found under the hashtag VanLife, choose the van or motorhome as the place and form of their vacation for various motivations. According to Triantafillidou & Siomkos (2013), the connection to nature is a reason to camp, as is the social interaction with other campers. In addition, camping fulfills the demand for adventure, escape from everyday life, respectively the city, and also holds the possibility to learn something new (Brooker & Joppe, 2014). In the following text, VanLife or VanLifer is used as a term for travelers vacationing in a van, or motor home.

Not just the purchase and possession of a van, but also the aspect of traveling can be perceived through the lens of conspicuous consumption, a field of consumer behavior. In many cases, the consumer's decision to buy a good cannot be explained simply by the intrinsic utility derived from its consumption. Rather, it may be grounded in what the purchase symbolizes for others. Thorstein Veblen was one of the first to criticize consumer society. His work, "The Theory of leisure class", forms the basis for the theory of conspicuous consumption, which comes from the phenomenon that consumers decide to buy a good because it is expensive, and the consumer can use it to demonstrate

his wealth (Veblen, 1899). Goldsmith et al., 1996 claim that consumer behavior is influenced by the high motivation of striving for status and social prestige. This is because the higher the pursuit of status, the higher the consumer's adaptation to behaviors that increase their status, and this precisely includes the consumption of status symbols (Eastman et al., 1999). According to Mason, for the conspicuous consumer, the satisfaction derived from a particular purchase derives not from its use value, but from the public's reaction to the wealth the buyer demonstrates by having been able to afford the product for consumption. Thus, conspicuous consumption is characterized by the fact that the price of the product is, in most cases, the only factor that matters to the consumer (Mason, 1984).

Demand that is not stimulated by specific characteristics of the product but by possible increases in utility generated by external factors is described by Leibstein (1950) as non-functional demand. Utility-enhancing external effects are increases or decreases in consumption as well as rising or falling prices. In the context of non-functional demand, Leibstein distinguishes between three demand effects of conspicuous consumption. The Veblen-effect describes an increase in consumption by a consumer, through an increase in the price of a good. The snob-effect is the decrease in demand, due to an increase in consumers consuming the same good. The snob has an increased urge for exclusivity and uniqueness. The difference between the Snob and Veblen-effect is that the former reflects a function of consumption, while the latter reflects a function of price. The bandwagon-effect describes the demand for a good, which increases because others consume the same good. The bandwagon-effect is associated with the desire to conform to the people with whom one wants to be associated.

As the importance of experiential purchases grows and materialistic purchases lose their dominant position, those observations and conspicuous consumption can be found in experiential consumption as well (Howell et al., 2012; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Yang & Mattila, 2017). A study by Bronner and de Hoog (2017) determined some key aspects of conspicuous consumption while traveling. While more than 60% of vacationers agreed with the statement that the way people spend their summer vacation reflects the 'kind of person' they are, only 13% disagreed with this statement. As conspicuous consumption is deeply intertwined with the perceived perception by others, a connection to travel is highly probable. Two-thirds of vacationers were interested in sharing their vacation with others. They also identified two factors for conspicuous consumption regarding travel: (Social) status demonstration and identity demonstration. While there was an almost perfect correlation between age and conspicuous consumption, other socio-demographics such as social class or gender were not relevant (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018). However, they have a large influence on the perception of travel destinations as conspicuous or inconspicuous (Phillips & Back, 2011).

The predisposition of younger generations to conspicuous consumption was also observed by Liu et al. in Chinese college students. Over 90 % of the Chinese students were sharing their travels through social media and 32.7 % were thinking that this behavior was to gain recognition from peers (Liu & Huang, 2019). The usage of social media tools and platforms has a direct impact on conspicuous consumption because the user has full control over the information shared (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011) and, as mentioned by Taylor & Strutton (2016), can therefore be used to present the best version of oneself, which is achieved through the carefully designed representation of positional goods. The desire for self-promotion is positively related to conspicuous online consumption, as are envy and narcissism, which are also positively related to the desire for self-promotion (Taylor & Strutton, 2016). Travel is often associated with happy moments that people would like to remember (Kuhlhüser, 2017), hence it is a common form of (self-)representation on social media for virtually presenting goods or activities with travelogues.

While it is established, that traveling and conspicuous consumption can be interrelated, it remains unknown whether traveling with a van or a campervan in particular can be described as conspicuous consumption, or whether there is a correlation between the two variables. Is owning and traveling with a van seen as a status symbol? Is the motivating factor behind VanLife the prestige gained through its consumption? This study will attempt to answer those questions in the following.

2. Materials and Methods

To investigate the possible relationship between validity consumption and the VanLife movement, the qualitative research method of in-depth interviews was chosen to determine contextual relationships and personal motives of the interviewees (Bock, 1992, p.91). The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide, which was designed to cover various sub-areas. First, the general vacation behavior of the interviewees was examined, followed by questions about purchase decisions, individualization, and traveling with a van. Finally, the need for social recognition and the usage behavior of social media were discussed. To allow a natural flow of conversation, the semi-structured form of the interview was chosen and general questions about travel were used as a warm-up. To explicitly determine the motives behind the statements, the interview subject was not told in advance and the questionnaire was structured to get general vacation preferences before VanLife was mentioned.

The eight interviews conducted lasted from 32 to 60 minutes and were conducted by zoom or in person. The interviewees ranged in age from 22 to 30 and were either working or studying. The interviews took place mostly in the evening. Six men and two women were interviewed, who own an upgraded van. Interviewees were selected by the conductors due to the fact, that they own a van and have prior experiences in van travel, additionally the participants were known by the conductors beforehand.

The resulting texts were processed with the help of a qualitative content analysis based on Mayring (2016). The structure of the questionnaire served as an initial orientation for a category system, which was inductively supplemented from the text. Subsequently, the entire text was coded again and then analyzed. The category system can be found in the appendix of this paper.

3. Results

There seems to be a great amount of commonality between our participants with regard to their vacation behavior. They seek vacation as a means to escape their daily life, work, and to some extent even society as a whole and to gain freedom, as one participant put it: *“Ich verreise so um dem zu entfliehen, weil wir in Berlin wohnen und hier sind einfach viele Menschen, dann suche ich das Gegenteil.”* (Interview 3) expressing the need to escape their hustling environment of Berlin.

Most of them put great emphasis on the value of vacations. They try to fill in as much trips as they are able to squeeze into their year as possible: *“Ich habe viermal Ferien und in den Ferien sollte ich auch einmal Urlaub gemacht haben.”* (Interview 8). Their vacation destinations are for the most part in Europe, especially in Germany, Scandinavia and the Mediterranean. Even when they are not traveling by van, they tend to favor nature a lot over cities or bustling tourist destinations. Additionally, there was a trend towards traveling by car or train instead of flying. All of them travel with their partner or a small group (three to four people) of friends or family, traveling alone was seen as boring.

The subjects' motivation for using the van to plan their vacation can be deduced from their vacation preferences. One of the respondents clearly describes that it is the best form of vacation for him *“Aber für mich persönlich, finde ichs einfach nur genial. Ist genau meine Urlaubsform.”* (Interview 7). The three biggest motivators for our respondents are flexibility in vacation planning, the possibility to travel spontaneously and especially the feeling of freedom: *“Dass man überall anhalten kann, wenn man möchte und da dann auch bleiben. Man ist flexibel. Man kann selbst den Rhythmus deiner Reise bestimmen und Orte entdecken, die du sonst nicht gesehen hättest.”* (Interview 3). The possibility of spontaneous short vacations was frequently mentioned: *“Dass man übers Wochenende dann mal ein paar Tage weg ist. Gerne mal ein verlängertes Wochenende und sowas.”* (Interview 2). Van vacationing can be as spontaneous as traveling for just a few days, like a prolonged weekend.

The participants express a disdain of well-travelled destinations and are disappointed if their camping spots are already occupied by other travellers: *“Und wir kamen da an und dann standen da schon drei Vans mit deutschem Kennzeichen dort. Das hat mich gestört.”* (Interview 4).

The hype surrounding the VanLife was indeed seen as a barrier. Currently the demand for used Vans is far exceeding the supply, as a result, they are sold at immense prices. Generally speaking, the greatest barrier regarding VanLife was the high financial burden.

Their decision to buy a van was influenced by several factors. Three quarters of the respondents had been on vacation with a van or a campervan before, in order to test the form of vacation for themselves before they decided to buy one of their own. In their decision to buy a van, respondents were influenced by their immediate environment.

Recently, the VanLife gained a lot of popularity, but this was not seen as bad per se. The majority identified the VanLife community or lifestyle as a hype and one respondent formulated very nicely that Corona acts like a booster. The self-presentation of many community members displeases our subjects because this does not match their ideas of the VanLife. It was noticeable, however, that the VanLife as the subjects defined it for themselves is not properly represented in the social media. The subjects' goal is to live in the moment and escape from everyday life to find themselves. However, those active on social media would share every detail of their trip, giving subjects the impression that some are just jumping on the bandwagon but do not really like the VanLife itself.

Beyond that, however, some also use the community as a source of information. *"Man lernt ja auf den Stellplätzen, dann schon hier und da mal Menschen kennen und tauscht sich aus."* (Interview 6). They are mostly companions who were met during the van vacation. Additional information sources are social media platforms, which are used to gather specific information. According to the other respondents, social media platforms are primarily used as a source of solutions to certain problems or as a source of inspiration for design ideas or destinations. Even if only used to inform others, the participant perceives posting about the van as showing off: *"Wenn würde ich informieren wollen, aber dann kommt auch immer ein ‚Guck mal was ich mir leisten kann‘ und so schwingt dann immer halt mit. Und das möchte ich nicht rüberbringen."* (Interview 7).

When photos and videos are shared, it is mainly in private circles: *"Nein, ich dokumentiere meinen Ausbau nicht selbst auf Social Media. Ich teile schon mit Freunden und Familie Fotos, aber nicht öffentlich."* (Interview 4).

Whether the van is a status symbol is a matter of differing opinions among our test subjects. For many, the term 'status symbol' is difficult to define and differs from person to person. Two respondents explicitly mentioned the VW brand, with which they associated aesthetics and a positive brand image: *"Oder ein Freiheitsgefühl, Statussymbol. Ist ja VW halt einfach in dem Punkt ist ja so einfach eingebrannt bei uns, dass hat so mit seinen Anteil in die ganze Geschichte gebracht."* (Interview 1) listing the brand as a general sign of freedom. Despite this, it was mentioned that a van can be associated with a status symbol dependent on the price: *"Da gehen ganz gut mal für selbst, also von Profis ausgebaute, Vans gehen ohne Fahrzeug, nur der Ausbau und die Außenanbauteile, manchmal 120-130k, manchmal 140k drauf, und natürlich gibts da nach oben kein Limit und dann wird das absolut zum Statussymbol, wenn du dann auch 'ne Auffälligkeit erreichen möchtest, dann klar, ist das 'nen Statussymbol wie ein Lamborghini, ein Porsche, was auch immer."* (Interview 7). Vans converted by professionals can easily cost 120-140.000 €, with no limitations upwards. And if you pay that much, it is seen as a status symbol, comparable to a Lamborghini or Porsche.

4. Discussion

The characteristics of conspicuous consumption in travel is already investigated (Correia et al., 2016; Liu & Huang, 2019; Phillips & Back, 2011; Sirgy & Su, 2000). The posed assumption of this paper was the existence of a direct connection between VanLife traveling and conspicuous consumption, as experiential consumption becomes more relevant. Contrary to expectations, it was hard to find much direct evidence, that supported our hypothesis of VanLife as a means for conspicuous consumption. Most interviewees did not participate much in the social exchange on social media, which would be a clear indicator for conspicuous consumption (Liu & Huang, 2019). They acknowledged this actively and were averse to the idea of sharing their vacation online: *"Aber ich mag diese Selbstdarstellung, die da häufig einhergeht, auch wenn man die beste Intention hat, [...] nicht."* (Interview 7). The showmanship that goes with sharing on social media even without the intention of showing off, is disliked. This is

supported by the extensive findings on the subjects' vacation priorities and their similar stance on sharing behaviors during the van conversion. The only outlier being one proband, that just started sharing their van conversion on Instagram (Interview 2). The main driver for choosing van vacations is the freedom, that comes with this vacation mode, as stated by nearly anyone: *"Die Freiheit, die man dadurch hat. Dass man sein Zuhause auf vier Rädern hat."* (Interview 3). Additionally, they also exhibited a great preference towards van vacations. This increases the likelihood that the decision is based on enjoyment of VanLife, rather than on underlying motives such as showing off.

As a result, the main motivations for going on van vacations reflect their preferences fittingly: With a huge emphasis on freedom and flexibility, as well as spontaneity, all but one participant were convinced to use a superior form of travel. Especially the aspect of freedom often contradicts the idea of conspicuous consumption, as most people wanted to escape their daily life and get far away from others, which makes sharing the experience less valuable. With one even going as far as using van vacation for a "social media detox": *"Von den drei Monaten [Vanurlaub] habe ich beispielsweise drei Wochen kein Social Media genutzt."* (Interview 6). One participant decided to waive social media consumption for three weeks of his three-month trip with his van.

In addition, no direct indicators could be found in the search for behavioral patterns corresponding to the Veblen- Snob- or Bandwagon-effect. Everyone was either happy about the increasing interest in VanLife or at least indifferent. The only exception being if others had the same travel destination as themselves or if people did not adhere to the common camping etiquette. Since the 'Snob' needs the exclusivity and is averse to sharing his consumption, the Snob-effect could not be found in our sample. The Veblen-effect of increased interest with increased price was also negated because everybody saw the high-price as a problem instead of a perk. While one could argue that some of the participants were 'Bandwagoners', since their buying decision was based on former partners or parents who already had a van or camper, the conductors reason that the appeal was in the vacation mode and not in the mimicry of others. Some indirect indicators were found however: *"Ein Pärchen war sehr abgehoben, weil wir den Van damals nur seit ein paar Monaten hatten und nicht wie die seit 5 Jahren."* (Interview 6). One couple thought lesser of the participant, because they had the van much longer than them.

Only when asked about the van as a status symbol there was an affirmative answer. Just two participants denied the claim, while three participants confirmed the statement. The last three were adamant, that their van was not a status symbol, but those of others were. A distinction mainly based on the car type used for the conversion. This is further supported by our indirect evidence. While the participants of this study did not fit the criteria, there was a consensus, that the VanLife tribe, mainly on Instagram and YouTube, is exhibiting clear signs of conspicuous consumptions: *"Also wie sich einige Menschen mit den Dingen versuchen zu profilieren ist ja schon crazy."* (Interview 6). Some people are trying really hard to distinguish themselves through their vans. The influx of modern day influencers has not spared the VanLife community either: *"[...] und dann gibts so ein paar Instagram-Kanäle, die den kompletten Markt beeinflussen [...]"* (Interview 7). Some Instagram-channels influence even the van market. The participants also spoke lightly about the parts of the community, that prefer to talk about their van, rather than using it: *"Das sind Leute, die lieber über ihr Auto reden, als mit dem Auto wegzufahren."* (Interview 8). Thus, the existence of a bigger (or at least very visible) group of VanLifers, who would rather fit the label of conspicuous consumption is confirmed. However, within this study the conductors failed in finding such interview partners.

This is also one of the proposed reasons why this study could not show direct examples of conspicuous consumption, due to its sampling method. All participants were relatively homogenous in age and live in close geographic proximity. Additionally, there is a disparity of female and male participant, as only two probands were female. As age plays a factor in traveling as means of conspicuous consumption (Bronner & de Hoog, 2018) and different occupations prefer different traveling destinations (Correia et al., 2016), that are more or less conspicuous, a more diverse sample would have been preferred (Phillips & Back, 2011). This selection bias occurred due to time restraints and the resulting personal search for appropriate interview partners.

Another leverage point could have been anti-consumption as conspicuous consumption: as there were multiple statements by the subjects, that were mentioning disdain of normal vacation practices, such as traveling by plane or sleeping in a hotel, as well as the need to emphasize that their van was not a status symbol. As the main focus was on the consumption of VanLife, instead of the anti-consumption of other vacations, this was quickly dismissed. However, a more balanced approach with a combination of both, such as symbolic consumption could yield some worthwhile results, because some of the participants were talking about their anti-consumption of their own accord. Symbolic consumption takes the consumption of goods to maintain and enhance self-esteem and self-concept of the consumer into account, as well as the anti-consumption to protect the self-esteem and to avoid self-abasement within the self-concept (Hogg et al., 2009). A correlation this study could not satisfactorily dissect, as the research question led to a focus on consumption, which left the anti-consumption portion of symbolic consumption without enough depth for proper interpretation.

This report, in its explorative nature, only scraped the surface of the topic on hand. As a result, there is still high potential in this research field. Current research on VanLife is limited to vans as substitute housing. VanLife as a vacation mode is still mainly unknown. Because the expression of conspicuous consumption is often found in social media, a netnography of the #VanLife may lead to a better understanding. Another angle to this topic would be moderator or mediator variables. Are there unknown variables that change the relation of VanLife and conspicuous consumption? Or is it possible, that VanLife is used as a transporter for conspicuous consumption and takes on a moderator/mediator role? The research subject also intersects with other research fields. As VanLifers are often highly experienced in their hobby and spend a lot of time and emphasis on their car and vacations, a bridging tie to Connoisseurship for example is warranted. As the VanLife-tribe experiences a considerable growth which is only amplified by the ongoing Corona pandemic, especially in the younger generation, further studies are needed to shed light on this upcoming trend.

References

- Backof, Peter. (2017, Juli 17). Lifestyle-Phänomen #vanlife—Aussteigen mit Hashtag. Deutschlandfunk. <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/lifestyle-phaenomen-vanlife-aussteigen-mit-hashtag-100.html>
- Bechthold. (1991). Le paradoxe du luxe. *Reveu Francaise du Marketing*, 132/133(2–3), 41–43.
- Bock, M. (1992). „Das halbstrukturierte-leitfadenorientierte Tiefeninterview“. In J. H. P. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik (Hrsg.), *Analyse verbaler Daten: Über den Umgang mit qualitativen Daten* (S. 90–109). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-90092-0_4
- Bronner, F., & de Hoog, R. (2018). Conspicuous consumption and the rising importance of experiential purchases. *International Journal of Market Research*, 60(1), 88–103. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470785317744667>
- Brooker, E., & Joppe, M. (2014). A critical review of camping research and direction for future studies. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 20(4), 335–351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766714532464>
- Budde, Vanja. (2021, August 4). Unterwegs im Camper-Van—Der Traum von Freiheit. Deutschlandfunk Kultur. <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/unterwegs-im-camper-van-der-traum-von-freiheit-100.html>
- Correia, A., Kozak, M., & Reis, H. (2016). Conspicuous Consumption of the Elite: Social and Self-Congruity in Tourism Choices. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(6), 738–750. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287514563337>
- Eastman, J. K., Goldsmith, R. E., & Flynn, L. R. (1999). Status Consumption in Consumer Behavior: Scale Development and Validation. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 7(3), 41–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10696679.1999.11501839>
- Goldsmith, Flynn, & Eastman. (1996). Status consumption and fashion behaviour: An exploratory study. *Association of Marketing Theory and Practice Proceedings*, 309–316.
- Gonzales, A., & Hancock, J. (2011). Mirror, Mirror on my Facebook wall: Effects of exposure to Facebook on self-esteem. *Cyber Psychology, Behavior & Social Networking*, 14(1/2), 79–83.

- Gretzel, U., & Hardy, A. (2019). # VanLife: Materiality, makeovers and mobility amongst digital nomads. E-review of *Tourism Research*, Vol. 16 No. 2/3. <https://ertr-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/ertr/index.php/ertr/article/view/325/98>
- Hogg, M. K., Banister, E. N., & Stephenson, C. A. (2009). Mapping symbolic (anti-) consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 148–159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2008.01.022>
- Howell, R. T., Pchelin, P., & Iyer, R. (2012). The preference for experiences over possessions: Measurement and construct validation of the Experiential Buying Tendency Scale. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 7(1), 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.626791>
- Kringe, Sarah. (2021, Juli 4). *Leben im Van: Die Realität ist nicht wie auf Instagram*. <https://www.zdf.de/uri/548d879a-00ab-458d-b274-92f8dd4cf1e4>
- Kuhlhüser, S. (2017). #fernweh #wanderlust #explore: Reise- »Erzählungen« auf Instagram. *Rhetorik*, 36(1), 12–20. <https://doi.org/10.1515/rhet.2017.007>
- Liu, K., & Huang, X. (2019). Research on Conspicuous Consumption in Travel Behaviors of the College Students. *Proceedings of the 2018 International Symposium on Social Science and Management Innovation (SSMI 2018)*. *Proceedings of the 2018 International Symposium on Social Science and Management Innovation (SSMI 2018)*, Xi'an, China. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ssmi-18.2019.46>
- Mason. (1984). Conspicuous Consumption: A Literature Review. *European Journal of Marketing*, 18(3), 26–39.
- Mayring, P. (2016). *Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung* (6., überarbeitete Auflage). Beltz.
- Phillips, W. J., & Back, K.-J. (2011). Conspicuous Consumption Applied to Tourism Destination. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 28(6), 583–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548408.2011.603630>
- Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage*. Harvard Business Press.
- Rizvi, A. H., Morayko, K., Hancock, M., & Song, A. (2021). Provocations from #vanlife: Investigating Life and Work in a Community Extensively Using Technology Not Designed for Them. *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445393>
- Roux. (1995). Consumer evaluation of luxury brand extensions. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 1971–1980.
- Sirgy, M. J., & Su, C. (2000). Destination Image, Self-Congruity, and Travel Behavior: Toward an Integrative Model. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(4), 340–352. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004728750003800402>
- Taylor, D. G., & Strutton, D. (2016a). Does Facebook usage lead to conspicuous consumption?: The role of envy, narcissism and self-promotion. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 10(3), 231–248. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIM-01-2015-0009>
- Taylor, D. G., & Strutton, David. (2016b). Does Facebook usage lead to conspicuous consumption? The role of envy, narcissism and self-promotion. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 10(3), 231–248.
- Triantafyllidou, A., & Siomkos, G. (2013). Summer camping: An extraordinary, nostalgic, and interpersonal experience. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 19(3), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766712463719>
- Uzgoren, E., & Guney, T. (2012). The Snop Effect in the Consumption of Luxury Goods. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 62, 628–637. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.09.105>
- Veblen, T. (2018). *THEORY OF THE LEISURE CLASS: An economic study of institutions, conspicuous consumption, fashion ... and traditions* (hardcover). LULU COM.
- Vigneron, & Johnson. (1999). A review and a conceptual framework of prestige-seeking consumer behavior. *Academy Of Marketing Science Review*. www.Amsreview.Org/Articles/Vigneron01-1999.Pdf
- Yang, W., & Mattila, A. S. (2017). The Impact of Status Seeking on Consumers' Word of Mouth and Product Preference—A Comparison Between Luxury Hospitality Services and Luxury Goods.

Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 41(1), 3–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1096348013515920>

Research Report

Sustainable Consumption as a Status Symbol? Drivers and Barriers of Sustainable Consumption and the Use of Car Sharing

Anna Berning¹, Christian Kruzynski², Moritz Löttsch³, and Julian Hense⁴

¹ Kiel University; stu222923@mail.uni-kiel.de

² Kiel University; stu202862@mail.uni-kiel.de

³ Kiel University; stu229426@mail.uni-kiel.de

⁴ Kiel University; stu232619@mail.uni-kiel.de

Abstract

In today's society, especially among Millennials and GenZ, there is a growing trend towards sustainable consumption. Companies are reacting to this with a wide range of sustainable products and services, such as sharing offers like car sharing. This qualitative study examines the drivers and barriers of sustainable consumption behavior and the use of car sharing as well as personal status symbols among the tribe of sustainable students. A special focus is placed on the question of whether status-related motives represent incentives for sustainable consumption and the use of car sharing or whether these can serve as status symbols. The results show that motives for sustainable consumption are primarily ecological and functional in nature. Car sharing is primarily used for functional reasons. Neither sustainable consumption behavior nor car sharing are seen as status symbols among sustainable students; a potential status gain through sustainable consumption or sharing use cannot be identified as a motive. However, the study also provides indications that this could change in coming years.

Keywords: Sustainable Consumption; Conspicuous Consumption; Status Symbol; Car Sharing

1. Introduction

The burden to the environment and the use of natural resources is equally attributable to producers and consumers (Umweltbundesamt, 2021). Companies respond with products to the corresponding demand of consumers. However, this is also how a greater supply of sustainable products can be achieved through an increase in demand, as is the case with green electricity and organic products. Increasing importance is also being attached to the collaborative consumption of goods and services, primarily with a view to achieving a positive ecological effect (Witzke, 2016). This sharing economy is particularly popular among the young and educated (PwC, 2018). For young people, the focus is on quality of life instead of material status symbols or wealth.

There are various influencing factors that affect sustainable consumption: Intrapersonal factors (socio-demographic factors & psychographic factors), interpersonal factors (social norms & symbolic motives) and other factors such as the availability of products and services (Herbes, 2021). In the case of the interpersonal factors, the symbolic motives show up in the form of conspicuous consumption or demonstrative consumption. In this case, people behave in a prosocial or environmentally friendly manner in order to increase their status.

In the study by the GfK organization (Süptitz, 2021; GfK, 2021), customers of sustainable products were divided into five different customer segments. The largest segment is made up of the so-called glamour greens. For this type of customer, green is a status symbol, and they are keen to show their environmentally friendly behavior. Here, the need to belong is driven by image awareness. This segment also includes an above-average number of students. The glamour greens are characterized by the need for an active and mobile lifestyle, which is compatible with car sharing.

Car sharing is a form of shared car use where only access is shared, not ownership, and usage intervals are relatively short (Riegler et al., 2016). There are various forms of car sharing, such as conventional and private car sharing. In this paper, conventional car sharing, in which the vehicles are provided by companies via an online platform, is considered. Car sharing has seen a steady increase in the number of users in recent years in Germany, accompanied by a rise in the number of car sharing vehicles offered (Bundesverband CarSharing, 2022).

The object of investigation in this paper is based on the question whether car sharing can be seen as a status symbol for sustainability or not. In order to answer the research question, eight in-depth interviews were conducted. The focus group consists of sustainable students. Sustainable students are those who are aware of their actions and their impact on the environment, and who try to adapt their consumption habits to environmentally friendly behavior. On the one hand, the focus group seems suitable because, as mentioned earlier in the text, the sharing economy is particularly popular among the young and educated, and there are also an above-average number of students among the glamour greens. On the other hand, it was found in own observations that students with an affinity to the topic of sustainability exchange a lot in this regard, as well as live out their sustainable behavior openly.

The next chapter discusses the methods used to answer the research question. Followed by an analysis of the in-depth interviews and the elaboration of the resulting findings. Finally, the results are discussed, and important findings are highlighted, as well as recommendations for further research are derived.

2. Materials and Methods

To be able to answer the research question, a qualitative research was conducted. The purpose was to investigate whether and to what extent there is a connection between sustainable consumption and conspicuous consumption. In particular, car sharing will be investigated. In order to discover a connection, the method of in-depth interviews is chosen in the context of the qualitative research.

Eight interviews were conducted with interview partners from the researchers' personal environment. The interviewees had to be students, who demonstrably show sustainable consumption behavior in their everyday lives. The sample consists of 50 % female and 50 % male participants with an average age of 25.5 years. The interviews were conducted face-to-face or via online video conferencing tools.

In order to gain insights with the in-depth interview, the research question is broken down into its components. This results in the following three relevant components: sustainability, status symbols, and carsharing. These form the starting point for the further research and form the basis for the structure of the in-depth interview. Each component forms a block, which build on each other. The blocks contain a total of 34 open questions that arose in a group discussion and are intended to cover different perspectives on the topics.

The first block deals with the topic of sustainability and environmental awareness. On the one hand, this block serves to ensure that the interview partner belongs to the tribe of the environmentally conscious student. On the other hand, it is intended to develop a better understanding of sustainable behaviors. The second block, possessions and status symbols, is intended to capture the perspective and relevance of the previously defined tribe on this topic. In addition, a relationship between sustainability and status symbols will be established here. The last block contains general questions about car sharing and usage behavior at the beginning, while the three components are brought together in the form of further questions at the end.

For the evaluation, the individual in-depth interviews are transcribed and searched for statements that are potentially relevant to the research question. Based on this, these statements are inductively transferred into subcategories. Finally, the subcategories form the basis for thematic main categories, on the basis of which the frequency analysis and evaluation follows. Numerical values in the tables below refer to how many individuals have mentioned the aspect and are then summed up

in the main categories. Categorization and coding were carried out and compared by all researchers to increase inter-coder reliability.

3. Results

Based on the interviews and the categorised quotes on the topic of sustainability, overlaps in the answers of the interviewees become clear. First, a block of topics could be isolated, which deals with the barriers to sustainable action.

For example, six out of eight respondents feel that a sustainable lifestyle is too expensive and therefore refrain from pursuing it consistently (cf. A1, A2, C1, C2, M1 and M2). Referring to that M1 says: "Finanziell ist es leider oft teurer sich einen nachhaltigen Lebensstil zu finanzieren. Als Beispiel unverpackt-Läden, Bio-Läden etc." A special case is one of the interviewees, who in principle rejects sustainable products, which would be significantly more expensive than conventional products due to their sustainability (cf. C1). C1 says: "bei manchen anderen Dingen ist es tatsächlich auch ein Prinzipien-Ding, wenn nachhaltige Dinge einfach teurer sind bzw. unverhältnismäßig teuer sind, dann sehe ich das teilweise nicht ein, dass ich dafür nur mehr bezahle, weil es angeblich nachhaltiger ist." In addition, all respondents state that they are not consistent in their sustainable behaviour either out of laziness, convenience, habit or for reasons of independence. A1 says for example: "Aufwand und Zeit, dass man sich damit beschäftigen müsste." Other barriers are availability (cf. A1 and C2), the effort required to obtain information (cf. A1 and J1) and the time required (cf. M1 and J1). In addition, some respondents say they are not always aware of the consequences of their actions (cf. M1 and J1). M1: "vielleicht auch, dass man sich trotz eines gewissen Bewusstseins nicht zu jedem Zeitpunkt zu 100% der Folgen bewusst ist, die das Handeln nach sich zieht."

The next section deals with the overlaps regarding the drivers of sustainable behaviour. Here, too, the interviewees reveal strong commonalities.

The interviewees all state that they try to behave sustainably in order to protect the environment, animals and/or resources (cf. A1, A2, C1, C2, M1, M2, J1 and J2). J2 states: "dass ich probiere, relativ umweltbewusst, also meine Umwelt wahrzunehmen und zu gucken, welches Verhalten von mir welchen Einfluss auf die Umwelt hat, auch wenn er jetzt nur relativ klein ist." Three out of six respondents also state that they wanted to work for a "liveable tomorrow" (cf. A1, M1 and J1) and for the same number, intrinsic motivation or their own conviction plays a major role in their choice of sustainable actions (cf. A1, M1 and J1). Furthermore, for some of the respondents, the environment plays a role in their decisions; among others, two people state that they want to be a role model for others and therefore behave more sustainably (cf. M1 and J2). J2: "Man kann, denke ich, auch sehr viel nur selber für sich im Kleinen tun und hoffen, dass andere Menschen einem gleichtun." The motivations "fun" (cf. M1) and "making someone else happy" (cf. A1) are also mentioned, as well as financial benefits through the use of second-hand offers (cf. M2), and the more efficient use of time when travelling by train (cf. C1), convenience (cf. C1), and health through cycling or walking (cf. C2).

Table 1: Barriers of Sustainable Consumption Behaviour

Too expensive	6	Financial barriers	7	Barriers	30
Eco-Tax (principle)	1				
Lack of availability	2	Availability	3		
Lack of alternative products	1				
Expenditure of time	2	Effort	5		
Expenditure of time to collect information	2				
Lack of compatibility with the job	1				
Lack of information	2	Lack of information	4		
Lack of awareness of the consequences of one's own actions	2				

Laziness	3		
Convenience	5	Behaviour pattern	11
Habituality	1		
Independence	2		

Table 2: Drivers of Sustainable Consumption Behaviour

Make someone happy by sharing Pleasure	1	Hedonism	2	Drivers	28
Liveable tomorrow	3				
Environmental protection	6	Environmental consciousness	10		
Animal welfare	2				
Save resources	2				
Personal environment	1	External influences	4		
Influence of the Fridays for Future movement	1				
Role modelling	2				
Intrinsic motivation/conviction	3	Intrinsic motivation	3		
Save money	2	Financial motives	2		
Convenience	1	Functional motives	4		
Efficient use of time	1				
Protection against infection (Covid)	1				
Health-related motives	1				

As can be seen in the tables, the individual aspects mentioned can be combined into categories and finally divided into barriers and drivers.

Barriers include financial resources, which are made up of the aspects “too expensive” and the refusal of an eco-tax. Almost all interviewees agree that more sustainable products come with higher prices and therefore they cannot behave as sustainable as they would like. Availability is also a problem. Both the non-existence of alternatives and the poor availability of existing alternatives in some regions are mentioned here. The effort associated with a more sustainable lifestyle is also criticised several times by the interviewees. Both the procurement of information and the actual purchase take time and are thus not always compatible with the job, according to the opinion of one interviewee. The renunciation of sustainability is also not always intentional; lack of information forms another category in the frequency analysis. Together with financial barriers, behavioural patterns form the most significant category in the analysis. Habits, laziness, convenience and independence are due to familiar behavioural patterns of the interviewees, which they find difficult to break away from.

The biggest driver of sustainable behaviour is environmental awareness. This consists of environmental protection, animal welfare and saving resources. All interviewees address at least one of these points in their answers. The personal environment, the influence of demonstrations and movements, as well as the urge to act as a role model for others can be summarised as external influences, which together with the functional motives convenience, efficient use of time, protection from Covid infection and health are the second most important categories. Other categories are hedonism, financial motivation, future-oriented motivation and intrinsic motivation.

The answers regarding the use of car sharing can be categorised and evaluated in the same way as the answers relating to sustainability. Here, too, drivers and barriers could be isolated. In the following, the similarities but also the differences between the drivers and barriers of sustainability and the use of car sharing are compared.

With regard to the drivers, it can be clearly stated that the largest share for car sharing is due to the purely functional motives, such as the need of a large vehicle for transport (cf. A1, C2, M1 and M2). M2 says: "Ich nutze Carsharing, wenn ich etwas transportieren muss, was ich weder mit dem ÖPNV, noch zu Fuß oder mit dem Fahrrad transportieren kann." These functional motives play a subordinate role in sustainability, whereas here the environmental awareness of the interviewees plays a significantly more important role. Hedonism and moral motives are equally mentioned, while it is striking that external influences make a major contribution to sustainable behaviour and are not mentioned once in relation to car sharing. Overall, significantly fewer drivers are named for the topic of car sharing than for the general questions on sustainability.

In terms of barriers, car sharing and sustainable behaviour are similar in many of the interviewees' answers. Financial barriers are one of the biggest barriers. Both the purchase of sustainable products and the use of car sharing are perceived as too expensive by almost all interviewees. In the case of car sharing, this is compounded by opaque insurance costs (cf. C1). C1: "Wenn man jetzt einen Unfall hat mit einem Carsharing-Wagen, ist das meistens nicht Vollkasko und die Selbstbeteiligung ist auch noch recht hoch." The lack of information is also criticised by more than half of the interviewees (cf. A1, A2, C2, M2 and J2). Also, according to the interviews, availability is not always given (cf. A1, C1, C2, M1 and J2), similar to sustainable alternative products. C2 states: "Auch generell sollte der ländliche Raum besser erschlossen werden." Only the behavioural patterns that are often mentioned by the interviewees in relation to a sustainable lifestyle do not come up as a barrier in the case of car sharing. These are mostly found here as functional motives as drivers.

Table 3: Barriers of the Use of Car Sharing

Availability	5	Availability	6		
Too expensive	5				
Insurance costs	1	Financial barriers	6		
Low public awareness	3			Barriers	20
Lack of transparency about prices	1	Lack of information	7		
Insufficient explanation of use	3				
Lack of flexibility	2	Lack of flexibility	2		

Table 4: Drivers of the Use of Car Sharing

Lack of availability of own car	1				
Transportation of larger items/shopping	4				
Flexibility	3	Functional motives	15		
Protection against infection (Covid)	2				
Low effort	1				
Convenience	4			Drivers	23
Space-saving (revegetation)	1	Environmental consciousness	3		
Reduction of CO2 emissions	2				
Moral aspect	1	Moral motives	2		
Convey values to the outside world	1				
Curiosity/interest	1	Hedonism	1		
Low costs	1				
Free parking	1	Financial motives	2		

The following section is about the evaluation and development of status symbols. The structure is as follows: First, classic status symbols are shown that are named by the interview participants.

Then, their personal status symbols are highlighted and a development is derived from this. Finally, the special case of whether sustainability can be seen as a status symbol is examined.

As classic status symbols, six out of eight respondents count the car (cf. A1, A2, C1, C2, M1 and M2). In addition to the fact that so many participants associate cars with status symbols, the following statement underscores the importance of the car as a status symbol. Interview participant C1 says that when he thinks of status symbols, he thinks of the Germans' status symbol par excellence: the car: "Wenn man von Status spricht, denkt man natürlich an das Statussymbol schlechthin der Deutschen, nämlich das Auto." Five of the interviewees count clothing and jewellery among the classic status symbols (cf. A1, A2, C1, C2 and M2). This is followed by technical equipment for three of the respondents (cf. A1, C2 and J1) and real estate, with apartments and houses mentioned (cf. A1, A2 and C1). Watches (cf. A1 and J1) and family (cf. A1 and C1) are mentioned twice each. Less important are expensive hobbies (cf. A2), social media (cf. C1), travel (cf. C1) and money (cf. M1). All in all, a certain pattern can be discerned here, because with the exception of family, all the status symbols mentioned represent material objects.

The question now is whether these material status symbols are also seen as personal status symbols for the respondents. It is noticeable that very few material objects are listed as personal status symbols. Only one respondent mentions technical devices (iPhone and Macbook) as status symbols (cf. A2) and another respondent mentions a watch (Rolex) as a personal status symbol (cf. J2). Otherwise, the status symbols listed are immaterial in nature. It is striking that the personal status symbols mentioned differ in terms of their design, but are comparable in nature, in their immaterial character. Based on the answers, success is mentioned two times (cf. A1 and C1), education one time (cf. M1) and social recognition one time (cf. M1). For example, respondent A1 says that for him success in what you do is considered an important status symbol: "Erfolg in dem was man tut, ob es Studium ist, im Job, beim Sport, überall." In a similar direction, one respondent (cf. A1) says that it is important for him to be fully ambitious in sports and at university: "Beim Sport ist es mir wichtig, dass ich gut bin und meinen vollen Ehrgeiz einbringe, in der Uni auch." Here the idea of success can also be identified.

Other mentions for personal status symbols are leisure time (cf. M1 and M2). Especially in times when many people suffer from burn-out and the boundaries between work and free time can become blurred due to the home office, conscious free time is seen as a status symbol. This is also confirmed by respondent M1, who says that there are many people, who have to work a lot: "...viele Menschen gibt, die sehr viel arbeiten müssen." Furthermore, friends and family are mentioned as a status symbol (cf. A1), teeth (cf. M2) and also bicycle (cf. M2). Two respondents say of themselves that they do not see anything as a status symbol (cf. C1 and C2).

At first glance, a difference can be identified. Many respondents list material objects as classic status symbols, such as cars, real estate, clothing and jewelry, as well as technical devices. In contrast, these items are not among their personal status symbols. These include intangible items, such as success, education and leisure. This possible difference and a possible generational theme are also addressed by some respondents. Referring to the car, respondent A1 says that the car was an important status symbol 20 or 30 years ago, not so today: "Tendenziell war früher das Auto auch echt ein wichtiges Statussymbol und wenn man es vergleicht mit vor 20-30 Jahren, dann ist das nicht mehr so richtig." Respondent C2 also confirms this for the older generation: "Das Auto ist für die ältere Generation auf jeden Fall noch ein Statussymbol." Respondent M1 also recognizes a social change in which the car is losing importance: "Ich glaube, dass ein langsamer gesellschaftlicher Wandel einsetzt, der die Bedeutung des Autos als Statussymbol reduziert." It can therefore be deduced that the car is losing importance as a status symbol.

In the case of personal and, in our case, mainly intangible objects, the aspect of environmental protection or sustainability is not mentioned at all. The next part is about whether sustainability can also be seen as a status symbol. Here, the subjects agree that it is not a status symbol for them personally (cf. A1, A2, C1, C2, M2 and J1). However, they also agree that it can already be a status symbol for some other people. There are even reports of acquaintances who want to distinguish

themselves with sustainable products, A1 reports among a circle of acquaintances that they show each other their sustainable products: “wie viele tolle Produkte sie haben, die nachhaltig sind.” Furthermore, interview participants agree that the aspect of sustainability and environmental protection could continue to gain importance as a status symbol in the future. Respondent A2 says that sustainability could become a status symbol, especially among the younger ones who prefer second-hand, etc: “in kommenden Generationen zum Statussymbol.”

Last but not least, another conspicuous feature should be noted here: There could be an attitude-behaviour gap. As shown in the previous explanations, the respondents are aware of sustainable activities, but do not implement them at all due to the barriers described, for example financial hurdles. It may also play a role here that they do not want to break out of their habits due to laziness, convenience, etc. The interview participants also agree that they could be more environmentally aware (cf. C1, C2, A1).

4. Discussion

In the following, the results of the qualitative analysis, practical implications as well as limitations of the study and prospects for future research will be discussed.

The results show that for the tribe of sustainable students, there is a wide variety of drivers for sustainable consumption behavior. The main drivers for sustainable consumption in general include environmental awareness, external influences, and functional motives, while the motive for the use of car sharing as the particular sustainable consumption behavior under investigation primarily lies in its functional benefits. Status-related motives were not found to be a motive for sustainable consumption, neither generally nor for the use of car sharing. This result contradicts empirical studies that find that conspicuous motives have a positive effect on sustainable consumption (e.g., Griskevicius et al., 2010; Dastrup et al., 2012; Sexton & Sexton, 2014). However, it is in line with the finding that environmental protection and sustainability are not seen as personal status symbols among sustainable students. The glamour greens customer segment that sees sustainable behavior as a status symbol and is eager to demonstrate its environmentally friendly behavior (Süptitz, 2021; GfK, 2021) cannot be found in this sample of sustainable students. As demonstrated in this study, sustainable students express status through other intangible items such as education, leisure and success in university or in the job. Compared to the classic status symbols valued by older generations, this indicates a shift away from materialistically expressed status symbols. However, the mentioned intangible status symbols still follow the same mechanism of classic status symbols: They can all be seen as an expression of success. From this point of view, it is questionable whether sustainable consumption could follow this mechanism and thus serve as a status symbol. However, the results indicate that a more narrowly defined tribe of very sustainable and committed people might see sustainable consumption behavior as a status symbol and that its importance as a status symbol is expected to rise in the future. This could indicate that in the future, there might develop other factors through which people gain status.

Car sharing is also found not to be a status symbol for sustainable students. For this sample, the fact that sustainable consumption behavior is not seen as a status symbol, and the corresponding explanations given above, can certainly also help explain this finding. In addition, the declining importance of cars as status symbols among young adolescents may play a role. As demonstrated in empirical studies, and also shown in this study, cars are no longer a status symbol for the majority of young people between 16 and 29 years (Anzenhofer, 2019). This tendency does not seem to be influenced any sustainability-related status benefits gained by car sharing. Even among the people for whom cars are still a status symbol, the car sharing concept might not enhance status. Classical status goods need to be exclusive in order to function as conspicuous consumption goods (Hammad et al., 2019). Car sharing, however, is not exclusive as it is easily accessible, and providers mostly offer average car brands.

Practitioners can conclude from the results that in promoting car sharing among students, they should emphasize the functional benefits of car sharing like flexibility, availability, and affordability.

There is no evidence from this study that there is an advantage in addressing this target group by emphasizing the environmental benefits of car sharing or by using status-related appeals in advertising.

When considering the results, it should be noted that this is a qualitative study with small sample size, which was subject to unavoidable selection bias. Objectivity of the experimental procedure was limited since the researchers questioned their self-selected interview partners. Even though we had the participants' sustainable consumption behavior confirmed by questions at the beginning of the questionnaire, the sample was a relatively heterogeneous with regard to the scope of sustainable behavior. This allowed us, in an explorative manner, to identify a tendency for the broader tribe that should be confirmed by quantitative studies. However, to find out more about the potential status effect of sustainable consumption behavior in general and car sharing in particular, as well as about its mechanisms, a more narrowly defined tribe should be examined in future research. Nevertheless, it makes sense to conduct quantitative surveys in the future as well as surveys with more heterogeneous subjects.

References

- Anzenhofer, L. (2019, Sep 07). *Auto für Millennials kein Statussymbol mehr – statt PS zählen Klima und Digitales*. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.de/gruenderszene/automotive-mobility/bitkom-umfrage-auto-digital-klima-millennials/>
- Bundesverband CarSharing (2022, Mar 9). *CarSharing ist auf Wachstumskurs*. bcs Bundesverband Carsharing e.V. <https://carsharing.de/carsharing-ist-auf-wachstumskurs>
- Dastrup, S.R., Zivin, J.G., Costa, D.L., & Kahn, M.E. (2012). Understanding the Solar Home price premium: electricity generation and 'Green' social status. *European Economic Review*, 56(5), 961-973.
- GfK (2021). *Green Gauge® 2021 Report*. GfK-Growth from Knowledge. <https://www.gfk.com/gfk-green-gauge>
- Griskevicius, V., Tybur, J. M., & Van den Bergh, B. (2010). Going green to be seen: status, reputation, and conspicuous conservation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 98(3), 392-404.
- Hammad, H., Muster, V., El-Bassiouny, N. M., & Schaefer, M. (2019). Status and sustainability: can conspicuous motives foster sustainable consumption in newly industrialized countries? *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 23(4), 537-550.
- Herbes, C. (2021). Nachhaltiger Konsum In P. Genkova (eds.), *Handbuch Globale Kompetenz* (pp. 1-18). Springer.
- PwC (2018, Feb 21). *Eigentum? Brauche ich nicht! Wie die Share Economy Statussymbolen ihren Reiz nimmt*. PwC Deutschland. <https://www.pwc.de/de/digitale-transformation/eigentum-brauche-ich-nicht-wie-die-share-economy-statussymbolen-ihren-reiz-nimmt.html>
- Riegler, S., Juschten, M., Hössinger, R. R., Gerike, R., Rößger, L. B., Schlag, B., Manz, W., Rentschler, C., & Kopp, J. (2016). *Carsharing 2025 – Nische oder Mainstream?* Ifmo. https://www.ifmo.de/files/publications_content/2016/ifmo_2016_Carsharing_2025_de.pdf
- Sexton, S.E. & Sexton, A.L. (2014). Conspicuous conservation: the Prius halo and willingness to pay for environmental bona fides. *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, 67(3), 303-317.
- Süptitz, P. (2021, Dec 22). *Wie Glamour Green sind Ihre Kunden?* planung&analyse. <https://www.horizont.net/planung-analyse/nachrichten/nachhaltigkeit-wie-glamour-green-sind-ihre-kunden-196248>
- Umweltbundesamt (2021, May 19). *Konsum und Produkte*. Umweltbundesamt. <https://www.umweltbundesamt.de/daten/private-haushalte-konsum/konsum-produkte>
- Witzke, S. (2016). *Carsharing und die Gesellschaft von Morgen. Ein umweltbewusster Umgang mit Automobilität?* Springer.