

# SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN THE CLOTHING SEGMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN BRAZILIANS AND GERMANS

## *CONSUMO SUSTENTÁVEL NO SEGMENTO DE VESTUÁRIO: UM ESTUDO COMPARATIVO ENTRE BRASILEIROS E ALEMÃES*

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective** – To Analyze and compare sustainable consumption habits in the clothing segment between Brazilians and Germans.

**Design/methodology/approach**– Descriptive, exploratory, and qualitative research. Interviews were conducted with 15 Germans and 15 Brazilians, aged between 20 and 32 years old, in order to identify consumption habits in the clothing segment, familiarity with the theme: sustainable consumption, and levels of personal awareness regarding their consumption behavior, applying the content analysis based on Bardin (2011) as a technique.

**Findings** – A significant difference between the two groups was found. While Germans presented greater knowledge on the subject, which was converted into embracing sustainable conduct in the clothing segment, Brazilians demonstrated to have a more superficial knowledge, besides presenting lower levels of awareness in their consumption and sustainable practices in the analyzed segment. Therefore, it concludes that Germans have greater access to information on the theme and more interest and familiarity with the subject. Consequently, it showed that it influences their consumption behavior, presenting habits towards environmental, social, and economic concerns in the clothing segment, habits that were not identified in the Brazilian sample group.

**Originality/value (mandatory)** – It contributes by providing an opportunity to comparatively analyze the habits and consumption of two distinct countries, helping entrepreneurs and managers to understand the market segments better and create more powerful strategies, focusing on the value perceived by the customer in the acts of consumption.

**Keywords** - Consumer behavior, sustainable consumption, clothing, Brazil, Germany.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo** – Analisar e comparar hábitos de consumo sustentável no segmento de vestuário entre brasileiros e alemães.

**Desenho/Metodologia/Abordagem**– Pesquisa descritiva, exploratória e qualitativa. Foram realizadas entrevistas com 15 alemães e 15 brasileiros, com idade entre 20 e 32 anos, a fim de identificar hábitos de consumo no segmento de vestuário, familiaridade com o tema consumo sustentável e níveis de consciência pessoal quanto aos seus hábitos de consumo empregando como técnica a análise de conteúdo baseado em Bardin (2011).

**Resultados** – Constatou-se uma diferença expressiva entre os dois grupos. Enquanto os alemães apresentaram maior conhecimento sobre o assunto, que se converteu na adoção de hábitos de consumo sustentável no segmento de vestuário, os brasileiros demonstraram ter um conhecimento mais superficial, além de apresentarem níveis menores de consciência de consumo e de práticas sustentáveis no segmento analisado. Conclui que os alemães têm maior acesso a informações sobre o tema e mais interesse e familiaridade com o assunto. Isso mostrou influenciar seus comportamentos de consumo, que apresentam hábitos no sentido de preocupação ambiental, social e econômica no segmento de vestuário, costumes esses não identificados no grupo amostral brasileiro.

**Originalidade/valor** – Contribui por oportunizar analisar comparativamente hábitos e de consumo de dois países distintos, auxiliando empreendedores e gestores a conhecer melhor os segmentos de mercado e criar estratégias mais assertivas, atentando-se para o valor percebido pelo cliente nos atos de consumo.

**Palavras-chave** – Comportamento do consumidor, consumo sustentável, vestuário, Brasil, Alemanha.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The current globalized capitalist society is characterized by exacerbated consumption. The speed that new products are launched generates an increasingly intense desire to buy, resulting in a short production and consumption cycle (Santos, 2009). Corporations have managed to implement a way of life based on unbridled consumerism. Thus, the fetish attached to goods manipulates human sensations and conditions the current consumption mode (Alves, 2016).

The clothing segment, like many others, saw in this situation an opportunity to increase its sales. Therefore, in the 1980s, the concept of fast-fashion emerged, which consists on a fast method of producing pieces with lower quality and affordable price, based on the fashion trends of the big brands (Shimamura & Sanches, 2012).

However, to cheapen such a complex chain, brands started hiring workers in underdeveloped countries, where labor is cheaper, and using extremely aggressive products to the environment. With the product's life cycle reduced, people tend to buy more frequently, increasing the volume of disposal (Mori, 2016).

According to the American documentary "The True Cost" (2015), the world consumes about 80 billion new garments each year, which means an increase of 400% compared to 20 years ago. This scenario has brought numerous negative consequences for the ecosystem and society.

Parallel to this, the concern with the environment has been a widely discussed issue, and the concept of sustainability is gaining space in all social spheres. There is a growing awareness of the need to reduce social and environmental damage in production systems and develop more sustainable consumption habits (Mori, 2016).

Slow fashion emerges in this scenario with the spirit of changing, so that? companies and consumers become more aware of their actions and the damage they can cause. These changes reflect directly on the buying behavior. A more sustainable consumer profile emerges, engaged with social and environmental causes, which seeks to rethink their attitudes and become loyal to brands with the same concerns (Fabri & Rodrigues, 2015).



Thus, the present study aims to answer the following question: What are the main differences between Brazilians and Germans regarding sustainable consumption in the clothing segment? Its general objectives were to analyze and compare sustainable consumption habits in the clothing segment between Brazilians and Germans and, specifically, to investigate and compare their familiarity with the theme “sustainable consumptions”, in order to analyze the personal level of awareness regarding their consumption behavior.

As can be observed, there is a contradictory situation. While there is an increasing supply of clothing items offered at a low price and in the short term, there is also a growing concern with social and environmental damage and a search for more sustainable consumption habits. All this under a strong cultural influence, which justifies possible differences between regions.

To reach the expected results, the methodology used initially was bibliographical research, which enabled access to secondary data. The approach is qualitative with a semi-structured interview script, conducted with Brazilians and Germans, in person and via WhatsApp, in Portuguese and English, resulting in primary data, which were later analyzed to answer the central question.

This paper presents six sections. The first is the Introduction, which presents an initial approach to the theme, besides the general and specific objectives and the justification for the study. The following sections focus on aspects of the literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion of results, final considerations, and references.

## 2 CULTURE, CONSUMPTION, AND CLOTHING

Although the word culture is not recent, its study began to gain more importance from the XVIII century, when Anthropology emerged as an area of knowledge. From the 19th century on, the anthropological debate gained strength due to the systematization of knowledge and new research aiming to establish general laws to describe and interpret cultural phenomena (Morgado, 2014).

For Hervé and Gilles (2012), culture is how human beings relate to themselves, others, and the world. Each culture establishes its particular worldview, meaning that appropriate understandings and rules in one cultural context may be considered absurdly inappropriate in another (Mccracken, 2007).

Shavitt, Lee, and Johnson (2008, p. 1103) state that culture has “shared elements that provide standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting among those who share a language, a historical period, and a geographic location.”

More complex cultures are associated with a society or a nation, and the term culture is most commonly used to refer to patterns of language, rituals, rules, and customs. National culture also includes elements such as historical events and characters, social customs, family practices, philosophies of government, religion, philosophies, economic practices, beliefs systems and values. Hence, any social unit develops a culture over time (Hall, 1979).

The acquisition and perpetuation of culture is a social process, not a biological one, and are the results of learning. In this way, each society passes the cultural inheritance it has received from its ancestors to the new generations. Therefore, culture is also defined as social heritage (Morgado, 2014).

According to McCracken (1988), culture and consumption found out, since the 20th century, a connection without precedent in human history, since consumption became the way in which society began to assimilate its own culture. Also, according to the author, consumption can be defined as the creation, purchase, and use of goods and services.

When it comes to the relationship between culture and consumption, culture involves a network of representations and discourses with different social meanings. Individuals living in a Western industrial culture have a wide range of meanings they can extract from goods. The cultural meanings attributed to goods are sometimes evident and sometimes hidden to consumers (Mccracken, 2007).



In the current globalized order, products are no longer a privilege of some and become an aspiration of all. Objects gain new meanings, from functional elements to mere status signaling, reflect of the celerity of social changes and the new spheres that demonstrate collective and individual expression (D'angelo, 2003). Fashion is an example of this network of social representations of consumption that carry cultural brands, which acquire distinct meanings related to the groups producing and consuming them (Beck, Henning, & Vieira, 2014). The clothing system represents a highly complex scheme of cultural categories and their relationships, a veritable map of the cultural universe (Sahlins, 1976).

According to McCracken (2007), the fashion world operates through three different strategies to aggregate meaning to goods. The first way is transferring an existing cultural meaning to a consumer goods. This effort to link aspects of the consumer's world to a product is evident in magazines and newspapers, in which a process of identification and glimpse is sought. Thus, the fashion system links new clothing styles to established cultural categories and principles, connecting meanings from the cultural world to consumer goods.

In a second strategy, the fashion system effectively invents new cultural meanings in a modest way and introduces them through opinion makers who are distant from consumers: highly prestigious people who come from a social elite and who, under birthplace, beauty, or achievements, have the power to create copycat groups. For example, we have movies and popular music artists. These opinion leaders are permeable to cultural innovations, creating new cultural meanings for products, passing them on to subordinate groups that imitate them.

In the third strategy, the fashion system engages in a radical reform of cultural meanings, which are in a profound and constant change. This radical instability of cultural meanings is due to Western societies that willingly accept and even encourage big changes. With this, cultural meaning in a Western, industrial, complex society constantly undergoes systematic changes, and these are important for feeding certain economic, social, and cultural sectors of its world. The fashion industry represents one of the links that changes highly innovative cultural meanings.

### 3 SUSTAINABILITY IN THE APPAREL SEGMENT

Exponential population growth, irrational and excessive use of resources and the severity of environmental contamination and degradation show how societies have altered and destroyed life-sustaining systems on Earth (Dias, 2017).

Sustainable Development refers to the integration of economic, social, and environmental issues, so that the production of goods and services are able to preserve the diversity and integrity of ecosystems, and so that there is compatibility between the rhythms of renewal of natural resources and the extraction necessary for the functioning of the economic system (Dias, 2017).

According to Ribeiro (2015, p. 18), sustainability is "the ability to explore regions and planetary resources generating the least possible damage to the environmental balance and, consequently, to humanity and the entire biosphere that need it to survive."

Agenda 21, a document launched by Rio 92 (or Eco 92, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development), addressed the topic of Changing Consumption Patterns, and assumed that the leading causes of environmental degradation lie in unsustainable patterns of production and consumption. Furthermore, socioeconomic inequality was discussed: in certain parts of the planet consumption standards are very high. At the same time, there is a large segment of society that is not served in its basic needs. Sustainable production and consumption aims to minimize the negative environmental impacts of their systems, in order to promote a better quality of life for all, by encouraging sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources, as well as promoting the generation of decent jobs and fair trade (Ministério do Meio Ambiente, 2011).



In a survey conducted by the Akatu Institute in association with the Ethos Institute in 2005, more than 60% of consumers interviewed considered that the role of large companies is to go beyond what is determined by law and actively help build a better society for all. Thus, consumers now consider that companies should act as social agents whose responsibility goes far beyond generating products, jobs and taxes, but should also contribute to the welfare of society (Akatu, 2005).

According to Dias (2017), there are several external factors that cause companies to decrease environmental damage. Among these are the state, the community, the market, and suppliers. An important aspect in the change of posture within companies is the search for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which can be defined as the stimulus for an organizational behavior that integrates social and environmental aspects, that are not necessarily in the legislation, but that aim to correspond to the desires of society in relation to organizations. CSR is composed of actions that seek to identify and minimize possible negative impacts resulting from the company's activities, as well as actions to improve its institutional image.

It is worth pointing out the relationship between fashion and clothing. Basically, fashion corresponds to the way clothes reflect and communicate different points of view in society, connecting people to the time and space where they are located (Fletcher, 2008). To exemplify how companies in this segment have dealt with these issues, it is important to address the concepts of fast-fashion and slow-fashion. Fast fashion emerged in the 1980s as a response to the customs of the contemporary globalized and consumerist society. It is a fast system of mass production that aims to bring collections to the points of sale at the right time, at the peak of a fashion trend, stimulating a need for consumption and, consequently, increasing sales (Caetano, 2013).

Thus, clothing stores have new collections on a weekly basis, something that used to happen only at the change of seasons in decades past. The intention is to accelerate production and increase the economy with mass production, resulting in reduced costs in processes, better interaction of factories with retailers, faster deliveries to customers, reduced inventories, increased production capacity, and reduced human labor, due to technological investments (Gardetti & Torres, 2013).

However, despite being economically viable for companies, there are serious social and environmental consequences, such as the exploitation of semi-slave labor, importation of raw materials from underdeveloped countries at very low prices, extraction of raw materials in an illegal and predatory manner, generation and disposal of waste without treatment throughout the chain, use of subhuman working conditions, and stimulation of exacerbated consumption of consumers, always hungry for novelties, consuming just to consume (Gardetti & Torres, 2013).

In contrast to this, inspired by the slow food movement, slow-fashion emerges, the slow fashion, which aims to raise awareness and the practice of sustainability in consumers and in the fashion industry (Mori, 2016). The movement advocates for the production of quality garments, more durable, without following fashion trends, often made by hand and using environmentally friendly materials, also suggesting the adoption of a more conscious and well planned consumption style (Caetano, 2013).

According to Fletcher and Grose (2011), slow fashion does not depend only on the restructuring of the production chain and processes, but also on the offer of products that are created from the beginning by designers themselves (while in fast fashion adaptations or even imitations of great designers are made), going through the conscious choice of materials and processes, until reaching the point of sale in a correct manner. For the authors, the consumer has a bigger involvement with the chain and greater awareness of the impacts that the product can cause on the environment, economy and social sectors.

In addition, Fletcher and Grose (2011) believe that slow-fashion encourages the consumption of models considered "key pieces" in a closet, reducing impulse buying, providing conscious purchases of better quality and durability pieces, ensuring their manufacturing origin and the protection of the worker who produces these pieces, avoiding slave and illegal labor.



As an example of these changes, it is noted that some Brazilian companies are already adopting the concepts of the slow fashion movement and producing 100% recycled fabrics, as, for example, the case of E-Tex Ecológica, responsible for recycling fabrics discarded by the textile industry and producing fibers from PET bottles. Thus, slow fashion is characterized by small-scale production and artisanal processes that value the region of origin, questioning fast fashion about their production on a large scale, with models considered global, mischaracterizing the unique style and building a massified fashion without personality (Mori, 2016).

According to Fletcher and Grose (2011), the choice of materials used on the products constitutes the main point to alleviate the environmental problems caused by the clothing segment. The impact of textile fibers used in the apparel process is associated with several types of damage, such as climate changes, chemical pollution, waste generation, loss of biodiversity, adverse effects on the water and its cycles, etc., damaging the health of workers, the final consumer and the entire ecosystem.

To contribute to sustainable development, a movement called Fairtrade was created in Europe in the 1960s, which seeks greater interaction between producers and buyers, working in rural and farming communities, and guaranteeing the rights of workers and producers through commercial partnerships. In addition, the movement establishes a minimum fixed price of the product to ensure its sustainable production and to prevent abuse in the value passed on to the consumer (Lee, 2009).

When it comes to consumer trends, it is worth noting the sudden and growing interest in the reuse of clothing by the fashion-consuming public, the search for thrift store pieces, and the customization of clothes already in the closet, due to an advent of vintage style. Thus, the user contributes to an environmental awareness, even if in a more unconscious and gradual way (Moreira, 2015).

Therefore, despite the contradictions in the clothing segment, promoting sustainable actions is among the priorities of many corporations; moreover, consumers have also shown a great interest in the topic. Thereby, the sale of sustainable merchandise has grown globally.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

As for the methodological aspects, the study used a qualitative approach, which is based on the interpretation of phenomena and the attribution of meanings, without using statistical procedures. Data analysis is usually done intuitively (Prodanov & Freitas, 2013).

The descriptive and exploratory character was predominant because, from this category of study, it became possible to ascertain the frequency of a phenomenon, its particularities and nature, its characteristics, relationships, causes and effects in relation to other phenomena (Barros & Lehfeld, 2000; Rodrigues, 2015).

At last, Malhotra (2012) defines exploratory research as a type of study whose purpose is to explore a given problem in order to provide insight and understanding about a problem-situation faced by the researcher. In this type of research, the information needed is broadly defined; the research process is flexible and versatile; with small and non-representative samples, and qualitative analysis of primary data. The overall goal of exploratory research is to gain insights and ideas.

Thus, regarding data collection, it was used, at first, a survey of secondary data, from the bibliographical research, seeking the necessary knowledge for the formation of the field research. Then, personal semi-structured interviews were executed.

A great advantage of the semi-structured interview is its flexibility. At the same time that the researcher can obtain more in-depth results about the problem situation with the interviewees, he can also direct the questions so that the interview does not escape the proposed objectives (Gil, 2010).



Therefore, a script of questions was used to guide the interviews, which were mandatorily made, but there was also a flexibility for new questions to be reported from the course of the interview, seeking more accurate or in-depth information.

To prepare the interview script, the following phases were taken into account:

1. Asking questions: based on the objectives pursued by the research, the questions must be decided by quantity and derivation, even if redundant, written in a different way, but with the same content. In this first stage, 12 questions were prepared (besides those that aimed to define the socioeconomic profile).
2. Rationalization: At this point, redundant questions are eliminated, selecting those that are judged to be the best and in accordance with the objective. In this second stage, the questions were reevaluated and reduced. Logical ordering: Now the questions must be placed in a logical sequence and numbered. At this point, the script was divided and ordered into three themes: 1) socioeconomic profile; 2) clothing consumption habits, and 3) sustainable consumption.
3. Pre-testing the questionnaire: in this stage, it is necessary to test in the field if the questionnaire works. Three people were interviewed in Portuguese and two in English, trying to identify points of improvement, and asking them about the structure of the questions at the end of the interview.
4. Final questionnaire: in this last stage, the results and feedbacks from the pre-test phase are analyzed and, if necessary, modifications are made. It should be noted that if the modifications are numerous, it is convenient to conduct another pre-test. Minor adjustments were made in some questions and in their translations, trying to make the interview as fluid and interesting as possible, given the difficulty of doing them via WhatsApp with Germans.

The questions were designed to answer all the objectives of the present study. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship.



**Table 1 - Relationship between specific objectives and interview questions**

<b>GOAL</b>	<b>QUESTION</b>
To know and compare clothing consumption habits between Brazilians and Germans	How often do you buy clothes?
	Do you usually research among several options before buying or do you buy on impulse?
	What are the main decisive factors when buying an article of clothing? (List: price, quality, trend, brand prestige, comfort, beauty, versatility, product sustainability)
Investigate and compare familiarities with the theme "sustainable consumption" between Brazilians and Germans	What do you know about sustainable consumption?
	How did you learn about sustainable consumption?
Identify and compare levels of personal awareness regarding their consumption behavior in the clothing segment	Would you be willing to pay more for sustainable clothing? If so, have you done this before?
	Do you consider yourself a sustainable consumer in the clothing segment? Why?

Source: Authors (2021)

After the data collection stage, all the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. This analysis process sought to transform the data obtained into relevant information that could help achieve the proposed objectives. To this end, the content analysis method of Bardin (2011) was used, which consists of an investigation divided into three stages.

In the first stage, there is a pre-analysis, the documents are selected, the hypotheses or objectives are formulated and indicators are developed to support the final interpretation. This phase aims to operationalize and systematize the central and primary ideas, in order to conduct and develop the analysis. At this point, the interviews were read and studied individually, and then analyzed in a set scenario, in which points that relate to the objectives of this study were identified.

In the second stage, a review in the material is made, the documents of analysis are categorized to conduct the subsequent final stage. For this study, categories were defined based on the specific objectives, as shown in Figure 2 below.

**Table 2: Analysis categories**

<b>ANALYSIS CATEGORIES</b>		
Consumer behavior in the clothing segment	Familiarity with the theme "sustainable consumption"	Sustainable awareness in the clothing segment: knowledge versus action

Source: Authors (2021)

Finally, the third stage refers to the analysis of the collected data and their interpretation. At this point, the results were condensed, information was selected, inferences were made and interpretations were advanced.





## 5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This section is divided into the three created categories of analysis, based on the interviews, in order to allow a better interpretation of the content and the achievement of the central objectives. They were built based on the topics most frequently found or that proved to be most relevant, always relating their pertinence with the objectives of the work.

Figure 3 shows the socioeconomic characteristics of the Brazilian respondents and Figure 4 shows the socioeconomic characteristics of the German respondents.

**Table 3: Characteristics of the Brazilian respondents**

INTERVIEWEE	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	EXPERIENCE IN LIVING ABROAD	LIVE WITH	PER CAPITA INCOME (RS)
Brazilian 1	Male	21	Business Student/ Entrepreneur	Yes	Parents	5.000,00
Brazilian 2	Male	20	Business Student/ Entrepreneur	Yes	Parents/Sister	4.000,00
Brazilian 3	Male	20	Business Student/ Entrepreneur	No	Parents	2.500,00
Brazilian 4	Male	21	Business Student	No	Mother/Brother	2.000,00
Brazilian 5	Male	21	Business Student	No	Parents/Siblings	2.500,00
Brazilian 6	Female	23	Publicity Student	Yes	Parents	4.000,00
Brazilian 7	Female	24	Student of Environmental Engineering	No	Sister	2.000,00
Brazilian 8	Female	22	Student of Civil Engineering	No	Mother	3.000,00
Brazilian 9	Male	23	Student of Production Engineering/ Entrepreneur	Yes	Parents	6.500,00
Brazilian 10	Female	21	Business Student	Yes	Mother/Sister	3.000,00
Brazilian 11	Female	23	Designer	No	Boyfriend	1.500,00
Brazilian 12	Female	25	Designer	No	Parents/Sister	1.500,00
Brazilian 13	Male	21	Designer	No	Mother/Sister	1.000,00
Brazilian 14	Female	28	Tourismologist	No	Husband	5.000,00
Brazilian 15	Female	25	Manager	Yes	Parents/Sister	5.000,00

Source: Authors (2021)

Table 4: Characteristics of the German respondents

INTERVIEWEE	GENDER	AGE	PROFESSION	EXPERIENCE IN LIVING ABROAD	LIVE WITH	PER CAPITA INCOME (€)
German 1	Male	25	Entrepreneur	Yes	Friends	2.000,00
German 2	Male	30	Engineer/ Research Assistant	Yes	Alone	4.000,00
German 3	Male	26	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	1.000,00
German 4	Male	22	Undergraduate Student	No	Friends	850
German 5	Female	22	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	-
German 6	Female	24	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	1.000,00
German 7	Female	29	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	850
German 8	Male	24	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	800
German 9	Male	26	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	-
German 10	Male	25	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	600
German 11	Female	21	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Alone	300
German 12	Male	26	Freelancer	Yes	Family	1.800,00
German 13	Female	23	Undergraduate Student	No	Alone	600
German 14	Male	32	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Friends	800
German 15	Male	24	Undergraduate Student	Yes	Family	2.000,00

Source: Authors (2021)

Source: Authors (2021)

It is worth noting that the monthly income described consists of the total family income divided by the number of people living together, in the case of families, or individual income, in the case of respondents living alone/with friends. The empty fields refer to respondents who preferred not to inform their income.

### 5.1 Consumption habits in the clothing segment and familiarity with the theme: sustainable purchase.

The first analysis category presents information on how often people buy and the second, asks if the interviewee researches before buying or if they are driven by impulse. It can be noticed that these two questions already address factors related to sustainable consumption - which goes against unbridled consumerism - but in an indirect manner to not dodge from the next questions that are actually addressing the theme. Finally, the third question shows the main factors why they chose their clothes, and asks the interviewee to list them from the most to the least important, and then comment on how he/she did it.



Regarding the frequency of buying clothes, the average for both Brazilian and German respondents is once every 2-3 months. However, one difference found was the great variations in the Brazilian group, thus, some buy once or twice a year, while others buy every fortnight. In the German group, this frequency is more balanced, so almost all the answers consist of an interval of 1 to 3 months.

When it comes to the habit of researching before buying, the results were also similar. Approximately half of the respondents from both groups say they buy on impulse, and the other half say they research and compare. However, a difference is perceived throughout the research. Most Brazilians state that they compare products and prices among stores in person - mainly in malls - while most Germans claim to do this work online, in virtual stores.

Regarding the decision factors when they buy clothes, there is a notable difference between Brazilian and German respondents. To reach this result, an average of the grades given to each factor by the respondents in each group was made, and then these averages were listed in ascending order so that it was possible to evaluate degrees of importance in each case, associating them with the comments made by the interviewees when asked to analyze how they ranked the factors.

The beauty factor is the only one listed equally between the two groups, being considered the second most important factor in the clothing purchase decision. The most important factor for Brazilians highlighted was price while for Germans, quality. Brazilian respondents tend to put quality second when the price is low, while for Germans this logic is inverted.

I value the price a lot because I get sick of the clothes. (Brazilian 2)

Price comes first because if I regret the purchase it will not make much difference. (Brazilian 9)

For me, first the product needs to have quality. So I know it was a good purchase. (German 10)

In general I am willing to spend more on quality things, like jeans that fit well. (German 5)

Another factor that showed a significant difference in perception between the groups was the brand. For the German respondents this represents the fourth most important factor, right after price, while for the Brazilians it corresponds to the sixth and penultimate factor. Almost all Brazilians claim not to care about getting to know the brands or becoming loyal to some of them.

I don't care much about the brand, because brand clothes are more expensive. (Brazilian 2)

A good brand gives me credibility, but the brand is not as decisive for me as the others. (Brazilian 4)

Most of the Brazilian respondents made it clear that brand is irrelevant to their purchasing decisions. Only two showed identification with this factor. For one of them, brand would be the most important aspect due to its relationship with the feeling of inclusion and belonging to a certain social group. However, soon after he subjected it to the price factor. Meanwhile, the second Brazilian associates it with the enchantment that a brand can bring when sharing its history and values, exhibiting characteristics of slow fashion.

The brand is the essence of clothing, it expresses a certain group of people who wear that brand, so when you identify with the brand you identify with those people. But for me there is also no point in a brand being very famous if it is very expensive. (Brazilian 5)

If you know the brand, you know the whole story behind it, and you understand what motivates it. For example, there is a clothing brand in Fortaleza called Ahazando, if you know the whole philosophy of the brand, you will be enchanted by it. (Brazilian 7)

As for the Germans, the factor shows considerable relevance and is a topic of greater knowledge for them. For this group, the brand is more important because its value is linked to qual-

ity, which is the most prioritized factor for this group. Many inform that they have favorite brands with which they identify and are loyal. However, possibly because this is a young sample group, the price factor still has more influence.

[...] I, for example, always buy Adidas shoes. (German 3)  
I like to buy from good brands but I am a student who has only a small job, and famous brands are usually more expensive. (German 11)

Brazilians (mostly women) place a higher importance on fashion trends compared to Germans.

I follow fashion trends a lot, I hardly ever buy something that isn't a trend, but always adapting it to my style, my body. (Brazilian 14)  
I personally do not care about fashion trends, it is not something I am interested in. (German 12)

It was also pointed out that, in Brazil, fashion trends represent a very intrinsic element and present in the stores, so they eventually end up consuming them, even if it is not something so important in their conceptions.

[...] it ends up that when you go to a store, you will have the things that are in trend, they will not be there for nothing, so this is already included in the range of options in the store. (Brazilian 11)

Another point raised is that the lack of knowledge about the brand may affect the visibility given to sustainability. In this case, a passive posture of the interviewee is perceived, who understands the problem, but does not take attitudes to reverse it, meaning that it remains without researching about brands and their relations with sustainability.

Sustainability depends on my knowledge of the brand and as a brand is the least relevant factor for me, it doesn't make so much sense. I don't have favorite brands so I don't inform myself about how they deal with this issue of sustainability. (Brazilian 13)

The way in which the sustainability factor of the products is handled differs between the two groups. While several Brazilians quietly admit their lack of interest in the subject, all Germans show some level of importance or recognize that they identify with the theme, often regretting when they realize that, despite this, it is one of the last factors listed.

Thus, despite the topic having more relevance for them, the other factors seem to act as a barrier for sustainability to be taken into a bigger consideration at the time of purchase.

Product sustainability is something that I definitely think is important and that I always try to consider when I am shopping. But I think quality, brand and price are still more decisive for me. (German 8).  
I have to admit that unfortunately I often go with what I like first rather than sustainable products when it comes to clothes. (German 5).

The analysis of this first category allows us to see some significant differences between the two sample groups when it comes to clothing consumption behavior, especially in the decisive purchase factors. While Brazilians prioritize the price of the garment, Germans prioritize quality. This reflects a series of ideas and positions regarding the two realities, and is directly related to the



importance given to the sustainable aspect.

Brazilian respondents, in general, do not seek to understand the quality of the product or what values the brand represents. Moreover, sustainability is left aside, often without even questioning it. For them, the main focus is on the cost-benefit of the product in terms of price x beauty.

The German respondents, on the other hand, prioritize quality and, therefore, have greater identification with the brand factor. Price still represents an important factor, but there is a greater awareness in terms of sustainability.

With regard to the second category about familiarity with the theme “sustainable consumption”, most of the Brazilian respondents recognize that the subject is gaining more visibility in society, but show a basic level of understanding and relate the concept mainly to environmental aspects.

Sustainable consumption is to consume things that don't do a lot of damage to nature, but in a moderate way. (Brazilian 5)

What I understand by sustainable consumption is something related to not hurting nature. (Brazilian 14).

When analyzing the answers of the German respondents, it's noticeable that they all demonstrate to have some knowledge about the subject. Environmental aspects were mentioned, as well as social, economic and personal awareness of consumption.

Sustainable consumption means buying products that are more sustainable in all aspects: ethical production with fair wages and good working conditions, using fewer resources like water and electricity, and paying attention to the very material each product is made of. Also producing locally as much as possible where it makes sense. Also, it is better to consume less and buy second hand before consuming new products. (German 5)

I would say it is to buy products from sustainable resources, with the production processes done in an environmentally friendly way and with easy recycling possibilities. (German 9)

A type of consumption strongly focused on reuse, to minimize the waste of resources. (German 12).

## 5.2 Personal conscience in the clothing segment: knowledge vs. Action

In the third category of analysis, two questions were asked, which branched out into four. The first question asked was whether the respondent would be willing to pay more for sustainable clothing. If the answer was yes, they were asked if they had already done that. The second question asked whether the respondent considers him/herself a sustainable consumer, and why. This category seeks to extract from these questions a relationship between knowledge and action, that is, the extent to which personal awareness affects the respondents consumption habits.

Regarding the first question, 8 out of 15 Brazilian respondents claim that they would pay more for sustainable clothing. However, in many cases this is conditioned to other factors such as quality and beauty. That is, the sustainable garment must first meet some prerequisites in order to be considered for purchase; the sustainability factor alone is not convincing enough.

I would be willing to pay more if the clothes meet the prerequisites of quality, price, and beauty. (Brazilian 1)

I would pay more if it had quality attached, if it went through all these processes and still would last longer. (Brazilian 13)

Among the 8 respondents who claim to be willing to pay more for sustainable clothing, only two have done so before in a conscious way, coincidentally buying from the same local brand that produces T-shirts made from PET bottles.

A possible justification for this small number of people who have already bought sustainable clothing is the lack of knowledge about the options that exist, or the lack of options in the national market itself. According to Brazilian 14, a problem in Brazil, especially in the Fortaleza region where the interviews were made, is that there are no options for sustainable clothing brands. "I at least have never heard of any," she claims.

For the respondents who declare they are not willing to pay more for sustainable garments, a perceived point is the discredit given to so-called sustainable brands. Some of them claim not to trust that the product is, in fact, sustainable and therefore the investment would not be worth it.

I would not be willing to pay more because I would not trust it here in Brazil, I would think it is easy marketing. (Brazilian 9)

Another view of this issue is observed by two interviewees. According to them, it is not worth consuming more just because the garment is sustainable, and something to be done that can really make a difference is to buy second-hand clothes, in thrift stores, for example.

I wouldn't pay more because I see that there are already a lot of clothes being produced in a non-sustainable way, so I prefer to buy from bazaars, because they are clothes that have already been bought, they already exist, and what I can do is buy from these places because I will be reusing them in a certain way. Then I can give them to other people again. I prefer this rather than spend more money that I could use for other things, just because that product is sustainable. (Brazilian 11)

Analyzing the responses of the German respondents, it appears that 13 out of 15 respondents say they are willing to pay more for sustainable clothing. But, as for Brazilians, there are some caveats, such as a limit to the increase in price, beauty, quality of the pieces and brand credibility.

I would say I would pay 5% to 10% more on sustainable clothing. (German 15)  
Yes, I would pay more if I like the clothes and the quality is high. It always depends on whether I am thinking that it really was produced in a sustainable way. (German 11)  
I would be willing to pay more if I knew the whole story behind it. (German 6)  
After considering second hand first, yes. I have done this before with my exercise pants, for example, which are fair trade and sustainable. I also buy from some other brands like Patagonia, which I really like. (German 5)

Of the 13 Germans who say they are willing to pay more for sustainable clothing, eight have done it before. When it comes to the availability of options in the market, it is noted that in Germany the concept is much more widespread. According to the interviewees, the brands always indicate on their garments when they are Fair Trade, and it is also communicated in the stores. This facilitates access to knowledge and to this type of clothing.

Regarding the second question, only 2 out of 15 Brazilians consider themselves sustainable consumers in the clothing segment. However, it is worth pointing out that these two interviewees had a peculiar view on the subject. Both said they came from very simple families, so they developed a more minimalist and less consumerist lifestyle. However, their motivations were a necessity, and their goal was to save money. Socio-environmental awareness is not present in these situations.

I grew up in a very limited reality, so, as I came from a poor family, everything I did was thinking about how I was going to use it until it was no longer possible. When I had a blouse that was falling apart, I used it as a floor cloth, a table cloth. So it was kind of a lifestyle, recycling, being creative to reuse everything. But this awareness came a lot out of necessity. That is why every time I go to buy something I think a thousand times about whether it is worth it. (Brazilian 11)

I consider myself sustainable in relation to clothes because I always reuse them. I utilize things a lot, so sometimes there is a neighbor on my street who doesn't want some clothes, he leaves them at my home and I reuse them. Growing up in a family that had little money, I often reused my cousins' clothes and I learned to only buy when I needed to. (Brazilian 12)

Some respondents make it clear that they are not sustainable in the specific consumption of clothing, but that in other segments they have made efforts to try to improve, especially in the disposal part. This is due to the fact that they do not consider that the clothing industry has a major impact on the environment.

Analyzing the answers of the Germans, only 4 of them stated that they are not sustainable consumers in the clothing segment. A point that got raised was the way brands produce and sell so-called sustainable products. For the interviewee, this is not done in a way to facilitate or encourage the consumption of these pieces.

I don't consider myself a sustainable consumer. I think it's because brands don't put out sustainable products as they should to really make a difference. I think they could make a difference by changing at least

40% of their products are more environmentally friendly products. A percentage where you have a good amount of diverse products for people to realize that. Or if the prices of these products were not much more expensive, people would buy more. (German 3).

Two Germans consider themselves to be sustainable consumers in the clothing segment, and point to some habits they have adopted, such as paying attention to keeping consumption patterns as low as possible and reusing second-hand items. The other 9 respondents consider themselves partially sustainable. They already have some consumption habits in this respect, but they think that it is not enough. Most suggest a desire to become sustainable consumers and say that they are trying to improve.

I try my best, but I could do much more. Because we are facing a global crisis. This will affect all future generations. (German 12)

I buy second hand from regional stores, I buy recycled clothes, I don't buy from H&M/Zara, but I still feel it's not enough. (German 8).

I guess on a scale of 1 to 10 I have to admit that I am a 6 at most. Maybe even less! It's a shame, since I know a lot about it and care about sustainable products in other areas but not enough with clothing. I opt for sustainable brands from time to time, repair my clothes before I throw them away and don't have much in general. I buy second hand sometimes, but not enough, and I feel it is much easier in other countries where it is more "in" and "hip" than in Germany, or Bremen in particular. But I also shop online and then send everything that I don't like back, which is not great for the environment, even though I live in a central region. (German 5)

This third and last category of analysis allows us to trace a relationship between knowledge about sustainable consumption and action, that is, the practice of this knowledge in the form of consumption habits.

In the case of Brazilian respondents, there is a direct relationship between lack of knowledge and lack of sustainable habits. But, on the other hand, even respondents who demonstrate to have more knowledge on the subject do not consider themselves sustainable consumers, so this second relationship is not necessarily directly proportional. Thus, it can be observed that the lack of knowledge implies the lack of sustainable habits, but the presence of this knowledge does not necessarily imply sustainable habits. The difficulty in putting into practice was pointed out by some interviewees.



Sustainability is something that I think about but don't pay much attention to at the time of purchase, I can't put it into practice. (Brazilian 2)

On the other hand, Germans have a wider and more homogeneous knowledge on the subject, as observed, the adoption of sustainable consumption habits was much more present. In this case, it is important to point out that knowledge not only interferes in actions, but also in critical thinking. Proof of this is that the vast majority of respondents claim to have several awareness habits in this regard, but even so they do not consider themselves sustainable consumers in the clothing segment. Among the most common habits adopted by the group are: consuming fair trade products, buying in thrift stores and regional stores, consuming only what is necessary, avoiding exaggeration, reusing clothes, and boycotting fast fashion stores.

## 6 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The general objective of this study was to understand and compare sustainable consumption habits in the clothing segment between Brazilians and Germans. In order to help achieve the general objective, three specific objectives were defined.

The first consisted in knowing and comparing Brazilians and Germans consumption habits in the clothing segment. In this aspect, three points were analyzed: the frequency of purchase, the habit of researching and comparing different options before buying, and the definition of decisive factors at the moment of purchase.

In relation to the frequency of buying clothes, the average of Brazilian and German respondents was very close, being approximately once every 2-3 months. In the German group, however, this frequency was more balanced, so that almost all answers consisted of once every 1-3 months. When it comes to researching before buying, the results were also similar. Approximately half of the respondents in both groups said they buy on impulse, and the other half said they do research. However, a difference was perceived in the way research is done. The majority of Brazilians said they compare products and prices among stores in person - mainly in malls - while the majority of Germans claimed to do it online, in virtual stores.

Regarding the decisive factors when buying clothes, it was found that Brazilian respondents, in general, do not prioritize understanding the quality of the product or what values the brand represents. For them, sustainability is left aside, without often being questioned. The main focus is on the cost-benefit of the product in terms of price x beauty and fashion trend - another factor that is taken into account, especially by women.

The German respondents, on the other hand, prioritize quality and have greater identification with the brand factor. Price also represents an important factor, but there is a greater awareness in terms of sustainability, which exerts a more significant force at the moment of purchase when compared to Brazilians.

The second specific objective was to investigate and compare, among Brazilians and Germans, familiarity with the theme: sustainable consumption. To obtain the necessary information, we analyzed what respondents shared about their conceptions of the subject and how they learned about it. For Brazilians, it was observed that the theme is, in general, understood in a superficial or incomplete way, and some people do not know what it is about. For the Germans, the subject was much more familiar, as well as their daily experience - an example of this is the number of interviewees who know and are customers of brands considered Fair Trade.

It was found that the Germans are a step ahead of the Brazilians in terms of understanding about the subject. This was proven by observing, in the German sample group, a greater homogene-





ity in the levels of knowledge and by the greater numbers of sources, which showed that their access to knowledge is easier and more democratized. Moreover, the Germans seem to show a greater particular interest in the subject, which indicated that the knowledge about the subject's relevance was internalized. In contrast, for Brazilians, the subject is often treated with a certain disregard.

The third and last specific objective was to identify and compare, between Brazilians and Germans, levels of personal awareness regarding their consumption behavior in the clothing segment. At first, the respondent was asked whether he/she would be willing to pay more for sustainable clothing. More than half of the Brazilian respondents said yes, but among them only two had done so previously. In the German sample group, almost all respondents said they were willing to pay more, and among them, more than half had done so before. This reaffirms the relationship between sustainability and price for each group.

The second question asked whether the respondent considers himself/herself a sustainable consumer in the clothing segment and why. While almost all Brazilians do not consider themselves sustainable, most Germans consider themselves at least partially sustainable in terms of consumption in the clothing segment. Moreover, the Germans made it very clear that they want to improve more and more in this theme. The awareness in the Brazilian group has also started to be evidenced, but in a very discreet way and in short steps. Almost all the Germans stated that they have sustainable consumption habits, they already have some habits in this respect, but they think that it is not enough. Most suggest a desire to become sustainable consumers and say they are trying to improve.

It was found that Germans have greater access to information on the subject and more interest and familiarity with it. This proved to influence their consumption behaviors, which show habits towards environmental, social and economic concern in the clothing segment, habits that were not identified in the Brazilian sample group.

Although the proposed objectives have been achieved, it is worth highlighting some limitations in the research. First, a small sample size was used, as is common in qualitative research, it is not possible to make generalizations. Another difficulty was to get Germans to be available to be interviewed, both because of the time difference between Brazil and Germany, and because of the convincing process itself, which is more difficult at a distance. Therefore, the resistance is bigger.

About the contributions of this study, two types can be identified: managerial and academic. By analyzing habits and consumption behavior of two distinct groups, the work can help entrepreneurs and managers of both countries to better understand the profile of their market segment and, thus, develop a compatible brand persona and create more assertive strategies, directing efforts to what really is important to the customer.

In academic terms, this study is presented as the result of the author's academic experience in Germany, which allowed her to get to know new realities, critically reflect on them, have a bigger contact with international students, and develop herself in German and English. Thus, the work appears as evidence that academic mobility projects can bring tangible positive contributions.

Finally, the paper opens up room for future research that can further deepen the subject. The area of sustainable consumption in the clothing segment allows numerous forms of research, which can be cross-cultural or not. As for the groups analyzed in this study, one suggestion would be to conduct quantitative research with significant samples that would allow for more precise and generalizable information to be extracted.



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1. Definition of research problem	√	√			
2. Development of hypotheses or research questions (empirical studies)	√	√			
3. Development of theoretical propositions (theoretical work)	√	√	√	√	√
4. Theoretical foundation / Literature review	√	√	√	√	
5. Definition of methodological procedures	√	√			
6. Data collection	√	√			
7. Statistical analysis	√	√	√	√	
8. Analysis and interpretation of data	√	√	√	√	√
9. Critical revision of the manuscript				√	√
10. Manuscript writing	√	√	√	√	√
11. translation and formatting				√	√

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