Is less actually more?

A qualitative study of how lifestyle minimalism is communicated by generations X and Z
ABSTRACT

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In the last few years, the concept of lifestyle minimalism has gotten more and more attention. Since discussions about climate change and sustainability have gotten louder, negative aspects of consumption have surfaced. Minimalism seems to be the answer to the problem of consumption and its unsustainable aspects, so why is there so little communication about it when it seems to be a simple way to improve life and live more sustainably? This study examines how minimalism is communicated and defined by generations X and Z by conducting semi structured qualitative interviews within a framework in the areas of minimalism, sustainability, consumption, and well-being. The outcomes are that there is no difference in the perception of minimalism when it comes to the generations, but there are differences depending on how someone is already involved in topics like sustainability and minimalism. With these findings, a model was developed to visualize the “bubble process”, which explains how people find their way into the bubble of sustainability/minimalism and can extend it.

Keywords: consumption; minimalism; sustainability; communication; well-being; generation X; generation Z; filter-bubbles
# Table of Content

1  Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 1

   1.1  Research Problem ........................................................................................................................... 1

   1.2  Research Aim ................................................................................................................................... 1

   1.3  Research Questions .......................................................................................................................... 2

2  Literature Review ..................................................................................................................................... 3

   2.1  Literature Review Procedure .......................................................................................................... 3

   2.2  Previous Research regarding Minimalism ....................................................................................... 3

   2.3  Previous Research regarding Consumption ..................................................................................... 4

   2.4  Previous Research regarding Generations ....................................................................................... 5

   2.5  Previous Research regarding Communication ................................................................................ 6

   2.6  Research Gap .................................................................................................................................... 6

3  Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................................. 8

   3.1  Minimalism ....................................................................................................................................... 8

   3.2  Consumption .................................................................................................................................... 11

   3.3  Sustainability .................................................................................................................................... 14

   3.4  Communication .............................................................................................................................. 15

   3.5  Generation X and Z ........................................................................................................................ 16

4  Methodology .............................................................................................................................................. 20

   4.1  Research Design .............................................................................................................................. 20

   4.2  Data Collection and Sampling Method ........................................................................................... 21

   4.3  Data Analysis Procedure ................................................................................................................ 23
List of Tables

**TABLE 1:** COMPARISON OF DIFFERENT DEFINITIONS OF THE GENERATIONS .......................................................... 17
**TABLE 2:** SAMPLE OF SUBJECTS FOR INTERVIEWS – GENERATION X .............................................................. 22
**TABLE 3:** SAMPLE OF SUBJECTS FOR INTERVIEWS – GENERATION Z .............................................................. 22

List of Figures

**FIGURE 1:** THREE DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY. AUTHORS OWN ELABORATION ........................................ 14
**FIGURE 2:** GIOIA CODING MODEL “SUSTAINABILITY- & MINIMALISM-BUBBLE”. AUTHORS OWN ELABORATION ....... 34
**FIGURE 3:** GIOIA CODING MODEL “NON-SUSTAINABILITY- & MINIMALISM-BUBBLE”. AUTHORS OWN ELABORATION .. 35
**FIGURE 4:** VISUALIZATION OF THE “BUBBLE PROCESS”. AUTHORS OWN ELABORATION ........................................ 36
1 Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

The concept of lifestyle minimalism has gotten increased attention in the last few years through blogs and social media. A minimalist can be described as someone, who takes care about their possessions, only buy things they need and try to live a simple life. Since discussions about climate change and sustainability have gotten louder, negative aspects of consumption have been mentioned (Johnson et al., 2021). Minimalism seems to be the answer to the problem of overconsumption and its unsustainable aspects, so why is there so little communication about the advantages of minimalism, which could improve a person’s life and their effect on sustainability (Llyod & Pennington, 2020)? In this thesis, the term “communication” stands for communicating on social media, interpersonal communication as well as communication in mass media.

Connected to this topic of communication is the question of how different generations, namely generations X and Z, think about the concept of minimalism. Since generation X is raised by the consumeristic-focused Baby Boomers, they grew up with the value that consumerism strengthens the economy (Katz, 2017). But this value developed into the issue of over-consumption and production of materials, which damages the environment. Generation Z, the children of generation X, was raised in a time when climate change and sustainability became urgent, which leads to the researchers assumption that generation Z is more likely to adopt the lifestyle of minimalism to change their carbon footprint.

1.2 Research Aim

This thesis aims to examine the communication of minimalism by generations X and Z. By analyzing the different perceptions about minimalism and a comparison of these, the study tries to find out how different values and societal circumstances distinguish the definition of minimalism. For this purpose, the influence of a minimalistic lifestyle on a person’s view of sustainability is investigated through a deep literature review beforehand. The goal is to understand the perception
of minimalism in society better, so that future research can use the results to provide suggestions for institutions or companies to use minimalism as a method to live more sustainably.

Generation X and Z were chosen because one complete generation, namely Generation Y or Millennials, lies between them (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). Their experiences, values, and habits, which were adapted over this period, influence consumption choices, as well as living habits and could have an impact on today's opinions of minimalism (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). Generation X was influenced by their parents the (Baby) Boomers (Katz, 2017). Hence, they developed a different belief about consumption. The possibility to buy more and more and the need to strengthen the economy were their traditional values (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). Climate change and sustainability were not urgently communicated during this time; therefore, they did not question their consumption habits. For generation Z these values continue and intensify but the awareness about the issue of climate change is present in society, wherefore a part of society now tries to do something against it. Therefore, sustainable, and thoughtful consumption is more relevant in this generation (Statista, 2020).

1.3 Research Questions

Since minimalism is a very individualistic topic, it is interesting to find out, how different people define and communicate minimalism. The research questions, which narrow this topic down and help to achieve the aim of this study, are stated as the following:

**RQ1:** How do generations X and Z define and communicate minimalism?

**RQ2:** How can the perception stages of minimalism be described?

The research questions are divided into two parts to examine first how the generation’s opinions differ from each other. Secondly, to expose how the communication process to perceive information about minimalism could resemble.
2 Literature Review

In this chapter different studies related to the topics of minimalism, sustainability, and generational research will be introduced. Before that, the process of the research will be stated to conceive the connections between the different areas.

2.1 Literature Review Procedure

To find suitable material and information for the literature review and the following theoretical framework, different data platforms were used, such as Google Scholar, Web of Science, or Primo, the website of the Jönköping University library. Particularly, articles, books, and reports were searched. For finding suitable research, specific keywords were used for the different areas. Research for the topic of minimalism was found by searching for keywords like “minimalism”, “voluntary simplicity”, “communication + minimalism”, “communicating minimalism” and “minimalism + sustainability”. Material for the area of consumption was found by looking for keywords such as “consumption”, “anti-consumerism movement” or “green consumer”. Lastly, information for the different generations was found, using the keywords “generation X”, “generation Z”, “the X and Z generation”, and “communication + generations”.

2.2 Previous Research regarding Minimalism

In the field of minimalism, previous researchers investigated the connection between having less possessions and well-being, for instance, Hüttel et al. (2020), who speak about the influence of anti-consumption on the well-being of individuals. As a foundation for their study, the authors used theories about anti-consumption, voluntary simplicity, collaborative consumption, and subjective well-being. By using a quantitative survey in the US and Germany, the researchers wanted to testify different hypotheses. The method used is “structural equation modeling (SEM) with latent interaction terms and multiple-group analysis” (Hüttel et al., 2020, p. 2). The findings of the study are that the hypotheses about how anti-consumption influences well-being on several levels cannot all be justified. Overall, consumption consciousness is positive for consumers, but voluntary simplicity has not had a major effect on it (Hüttel et al., 2020).
Johnson et al. (2021) examine a related topic, where they research how minimalism as a sustainable lifestyle influences behaviors and emotional well-being. Aiming to “empirically define minimalism [...] with its behavioral indicators [...] will situate minimalism as a sustainable lifestyle” (p. 803). The study attempts to fill a research gap in which there is no clear definition of minimalism and an associated sustainable lifestyle. For stating this new definition of minimalism, Johnson et al. provide an overview of several concepts, for instance, voluntary simplicity, sustainable consumption, or minimalism and emotional well-being (Johnson et al., 2021). Johnson et al. (2021) used a quantitative methodology, which was split into two studies. By examining a survey with data from 1,050 US residents who were 18 or older, the authors conducted the data. With the results of the survey, Johnson et al. (2021) provided an empirical definition of minimalism. Further, they tested two hypotheses about “depression” and “flourishing”. These were then included in a second survey with the same sample, so that the hypotheses could be tested and, in the end, both justified (Johnson et al., 2021). Overall, the study concludes that “minimalism enhances flourishing while alleviating the level of depression” (Johnson et al., 2021, p. 811).

The study by Palafox (2020) is also about the topic of minimalism, but more in terms of the impact on the environment. It aims to examine how minimalist practices (individually and generally) could influence the carbon footprint of individuals to help protect the environment. By stating several theories, for instance, how minimalism is defined as well as illustrating current criticism about the concept, the author introduces the topic. For the research, a Critical Discourse Analysis was used. Therefore, the theory was used to build an empirical suggestion for regulations, which can be implemented by individuals or governments to thrive for a more minimalistic lifestyle (Palafox, 2020). As findings, there are several suggestions on how laws and taxes could look like when minimalism would be implemented as a solution to fight against climate change (Palafox, 2020).

2.3 Previous Research regarding Consumption

For the field of sustainable consumption and anti-consumption, the research by Martin-Woodhead (2021) served as a foundation. The study aims to find out if minimalists have more individualistic motivations or if they are driven by more collective environmental concerns. The author used a qualitative method, particularly in-depth interviews with 15 minimalists from the UK. In these interviews, she examines that the interviewees have different methods of consumption and usage
of their products, for instance, “limited consumption”, “considered consumption” or “sustainable consumption” (Martin-Woodhead, 2021, p. 10f.). The findings of the study are that all subjects explain their motivation to live a minimalistic life because they see advantages in areas such as “physical, temporal and mental space” (Martin-Woodhead, 2021, p. 16).

Furchheim and Morhart (2020) provide a novel approach when it comes to the influence of sustainable consumption on well-being. In their study, they examine how buying consciously sustainably produced products can influence stress and well-being (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). Through a questionnaire completed by 128 students, they tested four hypotheses, which leads to the results that participants with a higher focus on sustainable consumption had more stress and therefore lower satisfaction with life (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). The reason is their high values for consuming responsibly and when they could not buy something within these values, they felt stress, which led to dissatisfaction with life (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020).

### 2.4 Previous Research regarding Generations

Previous research around generations was conducted by Herrando et al. (2018). The study focuses on the difference between generations when it comes to trusting commerce websites. The theories, on which the study is based, are related to trust, user-generated information, company-generated information, and generational cohort theory (Herrando et al., 2018). To test their established hypotheses, the researchers surveyed 715 participants between the age of 16 to 55 years. The outcomes of the study are that differences between generation X and Z are, that generation X trusts company-generated content more, whereas generation Z focuses more on user-generated content (Herrando et al., 2018).

In their study, Lakatos et al. examine the attitude of different generations towards consumption and living a sustainable lifestyle (2018). The study consists of a questionnaire, which was tested on 37 participants, and showed that generation X is more engaged in ecological consumption than generation Z (Lakatos et al., 2018).
2.5 Previous Research regarding Communication

In the area of communication, the study by Bozdag and van den Hoven (2015) how information diversity is influenced by filter bubbles and algorithms on social media platforms and how this influence could harm democracy. By introducing different models of democracy, the researchers study software tools to fight filter bubbles. The outcomes are there are no clear definitions what filter bubbles exactly are and that they are mainly made for liberal or deliberative models of democracy (Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015).

Kang (2019) examines in his study how sustainable development is communicated in daily communication and how storytelling could strengthen this communication. By conducting two surveys with more than 460 participants, the researcher finds out that social media platforms lead to a higher encouragement rate to improve the participants behavior regarding sustainability (Kang, 2019).

2.6 Research Gap

Taking these studies into account, a research gap around the topics of minimalism, sustainability, consumption, and the different generations can be drawn. In general, no study examines the differences in the communication about minimalism by different generations. Therefore, this study can fill this research gap as well as the gap in the study by Hüttel et al. (2020), where more information about the connection between consumption and minimalism could be useful. Furthermore, for the communication of minimalism, this study can help to fill the gap in Palafox’s study (2020), since this study only describes theoretical data, and this thesis could provide new empirical knowledge. Moreover, new data on how sustainable consumption influences well-being could be examined, which would extend the information of the research of Martin-Woodhead (2021) or Furchheim and Morhart (2020).

For the generational part, the studies of Herrando et al. (2018) and Lakatos et al. (2018) can be updated since their studies were conducted in 2018. Because generation Z has changed in the last four years as well as the increased awareness about climate change increased and the effects of the Covid-19 on the world. The studies about communication help to understand how filter bubbles
work and how information about sustainability are communicated in society. This study also focuses on happiness and well-being and how consumption or living a minimalistic lifestyle influences these aspects.
3 Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical knowledge and framework, which is needed to contribute to the different areas of the researched topic. Therefore, the definitions of minimalism, consumption, and sustainability will be stated as well as the benefits of minimalism and forms of consumers. Furthermore, the chapter contains information about the selected generations X and Z and their characteristics, differences, and consumer attributes. Lastly, also communication will be introduced, which functions as the connector of all these different topics, since through communication society, and especially relevant for this study, generations X and Z receive information about the topics.

3.1 Minimalism

There is no clear definition for minimalism since every individual defines minimalism differently. This thesis will present different approaches to find a foundation with the same values. Johnson et al. (2021) mention a definition that says that the purpose of minimalism is to declutter all material possessions, so the individual has only a small number of things. They continue their definition by stating that it also leads to a more conscious consumption of new things. This concept can be described as a mindset of individuals, who want to focus on what matters most to them and do not want to waste time or money on things they do not need in life (Johnson et al., 2021). On the other hand, Dopierała (2017) defines the different approaches of minimalism as criticism of excessive consumption, minimalism as a tool to discover one’s “real” values as well as sometimes its potential to change the capitalistic system.

These definitions of minimalism lead to the currently researched theory, that the lifestyle of minimalism would change the production process of all firms. By reducing consumption, minimalists think that the behavior could change the whole production system itself (Johnson et al., 2021). On social media, numerous accounts promote the lifestyle and express that they “feel happier and more fulfilled than ever before; they are better able to focus on things more important to them” (Simple Happy Zen, 2019). Further, several researchers have declared that anti-consumption is strongly connected to well-being (Shen, 2020; Palafox, 2020; Lloyd & Pennington, 2020).
The reasons and goals why minimalists practice this lifestyle vary from having fewer things to creating a smaller carbon footprint for themselves (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). This is by creating an anti-consumption approach in combination with a wish for a non-materialistic life (Johnson et al., 2021; Dopierała, 2017). Often no consumption at all is unrealistic, but minimalism is defined as buying only products which are needed and, on some occasions, also within sustainable consumption. Dopierała goes on by explaining that there are three distinct aspects, that need to be considered: “criticism of consumerism; post-materialistic redirection of aspirations and methods of restructuring one’s ‘old lifestyle”’ (2017, p. 67f.). Living after these values would lead to improved well-being because minimalists would focus on the important things in life and not just on materialistic things (Dopierała, 2017; Hüttel et al., 2020). Beginning by reducing possessions, minimalism is a process to create a more balanced and moderate life (Dopierała, 2017; Martin-Woodhead, 2021). The focus for this lies in its voluntary aspect, there is no need for minimalists to do this, their goals and values are just to live this lifestyle.

In some instances, minimalists also try to eat vegetarian, vegan or live spiritually, so their movement goes beyond the minimalist lifestyle and against the mainstream (Martin-Woodhead, 2021). The goal is to live a life where “less is more” and where time has the most value. Focusing on buying too many products and the resulting debt, stress, and even burnout are the consequences (Dopierała, 2017). Martin-Woodhead goes on with describing minimalism as a form of “individualism, based on personal motivations and self-development” (2021, p. 2). Furthermore, it must be said that minimalism is only practicable in a class of society, where a higher income is given due to the fact that there is no overconsumption in society classes with low income. That is why, minimalism could be described as an individualistic choice of the middle or higher classes in society.

3.1.1 Voluntary simplicity as the history of minimalism

Voluntary simplicity (VS) existed before the trend of minimalism (Johnson et al., 2021; Dopierała, 2017). The difference is that voluntary simplicity often is politically motivated whereas minimalism can also be practiced by people, who simply like the lifestyle itself (Johnson et al., 2021). Similar to minimalism, the concept of voluntary simplicity is defined by “material simplicity, self-determination, self-sufficiency, ecological awareness, social responsibility,
spirituality, and personal growth” (Elgin & Mitchell, 1977 in Lloyd & Pennington, 2020, p. 122). Other research confirms these values by defining VS as “rejection of high-consumption”, “a frugal, anti-consumer lifestyle” or “a low material dependency” (Dopierała, 2017; Martin-Woodhead, 2021; Shen, 2020; Balderjahn et al., 2013; Lee & Ahn, 2016). VS had its peak in the 1970s and lead to the minimalism movement after the financial crisis of 2008 because consumers needed to focus on their finances (Dopierała, 2017). Martin-Woodhead goes on to add the concerns about the climate crisis (2021) and Lee & Ahn the desire for better personal well-being (2016).

3.1.2 Well-being and financial influence

One of the main goals minimalists have when they start a minimalistic lifestyle is to improve their well-being (Hüttel et al., 2020; Lloyd & Pennington, 2020; Lee & Ahn, 2016). This effect is explained by the fulfillment of values. Minimalists define their values after an improvement of their autonomy and the development of their intrinsic and extrinsic goals (Lee & Ahn, 2016). Further, several studies have shown that experiences and non-material sources foster better well-being than materialistic objects (Myers & Diener, 1995 in Lee & Ahn, 2016). A contradictory approach comes from Furchheim and Mohart (2020), who say that living after these values and trying to fulfill them could also lead to a deterioration of well-being because the person is not able to accomplish all their goals. For instance, a person wants to boycott a specific company because this brand interacts against the person's values and then there is no other option than to buy a product from this brand. The person would think that they failed, which could lead to stress and diminished well-being.

It must be noted that not everyone is in the position to live a minimalistic lifestyle in the manner described. People who are not financially stable could not have the problem of over-consumption because they simply do not have the resources to afford a lot of things (Dopierała, 2017). That is why there is no actual need to cut down on possessions since people only have things they need. In developed areas of the world, this case is different because the natural living standards are given and societies can spend their money on products or other things, which leads a part of society to short-term happiness (Lee & Ahn, 2016). Due to the mindful consumption of objects that a person needs, minimalism also brings financial advantages (Martin-Woodhead, 2021; Vita et al., 2019). Long-term financial stability and reducing the carbon footprint could thrive by only buying new
products if they are needed. This financial stability also leads to better well-being because of having the ability to achieve long-term goals due to savings (Martin-Woodhead, 2021; Vita et al., 2019; Balderjahn et al., 2013).

3.1.3 Materialism

The opposite of minimalism and anti-consumption is called ‘materialism’ which can be described as the “culture of consumption” (Kasser et al., 2004 in Furchheim & Morhart, 2020, p. 116). Especially in socially and materially strong societies, excessive consumption resembles higher social status (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). For materialists earning money and spending most of it is the most fulfilling aspect of their well-being. This leads to a vicious circle because the consumers cannot stop buying things and consumption leads to a need for even more consumption, leaving them dissatisfied with their lives (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). These values are problematic because not only the reduced well-being but also the ecological behavior is often not included in this mindset (Hurst et al., 2013). Lee & Ahn continue to argue that materialists often do not have control over their product consumption, which means that the consumers do not question the actual need for the products and their influence (2016). This could also lead to an escape from the real world and the problems that are coming with it, which leads to diminished well-being as well (Lee & Ahn, 2016). People who tend to be materialists are proven to be “self-centered”, “selfish”, “envious” or “non-generous” which could also influence their well-being (Lee & Ahn, 2016, p. 21). Furthermore, materialists tend to compare themselves to others more often, which could end up in envy. The aspirations and claims of materialists are often higher than usual, so if they could not afford to buy a product, they would feel unsatisfied. This issue is called “hedonic adaptation” or “the hedonic treadmill” (Brickman & Campbell, 1971 in Lee & Ahn, 2016, p. 22).

3.2 Consumption

Consumption is not only the acquisition of products and resources but according to Baudrillard also the approach to social distinction (Baudrillard, 1998). “Consumption is linked to economic development”, which means that it has advantages and disadvantages for society (Giddens, 2006, p. 943). On the one side, as the living standards are rising, people have more financial resources to
spend. On the other side, this kind of consumption has a negative influence on the ecological and social side of sustainability (Giddens, 2006). Due to the production, transportation, usage, and recycling of lifestyle products, emissions are produced and get into the atmosphere. Even though the awareness of sustainability is getting better, the consumption of lifestyle products is still rising, which is stated by the Consumption Climate Index in Europe (Gfk, 2018 in Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). Especially in developed and industrialized parts of the world, consumption is not decreasing but rather increasing (Seyfang, 2005). In Europe, the living standards and consumption lead to 16t CO₂ per capita and the year of the average household (Vita et al. 2019). This does not only have an impact on ecological sustainability but also the social side. Since most of the products are produced in underdeveloped countries, it can be assumed that most workers are not paid fair wages or have safe working circumstances. Besides these issues, consumption also influences the ecological part in terms of the growing consumption of water or fossil fuels (Giddens, 2006). This can lead to imbalances in undeveloped parts of the world because the resources are missing there first. Wanting to do something about this issue, plenty of consumers nowadays take the initiative and consume less, “greener” or boycott consumption at all. These are three different types of more sustainable consumption, which will be presented in this chapter. All of them are mostly driven by the concerns of sustainability (Lee & Ahn, 2016).

3.2.1 Anti-consumers

The strictest type of sustainable consumption is no consumption at all. This type is called “anti-consumerism” and is defined as a reluctance or renunciation instead of only replacing normal goods with a more sustainable version (Lee & Ahn, 2016; Gilbert, 2008). Anti-consumers often not only dislike a company itself and try to boycott them but also attempt to do something on the macro-level and against the capitalistic system (Lee & Ahn, 2016). The positive side-effect of living a more sustainable life compared to excessive consumption is also better well-being because of less stress (Etzioni, 2004; Iyer & Muncy, 2009).

3.2.2 Second-hand consumers

Another option to consume more sustainably is to shop secondhand. Besides regular secondhand shops in a physical form, different apps, and online shops where consumers can buy used clothes
and products have been released meanwhile. The consumer profits not only by paying less money for the used products but also by getting quality products for a better price (Martin-Woodhead, 2021). For sustainability reasons buying secondhand is also preferable. Due to the circumstances that the products are already available and there is no need to produce things, the initial carbon footprint of the products will be reduced (Martin-Woodhead, 2021).

3.2.3 Green consumers

To define a green consumer, several aspects need to be considered. Relevant sources define a green consumer as a person who has a concern for ethical and environmentally friendly consumption because of the urge to protect the environment (Martin-Woodhead, 2021; Furchheim & Morhart, 2020; Lee & Ahn, 2016). To achieve this, compromises have to be made, including in the consumption of food, clothing and footwear, electronic products, and even transport and tourism (Vita et al., 2019). This protection is not as strict as a clear anti-consumption, but rather has the focus on more sustainably produced products, meaning that these were produced with technologies running on renewable energies or by using recycled materials to extend lifetime cycles (Vita et al., 2019). The intention to consume these products varies from person to person. Often these consumers are driven by ethical reasons, for instance, to protect the environment, but in a rather calm than radical way or to do something good (Vita et al., 2019, Balderjahn et al., 2013). Another reason is to live a specific “standard” in society. Griskevicius et al. (2010) researched this phenomenon and explained it as the following: “a desire for status can spur self-sacrifice [and] also presents a powerful tool for motivating prosocial and pro-environmental action” (p. 402). Since the consumers started to think about their consumption and its consequences, it appears to be a first step in the right direction, which is why it should not be denounced. The issue of green consumption is that green consumption is still consumption after all. Even though they think they are doing something good for the environment, these products still need to be produced and require resources. This is accompanied by the fact that these products usually cost a lot more than conventional products, which is why not all consumers of society can afford them (Furchheim & Morhart, 2020). For the economy, companies, and the policy, this consumption of green products is important, regarding the demand for sustainable products to create regulatory frameworks or alternatives in general (Balderjahn et al., 2013; Seyfang, 2005).
3.3 Sustainability

The most famous definition of sustainability comes from the Brundtland Commission, which is stated as the following: “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 15). Further, sustainability consists of three pillars: “ecological, economic and social” (Elkington, 1999), which define the different dimensions it is dependent on (see Figure 1).

The first and most important of the three pillars of sustainability is the ecological part which describes the state of the earth. Since scientists worldwide found out that climate change is created by humans, people try to create awareness that something must change to stop global warming and natural disasters caused by this (IPCC, 2022). Moreover, the change of ecosystems or biological diversity could cause a shift for human systems as well (IPCC, 2022). This could also influence the other dimensions, namely the social and economic parts.

![Figure 1: Three dimensions of sustainability. Authors own elaboration.](image)

Moving on to the economic part of sustainability, Elkington states that the economic bottom line is dependent on the ecological dimension since there cannot be an economy without a functioning environment (1999). Lastly, there is the social part, which also depends on the economy as well as on the environment. For social sustainability, the focus is on society and the interaction with others.
Therefore, all the dimensions are connected, and they would not work without each other. (Geiger et al., 2021).

In the last years, researchers tried to find out new ways to improve the economical side, shifting it from a capitalistic approach to a more circular economy. This would lead to a more sustainable way to run the economy since resources would be used more efficiently and emissions could be reduced (Lakatos et al., 2018). Seyfang continues these improvements by proposing the concept of “planetary citizenship”, which contains the idea of a “re-shaped economy driven by social and environmental need rather than financial pressures” (2005, p. 291). She goes on that sustainable consumption would be the best option for the first step in this direction (Seyfang, 2005). Other authors fear that too much green consumption could lead to a degradation of the economy since the consumption would decrease (Vita et al., 2019).

3.4 Communication

Communication influences every part of human life since it affects not only the verbal level but also the body language of a person (Pörksen & von Thun, 2016). Due to digitalization and the rise of social media networks around the world, communication online has grown into a big part of people’s lives. 36% of the 18–24-year old’s use social media as their main news source whereas it is 8% of the 45–54-year old’s (Uni Zürich, 2021). Since it is not only possible to communicate with family and friends all over the world, but also to learn and receive news, more people have the chance to become aware of the topic of sustainability and minimalism.

3.4.1 Filter bubbles

Filter bubbles are according to Dubois and Blank algorithms on social media to present the user personalized content (2018). Their purpose is to filter the content for the users, which they preferred in the past, and to reduce the content overload (Berman & Katona, 2020). By doing so, the user only sees content that the algorithm thinks they like. Since this also includes the presentation of political content e.g., before an election, there are several public discussions if filter bubbles may jeopardize democracy (Bozdag & Hoven, 2015). It appears that the users only receive content on their political opinion and not about other views, which is why a full spectrum of opinions could
not be formed. Communication and information gathering are therefore restricted even though the user does not realize it (Bozdag & Hoven, 2015).

### 3.4.2 Sustainable Communication

To create awareness about the idea of sustainable consumption and the issues the earth and society are facing today, it is important to communicate the issues and solutions for them. Godemann and Michelsen (2011) define sustainable communication as “a process of mutual understanding dealing with the future development of society at the core of which is a vision of sustainability” (p. 6). It is therefore not only important to communicate between politics and societies but also between individuals, to learn, adapt and create awareness about current issues and possible actions (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). They are going on by saying that the mediation of sustainability could develop into seeing it as a norm, which would influence creating awareness about the issues. By doing so, sustainability would be present in the daily life of more people, which could change their behavior subconsciously (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011).

The communication about minimalism is only a minor part of this communication but could influence society. Since there is a macro- and micro-perspective for taking action for sustainability, communication is two-sided (Wilkinson, 1998). These communication processes are needed to engage society to take individual action as well as for policies to change and implement guidelines and rules.

### 3.5 Generation X and Z

According to literature, the borders of generations are hard to define (Dimock, 2019; McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). As said by McCrindle and Wolfinger, “two decades is far too broad a generational span” because nowadays values, technologies, and business options change too quickly and therefore the behaviors of a generation as well (2009, p. 17). This proposition is followed by the definition that generations now “are defined sociologically rather than biologically” (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009, p. 17).
For this study, the focus is on generation X and generation Z. According to several studies about the definition of generations, there is no official confirmed starting point, for the birth of generation Z. Lancaster and Stillman further contribute a new definition for people, who were born on the edges of different generations and called them “cuspers” (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002 in Oh & Reeves, 2007). Therefore, this study goes with the 15-year-period, which is used by the listed authors in Table 2. Thus, the used period for this study is the following: Generation X is born between 1965 and 1979, while generation Z is born between 1995 and 2009.

Table 1: Comparison of different definitions of the generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>(Baby) Boomers</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Generation Y / Millennials</th>
<th>Generation Z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

This chapter focuses on the definition of the characteristic of generations X and Z as well as the consumption habits. Further, the distinction between each other will be explained later.

3.5.1 Generation X

Generation X is characterized by the fact that they lived in a high “material prosperity” in the western world (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009, p. 36), but also in a world where the Second World War was still perceptible (Statista, 2020). They grew up with parents, who were both working, so
they had a lot of time for themselves (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009). Therefore, they value non-material things more than material ones. Today they became parents themselves and raised generation Z. (Smaliukiene et al., 2020). This leads to a behavior where generation X is focused on giving their families the best life, by living after their beliefs and values, since they are focused on a balanced lifestyle (Lakatos et al., 2018; Severo et al., 2017). Severo et al. continue by saying that generation X take into consideration how their consumed products are produced, which quality they have, and what environmental effect they could have (2017).

When it comes to characterizing generation X as consumers, it has to be said that online shopping is not something they grew up with. More than 30 percent of this generation prefer to go to a shop and only rarely order anything online (Statista, 2020). In comparison with generation Z, they are also a less sustainable consumer (Statista, 2020). Further, generation X stay loyal to a brand they like, and they do not like to try new products or brands (Statista, 2020; Richardson, 2018). Severo et al. confirm that by stating that generation X values the quality of a product and considers the environmental issues that could be caused by the production process (2017). Since generation X is at an age where they have kids, their spending is generally higher than that of generation Z. That is why they have a higher buying power to provide their families with goods in the western middle and higher class (Lakatos et al., 2018).

3.5.2 Generation Z

Generation Z representatives were raised in a time when smartphones were developed and widely implemented on the market. This is reflected in the behavior and media usage of generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2019). They were raised with the knowledge of climate change and the communication about the consequences of it. Therefore, they have concerns regarding the environment and the influence of their consumption (Lakatos et al., 2018), and are actively engaging in it (Dabija et al., 2020). When it comes to communication, generation Z is very flexible, since they are used to constant changes in communication platforms due to globalization and they adapt quickly to them (Smaliukiene et al., 2020). Kapferer and Valette-Florence discovered that a shift is going on and generation Z values materialism less than before (2019). Despite that, generation Z is consuming more than other generations (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2009).
Due to the pandemic and the fact that generation Z is defined as Digital Natives, also the consumption of this generation is mostly online and digital (Smaliukiene et al., 2020). They are often influenced by seeing products on social media platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok, or YouTube. But generation Z is also more sensitive to social issues and questions the company they are buying from (Smaliukiene et al., 2020). This is because they want to support companies that correspond to their values (Ferguson, 2018). Statista also defines generation Z as a more sustainable consumer (2020).
4 Methodology

This thesis aims to analyze the communication about lifestyle minimalism by generations X and Z. For answering the related research questions, this study conducted qualitative interviews with selected subjects. Beforehand a deep literature review and theoretical framework has been done, to define the chosen generations as well as the concept of minimalism and the influence on a sustainable lifestyle. The first research question “How do generations X and Z define and communicate minimalism?” can be answered through interviews, because the sampling of the interviewees is based on age. Therefore, only someone who is born during the period of generation X or Z was interviewed (see Table 2 for the exact dates). The second research question will be examined after the interviews with the gathered data.

This chapter focuses on the explanation of the method used to gather data to examine the introduced research questions. Furthermore, the research approach, data collection and sampling method will be discussed. Lastly, it will be evinced if the data is qualified to use and what the limitations and ethics of interviews as a method are.

4.1 Research Design

Since this thesis pursued a qualitative approach, interviews were the chosen method to gather the needed data. Interviews are often used for qualitative research because they offer a relatively free and flexible way of working (Bryman, 2016). By using a semi-structured style, the interviews could be adapted to the conditions of each interviewee. This has the advantage of aiming to imitate a normal conversation, where the interviewees can speak freely, and the atmosphere is relaxed (Bryman, 2016). As a foundation served a beforehand developed interview catalog (see Appendix 1). Based on the theoretical background, the questions regarding the themes of minimalism, sustainability, consumption, well-being, communication, and generations were asked. Because the execution was in German, these questions were translated to German before the interviews so that the interviewees could express their opinion in the best feasible way.

This thesis followed an inductive research approach since it is a qualitative study and there was no grounded theory, which could have been used (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The coding technique
after Gioia was used, as well as an inductive coding approach, where the codes were developed during the process of analyzing the material (Saldana, 2009). Further, the six steps for a thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke were used to structure the analysis (2006).

For the data collection, primary as well as secondary data were used. The primary data was received during the interviews, within a way of a discursive interview approach. During the interviews, the questions were explained and for instance, after the interviewee defined minimalism themselves, a clear definition of minimalism was given. The reason for that was that the interviewees should have a better knowledge of the topic to proceed with the following interview questions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

4.2 Data Collection and Sampling Method

Since this study conducted qualitative interviews, the sampling method to choose the subjects is crucial for the outcomes of the research. For qualitative methods, the focus is to prove the aim of the study (Marshall, 1996). The thesis-writing time was limited, which is why the chosen sampling method consisted of a purposeful sample. It is defined as the selection of actively chosen subjects by the conductor to get the most productive results (Marshall, 1996). The subjects should have specific characteristics that suit the aim of the study. In this case, the sample consisted of subjects, who are interested in minimalism or sustainability and belong to generations X and Z and by choosing subjects, who have opposite attributes to access a full variety of information about the topic (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Therefore, the interviews were also done with subjects, who are not interested in minimalism or even never heard of it before, to get different perspectives on the topic.

In consideration of the limited time in which this thesis was conducted, the number of interviews is defined as four to five per generation, which led to nine interviews in total. Since the aim of the study is not to create a quantitative study of how minimalism is reviewed in the whole society, a smaller number of interviews with qualitative answers were sufficient for the credibility of this thesis.

Another consideration for sampling suitable candidates for the interviews was comparable socio-economic factors. That is why all participants came from a similar background, for instance,
everyone in the group of generation Z was either a student or had done an apprenticeship. In generation X everyone had a job in the middle class and therefore a regular stable income. Also, this group either lived in their own house or flat or had a bigger apartment for their use, which describes that the participants are related to a middle or higher class in society since they all had more than enough space for living.

Tables 3 and 4 show the chosen subjects for the different generations and the sample for the interviews. The demographic stratification helps to classify the interviewees. The “(x)” means, that the person started thinking about sustainability issues only recently and “x” is defined as someone, who is interested in the topic. Due to the limited time for writing this thesis, the participants were all part of the researchers circle of acquaintance’s.

Table 2: Sample of Subjects for Interviews – Generation X

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interest in minimalism</th>
<th>Interest in Sustainability</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X1</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>25.04.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X2</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>28.04.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X3</td>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>24.04.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X4</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>(x)</td>
<td>24.04.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Sample of Subjects for Interviews – Generation Z

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Year of Birth</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Interest in minimalism</th>
<th>Interest in Sustainability</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Z1</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>22.04.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z2</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>23.04.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Data Analysis Procedure

To use the generated material, the method by Gioia was used (Gioia et al., 2013). Therefore, suitable quotes from the interviews were coded with the Gioia method, in first and second levels. The result were concepts, themes, and aggregate dimensions, which were used in the analysis of this thesis (Gioia et al., 2013). Since the interviews were conducted in German, the suitable phrases for the coding were translated word by word into English. The outcome in the form of a diagram with the different headlines of the coding is shown in the analysis.

The thematic analysis with the Braun and Clarke approach was used to have a guideline for analyzing the data (2006). With the six steps, namely “familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up” the conducted data and the writing of the analysis had a structured system (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). During the analysis, a latent approach was used, to not only relate to the explicit saying, but also how their opinions and definitions could be interpreted in the context of consumption and minimalism.

4.4 Research Quality

Since qualitative research does have some limitations when it comes to gathering enough data, its quality is important. To ensure that enough quality was given to the interviews, three aspects were considered: “the richness of the interviewee’s answers, the length of relevant answers, and the clarification of the interviewee's statements” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 89). All interviewees were given time to think about their responses and to explain their opinion in a relaxed atmosphere, to ensure a qualitative statement. Brinkmann and Kvale go on to state ten qualification criteria to which it is important to pay attention during the interview. These are defined as the following: “knowledgeable, structuring, clear, gentle, sensitive, open, steering, critical, remembering and
interpreting” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018, p. 89). During the interviews the special focus was on these criteria, to receive the best possible quality for the interviews as well as to give the interviewees the best foundation to answer the questions. To make certain that the statements of the interviewees were rightly interpreted, an on-the-line interpretation was used, which is characterized as regular inquiries and repetitions of what has been said (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

To code the conducted interviews, the Gioia method was used. This method provides a guideline how to code interviews by separating them into different concepts (Gioia et al., 2013). These concepts are then channeled into themes, which describe the overlined topic. With these themes, general dimensions can be developed. In this study the process was the following: The concepts represent the answers during the interviews and are displayed as “representative quotes” in the two developed Gioia Models (see Figure 2 and 3 in the analysis). These quotes were than summarized into 1st order themes, which represent not only chosen topics for the interviews but also topics, which came up during the interviews. Since the answers of the interviewees differed, two different models were created and named after the bubbles, the interviewees were in (aggregate dimension).

4.5 Research Ethics

Moral and ethical behavior towards the research approach and then the interviewees were respected in every stage of the process. Therefore, the seven stages of possible ethical issues by Brinkmann and Kvale (2018, p. 23) were listed, which present the potential ethical concerns that could arise in the process of conducting the interviews till analyzing and reporting the data. The seven stages help to define and take care of possible concerns (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018).

1. Thematizing. Formulation of research questions about the communication of lifestyle minimalism by generations X and Z.

2. Designing. Planning the interview with nine people, who were either born in the period of generation X or Z.

3. Interviewing. A detailed interview guide was used to conduct the interviews within a semi-structured method. Therefore, not all questions were asked, and more related questions were asked
during the conduction of the interview. The interviews lasted between 40 to 50 minutes and were held online via Zoom, where they were video recorded. Before starting the interviews, the interviewees were briefed, to tell the truth, and share their opinions freely on the discussed topics. Also, it was mentioned that their opinion will not be judged or maligned and that the interview will be recorded. Additionally, the interviewees had to fill out and sign a GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) Consent Sheet (see Appendix 2). After the main interview, a debriefing was given stating that the data will be deleted after finishing the thesis. Furthermore, the possibility was given to hand out the finished thesis afterward.

4. Transcribing. All nine interviews were transcribed verbatim.

5. Analyzing. By using the Gioia method to code the interviews, the content could be used for the analysis. With this method, the interviews could be categorized into different concepts, themes, and dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013).

6. Verifying. During the entire process the validity, reliability, and generalizability of the generated material were checked to provide substantial research.

7. Reporting. The results were given in the findings and then discussed in the analysis of this thesis.
5 Findings

In this chapter, all findings of the interviews conducted will be reviewed. The structure is based on the themes of the interview for creating an understandable order of presenting the findings.

According to the interviews, no interviewee would designate themselves as a minimalist in a classical way. But compared to the literature, a few of the interviewees could be described as minimalists since they are consuming thoughtfully, take care of their possessions and even try to include a minimalistic approach when it comes to friendships and acquaintances.

5.1 Generation X

5.1.1 Minimalism

When it comes to the definition of minimalism, generation X was not certain how to define minimalism properly at first. Only X3 answers directly with the definition of “less is more”, whereas the other interviewees cogitate and then answer that they would define a minimalist as someone who “really consumes almost nothing, buys nothing and owns nothing” (X4) and only needs the things in life in the need to survive. All of them would not consider defining themselves as minimalists because they have too many things they do not need. Also, X1 and X2 say that the effort to implement this lifestyle in their life would be too big. X4 continued that he thinks that he would rather call himself a materialist than a minimalist and even though he knows about the advantages of minimalism, he would not prioritize them over his current lifestyle.

Generation X agrees that the communication about minimalism is rather rare in society. Also, they think that minimalism has a good reputation in society, but X2 adds that the people do not actively live a minimalistic lifestyle even though they know about the benefits. X1 and X4 think that materialism and consumption are in the foreground and are communicated more than minimalism. Furthermore, X1 and X3 assume that more communication about minimalism is needed to create awareness in society. X2 continues with an explanation of what the future of minimalism might look like:
“I think it is coming anyway because I think what is happening in the world at the moment, you will not be able to afford some of the things you used to. And that you think more about what you spend your money on because I think you will have less and less money and then you automatically think about what you really need to live” (X2).

5.1.2 Sustainability

All four interviewees would consider themselves interested in sustainability, some of them more and some of them less. X2 states that “if I am honest, it does not really matter at the moment. I have so many other things on my mind, so I cannot deal with sustainability as well” while X3 says that it plays “a big role, I would say, but not predominant now”. They try to implement a few sustainable behaviors in their daily routine, for instance buying biological food, cutting down on meat and dairy products, or using the bike instead of the car. For sustainable consumption, X1, X2, and X3 would consider buying sustainably produced products, but they did not pay attention in the past. X3 also mentions that she thinks it is important to buy these products since she “[has] to use [her] money to give [her] voice to the things [she] think[s] are good. And sustainability is definitely worth the effort”.

5.1.3 Consumption

As for the topic of consumption, generation X does not agree when it comes to short-term or long-term happiness because of consumption. One interviewee describes the feeling after consumption as joy and deliberately demarcates the feeling from happiness (X2). She also states that she sees consumption as doing something good for herself and treating herself. X1 mentions that her consumption decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic since she was not able to go to stores and does not like ordering something online. She associates happiness through consumption more with shopping and spending time in the city than with the products she buys there. All interviewees rate quality higher than quantity when it comes to consumption, except X2. Since she is the only one, who would consider herself financially unstable, she says that she must take care of the products she buys, fit her budget rather than if the quality is good or if the brand is sustainable. X4 states that he mostly questions the need for the product before he buys it, but also sometimes makes
impulsive purchases. X1 and X3 buy secondhand regularly, X2 is interested in it and X4 has no interest in purchasing products secondhand. Further, X1 and X3 try to boycott fast fashion, and Amazon, X2, and X4 do not boycott any brands even though they know about the production conditions.

5.1.4 Well-being

To make generation X happy, the interviewees say that they need rest, no stress, and insouciance. They all prefer to spend time with their friends and families and would not rank the happiness that comes from consumption higher than this happiness. X2 and X3 have the opinion that the consumption of products can lead to long-term happiness when they use things they wanted for a longer time. X1 and X4 think that the consumption of products only brings short-term happiness. X3 continues that she would be happier if she had fewer things and would live in more structured surroundings. X4 is happier with having more possessions.

5.1.5 Generation X about Generation X

Generation X defines their generation as an active generation who likes to spend money on products, vacations, cars, or houses. Also, they think that their path in life is predetermined as the following: “You walk and then you study and then you get a job, then you build a house, then you have the children, then you have the car, then comes the dog and if things go well, maybe the SUV.” (X3). X2 thinks that they saw this lifestyle as self-evident and the Covid-19 pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine served as an impulse to change this thinking. X1 and X3 think that a part of the generation takes care about living environmentally friendly, but not all people of the generation.

5.1.6 Generation X About Generation Z

The interviewees from generation X describe generation Z as self-confident, consuming, but also more environmentally acting than generation X. They also have a higher usage of technical things and are using social media platforms more than generation X. They describe them as light-hearted and sometimes spoiled by their parents since they were born when their parents already had
everything, so they sometimes took it for granted. X3 thinks that generation Z is the main driving force when it comes to environmental protection and pushes generation X more in this direction.

5.2 Generation Z

5.2.1 Minimalism

Generation Z describes a minimalistic person as someone who only buys the things they need and does not have a lot of possessions. Z1 continues that “it is a lifestyle in which one focuses on the essentials. And what the essentials are, everyone must define for themselves. So, it is not about owning as little as possible, but what is important for you”. Moreover, they describe a minimalist as someone who is sorting out things they do not need regularly. From their perspective, interviewee Z2 also says that he feels better and less stressed when he does not have a lot of things. All the interviewees would not call themselves minimalists because they think they still have a lot of unnecessary things they did not get rid of, yet. Z2, Z3, and Z4 also sometimes buy things they do not need because they want to have a specific selection of things to choose from (Z4). Sorting things out and selling them (online) is a regular procedure for a few of them (Z1, Z2, Z3, Z5), even though Z2 and Z5 would consider it a big effort to find a better place for their things.

When it comes to communication about minimalism, some of generation Z do have the stereotype that a minimalist lives in an empty apartment and only has vital possessions. Otherwise, they would say that communication about minimalism is rather small and only by people who are interested in the subject. Overall, they describe it as a “bubble” where people in it receive information (over social media or friends) about it and outside of that bubble someone would not get knowledge. Z1 and Z5 continue that they think that wider communication could create more awareness about minimalism and could inspire people to think about it.

5.2.2 Sustainability

Regarding sustainability, the interviewees have different answers to the question of whether they are interested in sustainability and which role it plays in their life. Z1 and Z5 state that they are very interested in it and that it plays an important role in every part of their life. Whereas
interviewee Z2 says that he is interested, he is also not aware of the whole topic and that it is too big of an effort “to start to become more sustainable” (Z2). Z3 is interested in sustainability and recently started reducing her use of packaged products. Z4 states that she is not interested in the topic and that it does not play a role in her life because “I have not dealt with the idea of living sustainably, yet”. Moreover, these opinions reflect their perception of sustainable consumption, considering Z1, Z5, and parts also Z2 and Z3. They question brands they are buying from and would or already do pay more money for sustainably produced products. All interviewees of generation Z have bought or buy secondhand. For example, the female participants predominantly buy secondhand clothes while the male ones would not consider buying secondhand clothes, but electronic products or furniture.

5.2.3 Consumption

The consumption of generation Z is diversified. Z1 and Z5 clearly say that they only buy products they thought about for a longer time, while Z3 only recently started questioning the products she buys. Therefore, she sometimes still makes impulse purchases when she likes something. Z2 is similar, he only goes shopping when he needs something but then sometimes makes impulsive purchases he does not need. Z4 does not think about her consumption and buys the things she likes. Z3 and Z4 see consumption as a form of treating themselves and doing something good for themselves. Z2, Z3, and Z4 buy products they like and do not care which brand or production conditions they are from. All interviewees say that they boycott fast fashion brands like Primark, Shein, or similar, but rather because of the quality of the products and not of the social issues behind these brands. Except for Z1, she is aware of the issues and boycotted brands and products because of their social influence. She also states that she has “feelings of guilt because I want to be sustainable and I know how bad things are with climate change and so on, so I feel guilty if I do not use sustainable products” (Z1). Almost all participants of generation Z say that they are happy about their purchases in a long run, only Z2 says that this happiness does not last long. The other interviewees say that when they saved money or wanted something for a long time, the happiness about the product also lasts longer.
5.2.4 **Well-being**

Regarding the questions about well-being, the participants of generation Z answer that they gain happiness while spending time with friends and family and activities they enjoy. Living stress-free is also a big aspect for them, whereby Z5 also mentions insouciance. Z4 already works in a full-time position and even though going to work is a factor for her happiness, she also states that less work would be a factor to have less stress in her life.

5.2.5 **Generation Z About Generation X**

Generation Z describes generation X as focused on work and family. Z2 says they are “clearly more conservative than us. Not as open to new things, because they have always done it this way and they have learned it this way” while Z5 says almost the same about their way of thinking: “Because simply certain things have always been like that, then they will always remain like that”. They are not so open-minded because “they have simply seen less of the world” (Z1). Their usage of technology products and social media is not as addictive as their own and it depends on the person if they can use it or not, since they have not grown up with it (Z1, Z2, Z4). The participants continue that they think that generation Z focuses more on sustainability and is more active than generation X.

5.2.6 **Generation Z About Generation Z**

By describing themselves, interviewees Z3 and Z4 actively split up the generation into an older and younger part because they cannot define the whole generation Z. They say that the younger part is more extreme when it comes to everything and that they are motivated to do something. In general, all interviewees would define generation Z as “more open, more tolerant, because we are all concerned with sustainability or gender equality or political correctness. I would also say that we are more politically engaged through things like Fridays for Future, for example” (Z1). Z5 has the opinion that “the younger generation is more active in doing things on their own, especially in terms of environmental activism. But they often do it just to do something good for themselves” and says that it is a little bit hypocritical. All of them would describe their technology usage and social media consumption as addictive and disordered and that they spend too much time on their
smartphone. But Z1 says that she would not know so much about sustainability if she had not learned about it on social media.
6 Analysis

In this chapter, the knowledge given in the theoretical background and the information from the interviews will be analyzed, compared, and discussed. The developed models after Gioia will help to structure the chapter and to understand the connections between the different interviews (Gioia et al., 2013).

6.1 Developed models

The developed models through the conducted interviews are split up into two parts: “sustainability- & minimalism-bubble” and “non-sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”. At first, the separation should have been done by splitting the interview groups and the models in generation X and generation Z, but the outcomes of the interviews were so different in each group that the separation would not have made sense.

Now the data of the different generations are mixed, and it depends if an interviewee is interested in sustainability and minimalism. When they are interested in these topics and have heard or spoken with other people (online and offline) about it, their statements are assigned to the “sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”-model and vice versa.

The first developed model (see Figure 2) is made with the statements of interviewees, who are interested in sustainability and minimalism. More precisely, these were X1, X3, Z1, Z2, and Z5 because their answers to the interview questions pointed out that they were interested in these topics and acted after these values. The representative quotes lead into the first-order themes, which describe the topics the statements are about. In this case, these topics are “definition of minimalism”, “communication about minimalism”, “considered consumption” and “well-being through minimalism”. These first-order themes then conclude into the aggregate dimension “sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”, which is, in this model, displayed as the bubble around the representative quotes and first-order themes. Concerning the following “bubble process”-model, the participants, who are assigned to this model, are already in higher stages of it. Because they started thinking about the topic and some of them also adapted to try to live a sustainable lifestyle
and started to speak with other people about it, it can be assumed that they started to spread out the bubble.

Figure 2: Gioia Coding Model “sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”. Authors own elaboration.
The opposing model “non-sustainability- & minimalism-bubble” is adapted with the statements by X2, X4, Z3, and Z4 (see Figure 3). There the representative quotes lead to the first-order themes “definition of minimalism”, “communication about minimalism”, “unconsidered consumption” and “well-being through materialism”. The aggregate dimension is therefore “non-sustainability- & minimalism-bubble” because the associated themes lead to the assumption that the interviewees are not in the “bubble process” and therefore they are outside of the sustainability- & minimalism-bubble, but in other bubbles, which are simply described as “non-sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”.

![Figure 3: Gioia Coding Model “non-sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”. Authors own elaboration.](image)
Figure 4 shows the visualization of the “bubble process”, meaning how people develop their knowledge about sustainability and minimalism.

![Visualization of the “bubble process”](image)

*Figure 4: Visualization of the “bubble process”. Authors own elaboration.*

The steps are the following:

1. They get into the bubble by speaking with people in their social environment or informing themselves on social media about sustainability or minimalism.
2. They start thinking about this information and implementing it into their mindset and values.
3. They take action and change their lifestyle with few adjustments.
4. They develop a broader minimalistic and sustainable behavior in different areas of their life.
5. They speak with other people or post content on social media so new people receive information and get into the bubble.

This model helps to understand how bubbles and especially the bubble for sustainability and minimalism grows. Z3 mentions these bubbles and this growth in her interview:

“You cannot say that now, because I think minimalism has not really arrived in society yet, especially at this point in time. It is not as widespread as
sustainability. It is only just emerging, and minimalism is somehow far behind it. So, people are not aware of that” (X3).

This means that the bubble around sustainability is bigger than the bubble about minimalism, which can be recognized by looking at the different statements of the interviewees. In the next subchapters, the different topics will be analyzed and discussed in connection with the knowledge gained in the theoretical background. By keeping this model as well as the developed bubbles in mind, the analysis can be structured to compare the different interviewees within their bubbles.

6.2 Minimalism

Overall, the interviewees define minimalism relatively similar. According to the “sustainability- & minimalism-bubble”, a minimalist is someone who consumes almost nothing and has almost nothing and that “less is more” (X3). Especially the last part is the same as in Dopierała’s definition since she also says that minimalism is defined in this way (2017). Further, X3 mentions that minimalism can be described as a mindset to live their life, which is similar to the definition of Johnson et al. who say that minimalism is a mindset of individuals who want to focus on time rather than things (2021). From X3’s statements, one could assume that she lives a slightly minimalistic lifestyle. She says “I definitely have a thousand things more than I need. But I am getting more and more in this direction” (X3) which is relatable to the process of accomplishing a minimalistic lifestyle since it is a process (Dopierała, 2017; Martin-Woodhead, 2021). Z1 is the only interviewee who mentions the voluntary aspect of the lifestyle and that it is not only about having fewer possessions but also about having things that are important to themselves. This definition is similar to the one by Johnson et al, who are describing it as the focus on what matters most (2021). Interviewees Z1, Z2, and Z5 are living after a more minimalistic approach but would not consider themselves minimalists since they all still have more things than they need. This process could feel miserable, but would then (according to studies by Hüttel et al., 2020; Shen, 2020; Palafox, 2020; Lloyd & Pennington, 2020) lead to better well-being if the mindset of the participants also would change so that they feel satisfied with the things they own.

This demarcation of being a minimalist shows especially in the interview with Z5 because, in the beginning, he states that he lives sustainably but not minimalistic. After talking about the concept
of minimalism and the different definitions as well as the topic of consumption, he states at the end that “I am kind of in a phase at the moment where I am becoming more and more aware of this” (Z5). Z2 also noticed that a minimalistic approach lets him think that: “the less I have in my head, the less stressed I am. [...] You simply must take care of less. And I think it is better when there is not a lot of stuff and everything in its order” (Z2). On the other side, he feels already the downsides of a minimalistic approach by saying that “in the back of my mind it is always like, "Okay, I could still do that. I still have to do that". Interestingly, X3 and Z5 are also saying that they only want to spend time with people they have fun with and who they enjoy spending time with, which leads to a minimalistic approach regarding relationships as well. Furthermore, a few of them already consume thoughtfully and maybe want to take a step in a more minimalistic direction, but think that it would be too much of an effort to sort things out and get rid of them (X1, X3, Z1, Z2, Z5). It seems like it is a big effort to adjust to this lifestyle since interviewees X1, X3, Z1, and Z2 say they would have to change a lot about their current lifestyle.

On the contrary, the “non-sustainability- & minimalism-bubble” defines a minimalistic lifestyle as something, where the individual does not have a lot of possessions and only buys the things they need. According to Martin-Woodhead and Dopierala, the execution of a minimalistic lifestyle is defined by the individual themselves (2021, 2017), which the participants of this bubble did not know. Additionally, X2 mentions that she thinks that “if you focused more on the essentials, you might sometimes have a more balanced, calmer life”, which is scientifically shown by Hüttel et al. (2020), Lloyd and Pennington (2020) as well as by Lee and Ahn (2016).

6.3 Communication about minimalism

According to the interviewees, the communication about minimalism is not in the foreground of society. Both bubbles say it is not communicated very well in mass or social media as well as for interpersonal communication. They agree that there is a stereotype about minimalists that they live in an almost empty apartment, consume nothing, and do not own anything. X4 also notes that “I have someone in mind as a minimalist who consumes next to nothing and buys nothing and owns nothing. So, the extreme”, which could be seen as the stereotype of a minimalist since X3 mentions something similar and Z1 says that it is possible that minimalism could have this appearance. Interestingly participants who already were interested in sustainability and minimalism described
the reputation of minimalism as rather positive. As Z5 says: “Minimalism does not necessarily have a bad reputation. It rather depends on who is communicating it. Depending on the consumer attitude, minimalism is then evaluated negatively or positively” which is comparable to the “bubble-approach” made by interviewee Z1: “I would say that in the sustainability bubble, minimalism is also more of a positive thing, but not necessarily outside of the bubble”. These bubbles represent algorithms on social media platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok. Therefore, it can be assumed that users who are consuming sustainability or minimalism-related content on social media are in these bubbles and receive the matching content as a result. Users who are not interested in these topics, who maybe also not search for information about it, are not shown said content because they are not in the bubble. The bubbles influence and inform ones about topics like climate change, sustainability, and minimalism. Since generation X is not as much on social media platforms as generation Z, it makes sense that they are not really into the sustainability bubble like generation Z. Therefore, they shape this bubble and know more about the whole topic than the older generation. Of course, there are exceptions, which can be seen with interviewees Z3 and Z4. Even though almost all of generation Z mention that they are addicted to social media and their smartphones, Z1 declares that she thinks that it also has positive sides for her knowledge:

“We are all very influenced by it, I would say, maybe even a little addicted to it, which is not necessarily positive. But I mean, that also has its positive sides. Because I think, for example, I would not know so much about things like minimalism or sustainability” (Z1).

On the other side, Z2 states that he does not use social media platforms like Instagram and Tik Tok but says: “I do not think I would know anything about minimalism if I had not just talked about it with people who have dealt with it. So, I think our society is very consumerist and presented that way”. With this statement, it can be assumed that it does not depend in which generation the person is born, but rather in which bubble they live. There they get their information; their values and information sources are getting shaped in a new way. Additional to this topic, Z5 continues: “The people who are interested in something like this, wherever it comes from, simply tend to promote it and the people who are not interested in it will not be interested in the future either”. This points out that the information about minimalism and sustainability could also come from friends, family, or other acquaintances.
X1 and X3 talk about how more communication could influence the awareness of minimalism, which explains again Figure 7 since the bubble would get bigger and grow on its own. X3 thinks “the masses just do it because it is a mindset. And if I consume something and something else comes along more and more often, then it also does something to the mindset. And I think that happens automatically.” This statement also describes the process of how someone gets into the bubble, learns about it, and stays in it. X4, who is apparently not deep into the sustainability- & minimalism-bubble and is not on social media platforms, thinks that communication in society is more about materialism than about minimalism, especially on platforms like Netflix.

6.4 Sustainability

The topic around sustainability connects all the other topics like minimalism and consumption since with a more minimalistic lifestyle and less consumption, a person could improve their carbon footprint and therefore their impact on sustainability (Palafox, 2020). This can be seen in the interviews: All interviewees who were interested in the topic of sustainability also started to think about their consumption. In general, almost everyone (except Z4) is interested in sustainability, even though there are big differences when it comes to the application in real life. X1, X3, Z1, and Z5 try to live sustainably in different areas of their life, while X2, X4, Z2, and Z3, do it sporadically. For example, they started to question their consumption of food, lifestyle products, or traveling. Since X2 mentions that she has no time to implement more sustainable hacks in her life, it can be seen how her prioritization of things is. This relates to something generation Z said about generation X: that they do not change because they are used to their structures and processes. Z4 has no interest and knowledge about sustainability and does not mention friends, family, or acquaintances who speak with her about it. Therefore, it can be assumed that she is not in a bubble where these issues are discussed. Since she also has not received a lot of information about it on social media, it seems like she is not in the bubble there either. Her statement about this is the following: “if I just buy less, then someone else buys it. [...] So, I always think I will buy it anyway, even if I do not need it, because it is already produced”. With this statement, it can be assumed that she eventually does not know how supply and demand work and that she as an individual also has the power to change something. With this point of view, she is probably not the only one in society.
On other the side, Z1 is already further advanced in this process since she included sustainability in almost every part of her life, studies sustainability, and wants to work in this field.

6.5 Consumption

One trigger for people to think about their possessions and consumption started during the first lockdown of Covid-19. The people had more free time, were home a lot, and could not go to the city to buy new things. A lot of people on social media shared that they sorted through their things and started a trend so that a lot of people got rid of their possessions. At the same time, online consumption increased since it was the only option to buy and consume new products (Rusche, 2021). This behavior persists till today because a few interviewees (Z3 & Z4) say that they order more things online than go shopping in real stores: “Covid-19 made me love online shopping” (Z3). All the interviewees boycott fast fashion brands like Primark. Participant X2 is the only one who considers herself as financially unstable and says that she knows about the production and issues, which are coming from buying these products, but she does not have a chance to buy something else because of her budget. On the other hand, she says that she is not into secondhand consumption, which could be a solution to this problem since secondhand products are mostly cheaper (Martin-Woodhead, 2021).

A higher sustainable demand for sustainably produced products decides if there is a bigger supply on the market because when there is a higher demand, the market will respond with a broader range (Varian, 2003). Participant X3 also mentions that a switch to more sustainably produced products would be good:

“That would be good. Because at the end of the day, it is important to set an example in what I consume, that is whom I give my money. [...] I must use my money to give my voice to the things I think are good. And sustainability is definitely worth the effort” (X3).

Since this statement only reflects the individual level of consumption, it needs to be mentioned that an overall change of the system with laws and guidelines for consumption could have a broader and bigger effect than individualistic choices. Since these changes are harder to implement, individualistic choices can be seen as a first step to create awareness for the producers. The
interviewees outside of the bubble argue with other reasons, for instance X2 describes her relationship with consumption as the following feeling:

“Sometimes just to do something good for me. Of course, I do not need a handbag to live. But it is quite nice when you have something new, to reward yourself. Then you are happy for one moment. You have treated yourself even though you do not actually need it” (X2).

This can be interpreted as she has a completely different connection to consumption than the participants, who are more in the bubble of sustainability and minimalism. But she is also the only participant who consciously distinguishes the feeling after purchasing something. This feeling is not real happiness for her, but rather joy, which is not comparable to long-term happiness in her opinion.

Interestingly to see is how the participants describe their consumption habits and how these habits could be classified among the different forms of a consumer from chapter 3. Z1 is the only participant who could be described as an anti-consumer since she tries to keep her consumption to a minimum, boycotts different brands, and attempt to change the system by acting sustainable in every life area like her choice of study or future work field (Lee & Ahn, 2016). The other participants, who are in the sustainability- & minimalism-bubble could be described as second-hand-consumers or rather green consumers. They try to take care of the brands they buy from and search for more sustainably produced products (Vita et al., 2019).

6.6 Well-being

In terms of well-being and happiness, all interviewees stated similar causes that led them to be happy. For instance, all of them ranked the time with their friends and families over consumption, meaning that non-material things are a higher factor for happiness and well-being. This has also been scientifically shown by Lee and Ahn (2016), who said that well-being can be improved through experiences and non-materialistic values. On the other side, the point made by Furchheim and Mohart can be confirmed with the interviews. In their study, they researched the influence of trying to live a sustainable life and its effect on well-being (Furchheim & Mohart, 2020). Their findings state that this lifestyle can also cause deterioration of well-being, which can be confirmed
by the statement of interviewee Z1: “It has something to do with feelings of guilt because I want to be sustainable and [...] I feel guilty if I do not buy sustainable products”. Therefore, it can be assumed that living in the bubble and trying to take care of a sustainable lifestyle can, on one hand, lead to better well-being because people focus on the important things in life, live consciously, and be grateful for everything. On the other hand, it can also lead to a deterioration of well-being since they think too much about it and are aware of the consequences of unsustainable living. This leads to the question if living a non-sustainable lifestyle is better for the well-being of a person since they do not have ulterior motives or a guilty conscience in their mind that they could do better.
7 Conclusion

To conclude this thesis and to answer the research questions several aspects need to be considered. After conducting the interviews, it emerged that a comparison between the generations X and Z in the classical sense was not possible because the data led to a new classification between the participants. Therefore, the separation between a “minimalism- & sustainability-bubble” and “non-minimalism- & sustainability-bubble” helps to compare the two sides.

Nevertheless, the first research question “How do generations X and Z define and communicate minimalism?” can be answered with the data of the interviews as it has nothing to do with the separation into the bubbles. Minimalism is defined and communicated by generation X as a lifestyle, where the individual consumes almost nothing, has almost nothing, and that “less is more” (X3). They agree that minimalism is rather less communicated among society since they have not heard a lot about it, but they have a stereotype about a minimalist in mind. On the other side, generation Z defines and communicates minimalism relatively similar. Since they use social media platforms more often than generation X, they have heard more about this topic. Their definition focuses on how many possessions a person has and how often and much they consume. In their opinion, the communication of minimalism is rather seldom, but since a few participants are in the minimalism- & sustainability-bubble and use social media, they have heard and gained knowledge about the topic through communication on platforms like Instagram.

In comparison, these definitions have no major differences. Only the communication depends on which bubble the interviewees are in. Since the people in the “non-minimalism- & sustainability-bubble” have only a few connections to people in the bubble, they have not heard a lot about minimalism. Even though they might be interested in the topic of sustainability, they are not deep into the entire process of adopting a sustainable lifestyle.

The second research question “How can the perception stages of minimalism be described?” can be answered with the “bubble process”-model. It depends on how far a person is in the bubble process. If someone is in the early stage, they probably would say that minimalism is rather less communicated and would not adapt and live a minimalistic lifestyle. If a person is in a more advanced stage of the process, they would already have adopted a minimalistic lifestyle and would communicate about it with their social environment. By communicating with other people, the
bubble is growing, other individuals are included in the process, or they meet new people with the same interests. Therefore, it is an automatic cycle that allows the bubble to grow in social classes where a minimalistic lifestyle could be implemented.

7.1 Limitations

Naturally, this thesis has some limitations. Firstly, the time frame for collecting the theoretical as well as the practical data for the thesis and analyzing it was quite short. With more time, the data collection could have been bigger and the whole analyzing process could have been deeper. Since the study was only written and executed by one person, the resources were limited as well.

For the data collection, there were limitations in the sampling since the interviews were predominantly conducted with women. Two men were examined in generation Z and only one for generation X. Furthermore, none of the participants have considered themselves a minimalist, who practices this lifestyle. Since the study was about the minimalistic lifestyle, it would be interesting to interview people who practice this lifestyle. Lastly, the interviews were conducted with participants from Germany, all living in relatively similar life conditions.

7.2 Future Research

In the future, more research needs to be conducted about the topic of minimalism and its influence on generations, bubbles on social media as well as in real life. In particular, more interviews and fieldwork need to be done to research the practical side and gather new data on this area of research. According to the limitations of the study, more research could be done in other countries as well as in other social classes to see if minimalism plays a role there and how it is communicated. After examining more qualitative data, it could be interesting to prove it by also conducting a quantitative study. Lastly, it could be interesting to find out how gender, bubbles, age, and the perception of minimalism influence the consumption habits of people to adopt a minimalistic lifestyle to improve their sustainability.


Appendixes

1. Interview Questions

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
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<tr>
<td>A2</td>
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On which platforms have you heard about minimalism?

Would this communication influence your behavior about minimalism?

Do you think the communication has a bad or good reputation?

How would you describe your generation?

Would you describe yourself with the same characteristics?

How does your generation differentiate from generation X/Z?

Has this interview changed your perception of minimalism?

Is there anything else you think is relevant that hasn’t been asked?

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2. GDPR Consent Sheet

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Participant Information Sheet

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand that the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything needs to be clarified. If you would like more information, take time to decide whether or not to take part.

**WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO TAKE PART?**

I am studying the master program "Sustainable Communication" at Linnaeus University, Sweden. For the module "Value Making 2", I have decided to conduct a study about a chosen topic. My project is therefore about a study about the communication about this generation and the generation before it.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DECIDE TO TAKE PART?**

We will be using this study to look into topics like responsibilities, sustainability, consumption, and being part of generations. The interview will be conducted digitally over the internet. It will be conducted once, it will be recorded. The data will be stored during the data collection process and will be destroyed afterwards. The recording won’t be published, and the information will be anonymized by using specific numbers for each interviewee. The transcripts won’t be published, as few quotes could be used in the thesis. Since the interviews will be conducted in German, the data will be translated into English for the thesis.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?**

The thesis will be submitted as "Thesis", an institutional repository for research publications. Contact details for further information.

Thesis contact: [Dr. Anna Nabandang](mailto:anna.nabandang@lu.se)

Thesis student: [Tina Negara Lindahl](mailto:tina.lindahl@lu.se)

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Version: March 2022
3. GDPR consent sheets participants generation X
4. GDPR consent sheets participants generation Z
GDPR: The Study Consent Form

Responsible by European Union General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679

The GDPR consent form should always be accompanied by a Participant Information Sheet

GDPR Consent for "The communication of lifestyle minimisation: A comparison between two generations"

Please tick the appropriate boxes

Yes No

Taking part in the study

I consent to RE Turin processing my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.

I consent voluntarily to be a participant in the study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions and I can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason.

My signature below indicates that I choose to take part in the study and consent to RE Turin processing my personal data in accordance with current data protection legislation and the data delivered.

[Signature]

[Name of participant (in capital letters)]

[Date: 27.05.2019]

Thesis contact details for further information:
Barbara Gensini, barbara.gensini@unimi.it

Version March 2022