Transforming more with less?
Exploring NGO Communication
on Sustainable Anti-Consumption
in the Context of Clothing
ABSTRACT

The textile industry is an unsustainable industry that contributes to many environmental and social challenges. As a promising approach to its transformation, this thesis explores the concept of anti-consumption. It investigates how non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) communicate the concept in the context of fashion on Instagram. The study aims to explore the key themes used and seeks to understand how organizations critique the capitalist system and to whom responsibility for its implementation within the communication is attributed. A total of 45 Instagram posts from the organizations Fashion Revolution and Remake were examined in a thematic analysis.

The NGOs expose exploitative power dynamics and colonial structures and reveal manipulation as a tool of capitalism. In contrast, the value of clothing is redefined and happiness in individuality is examined. While brands are held accountable in the communication, the emphasis is on individual responsibility.

Keywords: Sustainable Communication, Anti-consumption, Sustainable consumption, Clothing consumption, Textile industry, NGOs, Thematic analysis
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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms Used

CCC – Collaborative Clothing Consumption
IML – Imperial Mode of Living
NGO – Non-governmental Organization
PSS – Product-service Systems
RQ – Research Question
SCCB – Sustainable Clothing Consumption Behaviour
sSC – Strong Sustainable Consumption
wSC – Weak Sustainable Consumption
1 Introduction

“Infinite growth of material consumption in a finite world is an impossibility.” E.F. Schumacher

The fashion industry is a major contributor to environmental and social challenges, including waste generation, exploitative labour practices, and the depletion of resources. In the last 20 years, textile production has doubled, while the amount of time clothes have been in use has halved (Oxfam, 2020). Western countries in particular have a problem with over-consumption, especially when it comes to clothing. According to Greenpeace, 60% of Germans admit to owning more clothes than they need (Greenpeace, 2017). With low prices and a plethora of new trends each season, today's fashion industry makes overconsumption affordable and operates almost linearly (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). As Schumacher's opening quote sums up, a purely linear system is unsustainable because growth in production and consumption is incompatible with finite resources. According to the European Commission, the textile industry is the third-largest user of water and land and the fifth-largest user of primary raw materials (European Commission, 2022). In 2015, greenhouse gas emissions from textile production were higher than those from all international flights and ocean shipping combined (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Working conditions in the textile industry are another major concern. According to Greenpeace (2016), many workers are subjected to hazardous working conditions, long hours, and inadequate salaries.

Sustainable anti-consumption, with its focus on responsible practices and mindful consumption choices, has emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges. In this context, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a key role in advocating values and goals for sustainable consumption (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). As little is known about the promotion of anti-consumption ideas and how they are received (Hwang et al., 2016), this master's thesis aims to better explore and understand the communication of the topic. Therefore, the communication of the two organizations Fashion Revolution and Remake on the social media platform Instagram will be investigated.

Sustainable anti-consumption, as referred to in this paper, aims to slow down both the production and personal consumption cycles, so that consumers buy fewer products and use them for longer (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Shifting the focus from material consumption to usage is seen as one key element of the concept (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

From a social perspective, the relevance of this study is profound and multifaceted. The social and environmental impacts identified, such as exploitative supply chains and resource
depletion, call for greater accountability and legislation. Understanding communication might amplify the impact of NGOs and shed light on the potential of social media as a catalyst for promoting change toward a sustainable and responsible future for the textile industry.

From a media and communication studies perspective, this research delves into an increasingly relevant and dynamic area of inquiry. In today's digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram have become powerful tools for communication and advocacy (Borboni, 2019). The fashion industry makes extensive use of Instagram to promote brands, influence consumer preferences and stimulate consumption (Nash, 2019; Strähle & Gräff, 2017). A paradox: How do organizations use the capitalist platform to promote less, not more, consumption?

2 Research Objective and Questions
The main aim of this research is to investigate how NGOs communicate the concept of sustainable anti-consumption in the context of fashion on Instagram. The study will explore the key themes used in the communication of two organizations that aim to achieve a sustainable transformation of the textile industry. In addition, the research aims to understand how the capitalist system is criticised in their communication and in what way they attribute responsibility for the implementation of sustainable anti-consumption.

To this end, this thesis examines the following research questions:

RQ1: How do non-governmental organizations communicate the concept of sustainable anti-consumption on Instagram within the context of fashion?

RQ2: How do the organizations criticise the capitalist system in their communication of sustainable anti-consumption on Instagram?

RQ3: To whom do the organizations attribute responsibility for the implementation of sustainable anti-consumption in their communication on Instagram?

Sustainable anti-consumption, as referred to in this study, aims to reduce the environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry. It encompasses a range of practices that promote a more mindful and responsible approach to clothing consumption and advocates for a shift away from the prevailing culture of overproduction and overconsumption (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

Instagram is an interesting platform for this study because of its widespread use in the fashion industry and its potential influence on consumption patterns (Nash, 2019; Johnson, 2014). As a
social media platform, Instagram can encourage people to buy more clothes through sponsored content and advertisements from brands and influencers (Strähle & Gräff, 2017).

This study makes a significant contribution by highlighting how NGOs, as crucial independent actors, critique the dominant capitalist system within which the fashion industry operates. By focusing on the communication of anti-consumption, a concept based on a reconfigured value system, the study suggests an alternative approach that addresses not only individual behaviour but also collective change. Furthermore, the comprehensive examination of NGO communication strategies offers a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between anti-consumption, capitalism and sustainability in the context of the fashion industry. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to further research on how communication can contribute to slowing down the cycle of production and consumption to foster a truly sustainable and holistic transformation of the textile industry.

3 Background and Previous Research

This section provides an overview of the current state of the research literature and includes important background information for further work.

3.1. Sustainable Clothing Consumption

Examining clothing consumption from a sustainability standpoint necessitates a closer investigation of the idea of sustainable consumption in general, which has been subject to a multitude of meanings and interpretations. In 1994 the Oslo Symposium defined sustainable consumption as “the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimising the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life-cycle so as not to jeopardise the needs of future generations” (Norwegian Ministry for the Environment, 1994). According to this definition, sustainable consumption aims to provide a good life for everyone while remaining within the limits of the Planet’s capacity. McNeill and Venter (2019) state that the definition fits well with the consumption of critical resources such as food, water, or clean air, but may not resonate with clothing consumption. However, it can be argued that the overuse and pollution of resources such as water and air is directly linked to the consumption of clothing, as the fashion industry is a major contributor to the waste of these resources. Later discourses expanded on the fundamental framework to include consistency (McDonough and Braungart, 2002), the creation of things from materials that can be fully re-used, composted, or recycled; and sufficiency (Princen, 2005). Some researchers focus more on the perspective of the consumer when looking
at sustainable consumption. For example, Geiger et al. (2018) refer to sustainable consumption behaviour as individual acts of satisfying needs in various areas of life by acquiring, using, and disposing of goods and services that are not harmful to the ecological and socioeconomic conditions of all people to satisfy their own needs.

When talking about sustainable consumption of clothing, Vesterinen and Syrjälä (2022) differentiate between three types of consumption: (1) ‘Greener’ consumption, which involves using eco-friendlier products that may reduce the use of raw materials on a global scale. This does not necessarily reduce the number of products a consumer uses. (2) Circular consumption, which also reduces raw material consumption, but the number of products that a consumer uses remains the same by keeping them in a ‘loop’ of reuse and recycling. Lastly, there is (3) Sustainable anti-consumption (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Anti-or decreased consumption has also been investigated in movements such as voluntary simplicity and non-materialism (Black and Cherrier, 2010).

When reviewing the current state of the art in the field much of the literature on sustainable consumption is dominated by what is known as the weak sustainable consumption (wSC) approach. The wSC focuses on improving consumption efficiency via technological solutions and encourages consumers to buy more environmentally friendly products (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). As this approach only shifts the consumption and does not go to the core of the problem, this thesis is more interested in the so-called strong sustainable consumption (sSC) approach.

3.1.1 Strong Sustainable Consumption

The sSC approach assumes that transformations in consumption levels and patterns are required to achieve sustainable consumption. Instead of emphasising product-based individual consumption, the approach highlights the need for a reduction in overall resource consumption. Furthermore, it examines people not only in terms of their role as consumers but also as citizens (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). Lorek and Fuchs (2013) highlight that the sSC governance is often expected to be about “voluntary personal sacrifice”, which they counter. They argue that the approach is not about sacrifice, as non-material factors can contribute to increased well-being and further emphasise the need to focus on structural change (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013).

Sustainable anti-consumption can be closely linked to the sSC approach and is examined as the pathway to sustainable consumption (Makri et al., 2020). It aims to reduce the number of products that individuals consume altogether (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Therefore, anti-consumption appears to be a promising concept to achieve sustainability comprehensively, as it not
only tries to shift consumption patterns but brings an oppositional approach to contemporary consumer culture. The concept of sustainable anti-consumption will be elaborated further within the theoretical framework.

3.1.2 Barriers and Drivers
What factors hinder people to follow sustainable and reduced clothing consumption? Several research has been conducted to determine the hurdles to sustainable clothing consumption. The barriers might be classified as product-related or consumer-related. (1) price, (2) quality, (3) style, (4) lack of information/knowledge, (5) transparency, and (6) availability are the most frequently mentioned product-related influencing factors.

Several research has identified the price of sustainable clothing as one of the most discussed challenges (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018; Cairns et al., 2022; Berberyan et al., 2018). Consumers believe that purchasing apparel from ethical businesses or clothing manufactured from organic or recycled fibers is expensive and not affordable (Diddi, 2019). Diddi et al. (2019) found that survey participants preferred to buy clothes at lower prices and believed that their limited budget hindered them from engaging in sustainable clothing consumption behaviours (SCCBs). According to Harris et al. (2016), the price barrier in research stems from consumers' unwillingness to pay more for ethical or sustainable solutions and their preference for buying inexpensive rather than sustainable (Harris et al., 2016). To lower the price barrier, Harris et al. (2016) suggest interventions such as aligning rewards with sustainable goals, introducing legislation, and increasing the value of clothing. The described price barrier demonstrates that research frequently focuses on weak sustainable clothing consumption. It should also be noted that referring to consumers' 'unwillingness to pay' excludes people who are unable to pay more.

Some consumers believe that sustainable apparel is not long-lasting and of poor quality (Berberyan et al., 2018). This is explained by the notion that a corporation is more concerned with ethical standards than with product quality (Berberyan et al., 2018).

On the one hand, the style barrier could be associated with both weak and strong sustainable clothing consumption. Research shows that consumers continue to associate sustainable fashion with not being trendy, alternative or uninteresting (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018; Cairns et al., 2022; Harris et al., 2016). The modern fashion industry is based on rapidly changing trends. According to Diddi et al. (2019), consumers place a high value on these trends and their desire to fit in. Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015), on the other hand, see style as an opportunity rather
than a barrier. Abstaining from consumption allows consumers to better explore and intensify their personal style.

Sustainable clothing is a complex topic, and many consumers express dissatisfaction with their lack of background knowledge and seek to be better informed about sustainable product features (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Due to a lack of information, buyers are unable to grasp the origins of garments and, as a result, abandon their goal to avoid potential sweatshop purchases (Berberyan et al., 2018). Some people claim a lack of skills related to strong sustainable consumption behaviours such as repairing and mending clothes. (Diddi et al., 2019). Others discovered that if consumers waived garment acquisition, they would discover "untapped abilities to sew" (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p. 175).

Furthermore, consumers want more transparency and believe that stores have a responsibility to provide it (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). This is one of the reasons why communication on the issue is so important.

Consumer-related barriers to sustainable clothing consumption are frequently stated as (1) scepticism, (2) emotions, (3) habits, and (4) self-centred values. As sustainability has become a buzzword, more and more companies are incorporating it into their messaging. According to Harris et al. (2016), consumers' scepticism about green claims and the motivations behind them is a major barrier to communicating sustainable clothing consumption. Consumers are sceptical about the impact of SCCBs, especially when purchasing from sustainable companies (Diddi et al., 2019).

Only a few studies look into more complex barriers including social norms, values, and emotions. Jacobs et al. (2018) highlight self-enhancement values as a barrier. This self-centred behaviour is defined by Diddi et al. (2019) as a lack of self-control and a feeling of enjoyment when it comes to materialistic things, resulting in not engaging in SCCBs, such as buying fewer items. This is in line with consumers’ emotions as they claimed that buying used clothes made them feel humiliated and less enthusiastic and delighted than buying new items (Diddi et al., 2019).

3.3 Communication on Sustainable Clothing Consumption

The study of sustainable consumption and communication is a relatively new scholarly subject, with few studies focusing particularly on the communication of strong sustainable clothing consumption. Research that focuses explicitly on the communication of anti-consumption can rarely be found. In general, weak conceptualizations of sustainable consumption predominate
the field (Fischer et al., 2021). The most common type of communication is that which focuses on changing consumer behaviour. It is concerned with influencing individual behaviour change through outward communication cues that do not anticipate deep cognitive engagement (Fischer et al., 2021).

Fischer et al. (2021) identify communication for consumer self-empowerment, communication for consumption system change, and communication as constructing sustainable consumption as other prevalent typologies of sustainable consumption communication. It is worth noting that the communication for consumption system change was the smallest cluster of all journal papers (Fischer et al., 2021). This is a critical gap in that it seeks to change systems of consumption and production rather than individual behaviour.

The use of dialogue and two-way communication, rather than unidirectional information distribution, is crucial to promoting change (Lorenzoni et al., 2011). Candeloro (2019) argues that online communication is essential to communicate sustainable ideals and practices, and to influence consumer behaviour.

There is a small amount of literature on the topic of anti-consumption communication in the context of fashion. Hwang et al. (2016) investigated the effects of anti-consumption advertising on consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions for an apparel product. According to Hwang et al. (2016), anti-consumption advertising changes consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions. After viewing the anti-consumption advertisement, participants were less likely to purchase the product and were reminded of the environmental crisis caused by overconsumption (Hwang et al., 2016).

Advertising that discourages consumption can be used to increase consumers' awareness of their clothing consumption behaviour and could be a start to changing the clutter of today's consumer society (Hwang et al., 2016).

### 3.4 Role of NGOs for Sustainable Consumption

According to Kong et al. (2002), NGOs play an important role in sustainable development, particularly because of their relationships with key stakeholders. They are in a key position to shape values and goals for sustainable consumption and to encourage citizen engagement (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013). Since they can be seen as mediators in the system working with stakeholders at social, economic, and environmental levels, this work focuses on the communication of these specific organisations. As NGOs are not profit-oriented, it is expected that anti-consumption communication will be implemented in a more holistic way than communication of
businesses in this regard. Many NGOs are gaining a more in-depth grasp of environmental issues based on reliable scientific research, and they are creating successful plans to address environmental issues through strategic alliances (Kong et al., 2002). Well-known NGOs are increasingly motivated to push businesses and households to change their consumption patterns toward more sustainability (Kong et al., 2002). In their study, Kong et al. (2002) examine five approaches NGOs use to move the contemporary consumer culture towards more sustainability: (1) Using strategic means to point out the problems, (2) Assessing the environmental impacts of products, (3) Greening the supply of products and services, (4) Focusing on market forces by creating a green demand that will drive changes in supply, and (5) Forming extensive networks of different stakeholders.

Whether the mentioned approaches are successful in changing consumption behaviour depends on different aspects: First, the degree to which consumers feel empowered to affect change through their purchase decisions. Second, how an individual’s quality of life will be impacted by the decision to buy or not to buy something (Kong et al., 2002). In their study, the researchers examine the widespread assumption in contemporary society of a positive correlation between consumption and happiness. People believe that to achieve a higher quality of life, they need to consume. But if they were offered the possibility to consume less while retaining the same or improved quality of life, they would accept this deal (Kong et al., 2002). Therefore, one can derive that a successful communication of NGOs in the context of sustainable (anti-)consumption should try to highlight the advantages of not consuming and the offered possibilities to improve one’s quality of life without the need of purchasing. Lorek and Fuchs (2013) see an urgent need for NGOs to move away from weak sustainable consumption (shifting purchases from conventional products to green products) and to address people as citizens rather than consumers. NGOs need to engage in real challenges by discussing the important values and proposing alternative models of social organisation, rather than encouraging individuals to make simple behavioural changes with limited impact (Lorek & Fuchs, 2013).

3.5 Social Media and Instagram

Social apps such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn have become increasingly popular, especially for communicating with young people (Borboni, 2019). More precisely social media is seen as the most effective communication channel for sustainable fashion (Kusá & Urmínová, 2020). In particular, Nash (2019) identifies the social platform Instagram as the main platform to follow fashion-related topics. The visual nature of the social network makes it very suitable for fashion-interested social media users (Nash, 2019). Instagram is essential not only
in the context of fashion in general, but also in the context of sustainable clothing consumption (Lee & Weder, 2021). Due to its use of visual language and direct way of communication, Instagram has a strong influence on consumers (McCluskey et al., 2019). More importantly, it has been found to play an important role in promoting sustainable and innovative clothing practices, such as recycling and reuse, as well as bringing together groups of people interested in sustainability and promoting alternative consumption practices (Creangă, 2019). Additionally, social media is seen as important in promoting sustainability by influencing values and consumer behaviour (Johnson, 2014). Creangă (2019) discovered that Instagram is a relevant platform for the promotion of sustainable fashion on three levels: (1) on the mental level by promoting recycling and re-use, (2) on the social level by creating a community of like-minded members, and (3) on the environmental level by contributing to offer an alternative to fast fashion. Still, it appears that communication on the matter in general, particularly on social media, is mostly focused on advocating the purchase of old or fair clothing rather than the purchase of nothing.

According to Johnson (2014), social media not only enables easy sharing of sustainability-related information, but also engages stakeholders in discussions about sustainability (Johnson, 2014). As noted by Minton et al. (2012), social media has the potential to make consumers feel like an integral part of a movement to create a more sustainable society. However, many companies use targeted social media marketing to increase product demand (Strähle & Gräff, 2017). The overall interest of this work is to explore how social media, and Instagram in particular, can be used differently to not only promote the purchase of greener products, but also to promote the non-purchase.

When discussing the role social media plays in sustainable consumption patterns and values towards the topic, it is also crucial to look at the power relations within the networks. While some researchers see horizontal hierarchies with a similar power between all actors on the platforms (Fraoua et al., 2014), others highlight the imbalanced visibility of power on social media networks (Fuchs, 2021). Fuchs (2021) argues that not all voices have equal power, and that created content and voices are often marginalised because visibility is a very important resource in contemporary culture that wealthy and powerful actors can buy. This is highlighted by Fuchs (2021) in the context of participatory culture, but it can also be related to the visibility of certain issues in general. Profit-oriented accounts that make money by promoting their products, for example, will be more likely to pay for more visibility than non-profit-oriented accounts that promote values and anti-consumerist ideologies, for example.
3.6 Research Gap

In reviewing the current state of the art in this area, much of the literature on sustainable consumption has focused on the wSC approach (Fischer et al., 2021), examining barriers and ways to encourage the purchase of greener or recycled products (Mukendi et al., 2020). However, there is a significant research gap concerning the sSC approach, particularly in the area of anti-consumption communication, which has been little explored in the literature. While some studies have examined the impact of advertising on consumer behaviour (Hwang et al., 2016, Kim et al., 2018), there is a lack of research specifically dedicated to understanding how anti-consumption is communicated, critiqued, and directed. Furthermore, the unique challenge of promoting this 'anti-capitalist' concept of sustainable anti-consumption on a capitalist-driven social media platform such as Instagram remains under-researched. The tension and paradox between advocating for reduced consumption and operating within a platform that promotes consumerism warrants further exploration.

In addition, the existing literature tends to focus on the behaviour of the consumer and overlooks the potential of communication strategies to drive systemic change (Fischer et al., 2021). This represents a significant research gap in understanding how communication efforts can be used to promote widespread and lasting change in the fashion industry.

4 Theoretical Framework

This section lays the foundation for understanding the key concepts and principles of this study. It delves into relevant literature and theory to explore the concept of sustainable anti-consumption, the critique of the capitalist system in the context of the fashion industry and the role of NGOs for sustainable consumption.

4.1 Sustainable Anti-Consumption

Sustainable anti-consumption brings an oppositional approach to contemporary consumer culture by reducing the number of products within the consumption cycle (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

Mukendi et al. (2020) consider the rejection of excessive consumption as a radical and effective method to achieve sustainable goals, such as a circular economy, ethical supply chains etc., in the fashion industry. In general, the concept is not necessarily connected to sustainability. It can include any form of resistance to commercial goods, such as refraining from buying certain products or boycotting certain companies (Makri et al., 2020). However, Black and Cherrier (2010) highlight that anti-consumers are deeply concerned about the negative impacts of over-
consumption, both at an environmental and societal level. They therefore tend to exercise their consumer power by refusing to buy products or brands that are deemed unsustainable (Black & Cherrier, 2010).

Anti-consumption is commonly understood as the act of refusing, reducing, and reusing products (Black and Cherrier, 2010). According to Lee et al. (2011), anti-consumption involves rejecting every stage of the cycle of consumption, which includes not only the acquisition, but also the usage and disposal of goods. On the other hand, Vesterinen and Syrjälä (2022) state that it does not mean simply being against all phases of consumption, but rather being pro-usage and against acquisition and disposal. Shifting the focus from material consumption to usage can be seen as a key element of sustainable anti-consumption. This approach is in line with a use-oriented clothing economy and can be achieved, for example, by replacing products with services (Armstrong et al., 2016). Anti-consumption aims to slow down the personal consumption cycle so that consumers acquire fewer products and use them longer (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Instances of reduced consumption that occur involuntarily or unintentionally are not classified as anti-consumption incidents (Makri et al., 2020).

4.1.1 Strategies to Implement Sustainable Anti-Consumption

There are various strategies for adopting anti-consumerist beliefs in the context of fashion. One of the commonly discussed strategies is abstinence, which can involve a fashion detox (Armstrong et al., 2016; Rupert-Stroescu et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2013). Other strategies in line with abstinence are reduced consumption by buying less (Diddi et al., 2019; Joanes, 2019) and the concept of a capsule wardrobe, where a small collection of clothes is curated that can be mixed and matched to create a variety of different outfits (Todeschini et al., 2017).

A fashion detox involves abstaining from buying clothes for a certain period of time (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). For that, Armstrong et al. (2016) revealed several barriers at the individual, social, and cultural levels. Participants described feeling envious of and inadequate in their social interactions with others. One of the most frequently cited cultural barriers to reduced consumption was the distress caused by a variety of seemingly irresistible impulses of the fashion system, including marketing and social media, retailing, and seasonal fluctuations (Armstrong et al., 2016). According to Wu et al. (2013), one of the biggest obstacles to clothing abstinence is the social pressure to follow fashion trends. The analysis will look at how the barriers mentioned are addressed and whether the focus in overcoming the barriers is addressed on the individual or the cultural level.
However, the research found that increased creativity and self-control benefitted a fashion detox (Armstrong et al., 2016; Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015). When consumers started to put together various outfit options out of already existing clothing in their own wardrobe and found them attractive in new ways, creativity could contribute to SCCBs (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015). Users turned to social media sites like Pinterest to get inspiration: "Instead of looking at Pinterest as a way to find new things to buy, participants utilized the information to style clothing they already owned." (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015, p. 176).

Although Ruppert-Stroescu et al. (2015) emphasise the connection of creativity and a fashion detox as a benefit and a way to derive various creative contributions like redefinition and redirection, these do not always result in lower consumption. Participants either shopped for home décor or did the shopping for other people instead, which just shifts consumption and does not address the roots of the problem.

Along with these results, consumers experienced "a new level of clarity about what is important in life and how material goods may distract from this" (Armstrong et al., 2016, p. 432). Participants mentioned the product life extension, which led to both increased use of their wardrobe and the rediscovery of old items. Armstrong et al. (2016) claim that abstaining from purchasing apparel can be a useful pedagogical tool for examining consumption patterns in the context of fashion.

Wu et al. (2013) delved into the motivations behind clothing abstinence and the concept of voluntary simplicity. Motivations such as financial health, improved quality of life, and environmental concerns were identified as key motivators. However, it is important to note that the participants in this study were already engaged in the topic voluntarily, and the results may differ for those who are not already interested in the topic. The extent to which the motivators mentioned are taken up in communication in order to promote the implementation of the concept will be examined in the analysis.

Further strategies that can put the concept of clothing anti-consumption into practice are (2) clothes care, (3) design for longevity, (4) product-service systems, and (5) collaborative fashion consumption (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022).

Clothes Care in general refers to actions that create a longer lifespan of clothes. This includes for example: mending, repairing, redesigning, upcycling, and laundry knowledge (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022; Diddi et al., 2019). For example, it is a prevalent misconception that frequent high-temperature washing of clothing is necessary and that compromises the products'
longevity and the environment (Harris et al., 2016). This is a very small example of how communication can be used as a tool to change the misconception mentioned. Replacing a zip or a seam, adjusting the size of a garment, or creating something entirely new from used clothing are all examples of mending. Making your own clothes can be a form of market resistance, but whether this lowers consumption or not depends on the consumer and whether new fabrics are used. If new clothes are made from old ones, it represents a sustainable form of clothing anti-consumption (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Additionally, self-made garments can add value to the product and therefore prolong the lifespan (Niinimäki & Armstrong, 2013), which goes along with the notion of design for longevity.

Product-service systems (PSS) can be seen as another strategy to reduce clothing consumption. PSS combine products with services and include use-oriented systems, such as clothes swaps and rental, and product-oriented systems, such as take-back and repair (Armstrong et al., 2015). Because they reduce the need for consumers to purchase clothes, swapping, renting, repair and alteration services, and style advice services demonstrate the sustainable anti-consumerist ideology (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). However, other PSS models do not fit the goal of anti-consumerist ideologies, such as the take-back of used clothes in exchange for a voucher to buy new clothes (Armstrong et al., 2015).

Collaborative clothing consumption (CCC) “embraces fashion consumption in which consumers, instead of buying new fashion products, have access to already existing garments either through alternative opportunities to acquire individual ownership (gifting, swapping, or second-hand) or through usage options for fashion products owned by others (sharing, lending, renting, or leasing)” (Iran & Schrader, 2017, p. 472). The concept aims to increase the number of times an item can be used and to satisfy consumer needs with fewer products. Some researchers, such as Vesterinen and Syrjälä (2022), exclude second-hand clothing from their framework of sustainable anti-consumption because it does not reduce the number of products in the consumer's individual consumption cycle. The strategies mentioned make the implementation of the concept tangible and are therefore expected to be dominant in the communication analysed.

4.1.2 Ideologies

As concepts that manifest sustainable anti-consumption of clothing, Vesterinen and Syrjälä (2022) identify slow fashion, voluntary simplicity, and “consume less, consume better”. To examine the communication of anti-consumption in the context of clothing, it will be helpful to look into the mentioned concepts to understand how the phenomenon can be implemented.
Slow fashion is a principle that aims to slow down the fashion cycle by reducing both production and consumption. Slow consumption here means to entail a longer product lifespan from production to disposal. This approach involves adopting quality-based strategies that prioritize longevity over quantity (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Jung and Jin (2014) identified five key dimensions of slow fashion – equity, localism, authenticity, exclusivity, and functionality – which for example include caring for producers and local communities or prolonging the product lifespan. In this way, the slow fashion concept combines characteristics of sustainable acquisition and sustainable anti-consumption practices.

Another concept is the philosophy of voluntary simplicity. Wu et al. (2013) look at it as the reduction of material consumption. In contrast, Taljaard and Sonnenberg's (2019) definition of voluntary simplicity in clothing again includes the choice of local brands and handmade clothing, as well as ethically and environmentally sustainable brands. As their definition includes a shift from the purchase of conventional to sustainable products, it cannot be fully applied to the goal of anti-consumption. However, when implementing voluntary simplicity in the consumer's life, Taljaard and Sonnenberg (2019) give practical ideas such as reducing the number of clothes a person buys, uses and throws away, repairing clothes and reusing clothes (e.g. donating them), which go hand in hand with the aim of sustainable anti-consumption of clothing. Similarly, “consume less, consume better” consumers satisfy their desire to consume by “shopping in their own closets” and rediscovering clothes they already own (Bly et al., 2015). These consumers focus on buying less and higher quality from trusted retailers. Moreover, in addition to prioritising quality, they use their personal style as a means of reconciling the paradoxical ideals of sustainability and fashion. By choosing clothes that reflect their identity rather than fleeting trends, these consumers are able to wear their clothes for longer periods of time, thereby reducing the frequency of their clothing purchases (Bly et al., 2015). This is in line with the central principle of style consumption. Personal style is used to express an individual's long-term identity, rather than responding to the latest trends. It reflects an individual's attitudes and lifestyle and can also be described as quality-based (Gupta et al., 2019). A style-oriented consumer is less likely to shop frequently. For this reason, Gupta et al. (2019) suggest that one possible way to encourage reduced consumption would be to shift the focus from buying fashion to buying style. In further analysis, this work will examine if this point of style is included in the communication of anti-consumption in the context of clothing.
4.2 Capitalism and Sustainability

As a dominant economic system that can be linked to the phenomena of overproduction and overconsumption, capitalism has been studied and criticized by numerous sociologists, philosophers, and political scientists.

One notable critique is the concept of the Imperial Mode of Living (IML), coined by political scientists Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen. They argue that capitalism allows privileged societies in capitalist centres to disproportionately exploit nature and people, resulting in an over-extended and unsustainable way of living (Wissen & Brand, 2018).

The IML refers to a “global consensus on the attractiveness of modern capitalist everyday practices” (Wissen & Brand, 2018, p.75). According to Brand and Wissen, the capitalist mode of production results in uneven development and “constant and accelerating universalisation of a Western production model.” (Wissen & Brand, 2018, p.75). The IML suggests that people's behaviours, orientations, and identities strongly depend on the unlimited use of resources, disproportionate demands on global and local ecosystems, and cheap labour from other countries (Wissen & Brand, 2018). Wissen and Brand argue that the IML is not socially neutral. According to them, people with relatively higher levels of education, income, and environmental awareness tend to consume more resources than those from lower classes (Wissen and Brand, 2018).

A similar concept is presented by Stephan Lessenich in "The Externalization Society" (2015) where he highlights how people in the global North live at the expense of others in the global South. He looks at what capitalism has done for people and how it has allowed them to live seemingly good lives. However, this good life comes at the expense of the well-being of others, as the externalizing society functions through modes of exploitation (Lessenich, 2015).

Lessenich (2020) outlines seven dimensions of externalization: (1) dominant appropriation of resources, (2) economic exploitation of acquired resources, (3) devaluation of resources post-acquisition, (4) outsourcing of costs and consequences, (5) selective closure of economic and social domains, (6) suppression of knowledge about externalization and (7) delayed effects of externalization.

These mechanisms point to the profound socialising effects of the externalization society. Lessenich (2020) points out that individuals in this society cannot escape it by individual decisions of will. Their standard of living is interwoven with the perpetuation of externalization practices.
Following the theories that have been presented, three dimensions can be considered in critiquing capitalism: the (1) functional, (2) moral, and (3) ethical dimension of critique (Jaeggi, 2016).

The moral dimension goes hand in hand with the theories already mentioned. It focuses on exploitation and the inequitable distribution of resources. It argues that capitalism deprives individuals of the fruits of their labour and perpetuates an immoral and exploitative social structure. People are 'enslaved' by a system that forces them into exploitative social relations (Jaeggi, 2016).

The functional argumentative strategy posits that capitalism is inherently dysfunctional and crisis-prone, undermining its capacity to function effectively. The system's emphasis on endless growth, profit maximization, and competition creates inherent instabilities that lead to periodic economic crises (Jaeggi, 2016).

The ethical perspective argues that capitalism shapes a harmful existence, promoting alienation and emptiness in our lives. A life driven solely by material gain and the pursuit of profit leads to an impoverished, meaningless, and disconnected existence. This ethical critique has been present since the beginning of capitalism, focusing on problems such as objectification, greed, and the erosion of meaningful human relationships (Jaeggi, 2016). However, all three dimensions face challenges in identifying which symptoms are specifically caused by capitalism and in establishing clear criteria for evaluating its impact.

This is why Jaeggi (2016) suggests combining all three dimensions into a comprehensive “critique of capitalism as a form-of-life” (Jaeggi, 2016, p.65). This involves examining the ethical shortcomings of capitalism, particularly the insatiable greed that arises in the accumulation of capital. Immanent critique, which identifies self-contradictions, is proposed as a means of exploring elements such as alienation and objectification as frustrations of the modern promise of freedom. The intertwining of functional and normative deficits within capitalism is also highlighted. While capitalism has consistently fallen short of normative ideals, Jaeggi argues that this dissatisfaction isn't just an ethical judgement; it is inextricably linked to practical shortcomings. In the search for an improved way of life, Jaeggi (2016) introduces a meta-criterion: a successful way of life should facilitate, not hinder, collective learning processes.

4.3 Connecting the Theoretical Framework
The chosen theoretical framework provides a robust basis for approaching the research questions from different perspectives. Given the identified barriers to the implementation of anti-
consumption at individual, social and cultural levels, the framework provides the tools to under-
stand how these barriers are addressed in communication and how they relate to the capita-
list system.

The motivations that drive anti-consumption, such as financial health or improved quality of
life (Wu et al., 2013), are expected to be integral to the communication. The theoretical frame-
work allows for a close examination of how these motivations are used in the communication
to promote the concept. The strategies for implementing anti-consumption are expected to be
a large part of the communication, as implementation is expected to be one of the main goals.

In order to answer the research question of how the organisations criticise the capitalist sys-
tem within the communication of anti-consumption, the theories by Wissen and Brand (2008)
and Lessenich (2015) will serve as fundamental pillars for understanding how NGOs articu-
late their criticism within their anti-consumption communication. In addition, the dimensions
identified by Jaeggi (2015) will help to classify critique and highlight perceived shortcomings.

5 Methodology
This section presents the design of the study and will first concentrate on how the material was
selected. As shown in the previous part of this work Instagram can play an important role in
sustainable fashion inspiration and influence consumer behaviours. Additionally, NGOs are
seen as key stakeholders in the transformation of sustainable consumption. As they do not fol-
low profit-oriented goals, NGOs could do important work in shifting values and beliefs in so-
ciety towards a reduction of clothing consumption and bringing together different stakeholders.

5.1 Choosing the Organizations
The choice of Organizations to be part of the research is based on criterion sampling using two
basic criteria. First, the main work of the organization is focused on fashion. Second, the organi-
zation is present on Instagram. To select the most important organizations for further analysis,
a Google search was conducted. The search term included both "Organizations for Sustainable
Fashion" and more explicitly "Anti-Consumption in Fashion Organizations". The results of the
two search terms produced similar output. The selection of the first search term can be justified
by the fact that an organization dealing with sustainable fashion will presumably also have the
general reduction of consumption as an overarching goal. In order to exclude the possibility
that the selected organizations are merely actors aiming at a shift towards green consumption,
the second search term was used and the results of the two searches were compared. A total of
32 organizations were identified. The next step was to identify the five most frequently mentioned organizations.

These included:

1. Fashion Revolution
2. Remake
3. (Slow Factory Foundation)
4. Clean clothes campaign
5. Centre for sustainable fashion

One criterion that had to be met was that the main work of the organization had to be in the field of fashion. As the Slow Factory Foundation focuses on the totality of climate change solutions, of which fashion is only one aspect, the organization was excluded from the analysis.

As the organizations' Instagram presence is important for further analysis, the next step was to select the two organizations with the largest reach on Instagram from the four organizations mentioned.

These included:

1. Fashion Revolution (533,000 Followers, 11.07.2023)
2. Remake (157,000 Followers, 11.07.2023)

5.2 Data Collection

The study analysed Instagram posts from two organizations, Fashion Revolution and Remake. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted to code the patterned meanings across the various posts (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The most current 150 posts of each organization were selected and downloaded with a web scraping tool. In order to narrow down the content and include in the analysis only those posts that deal with the concept of anti-consumption in the context of fashion, two stages of selection were carried out. In the first stage, all posts containing the following keywords were selected: consum*, buy, shopping. In the second phase, the author read through all the data and excluded posts that could not be related to the research questions because they did not discuss issues related to resource reduction and consumption. Videos and reposted content were excluded from the sample. In the end, this resulted in a data collection of 45 posts, with 20 Fashion Revolution posts (within the period from 23/09/2022 to 13/16/2023) and 25 Remake posts (within the period from 09/11/2022 to 16/06/2023). In order
to include the full content of each post in the analysis, both the caption and the text on the images were included.

5.3 Thematic Analysis

A six-stage approach was used in the analysis, based on Braun and Clarke (2006):

Step 1: Becoming familiar with the data

Before coding, the researcher obtained an overview of the dataset by repeatedly reading through the data and taking first notes. Skipping or being selective during this phase is not advisable, as it forms the foundation for the rest of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 2: Generating initial codes

This phase involves the production of initial codes of the data. For the coding process, the program Nvivo was used, and the whole coding process was conducted inductively.

Step 3: Identifying themes

In this step, different codes are sorted into potential themes and all the relevant coded data extracts are collated within these identified themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the sorting process, it was helpful to use a mind map as a visual thinking tool to organize and find relations between the different codes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

After re-reading all the extracts of themes and sub-themes, some of them could be further summarised. Some codes were found to be irrelevant to the research questions and were excluded.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

The themes are then defined and refined. This involves identifying the essence of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For each theme, particularly meaningful extracts were selected for the report. The final naming of the themes was also adjusted several times during the analysis.

Step 6: Producing the report

The final step in the thematic analysis is the writing of the final report. This is where the data story is formulated and illustrated with examples.
6 Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis are presented and discussed below. The following themes were identified: (1) Exposing Exploitative Power Dynamics and Colonial Structures, (2) Individual Responsibility, (3) Manipulation as Tool of Capitalism, (4) Redefining the Value of Clothing, (5) Happiness in Individuality.

6.1 Exposing Exploitative Power Dynamics and Colonial Structures

In the context of anti-consumption, the organizations frequently criticise the current exploitative power dynamics and colonial structures in their communication. The negative impact of capitalist practices and the exploitation of natural and labour resources within the system are highlighted. The dataset reflects a critique of brands, highlighting their profit-driven motives and their lack of responsibility for their actions.

In their critique of brands, organizations use strong, meaning-laden phrases such as 'toxic' and 'modern slavery', which emphasise a clear demarcation of these practices.

“Celebrating because no matter how hard life gets we’ll never post a toxic SHEIN haul made with modern day slavery that destroys our planet.” (Remake, 2023, 23.05.)

In this example, the criticism is directed at a specific company, an ultra-fast fashion brand from China. SHEIN's business model is based on extremely fast production, online only distribution and extremely low prices. On the one hand, there is the fast fashion company that makes a profit; on the other hand, there are the people who make the clothes and yet have little or no ability to make a living. This is directly related to the concept of an externalised society (Lessenich, 2015). In this case, the 'good life' is achieved by consuming as many goods as possible (in the global North) at the expense of people in the producing countries (in the global South). Here the mechanisms of the externalization society become clear. The quote shows that there is an appropriation of labour and nature. The result is an exploitation of the resources mentioned, in which the more powerful side systematically exploits the ‘more powerless opposite side' for its own benefit (Lessenich, 2020). The devaluation of resources (dimension 3) is also evident in the fact that ‘our planet’ is not appreciated as a resource but is ‘destroyed’. The same applies to labour, which is devalued in 'modern slavery' through extremely low wages or forced labour.

Connecting this to Jaeggi (2016), the critique clearly starts at the moral dimension, where people are deprived of the fruits of their labour and ‘enslaved’ by a system that forces them into exploitation. The ethical dimension is also included here by criticising hauls that represent bragging about newly acquired products and celebrating the materialistic lifestyle.
As a consequence of overproduction and overconsumption, the issue of clothing exports in the dataset is linked to the phenomenon of waste colonisation, which refers to the export of discarded clothing from developed countries to less developed countries as a cheap means of disposal that feeds a cycle of exploitation and inequality (Remake, 2023).

“This is also known as waste colonization—where old colonial patterns and power dynamics are continued through the modern system of industrial waste (in this case, fashion’s waste) detrimental to communities and the environment.” (Remake, 2023, 10.03.).

The criticism in this example is directed at systematic structures and imbalanced power dynamics. It is described that old colonial structures persist in the current capitalist system. This goes hand in hand with outsourcing of consequences and costs (dimension 4) within the externalization society, where collateral damage is externalised. In this case, it is textile waste that results from overproduction and overconsumption in the capitalist system. This textile waste comes with serious consequences for the environment and the health of the people, as “[...] decomposing clothes can contain dangerous chemicals, microplastic fibers, and release greenhouse gasses [...]” (Remake, 2023, 16.03.)

Externalization leads to environmental and health consequences in the affected countries, whereas the damage caused is not borne by the polluters (in this case the global North).

Pointing out Western privilege is a frequent starting point for raising awareness of certain problems of the current fashion industry. One example is this quote:

"In privileged Western countries, we deem clothing to be disposable due to its low cost. We buy, we wear, we rip, we throw away." (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 22.02.)

This quote highlights the concept of Western privilege by emphasising how individuals in Western countries often fail to value their possessions, including clothing. This disregard is attributed to the affordability of products, leading to a culture of disposability. This perspective exposes the colonial structures that underpin this behaviour, suggesting that the act of buying and discarding in the Western world is deeply rooted in an exploitative system. The emphasis on Western privilege is embedded in the Imperial Mode of Living. According to Wissen and Brand (2018), this is not socially neutral. For example, people with higher income and education tend to consume more resources (Wissen & Brand, 2018). This is illustrated in the post above, where readers are presented with an image of the throwaway society that illustrates the tremendous power and resource imbalances.
Another post worth highlighting within the theme asserts that the pursuit of low prices and constant sales dominates the industry's priorities.

“Fair pay should never be subject to a discount, and human rights are not for sale. The people who make our clothes - mostly women - earn less than they need to live on. These people remain trapped in poverty while big fashion companies continue to profit from their hard work.” (Fashion Revolution, 2022, 09.11.)

It highlights that within this profit-driven framework, financial considerations take precedence over fair pay and human rights. By emphasising that "a fair wage should never be the subject of a discount" and that "human rights are not for sale", the communication highlights the moral dimension that is often overlooked in the pursuit of economic growth. The quote highlights the people behind the products, particularly the predominantly female garment workers who earn inadequate wages to make a living. This disparity between what workers are paid and the profits made by large fashion companies is presented as an inherent flaw in the capitalist system, where economic gains overshadow ethical and social considerations. The communication thus critiques the system's tendency to perpetuate poverty and inequality while prioritising the interests of profit-driven entities.

Looking at the dimensions of critique identified by Jaeggi (2016), it is clear that the communication within this theme mainly relates to the moral dimension (see chapter 4.2). While the ethical dimension is partially addressed, the functional dimension of the criticism remains largely unexamined. This is problematic insofar as the discussion of exploitative power dynamics and colonial structures should also include functional deficits. Here, the holistic critical approach of Jaeggi (2016) would be desirable.

### 6.2 Individual Responsibility

The theme emerges as an overshadowing pattern in the dataset and underlines the belief that the power to drive change lies in the choices made by individuals. By promoting individual responsibility, these organizations encourage the idea that even small actions can have a significant impact. This perspective is consistent with the idea that a groundswell of conscious choices has the power to challenge social conventions and encourage a more sustainable culture of consumption. Consumers are portrayed as catalysts for positive change.

Even when addressing structural problems, the starting point for communication is individual responsibility. One of the patterns used is to point out that the actions of consumers matter and
to show different ways in which the 'power' of the consumer can be used. One example that can be given is this one:

“We may not be able to solve fashion's BIG problems on our own. But every small step matters. Whether you want to transform your shopping habits, learn some practical skills, or take part in local community action, you'll find lots of inspiration for your new year's fashion resolutions on our website.” (Fashion Revolution, 2022, 15.12.).

Although the communication acknowledges that individuals may not be able to solve all of the fashion industry's problems on their own, it states that every small step counts. This approach reinforces the idea that individual efforts can lead to significant change. This is especially interesting as it can be observed as a capitalistic perspective when emphasizing individual choices while downplaying the systematic factors. By emphasising the impact of individual actions, organisations seem to be trying to overcome the barrier of scepticism described in the theory, according to which consumers are sceptical about whether they can influence change at all with SCCBs (Diddi et al., 2019).

Individuals are not only called upon to overcome their scepticism and exert their impact. They should also be shown with concrete figures how big their impact could be by reducing their consumption. Here is an example:

“The potential positive impact of buying less and making our clothes last longer is huge. In a 2011 report from the Carbon Trust, “doubling the useful life of clothing from one year to two years reduces emissions over the year by 24%.” (Remake, 2023, 22.02.).

This is where the theory of Kong et al. (2002) comes in, according to which the way to achieve greater sustainability in consumer society is to show consumers that they can make a difference through their consumption choices. Nevertheless, it seems more reasonable to follow Lorek and Fuchs (2013) who advise against encouraging individuals to make simple behavioural changes and rather engage in real challenges like alternative models of social organisation.

Another involvement of consumers in the critique of systematic structures happens in the communication about disposal. One example is a post that deals with waste colonisation and the donation of clothes.

“For people to donate clothes in that condition believing they will go to people ‘in need’ suggests an attitude of superiority and otherness from donors towards people in the Global South.” (Remake, 2023, 10.03.)
Even though the criticism in this example is directed at systematic structures and imbalanced power dynamics, consumers are included in the critique and portrayed as part of the problem. The donation of clothing, which, despite the good intentions of the donors, is seen as serving the structures of colonialism. For donors to own too much and therefore donate to ‘people in need’ who are seen to be dependent on help implies a perception of superiority. In addition, donations of clothing very clearly cannot be seen as positive for the 'recipients', as a high percentage of the used garments that make their way to several countries in the global South are worthless (Remake, 2023, 16.03.). To include consumers in the criticism of clothing exports shifts the focus to individual responsibility where it should address system responsibility.

A striking feature of communication is the frequent use of the first personal pronoun in the plural. As this example shows:

“We buy, we wear, we rip, we throw away. Many of us no longer feel motivated to value the things we buy, even less so to repair them when they start to fall apart.” (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 22.02.)

By addressing consumers collectively as a unit (‘we’), the communication implies that everyone contributes to perpetuating the cycle of consumption and waste. While this approach highlights the problem of overconsumption, it could be seen as placing too much responsibility on individual consumers rather than addressing the systemic factors that encourage such behaviour within the capitalist framework. Nevertheless, one could also see the connection to Lessenich, as the life of each individual here seems to be interwoven with the perpetuation of externalisation (Lessenich, 2020). At the same time, and in line with his theory, the feeling is conveyed that it is not possible for individuals within the externalised society to escape the social structures.

A predominant form of communication in the dataset is the expression of concrete recommendations for action for consumers, with whom the responsibility is clearly attributed to the individual. The most prominent recommendations for action could all be connected to the strategies of anti-consumption such as fashion detox, clothes care and collaborative clothing consumption. These are described in the theory (see chapter 4.1.1).

A dominant call for action in the dataset was the participation in the #NoNewClothes challenge, which was launched by Remake during the period analysed. In this challenge, followers were asked not to consume any clothes for 90 days. One example of how the organization framed the aim of the challenge can be seen here:
"#NoNewClothes is about so much more than buying less, we're unlearning harmful habits from years of marketing that trained us to overconsume mindlessly." (Remake, 2023, 09.06).

This seems to be the organization's response to the cultural barrier frequently mentioned in the literature, the distress caused by marketing, social media, seasonal fluctuations, etc. (Armstrong et al., 2016). Not only is it presented here as a barrier to reducing consumption, but the challenge of abstinence is presented helping to overcome this barrier by raising awareness of the sometimes unconscious pressure.

Other theory-related benefits and motivators are addressed. The motivator of financial health identified by Wu et al. (2013) is highlighted as a benefit in the context of the challenge. In the formulation, the focus was primarily on not supporting companies with poor working conditions with one's own ‘hard-earned money’.

The increase in creativity highlighted in the literature (see chapter 4.1.1), which can also be seen, for example, in the creation of new outfits from existing items of clothing, is highlighted as a benefit in communication.

“I am exploring my personal style and nurturing my creativity by discovering new ways to mix and match existing pieces in my wardrobe.” (Remake, 2023, 14.06.).

To abstain from buying new clothes was portrayed as an opportunity for relief and relaxation, to reconnect with one's values and create time for self-reflection. This goes in line with the “new level of clarity about what is important in life” highlighted by Armstrong et al. (2016).

Especially throughout the challenge, the responsibility is clearly attributed to the individual, even when it comes to big structural problems that clearly can not lay in the hands of consumers. Textile waste is again a good example to illustrate this:

“By challenging yourself to buy 'no new clothes' [...] you will [...] limit the waste you send to landfill [...]” (Remake, 2023, 19.05.).

Here the organization frames the problem of textile waste that goes to landfills as an active individual choice. One could argue that the fewer products are bought, the fewer products can be thrown away and end up in landfill. This is far too short-sighted and does not go to the root of the problem. The perpetrators of this problem are not the consumers, but the producers who continue to strive for maximum growth in the capitalist system, the deep-rooted values of this system and the structural exploitation.
When addressing the roots of problems that come with overconsumption, another quote that can be cited is this one:

“If you still feel overwhelmed by stuff, try reflecting on your consumption habits to get to the root of the problem!” (Remake, 2023, 20.03.).

Here it is suggested that one's own consumption behaviour is the fundamental problem, while the influencing factors of the capitalist system are ignored, and the responsibility is placed solely in the hands of the consumer.

The theme of 'individual responsibility' predominates in the data sets analysed. In summary, it can be said that communication in this theme focuses exclusively on the type of communication most frequently identified by Fischer et al. (2021) in connection with sustainable consumption: 'communication for consumer behaviour change'. While there is some 'communication for consumer empowerment', there is a strong absence of 'communication for consumer system change'. As the theme focuses on individuals as agents of change, this seems to be reasonable. However, the theme is so dominant that it also makes it clear that in communication, change is seen to be achieved through “change through behaviour change” rather than “change through coordination” (Fischer et al., 2021).

6.3 Manipulation as a Tool of Capitalism

Another theme that emerged is ‘Manipulation as a Tool’, in where the organizations in the dataset expose manipulation as a fundamental tool that fuels the functioning of the capitalist system. This theme explores multiple layers through which manipulation operates within the consumer landscape. It reveals the use of manipulative marketing strategies to encourage consumers to increase their purchases, highlighting the calculated efforts to generate more sales. The theme also reveals how consumer psychology is manipulated to promote the belief that the constant acquisition of new products is synonymous with happiness and self-worth. In their communication NGOs highlight how brands deliberately design products with a limited lifespan to encourage consumers to make more purchases. This deliberate approach to planned obsolescence reinforces the cycle of consumption within the capitalist paradigm.

Raising awareness of the marketing strategies used by brands particularly was used during special events such as Black Friday, a shopping event that originated in the USA and is held in many countries on the last weekend of November and is characterised by discounts. During the period analysed, Fashion Revolution ran a campaign to encourage people to be aware of the
manipulation involved in such promotions. One example is a post that informs about artificial price increases:

“Often brands even artificially hike up prices before sales, convincing consumers they are getting a bargain when they’re actually being manipulated by clever marketing. In fact, which analysis suggests that 9 in 10 Black Friday "deals" could be found at the same price or cheaper earlier in the year.” (Fashion Revolution, 2022, 25.11)

This illustrates the strategic manipulation tactics intertwined with prices and sales. By artificially inflating prices before discounting, brands create an illusion of value. They trap consumers in a web of deceptive marketing. Within the critique of manipulative marketing strategies, organizations address the pervasive social pressure imposed by them. In doing so, one of the main cultural barriers to reduced consumption is addressed: the distress caused by a variety of impulses by marketing and social media (Armstrong et al., 2016). For example by stating that people can expect a “flurry of brands” across social media, emails and stores, the NGOs emphasise how individuals are submerged within the capitalist system, making it difficult to identify the external forces that force them into a cycle of consumption (Fashion Revolution, 2022, 25.11.). Another supporting example is a quote of Susan Paulson, co-author of ‘The Case for Degrowth’: “You’re perpetually feeling bad, that’s what makes you a good consumer.” (Fashion Revolution, 2022, 18.11.) It is suggested that the marketing tactics create a perpetual sense of dissatisfaction, that is cultivated to drive individuals to become avid consumers. The idea that feeling bad about one’s current state drives consumer behaviour highlights the psychological manipulation inherent in the capitalist system of consumerism. The argument here is from an ethical perspective that capitalism leads to an unfulfilled and empty existence (Jaeggi, 2015).

The critique here develops around this unfulfilled existence in the current consumer society, which in turn is filled with more consumption, leading to an endless cycle of new consumption.

Another level at which organizations expose manipulation as a tool within the capitalist system is within the business models of fast fashion brands, which are characterised by the production of short-lived and trend-driven items. An example that can be given is this post:

“Fast fashion's business model exists on the basis of our impulse shopping. Their items are made with the aim of not being able to last, being hyper trend-based, and that we can afford to buy a lot of it.” (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 06.02.)

Several critical aspects can be identified that underscore the core strategy of fast fashion brands. It is suggested that brands intentionally produce items that are not meant to last. This planned
obsolescence is designed to ensure that consumers have to buy more often. Additionally, the items are designed to be “hyper trend-based”, encouraging people to keep up with the latest trends, even if that means throwing away good clothes. The affordability is mentioned as another key element. Low prices can enable consumers to buy more products. However, this affordability is often only achieved through exploitative practices (Wissen & Brand, 2008; Lessenich, 2015).

6.4 Redefining the Value of Clothing

This theme deals with the return of the appreciation of fashion. In this way, organizations seem to be creating a foundation on which to build the transformation of the textile industry. Fashion is not presented as a simple consumer product. Rather, it is communicated as an art, reminding us that clothing is made by people and should be seen as a craft. The organizations emphasise the value that clothing should have in societies. As this example shows:

“Fashion respects culture and heritage. It fosters, celebrates, and rewards skills and craftsmanship. It recognises creativity as its strongest asset. Fashion never appropriates without giving due credit or steals without permission. Fashion honours the artisan.” (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 28.04.).

The people behind the production of fashion are seen and appreciated in this description of fashion. The supposedly lost connection to clothing is restored and described as a stage of harmony not only with people, but also with the planet. With this approach, they form the counterpart to the externalised society (Lessenich, 2015). Here, neither natural resources nor people are exploited. Instead, the producing people are valued as 'artisans'. Whereas in capitalist society everything is geared towards profit maximisation, here the focus is put on slow production in which creativity and craftsmanship find space and appreciation.

In order to increase the appreciation of clothes, activities are emphasized that can theoretically be connected to the strategy of clothes care (see chapter 4.1.1). This includes mending, repairing, reusing, recycling, upcycling, and careful washing. All the mentioned actions aim to create a longer lifespan of clothing and by that placing a higher value on them. For example, on certain occasions when people typically buy new products, the activities mentioned were increasingly recommended.

“Get creative with upcycled materials rather than a ready-to-wear costume” (Fashion Revolution, 2022, 10.10.).
In this example, Halloween is used as the occasion, and upcycling is communicated in conjunction with increased creativity. In the literature, increased creativity resulting from reduced consumption is highlighted as a benefit (Rupert-Stroescu et al., 2015). So here the organization uses the theoretical benefits of anti-consumption in order to redefine the value of clothing. Which makes sense in that way that self-made garments add value to clothes (Niinimäki & Armstrong, 2013).

The increased appreciation of clothing is presented in the communication as a counter design to the current system:

“By loving your clothes and taking care of them, you are challenging the fashion industry's current trend of disposable fashion.” (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 14.02.).

This argument is in line with the Imperial Mode of Living’s argument that the capitalist mode of production reinforces constant consumption, resulting in clothing that is designed to be easily replaced (Wissen & Brand, 2008). The devaluation of clothing can be seen to be rooted in the exploitative system, where low-cost production contributes to the perception of clothing as disposable. This aligns with Lessenich’s argument that within the externalisation society consumers are shielded from the negative consequences (Lessenich, 2020). Moving away from this disposable fashion perpetuated by capitalism, would allow for a reassessment of the value of clothing.

6.5 Happiness in Individuality

The theme emphasizes the positive impacts on mental health by aligning actions with personal values and letting go of cultural pressures to overconsume. The view is shared that sustainable anti-consumption can lead to a more satisfying and fulfilling life. Individuals are encouraged to reflect on their values to find back to themselves and their own personal style. People who integrate anti-consumption into their lives share their experiences, as in this example:

"Through this transformative journey, I am discovering the power of mindful living, realizing that true happiness and fulfillment come from aligning my actions with my values rather than succumbing to societal pressures.” (Remake, 2023, 14.06.).

This is in line with the widespread assumption in contemporary capitalist society that consumption and happiness are positively correlated. As Kong et al (2002) suggest, there needs to be a shift in communication to emphasise that consuming less can be consistent with the same or even improved quality of life. This is supported by Armstrong et al. (2016) by showing that individuals can be distracted by material things from the 'important things in life'.
The cycle of consumption is contrasted with the cycle of anti-consumption, which should no longer produce short-term happiness after shopping, but long-term happiness with new habits. The following extract was visualised, whereas here only the text will be shown:

“The cycle of no new clothes: Buy nothing new → Break free from overconsumption + trend cycles. → Discover sustainable alternatives + community. → Develop personal style. → Feel happier with new, lifelong habits. → Inspire others to do the same.” (Remake, 2023, 09.06.).

The communication mainly focuses on mindfulness in the context of ‘Happiness and Self-Reflection’ and encourages readers to reflect on themselves and their habits. Slowing down is a recurring goal that is presented to lead to greater happiness in the long run. Here is another example for this argument:

“One's view of both one's clothes, one's wardrobe, and oneself improves, and one removes the power from material things and the temporary feeling of happiness it gives when buying new things.” (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 06.02.).

Again, the distinction between short-term and long-term satisfaction is used. The implication is that anti-consumption can lead to long-term happiness. This resonates with the ethical perspective which argues that capitalism promotes alienation and emptiness in our lives. It highlights how capitalism drives people into a life centered on material gain and the pursuit of temporary happiness through consumption. By taking an ethical perspective, the theme shifts the focus away from materialism and seeks to foster a deeper sense of connectedness with oneself.

The theme emphasises the individuality and creativity that comes from engaging with strong SCCBs. Shifting the focus from buying fashion to buying style is seen as a way to encourage reduced consumption, as a style-oriented consumer is less likely to shop frequently (Gupta et al., 2019). The development of a personal style is presented as a natural progression within reduced clothing consumption.

“Be aware of your style. Don’t be influenced by trends and brands. What colours, fits, and items do YOU like?” (Fashion Revolution, 2023, 13.06.).

By emphasising self-reflection (‘What colours, fits, and items do YOU like?’), Fashion Revolution stresses the common societal pressures to consume and reinforces the prioritisation of individuality and values. Again, the ethical perspective is used where capitalism promotes a disconnected life (Jaeggi, 2016). Here it seems that the individuals trapped in the system have lost access to their true needs and preferences. However, the question arises to what extent an
individual can be considered detached from the society in which they live. The theme assumes that people can reshape their values independently of the outside world. However, the systematic level should also be included here and it should be communicated how values could be reshaped in society in the opposite direction, if possible.

7 Conclusion
This study aimed to investigate how non-governmental organizations (NGOs) communicate the concept of sustainable anti-consumption in the context of fashion on Instagram. The study sought to understand how the capitalist system is criticised in their communication and to whom responsibility for implementing sustainable anti-consumption is attributed.

The concept of anti-consumption has emerged as a promising approach to achieving comprehensive sustainability by reducing the over-consumption prevalent in societies. The approach aims to reduce the number of products consumed within a society (Vesterinen & Syrjälä, 2022). Particularly in a capitalist system, this goal faces various barriers such as social pressure, which is also particularly amplified by social media (Armstrong et al., 2016), which makes the study of anti-consumption on a platform such as Instagram particularly interesting.

NGO communication highlighted various benefits of implementing anti-consumption, such as increased creativity, self-reflection and improved quality of life (Wu et al., 2013; Rupert-Stroescu et al., 2015), which resonated with ethical arguments against capitalism's materialistic culture (Jaeggi, 2015). In particular, the themes of 'Happiness in Individuality' and 'Redefining the Value of Clothing' acted as counter-concepts to capitalism, addressing its devaluation of objects and promotion of a disconnected existence (Lessenich, 2015). These themes aligned with ethical critiques of capitalism's pursuit of short-term material happiness, reflecting the core issues of overproduction and overconsumption. Interestingly, while the strong sustainable consumption approach emphasises a collective focus, the dominant theme throughout the communication was 'Individual Responsibility'. This theme underlined the belief that individual choices have the power to drive change. Despite addressing structural issues, the communication consistently started from the standpoint of individual responsibility. NGOs provided concrete recommendations for individuals, in line with strategies such as fashion detox.

The critique of systematic structures in communication was evident in themes such as 'Exposing Exploitative Power Dynamics and Colonial Structures' and 'Manipulation as a Tool of Capitalism', where responsibility was placed on the production side and the inherent injustices of capitalism. These critiques often referred to the moral dimension. However, the functional
dimension of the critique of capitalism remained underexplored. In general, all three dimensions should be taken into account, e.g. as suggested by Jaeggi (2016) in the form of a critique of capitalism as a "form of life".

To fully understand the challenges of the contemporary fashion system and inspire a shift towards sustainability, a more holistic approach is needed. While communication on platforms such as Instagram is primarily aimed at consumers, it's reasonable to include tangible recommendations and benefits for them. However, the responsibility for change should not be placed solely on the individual, but rather on the system in which the individual operates. This nuanced perspective is essential in envisioning a more sustainable and equitable future for the fashion industry.

8 Limitations and further research

While this research provides valuable insights into sustainable anti-consumption communication on Instagram in the context of fashion, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The first limitation is the small sample size, as only two NGOs were included in the analysis. Expanding the sample to include more organizations would increase the generalisability of the study and provide a broader perspective.

Another limitation stems from the purely qualitative nature of the study. Combining qualitative data with quantitative measures could provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact and effectiveness of sustainable anti-consumption communication. In addition, incorporating audience responses and comments would provide a more holistic view of how the communication is received and interpreted.

The data collection method, which was based on specific keywords, may have led to the potential exclusion of relevant posts. To mitigate this limitation, future research could use a more comprehensive data collection approach that includes all relevant communication channels used by NGOs, such as websites, toolkits, conferences, and offline events. An analysis of organizations' entire communication strategy would provide a more comprehensive picture of how they promote sustainable anti-consumption across multiple platforms.

The thematic analysis was conducted by a single researcher, which introduces the possibility of researcher bias. To increase the rigour of the study, multiple researchers could be involved in the analysis process, ensuring greater objectivity and reliability of the findings.
Future research could go beyond the analysis of communication content to assess the impact on consumer behaviour and perceptions. Longitudinal studies, including interviews and surveys, could shed light on whether and how communication strategies lead to changes in consumer behaviour that support the movement towards a more sustainable fashion industry.

In addition, exploring the effectiveness of sustainable anti-consumption communication in driving systemic change is a promising avenue for future research. Investigating how NGOs work with industry stakeholders and policymakers to promote sustainable practices and policy change would be valuable in understanding the broader impact of anti-consumption advocacy.
Appendix

1. Dataset

Fashion Revolution

Fashion Revolution, 01.11.2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cka8RqpKIAg/
Fashion Revolution, 14.11.2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/Ck8hWb-h1c9/
Fashion Revolution, 23.11.2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CITQ7ZNMgXJ/
Fashion Revolution, 06.02.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CoUtODVMEht/
Fashion Revolution, 03.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CtBb_a4oCbx/
Fashion Revolution, 06.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CtBb_a4oCbx/
Fashion Revolution, 06.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CtMKegFrV1F/
Fashion Revolution, 13.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CmMPGU1syld/
Remake

Remake, 27.01.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn7s6e6APKK/
Remake, 08.02.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CoaqX1Ty0h9/
Remake, 10.03.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cpn9oZFyjjZ/
Remake, 16.03.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cp3SSIVAjSG/
Remake, 20.03.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CqBgmAEyvWI/
Remake, 23.03.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CqJM2IvAW64/
Remake, 27.04.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CriPAI1P1Wz/
Remake, 19.05.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Csb_43ZyxpF/
Remake, 23.05.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Csb_43ZyxpF/
Remake, 26.05.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CsuJp6ly8qd/
Remake, 31.05.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs6dvlwt5-2/
Remake, 01.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cs9YPl6P8WK/
Remake, 06.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CtKhPjS9GY/
Remake, 09.06.2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CtR30-DJ0_Y/
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Fashion Revolution [fash_rev]. (2022c, November 25). *Today is #BlackFriday, so you can expect a flurry of brands on your social media feeds.* https://www.instagram.com/p/ClYRUACqfEa/


Fashion Revolution [fash_rev]. (2023b, February 6). *Need some help ditching fast fashion? Try these helpful tips from @fashrevenmark.* https://www.instagram.com/p/CoUtODVMEht/

Fashion Revolution [fash_rev]. (2023c, February 14). *Valentine’s day is all about love, so why not show some love to your clothes!* https://www.instagram.com/p/CopF2pQNCnE/

Fashion Revolution [fash_rev]. (2023d, February 22). *“In privileged Western countries, we
deem clothing to be disposable due to its low cost.” https://www.instagram.com/p/Co9540uM_kx/

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Fashion Revolution [fash_rev]. (2023f, April 28). &lt;i&gt;Welcome to day 7 of #FashionRevolutionWeek Today we’re focusing on points 4 &amp; 7 of our manifesto. &lt;/i&gt;&lt;span&gt;https://www.instagram.com/p/CrkonossoNy/&lt;/span&gt;

Fashion Revolution [fash_rev]. (2023g, June 13). Re-post @fashrevdenmark Let’s stop textile waste by shopping more responsibly. https://www.instagram.com/p/CmMPGU1syld/


Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023, June 9). #NoNewClothes is about so much more than buying less, we’re unlearning harmful habits from years of marketing. https://www.instagram.com/p/CtR30-DJ0_Y/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023a, January 13). Despite embedding resale and upcycling initiatives into their businesses, brands show no signs of slowing down. https://www.instagram.com/p/CnXsiAYL4B3/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023b, February 22). The potential positive impact of buying less and making our clothes last longer is huge. https://www.instagram.com/p/CoxePSgnbk/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023c, February 27). We love a red carpet rewear and sustainable styling. Recently, Cate Blanchett rewore this dress from 2018. https://www.instagram.com/p/CpLjge2S4--/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023d, March 10). The fashion industry produces more clothes than we will ever need. https://www.instagram.com/p/Cpn9oZFyjjZ/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023f, March 20). *Today is the first day of Spring!* Before you Marie Kondo your closet, read our tips. https://www.instagram.com/p/CqBgmAEy-vW/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023g, April 27). *When you buy a preloved leather jacket instead of new, you avoid having to repeat the processes and impact.* https://www.instagram.com/p/CrjPA11P1Wz/


Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023j, June 9). *#NoNewClothes is about so much more than buying less, we’re unlearning harmful habits.* https://www.instagram.com/p/CtR30DJ0_Y/

Remake [remakeourworld]. (2023k, June 14). *June affirmations as you transform your life and closet with our summer of #NoNewClothes Challenge.* https://www.instagram.com/p/Cte2_zvvUkS/


