CONSUMERS PERCEPTION OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION COMPANIES

A PERCEPÇÃO DO PÚBLICO DE EMPRESAS DE MODA SOBRE SUSTENTABILIDADE

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ABSTRACT

Fashion is one of the sectors responsible for generating negative socio-environmental impacts, leading the public to become aware of sustainable aspects when consuming. An existing challenge involves understanding how fashion companies must communicate their sustainable position. Therefore, this article aims to present an overview of the associations that the public makes from different communications on sustainability. Specifically, we seek to understand the role of rational and emotional persuasion in communication, especially in the advertising of responsible brands. For this, we conducted an exploratory research with young people from 18 to 24 years old. The data collection approach includes the analysis of the sample's perceptions after exposure to videos and publications on social media of two brands recognized as environmentally responsible in the fashion sector. Our results show that emotional persuasion is more effective in generating identification and representation. The subjective elements evidenced in brand communication that uses emotional appeal tend to direct purchase intention more than attributes, benefits, and advantages described in brand communication that uses rational appeal. The study advances discussions on sustainable transition in the fashion industry by exploring more effective communication strategies to position brands and encourage pro-environmental purchasing behavior in this sector.

Keywords: Communication of Sustainable Brands. Sustainable Consumption. Positioning. Sustainability.

RESUMO

A moda é um dos setores responsáveis pela geração de impactos socioambientais negativos, levando o público a tomar consciência dos aspectos sustentáveis no momento do consumo. Um desafio existente é entender como as empresas de moda devem comunicar seu posicionamento sustentável. Assim, este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar um panorama das associações que o público faz a partir de diferentes comunicações sobre sustentabilidade. Especificamente, buscamos compreender o papel da persuasão racional e emocional na comunicação, especialmente na publicidade de marcas responsáveis. Para isso, realizamos uma pesquisa exploratória com jovens de 18 a 24 anos. A abordagem de coleta de dados inclui a análise de percepções da amostra após a exposição de vídeos e publicações nas redes sociais de duas marcas reconhecidas como ambientalmente responsáveis no setor da moda. Nossos resultados mostram que a persuasão emocional é mais eficaz para gerar identificação e representação. Os elementos subjetivos evidenciados na comunicação da marca que utilizam o apelo emocional tendem a direcionar mais a intenção de compra do que os atributos, benefícios e vantagens descritos na comunicação da marca que utiliza o apelo racional. O estudo avança nas discussões sobre a transição sustentável na indústria da moda ao explorar estratégias de comunicação mais eficazes para posicionar as marcas e incentivar o comportamento de compra pró-ambiental nesse setor.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação de Marcas Sustentáveis. Consumo Sustentável. Posicionamento. Sustentabilidade.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, communication about sustainability has acquired significant importance (Sahadev et al., 2022). It is increasingly acknowledged that the current linear pattern of production and consumption is unsustainable (Panchal et al., 2021; Sarja et al., 2021). This challenge is one of the main themes addressed in the 2030 Agenda (Sakharov and Andronova, 2021), especially through Goal 12, which aims to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns (ONU, 2020). In this context, the role of communication is not only to transmit information but also to coordinate human actions, create social meaning, and share reality (Fischer et al., 2021).

Communicating about sustainability allows individuals to properly interpret the available information and, consequently, be more prepared to face the complex social challenges that exist (Adomßent and Godemann, 2011). Therefore, communication helps to convince consumers about the importance of sustainable consumption (Vehmas et al., 2018). Moreover, communication can contribute to the proper positioning of responsible brands since, today, consumers often fear not being able to identify which brands are effectively sustainable and do not explore techniques such as greenwashing (Han et al., 2017). Still, despite the disruptive role of social media in terms of promoting responsible lifestyles, communication about sustainability, in particular its persuasive techniques with greater effectiveness, must be better understood (Kong et al., 2020; Sheng et al., 2022).

Considering the above, this study presents an overview of the association that the public makes from different communications on sustainability, having as the problematization the following question: "How should fashion companies communicate sustainable positioning for young consumers?". To understand the ways of working with persuasion in communication, we based the research on the presentation of videos and posts from two sustainable fashion brands that operate their business in Brazil. Backed on the different forms of communication developed by the selected brands, we identified which of the types of arguments (rational or emotional) generate more identification and a higher level of persuasion of the interviewees, leading them to have pro-environmental purchasing behaviors.

The fashion industry is the second biggest polluter of the environment (Puppim de Oliveira et al., 2022). The negative impacts generated by this industry are clearly evidenced throughout the supply chain – from raw materials to used clothing disposal (Moorhouse, 2020). The clothing sector accounts for between 2% and 8% of global carbon emissions, while textile dyeing is a significant water polluter (UNEP, 2022). Each second, the equivalent of a garbage truck's worth of textiles is landfilled or burned. If nothing is done, by 2050, the fashion industry will consume a quarter of the world's carbon budget (UNEP, 2018).

Furthermore, the average person buys 60% more clothes than 15 years ago, while each item is kept for just half the time (UNEP, 2022).

Given this scenario, it is necessary to adopt more sustainable behaviors within this industry (Shirvanimoghaddam et al., 2020). In order to make a positive contribution to sustainable development in this sector, production and consumption must be considered together. Not only should clothes be produced with a focus on sustainability and circularity, but these principles also need to be integrated into consumption practices (Freudenreich and Schaltegger, 2020). Thus, both industries and consumers must be engaged to aim for a sustainable future in the fashion industry (Moorhouse, 2020). The important role of consumers for the sustainable transition of this industry has been increasingly highlighted (Colasante and Adamo, 2021).

However, although consumers are increasingly aware of the social and environmental impacts of their clothing consumption, some still look for traditional attributes of fashion products when shopping (Colasante and Adamo, 2021; Garcia et al., 2019). Additionally, in some cases, existing sustainable fashion brands do not communicate credibility to consumers (Hugo and Nadae, 2021). Some sustainable and innovative business models have also failed to convince consumers of the benefits of sustainable fashion products (Todeschini et al., 2017). In that way, Todeschini et al. (2017) argue that consumers must be educated and guided toward a more sustainable consumption behavior. It is necessary to properly communicate with consumers and motivate them to participate in circular initiatives from the fashion industry (Abdelmeguid et al., 2022; Vehmas et al., 2018).

Finally, we understand that our study is also justified since communication and sustainable consumption lack conceptualizations, and there is a need to expand the focus of this field to underdeveloped countries. According to Fischer et al. (2021), academic research about sustainable consumption and communication is still recent, fragmented, and focused in European countries. Hugo et al. (2021) point out that research about the behavior of consumers on sustainable fashion from emerging countries like Brazil is still missing. In addition to that, our study responds to the call of Fischer et al. (2021) for the realization of research on different communication approaches to the clothing sector. Additionally, previous studies have focused on communication and sustainability in the fashion industry from a business perspective (Brydges et al., 2022; Han et al., 2017) rather than a consumer perspective. As consumers are the receivers of products and services offered and the decision makers on consumption, proper communication about sustainable information for the consumers is essential (Wang and Su, 2022).

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Understanding how to influence people to adopt more sustainable consumption patterns and pro-environmental behaviors is a key step toward facing current environmental challenges. According to Kotler (2011), communication professionals need to touch the human spirit of consumers, including sustainability as a part of the company's strategy, which arises from mission, vision, and values.

2.1 WAYS OF WORKING PERSUASION IN COMMUNICATION

Discussions from the most varied domains flow daily in the contemporary media scene. Those belonging to the field of advertising are especially relevant for studies focused on culture, as they aim to position the advertised products at the top of the mind of individuals so that they decide for them when buying or hold them in high regard, even when they do not consume them materially (Barroso et al., 2011).

According to Santarelli (2005), the advertising copywriter is responsible for creating written content to persuade the public to perform a certain behavior. This attribution can be made based on two definitions created by Nietzsche in the 19th century: Apollonian and Dionysian. For this author, art plays a central role in human culture, and creation depends on articulating these two principles. The Apollonian model is characterized by rationality, reason, and moderation. The opposite, Dionysian, represents irrationality, excesses, and extreme emotions. Both concepts are not mutually exclusive but complementary, and merge in forms of communication.

In the current advertising context, the Apollonian model represents the traditional formatting scheme of a rational and persuasive nature (Santarelli, 2005). The purpose of advertising is to advise the public to positively judge a product, service, or brand. For this, there are some rules to outline the rational model of persuasion (Carrascoza, 2004), as exposed in Table 1.

Table 1 - Norms to outline the rational model of persuasion

Genre	Dissertation texts of a logical nature, with space for the description of the properties of the product, abstract concepts prevail to interpret, expose and summarize the ideas.
Aristotelian Scheme	According to Aristotle, a logical discourse has four stages: exordium, narration, proofs and peroration.
Circularity	The proposition is presented at the beginning of the speech and must come back to it, a closed circuit leads to definitive conclusions.
Figures of Language	They seek to expand expressiveness.
Lexical Choice	The text is formed of pertinent words selected in an effort to seduce the public.
Cold Message	They present less information, simpler, requiring less decoding effort.
Conative Function	Focused on the receiver to convince him of the message.
The Stereotypes	The "truth" already accepted by the public prevents questioning.
Appeal to Authority	Use of expert quotes to validate what is being stated.
Affirmations and Repetitions	Thought is connected to reality, and can only be expressed in the affirmative. Repetition seeks to undermine opposing opinions.
Presentification	The tense that predominates is the present, the advertisement is directed to the public that lives the "here and now".
Overcoming Arguments	Possibility of always going further, with continuous growth in value.
Comparisons	Explore a competitor's limitation.
Themes	The themes refer to what is concrete, they seek to explain reality.
Semantic Network	Elaborate the text with words from the semantic universe of the subject addressed.

Source: Authors (2022) based on Carrascoza (2004)

In contrast, the structure of the Dionysian model is created in the narrative or poetic format, in which persuasion is diluted and seduced by the emotional aspects contained in the narrative (Santarelli, 2005). Ads of this variant seek to influence the public by telling stories. In the advertising text, the product and invitation to consumption are discreetly inserted in the narrative. For that, there are some rules to outline the emotional model of persuasion (Carrascoza, 2004), as exposed in Table 2.

Table 2 - Norms to outline the emotional model of persuasion

Genre	The genre is narrative, the enunciator does not express his opinion directly, he does so through characterizations attributed to the characters, veiling the authoritarian discourse.
Unit	It is necessary to find the common thread of unity, due to the diversity of actions, characters, places and times.
Narrative Components	It must contain the elements: narrative focus, plot, characters, environment and time.
Narrative Phases	They are organized into four sequential phases: manipulation, competence, performance and sanction. In advertising, manipulation and sanction are the most important phases.
Ways of Narrating	The story can be narrated in first or third person.
Lexical Choice	The words are not chosen just for functionality, but to generate identification with the public.
Cold Message	There is a "cooling down" of the message so that the story can be understood effortlessly.
Figures of Speech	They seek to expand expressiveness.
Emotive and Poetic Functions	The emotive function is very present in ads through first-person narration.
Stereotypes	The characters lack the psychological depth to allow the audience to quickly identify and understand the story,
Figures	In ads that tell stories, figures are the main character, as the narrative seeks to represent the world.
Direct, Indirect and Free Indirect Speech	Ways characters communicate and expose their thoughts.
Testimonials	Using someone else's testimonial to advise experimentation.
Illustration	Narrator enunciates a general statement and seeks to prove it throughout the story.
Hidden History	The main information is covered by the narrative.

Source: Authors (2022) based on Carrascoza (2004)

In addition, advertisers also act in accordance with the cultural aspects of the community during the creative process. To expand it beyond the text, the use of images has become essential, providing complete content (Barroso et al., 2011). In this sense, the authors point out that the image has been used to enhance the persuasive results of advertising. Also, Barroso et al. (2011) state that the purpose of advertisements is to intentionally contribute to emphasizing brand values, creating an image, and selling products.

3 RESEARCH METHOD

We conducted an exploratory and qualitative research. Qualitative studies are based on small samples, provide insights and understanding of the problem context and allow a deeper understanding of the behavior of groups of individuals or organizations (Malhotra, 2019). As we aim to understand in detail the perception of people about the communication of companies concerning their sustainable positioning, this would only be possible through an in-depth study.

3.1 PARTICIPANTS SELECTION

The audience for conducting the study was selected based on the characteristic of being people that support sustainable causes. The chosen profile is based on a survey conducted by Box 1824 and YOUPIX (WAGALUME, 2022), which gave rise to the Pyramid of Influence, verifying that people aged between 18 and 24 are the group responsible for implementing new behaviors and ways of thinking in society, becoming a role model for the younger ones and an inspiration for the older ones. From this, twelve people were selected to participate in this study, six men and six women between 18 and 30 years old who live in the South of Brazil. Table 3 presents the characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 3 - Interviewee's description

Gender	Age	Code
Female	21	P1
Female	23	P2
Female	21	P3
Female	19	P4
Female	23	P5
Female	24	P6
Male	20	P7
Male	27	P8
Male	28	P9
Male	24	P10
Male	22	P11
Male	21	P12

Source: Authors (2022)

3.2 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENT

Considering the exploratory and qualitative nature of the research, data were collected through in-depth individual interviews. After prior scheduling, the interviews were conducted through the Google Meet platform between April 26, 2022, and May 4, 2022. The interviews lasted from 20 to 40 minutes. During the calls, all participants kept the camera and audio on so that the recording tool provided by Google Meet could be used for data collection, transcription, and analysis. After these steps, the recordings were deleted to maintain anonymity. In addition, all signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE). During the interviews, the researchers took notes to avoid bias. If discrepancies or incomplete information were found, the participants were contacted in order to obtain further details and clarification.

The research is contextualized by the brands Vert and Osklen. Vert is a French brand founded in 2004, produced in Brazil, and sold worldwide. It was created connected to the sustainability values and pillars, presenting to the consumer transparent information about the production process of their shoes and the choice of less impactful materials. Osklen opened the first shop in 1989 to sell winter clothes, and today it is one of the Brazilian representatives synonymous with luxury. The central concept of the brand is sustainable fashion, and it has three defined flags: regenerate life, redesign waste, and respect our people. According to the exposed in Section 2, the forms of communication of these brands were presented in order to understand, based on the theory of rational and emotional persuasion, which of the proposals generates more identification and a higher level of persuasion of the interviewees, leading them to have pro-environmental purchasing behaviors. The Vert brand follows a rational communication model, while Osklen uses an emotional model. We highlight that validation of these two brands was carried out with two experts in the area of sustainability and advertising.

Table 4 presents the interview questions. The research protocol consisted of open questions to allow respondents to spontaneously elaborate their answers, providing valuable information to the researcher (Malhotra, 2019). The research instrument contemplates two main aspects. The first is more generic, aiming to understand the interviewee's routine and behavior pattern concerning consumption. The second, after presenting the communication of the Vert and Osklen brands with videos and social media standards, investigates the type of message and influence on the subject's planned behavior. Before application, the research protocol was validated with two other experts in the area of advertising and sustainability.

Table 4 – Research Protocol

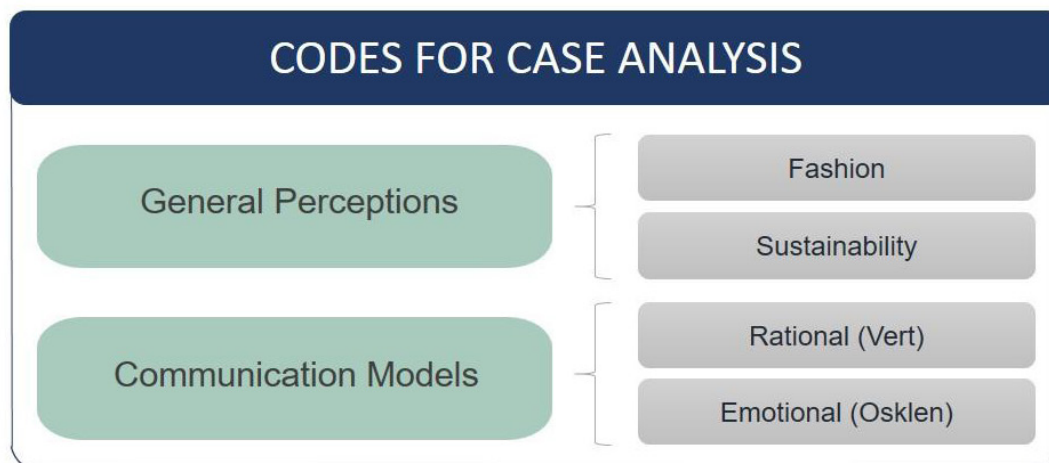| Purpose	Question
The interviewee's perception of fashion	What is fashion for you?
Knowing how often the respondent consumes a new piece of clothing	How often do you buy a new item of clothing?
Understand the reasons for preference of brands that they consume	Do you have a preference for brands when consuming? If yes, what are the brands and why.
How communication is present in consumption habits	Do you follow these brands that you mentioned on social media? In which ones and how often?
The interviewee's perception of sustainability	What is sustainability for you?
Understand if fashion and sustainability are related for the interviewed	Do you understand that there is a relation between fashion and sustainability?
Understand which communication model, based on rational and emotional theory, works better for the interviewee, presenting the brands Vert and Osklen.	Presentation and contextualization of the communication of the brands Vert and Osklen. Ask individually what they think of the communication and values of each brand. Ask which of the two would be the choice for consumption and why.

Source: Authors (2022)

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

As for data analysis, we followed the methodology of content analysis proposed by Bardin (1977), which involves employing a range of communication analysis techniques to gather (non-quantitative) indicators that would enable us to derive insights and understanding. For the coding and categorization of the textual material resulting from the transcriptions, we initially conducted a thorough examination of the statements. The transcriptions were read and reread until they became familiar. Subsequently, we separated and isolated each significant portion, which was then coded. The key concepts (codes) were established with reference to the variables found in the bibliographic research carried out. Figure 1 illustrates the main theoretical contributions that guided the analysis of results.

Figure 1 - Codes for analysis of results

CODES FOR CASE ANALYSIS

General Perceptions — Fashion / Sustainability

Communication Models — Rational (Vert) / Emotional (Osklen)

Source: Authors (2022)

We implemented certain procedures to ensure reliability and validity and reduce the bias of the method. We carried out the appropriate selection of participants to participate in the research and used a protocol for data collection and analysis. The coding process was carried out separately by each author. Subsequently, we held meetings to review and discuss any discrepancies in the coding, with the goal of achieving a consistent and impartial coding approach.

4 RESULTS

This section presents the results of the interviews. Initially, we describe the respondents' perception of fashion and their buying behavior regarding these products, their perception of sustainability, and the relationship between these topics (sub-section 4.1). Next, we present the interviewees' perceptions about communication models based on rational and emotional theories (sub-section 4.2). Finally, we discuss our results (sub-section 4.3).

4.1 GENERAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FASHION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Initially, we sought to understand respondents' perceptions of fashion and sustainability. When discussing what fashion is, most of the public understands that fashion is a form of expression that reflects the individual's personality and how the person feels wearing that outfit. P4 stated that "[...] fashion for me is more a form of expression and how I show myself to the whole than something like "this is in fashion, or this is not" [...]". Some respondents also relate fashion as a way of introducing ourselves

to others, recognizing similar ones, and generating identification and belonging. Furthermore, fashion appears as a political, historical, and social movement, whether through consumption, production, or representation.

Most of the respondents interviewed consume new clothes in an interval of three to four months, which is considered a low purchase frequency by consumers. They look for pieces that can match with what they already have in their wardrobe or buy them when they need clothes for specific occasions, such as parties. In addition, part of the interviewees stated that they consume new pieces of clothing monthly or every two months. In both situations, it is still considered a low consumption frequency for the public.

Subsequently, respondents were asked if they had a preference for brands when consuming in order to find out which brands and the reason for prioritizing them when consuming. Most respondents pointed out that they do not prefer brands when consuming clothes but pay more attention to thrift stores and look for comfortable options that last a long time. The preferred targeting of brands is when buying sneakers, in which case, they mostly opt for Nike, Vans, Adidas, and Mizuno. Those who answered that they have a preference for brands when consuming differ between brands that are widely known and brands that are local. Again, the brands that stand out as a preference are Vans and Nike, whether for clothing or sneakers. Participants who opt for local brands have the justification that they belong to friends or family and the identification they have with the clothing items. Additionally, they can find pieces at an affordable price and are ecological.

Next, in order to understand how communication is present in the consumption habits of the public, it was asked if the interviewees follow the brands mentioned on social media and how often. Half of the respondents stated that they accompany the brands on social media; the other half do not, and the frequency was not specified. Followers mostly use the Instagram platform in addition to Twitter and TikTok. Those who do not accompany the brands on social media clarify that they receive advertisements and sponsorships on these platforms due to the fact that they visit the site to decide what they want to buy.

Addressing the topic of sustainability, we observed that the most significant number of respondents relate sustainability to the coherence of the exploitation of natural resources. In addition, some participants explained that sustainability is directly linked to conscious consumption as a lifestyle, influencing all areas on a daily basis, not just in fashion. Others reported that sustainability is the power to reuse things, extending their lifetime. In fashion, acquiring a piece of clothing should not be compatible with the unbridled buying habit but rather be consumed consciously and not discarded so easily. Some even pointed to sustainability as the attitudes practiced in the present that will generate a reflection of the world for future generations.

Subsequently, to deepen the discussion on fashion and sustainability, the public was asked if they understood that there is a relationship between these two subjects. All the participants agree that there is a relationship. The biggest reason is environmental pollution, resulting from incorrect textile disposals in the environment, such as in deserts or rivers, generating accumulation and negative consequences. P11) stated that "[...] I see a complete connection because we know that fashion is one of the capitalist sectors with the greatest need for sustainable viability [...]". In addition, some respondents recognize companies that aim at the profit and cheap labor in the process of making pieces. The low cost of mass production has a direct impact on disposal, which becomes a constant and speedy cycle. They report that a brand with only one sustainable clothing line makes no difference, but they want to find companies with all sustainable items. Finally, we found that respondents no longer seek to give preference to brands that produce on a large scale. They choose to buy fewer pieces of clothing and bet on thrift stores to encourage circular fashion.

Table 5 summarizes the answers about the general perceptions of the interviewees about fashion and sustainability.

Table 5 – Summary of General perceptions about fashion and sustainability

Perception	Responses
Fashion meaning	Form of expression (7 citations) Ways to recognize similar ones (3 citations) Political, historical and social movement (3 citations)
Frequency of consumption of new clothes	Three to four month interval (4 citations) Monthly (4 citations) Two months interval (3 citations)
Preference for brands to consume	No preference for brands (6 citations) Preference for known brands (4 citations) Preference for local brands (2 citations)
Presence of communication in consumption habits	Follow the brands on social media (4 citations) Do not follow the brands on social media (4 citations)
Sustainability meaning	Coherence of the exploitation of natural resources (4 citations) Conscious consumption as a lifestyle (3 citations) Power to reuse things, extending their lifespan (3 citations) Attitudes practiced in the present that will reflect the world for future generations (2 citations)
Relation between fashion and sustainability	Environment pollution (5 citations) Profit and cheap labor in the process of making pieces (4 citations) Buy fewer pieces of clothing and bet on thrift stores to encourage circular fashion (3 citations)

Source: Authors (2022)

4.2 COMMUNICATION MODEL

The brands Vert and Osklen were presented and contextualized with the main objective of understanding which communication model, based on the rational and emotional theories exposed above, works best for the interviewees.

The analysis shows that the Vert brand stands out for its minimalist and timeless design (9 citations). It is easy to use for a long time and is always in fashion. For the public, it appears to be a sophisticated and artisanal product in the way of production. Figure 2 compiles the main adjectives used to describe the brand.

Figure 2 - Main adjectives used to describe the brand Vert

Timeless Conscious Objective Sophisticated Versatile Classic Usable Sustainable Minimalist Clean Transparent Durable Handmade Purpose

Source: Authors based on the interviews (2022)

The respondents recognize that the company thinks about sustainability and the well-being of all those involved in the production process (4 citations). Therefore, the products cause positive environmental and social impacts. They also emphasize the importance of the company knowing the entire production chain and where the raw materials for manufacturing are coming from. P3 affirms: "I thought it was really cool because I saw how much they look at the products they are using, where they come from, how much they affect the environment, it is a product 100% focused on sustainability". According to P6: "[...] I thought it was cool that apparently, they follow all the stages of production, from the extraction of the primary items to the entire production [...]".

The brand Osklen stood out for the provocations and reflections it provides to its audience, urging them to know where the product they consume comes from and what impact they want to have on the environment when choosing their pieces (6 citations). Figure 3 compiles the adjectives used to describe the brand.

Figure 3 - Main adjectives used to describe the brand Osklen

Honest Conscious Appealing Sustainable Value Reuse Near Transparent Young Concerned Representative Moving Intimate

Source: Authors based on the interviews (2022)

The communication of the brand was considered closer to the young public, which generated identification and representation (4 citations). According to P3: "I felt that this one has a younger vibe [...] I felt that the voice represented me a little more [...]". P10 affirms: "[...] but I felt that this communication is much closer to the public [...] this one has something closer to the consumer and was more concerned [...]".

Some interviewees pointed out that they missed seeing the application of sustainable initiatives in products. In addition to providing reflection, they would like it to be explicit which actions the company actually carries out (2 citations). For P6: "[...] but you don't directly see the application in the product, it's much more what the brand does to improve this waste generation [...] they are improving this waste generation, but not that this is directly in the product." P12 says: "[...] but maybe I felt like it kind of spoke for talking, it didn't show that they actually do [...], did not show me actions that it does, I would research more about Osklen to see if it is in fact sustainable [...]".

After the presentation of the two brands, the participants were asked which one would be their consumption choice and why. The majority opted for Osklen (7 citations), corroborating the idea that for the public, the emotional model of persuasion is the most effective for communicating sustainable brands. Firstly, this preference is related to the fact that they look for more sustainable clothes than shoes. In this way, they can find multiple pieces under one brand. In addition, and more importantly for the purpose of this study, subjects said that the way Osklen communicated sustainability was more familiar, the clothing style generated more identification and the emotions triggered by the video generated esteem and self-realization when thinking about the use of the brand's products.

According to P2: "I think I would choose Osklen...I thought it was cool that they showed this other side, like showing images of where the material comes from and how it works [...]. I think it makes me want to consume from this brand, it touched my heart, I thought it was more sincere". P5 highlighted:

"I think that maybe I would choose Osklen because it has more options, because, for example, if I were to buy from Vert, it would only be the shoes, you know? Then I would have to look for other brands […]".

Table 6 summarizes the answers about the general perceptions of the interviewees about the communication models used for the two brands.

Table 6 – Summary of perceptions about the Communication Model and the two brands

Brand Vert	Brand Osklen
The brand has a minimalist and timeless design	The company provokes reflection in the public about the origin of the products
The company thinks about sustainability and the well-being of people	The brand is close to the young public and generates identification and representation
Communication model generated less preference	Communication model generated greater preference

Source: Authors based on the interviews (2022)

Finally, we investigated how subjects describe their intention to behave after being exposed to different persuasive communication models. In this sense, Table 7 summarizes perceived emotions and feelings that can speed up or slow down behavioral intention.

Table 7 - Intention of behavior

Intention	Citations
SPEED UP BEHAVIORAL INTENTION	
Happiness, satisfaction and well-being (6 citations)	P1) "[…] Then I feel generally happier buying from brands like Osklen. I feel like I'm also doing something for the world, even if it's small. I feel good […]." P3) "[…] I feel like I'm playing a role in the world […]. It feels like you're not harming the environment, you feel good, it's like mission accomplished, you know […]." P11) "when I saw the videos, especially those from Osklen, I felt good[…] So, I think that when you are buying from these brands, or when you are choosing a sustainable product in the case of fashion, you are satisfying yourself, you demonstrate that you are cool […]."
Pride (5 citations)	P1) "[…] when you buy a piece, you know where it comes from, you see that the brand cares about it…so I see a bit of my ideals, especially in the Osklen brand […]" P8) "[…]The idea of helping causes that are truly interested in sustainability, supporting people and brands that raise this flag is super important, and moving away from companies that do so much harm to the environment […]" P11) "[…] I am promoting an industry that I believe in, that has my sustainability ideals, so I am betting on a company so that it can produce and reach more people so that they can have a more conscious consumption."

SLOW DOWN BEHAVIORAL INTENTION	
Frustration (5 citations)	P2) "I think the main problem for the purchase is the cost, because fast fashion, as there is no concern about where the materials come from and who the employees are, mainly, we know that things are much cheaper [. ..]." P5) "I think the biggest obstacle to buying is still the price, because it is much easier to buy raw materials from unethical places and pay for cheap labor to produce a piece of clothing, than to do everything according to the standard like Vert does [...]." P9) "[...] buying sustainable fashion can cause some inconvenience, which is a negative point. You're going to have to do more research and investigate the brand, because sometimes some brands say they're sustainable, but when you look behind the scenes, it might not be everything they say it is [...]."

Source: Authors based on the interviews (2022)

Considering the emotions and feelings that can accelerate the intention of pro-environmental behavior, we noticed that communication that focuses on the emotional model of persuasion reinforces positive emotions, such as happiness, satisfaction, well-being, and pride. As for communication that prioritizes the rational model, try to make thoughts associated with cost and credibility emerge, often bringing negative allusions that can hinder or delay the purchase intention.

4.3 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Understanding what predisposes individuals to adopt pro-environmental behavior is a complex issue that is not yet fully understood (Coelho et al., 2017). Although a broad body of research has been developed in recent years, potential barriers to environmentally friendly practices continue to be verified (White et al., 2019). In this context, when evaluating different communicational appeals practiced by fashion brands with a sustainable appeal, the results of the present study indicate that emotional messages tend to be more adequate for the sustainable positioning of brands.

From the propositions proposed by Santarelli (2005) and Carrascoza (2004), we infer that, in the universe of fashion, the emotional approach plays a more effective role by generating identification and representation. This analysis is in line with the results described by Han et al. (2017), who claim that it is essential for any organization that produces sustainable fashion to establish a personal relationship with its stakeholders. Furthermore, emotional communication tends to attract attention and increase relevance compared to simply providing information (Russell and Ashkanasy, 2021; Sheng et al., 2022).

Another aspect that should be discussed centers on the needs that sustain consumers' motivation when evaluating fashion brands. Although the sampled group is considered a group that makes choices more consciously, it is a fact that their hedonistic/experiential motivations are stronger than their utilitarian motivations (as explained in the initial questions of the study). This means that the subjective

elements evidenced in the communication tend to direct the purchase intention more than attributes, benefits, and advantages. In addition to the above, returning to the cloud of words generated for each of the evaluated brands, we can infer that the persuasive practice centered on emotion tends to trigger, in addition to feelings of belonging, feelings of esteem, and self-realization in subjects.
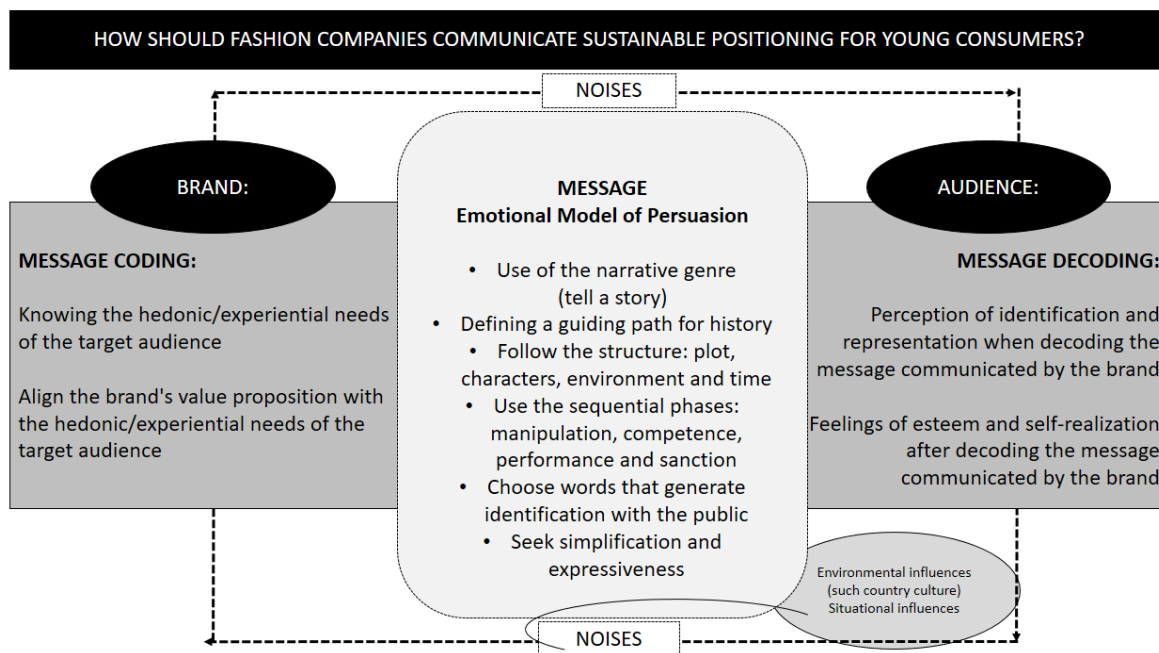
As for the rational persuasive argument, we believe that it is more effective for brands and/or contexts in which the interference of social norms is stronger. Conceptually, social norms are composed of a set of beliefs about what most people do (descriptive norms) or approve (injunctive norms) (Farrow et al., 2017). In fact, some studies indicate the effect of social norms on responsible purchase intentions. For example: reducing water consumption (Jaeger and Schultz, 2017; Lede et al., 2019; Richetin et al., 2016; Schultz et al., 2016); energy conservation in public restrooms (Bergquist and Nilsson, 2016); pro-environmental online shopping behaviors (Demarque et al., 2015); intention to use renewable energy sources at the domestic level (Fornara et al., 2016); and choosing a more energy-efficient heating system (Hafner et al., 2019).

We understand that the results of the present study help to adjust advertising messages based on the type of product or brand you want to promote. Such promotion is challenging, mainly because it is often limited to encouraging desired behaviors or discouraging unwanted behaviors (Kronrod et al., 2023). Also, because there are often doubts about what we should promote when we talk about sustainability and whether we should do it generically (speaking in general terms about the brand) or specifically (speaking explicitly about the product and its characteristics) (Shrum et al., 1995; Sibai et al., 2021).

Finally, in Figure 4, we summarize our main findings. The preparation of this figure observed: (i) the results of the exploratory field study; and (ii) the norms described in the theoretical framework to outline emotional models of persuasion.

Figure 4 - Summary of the most appropriate responsible fashion brand sustainability communication process

HOW SHOULD FASHION COMPANIES COMMUNICATE SUSTAINABLE POSITIONING FOR YOUNG CONSUMERS?

NOISES

BRAND:

MESSAGE CODING:

Knowing the hedonic/experiential needs of the target audience

Align the brand's value proposition with the hedonic/experiential needs of the target audience

MESSAGE
Emotional Model of Persuasion

- Use of the narrative genre (tell a story)
- Defining a guiding path for history
- Follow the structure: plot, characters, environment and time
- Use the sequential phases: manipulation, competence, performance and sanction
- Choose words that generate identification with the public
- Seek simplification and expressiveness

AUDIENCE:

MESSAGE DECODING:

Perception of identification and representation when decoding the message communicated by the brand

Feelings of esteem and self-realization after decoding the message communicated by the brand

Environmental influences (such country culture) Situational influences

NOISES

Source: Authors (2023)

Our figure starts from the classic concept of the communication process (Stern, 1994). Thus, the brand of the fashion company is the sender, which encodes a message encouraging pro-environmental consumption. Proper encoding of the message demands that the organization knows more than the utilitarian needs that motivate the purchase of its products. Fundamentally, it must know the hedonic/experiential needs of the audience. Furthermore, the brand's value proposition must be aligned with such needs, in such a way that organizational practices, in addition to the coded message, generate identification and trust in the audience. As for the message, the codes that contemplate elements of the emotional persuasive model are more adequate. Young consumers, receivers of the message, decode the same having as the main perception the representation by identification, and feelings of esteem and self-realization. Finally, there are noises that may have interfered with the process. Analyzing the whole process, we infer that aspects of Brazilian national identity, as well as issues related to the age and stage of the life cycle of the subjects sampled, are noises that may interfere and, therefore, must be considered.

CONCLUSION

The textile industry is one of the most responsible for generating large amounts of waste and negative impacts on the environment and its resources. Because of this, important brands are providing a new model of production and consumption for the market, more responsible. In this context, the study sought to understand the role of rational and emotional persuasion in communication, especially in the advertising of responsible brands.

Theoretically, we emphasize that the analysis of the communication process described here took place from the perspective of the consumer, not from the perspective of the business. In this regard, the understanding that in fashion, in addition to the utilitarian issues of the product, its attributes, benefits, and advantages, communication must include hedonic/experiential aspects. It is necessary that communication not only inform but also bring out feelings of identification, esteem, and self-fulfillment. This is essential to generate the affective component of the attitude, which adds to the cognitive component (beliefs) and leads to the conative component (behavioral intention). In addition, communication must mix generic arguments (speaking in general terms about the brand) and specifically (speaking explicitly about the product and its production process).

In practice, we suggest that brands align their messages with the value proposition that guides their business. Sustainable fashion brands must use transparent communication so that there are no doubts about possible tactics such as greenwashing. This means revealing all stages of production (where the raw material comes from, how production is done, what the working environment is like, who works in production, and how the products are disposed of). However, we reinforce that the presentation of this entire production chain must be made from the emotional model of persuasion, in view of its strength of identification with the audience. Finally, we understand that the study helps professionals who want to enter the Brazilian market, especially for positioning responsible fashion products with the young public.

The main limitation of the research is the sample of respondents, which covers a low number of people within a specific age range. Thus, the study cannot be generalized to a broader population as a basis for behavior. Furthermore, the study did not focus on a specific category of sustainable products but examined the broader aspect of consumers' perceptions based on the two brands. For future research, it is suggested to use a sample of people who are not in favor of pro-environmental buying behavior to explore the public that does not tend to this behavior and how to influence them, in addition to having different age groups.

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