



Research Article

# Beyond Green Promises: How Concrete Information Sparks Pride and Drives Sustainable Fashion

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between trust and pride and their collective influence on sustainable consumption within the fashion industry. We hypothesized that concrete marketing communications would enhance consumer trust, which in turn would directly, and indirectly via increased pride, encourage sustainable consumption intentions. Through an experimental design involving 199 participants, we tested the effects of concrete versus abstract sustainability claims on trust, pride, and sustainable consumption intentions such as word-of-mouth endorsement and the willingness to buy sustainable products. Our findings show concrete (as opposed to abstract) marketing information significantly strengthen trust, and that trust directly encourage sustainable consumption intentions and indirectly promotes them by boosting pride. This dual pathway underscores the crucial role of trust in sustainable fashion marketing, serving as both a direct motivator of consumption intentions and a catalyst for generating pride. Our study offers valuable insights for marketers on effectively communicating sustainability and fostering genuine consumer engagement with sustainable fashion.

## KEYWORDS

*Sustainable Fashion Consumption, Pride, Trust, Construal Level Theory, Message Concreteness*

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## 1. Introduction

One of today's most pressing challenges is the over-consumption of natural resources, leading to a significant environmental footprint and contributing to climate change. The textile industry, notably led by the fashion sector, is a major contributor, accounting for up to 7% of worldwide CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (UNECE, 2018). Projections indicate that by 2050, fashion clothing and footwear alone could account for more than 25% of the world's carbon budget (Earth Day, 2022). Addressing the fashion industry's environmental impact necessitates exploring sustainable alternatives to mitigate its detrimental effects. Sustainable fashion offers a promis-

ing solution, but its adoption hinges significantly on effective marketing communication strategies (Jones et al., 2014). The current situation reveals that despite heightened consumer awareness and favorable attitudes towards sustainability, the prevalent inclination towards non-sustainable apparel persists (Park & Lin, 2020; Sharma, 2021). This persistence underscores the urgent need for research to devise effective communication strategies aimed at redirecting consumer behavior toward sustainable fashion products.

In recent years, a growing body of research has focused on understanding the influence of pride on consumer behavior, particularly in the context of



sustainability (Kaur & Verma, 2023). Studies have demonstrated that sustainable purchases evoke feelings of pride (Bly et al., 2015), leading to a greater desire to make similar purchases in the future (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014a,b; Chéron et al., 2022; Onwezen et al., 2013). This effect also applies to sustainable fashion consumption, with research showing that increased pride leads to a higher willingness to buy sustainable fashion products (e.g., Adigüzel & Donato, 2021; Bürklin, 2017; Islam et al., 2022; Yan et al., 2024) and favorable word-of-mouth endorsement (Bürklin, 2017; Pangarkar et al., 2023; Septianto et al., 2020).

However, this pride-driven mechanism can be significantly undermined by a lack of trust, particularly in an industry plagued by greenwashing practices (e.g., Policarpo et al., 2023; Riesgo et al., 2023). When consumers doubt the impact of their sustainable choices, it may diminish the feeling of pride in their purchases. Trust, therefore, becomes crucial not only in reinforcing sustainable behavior but also in preserving and enhancing the pride associated with these choices (Dhir et al., 2021; Williams & Hodges, 2022). Although some research suggests that trust can amplify the feeling of pride (Biggemann et al., 2014), studies exploring the interplay between these two factors remain limited and yield mixed findings (Biggemann et al., 2014; Septianto et al., 2021). This area remains ripe for further exploration to clarify these complex relationships.

Our research builds on existing literature, which predominantly examines the triggers of mistrust in companies' environmental communications and advocates for further exploration of trust antecedents (e.g., Jäger & Weber, 2020; Mohammed & Razé, 2023; Policarpo et al., 2023; Riesgo et al., 2023; Septianto et al., 2021). We aim to expand the current understanding by exploring the impact of message framing, and particularly the construal level, on trust. *Construal Level Theory* suggests that people think about near things in detail and distant things more abstractly (Trope et al., 2007), formulated as concrete and abstract information in marketing (Chang et al., 2015). The fashion industry

presents a particularly compelling context for this study, not only due to the pervasive issues of greenwashing and consumer mistrust but also because of its deeply ingrained tradition of abstract communication of sustainability (Thomas, 2008). This abstract approach to marketing often obscures the tangible details consumers need to assess the environmental impact of fashion products, further fueling confusion and skepticism (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015; Walker & Wan, 2012). Given these dynamics, the fashion industry's communication practices serve as an ideal backdrop for investigating how the concreteness of the message framing, whether more abstract or more concrete, can help rebuild trust and guide consumers toward more sustainable choices.

While previous research has primarily highlighted the drawbacks of employing abstract terms such as "sustainable" and "eco-friendly" in communication within the fashion industry due to consumer confusion and concerns about greenwashing (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2017, 2018; Thomas, 2008), our study aims to address this challenge by investigating the effectiveness of using concrete information to enhance trust. While only a few studies have explored the effect of trust in environmental communication (e.g., Jäger & Weber, 2020; Kim & Damhorst, 1999), these studies indicate that trust stemming from environmental information improves the attitude towards environmentally friendly products. Our paper enhances the existing body of knowledge on sustainable fashion consumption by empirically examining the impact of message concreteness in marketing communications on trust, exploring the interaction between trust and pride, and investigating how this interplay influences sustainable consumption intentions, such as word-of-mouth endorsement and the willingness to purchase sustainable fashion products.

We believe this study offers significant contributions to the growing field of sustainable fashion consumption, providing valuable insights for future research and practical guidance for marketers and policymakers to promote sustainable practices within the fashion industry. Theoretically, it advances the understanding of the relationship between trust and pride, demonstrating

that concrete information enhances trust in sustainability claims, which in turn boosts pride and drives both purchasing and word-of-mouth endorsements. Managerially, it highlights the importance of using specific, detailed sustainability information in marketing communications to build trust and foster pride, thereby encouraging sustainable consumer choices in the competitive fashion industry.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: The following section conceptualizes the relationship between sustainable fashion consumption and pride, trust, and concrete information, followed by the development of our hypotheses. Subsequently, we present an experimental study and its results. The paper concludes by addressing its limitations, theoretical contributions, and managerial implications.

## 2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

Pride, recognized as a pleasant and adaptive feeling closely linked to perceptions of personal ability and effort (Tracy & Robins, 2004), significantly influences human behavior and acts as a reinforcement mechanism for actions leading to socially valued outcomes (Tracy & Robins, 2007a; Williams & Desteno, 2008). Pride can be defined as a feeling "generated by appraisals that one is responsible for a socially valued outcome or for being a socially valued person" (Mascolo & Fischer, 1995, p.66). Moreover, research on pride has found that the feeling has two facets: Hubristic and Authentic. Hubristic pride is associated with narcissism and other undesirable outcomes such as aggression and relationship conflict, while authentic pride includes words such as "accomplished", and "confident" (Tracy & Robins, 2007b; Weiner, 1985). The first is often connected with luxury consumptions, while the latter fits the warm, prosocial, and achievement-oriented conceptualization of pride (Mcferran et al., 2014) connected to research on sustainable fashion consumption. For simplicity, we will refer to authentic pride in a company's sustainability claims as 'pride' throughout this paper.

Pride is associated with consumers' perceptions of effectiveness (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014b), and the

belief in one's ability to effect meaningful change is a crucial driver of this feeling (Roberts, 1996). Studies have shown that experiencing pride in sustainable purchases can positively influence consumers' inclination towards future sustainable behaviors (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2014a, 2014b; Chéron et al., 2022; Onwezen et al., 2013). Even after a single purchase, consumers' perceptions of effectiveness can influence consumers' intentions to buy similar products (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014b). In the context of sustainable fashion consumption, research shows that priming consumers with pride can increase sustainable behavior and intentions (Yan et al., 2024) and experiencing pride after making a sustainable purchase can lead to a greater desire to make similar purchases in the future (e.g., Adigüzel & Donato, 2021; Bürklin, 2017; Islam et al., 2022) and increase the willingness to share positive word-of-mouth (e.g., Bürklin, 2017; Pangarkar et al., 2023; Septianto et al., 2020). Put simply, when consumers feel proud of their sustainable purchases, they perceive themselves as contributing to positive outcomes, thereby motivating them to continue making similar choices in the future, making pride a promising antecedent to future sustainable behavior.

*Hypothesis 1: Pride will have a positive effect on sustainable fashion consumption intentions.*

However, the greenwashing practices within the fashion industry, which results in a lack of trust in companies and their sustainability claims, present a significant obstacle to the adoption of sustainable fashion (e.g., Policarpo et al., 2023). The complexity of fashion supply chains, often spanning multiple countries and involving numerous subcontractors, makes it difficult to track and verify sustainable practices. This opacity provides fertile ground for greenwashing, where companies can make sustainability claims that are hard to substantiate or verify (Velasco-Molpeceres et al., 2023). For example, H&M has marketed its "Conscious Collection" as a more sustainable option, using recycled and organic materials. However, investigations have shown that the actual environmental benefits are minimal, and the collection represents a small fraction of their overall production (Sergan, 2019). Critics argue that the brand uses this collection

to create a misleading perception of sustainability while continuing unsustainable practices at scale (Sergan, 2019). As a result of greenwashing practices in the fashion industry, a lack of trust has emerged as a major barrier to green purchases, often cited as a key reason for consumers' hesitation to adopt sustainable clothing (Riesgo et al., 2023).

Conversely, trust strengthens the consumer's commitment to sustainable practices (Dhir et al., 2021; Williams & Hodges, 2022). Trust is defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor" (Mayer et al., 1995, p. 721). Trust in a company refers to the willingness to accept one's vulnerability to the company's actions based on positive expectations (Kollat & Farache, 2017) and the belief that the company can be trusted from a long-term perspective (Martinez & Bosque, 2013). Trusting a company is trusting that the customer's expectations are met and the belief that the brand can fulfill its value promise and that these promises are still kept when no one is looking (Tong et al., 2018). Trust in the context of sustainable consumption is often referred to as green trust (Dhir et al., 2021), defined as the consumers' willingness to use green products based on confidence in their potential to protect the environment (Wang et al., 2018). For simplicity, we'll refer to trust in a company's sustainability claims as 'trust' throughout this paper.

Given pride's intrinsic association with accomplishment and perceptions of effectiveness (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014b; Weiner, 1985), we argue that mistrust undermines the potential of pride as a motivator for sustainable fashion consumption. As a result, when consumers begin to question the authenticity of companies' sustainability efforts, they may also start to doubt the significance of their own sustainable choices, ultimately resulting in diminished pride in their purchases. This impedes consumers' ability to derive pride from sustainable fashion purchases, thereby undermining the positive impact of sustainable purchases on positive word-of-mouth and willingness to buy sustainable products. In the same way, mistrust

hinders sustainable consumption, consumer trust emerges as a crucial determinant of sustainable purchases, with several studies underscoring the pivotal role of consumer trust in shaping decisions (e.g., Dhir et al. 2021; Williams & Hodges 2022), and recently, influence purchase and word-of-mouth intentions in the fashion industry (Huynh et al., 2024). As such, building trust should be a primary focus for marketers and policymakers aiming to enhance sustainable fashion consumption. By fostering a transparent, authentic, and consistent communication strategy, companies can mitigate consumer skepticism, foster trust, and allow both trust and pride to effectively influence the propensity for word-of-mouth endorsement and the willingness to engage in sustainable purchasing behaviors. From this, we posit:

*Hypothesis 2: Trust will have a positive effect on sustainable fashion consumption intentions.*

Although research on the interplay between trust and pride is limited, two distinct paths emerge. On the one hand, consumers who trust a company to act responsibly and ethically often take pride in their association with the brand and their contributions to its endeavors (Biggemann et al., 2014). On the other hand, experiencing pride in response to a brand's transparency practices can lead consumers to perceive the brand as honest and fair, thereby fostering increased trust (Septianto et al., 2021). In either scenario, trust and pride are intricately linked to sustainability within the fashion industry. This interconnectedness suggests that trust and pride reinforce each other in a positive feedback loop. Given pride's link to the perceptions of effectiveness and the experience of contributing something valuable to society (Antonetti & Maklan, 2014b; Weiner, 1985), we suggest that pride is a consequence of trust, rather than a prerequisite for it, and argue that trust plays a crucial role in enabling pride. For instance, we know that transparent and honest communication from brands about their sustainable practices builds trust (Yang & Battocchio, 2021), which in turn allows consumers to feel proud of their purchases. Moreover, recent research has provided empirical evidence suggesting that when consumers trust that purchasing an eco-friendly fashion product will make a positive differ-

ence, they anticipate positive feelings, as they believe their actions contribute to a greater good (Grappi et al., 2024). This underscores the foundational role of trust in the development of consumer pride. Consequently, we hypothesize that trust will have an indirect effect on sustainable consumption intentions:

*Hypothesis 3: Trust will have a positive effect on pride.*

Recognizing the critical importance of trust in sustainable consumption, we now try to uncover its optimal utilization in the market communication of fashion products.

### 2.1. Message Concreteness

Traditionally, communication of fashion products has relied on sparse and abstract information to avoid overwhelming consumers with excessive details. For instance, fashion brands often limit communication to just their name, fearing that additional details might confuse consumers (Lorek & Lucas, 2003). In line with this reasoning, research shows that abstract information is more effective when the customer is familiar with what is being communicated (De Angelis et al., 2016). Conversely, when consumers lack knowledge about the subject, they require more concrete information to understand it effectively (De Angelis et al., 2016).

The use of concrete and abstract information in marketing communication is theoretically grounded in the Construal Level Theory of Psychological Distance (Jäger & Weber, 2020). According to the Construal Level Theory of Psychological Distance (Liberman et al., 2007; Trope et al., 2007), when something is perceived as psychologically near, individuals tend to focus on concrete details, whereas when something is perceived as psychologically distant, they tend to think about it in more abstract terms (Jäger & Weber, 2020). Similarly, marketing messages can be formulated as either abstract or concrete (Chang et al., 2015), where abstract information is perceived as more distant, and concrete is perceived as near. Moreover, research shows that when a message is perceived as more distant, the problem is perceived as less relevant (Bashir et al., 2014), consequently affecting the willingness to buy sustainable products (Jäger

& Weber, 2020)

The primary challenge in communicating sustainable fashion products lies in customers' difficulty in discerning the environmental impact of the products (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015; Walker & Wan, 2012). Research shows that the prevalence of abstract terms like "environmentally friendly" and "sustainable" (Polonsky et al., 1997), compounded by the lack of a shared understanding of terms such as "sustainable" (Paco & Reis, 2012), makes it problematic to distinguish between genuine sustainability claims and false ones (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2017, 2018; Thomas, 2008), leading to confusion and mistrust (Schons & Steinmeier, 2015; Walker & Wan, 2012). In a recent study, 90% of fashion consumers declared that they have heard of sustainable fashion, and 73% claimed to be able to define in their own words what sustainable fashion is (Riesgo et al., 2023). When the same consumers were questioned about why they did not buy sustainable fashion or why they did not do it more often, they answered, "Because I cannot discern when a brand is really sustainable or when it just claims to be it in order to improve its image" (Riesgo et al., 2023, p. 5). Instead of using abstract terms, tangible actions and concrete information, which is essential in avoiding misunderstandings and being perceived as more trustworthy, are suggested (Riesgo et al., 2023).

Concrete information, in this context, refers to specific details about the product's sustainability features, making it easier for consumers to understand and evaluate the brand's commitment to sustainability (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018; Kim & Hall, 2015; Lim, 2019; Pracejus et al., 2003; Thomas, 2008). This could be signaling the materials used, the manufacturing processes employed, or the environmental certifications obtained (Williams & Hodges, 2022). In a study exploring the marketing of eco-friendly fashion, consumers developed positive attitudes toward apparel brands with explicit eco-friendly advertising, and this was strongly predicting the intention to purchase such brands (Yan et al., 2012). However, recent findings building on this theory claim the relationship between concrete communication and the willingness to buy sustainable products is mediated by trust (Jäger

& Weber, 2020). Concrete information is generally considered more sincere than abstract once (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Lattal, 2014; Thomas, 2008), and can foster trust by reducing ambiguity and uncertainty, as the characteristic of concrete information also increases the credibility of a message (Jäger & Weber, 2020). Finally, a recent study (Williams & Hodges, 2022), shows that fashion consumers were expressing a strong interest in sustainability information. The study revealed that clear and transparent communication, using detailed yet simplistic information, is perceived as crucial for the consumer to build trust and credibility in sustainability claims. This aligns with findings drawing on signaling theory, which demonstrate that specific cues, such as detailed security and privacy disclosures, significantly boost trust in online environments, with the level of detail being crucial (Wang et al., 2004). Similarly, studies show that concrete signals, like seals of approval or specific sustainability claims, are effective in enhancing trust by reducing perceived ambiguity, which can, in turn, increase purchase intentions (Casado-Aranda et al., 2019). Recently, in the context of fashion, detailed sustainable labeling has also been shown to reduce perceived ambiguity and enhance perceived benefits, trust, and purchase intentions (Cho et al., 2024). These findings underscore the importance of providing clear and specific information to build consumer trust, particularly for brands that may not have established reputations. In essence, while abstract information can seem distant and less relevant, concrete information are perceived as near, clarifying, and essential for trust. Therefore, our research proposes the following:

*Hypothesis 4: Concrete versus abstract information will have a positive effect on trust.*

Building upon the understanding that concrete versus abstract information fosters trust (H4), and that trust influences pride (H3), we propose that trust mediates the relationship between concrete versus abstract information and pride. Building on this, we propose that:

*Hypothesis 5: The positive effect of concrete versus abstract information on pride will be mediated by trust.*

Extending this understanding, we propose that the effect of concrete versus abstract information on sustainable fashion consumption intentions operates through a serial mediation process. In this process, concrete information first enhances trust (H4), which then leads to increased pride (H3). This heightened pride subsequently motivates consumers to engage in sustainable fashion consumption (H1). From this, we propose:

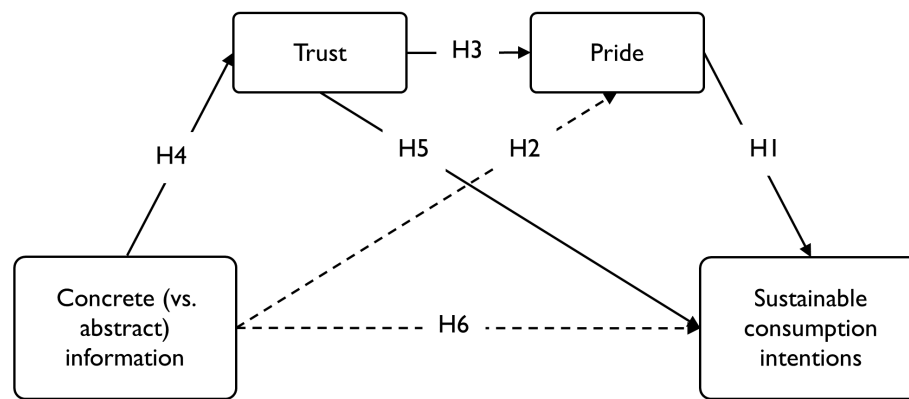
*Hypothesis 6: The positive effect of concrete versus abstract information on sustainable fashion consumption intentions will also be serially mediated by the positive effect of trust on pride.*

### 3. Method

We tested our hypotheses in an experimental study. First, we tested the effect of pride on sustainable fashion consumption intentions (H1). Next, we examined the effect of trust on sustainable fashion consumption intentions (H2) and the effect of trust on pride (H3). Then, we assessed the effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on trust (H4) and whether there was an effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on pride mediated by trust (H5). Finally, we tested whether the effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on sustainable fashion consumption intentions was serially mediated by both trust and pride (H6). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model and hypotheses for the current research.

#### 3.1. Sample, Design and Procedure

The study was designed using Qualtrics, and the data was collected in controlled environments using Prolific. Two hundred and seven respondents aged 18–71 participated in the study. To ensure data quality, we enforced one screener question as an attention check, during which participants were asked to select which product they had been exposed to in the study. Respondents were randomly given five garments to choose from. The five alternative items in the attention check were a jacket, a sweater, trousers, shoes, and a T-shirt. Four respondents were removed due to failure to pass the attention test, while another four were removed due to invalid ID numbers, resulting in a total of 199 remaining valid responses. In terms of gender



**Figure 1.** Overview of the Study and the Hypotheses. Solid Arrows Indicate Direct Effects. Dotted Arrows Indicate Indirect Effect on Pride via Trust (H5) and Indirect Effects on Sustainable Consumption Intentions via Trust and Pride (H6).

distribution, 50.8% were men, 47.2% were women, and 2% identified as “other.” The mean age of the respondents was 41.7, with a standard deviation of 14.5.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions (concrete product information and abstract product information) between-subjects design. Participants first answered questions about their gender and age. Then, they were asked to imagine buying a white T-shirt (the target product). To make the experiment as authentic as possible, we designed it to resemble a natural online environment based on the layout usually found in online stores. The T-shirt looked identical, but the concreteness of the product information varied across the two experimental conditions (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). One group received concrete product information (see Figure 2), in which concrete material and production process was described (Williams & Hodges, 2022). The other group got abstract product information (see Figure 3), where abstract terms like “environmentally friendly” and “green” (Evans & Peirson-Smith, 2018) were used to describe the material and production process. The respondents were roughly equally distributed among the two groups.

### 3.2. Measures

To test whether or not the manipulation worked as intended, we adopted four out of five items for testing

the concreteness of advertisements by Mackenzie (1986), asking the respondents to rate the product information according to how detailed/sketchy, explicit/vague, concrete/abstract, specific/general they thought it was. The original measures also asked the respondents to rate the product information according to how vivid/dull they thought it was, but we found this item irrelevant in this context.

Trust was measured using the five-item ADTRUST Scale (Soh et al., 2009). The respondents were asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with five statements based on the information about the product that they had received (Item wordings: “The information is honest”; “The information is truthful”; “The information is credible”; “The information is reliable” and “The information is dependable”). The strength of the feeling of pride was measured using four items, of which two were adapted from Tracy & Robins (2007b)’s authentic pride scale (Item wordings: *I feel proud based on the purchase I have made*; “*I feel accomplished based on the purchase I have made*”). The first item was chosen because proud is the term most related to pride, and the second because accomplished is the term strongest related to authentic pride and the least connected to hubristic pride Tracy & Robins (2007b). This scale has previously been used in studies on pro-environmental behavior (Adigüzel & Donato, 2021; Onwezen et al., 2013). The two



**Figure 2.** T-shirt with Concrete Information.



**Figure 3.** T-shirt with Abstract Information.

other items were adapted from (Roseman, 1991) and modified to fit the current context (Item wordings: “I feel good about myself based on the purchase I have made”; “I feel pleased based on the purchase I have made”). These items have previously been used in sustainable consumption research (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2014b; Antonetti & Maklan, 2014a).

Sustainable fashion behavior was measured using two variables: Willingness to buy and word-of-mouth endorsement (e.g., Guerreiro & Pacheco, 2021; Wang et al., 2018) both closely linked to pride in research on sustainable consumption intentions. Willingness to buy was measured using three items from Dodds et al.’s (1991) five willingness-to-buy indicators. The three chosen items were modified to fit the current context (Items wording: “I am likely to buy an environmentally

friendly product again in the future”; “I am likely to buy an environmentally friendly clothing/fashion product again in the future”; “When choosing between two similar clothing/fashion product in the future, I am likely to choose the more environmentally friendly.” Word-of-mouth endorsement was measured using three items from Eisingerich et al. (2015). The items measured the willingness to share information with friends and family in person (Item wordings: “I am likely to say positive things about the product to others in person”; “I am likely to encourage friends and relatives to buy the product in person”; “I am likely to recommend the product to others in person”). For all items, the respondent’s level of agreement was measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), except for the manipulation check (concreteness), where the

respondents had to choose between items describing the information as concrete or abstract.

A Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the measurement model and ensure satisfactory fit indices. Two separate models were tested. Model 1 included trust, pride and willingness to buy, model 2 included trust, pride and word-of-mouth endorsement. The CFA indicated that the initial models did not fully meet the fit criteria. While most measures were excellent, the REMSA fell short. To improve model fit, two items “The information is truthful” and “I feel proud based on the purchase I have made” were removed. After this adjustment, the revised model fit indices improved. For the first model the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was 0.98, well above the threshold of 0.95, indicating a strong fit. The RMSEA improved to 0.08, comfortably within Hair’s (2006) “good” range. Additionally, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was excellent at 0.05, well below the 0.08 threshold for acceptability. Similarly, for the second model the fit indices were strong. The CFI was again 0.98, reflecting a well-fitting model. The RMSEA remained at 0.08, which is at the threshold of acceptability based on conventional standards, but still classified as “good” according to Hair et al.’s (2011) interpretation. The SRMR for this model was also excellent, at 0.08, remaining comfortably below the acceptable limit. Cronbach’s alphas for the revised scales were above the 0.70 threshold (Cronbach, 1951), with factor loadings ranging from 0.87 to 0.94, indicating good reliability with our sample. Finally, we averaged the scores obtained for the four items assessing concreteness (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.86$ ), the four items assessing trust (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.93$ ), the three items assessing pride (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.87$ ), the three items assessing willingness to buy (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.87$ ), and the three items assessing word-of-mouth endorsement (Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.92$ ), to constitute an aggregate measure of the constructs. Table 1 provides the item wordings, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach’s alphas for all scales used in the study.

To establish that Common Method Bias (CMB) is not a problem in this study, we will highlight the several steps that were taken to minimize its likelihood. First,

psychological separation was implemented by structuring the study with multiple tasks in sequence, which reduces the chance that participants’ earlier responses would influence their answers to later questions. Additionally, the study used validated scales, such as the ADTRUST scale and the authentic pride scale, which are known for their reliability and clarity. Furthermore, random assignment to experimental conditions (concrete vs. abstract product information) ensures that individual differences between participants do not systematically bias the results, as these differences are evenly distributed across groups.

Moreover, the study incorporated attention checks and removed invalid responses, ensuring that only high-quality data were included in the analysis. Finally, the balanced demographic distribution of the participants, particularly in terms of gender and age, minimizes the possibility of systematic biases based on these factors. These procedural choices align with established recommendations for preventing method bias and provide a strong foundation for concluding that CMB is not a significant issue in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

To further establish that CMB is not a problem in this study, attention was given to both the formulation of the questions and the length of the survey. As mentioned above, the questions were carefully designed using validated and reliable scales like the ADTRUST and pride scales. This ensured that the wording was clear, concise, and unambiguous, which minimizes response bias and reduces the likelihood of participants interpreting the questions in a way that could lead to biased answers. Additionally, the length of the survey was kept manageable to avoid participant fatigue, which can contribute to CMB. A well-paced and balanced survey reduces the risk of participants giving automatic or biased responses due to tiredness or disinterest, ensuring that their responses remain accurate and focused throughout the process.

To further support that CMB is not a concern in this study, we also monitored how much time participants took to complete the survey. In summary, these procedural choices and safeguards are in line with the recommendations from Podsakoff et al. (2012) and collectively provide a strong foundation for concluding that

**Table 1.** Item Wordings, Means, Standard Deviations, Factor Loadings and Cronbach's Alphas.

| Scale                     | Item Wording                                                                                                         | Mean | SD   | FL   | CA   |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Concreteness              | Please select the appropriate option: Detailed/Sketchy                                                               | 1.30 | 0.46 | 0.80 | 0.86 |
|                           | Please select the appropriate option: Explicit/Vague                                                                 | 1.44 | 0.50 | 0.87 |      |
|                           | Please select the appropriate option: Concrete/Abstract                                                              | 1.32 | 0.47 | 0.83 |      |
|                           | Please select the appropriate option: Specific/General                                                               | 1.46 | 0.50 | 0.83 |      |
| Trust                     | The information is honest                                                                                            | 5.09 | 1.09 | 0.77 | 0.93 |
|                           | The information is credible                                                                                          | 4.89 | 1.19 | 0.87 |      |
|                           | The information is reliable                                                                                          | 4.83 | 1.17 | 0.94 |      |
|                           | The information is dependable                                                                                        | 4.85 | 1.17 | 0.90 |      |
| Pride                     | I feel accomplished based on the purchase I have made                                                                | 4.70 | 1.51 | 0.80 | 0.87 |
|                           | I feel good about myself based on the purchase I have made                                                           | 5.06 | 1.43 | 0.89 |      |
|                           | I feel pleased based on the purchase I have made                                                                     | 5.19 | 1.20 | 0.83 |      |
| Willingness to buy        | I am likely to buy an environmentally friendly product again in the future                                           | 5.01 | 1.37 | 0.88 | 0.87 |
|                           | I am likely to buy an environmentally friendly clothing/fashion product again in the future                          | 5.22 | 1.24 | 0.81 |      |
|                           | When choosing between two similar clothing/fashion products, I am likely to choose the more environmentally friendly | 5.03 | 1.41 | 0.82 |      |
|                           |                                                                                                                      |      |      |      |      |
| Word-of-mouth endorsement | I am likely to say positive things about the product to others in person                                             | 4.92 | 1.38 | 0.82 | 0.92 |
|                           | I am likely to encourage friends and relatives to buy the product in person                                          | 4.61 | 1.44 | 0.93 |      |
|                           | I am likely to recommend the product to others in person                                                             | 4.58 | 1.44 | 0.93 |      |

Notes: SD = Standard Deviation; FL = Factor Loading; CA = Cronbach Alpha.

common method bias is not a significant issue in this study.

### 3.3. Results

We started by testing the manipulation, that is, whether the respondents perceive a difference between concrete and abstract product information through a T-test (with perceived concreteness as a function of concrete versus abstract information). Cohen (1988) highlights that T-tests are appropriate for comparing means between two independent groups (concrete vs. abstract information), as they help determine whether observed differences in variables are statistically significant. Levene's test for equality of variances indicated a significant difference in variances between the groups ( $F = 11.097$ ,  $p = .001$ ), which led us to apply Welch's t-test to account

for this discrepancy. The results showed a significant difference in perceived concreteness between the two groups,  $t(193.96) = -4.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . The mean difference between the groups was  $-0.27$  with 95% CI  $[-0.37, -0.16]$ . The group receiving concrete product information perceived this as more concrete ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ) than the group that received abstract product information ( $M = 1.51$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ).

We tested the differences between groups on demographics, first gender then age. The data were assessed for normality within the concrete and abstract groups, with gender as the observed factor. For the concrete group, skewness was  $0.50$  ( $SE = 0.24$ ), indicating mild positive skew, while kurtosis was  $-0.96$  ( $SE = 0.48$ ), suggesting a slightly flat distribution. The abstract group showed near-symmetric distribu-

tion with a skewness of 0.19 ( $SE = 0.24$ ) and kurtosis of -1.16 ( $SE = 0.48$ ), indicating a flatter-than-normal distribution. Although both groups displayed mild deviations from normality, none were severe, indicating approximate normality. Levene's test confirmed the assumption of homogeneity of variances across gender groups ( $p > 0.05$ ). ANOVA results revealed no statistically significant difference between genders on the dependent variable,  $F(1, 20) = 0.97$ ,  $p = 0.33$ . The effect size was small, with  $\eta^2 = 0.005$ , indicating that gender accounted for only 0.5% of the variance. Thus, gender does not appear to have a meaningful impact on the outcome.

The descriptive statistics for age in the concrete and abstract groups showed that the mean ages were 43.38 ( $SD = 14.82$ ) and 40.06 ( $SD = 14.00$ ), respectively. Both groups had small skewness and kurtosis values, indicating mild deviations from normality. Normality tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk) were significant for both groups ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that the distributions were not perfectly normal. Large age ranges can sometimes lead to more variability, which can make normality harder to achieve, especially if there are clusters of ages or outliers. In this case, the mild skewness and kurtosis values suggest that the distribution is not extreme, but there are some deviations from normality that are picked up by the tests. However, given the large sample sizes ( $n = 99$  and  $100$ ), the Central Limit Theorem ensures that parametric tests remain robust, making these deviations unlikely to impact the results (Kwak & Kim, 2017).

To test H1, H2, H3, H4, and H6, we conducted two serial mediation analyses using PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes, 2017), with 5,000 bootstrapped samples. Hayes (2017) highlights the usefulness of PROCESS models for examining complex mediation and moderation effects in psychological research. Additionally, Demming et al. (2017) note that regression-based mediation now offers reliability comparable to structural equation modeling (SEM). In the first model, message concreteness (concrete vs. abstract information) was the independent variable, trust was the first mediator, pride was the second mediator, and willingness to buy was the dependent

variable. In the second model, construal level was again the independent variable, trust was the first mediator, pride was the second mediator, and word-of-mouth endorsement was the dependent variable. The results are summarized in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

### 3.4. Direct Effects

As shown in Figures 2 and 3, pride had a significant direct effect on willingness to buy ( $b = 0.27$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and word-of-mouth endorsement ( $b = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1. Trust had a significant direct effect on willingness to buy ( $b = 0.45$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and on word-of-mouth endorsement ( $b = 0.39$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming H2. Trust also had a significant direct effect on pride ( $b = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H3. Furthermore, the direct effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on trust was significant ( $b = -0.41$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), confirming H4. However, the direct effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on pride ( $b = -0.08$ ,  $p = 0.64$ ), willingness to buy ( $b = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.94$ ), and word-of-mouth endorsement ( $b = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.61$ ) were not significant.

Then, we also conducted a T-test to test H4 further (with trust as a function of concrete versus abstract information). The results showed a significant difference in trust between the two groups,  $t(183.03) = 2.85$ ,  $p = 0.002$ . The mean difference between the groups was 0.41 with 95% CI [-0.13, -0.70]. The group receiving concrete product information perceived this as more trustworthy ( $M = 5.12$ ,  $SD = 0.87$ ) than the group that received abstract product information ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), confirming hypothesis 4.

### 3.5. Indirect Effects

Furthermore, the regression analysis using PROCESS model 6 showed that the indirect effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on willingness to buy through the mediators trust and pride was significant ( $b = -0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.13, -0.02]). Additionally, the indirect effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on word-of-mouth endorsement through trust and pride was significant ( $b = -0.10$ , 95% CI [-0.20, -0.03]). These results confirm H6. However, the indirect effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on willingness to buy through pride alone was not significant ( $b = -0.03$ , 95% CI [-0.18, 0.10]), nor was the indirect effect

on word-of-mouth endorsement via pride alone ( $b = -0.02$ , 95% CI  $[-0.12, 0.06]$ ). These results suggest that trust and pride sequentially mediate the effect of construal level on both willingness to buy and word-of-mouth endorsement. While concrete (vs. abstract) information does not directly impact pride, willingness to buy, or word-of-mouth endorsement, it influences these outcomes indirectly through trust and pride.

PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes, 2017), tests both direct and indirect effects, including specific indirect effects through each mediator and serial indirect effects through multiple mediators in sequence. However, to specifically test the indirect effect of concrete (vs. abstract) information on pride via trust (Hypothesis 5), we employed PROCESS Model 4. This model included message concreteness (concrete versus abstract information) as the independent variable, trust as the mediator, and pride as the dependent variable. As shown in Figure 2 and 3, trust has a significant direct effect on pride ( $b = 0.55$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), reconfirming H2, and concrete (versus abstract) message framing has a significant direct effect on trust ( $b = -0.41$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ), reconfirming H4. Moreover, concrete (versus abstract) message framing has an indirect effect on pride via trust ( $b = -0.23$ , 95% CI  $[-0.42, -0.06]$ ), confirming H5. As revealed in the analysis above, the direct effect of concrete (vs. abstract) message framing on pride was not significant ( $b = -0.75$ ;  $p = 0.64$ ) and, therefore, was not included in Figure 2 and 3. Only significant paths and effects are depicted in Figures 2 and 3, where solid arrows indicate direct effects, and dotted arrows represent significant indirect effects via trust and pride.

To further examine the overall explanatory power of the predictors, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. In this analysis, message concreteness (concrete vs. abstract) was entered in the first step, followed by trust and pride as predictors in the second step. When predicting word-of-mouth endorsement, entering only information type (concrete vs. abstract) in the first step did not yield a significant model,  $R^2 = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.13$ . However, adding trust and pride in the second step significantly improved the model, explaining 33% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $F(2, 195) = 47.19$ ,

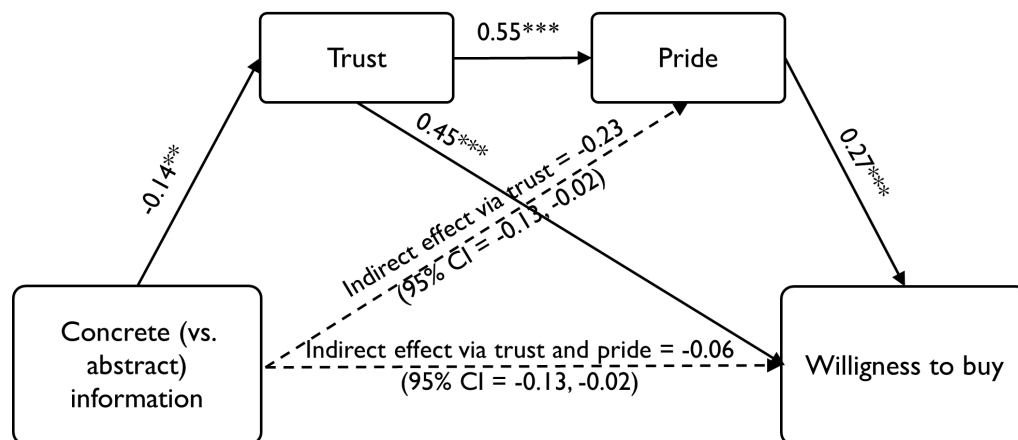
$p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, when predicting word-of-mouth intentions, information type alone explained only 0.6% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.006$ ,  $p = 0.26$ ). However, adding trust and pride increased the explained variance to 37% ( $R^2 = 0.37$ ,  $F(2, 195) = 57.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

#### 4. General Discussion

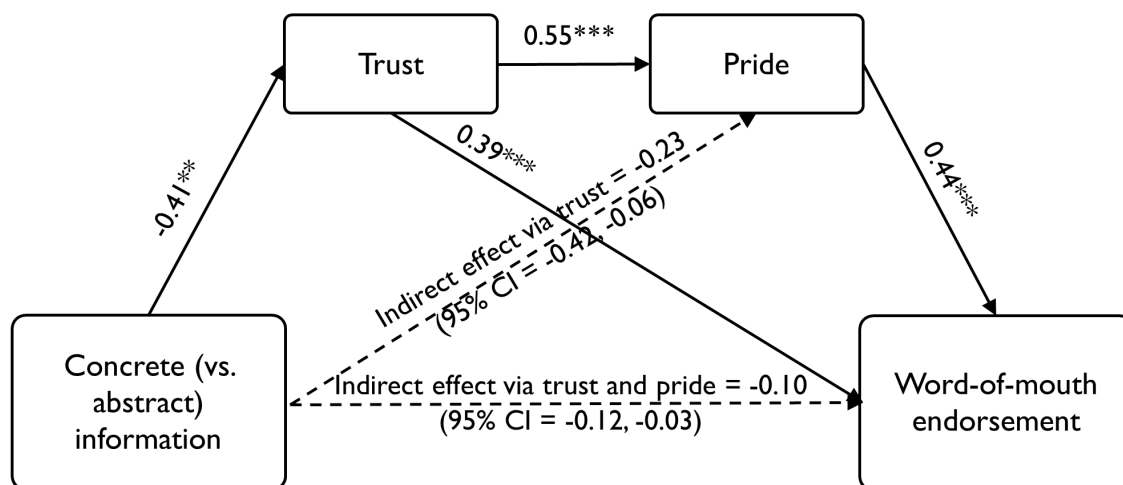
We empirically tested the effectiveness of concrete versus abstract information in the context of sustainable fashion consumption intentions. The results show that concrete information has a stronger effect than abstract information on trust in a company's sustainability claims and that trust in a company's sustainability claims positively affects pride stemming from sustainable fashion purchases, word-of-mouth endorsement and the willingness to buy sustainable fashion products. Moreover, the results show a positive effect of concrete versus abstract information on word-of-mouth endorsement and the willingness to buy sustainable fashion products mediated by the effect of trust, and the positive effect of trust on pride. This demonstrates the importance of trust in a company's sustainability claims in the context of sustainable fashion consumption. Table 2 shows a summary of the results.

##### 4.1. Theoretical Implications

Our research enriches the existing literature on sustainable consumer behavior in three significant ways. First, our research offers a novel perspective on the significant, yet underexplored, influence of trust on pride in the context of sustainable fashion consumption. While existing studies have primarily focused on the individual roles of trust (e.g., Dhir et al., 2021; Policarpio et al., 2023; Williams & Hodges, 2022) and pride (e.g., Adigüzel & Donato, 2021; Islam et al., 2022; Septianto et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2024) and only briefly explored the interplay between these two, with Biggemann et al. (2014) as a notable exception, our study provides valuable insights that enhance the understanding of this relationship. Specifically, we demonstrate a strong mediating role of pride in the relationship between trust and the willingness to purchase sustainable fashion products and between trust and the willingness to engage in word-of-mouth endorsement, thereby deepening the understanding of how trust can catalyze emotional engagement and consumer advo-



**Figure 4.** The Effect of Concrete (vs. Abstract) Information on the Willingness to Buy Sustainable Fashion Products Through the Mediating Effect of Trust on Pride. Solid Arrows Indicate Significant Direct Effects, Dotted Arrows Indicate Significant Indirect Effects via Trust (H5) and Significant Indirect Effects via Trust and Pride (H6). \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 5.** The Effect of Concrete (vs. Abstract) Information on Word-of-Mouth Endorsement of Sustainable Fashion Products Through the Mediating Effect of Trust on Pride. Solid Arrows Indicate Significant Direct Effects, Dotted Arrows Indicate Significant Indirect Effects via Trust (H5) and Significant Indirect Effects via Trust and Pride (H6). \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

**Table 2.** Summary of the Results of the Hypothesis Testing.

| Hypothesis | Relationship                                                                          | Effect / CI              | Support   |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| H1         | Pride → Willingness to buy                                                            | b = 0.27 / 0.14, 0.39    | Supported |
|            | Pride → Word-of-mouth endorsement                                                     | b = 0.44 / 0.30, 0.58    | Supported |
| H2         | Trust → Willingness to buy                                                            | b = 0.45 / 0.30, 0.60    | Supported |
|            | Trust → Word-of-mouth endorsement                                                     | b = 0.39 / 0.22, 0.55    | Supported |
| H3         | Trust → Pride                                                                         | b = 0.55 / 0.41, 0.70    | Supported |
| H4         | Concrete (versus abstract) information → Trust                                        | b = -0.41 / -0.70, -0.13 | Supported |
| H5         | Concrete (versus abstract) information → Trust → Pride                                | b = -0.23 / -0.42, -0.06 | Supported |
| H6         | Concrete (versus abstract) information → Trust → Pride<br>→ Willingness to buy        | b = -0.06 / -0.13, -0.02 | Supported |
|            | Concrete (versus abstract) information → Trust → Pride<br>→ Word-of-mouth endorsement | b = -0.10 / -0.20, -0.03 |           |

cacy. Moreover, our findings contribute to the literature on trust signals by highlighting their role in fostering emotional engagement and consumer advocacy in sustainable fashion consumption. These strong indirect effects can be explained by the necessity of perceived effectiveness or accomplishment and the sense of contributing valuably to society—factors critical in evoking pride (e.g., [Mascolo & Fischer, 1995](#); [Mascolo & Fischer, 1995](#); [Weiner, 1985](#)).

Second, our empirical evidence underscores the critical role of pride in linking trust with word-of-mouth endorsement. Extending previous research (e.g., [Pangarkar et al., 2023](#); [Septianto et al., 2020](#)), our study reveals how trust enhances pride, which in turn activates consumers to promote sustainable products virally. This insight is particularly relevant given the pivotal role of word-of-mouth in consumer decision-making ([Berger, 2014](#)), where trust disseminated through personal recommendations can create a positive loop, enhancing brand credibility.

Third, our findings support a growing body of literature that explores the strategic use of information to build trust (e.g., [Jäger & Weber, 2020](#)) and offer a nuanced understanding of how message framing influences the relationship between trust, pride, and sustainable consumption intentions. We demonstrate that concrete information significantly boosts trust in sustainability claims, which enhances feelings of pride and, consequently, influences consumers' willing-

ness to buy sustainable products and engage in positive word-of-mouth activities. This sequence underscores the importance of how information is presented in shaping perceptions of trustworthiness and fostering emotional connections with sustainable practices.

By elucidating these mechanisms, our study not only contributes to the theoretical landscape of sustainable consumer behavior but also sets a robust foundation for future research aimed at optimizing communication strategies to foster more environmentally responsible consumer actions.

#### 4.2. Managerial Implications

This research addresses the significant environmental challenges posed by the fashion industry, underscoring the pivotal role of strategic marketing communication in fostering the adoption of sustainable fashion practices ([Jones et al., 2014](#)). Our findings suggest that employing concrete information in marketing communications, such as specifying the use of eco-friendly materials, detailing non-toxic chemical processes, and highlighting carbon emission reduction efforts, can significantly boost consumer trust and pride. This approach moves beyond the use of vague descriptors like "environmentally friendly" or "green," providing consumers with clear, tangible details that underscore a brand's commitment to sustainability. Such transparency not only meets the growing consumer demand for honest communication ([Riesgo et al., 2023](#)) but also serves as an effective strategy to

guide consumer behavior toward more sustainable choices. In light of these insights, we recommend that companies critically evaluate their current marketing strategies and consider the integration of specific, concrete details about their sustainability initiatives. This strategic shift can help brands not only strengthen their competitive position but also contribute more effectively to the global movement toward environmental sustainability within the fashion sector. By implementing these recommendations, brands can enhance their market presence, foster consumer loyalty, and play a crucial role in the broader context of environmental stewardship.

#### 4.3. Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into streamlining communication to change unsustainable consumer behavior, our findings have limitations that offer opportunities for future research. Firstly, our reliance on hypothetical scenarios within an experimental framework may limit the generalizability of our findings. Future research could employ real-world observations or longitudinal studies to validate these results and ensure they hold true across actual consumer behaviors. Additionally, the potential influence of cultural differences on the relationships between message framing, pride, trust, and sustainable consumption warrants deeper exploration. For instance, the reaction to concrete information framing might vary significantly between Chinese consumers, who represent a major segment of the global fashion market, and the American consumers studied here (De Oliveira & Nisbett, 2017). Understanding these cultural nuances could enhance the effectiveness of targeted marketing strategies. Furthermore, exploring additional moderators or mediators, such as individual differences, could also enrich our understanding of the dynamics at play. Recent research suggests that segmenting fashion consumers into distinct personas based on their preferences for message framing can be an effective strategy (Kaner & Baruh, 2022). This approach could be integrated into future studies to tailor and optimize communication strategies more effectively.

Moreover, while the current research focuses on

the framing of product information for a generic white T-shirt, future studies should investigate the effects of message framing on a broader range of product types. Such studies could determine whether certain types of apparel are more suitable for different framing strategies. For example, more complex fashion items, such as jeans, which possess multiple attributes like shape, brand, style, and color. Such characteristics could influence the effects of pride, as well as consumer willingness to buy and engage in word-of-mouth endorsement. Finally, our findings indicate that while the impact of trust on sustainable consumption behaviors was robust, the influence of pride was particularly strong on word-of-mouth endorsement compared to its effect on the willingness to purchase sustainable fashion products. This suggests a potentially unique role of pride in promoting viral marketing, which could be a fruitful area for further research. Hopefully, our work will inspire more research in an area where it is urgent to find diverse solutions to prevent the severe consequences of consumers not changing their unsustainable fashion consumption.

Finally, we recognize that the effectiveness of our attention check might be limited, which is particularly crucial in our study as it directly impacts the reliability of the data concerning consumer behavior in sustainable fashion. While our manipulation check for information concreteness was useful, we acknowledge a potential confound related to the amount of information provided. This is significant because an inadequate manipulation check could lead to misinterpretation of how information concreteness affects consumer decisions, which is central to our study's aims. To enhance future research, incorporating multiple attention checks or employing more complex measures could improve the assessment of participant engagement and data quality. Implementing such practices will strengthen the reliability of findings and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of consumer behavior in sustainable fashion.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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