

DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

Mainstreaming Sustainable Fashion?: The Role of Sustainable Fashion Influencers

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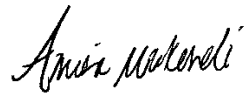
Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing

DECLARATION

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PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORK

Chapter 2 of this thesis was originally published as ‘Sustainable Fashion: Current and Future Research Directions’.

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I (Amira Mukendi) contributed to this paper by conducting the systematic literature review, conceptualising the framework, taking the lead in interpreting the findings, and by taking the lead in writing the manuscript. In this thesis, the paper will be referred to as Chapter 2.

Signed:

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Abstract

In the UK, media interest in sustainable fashion has increased as the negative implications of the fast fashion industry and overconsumption have become more well-known. Over the last 10 years, research on sustainable fashion has also grown. The literature asks how we can move consumption from fast fashion to sustainable fashion. Previous research has begun to consider the role of social media to make sustainable fashion more popular, however, this research is still nascent. Therefore, this thesis draws on dramaturgy as a conceptual metaphor to understand the role of sustainable fashion social media influencers in popularising sustainable fashion. This thesis provides a novel synthesis of sustainable fashion, social media, sustainable communication, dramaturgy (Benford and Hunt, 1992), and perspectives from theorists such as Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1977). 26 sustainable fashion influencers on Instagram were interviewed and visual media were also collected. This thesis has several contributions to the literature. Firstly, in delineating the role of the sustainable fashion influencer, this thesis identifies several strategies that the influencers adopt to communicate their message and overcome practical obstacles in SF influencing. This research identifies a spectrum of sustainable fashion influencers and approaches between #Lifestyle influencers to #Activist influencers. Secondly, another contribution of this work is the novel development of two types of roles in the sustainable fashion space: the ownable role and the given role. While the ownable role reflects the standards set by sustainable fashion influencers on their practice, the given role reflects the aims of capitalism and how it is inextricable from sustainable influencing. Finally, a major contribution of this work is the identification of discrimination in sustainable fashion influencing and strategies that marginalised influencers enact to counteract their exclusion. Overall, this thesis lays the foundation for a more inclusive theory of the role of sustainable fashion influencers in society.

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Glossary

Term	Definition	Page number introduced
boyd*	*The name boyd in this thesis is intentionally lowercased as that is how danah boyd spells their name.	p.2
Dramaturgy	Utilising theatre and drama to conceptualise the social world in some way	p.72
Habitus	A governing principle of practices and a way of thinking based on the environments we find ourselves in throughout our lives	p. 68
Instagram Islands	Individual Instagram profiles where because people have to manage their own profile, the pressures of managing the platform and creating their own content can overshadow other aspects of being in the space	p. 173
Social Media	‘An umbrella term for a diverse set of technologies, websites, mobile apps, and protocols that facilitate the creation, annotation, and sharing of digital media’ (Marwick, 2019, p. 309).	p. 56
Strategic Concealment	The action that occurs once the influencer feels it is no longer wise to be transparent and instead conceals aspects that may harm their credibility	p. 189
Strategic Disclosure	Refers to influencers only talking about fashion rather than other aspects of sustainable living that they have not yet “perfected”	p. 190
Strategic Honesty	Refers to being honest about unsustainable consumption and purchases to a limit	p. 188
The Allowable Character	The standards that SF influencers impose upon themselves and other SF influencers	p. 222
The Given Role	The role of the influencer as given by the capitalistic market which aims to neutralise the threat of more inclusive or transformative sustainable fashion by commodifying SF into products that influencers can sell.	p. 230
The Ownable Role	The role that SF influencers have created for themselves within the movement. This is how SF influencers understand their responsibilities to themselves and to their audience. This role includes standards that indicate legitimacy in the space; these standards are those that influencers apply to themselves and to others.	p. 214
Sustainable Fashion	The variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption, and production practices	p. 18
Sustainable Fashion Influencer	A person who successfully creates content about topics including but not limited to SF products, ideas, ways of living, and shares this content on social media which then results in a relatively high level of engagement on social media platforms. These individuals are relatively well known in the space they occupy	p. 59

1 INTRODUCTION

1.0 PREAMBLE

Drawing on drama as a metaphor, this interpretative doctoral thesis explores the innerworkings of the sustainable fashion social media field. This research adopts a novel perspective by bringing together sustainable fashion, social media, dramaturgy (Benford and Hunt, 1992), and Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of fields and habitus. It highlights the experiences of sustainable fashion social media influencers who are aiming to challenge the fashion industry through every post. The main contribution of this thesis is that it sets the foundation for a more inclusive theory of the role of sustainable fashion influencers in society. Additional contributions include the identification of two roles of sustainable fashion influencers in the movement, the identification of four strategies used to communicate sustainable fashion, and also the identification of exclusion and adaptive strategies in the sustainable fashion movement. This chapter opens by providing the research context and rationale for this doctoral thesis [1.1], the aims and objectives of this thesis [1.2], an overview of the methodology [1.3], and a brief overview of the thesis chapters [1.4].

1.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

This thesis tells the story of sustainable fashion social media influencers on Instagram from 2017-2021. Instagram is one of the key social media platforms for fashion inspiration (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016) and has over 1 billion users (Newberry, 2021). Typically, fashion influencers are seen as the bane of sustainable consumption's existence (Nasinde, 2020; de Ferrer, 2021) yet there is a growing group of people aiming to redefine what the role of a fashion influencer is all about. It is these fashionable, yet environmentally and socially conscious individuals that this thesis focuses on. In recent years, interest in sustainable fashion (SF) has grown in terms of consumer demand (Granskog et al., 2020), government focus (Adegeest, 2021), and in the media (Mubarak, 2020). Interest in SF is also increasing in the literature as discussed in Chapter 2 which presents a systematic review of SF in management. As will be discussed further in Chapter 2, sustainable fashion goes by many names which has resulted in *conceptual ambiguity* as people try to navigate

what exactly it entails. Because of this, even if people do believe that SF is important, the steps to act on this knowledge are not clear (Bly et al., 2015; Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018). Consequently, its theoretical possibility and practical viability are called into question. Based on an exploration of SF definitions, this thesis defines SF as ‘the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption, and production practices’ (Chapter 2). Currently, there is a trend in SF research to focus on the purchase of sustainable fashion rather than the full consumption cycle. For example, a lot of the research aims to identify factors that encourage people to buy SF (Ciasullo et al., 2017; Brandão and da Costa, 2021; Rausch and Kopplin, 2021). This focus results in questions around the ‘attitude-behaviour gap’ where despite people having positive views of SF, they do not buy it (Perry and Chung, 2016; Reimers et al., 2016; Diddi et al., 2019; Park and Lin, 2020). This framing views SF primarily as something to be purchased rather than something to be engaged in. SF practices also include actions such as laundering (Jack, 2013), developing personal style to reduce the reliance on trends (Hirscher et al., 2018), and repairing clothes (Lapolla and Sander, 2015). Nevertheless, research on engaging people in SF is important. Recent research has begun to explore the use of social media to promote SF. Researchers have considered blogs (Bly et al., 2015; LeHew and Patwary, 2018), forums (Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012; Shen et al., 2014), and now social media (Kim et al., 2020; Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021). However, much of the research focuses on analysing the SF content and not on the creator themselves.

Social media influencers are people that have been able to accrue an audience through their content creation online (De Veirman et al., 2016). These individuals have gained the trust of their audiences and are able to influence them through this bond (Garcia-Rapp, 2017). In social media research, similar trends can be found in that the research on influencers often focuses on how they can increase purchase intention (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020) or otherwise create value for brands (Britt et al., 2020). I suggest that this focus is due to the dominant social paradigm of our time which frames unlimited production, consumption, and growth, as a good thing; and aims to restrict our imaginations in developing solutions that will effectively dismantle it (Kilbourne et al., 1997; Prothero et al., 2011). This thesis suggests that the focus on purchasing SF and on influencers only as selling tools is misaligned with the needs of sustainability.

In addition to its commercial applications, social media networks enable people to publicly share their ideas and communicate with others (boyd and Ellison, 2007 – boyd is intentionally lowercased). Social media networks present an arena for influencers who are passionate about a topic, such as SF, to freely share and engage with others also interested in the topic. The features of social media resonate with theories around sustainable communication. One way of communicating about sustainability is the ‘green commodity discourse’ which aims to promote sustainable values through the market (Prothero et al., 2010). If people can be convinced they need fast fashion through marketing, why can they not be convinced that they do not through marketing? These are the type of questions that this literature aims to answer. Kemper and Ballantine (2019) categorise this approach into the category of ‘reformative sustainability marketing’, which focuses on consumption, sustainable lifestyles, and wellbeing. Prothero et al. (2010) argue that between 2000 and 2010, evolving consumption habits have caused brands and other stakeholders to start being more environmentally aware. They argue that if consumers continue to demand change, their consumption activities can change the dominant social paradigm (Prothero et al., 2010). Kemper and Ballantine (2019) argue that approaches such as these may be helpful in redefining the relationship between consumption, consumer wellbeing, and how much stuff we really need. In 2021, there is an opportunity to re-examine these ideas in the context of social media.

Looking beyond consumption, the possibilities of how influencers can make change in social movements has remained relatively unexplored in the SF literature. Because of the impact of influencers, I suggest that there is a role for social media influencers in the wider movement towards sustainable fashion however our understanding of that role is still nascent. Moreover, in terms of social media research, there is also an opportunity to acknowledge sustainability and the ecological crisis to consider how influencer impact can be deployed in different ways.

Recently, the media has applauded SF influencers for being changemakers in social media space and the fashion industry (Eggenberger, 2019; Mayer, 2020), illustrating the importance of looking deeper into this category of influencers. In Chapter 3, I define a SF influencer as *‘a person who successfully creates content about topics including but not limited to SF products, ideas, ways of living, and shares this content on social media which then results in a relatively high level of engagement on social media platforms. These individuals are relatively well known in the space*

they occupy'. Therefore, this thesis aims to address the gaps in SF and social media research by focusing specifically on SF influencers on Instagram. Through this aim I explore the context and motivation that SF social media content is created in while casting a critical, and curious eye, on the implications of such framings in the wider context of the movement. Understanding how the SF influencers conceptualise their role and the types of content they create is important to understanding the picture of SF being created on social media.

However, it would not be accurate to say that SF influencers cannot also be problematic. Bly et al. (2015) conducted a study with SF bloggers, which they termed 'Sustainable Fashion Pioneers'. These pioneers redefined SF for themselves to find what works for them in light of the perceived contradictions in the term. Bly et al.'s (2015) study focused on how the bloggers navigate SF in their own lives but what is still relatively unknown is how they reconcile tensions in their SF consumption publicly for the followers of their blogs. This thesis addresses the public side of SF communication to understand how influencers reconcile and communicate SF to others while trying to maintain their credibility as 'pioneers'. Moreover, considering the consumption focus of SF and social media, to uncritically accept the SF influencers' framings seems to be misguided. Although SF social media content may be beneficial, the question is, beneficial to who? These are additional themes that I address in Chapters 7 and 12 of this thesis.

1.1.1 Theoretical Framework

So far a complex picture is building up of individuals who create content on social media about SF based on their private consumption practices to influence others. Considering the ambiguity of SF, people adopt a variety of approaches to SF influencing. In a group, there are many occasions where people present ideas that others may not agree with. Further, there are a variety of other actors also involved the SF conversation on social media. Therefore, I find it prudent to define the SF social media space as a field, to conceptualise how these different actors fit together. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1977) ideas of habitus and fields, the SF social media space can be understood as a field consisting of competing definitions, positions, and approaches. Consequently, not only are influencers trying to communicate SF to those outside of the field, but they also need to navigate the internal dynamics of the field. Previous research on SF and social media tends to focus on

consumers' response to SF social media content (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Kim et al., 2020), or utilise content analysis to see how people talk about SF on social media (Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021), and not necessarily how SF influencers also shape the movement behind the scenes. To explain this more, I draw on dramaturgy as a metaphor to show that the role of SF influencers has both backstage and frontstage components. The backstage and frontstage aspects of the SF influencer role must be taken into consideration to understand how SF influencers fit into the wider SF movement. Utilising Benford and Hunt's (1992) framework of dramaturgy, I adopt a novel perspective by conceptualising the SF social media field as a drama where the influencers are the protagonists, trying to be the moral good in murky waters. Within Benford and Hunt's (1992) framework, I focus specifically on 'scripting' and 'staging' to focus on how SF influencers conceptualise their role. 'Scripting' refers to elements such as the cast and defining their roles, whilst 'staging' refers to the management of the stage to portray the performance.

Through the lens of dramaturgy, I contribute to the SF literature by conceptualising new roles of the SF influencer. Previous literature has found that SF social media content primarily have utility for promoting brands and consumption (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Strähle and Graff, 2017; Kim et al., 2020). This thesis describes two new roles. One, their '*ownable role*', or the role that the SF influencers conceptualise for themselves. It is based on how SF influencers understand their responsibilities to themselves and to their audience. The ownable role includes standards that indicate legitimacy in the space; these standards are those that influencers apply to themselves and to others. Here I introduce the SF influencer habitus which is reflected in the '*allowable character*', or the boundaries of what a SF influencer should be. And two, their '*given role*', the role given by the dominant social paradigm of our time to keep us debating on the merits of SF vs fast fashion, rather than asking what is really going on here. The given role of the influencer is given by the capitalistic market and aims to bring SF into alignment with the fashion industry and wider dominant market system. Specifically, this thesis contributes to conversations around SF communication by those such as Bly et al. (2015), Lundahl (2014), Lehew and Patwary (2018), McKeown and Shearer (2019); and Jones (2020). The dramaturgical roles identified in this thesis contribute to the literature by explaining why certain approaches, such as the focus on brands and consumption, are prevalent in the SF space. Also, by looking at SF influencers as cast members, my analysis reveals that there are issues of representation in regard to who is seen as a SF

influencer and broadly, as part of the movement. The issue of representation was an emergent theme arising from the interviews. I also contribute to the literature by revealing how these issues of casting seem to not be an oversight, rather it is done by a group that I call the ‘Isms’, or the structural ills of society such as racism, sizeism, and more. These structural barriers impact the role of SF influencers in ways that have not yet been addressed in the SF and social media literatures.

This thesis asks, ‘*what is the role of SF influencers in the sustainable fashion movement?*’ Through 26 qualitative interviews with SF influencers from around the world, I find that the SF influencer experience is not as straightforward as the literature suggests. In doing so, this thesis advances the SF literature by building towards a more inclusive theory of the role of SF influencers in society. This thesis does this by exploring a nascent medium for SF communication, developing the role of the SF influencer, and identifying its potential and practical obstacles that need to be overcome for it to be realised. Moreover, this thesis strengthens the link between SF, sustainable communications, and macro-marketing by bringing these ideas into a new context.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overarching research question of this thesis is ‘*what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?*’. This thesis aims to highlight the complexity and messiness inherent in the role from a dramaturgical perspective. Therefore, four objectives have been developed to help answer the research question.

Table 1.1 Table of Research Objectives

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Objective 1: To analyse how SF influencers conceptualise their roles and responsibilities in the SF social media space. (See Ch. 6, 9, and 10)	The purpose of this objective is to understand how individuals who choose to take up this role of SF influencers perceive their role and obligations in this space.

<p>Objective 2: To explore what facilitates or constrains the SF influencers’ role in carrying out their role. (See Ch. 7, 8, 9, 10)</p>	<p>The purpose of this objective is to understand what and how different factors may impact the SF influencers and their message.</p>
<p>Objective 3: To explore who is cast in the role of SF influencer, the relationships within the cast, and what implications that may have on the SF movement. (See Ch. 7)</p>	<p>The purpose of this objective is to gain insight into who is able to be cast in the role of a SF influencer.</p>
<p>Objective 4: To explore how other actors are conceptualised through the eyes of the SF influencers to illustrate the complexities of this space. (See Ch. 8)</p>	<p>The purpose of this objective is to shed light on who else is in this space and how they might influence how SF influencers carry out their role.</p>

To answer this question and fulfil these objectives, I now describe the research methodology that this thesis adopts.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an interpretive methodology to enter the behind-the-scenes world of SF on Instagram. This study focuses on Instagram as it is one of the go-to social media platforms for fashion inspiration (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016). I conducted 26 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with SF Instagram influencers, conducted between February 2019 and March 2020. The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to four hours in length and were primarily conducted online through platforms such as Skype, Zoom, and WhatsApp. Most of the interviews were done in this way because of the location of the participants and because of the Covid-19 pandemic. I interviewed people based in the USA, UK, India, Canada, South Africa, Dubai, and Australia. The sample was made up of primarily women (25) and one man. The interviews focused on how SF influencers conceptualise their roles and how they navigated tensions present therein.

Having described the rationale and positioning of this thesis, as well as the research objectives and methodology, I now provide an overview of the thesis to act as a playbill as the reader moves through the thesis.

1.4 THE PLAYBILL: OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

This thesis draws on dramaturgy as a metaphor for the SF social media space. The thesis is divided into two main parts. It first begins by setting the scene by reviewing the literature on sustainable fashion, social media, and sustainable communication in Chapters 2 and 3. The thesis then introduces the theoretical lens applied to the analysis in Chapter 4. Following these chapters, I then explain the methodology implemented in this study in Chapter 5. From there we move to the second half of the thesis which presents the findings and analysis chapters, which are Chapters 6 to 10. Chapters 6 to 8 focus on the ‘scripting’ aspects of the dramaturgical framework while Chapters 9 and 10 focus on the ‘staging’ aspects of the framework. The findings chapters first conceptualise the role of SF influencers (Chapter 6) and then discuss who is cast in that role in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is the last chapter that focuses on ‘scripting’ and introduces the other cast members. The latter two findings’ chapters, Chapters 9 and 10 describe the management of the SF influencer role by focusing on the production of content as well as how influencers manage their image and businesses. In Chapter 11, I discuss the findings in light of the relevant literature before concluding in Chapter 12 by bringing everything together, identifying contributions, and providing future research recommendations. I now summarise each chapter.

1.4.1 CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW: SUSTAINABLE FASHION: CURRENT AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This chapter presents a published systematic review on SF research in the management literature. This chapter conceptualises SF research in a two-by-two matrix of ‘pragmatic’ to ‘radical’ research and ‘consumption’ to ‘production’ research. In this matrix I place the key themes of supply chain; social retail marketing; consumer behaviour; consumer practices and communities; social marketing interventions; sustainable fashion business models, and future leaders.

1.4.2 CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW: SF AND SOCIAL MEDIA

This chapter narrows down the focus from the broader systematic review to examine SF communication. This chapter reviews the literatures of SF communication, social media, and sustainable communication to ground the importance of the research question. The main gap

identified in these literatures is that as of yet, little research has looked at the role SF influencers on Instagram in the quest to make SF mainstream.

1.4.3 CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL LENS

This chapter introduces the theoretical lenses that guide this study. The chapter opens with discussions on Bourdieu (1977) and his theories around habitus and fields. The chapter then introduces the dramaturgical lens and how it has been operationalised in this study as a metaphor to understand the internal and external dynamics of the SF influencer space. I utilise Benford and Hunt's (1992) dramaturgical framework to investigate the role of SF influencers. This thesis focuses on the 'scripting' and 'staging' of aspects of this framework.

1.4.4 CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

This chapter walks the reader through the interpretive methodology of the study. The chapter opens by discussing the philosophical context that this thesis sits in and then goes on to discuss my position in the research. I describe how identity has been inextricable in the conducting of this research and how that is reflected through the writing of this thesis. In this chapter I discuss the sampling procedure and how I created the SF influencer database for this study. Through 26 semi-structured interviews with SF influencers, I gain access into the world of SF influencers.

1.4.5 CHAPTER 6: PROTAGONISTS

This chapter is the beginning of the findings chapters. This chapter is also the first of the chapters focused on 'scripting'. It is in this chapter that we meet our protagonists, the SF influencers. This chapter addresses Objective 1 to analyse how SF influencer conceptualise their roles and responsibilities in the SF social media space. This chapter introduces the three different approaches to SF influencing: #Lifestyle influencers (n=13), #Activist influencers (n=10), and #Bit-of-both influencers (n=3). I describe these different approaches in reference to the tone used to talk about SF and the type of change that people perceive is needed to bring SF about. From there, the chapter focuses on the role of SF influencers in the SF movement. SF influencers engage people in SF through a variety of communication strategies: *fluidity*, *baiting*, *frank talking*, and *SF for all*. Due

to their influence, SF influencers also act as trusted gatekeepers in the movement by sharing information about SF and working with brands.

1.4.6 CHAPTER 7: CASTING: WHO IS (NOT) CAST IN THE ROLE?

This chapter is the second findings chapter which focuses on ‘scripting’. This chapter addresses Objectives 2 and 3 which are to explore what facilitates or constrains the SF influencers in carrying out their role and to investigate who is cast in the role of SF influencers, respectively. The themes of this chapter were emergent as questions around representation were not part of the original research design. This chapter introduces the issues of inclusion that SF influencers face in trying to enact their role. SF influencers may face exclusion from the movement on the following bases: personal characteristics, expertise, location, and culture. I then present four adaptive strategies that SF influencers implement to create space for themselves and others in the movement: *being a voice, taking up space, bringing in experiential knowledge, and sharing the mic*.

1.4.7 CHAPTER 8: OTHER CAST MEMBERS & DIALOGUE

This chapter addresses Objectives 2 and 4 which are to identify the other members of the SF drama and consider how they may impact the SF influencer role. This chapter is the final chapter on ‘scripting’. The other characters are the antagonists (fast fashion influencers, big fast fashion brands, and (over)consumers), those negatively affected by the lack of SF, audience, media, SF brands, and social media. These characters are developed through the eyes of the SF influencers and act as plotlines that influencers use to explain their actions.

1.4.8 CHAPTER 9: STAGING: THE PRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the next aspect of the dramaturgical framework which is ‘staging’. This chapter focuses on how the strategic decisions discussed in Objectives 1 and 2 translate into how SF influencers approach content production. As part of this chapter, I discuss the costumes, setting, props, and production that make up the influencers’ content.

1.4.9 CHAPTER 10: STAGING: THE DRESSING ROOM

This chapter is the second chapter focused on ‘staging’. This chapter also addresses Objectives 1 and 2 by analysing how SF influencers manage their public image and considering how this may impact their role. In doing so, I discuss three strategies for image management: *strategic honesty*, *strategic concealment*, and *strategic disclosure*. The second half of this chapter focuses on how SF influencers manage the business aspects of their personal brands. The primary way influencers finance their platforms is by working with brands, but some influencers pursue alternative funding models to avoid the conflicts of interests that come from working with brands.

1.4.10 CHAPTER 11: DISCUSSION

This chapter weaves together the previous findings chapters to answer the research question of ‘what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?’ In answering this question, the data show that there are two main roles in being a SF influencer. Firstly, I introduce the concept of the ‘ownable role’, or the role that SF influencers have created for themselves within the movement. In this role the primary aim of SF influencers is to get people interested in SF. This is done differently for each influencer group thus I place the different approaches to influencing on a continuum. Within that role is the ‘allowable character’, or the boundaries that SF influencers impose upon themselves and others in the movement. This character unifies SF influencers together into an identifiable category. I connect this concept to the SF influencer habitus, as it guides the influencers’ actions in the field. I introduce four elements of this habitus which are to: have the right motivation and values, support SF consumption, work with the right brands, and align public and private consumption. The chapter then introduces the second main role which is the ‘given role’, or the role given by the market and capitalistic system to keep the fashion industry from changing too much. The market system uses influencers in two main ways: to de-radicalise SF; and to dress up the facts, making the facts around SF seem less negative than they are.

1.4.11 CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSION

The thesis concludes by reflecting on the study. I discuss how this research has achieved the objectives laid out in Chapter 1.2., clarify the theoretical contributions, and provide recommendations for future research and final commentary.

1.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has introduced the key concepts of this thesis, SF, social media, dramaturgy (Benford and Hunt, 1992), and Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of fields and habitus. This chapter has demonstrated how the SF influencer's role is primarily theorised in terms of its usefulness to increase purchase intention (McKeown and Shearer, 2019; Kim et al., 2020). This thesis expands theorising around SF influencers by asking '*what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?*'. In answering this question, I lay the foundation for the construction of a more inclusive theory of the role of SF influencers in society. Having provided an overview of the thesis, I now review the literature on SF in management.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW: SUSTAINABLE FASHION: CURRENT AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

2.0 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the published version of my systematic literature review on SF. This chapter fits into the thesis by providing an overview of the key trends in SF research in management. The research crosses seven domains: supply chains, social retail marketing, consumer behaviour, consumer practices and communities, social marketing interventions, future leaders, and sustainable business models, which have been organised along the *radical-pragmatic change*, and *production-consumption continua*. This paper has been reformatted to be consistent with the thesis. I now present the paper starting from the abstract.

Abstract

Purpose:

The sustainable fashion literature is fragmented across the management discipline, leaving the path to a sustainable fashion future unclear. As of yet, there has been no attempt to bring these insights together, or to more generally explore the question of ‘*what do we know about sustainable fashion and where do we go from here?*’ The aim of this review paper is to bring together the sustainable fashion field, identifying opportunities for societal impact and further research.

Design/methodology/approach:

A systematic literature review was conducted from the first appearances of sustainable fashion in the management literature in 2000 up to articles published in June 2019, resulting in 465 included articles.

Findings:

The results illustrate that sustainable fashion research is largely defined by two approaches: pragmatic change and radical change. Our findings reveal seven research streams that span across the discipline to explore how organisational and consumer habits can be shaped for the future.

Research limitations/implications:

What is known about sustainable fashion is constantly evolving with a variety of contributions from multiple fields. The paper aims to provide a representative sample of the state of sustainable fashion in management literature to date, but space limitations make a full exploration of all contributions impossible.

Practical implications:

This review provides decision makers with insights that have been synthesised from across the management field.

Originality/value:

This review identifies knowledge gaps and informs managerial decision making in the field, particularly through serving as a foundation for further research.

Keywords: Sustainable Fashion; Ethical Fashion; Marketing Ethics; Sustainable Business Models

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The media spotlight has been firmly cast on the fashion industry. Far from celebrating an industry that represents two percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and is valued at three trillion US Dollars (FashionUnited, 2018), a critical spotlight has brought into focus a whole host of fashion sustainability ills. Be it unwanted clothes going up in smoke at Burberry, or documentaries such as 'Fashion's Dirty Secrets', the devastating social impact of the world's fashion industry has been brought into the mainstream, calling into question traditional fashion consumption and production practices. To deal with these issues, sustainable fashion (SF) has emerged as a broad term for clothing and behaviours that are in some way less damaging to people

and/or the planet. SF – and related practices of ethical fashion, eco-fashion, and slow fashion – highlights alternative approaches to fashion and presents a challenge to the rest of the industry by suggesting that ‘fast fashion needs to slow down’ (Dory, 2018). Yet, while the practical climate for SF develops at a rapid pace through an increasing number of start-up accelerators, clothes swapping events, consumer-facing scoring and measurement tools, and civil society organisations, the academic literature has been slow to define and conceptualise SF, despite some notable developments (e.g., Fletcher, 2008; Henninger et al., 2016).

It is against this backdrop that this review paper is situated. At present, a limited body of research explores the phenomena of SF beyond the micro-institutional or individual consumer level (Ekström and Salomonson, 2014; Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Previous literature reviews that have made headway, have focussed on only specific *aspects* of SF: e.g., supply chains (Karaosman et al., 2016; Köksal et al., 2017; Strähle and Müller, 2017), consumers (Tey et al., 2018) and retailing (Yang et al., 2017). As of yet, these insights have not been systematically brought together and the question of ‘*what do we know about sustainable fashion and where do we go from here?*’ remains unanswered. At a time when interest in SF as a research domain of vital societal interest is mounting (Johnson et al., 2013; Strähle and Müller, 2017), this paper provides a review which is intentionally provocative and designed to promote further development of the field, both academically and practically. It encourages researchers to connect theory to practice, to ask relevant questions, and to engage with the public to drive a more sustainable future for fashion.

This paper makes two important contributions. First, this paper is the first to systematically draw together the different aspects of SF in a cross-disciplinary, holistic, and coherent way, building on key scholarship (e.g., Karaosman et al., 2016; Köksal et al., 2017; Yang et al., 2017). Our analysis is not limited to a particular discipline or practice but instead identifies *what is known* and *what is yet to be known* about SF across the management discipline. As a result, the paper offers a working definition of SF: *the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption, and production practices*. It also offers a conceptual model to aid the reader in integrating SF across different domains. Second, this review serves as a foundation for identifying knowledge gaps and informing managerial decision making in the field.

In this respect it considers both the research challenges of sustainable consumption (McDonagh et al., 2011), as well as the incorporation of production into this discourse and what this means for the emergence of ‘Sustainable Consumption & Production (SC&P)’ as a research field (McDonagh et al., 2011).

This paper first discusses the systematic literature review methodology, before defining SF and conceptualising SF. It then moves on to unpacking two approaches to understanding SF: pragmatic and radical change. The paper concludes with a discussion and future research agenda, before providing concluding remarks and managerial implications.

2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a meta-narrative systematic literature review approach to synthesise SF literature across the management discipline. Meta-narrative syntheses integrate qualitative and quantitative works while maintaining the integrity of the original work (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006; Thomas and Harden, 2008; Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009). It is a useful approach for understanding complex issues, especially in emerging fields like SF, where the literature is still developing (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006). Utilising Denyer’s eight-step process to conducting a systematic review (see Denyer and Pilbeam, 2013, drawing on Denyer and Tranfield 2009), the methodology is structured around the key steps of: 1) developing a protocol, 2) conducting a comprehensive search, 3) screening titles and abstracts, 4) developing explicit selection criteria, 5) evaluating results, 6) extracting and synthesising information, 7) reporting results, and 8) informing research and policy. Denyer and Tranfield’s (2009) process has been specifically designed for management studies and emphasises informing theory and practice, key goals of this paper. The following section summarises the steps into two phases, an outline of the review process (phase 1: Denyer and Pilbeam’s steps 1-4) and a discussion of how the review was conducted (phase 2: Denyer and Pilbeam’s steps 5-8).

Phase 1: Denyer's Steps 1 - 4 – Review protocol to sample selection

A preliminary research protocol was developed as a guideline for conducting the review based around the question, '*what is SF?*'. A scoping study revealed ambiguity around what constitutes SF, with conversations fragmented across disciplines (Johnson et al., 2013). Systematic reviews in management are an iterative process (Tranfield et al., 2003), especially when applying meta-narrative synthesis (Denyer and Tranfield, 2006). Considering this, the protocol was adjusted to answer, '*what do we know about SF in management?*'.

In step 2, to ensure that a wide variety of sources would be represented in the review, a time limit was not imposed. The comprehensive literature search included research from the first studies on SF, and related terms, in management in 2000 until June 2019 (Tranfield et al., 2003, Denyer and Tranfield, 2009). Because research relevant to management is published in a variety of journals, nine of the major databases were selected. Emerald Insight, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, ABI/Inform, SAGE, Springer, Taylor and Francis, Business Source Complete, and Scopus were searched between October to December 2017 with updates conducted in June 2019 to account for more recent publications. In each database the keywords: 'sustainable fashion', 'ethical fashion,' 'slow fashion,' 'eco fashion,' and 'green fashion' were searched because these terms are used synonymously with SF (Thomas, 2008; Bly et al., 2015; Henninger et al., 2016). Databases such as ResearchGate and Google Scholar were used as secondary databases if a document could not be found in full text in the first instance.

The comprehensive search found more than 6,200 articles (including duplicates) across the nine databases. The initial screening of titles and abstracts (step 3) included articles from every discipline to conceptualise a holistic definition of SF; papers around material composition were included, for instance. The protocol was further refined through the use of inclusion and exclusion criteria (step 4) to include papers of relevance to the management discipline specifically (see Table 2.1). Initial screening reduced the number of relevant articles to 1,315, excluding duplicates. The authors regarded this number cautiously as many of the papers used terms such as 'sustainable fashion' or 'ethical fashion' peripherally, resulting in false positives that were excluded in step 4 through the exclusion of articles without a primary focus on sustainable fashion (see Figure 2.1). This study includes a wide range of sources including empirical and conceptual journal articles,

conference papers, and book chapters. The full texts were then reviewed, and 465 studies were selected for inclusion. To accommodate EJM word limits, a full list of articles can be obtained from the authors on request.

Table 2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	<i>Inclusion</i>	<i>Exclusion</i>	<i>Justification</i>
Subject	Focuses on SF management and SF principles	Studies regarding general ethical or sustainable consumption, design, and material science.	Non-SFM studies would not answer the research question.
Language	Studies written or translated into English	Translations not available	To ensure comprehension and accurate representation of the articles
Access	Can access full-text	Cannot access full-text	To ensure a more accurate interpretation of an article
Methodology	All	No exclusions	All methodologies included for a holistic view
Nature of article	All	No exclusions	All types of literature included for a holistic view

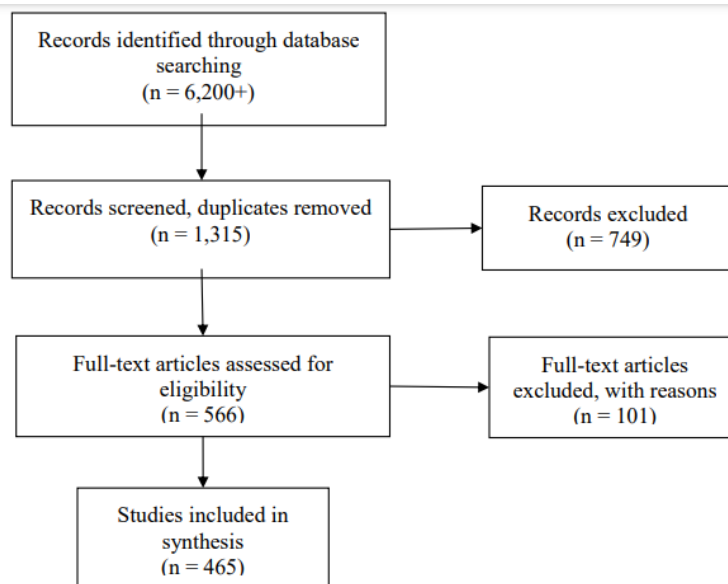


Figure 2.1 Adapted PRISMA Flow Chart (Moher et al., 2009)

Phase 2: Denyer's Steps 5-8 - Conducting the review

In step 5 selected articles were imported into Mendeley while in step 6 details of the selected studies were extracted into a standardised database. Following the meta-narrative synthesis process, each article was primarily assessed for its internal validity (Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009) and the database was regularly discussed amongst the co-authors. Studies were broadly assessed using Denyer and Pilbeam's (2013) criteria, however, all works were assessed through methods appropriate for the publication (i.e., journal article, book chapter, etc.) and its research design. An interpretative approach was taken to synthesise the various sources of data into a narrative of what is known about SF today (see Table 2.2). Step 7 (report of results) can be found in the findings section, and step 8 (informing research and policy) can be found in the discussion and conclusion of this paper.

Table 2.2 Assessment Criteria adapted from Denyer and Pilbeam (2013)

<i>Paper Type</i>	<i>Assessment Criteria</i>
<i>Empirical</i>	Theoretical justifications Clear and appropriate research design Appropriateness of sample Consistency of findings
<i>Conceptual</i>	Relevant findings for policy, practice, and future research Theoretical framework Relevant contributions for policy, practice, and future research

2.3 FINDINGS

2.3.1 Defining Sustainable Fashion

SF really started to appear in the management literature around 2008 with pioneering works such as Fletcher (2008), Beard (2008), De Brito (2008), and Clark (2008). However, more than 10 years on, an agreed upon definition of SF is still elusive (Henninger et al., 2016; Reimers et al., 2016). Offering a precise definition is beyond the scope of this paper, particularly given the fluid and evolving nature of sustainability in fashion, and also the recognition of limitations in identifying an 'absolute' SF item or practice. This is largely due to the subjectivity that surrounds sustainability as being, 'intuitively understood, yet has no coherent definition' (Henninger et al., 2016, p.402).

This section does, however, offer a working definition that pertains to the parameters of SF; what it is, and what it is not. This paper forwards the view that SF *includes the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty free and anti-consumption, and production practices.*

This working definition was formulated through a synthesis of the emerging definitions present within the literature to date. For instance, several studies have attempted to define SF from a consumer perspective (Joergens, 2006; Hill and Lee, 2012; Jung and Jin 2014; Jung and Jin, 2015; Reimers et al., 2016). Other researchers have adopted a more macro approach, incorporating infrastructure, norms, and wider stakeholders into their definitions (see Thomas, 2008; Haug and Busch, 2016). It is worth noting that while overlaps exist between SF, ethical fashion, eco-fashion, slow fashion, and green fashion research, in practice, these terms do have different connotations, and rarely intersect. This was touched upon by Reimers et al. (2016), who explored different conceptions of ethical fashion between researchers and consumers. Although academia views SF as including both social and environmental aspects, consumers primarily define SF as using environmentally friendly language (Hill and Lee, 2012), although this is not without contradiction (Bly et al., 2015). Consumers simply expect brands to do the right thing, to act morally and uphold industry standards (Reimers et al., 2016).

As illustrated in Table 2.3, SF is not academically synonymous with slow fashion (Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013) or eco-fashion (Carey and Cervellon, 2014). SF is most closely related to ethical fashion, which is reflected in the overlap of the literature and definitions (Lundblad and Davies, 2015). Joergens (2006, p. 361) suggests that ethical fashion can be defined as: ‘clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton,’ demonstrating ethical fashion to be a process as well as a product. However, SF has transformed the “while” into the more flexible “and/or” (Goworek et al., 2012; Henninger et al., 2016). For instance, Goworek et al. (2012, p. 938) base their definition of SF on Joergens’ (2006) definition, however, they have expanded the scope of what might be considered SF to, ‘clothing which incorporates one or more aspects of social or environmental sustainability, such as Fair Trade manufacturing or fabric

containing organically-grown raw material.’ This sentiment is also shared by Henninger *et al.* (2016), who suggest that SF incorporates environmentally friendly raw materials and/or a more socially responsible means of production, and Lundblad and Davies (2015, p.150) who define SF as an attempt to, ‘correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation.’ Here the keyword is “perceived” as it illustrates the selective nature of SF. In sum, unlike previous definitions of ethical or eco-fashion, the emergent definitions of SF that this paper draws upon are less specific over time, and more malleable in offering consumers and producers the option to select which aspects of sustainability they implement. This does however leave a broad scope for both academics and practitioners to make competing claims for SF, which may intersect, or even conflict with each other; a topic explored further below.

Table 2.3 Sustainable Fashion Terminology

<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<i>Ethical Fashion</i>	“fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton.”	Joergens, 2006, p.361
	“the positive impact of a designer, a consumer choice, or method of production as experienced by workers, consumers, animals, society and the environment.”	Thomas, 2008, p.533
	“clothing that seeks to minimise its negative impact on the environment, employees, and animals via processes that include, but are not limited to, slow fashion.”	Reimers <i>et al.</i> , 2016, p.388
<i>Eco Fashion</i>	Any clothing item made in an environmentally friendly process including recycled materials, nontextile materials, and reused clothing	Carey and Cervellon, 2014
<i>Slow Fashion</i>	A philosophy, design approach, and method of consumption that prioritises the relationship between the wearer and the clothing, local production and resources, and ethical treatment of workers	Clark, 2008; Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013; Tama <i>et al.</i> , 2017
<i>Sustainable Fashion</i>	".... ecological integrity, social quality, and human flourishing through products, action, relationships and practices of use"	Fletcher, 2008, p. xviii3

2.3.2 Conceptualising Sustainable Fashion

The SF literature can be segmented into two broad approaches: *pragmatic change* and *radical change* (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Building on Doherty et al.'s (2013) definition of pragmatic consumption, pragmatic change relates to the use of mainstream retail and marketing methods to grow SF impact. Pragmatic change approaches work within the system, using the dominant social paradigm (DSP) around consumption and production to encourage stakeholders to “do better”, adopting familiar language and practices (Prothero et al., 2010; McDonagh and Prothero, 2015). For example, brands such as *People Tree* and *Patagonia* utilise physical stores, e-retailing, advertising, and social media marketing just as their non-sustainable counterparts do, despite their goals being markedly different. *Radical change*, on the other hand, relates to more transformative practices that work *outside* of, or counter and *challenge* the system and mainstream consumerist culture (Doherty et al., 2013). Such examples include anti-consumption, pioneering innovative business models, and investing in individuals (such as through educational programmes around clothing repair) to encourage social change.

In reviewing the current literature, it is clear that both pragmatic and radical change can occur throughout the continuum from SF *production* to *consumption* (see Figure 2.3). A *producer* ‘convert[s] a collection of raw materials into a finished product’ for use in the market (Davies, 2014). *Consumption* is defined as, ‘the acquisition, usage, and disposition of products,’ (Holbrook, 1987, p.128). Products in both instances refer to ‘goods, services, ideas, events, or any other entities that can be acquired, used, or disposed of in ways that potentially provide value,’ (Holbrook, 1987, p.128). This definition implies that consumption is not just the purchase of items but also ideas or behaviours.

In commencing this systematic review, we provide the following Figures and Tables exploring the dominant fields of extant SF literature. Figure 2.2 demonstrates the growth of research across the SF field in general. Next, Figure 2.3 is a new conceptual framework that maps the field of SF across seven clusters that emerged from the analysis: supply chains, social retail marketing, consumer behaviour, consumer practices and communities, social marketing interventions, future leaders, and sustainable business models, which have been organised along the *radical-pragmatic change*, and *production-consumption continua*. This framework aims to help the reader understand

the complexities and challenges of SF theory and practice. Table 2.4 offers more detailed descriptions of each of these clusters, and Table 2.5 illustrates the methodological approaches most prevalent in each cluster.

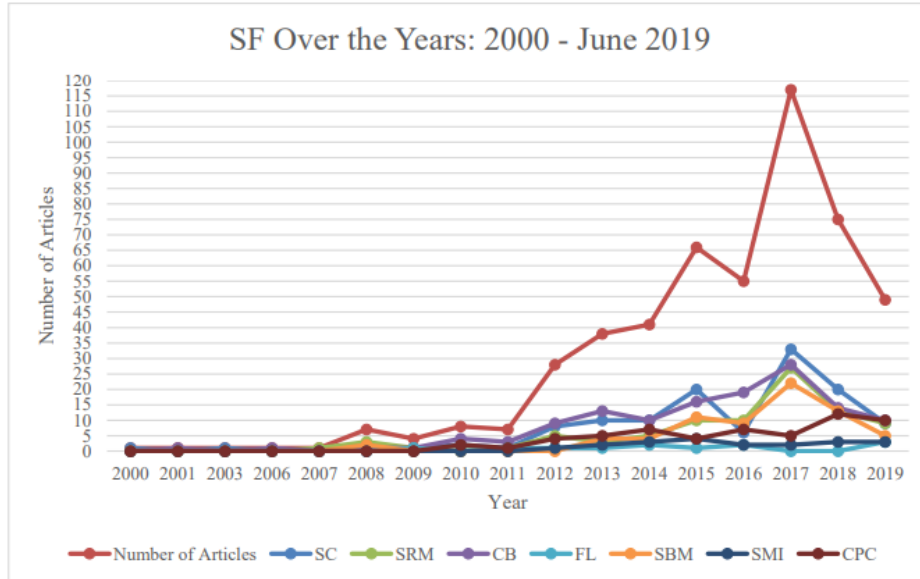


Figure 2.2 Number of papers per year

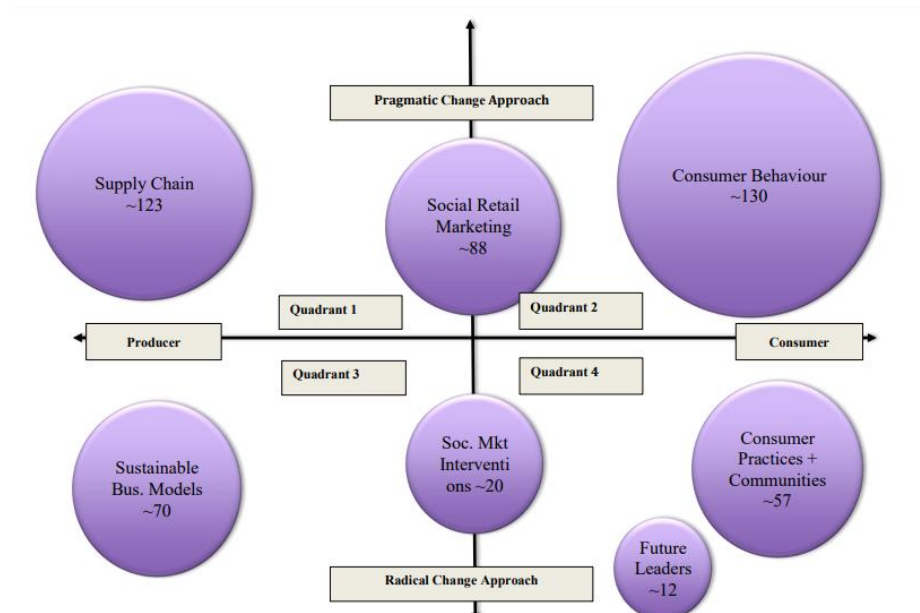


Table 2.4 Pragmatic and Radical Change Approaches to Sustainable Fashion

<i>Domain</i>	<i>Research Characteristics</i>	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Key Papers</i>
Pragmatic Production - Quadrant 1			
<i>Supply Chain</i>	Refers to the movement of raw materials through design, fabrication, and manufacturing to produce a sustainable fashion (SF) <i>product</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Traceability & Sourcing ● Supplier Configuration ● Barriers and facilitators 	de Brito et al., 2008; Shen, 2014; Turker and Altunas, 2014
Pragmatic Consumption - Quadrant 2			
<i>Social Retail Marketing (SRM)</i>	Encouraging people to buy more SF rather than conventional clothing through traditional retail marketing methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Retail marketing methods ● Consumer responses to advertising techniques 	Beard, 2008; Yan et al., 2012; de Lenne and Vandenbusch, 2017 Han et al., 2017
<i>Consumer Behaviour</i>	Psychologically driven consumer perspective, with a focus on consumer attitudes and purchase intention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consumer perceptions, attitudes towards SF, and willingness to pay for SF 	Joergens, 2006; Chan and Wong, 2012; McNeil and Moore, 2015; Lundblad and Davies, 2016
Radical Production - Quadrant 3			
<i>Sustainable Business Models</i>	Business models that “seek to create positive benefits or reduce negative impacts on the environment and society...” (Bocken, 2017, p. 82).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● New business models & barriers to implementation ● Barriers/opportunities for SF entrepreneurs 	Fletcher, 2010; Pederson and Netter, 2015; Todeschini et al., 2017
Radical Consumption - Quadrant 4			
<i>Social marketing Intervention (SMI)</i>	Non-commercial bodies attempting to influence the wider population to adopt sustainable behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interventions into people’s consumption ● Persuading people to consider SF behaviours 	Janigo and Wu, 2015; Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016b
<i>Consumer Practices and Communities</i>	Research into activities that consumers have incorporated into their lifestyles and related communities of practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SF behaviours i.e. upcycling and swapping clothes 	Cevellon et al., 2012; Bly et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2015
<i>Future Leaders</i>	Sustainability education in business schools to empower students to be change-makers e.g. PRME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teaching students about sustainability & preparing them for the workplace 	Armstrong and LeHew, 2014; Williams, 2016

Figure 2.5 Research Bubbles of SF Literature in Management

Table 2.5 Research Methodology of Selected Studies

<i>Research methodology</i>	<i>Conceptual works, industry articles, and literature reviews</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>	<i>Quantitative</i>	<i>Mixed</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pragmatic Change					
<i>Supply Chain</i>	44	46	26	7	123
<i>SRM</i>	28	17	32	11	88
<i>Consumer Behaviour</i>	12	26	78	14	130
<i>Pragmatic Total</i>	84	89	136	32	341
Radical Change					
<i>SBM</i>	24	30	10	6	70
<i>SMI</i>	3	12	2	3	20
<i>CPC</i>	7	13	28	9	57
<i>Future Leaders</i>	2	8	1	1	12
<i>Radical Total</i>	36	63	41	19	159
Total	120	152	177	51	500*

Although 465 articles have been incorporated into this review, 500 are represented across the matrix (Figure 2.3) to accommodate articles which addressed multiple fields. The size of the bubbles is also representative of the relative ‘weight’ of research in the field to date in this area. It is important to note that the number of articles in the SF management literature has increased steadily since 2001, but rapidly since 2012, peaking in 2017, and falling in 2018 (Figure 2.2). Why there has been such a rapid increase and then decrease is difficult to pinpoint because of the academic publishing cycle but crises such as the factory collapse in Rana Plaza (2013), the launch of Fashion Revolution Week (2014), and documentaries such as *The True Cost* (2015), may have contributed to the rise. There are no notable temporal patterns across the seven individual clusters identified through our analysis, but as shown in Table 2.4 and Figure 2.3, clusters such as future leaders, social marketing interventions, and consumer practices and communities, have a much lower volume, illustrating the necessity of further research into more radical forms of SF practices. The literature so far is dominated by Western voices (the USA and Europe) which is unsurprising considering these countries purchased more than 24 billion items of clothing in 2017 (Common Objective, 2018). China has the highest quantity of clothing purchased, estimated at 40 billion, but

this same dominance is not reflected in the literature. The literature could greatly benefit from more nuanced analysis around subcultures in the West and other cultures around the world, and how they relate to SF. Additional research is also needed into how people experience the effects of SF, or lack thereof, so that researchers and practitioners can have more nuanced view into the problems they are attempting to solve.

Across these different clusters, several methodological approaches are used (Table 2.5). Although there appears to be a balance between qualitative and quantitative research in the SF literature, quantitative research dominates the pragmatic consumer behaviour cluster, usually involving the application of tried and tested theories of rational-cognitive decision-making commonly applied to other sustainable consumption contexts (such as food and energy usage). Conversely, qualitative work is more embedded in the radical change and supply chain studies. However, from both a supply-chain and radical change perspective, SF is conceptualised as a unique context in need of further theory development. These issues are explored below.

2.3.3 Sustainable Fashion: A Pragmatic View on Production and Consumption

Pragmatic change approaches operate *within* the dominant social paradigm (DSP) around consumption and production (Prothero et al., 2010; McDonagh and Prothero, 2015). In this tradition, there are contributions clustered into supply chain, social retail marketing, and consumer behaviour research streams, which are discussed below.

2.3.3.1 Supply Chain

Supply chain refers to the movement of raw materials through design, fabrication, and manufacturing to produce a SF *product*. The supply chain is an integral part of making a product more sustainable (Henninger et al., 2015; Lee, 2017), and thus is a vital field for SF practice, both within small (and micro) firms, as well as large, global multinationals. In this section we look first at the emergent literature on micro-organisations, followed by an exploration of brand owners, finishing with a review of the very limited research into garment manufacturers themselves.

The supply chains of micro-organisations, such as the Danish fashion company *Noir* (Black and Anderson, 2010), are the most common context in this domain as they occupy a unique position;

they have sustainability at their core but implement it with considerably fewer resources and structure than more established brands (Caniato et al., 2012; Henninger et al., 2015; Di Benedetto, 2017). Their size has enabled them to develop a culture around sustainability and make more attempts to ensure transparency throughout their supply chains (Caniato et al., 2012; Goworek, 2011; Bouzon and Govindan, 2015; Henninger et al., 2015; Joy and Peña, 2017). Although the size of smaller brands can be advantageous, micro-organisations often lack power and influence in the market (Kogg, 2003; Black and Anderson, 2010; Caniato et al., 2012). With limited budgets and minimum order quantities, micro-SF brands are forced to make a variety of trade-offs to manage costs and increase profitability (Pessôa et al., 2015; DiVito and Bohnsack, 2017). For example, in times of economic uncertainty, sustainability initiatives are often cut (Perry et al., 2014). Moreover, the literature has shown that micro-organisations may not measure the impacts of their sustainable interventions, nor do they seek certification; therefore, it is unclear how they measure their impact, determine their sustainability, and communicate this to other stakeholders (Henninger et al., 2015; Moon et al., 2015). Researchers should be wary of over generalising the results gained from these cases or setting them as exemplars for the industry as the sustained environmental impact of their models is still unclear. Yet, it is worth noting that micro-organisations can create useful societal debate and influence larger organisations to transform the fashion industry through a ‘David’ (micro-organisations) and ‘Green Goliath’ (global brands) approach (Molderez and De Landtsheer, 2015). Further theory development would be helpful in this area, moving away from the broadly descriptive, or purely conceptual, approaches undertaken to date.

Regarding global brands, governance, either by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (e.g., Jastram and Schneider, 2015 and Ciarapica et al., 2017) or through legislation (e.g. Ma et al., 2016; Niu et al., 2017 and Oelze, 2017), has been investigated as a method to support and enforce companies to implement SF practices. Niu et al. (2017) suggest government regulations that provide subsidies may encourage retailers to transform how they procure garments. Beyond governance, the literature suggests manufacturers should adopt various SF practices such as: utilising environmentally friendly dyes (Fulton and Seung-Eun, 2013), adopting innovative procurement strategies and life cycle analysis (Pui-Yan Ho and Choi, 2012; Resta et al., 2013; Wang and Shen 2017; Niu et al., 2017; Cimatti et al., 2017; Roos et al., 2017), coordinating closed-

loop supply chains and developing less wasteful philosophies (Pui-Yan Ho and Choi, 2012; Bouzon and Govindan, 2015; Nagurney and Yu, 2012; Strähle and Schnaidt, 2017; Dissanayake et al., 2017), localising operations (Fulton and Seung-Eun, 2013; Shih and Agrafiotis, 2018), and upcycling (Paras and Curteza, 2018), to tackle sustainability in supply chains. While such ideas are useful in stimulating creativity, strategic insight into actual supply chain recommendations and decision-making is lacking, as is quality research into the market-based impacts of making such changes to competitive positioning. Moreover, for the textile industry, one with such scope and power, there are surprisingly few studies exploring the means through which companies optimise the sustainability of their upstream operations or how they motivate suppliers to transform.

Interestingly, even within the supply chain research on SF, it is often the retailers and brand owners that are the focus of research, rather than the suppliers themselves. With brands coming under fire for not ensuring safe working conditions in the third-party factories they work with, it is no surprise that few papers have been given access to organisations to analyse the supply chain from the supplier perspective (e.g., Kogg, 2003; Oelze, 2017; Kim and Zorola, 2018). This limits our understanding of the ways in which brands can drive, or be complicit in, unsustainable behaviours. Additionally, suppliers face an asymmetric power situation (Kim and Zorola, 2018) whereby brands make demands and set prices. Further understanding the supplier perspective is imperative to facilitating more sustainable supply chains. Despite codes of conduct developed by brands (Turker and Altunas, 2014), suppliers are the ones who ultimately decide whether to enforce them (Köksal et al., 2017).

Research has, however, shown that it is not just brand pressure that promotes supply chain transformation but actually the culture of the supplier, their collaborative networks, the competitive landscape (for both brands and suppliers), and the degree of innovativeness in the textile manufacturing sector (Oelze, 2017; Kim and Zorola, 2018). What is emergent is that suppliers feel that third party auditors want to find something wrong, or that when change is required they do not have the support of their brand partners to make actual changes (Huq et al., 2016). As such, many suppliers feel excluded in sustainability discussions, and face pressures and overlapping requirements from multiple different brand partners (Kim and Zorola, 2018). The authors suggest that further research is needed to understand SF practices from a supplier

perspective, in different cultural contexts, and how these practices could be expanded across the industry (Caniato et al., 2012; Köksal et al., 2017; Oelze, 2017). Further, few studies incorporate social welfare in their assessment of supply chain sustainability, despite this being a key focus of SF literature to date (Köksal et al., 2017). Those that do are largely underpinned by the application of Fair Trade principles (Goworek, 2011; Dissanayake et al., 2017), with little exploration of other issues of societal interest in the supply chain. Just one study focuses on animal welfare (Molderez and De Landtsheer, 2015) and another on consumer perceptions of leather alternatives (Jung et al., 2016). Considering recent brands *Gucci* and *Michael Kors*' commitments to cease fur sourcing and the popularity of fur-free brand *Stella McCartney*, further insight is needed into the impact of these contextual changes. While de Brito *et al.* (2008) call for a holistic approach to SF supply chain research, research needs to move beyond solving environmental issues in the supply chain to consider issues of social responsibility and animal welfare; clear gaps for future research (Ni et al., 2017; Köksal et al., 2017).

2.3.3.2 *Social Retail Marketing*

The primary question for social retail marketing (SRM) papers is: how can SF be mainstreamed by using traditional retail marketing methods? Some say make it 'trendy' (Beard, 2008; Haug and Busch, 2016; Blanchet 2017), while others question if this is the best approach (Winge, 2008). SRM focuses on the actions of the retailers, promoting the idea that SF is achievable through business-as-usual practices. The key aspects of SRM research fall into four areas: branding, communications, marketing materials, and barriers to brand adoption of SF.

First, although important, the advice on SF branding is, at best, conflicted. On the one hand, consumer brand schemas are incredibly important in influencing how consumers perceive the fit between sustainability and the brand (Phau and Ong, 2007; Dabija, 2018; Lee et al., 2012; Kim and Hall, 2015). On the other hand, consumers may be more open to SF by fast fashion brands than previously conceptualised (Hill and Lee, 2015). It follows that different segments need to be approached using different marketing methods to speak to heterogeneous consumer needs (Kim et al., 2013; Bhaduri and Ha-Brookshire, 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Di Benedetto, 2017; Dabija, 2018).

Despite stories of the impending climate disaster and the ill-treatment of garment workers, many consumers do not consider sustainability when shopping for clothing (Harris et al., 2016). The key question for SF brands is thus, how to attract the uninterested consumer?

The SF literature offers a variety of suggestions in relation to this conundrum, from promoting fashionability (Beard, 2008), positioning SF as a social norm (Kim et al., 2012), as well as emphasising hedonic benefits (Visser et al., 2015) or luxury brand experiences for SF (Karaosman et al., 2017; Han et al., 2017a; Amatulli et al., 2017; see Athwal et al., 2019 for review on sustainable luxury). Brands can also utilise celebrity endorsement (Kang and Choi, 2016; Blanchet, 2017), and invest in creating an inspiring narrative around the brand (Jang et al., 2012; Blanchet, 2017) or SF itself (Blanchet, 2018; Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018). However, if these strategies fail to truly educate consumers about SF, consumption patterns are repeated, and the DSP is further strengthened. For dedicated SF consumers, Kim et al. (2012) suggest that marketing claims need to be more specific about the sustainability of the product rather than resorting to discussion of superficial attributes, such as donations to a cause (Phau and Ong, 2007). Interestingly, anti-consumption advertisements by SF brands have been found to lower purchase intention but not necessarily influence consumers' attitude toward buying the product (Hwang et al., 2016). While SF makes consumers think twice, it still results in patronage of the brand (Hwang et al., 2016). More analysis of different messages, (un)intended consequences, and longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of different techniques would be useful in developing branding strategies fit for a sustainable future.

Secondly, research into communication channels reveals the importance of retailers as facilitators of SF consumption and behaviours (see James and Montgomery, 2017a). Both offline and online channels are important for SF retailing (Han et al., 2017b). Physical locations enable consumers to experience SF; challenging their preconceived notions of what SF is and create positive attitudes towards it (Han et al., 2017a; Di Benedetto, 2017; Overdiek, 2018). Yet, social media is identified as the most-used channel to reach consumers (Han et al., 2017b) and is an important platform for communicating norms and fostering brand loyalty in consumers (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Kang and Kim, 2017; Strähle and Graff, 2017). Promoting SF on social media has been found to increase purchase intention, positive attitudes, and self-efficacy (de Lenne and

Vandenbosch, 2017). Across all of these channels, brands are encouraged to be transparent and ‘open’ with customers (Beard, 2008; Henninger et al., 2015; James and Montgomery, 2017c) although the opaque nature of SF as a concept makes the scope of overclaiming a major area of concern.

Da Giau et al.’s (2016) matrix of brands’ commitment to, and disclosure of, SF practices, illustrates this challenge. Brands range from ‘low disclosure’ companies, very committed to SF but who do not advertise it, to those that are, ‘not at all committed’ but overemphasising the minimal actions that they have adopted. The ideal location in the matrix is to be a company highly committed to SF and able to communicate it effectively, but this quadrant lacks case examples from the extant literature, in particular regarding what efficacy in communications looks like for highly committed SF brands. With successful SF brands like *Stella McCartney*, *People Tree*, and *Reformation*, it would be useful to know what types of messaging and communication are useful for different channels in fostering more SF behaviours.

Thirdly, the majority of research related to marketing material has focussed on the use of ‘hang tags’ that educate consumers at the point of sale (Thomas, 2008; Moon et al., 2015; Blanchet, 2017, Ma et al., 2017). However, research has found that these channels are rarely understood, with many consumers unaware of the purpose they serve and why they should care (Sonnenberg et al., 2014; Henninger, 2015; Hwang et al., 2015). It has been argued that having information about SF practices on clothing tags is better at generating attention around SF at the point of purchase (Hyllegard et al., 2014). It is however important that labels should be clear and accurate to avoid confusion and greenwashing (Thomas, 2008; Ma et al., 2017; Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018), as few consumers can truly discern between different terms and accreditations (Hwang et al., 2015). Digital technologies – such as applications that reveal the source of an item – have also been suggested to provide people with more detailed and engaging information (Hyllegard et al., 2012; Strähle and Sfameni, 2017). However, methods for developing sustainable behavioural habits at the point of purchase remains an area that is understudied to date.

Finally, dealing first with the barriers to SF adoption, the SF movement has ebbed and flowed throughout the years, making some sceptical of its ‘stickiness’ (Winge, 2008). Although there are many strategies SF brands can implement, they also face a variety of barriers which have been

well explored in the literature. SF brands face the same demands as traditional brands (Beard, 2008); however, they have the additional task of educating consumers about what SF is and why they should pay more for it (Harris et al., 2016). Small SF brands face barriers such as a lack of capital for certification and materials (Moon et al., 2015), as well as uncertainty about the appropriateness of existing certifications (Henninger, 2015). As a result of barriers on both sides, profit margins are slim (Beard, 2008; Moon et al., 2015). These issues illustrate why branding is pivotal for the success of SF brands (D'Souza, 2015). In sum, SRM studies blend psychological cues and other retail marketing methods used by traditional retailers, but with a different goal in mind: to help consumers switch from fast fashion to SF. However, SF brands must be wary of acting too much like their non-SF counterparts; this balance is yet to be seriously acknowledged in the SF literature (Winge, 2008; Wilber and Pasricha, 2016). SF retailers should challenge themselves to be truly different by taking a holistic view of SF that includes the personal and collective mental well-being of consumers (see also Mick et al., 2011) and respect for producers.

2.3.3.3 *Consumer Behaviour*

A large proportion of the consumer behaviour literature evaluates SF on a micro-level to explore consumer perceptions of SF products and concepts. This section explores these consumer characteristics, as well as drivers and barriers of SF in the context of consumer markets.

Focusing first on the characteristics of consumers, a number of studies have found several drivers of SF consumption. It is argued that self-identified sustainable consumers are becoming tired of mindless consumption and desire freedom from the monotony of trends and pressures to consume (Bly et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016b). Some consumers are even beginning to avoid fast fashion entirely for reasons including poor product quality, the desire to support local brands, and the lack of creativity and originality in clothing choices (Kim et al., 2013). The desire to express oneself through cultivating personal style and generally being “different” from others is a recurring theme in the literature (Gam, 2011; Kim et al., 2013; Han and Chung, 2014; Bly et al., 2015; Cho et al., 2015; Lundblad and Davies, 2015). Moreover, recent work suggests that consumers are becoming more aware of issues in the fashion industry and a desire to ‘vote’ with their dollars (Ertekin and Atik, 2015; Moon et al., 2015).

The notion of consumer voting is frequently espoused by the media as an easy solution to SF (Wicker, 2017). However, preliminary research on consumer attitudes, values, and perceptions found little evidence that knowledge of ethical issues influences SF consumption (Joergens, 2006; Moore, 2019). Later, consumer attitudes towards the environment were found to be more influential on purchase intention of SF, rather than attitudes toward SF products specifically (Chan and Wong, 2012). In Cowan and Kinley's (2014) study, previous purchases of SF and attitudes towards purchasing SF were found to be the most influential on purchase intention (Cowan and Kinley, 2014). However, in opposition to the dominant research in the supply chain area, the consumption literature repeatedly finds that individuals do not consider the environment in relation to clothing consumption (Joy et al., 2012). The conflicting results illustrate uncertainty about which consumer characteristics, if any, are the most important under which circumstances. However, Table 2.6 illustrates various values and attitudes that have been found to influence purchase intention of SF.

Table 2.6 Examples of Characteristics Leading to Purchase Intention

Environmental concern	Gam, 2011; Yan <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Cowan and Kinley, 2014; Thompson and Tong, 2016; Razzaq <i>et al.</i> , 2018
Environmental Compassion	Geiger and Keller, 2017
Environmental knowledge	Cowan and Kinley, 2014; Diddi and Niehm, 2016; Sadachar <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Kong <i>et al.</i> , 2016
Social pressure/influence	Kang <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Cowan and Kinley, 2014; Ciasullo <i>et al.</i> , 2017
Environmental guilt	Cowan and Kinley, 2014
Perceived environmental impact	Cowan and Kinley, 2014
Previous environmentally friendly purchases/ behaviour	Gam, 2011; Ellis <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Cowan and Kinley, 2014
Normative judgements of varying types	Yan <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Manchiraju and Sadachar, 2014; Kim <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Diddi and Niehm, 2016; Kong <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Diddi and Niehm, 2017; Nam <i>et al.</i> , 2017; de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017
Self-image	Kang <i>et al.</i> , 2013; Lunblad and Davies, 2015; Wei and Jung, 2017
Desire to be well dressed, individual, and stylish/ Fashion involvement	Gam, 2011; Cho <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Jung and Jin, 2016; Thompson and Tong, 2016; Razzaq <i>et al.</i> , 2018
Race	Ellis <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Prefer to shop in high end specialty stores	Ellis <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Pay for their own clothing	Ellis <i>et al.</i> , 2012
Moral obligation	Hwang <i>et al.</i> , 2015
Religiosity	Razzaq <i>et al.</i> , 2018
Perceived risk	Su <i>et al.</i> , 2018

Focusing on consumer drivers, social norms and social pressures are repeatedly found as drivers of SF consumption in consumer psychology studies (Kang et al., 2013; Cowan and Kinley, 2014; Kim et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2016). However, Kang et al. (2013) note social pressure and knowledge of social norms only work on the non-converted because SF consumers are already convinced of the legitimacy of SF issues. Moreover, although social pressures (Kang et al., 2013; Cowan and Kinley, 2014; Ciasullo et al., 2017) and ‘saving face’ (Wei and Jung, 2017) have been found to significantly influence SF consumption, Sadachar et al.’s (2016) found interpersonal influence did not. Parallels can be drawn here with other types of consumers. Ochoa (2010) explored the relationship between organic food and organic clothes consumption. Interestingly, they found no direct relationship between organic food consumption and willingness to pay for organic clothing (Ochoa, 2010). Similarly, Ritch’s (2015) and Nilssen et al.’s (2019) study found the link between the slow food movement and slow fashion consumption is a tenuous one, as people struggle to translate the benefits of slow or organic food into fashion. This emphasises the uniqueness of the SF context. The role clothes play in people’s lives, and the complexity of sustainability claims being made, distinguish SF from the typical commodity product categories which dominate extant sustainable consumption research (McDonagh and Prothero, 2014). This suggests a need to move away from the application of extant nudge theories on enhancing sustainable consumption, to a unique set of theory building tools around SF consumption behaviours, built from the fashion consumption (not sustainable consumption) literature.

Finally, numerous barriers to SF consumption have been identified in the literature (Harris et al., 2016). A lack of accessibility and convenience prevents consumers from being able to easily buy or experience SF (Ritch and Schröder, 2012; Han et al., 2017a; Harris et al., 2016; Crane, 2016; Lai et al., 2017). Perry and Chung (2016) suggest that consumers may not have the time, capacity, or desire to invest extra energy into finding SF. The lack of visibility discourages consumers, often promoting misconceptions about SF as being premium and exclusive (Henninger et al., 2016; Han et al., 2017a). As most SF brands are sold online, there are interesting questions around equality and access to sustainable goods for those with limited access to such platforms or with limited time to seek them out. The SF aesthetic is also often perceived as being unfashionable by mainstream consumers (Joergens, 2006; Gam, 2011; Hill and Lee, 2012; Joy et al., 2012; Cherny-Scanlon, 2016; Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013; Carey and Cervellon, 2014; Harris et al., 2016;

Lai et al., 2017). Paradoxically, the less fashionable an item is, the more sustainable consumers believe it to be (Wagner et al., 2018), but so far the question of how to change such preconceptions remains unanswered. Further scepticism surrounds the quality of SF (Wong and Taylor, 2001; Harris et al., 2016; Jung et al., 2016; Kong and Ko, 2017). Yet, Lundblad and Davies (2015) found existing customers of SF brands viewed the product's attributes (including quality) very highly. SF studies illustrate that cultural differences and the idea of style varies across the world (Joergens, 2006; Carey and Cervellon, 2014; Achabou and Dekhili, 2015; Kong and Ko, 2017) and likely even within countries, suggesting that SF might be more attractive to some demographics and markets (e.g., Scandinavian countries) than others.

As mentioned, SF is largely perceived to be a premium product (Gam, 2011; Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013; Ertekin and Atik, 2015; Moon et al., 2015; Crane, 2016; Henninger et al., 2016; Harris et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2017; McLaren and Goworek, 2017). While some studies have found that people are willing to pay more for SF (Tama et al., 2017; Ciasullo et al., 2017), sustainability is often seen as an additional benefit to clothing rather than an integral aspect (Magnuson et al., 2017). Many consumers find it difficult to justify higher prices (Ritch and Schröder, 2012) and although second-hand fashion is often posited as an alternative for buying new SF clothing, for many consumers the idea of buying second-hand is unattractive (Goworek et al., 2013; Tama et al., 2017), shameful, and may affect self-esteem (Chipambwa et al., 2016). In sum, due to these barriers, consumers feel a variety of tensions between their values, desires, commitments, and resources (Joergens, 2006; Jägel et al., 2012; Ritch and Schröder, 2012; Bly et al., 2015; Henninger et al., 2016). Perhaps more important are the reasons why people feel this way. More research into issues of class, race, gender, and power would be useful to understand what cultural aspects need to be addressed in encouraging SF, rather than focusing solely on individual practices.

This begs the question, where does society go from here? For example, if consumers believe SF is inaccessible, what retail channels could change that (Overdiek, 2018)? Or, if consumers think SF is ugly, then maybe more cross-disciplinary work with designers should be the aim (Goworek et al., 2016)? There is also a level of insensitivity that comes with discussing the attitude-behaviour gap (Hiller, 2010), as such scholarship ignores more systematic issues as to how people actually use clothing (Woodward, 2015), why many feel that they have to have the latest fashion, or why

can they not afford to purchase SF. Exploring why these issues exist on a societal level seems to be more productive than blaming consumers for the inaction of brands and governments to address more macro-social barriers (Kennedy, 2016) to SF consumption beyond the dominant micro focus.

Having discussed the pragmatic approach to SF, our attention now turns to the more radical change paradigm.

2.3.4 Sustainable Fashion: A Radical View on Production and Consumption

The radical change literature focuses on novel ways to create value in personal lives and business structures. The analysis reveals that there are four clusters in the radical change approach: sustainable practices, interventions, future leaders, and sustainable business models (Figure 2.3). Each will now be discussed in turn. The literature in quadrant 3 demonstrates a shift from encouraging people to ‘buy better’ to encouraging them ‘not to buy at all’ or to engage with alternative forms of consumption. The papers in quadrant 4 examine innovative ways of structuring a SF business for sustainability (Bocken, 2017). These are considered radical changes departing from the DSP around fashion consumption.

2.3.4.1 *Consumer Practices and Communities*

Consumer practices and communities illustrate the growth of what Fletcher (2010) terms a ‘slow fashion’ culture. Papers within this cluster explore how consumers are changing their fashion-oriented behaviours and practices for a more sustainable future. Further, they investigate communities of practice that evolve from such activities, which have developed subcultures aside from the mainstream fashion system. This is an underdeveloped research area as the SF conversation tends to focus on how mainstream fashion products and consumption can be made more sustainable (Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012).

Focusing first on communities, findings suggest that communities are especially important in SF research; SF pioneers (Bly et al., 2015) and consumer communities educate, advise, and teach each other, providing tips and tricks to implementing SF behaviours and avoiding unsustainable practices (Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012; Shen et al., 2014). As SF is still considered a niche, communities are a place where alternative practices are accepted and negotiated collectively.

Reiley and Delong (2015) found that vintage style communities act as trendsetters and often encourage aspiring fashionistas to adopt SF practices. This insider perspective is useful for understanding the importance of context as well as the transition that takes place when implementing SF behaviours. Other studies focus on specific practices amongst consumers, such as avoiding fast fashion (Kim, 2013), relationship formation between wearers and designers (Clarke and Holt, 2015), clothes swapping (Rathinamoorthy et al., 2019), second-hand and vintage shopping (Cervellon et al., 2012; Cassidy and Bennett, 2012; Xu et al., 2014; Reiley and Delong, 2015; Ryding et al., 2017), and clothing disposal behaviours (Sung and Kincade, 2010; Goworek et al., 2013; Yee et al., 2016). However, this is still a limited field with few studies providing generalizable insights.

The balance between bringing consumerism into SF consumption and promoting anti-consumption is a delicate one (Balsiger, 2014). This tension is evident in the literature as much of it still focuses on the consumption of SF *products* and positions anti-consumption in a different sphere of behaviour. These papers look at what is motivating people to pursue SF and what barriers they face in doing so. Despite their best intentions, pioneers realise that there are trade-offs in their choices. First, they acknowledge that the most sustainable consumption is to not consume at all (Balsiger, 2014), but as pioneers still need to wear clothes, they try to achieve this need in the most sustainable way available. Sceptical of fast fashion brands creating SF lines, accusations of profit-driven motivations and greenwashing draw pioneers away from the mainstream market (Bly et al., 2015), and to some extent, from the ethical fashion market as well, because even clothing made from organic and/or recycled materials are viewed with caution (Goworek et al., 2012). To overcome these barriers, shopping second-hand, making clothing, and reducing consumption are solutions implemented to overcome financial barriers and moral convictions (Bly et al., 2015). Further, although they are environmentally conscious, SF pioneers still desire to be stylish (Lundblad and Davies, 2015). This tension is mediated by distinguishing “style” (Cho et al., 2015), which is typified by its uniqueness, from “fashion”, which relates to the following trends.

SF consumption and communities have become an alternative means of identity construction (Clarke and Holt, 2016). Here, SF is not just about saving the world, but also saving the self (Lundblad and Davies, 2015; Bly et al., 2015; Clarke and Holt, 2016). Many participants in

Armstrong et al.'s (2016b) study felt liberated from the pressure of having to constantly consume to reinvent their identities, and freer to pursue self-expression, pleasure, and self-improvement goals. This desire and use of SF for self-expression and pleasure shows that not all pioneers will be ecocentric but seek to meet other goals such as creativity and uniqueness (Lundblad and Davies, 2015, Bly et al., 2015, Lang et al., 2016; Clarke and Holt, 2016). Interestingly, for some pioneers, SF has shifted from a lifestyle choice to a business opportunity. The idea of a 'prosumer' in fashion is emerging with consumers who are also producers, participating in activities such as DIY (Hirscher et al., 2018) and co-creation (Strähle and Grünewald, 2017). The integration of these prosumers into the sustainable business model landscape is a particularly fruitful area for future research, alongside the impact thought leaders in this space could have in driving a cultural shift. These additional goals run perpendicular to environmental concerns, painting a very different portrait of the idealised SF pioneer. Although the literature often points to these individuals as exemplars of SF, research is lacking into how effective these practices are, and how different members of society can more broadly scale and facilitate these lifestyles for the masses.

2.3.4.2 *Social Marketing Interventions*

Social marketing intervention papers explore lifestyle and behaviour changes. Because of their radical nature, it is unsurprising that there are few papers in this field. There are two core modes of study in this field: Longitudinal reflective studies and one-off intervention studies.

Focusing first on the reflective studies, these tend to introduce participants to SF principles and then challenge them to implement behavioural change, such as abstaining from clothing consumption (Armstrong et al., 2016b), refraining from doing laundry (Jack, 2013), and employing creativity to forming a personal style (Ruppert-Stroescu et al. 2015; Hirscher et al., 2018). Several data collection techniques are employed in this stream of work, for example, participants are invited to implement new practices, write diaries (Goworek et al., 2012), blog posts (Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016b) and participate in interviews to encourage reflexivity. Goworek et al.'s (2012) study, for instance, encouraged participants to do home tasks and workshops; reporting behaviour change in some of the respondents. The research found that fashion practices are formed from habits, suggesting that a consumer can unintentionally engage in environmentally friendly and non-environmentally friendly behaviours. A commonly found

issue is that people simply do not know what to do with their old clothes and believe that the government should be taking a larger role in making clothes recycling more straightforward (Goworek et al., 2013; Ekström and Salomonson, 2014). This passes the responsibility for an individual's waste onto a third party and doesn't solve the problem of over-consumption in the first instance. Jack's (2013) study revealed that although habits are important, much of the way we interact with clothing and laundering is shaped by cultural influences, suggesting that for practices to change, the DSP must change first. Yet, how this can be done practically sits at the crux of the problem for all sustainability-related work.

Unlike longitudinal studies, 'one-off' studies act as a litmus test of society's ability to perform SF behaviours. Lapolla and Sanders (2015) hosted a one-off workshop to inspire participants to use their clothes for longer through upcycling and redesigning. The workshop revealed that for this commonly suggested behaviour to come to life, many need more skills to actualise their designs (Lapolla and Sanders, 2015). Participants in this, and similar studies, are reported as coming away inspired to think about what they could do with the clothes they owned; and were encouraged to see beyond their limitations and imagine what they could achieve (Janigo and Wu 2015; Lapolla and Sanders, 2015). Most studies do not follow up with the participants post study, however, Hirscher et al., (2018) did follow up with their participants a year later and found some still used the clothing they made in their workshop, suggesting a bond was formed between the maker and the item.

Creativity in redesign and repurposing is frequently identified as helping people to keep their clothes for longer, but individuals need to be equipped with the skills to apply their creativity in this way (Ruppert-Stroescu et al. 2015; Janigo and Wu, 2015; Lapolla and Sanders, 2015; Hirscher et al., 2018). Lacking simple skills such as sewing (removed from UK curriculum alongside home economics in the 2000s), are leaving many people unskilled in even the basic capabilities needed to apply their creativity. This highlights a societal capability gap in achieving the focus on mending and building lasting relationships with clothing in Western contexts (Fletcher, 2008). Research on re-skilling society to take care of, and mend, clothing would be useful to turn these one-off studies into practices people can implement.

Other stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), retailers, and governments also influence the DSP, and so social marketing intervention research falls across the consumption-production continuum. Ekström and Salomonson (2014) and Balsiger (2014) explore how production-side stakeholders can form networks to facilitate SF behaviours in consumers, while Grappi et al. (2017) explore the effects of a campaign against unethical behaviour by fashion brands. Ekström and Salomonson (2014) employ actor-network theory to brainstorm collaborative solutions to the SF crisis such as educating consumers, making clothing recycling easier, and creating comprehensive accreditation labels. Grappi et al. (2017) found campaign interventions shaming brands are particularly useful in segments where consumers are unlikely to justify a brand's unethical behaviour. They further suggest a brand's non-compliance with consumer campaigns negatively influences consumers' attitudes towards the brands. Such campaigns can encourage consumers to be more critical of brands, thus reducing future purchase intention and encouraging more sustainable consumption (Grappi et al., 2017). This has implications for other NGOs and brands. On the NGO side, campaigns requiring action may be an effective tool to drive change, while brands should take these campaigns more seriously or face backlash from their customers. As evidenced by the variety of papers in this area, SF fashion is more than just a consumer behaviour issue, but there is a lack of research exploring how to mobilise diverse stakeholders in facilitating behavioural change (Winge, 2008; Ekström and Salomonson, 2014; Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Future research should explore if and how these key stakeholders attempt to radically influence SF behaviours and what results they achieve.

2.3.4.3 *Future Leaders*

A relatively small cluster and a latecomer in the evolution of SF research, future leaders research takes the view that for society to change, everyone, including academia, needs to play a part. However, Armstrong and LeHew (2014) found integrating SF issues into curricula is difficult as educators often face a lack of support and community in conducting such modules. Further, sustainability education in business schools questions the purpose of business education, highlighting unique tensions between educating students to do business better and how to effectively design and market products.

A primary aim of higher education is to prepare students to be employable (Williams, 2016).

However, the job market for fashion and management students has changed significantly and as brands grapple with the demands for increased sustainability, a new set of skills will be required (Williams, 2016). Educators realise to equip these students for grand social challenges and the future, they must also equip them with sustainability knowledge and related analytical skills sets. These papers target future leaders, specifically management and fashion students, to increase their knowledge and awareness of SF issues in society, with the hope they will inspire and implement change (Landgren and Pasricha, 2011; Armstrong et al., 2016b) and to develop sustainable behaviours in their fashion (non) consumption (Connell and Kozar, 2012; Ruppert-Stroescu et al. 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016b).

Typically, underpinning these pedagogical studies, are subjective epistemologies (Landgren and Pasricha, 2011), using theories centred on experiential learning and reflexivity, encouraging students to be active participants in their learning (Armstrong and LeHew, 2014). Educators are in a unique position to study students since they engage with them on a weekly basis over several weeks, enabling researchers to observe change over time. Due to this unique vantage point, the most common methodology is to develop modules that act as a social experiment (Armstrong and LeHew, 2014). Many experiments are designed with the independent variable being information exposure and the dependent variable as reported behaviour change (Connell and Kozar, 2012; Baytar and Ashdown, 2014). Others take a more disruptive approach and require students to actively participate in changing and documenting their behaviour changes (Goworek et al., 2012; Ruppert-Stroescu et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016b). Armstrong et al. (2016b), for instance, invited students to participate in a ‘fashion detox’ where they abstained from fashion consumption for 10 weeks while writing blog posts to document their experience. As a result, students felt less temptation to shop for clothes as they learned to better differentiate ‘needs’ from ‘wants’, and to exercise self-control. However, many students felt compelled to buy something at the end of the experiment, illustrating rebound effects. Again, focusing only on the consumer may yield unexpected results. Future research could explore these effects further and how they might be reduced when implementing interventions.

Overall, the results have been varied as each experiment has been designed differently. Storytelling through videos (Baytar and Ashdown, 2014), incorporating SF concepts into modules (Armstrong

and LeHew, 2014), and designing modules around SF (Connell and Kozar, 2011; Williams, 2016) might help increase SF-related knowledge in students. While in terms of behaviour change, dance therapy (Thornquist, 2018) and encouraging creativity and abstinence may be ways to reduce consumption (Ruppert-Stroescu et al. 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016b). There are a lot of opportunities to engage with students as they are not only future leaders but also high consumers of fashion. Moreover, although these studies were conducted over a series of weeks, whether students' consumer behaviour has actually been changed or if they have brought these ideas into the workplace has yet to be confirmed (Connell and Kozar, 2012).

2.3.4.4 *Sustainable Fashion Business Models*

A variety of SF business models have been identified and discussed within the literature from collaborative fashion consumption (CFC) models including renting, sharing, and swapping (Pederson and Netter, 2015; Armstrong et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016; Becker-Leifhold and Iran, 2018; Johnson et al., 2016; Strähle and Erhardt, 2017; Todeschini et al., 2017, Pal, 2017; Iran and Schrader, 2017; Zamani et al., 2017; Iran, 2018) to second-hand retailing (McColl, 2013; Chan et al., 2015; Strähle and Höhn, 2017; Strähle and Klatt, 2017; Pal, 2017), and upcycled goods (Janigo and Wu, 2015; Todeschini et al., 2017; Pal, 2017). Beyond business models, other studies analyse the practices of micro-organisations and their owner-managers (Leslie et al., 2014; Lewis and Pringle, 2015; Gurova and Morozova, 2016; Henninger et al., 2016; DiVito and Bohnsack, 2017). These papers illustrate the tensions and trade-offs that innovative business models face but also highlight the complexity of what constitutes SF in an environment where there is no clear minimum bar to be reached in making SF claims. For example, innovative businesses face the issue of scale, such as being able to offer consistent styles and quality, which is a barrier to most business models (Cassidy and Han, 2013; Pal and Gander, 2018). Micro-organisations are already under financial pressure to keep prices competitive and invest in higher quality materials, however with limited resources they cannot do everything on their own (DiVito and Bohnsack, 2017). What this means for SF is that the traditional model of scaling up businesses may not be appropriate to achieve the aims sustainability requires. This requires institutional investors to also reconsider what metrics may be appropriate for evaluating SF business models. As of yet, this area is under-researched in the SF management literature.

Much of the qualitative and mixed methods research that dominates this field of research focuses on consumer perceptions of SF business models. Although useful to know how consumers perceive these business models, it is imperative to analyse the potential rebound, environmental and social effects of these business models and evaluate their suitability for a sustainable future. Very few papers have addressed this issue (e.g., Hu, 2016; Iran and Schrader, 2017, Zamani et al., 2017; Strähle and Erhardt, 2017). Becker-Leifhold and Iran (2018) discuss difficulties preventing collaborative consumption from becoming mainstream while Pal and Gander (2018) discuss the merits and disadvantages of various SF business models. Fashion rental could reduce the environmental impact of fashion consumption however it is dependent on adoption (Armstrong et al., 2015; Zamani et al., 2017; Becker-Leifhold and Iran, 2018). Similarly, it is unclear whether fashion rental (such as circular economy business models like *MUD Jeans*, where you lease jeans at a cost comparable to buying a pair of *Levi's*), are genuinely more sustainable or simply a means of increasing business profitability as with other servitization business models (Neely, 2008). Overall, work exploring SF business models is very limited, with few exemplars on which to build a conceptual model of how to make the fashion sector function from a sustainability perspective.

2.4 DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH AGENDA

Having presented the review, SF materialises as a varied and complex field of study. Despite the identification of 465 papers directly addressing SF, it is still a field in its infancy with large gaps in understanding. Table 2.7 summarises the key areas for future research identified above and this section now synthesises the findings, drawing out key conclusions and an agenda for future research. Moreover, while the difference between pragmatic and radical change perspectives on how to deliver more SF practices has been highlighted, the authors advocate for a combination of *both* approaches to make meaningful ecological change to how fashion is produced and consumed. In drawing the different clusters together, six overarching themes are identified: appealing to a wider demographic, changing shopping habits, influencing production, shaping social practices, upskilling the future, and developing a fit-for-purpose labelling scheme.

Table 2.7 Areas for future research

Pragmatic Change	
<i>Supply chains</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widening research regarding animal welfare, labour, and social impacts • Defining solutions for sustainability measurement and reporting practices • Widening the scope of research to cover manufacturers and raw material suppliers in differing cultural contexts
<i>Retailing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating ways of framing SF in communicating retailer and product sustainability to consumers • Explore the role of market influencers (such as the media, bloggers, and celebrities) in reshaping fashion markets and if/how they impact their network in terms of behavioural change
<i>Consumer behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the demographic, cultural and social spectrum of participants in SF studies • Enhancing the research into actual SF consumers rather than broad consumer panels. • Investigating mechanisms for getting consumers to trial SF products
Radical Change	
<i>Sustainable Fashion Business Models</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research investigating the environmental impacts, logistics and rebound effects of Collaborative Fashion Consumption models • Exploring how to make alternative modes of consumption more appealing/available • More exploration of scaling alternative business models for mainstream markets
<i>Social Marketing Interventions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modes of upskilling people and forming habits to facilitate changes in behaviour around sustainability (such as creativity, design, repair and manufacture) • Investigations into the viability of technology (e.g. apps) for facilitating consumer change • Asking what roles government, NGOs, consumer groups and other stakeholders have in encouraging a sustained shift in consumer behaviour.
<i>Consumer practices and communities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research looking at generalizable trends from community-based initiatives such as vintage communities and anti-consumption communities, which could be leveraged for a more sustained shift in consumer practises • Deeper investigation into the role of SF in peoples lived experience
<i>Future leaders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating how education can be harnessed to create the next generation of fashion designers, marketers and managers to adopt / champion more sustainable alternatives • How education can drive more sustainable consumption choices

2.4.1 Appealing To a Wider Demographic

It can be surmised from the review that it is imperative to avoid incremental repetition of sustainable consumption theory into this new SF context. The qualitative and particularly radical approach highlights the need for new SF theory building, beyond what is already known about

sustainable behaviours in commodity markets. There is a unique fashion literature (Fletcher; Niinimäki, 2010) which provides a wealth of insight into why consumers buy the products they do, which can vary wildly from the rationale for commodity-based products (Davies et al., 2012). Yet this research is rarely linked to the SF consumption research explored at present. Those that do link these fields such as Hwang et al. (2016), Beard (2008), and Visser et al. (2015) find linking sustainability to a benefit for the consumer is by far the most powerful approach to engaging consumers in sustainable consumption practice. Further, most studies on SF consumer behaviour utilise convenience sampling amongst female university students, however, this seems like a missed opportunity to engage with other demographics considering an ageing population in many Western countries, a rising middle class in the developing world, and a booming menswear market. College students are at a very specific life stage; therefore, applying learnings from their context to the wider population should be done with caution. Future research should consider sampling individuals of various genders, life stages, ethnicities, and incomes (see Ritch and Schröder, 2012; D'Souza et al., 2015; Kozar and Connell, 2015; Henninger and Singh, 2017; Liang and Xu, 2017, 2017; Dabija, 2018). Interdisciplinary insight may also offer a deeper understanding of how SF may become normalised (Shaw et al., 2016).

2.4.2 Changing Shopping Habits

There is still a clear need to address the main purpose of the SF literature: how to change habits towards greater sustainability throughout the marketplace. This goal resonates not only at the consumer level (Armstrong et al., 2016b; Goworek et al., 2012; Lapolla and Sanders, 2015), but also throughout the demand chain literature (Beard, 2008). However, research into habit-forming around SF is limited. In the consumer space an over-reliance on outdated, and often refuted theories of consumer decision-making (Bagozzi, 1975; Belk, 1988), limits the development of the field. As aforementioned, consumption in areas such as organic and slow food does not translate to fashion (Ochoa, 2010; Ritch, 2015). A focus on cognitive decision-making similarly does not tackle consumption as a habit but as a cognitive process. Theories more applicable to fashion consumption need to be developed. Where research has built from a fashion theory perspective (Niinimäki, 2010; Thornquist, 2018), markedly different results emerge than the imposition of cognitive behavioural theory. To know how consumer habits change, new theories

of consumption need to be developed. For instance, research could investigate social innovations that are enabling new ways for people to engage with SF behaviours. Interventions, longitudinal studies, and innovative research designs may be useful in exploring this uncharted territory where the externalities of habit change are largely unknown.

2.4.3 Influencing Production

The lack of insight into consumer habit-forming is mirrored in a lack of research into organisational habits. Research into organisational decision-making is a particularly fruitful field for creating change because organisations have so much more institutional power and reach than individuals. Looking at Fair Trade as an example, it is countries where the retailers and major brands made the switch with their product lines (Ireland, Switzerland, and the UK) that dominate the national Fair Trade sales per capita, not where consumer pull was strongest (Doherty et al., 2013). This highlights a significant gap in the literature regarding how to influence change in major brands, manufacturers, and retailers.

Here the paper strikes a healthy accord with DesJardins (2016, p.133): ‘It would be difficult to imagine a better challenge for entrepreneurs and business leaders than to actualize the business opportunities created by a sustainable economy’. The overemphasis on the consumer perspectives of sustainable business models, as opposed to research exploring what a SF business model could practically be, is a notable gap in the literature. Similarly, the limited research exploring the avenues for growth of micro-organisations and how they could better collaborate/partner with larger organisations is a potentially limiting factor. Beyond Molderez and De Landtsheer (2015), Adam (2018), and Adam et al. (2018), there is little consideration of how a major change can occur in the marketing system. This is an important issue because as shown in the consumer behaviour section, there is still little consumer demand for SF (Joy et al., 2012). Rapid change is likely to come from either micro-organisational mainstreaming, or mainstream players evolving in the face of consumer scepticism (Wong and Taylor, 2001; Harris et al., 2016; Jung et al., 2016). How these organisations can be influenced to make change is a vital gap that needs addressing.

2.4.4 **Shaping Social Practices**

So far this paper has mostly responded to the marketization of more sustainable alternatives. However, also within this institutional space is the need for research exploring how to shape social practices and support sustainable clothing, pro-sumption, laundering, reuse, and ultimately disposal. Indeed, most existing SF consumers acknowledge that not consuming “new” is the most sustainable option (Balsiger, 2014; Bly et al., 2015). Yet, *how* society can address the lack of structural and cultural support for alternatives will be vital to the expansion of these niche fields and communities of practice. Although research into these areas is emerging, current findings repeatedly show that structural barriers such as a lack of reuse opportunities, limited choice in second-hand purchasing options, a lack of recycling availability and limited alternatives to laundering, constrain the ability to engage in SF behaviours. Combined with a lack of skills, education, and information around SF alternatives, these constraints limit the freedom of pioneers to express their sustainable identities and lifestyles. Insight into how this can be addressed through local, organisational, national, and international movements or policies is severely lacking. Case examples of where some of the barriers to alternative lifestyles have been addressed would be a good starting point, but a broader debate of *how* to provide people with the requisite knowledge, skills, and societal support to live more sustainably remains one of the biggest unanswered questions of the present time.

2.4.5 **Upskilling Future Leaders**

There are many opportunities to encourage interventions outside of the retail context. One emerging area is the role of education. The radical change research suggests that educators should empower students as agents of change and provide them with the skills necessary for understanding sustainability (Pasricha and Kadolph, 2009; Armstrong and LeHew, 2014; Williams, 2016). Many consumers perceive a lack of institutional support structures for recycling (Goworek et al., 2013; Ekström and Salomonson, 2014), and many people believe that they lack the craft skills and creativity to undertake more radical approaches to SF such as reuse, repurposing or creating individual style (Lapolla and Sanders, 2015; Janigo and Wu, 2015). In many countries, these skills have become less of a focus in recent decades, leaving today’s graduates far less capable of living sustainably than previous generations. In lieu of being able to change the

education system, the provision of places and spaces for development in these areas may fall on the third-sector of civil society, but studies investigating the role that could be played by third-sector organisations is presently lacking.

2.4.6 Developing a Fit-For-Purpose Labelling Scheme

A method commonly adopted in fashion, as well as many other industries, is to rely on labelling as a means of sustainability communication (Thomas, 2008; Hwang et al., 2015; Henninger, 2015). Problems with labelling from a cost and consumer scepticism perspective have been aforementioned (Henninger, 2015), however without a mechanism for labelling to support or evidence product claims, there is an inherent barrier to change. A variety of characteristics underpin SF, yet a sufficient labelling scheme has yet to be adopted in theory and practice (Moon et al., 2015; Henninger et al., 2016). This is largely due to what the authors' term the 'SF imbroglio.' Whilst many organisations such as *Not my Style*, *Good on You*, and the *Sustainable Apparel Coalition* have developed rating schemes and organisations such as *Positive Luxury* have created labelling schemes, very few of these schemes have broken into the mainstream. The *Positive Luxury* 'Butterfly label' is making great headway, however, the obvious limitation is that it only considers the niche area of luxury products. Nonetheless, recent developments by *Stora Enso* (a Finnish-Swedish forestry, pulp, packaging, and renewable materials company) of an 'ECO RFID' tag offering a cloud-based track and trace solution for retailers and manufacturers offer hope in the development of such complex data management solutions (Roberti, 2018).

Academics have also attempted to alleviate this gap by developing matrices and continua to organise SF practices in the context of labelling. Henninger et al. (2016) created a matrix of possible SF activities that a brand could undertake while Pederson and Anderson (2015) developed a continuum of where a brand was positioned on a variety of dimensions. However, as discussed above, consumers tend to be sceptical of labels (Bly et al., 2015) and lack the requisite knowledge to apply them in their decision making (Sonnenberg et al., 2014; Henninger, 2015; Hwang et al., 2015; McLaren and Goworek, 2017). Further empirical research is needed to explore how the diversity of what constitutes SF can be converted into something easily digestible for both retailers

and consumers; similar to the energy ratings in electronic goods, or nutritional “traffic lights” on pre-packaged food items.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This review aimed to answer the question, ‘*what do we know about SF in management and where do we go from here?*’ This review paper finds that *pragmatic change* is facilitated within the existing SF market (Doherty et al., 2013), whereas *radical change* adopts a more nuanced view of what SF might become through innovative business models, empowering changemakers, and better understanding SF consumer lifestyles. Although academic research into SF has shown a dip from 2018, pragmatic interest is advancing more than more radical research, especially research into future leaders and social marketing interventions. However, while this paper advocates that both approaches are necessary to translate SF ideals into a mainstream practice, there remain to be significant gaps in knowledge, particularly in habit formation both individually and corporately. Much SF research is undertaken in silos, however by crossing disciplinary lines, exciting new ideas may be introduced into the field. This review of SF contributes to the literature by mapping out *what* we know and *how* we know it as well as outlining ways that as researchers and practitioners can co-create a SF future.

In terms of practitioner and policy implications, we can see several areas in which the powerful institutions in the fashion market – retailers and brand owners – can provide a more fertile environment for SF. The first is around consumer communication. As discussed above hang-tags have very questionable benefits, due to the complexity of information and consumer scepticism of claims. The textile industry coalescing around a consistent approach to sustainability communications would be a powerful approach to simplifying the point-of-sale decisions. A consistent labelling approach (such as the ABC ratings on electrical goods, or traffic lights on food) would help both educate and inform consumers, however as evidenced in the literature social media and digital channels are the most likely touchpoint for many fashion consumers. Utilisation of these channels to provide coherency and transparency in sustainability communications appears key in both engaging committed SF consumers and educating sceptical or non-consumers.

Further, in these communications, it is vital to identify benefits to the self, including the personal and collective mental well-being of consumers (Mick et al., 2011) and respect for producers. Existing SF consumers see benefits to self in the consumption of more sustainable clothing, but at present these are unclear to non-consumers. A focus for branded manufacturers on style, quality and branding appear essential in being successful in this sphere, so linking sustainability to hedonic benefits appears key. However, retailers and branded manufacturers should also work on building supplier networks and promoting supplier innovation in tackling sustainability challenges. Too much focus has been placed on enforcement and auditing rather than galvanising the collective brain of the supply network in addressing core negative issues in the fashion sector. Creating networks (e.g., in the coffee supply network, Davies and Doherty, 2019) for suppliers to share best practice, develop innovations and collectively solve problems, could be a key mechanism to evolve the whole supply chain leading to a universally more sustainable textiles sector. Finally, the role of governments, NGOs, education and the third-sector need to be better integrated around policies to change the DSP. Collective action by all stakeholders to reshape our education system, remove barriers to sustainable consumption and facilitate sustainable business models is needed for lasting change. This requires multiple parties to come together to address key areas of concern. No dominant body yet exists encompassing all of these stakeholders, where transparency and free flow of information can develop, but we have a duty to ourselves and our environment to create such a platform.

2.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the published version of my systematic literature review on SF. In terms of how it fits into the thesis, it sets the stage for some of the key debates presented in Chapter 3 and then revisited in Chapter 11. Although the review was completed in 2019, the trends in SF have not substantively changed; therefore, this review is still very much relevant. Similarly, I have had daily Google alerts for ethical and sustainable fashion to ensure that the review still broadly represents the field. I will now describe some recent work in the field.

Recently, in the consumer behaviour domain, Mohr et al. (2021) have developed a new theory of SF adoption called the triple-trickle theory to illustrate how social media enables SF

communication to flow from the bottom-up (from the masses to celebrities), top-down (from celebrities to the masses), and horizontally (peer to peer). Such a theory is useful in providing a contemporary understanding of how trends travel through society. Another insightful paper in the consumer behaviour domain is Grazzini et al. (2021), which examined a new variable for SF consumption: warmth, or ‘the cooperative and good intentions companies have toward the others’ (Grazzini et al., 2021, p.4). They found that perceived warmth helps to explain why sustainability affects purchase intention (Grazzini et al., 2021). In the supply chain literature, Wells et al. (2021) have drawn on legitimacy theory to investigate the credibility of luxury brands’ sustainability reporting. They found that there was a lack of consistency and selective reporting, consequently, making their commitment to SF seem less legitimate (Wells et al., 2021). Caldarelli et al. (2021) suggest that blockchain could improve the sustainability of fashion supply chains, however, there are barriers to implementation such as selecting which suppliers they can actually track. In the sustainable business model cluster, Ostermann et al. (2021) investigated drivers to adopt circular business models while Clube and Tennant (2020) investigated contamination as a barrier to fashion rental. Few studies have been done regarding future leaders, however, Manieson et al. (2021) analysed media framings of the circular economy to understand how this may impact how fashion students understand the term. Similarly, there seems to be few new articles regarding consumer practices and communities and social marketing interventions. Considering the social retail marketing cluster, Li and Leonas (2021) compared information about SF delivered on clothing hang tags to that on webpages and found that clothing hang tags can increase peoples’ objective knowledge. Moreover, Chapter 3 provides an updated review of the specific elements of the social retail marketing literature that this thesis speaks to. Thus Chapters 2 and 3 present an update to date view of the SF literature.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW: SF AND SOCIAL MEDIA

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the literature the core question is clear: how can sustainable fashion become our new ‘normal’ and what does it take to get there? This chapter narrows down from the broad perspective given in Chapter 2 to reviewing specific literatures that can provide a conceptual framing of the role of influencers in communicating about SF. Specifically, this thesis sits at the nexus of three literatures: SF communication, social media, and sustainable consumption. This chapter opens with literature on communicating SF [3.1], social media [3.2], SF and social media [3.3], and sustainable communication [3.4]. The table provides a summary of the key concepts from this chapter.

Table 3.1 Key Literatures guiding the study

<i>Literature Family</i>	<i>Key points</i>	<i>Core scholars / papers</i>	<i>Key Gaps the Thesis Aims to Address</i>
Communicating SF	Primarily focuses on the confusion and/or commercially focused ways that SF is communicated	Lundahl, 2014; Peirson-Smith and Evans, 2017; Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018; Jones, 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways to communicate SF in a way that is engaging • The use of social media to communicate SF
Social media and influencers	Social media influencers are people that have accrued a following on social media and use their influence to persuade people to do different actions. Primarily used for the purpose of promoting brands.	boyd and Ellison, 2007; boyd, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Marwick, 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The role of social media influencers in the context of SF
SF and social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media can be used to promote SF • Social media influencers may influence attitudes towards SF • People talk about a variety of topics around SF on social media 	de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Han et al., 2017; Kang and Kim, 2017; Strähle and Graff, 2017; LeHew and Patwary, 2018; McKeown and Shearer, 2019; Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the use of social media to communicate SF • Understand the type of content people create about SF • How influencers balance their public and private consumption

Sustainable communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable communication • Green commodity discourse • Alternative hedonism 	<p>Kilbourne, 1998; McDonagh, 1998; Prothero and Fitchett, 2000; Hobson, 2002; Kilbourne, 2004; Prothero et al., 2010; Caruana et al., 2019; Kemper and Ballantine, 2019; Hill and McDonagh, 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating these theories in the context of social media • Focusing on messages from SF influencers rather than governments or corporations
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3.1 COMMUNICATING SF (CREATING THE SF NARRATIVE THROUGH MEDIA)

This section draws on the social retail marketing (SRM) literature presented in Chapter 2. In this cluster of the literature, the main focus is on how to communicate SF to reach a variety of goals. From the systematic review, we see that there are contrasting approaches to how to communicate SF, specifically the emphasis on the building a brand around the concept of SF (Beard, 2008; Haug and Busch, 2016; Blanchet, 2017) or focusing on the practical changes required of SF (Winge, 2008; Jones, 2020). But an area of agreement is that SF is confusing (Markkula and Moisander, 2011; Peirson-Smith and Evans, 2017; Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018; Orminski et al., 2021) and its story needs a makeover. The literature suggests that having a clear and consistent SF discourse is an important aspect of making SF mainstream (Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018), but the question of how to create an engaging story around SF remains.

Lundahl (2014) explores Finnish magazines targeted towards women and their efforts to discuss sustainable consumption. They found that sustainable consumption is framed in two main ways, ‘Eco-Chic’ and ‘Free to choose’. The ‘Eco-chic’ framing treats sustainable consumption as a trend and status symbol, it primarily focuses on sustainable products and its benefits for the customer. This approach also utilises celebrities to make sustainable products seem cool. This has previously been noted as greening the commodity form (see Prothero and Fitchett 2000) and will be discussed later in this section [section 3.4]. Lundahl (2014) finds that because magazines need advertising to survive, they treat sustainable consumption as a short-term trend and are happy to talk about it as long as consumption is not reduced. ‘Free to choose’ frames sustainable consumption as something that should be a choice and people should not feel pressured to do it. Overall, the magazines are focused on making sustainability fashionable and in doing so depoliticizing sustainability. Depoliticizing sustainability involves shifting the accountability for progress in SF

from the law/policy/ -decision-makers of society to those who do not have that power or specific responsibility. In this case, the blame is shifted on to consumers to do better. This involves shifting the conversation from the political sphere to be debated and actioned on, to the lifestyle sphere where SF is just another choice people can make. Jones (2020) conducted a similar study by utilising critical discourse analysis on how major fashion magazine, Vogue, talked about SF over a period of twenty-five years (1990-2015). They found similar efforts of depoliticising SF and avoiding discussing consumption reduction. Rather the magazine positions sustainability as a lifestyle choice and moral position that can be occupied. The boundaries of what is considered SF are dynamic as people represent SF in different ways (Blanchet, 2017). Blanchet's (2017) study of the Ethical Fashion Show (EFS), an ethical fashion tradeshow, illustrates the deliberate choices they made to justify its existence, create boundaries around what should be expected of it, deflect from contradictions, and defend itself from criticism (Blanchet, 2017). The literature mentioned here illustrates that people strategically represent SF in different ways.

Lundahl (2014) calls into question the effectiveness of mainstream media to promote sustainability because of their profit- and trend-oriented motivation. Magazines for example rely on advertisers for their revenue as part of their business model. They go through different trends to keep their audiences engaged and constantly tuning in to the magazine. By captivating the imagination of their audiences, the magazines aim to sell more magazines and have more eyes on their adverts which keeps the magazines' revenue flowing (Lundahl, 2014). Therefore, they call for research into the role of blogs and social media where 'celebrities can communicate with their followers directly and thus bypass mainstream media institutions' (Lundahl, 2014, p. 346). Social media, which will be further defined in Section 3.2, is an interesting space where people do not necessarily have to rely on advertisers to support their platforms, if they do not want to. However, this view of social media as being separate or not heavily influenced by commercial interests may not be the case as social platforms increasingly seek to monetise their platforms in innovative ways. Nevertheless, social media influencers are arguably the micro-celebrities of today (Jin et al., 2019); therefore, this thesis answers this call by focusing on the role of SF influencers in communicating SF. To further explain why SF influencers are interesting, we first have to consider the characteristics of social media to see why such platforms may be an effective way to communicate about SF.

3.2 SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEXT

4.20 billion people worldwide use some form of social media; for reference as of January 2021, the population of the world was estimated to be 7.83 billion (Kemp, 2021). Social media's popularity and wide-ranging uses have made it a mainstay in our everyday lives (boyd and Ellison, 2007). Rather than turning to traditional news outlets, people look to platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for their news (BBC, 2020; Shearer and Mitchell, 2021). For example, more people turn to social media to find out information on products whilst businesses turn to it to promote their brands (Forbes and Vespoli, 2013; Glozer et al., 2018). In fashion, platforms such as Instagram are used to find inspiration for outfits whereas magazines would have been the first point of call (Goldfingle, 2018). Research shows that 55% of people shopping for fashion have bought something based on content created by an influencer (Newberry, 2021).

3.2.1 Defining Social Media

In Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) seminal paper, they explain that social media is based on two key concepts, Web 2.0, and user generated content. Web 2.0 represents an ideological shift in how people used the internet; the internet became more collaborative and connected. User generated content (UGC) refers to online content made by users for non-professional purposes (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). UGC on social media can include comments, photographs, and other media. With this in mind, 'social media is a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010, p.61). Meaning that social media is a way for people to share different forms of content with other people online. However, as social media has become realised as a place with major commercial potential, this definition no longer fully describes the social media landscape. Social media is now broadly defined as 'an umbrella term for a diverse set of technologies, websites, mobile apps, and protocols that facilitate the creation, annotation, and sharing of digital media' (Marwick, 2019, p. 309). UGC is still seen as content created by users in an independent manner (dos Santos, 2021). However, brands attempt to pay users to create content on their behalf, although this is not considered UGC according to the literature. Brands may compel people to create UGC for them because it has been found to be influential in persuading consumers to purchase (Sethna et al., 2017; Cowan and Hunt, 2018).

Consequently, sponsored content has proliferated social media under the guise of UGC (Kim and Song, 2018).

There are many different types of social media (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), however focusing specifically on social networks, they are platforms that ‘allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system’ (boyd, 2008, p. 210). Although there are a variety of social network platforms, they usually share the same basic features of enabling people to have a profile, friends, a feed of content, and the ability to interact with others (boyd and Ellison, 2007). On social media, users engage in social labour, which Anderson et al. (2016, p.384) define as ‘The means by which consumers add value to their identities and social relationships through producing and sharing cultural and affective content. This is driven by observational vigilance and conspicuous presence and is rewarded by social value.’ On social media people are encouraged to create content around a variety of topics. The features of social media resonate with McQuail’s ideas on the public sphere where the public sphere is ‘a “space” that exists in a society outside the immediate circle of private life and the walls of enclosed institutions and organizations pursuing their own (albeit sometimes public) goals’ (McQuail, 2010, p.475). Dahlberg (2005, p.112) comments that the public sphere is ‘constituted wherever and whenever any matter of living together with difference is debated.’ McQuail (2010) further argued about the role of media in the public sphere. In the beginnings of the internet, social media was seen as a place where the potential for democratic public speech could thrive (Hindman, 2009), however media literature has shown that it is not the case (Hindman, 2009; McQuail, 2010; Kozinets, 2019). For example, the literature shows that women face harassment online when they confront misogyny online (McCarthy and Glozer, 2021), which can make the emotional cost of engaging in social media high. However, social media platforms can also become places where people can find community and bond over shared experiences with others (Clark et al., 2018). People also utilise social media to engage in “clicktivism”, which refers to internet-based activism where people aim to utilise social media to stand for social issues (Kozinets, 2019). In light of the various uses of social media, I now discuss the influential people of social media.

3.2.2 Defining Social Media Influencers

Millions of people have social media accounts and some people have been able to stand out on these platforms. These people who are able to stand out are known as social media influencers. The concept of an influencer is not new; opinion leaders and market mavens are the original influencers in the marketing literature (Summers, 1970; Feick and Price, 1987). Opinion leaders are those who ‘exert a disproportionate amount of influence on the behaviour of others in some given topic area’ (Summers, 1970, p.178). Feick and Price (1987, p.85) define market mavens as ‘individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information’. There are a lot of synergies between these definitions and today’s definitions of social media influencers. For example, Bakshy et al. (2011, p. 65) note that the concept of influencers is very loosely defined as ‘individuals who disproportionately impact the spread of information or some related behaviour of interest’. Influencers are opinion leaders in the social media space.

Many define social media influencers in terms of how they can be monetised for personal gain and brands. For example, Hearn and Schoenchoff (2015, p.194) define a social media influencer as a person who aims to ‘generate a form of "celebrity" capital by cultivating as much attention as possible and crafting an authentic "personal brand" via social networks, which can subsequently be used by companies and advertisers for consumer outreach’ (Hearn and Schoenchoff, 2015, p. 194). Whilst Abidin (2016, p.3) defines influencers as ‘every day, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in “digital” and “physical” spaces, and monetize their following by integrating “advertorials” into their blogs or social media posts and making physical paid-guest appearances at events.’ Advertorials can be described as a public relations exercise where a brand usually pays for content that is effectively an ad for a product or service. Jin et al. (2019, p. 568) define social media celebrities as ‘individuals who became famous via their social media presence, as opposed to traditional celebrities who are famous from film, music, and TV shows’. The commonalities across these definitions are that influencers are ‘normal people’ who have become well-known, have large followings on social media and are paid for their personal brands. These individuals become popular for a variety of

reasons. Fashion can be used as a personal-branding tool to gain aspirational status amongst others (Logan et al., 2013). McQuarrie et al. (2013) found that fashion bloggers gain popularity by creating the image that they have a distinct taste. De Veirman et al. (2016) describes that influencers are seen to be tastemakers in a particular niche. Previous research has found that social media influencers are perceived to be more relatable and authentic than traditional celebrities (Jin et al., 2019). Being relatable and authentic are key aspects of being a popular influencer (Abidin, 2016). Casaló et al. (2020) found that people prefer influencers who are unique and create original content. Moreover, the provided definitions imply that these individuals have large numbers of people who follow their accounts, but this is not always the case. Micro-influencers are influencers with fewer followers and in some cases can be even more influential than those with larger audiences (Kay et al., 2020).

Using these definitions of influencers, I present my working definition of a SF influencer as *‘a person who successfully creates content about topics including but not limited to SF products, ideas, ways of living, and shares this content on social media which then results in a relatively high level of engagement on social media platforms. These individuals are relatively well known in the space they occupy’* (Table 3.2). Previous definitions do not capture individuals who promote ideas or those who consume products in an alternative way, rather they encourage us to see influence and influencers as only a means to be used by marketers and/or personal gain. When we add in the concept of sustainability, we see that these definitions are insufficient to capture individuals who may not work with brands or whose main priority is not monetisation. These definitions focus on commercial, and celebrity aims rather than ecology and the impact of the consumption they promote may have. This is important because there is more to be communicated about sustainability than working with brands, therefore, a definition is needed that can capture this. Moreover, these definitions imply that the only use for an influencer is to create value for brands or themselves, which does not leave room for community, activism, or the other ways that people utilise influence beyond self-indulgence. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on individuals who try to be influencers in a different way.

Table 3.2 Who is an Influencer? Compiled based on definitions from Summers, 1970; Feick and Price, 1987; Bakshy et al., 2011; and Abidin, 2016

	Who?	What do they share?				
	An individual	Product	Idea/ Behaviour	Lifestyle	Large Following	Definition
Opinion Leader	X	X			X	Individuals that “exert a disproportionate amount of influence on the behaviour of others in some given topic area” (Summers, 1970, p.178).
Market maven	X	X				Individuals ‘who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information’ (Feick and Price, 1987, p.85)
Social media influencer	X	X		X	X	Influencers are ‘every day, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in “digital” and “physical” spaces, and monetize their following by integrating “advertorials” into their blogs or social media posts and making physical paid-guest appearances at events.’ (Abidin, 2016)
SF social media influencer (new)	X	X	X	X		‘a person who successfully creates content about topics including but not limited to SF products, ideas, ways of living, and shares this content on social media which then results in a relatively high level of engagement on social media platforms. These individuals are relatively well known in the space they occupy’

In Table 3.2, the question ‘who’ refers to who an influencer is. The definitions all agree that an influencer is a person with a personal brand. What they share refers to the type of content that the influencer shares, it could be that they promote products, or they talk about climate change (idea/behaviour), or they just share their dinner for that evening (lifestyle). These categories are not mutually exclusive. Finally, many suggest that influencers must have a lot of followers or a large audience. I do not think just having a large audience makes someone influential as Kay et al. (2020) pointed out. Rather, like Bakshy et al. (2011), I think someone is influential when they are well known or well regarded in their particular niche. For this research, I define a SF social media influencer to mean ‘*a person who successfully creates content about topics including but not limited to SF products, ideas, ways of living, and shares this content on social media which then results in a relatively high level of engagement on social media platforms. These individuals are relatively well known in the space they occupy*’. With this in mind, I now turn to the literature on social media research in the SF field.

3.3 SF AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Research that looks at the role of social media in SF tend to do so for the purpose of identifying characteristics and ways to get people to buy SF (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Han et al., 2017; Kang and Kim, 2017; Strähle and Graff, 2017; McKeown and Shearer, 2019; Testa et al., 2021). For example, through a survey with YouTube users Kim et al. (2020) found that the social capital of the YouTuber, the one who has created the content and posted it to YouTube, influences the purchase intention for SF. They also found that content on YouTube can introduce viewers to new concepts or ideas that they may not be familiar with. Moreover, de Lenne and Vandenbosch (2017) found that social media content about SF increases positive attitudes toward SF clothing and increases the belief that SF is attainable. Ng et al. (2015) suggested that perhaps social media content may encourage people to dispose of their clothes more sustainably. These are important findings because although many people may think of SF as being fashionable (Lundblad and Davies, 2015; Brandão and da Costa, 2021), there are a lot of stereotypes associated with it, specifically that it is not fashionable (Winge, 2008; Hiller Connell, 2010; Zane et al., 2016). The findings of this research suggest that social media content may be useful in changing how people view SF. However, the research in this area is still nascent and there is still a lot of ambiguity

around the content. For example, authors may refer to YouTube content, however, generally it is not YouTube that made the content but an individual. Social media is a subjective experience. This subjectivity shapes users' experiences and that of others. So, while we know broadly that the content is influential, we do not know much about the actual content, the circumstances surrounding its creation, or the people who have created it.

More recently, McKeown and Shearer (2019) investigated 'celebrity institutional entrepreneurs', or celebrities who use their influence to talk about social change and can challenge mainstream practices. They focused on SF and specifically on Emma Watson's @the_press_tour account on Instagram. Utilising netnography and interviews with followers of that Instagram account, they found that SF content does not significantly impact SF purchases but fosters positive attitudes, raises awareness of SF, and creates opportunities to discuss SF (McKeown and Shearer, 2019). An interesting issue raised was that the @the_press_tour account featured SF that could be considered luxury relative to high street fashion; McKeown and Shearer (2019) suggested that maybe people would buy SF if they saw more everyday items. Although this study is not concerned with whether people buy SF or not, this point illustrates the need to look beyond celebrities but also at influential non-celebrities who represent a variety of budgets and style choices. LeHew and Patwary (2018) focus specifically on SF bloggers. They conducted a content analysis on the blogs of 10 SF bloggers and found that the majority of them focused on materials, SF brands, and sustainable alternatives. This thesis extends this conversation by talking to the SF influencers and exploring how they see their role and responsibility in the movement.

In terms of what people actually talk about in the SF social media space, research such as Cervellon and Wernerfelt (2012), Shen et al. (2014), Lee and Weder (2021), and Orminski et al. (2021) focus on 'the discursive content' of SF discussions on social media. Cervellon and Wernerfelt's (2012) study on SF conversations on forums found that over time the conversations changed as members gained knowledge about SF. They observed how the conversation shifted from environmental issues in fashion to emphasising more of the fashion aspects (Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012). Lee and Weder (2021) conducted content analysis on posts using the #slowfashionaustralia on Instagram and found that slow fashion is portrayed as a positive alternative to fast fashion.

Orminski et al. (2021) utilise the concept of diffusion of innovation to explore how online opinion leaders talk about SF in terms of production and consumption on Twitter. They do this by analysing 10 accounts of opinion leaders in SF including NGOs concerned with SF, SF experts, and popular SF bloggers. They found that the SF discourse on Twitter is very broad but could be categorised into discussions around production processes, consumption behaviours, and educating people about SF (Orminski et al., 2021). Their study illustrates three main barriers to the SF conversation becoming more mainstream: people using different SF terms interchangeably; people using a variety of hashtags, so it is not easy to follow the conversation; and the conversation around SF being limited to those actively interested in it (Orminski et al., 2021). To explain the last point, people in the space often tag each other in posts, which keeps SF conversations within their network and not reaching other audiences. This paper helps categorise what experts in SF are discussing and exposes some of the constraints of talking about SF on Twitter. Considering Winge (2008), Lundahl (2014), and Jones (2020) critical studies of magazines, this research illustrates the need to not just look at SF social media content at face value but to contextualise it in terms of the dominant social paradigm.

Overall, we see that social media in various forms is influential, whether that be by opening the door to conversations (McKeown and Shearer, 2019) or increasing positive attitudes towards SF (de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017; Kim et al., 2020). However, although influencers are implicated in these studies, very few studies seek to bring their voice into the conversation, with Bly et al. (2015) being a notable exception. This is important in understanding what these influencers are trying to achieve in the SF movement. Therefore, this thesis aims to address this gap in the literature where SF social media content is seen as influential yet not much is known about why this content is created, the general context that it sits in, and more specifically the role of the SF influencer in all of this. At the same time, we are in an ecological crisis which requires significant change in the way our culture works. This research is important to thinking about how influencers can be part of this change in a positive way.

However, this is not to imply that the SF social media world offers a realistic perspective of SF. The conversation about SF influencers intersects with Bly et al.'s (2015) paper which looked at SF pioneers, or SF bloggers, and the practices they implement in their own life. As discussed in

the systematic literature review, the bloggers' implementation of SF varied and often consisted of inconveniences, contradictions, and tensions. This study extends this conversation by offering a view into how SF bloggers translate their private actions and challenges into public displays of SF. The Bly et al. (2015) paper helps to anchor this study by offering a contrasting view of the reality of implementing SF with the idealized images that may be portrayed online. Considering the tensions of living a SF life, this thesis also looks at how these tensions are resolved to present a cohesive SF narrative on social media. This in turn provides insights into how the SF influencers see their role and their responsibilities to their followers.

3.4 INSIGHTS FROM SUSTAINABLE COMMUNICATION

To gain more insight into other ways of discussing sustainability, I turn to the sustainable communication literature. Kilbourne (1998) explains that the dominant social paradigm (DSP) is based on neoclassical economics and emphasises increased growth, development, and capital. Therefore, in such a society, communications around sustainability and environmental issues are constrained as to not disrupt the status quo (Kilbourne, 1998; McDonagh, 1998). This links back to the earlier discussion on the unwillingness of magazines to promote a reduction in consumption (Lundahl, 2014; Jones, 2020). It is also revealed through definitions of social media influencers where they are primarily conceived of as sales agents. Considering the DSP, this is unsurprising. Nevertheless, there have been many ideas of how to communicate and advocate for a sustainability that recognises that as a society, we need to slow down.

McDonagh (1998) offered the theory of sustainable communication for how organisations can communicate in a society that prioritises ecology. This theory has four ecological principles: trust, access, disclosure, and dialogue. Although it has been conceptualised as a theory for organisations, these principles are still relevant in thinking about how to communicate sustainability to different audiences. Trust refers to rebuilding trust between people and organisations. Trust is also reflected in the perceived credibility of the source of the message in sustainability marketing (Huber et al., 2015). Access refers to openness and letting people get involved. Disclosure refers to transparency on the part of the organisation. Dialogue refers to dialogue between an organisation and people. The organisation should provide 'on-going dialogue to help them understand the issues, and

become ecologically meaningful' (McDonagh, 1998, p. 603). Recently, research utilising this theory has looked at specific elements such as credibility (Huber et al., 2015) or what kinds of organisational messages are effective in communicating corporate social responsibility (CSR) (McDonagh and Prothero, 2014; Gruber et al., 2017). Social media and sustainable communication may have synergies. For example, dialogue requires the ability to have an open and participatory interaction between organisations and consumers. Social media networks broadly enable people to participate and share their opinions (Sandlin, 2007; boyd, 2009; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2017).

Hobson (2002) focuses on the discourses surrounding sustainable consumption. In Hobson's (2002) study of a government project to encourage its communities to be more sustainable, many participants felt as though the approach embedded into the programme did not represent their needs, concerns, or lifestyles. They explain how the primary discourse of sustainable consumption is one of rationalisation where if you give consumers proper information then they will then adjust their behaviours because humans are rational beings. This links back to the systematic literature review in Chapter 2 and the pragmatic approach found in the SF literature. Such approaches focus on small incremental changes in production and consumption (Hobson, 2002; Kemper and Ballantine, 2019). Hobson (2002) suggests that the rational discourse, especially coming from a government programme, is incompatible with the intended audience. The top-down and one size fits all approach was felt to be misguided and did not resonate with their lived experiences (Hobson, 2002). An alternative discourse is the green commodity discourse. It has been suggested that the concept of green commodity discourse could be used to communicate sustainable behaviours '...through the mechanism of the market itself' (Prothero and Fitchett, 2000). The green commodity discourse aims to encourage people to buy less for improved wellbeing rather than buying more to feel fulfilled, which is the dominant messaging around consumption (Prothero and Fitchett, 2000; Prothero et al 2010; Kemper and Ballantine, 2019). Moreover, it appears that in the time between Prothero and Fitchett (2000) and Prothero et al.'s (2010) research, consumers have taken up the green commodity discourse by trying to engage in more sustainable consumption and pushing brands to do the same. Prothero et al. (2010) have suggested that there are four types of consumers in the green commodity discourse based on a matrix of consumer vs citizenship and motivation. The four positions are the blind green consumer, the collective green consumer, the individual green citizen, and the collective green citizen (Prothero et al., 2010). The blind green

consumer engages with sustainable consumption inadvertently, while the collective green consumer engages with sustainable consumption for the public good (Prothero et al., 2010). The individual green citizen engages with sustainable consumption for their own wellbeing, while the collective green citizen engages with sustainable consumption for ecological reasons (Prothero et al., 2010). Another suggested discourse is one of ‘alternative hedonism’, which argues that moral behaviours, such as sustainable consumption, do not have to be devoid of pleasure to still be moral (Caruana et al., 2019).

One commonality among these different approaches is that they consider the role of institutions such as organisations, businesses, and governments however it may be useful to look at actors who are a bit closer in proximity to consumers to gain insight into how they encourage conversations around sustainable fashion. However, this research is still very insightful for this thesis. They serve as a litmus for understanding some of the discourses that may appear in the SF social media space and help explain why certain discourses are prevalent and/or more appealing. The truth is, it is unlikely that there is just one discourse that will reach everyone, which is why the social media space is so interesting and potentially impactful. Therefore, bringing social media into these conversations offers the opportunity to revisit and reanalyse different ways to communicate about sustainability.

3.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored the four main literatures in which this thesis is situated: SF media; social media; SF and social media; and sustainable communication. From Section 3.1 several key issues were identified. In terms of communicating SF, there are two main gaps that this thesis aims to address: methods of communicating SF in an engaging way and the use of digital mediums to communicate SF. In Section 3.2, I focused on describing the key elements of the social media context. Social media influencers have been primarily analysed in the context of their commercial uses however I expanded this definition to include those who communicate messages not limited to consumption. I defined SF social media influencers as: *‘a person who successfully creates content about topics including but not limited to SF products, ideas, ways of living, and shares this content on social media which then results in a relatively high level of engagement on social media*

platforms. These individuals are relatively well known in the space they occupy.' In light of this definition, I turn to the intersection of SF and social media where the literature primarily focuses on social media as a means to increase the purchase intention. Similarly, we do not yet know a lot about the SF influencers or what motivates their social media content. Finally, in Section 3.4, I looked to sustainable communication to help make sense of the different facets of communicating about ecological change. Drawing on previous research on SF and social media and sustainable communication, my research question of '*what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?*' aims to address the gaps regarding how we communicate SF in a way that is engaging by using social media. In the next chapter, I explain the theoretical lens used to develop the study.

4 THEORETICAL LENS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the theoretical underpinnings to this thesis. This chapter has two main parts, the theoretical entrée of Bourdieu (1977; 1998) [4.1] and the concept of dramaturgy (Benford and Hunt, 1992) [4.2]. This thesis sits at a unique space in the literature as it brings these two concepts together in the context of SF and social media. The first section on the theoretical entrée acts as an introduction to the theories that have framed my thinking. This leads into the second section on dramaturgy which is then broken into four sections. The first section focuses on the use of dramaturgy in marketing and then goes deeper into different dramaturgical perspectives. I then anchor these discussions into the social movements literature and present the dramaturgical framework that guides the analysis. I first start off with discussing Bourdieu.

4.1 THEORETICAL ENTREE: BOURDIEU

The foundation of my thinking around SF influencers can be found in Bourdieu and his ideas around practices and social change (Bourdieu, 1977; 1998). This section describes Bourdieu's key concepts, including habitus, doxa, field, capital, and taste. I then discuss which concepts this thesis focuses on and why to provide a theoretical framework of the SF social media space.

Starting with habitus, habitus can be thought of as a structuring process that frames how people interpret meanings and actions. It is a governing principle of practices and a way of thinking based on the environments we find ourselves in throughout our lives (Bourdieu, 1977). Norbert Elias, a German sociologist who was also interested in the relationship between people and society, describes habitus as a second nature that guides peoples' way of living (Paulle et al., 2012). Habitus helps us to understand what is acceptable and expected in different situations. I utilise this concept in this study as a framework to understand the second nature that guides SF influencers' way of being influencers, I call this the SF influencer habitus. The SF influencer habitus distils down the differences in the individual approaches to being an SF influencer to the core elements that make someone a legitimate SF influencer. Through listening to how SF influencers conceptualise their

roles, the governing principles underpinning their roles are revealed. These choices are not only influenced by habitus, but also, by the concept of doxa.

Kilbourne et al. (1997) noted that challenging the status quo is difficult because the status quo presents itself to be the only possible way. Bourdieu (1998, p. 57) defines doxa as ‘a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view’. Because of this undercurrent of what is possible and impossible, it is very challenging to introduce ideas that go against the dominant logic of society. Although not explicitly analysed due to the research question focusing on the roles and responsibilities of influencers, doxa is revealed through how the influencers describe their role and the type of change that they see to be possible. Originally, I viewed SF influencers as people who could challenge the status quo and influence change, but we are all influenced by the doxa of our time. Bourdieu conceptualises doxa as being undisputed and unnoticed, it seen as being imposed on society by those in positions of power (Bourdieu, 1984). However, doxa is not impermeable; when doxa is challenged by those in society, it then becomes orthodoxy which aims to disguise itself as though it is still the doxa (Bourdieu, 1977). Alternately, we see the development of heterodoxy which is the development of alternative value systems and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). In this study, I adopt the perspective that SF influencers represent the development of heterodoxy as they aim to prioritise sustainable values rather than overproduction and consumption and offer different possibilities of what sustainable fashion consumption could look like.

Moving on to fields, habitus and displays of habitus are specific to the field they are in (Bourdieu, 1977; de Clerc and Voronov, 2009). Bourdieu defined fields as distinct social systems and viewed those in the field as players with different positions (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). In a field people have implicit shared beliefs, or a collective habitus, that influence how they interpret meaning and decide which actions are reasonable actions (Bourdieu, 1977). Fields are relational and hierarchical, where people in different positions have access to different parts of the field (Bourdieu, 1984; Naidoo, 2004; Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). In this study, I utilise the concept of fields as a framework to understand the dynamics within the SF field. SF is a sub-field that sits in the wider field of fashion which has its own logic or to use Bourdieu’s term, doxa (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006). So, by using the field framework, I am able to consider the internal and

contested dynamics of the field in addition to the oppositional dynamics from the wider field of fashion. Moreover, the language of players and positions enables me to conceptualise not just the role of the SF influencer but also how different positions within that role may result in different priorities.

In navigating the field, individuals have different levels of capital. Capital operates as currency in the field (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu conceptualises capital as ‘...a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible.’ (Bourdieu, 1986, p.241). Meaning that having desirable forms of capital advantages some and disadvantages others. Although there are field specific forms of capital, it largely takes on three main forms, cultural, economic, and social (Bourdieu, 1986). There are some forms of capital that we are born with, and other forms that we acquire throughout our lives. Cultural capital encompasses a variety of domains that have value in society, thus, it includes elements ranging from personal experience and cultural goods to educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital includes one’s relationships, networks, and reputation. Social capital requires acknowledgment and recognition from others to have any value (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital refers to one’s economic resources. This study focuses on how influencers conceptualise their role, not necessarily on how they accumulate or use their capital in the field, so capital is not a featured concept in this thesis. Although capital is not directly explored in this study, it is part of this conversation as SF influencers have and have garnered some degree of social and cultural capital as they have amassed followings that value their opinion (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Moreover, having the concept of capital in my conceptual toolkit sensitised me to think about how different influencers have different forms of capital which may impact their experience in the SF field. This is a theme explored in Chapter 7, where questions around who counts as a legitimate player in the field and where does power lie in the field come to the forefront.

In addition to having not only the right capital, but enough of it, Bourdieu also conceptualises taste which functions as a marker of distinction between social groups and classes (Bourdieu, 1984). He largely conceptualises taste as being revealed through consumer preferences (Allen and Anderson, 1994), and how people utilise consumption to distinguish themselves from those seen as being subordinate (Bourdieu, 1984). Taste ranges from what is seen as moral and immoral to what is

seen as avant-garde versus tacky and tasteless (Bourdieu, 1984). It is those who are dominant in society who define what is considered good or bad taste (Allen and Anderson, 1994). Taste is something that is learned over time through experiences with family, friends, culture, and media (Bourdieu, 1984). Taste and cultural capital are intertwined as having the “right” kinds of cultural capital can result in having the “right” taste befitting of one’s social position. Having good taste can also increase one’s cultural capital (McQuarrie et al., 2013). In this study, I am not examining the taste that SF influencers display, however, as will be discussed in Chapter 8, a form of taste is present when SF influencers use fast fashion influencers as a foil to distinguish themselves as being a different type of influencer. So, although taste is not the main focus of this study, having this concept in my conceptual toolkit enables me to notice where and how SF influencers portray themselves as different in the data and question why they may be doing that. It also enables me to consider how some SF practices may be a matter of taste, rather than purely about sustainability.

All of these concepts were instrumental in understanding that a field is extremely complex and structured with power imbalances (Bourdieu, 1984). Together, these concepts help to anchor how I thought about this study and provided the foundation to my dramaturgical lens.

4.1.1 Linking Bourdieu and dramaturgy

Many of Bourdieu’s concepts described in this section resonate closely with the dramaturgical perspective that this study adopts. There are three main links that I will discuss: fields, habitus, and self-interest.

Bourdieu’s concept of field and players links to the dramaturgical stage. Lunt (2020) argues that Bourdieu conceptualises the field in terms of its individual players and not as a collective of people working together to achieve a purpose. Alternately dramaturgy focuses on the collective cast and how they work together as a team (Lunt, 2020). This is where dramaturgy can help as the research question is concerned with the SF movement and the role of SF influencers in it. This question is both individual and collective and thus bringing these two concepts together allows for greater analysis of how influencers conceptualise their role individually and how they see their work as part of a collective.

Another link between Bourdieu and dramaturgy is the concept of habitus and improvisation. With the habitus, people have a “script” of sorts that guide their behaviours; however, people are able to improvise (Bourdieu, 1977). This resonates with practices in theatre and drama where actors often improvise their script. Wexman (1980) argues that improvisation has to be done with the public, or the audience, in mind or else the audience can feel left out of the performance (Wexman, 1980). Ball et al. (2021) utilised drama and Bourdieu’s habitus to conceptualise how in crisis communications, the communicators tend to stay close to their script and only improvise when needed to maintain their legitimacy. People perform their habitus to those around them to show their belonging and legitimacy in the fields they are in, similar to an actor portraying a convincing performance on the stage (Ball et al., 2021). This is where dramaturgy is insightful because it enables us to see how individuals make the SF influencer role their own and work to maintain their legitimacy as SF influencers.

Lunt (2020) argues that from the perspective of Bourdieu’s theory of practice (1977), people ‘seek to give the impression of rule following while serving individual interests’ (Lunt, 2020, p. 2954). Lunt (2020) notes the similarities with Goffman’s conceptualisation of dramaturgy (1959, 1967), where people are always trying to create a positive impression of themselves to others. Bourdieu’s ideas underpin the self-interested aspects of being an influencer that may not be obvious, while dramaturgy enables the consideration of how influencers seek to portray an image of a SF influencer while also reconciling their self-interest. These three aspects illustrate the compatibility of Bourdieu’s concepts and dramaturgy in general. Dramaturgy helps to operationalise Bourdieu’s concepts of field and habitus. Dramaturgy is also able to take Bourdieu’s concepts of fields further by looking not just the individual position of players, but also collective action taken by players. I will further explain dramaturgy and the dramaturgical frame from the social movements literature that I adopt in Section 4.2.

4.2 DRAMATURGY IN MARKETING

In the SF literature, dramaturgy is a novel perspective to adopt but many scholars in consumer research have adopted a dramaturgical lens. One such paper is Mikkonen and Bajde (2013), they utilised the dramaturgical technique of parody to look at how consumers engage in alternative forms of consumption and how it can be a form of consumer resistance. Giesler (2008) drew on

Turner's concept of social dramas to understand the push/pull conflict between free music downloaders and record labels. As a result of music downloaders downloading music for free, the record labels tried to fight back. As both sides tried to hold their own, ultimately a new model of music streaming was born. By utilising the social drama framework, Giesler (2008) was able to see how both sides tried to portray themselves as righteous and use the other as a foil to further their own views. Whilst Holt and Thompson (2004) drew on the idea of narrative to see how men construct their identities as 'men of action' in different ways. They found that the men elevated their everyday activities into dramatic events to fit with how they see themselves. By utilising this dramaturgical perspective, they were able to see how actors draw from societal scripts but then transform them to make the role work for them. This paper was insightful because it shows how people, or rather actors, can draw from and transform broader scripts to make the script work for them. This is important when thinking about SF influencers, because although there may be some expectations of what this role should look like, there is also a degree of flexibility on how people will adapt this title to suit themselves.

In Holbrook's (2001) discussion of exhibitionism, he describes Gabler's (1998) book which explores how our lives have become entertainment for others and we have all become performers. From this view, all aspects of our lives can be seen as a form of entertainment, or real-life reality TV, for others. In terms of how this relates to SF social media, aspects such as doing laundry or how one takes care of their clothes are no longer private acts but something that may inspire others. Holbrook (2001, p. 83) argues that from Gabler's (1998) perspective, 'we are all performers in the life movie, dreaming of celebrity status'. This perspective is insightful because it offers more context as to why influencers feel that sharing their lives online is a perfectly reasonable thing to do. Kylkilahti and Autio (2020, p. 14) drew on Burke's concept of dramatism to develop their concept of gameful service performance which they define as 'non-scripted service situations in which consumers use their freedom to be creative and to draw on situationally available resources'. Nixon (2018) utilises dramaturgy, specifically the concept of role distance, to look at how people who have exited the mainstream consumption market distance themselves from the consumer role. By utilising this dramaturgical framework, they were able to identify strategies that people use to distance themselves from the market (Nixon, 2018). This is insightful because it illustrates how even though people may want to leave the market, they recognise that complete removal is

impossible. This is important to this study as SF influencers broadly aim to be more sustainable and, therefore, engage with the market differently, yet they face tensions in publicly living this out. Kerrigan and Hart (2016) utilised dramaturgy to theorise the concept of digital personhood and how people manage multiple, concurrent, digital identities. For a final exemplar, Humphreys and Carpenter (2018) utilised dramaturgy for the methodology of their study by viewing the wine industry as a drama to uncover shared values which then acted as guides for behaviour. Taking this view enabled them to explore the perspectives of different actors and create a cohesive picture of the wine industry. The SF social media space also has a variety of actors and utilising a dramaturgical perspective allows for the analysis of exploring different perspectives and how they relate to each other.

To summarise, the marketing literature has utilised drama in a variety of ways, from talking about how individuals see and construct their identities to managing complexity when there are multiple perspectives to consider. This review is by no means exhaustive but provides insight into how marketing and drama go hand in hand (Deighton, 1992). From the lens of Bourdieu (1984), a thread throughout these studies is to recognise that values, meanings, and behaviours tend to be situational and relate to the broader social and cultural context. This perspective fits with the aim of this study precisely for these reasons. It is able to look at the role of one actor but also able to situate that role amongst the other cast members in the social world. Considering the different ways marketing has used dramaturgy, I turned to the foundations of dramaturgy to understand it more.

4.2.1 Going Further into Dramaturgy: Theatre as an Analogy for Life

Dramaturgy is a concept related to theatre and art (Birch, 2019). There are five main perspectives in dramaturgy; *life as theatre*, *life is revealed by theatre*, *life and drama are interdependent*, *life is theatre*, and *life is like theatre* (Birch, 2019). These are summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Overview of Dramaturgical Views

Main perspectives	Description	Example studies
Life as theatre	Using theatre production to investigate concepts and constructs	What can be learned about leadership by observing theatre production (Posner, 2008)
Life is revealed by theatre	Using theatre to gain insight into life	Study using staged theatre to understand and improve social interactions in the Norwegian military (Firing et al., 2018)
Life and drama are interdependent	Idea that life is related to theatre and theatre is related to life	Study on the conflict between free music downloaders and music publishers over time (Giesler, 2008)
Life is theatre	Idea that everyone is performing all of the time and these performances are to be interpreted	Study on how service providers and consumers interactions are theatrical (Kylkilahti and Autio, 2020)
Life is like theatre	Theatre is a simile that can help us to understand life	Study explaining how luxury influencers try to create their image (Leban, 2021) Study exploring temporality, self-presentation, and digital personhood (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016)

Life as theatre looks to theatre production to investigate organisational concepts (Birch, 2019). For example, Posner (2008) conducted an ethnography within a theatre production to explore the concept of leadership and to see how it plays out. Life revealed by theatre uses actual plays to gain insights into life (Birch, 2019). The interdependency view of life and theatre holds that both of these aspects influence and relate to each other (Birch, 2019). Turner, who is well known for his

development of the concept of social dramas, holds this view. Social dramas are moments of crisis between individuals or groups (Sinha, 2010). It looks at the process of how people with opposing views of interests come to some sort of resolution which can lead to social change (Sinha, 2010). This view is insightful, yet I do not fully apply it here. Although there may be a social drama occurring between the fast fashion and SF industries, this research focuses on a specific group of actors within SF. Another type of dramaturgy says that life is theatre (Birch, 2019), or in the words of Shakespeare, ‘all the world is a stage’. Burke, who is well known for the concept of dramatism, is known for adopting this view (Boje, 2003). Burke views social action as theatrical and uses dramaturgical terms to gain insight into how people interpret their social world (Sinha, 2010). From this perspective, ‘what social actors say about their actions is as much a fact as what they actually do’ (Sinha, 2010, p.189). Dramatism also allows for the analysis of how these interpretations may be influenced by wider cultural influences (Kylkilahti and Autio, 2020). This view is helpful in understanding SF influencers and how they interpret their role in the SF social media space. Dramaturgy as developed by scholars such as Goffman is conceptualised as using theatre as a simile for life (Sinha, 2010; Birch, 2019). This form of dramaturgy finds its roots in symbolic interactionism and focuses on meaning that arises from everyday interactions (Cook, 2012).

Although all of these different strands of dramaturgy are useful, I adopt the view of theatre as an analogy for life. Meaning that by using the language and dynamics of theatre, we can make sense of complex social processes (Reybold and Halx, 2018; Birch, 2019). Studies in this vein draw on dramaturgical terms such as roles, scripts, and performances (Sinha, 2010). According to Hope and LeCoure (2012), such terms are useful to make sense of situations where actors may play several different roles. This is important for the SF social media space because there are a lot of actors involved in making the space what it is. To clarify, this thesis is focused on the role of SF influencers and uses drama as analogy to understand the SF social media world. Corrigan and Beaubien (2013) consider dramaturgy to be an intermediate, meso level of analysis because it can incorporate both culture and society (macro), as well as the individual level (micro). Corrigan and Beaubien (2013) describe dramaturgy as ‘a view of micro-practices with a gaze drawn to the specific and contextual’ (Corrigan and Beaubien, 2013, p. 311). Meaning that through the ideas of the individual, we can also gain insights about society. Therefore, I place SF social media

influencers in the wider context of a ‘shared and public storyline’ (Reybold and Halx, 2018, p.274), around sustainability in fashion. My use of dramaturgy is a bit different as I conceptualise SF as a field where the backstage is the behind scenes of being a SF influencer and the front stage is the influencers’ public image. I use dramaturgy as a metaphor to explain how different characters in the SF drama relate to each other and try to use each other to create a certain image. Thus, I expand the scope of analysis from a specific conflict or role, to conceptualising SF as its own little social world. In doing so, I am able to have a relational approach that moves beyond conflict as the main point of relation (e.g., Giesler, 2008) and expose a glimpse of the inner workings of this microcosm. To go deeper into the context of SF social media influencers, it is prudent to consider the wider movement. For this reason, we turn to the social movement literature.

4.2.2 Social Movements and Drama

Thinking of the SF social media world as a play made a lot of sense to me and the marketing literature was instrumental in my understanding of how to operationalise the concept but as I began to delve into the concept of dramaturgy more, I felt that nothing quite captured what I was trying to say. This study adopts a dramaturgical frame from the social movements’ literature. An exemplar paper is Reybold and Halx (2018) and their study of performing ethicality utilised Benford and Hunt’s model (1992) of dramaturgy from the social movements’ literature. Benford and Hunt’s (1992) model was the link I was looking for.

Melucci (1980) argues that social movements have to meet two main conditions to be considered a social movement. Firstly, a social movement consists of collective action, which represents groups of people engaged in some sort of struggle for or against something in a social system (Melucci, 1980; Touraine, 1985). According to Touraine (1985), social conflict is inherent in the definition of a social movement. Social movements consist of opposition between organised actors that have conflicting goals (Touraine, 1985). The second condition of a social movement is that the collective action goes against the dominant social paradigm in some way and therefore challenges established structures (Melucci, 1980). Considering this, social movements are commonly conceptualised as the people versus those in power (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004).

Consumer movements are a type of social movement, but they usually aim to change various aspects of market structures or culture (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Gollnhofer et al., 2019). Inspired by Kozinets and Handelman (2004), Weijo et al. (2018, p. 251) define consumer movements ‘as resolute and persistent efforts by organized groups of consumers to reimagine elements of consumer culture’. Consumer movements may have more than one goal and the magnitude of these goals can range from changes in practices to changes in the way society works (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). The effectiveness of consumer movements can be hit or miss but research has shown that some of them are able to affect change in the marketplace (Sandikci and Ger, 2009; Karababa and Ger 2010; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Dolbec and Fischer, 2015; Gollnhofer et al., 2019). Within social movements there are different parties competing for a desired result and this is linked to discussions of power and who decides the *right* way to do something (Benford and Hunt, 1992). This links back to the previous discussion on fields where people are struggling for positions of dominance (Bourdieu, 1977). Power is related to influence; power has the privilege to present a specific view reality and dictate meaning (Benford and Hunt, 1992). According to Foucault, power is something that is exercised (Gallagher, 2008). SF influencers by their name exercise power in presenting images of SF that implicitly or explicitly say, this is how SF is and this is what it should look like.

From here we must take a brief intermission to talk about another perspective that I considered and that is prefiguration. Prefiguration is broadly defined as an approach where social movement actors try to bring about positive social change through everyday actions in the present (Trott et al., 2018; Scholsberg, 2019). It is an exciting concept that applauds imaginativeness and forward-thinking. Yates (2015) suggests that prefiguration consists of five processes: experimentation, perspective, conduct, consolidation, and diffusion. Experimentation involves trying new practices and learning from the process whilst perspective involves critiquing and developing new ideas. The conduct process is about developing new norms, values, and codes of conduct. Consolidation and diffusion turn those ideas into new norms and practices and then share them with the world. Prefiguration definitely plays a role in this conversation, however, prefiguration research in the social movements field often focuses on collectives or clearly defined groups. In the social media space, SF influencers are much more diffused and are more like individuals in a public space than a tight knit community. Moreover, although it is useful for exploring tensions and contradictions

within a collective, it does not fully capture the inside/outside aspects of the SF world that I am trying to communicate.

In thinking about how all of this relates to dramaturgy, I look to Benford and Hunts' (1992) well regarded paper on using dramaturgy to understand the communication strategies of social movements (*see for other examples using their framework* Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Hendriks et al., 2016; Reybold and Halx, 2018). Benford and Hunt (1992, p.38) define social movements as 'dramas in which protagonists and antagonists compete to affect audiences' interpretations of power relations in a variety of domains, including those pertaining to religious, political, economic or lifestyle arrangements.' They argue that it is important to consider the dynamics within a social movement that sustain it since social movements are dynamic rather than static entities (Benford and Hunt, 1992). This is interesting for this study because as mentioned in the beginning of this section, SF influencers are not only trying to communicate SF but also trying to navigate the SF social world in a way that is fair and equitable. Benford and Hunt (1992) mention that some amount of critique from the inside of the movement can help it to improve but at the same time, taken too far can open an opportunity for those against the movement to negate their efforts. Dramaturgy is a helpful framework to tease out the balance between public facing actions and within movement tensions. This thesis can contribute to this conversation by shedding light on how SF influencers navigate their role in light of internal and external pressures.

But going back to the definitions of social movements, SF social media influencers themselves are not a social movement but SF itself is largely identified as being a movement (Pookulangara and Shephard, 2013; Henninger et al., 2016; Lundblad and Davies, 2016). In light of this, I regard SF influencers as movement actors that are part of the wider movement toward SF. Within this metaphor of drama, there are people aiming for more sustainable production and consumption practices and also those who would prefer to keep things as they are. To understand the dynamics of the SF social media world and the role of SF influencers, I utilise Benford and Hunt's (1992) framework to explore the nuances within the movement. The following section explains the framework this study adopts.

4.2.3 The Dramaturgical Framework

In Benford and Hunt's (1992) work on social movements they found that social movements utilise four dramatic techniques to communicate their message: scripting, staging, performing, and interpreting. Looking to recent applications of their framework, Hendriks et al. (2016) focused on scripting and staging in their dramaturgical analysis of Facebook and environmental issues. Because this thesis is focused primarily on the role of SF influencers in the broader SF movement, I too focus on the first two aspects of Benford and Hunt's (1992) framework, scripting and staging to tell the story of SF and SF influencers role in the SF social movement. Extant SF social media literature has largely dealt with performance, or what is posted, justifying this focus. To clarify, I am using these terms to translate what is happening in the SF world using the analogy of a play. Scripting refers to selecting the cast and defining their role while staging is primarily concerned with the management behind the performance. I am also using this framework to communicate the findings to you as the readers; therefore, I adopt creative license in telling the story in this way. This is further discussed in Chapter 5 in the methodology, but the following section discusses the nuances of scripting and staging.

4.2.3.1 *Scripting*

Scripting is the process of creating the cast of characters, assigning their motivation, and allocating what they do and when (Hunt and Benford, 2011). Scripting here can be looked at as inspiration or guides for action. This view of scripting resonates with the ideas around habitus introduced in Chapter 4.1 as the script creates boundaries for the characters. Turner and Stets (2006) describe scripts as being influenced by culture and dominant ideologies. Scripts are also not set in stone nor are they followed to a tee, rather they can be improvised in real time as the situation develops (Hunt and Benford, 2011). However, for actors to be successful in their role there are limits in how much they are able to improvise without being penalised or seen as an illegitimate actor (Turner and Stets, 2006). In discussing the formula of Bond films, Preece et al. (2019) examined the Bond formula which allows subsequent movies to be developed and seen as a part of the Bond universe. Although scripts can be improvised, because of cultural conventions people are discouraged from straying too far (Turner and Stets, 2006). Therefore, it may be argued that in order for a SF influencer to be a SF influencer there is a basic script that must be adhered to for them to be seen

as legitimate actors in this space. Using Benford and Hunt (1992) elements of discussing the script, the next section is broken down into three parts, casting, dialogue, and direction, and how they are meaningful for this context.

4.2.3.1.1 Step 1: Casting

Hunt and Benford's (2011) define protagonists as 'those identified as having the capability of overcoming injustice or solving the problematic situation.' Protagonists are considered to be the "hero" in the story (Luedicke et al., 2010). The protagonists in this story are the SF influencers who exist to fight the antagonists. The antagonist is traditionally the character who exists in contrast to the protagonist (Giesler, 2008). They are usually seen as immoral characters (Luedicke et al., 2010; Hendriks et al., 2016). To determine the different cast members in this story, I use quotes from the SF influencers to identify them. The point of view of one character can be ascertained through the view of another (McIntyre, 2004). Therefore, by using the quotes I am able to identify the different cast members in the SF space.

4.2.3.1.2 Step 2: Dialogue

Dialogue is an important aspect of scripting as it gives the cast plotlines to draw from and motivation to act (Benford and Hunt, 1992; Hunt and Benford, 2011). Dialogue in this context refers literally to the lines that make up the script rather than dialogue in terms of a conversation between people. Dialogue provides the justification of why SF is important and why being a SF influencer is a useful way to go about it. People learn dialogue in many ways, but one way is from seeing other people model appropriate ways to perform (Gardner and Avolio, 1998). This links back to Elias' and Bourdieu's views on socialisation and how people come to learn how to behave in certain situations (Paulle et al., 2012). This is meaningful for this context because SF influencers are not only protagonists but audience members as they witness how other SF influencers engage with the space. Moreover, protagonists can dictate the dialogue of their followers (Gardner and Avolio, 1998; Corrigan and Beaubien, 2013). So, from this perspective, as SF influencers communicate on social media, they are influencing the dialogue of their followers and other SF influencers. This highlights the potential role of SF influencers in the SF movement.

4.2.3.1.3 Step 3: Direction

Moving on to direction, direction tells the actors what to do and when, and how they must appear to feel (Benford and Hunt, 1992). Thus, direction includes emotion management and nonverbal action through body language and things of the visual nature. Emotional control is a key part of scripting (Turner and Stets, 2006). Emotional scripts can be drawn from wider cultural scripts about what emotions are appropriate for different social situations (Turner and Stets, 2006; Higgins and Hamilton, 2019). Direction is important in managing the impression the audience perceives (Gardener and Avolio, 1998).

4.2.3.2 *Staging*

Staging is the next part of the dramaturgical framework. Staging involves the stage management and is strategic. Staging can be physical and/or symbolic; it is intentional and aims to convey a specific image (Gardener and Avolio, 1998). Staging is also done on the front stage and uses symbols, costumes, props, and various resources to create the performance (Gardener and Avolio, 1998). Consequently, the process of staging involves deciding what is shown on the stage and what will remain hidden beyond the view of the audience (Rose, 2001; Hunt and Benford, 2011). In staging, the chosen elements have to be consistent with the script for a convincing performance (Gardener and Avolio, 1998). Table 4.2 gives examples of what props, costumes, and masks influencers adopt to convey their roles.

Table 4.2 Elements of staging

Persona/ Masks	A blemish free identity adopted by actors that hides contradictions and presents the desired image (Leban, 2020)
Prop	‘...any inanimate object that the actor manipulates and utilizes in order to further express his or her role’ (Schulz, 2012, p.6)
Costume	The outfit, accessories, etc. that help the actor portray the role (Schulz, 2012)

4.2.3.3 *Adapting for Social Media*

Because this study is focused on individuals active in the social media space, adaptations are needed for the social media context. Hendriks et al. (2016) suggests that dramaturgy is useful for social media studies. Hogan (2010) adapts a dramaturgical approach for social media network sites by viewing social media as an exhibit rather than a live performance. This is an important distinction because the content on social media is often displayed in an anachronous manner. Moreover, once people post something on social media, it can become an artefact, rather than something that will simply go away (Hogan, 2010). These social media artefacts also build up to create a portfolio of work which helps to build up ones' credibility and reputation in the eyes of an audience (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007). The performance becomes disembodied and separated from its physical creation. It follows that the idea of performance has to be reconceptualised. Performances are usually thought of as being viewed live by an audience but on social media the performance has different properties. For example, according to Hendriks et al. (2016) and Hogan (2010), viewership on social media is not limited to a specific audience viewing the content at a specific time. Audiences can be multiple and change over time (Hogan, 2010; Hendriks et al., 2016). Further these audiences are *imagined*, although users can restrict somewhat who sees their content, they never really know who has seen their content (Hogan, 2010; Hendriks et al., 2016). The features of social network platforms also mediate the performance. For example, algorithms organise content on the website and filter what content people see (Hogan, 2010). Moreover, users are also able to filter their experience to some degree. They are able to search for specific content and block or skip over what they do not want to see. This is important because in a live performance, once seated, audiences have little choice in what they see, but on social media a performance can go virtually unnoticed. This is a key consideration since social media influencers have to manage to get their content highlighted by the algorithm. Influencers may be inclined to produce content that will be popular on social media rather than impactful (Duffy, 2016).

In terms of the actors, this concept also needs to be adapted for social media. Kerrigan and Hart (2016) utilise the concept of digital personhood to understand the complexity of digital identities. In the digital world, people have multiple identities, spanning the past and present, at the same time (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016). These identities are carefully managed and sometimes the

distinctions between them are blurry (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016). For example, Leban et al. (2020) explored how wealthy social media influencers construct their behaviour as ethical in light of their luxury lifestyles. This is relevant for this thesis because the SF social media influencer profiles under study are their public-facing selves which is carefully managed. Moreover, as identities are constantly being constructing in the digital space, it helps to acknowledge that analysing how the SF influencers see their role now, may not be the same as they see it in the future or as they saw it in the past. Hogan (2010) offers the helpful term artefacts to describe how once something is posted on social media it is there to be found again at a later time, unless it is deleted. These artefacts can tell us a lot about changes the SF influencer has made. Kerrigan and Hart (2016) noted that within the social media space, people can have multiple concurrent identities. For example, if one were to look deep into my social media artefacts, they would see how my page has gone through several iterations, and the old is still there along with the new. I talk more about the fluidity of the SF influencer context in Chapter 5. With these adaptations in mind, dramaturgy is seen as a suitable framework for the social media context.

4.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis of this study. I first described three elements that help us to understand the relationship between society, individuals, and change [4.1]. From there, I explained the rationale of drawing on dramaturgy as a metaphor to help understand the role of SF social media influencers in the field of SF [4.2], which is a sub-field of the fashion industry. This lens is important in explaining the internal and external dynamics of the SF social media space. I operationalise the dramaturgical metaphor in this study [4.2.4], by drawing on Benford and Hunt's (1992) model of dramaturgy developed from their work in social movements. The aim of viewing SF as a play is to explore and reveal tensions within SF and how influencers navigate these tensions considering the different roles they play. The thesis now moves on to the methodology of this study.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters on SF, social media, and the theoretical lens, lay the groundwork for this research project. This chapter explains the research process to answer the thesis research question of ‘*what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?*’. This interpretative study puts the spotlight on the world of SF social media influencers to explore how they conceptualise their role in the SF movement. To do so, I utilise qualitative interviews. The chapter starts out by explaining the philosophical underpinnings of the thesis [5.1] and then thoroughly explains the research methodology [5.2]. Throughout the chapter, I explain my reasoning behind the choices made for this work and provide moments of reflection throughout different stages of the process.

5.1 PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNINGS

There are many ways to look at the world. Ontology is concerned with reality and what the world is (Burgoyne, 2008). Epistemology is concerned with what knowledge is and how can we know it (Saunders and Lewis, 2017). These two concepts influence the methodology used because the methodology are the means that are used to find out what we believe we can know (Willing, 2008). Cunliffe (2011) explains that:

‘...our metatheoretical assumptions have very practical consequences for the way we do research in terms of our topic, focus of study, what we see as “data”, how we collect and analyse that data, how we theorize, and how we write up our research accounts,’ (Cunliffe, 2011, p.651).

Consequently, this section starts off with discussing the ontology and epistemology [section 5.1.1] and then moves to discuss the position of researcher and reflexivity to explore my role in the research [section 5.1.2].

5.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Morgan and Smircich (1980) provide a helpful continuum to understand theoretical approaches. The continuum ranges from objective and subjective approaches. These approaches are associated with different ontologies, epistemologies, and methods. Table 5.1 summarises two main approaches.

Table 5.1 Summary of Philosophical Underpinnings

	Positivism	Interpretivism/ Subjectivism
Ontology	Reality is concrete and there is one external reality (Carson et al., 2001; Cunliffe, 2011)	There are multiple external realities that we cannot access (Carson et al., 2001)
Approach	Objective	Subjective
Epistemology	Knowledge gained through observation (Cunliffe, 2011)	Knowledge perceived and/or co-created (Carson et al., 2001; Cunliffe, 2011)
Aim	Make predictions and identify cause and effect relationships (Su, 2018)	To understand peoples' experiences and perceptions of reality (Morgan and Smircich, 1980)
Privileges	'...privileges an outsider view of culture and behaviour, imposes scientific meanings on observations of everyday behaviour...' (Su, 2018, p. 35)	Privileges the view of the insider

Reflecting on the positivist view summarised in Table 5.1, the aim of positivist research is not consistent with the aim of this study. Moreover, the literature is scarce about SF influencers and because this study looks at their experiences, it seems inappropriate to impose a rigid view on the study. Finally, I question the ability of a researcher to truly be an objective outsider to the study and social world. The point of view of the researcher is implicated in the study from the wording of questions to the interaction between the researcher and the researched. The symbolic interactionist perspective is helpful here as this approach acknowledges that things like race 'persist through interaction' (Morris, 2007, p. 410); therefore, the identity of the researcher cannot

be separated in a research project. For example, in this study, the only reason one participant agreed to speak to me free of charge was because I was also Black. Even before actually collecting the data, who I was influenced my access to the participant. Because of inequality based on race (Morris, 2007), the participant felt as though if I was not Black, then this would be another opportunity where their labour was not valued. Here it is evident how it was impossible for me to separate myself from the research despite not being the one to bring up race. I discuss my position in the study more later in this section 5.1.2.; overall, a positivist approach is not consistent with the aims of this study.

This research falls in the interpretive research camp. From an ontological standpoint, this research views the social world as having some rule-like structures and order but ‘is the product of intersubjective experience,’ (Hassard, 1991, p.277). How this is interpreted varies in the subjective school but referring back to Morgan and Smircich (1980), this study lies somewhere around viewing the social world as symbolic discourse. Viewing the social world as symbolic discourse means ‘human beings live in a world of symbolic significance, interpreting and enacting a meaningful relationship with that world’ (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 494). de Burgh-Woodman and King (2013) adopt this view to interrogate the concept of sustainability and the meanings that people apply to it. This view of reality coincides with the dramaturgical approach of this thesis as it views people as actors and acknowledges the existence of social rules or a script (Cunliffe, 2011). Epistemologically, this view takes the position that ‘knowledge, understanding, and explanations of social affairs must take account of how social order is fashioned by human beings in ways that are meaningful to them’ (Morgan and Smircich, 1980, p. 494). For example, Ritch (2015) adopted an interpretivist approach in their study of SF because both terms are understood through shared meaning.

This view is consistent with the common aims of interpretative research. Interpretive research is concerned with symbols, shared meanings, and social rules that may impact how people act and see the world (Gephart, 2018). Interpretative research aims to ‘deconstruct the phenomenological processes through which shared realities are created, sustained and changed,’ (Hassard, 1991, p.277). This view is consistent with the aims and objective of this study which are to identify these shared meanings and rules of the SF social media influencer experience. Unlike the positivist

framework which sees facts as being free from context and time, interpretive research contextualises knowledge in terms of culture and time (Gephart, 2018). Then based on this knowledge, we can understand what the practices may have meant for those in that time and place (Gephart, 2018). Research in this theoretical tradition looks to understand the perspective of different actors (Hassard, 1991). Because this view builds off what people experience rather than imposing on what their experience should be, it is a good fit for this thesis. The next section focuses on my position in this research.

5.1.2 Position of Researcher and Reflexivity

Following on from the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis, I expound on my position in the research. I think it is important to discuss this early in the chapter as Corlett and Mavin (2018) explain how being reflexive is not just a one-off occurrence but entails questioning every aspect of the research process from the epistemology and motivation of the study to relationships with the subjects of the study. Reflexivity is important because it would be untrue to say that who I am had no bearing on how the study has developed or the themes that resonate with me so clearly (Alvesson, 2003).

Since I am taking an interpretative view to the social world, I acknowledge that:

‘Our research accounts are also subjectively situated: relative to our own and organizational members’ embedded experiences, which influence our observations, interpretations, and research accounts (the double hermeneutic).’ (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 656)

Therefore, throughout this study I aimed to be reflexive about my role in the study and how I interpreted the data (Hayward and Cassell, 2018). For this reason, I incorporate reflexivity throughout the methods section to help the reader understand the decisions I made in conducting this study. I also write from the first-person point of view which is consistent with a subjective epistemology which acknowledges the researcher as being present in the research (Cunliffe and Karunanayake, 2013).

5.1.3 Personal Background to the Study

To begin, I first want to explain what led me to this research area. I first became interested in SF when I watched the True Cost documentary (Directed by Andrew Morgan, 2015). I did not consider it much at the time until one day I wanted to buy a new outfit and I found one for less than £15. I wondered how it could be so cheap and I looked for a more sustainable alternative. That alternative was £60! I was appalled by the way people were being treated and thought something had to change but at the same time I could not afford SF brands. I could say that my initial interest in mainstreaming sustainable fashion was purely altruistic but that is not the whole story. I did my Master's degree on exploring fashion rental as a potential avenue of making SF more attainable (for me) and my PhD was initially motivated by the same thing. I thought that if influencers were so influential, could they not influence people to buy more SF, thus making it more common and attainable? From here it is obvious that I looked at my research from a positivist epistemology, where a simple survey could tell me all that I needed to know. Quickly, I learned that SF was not as straightforward as the simple supply and demand graphs of economics would suggest. I began to consider society and cultural practices. I looked to sociological theories to think about why it was so hard for our practices to become more sustainable. Then I began to consider what if the issue is how SF is seen and communicated to people.

I again looked to SF influencers as I believed that they show a variety of ways to engage with SF. Originally, I was interested in seeing how they conceptualise SF to their followers and how that could be shaping the ways we engage with SF but then I started to reflect more on their role in the wider SF movement. I knew the role that I had given them, but I wanted to explore how they conceptualised their role and how that is expressed through the content that they create. You may be wondering why I thought influencers were influential in the first place. For me, I have been blogging on and off since 2012 when I embarked on a journey to embrace my afro hair texture. Seeing so many women online with beautiful, healthy afro hair inspired me to embrace my own and taught me almost everything I know about haircare. Currently, I run a different blog, sustainable.com, where I explore various aspects of life, from SF to creativity. I am also in a Facebook group for ethical bloggers where people share their thoughts and opportunities. From this standpoint I can relate to what it means to share your journey and what it means to be witness to someone else's. Taking all this together formed my core interest into looking into SF on social

media and exploring the potential impacts of these digital conversations. Next, I discuss my position in the research.

5.1.4 My Position in the Research

Negotiating my position in the research was an iterative process, especially during the interviews as I tried to navigate different personalities and experiences. A good way to describe an interview is as a ‘complex social event’ (Alvesson, 2003). It is complex because it is a situation where usually a stranger has a list of questions that they ask another stranger (Berg and Lune, 2012). In negotiating this interaction, both parties have to consider how they relate to one another and are conscious of the way they present themselves and their stories (Alvesson, 2003).

Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) describe four continuums of positions the researcher may occupy in a study: insider–outsider, sameness–difference, engagement–distance, and political activism–active neutrality. The key positions relevant to this study are the insider–outsider and sameness–difference. Insider–outsider refers to in how far the participants perceive the researcher to be ‘one of them’ (Hayward and Cassell, 2018). During the interviews, I think I occupied a position of being both an insider and an outsider. For example, sometimes there was an expectation that I would know of certain people in the space or a knowing pause of ‘you know what I mean so I do not have to say it’. Ochieng (2010) describes a similar research experience in their work with families of African descent where she was also perceived as being ‘one of them’. Other times I was not. To the majority I was an outsider because they did not know of me in the space. Further, as a SF influencer, they do not stop being an influencer in the interview, in fact this can be seen as part of their role. I also do not stop being myself during the interview, albeit a more professional version. During the interview, the influencers attempted to construct a consistent identity of a good SF influencer, the meaning of which will be further discussed in the analysis section but what is important here is that we were all trying to portray a good impression.

Sameness–difference refers to how far the participants perceive the researcher to be similar or different to them. Because of this, it is impossible to ignore the impact of the interviewer on the interview. However, in this study, the identity of the interviewer was integral to certain topics being brought up. The benefit of having similarities is that it can help the participants to trust the

interviewer more and be more open, however there is a danger of over-rapport (Hayward and Cassell, 2018). I was largely close in age to the participants, have a shared interest in the subject matter and blogging, and of a similar background to many of the participants in some form (being Black, a woman, and American). At times, the interview felt more like conversation with a friend that has interesting stories rather than the complex interaction that it was. However, this is not to say that I freely gave my opinion or tried to overly insert myself into the participant's narrative, which is ill advised in interviews (Alvesson, 2003). I aimed to remain at a "critical distance", which involves being reflective and maintaining some degree of separation between the researcher and the researched (Hayward and Cassell, 2018). In some cases, this "management" felt weird as the participants wanted to know what I thought about the SF influencer space, what other people had said, and my own ambitions. To manage this, I tried to save any commentary to the end of the interview, which in some cases led to additional insights on the topic. Many of the interviews flowed naturally and led to interesting twists and turns.

From a dramaturgical standpoint, I adopt the position of the director. Previously, I thought I would have the role of narrator as I was retelling the story but upon reflection my role is more involved. I am giving my interpretation of events and crafting various stories into one narrative, which makes the role of director more suitable. Directors develop the concept and direction that the story takes (Bleeker, 2003). According to Posner (2008), directors use their personal experience, research, and the content to craft the vision. In doing so, I hold creative license and decide what best helps tell the story. Therefore, this thesis can be considered the director's cut as what is presented here and what may be seen 'on the stage' may be different. However, in directing this production I aim to stay true to the voices of the character and the stories told. The next section goes through how I conducted this research.

5.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the primary methods used to gain insight into the world of SF influencers. Drawing on an ethnographic toolbox, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 SF social media influencers over the period of February 2019 to June 2020. I say ethnographic tools because although I did consider an ethnography for this study, it was not the most appropriate method to

meet the objectives. To gain insight into being a SF influencer and all that comes with it I would have had to shadow an influencer or become one. Becoming a successful influencer is no easy feat; therefore, I look to SF influencers to share their experiences. Whilst doing so, I kept my eyes open to the language used, practices, and shared meanings as one would do if doing an ethnography (Cunliffe, 2011). Moreover, my continued blogging and ongoing social media complemented this ethnographic approach as I am immersed in the social media context. As ethnographies are not just about gaining multiple insights but also to interpret those insights (Cunliffe, 2011), I bring together diverse accounts of being a SF influencer into one narrative presented through the lens of dramaturgy. In the following sections I discuss the choice to utilise Instagram [5.2.1], semi-structured interviews [5.2.2], the interview guide [5.2.3], the pilot study [5.2.4], the sampling context [5.2.5], and the data collection process [5.2.6].

5.2.1 Why Instagram

Because of its influence in the fashion industry, this research focuses specifically on Instagram. Instagram is a ‘photo and video-sharing social networking service that allows users to upload content that can be edited with various filters and organized with tags and location information’ (Nouri, 2018, p. 4). Instagram has over 1 billion users (Newberry, 2021) and the primary users of Instagram are people between the ages of 18-35 (WeAreSocial, 2018). Users can engage with the platform in a variety of ways. The media they create are not restricted to selfies, or pictures taken of themselves, but they can also share things such as collages, food, quotes, art, and more (Highfield and Leaver, 2016; Caldeira et al., 2020). People can follow accounts that interest them, leave a comment or ‘like’ a post, tag, and message other users, and share posts with others. Instagram is always adding new features and apps to its repertoire which changes the way users are able to interact with the app (Highfield and Leaver, 2016). For example, 2020 saw the launch of Instagram Reels, a feature that lets users post short clips with music, filters, and creative effects (Instagram, 2020). Finally, Instagram is often the go-to for fashion and lifestyle inspiration (Arvidsson and Caliendo, 2016; O’Connor, 2018). Considering that Instagram is where SF influencers are the most visible and engage more often, it is seen as a suitable platform to explore SF.

5.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

It is one thing to examine the content of social media influencers and immerse oneself into their online community but doing so does not necessarily give access into the backstage world of being a SF social media influencer on Instagram. In this study, the purpose of the interviews is to understand how SF influencers understand their dramaturgical roles as SF influencers and to explore their experiences in that role. To get a peek into the backstage workings of their digital world, semi-structured interviews were a vital tool (Kvale, 2007). Compared to structured interviews, the semi-structured approach provided the interviewees and I with the flexibility to shape the interaction as it played out, which resulted in the co-creation of the script between the ‘actors’ and myself. Interviews are a widely used method to gain insight into people’s experiences (Roulston and Choi, 2018). Although surveys were another possible tool that I could use, they cannot provide a rich description of the influencers’ experiences and the questions would be limited to what I know about their world rather than what they know. Semi-structured interviews are useful to ‘...give voice to people’s lives and their perceptions of experiences important to them,’ (Arsel, 2017, p.939).

The aspect of giving voice is important to understanding how different actors conceptualise their roles. Although SF social media influencers are the protagonists in this drama, some actors that occupy this role have been historically, socially, and culturally silenced. Saren et al. (2019) describe how when it comes to race, gender, and economic status some groups are ignored. Grier and Poole (2020) challenge the marketing discipline to value the experiences of minorities and these experiences bring them to the forefront. Moreover, influencing can be seen as frivolous (Abidin, 2016), and thus their actions as SF influencers may not always be seen as a serious topic to be discussed. Therefore, giving voice to a variety of SF influencers is important in building up the SF story and challenging assumptions in SF. Semi-structured interviews are a way of letting people tell their own stories (Kvale, 2007). Although these stories are interpreted by me, I constantly went back and forth between the data and my interpretation, and also discussed evolving observations with the supervisory team. Having discussed the primary method used to conduct this research, I now describe the development of the interview guide.

5.2.3 Interview Guide

Firstly, to prepare for the interviews an interview guide was developed. Roulston and Choi (2018) recommend using an interview guide to generate conversation. An interview guide was developed to spark conversation around the different aspects of being a SF influencer (Roulston and Choi, 2018). Crafting an informed interview guide is recommended so that the interview can be done with intentionality and purpose (Berg and Lune, 2012; Arsel, 2017). Recognising the limitations of what the literature knows about SF influencers and also the limitations of imposing one interview guide to capture all experiences, as customary in a structured interview guide, I adopted a more flexible approach in semi-structured interviews (Berg and Lune, 2012). This flexibility is important because it enables the interviewee to explain what is important to them about their role (Berg and Lune, 2012). When requested, a modified interview guide was given to participants. Initially, I was hesitant to supply the guide in case people tried to give predetermined answers. However, as I spoke to people who better express themselves through writing or those for whom English was not their first language, I realised sharing a modified version would help put the participant at ease and enable us to have a better conversation now that the expectations had been set.

The guide was built around four main themes: their SF journey, their mission for their social media platform, the practices that they do in their role as SF influencers, and the challenges they faced in carrying out that role. The interview guide went through different iterations and different avenues of inquiry were opened as the interviews progressed, but the core themes stayed the same (Berg and Lune, 2012; Arsel, 2017). Table 5.2 illustrates the core of the interview guide. Many of the questions were not asked as formally as presented here but rather took on a more conversational style to build rapport with the influencer. Building rapport allowed the interviews to go a bit deeper to uncover some of the fears and challenges faced by the SF influencers. The guide was then tested in the pilot interview.

Table 5.2 Interview Guide

Objective	Interview Questions
Mission and success for being a SF influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you hope to achieve through your blog/Instagram? • What is your mission for your Instagram/blog? • Do you/ how do communicate that with your audience? • What does success look like for you? • How do you measure/ know if you are successful at that?
General questions about SF journey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about how you got interested in sustainable fashion? • What would you say are the biggest issues in fashion? • What is sustainable fashion to you?
The role of being a SF influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you see as the role of a SF influencer? • What are your mains sources of revenue? • Do you consider yourself to be an influencer? • Is there a SF community and if so, what is it like? • Do you often collaborate with brands or other influencers?
Benefits and challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you tell me about any benefits, challenges, or difficulties you face in being a SF influencer? • How do you handle that?

5.2.4 Interview Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to help refine and assess the effectiveness of the interview guide to answer the research question (Berg and Lune, 2012). Participants in the pilot study were primarily found on Instagram using hashtags (see Table 5.3). Other participants were found by either personal knowledge or chance. One day I happened to meet a model who had an Instagram focused on SF at the US Embassy in London. She became the first interviewee. The pilot study began in February 2019 and naturally flowed into the primary study. I began with six pilot interviews and

all except for two did not meet the criteria for the final study. One was excluded because they did not have enough followers to meet the criteria and the other did not associate themselves with SF, they perceived themselves to be part of the sewing community. These interviews were still very insightful to see how SF was viewed from an audience perspective, whereas those included were able to speak from an insider perspective.

All the pilot study participants were emailed a consent form to ensure they knew the nature of the study. From the pilot study, the sampling technique was altered to be more systematic by using lists created by others to find SF influencers that others regarded as influential. By using lists that are publicly accessible to all, others may be able to explore this area and see if they arrive to similar conclusions. The interview guide was also altered to focus more on the experience of being a SF influencer rather than their SF journeys. Although the SF journey was still included in the guide, it was no longer a main talking point. The main result of the pilot study was that I was able to be introduced to other SF influencers that would be willing to participate in the study.

Table 5.3 Profile of Pilot Study Participants

Profile	How I met them	Interview length	Format	Age	Educational Attainment	Final Study
Beauty Queen	US Embassy London	55 min	Face to face	Late 20s	Bachelor's	Y
Ethical fashion blogger, Copywriter	Instagram #ethicalfashionrepresentationmatters	54 min	Video call	Mid 20s	Bachelor's	Y
Full time ethical fashion blogger	Twitter	60 min	Telephone	Mid 20s	Bachelor's	Y
Slow fashion Instagrammer, Occupational Therapist	Instagram #ethicalfashionrepresentationmatters	41 min	Video call	Mid – Late 20s	Master's	N
Sewing Instagrammer, Finance	Instagram #sustainablefashion	70 min	Telephone	Late 20s	Bachelor's	Y

Sewing Instagrammer, TV Producer	Instagram #sustainablefashion	n/a	Instagram direct messages	Mid – Late 20s	Bachelor's	N
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5.2.5 Sampling

After conducting the pilot interviews, I also utilised purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is used when the sample is chosen according to the guidance of the literature or the needs of the research question (Salmons, 2016). Hackley (2019) argues that interpretative research should be systematic, transparent, and well-reasoned so random sampling is not compatible to building credible interpretative research. To achieve the objective of understanding the experiences of SF social media influencers, it was important to be intentional in selecting influencers whose main focus was SF. Snowball sampling was utilised to gain access to more SF influencers and increase the likelihood that they would reply. The following section details the sampling criteria [5.2.5.1] and then the development of the SF influencer database [5.2.5.2].

5.2.5.1 *Influencer Criteria:*

Based on the working definition given in Chapter 3, I set the following criteria to identify SF social media influencers.

1. Must be an influencer or personal brand, not an organisation (The founder could be an influencer but not the organisation itself)
2. Must be the face of the account i.e., not solely posting infographics which may make people think it is an organisation.
3. Must have an Instagram account.
4. More than 1,000 followers or subscribers - According to industry experts cited in the NY Times, influencers with 1,000 - 5,000 followers sometimes have higher engagement than larger accounts and are seen as more approachable and genuine by their audiences (Maheshwari, 2018). Due to the nature of the study, I felt it was important to include these 'nano-influencers' as well.
5. Most of their content must be SF related.

6. They must also self-describe themselves as interested in sustainable fashion. This is because there may be people interested in sewing or thrifting for their own sake and have no interest in sustainability.
7. Could be perceived as an influencer even if they do not identify as one. For example, some people were identified as influencers by other blogs whilst others use labels such as content creator in their Instagram bio.
8. Accounts are public and not private.
9. Must still be active, *Covid-19 may mean that people are less active or have more commitments than usual, and this was taken into consideration.

These criteria were then applied to a SF influencer database that was developed for this study.

5.2.5.2 Developing the SF Influencer Database

Turning to the development of the SF database, this section discusses in-depth how the sample was collected. I compiled the database from September 2019 to February 2020, since then influencers have grown in followers, deleted their accounts, or changed the focus of their Instagram pages, so the database is a snapshot into their SF influencer journey. At the time of being added to the database the influencers fit the criteria but currently, some in the database would not. To compile the database, I used YouTube Data Tools, 27 established lists of SF influencers, personal knowledge [discussed in 5.2.5.2.3], and snowball sampling to identify SF influencers on Instagram. This section discusses the process used to create the final database which included 91 influencers (see Appendix A for database). This section starts by going through the different stages of developing the database. Firstly, it discusses YouTube Data Tools [5.2.5.2.1], Established SF lists of influencers [5.2.5.2.2], Additions to the list [5.2.5.2.3], and finishes by describing the sample [5.2.5.2.4].

5.2.5.2.1 YouTube Data Tools

Although this thesis focuses on Instagram, I initially used YouTube to start the search because of the availability of software that can identify a lot of content around a specific topic. I utilised the video list tool, a tool created by the Digital Methods Initiative group, to find a list of 500 videos about SF and their creators. Through this process I was able to identify potential SF influencers. Although my criteria count the number of followers, I could not sort the videos by

subscribers/followers because the tool gives information about the specific videos and not user accounts. The tool also includes videos made by the same account which means although there were 500 results, many of these videos were made by the same creator. Therefore, I removed duplicate content creators and videos with less than 1000 views from the dataset. My logic is that if someone has a substantial number of followers then they would also have a similar number of views. This resulted in 253 videos to move to stage 2. I then went through to identify who was an influencer and who was a brand/news site. This resulted in 87 results. I then went through that list to identify those who were sustainable fashion influencers, this process resulted in 10 influencers being added to the database. After identifying these individuals, I found them on Instagram.

5.2.5.2.2 Established SF lists of Influencers

The 27 lists of influencers were found through a mix of conducting online searches for SF influencers and lists that I came across while being active in the space. I searched for established lists on Google News on May 29, 2019, and December 30, 2019, and January 2, 2020. A final search was conducted as a general Google search on Feb 10, 2020, where I searched up to page four. I conducted the Feb 10, 2020, Google search to find additional participants as it was not easy to gain access to all of the identified influencers. I stopped after page four because I had then collected more than 25 new lists and felt that I had reached a saturation point in finding SF influencers. To briefly discuss the influence of Google Ads, I did not find that this greatly impacted the study because the influencer lists that were provided as top results were still subject to my own criteria. Further, from personal knowledge of being in the space and snowball sampling, my sample did not solely rely on Google results. Additional lists were found from being active on Twitter. For example, I came across an article from *Who What Wear* on SF influencers. The lists in total resulted in 63 influencers being added to the database.

5.2.5.2.3 Additions to the List

As described in Section 5.1.2, I am active in the SF space, so I knew of influencers that met the criteria but were not on the lists. For example, as I am part of an ethical blogger community on Facebook, I also asked if other members would like to participate. I also asked influencers if they could recommend anyone that I should speak to which added in snowball sampling.

Further, previous literature has noted the lack of diversity in marketing research and acknowledgement of topics related to race (Grier et al., 2019). Marketing research tends to ‘...focus was on linking phenotypic and cultural traits to consumer behaviour in a decontextualized fashion...’ (Grier et al., 2019, p.4). But what is missing is looking at the interplays between the market and race (Grier et al., 2019). Since race impacts how people experience the world and marketplaces are made up of a variety of individuals, it is imperative to include and value people of colour’s perspectives (Grier and Poole, 2020). In my initial sampling, I noticed that people of colour (POC) from around the world were missing from the lists and YouTube analysis. I speculate there are a variety of reasons for this occurrence. One being that SF social media has been known to have a diversity problem, according to POC influencers in the space and journalists (*see* Chua, 2019; Mayer, 2020). It is such an issue that influencers in the space have begun using a specific hashtag, #ethicalfashionrepresentationmatters to find other POC influencers. The second reason may be bias in the development of the lists where perhaps the creators were not cognizant of the lack of diversity in their lists. Agyeman (2010, p. 753) notes a tendency for sustainability research to characterise sustainability as ‘...largely white, educated and middle class while the environmental justice movement is largely low-income, people of colour driven.’. This same finding was echoed in Hickcox’s (2017) work on the environment, whiteness, and perceptions of belonging in Boulder, Colorado. Agyeman (2010, p.752) explains how recently ‘it has become increasingly apparent that the issue of environmental quality is inextricably linked to that of human equality.’ Considering the lack of diversity in management research samples and the importance of equality for sustainability I felt it important to include marginalised voices in the study (Agyeman, 2010; Grier and Poole, 2020). Including diverse voices is important because they provide a different vantage point to the necessity of SF. I searched for a list of diverse influencers and found a list featuring women of colour that were SF influencers.

The final database ended up being 91 SF influencers (see Appendix A). In the database process, I only contacted those who I felt were definitely SF, those I had unresolved reservations about I reviewed and felt comfortable to exclude them at this time. Although, the number of SF influencers meeting the criteria expands daily, a wide variety of influencers make up this database; therefore, my sample represents many different types of SF influencers. The next section provides insight into the makeup of the database.

5.2.5.2.4 Profile of the Final Database

After applying the criteria to identify who was an influencer, I analysed the database to understand the different *types* of influencers in the SF space. The influencers in the sample have followings ranging from 1k Instagram followers to more than 200k followers. See Appendix A for more details on the influencers in the database. Below I discuss how the influencers categorise themselves and how I categorised them.

Instagram allows for people to have personal, business, and creator accounts (Herman, 2021). Business and creator accounts can be opened by anyone, from bloggers to comedians, as long as they connect it to a Facebook business page, which can also be started by anyone for any reason. Having an Instagram business or creator account enables users to view analytics, or stats, about their posts and how they engage with their audiences. When setting up either account, the user is required to label themselves into which category fits who they are the most. The options are extensive yet limited. There are labels from car service to digital creator to scientist. There is no option for influencer at the time of writing. Users do have the option of hiding their label or having it public on their profile. It can also be changed at any time. I went through the sample and noted how they identified as of April 2020. In my sample, the influencers primarily identified themselves as digital creators or bloggers.

However, these Instagram generic labels only tell us so much. For example, I am labelled as a scientist because there is no option for an academic. Therefore, to come up with my categories, I used their Instagram label, and the roles they labelled themselves as in their Instagram bios. Instagram bios give users space to tell others more about themselves. Influencers might mention their businesses, careers, or other aspects such as being a mom. I only took note of the labels they used in reference to SF and grouped these into broader categories. This resulted in six categories. These categories are loosely defined and are provided here to show the different types of influencers in the database. Some of the influencers fit into multiple categories; therefore, the table adds up to 97, despite there being 91 people in the database. Table 5.4 gives an overview of the different categories the influencers fall into. Having discussed who is in the database, I now describe the data collection process.

Table 5.4 Types of Influencers in the Database

Category	Descriptor	Count
Fashion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often share outfits or brands they are interested in • More than likely promote brands/products • People who are just sharing outfits with little to no discussion of facts about SF • Occasionally provide tips and information about SF 	41
Enthusiasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very similar to fashion category • Specify that they are exploring or sharing their SF journey 	19
Activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-described as activists or advocates for/in SF but still include their own personal SF experiences 	7
Entrepreneurial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SF Influencers who also have (separate) businesses not necessarily tied to their influencing • May mention their business in passing but their account is more focused on their personal experience of SF or even other brands 	19
Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who share SF news and headlines intending to spark a discussion but still include their own personal SF experiences 	2
Stylist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional and non-professional stylists sharing style tips, outfit inspiration, or how to make the most of current wardrobe. 	9

5.2.6 Data Collection Process

This section discusses the data collection process for the 26 interviews. Firstly, I describe my public persona [5.2.6.1] and then I describe how the interviews were conducted [5.2.6.2]. Next I reflect on the interviews in section 5.2.6.3, the visual analysis [5.2.6.4] and describe the analysis and coding procedure [5.2.6.5]. Finally, I discuss the credibility of the thesis [5.2.6.6].

5.2.6.1 *My Public Persona*

Although I was not conducting an online ethnography, I was engaging and interacting with influencers on social media. Therefore, I made it clear to people that I was conducting research on the platform, which is in alignment with ethical online research guidelines (Kozinets, 2015; ICC and ESOMAR, 2016; Whiting and Pritchard, 2017). Before commencing the interviews, I repurposed one of my Instagram accounts to be specifically for the study where I explained that I was researching SF social media (Figure 5.2). I also wrote a blog post to explain the study in case people wanted more information (Figure 5.1).

What do I do? My Sustainable Fashion and Social Media Research

Reading Time 3 min

Currently, I'm doing my PhD and I'm researching how we can normalise sustainable fashion. I talked about [my sustainable fashion journey a bit in this post](#). But long story short, I watched this

Figure 5.1 Screenshot of My Blog Post Describing My Research



Figure 5.2 Screenshot of My Researcher Instagram Bio Asking for Participants

5.2.6.2 *How Were the Interviews Conducted?*

25 interviews and one email interview were conducted with influencers from around the world, Table 5.5 gives a summary of the interview participants. The email interview was with a prominent SF YouTuber with a new-born child and an email interview was all that she had time for. 25 of the interviews were done via Skype, telephone, or WhatsApp because the participants were from all around the world. They were mostly from North America, but I also spoke to people from Dubai, South Africa, India, and Brazil. 25 of the interviews were with women and one was with a man. The interviews were conducted between February 2019 and March 2020. They were 60 minutes on average, the shortest interview was 20 minutes, and the longest interview was 240 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded. In conducting the interview, I let the conversation flow naturally while incorporating the key research topics. Roulston and Choi (2018) interviewers aim to deprioritise themselves to focus on the subject. I aimed to refrain from sharing my views too much, but I tried to adopt an inquisitive stance in the interview because the SF influencers were the experts on being influencers.

Participants were provided with an informed consent form and were able to withdraw from the study at any time. Moares' (2012) work in the digital space found that some people do not wish to be anonymous. That was the case in this study as only some of the interviewees wanted to be anonymised. Influencers are public figures; some wanted their thoughts to be attributed to their name or they did not mind either way. However, because they agreed to consent prior to seeing how their words would be used, I thought it best to anonymise everyone as the aim is not to cause anyone harm or bring undue attention (for example, cyber bullying or online abuse) as a result of this study. All the interviews are held in encrypted folders on a secure database. Next I reflect on the interviews.

Table 5.5 Profile of Participants

Name	Age Group	Based	Occupation	Educ.	Interview Length
#Lifestyle1	20-29	UK	Model	BSc/ B. A	55 mins
#Lifestyle2	20-29	UK	Freelance Digital Marketer and Writer	BSc/ B. A	30 mins
#Lifestyle3	20-29	USA	Communications Specialist	BSc/ B. A	54 mins
#Lifestyle4	20-29	UK	Full-time blogger	BSc/ B. A	60 mins
#Activist1	20-29	UK	Speech writer	BSc/ B. A	70 mins
#Activist2	30-39	UK	Writer, Personal Stylist	BSc/ B. A	60 mins
#Bit-of-both1	20-29	USA	Insurance, Model	BSc/ B. A	45 mins
#Lifestyle5	20-29	Australia	Employed	BSc/ B. A	50 mins
#Lifestyle6	20-29	USA	Entrepreneur	BSc/ B. A	70 mins
#Activist3	20-29	USA	Designer	Postgraduate	60 mins
#Activist4	20-29	USA	Government Worker	BSc/ B. A	105 mins
#Activist5	20-29	USA	Full-time blogger, photographer, and journalist	BSc/ B. A	55 mins
#Bit-of-both2	20-29	S. Africa	Student/ Founder	BSc/ B. A	240 mins

Name	Age Group	Based	Occupation	Educ.	Interview Length
#Bit-of-both3	20-29	USA	Student/ Freelancing	BSc/ B. A	65 mins
#Lifestyle7	30-39	USA	Bookstore/ Carer*	BSc/ B. A	70 mins
#Activist6	20-29	India	YouTube	BSc/ B. A	50 mins
#Lifestyle8	20-29	UK	Senior Exec	BSc/ B. A	65 mins
#Lifestyle9	20-29	UK	Entrepreneur	Master's	55 mins
#Activist7	30-39	India	Writer	BSc/ B. A	45 mins
#Lifestyle10	20-29	UK	Employed	BSc/ B. A	45 mins
#Activist8	30-39	USA	Journalist/Editor	BSc/ B. A	40 mins
#Lifestyle11	20-29	UK	Student	BSc/ B. A	20 mins
#Lifestyle14	30-39	Dubai	Wealth Manager	BSc/ B. A	40 mins
#Lifestyle12	30-39	Canada	Freelance writer/ Full-time blogger	BSc/ B. A	45 mins
#Activist10	30-39	Canada	Entrepreneur/ Full-time blogger	BSc/ B. A	40 mins
#Lifestyle13	30-39	Canada	Full-time blogger	BSc/ B. A	N/A

Table 5.6 Profile of Participants' Social Media

Name	Followers	Category	Description
#Lifestyle1	50k-55k	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands
#Lifestyle2	5-10k	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Lifestyle3	5-10k	Enthusiast	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Lifestyle4	11-15k	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Activist1	1-5k	Enthusiast	Shares their sewing creations and SF commentary
#Activist2	200k+	Information	Shares thought and discussion provoking facts about SF
#Bit-of-both1	11-15k	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Lifestyle5	1-5k	Enthusiast	Shares experience of living more sustainable life
#Lifestyle6	1-5k	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Activist3	11-15k	Entrepreneurial	Shares photos of their upcycled clothing
#Activist4	N/A	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Activist5	45-50k	Activist, Entrepreneurial	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF
#Bit-of-both2	5-10k	Fashion, Entrepreneurial	Primarily shares outfits and thoughtful commentary

Name	Followers	Category	Description
#Bit-of-both3	30-35k	Enthusiast	Primarily shares their outfits and experiences
#Lifestyle7	15-20k	Activist, Fashion	Primarily shares their outfits and information about activism
#Activist6	5-10k	Fashion	Primarily shares outfits and thoughtful commentary
#Lifestyle8	5-10k	Fashion	Primarily shares SF brands
#Lifestyle9	1-5k	Fashion, Entrepreneurial	Primarily shares outfits and thoughtful commentary
#Activist7	1-5k	Enthusiast	Primarily shares outfits and thoughtful commentary
#Lifestyle10	15-20k	Enthusiast	Primarily shares second hand finds outfits and facts about SF
#Activist8	N/A	Information	Sharing their take on SF news
#Lifestyle11	5-10k	Fashion	Primarily shares second hand finds outfits and facts about SF
#Lifestyle14	25-30k	Fashion	Primarily shares outfits and thoughtful commentary
#Lifestyle12	20-25k	Stylist	Shares styling tips and SF brands
#Activist10	40-45k	Activist, Entrepreneurial	Primarily shares outfits and thoughtful commentary on plus size fashion
#Lifestyle13	15-20k	Enthusiast	Primarily shares SF brands but also facts about SF

5.2.6.3 *Reflecting On the Interviews*

Speaking to 26 people gave me a lot to reflect on. Corlett and Mavin (2018) advise taking note of thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. As I mentioned in the Section 1.1.2 about my position in the research, some complex feelings arose throughout the process. For example, in one interview with an influencer who was very familiar with speaking to the media and journalism, I struggled to connect with them and their experience. When discussing challenges that they face in their role as a SF influencer, she would speak in reference to challenges that *all* SF influencers may face rather than her specifically. This distance between them and some of the questions made it difficult to connect and I felt as though there was a barrier that I would be unable to cross in that interview. At the end of that interview, I felt as though I had done something wrong but as I listened back to the audio recording, I realised that the interview was fruitful. Considering these are public figures, it makes sense that they would want to be careful about what is associated with their name, especially considering some of the ethical challenges they face in their role. Feeling disconnected from the participants often brought me feelings of anxiety and worry about how the interview was for the participant as I wanted everyone to feel valued and understood. Navigating this was difficult at times because we all have different personalities, but I aimed to be prepared and listen actively to engage the interviewee. Most, if not all, the interviewees said they really enjoyed being able to talk freely about SF and I also really enjoyed the process.

Another example of the complexity I experienced was in my actual knowledge around capitalism and environmental injustice. I admit I had “rose coloured glasses” when it came to sustainability and was still developing my critical eye. In some interviews I felt grossly uninformed and unprepared for issues of capitalism and unfair systems. These were not topics that I felt I had the range to discuss, and I did not anticipate them coming up in the interviews. In these cases, I tried to learn and listen as much as I could to the interviewees. I realised how one cannot separate capitalism from being an influencer, even a sustainable one. One unexpected result of the interviews that affected me on a personal level was how I think about my own ambitions with my blog. I expected to find that the SF online community would be wholesome and helpful, so I was surprised when conversations of discrimination and hypocrisy were organically brought to the forefront. The dubious ethics of being an influencer made me feel uncomfortable and caused me

to question if and how one day I would monetise my own platform. Previously, I looked at SF influencers with naivety and although I still believe they play a role in shaping SF, I now question how positive of a role it currently is. However, I remain hopeful that the role can be positive. Having discussed my experience in conducting these interviews, next I discuss the analysis and coding.

5.2.6.4 *Additional Visual Analysis*

In addition to the interviews, I followed all the influencers on Instagram. To analyse the look, or costume and props of SF influencers, I took screenshots of their content. I analysed 9 photos from 23 Instagram accounts. This is because three of the influencers have deactivated their accounts at the time of collecting the visual data. This resulted in 207 photos.

It was important to incorporate elements of the visual into this study as the visual representation of topics convey meanings ascribed to that topic (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Visual media is seen as a vehicle to provide different ways of looking at the world (Rose, 2001). Although taking screenshots of social media images may seem benign, the images people create show their world in a specific way (Rose, 2011). Therefore, by also considering the media that SF influencers create, we can get a fuller picture of how they communicate SF. Images are not just about what they convey but also how they were produced and composed (Rose, 2001; Moisander and Valtonen, 2006). Further images cannot be taken at face value but have to be interpreted (Emmison et al., 2012).

Rose (2001, p.16) explains that an image can be interpreted on three bases: ‘the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences.’ This thesis focuses on the production of the image, which correlates with the staging aspect of the dramaturgical framework presented in Chapter 4. Production includes the technology used to make the image, composition includes the different elements used to compose the image, and social refers to the context the image was created in (Rose, 2001). For example, where influencers draw on specific colour palettes in their images, I aimed to consider what these colours are commonly linked to and what meaning these colours are seen to convey. I also observed other objects in the image, such as plants, that influencers use as props, please see Table 5.7 for items

that were common in the photos. To create this table, I observed the main elements in each photo and counted elements that were featured in the photos. I have not reproduced the content here as I do not have express permission and do not want to infringe on their copyright or privacy as they may not want their work to be reproduced in the thesis in perpetuity (Whiting and Pritchard, 2007). Moreover, considering that the participants have been made anonymous, reproducing their content would reveal their identities. Instead, I have created an example image to represent SF content which can be seen in Appendix C. Having discussed the interviews and visual data, I now discuss the interview analysis and coding.

Table 5.7 Influencer Images

Locations	Frequency
Home	77
Outdoors/ Natural Environment	46
Outdoors/ Other	41
Commercial space (e.g., restaurants)	9
Props	
Themselves	131
Other People	6
House Plants	25
Clothing	110
Technology	1
Other Sustainable Items	12
Food	7
Quotes/Graphics	26

5.2.6.5 *Analysis and Coding*

Jenks (2018) argues that recording interviews and writing up transcripts are subjective processes because what is recorded and how it is written up is up to the discretion of the researcher. Jenks (2018) describes a continuum between an open and closed way of transcribing data. The extremely closed position transcribes only the answers to the questions that were asked whereas an extreme open position aims to transcribe everything from body language to silences. I utilised a form of open transcribing by manually transcribing the interview texts verbatim, aiming to capture laughter and tone shifts. Incorporating these elements into the text helped to provide more context and deeper meaning to the text (Bailey, 2008). Capelli et al. (1990) suggests that intonation is an important cue that people use to suggest sarcasm. Therefore, identifying these shifts in tone were important. The main tone shifts I tried to capture were the voices that participants put on when they were recalling conversations or being sarcastic. For example, some people would use a higher pitch voice when presenting a viewpoint from another perspective that they did not agree with. The literature suggests that this mocking tone is a common trait in speech to express disagreement (Capelli et al., 1990). With the transcript development in mind, I now discuss the coding and analysis procedures.

5.2.6.5.1 Coding/ Analysis

Saldaña's (2009) argues that coding *is* analysis. I utilised Spiggle's (1994) and Saldaña's (2009) guidelines for analysing qualitative data. During the transcription phases I began to take notes and identify recurring themes. This process helped to sensitize me to potential themes in the data. However, during the formal coding process I did not refer to the list of themes I identified during the transcription phase until after the open coding phase to compare what I found. Saldaña (2009) describes coding as a process where what stands out to the researcher depends on the background of the researcher and the lens used to look at the data. Because of my interest in SF influencers, aspects referring to their emotions and experiences stood out to me. As a black woman, themes of discrimination and inequality also stood out to me. Saldaña (2009) also advises that there is no

perfect way to code, in fact it is more like a craft where you use the necessary tools to understand the data. I utilised NVivo to code the transcripts.

Spiggle (1994, p. 493) defines categorisation as ‘the process of classifying or labelling units of data.’ It involves going through the data and identifying potential groups of meaning or patterns. These categories are flexible and often evolve over the course of the research. In this study, open coding started this process. Open coding involves intensively exploring the data to see what is there and to start identifying potential themes and patterns (Esterberg, 2002). Some researchers recommend starting with line-by-line coding whilst others feel line by line coding is unnecessary (Saldaña, 2009). I utilised a mix of both. I started with holistic coding (Saldaña, 2009) to grapple with the transcripts in a way that made sense to me. Starting with broad codes enabled me to get to ‘the essence of categorizing a phenomenon’ (Saldaña, 2013, p. 23). I coded broad codes such as ‘the role’, ‘livelihood’, ‘authenticity’, ‘community; or ‘the mission’. These broad codes were then broken down into smaller codes by going line by line to explore the nuances and intricacies of the code. So, for example, ‘livelihood’ included codes such as ‘funding models’, ‘the need to make money’, ‘not working with brands’, and ‘SF as opportunity’. More examples of codes can be found in Table 5.8. Overall, I coded any actions the influencers did in their role and any beliefs and values they seemed to have. I also coded for words and phrases that started to appear more often, for example I noticed an emphasis on the word positivity. Utilising NVivo’s query functions, I explored how different words were used in context to understand different perspectives and paint a broader picture. Using my initial holistic codes and more specific codes, categories were emerging. I transitioned into abstracting the categories into more general concepts (Spiggle, 1994).

The third element of Spiggle’s (1994) guideline is comparison. Comparison aims to identify similarities and differences between categories to further refine them. Charmaz (2006) recommends questioning the data during the coding process. Adopting a critical eye helped to group and condense categories into concepts (Charmaz, 1996). Throughout the process, I began seeing two main approaches to being a SF influencer so then I re-analysed the data to see if there were any similarities and differences between these two groups. I used NVivo to look at how the different groups conceptualize their experiences in the SF space. Another element I utilised was

integration as described by Spiggle (1994). Integration “requires the mapping of relationships between conceptual elements.” (Spiggle, 1994, p, 494). Throughout the thesis, I developed mind maps, narrative memos, and Excel sheets to help me to think through the different themes and explore possible connections. Table 5.7 summarises the different data sources.

Table 5.8 Data Sources

<i>Source</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Why has it been included?</i>
Interviews	Interviews with the influencers	Main source of insight into the world of influencers
My notes and mind-maps	Notes made throughout the research process	To gain deeper insight into the interview transcripts
Social media screenshots	Screenshots taken sporadically throughout the research process of the influencers Instagram posts	Provided additional insight into how SF influencers communicate their message To analyse the look, or costume and props of SF influencers.
Articles about SF	Media articles about SF that I encountered in the field	Has been indirectly included as it helped to contextualise some of the findings

Using spreadsheets helped me to visually move the codes around and to see possible connections. From this process I began to see that there was work to be done in the SF influencer community and outside of it in the mainstream fashion industry. This dual process made understanding the world of SF tricky. This concept of inside/outside encouraged me to think of other conceptualisations that were similar. This led me to the metaphor of a play, where work is done behind the scenes and performed on the front stage, to make sense of the data.

The final process of coding was to integrate and flesh out the intricacies of the themes (Spiggle, 1994). Table 5.8 gives a glimpse into the codes, categories, and subsequent themes. Throughout the study, the main themes were: ‘Conceptualising the SF Influencer’, ‘Having Voice in the SF Movement’, and ‘The Contradictions in Being a SF Influencer’. A golden thread is the need to re-

imagine SF. A SF that is more authentic, inclusive, and equitable. It is from this thread that I weave the SF influencer drama. I now turn to discuss the credibility of this study.

Table 5.9 Excerpts from Codebook

Golden thread	Theme	Categories	Codes
Reimagining SF	Conceptualising the SF influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach/Point of view • Practices/ The Role itself • Motivation to start channel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversations • Mission • Positive approaches • Critical approaches • Working with brands • Researching brands • Being a Resource
	Having voice in the SF movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should speak? • Marginalised voices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representation • Power • Privilege • Size inclusivity
	The Contradictions in Being a SF Influencer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authenticity • Fear of Hypocrisy • Transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihood • Greenwashing • Challenges
	Beyond shopping for SF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SF beyond shopping • Inclusive SF 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No perfect solutions • Conversation
	Other cast members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience • Small brands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media • Audience engagement • Are you an influencer

5.2.6.6 *Credibility*

There are many views on how to conduct credible qualitative research, but general guidelines include: being systematic, coherent narratives, and reflexivity (Willing, 2008). I have utilised notetaking in the research process and have aimed to be reflexive throughout the process. I have utilised mind-maps to develop coherent narratives. Further, I aimed to write detailed notes on the steps that I took, which have been detailed in the previous sections. From the process of building the initial database to the iterative process of mind maps and questioning findings, I have tried to stay true to the phenomena under study. Moreover, I have interviewed multiple people from different perspectives to gain a more thorough understanding of people's experiences as a SF influencer. As summarised in Table 5.7, I have also drawn on supplementary data to gain additional insight into their experience. For example, during my data collection I came across an article, 'Does the Ethical Fashion Community Have a Diversity Problem?' (Chua, 2019), about representation in SF that helped me to contextualise some of the experiences of my participants and prompted me to ask 'Why?'. Throughout this chapter I have aimed to show credibility by sharing my reflections and assumptions throughout the data collection process (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008).

5.2.6.6.1 Limitations of the research

In terms of being aware of the specificity of this research, I see this research as being a snapshot in time. For example, in the SF space, people enter, exit, and change their approach to the SF social media space. Although the individuals may have changed, the approaches, actions, and beliefs reveal something of the time that we live in. In terms of acknowledging limitations, this study only looks at one type of social media influencer when there are many other types of SF influencers on social media and engaged in offline action. This study acknowledges that these results cannot be overly generalised to speak to other types of SF influencer situations, such as NGOs or book authors, or even non-fashion specific ethical influencers. This study does not aim to generalise these findings or speak for every group, rather this is a situated description of SF social media world at this point of time.

5.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter described the research process for this thesis. The objective of this chapter is to explain the rationale of why certain decisions were made to answer the research question. The research question asks, ‘what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?’ To answer this question, I specifically focus on Instagram as discussed in Section 5.2.1. First the chapter described the interpretive underpinnings of the empirical study and my position in the researcher [5.1]. Then I moved into the details of the research methodology as I explained the choice to use semi-structured interviews to gain insight into the backstage workings of the SF social media world [5.2.2]. Developing the interview guide was an iterative process as the guide developed as I did more interviews [5.2.3]. I tested the interview guide with a small pilot study of six people interested in SF on social media [5.2.5]. Following this, I detailed the sampling process of identifying and categorising the SF influencers. From there I detail how the interviews were conducted and some of the precautions I took being a researcher online. The chapter ends by describing the analytical process [5.2.6.5] and how I aimed to produce a credible study [5.2.6.6]. Having discussed the *how* of the study, I now move to the analysis and findings where I detail *what* was uncovered from behind-the-scenes.

6 PROTAGONISTS

6.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first ‘scripting’ chapter and introduces the protagonists, SF influencers, of this drama. This chapter addresses Objective 1 which is to analyse how SF influencers conceptualise their roles and responsibilities in the SF social media space. Through the analysis, three approaches to SF influencing were identified: #Lifestyle, #Bit-of-both, and #Activist influencing. They are distinguished by three main aspects: *scale of change*, *the tone in communicating SF*, and *the time for change*. Table 6.1 below offers an overview of the key themes and approaches in this chapter. Appendix B provides fictional casting calls for each of these approaches. The chapter opens with a discussion of the different types of SF influencers [6.1] and the different approaches they adopt to communicate about SF [6.1.2]. The chapter then moves onto how SF influencers perceive their role within the SF movement and the different ways they try to contribute [6.2].

Table 6.1 Overview of SF influencing

	#Lifestyle Influencer (n=13)	#Bit-of-both Influencer (n=3)	#Activist Influencer (n=10)
Scale of Change	Individual	Both needed	Systemic
Tone in communicating SF	Positive & Fun	Mix of both	Frank
Time for change	The Future	Mix of both	The Present

6.1 APPROACHES TO SF INFLUENCING

Through the analysis conducted using Spiggle (1994) and Saldaña's (2009) guidelines, it became evident that there is a continuum of three main approaches in SF. There are the #Lifestyle influencers on one side, the #Activist influencers on another, and the #Bit-of-both group which lies somewhere in the middle. This section primarily introduces the viewpoints of the #Lifestyle and #Activist influencers as they represent the dominant views, whereas there are only three #Bit-of-both influencers in this study. The differences between these groups are encapsulated in how they see the scale of change [6.1.1], the tone used to communicate SF [6.1.2], and the perception of time remaining to address SF. Each will now be discussed in turn.

6.1.1 Scale of Change

The first point of difference between the two groups is the perceived scale of change. The #Lifestyle influencers focus on individuals and consumer behaviour whilst #Activist influencers look at sustainable fashion from a more systemic perspective. Each will now be discussed in turn.

6.1.1.1 *Lifestyle Influencers*

#Lifestyle influencers believe that the solution to SF largely lies in changing consumption habits; therefore, they approach their role with the mindset of positivity and getting people on board to support SF brands. This is illustrated below by #Lifestyle4:

'I started looking into that [the fashion industry] a lot more and championing small brands that were, at that point, were doing things slightly differently.' -#Lifestyle4

Looking at it this way, we can see that the aim of #Lifestyle influencers is to focus on the good of SF and how people can be better consumers. #Lifestyle influencers do this by focusing on what they perceive to be solutions, namely, championing brands and showing people individual lifestyle changes that they can make. SF influencers are not necessarily equipped with the expertise to evaluate the environmental and social benefits of these changes but try to do what they can with the information presented to them. They frame the problem as: if the problem is just consumption and we can vote with our dollars to create change, that is what we should do.

‘And also, I think it’s about revealing to the consumer that they have power and that what we buy actually makes a huge difference.’ -#Lifestyle8

Because their focus is on the individual, they emphasise consumer power and responsibility to make better choices. Moreover, the data suggest that #Lifestyle influencers construct a message that the changes SF requires are not dramatic or unattainable. They subscribe to the consumer society and, therefore, reinforce it rather than challenge it.

‘I think that’s what influencers can do, that they can highlight a solution and a new way of living that doesn’t have to look so different to the life we currently live...’ -#Lifestyle9

‘You don’t have to take to the streets, I mean, you know I think we should, I’m not discounting forms of protest and activism but not everybody is comfortable with it. Not everybody has the time or energy or whatever but if instead you can choose to buy less, you can choose to buy second hand, you can choose to hang dry a garment as opposed to sticking it in your dryer. Like there are real tangible differences that you can make every day that anybody can do regardless of wealth or status, or you know, economic privilege.’ -#Lifestyle7

The quotes from #Lifestyle7, #Lifestyle8, and #Lifestyle9 suggest that consumers have power to change society through their consumption. #Lifestyle influencers suggest that implementing more SF behaviours is an act of protest, but at the same time, the above quotes give the impression that living a SF life should not inconvenience you. So, despite the issues in fashion and the fact that consumers have power to change, mistakes and imperfections are not a big deal, they are just part of the process. This approach is very individual and personal, in that it is about what works for *you* and what makes sense considering the context of your life. Therefore, the way they approach their role is more like a friend giving advice which is illustrated in this quote from #Lifestyle7: *‘So that’s how I view my role, I’m your friend that you can turn to for answers’*. As a friend, SF influencers aim to encourage people to do their best.

6.1.1.2 **#Activist Influencers**

Alternatively, #Activist influencers want change and although nice pictures may be part of it, for them SF is a serious issue that can only be somewhat addressed by changing consumption practices. This view acknowledges the role of consumers but also recognises that there is work beyond consumption to be done. Consider #Activist5’s thoughts on addressing issues in SF:

'So, it is not enough to focus just on brands that are doing things right, I think that's very important but at the same time we still have this beast that is fast fashion. So how do we attack fast fashion from three points of view? From a point of view of workers' power and building workers' rights and liberation; consumer education, understanding as consumers we have our own sense of power that leads to brand and corporate accountability' -#Activist5

From this quote, it appears that the issues of SF, from the #Activist perspective, are not going to be solved by just changing what people wear because although people are exiting the market, the market itself still needs to be addressed. The tension between exit and voice as described by Hirschman (1970) can be seen at play here. #Activist5's quote points to the need to address the fast fashion industry as a system and not just as brands to be avoided. Here we see that like #Lifestyle influencers, consumers are still seen as having a responsibility to contribute to SF, however, #Activist influencers perceive consumer actions to be just one aspect of the solution. This is echoed by #Activist3:

'I'm not saying they're bad people or that they're doing harm, I just don't think there is a system, they're not trying to change any system. And if you don't think about the system, if you only think about your small universe, you won't do many changes. Even though you won't do many changes, you're showing yourself like you were the personification of a world change so how does this work?' -#Activist3

The idea of addressing the system is seen as being imperative to actually seeing change in the fashion industry. By looking at it as a system, individuals are no longer seen as bastions of change but as people who are able to have a wider impact. This is not to say that individuals should not make changes in their own consumption, but that people should look beyond what they are doing to see what is going on around them.

Having described the differences in the scale of change between the two main groups, I now focus more on *how* they choose to communicate their message.

6.1.2 **Setting the Tone**

The influencer groups utilise very different tones in the way they communicate SF. This section contrasts the two main approaches to communicating SF, starting with the consumption-focused approach [6.1.2.1] and then the frank, or serious, approach [6.1.2.2].

6.1.2.1 *SF is Fun (Positive)*

#Lifestyle influencers adopt a positive, consumption-focused approach and utilise words like fun, aspirational, and encouraging in how they communicate SF. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle12: *'I just wanted it [SF] to be approached in a fun way and there were some great channels out there that are, that have been tackling it [issues in sustainable fashion], but I, I don't know, the audience appreciates that there's like that fun component so I feel like, I kind of make light of it often, I mean it is fashion, it's serious, it's a huge part of like a global fashion footprint but at the same time, it is clothing so I don't know.'*

By focusing on individual actions, #Lifestyle influencers are able to feel positive that their actions make a difference. This allows #Lifestyle influencers to access ideas of fun and positivity as a reward for doing their part. Moreover, the quote from #Lifestyle12 reminds us that in SF, the fashion aspect cannot be forgotten. The influencers in the #Lifestyle group enjoy fashion and see it as fun, so although there are serious issues at hand, they do not believe it has to be separate from what they enjoy. There is a reluctance to condemn fashion in its totality, in favour of trying to redeem and salvage what they perceive to be its positive qualities. For them, simply focusing on the issues does not provide hope or a course of action. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle9 where they reject a fear-based narrative of talking about water issues: *'I was coming from a fear-based perspective of "oh my God, the world is doomed" and was trying to educate about the world's water issues, now I try to come from a place of positivity and give a solution rather than focusing on the problem because I think there's a lot of discussion about problem out there.'* -#Lifestyle9

Many of the #Lifestyle influencers prefer to focus on the positive rather than the "doom and gloom" and refuse to dictate to people how they should live their lives. In line with their redemptive arc of sustainable fashion, SF influencers draw on religious terms such as preaching or evangelising to describe how *not* to talk about sustainable fashion. Being too *preachy* or evangelistic is seen as being too much, or an excessive and inappropriate way to communicate SF. Consider the following from respondents #Lifestyle1 and #Lifestyle6:

'I think it's like if you're preachy, people won't listen. So, for me, I'm just trying to be an example by doing things in a green a way then people are like oh that's cool but if you just go on at people about things then they shut down and they won't listen...' – #Lifestyle1

‘This [sustainable fashion] is a topic that’s interesting, that will actually help the world. It’s not like I’m going everywhere trying to evangelise ‘oh you have to be sustainable’, it’s like “hey I do this it might work for you. And it is working for some other people too.”’ – #Lifestyle6

This idea of not being preachy extends to the #Bit-of-both group as they do not want to make people feel bad for not being able to consume SF.

‘Just cause like I don’t want to guilt people into it but sometimes maybe I am doing it without realising that I’m doing it, you know. So, I can’t necessarily say “oh I’m not guilt tripping people”, but I do try and talk about, whenever I talk about it, I try to talk about my experience to it because then it seems like it’s just me just talking about myself and my journey rather than me being like you should do this for these and these reasons’ – #Bit-of-both2

Throughout the #Lifestyle and #Bit-of-both groups the common thread was that by being too intense, SF influencers may actually discourage people from pursuing SF. These quotes also tie into how they see their role, which is to be an example rather than prescriptive. This will be further discussed in Section 6.2.1. Overall, it appears that people should be inspired and given tools to improve their fashion footprint rather than forced to change.

6.1.2.2 *SF is Serious*

In light of how SF influencers perceive the scale of change needed, #Activist influencers tend to use words such as serious, advocate, activists when describing their approach to their role. Consider #Activist3’s thoughts on how others in the SF community talk about SF:

‘I think we have to be more serious about it. Because it’s almost like...when we’re social media influencers we look like we’re playing the cool girls at school. This is how I feel. This doesn’t sound serious. It’s nice, you’re showing something different but to explain how dangerous it is, how big it is, how horrifying it is, it takes way more than only me changing my clothes there and talking to people...’ –#Activist3

The quote above reflects how seriously #Activist influencers approach their role in the movement. Although social media is all about showing influence and being aspirational, #Activist influencers think that the fun approach does not convey the seriousness of the issues SF addresses. In light of this, preaching/frank talking is primarily adopted by the #Activist influencers. Unlike the #Lifestyle influencers, they embrace the preachy:

'I kind of hear people squabbling about little things and I'm like there's something bigger happening so I think that I'm probably going to be a strange, strange preachy vegan lady...' - #Activist1

This approach contrasts the fun or positive approaches that suggest that doing your best or appearing to do your best is fine. However, for #Activist influencers, this is not seen as being good enough. #Activist2 puts it this way:

'Like we have to get out of this mentality that "oh your message will be better received if you don't shame people". Like I'm sorry but this privileged world should feel ashamed of what we're doing with climate change. Like do people change their behaviours if you pat them on the head and tell them it's okay? Not really. At this point in time, it's a climate emergency, I'm not gonna hold someone's hand and be nice to them when they could be doing better but I'm also gonna recognise that there are people who can't do better and it's not my job to preach to them but if you're middle class or upper class, I'm looking at you real hard' -#Activist2

A close reading of this approach reveals a scepticism around a soft approach to SF. It appears that the activist approach to SF is about being frank and making actual changes in how we consume. The quote from #Activist2 reveals a distinction between the perceived urgency of sustainability. For #Lifestyle influencers, sustainability is seen as something they can address on their own terms whereas #Activist influencers perceive climate change to be a climate emergency which needs to be addressed immediately. However, the differences between #Lifestyle influencers and #Activist influencers is not cut and dry. For example, the #Activist influencers can still be positive, it is just that they do not describe their approach as such. A lot of the influencers would actually fit somewhere in between the two extremes. This is where the #Bit-of-both group fits as one of the reasons they float between both sides is because they want to adopt a more relational approach to talking about SF while still acknowledging the systemic issues that people face.

6.1.3 Section Conclusion

In sum, the data suggest that deciding on which approach you will adopt as a SF influencer is a highly personal and political choice that reflects how you see people's roles in society. On one side, there is emphasis on personal responsibility, fun, and possibilities and on the other side there is an acknowledgement of a broken system. Those in the #Bit-of-both category may eventually move towards either side of the spectrum as even now those in this group lean more in certain directions. As such, the continuum shows that the SF space is not monolithic and it appears that

depending on which side you engage with, as an influencer or as a consumer, one could come away with a different understanding of SF and what is required to change society. Considering the research question, having a range of SF influencers is helpful because both approaches are needed as they will resonate with different people. A positive approach can provide hope and inspiration of how people can get involved in social change. However, if people only engage with the fun side of SF, it is unlikely that we see real change as people will not fully engage with the issues beyond changing their consumption habits. As such there is a danger to treat SF as fast fashion, which will just recreate the cycle. #Activist influencers can balance out this approach by bringing to the forefront that there is more to SF than what we do in our homes. With this in mind, I now turn to how SF influencer conceptualise their roles and responsibilities in the SF social media space.

6.2 WHAT SF INFLUENCERS DO:

This section focuses on the different roles that SF influencers adopt all whilst remaining fashionable. Their roles can be conceptualised into two main sections: engaging people in SF [6.2.1] and acting as gatekeepers to the movement [6.2.2].

6.2.1 Engaging People in SF

Considering the difference in perceived scale of change and in tone that SF influencers ascribe to their platforms; it is no surprise that they have different views in how to engage people in SF. There are four main strategies that SF influencers utilise to recruit people into the movement: *fluidity* [6.2.1.1], *baiting* [6.2.1.2], *frank talking* [previously discussed in Section 6.1.2.2], and *SF for all* [6.2.1.3]. Each will now be discussed in turn.

6.2.1.1 Fluidity

Fluidity is all about displaying the flexibility of a SF lifestyle. The data indicate that SF influencers, particularly #Lifestyle influencers, primarily see SF as something that does not have rules or regulations, at least on the consumer side. Rather it is something where people can decide what that looks like for them. Therefore, their role is about helping people make small steps toward sustainability.

'I still use plastic but it's about changing your behaviour and making small adaptations and then they finally become instinct for yourself. I think that was my main aim, to make it, to open people's eyes... I want to help them understand you don't have to be perfect and that it is achievable in small ways and everyone's journey is different. We all live in different places; we all have different things available to us. Not everyone can go to a bulk food store and buy stuff, not everyone has a garden so not everyone can grow their own food, so that was my aim. Just to make it realistic and achievable to just the average person instead of the Instagram models of the world.' -#Lifestyle5

Here we see that SF is a journey made in increments rather than leaps and bounds. Further this quote acknowledges that everyone has different capabilities in terms of the extent of SF changes they are able to implement. They seem to be trying to navigate the tension between always being able to consume sustainably and the fact that we live in a consumption and production system that does not prioritise sustainability. Considering this, many of the #Lifestyle influencers remark that sustainability is more like a spectrum rather than a binary box, consequently the question they ask is who is really able to say what is and is not right. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle1:

'There's always a grey scale though, isn't it? It's not just black and white. As long as the choice is better than the choice you made before, it's never going to be perfect 'cause even like the factories they require loads of electricity and water and they're dropping loads of waste but as long as it's reducing in some way it's better than not doing anything at all' -#Lifestyle1

This framing is about being open and flexible in ones' sustainability journey which allows people to show themselves grace rather than stressing about being perfect SF consumers. By being perfect SF consumers, I mean being able to always buy SF or being able to implement SF behaviours all the time. Instead, people should become more and more sustainable over time. This concept is illustrated in the quote below from #Lifestyle14:

'So, everybody has their own journey, you don't have to be perfect from day one, but at the same time you have to at least realise about the things you're doing wrong and once you have that kind of realisation, I think that change starts trickling down, maybe not now but 6 months later...' -#Lifestyle14

Again, here we see sustainability as an incremental series of decisions towards a more sustainable, but not perfect, end. The data suggest that by acknowledging sustainability as fluid, it allows influencers and their audiences to remain hopeful that their actions make a difference and are not in vain.

6.2.1.2 *Baiting*

#Lifestyle influencers argue that ‘you catch more flies with honey than vinegar’ (#Lifestyle7). This phrase is usually used in North America when you are trying to get someone to come around to your way of seeing or doing things. It means that if you or your message are sweet or gentle then people will be attracted to what you have to say but if you are offensive, like the smell of vinegar, you will drive them away. Influencers primarily practice baiting through conversation and images. Turning first to the idea of conversation. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle10:

‘I feel like just initiating conversation like we are like a catalyst for conversation, I think. If people are talking about it, people are being influenced. it's important. I think it's really cool how people are like “oh, I saw this online”, “I saw this girl at a panel, and she was talking about this”, the power is like massive. So, I think the role of a sustainable influencer is to initiate conversations with people...’ -#Lifestyle10

When people see something new and are inspired, they may be encouraged to find out more about it. Conversation is seen as a way to open the door to SF which influencers hope will lead to further discovery. The data indicate that because of the emphasis on positivity, influencers feel that they have to draw people in with ‘bait’ rather than the facts. Therefore, they seem to conduct covert operations that draw people into SF without being harsh. #Lifestyle1 describes this approach well:

‘...I think you do need some people who are preachy to get the point across but that’s just not my brand because ...what’s my phrase...iron fist velvet glove... [they] find out things about being green without being full on’ -#Lifestyle1

Influencers draw people in with something that seems innocent to then introduce SF issues subtly. This is also exemplary of the #Lifestyle influencers’ approach which aims to have a softer approach to SF. Baiting also underpins the approach of the middle area between the #Lifestyle and #Activist approaches. Consider this quote from #Bit-of-both2:

‘Just ‘cause like I don’t want to guilt people into it but sometimes maybe I am doing it without realising that I’m doing it, you know. So, I can’t necessarily say “oh I’m not guilt tripping people”, but I do try and talk about, whenever I talk about it, I try to talk about my experience to it because then it seems like it’s just me just talking about myself and my journey rather than me being like you should do this for these and these reasons’ -#Bit-of-both2

Here #Bit-of-both2 aims to draw people in by sharing their experiences. Drawing on personal experiences is seen as a safe way to talk about SF so that they do not come across as judgemental

or condescending. Instead, the aim is to just show that SF is part of their lifestyle to then spark conversations. These conversations do not need to be particularly nuanced because the aim is just to get people started on their journey, not to dictate what they should do. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle14:

'.. so, I think we need to do this, we need to talk about this, we need to create awareness about this, in whatever way it is. And whatever is the trend, all the people start following it so if you talk about sustainability, suddenly sustainability is cool, even though I may not understand it completely, or I'm not too connected with it, I would follow it because everybody is doing it. So, one way or the other I think it's a good thing, whatever it is. But the dialogue has to go on and we don't have to be perfectionists because trying to be perfect can draw us back from our agenda' – #Lifestyle14

Throughout this section it is apparent that there is an emphasis on raising awareness but not so much emphasis on helping people to understand the nuances of SF. Rather, the data suggest that as long as people are making any informed or uninformed, step towards sustainability, this is a positive thing which influencers hope will grow into more a more nuanced understanding of SF. Following on from conversation, the next section focuses on how SF influencers aim to make SF seem enticing.

A large part of baiting is setting the hook. The influencer aims to draw in the viewer with their stylish outfit and introduce some small things they can do to be more sustainable but first they have to make SF appealing. SF influencers believe that people perceive SF brands as boring, think of clothing from charity shops as bad, and do not know how to wear the clothes they have in their wardrobes. Addressing these issues is seen as imperative to engaging people in the SF movement. So, SF influencers aim to be an example and make SF look aspirational to overcome negative stereotypes. This quote from #Lifestyle8 show the importance of SF being aspirational.

'And something that I found that is that we should learn from them is marketing and being aspirational. Because when you talk to people about sustainable brands, they'll look it up and be like "oh, it's kind of boring" or "I'm not inspired" or like, you know what I mean? It's not as inspiring whereas when you see an ad from H&M you're sort of like "I want to be that model and I want to wear what she's wearing and I want, I'm so inspired"' – #Lifestyle8

It appears that SF is not something that you can just tell people about because it is boring, instead you have to show them. The data also suggest that SF influencers aim to become aspirational

individuals wearing aspirational brands for their audiences to aspire to. The aim is for SF to replace fast fashion, which is seen as edgy and cool. Therefore, for SF to be a worthwhile pursuit, it needs to be able to compete with fast fashion. Consider these quotes from #Lifestyle11:

'I started my Instagram account, initially I started it just to show that, because I thought there was a real stigma against charity shopping, so I wanted to show that actually, it's a great way to give to charity and find really great clothes for a good price' -#Lifestyle11

'I do want to post things that are like more enticing so rather than just posting basics which I do sometimes do. I want to post like really fun pieces or like really popular pieces so then people can look at my clothes and think oh my goodness these are really nice clothes, but she got them from a charity shop.' -#Lifestyle11

Taking on the role of a SF influencer implies that the influencers are stylish enough to overcome the stigma of SF practices, including charity shopping. This is interesting because many people have had no choice but to shop from charity shops and have borne the brunt of the stigma against it but now people are reframing charity shopping as a noble pursuit. Changing the image of SF is important but so is including people in the image.

6.2.1.2.1 Being an Example

SF influencers see their role as drawing others into the movement and hopefully educating them, to some capacity, along the way. To do this, SF influencers aim to educate their audience about solutions in SF by being an example and showing people the different ways to live a sustainable lifestyle. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle9:

'...that's also what I enjoy, that when suddenly people realise I'm wearing sustainable fashion that can then inspire them to even think about shopping more sustainably because a lot of it is, "I could shop sustainably but how can I do it?". A lot of people want to, but they don't know how...' -#Lifestyle9

From the #Lifestyle perspective, the primary way that this is done is by showing people sustainable solutions and lifestyles, largely based on their personal experiences. SF is framed as something that people want and can do if only they knew how. Thus, SF influencers adopt a "show and tell" role to engage people with SF. This involves showing people the "reality" of living a sustainable life, ideally from multiple perspectives. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle13:

'I hope that content creators are helping spread awareness, educating, and most importantly showing real life examples of sustainability and mindful consumption. Sustainable living and a conscious closet looks different for everyone, so I think having as many different people and examples as possible is the best way to connect and inspire change.' -#Lifestyle13

Real life examples are seen as ways to show people that living a sustainable life does not have to be impossible. A key point is the framing of consumption, which is that people just do not understand how easy it is to be a sustainable consumer. #Lifestyle8 puts it this way *'I think our role is to show people that it is possible to consume fashion in a responsible way.'* They aim to show people that it is possible to be a responsible consumer, it is possible to be fashionable, and it is possible for everyone.

6.2.1.3 *SF for All (Inclusion)*

In terms of inclusion, there is also a range of approaches. Towards the #Lifestyle influencer side of scale, inclusion is reflected in the strategies around fluidity. Inclusion from this view aims to recognise that everyone has different privileges, values, and access to the market so people should not feel bad about doing what they can.

'And I also I think my behaviour has changed in the past year greatly towards my thoughts on others who are or are not participating in slow fashion and the sustainable fashion movement...And I think as I've gotten older I've just come to see that it is so much more about privilege and accessing your own privilege and how it really is and has become, in some aspects, a movement that some people can just buy into. And then have that label of them being a conscious consumer and I don't think that's what it should be about. So, in the past year especially, I've come to approach a more holistic approach to sustainable fashion' – #Bit-of-both3

#Activist influencers would say the same but referring back to an earlier quote from #Activist2, they perceive that people are not being completely honest about what they can and cannot do, in favour of convenience or a misunderstanding of where they fall on the global wealth scale. On one side inclusion is about living your life the way you see fit and on the other it is about bringing more seats to the SF table. On the activist side, inclusion is more related to the strategy of being an example and showing people that SF is for everyone, including marginalised groups. Consider this quote from #Activist4:

'...And especially when you look at it, I'm not just here for people of size to matter in this space, but I'm here about disabled folks, I'm here for following black and indigenous folks while also holding an immense privilege in my appearance...' -#Activist4

These quotes illustrate the importance of showing others that there is space for them in the movement. In light of this, these influencers see their role as advocating for others. Consider these quotes from #Activist5 and #Activist10:

'I think I kind of reoriented my work in the last two years to very much be rooted in garment workers and organising at the level because I really think that's where the true liberation lies.' - #Activist5

'I wanted to help other people find ethical clothing that fit larger bodies and started creating a platform to advocate for the intersections of size inclusion and ethical and sustainable clothing.' -#Activist10

These quotes from #Activist5 and #Activist10 illustrate that SF is for everyone, including garment workers, and not just the end consumers. Looking beyond consumption is essential to the SF movement as SF can be expensive and price people out of being able to engage with it. Consider this quote from #Activist6:

'By default, if making sustainable fashion choices is only about buying clothes that are made sustainably and/or made ethically then it immediately becomes something that only people who earn a certain amount of money can buy or can afford to access it and I know that's not the reality for a lot of people.' – #Activist6

SF influencers also see their role as making SF culturally relevant and accessible beyond consumption. For example, #Activist3 aims to show people in their culture that sustainability is nothing new and tries to put it in terms they are already familiar with:

'Like every time I'm out with my friends I'm talking about it in a way they can understand. I'm showing them, "oh you don't know" "you've never seen, let's show you, this is Rana Plaza". I think we have to raise consciousness for people who can't, some people don't even have the access, ... they're only seeing what the media is showing them and this is really out of the media. We have this expression ant work' -#Activist3

Many participants brought up the fact that in many cultures, sustainability is inherent in the way do they things, but they are just not called sustainable. #Activist3 is from South America and in the quote above they are explaining how they translate, in a way, the western sustainability discourse into culturally based sustainability. They aim to link local practices and customs with

what is happening around the world, in this case, Rana Plaza. In the quote #Activist3 explains the idea of ant work, which I understood to mean that big changes require everyone to pitch in and for everyone to do that, information needs to be explained in a way that is relevant. Although I explicitly pointed to #Activist3, showing people that sustainability is culturally relevant actually went across the spectrum and will be further explored in Section 7.1.4. In this section we see that the role of SF influencers is to expand the reach of the SF movement by reaching out letting people know that SF is relevant for everyone.

6.2.1.4 *Section Conclusion*

This section has described three strategies that SF influencers utilise to engage people in SF: *fluidity, baiting, and SF for all*. Considering the research question, it appears that the SF influencers' role is to primarily recruit people into the movement and get them started. Their role is not necessarily to help people learn about the nuances or more complex aspects of sustainability but rather they are able to show the day-to-day practices that people could do. Further, influencers have an additional role of showing a variety of lifestyles with the aim to show that SF is for everybody, this however is not as straightforward as it seems and will be discussed in Chapter 7. While engaging people is a large part of their role, influencers also act as gatekeepers of information to the movement. This will now be discussed.

6.2.2 **Trusted Gatekeepers**

SF influencers can gain considerable influence in the movement which gives their opinions power. Consequently, another aspect of their role is to act as gatekeepers where they can share information and brands that they think are suitable for the movement. This section is divided into two parts, SF influencers as information providers [6.2.2.1] and working with brands [6.2.2.2].

6.2.2.1 *Providing the information*

Throughout this process of guiding people through SF, influencers, to varying degrees, act as information providers. Although #Lifestyle influencers do not want to talk about the doom and gloom of SF, the provision of information is still seen as an important part of the role. Some SF

influencers view SF as being an incredibly complex subject that few consumers can understand. Consider these quotes from #Lifestyle12 and #Lifestyle7:

'I did a post recently on IG [Instagram] about that whole like minimalism is great but I think a lot of times people mistake it for like get rid of everything and then like buy a bunch of whole new things which isn't necessarily sustainable either.' -#Lifestyle12

'I think my goal was to make ethical fashion accessible and easy to understand because I was really like getting caught up in the weeds of data and research and you know things like that but I think that most people don't and most people find it really, really confusing and they don't understand and I think that the fashion industry does a lot of obfuscation on purpose to keep people in the dark, to keep people not knowing what's going on...' -#Lifestyle7

These quotes suggest that SF influencers do not see themselves as consumers but rather as those who are able to see through the 'obfuscation' of marketing to discern the "sustainable truth", or what is really happening in the fashion industry. Although SF influencers are unable to verify whether or not brands are actually sustainable, they perceive themselves as being able to make sense of the complexity of the fashion industry better than the average person can.

'I just really want to communicate accurate information. There's so much marketing out there ... and I want to have integrity to what I actually think and believe in and if there's something fishy that I'm feeling or sensing then I'm going to look into it because I don't want other people tricked into buying something that isn't going to do the thing that I'm promising it's going to do so I want to know that it will actually work before sharing that with people....' -#Lifestyle3

SF influencers are sceptical of brands and marketing and think that they lack integrity. SF influencers see themselves as being avenues where people can receive the truth rather than be duped by untrue claims. Subsequently, they see their role as translators or bridges between brands and normal consumers. Many of the influencers in this study do not necessarily have specific backgrounds or expertise in sustainability to evaluate sustainability claims, however, they are passionate about sustainability. As such, they see it as their role to pass that knowledge on to others. I see them more as early adopters, or people who have become aware of SF before the mainstream population, so they are able to tell us what they have tried so far.

6.2.2.1.1 Communicating Accurate Information

In positioning oneself as knowledgeable about SF, influencers have to be careful about the brands they promote because people look to them as resources. Another reason they have to be careful is so that they do not spread misinformation, as seen in the quote below:

'I really like doing "ask me anythings" on Instagram because I get to delve way more into this. Um and a lot of things are things I want to write and talk more in-depth about they just require a lot of research to make sure that I'm educating people accurately. Because the reality is thousands of people watch my Instagram stories or engage with my content so there's also a responsibility on me to make sure the information I'm giving is researched' -#Activist10

Providing accurate information seems to be an important part of their role as people often ask them for advice. For example, the amount of people that interact with #Activist10's work illustrates how influencers act as resources for information. Either by being resources themselves, by sharing their lifestyles, or creating resources for others. In light of this, being seen as a resource seems to be used as a justification for their consumption of SF clothing rather than reducing their consumption.

'it's balancing which partnerships I take on because I don't want to consume, so it's hard but at the same time I want to introduce ethical and good brands and I also want to experience these brands so that if I have to vouch for them or if someone asks me where can I get a great basic t-shirt like I always direct people to second hand or thrifting first but sometimes you know, not everyone, thrifting takes a lot of time, and you know if that's not someone's jam then that's fine.' -#Lifestyle12

The data suggest that the idea of being more informed than the average consumer feeds into how they see their role. The role of SF influencers in the movement is to share brands and answer questions from their inquisitive audiences. For example, although an organisation may share a document with facts, people are unable to ask questions and get an immediate response from that document. SF influencers, on the other hand, position themselves as people that have insight into the workings of SF; therefore, they are seen as trustworthy people to receive inspiration or ask for advice from. To build up their repertoire, SF influencers conduct a lot of research and believe they have to try these brands before they can truly advocate for them. These quotes start to paint a picture of a tension between being a resource for others by sharing sustainable brands but also not wanting to overconsume themselves. This is a tension that will be discussed later in Section 10.3.1 but SF influencers see working with brands as a big part of their role.

6.2.2.2 *Working with Brands*

Working with brands is not just seen as a big part of the role, but it is seen as a natural part of being a SF influencer. Typically, SF influencers work with SF brands by being paid or gifted clothing to then share to their audiences.

'Everything is to try to help build sustainable wardrobes either by reading or helping you shop from brands that are already kind of approved by me and by other people that are better choices than buying fast fashion.' -#Lifestyle6

SF influencers act as bodies of approval that a brand meets SF standards, that this brand is a safe brand to shop from if you care about SF issues. Although, many of the influencers did not work in the fashion industry, they perceive themselves to know enough about standards to judge brands adequately. Taking on this responsibility, some influencers like #Lifestyle4 also ask brands questions to hold them accountable for their actions.

'I'm always happy and open to be in communication with brands in a way and to be asking them the right questions...so I do think it's definitely a time-consuming activity and it's something that not everybody should do. In fact, less than 1% of consumers should have to... at least there's a small community of people out there who are doing that now perhaps that will raise flags for these brands moving forward to change their supply chains if they aren't up to scratch and if they are talk about them more.' -#Lifestyle4

Holding brands accountable also involves pushing for more standards in the SF industry. As mentioned #Lifestyle influencers want to help people make better choices and the data suggest that the better choices include shopping from their recommended brands. From an #Activist point of view, they also try to push the movement and SF brands to do better. For example, #Activist10 and #Activist4 actively work with brands and take on considerable labour to expand the SF movement. Both work as fit testers to enable brands to expand their sizing ranges whilst #Activist10 has embarked on a large-scale research project to find out what sizes people actually wear to dispel myths around people not buying plus-size clothes. In light of the research question, SF influencers are advocating for better standards in the SF movement to make it more inclusive. SF influencers like #Activist10 have the reach to do research that brands are not willing to do, or act on. This is important because it shows that SF influencers are able to advocate for others. This work of pushing brands to higher standards is important in light of the research question. Because of their influence, brands may be more inclined to listen to SF influencers.

Moreover, #Activist influencer #Activist5 tries to blend their commercial role as an influencer with their educative role:

‘I just try to make it so that those sponsored content moments are learning moments where we explore a certain issue instead of just pushing product in people’s faces aimlessly.’

For them, pushing product is seen as a necessary evil, but education is an attempt to neutralise its affects. In terms of the research question, SF influencers aim to equip people with knowledge that will help them to advocate for themselves and others. #Activist influencers like #Activist5 shares some of their lobbying work to advocate for changes in policy to actively fight fast fashion with their audiences.

6.2.3 Section Conclusion

In sum, SF Influencers appear to be next level consumers who are able to decipher the fast fashion industry and guide us all to a sustainable future by engaging people in SF. In terms of what this means for the research question, SF influencers play an important role in spreading easy to digest information about SF to their audiences and they also have the ability to question and engage with brands in ways that a non-influencer might not be able to. Although the influencers decide what to share and how to share it, they inadvertently act as gatekeepers to the movement, and I am not sure that they realise how much influence they can actually have. This will be picked up more in Chapter 11. SF influencers could use their position to push for higher standards by leveraging their influence. Further, in their role as information providers, most of the information they share is regarding SF brands. As a result, they are the ones primarily introducing brands into the movement and through the brands they choose to share, they help to create an image of SF that is fashionable yet moral. However, there is the saying that you can have too much of a good thing and that sentiment is reflected in the idea that they do not want to ‘push product in people’s faces’ which goes to show that the role of the SF influencer can start to become counterproductive if too much substance is lost.

6.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to fulfil Objective 1 which was to understand how SF influencers conceptualise their role in the movement. The chapter started out by introducing approaches to SF influencing which ranged from #Lifestyle influencers to #Activist influencers [Section 6.1]. Through the analysis of the different approaches to being a SF influencer we see that SF influencing can be understood as a spectrum where different influencers prioritise different aspects. Two of the main differences between both sides are the tone used to talk about SF and the scale of change that they believe is required. On the #Lifestyle side they emphasised the fun and positivity that can be associated with SF whilst the #Activist influencers perceive SF as a serious crisis. These differences are reflected in how influencers perceive the scale of change needed in SF. For #Lifestyle influencers, individual changes should be the priority whilst #Activist influencers aim to address the systemic issues that are holding SF back. These different approaches illustrate that depending on who someone follows, they could end up perceiving an image of SF that is either very light-hearted or one that is more akin to advocacy and activism. On one hand, having these differences means that SF influencers may be able to reach more people due to the diversity of thought however because the #Lifestyle approach is more mainstream the reach of #Activist influencers may be limited due to challenging the status quo.

Moreover, the analysis has also showed how the way SF influencers approach SF impacts how they see their role in the movement. Overall, two main roles were discussed, *engaging people in SF* [6.2.1] and *being trusted gatekeepers* [6.2.2]. In terms of engaging people in SF, the analysis has uncovered three aspects of the SF influencer role: *fluidity* [6.2.1.1], *baiting* [6.2.1.3], and *SF for all* [6.2.1.4]. The chapter then discussed the influencers' role as trusted gatekeepers in Section 6.2.2, in terms of communicating information and working with brands. The findings show that SF influencers want to be resources for SF information and brands to help guide people along their sustainable journey.

Now that we have discussed the role the next question is who gets to fill it? The next section asks who gets a speaking role in the SF influencer drama and picks up on some of themes presented in Section 6.2.1.5 on inclusion.

7 CASTING: WHO IS (NOT) CAST IN THE ROLE?

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 6 ended by illustrating the role of SF influencers and now we ask who gets to be cast in that role. This chapter continues to discuss ‘scripting’ and primarily addresses Objectives 2 and 3 which are to understand who is cast in the role of a SF influencer and how this may impact the role of SF influencers. This chapter addresses who is actually able to speak in the SF movement. This section introduces the concept of exclusion in the SF movement.

Table 7.1 Forms of Exclusion in the SF Movement

Form	Description
Based on personal characteristics	SF influencers who are black, POC, and/or plus-sized experience exclusion from the movement by brands and the media
Based on knowledge	SF influencers who have expertise may be excluded from the movement
Based on location	SF influencers who are located in countries other than Europe and North America experience exclusion from the SF conversation
Based on culture	Cultural and experiential knowledge which is excluded from the SF conversation or repackaged as something new

7.1 FORMS OF EXCLUSION

The section on SF for all [6.3.1.4] started to touch on this but the data suggest that the SF movement is being portrayed as a movement for a specific type of person rather than for everyone. Exclusion appears in different ways for the SF influencers. Therefore, this chapter presents four basis of exclusion: personal characteristics [7.1.1], expertise [7.1.2], location [7.1.3], and culture [7.1.4]. Table 7.1 provides a summary of the different forms.

7.1.1 Exclusion Based on Personal Characteristics

The first area of exclusion is based on race, size, abilities, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Influencers of colour often find themselves taking longer to be recognised as experts in the field despite interest in the field growing.

'... so, if you think of like [A Black SF influencer], I don't know if you've spoken to her but basically she's been doing this for like years but she's only, and even like [Another Black influencer], they've both been doing it [working on SF] for at least 10 years or more and they're only gaining traction now and people are finding out about them. Whereas other white women will come into the space or like be talking about it, which is great, but they'll be like talking about it for maybe two years and suddenly get the same following that like [Another influencer] and [Another Influencer] have been working for like 10 years for.' - #Bit-of-both2

Here we see that one thing that restricts the SF influencer role is recognition. Here we have people who have been working on SF for at least a decade, yet their work was not recognised in SF until recently. As a result of the exclusion of people like them, the SF conversation has largely focused on solutions that centre the status quo.

'I think that there is a lot of topics of race and gender and socioeconomic status that go into these conversations of fashion that I think are being ignored whenever we take into account the big picture and I think that a lot of times when talking about sustainability we tend to have the mindset of creating blanket statements' -#Bit-of-both3

And when diverse voices are included, it is more in the capacity of a token, or as a symbolic gesture to give the appearance of diversity, which does not hold any power in changing the SF story because you are there to be seen and not heard.

'yeah, it's [representation] getting better, because I think there is that pressure of if you're not representing, what are you doing? But I would say that sometimes there is an undercurrent of tokenism. Sometimes I feel like "am I here to be your token brown girl?", do you know what I mean? But obviously it's hard to know sometimes and I think a lot of people of colour often navigate professional spaces wondering. Obviously, you know you should be there, you have the depth and the nuance of sustainability but when there's been so many gatekeepers in this space, you know. But the way I think about it, if I am the token, I am just going to disrupt the space as much as I can and just give my unfiltered thoughts and not be palatable because it's so important for me to do that. So, a lot of the spaces I speak at are often very white dominated, but I won't shy away from talking about white supremacy and talking about how black and brown and indigenous communities have always been at the front line of sustainability. Sometimes it is a bit uncomfortable, you're often coined as the angry brown woman, but whatever. It's fine.' -#Activist5

Here it seems that some factions of the SF movement are saying that you can be in the movement, but you are not welcome here. In such a situation, influencers of colour are constrained from really being heard in the movement because in some cases, that is not what they are in the room for. #Activist5 does not mind speaking up in such an environment, but I am sure there are others who do not want to take on the burden or label of being an ‘angry brown woman’. This in turn puts an undue burden on influencers of colour to put themselves in uncomfortable positions to advocate for others in the fashion industry. As a result of this exclusion, the conversations that are had cannot fully capture peoples’ experiences. Another basis of exclusion in this category is size.

‘it’s just funny when like brands will say “we’re only going to make for medium, small” because then they think they’re just going to have like slim people wearing their clothes but it doesn’t necessarily mean that... I just think brands should be as size inclusive as possible’ -#Bit-of-both2

For influencers and consumers alike, options for buying SF are limited because brands choose not to make clothing in their size. Combined with the fact much of SF is positioned as a luxury product, a lot of people are not able to afford SF all of the time, if at all.

‘I think something that I have experienced personally in being in a plus sized body is a statement saying you know “the key to changing the fashion industry is putting the heat (so to speak) on the brands in part by the consumer”, so saying like it’s the consumers sole duty to make sure they consume ethically, that they’re doing their homework, that they’re consuming sustainably which I agree with. I think that we have a responsibility to take ownership in what we buy and to have some sort of moral stance there. But that is a statement that is really harmful to people of a lower socioeconomic status. People who are living in poverty and cannot afford to buy these sustainable fashion brands.

And are people living in plus sized bodies who don’t have the, there are just sometimes I’m like I need jeans and comes down to me having to put myself in the position of do I buy these jeans and feel like I’m not a sustainable consumer or do I not buy these jeans and then I don’t have jeans. And I think that’s not just something that’s experienced for plus size people I think that it is a privilege to even interact in modern day sustainability in the sense of, this more expensive approach to it is really something to be noted as a privilege in itself. So, I think blanket statements saying, ‘if you don’t shop here, if you shop at Forever 21 then that’s bad, you’re a bad consumer’, is very ignorant and harmful for people who don’t have another option.’ -#Bit-of-both3

This quote from #Bit-of-both3 illustrates the limitations of putting the responsibility of SF into the hands of the consumers. With this responsibility, the role of SF influencers and consumers is limited by factors that they do not control. Blanket statements about SF, therefore, reflect the privilege of those who dominate the narrative. In doing so, this framing positions shopping from luxury SF brands as good and anyone who does not do that as bad despite obvious barriers of consumption being in place.

7.1.2 Exclusion Based on Expertise

Another basis of exclusion in the movement refers to expertise. Throughout the thesis it has been suggested that most of the SF influencers do not have the technical backgrounds to thoroughly critique sustainable solutions.

“I just think the direction of sustainability is diverse and it has to be inclusive and right now I’m seeing a lot of white affluent woman who have made small fortunes off of fast fashion attempting to pivot into sustainability because fast fashion is going away. And that’s something that can’t happen because it will ruin this movement, it really will. We will become the same as fast fashion because there’s no credentials or credibility behind a lot of these people who are talking about sustainability and writing about it. That’s great that you want to be a part of the movement because everyone should to be honest, but maybe your position isn’t holding the mic being that you perpetuated the problem for a large amount of time” – #Activist2

#Activist2 makes the point that some SF influencers are not knowledgeable about SF, yet they have the loudest voice. These faux-SF influencers are seen as not having any credibility, yet they are looked to as SF influencers whereas those who have been working in the area for at least a decade like #Activist2, have only recently started to garner that success. Moreover, they introduce the concept of sharing the mic. For new voices to be heard, those who have the mic need to create space. However, even when influencers do have credibility, it does not mean that it transfers to social media. Consider this quote from #Activist4, who works in water quality:

‘I really want to talk to people a lot more about their clothes shedding and everything but because I don’t have a master’s degree in textile science, it’s like, white ladies especially jump down my throat and white gentlemen and everything like, people are very territorial over science but like a very Western approach to science...’ –#Activist4

#Activist4 is a woman of colour from an indigenous background and explains that she does not feel her knowledge is valued or welcome in the movement. Although #Activist4 works directly with water quality and the government, her expertise in the space is diminished and unappreciated and actually opens her up to unwelcome critique. This contrasts with #Activist8, a white writer and now former influencer in the space, who describes bloggers as being the problem.

‘...I think social media has created a system where um it’s very democratizing right, everyone has a voice, but what it’s done is it’s created this thing where people who don’t know much are able to get more attention than the ... I mean the experts, you know, they went to school...they’re being shouted down by people who you know just learned about this topic three months ago and now are

really excited about it and are good at using social media and so that's created a really dangerous situation where misinformation can spread. I mean, you're seeing it with COVID too. People, like everyone is an expert now on COVID but there are people who are even epidemiologists and if we just ask them, they will tell us the answers' –#Activist8

So, here we see that in general those who are experts and not so great at using social media do not really have a voice in the movement however those SF influencers who actually do have expertise in the area are silenced as seen by the previous quote from #Activist4 (p.140). This section reveals the need for intersectional approaches because #Activist8 describes social media as a place where everyone has a voice, which is true, but at the same time some voices are able to have more legitimacy than others. Here I gave the example of two SF influencers with extensive experience working in SF or with natural resources, yet as women of colour, their expertise is not valued. The role of SF influencers in the SF movement is constrained by the power dynamics at play. There is tension over the ownership of SF and who and what facts are allowed to decide what it is.

7.1.3 Exclusion Based on Location

Considering the power dynamics around whose expertise is valuable, this is also linked to location. So far, this thesis has discussed different forms of representation and exclusion from the SF movement in terms of race, size, and expertise but has not yet explored the impact of location. Consider the contrasting views of the SF community between #Lifestyle12 and #Activist7:

'I think it's pretty inclusive and relatively close knit... there's the Europeans, and then there's the Americans, or the North American crowd but everyone interacts with each other so yeah, I would definitely say it's close knit and everyone seems, for the most part everyone seems to support each other which is nice' –#Lifestyle12

'... I don't know if people are acknowledging that yeah, this is all just mainly like people from the Global North, and they're driving the conversation. ... because I believe that this should not be a conversation that is just driven by where the consumption happens which is why I feel that the voices are exclusively in the North because it's consumption focused...' - #Activist7

#Lifestyle12 perceives the SF influencer community as being inclusive and made up of the North Americans and Europeans. The analysis so far has found that the movement is not inclusive but the focus here is on the locations that #Activist7 highlights. #Activist7 feels that the focus on the Global North is an accurate representation of the SF community. However, #Lifestyle12 perceives this to be positive while #Activist7 points out that the reason that the community is this way is

because the conversation is dominated by consumption. It appears that those from countries not in Europe or North America, are largely left out of the SF global conversation. #Activist2 and #Bit-of-both2 (below) touches on the fact that those in the Global South are usually not included in the SF conversations which is also illustrated above.

'You know I told people at the Copenhagen Fashion Summit 'next year more representation from the Global South.' We can't have a summit about making the fashion industry better without representation from the Global South. We can't have a summit about making the fashion industry better without listening to people who are negatively affected by the fashion industry and there just wasn't enough of that. But that's what like change of power looks like, it's sharing the mic.' – #Activist2

'So basically, everything is happening in Europe, America, Japan, like that's where all of the conversations are happening and all of like the summits and stuff like that... I think like, somebody said this to me recently, like there's the West and the East, like these two ideologies and people always talk about them and how different they are about things but people don't talk about how Africa as a continent has this ideology too... It's always like you find lots of different cultures and languages in Africa will have the same ideology but a different name for it but basically Ubuntu is to look after one another and to like to share and that conversation I feel like needs to be one that we should be like talking about because that is what sustainable and ethical living should be about. That's an African ideology to have Ubuntu and so that's why I think it's important for people to come here and learn from us too,' –#Bit-of-both2

The above quotes illustrate how those not based in North America or Europe, are effectively left out of the conversation both geographically and also narratively. By narratively, I refer to #Bit-of-both2's comment about African ideologies not being included in the SF conversation. Again, we see unequal power dynamics around who is able to contribute to sustainable knowledge as the major conferences around SF take place in the Global North. These quotes point to another theme which is to “share the mic” (#Activist2). This idea is also seen in the quote from #Bit-of-both2 who pointed out that people should learn from other cultures as well. Here we see that the role of SF influencers could be to bring ideas that are commonly not spoken about in SF to the forefront. However, this ideal is constricted by the fact that influencers that do not fit the mainstream representation of SF are not seen as valuable.

7.1.4 Exclusion Based on Culture

The quote from #Bit-of-both2 regarding African ideologies not being recognised as something that can positively impact SF leads to the final basis of exclusion which is culture. Previously,

#Activist7 mentioned that SF can appear homogeneous, and this may be because of the lack of diversity in who is able to speak and what solutions are able to be recognised. This is unfortunate considering that many of the influencers brought up the fact that for them sustainability is something inherent rather than something to be learned. Consider these quotes from #Lifestyle8 and #Lifestyle14:

'I'm also trying as well to connect with people of colour to get something started and talk about sustainability from that perspective. ... I am originally from Ghana and for me sustainability is in our culture. It's something we've done for generations and for ages... You know sometimes how we talk about sustainability and how it's trending right now, and then the white space it seems like something that's so new like 'we should get this happening' and then as a person of colour you're like this is just how we function... it's about starting that conversation in that space and saying this is actually really natural to who we are as a people and we have so much to contribute because of that...' -#Lifestyle8

'So, you know, me coming from India, India is naturally people have this habit of living sustainably. We've been brought up in a way that we don't waste plastic, we don't have really have a habit of buying a lot of things. So, coming from India, so many things which I saw just naturally a part of our lifestyle so I would say it's not really something that I started one day living like that...' -#Lifestyle14

These quotes illustrate that although sustainability is becoming trendy and the media in Western nations are talking about it, the actual practices associated with it are not new. However, because peoples' experiential knowledge is not valued, sustainability can then be repackaged as something innovative. By excluding this experiential knowledge, people may feel as though SF requires a lot of extra effort when really it may include practices that they are already familiar with.

7.2 ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

Considering these bases for exclusion, SF influencers adopt different strategies to create space for themselves in the movement including *being a voice* [7.2.1], *taking up space* [7.2.2], *bringing in experiential knowledge* [7.2.3], and *sharing the mic* [7.2.4]. A short description of each can be found in Table 7.2. This section begins with the bases of exclusion in the SF movement.

Table 7.2 Adaptive strategies to Exclusion in the SF Movement

Strategy	Description
Being a voice	Marginalised SF influencers use their power to highlight conversations that are not in the mainstream SF conversation
Taking up space	Marginalised SF influencers create space for themselves in the movement to increase representation
Bringing in experiential knowledge	Marginalised SF influencers highlight the knowledge from their cultures and experiences that others see as brand new
Sharing the mic	Marginalised SF influencers are calling for SF influencers with privilege should share the mic to allow their work to be seen and recognised as part of the wider movement.

7.2.1 Being a Voice

Looking first at the idea of voice. Consider this quote from #Activist2:

‘I find that people who are in those different circles that I just mentioned really actually enjoy the fashion talk because no one has really talked to people in those circles about fashion. Like when it comes to the plus-size community, they’ve been locked out of the conversation, when it comes to people with disabilities they’ve been locked out of the conversation and when it comes to trans-people they’ve been locked out of the conversation. So, people really enjoy the intersectionality aspect in regard to fashion because the fashion industry overlooked people that fall under a different intersection. And I think that’s been the success to some of my growth is that I’m really catering to people that feel like they’ve been ignored by the conversation.’ -#Activist2

This quote from #Activist2 poignantly describes people from marginalised backgrounds as being locked out of the SF conversation. The word choice of locked is so impactful when you think about a door. A door that is closed can easily be opened but a door that is locked is used to purposefully keep something in or out, meaning that the exclusion of these groups is not accidental. In light of this, one of the main aims for black and POC influencers, and influencers who are/are also plus-size, is to change the narrative around SF by increasing representation. Consider this quote from #Bit-of-both1:

'I think [another influencer] is the one who came out and said but if you were to think of a young woman who's eating vegan food, who's wearing ethical clothing, who's using her reusable straws, doing yoga every morning, you automatically think of like a skinny white woman, maybe blonde, I dunno if we wanna be specific, but you don't think of a black woman when they describe this person. And it's like well why not? I think that the sustainable movement is, people think that it's for rich white people and that's not really true.' -#Bit-of-both1

Here we see that the current narrative of SF does not include communities of colour but rather portrays good sustainable consumers as being white women. With this representation, it is evident how anyone not fitting that description would feel locked out of the conversation. The data overwhelmingly suggest that marginalised people in society are also marginalised in SF by generally not being recognised as mainstream representations of the movement. As mentioned in the methodology, I had to search specifically for influencers of colour because they were not represented on many of the lists of top influencers. Therefore, the idea of having a voice and being a voice for others was a major theme for influencers of colour in this study. People not included in the movement feel as though their voices were not appreciated in the movement however these influencers want to use their voices and take up space.

7.2.2 Taking up Space

Taking up space is seen by black and brown influencers as a form of resistance, ownership, and advocacy for garment workers, who are largely women of colour.

'...But it is difficult, it's such a white space, I mean everyone is lovely obviously, but we need to take up space because it's also about us and it's about our people. Because when you think of the fashion industry, the people who are suffering the most, they're always brown people...' -#Lifestyle8

Here we also see my role in the research as the #Lifestyle8 uses the words “we” and “our” to express our diasporic kinship. Although everyone should care about SF, #Lifestyle8 makes the point that it is our people who are primarily affected and, therefore, we should have more equity in the conversation. In light of the research question, one of the roles of SF influencers, particularly those who are from marginalised backgrounds or identities, is to take up space in the movement to show that SF is for everybody.

'Hugely I think that is definitely part of why I started talking about it more here because I knew that it was important, 1) to have somebody who is South African talking about it for more South Africans to do it but also somebody who is a person of colour' -#Bit-of-both2

The above quotes illustrate that SF influencers have noticed the lack of representation and inclusion in conversations around SF and they try to use their presence in the movement to rectify that. Conversely, considering the quote from #Bit-of-both1 about the stereotypical person that represents sustainability, if this is how SF is being portrayed then the general role of SF influencers is limited in its effectiveness. This is because it may be difficult for people to want to join a movement where they cannot see representations of themselves. This may make SF seem as though it is not important, rather it is just another trend they are not included in.

7.2.3 **Bringing in Experiential Knowledge**

Having diverse SF influencers in the movement can help to expand SF solutions. I introduce the term 'inherent sustainability' to illustrate that a lot of the actions heralded as being sustainable are things that they have had to do for years.

'Whenever I started to buy, I think I bought in with capsule wardrobe mindset without knowing it. I would say okay since I don't have that much money and I can only buy two tops; I would think what colour tops would match most of my wardrobe and that's what I would buy' -#Lifestyle6

A capsule wardrobe is a wardrobe made up of a limited set of items that the wearer can wear consistently for a season before swapping it for the next season outfits. This practice has become increasingly popular over the years and is often suggested as a sustainable practice to get people to wear their clothes more often. Nevertheless, this quote illustrates that people who have fewer economic resources likely do not have to go through that same journey of downsizing their wardrobes and learning to rewear their clothing because they never had a large wardrobe. Considering the stigma that can come from rewearing clothes, it is interesting that now this practice is becoming celebrated. It appears that this experiential and cultural knowledge is not valued in the SF conversation as it is being treated as a new phenomenon and not something that people do every day. Consider the following quotes from #Activist4 and #Activist5:

'I have so many issues with our own distrust, especially, especially as people of colour because a lot of us have been figuring out what it means to be sustainable, we've been, again like my people

used to do companion planting so corn, beans, and squash all help each other with their nitrogen fixing nodules and what they take versus what they put back into the soil, they help each other grow. We figured that out, we didn't have to go through soil testing, we didn't have to go through X, Y, Z like we knew it from trying and noticing and so we made those larger shifts. So, like we are taught to distrust, and we're taught very much to distance ourselves from our natural intuition, or natural scientific methodology and so I just yeah, it's wild' –#Activist4

'I think my family has always been inherently sustainable, it's just kind of giving them the language and insight to understand this from a more holistic perspective of the stuff you've been doing for so long is great and this is what we could do to be more sustainable. That's amazing to be able to do that. Yeah, I just don't want people to feel that they have to buy some \$300 fair trade jacket or something to feel like they can engage in this movement, and I think it's been really cool to have that conversation with my family.' –#Activist5

Again, knowledge based on experiences and culture is not part of the wider sustainability conversation. However, having these perspectives as part of the conversation allows SF to be relatable and relevant for more people because it is not something new, it is something familiar. The data indicate that there is great value in bringing in diverse voices from around the world in conversations around sustainable solutions that go beyond simply changing what we consume.

7.2.4 Sharing the mic

Everyone has a voice, but not every voice is heard at the same volume. This introduces the next theme of sharing the mic. Some of the SF influencers acknowledge the lack of representation in the SF community and reflect on how it is entangled with conversations around privilege. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle3:

'I think part of it too is being like okay I'm an Asian American woman so yes I'm a woman of colour but even as an Asian American woman there's a certain amount of privilege that I have so I want to be really conscious of that in thinking about how often I speak and whether I'm saying something of value or that can be empowering to other people or just taking up space and kind of making noise. So just being aware of social media dynamics and wanting to make sure when I do take up space it's helpful and informative or just connects to the people around me in some way.' –#Lifestyle3

So far this section has discussed that some SF influencers' experiences and knowledge are not valued in the SF movement and wish to use their voice to increase representation in the movement. To rectify this, it is suggested that people with more privilege should be sharing the mic rather than “clasping it” (#Activist2) and should refrain from taking up space in a way that is more

detrimental than it is positive. However, the solution is not black and white. It seems that there is a time and place for people to take up space in the movement. Consider this quote from #Bit-of-both2:

'Yeah I think that some people think that we should only be listening to people of colour which I think in terms of maybe if we're talking about the intersections or something like that, then definitely we should be but I do think that it's important for everybody to feel represented so like if we say no white influencers should be a part of this space then white people are going to be like well like where do I come into this kind of a thing but I do think that white influencers who already in this space should be amplifying the women of colour in this space especially like talking about how maybe they have also been not so intersectional. They need to amplify other voices but style wise, you need to be able to see representations of the style that you're into in the space otherwise you might not wanna be part of it.' -#Bit-of-both2

Thinking about the previous discussion on how SF influencers should be an example of a SF lifestyle [Section 6.2.1.3], the quote above suggests that the SF community needs representation not just in terms of race and size but also at all levels in order to reach everyone. Sharing the mic does not mean that everybody does not get to speak, rather it means that those who get to have the mic the most should pass it to those who rarely get the chance. The fact that this discussion needs to be had in an industry that is trying to be more ethical and sustainable is ironic but unsurprising considering the present dominant social paradigm. Consider this statement from #Bit-of-both2 below:

'I guess about, recently, the more sustainability becomes trendy the more of the traditional fashion industry moves in on it and with it they're bringing a lot of the toxic things that they have created and so I wonder now like how it's going to look in a few years' time. Are we, the sustainable and ethical fashion community, strong enough to make sure that we're still listening to everybody and trying to include everybody or are we going to become the same as the traditional fashion industry except now the fabric is made more sustainably and the garment workers are paid a living wage? It just seems like those are the two things like the fashion industry is focusing on, they're not focusing on how that intersects with everything else.' -#Bit-of-both2

The quote above suggests that #Bit-of-both2 believes that the SF industry is not yet under the hold of the traditional fashion industry practices, but the data suggests that this may already be the case; at least in the SF social media community, as the structures of racism and inequality seem to be just as present in this space. For example, one person brought up the fact that many SF brands do not use diverse models, and another explained how SF brands work with people who look like, or who they perceive, their target customer to be. This suggests that the industry is dominated by

people who are socially unaware and in doing so, continue to perpetuate the same inequalities present in wider society. It appears that they create brands that make SF appealing to people like them without thinking that SF needs to be appealing to people all of all races and sizes. Even in thinking about market segmentation, a SF brand could segment on variables other than race and size such as psychographic, lifestyle, and other demographic details. Considering the research question, SF influencers could be used to introduce SF brands to a wider audience, but this opportunity does not seem to be taken by SF brands.

7.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to fulfil Objectives 2 and 3 to explore who is cast in the role of SF influencer, the relationships within the cast, and what implications that may have on SF. Throughout this chapter, it is evident that many people are excluded from being able to have their contributions to SF recognised based on personal characteristics, expertise, location, and culture. In regard to who is doing the excluding, I introduce the character of the 'Isms', or a group of systemic injustices that create structural barriers in SF and wider society. No one is physically excluding the influencers but by putting influencers in a situation to be tokens, by not having diverse representation in SF, or by setting the standards of SF in the luxury sphere, a lot of people are locked out of the SF conversation. Therefore, SF is not just as simple as switching what people buy, it also includes navigating discrimination.

I think a great quote to summarise this section is this one:

'I actually work with a lot of brands for free, I just want them to recognise the humanity of these larger bodies that they have otherwise been shutting off from their business and, therefore, their worldview. It is baffling, it's hard enough trying to talk to people about diversity as far as people's ethnicities and cultures. It's so hard to just cross that with folks let alone talking about sizes, or abilities and disabilities or language access. Like it is, or cost, cost accessibility. It's really shocking and again really shows me that we have so much more work to do, especially just kind of seeing each other's humanity.' -#Activist4

So far, the SF movement has not been recognising the humanity of those it is aiming to help or even those who are trying to contribute to the movement. Having a movement that is not diverse results in conversations that are happening being ignored in the mainstream SF conversation. The

data indicate that the conversations that need to be had are difficult conversations that would require actors to really be honest with themselves to come up with equitable solutions. It appears that if people are not being self-reflective of how the movement is going and who is and is not in it, then it will be difficult for SF to be different from the traditional fashion industry. It appears that brands and people are still at the beginning stages of digging deep into the SF movement. The lack of diversity in the SF community is a barrier for the popularisation of SF as it seems to be framed as a very vague, yet specific thing, or a specific group of people. This is a limiting factor that is not often mentioned in the SF literature, which tends to focus on the common barriers of price and style. In light of this, SF influencers adopt four strategies: *being a voice*, *taking up space*, *bringing in experiential knowledge*, and *sharing the mic*. Having discussed the casting for the SF role, we now move onto the roles of other actors in the space.

8 OTHER CAST MEMBERS & DIALOGUE

8.0 INTRODUCTION

As mentioned, SF influencers are not the only ones trying to impact SF on social media. This chapter turns to the other cast members of the SF drama including, the antagonists, audience, those negatively affected by the lack of SF, media, and SF brands. Table 8.1 describes these cast members. The aim of this chapter is to address Objectives 2 and 4 of the thesis which are to identify other actors who impact the role of SF influencers and how these other actors may facilitate or constrain the SF influencer role. These characters inspire the dialogue and act as plotlines that SF influencers draw on to explain their practices and motivation (Benford and Hunt, 1992). Each character is developed through the lens of the influencer protagonists, as they are the star of the show. This section starts with the antagonists [8.1], then those negatively affected by the lack of SF [8.2], the audience [8.3], media [8.4], SF brands [8.5], and concludes with social media [8.6].

Table 8.1 Antagonists in SF

Cast of Characters		
	Character	Description
Antagonists	Fast fashion influencers	Influencers who promote fast fashion brands
	Big fast fashion brands	The brands who produce clothing with quick turnover and have questionable labour practices
	(Over)consumers	People who buy clothing without regard to the impact the consumption has
Other Cast Members	Those who are negatively impacted by the fashion industry	Those who are negatively impacted by the fashion industry such as garment workers and the environment
	Audience	The SF influencers' imagined Instagram followers/ audience
	Media	Mass media which communicates messages about SF
	SF Brands	Brands who make SF
	Social media	The platforms that enable SF influencers to share their messages

8.1 ANTAGONISTS

Firstly, antagonists are the characters that exist in opposition to the SF influencers. In this drama we have several villains: fast fashion influencers [8.1.1], fast fashion brands [8.1.2], (over)consumers [8.1.3].

8.1.1 Fast Fashion Influencers

Although the focus of this thesis is SF influencers, they had a lot to say about fashion influencers who promote fast fashion. Throughout the interviews, the SF influencers often drew on influencer stereotypes to differentiate themselves, to say ‘I am not like them’. To SF influencers, traditional fashion influencers are a big part of the problem when it comes to sustainability. This section discusses two main themes, influencing for personal gain [8.1.1.1] and selling unrealistic lifestyles [8.1.1.2].

8.1.1.1 *Influencing for Personal Gain*

Fast fashion influencers are seen as aspirational and fashionable people who do not use their considerable influence for good. #Lifestyle6 points to a popular reality show, Love Island, which has a considerable influence around the world:

‘It’s really frustrating when, I’m sure they’re lovely people, I watch Love Island, I do, I do enjoy it. I’m sure they’re nice human beings but sometimes it is frustrating to see girls like that post their fast fashion stuff online or like promote them heavily... the people that sustainable influencers are struggling to kind of influence are perhaps, young, impressionable girls that are kind of looking up to Love Island level sort of, not Love Island level, but Love Island sort of looking girls, which there’s nothing wrong with ..It’s a difficult one if we could promote sustainability in more of like a fun, not in a down to the woods way, not to promote as hard core.’ #Lifestyle6

The quote above suggests that fast fashion influencers are seen as taking advantage of their audiences and encouraging them to pursue unsustainable lifestyles by promoting fast fashion. Moreover, stereotypically, social media influencers are seen as shallow people selling superficial products to millions of people however, SF influencers consistently push back on that narrative whether it be by trying to share content that is more “realistic” or by saying we are all influencers:

‘I tell people this all the time you don’t have to have thousands of followers, you don’t have to be what people might theoretically think an influencer is, you know holding up tummy tea or whatever it is - detox stuff, you know? None of that, you don’t need be a Kardashian to be a part of it. We can all make a change we can all inspire somebody.’ -#Lifestyle4

This quote links back to the idea of ant work where everybody is needed to help create change, it is not restricted to the “Kardashians”. Here SF influencers are seen as being more normal. Fast fashion influencers on the other hand; they are very cool, fashionable, and famous. They are

everything SF appears not to be. #Lifestyle6 uses the phrase ‘down to the woods’, to describe the less fashionable approach to SF. Contrastingly, fast fashion influencers are seen as aspirational which makes it difficult for SF and SF influencers to compete with them. Because fashion influencers are so aspirational, it appears that SF influencers want to make SF fashionable and be aspirational as well; to encourage people to become more sustainable, as mentioned previously in Section 6.2.1.4. Interestingly, SF influencers often seem to find themselves emulating fashion influencer techniques such as taking pictures of their outfits and sharing brands. However, when fast fashion influencers do this, they are perceived by the SF influencers as lacking morals and money hungry.

‘While I feel there is a bigger brand fatigue, I think viewers themselves or even audiences themselves are trying to, basically trying to identify who’s branded and who’s not....’ - #Activist6

Previously, social media influencers were seen as trustworthy and, therefore, people trusted their opinion on what products were good (Schouten, et al., 2020), but now that the influencer economy has taken off, many SF influencers feel like that trust has been broken. Being branded means that the fashion influencer is constantly promoting brands, everything from their tops to their shoes to their water bottle may be accompanied by a helpful link to purchase. These quotes illustrate why there is a reluctance for SF influencers to call themselves influencers. They do not want to be associated with the stereotypes of fashion influencers, and general influencers, because they are seen as promoting overconsumption of unnecessary items. Consider the previous quotes and this quote from #Lifestyle3.

‘I think I had seen influencers as kind of like promoting overconsumption and promoting...I hadn’t seen them promoting ethical brands at all because I hadn’t been following those people for most of the time that I have been using social media. As I started to get more into ethical fashion realm and connected with more people and accounts that were communicating that alternative message of what consumption could look like I was like ‘oh so it’s not that this can’t be done well it’s just that it has to be very thoughtfully and carefully done.’ –#Lifestyle3

SF influencers perceive their approach to influencing to be more thoughtful and careful than traditional fashion influencers. Traditional influencers are seen as people who overconsume and encourage others to do so. They are seen as people who will promote anything just to make more money (as seen in #Lifestyle3 and #Lifestyle4 above). In terms of the research question, the role

of SF influencers in the SF movement is to be the antithesis of traditional influencers. Instead, they see themselves as authentic people who have morals and use their influence for good.

8.1.1.2 *Selling Unrealistic Lifestyles*

Moreover, not only are these influencers charged with being overly commercial, but SF influencers also feel that traditional influencers perpetuate unrealistic standards. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle5 and #Lifestyle6:

'Not everyone can go to a bulk food store and buy stuff, not everyone has a garden so not everyone can grow their own food, so that was my aim. Just to make it realistic and achievable to just the average person instead of the Instagram models of the world.' -#Lifestyle5

'I think a lot of people in that community do the same stuff because occasionally they might share "oh, I went on a trip," but most of their outfit pictures, like we're sharing outfits not the perfect lifestyle that everyone wishes to have, we're sharing outfits, we're sharing how we re-wear our clothes, not the perfect Instagram life. So, I think that's what the community is about more than anything. It's more like real life.' -#Lifestyle6

They seem to perceive influencers who promote fast fashion as being unrealistic and selling a lifestyle that many can only aspire to, unlike these “normal” SF influencers. Despite being on the same social media platform and largely performing many of the same activities in terms of reviewing and promoting brands, and being aspirational, SF influencers distance themselves from fashion influencers as a way of saying ‘we are not like them, we are real.’ Going a step further as SF is becoming more mainstream, some influencers who promote fast fashion have started to dip their toe in the SF space however SF influencers do not take this lightly. Consider this quote from #Activist2:

“There are people who have been doing this work, to me if you've never bowed down to fast fashion and taken that money and sold the product then yeah you are sustainable...” -#Activist2

Fast fashion influencers are seen as people that cannot really be interested in sustainability but only engage with it because it is trending right now. And even though these influencers may have millions of followers who may be influenced to try out a SF brand; their attempts at being sustainable are framed as greenwashing because they still work with fast fashion brands. So, although SF influencers may say SF is a journey, it seems that this does not apply to fashion

influencers. Not to defend shady influencer practices, of which there are many. It is just interesting that for some, being a fast fashion influencer is their full-time job and how they support their families. So, I am not sure how feasible it actually is for people to completely overhaul their lives and businesses overnight. Overall influencers who promote fast fashion are seen as irresponsible people who, because of the glamour of the unrealistic lifestyles draw huge audiences only to lead them deeper into overconsumption. In terms of the research question, the role of SF influencers in the SF movement is to make SF seem aspirational yet realistic. These fast fashion influencers are perceived to be barriers to sustainable consumption in the SF drama. However, influencers who promote fast fashion are not all to blame, the thesis now turns to the fast fashion brands.

8.1.2 **Big Fast Fashion Brands**

Through the eyes of the SF influencers, it appears that like their fast fashion influencer counterparts, these brands are the primary enemy of the SF cast. Fast fashion brands provide two main plotlines for the SF influencers. The first is trapping consumers [8.1.2.1] and the second is infiltrating the movement [8.1.2.2].

8.1.2.1 *Trapping Consumers*

The findings suggest that fast fashion brands trap consumers by providing an endless stream of cheap clothing, without ever mentioning the process or environmental and social impacts that it has. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle14:

'I came across a lot of articles about fast fashion, I read about the Rana Plaza story and it kind of shocked me how something like fashion which seems so innocuous could have such a dark angle to it. I never realised that people were being paid such low wages, they were working in such bad conditions just because we could get our clothes cheap, and we could change them frequently according to seasons.' -#Lifestyle14

Fast fashion brands disguise their impact with aesthetics and fun which makes them seem harmless. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle6:

'With the campaign I did with Earth Minute, I said to Emma is there any way we could film a trailer that's pretty much exactly like a fast fashion brand... If we could make it cool, make it edgy, or whatever. If we did a little trailer kind of similar to Missguided trailer because everyone

knows that, but second hand. I think that's a way we can promote sustainable fashion in a way that's more fun and more like what young girls want.' - #Lifestyle6

Fast fashion brands make fashionable, aspirational, edgy, cheap clothing for the masses to overconsume. As mentioned in Section 6.2.1.4.1, because fast fashion is seen as exciting, SF influencers feel that they have to portray SF in the same way to encourage people to switch sides. The quote from #Lifestyle6 and the previous analysis of fast fashion influencers suggest that fast fashion is seen as a Venus fly trap, which attracts people with its fun appearance, but leads to an unhappy, or rather unsustainable, ending. Despite its detrimental impact, fast fashion is seen as still having a place in SF. See these quotes from #Lifestyle6 and #Activist2:

'I'm not against buying fast fashion in a second-hand market because anyways its clothes that someone didn't want that they were going to throw out. H&M, H&M doesn't pay well to their workers but if it's a top that I like, I would buy it even directly from a fast fashion brand. I think the important thing is to have a capsule wardrobe mindset of okay if I'm going to buy that top I'll have to wear it at least 30 times to make myself feel like I bought something and I really used it, at least 30 times...I think you can't be radical in ethical fashion you can't be like I'm going to buy organic all the time, I'm going to by second hand all the time because you can't find underwear second-...' -#Lifestyle6

'Yeah, it's no one's job to shame a single mom on benefits for getting her children's clothes from Primark.' -#Activist2

From this perspective, fast fashion is needed because of its accessibility for lower income individuals or convenience when you urgently need something. Moreover, as seen in the quote from #Lifestyle6 not all SF influencers believe that shopping from fast fashion brands is wrong. An interesting thing about this quote is that SF influencers often talk about thrifting however, thrifting fast fashion relies on people buying it first so then it can be bought second-hand, sans the guilt. This quote illustrates how fast fashion is seen as necessary in the fashion market to fuel secondhand consumption and to provide more options for consumers. In terms of how this impacts the role of the influencer, here the influencer legitimises fast fashion brands as belonging in the SF ecosystem in some capacity, whether it be because of convenience, price, or even just desire.

8.1.2.2 *Infiltrating SF*

Fast fashion brands are not passive actors in the SF movement but are actively trying to infiltrate and appropriate it. Brands try to assuage peoples' perceptions of their environmental impact by

creating sustainable product lines and trying to partner with sustainable influencers. This quote demonstrates how and why brands try to partner with sustainable influencers:

'There are fast fashion companies who are now trying to collaborate with like so, I guess, marketing wise do you call me a micro-influencer? ... so, there are brands that will approach me and ask me to collaborate with them, but they don't mention if they are ethical or sustainable. Like I had Puma wanting to send me shoes, I'm like no thank you. Like that makes no sense but notice how bigger brands are going into those things [working with micro-influencers], they think 'okay these people don't have that many followers and they probably aren't offered much stuff so one, we don't have to pay them but we'll still influence this amount of people to buy whatever this product is, but also two, we'll make people through association think we are ethical and sustainable.' Which, I'm realising, I'm a greenwashing tool for them in way. And I've noticed them do this, there's this girl called ... and she talks a lot about ethical and sustainable fashion on her YouTube but then she recently collaborated with Nasty Gal which is a fast fashion store.' -#Bit-of-both2

This quote illustrates how fast fashion brands try to partner with SF influencers and how they hope, or bet on, SF influencers not doing their due diligence, or not caring about whether or not the products they are being sent are actually sustainable. When SF influencers do choose to work with fast fashion, they are lending legitimacy to these lines which is seen as misguided:

'I've seen a lot of fashion influencers like sustainable fashion influencers using H&M because H&M now have the ecological fabrics, but you still have all the problems of a fast fashion chain, and we all know what problems those are. They're still doing their things in Bangladesh. Of course, maybe the factories are better but we're not sure that these people's lives are better.' -#Activist3

Fast fashion brands who launch sustainable lines are seen as agents of greenwashing and their efforts are seen as a drop in the water compared to their environmental and social impact.

'... the Conscious Collection from H&M is like a really small collection and ... they don't talk about how the labour is treated, are they being paid fair wages, are they paying their labourers fairly and it's still new collections every week so even if you're using recycled fabrics or organic cotton, it's still more production and the more you produce it can never be sustainable.' -#Lifestyle14

Fast fashion brands tend not to go into specifics about how they were able to produce these more sustainable lines and the lack of clarity results in questions around if and how this impacts the garment workers. In terms of the research question, fast fashion brands try to utilise SF influencers

to reach sustainable consumers and try to garner some legitimacy for themselves. However, brands are not all to blame, consumers play a role as well.

8.1.3 (Over)consumers

Consumers who buy too much clothing are part of the problem because they validate the overproduction of brands and overconsume clothing, resulting in a lot of waste. This quote from Activist2 is telling:

'Look at it this way. How embarrassing would it be if the human species demolished themselves because of fast fashion? Like how embarrassing would it be if an alien race came to visit this planet long after we're all gone, they were looking through artefact's and they were like 'oh my God they killed themselves because they couldn't stop buying Topshop dresses. Like that's mortifying, we can all do better than that [they laugh] we really can.' - #Activist2

Here the blame is put on consumers for not being able to exercise self-control or discipline to change their shopping habits. SF influencers across the spectrum draw on the plotline of consumer responsibility to drive change in the fashion industry. If only consumers would buy less clothing and stop throwing their clothes in the trash. See these quotes from #Activist2, and #Activist4:

'You have to blame the general public at some point too. We all had to know at some point that if a shirt cost £5 then there's no way for it to have been made in an ethical way like we all in the back of our head if we have a tiny pinch of empathy, we know that.' -#Activist2

'You know, we think that we throw something away it's no longer in existence. We don't think of the truck it has to get on to the processing unit to get to X, Y, Z. We literally stop thinking about it as soon as it's out of our hands and so I think that we need to change our attitudes about how we recycle things, we have way more break down options for recycling than our trash, we need to be supporting reusing our own stuff a lot more.' -#Activist4

On one hand, people are seen as just being wasteful and on the other, people are seen as uninformed about waste and what happens to clothes at the end of their lives. SF influencers draw on this plotline to justify why raising awareness about SF is important. The theme of an uninformed consumer is a common thread throughout how influencers see their role. The next section introduces those the SF influencers see as being negatively affected by the lack of SF.

8.2 THOSE AFFECTED

Those needing help in this drama seem to be the garment workers and the Earth. The data suggest that the influencers feel a particular connection with nature and did not know the negative environmental impacts that it was being subjected to.

'Yeah, my family, it was just always there, appreciation for the natural world and then I think the appreciation was always there and then as I got older and I started really learning about that, about how it's not being cared for, I was like 'wait, what? this is awful'' - #Lifestyle7

Moreover, the social impacts of the fashion industry were of importance to the influencers. Garment workers are seen as those who are suffering the most and SF influencers often connect advocating for them as a form of feminism as garment workers tend to be women.

'It was International Woman's Day yesterday and I remember being in my head like oh I'm really annoyed I haven't posted anything about being a woman and how important it is to be a feminist, to do with sustainable fashion because at the end of the day like sustainable fashion and fast fashion is a feminist issue because the garment workers are women and a lot of them aren't being paid correctly or at all so the environmental, the detriment to the environment that it causes or whatever.' -#Lifestyle10

SF influencers draw on the Earth and garment workers to explain to others their motivation for engaging in SF. After seeing that these things are happening, SF influencers in this study became motivated to change their habits and share with others. Moreover, who the influencers perceive as needing help influences who and what SF influencers will advocate for on their platforms. In terms of who they share with, we now turn to the audience.

8.3 AUDIENCE

Reflecting on the role of influencers as providers of information in Section 6.2.2, a lot was revealed about the audience. The data suggest that SF influencers view those that follow them as people who are unintentionally uninformed who just need guidance to make better choices. They frame their audiences as being people who are unable to discern sustainability credentials and make good choices. It seems as though #Lifestyle influencers, in particular, perceive others to be incapable of being good at SF, therefore, the bar should be set low to not discourage them from pursuing it further.

'But the dialogue has to go on and we don't have to be perfectionists because trying to be perfect can draw us back from our agenda' - #Lifestyle14

Instead, we should consider what interests the audiences. The data suggest that fashion is the main interest. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle12:

'The audience is definitely still fashion first so it's more about using what they already have in their closet, like getting creative with what they already have, and having like a well edited closet. I definitely touch on sustainability points and things; they also get that information as well and some of them do respond a lot to that. Instagram seems to catch on more to the sustainability piece whereas YouTube is more how can I use what I already have, not shop so much, and make smarter shopping choices. And then that being said, on both sides they love being introduced to ethical brands...' -#Lifestyle12

Influencers have to be strategic about how and where they talk about sustainability because their audiences prioritise fashion. When talking to mainstream consumers it seems that sustainability in moderation is best. Instead, people seem to resonate with practices such as making the most of their current wardrobes. However, people are less interested in topics such as laundering practices because that is not what people are necessarily desiring from Instagram.

'I did an IGTV with an eco-friendly dry cleaner... I really should do more, it's just a less sexy topic that people don't really want to learn about so much but I, that reminds me, I did another IGTV that I just haven't published about caring for clothes but yeah, it's something that would get less engagement really. To be honest, people don't really care about it so much, but it is an important topic' -#Lifestyle9

Further, although influencers aim to educate consumers, they also have to be attuned to what the audience will find interesting, and this usually does not include topics around caring for clothing. Another way that SF influencers engage with audiences is by training them to open their eyes to the way the digital eco-system works.

'What I've worked on instead is training my audience to realise that nothing is free for you on the internet. One if somebody has a platform and they're telling you "Oh, swipe up to buy this dress, it's such a great dress" that's not free because your information has value and every time you hit that swipe up, a brand is getting a lot of information about you. A lot of information which is

actually worth millions of dollars and you're doing it for free, you're giving it to them for free.' - #Activist2

Influencers such as #Lifestyle4, #Activist10, and #Activist2 aim to teach their audiences how to ask questions for themselves and be critical. #Activist2 describes having to train their audience how to assess sustainable claims and ecommerce practices so that they will be more critical of how everyone is presenting themselves online.

Overall, the audience seems to be a group of people who need to be trained to ask questions and see through the lies and obfuscation of the marketing and fashion industries. SF influencers are not the only ones trying to influence their audiences. The media also plays a role in how people discuss SF and this will be discussed next.

8.4 MEDIA

Recently interest in sustainability seems to be growing as projects focusing on the environment have been featured in the mainstream media. Influencers mentioned programmes such as Stacey Dooley's 'Stacey Dooley Investigates, Fashion's Dirty Secrets' (Directed by Emeka Onono, 2018), Hasan Minhaj's 'The Ugly Truth of Fast Fashion' (Head writer Prashanth Venkataramanujam; Directed by Richard A. Preuss, 2019), and Extinction Rebellion on the news. It seems like SF and sustainability are part of the media agenda.

'From kinda a basic point of view there is definitely a consumer demand that's grown for ethical business and ethical fashion... I think that's grown a lot in terms of the last couple of years because there is now so much more awareness and that's being spread by media across programs such as David Attenborough's Blue Planet and Blue Planet 2. I mean he's always been talking about this, but I think he is really starting to come down more on climate change now and that's definitely had a boost of awareness especially in the UK. And then there's a lot more in the media talking about the environment as well, you know, big statistics from the UN saying that we have what is it 11 years now to turn things around and to take climate change seriously and alongside that you have people like Extinction Rebellion who are kind of raising awareness right now so they're doing thing in a more politically charged way and a more aggressive way but at the same time it's still

raising awareness that we are having an impact and as a society we need to change the way that we're doing things' -#Lifestyle4

These documentaries and programmes have also affected the SF influencers personally. Many of the influencers cite documentaries such as *The True Cost* (Written and Directed by Andrew Morgan, 2015) as the film that brought the truth of fast fashion to their consciousness.

'so I got interested in sustainability after I watched the documentary the True Cost on Netflix and I had already been thrifting for quite a while just because I was a broke college student, it was a way for me to get clothes without spending a lot of money but when I watched that documentary The True Cost, it exposed me to the realities of fast fashion and how people are being mistreated and they're not being paid fairly for their time and these companies are just exploiting workers and the garment workers are mostly women ... But then I watched the documentary The River Blue and that documentary talks about the environmental impact on the cities it's being made in and how it's polluting the rivers and the sources of drinking water. Realising the environmental impact too I was like 'okay this is something that's very important to me', that kind of' got me started on my sustainability journey.' - #Bit-of-both1

This suggests that the foundation of many people's understanding of SF has been framed by what the documentary focused on which may explain why SF influencers focus more on consumption than systemic issues. A two-hour documentary cannot cover everything but the influence of the documentary as the foundation for many SF influencers is clear. Perhaps because the documentaries inspired them to change, SF influencers see it as their role to diffuse the message and identify alternatives. Moreover, the increase in awareness has resulted in new opportunities for the SF influencers because now they have a wider audience that they can reach.

8.5 SF BRANDS

SF brands also play a large role in this drama as they are the brands that the influencers are encouraging people to switch to. They are the ones who pay the influencers and charge them with getting their products to the masses. The analysis suggests that small brands are seen as heroes in

the movement, righting the wrongs of fast fashion with every t-shirt. Consider these quotes from #Activist1 and #Activist2:

'And I suppose I hope that... there are big drives to be supporting small businesses...as consumers where we should be focusing all of our love is with the small producers because they just are more likely to think and to be clear about what they do and who it is affecting and they're not going to make the same money driven decisions that a big business will.' -#Activist1

'But here's what we do, if we stop shopping there, start putting our money into smaller businesses, those smaller business give fast fashion a run for their money, fast fashion is forced to do better because they're not selling clothing and they wanna continue to sell clothing. And that raises the bar for everyone basically.' -#Activist2

However, from the discussion in Chapter 7, we see that although SF brands may be trying to do fashion better, they generally fall victim to the same exclusiveness as the fashion industry in terms of race and size inclusion. SF brands also contribute to issues of representation by not creating larger sizes or by perpetuating stereotypes about the garment workers they claim to empower. Consider this quote from #Bit-of-both2 and #Activist4:

'That's another thing with sizes I think like it's been great for me to follow plus-size women even though I'm not plus-sized myself, there's so much more that they bring up that I think lots of people like forget about and that's with the thing like of sizes and people not going above and it's got to the point when I look at a new page and I don't see anybody who's above a size medium, I'm like oh I don't really like this brand, I just, like if they're not thinking to show more bodies in their clothing then I think oh there's something there in that company that isn't right.' -#Bit-of-both2

'...it's just this much larger thing where these brands just aren't making bigger sizes. It's hard because now I feel like, we're told by these smaller brands now, like at first we were being told by these really big brands, now we're being told by these small brands that customers need to buy from them in order to help this larger, you know, trend of kind of shutting out these larger businesses. It's weird that it feels like all the onus falls onto the consumer and small businesses' -
#Activist4

Here we see that SF brands play a large role in determining who can play a part in the movement based on the influencers they choose to support and the items they choose to produce. It is a paradox as #Activist4 points out, if everyone is pointing to consumer power, but then also excluding consumers, how can people win? Nevertheless, SF brands are largely viewed in a positive light and are shown much more grace than larger brands. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle3:

'I don't think brands need to come across as 100% perfect because at the end of the day nobody is 100% perfect there's still going to be carbon emissions created for every bag or t shirt that's made there's still going to be serious impact on the environment from cotton all the way through to leather products and things like that but being able to kind of highlight the areas that they are trying to be more ethical in and talking about those and also saying you know 'we're aware that we need to improve x, y, and z' I think that's the most honest way to go about it' - #Lifestyle3

Despite these critiques, independent brands seem to have a halo and like SF consumers do not need to be perfect, rather, they just need to try. Small brands are seen as having less of a negative impact on people and the environment because they produce at a lower volume than big fast fashion brands. In terms of the research question, SF brands influence the SF influencer role by contributing to funding their platforms in exchange for lending them legitimacy in the SF field.

8.6 SOCIAL MEDIA

Although Instagram is the setting for this drama, it is also an active character that shapes the way SF influencers engage with the space. There are three main themes in the section: the speed and aesthetics of Instagram [8.6.1], feeding the algorithm [8.6.2], and expanding reach [8.6.3]. Each will now be discussed in turn.

8.6.1 Playing the Instagram Game: Speed and Aesthetics

Instagram moves quickly but to feed the machine, it requires its users to post often to keep it going. In light of this Instagram favours posts that are short, snappy, and easily digestible. Moreover, as

a visual first platform, Instagram prioritises high-quality photos that will keep its users coming back for more.

'The fact that the way that Instagram is designed it's almost like an amazing selling tool, it is not really a photo sharing platform. It's a selling tool because it's addictive with everything changing and it always trying to show something new to keep these interesting. So, I think even people with the best of intentions, and I include myself in this bucket, get caught in the same traps that we were in before ... probably the impact is less and it is done with the right intentions, but it is still ultimately the same behaviour. And for me I'm on Instagram close to 12 hours a day.' -#Activist1

Here we see Instagram as a selling tool, linking back to the role of SF influencers to champion brands, we can see how SF influencers themselves become selling tools. This comes down to the nature of Instagram itself and the kind of behaviours it wants its audience to display. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle12:

'On YouTube or Instagram, it's a bit different. On YouTube is definitely a mix of what message do I want to get across but also what does the audience want. Like I try to pay attention to what videos do well but then at the same time it's also a lot based on what is it that I want to do, also. And then on Instagram, gosh, it's so much more flighty and arbitrary, it's so fast right. ... Yeah, it's more, I think Instagram is definitely more superficial or like what outfit, that kind of thing, it's a lot more aesthetic based and that kind of thing I think, oh gosh that sounds horrible' -#Lifestyle12

Amongst the influencers, Instagram has earned the stereotype of being more superficial and because of its focus on aesthetics rather than the mundanity of reality, Instagram encourages people to tell their stories in a way that is fun and aspirational.

'So, it is something that I do but I feel like the nature of Instagram as a visual platform that is rooted in kinda making a character around a blogger. Like you're known for a certain aesthetic, people kind of go and follow you because they want to see you. People are drawn more to that content and that's something you continue to see just by virtue of what gets the most engagement. And I think that's a very interesting question about the nature of social media and how it kind of is rooted in the sense of being palatable and being visually cohesive that, I also question is this

the right platform to really bring nuance ... But I just feel like there are very real limitations to just, our shrinking attention spans, the double tap and scrolling down nature of Instagram but at the same time, it's been a huge platform for me to get this message out there. There are people who do consume everything and really learn, so it's just hit and miss.' -#Activist5

#Activist5 makes several useful points about the nature of Instagram. Firstly, because it prioritises visual cohesiveness, SF influencers have to contort their message to fit the story of the feed. #Activist3 has very strong views on the effectiveness of SF influencers on social media. #Activist3 believes that personal brands distract from the issues of sustainability because people get caught up in the details of their appearance:

'I would like people to pay more attention to what I'm saying. I wanted people to look more to the subject than to myself. When I was sometimes talking about something serious, people were talking about my makeup or my hair. I was like here talking about the burning forest, 'oh your hair looks good'. This is not on my mind' -#Activist3

Rather than listening to what #Activist3 has to say, people focus on them and their appearance. The nature of Instagram encourages people to look to the visual and I think when people are just on Instagram for fun, they are not in the frame of mind for nuanced conversations, rather they just comment about what captures their eyes. Or perhaps people just do not know how to respond to serious issues presented on social media. These quotes from #Activist5 and #Activist3 show that it is difficult to have serious or mundane conversations on social media. However, influencers have to make it work so that they can continue to get engagement. Engagement is important for influencers to stay in Instagram's good graces and to continue to get commercial opportunities:

'Yeah no, it's been really good but from Instagram changing the algorithm, it's been, it's a slog because you're putting content out there and it's just not being seen by the numbers that it used to be seen by and it's really frustrating, it's actually quite demoralising because you're, you are, obviously, like posting, constant tweaking to be done' -#Lifestyle9

SF influencers have to constantly adapt to keep up with the algorithm to get their message out there. So, not only does the content have to be attractive but it also needs to conform to Instagram's expectations which by design, are vaguely understood by its users.

8.6.2 Feeding the Algorithm

Moreover, because SF influencers have to stay in character and move quickly to keep up with Instagram, it is not always possible to take the time to go in depth. Moreover, the requirements of frequent, attractive photos places pressure on the SF influencers to constantly churn out content in order to keep themselves relevant.

'I like to look at what's happening like in the sustainable fashion world, I like to keep up with that but sometimes I feel like there's such a pressure to be posting all the time. Sometimes I have to remind myself that you can read something and not have to post about it, or you can like take the time to read something about the environment or try to understand something about the environment or sustainability or whatever and not feel like you need to share, share, share.' - #Lifestyle10

This quote exemplifies the pressure that SF influencers feel to say *something* even if they are not yet ready to share because they feel that they have to always be feeding the Instagram algorithm. Here I introduce the concept of *Instagram Islands*, where because people have to manage their own profile, the pressures of managing the platform and creating their own content can overshadow other aspects of being in the space such as engaging in community. Creating content becomes less about sharing and more about maintaining their platform.

'...sort of the kind of pressure to produce consistent content is actually quite a big pressure, I actually, January almost didn't post anything just because I was kind of a creative block space and was uninspired. So, I just kind of left it, and now I'm coming back to it

Interviewer: How often do you try to post?

Interviewee: So, on Instagram, I mean when I'm like, I know I'm doing well when I post like 5 or 6 times a week but at the moment, it's been like 3 or 4 times a week.' -#Lifestyle9

This quote from #Lifestyle9 illustrates how they aim to post almost every day but sometimes they cannot which makes them feel bad. In terms of how this can affect the SF movement, Instagram moves so quickly that for influencers to continue being relevant they have to consistently post on the platform. This means that they do not necessarily have time to do deep dives and produce fact-based content and even if they did, after they post it, that content would get lost in the sea of other posts.

'I am a little bit active on Instagram right now but I don't use it the way I used to because I find that you can spend a lot of time researching and sharing information on Instagram and then it sort of disappears and no one ever finds it or sees it again so it becomes this thing where you are investing a lot of time into sharing this information and then you have to keep repeating yourself over and over again because you put it out there and it disappears unlike a website where people can go back, people can link to it. People can continue to go back to it and so I find that very frustrating as well as the fact that Instagram does not like people to leave its platform so unlike Twitter. Instagram makes it very, very hard, to support what you're saying with more resources.'
-#Activist8

This quote from #Activist8 touches on the affordances of Instagram where they aim to keep users on their app for as long as possible, therefore, they try to make it harder for users to leave the app. The fact that one can put so much time into something only for people to not see it or to have to do it again a few months later seems to disincentivize SF influencers from investing too much time into educational content for this platform. Therefore, it seems that Instagram is playing a role in how SF is perceived because it prioritises content that keeps people on the app not that sparks an interest and takes the user away to learn more. At the time of writing this thesis, only users with 10,000 followers or more can use the Instagram stories feature to share a link with their audiences. This may have implications for smaller influencers because they may have to play the Instagram game to accumulate enough followers to be able to link to more in-depth information. However, users can also put a link in their bio or in their IGTV caption, so SF influencers are able to take advantage of this. The next section goes into how SF influencers take advantage of Instagram's expectations.

8.6.2.1 *The production of social media content*

Some influencers like the shorter production schedule of Instagram, of for example 10 minutes to write a short caption, because it fits into their busy schedules. Previously, SF influencers would have been more focused on their blogs but because blog posts tend to be much longer, they take more time.

'I really enjoy the blog space I don't always have time to create content for it because a blog post is a lot longer than an Instagram caption, so I try to write two posts a month on the blog but sometimes it's closer to one or not' -#Lifestyle3

Moreover, Instagram is seen as requiring a lot less effort than a blog post because ideally it is easier to reach a lot more people quickly than trying to drive traffic to their website.

'Not many people read blogs anymore, at least the immediate audience that I have, everyone has moved to short form blogging or using Instagram now as their primary space for blogging. So that's helped me in being able to churn out content more frequently on Instagram because it requires much less effort than writing a full-fledged blog post and it has a higher reach and more shareability.' -#Activist6

This quote resonates with the quote above from #Activist5 which illustrates how despite social media's shortcomings it is still a great way to reach a lot of people, some of which will be really engaged. Instagram is seen as a form of micro-blogging that helps people to engage more frequently but at the same time some people utilise Instagram as part of their wider content strategy.

'I only publish one essay per month, and I've not even been meeting that lately cause again minimalism drives everything I do, and I believe in doing less but well. And so, I normally have a quarterly content strategy for Instagram and for my blog and on my blog it's easier because one long form essay, not even long form, one relatively easy to read informative essay on either mindfulness or sustainability and then I make frequent posts on Instagram about my outfits or like excerpts from the blog post, just like bits and pieces and I post 2-3 times a week.' -#Activist7

This quote from #Activist7 is interesting because they strive for a minimalist approach in producing content for their blog but at the same time, they too try to adapt to the frequent nature of Instagram to still engage with their audiences and drive traffic to their website. An important insight here is to do less but well. This concept shows promise for the role of SF influencers in the SF movement because despite the superficial nature of Instagram, if they are able to develop a well-informed piece that can be shared in digestible chunks to their audiences, people can be informed and entertained.

8.6.3 Expanding Reach

Linking back to the idea of using social media to reach a lot of people, hashtags are useful for finding a community and increasing the reach of the content. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle14:

'.. so even if you are not a professional influencer who's paid for their activities, and even if you are just a normal person with a social media account, and if you're talking about that positive change, if you're creating that kind of awareness, your one post is reaching out to hundreds of people so you can imagine how a 100 people can influence thousands and how thousands can influence millions and millions can influence billions.' -#Lifestyle14

The reach of Instagram makes it a platform where someone could potentially have a wide reach and although this is not guaranteed, the possibility is still there.

'And I think social media is such a great way to create community as well with people that feel exactly the same way, there's no other platform that allows you to do that so instantly and connect with others about, especially in fashion, as well. And I think using hashtags and things, I have a hashtag that called #fastfashionrebellion and a lot of my online friends, which is weird that I even have online friends, we also have like hashtags and on those hashtags people share their outfits and they're hashtagging sustainable fashion and I think that it's like the ripple effect, you know, more and more people see it and what to get on board with it. That's what a movement kind of is.' -#Lifestyle10

Here we see that through hashtags, people are able to make friends with likeminded people but at the same time, when a lot of influencers join in on a hashtag their influence combines to spread the message of SF even faster.

8.6.4 Section Conclusion

Overall, we see that Instagram is not a passive actor in the SF story as it actually holds a lot of influence around what content is made and how messages are shared across the platform. In terms of the research question, we see that the SF influencer role may be limited by the quantity over quality approach that Instagram advocates to keep content flowing on its platform. Moreover, the focus on visual is being used to drive consumption. Although SF influencers are talking about SF, the fact is, by sharing their outfits everyday they are helping to drive consumption. However, on a positive note, SF influencers are able to take advantage of features like IGTV which enables them to share long-form content where they can not only go more in-depth, but also organise their information which they can refer back to if needed. Further hashtags help SF to reach more people and start a ripple affect across social media.

8.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to address Objectives 2 and 4 which were to explore how other actors are conceptualized relative to SF to illustrate the complexities of this space. There are many more characters in this drama, but this section discusses the major players that impact how the SF conversation plays out on social media. The story of SF is not just about what the influencers say but this section introduced the plotlines and characters that influence the role and capabilities of SF influencers.

The chapter first opened with a discussion on the antagonists in this drama [Section 8.1]. As the term influencer tends to have negative connotations, SF influencers have to approach their role differently to make sure they are not seen as part of the problem but as part of the solution. Moreover, fast fashion brands are often the target of ire for the SF influencers but at the same time their presence is seen as needed in the fashion system; therefore, when it comes to talking about SF, some influencers choose to show how fast fashion can be part of a sustainable lifestyle. Some

influencers may even work with fast fashion brands and promote their sustainable lines which allows these brands to make themselves part of the SF world. SF influencers seem to oscillate between blaming brands and blaming consumers for the state of the fashion industry. Finally, overconsumption on the part of consumers is seen as a huge contributor to the problems of the fast fashion industry.

Next the chapter discussed those perceived to be negatively affected by the lack of SF [Section 8.2], audience [Section 8.3], media [Section 8.4], SF brands [Section 8.5], and social media [Section 8.6]. The SF influencers aim to help the environment and advocate for garment workers. They think that to do so, SF influencers must educate their audiences whom they believe to be lacking awareness. The media also plays a large role in the movement as it sparked many of the SF influencers to start their SF journeys. Then we discussed the SF brands who pay the influencers to promote their wares but also contribute to the lack of representation in the SF world. Finally, the chapter discussed the role of social media and how it influences SF influencers. This chapter has illustrated the other actors that contribute to the dynamics for SF influencers.

9 STAGING: PRODUCTION

9.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first chapter in the ‘staging’ part of the dramaturgical framework. It addresses Objective 1 as the chapter focuses on how the way SF influencers conceptualise their roles translates into the production of the content that they create. To prepare for the performance, SF influencers engage in strategic decisions to produce the content prior to it being published for consumption. Please see Appendix C for an artistic example of SF social media content. Drawing on dramaturgy, the key elements of the production are the costumes [9.1], the setting [9.2], props [9.3], production [9.4], and captions [9.5].

9.1 COSTUMES

Because these are fashion influencers, the costume is especially important. This can create difficulty for influencers with fewer resources as they may not have extensive wardrobes. Moreover, SF can be expensive and if the SF influencer is not able to afford the latest brands, they may be limited in their success. Therefore, SF influencers draw on a range of costumes such as styling or thrifting to engage in the movement in a way that is suitable for them. SF influencers also utilise their current wardrobes as costumes to encourage people to rewear their own clothing.

‘So, on my social media I try to make an effort to repeat the outfits that I have in my wardrobe and not only just repeat but tell people and inform people, you know, use the hashtag like #stylerepeats to show how beautifully you can repeat your outfits and you don’t have to be, it’s not a fashion faux pas to repeat an outfit basically.’ -#Lifestyle14

In terms of the colour schemes, most of the costumes/outfits are neutral, earth tones; few SF influencers feature bright colours. According to fashion columnist Whitney Bauck, this colour scheme is common in the SF space (Bauck, 2018). The idea is that neutrals go with anything and that means people can get more use out of their clothing (Bauck, 2018). However, the dominance of this aesthetic may result in those who appreciate colour and prints feeling as though SF is not for them:

'And they're all like, I think it's changing a little bit now, I think when it first started there was like a very specific aesthetic for sustainable fashion bloggers, and I definitely didn't fit it, I don't have that aesthetic but like yeah, I think there's a good community on there now' -Lifestyle12

Influencers in this study perceive being a SF influencer and SF in general, as being associated with a specific aesthetic. Those that do not like it may not find people they resonate with. Having diverse styles is important in the movement to appeal to a variety of fashionistas.

9.2 THE SETTING

Through the visual analysis described in Chapter 5, the majority of the influencers took their photos in their homes. This relates to their desire to be relatable and let people into their SF journey, and subsequently their lives:

'Almost everyone takes a selfie in the mirror or the white wall in your house...so that takes a lot of stress out of having to post on Instagram' #Lifestyle6

Referring back to the previous discussion on the character of social media, SF influencers tend to put the focus on their outfits rather than creating elaborate sets for their photographs. Instead, the infamous “white wall” is used to take pictures to display their outfits.

The second most common location was outdoors to invoke the connection between the influencer and nature. Many posted pictures without any visible man-made structures to create the image of a “pure” outdoor experience (Canniford and Shankar, 2013). Others took pictures in environments such as backyards or posed with plants in shops to show their connection with nature. If the influencers were indoors, they tended to utilise bright and natural lighting as a way to recreate the natural light that nature provides which situates the influencer as being in alignment with the natural environment. Not only does having a lot of natural light increase the quality of the final photograph, but it also conveys a message of freshness and cleanliness. Moreover, the influencers tend to take photos that had neutral and natural colours. Some influencers did draw on colourful colour palettes, however, these individuals were in the minority.

'I like bright photos with lots of natural lighting, lots of neutral tones, whites, greens, greys, that kind of thing.' - #Lifestyle3

SF influencers are often associated with minimalism, and this can be reflected in some of the settings that they choose. This natural colour scheme resonates with ideas around modern minimalism which emphasises ‘...absence of colors or of any excessive use of secondary elements’ (Margariti et al., 2017, p.2). Wilson and Bellezza (2021, p. 12) describe an aspect of minimalism as ‘...a sparse and uncluttered aesthetic’ which is reflected in the relatively uncluttered photos that the influencers pose in front of. Green is also often associated with nature and environmental sustainability (DeLong and Goncu-Berk, 2013). Natural colours can also be associated with purity, honesty, and morality which is consistent in how SF influencers portray themselves as moral actors. This resonates with Canniford and Shankar’s (2013) finding that people romanticise nature by focusing on its purity and naturalness.

9.3 PROPS

This section introduces the props that SF influencers utilise in their photos. The primary prop to be discussed is the body. Because of the focus on fashion and clothing, SF influencers use their bodies to model the clothing. Influencers may model the clothes using full body pictures or offer a glimpse of a new jewellery item by just photographing their wrists.

‘And obviously with my blog, I work with brands some of the, a lot actually, that I post on there is with sustainable brands and I guess it’s sort of indirectly modelling for them.’ -#Lifestyle8

Modelling brands is an important part of consumption as it can be used to create an image or perception of the brand in the mind of the customer. For example, in Stevens et al. (2019), drawing on embodiment theory they found that employees in Hollister were hired based on their likeness to lifeguards and models to fit with Hollister’s chic surfer brand. In the world of SF influencers, they also utilise their bodies to make SF appealing to their audiences. They aim to show SF brands and their current wardrobes in a way that is desirable and aspirational, while still being relatable to their audiences. From the table in Chapter 5, the majority of the pictures posted featured the influencer’s body in some way, whether it be a glimpse of a ring on a finger, or a full body shot in a large mirror. Additionally, other peoples’ bodies are also used as props to make the pictures more appealing and to diversify the subject.

'Well, I had a boyfriend for 3 years so that was helpful, you know the classic Insta boyfriend but actually sometimes, getting the pictures is sometimes an issue, like getting a picture that would look good' -#Lifestyle9

However, as new public figures, SF influencers do not always want to share pictures of people in their lives to protect the privacy of the other person and potentially to protect their own privacy as well.

'I want to take more content that's not just like pictures of me. I'm nervous about posting pictures of other people because now that there's people following me that I might not actually know I don't want their privacy to be at stake. So, when there's pictures I post, it's mostly of me, eventually probably other people that I have permission from or that feel really comfortable with their photo being seen by people who they might not ever meet. But yeah, we'll probably start integrating more product shots and that kind of thing because I'm like I don't want to see this many pictures of myself at once...for the sake of just like having different things on my feed I'll probably start changing it up a bit but for now it's just pictures of me and the outfits that I wear.' -#Lifestyle2

Here we see that some of the influencers do not like always having to use their bodies as a prop and are trying to take pictures of objects that are not them. For example, one influencer has taken to photographing their plants or utilising graphics to diversify their profile. In thinking about authenticity, some influencers are just not comfortable with the amount of over-sharing and visibility required to maintain the SF influencer image.

'I'm having to come to terms with myself with how much, how to share, because I'm not a natural sharer I don't really naturally connect with Instagram, it's something that I use, I'm using it as tool, not something that on my own, like I never really posted on my own Instagram.' -#Lifestyle9

Some influencers are uncomfortable with this because it requires making oneself the star of the platform and putting oneself in a position of authority when this may not resonate with how one perceives themselves in 'real life'. Here on social media, people are commanding attention and assuming a level of 'self-importance' and for those who may feel insecure, as several influencers mentioned, documenting their life is not natural to them. Other common props were houseplants and other sustainable items that influencers use to portray a holistic sustainable lifestyle.

9.4 PRODUCTION

Previously in Section 8.6.2.1, I touched on how SF influencers perceive Instagram to be less effort than maintaining a blog because it is a faster way to get a wider reach. All they have to do is take a picture and write captions whereas with a blog they have to take pictures and write/research more in-depth. However, I think there are levels to the production value that influencers adopt. Some of the influencers in this study utilise photographers or professional cameras to capture their images. On the ‘lower’ production side people utilise their iPhones, which now have great camera quality, to take their outfit photos:

‘...the content that I create, photographs are a part of it so just on my iPhone some of them are taken from my husband’s some of them are just on a tripod that I take myself.’ -#Lifestyle3

This tells us that access to being a mainstream SF influencer is limited. Considering that some people are working with professional photographers, having high quality images is required to be a successful influencer. So, influencers with fewer resources may need to be creative to ensure their images are up to the “Instagram aesthetic”. Influencers unable to maintain the minimum quality standard are likely to find their impact on Instagram is limited despite the quality of what they have to say. This means that being a SF influencer is potentially largely a middle-class pursuit to be able to afford iPhones, the clothes, and more. However, not all influencers have such an easy-going approach as they find taking pictures quite stressful:

‘Because it’s also like getting the pictures, and sadly it’s winter, you don’t have as many opportunities to get good pictures. I also live alone, and you know, I don’t walk ‘round with someone the whole time...sometimes, getting the pictures is sometimes an issue, like getting a picture that would look good’ - #Lifestyle9

Here the influencer was quite discouraged because they feel unable to keep up with the expectations of photos on Instagram. The next level of production is more creative and is more about creating a story:

‘I run my Instagram different than a lot of ethical fashion Instagram accounts. I don’t post a new outfit every day in the same place because I work as a photographer. I’m really interested in street style photography and more editorial photography than just like here’s my outfit every single day. So, I think I’m often driven by the inspiration of a creative shoot.’ -#Activist10

At this production level, the content is no longer about simply snapping a photo to post but creating a narrative. However, all of these levels link to authenticity with the influencer trying to do what feels authentic to them whether it be a down to earth approach or a creative, expressive approach or to rarely post oneself approach. Moreover, SF influencers create different types of content which can increase the time it takes to produce:

'Well sometimes they're quite researched and things like that, sometimes like per post can be like, like today the IGTV, I did an IGTV on clean beauty and that probably is like an hour or like there's so many, and then you've got editing...But otherwise a post, some can be quicker, some 20 minutes, 15-20 minutes, it depends how researched they are but like a blog post obviously takes longer and now what I've realised is that a blog is something great to have but actually most of my stuff comes through Instagram so I'm just trying to focus a bit more on that and get the IGTV and things like that going on Instagram.' -#Lifestyle9

Production is also strategic as influencers utilise filters to create a certain image. For example, a large part of a personal Instagram profile is to have a feed that communicates a clear and attractive message. Therefore, to make sure that all of their pictures look as though they fit together, influencers utilise filters or editing pre-sets to create a similarity amongst their different posts.

'...obviously the pictures even that I post are curated photos that are like edited and are like made to look a certain way to represent like consistency or sometimes a brand so they're not necessarily full representations of what an everyday person's life looks like' -#Lifestyle2

Creating Instagram content can be time consuming for those who wish to make more in-depth content. Depending on the amount of time the influencer has available to put into their platform, the production value can vary.

9.5 CAPTIONS

Captions and text-based graphics are also part of the visual story of the SF influencer (Hall, 1997). This section focuses on captions that SF influencers use to add context to their photos. Again, we see that there are different approaches to the captions. Some influencers like to take a more personal approach to their captions by sharing their thoughts or topics that they find interesting:

'The captions themselves sometimes they'll be pretty simple, and I'll try to be funny with like corny jokes but most of the time it's either describing the outfit that I'm wearing or a question that I have

that I want other people's input about or something personal that I've been thinking about. Other times sharing stuff I've been writing about for my blog' - #Lifestyle3

These captions, although informal, are important for the influencer to build connections with their audiences and fellow SF influencers:

'...but I find it more fun to just like engage and not just share like how ordinary fashion bloggers share. You know. In this community it's more of the outfit and the caption. In the caption they'll always tell you something about their life. For me it's much more meaningful to be connected with people...' - #Lifestyle6

Here captions are seen as a way to gain insight into the world of the SF influencer. They are a useful way to get to know people in the SF community. Besides text graphics, captions are really the place for SF influencers to share insights on SF. It is interesting that some influencers do not fully take advantage of this considering that they aim to share information about SF. Other influencers try to utilise the caption space for calls to action. For #Activist10, they put a lot of time into developing captions that do not necessarily draw attention to the clothing as something to be consumed but rather creates an experience.

'I spend a lot of time writing captions so again I think a little different from a lot of ethical fashion influencers, most of my captions are prose, or calls to action versus calls to shop' -#Activist10

Influencers try to develop some sort of narrative around the picture so as to inspire change and to inspire people to action.

'...it's always about the story behind every post I'm making. So whatever story goes on my social media always has a lot of background working to it. It's not just I made something today and I'll just post it, you know I'm at a fashion show and I'm posting about it. It's always about the story, whatever is there, the story behind that which is meant to inspire others to change and for me to change myself because sometimes when you are kind of creating that awareness for others it hits you that you have to make more positive changes in your lifestyle and you have to be a better version of yourself every place' - #Lifestyle14

These influencers perceive captions as an opportunity to inspire people to dive deeper into change rather than just focusing on where people can buy the outfit in the bio. These different ways of engaging with SF can engage a variety of people.

9.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to look at the production of SF content in light of how SF influencers conceptualise their role (Objective 1). This section gave a glimpse into the visual aspects of being a SF influencer by breaking down the costumes and content [9.1], The Setting [9.2], Props [9.3], Production [9.4], and Captions [9.5]. The next section talks more about how these influencers manage their platforms to portray a convincing performance of SF influencing.

10 STAGING: THE DRESSING ROOM

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Having discussed how the content is produced, we now turn to the behind-the-scenes of how SF influencers manage their platforms and get ready for their performance. This chapter is the second chapter on ‘staging’. The aim of this chapter is to go deeper into Objectives 1 and 2 by analysing how SF influencers manage their public image and considering how this may impact their roles. Previous chapters addressing this objective (Chapters 6 and 9), have addressed it in terms of how SF influencers create their role and their content, but this chapter looks more to the types of decisions the SF influencers have to make in undertaking this role. This chapter addresses Objective 2 by illustrating how different factors can affect the SF influencer persona and message. Firstly, this chapter considers the strategic decisions SF influencers make to portray their role [10.1] and then it goes behind the curtain into the SF influencer business model [10.2].

10.1 STRATEGIES FOR IMAGE MANAGEMENT

Image management is an important part of being a SF influencer. Although anyone can call themselves a SF influencer, in order to be accepted as a SF influencer by others in the space, they have to portray the right image. This section discusses three image management strategies that SF influencers use to portray a convincing performance as a SF influencer. The first strategy to be discussed is *strategic honesty* in Section 10.1.1, then *strategic concealment* in Section 10.1.2 and finally *strategic disclosure* in Section 10.1.3. Table 10.1 provides an overview of each of these strategies. Each will now be discussed in turn.

Table 10.1 Strategies for Image Management

Theme	Description
Strategic honesty	Refers to being honest about unsustainable consumption and purchases to a limit
Strategic concealment	This is the limit referred to in strategic honesty where influencers do not share everything that they do in order to stay in alignment with their personal brands
Strategic disclosure	Refers to influencers only talking about fashion rather than other aspects of sustainable living that they have not yet “perfected”

10.1.1 Strategy 1: Honesty

The first aspect of SF influencer image management is honesty. Portraying a successful SF image requires the navigation and alignment of their personal and private sustainable practices. In light of this, SF influencers aim to portray themselves as responsible people who make choices with integrity. Because influencers espouse that everyone should have their own standards, as discussed in Section 6.2.1, the data suggest that SF influencers need to make sure that they are seen to be keeping in line with their own standards. Consequently, there is a relationship between values and honesty, consider this quote from #Activist6:

‘There are some choices that I’ve made that I try to be honest about it, but I try not to make those mistakes in the first place, so I guess making sure I apply my values fully and not opt for personal convenience is like a personal challenge.’ -#Activist6

SF influencers are human so that means that they will undoubtedly make mistakes. In this case, mistakes refer to unsustainable consumption behaviours as discussed in the literature review chapter 3.4. Unsustainable behaviour appears to be seen as a matter of making poor choices or even selfishness as the quote above touches on personal convenience. However, other influencers see unsustainable behaviours as par for the course, as illustrated in the quote below. Therein lies a tension between being an example and the reality of imperfect sustainable consumption. The data suggests that to remediate this tension, influencers adopt an ‘honesty is best’ policy. Consider this quote from #Bit-of-both3:

'And yeah I think that's kind of the way I've gone about it, kind of going about my real life and showing people what that looks like being put into action instead of more theory and saying like you should do this, you should do that. And kind of being brutally honest about this is what it comes down to, we can say that it's important to x, y, z and that we should only shop from here but I had to go to Target to get socks the other day and I bought jeans from Madewell last month because that's what fit me best, and yeah I think it's just that transparency, that honesty, and how that fits into my life.' - #Bit-of-both3

By being honest about their struggles, influencers hope to reflect what SF looks like in real life as mentioned in Section 6.2.1. They aim to make SF seem real and attainable for all consumers; therefore, being honest is seen as a way to demystify SF and sustainable lifestyles, as well as justify their consumption. However, even honesty has a limit, the next section introduces the strategy of concealment.

10.1.2 Strategy 2: Concealment

Here, we look at the strategy of concealment. Although SF influencers utilise honesty and try to humanise themselves as also being imperfect consumers, concealment is required to maintain the trust between the audience and the influencer. SF influencers are often perceived — or maybe even portray themselves as perfect SF consumers — which then creates difficulties when they engage in imperfect (meaning unsustainable) actions.

'...like I never want to be a hypocrite. It does sometimes get hard, like everyone, not everyone, I've never said I shop 100% from charity shops but obviously, it's hard if I do on occasion buy something brand new to then try and, it's hard trying to justify it or posting it on Instagram when my whole page is meant to be about sustainable fashion so sometimes on the odd occasion that I buy something new that I really like and it's like aw I can't talk about it but should I be talking about it because actually it's important to show that you don't have to be perfect.' -#Lifestyle11

#Lifestyle11 points out that they never intended to portray the image that she only shops from charity shops, nevertheless #Lifestyle11 feels guilty about talking about their new purchases. Again, the idea of perfection comes up. By framing SF as an imperfect journey, they create space between perceived hypocrisy and perceived valid limitations on their SF practices. #Activist10 points out that influencers should not be looked at as perfect consumers and therefore, should not be pressured to be perfect.

'I think we need to stop expecting sustainable fashion influencers to have all the answers or be the perfect example of what ethical fashion looks like' -#Activist10.

However, this is not the reality for many influencers as they feel pressure to appear perfect. #Lifestyle11 explains it this way:

'I would also, I guess, the general thing of Instagram where everyone looks perfect except for you. So, it's like how do you balance that out as well?' -#Lifestyle11

It appears that being an influencer in general creates conflicting feelings around perfection or appearing perfect. Consider this quote from #Activist10:

'...the idea of an influencer is to have like an aspirational life like your life is 10% shinier than the general public...' -#Activist10

SF influencers may write, or rather post, themselves into a corner where they are perceived as perfect SF consumers and have no choice but to continue the façade or else they may face criticism. In such a dilemma, SF influencers practice concealment to shield against accusations of hypocrisy and manage their image. From the previous quotes from #Lifestyle11, they touch on the fact that they will not share their new products because it does not fit with whom they claim to be. Consequently, influencers both face the pressure to be perfect and reinforce the requirements of influencers to be perfect through strategic concealment. Consider this in light of this quote from Influencer #Activist3:

'... sometimes I even feel bad because like people are showing their bamboo straws and their bamboo everything, green shirts, you name it. It looks like this person's life is 100% sustainable but it's not you know. There's no way to be, if these bloggers are planning, if they're tripping on planes then they're already not being sustainable. And they don't talk about it. When they show stuff in glass jars, we don't know if they were really buying in zero waste stores or if they were only storing them this way. All of my things are in glass jars too but not all of them I bought from like zero waste stores and if I only showed this, my beautiful closet of glass jars, people would think "woo she's so sustainable!". But this is not the case, no one is. These girls are still like using their iPhone, they're not even concerned about more sustainable technologies. We're still massively buying and trying to sell stuff; this is not sustainable at all' -#Activist3

The other side of strategic concealment is that the audience and other influencers, never really know what others in their community are doing. #Activist3 refers to the prominence of glass jars in the SF space. The idea is that when someone goes to a zero-waste store, they have to bring their

own jar. This jar can then be refilled with every use. However, some people like to store their food items in glass jars for the aesthetic, regardless of where the items were bought. When people see a sustainable influencer post about glass jars they will assume it was the former rather than the latter. This is interesting because previously in Section 10.1.1, I described how SF influencers pride themselves on being honest and showing how SF works in real life, yet at the same time they are trying to balance doing the best they can in an unsustainable world while also creating a curated image. So, although honesty is a key value for these individuals, SF influencers acknowledge that there are only so many mistakes that one can make before they are seen as not being credible actors in the movement. Consider this quote from #Activist6, who previously spoke about trying not to make mistakes in a quote above:

'Sometimes out of even; just say, the pressure of having to be right or making the right choices, you're like okay how honest can I be about the mistakes I made without people disregarding my credibility as a voice in this space. If they see me breaking my own rules they would say "oh you're doing it, why can't we do it". So, it's hard even from a sharing point of view. Like how much can I share. I want to be honest of what my journey to low waste is but how much can I share. How much of it is me not having a choice and how much of it is actually me having a choice but not being able to exercise that choice due to time, due to money, due to any other factors. So yes, it's definitely difficult. I try to be honest, it's hard and it's definitely difficult. I know I struggle with that a lot.' -#Activist6

In this quote it is evident that some degree of concealment is important to being seen as a SF influencer, despite the influencers emphasis on SF as being a journey. The problem seems to be that SF influencers may inadvertently portray themselves as having arrived at the SF consumer destination, rather than also being on the journey. SF influencers are strategic about what they disclose, and this will be discussed in the next section.

10.1.3 Strategy 3: Disclosure

The data suggest that another aspect of managing their image is strategic disclosure. By this I mean that SF influencers do not talk about things that they do not feel they know enough about. This ties in with authenticity as influencers try to stay true to themselves and stay within their realm of expertise. Meaning that just because they know about SF does not mean that they know about other aspects of sustainability, such as eco-friendly beauty. Consider this quote from #Activist4:

'Like I sometimes still have to run to Sephora for an eyeliner just because I haven't totally figured this part out yet and my eyes are sensitive, blah, blah, blah. So, I don't post about it though, I don't talk about that. So that's part of it too, 'cause I don't want anyone to see like a snippet of me and see me quote "perfecting this" but I also don't want to encourage a habit that I haven't gotten to a place where I'm happy with how I deal with it myself.' -#Activist4

Considering that influencers say that they strive for honesty and transparency in terms of their consumption, they do not want to put themselves in a situation where they feel that they would be misrepresenting their expertise. Moreover, because SF influencers aim to show that SF consumption is possible, it feels disingenuous for them to promote something where they do not yet know what the best course of action is. There is a tension between knowing that they are seen as SF experts and the limits of their expertise in other aspects of sustainability. This seems to put a lot of pressure on the influencers as their audiences could always do their own research or look for an influencer in that niche, but because of the trust built with particular influencers, they are looked to as examples. Again, we see a tension between the impossibility of perfection and the pressure to appear and portray a perfect yet realistic version of themselves to their audiences. Therefore, SF influencers are strategic in what they share so that they do not overextend what they feel qualified to discuss and can continue to be seen as credible voices in SF.

10.1.4 Section Conclusion

Overall, to portray a convincing performance of a SF influencer, they strategically use honesty, concealment, and disclosure to maintain their credibility as SF influencers and guard themselves from hypocrisy and the pressure of perfection. In terms of the SF influencers' role in the wider movement towards sustainability in fashion, it is precarious as it depends on how well they are able to convince others that they are truly trustworthy, sustainable consumers. In terms of how these strategies impact their role, there are at least two sides. On one side, SF influencers try to be somewhat open which helps to show that a SF lifestyle is not always straightforward and sometimes requires negotiation to find what works for you. This may help others in the movement to feel like they are not alone in trying to be more sustainable consumers.

Another way to look at the impact of these strategies is to consider the potential negative impact. Social media by its nature is aspirational, and combined with how people want to portray themselves, it can be difficult to be completely open about sustainable wrongdoings. By not fully

disclosing their difficulties with SF and by spreading the message that SF does not require major changes, SF influencers may unintentionally create the image that SF is not that hard, people are just doing it wrong or not trying hard enough. Interestingly a more activist or systemic approach probably would have the opposite problem. Although the focus would be more on systemic constraints to change rather than on individual actions, which is a positive, people may also feel powerless to challenge structural barriers in society. However, as things are, it appears that the role of SF influencers is to portray an image of SF that shows a perfectly imperfect version of sustainability that is somewhat attainable to the masses. From this point of view, SF influencers are expected to be perfect examples and if they are less than perfect consumers in their own life, they should keep it to themselves. Having discussed some of the tensions and considerations that go into portraying a convincing SF image, we now turn to how they finance their personal brand.

10.2 FINANCING A SF PERSONAL BRAND

Portraying the SF image requires resources and capital to be successfully portrayed. This section focuses on the logistics of being a SF influencer by focusing on how they fund their work. Some of the key themes in this section are how SF influencers navigate the tricky situation of monetisation while also staying true to their voices in the SF movement. Table 10.2 gives a summary of the different income streams that SF influencers may adopt. This section has two parts: working with brands [Section 10.2.1] and alternative funding models [Section 10.2.2]. In these sections I discuss these different funding models, why they may be adopted, and what implications these different forms of income may have on the SF movement.

Table 10.2 Influencer Income Streams

Income Streams	Description
Working with brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brand sponsorships/ collaborations • Affiliate links
Audience funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subscription models on platforms like Patreon • Accepting monetary contributions through platforms like Venmo
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking engagements • Writing • Other jobs (i.e., freelancing)

10.2.1 Working with Brands

Working with brands is one of the primary ways that SF influencers fund their platforms and create content. Brands and influencers seem to have a symbiotic relationship. Brands get their products exposed to new or bigger audiences while SF influencers get access to new items and can use the brand as props for their content. Working with brands is seen as a natural part of being an influencer after a certain level. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle3:

‘I remember having a conversation with my husband maybe like a couple weeks into my own asking questions and exploring slow fashion and just being like okay like obviously it’s not going to happen for a while but if brands do contact me, I have to have a certain standard or certain things that are necessary if I agree to work with them’ -#Lifestyle3

Here we see that one of the main criteria for deciding which brands to work with is if the brand is aligned with the influencer’s values and standards. This standard usually means that the brand is a SF brand but may also include other requirements. Consider this quote from #Activist2:

‘I mean if a brand came to me and said ‘we want to collaborate on something and we want to use these factories and we’re going to pay people a fair wage. We’re gonna be using this sort of fabric.’ Then yeah, I’ll take the money from a brand. But if they’re just throwing me an item of clothing

and saying ‘we’ll give you half of what we give this white woman to wear it’ then no you can miss me with that.’ –#Activist2

For #Activist2, they want to make sure that the brand has actual sustainable and ethical practices rather than just making unsupported claims. Moreover, #Activist2 favours collaborations rather than just being treated like a salesperson. The data also suggest that after a SF influencer reaches a certain audience size, brands will start to notice their influence and offer them either free clothes or pay them for sponsorship. Since working with brands is really only a matter of time, it appears that the ability to attract brands is also seen as a sign of success and validation for a SF influencer. #Lifestyle6 puts it this way:

‘So, I guess that for me, these small rewards of starting to get these free clothes from brands it’s like okay I’m not like a super loser that didn’t know how to make visits to my website.’

Receiving free clothes is one of the many benefits of being a SF influencer but some influencers are able to be paid by SF brands to promote their products and could choose to do this work full-time.

There are many ways influencers can work with brands. Previously we discussed in Section 6.2.2 how some SF influencers work as fit testers to help brands expand their sizes but other ways of working with brands include: speaking engagements, sponsored posts, and other brand partnerships. Consider this quote from #Lifestyle12 who utilises a mix of these:

‘So yeah, that’s something that I think, cause if you have a [digital] product like that then that’s a great way to generate passive income so hopefully there would always be money coming in. Affiliate links, I use, that was kind of a big point of [another influencer]’s discussion on IG, about some influencers don’t feel that it’s right to use affiliate links, but I do. It always points back to either secondhand purchases or you know items that are from sustainable and ethical brands, so affiliate links are a really great way to make it sustainable. And then still sponsored content, like I would rather get to the point where my channel gets so many views that I don’t have to rely on sponsored content, like that would be the ultimate goal but I would still take on partnerships when, like I do now, I’m just as selective now as I would be hopefully if I ever get to that point. Yeah, I’m pretty sure, if I took on like 50% of the partnerships that were offered to me, I could definitely do this full-time right away, but I don’t. I only take on maybe 5% so yeah. Getting the view count up would definitely be a strategy to make it [their platform] sustainable and then sponsored posts.’ - #Lifestyle12

The data indicate that a majority of the influencers expect to make some type of gain from their work in the SF space, whether that be by working as a full-time influencer, receiving free clothes, or by having their influencer income as a supplement to their lifestyles. The above quote from #Activist2 about not letting brands pay them half of what they would pay a white woman illustrates that SF influencers see their platforms as labour that creates value for others and, therefore, should be compensated fairly. The data suggest that affiliate links, and sponsored content are the primary ways that influencers work with brands. In the quote above from #Lifestyle12, affiliate links refer to custom links given by brands to influencers where if someone buys something using their link for the product, then the influencer gets a commission from the sale, therefore influencers have an incentive to promote products as much as they can. The tensions that #Lifestyle12 brings up, such as is it right to use affiliate links and how much sponsored content is okay, will be further explored in Section 10.2.1.2. Having discussed some of the ways influencers may work with brands, I now turn to the monetary value of these partnerships.

10.2.1.1 *Calculating the worth of paid partnerships*

This section focuses on the monetary aspects of paid partnerships and considers who is able to profit from SF influencer platforms. Consequently, the key theme of this section is unequal beneficiaries. In a previous quote from #Lifestyle12 they describe how they do not take every opportunity offered to them. #Lifestyle12 is quite successful in working with brands as they are able to reject 95% of these opportunities, however, not all influencers feel that the current funding model of working with brands is equitable. Firstly, there is the issue of unequal beneficiaries. The participants cite several beneficiaries from white fashion influencers with large audiences to big “tech bro” brands such as Everlane.

*‘...okay it’s hard for me because I get, again there’s a side of me saying yes I get paid, but then there’s also who are we helping to get paid, every one of those damn Everlane affiliate links, it’s like what has Everlane ever done for good? They are a venture capitalist start up where this dude is like “I just want a nice t-shirt” [*this was said kind of sarcastically in like a typical tech bro voice] and like that’s what the whole basis is... I think it’s pretty disappointing because again it’s not about those who care about it the most, it’s not about those who do the most in their lives, it’s about those who can take a brand and put a creative social media spin on it to get enough traffic from their response to what the brand is putting out so I don’t think that it’s about people who*

care about necessarily the world being a little bit better, I think greenwashing has really kind of sunk it's teeth in already' –#Activist4

#Activist3 echoes this sentiment of brands involved in the SF space in general.

'The people talking about sustainability with us are big companies that are not sustainable. How's that possible, how will you learn something from it? They teach you; they teach people what is good for them to sell, and this is not changing the system' –#Activist3

These quotes suggest that although SF brands seem to have a halo as described in Section 8.5, that does not automatically make them ethical actors in the SF space. This is a key element to the SF conversation as SF brands are looked at as entities that we need to support but at the same time they are brands that also have a profit motive. #Activist4 asks an important question of who are we helping to get paid? Consider the following quotes from #Activist2 and #Activist10:

'We see it with Instagram all the time, we see it with who gets the big partnerships and who doesn't. We see it. You'll have a woman of colour influencer who has, you know, several followers and you'll have a white woman with about the same amount of followers and the company will come to her and ask 'what's your price for this, we'll pay you' and then they'll come to the black woman and say, 'oh there's no budget for this but we'll give you something for free.' –#Activist2

'... I interviewed a bunch of other influencers to try to get a sense of how much people are paid and what the income looks like and how sustainable it is and the biggest thing that I learned is that almost all influencers are making between 30%-80% of their income from Everlane affiliate sales. And in addition to the fact I just don't believe in Everlane as a company, they also don't go above a size 18 so the fundamental way almost all ethical sustainable fashion influencers are able to pay to take up space as influencers and to pay for their time is through companies who don't sell my size which means it is not sustainable, there is no long-term way for me to make money on commission sales at my size.' –#Activist10

The data indicate that it is not plus-sized, black, and other POC influencers who are largely benefitting from their work as influencers. Rather the opportunities for monetisation are limited because SF brands do not want to work with them or even provide opportunities for some people to wear their clothes. Moreover, as #Activist4 mentioned above, it is not those who care the most about SF that see the most success, rather it is the one who is able to be the most appealing on social media:

'Yeah, it's not just about producing educational content it's like making it look good that people would want to see the picture itself.' –#Lifestyle9

This is a situation where people who are passionate about the issue appear to be excluded from benefiting from their labour and participation in the SF movement in its current form. Further, being a SF influencer appears to take up a lot of time, so that means that those who are unable to afford to invest in the space without some form of monetary return are also excluded. Finally, even if an influencer does make money, it is usually not very much, because small SF brands tend not to have big marketing budgets. Consider these quotes from #Lifestyle9 and #Bit-of-both3:

'Yeah, sadly, being in the kind of sustainable fashion space, the brands that I work with tend to be much smaller, they don't have the budget to be paying people and even if you're doing work for them. So, there's also the question of how ethical, you know, obviously everyone is trying to make money and stuff but because there's such a new industry, there's a lot of unpaid stuff.' - #Lifestyle9

'[another SF influencer] on Instagram posted yesterday, she had a really long incredible post about how much she was paid as an influencer and broke down the estimated amount of hours that she spent on Instagram that year and compared that to the amount that she made from ads and sponsored posts and she made \$2.13 an hour is what it came down to and if she included the clothes she was gifted by brands then that raised it to like \$4 something an hour.' - #Bit-of-both3

Here it is very interesting to point out that SF brands say they are trying to pay people fairly but when it comes to SF influencers, there is no budget to pay them fairly for their labour. Although SF brands aim to extract value from partnering with influencers, they do not place enough value on the influencer for the work they will produce. With that in mind, it follows that there would be little incentive for an influencer to create content around topics that are not easily monetised. Although, some influencers do not mind the lack of payment for their work:

'So, I get gifted stuff which I've been told I should be asking them to pay me, but I don't necessarily like...at the moment I'm like privileged enough to not have to rely on sponsorships or anything like that to live because I live with my parents and they pay for a lot of my stuff but yes so like, I get like gifted things, and I'll post them and stuff like that. I guess like I would probably collaborate with brands that like align with things I love or that I believe in.' - #Bit-of-both2

For SF influencers who have an alternative form of income or do not need the income because most of their needs are provided for, they do not feel the same financial pressure that SF influencers who do this full-time do. On one hand this is great for SF brands that do not have large budgets however there is something to be said about SF brands not valuing the work of SF influencers. If

people do not adequately value their work perhaps it can devalue the work for others who do need compensation for their labour.

So, in all of this, the influencers do not benefit very much and marginalised influencers benefit even less. This raises a question of how SF influencers are able to sustain themselves full-time, but first we look at the potential conflicts of interest that comes with working with brands.

10.2.1.2 *Conflicts of interest*

Considering that working with brands is the primary income stream for SF influencers, the data suggest that this can create several conflicts of interest with the influencers. The key conflicts of interest for SF influencers are presented in Table 10.3. This section starts out by considering the relationship between SF content and money [10.2.1.2.1], then moves to the question of censorship in Section 10.2.1.2.2 to then analysing how SF influencers can engage in greenwashing in 10.2.1.2.3 and 10.2.1.2.4.

Table 10.3 Conflicts of Interest in monetising SF

	Conflicts of Interest		
Impactful content	Creating content that is exciting and fashionable that appeals to brands and consumers	vs	Creating content that is difficult or boring and may only appeal to a limited audience but tackles issues that people need to know about
Censorship	Providing only positive reviews of the SF industry	vs	Providing honest/critical reviews of the SF industry
Complicit in greenwashing	Accepting payment from brands that are not sustainable and allowing them to participate in the SF movement	vs	Not accepting payment from brands that do not align with their values and try to restrict what influencers say
Influencer overconsumption	Sharing brands with others so they know	vs	Constantly perusing new clothes can stoke the desire for consumption

	alternatives to fast fashion		
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10.2.1.2.1 Impactful content

To attract brands, SF influencers need to make sure that their audiences are engaged to show that they have influence. So that means that the influencers have to create content that will attract people, which may not be exactly what people need to hear. Consider these quotes below:

'it's not meant to be like a mean thing but if you're not paid to have certain conversations of course they take a back seat and I think that there needs to be some accountability from these influencers of what that looks like. What percent of their content that they're creating about ethical and sustainable content is truly just about the movement versus buying into the movement' -#Activist10

'And that gives me the freedom to publish less because I don't need to share my page views or my readership with anyone to get money and that's not on my agenda.' -#Activist7

#Activist10 implies that conversations or topics that will lead to monetary gains are the topics that SF influencers tend to focus on. These topics tend to be around buying SF brands rather than other ways to engage in the movement. As illustrated in #Lifestyle9's quote (p. 157), although they benefitted from working with an eco-friendly dry cleaner, they do not talk about such topics often. Topics which are more mundane, like laundry or mending, may not be spoken about as much because if the content is not interesting, the audience will not engage which in turn affects the social media analytics that brands ask for when partnering with an influencer. This is seen in the quote from #Activist7, where they do not work with brands, so they feel they have more freedom to talk about what they want because they have no obligation to anyone else. Some SF influencers perceive brands as exercising undue control over their platforms. Consider this quote from #Activist2:

'I'm also not going to let a brand come in, write a check, and tell me what I can and cannot talk about. Words that I use on my grid like white supremacy, colonialism, brands don't really like that stuff because they benefit from that phrase, and it makes their buyers uncomfortable. And so, I'm not going to let someone write me a check for an amount of money where I'm probably being undercut by what the next white lady is making and then have them tell me as well that my message needs to change in order to keep getting that money.' -#Activist2

It appears that if influencers need or want to show that their platforms are vehicles for promoting SF brands, they may try to avoid topics around race and topics that some deem as too political or not favourable to commercialisation. Combined with the need for SF influencers to talk about SF in a cool and fun way, there is little incentive for mundane and/or controversial topics to be discussed in the SF community. In terms of what this means for the movement, it means that in its present state, the SF movement is unlikely to lead to transformative change if it glosses over the systemic issues and actual consumer education. However, more recently, some SF influencers have started to be more vocal about social issues.

10.2.1.2.2 Censorship

Trying to placate brands and create content amenable to commercialisation is a form of censorship to keep SF similar to the fast fashion industry but with a more neutral colour palette [referring back to 9.1]. The data suggest that there is the possibility that brands can exert a lot of control over influencers by offering products and other rewards that keep the SF conversation focused on products rather than underlying or systemic issues. Further, the data suggest that influencers who rely on working with brands may not be incentivised to critique brands or products, because then this may jeopardise their relationship with the brand. I interpret this to be a form of censorship where influencers may feel they have to protect their streams of income by focusing on the positives of a brand. Consider this quote from #Activist5:

'...because I am doing this full-time there is more sponsored content that I've had to pick up. I'm very lucky that I'm at a point because I'm in such a niche space companies know me for what I do like being specifically in sustainability. I haven't had to vet out or like really, really seek out brands. I've been able to have brand partners that I am comfortable promoting but I think that's a very valid question. Like if you are relying on social media as your source of income, can you be as true and as unfiltered as you want to be. So far I don't think I've had to sacrifice my perspectives. I've been on panels that are sponsored by brands like Timberland that want you to embed their products into what you're saying and I've gone on panels and said 'hey everyone, don't believe this idea that you can buy sustainability' and I know it's kind of pissed off people on their team but I think at the end of the day that's what consumers are looking for' -#Activist5

#Activist5 acknowledges that they are fortunate to be in a position where they have a lot of people who want to work with them, so they are able to be freer with what they say as they are not worried about if brands will continue to want to utilise their platform. However, #Activist5 does

acknowledge that if SF influencers are relying on brands, they may be opening themselves up to being persuaded to let imperfections slide and not sharing those with their audiences. However, many influencers try not to fall into this trap:

'I would rather spend my own money and shut up than work with a brand and tell others to support them just because I wanted something free.' -#Activist4

This quote illustrates that it can be difficult to navigate working with brands when they expect you to promote them just because they have given the influencer something for free. It appears that there is a pressure of reciprocity that SF influencers feel when this happens; therefore, they try to avoid this type of situation by only working with brands they believe in. However, in life there are always those who will take the money and comply and that leads us to the next section on being complicit in greenwashing.

10.2.1.2.3 Complicit in greenwashing

Many influencers felt as though they have to be careful when working with brands so that they are able to maintain their integrity. However, taking this a step further, there are some influencers in the SF community who will accept partnerships even if the brand is not really sustainable. Thinking back to the discussion around honesty and authenticity in Section 10.2.1, SF influencers face tension between staying true to themselves while also sustaining their platforms. As seen in the section on calculating the worth of paid partnerships [Section 10.3.1.1], many of the SF influencers are not likely to break even on the amount of work they put into their platforms. The data suggest that some SF influencers are sometimes complicit with SF brands, or SF lines by fast fashion brands, in greenwashing by lending their stamp of approval to undeserving brands. Consider these quotes from #Activist10:

'And then the other part of that means that those people aren't able to criticise brands in the same way because that's how they make their income so as a result I think ethical fashion influencers are in this really difficult spot wherein in order to make money they have to support brands that they might not fully believe in and the like internal challenge with that and balance with that.' #Activist10

'I think that this is like this really hard thing, and it's been interesting in ethical fashion influencers because we teach our audience to ask questions but then those same influencers get questioned for who they partner with and are frustrated with that. Because I'm sure for them it's like I'll take this

partnership that I don't feel 100% great about because it pays X amount of dollars which means I can then talk about or promote brands that I do believe more in that don't have the budget to support me. And so, it's like this weird trade-off people are making' -#Activist10

SF influencers themselves are often charged with greenwashing. Influencer greenwashing refers to the practice of a SF influencer saying they are being sustainable and ethical, yet they are consistently making questionable ethical choices. The data suggest that there is a slippery slope between allowing for imperfections and greenwashing, especially when money becomes involved. Moreover, in recent years, there has been a boom in interest around SF which has created a lot of opportunities for a lot of people:

'I think that influencing as a whole is irresponsible. I think people get into it because they want free stuff, because they want to kind of make this curated aesthetic of what their life on a day to day is. I don't think that influencing as a whole is really healthy or appropriate. I think that getting masses of people to do something because of your say is a lot more power than people are willing to kind of really look at too much or really look at too closely.' -#Activist4

Combined with the growth of influencer marketing in general it appears that in the SF influencer community there are those more interested in the commercial aspects than the environmental and social issues at hand. As mentioned, getting free stuff is a benefit of being a SF influencer but it is not supposed to be an influencers' motivation for being in the space. There appears to be a baseline of acceptable SF influencer actions. Although many influencers are gracious in their framing of SF as a journey, even they question the ethics and sustainability of other influencers in the SF community:

'I think you know there's also a lot of fashion influencers who are getting onto the greenwashing thing so they will work for brands that are maybe H&Ms and Zara's for example who we all know could do so much more when it comes to ethical and sustainable fashion. But they will like wear something like 'oh this is recycled polyester', and the next post is like Boohoo or something. I don't want to judge anyone obviously but I'm like 'c'mon guys we can do better, let's actually do it for the brands that are doing things correctly', but I get that it's a journey.' -#Lifestyle8

'I had a debate with myself and the blogger I did the challenge with, we were sort of, not talking bad but gossiping a little about you know those bloggers where they're always trying to sell you something, sometimes there's like a really thin line when you're trying to promote values. But if you really don't live those values you're not like a true person. I think that there's some people that try and say they're sustainable but sometimes they're just greenwashing, and they have a huge wardrobe, and they have, I don't know, they don't really stick 100% to the values that they try to promote.' #Lifestyle6

The quotes from #Lifestyle8 and #Lifestyle6 really illustrate the tension within the SF community where there are people who are partnering with either too many brands or the wrong brands, such as fast fashion brands. Working with the wrong brands is attributed to not being mature in their SF journey (#Lifestyle8) or not being true to the values that they claim to have (#Lifestyle6). Again, the issue of values and people not having the right values is brought to the forefront. Not having the right values involves working with unsustainable brands or appearing money hungry, not being responsible in how they use their influence, and not actually trying to be a sustainable consumer. It appears that in letting people define SF values for themselves, people do not always make choices that the SF community generally see as being sustainable. The quotes from #Lifestyle8 and #Lifestyle6 hint at a limit or a line that SF influencers are getting close to crossing into unsustainable territory. Another way influencers can be complicit in SF brand greenwashing is by working with brands that are not inclusive. Consider this quote from #Bit-of-both2:

'it's got to the point when I look at a new page [SF brand Instagram page] and I don't see anybody who's above a size medium, I'm like oh I don't really like this brand... like if they're not thinking to show more bodies in their clothing then I think oh there's something there in that company that isn't right. Like they're not thinking beyond, they just think this is aesthetically pleasing but it's not like, I feel like, I don't know.' -#Bit-of-both2

Referring back to the lack of representation as discussed in Section 7.1.1, when SF influencers work with brands that are not inclusive they are inadvertently helping the brand to gain legitimacy without challenging their lack of inclusivity. However, this does not appear to be a criterion that many other influencers adopt. On one hand, well paid SF sponsorships are hard to come by and on the other it could be that people generally do not know how to assess brands they work with. Influencers like #Lifestyle4 have built up connections in the fashion industry over time but for most of the influencers, they are on a journey and rely on what the brands tell them about themselves. Consider this quote from #Activist4:

'I think that we aren't learning necessarily how to necessarily respond to these claims that brands are making, we don't necessarily know how to research all of this so I think that a lot of people aren't as honest or as open as they could be about the brands that they choose to work with' - #Activist4

This seems to be because many of the SF influencers do not have the connections that would enable them to assess whether or not a brand is truly sustainable because many of them do not have any

more access to the innerworkings of a brand than anyone else. However, linking back to the research question, in their role as gatekeepers to the SF movement, SF influencers allowing non-SF brands to infiltrate the movement and influencing their followers to purchase can mislead consumers into thinking that they are supporting SF when really they are just supporting the influencer and the brand.

10.2.1.2.4 Influencer overconsumption

Another tension is the fact that SF influencers have large wardrobes. For example, in working with brands, influencers receive a lot of free clothing items. At the same time, they are telling others to be more sustainable and buy less, yet they have a constant stream of new clothing. SF influencers do not talk about this much because it could be seen as another mistake in their SF journey. Further, SF influencers tell people to shop less but at the same time, they post almost daily about new SF brands that people should try out.

'It's weird because I feel like that puts you in a realm of like of being paid to do it like if I was promoting things or something on Instagram... it's another difficulty because I don't, I wouldn't, like can you ever really be a sustainable influencer, that's the master question, that's a thesis in itself. Because at the end of the day you're still encouraging people to buy more stuff and our whole, a lot of time at libraries, or you know like, especially books I read like with Extinction Rebellion and things like that, it's about literally just cutting down everything like we shouldn't be buying more stuff,' -#Lifestyle10

'Can you ever really be a sustainable influencer' seems to be a question that more and more SF influencers are asking themselves as they try to navigate the SF community in a way that feels authentic and fair. And really, SF influencers are not giving anything up. It appears that for them, fashion consumption would largely remain the same because they receive a lot of clothes whereas those who are not influencers have to pay for these things and face the costs of having a reduced wardrobe.

'Yeah, I mean that's what I do, every creator is different but again when I first started there were all these really beautiful quote, unquote ethical or sustainable fashion bloggers and they were showcasing obviously these amazing brands that should be showcased but I was like man their closets must be huge, how much of that do they actually wear. So, it was kind of like a where do you, how do you manage that. So... you might want to look into another Canadian blogger/Instagrammer who actually posted a really great conversation about like sustainable bloggers and what's happening. 'How can we call ourselves sustainable', and she is one herself,

she accepts products and had a whole conversation about it, and everyone chimed in, it was really, really good....' -#Lifestyle12

This quote from #Lifestyle12 illustrates that SF influencers themselves have noticed the contradiction between receiving a lot of clothes while promoting sustainability. The quote also illustrates how the SF influencers engage in self-correction by bringing these tensions to the public and calling each other to higher standards and more transparency. Consider this quote:

'I get a lot of free clothes from brands by virtue of the work that I do. It's something I'm quite transparent about...' -#Activist5.

Linking back to Section 10.2, being honest and transparent is seen as the antidote to accusations of greenwashing while acknowledging the privileges they have as influencers.

Despite the benefits of free clothes and backlash for promoting brands or “pushing product” (#Activist5), SF influencers face a lot of pressure to consume. The data suggest that SF influencers spend a lot of time either looking for brands or interacting with brands which awakens their own desire to consume for themselves.

'So, you know, I just felt weird. I felt really, really, I felt like a hypocrite honestly, promoting brands constantly. And it also made me want to consume more than I even normally would.' – #Lifestyle7

From surrounding themselves by brands or constantly receiving products, influencers expressed starting to feel like hypocrites because they were not practicing what they believed in. Referring back to the methodology chapter 5.2.1, people have become used to looking to influencers for style inspiration and expect them to produce clothing haul videos of the latest pieces. SF influencers are not exempt and feel pressure to consume to keep producing content.

'But with the vlog and with the YouTube channel too, my best videos were thrift haul videos, so I felt like I had to keep buying all of these things to show new clothes, it was very unhealthy. It was giving into to the consumeristic mindset where you have to keep buying, I was like 'oh I have to do a video I need to go shopping' and then not really wear the clothes I bought, I was like I don't wanna be doing this anymore. –#Bit-of-both1

Here we see that influencer greenwashing is not just because of the actions of the influencer but also because of the pressure and expectations of their audiences and social media platforms.

Having content that depends on consumption clearly leads to overconsumption as influencers have to keep consuming to keep creating. Some individuals like #Lifestyle6 and #Bit-of-both1, have noticed the hypocrisy of this and have stopped overconsuming for content and/or accepting paid partnerships with brands so that they are not constantly promoting new products.

'Yeah, not anymore. I used to do that [paid partnerships with brands], and I found that it just made me feel bad because I think it wasn't hitting, like you know how we talked earlier about it being a nuanced conversation and I think that like the nuance is we just need to buy less. So, I felt really uncomfortable promoting consumption on that level. I used to think that was the solution and kinda as I learned more and grew more, I realised it's not. We really just have to cut down on consumption...' -#Lifestyle7

The quote from #Lifestyle7 illustrates the recognition of something being not quite right in the SF world and by making one's content all about products, it is missing the mark for what sustainability requires, which is reduction. In light of this, some SF influencers have chosen to stop allowing their role to be overrun by brands and instead look to other forms of funding that are more authentic to them.

10.2.1.3 *Section conclusion*

This section set out to analyse the forms conflict of interest that SF influencers may face in their role. Three forms were identified: creating impactful content, dealing with censorship, being complicit in greenwashing, and influencer overconsumption. There are influencers who are trying to navigate this space as best as they can. Some influencers take it a step further and call these practices out and push for better standards when working with brands. However, as evidenced by the quotes, not all influencers are able to withstand the glamour of the market and there may be some negative ramifications. Focusing only on fun SF topics does not help people to gain a full picture of SF issues. Additionally, prioritising conversations that are easily monetised diminishes the value of hard or boring conversations that, while people may not want to discuss them, still need to be addressed.

In terms of censorship and working with brands, there is tension between providing accurate reviews of SF brands and only sharing the positives about a brand. Influencers may be misleading people into thinking that they are participating in SF consumption when really they are not. Further

by working with unscrupulous brands, SF influencers give brands undue status. For example, Everlane is a brand that was heralded by SF influencers as being sustainable, as evidenced in a previous quote from #Activist4 about their “damn affiliate links” in every SF influencers’ bio. However, recently it has become common knowledge in the SF world that Everlane is not as transparent and ethical as the image that they paint (Robertson, 2021). However, this may not be completely the influencers’ fault because most brands do not fully disclose their ecological and labour practices. When brands are allowed to drive the conversation about themselves, they undoubtedly try to portray themselves in the best way possible and keep themselves in the conversation even if it means that the movement does not actually progress. Having discussed the tricky relationship between brands and SF influencers, the next section focuses on alternative funding models.

10.2.2 Pursuing Alternative Funding Models

In light of the conflicts of interest addressed above, some SF influencers do not want to be told what do by brands [Section 10.2.1.2.2] or have to promote products to sustain their platforms. Instead, some influencers eschew this common model of monetising their platforms. At the same time, other influencers do not even have the opportunity to decide whether or not they work with brands as discussed in Section 10.2.1.1. This section explores alternative funding models that SF influencers may adopt.

Rather than pursuing brands, some SF influencers favour subscription models such as Patreon, where individuals can pay their favourite creators monthly to support their work. These influencers are able to be freer about what they say because people are buying into their platform and what they have to say. Their audience is choosing to be there which means they do not have to appease brands:

‘For example a lot of corporations are the sponsors of the fashion week here so if I’m not independent, I can’t speak up and be honest about certain things which are facts and I think that aspect I like because I have a direct relationship with my readers, I’m no longer obliged to, I don’t know, avoid questioning power, questioning companies that are holding power, or have questionable roots and stuff like that.’ -#Activist7

Here #Activist7 is describing why they chose to start a Patreon instead of choosing to be sponsored by corporations whom he believes to have too much influence in the fashion industry in India. By having a platform that people buy into, the influencers have more autonomy over how they run their space. Moreover, in light of Section 10.2.1.1, influencers are able to demand fairer compensation for their work by setting their own prices and boundaries about what they will and will not talk about.

'They're enjoying the resources you're providing and then they message you like 'hey can you tell me about this company' it's like 'no that's where you gotta go to Patreon'. So, I post there every day, I post on both places everyday but if you want more information from me in a more in-depth conversation then you have to go to my paid site which is unsponsored so you will get a completely untainted view....' -#Activist2

These quotes illustrate that payment from brands is associated with having a tainted point of view, where influencers feel like they cannot be completely honest about their opinion. Also, by creating platforms that people buy into, SF influencers are able to place boundaries on who gets to benefit from their labour rather than being taken advantage of by brands or their audiences. Finally, such platforms such as Patreon are seen as more sustainable, meaning long-lasting, ways of sustaining their platforms. Consider these quotes from #Activist10 and #Activist5:

'...and I think there are different ways to be an influencer and I'm really interested in finding better ways that aren't incomes denoted by selling. So, I moved to having a Patreon model similar to people like [another SF influencer] where instead of the majority of my money coming from commission sales or working with brands, the significant majority of my income from people sponsoring me or subscribing to support my content so that I'm getting paid to talk about ethical and sustainable fashion not to sell ethical and sustainable fashion.' -#Activist10

'The thing about any freelance work is that you have to diversify your income streams and I think for me, being in the commercial space, I was always scared about, I don't want my approach to sustainability to be purely capitalistic, right, like pushing this idea of buy this and buy that. I think that's why speaking engagements have been really important to me, kind of approaching this from a thought leadership perspective.' -#Activist5

Although these quotes take slightly different approaches, the desire to move beyond selling is clear as influencers look for other ways to leverage their knowledge and experience in the field. SF influencers believe that they are doing unpaid work for Instagram and for their audiences and because they are providing value, some of the value should be returned back to them. #Activist2 describes why having people join their Patreon is important to them:

'Being that Instagram is unmonetized, that's unpaid work. But if people are supporting my Patreon, then I feel like I am being compensated for that time period and that's really great and so, it's just like taxes, the people at the top need to do both and then everybody can actually enjoy the benefits of the government ... It's kind of the same for my work, like I know that a lot of white middle class ladies follow me and that's great but like put your money where your mouth is and support the work because it's not for free but people who can afford to support the work do it, then I can afford to make more things free for everyone.' - #Activist2

For #Activist2, they draw on the concept of equity to describe that those who can pay should so that everyone is able to benefit from their work on Instagram. If their platform was not supported then they would have less time to dedicate to their platform. Referring back to the discussion on the speed of social media in Section 8.6.1, Instagram requires almost daily engagement. If #Activist2 and others like them wish to make high quality and quantity work then their platforms need to be supported or else they will either lose favour with the algorithm which will reduce their reach, or they will have to reduce their nuance to keep up with the speed of the platform. Alternative funding models allow SF influencers to share their unfiltered thoughts, develop nuanced resources, and critique the movement whilst still benefitting from their labour. This impacts the wider SF movement by creating space for more critical work to be done and supported.

Overall, SF influencers have a complex relationship with funding their platforms. Some do not need to fund their platforms because they have jobs or are students who live with their parents; thus, they are not too concerned with monetising their platforms. The majority of influencers, even those with jobs, still require financial resources to support their platforms. I asked one influencer how they supports their platform now that they do not partner with brands, and they replied that they got a job. However, the most common approach to funding a platform is by working with brands. This income stream opens up the door to a lot of potential conflicts of interest such as hypocrisy and greenwashing which can dilute the effectiveness of the SF movement. More and more influencers seem to be gravitating to a subscription model which may help them to be freer in what they desire to say. This freedom may result in some of the work that is not being recognised in the mainstream still being able to push the movement in a more equitable direction.

10.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to explore the intricacies of portraying the SF influencer image which addresses Objectives 1 and 2 of this thesis. The chapter opened by considering the behind-the-scenes production of SF content to get an idea of how SF influencers portray themselves online. From there the focus moved deeper into the SF influencer image and through the analysis, identified three strategies that SF influencers use to give the impression that they are who they say they are.

Still behind-the-scenes, we then went to consider how influencers fund their platforms and what the implications are of two main forms of funding: working with brands and developing alternative streams of income. The analysis showed that in working with brands, SF influencers have to navigate potential conflicts of interest between commercialising their platforms and promoting sustainability. Alternative forms of funding may offer some relief as the influencers are able to move beyond selling SF to educating or inspiring people to participate in SF. If SF influencers fail to navigate these tensions successfully, they will be accused of influencer greenwashing but if they can navigate the tensions, they stand to build a sustainable platform that can promote SF ideals.

These sections come together to paint a picture of the role of SF influencers in the wider movement as very complicated as they are always trying to do their best in a situation where they really cannot win. They cannot win because they do not exist in isolation rather, they are impacted by social media, SF brands, their audiences, and factors outside of their control such as the Isms. Having laid out the cast of characters and analysing their different roles, it is now time to discuss everything in light of the research question and literature.

11 DISCUSSION

11.0 INTRODUCTION

The analysis has highlighted that despite SF influencers' best intentions, there is something very much amiss in the SF social media world. The following discussion answers the research question of the thesis: '*what is the role of SF influencers in the sustainable fashion movement?*'. Throughout this chapter I will show that the answer to this question falls into two ways of seeing the role. The first role and section of this chapter introduces the 'ownable role', which is the role that SF influencers create and impose on themselves and others aiming to carry out that role. The ownable role is how SF influencers define the role of SF influencers in the SF movement and consists of actions and mindsets that are consistent with this conceptualisation of their role. These components also serve to help identify other SF influencers. I primarily draw on SF and social media literatures to discuss the ownable role. The second role and section of this chapter considers the 'given role', which is the role of the influencer as given by the capitalistic market which aims to neutralise the threat of more inclusive or transformative sustainable fashion by commodifying SF into a product or by downplaying the seriousness of the issue. Here I continue to draw on the previous literatures whilst also bringing in outside perspectives such as media studies and macro-marketing to capture some of the emergent themes in the analysis. Finally, I discuss the need to reimagine the possibilities for SF influencing.

11.1 THE OWNABLE ROLE

The ownable role is reflective of how SF influencers perceive their role and responsibilities in the SF movement. In doing so, they take ownership of what they aim to contribute to the movement. In terms of the research question, the analysis shows that SF influencers' primary role is to get people interested in SF through various communication and presentation strategies. I first discuss the approaches that people adopt in talking about SF in light of the literature [11.1.1]. I then move into discussing the '*allowable character*' in 11.1.2 because although there are different approaches to SF influencing, there are still boundaries or constraints that influencers hold each other to. These boundaries serve to differentiate SF influencers from traditional fashion influencers as discussed

in the Chapter 8.1.1 and also act as plotlines they draw from to justify their actions. From there, we then move into how influencers reconcile their public and private practices in order to successfully portray the image of a SF influencer [11.1.3]. I will now discuss how SF influencers see their role in the movement.

11.1.1 Getting People Interested in SF

In answering the research question, I first want to contextualise how the influencers in this study approach SF influencing. From Chapter 2.2.2 on defining SF, it was evident that what is considered SF is largely seen as a personal conviction. For example, Henninger et al. (2016) created a framework for people to assess which aspects of SF resonate with them. Similarly, many definitions of SF are sufficiently vague in order to account for the fuzziness of what is considered SF (Goworek et al., 2012; Bly et al., 2015, Lundblad and Davies, 2015; Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018). Because of the lack of clarity around SF, consumers navigate SF in different ways. Some choose to ignore SF because they perceive its meaning to be either confusing or diluted by brands that are jumping on the bandwagon (Evans and Peirson-Smith, 2018). Others may create their own definition to suit what works for them (Bly et al., 2015). The literature aims to develop strategies to communicate SF in an interesting, authentic, and engaging way that will cut through the confusion around sustainable consumption.

Previously, the literature has looked at trade shows (Blanchet, 2017), forums (Cervellon and Wernerfelt, 2012; Shen et al., 2014), magazines (Lundahl, 2014; Jones, 2020), in-store experiences (Han et al., 2017), and more. But an area that is still nascent is the use of social media to engage people in SF. Most of the research on SF and social media are from the perspective of trying to increase the purchase intention of SF or focuses on the concept of social media rather than the people creating content on social media (e.g., de Lenne and Vandenbosch, 2017 and Kim et al., 2020). More recently, the literature has begun to focus on SF bloggers/ influencers, celebrities, and other actors such as NGOs and designers, to consider how they talk about SF online (Bly et al., 2015; LeHew and Patwary, 2018; McKeown and Shearer, 2019; Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021). The current research makes great headway but there is still a lot to know. Notably, McKeown and Shearer (2019) look at how the celebrity Emma Watson utilises her Instagram page for SF however, the literature has not engaged with SF influencers on Instagram

as of yet. On Instagram, SF is not just about what you do at home (Bly et al., 2015), or how you discuss it with others (Orminski et al., 2021), but also how you bring these elements together in a creative way that is useful for others. LeHew and Patwary (2018) made great strides in this area in their study on SF bloggers, however they did not interview the bloggers, rather they relied on how the SF bloggers talked about SF through their blog posts and About pages on their websites. As most theories about the role of SF influencers rely on content analysis (Lehew and Patwary, 2018; Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021), our understanding of how SF influencers conceptualise their role and some of the challenges they face is limited. Thus, we are unable to ascertain the full potential of SF Influencers in the movement. This is where my research makes a significant contribution which others can build upon in the future.

One of the objectives of this study was to analyse how SF influencers conceptualise their roles and responsibilities in the SF social media space. I contribute to the SF literature by identifying three approaches to SF influencing and four strategies to communicate SF. I start by explaining the three approaches to SF influencing which can be seen as a continuum in Figure 11.1 and linking to their respective communication strategies which are laid out in Table 11.1. Prior to explaining the different approaches, I first want to explain how someone is placed on the continuum. The two extremes represent a ‘pure’ view which most influencers do not fully fit. Therefore, to be considered as part of any group, the influencers would have been leaning towards either the left, middle, or right sides of two out of the three characteristics, as they would then be the dominant characteristics. If they fall into the middle on two out of three, then they belong in the #Bit-of-both category. With this in mind, I now discuss the first group.

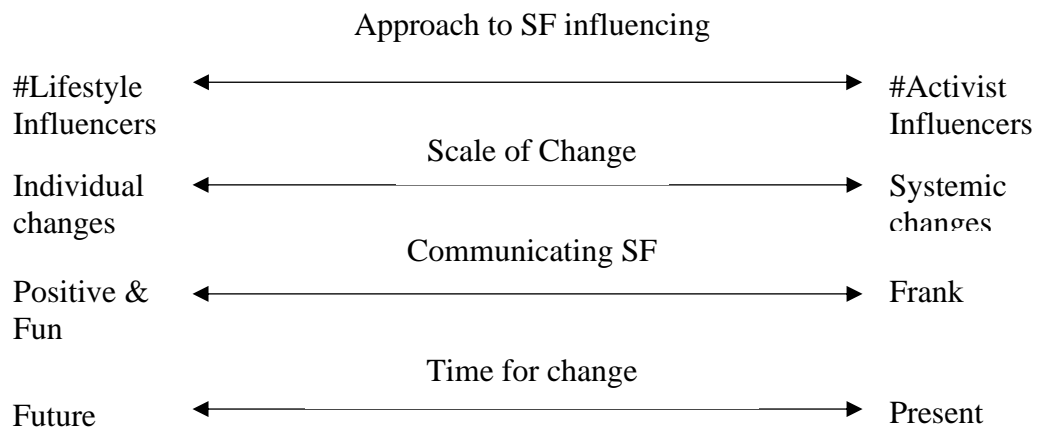


Figure 11.1 Continuum of SF Influencing

The first side to discuss is the #Lifestyle influencer side. #Lifestyle influencers act as ambassadors for SF; they are the interest makers and aim to draw people into the movement. #Lifestyle influencers perceive the scale of change needed for SF to be on the individual level. These influencers believe that consumers have the power to affect change at a wider scale through the goods that they consume. #Lifestyle influencers largely adopt a consumption-focused approach to talk about SF in a positive way to show that is a good alternative to fast fashion. This approach is similar to the green commodity discourse proposed by Prothero and Fitchett (2000); this approach aims to show people that buying less can improve wellbeing. #Lifestyle influencers adopt a similar approach where they focus on the benefits that can be attained with a more conscious lifestyle. Their positivity is also reflected in the idea of alternative hedonism (Caruana et al., 2019) by focusing on the joy or fun that can be had from shopping more sustainably. The #Lifestyle influencers aim to show that SF consumption does not have to be boring or difficult, rather it can be enjoyable and easy. #Lifestyle influencers are able to focus on positivity because their approach is in line with the pragmatic approach discussed in Chapter 2. Underlying this approach seems to be the idea that there is time to make incremental changes towards SF rather than seeing SF as something that needs to be addressed in the present. With the benefit of hindsight this may be a case of too little, too late.

On the furthest right side are the #Activist influencers. #Activist influencers tend to question economic and social systems, whilst still focusing on consumer actions. They perceive the fashion industry as needing transformation, rather than just renovation. This reflects the radical approach presented in Chapter 2 where the literature focused on creating new systems, models, and modes of consumption. Because of the perceived barriers for the current economic system to change, #Activist influencers are reluctant to focus on only consumption. Like the participants in Hobson's (2002) study, they recognise that only focusing on their individual actions may not be the best way to pursue societal change. #Activist influencers perceive the climate crisis and social injustices as issues that need to be addressed urgently, therefore, incremental, individual change is not fast enough. So, when the #Activist influencers focus on consumer action, this does not always involve getting people to buy more SF, it can also include educating people about social justice issues, getting involved in policy, or other forms of outreach. In terms of tone, #Activist influencers adopt a frank yet creative tone to get their messages across. Instead of just focusing on the good of SF,

they aim to have candid conversations or try to educate their audiences while drawing on creative visuals to capture the imagination of their audiences. Instead of trying to provoke desire for SF, they more so try to provoke open conversations.

The #Bit-of-both category lies between these two views. The #Bit-of-both category is made up of those who exist in between criticising the system and the more laissez-faire approach adopted by the #Lifestyle influencers. This middle ground experiences tensions between wanting to gently draw people into SF and recognising that SF needs structural changes. In terms of scale of change and tone, they roughly lie in the middle as they do not want to make people feel bad for their choices, but they want them to still be informed that their actions have an impact. Here there is tension between coming off as “preachy” whilst also knowing that serious changes need to be made. It is expected that over time, influencers in this category will move further left or right. Although, this category is small, the conversations with #Bit-of-both influencers illustrate how structural elements can start to pull people away from the consumption-focused approaches. In thinking about why this category exists, I saw that a common theme among the influencers was that they were people facing a lack of representation in SF. For example, two out of three of these individuals were people of colour who felt as though the SF conversation was not inclusive. Moreover, one of the people in this category was plus-sized and felt as though a lot of the standard advice given for SF was not applicable to them. Consequently, #Bit-of-both influencers cannot fully adopt a consumption-focused approach because they are somewhat excluded from it by the market and wider society. Therefore, the main reason I separated this group out was their recognition that consumption is not the only answer and their desire to advocate and make space for others in the movement.

Having discussed the spectrum of influencing, I now discuss their communication strategies. Accordingly, the different influencer groups tend to adopt different strategies for communicating SF.

11.1.2 Strategies for communicating SF

Considering the three different points of the continuum, I now discuss the strategies they adopt in communicating SF. There are four main strategies: *fluidity*, *baiting*, *frank talking*, and *SF for all*. To explain these strategies, I draw on previous literature on communicating SF.

Table 11.1 Strategies for communicating SF on social media

Communicating SF			
#Lifestyle strategies	#Bit-of-both	Theme 1 - fluidity	Theme 4 – SF for all (inclusion)
		Theme 2 – baiting	
#Activist strategies		Theme 3 –frank talking	

Elsewhere, in an analysis of magazines, research has found that SF is largely presented as a lifestyle choice that works for some but might not be for others, or as a passing trend for fashionistas to adopt (Lundahl, 2014; Jones, 2019). These approaches are common in magazines because their business model depends on having an audience that is willing to spend. Magazines are a unique medium because they usually have a set voice and standard that they are trying to adhere to, whereas social media influencers are not bound to any particular publishing house. Therefore, ideally, influencers have more editorial freedom. In this thesis, the #Lifestyle influencers tend to utilise two strategies to communicate SF: *fluidity* and *baiting*.

The first strategy focuses on fluidity. Markkula and Moisander (2012), Bly et al. (2015), Peirson-Smith and Evans (2017), Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018) found that people perceive communications around SF to be confusing because of brands and marketers using terms interchangeably and not tying them to actual practices. As a result, people just try to find what works for them. My thesis contributes to our understanding of how people navigate unclear sustainable practices by focusing on the specific strategy of fluidity. Fluidity is doubly interesting because not only is it something adopted by the influencers, but it is also a strategy they aim to instil in their audiences. Instead of focusing on terms, SF influencers navigate this issue by focusing on the SF journey. They accept that they and their audiences do not know everything but as long as they are on the journey, at some point they will figure it out. With fluidity, SF influencers

portray engaging in SF as a journey where one has to do what works for them, nothing is set in stone, and everything can be adapted to suit your capacity, needs, and values. During the SF journey, mistakes are not only welcome, but they are also expected and seen as being part of the journey since it is not always possible to consume fashion in a sustainable way. Instead of a 'Free to Choose' approach, as found by Lundahl (2014) where the decision to engage with SF or not does not reflect on consumers' morality, the fluidity approach found in this thesis implies the opposite. Because of fluidity, there is no reason to not consume SF and the decision not to is perceived negatively. This is a double-edged sword because on one hand, people have a lot of freedom on their SF journey, but there is also an implication of judgement when people veer too off course or do not join at all, because the SF journey is seen as something so simple. This was seen in Chapter 8 in the analysis of (over)consumers as antagonists in the SF story.

The second strategy is 'baiting'. This strategy is similar to the 'Eco-Chic' frame identified in Winge (2008) and Lundahl (2014) where magazines aim to position SF as a stylish and trendy option. This framing is used to make SF seem as though it is something fun to participate in. Magazines utilise this framing because they are then able to move on to the next trend which keeps consumption and advertising dollars flowing (Lundahl, 2014). However, for SF influencers, baiting is a distinct strategy because it serves a strategic purpose to engage, and keep people engaged, in SF as they go along their journey. Baiting refers to enticing viewers with fun outfits and pictures and then reeling them in to tell them about why SF is important. For some influencers this means championing SF brands to show that SF can be cool and fashionable just like fast fashion can. These findings complement studies such as de Lenne and Vandenbosch (2017), Kim et al. (2020), and McKeown and Shearer (2019) who have found that social media content increases purchase intention for SF clothing. In light of the analysis this is not surprising because talking about brands is seen as a natural part of the SF role and almost all of the influencers adopt this strategy. In general working with brands is a natural part of being an influencer (Newlands and Fieseler, 2020). However, baiting is different from just posting brands on social media, as the goal is not necessarily to increase the bottom line for companies (although it might be for some), the goal is to change the makeup of peoples' wardrobes. In LeHew and Patway's (2018) study on SF bloggers, they levied the critique that SF influencers focus more on championing brands than educating consumers. This thesis finds that this may be because #Lifestyle influencers define

educating consumers in a different way. Some may interpret that statement to mean focusing on the facts and science around SF, but for SF influencers they tend to view education as ‘teaching people to be better consumers’ by picking sustainable items or showing people how to style their clothes. This strategy certainly has some merit as people do need to know about these things (LeHew and Patwary, 2018), however because influencers are trying to portray SF in a certain way, practices that are not congruent with their aim of making SF exciting are minimised. Considering the baiting strategy, this is a fair critique as influencers aim to entice people to look into SF further, not necessarily to bombard them with SF facts. Kilbourne (1998) argued that the current DSP restricts the possibilities for sustainable communication as it aims to keep the status quo as it is. However, by looking at this strategy for what it is: a beginners’ entry point into SF and a group of people interested in a topic, this mode of communication could be useful in reaching a variety of individuals. Nevertheless, only pursuing this strategy is likely to produce sustainable fast fashion consumption, where the items change but the way we treat people, planet, and goods really do not.

What was missing in SF communication for Lundahl (2014), LeHew and Patwary (2018), and Jones (2020), was this acknowledgement that SF cannot solely rely on the purchase of SF. To fill in this gap, I introduce strategy three, frank talking, which is primarily utilised by #Activist influencers and groups such as Extinction Rebellion, as referred to in Chapter 8.4. This strategy contrasts with baiting to call out issues in SF and the fast fashion industry and disrupt the idealised image of SF in some way. Although some influencers who adopt this strategy still focus on creative imagery and sharing their outfits, they are also trying to bring attention to the issues in SF and wider society by focusing on topics such as capitalism, racism, and sizeism, or the Isms as I call them. Peterson (2020, p. 1195) utilises the term, ‘social media interrupter’ to describe an influencer who ‘engages with the visual style and discourse of Instagram fashion influencers while incorporating a subversive critique that points out the ways that this influencer industry perpetuates injustices and a neoliberal focus on individual solutions.’ Subbing out the influencer industry for SF industry, we see that this definition describes the #Activist influencers. These influencers prefer to talk frankly about the issues which can get them branded by others as ‘preaching’. Their approach is more about resisting the idea of consumption being the answer to our SF woes and embracing concepts like personal identity, responsibility, and representation to empower

individuals to join the movement in the skin and the clothes they are in. This leads to the final strategy that spans across the spectrum which is SF for all. SF influencers aim to increase representation by being present in the movement themselves, or by trying to increase representation for others. Through their presence and frank talking they aim to make SF a place for everyone. In terms of the theory of sustainable communication, it is clear that for the tenets of ecological access and dialogue to be implemented, then everyone needs to have access to the discourse. This theme will be further discussed in Section 11.4.

11.1.3 Section Conclusion

This section discussed the three approaches to SF influencing, #Lifestyle, #Activist, and #Bit-of-both. Similarly, the chapter discussed the four main strategies that SF influencers adopt, *fluidity*, *baiting*, *frank talking*, and *SF for All*. Despite the different approaches and strategies that influencers may adopt, their freedom from answering to publishers, and having control over their platforms, these influencers do not have complete freedom in how they run their platforms. SF influencers exist within a dynamic field which requires them to conform to the shared idea of SF influencers, as well as the norms of social media. In the next section, I introduce the concept of the allowable character.

11.1.4 The Allowable Character: Boundaries & Constraints

Having discussed the communication strategies that SF influencers employ; I now turn to the foundations of the SF influencer role itself. Research on SF influencers is still nascent however as interest in this group of individuals grows (e.g., Bly et al., 2015; McKeown and Shearer, 2019; Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021) it is important to understand the standards that SF influencers hold themselves to. To understand this more, I draw on ideas around habitus and also the social media literatures to unpick the shared logic of the SF influencer role. Understanding how SF influencers see their role is important to understanding what their role in the movement is, and what it could be.

Although every actor brings their own *je ne sais quoi* to the role, their actions in the role are constrained within the bounds of the allowable character of the SF influencer. To explain the

allowable character, I draw on habitus. Habitus and displays of habitus are specific to the field they are in (Bourdieu, 1977); therefore, the allowable character reflects the SF influencer habitus. The allowable character is self-imposed on SF influencers as they decide and maintain the boundaries of what it is they think people in this role should be doing, why they should be doing it, and how they should do it. This has synergies with Hamilton and Hewer's (2010) study on Kylie Minogue's fan forum where the cultural rules of the community influence how the forum users portray themselves and engage with the forum space. So, to be in the field, one must conform to the standards of SF influencers to be seen as a SF influencer. The analysis reveals that there are four main elements of the SF influencer habitus: *having the right motivation and values* [11.1.2.1], *supporting SF consumption* [11.1.2.2], *working with the right brands* [11.1.2.3], and *aligning the public with the private* [11.1.2.4].

11.1.4.1 *Having the Right Motivation and Values*

The literature on SF and social media suggests that social media is great for promoting brands (de Lenne and Vandebosch, 2017; Kim et al., 2020; Testa et al., 2021). However, only looking at social media for its utility to brands is at odds with the SF influencer habitus. Referring back to Bly et al.'s (2015) findings on authenticity, they found that SF bloggers consider brands who they perceive to be acting in their own self-interest and focused on profits to be inauthentic in their motivation to pursue SF. Moreover, they found that although the bloggers were interested in SF, they also had their own motives for engaging in the space, such as the desire to be unique (Bly et al., 2015). These findings are echoed in Lee and Weder where people emphasised self-expression and freedom (2021). Consequently, and perhaps problematically, the criteria of apparent selflessness did not apply to the SF influencers (Bly et al., 2015). Contrastingly, the findings of my thesis suggest the opposite. Despite knowing that being a SF influencer may result in monetary opportunities, SF influencers believe that they should be perceived as having selfless motivations for wanting to be an influencer. Part of the SF influencer habitus is showing that one truly cares about sustainability and is actively trying to live a sustainable lifestyle. Being seen as only wanting to make money or receive free goods are seen as signs of an inauthentic SF influencer (otherwise known as a SF greenwasher). This is interesting because fashion and commerce are dialectically intertwined (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006; Hewer and Hamilton, 2012; Ertekin et al., 2020).

Perhaps they have to be seen as separate in order to give the illusion that capitalism has not yet sunk its teeth into SF. Likewise, Adorno's theories around art and commerce illustrate how art has become a cultural commodity where its primary value is commercial (Songtao, 2013). In this context, commerciality is embedded in influencers' consumption and production of social media content as the platforms that they use to share it encourage commercialisation. Regardless, SF influencers have to be seen as pushing commercial interests to the side whilst still promoting brands to their audiences. Having the right motivation impacts their role in the SF movement by making them trusted individuals with a vested interest in sustainability. Being able to trust SF influencers to provide accurate information is important in terms of building a sense of community and purpose in the movement. This is important in making sure the movement has credibility, if influencers are perceived to be only in it for the money, then there is no reason to trust them. Thus, maintaining the image of having the right motivation is important.

11.1.4.2 *Supporting SF Consumption*

The next element of being a SF influencer is to believe, or at least act like, we can shop our way to sustainability. In section 11.1.1.1, I brought attention to the critique levied by LeHew and Patwary (2018); where in their analysis of SF blog pages, they found that the bloggers talked about SF brands the majority of the time. This thesis extends the work of LeHew and Patwary (2018) by finding similar trends on social media, however I draw a different conclusion. According to the SF habitus, SF influencers are supposed to equip people with what they need to be sustainable consumers, and this is primarily done by focusing on brands. This is because SF influencers share the belief that individual actions and shopping choices will ultimately lead to change in the fashion industry. SF influencers also see themselves as knowledgeable consumers that understand SF more than others. Consequently, they convey the message that switching to SF brands will make a tangible difference in the industry and consumers are responsible for social change, which is in line with trends towards consumer subjectivity (Dolan, 2009). To be a SF influencer, you must empower people to believe that they can not only make change but are responsible for it as well. Although SF influencers may have different approaches to talking about SF, they are all still targeting consumers and imploring them to make some sort of change to how they consume fashion. LeHew and Patwary (2018, Conclusion section, para. 1) suggest that 'Before massive

transformation of the industry can occur, more and more consumers need to be aware of the problems and find hope in companies doing things differently. Other companies will follow as more and more consumers demand better processes and products.’ This view is the same logic underpinning the SF habitus where the SF influencers primarily look to companies to do better and require consumers to demand better. Few SF influencers, or the literature, talk about how they can get involved in grassroots movements or policy. This reflects the doxa of our time where there is an (in)ability for people, including SF influencers, to conceive of change beyond consumption/consumer responsibility which epitomises the individualisation of a systemic problem that Beck talks of in risk society (Kilbourne et al., 1997; Kilbourne et al., 2018).

11.1.4.3 *Working with the Right Brands*

The next element of the SF influencer habitus is working with the right brands. In the wider context of influencing, ideally influencers should recommend brands that are in line with their values so that they can continue to be seen as authentic (Ebert and Sindermann, 2020). McQuarrie et al. (2013) found that traditional fashion bloggers are able to engage with mass-market brands and still be seen as authentic whilst this thesis shows that for sustainable fashion influencers, they do not have that same luxury. When influencers work with unreputable brands, it harms their personal brand and is seen as violation of ethics by other influencers (Wellman et al., 2020). Moreover, Reinikainen et al. (2021) found that when brands engage in unethical behaviour, it damages the reputations of the influencers that partner with them by making the influencer seem less cool.

This research is very insightful in understanding the general ethics of being an influencer however when a fast fashion influencer chooses to work with a brand that turns out to be bad quality, it really only impacts their reputation. However, in the SF influencer category, their aim is to impact the SF movement. This thesis contributes to the literature on influencer brand partnerships by looking at them in the context of SF. In this context, working with unreputable brands then becomes not just a bad look but also a blight on the overall SF image as SF influencers may no longer be seen as credible actors. Further, as trusted gatekeepers in the movement, when SF influencers work with brands, it makes the brand seem as though they are in line with SF principles even if they are not. In the traditional context, these concerns would not really matter, but in SF,

such choices can damage the influencers' reputations while also misleading consumers. There is an additional element here that is specific to the SF context. In McQuarrie et al.'s (2013) study, the fashion bloggers did not associate authenticity with whether or not a brand was small and independent. However, in this thesis, the evidence has shown that SF influencers must see small brands as the future, rather than large brands who are trying to be more sustainable. Supporting large brands raises suspicions that one is not truly informed or are immature in their SF journey. This illustrates why the SF context is unique and why the stakes are higher. The standards of SF influencing are vague yet sufficiently salient enough to evaluate SF influencers. Being seen as someone who does not have the right values and working with brands that are not sustainable draws the ire of their SF influencer peers. In their content analysis of SF posts, Lee and Weder (2021) found that users frame slow fashion as good and fast fashion as bad. This sentiment is echoed and amplified in SF influencing. So, to keep the movement "pure", in a way, SF influencers vet brands to try to avoid partnering with brands that will send the wrong message to others. This links back to having the right motivation and values where those who work with fast fashion brands are seen as at best, making mistakes or at worst, greedy. Alignment is a key part of the SF influencer habitus.

11.1.4.4 *Aligning the Public/Private*

With an increase in what is considered to be 'photographable', or worthy of being photographed and shared with others, 'the private realm of the domestic is brought into the public eye of Instagram,' (Caldeira et al., 2020, p.7). This results in a blurred line between SF influencers' influencer work and their personal lives (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016; Hund and McGuigan, 2019). Leban et al.'s (2021) study of high-net-worth (HNW) social media influencers helps us to understand this boundary more. They described how young, super rich influencers navigate the negative societal perceptions of young wealthy people with their desire to be seen as good. To do this, these influencers aim to adopt an image of being a 'good person' who is worthy of their wealth and their position as a HNW influencer, rather than being seen as a spoiled individual who "misbehaves" in their private life (Leban et al., 2021). In terms of the relevance to this thesis, their study illustrates the importance of aligning their public (online) activities with their private (offline) activities, or else the influencer will be perceived negatively. In this thesis, SF influencers

have to navigate a similar space of making sure their online and offline actions appear to be consistent. However, there is a key difference. In Leban et al.'s (2021) study, the influencers were not trying to influence others to be good or be part of social change, rather their goodness has more to do with avoiding negative stereotypes of young rich people. However, in the SF context, the influencers *are* trying to persuade people to adopt a sustainable lifestyle which raises the stakes for unethical behaviour.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of the balance between online and private consumption in the social media age, by showing how this tension is embedded in the SF influencer habitus. As mentioned in the findings, there is an expectation that people become SF influencers because of a genuine interest in SF but it appears that over time, combined with commercial and social media pressures/expectations, being a SF influencer can shift from a hobby to an identity. Considering digital personhood, as developed by Kerrigan and Hart (2016), where people have multiple, co-existing selves online, in the SF context, SF influencers have to display a unified identity. Once someone begins to see themselves as a SF influencer and others begin to see them that way as well, there can be stress and/or a disconnect for the influencer as they now have to reconcile their private SF consumption with a curated public persona. Like an artist trying to build a credible brand (Preece and Kerrigan, 2015), SF influencers edit their social media content to protect and portray the image of an SF influencer. The acknowledgement that they have further to fall if they “mess up”, is a built-in feature in their platforms. With this in mind, SF influencers follow three main strategies to mitigate the tension between public and private: 1) strategic honesty, 2) strategic concealment, and 3) strategic disclosure. I add the word strategic because although SF influencers want to stay aligned in their public and private consumption, they also want to retain their credibility as influencers.

Strategic honesty is connected to being relatable in terms of empathising with the struggles of their audiences to consume fashion sustainably. Thinking about the concept of fluidity and the strategic image management practices discussed in Chapter 9, it is clear that always consuming fashion sustainably is no easy feat. Bly et al. (2015) gives a glimpse into how SF bloggers do not see the tasks they do, such as repairing their clothes or thrifting, as time consuming. Their finding is consistent with SF habitus found in this thesis of making SF seem easy and enjoyable all the time,

even though many of the influencers talk about how they “make mistakes” just like everyone else in their consumption. This implies that publicly they may be more likely to talk about things they enjoy about SF (Bly et al., 2015), while in private they struggle to navigate the times where they do not consume in ethical or sustainable ways. Moreover, in a bid to remain relatable, SF influencers employ strategic honesty which I define as *‘being open about non-SF consumption up to a point where the influencer still has credibility’*. SF influencers do not actually have to be honest, which shows why this move can be seen as strategic. In Leban et al. (2021), the misbehaviour of the HNW influencers may find itself in the news whereas for SF influencers, unsustainable SF consumption is unlikely to be seen or cared about unless they happened to be caught in the act by a follower, or if they were extremely well known.

Moreover, McQuarrie et al. (2013) found how fashion influencers in general often become disconnected and less relatable to their audiences as they become more successful. They found that fashion influencers will try to act as though their financial situation and access to fashion has not increased to try to be relatable. Similarly, in Leban et al. (2021) the influencers enacted practices such as down dressing to make their fashions relatable to their less affluent audiences. SF influencers enact similar patterns. For example, SF influencers receive clothing quite often from brands, yet they still try to be relatable by saying how SF is expensive or by recommending that people make the most of their wardrobes, although theirs is expanding and many of the items they get are free or discounted. In doing so, they try to justify any unsustainable consumption by framing it as an opportunity to be honest about how sometimes SF living is not easy.

This balance is precarious as their legitimacy and credibility in their role as SF influencers is based on their ability to navigate the public/private in a way that seems real and relatable yet worth looking up to. To manage this precariousness, they employ the next strategy of strategic concealment. Duffy and Hund (2019) note that being an influencer means being visible, and visibility leads to critique. They found that concealment was a strategy that influencers use to defend themselves from critique (Duffy and Hund, 2019). The challenge of visibility shows itself differently in sustainable influencing. For SF influencers, concealment is a strategy used to protect their credibility and eligibility to be seen as a voice in SF. Therefore, I describe strategic concealment as *‘the action that occurs once the influencer feels it is no longer wise to be*

transparent and instead conceals aspects that may harm their credibility'. In the previous section, I discussed how influencers sometimes consume fashion in unsustainable ways privately, but do not always share these actions publicly. After a certain point the marginal benefit of their honesty turns into questioning whether they really care about the issues that SF aims to address. Therefore, they conceal. The final strategy is strategic disclosure, which is *'the practice of staying in ones' niche as to not give a false picture of one's sustainable practices.'* To ensure the alignment between public and private practices, SF influencers only make some practices public. For example, if they are not implementing sustainable food practices, they will not talk about them because they are unable to maintain that alignment.

11.1.4.5 *Section Conclusion*

Overall, the influencer habitus has four main elements: *having the right motivation and values, supporting SF consumption, working with the right brands, and aligning the public with the private.* An interesting argument put forward by Entwistle and Rocamora (2006, p.743) is that *'many practices are motivated by the desire to reproduce the very system that guarantees the existence of its members.'* This resonates with Galbraith's notion of *'enlightened self-interest'*, where in acting for the good of others, people are also acting in their own self-interest (Desmond, 2003). This idea is interesting as the analysis and findings revealed that many SF influencers see their role as primarily championing SF brands rather than educating people about sustainability. By not talking about consumption reduction or SF practices beyond purchasing SF, they will continue to be seen as necessary in the movement. By focusing on small brands, they are able to differentiate themselves from mainstream influencers and make themselves valuable resources that will continue to be needed as long as just changing what we buy is the solution. By restricting who is allowed to develop sustainable solutions, SF influencers will always be needed within their niche space. If SF became mainstream, they would no longer be different. Nevertheless, for SF influencers to successfully portray the influencer habitus, they have to engage in image management strategies. Built into the SF influencer habitus is the recognition that it takes skilful manoeuvring to maintain ones' credibility and aspirational characteristics while still being relatable to the audience. To do this they engage in three main strategies: strategic honesty, strategic concealment, and strategic disclosure.

11.1.5 Ownable Role Conclusion

This section concludes the discussion on the ownable role. Through the ownable role, SF influencers create their role in the SF movement. Through different perspectives of #Lifestyle influencing, #Activist influencing, and #Bit-of-both, SF influencers choose their unique path to transforming the fashion industry. Through these different approaches, they utilise different communication strategies to get their messages across. Despite their differences, there are elements that unify them in their shared roles. The SF influencer habitus helps SF influencers that join the space to orient themselves and gain the label of an SF influencer. There are four elements that make up the SF influencer habitus: having the right motivation and values, supporting SF consumption, working with the right brands, and aligning the public with the private. These elements help to create the allowable character of a good SF influencer. Interestingly, these elements are made up from the influencers themselves as they gatekeep other SF influencers to ensure they are keeping to the aims of the SF movement. With this in mind, I now discuss the role that SF influencers have been given by others.

11.2 THE GIVEN ROLE

This section focuses on the role that SF influencers have been given by the DSP of capitalism. To develop this section, I draw on various literatures to capture the emergent themes about monetisation and representation. Although I identified a variety of cast members in Chapter 8, the thread that ties those antagonists together are the Isms, or rather capitalism, sizeism, and racism, and more. The Isms represent the DSP which aims to protect itself. Considering Bourdieu's arguments around fields reproducing themselves and people fighting to uphold the status quo (DiMaggio, 1979, McDonagh et al., 2014), it appears that the aim is to transform SF influencers from agents of change into agents of maintaining the status quo to keep the fashion industry from being radically transformed into a more equitable system. This is not a role that they have conceptualised but rather a role they have been given by and through the Isms. The SF influencers want the fashion industry to be transformed, for the clothes to be sustainable, and for the garment workers to be paid fairly. Therefore, SF influencers see their role as getting people interested in SF by showing that it can be an accessible and fun alternative to fast fashion. However, through

the fast-paced nature of Instagram and the abundance of SF brands as described in Chapter 8, SF influencers seem to always be promoting brands and the latest looks while imploring consumers to do better. The conversation seems to be stuck around brands, as critiqued in LeHew and Patwary (2018), rather than questioning whether or not this is the best way forward. Consequently, although they see their role as leading people to SF, by focusing solely on consumption, it appears that this is fashion as we know it but with a facelift. This section explains how the Isms turn the SF influencers' ownable role into something that still benefits the status quo.

On one hand, the role of SF influencers appears to be to make SF the nicer version of fashion, however, as Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) have argued, sub-fields have the same DNA of the fields that they have emerged from. Therefore, instead of promoting consumption reduction or systemic change, SF influencers put the responsibility for SF consumption and production into the hands of consumers, which is in line with the present DSP. The reality of this given role becomes visible in two main ways: de-radicalising SF [11.2.1] and dressing up the facts [11.2.2]. These two elements are summarised in Table 11.2 and will now be discussed in turn.

Table 11.2 Tools to maintain the status quo

Theme	Description
De-radicalise SF	Presenting a consumption-focused idea of SF that is in line with an incremental approach to environmental change
Dress up the facts	Combining SF facts with playful imagery to make it seem as though the issues are not so serious

11.2.1 De-radicalizing SF: An Image of SF That Does Not Require So Much Change

The first way SF influencers are used as a tool to maintain the status quo is by presenting an image of SF that does not require so much change. Linking back to Chapter 2 and the discussion around pragmatic change, this view favours incremental steps forward over the long term rather than rapid changes. One quote that stood out to me was when an influencer suggested that SF influencers are able to show that consuming fashion sustainably does not require inconvenient practices or radical changes in the way that we live our lives. Although only one quote said this explicitly, this appears to be an implicit undertone to how the #Lifestyle influencers see their role. They emphasise that

they are sharing their SF journey and hope to inspire people along the way, but the changes they make largely revolve around what they consume, and not necessarily how they engage with SF beyond buying clothes. This is congruent with Bly et al.'s (2015) study on SF bloggers; where they did not voluntarily talk about clothes caring practices, such as laundry, in their interviews for the study until prompted by the interviewer. Perhaps because such topics are not usually seen as interesting. This is interesting because from a consumption standpoint, laundering has the highest environmental impact in the clothes consumption process (Bly et al., 2015). This could also be due to the nature of social media where if you want to grow your Instagram, you have to keep up with changes in the algorithm and make sure that your content is engaging and your audience is growing (Newlands and Fieseler, 2020). This means that, as a result, SF influencers have to focus on what fashion audiences deem exciting, which is not laundry.

Although, some influencers do focus on style or educating people about issues in sustainability, the primary way SF influencers contribute to the movement is by sharing SF brands that people may not have heard of and sharing their thoughts around buying SF. Under the guise of capitalism, this is an ideal situation where people communicate that all it takes to change in a complex system is to buy better, whatever that means, and that they should recruit others to do the same. Rather than seeing consumer responsibility as just one part of the puzzle, it appears that influencers frame consumer responsibility as the sole part of the puzzle. As such SF influencers are used as a tool to frame SF as a specific thing to then exclude wider actions or conversations that bring about change to the system.

11.2.2 Dressing Up the Facts

Another role of SF influencers, specifically the #Lifestyle influencers, is to talk about serious issues in a fun way. Yan et al. (2020) found that the participants in their study would not expect to receive information about micro-fibre pollution on social media. However, the findings of this thesis suggest that these influencers will try to dress up SF facts in a way that is interesting through a strategy called baiting. Picture an image of a person and their nice outfit, but the caption is about the state of oceans. The information shared is terrible but perhaps the picture helps to soften the blow and then after consuming this information, you are free to swipe to something better. The

concept is that people may not pay attention to endless statistics or be moved by catastrophic imagery; therefore, by taking a more subtle approach influencers are able to talk about issues in SF in less obvious ways. However, a consequence of this approach is that the issues then begin to lose their seriousness. I argue that this is intentional on the part of social media. Consider this argument from Horkheimer and Adorno (2002, p.57):

'But the original affinity between business and entertainment reveals itself in the meaning of entertainment itself: as society's apologia. To be entertained means to be in agreement. Entertainment makes itself possible only by insulating itself from the totality of the social process, making itself stupid and perversely renouncing from the first the inescapable claim of any work, even the most trivial: in its restrictedness to reflect the whole. Amusement always means putting things out of mind, forgetting suffering, even when it is on display. At its root is powerlessness. It is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality but from the last thought of resisting that reality. The liberation which amusement promises is from thinking as negation.'

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argue that in the culture industry, media entertainment, such as social media, acts as a balm for the trials and tribulations our society faces. In doing so, although people may be presented with real information about suffering or systemic issues on social media, by shrouding it in amusement and a myriad of other content, there is no real call to action or accountability. Perhaps one of the reasons why SF influencers focus on consumption is so that they do not feel powerless since although they cannot change structural barriers in society by themselves, they can change where they shop.

11.3 CONSTRAINTS: MONETISATION

Although SF influencers can be very useful in getting people through the proverbial “Sustainable Fashion Door”, this discussion has highlighted how SF influencers can be used as tools to maintain social structures. The question of how this is done, seems to be rooted in money. Simmel (1991) argues that money can be used to unify some aspects while also separating others. This argument can be seen in the findings of this thesis in how money, as discussed in Chapter 10, can be used to support, or constrain influencer platforms to achieve certain aims. Insights from arts marketing

suggests that sometimes creative people with platforms intentionally create personal brands that can be easily commercialised; therefore, they are strategic in how best to build and control their brands (Kerrigan et al., 2011; Preece and Kerrigan, 2015). In light of this, my thesis has found that monetisation is a key factor in the role of an SF influencer. It can be used to constrain the influencer role in the SF movement in two main ways: monetising visibility and the second about monetising conversations. Both will now be discussed respectively.

11.3.1 Monetising visibility

Because of the value that influencers are able to garner for brands, it is now expected that influencers get paid for the work that they do for brands (Newlands and Fieseler, 2020). To catch the attention of brands, influencers need to gain an audience worth paying for (Abidin, 2016; Newlands and Fieseler, 2020). However, visibility is not the only factor that brands have in mind when choosing influencers. In Bishop's (2021) study on brand safety and social media influencer management companies, they argue that brands and algorithms are not neutral and that decisions of who they decide to work with are rooted in racism. They explain that 'blackness specifically has been bound up with risk in cultural industries' (Bishop, 2021, p.5). In marketing in general, marketing agencies have engaged in discriminatory practices in creating marketing images that reproduce inequalities found in wider society (Gopaldas and Siebert, 2018). For example, according to Bishop (2021), black influencers get fewer and more poorly paid commercial opportunities than white influencers. This is interesting as content created by black women is often appropriated by brands with minimal, if any, acknowledgement (Sobande et al., 2020). These studies were conducted in mainstream markets but in extending these arguments to sustainable markets, similar arguments can be made.

I first discuss how race and size can act as constraints for SF influencers to effectively monetise their platforms. A key finding of my thesis, as explored through Chapter 7, was the lack of representation in the movement. It is not the case that the black influencers are not there but that they are less visible because they do not get highlighted in the movement. This suggests that for some influencers, acknowledgement of their accrued visibility can go unnoticed, and the monetary value diminished. For example, a high visibility, black influencer in this study has rightfully criticised the unfair compensation they are offered by SF brands. The invisibility, or lack of

acknowledged visibility by brands and the wider SF movement, may be resulting in fewer opportunities for the marginalised influencers in this study. In reference to size, as mentioned SF brands do not usually offer extended sizing. So not only do plus-sized people lack representation and options for shopping, but they are also restricted in how they can monetise their platforms. The usual routes of working with brands is not open to them if the brand does not create clothes in extended sizing. Further, plus-sized individuals also face stigmatisation in the media. Stereotypically, brands have not wanted their clothing to be associated with plus-sized people (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Harju and Huovinen, 2015). Therefore, brands in the fashion industry perceive that there is no money in making or marketing fashion in extended sizes or using plus-sized people to model their clothing. So, while slim influencers are able to exploit this market opportunity, black and/or plus-sized people may have to consider alternative forms of monetisation. Restricting who is able to fund their work in the SF movement helps to restrict the kind of conversations that can be expected of SF influencers as the brands choose which platforms to amplify and elevate.

11.3.2 Monetising conversations

Moreover, in terms of brand safety, brands usually want to avoid anything that could risk their brand image which includes controversial or political topics (Bishop, 2021). Certain topics such as white supremacy or consumption reduction, are not “brand-friendly”. Some brands also ask influencers not to do certain things in a contract (Bishop, 2021), so this may also restrict the influencers’ voice. Ebert and Sindermann (2020) put it this way ‘The influencer becomes an instrument, a medium of the company, from this perspective, which entails, to a certain extent, the commodification of the influencer’ (Ebert and Sindermann, 2020, p. 83).

In light of this, SF influencers are not incentivised to ask too many questions or to be too critical or controversial lest they become unappealing for brand partnerships. By monetising this space through brand partnerships, people who may or may not have had a relatively pure interest in sustainability are now able to make money off that interest which then seems to switch ones focus from the issues at hand to questions of ‘how can I grow and sustain my platform?’. By positioning working with brands as a service to others, people are still able to feel good about what they do despite the fact that they are still promoting products and consumption. This could be why some

of the more critical influencers do not want to be associated with the term ‘influencer’. Once influencers start to worry about appealing to brands, they may shy away from calling out hypocrisy. This appears to be a form of censorship to protect brand interests when working with influencers. Some influencers, in particular #Activist influencers, are more vocal about calling out racism or brands that claim to be sustainable but are greenwashing. Some of the influencers in this study explained that they would not allow a brand to pay them and to control their voice. This has forced some influencers to be more creative in how they monetise their platforms.

Finally, despite all of this, there is no guarantee for anyone that they will become a successful influencer (Duffy, 2016; Newlands and Fieseler, 2020). Previous research has found that the monetary beneficiaries of influencer work is highly unequal with aspiring influencers putting in a lot of labour to be appealing yet brands are benefiting the most (Duffy, 2016; Hund and McGuigan, 2019). At least three of the influencers in this study make well below the minimum wage for the US and UK when they break down their cost per hour. Some influencers work with brands and do not charge them for the promotion, even though the brand will benefit commercially. Some seem to do this because they are just happy to be recognised, while others feel as though because they have other streams of income, they can work with brands altruistically. Working with brands does have some positives for the SF influencers as they get free stuff, and they are able to use the brand as additional content so they can continue to entertain their audience. This finding complements previous findings on influencers creating ‘shoppable lives’ which can be purchased by their audiences (Hund and McGuigan, 2019). However, the benefits still seem unequal to the labour put in, especially considering the additional labour that black and other marginalised groups must do to play the Instagram game.

11.4 CONSTRAINTS: INVISIBILITY

Throughout this thesis, the themes of representation and inclusiveness, or rather the lack thereof, in the SF movement have come to the forefront. Previous SF studies have not really engaged with race and size discrimination. Although the literature has looked at the uses of social media in promoting SF, the literature has not yet developed theories around what gets promoted and by whom. This is important because theories that portray SF on social media as neutral do not quite

tell the whole story as they only portray SF in a specific way. Moreover, despite many studies around the attitude behaviour gap in SF (Hiller, 2010; Reimers et al., 2016; Wiederhold et al., 2018), few studies have considered structural elements that influence the SF movement's development (Ertekin and Atik, 2015). Previous consumer research has explored race in the marketplace, but the research is still nascent (Thomas, 2013; Crockett, 2017; Johnson et al., 2017). More recently, Grier et al. (2019), Grier and Poole (2020), and Francis and Robertson (2021) have challenged the marketing discipline to seriously engage with race and ethnicity and to view the experiences of people colour as legitimate in the marketplace instead of just treating it as an optional independent variable. This section discusses how these themes have emerged throughout the thesis to further call for more diverse research.

11.4.1 The Need to Re-Imagine SF and SF Influencing

In the SF movement, questions of who gets to speak and be seen are now at the forefront. Prior to the murder of George Floyd by police officers on May 25, 2020, the SF world was largely silent about the challenges that black influencers faced in being recognised in the SF field. The lack of representation in the SF movement appeared to not be recognised by those accepted in the dominant groups. Previous literature on sustainability found that in some environmental groups 'many don't see inequity and injustice, racism and classism as their responsibility,' (Agyeman, 2008, p. 751). Combined with my concept of *Instagram Islands*, where each person is only concerned with the development of their own profile, and the trend towards individualism, people are encouraged to look out only for their own interests and not to consider why certain things may be happening to others or where these others are in the movement. However, more recently SF influencers have been picking up the call to share the mic.

Although this discussion so far has focused on representation in terms of size and race, there are other people who also lack representation in the movement. Older people, men, and people with disabilities, are not represented in my sample, the SF literature, or seen as top SF influencers according to media lists. Including people from a variety of intersections is a huge gap in the SF literature and society in general. In terms of size and plus size inclusion, Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) and Harju and Huovinen (2015) have argued that plus-sized women often find themselves

being excluded from the mainstream fashion market in terms of product offerings. Historically, society, and specifically the fashion industry, has decreed slim bodies as the ideal body type and associate plus sized bodies with negative attributes (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Harju and Huovinen, 2015).

The exclusion of black SF influencers creates the image that white SF influencers dominate the movement. This fact can be found in other industries, and specifically the fashion industry, that the SF movement is aiming to displace. Turning to media studies, previous literature has found that black people in the UK often feel excluded from the wider media landscape and are not represented in the mainstream media (Sobande et al., 2020). Steele (2018, p. 119) has argued that ‘those who are a part of the dominant group have access to a plethora of representations in popular culture.’ In terms of SF, according to the lists used to develop the sample for this study as described in Chapter 5, many of the top SF influencers are white and the findings suggest similar results. Moreover, Hirji (2021, p.89) argues that ‘If virtual public spheres or subaltern counterpublics do still hold political promise, it is because they allow all of these different voices to come forward.’ Likewise, Jafari et al. (2012) argue that consumer research has largely focused on Western nations or looks at Non-Western nations from a Western perspective. They further argue that theories have largely been developed from a Western standpoint and then generalised to cover everywhere else. The findings suggest that the SF conversations tend to revolve around Western nations consuming better to save those in other nations. Rather than including those nations in SF discussions and valuing their cultural knowledge, people tend to focus on knowledge produced by Western nations.

The findings of my thesis suggest that white influencers from Europe and the US are highly represented in the SF movement. Gray (2005, p. 95, cited in Bishop, 2021, p.5) argued that there is a belief that ‘White audiences are “the ideal subjects of consumerism and representation”’. Whereas those who are not part of the dominant group feel excluded and create their own space and networks within the movement. Many of the influencers in this study have spoken about using their platforms to increase representation and to talk about topics in a way that is culturally relevant to their communities. Blogs and digital platforms have become spaces for self-representation for black bloggers in the US and UK (Gabriel. 2016; Steele, 2018; Sobande et al., 2020). Self-representation is important for marginalised groups. Sobande et al.’s (2020, p.424) paper

contributes to the call for ‘more research regarding race, the marketplace, experiences of marginalisation and associated coping mechanisms.’ I also contribute to this conversation by shedding additional light on this group of influencers by showing how much additional labour goes into occupying the role of SF influencers. I extend Abidin’s (2016b) term of visibility labour to also include the *representational labour*, or the labour that black and other marginalised people must do to be included in movements. In light of ideas around the public sphere where people should be able to come and engage in democratic dialogue, these same spheres are subject to the same structural inequalities as the social context they belong to (Hirji, 2021). However, my thesis shows that despite this, these influencers aim to challenge the norms in the industry by including diverse voices and opinions and have empathy in the SF practices they suggest. The influencers in this thesis apply four main adaptive strategies to resist their lack of representation: *taking up space*, *bringing in experiential knowledge*, *being a voice*, and *sharing the mic*. In doing so, they aim to use their position to show that underrepresented groups do belong in the SF movement and not only do they belong, but they can also contribute based on their experiential knowledge. Having voice and being able to express oneself is an important function for blogs for people of colour (Gabriel, 2015). However, reflecting on the public sphere, my thesis shows that although these influencers may not be included in the mainstream conversations in the SF movement, they are still able to utilise their platforms to take up space and build networks to counteract this marginalisation. They themselves act as representors for others looking for representation in the SF movement – which can also open them up to online hate and abuse (Duffy and Hund, 2019; McCarthy and Glozer, 2021). Moreover, considering the visibility labour that all influencers have to do as part of that role, black and people from other marginalised groups also must perform additional visibility labour of being seen in the space by not just brands but by fellow members. These influencers have to work against embedded racism in the social media ecosystem to be recognised in their fields.

Considering the lack of representation in the SF movement, it is important to reimagine SF in a manner that is more inclusive and equitable. The social movements literature (Crossley, 2002) helps to explain why representation is important. As mentioned in the section 11.1.2, I explained how there are certain traits that characterise someone as a SF influencer and makes them part of the community. Luna (2017) argues that authenticity in a social movement becomes even more

tricky in situations where ‘...the dominant group’s perspective has already shared the discursive structure. Thus, marginal movement actors must simultaneously engage and challenge that structure to offer their perspective.’ In this study there were lots of questions around what gets included in the SF conversation, who gets to speak for whom, and whose voice is amplified. There have been calls for dominant influencers to ‘share the mic’ and let someone else’s story be told. Steinfield and Holt’s (2020) study on female farmers in Kenya, they argued that assuming that everyone has the same capacity to cause or adapt to changes in the marketplace ignores the presence of power, and inequality, and may result in theories that are inconsistent with consumer experiences and behaviours. This finding is echoed in Johnson et al.’s (2017) study on privilege and inclusion in the market. Mirabito et al. (2016) argues that it is important for such stereotypes to be acknowledged and confronted in the marketplace. Consequently, it is important to reimagine SF in a way that opens the movement to others rather than making the movement narrower. It has been argued that marketing needs to start asking difficult questions (Prothero et al., 2021). To develop theories around SF and sustainable communication, the problem of invisibility has to be taken seriously. Representation is important to developing a sustainable society that is also equitable and just for all (Agyeman, 2008).

11.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to discuss the findings presented in Chapters 6-10 in light of the literature. I have drawn on several literatures from SF to macro-marketing to media studies, in order to discuss the role of SF Influencers. The chapter first discussed the three main approaches of SF influencing and places them on a continuum between #Lifestyle influencers and #Activist influencers [11.1.1]. From there I have discussed common strategies to discussing SF on Instagram. The chapter then considered what unifies SF influencers as an influencer category. Here I introduced the term of the ‘*allowable character*’ to describe the shared characteristics that make up the SF influencer habitus [11.1.2]. I then introduced the ‘*given role*’ which represents how the DSP of the capitalistic market system utilises SF influencers to maintain the status quo of the fashion industry [11.2]. This discussion shows that the role of SF influencers in the SF movement is not wholly good or bad but rather it is a role taken by individuals with mostly good intentions in the context of a DSP that priorities excessive production and consumption.

Within the present DSP, the SF influencers' influence may be used in ways they did not anticipate. Through this discussion section I have aimed to show how SF influencers are being used as a tool to maintain the status quo. I then discussed two of the constraints that impact the effectiveness of the role. I introduced two main themes: monetisation [11.3] and invisibility [11.4]. The question is who is really benefiting from all of this labour and the answer is not the SF influencer, or their audiences, or the SF social media public, or the wider SF movement but it appears that it is the DSP.

12 CONCLUSION

12.0 INTRODUCTION

This thesis aimed to answer the question of ‘what is the role of SF influencers in the SF movement?’ By answering this question and fulfilling the objectives of the study, this thesis builds towards a more inclusive theory of the role of sustainable fashion influencers in society. Through an interpretive methodology and dramaturgical lens, the analysis shows that the role of SF influencers is shaped by the SF influencer habitus and also by the other actors in the field. The overarching contribution of this thesis is the novel delineation of the SF role, its potential and the practical obstacles that need to be overcome for it to be realised. This chapter draws this drama to close by weaving everything together. The chapter clarifies the key contributions of this thesis as well as providing avenues for future research. This study has drawn on several literatures, sustainable fashion, social media, sustainable communications, and dramaturgy (Benford and Hunt, 1992) and Bourdieu (1977) each will now be discussed in turn.

12.1 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH: SF LITERATURE

Previously the SF literature has taken a broad view of SF on social media, preferring to look at the content rather than those behind it (de Lenne and Vandebosch, 2017; Kim et al., 2020). Presently, current theories of the role of SF social media influencers or bloggers in the movement have identified one type of influencer, one that mostly talks about brands rather than any other form of SF action (LeHew and Patwary, 2018). However, this thesis contributes to the SF literature by identifying the three approaches to SF influencing, as well as the ‘ownable role’, or rather the role that SF influencers have created for themselves. This finding fulfils Objective 1, which delineates the role of the SF influencer by investigating how they conceptualise their roles and responsibilities in the SF social media space. Within the ownable role there are three main types of SF influencing: #Lifestyle, #Activist, and #Bit-of-both. #Lifestyle influencers focus on changing the image of SF while #Activist influencers focus on advocating for others within SF, while #Bit-of-both influencers do some of both. The different types of influencers are useful as ideally, people will

follow more than one type of account and engage with SF offline, to have a more rounded perspective on what SF entails. Similarly, previous research has identified two main ways of communicating about SF. The first way focuses on making SF a lifestyle choice while the second focuses on the trendiness of SF (Lundahl, 2014; Jones, 2020). My research has found four unique communication strategies in the SF influencer space: *fluidity*, *baiting*, *frank talking*, and *SF for all*. These strategies do not present SF as a trend or as something optional, rather SF is something that everyone has an obligation to do, albeit to different degrees. Although these strategies utilise different techniques, the end result is the same, which is to persuade people to engage with SF. The role of the SF influencer has great potential considering the variety of strategies. This is because they are able to reach multiple types of people with a message that will resonate with them. All of the strategies serve to make a SF lifestyle attainable in some way, which may spark people's interest in learning about SF and other environmentally friendly behaviours. Further research could develop these themes more by identifying when certain strategies are most effective or by observing these themes in other contexts. Also considering digital personhood, further research could adopt a temporal lens to see how the SF influencers and their strategies evolve and how they manage co-existing presentations of self on their platforms (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016). This thesis also introduces the idea of the SF influencer habitus which acts as boundaries for SF influencers to be recognised in their role (Bourdieu, 1977). Identifying the SF influencer habitus is important to understanding the logic underpinning the SF influencer role. Despite the existence of different approaches, there is a unity amongst the category that creates standards for others. Further research could explore what happens when people deviate too far from the norm for their category and how that may impact a social movement.

In Chapter 2, I discussed how there are many barriers to SF consumption including price, style, and accessibility (Harris et al., 2016; Henninger et al., 2016; Lai et al., 2017). The SF literature has not yet engaged with SF influencer experience; therefore, the practical obstacles have not yet been explored. This is where my research contributes. In terms of Objective 2, the aim was to explore what facilitates or constrains the SF influencers' ability to carry out their role. Through the analysis I have shown that many of the factors of being a SF influencer can either be constraints or enablers depending on which side of the coin one is on. The key elements seem to be: access to technology, access to financial resources, location, culture, personal characteristics (e.g., race and

size), expertise, lack of inclusiveness, and the affordances of Instagram. Access to technology refers to having the appropriate tools to create the content such as a smartphone with a high-quality camera while access to resources refers to the ability to buy SF items and also the ability to afford the technology. Personal characteristics, expertise, location, and culture were the four bases of exclusion identified in Chapter 7. The implications of this exclusion were discussed in Chapter 11.5 Another factor is social media which enables all of these individuals to have a platform yet also shapes the way those platforms can be used. Social media shapes certain types of SF content by favouring visual content and requiring a quick turn around on content, even though more in-depth content may require more time to make. As a result, SF influencing is largely a Western middle-class pursuit as it requires people to be able to afford the 'basic tools', have spare time, be slim, and adhere to the dominant DSP in the west. They have to be able to convey SF in a quick, creative, and interesting way which may come at the cost of covering topics that are more mundane. So, despite how SF influencers conceptualise their role, this thesis has illustrated how SF influencing can be a privileged space to occupy which is something not yet fully acknowledged in the current SF literature.

Additionally, through the development of the concept of the 'given role', it is evident that the market utilises SF influencers in order to sell more SF. The primary way that influencers can see a return on their time and efforts is by becoming advertisers for others. Therefore, the SF influencer role is constrained in such a way to encourage consumption while not necessarily being seen (by the influencers or their audiences) to do so. This is evidenced by some influencers having a moment of enlightenment where they realise that they are just being paid to promote products and deciding to either diversify their income, rely less on SF brands or to get additional jobs, or to continue as usual. If we are not careful, SF may become the new fast fashion if the attitudes and habits around clothing consumption are not addressed. Thus, in SF research, it is important to consider the implications of the SF content as well as who benefits from its current positioning. Further research could be done in light of this, and theories would be greatly enriched by applying this additional lens of analysis. Also, considering the constraint of monetisation, further research could examine how funding models affect sustainable personal brands and if/how full-time sustainable influencing is possible. There are many practical obstacles for the SF influencer role to overcome for its full potential to be realised.

Moreover, this thesis also contributes to the SF social media literature (de Lenne and Vandebosch, 2017; Kim et al., 2020, Lee and Weder, 2021; Orminski et al., 2021) as it does not tend to question SF social media content, with the exception of LeHew and Patwary (2018). This creates the illusion that SF is largely positive, however, this thesis contributes to the literature by illustrating how SF is not exempt from ‘The Isms’ of society. This finding is a result of Objective 3 which was explored in Chapter 7. This objective explored who is cast in the role of SF influencer, the relationships within the cast, and what implications that may have on the SF movement. Chapter 11.5 discussed how who brands choose to work with creates an image of SF. When brands only choose to work with slim and/or white influencers and make their products luxury, it creates the perception that SF is only for white, luxury consumers, however if SF is an important issue, then it needs to be for everyone. Other academics have critiqued this trend in the wider sustainability literature (Lee, 2017; Anantharaman, 2018; Kennedy et al., 2020), however this conversation has not yet reached SF. Therefore, this thesis furthers the discussion of these important issues in the SF space by showing how different forms of exclusion can disproportionately constrain the roles of some SF influencers while amplifying others. I have identified four adaptive strategies: *being a voice*, *taking up space*, *bringing in experiential knowledge*, and *sharing the mic*. Through these strategies, SF influencers aim to overcome some of the obstacles that society places on them. More research can be done in this space to question why the lack of representation exists or consider ways to increase representation in the SF space. Reflecting on Hamilton et al. (2014) and their use of social representations theory, further research may consider how current representations of SF may have negative effects on those (not) being represented, and how people perceive them. Further, although I aimed to include a variety of people, I am still writing from a Western perspective and YouTube and Instagram are also companies based in the West. Therefore, these results are situated in a very specific context. Research from the ‘Global South’ is especially needed as much other work on SF is from a Western perspective and although there is still work to be done here, it is time to share the mic. Finally, Objective 4 aimed to explore how other actors are conceptualised through the eyes of the SF influencers to illustrate the complexities of this space. Through the lens of dramaturgy, I have identified the following characters: *Fast Fashion Influencers*, *Big Fast Fashion Brands*, *(Over)consumers*, *Those affected by the lack of SF*, *Audience*, *Media*, *SF Brands*, and *Social Media*. Throughout Chapter 2, it is evident that there are a variety of actors engaged in SF.

However, by drawing on dramaturgy, I have also identified and conceptualised novel plotlines that SF influencers draw upon to justify their actions in the SF space. The SF influencers create a narrative where they are distinct (Bourdieu, 1984) from their Fast Fashion Influencer counterparts by being the hero in light of ‘Big Fast Fashion Brands’ and ‘(Over)Consumers’, who are exploiting others (the garment workers and the environment). Social media and the media are both seen as avenues to further the SF message; however, their profit motive may limit the effectiveness of these messages (Lundahl, 2014; Jones, 2020). Further, this thesis has shown that SF brands can also exercise monetary control over the SF social media space by offering little to no pay to some influencers, while providing a lot of pay to others. In doing so they are able to influence the SF conversation on social media. By understanding how SF influencers conceptualise different actors in the movement, we can better understand the relationship between the SF influencer role, SF content, and the wider SF movement. Understanding the different dynamics at play can also serve to develop a more critical theory of SF influencing, which this thesis starts to build. Moreover, although these relationships are presented as being static, they are actually quite dynamic as the influencers and other actors adapt to changes that other actors make (Preece and Kerrigan, 2015). Further research could adopt a longitudinal approach to see how these relationships and plotlines shift over time in light of developments in SF.

12.2 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH: SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRIBUTIONS

Previously, literature on social media has engaged with the public/private divide by looking at how people navigate their different identities (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016), try to create a positive image (Leban et al., 2021), or aim to stay relatable (McQuarrie et al., 2013). However, SF influencers present a unique context. In SF, Bly et al. (2015) looked at the private SF consumption of SF bloggers but did not consider their public life. This thesis has contributed to conversations around this by explaining how the public/private divide poses additional challenges and practical obstacles for sustainable influencers. These individuals base their platforms, and sometimes even incomes, off of their private consumption practices and invite their audiences to emulate them. Unlike non-SF influencers, SF influencers are also aiming to encourage people to join the movement, illustrating their potential for the wider SF movement. Collectively, their actions do not just reflect

on them, but on the movement as a whole. By upholding themselves as people of a high moral standard, they have to continue to portray such an image lest they be accused of greenwashing. Therefore, I contribute to the literature (McQuarrie et al., 2013; Duffy and Hund, 2019; Leban et al., 2021), by identifying three novel strategies that SF influencers use to align the public and private: *strategic honesty*, *strategic concealment*, and *strategic disclosure*. These strategies serve to protect the SF influencers' credibility, humanity, and authenticity as they navigate the complexities of the SF space. More research could be done on identifying when certain strategies are utilised. Another interesting question is to explore how much unsustainable behaviour one can get away with before they have betrayed their category.

Moreover, Abidin (2016) has defined the different forms of labour that influencers undertake to become successful influencers. However, these definitions do not include the representational labour that influencers have to do to be recognised in their own categories. This is where my research contributes as this is another obstacle for SF influencers to overcome. I have extended the definition of visibility labour to include the representational labour that marginalised SF influencers undertake to create space for themselves and others at different intersections in the SF movement. While other influencers have to worry about gaining attention from brands, influencers that lack representation also have to actively counteract it by utilising strategies such as *taking up space*, *bringing in experiential knowledge*, and *being voice for others*. Influencers with privilege in this area can also participate by sharing the mic. Social media research is beginning to have these conversations, consider for example the work done by Gabriel (2016), Steele (2018), Sobande et al. (2020), Bishop (2021), and other digital media scholars such as André Brock (2018). However, there is still a lot more work to be done regarding representation and social media in terms of influencers.

12.3 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH: SUSTAINABLE COMMUNICATION

Finally, the third area for contribution is sustainable communication, this draws on arguments made in Chapter 3.5.

This thesis contributes to conversations around the green commodity discourse described in Chapter 3.5 (Prothero and Fitchett, 2000; Prothero et al. 2010; Kemper and Ballantine, 2019). This thesis extends the discussion on the green commodity discourse by broadening the domain of the blind green consumer, by including consumers who partake in SF not because they have to (e.g., not purchasing clothing for financial reasons), or because they care about the environment, but because they care about fashion and trends. These consumers represent those that engage in sustainable practices because it is the thing to do, not because they know or feel a conviction about SF issues. This is one area where a strategy needs to be combined with the green commodity discourse because this type of consumer will engage with SF practices but because they do not understand why it exists, may result in the cycle of fast fashion consumption continuing.

This thesis also contributes to this conversation by showing how the majority of the influencers have adopted this strategy of trying to show people that there is another, better way to consume fashion. SF influencers try to shape consumer desire by illustrating how SF can be cool and fashionable through the message that it is all about finding what works for you. On one hand, SF influencers show that the green commodity discourse can be effective in getting people interested in SF. At the same time, this thesis provides evidence for a more transformative approach as discussed by Gordon et al. (2011) which requires a mix of lifestyle messaging and change at the institutional level. One issue of the green commodity discourse is that it aims to use the market to communicate messages of sustainability but at the same time the market is structured by inequality. Therefore, by just using the market as is, the output is consumer actions that still reproduce the failings of the market. This resonates with the #Activist influencer approach which still advocates for individual change but also calls for systemic change as well. Therefore, this thesis demonstrates that a variety of approaches are needed for SF to reach its full potential and for a sustainable future.

12.4 INSIGHTS GAINED FROM DRAMATURGY AND BOURDIEU

Benford and Hunt's (1992) dramaturgical framework and Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), have been instrumental in the development of these contributions. These perspectives have a lot of synergies. The main areas of these aligned theoretical approaches that I draw on include 'scripting,' 'staging', and 'foils'.

By focusing on the concept of ‘scripting’ (Benford and Hunt, 1992), I was able to deep dive into the specific role of SF influencers. Combined with the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), I was able to identify the shared logic underpinning the SF influencer role. Additionally, knowing that in a field there are dominant and subordinate positions (Entwistle and Rocamora, 2006), and linking this to dramaturgy, I was able to identify how some cast members can be made subordinate through exclusion. The dramaturgical lens also enabled me to identify how the influencers draw on other actors in the field as plotlines to motivate their actions. ‘Staging’ enabled me to consider the management of the SF influencer platform in terms of content creation and monetisation (Benford and Hunt, 1992). Dramaturgy provided me with the language to investigate how SF influencers sustain their roles by considering how decisions made in the SF influencer business model can impact the content that influencers create. Moreover, using drama as a metaphor enabled me to identify the use of foils. Foils are a literary device that Bourdieu (1984) invokes to describe how people create distinctiveness from others. The idea of foils was useful here to delineate what SF influencers perceive themselves not to be, which is fast fashion influencers. Overall, the dramaturgical framework as developed by Benford and Hunt (1992) and the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) were key in garnering many of the theoretical insights of this thesis.

These perspectives can be very useful to consumer researchers in providing the language and framework to explore characters and consider their perspectives in the complex context of sustainability challenges. These perspectives are also useful for dealing with social media publics, where people are united around a shared interest but are not quite a community (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2016). It is useful because one can break down one social position (SF influencer) into a variety of distinct characters (#Lifestyle influencer, #Activist influencer, and #Bit-of-both), which allows for deeper analysis around the ‘backstage’ of social media activity. Further research can implement these perspectives to understand not just the content (or the ‘performance’) that people produce but also the strategic intent behind social media through the concepts of ‘scripting’ and ‘staging’ (Benford and Hunt, 1992). These approaches are also useful in investigating representation and inclusion by providing a framework to investigate dominant speaking roles and narratives.

12.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

To conclude, this thesis has presented the scripting and staging of the SF social media drama to understand the role of SF influencers in the wider movement towards SF. Through this drama, I have drawn on three main literatures: SF, social media, and sustainable communication. I have also drawn on Bourdieu and dramaturgy to understand this space more. In answering the research question, I have begun to build a theory towards a more inclusive view of the role of SF influencers in society. Throughout the thesis, the need for an inclusive approach to SF has been evident. As a result, we have seen that the role of SF influencers is not as straightforward as it seems. The SF influencers have to promote SF not just to their audiences but also they are actively defining SF and SF influencing on social media. Although at some points, I have thoroughly critiqued the #Lifestyle influencing approach, I do believe that all of these approaches are necessary to target people at different stages of their SF journeys. However, by bringing to light the role of the market through the given role, I hope that influencers will be able to critically reflect on their practices and the aspects taken as normal through the SF influencer habitus. This research has also exposed that SF is not immune from bias and discrimination and in some ways perpetuates it. In light of this, the literature and those in the movement need to acknowledge this in order to move forward. In terms of brands, I hope that those working in SF will reflect on their practices and privilege and address their role in the lack of representation in SF. This research has also contributed to the social media influencer literature by bringing in ideas of sustainability. As of yet, the literature has not really engaged with sustainability but as people demand change from institutions, including influencers, they will ultimately have to consider this subject. Thus, this thesis provides useful beginnings to that conversation. Finally, this thesis contributes to discussions of sustainable communication by showing its relevance and continued use in the social media context.

Overall, my hope for this thesis is that it will advance SF and the wider marketing literature to recognise the importance of representation in developing sustainable solutions that are equitable for all.

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14 APPENDIX A: DATABASE

Table 14.1 Profile of Database

Name	How were they found	Type of influencer	Instagram label
Moderas.in	Snowball	Fashion	Personal Blog
The Eco Diary	Snowball	Enthusiast	Personal Blog
Thrifts and Tangles	YouTube Data Tools	Fashion	Blogger
Styleand.sustain	Snowball	Fashion	Media
Benita_robledo	List	Activist, Fashion	Unknown
Mariko Ashley	Pilot study	Enthusiast	Blogger
Aja barber	Pilot study	Information	Unknown
Ohhhhhhhoney	Snowball	Enthusiast	Blogger
Marmag Creation	Snowball	Enthusiast, Entrepreneurial	Digital Creator
Curiously Conscious	Pilot study	Fashion	Blogger
Coconut_cracked	List	Fashion, Entrepreneurial	Personal Blog
Sustainable.maria	List	Entrepreneurial	Designer
Thebeaologist	Snowball	Fashion	

Name	How were they found	Type of influencer	Instagram label
Heylilahey	YouTube Data Tools	Activist	Blogger
Waterthruskin	List/ YouTube Data Tools	Activist	Public figure
Tollydollyposh	List	Activist, Entrepreneurial	Unknown
Unmaterialgirl	List	Activist/ Stylist	Blogger
I.thrift.shit	Snowball	Fashion	Unknown
Theflipside	List	Fashion	Personal Blog
Consciousnchic	List	Fashion	Public figure
Thatcurlytop	Snowball	Fashion	Unknown
Gabrielasage	Snowball	Fashion	Unknown
Callmeflowerchild	List	Fashion	Unknown
Cookiecat.herine	List	Fashion	Unknown

Name	How were they found	Type of influencer	Instagram label
Thriftdiary	Snowball	Fashion	Personal Blog
Venetiafalconer	List/ YouTube Data Tools	Fashion	Producer
Letstalkslow	WWD	Fashion, Entrepreneurial	Digital Creator
Jazmin vegaz	Snowball	Enthusiast	Personal Blog
Petraalexandra	List	Enthusiast	Unknown
Theconstantcloset	List	Enthusiast	Digital Creator
Shannydoots	List	Enthusiast	Just for Fun
My Green Closet	YouTube Data Tools	Enthusiast	Blogger
Inspiroue	YouTube Data Tools	Enthusiast	Digital Creator
Just Lauren Johnson	YouTube Data Tools	Enthusiast	Blogger
Niomi Smart	YouTube Data Tools/ List	Enthusiast	Digital Creator
Kissenundkarma	List	Entrepreneurial	Unknown
Mariana_nichifor	List	Entrepreneurial	Blogger
Michelleforgood	List	Entrepreneurial	Unknown

Name	How were they found	Type of influencer	Instagram label
Sustainablychic	List	Stylist	Digital Creator
Use Less	YouTube Data Tools/List	Stylist	Digital Creator
Nattystylist	List	Stylist	Cause
Fayedelanty	List	Stylist	Personal Blog
Aditimayer	List	Activist, Entrepreneurial	Artist
Kristen Leo	YouTube Data Tools	Activist	Unknown
Marta canga	List	Fashion	Blogger
Fairknalt	List	Fashion	Blogger
I GOT IT FROM THE CHARITY SHOP	List	Fashion	Personal Blog

Name	How Were They Found	Type Of Influencer	Instagram Label
Style.Destino	List	Fashion	Blogger
Truncation (Karin.Rambo)	List	Fashion	Blogger
Conscious Life and Style (Conscious style)	List	Fashion	Blogger
The Green Edition (Thegreenedition)	List	Fashion	Personal Blog
Tess Montgomery	List	Fashion	Digital Creator
Die Konsumentin	List	Fashion	Society & Culture
Styleme.Green	List	Fashion	Blogger
When_Sara_Smiles	List	Fashion	Personal Blog
Ruth Macgilp	List	Fashion	Digital Creator
Passing Whimsies	List	Fashion	Personal Blog
Uppishlondon	List	Fashion	Personal Blog
Intotheeco	List	Fashion	Blogger
Beatriceturner	List	Fashion	Digital Creator
Shaesburns	List	Fashion	Just For Fun

Name	How Were They Found	Type Of Influencer	Instagram Label
Jillematthews	List	Fashion	Blogger
Theniftythrifter_	Personal - Attended An Event	Enthusiast	Personal Blog
Notbuyingnew	Personal Knowledge	Fashion	Unknown
Madhurduittah	Personal Knowledge	Enthusiast	Unknown
Double3posure	List	Fashion	Unknown
Leevosburgh	List	Fashion	Digital Creator
Nati Macchiato	List	Enthusiast	Blogger
Flaunt Your Fancy	List	Enthusiast	Personal Blog
Evagoesthrifting	Personal Knowledge	Enthusiast Influencer	Blogger
Linednotes	List	Enthusiast Influencer	Unknown
Emma Slade Edmondson	Snowball	Entrepreneurial	Public Figure
Marielle.Elizabeth	List	Activist, Entrepreneurial	Unknown

Name	How were they found	Type of influencer	Instagram label
A Sustainable Mess	List	Entrepreneurial	Digital Creator
My Slow World	List	Entrepreneurial	Entrepreneur
The thrifty tomboy	List	Entrepreneurial	Unknown
Maridalor	List	Entrepreneurial	Personal Blog
Jenniferbnini	List	Entrepreneurial	Unknown
Denasimaite	YouTube Data Tools	Entrepreneurial	Entrepreneur
The consistency project	List	Entrepreneurial	Community
Alenactran	Article	Fashion	Digital Creator
The Discerning Brute	Snowball	Entrepreneurial	Fashion Designer
Alden Wicker	List	Information	Journalist
Vanessa Johnson @thecannyfashionista	List	Stylist	Unknown
Op_shop_to_runway	List	Stylist	Unknown
Msbeltempo	List	Stylist	Personal Blog
Saving the grace	Personal	Fashion, Entrepreneurial	Unknown
Meru_turao	List (Melaninass)	Stylist	Design And Fashion

15 APPENDIX B: CASTING CALL

I have developed these fictional casting calls to describe the cast for the #Lifestyle influencers, then the #Activist influencers, and finally the #Bit-of-both influencers.

THE #LIFESTYLE INFLUENCER

We are looking for a happy, fun young woman to play the role of #Lifestyle influencer. Although we are open to all ethnicities and nationalities, we would like to encourage North Americans and Europeans to apply. The candidate should portray sustainable fashion as joyful and light and be open to sharing their experiences in an aspirational way. The ideal candidate thinks of themselves as a guinea pig and is open to trying out a myriad of sustainable products with varying usefulness and actual sustainability. Do you live by the motto 'catch more flies with honey than vinegar'? Then we are looking for you! Bonus if you view yourself as a role model to others. We are accepting many people for this role (n=13) and those successful should expect lots of opportunities to grow their influence. Prepare to dominate the screen!

THE #ACTIVIST INFLUENCER

We are looking for a socially aware, straight-talking, passionate person to play the role of #Activist influencer. Those in this role should shine a light on inequalities and serious issues concerning sustainable fashion and the fashion industry in general. Preferably this should be done in an aesthetically pleasing way, so it helps to be creative. Should think of self as more of an advocate and voice for those whose voices are not often amplified. This role can be quite intense. Do you live by the motto 'honesty is the best policy'? Then we are looking for you! Bonus if you're not afraid to hurt people's feelings. We are accepting many people for this role (n=10), in largely non-speaking roles. Further, those successful should not expect lots of opportunities to grow their influence or work with brands. In fact, do not expect any opportunities at all! Consider either new business models or keeping your day job. Prepare to be overshadowed on the screen!

THE #BIT-OF-BOTH INFLUENCER

We are looking for someone who can see both sides of the story for the role of '#Bit-of-both influencer'. Those in this role should strive to have a balanced approach to talking about and portraying SF. Do you live by the motto 'there's something for everyone? Then we are looking for you! We are accepting only a few people for this role (n=3), in some speaking roles. Those successful should expect some degree of flexibility in terms of opportunities but please do not get your hopes up. Depending on how extreme you are on the spectrum between #Lifestyle and #Activist will influence how many opportunities are available to you. Prepare to be seen on the screen!

16 APPENDIX C: ARTISTIC EXAMPLE OF SF CONTENT

Pictured is a young woman taking a selfie of her outfit. She wears a black top, jeans, and boots. She stands in front of her snake plant.



Figure 16.1 Image created by author to represent an example SF image

Research vision

My research focuses on social media influencing, sustainable fashion, and market exclusion. Throughout my PhD research and practice in the social media space I have seen how these different elements intersect in various ways. My PhD research explores the role of sustainable fashion social media influencers in the sustainable fashion movement. The findings from my interviews with 26 influencers from influencers around the world including the USA, Europe, and India, tell a rich story about personal authenticity, lack of representation, influencer greenwashing, and more. My vision for my research career is to push for inclusivity in the marketing discipline and in how sustainability is communicated. I also aim to develop relevant research around influencers, specifically sustainable influencing.

Thesis Papers indicated with*

Theme: Market Dynamics

Marketing Theory has recently published a special issue on market system dynamics, illustrating the timeliness of this subject (Giesler and Fischer, 2017). Recently, consumer researchers have been focusing on how bloggers can change or transform markets (Scaraboto and Fischer, 2013; Dolbec and Fischer, 2015), however there is still a lot of work to be done in this area as markets are increasingly being shaped by social media influencers. Further, a lot of the theoretical work around market system dynamics has been done in conventional markets rather than sustainable markets. Moving towards a more sustainable society will require additional theorisation around the dynamics in markets. I describe my paper below.

Paper 1: How do online consumers in sustainable markets try to create change in the fashion industry? *

My PhD research explores the role of sustainable fashion influencers in the sustainable fashion movement. I conceptualise social media as a field to understand what the online sustainable fashion movement is and what is the place of sustainable influencers within it.

Theme: Exclusion and Representation in Markets

Recently Grier et al. (2019) explained that past and current research about markets overlooks the presence of race, which leads to under-theorisation and undue generalisation in the marketing discipline. To rectify this, they are advocating for research that brings more equity to markets. Saren et al. (2019) have also called for this in their editorial for *Consumption Markets & Culture*. The awareness of the need for this kind of research is growing as many journals such as the *Journal of Macromarketing*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Sociology* are currently calling for work on this. In light of the findings from my thesis and the relevance of this issue for academia and wider society, I describe two papers below.

Paper 2: Race, Voices, and Monetisation in Sustainable Fashion *

My work speaks to present conversations around representation and “woke-washing” (Sobande, 2020), in the marketplace. I explore how influencers face discrimination in the sustainable fashion movement and the role of other actors in continuing the lack of representation. This paper focuses

on the interrelations between representation and monetisation in the sustainable influencing space. An extended abstract of this paper was reviewed and presented at the Virtual European Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) Paper Development Workshop. The target for this piece is the *JCR*.

Paper 3: Crafting an inclusive approach to sustainability marketing

Due to market exclusion, sustainable practices have been defined from a narrow perspective. The aim of this research is to expand the definitions of what is considered a sustainable practice. The target for this piece is *Marketing Theory or Sociology* because it focuses on crafting theories that are aligned with challenges in the world is facing. I plan to apply for the *BAM British Academy of Management (BAM) Transitions 1 Research Grant Scheme* to develop this project.

Theme: Sustainable Influencing

Journals such as the *Journal of Marketing Management*, the UK Academy of Marketing's official journal, and the *European Journal of Marketing* have interest around social media influencers and prosumers, respectively. Taken together, there is growing interest in influencer marketing as it seems to be here to stay. However, in light of the climate crisis and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the influencer marketing industry will also have to adapt. Therefore, there is a growing need to consider the role of social media influencers in reference to these goals. Presently, there are many influencers on social media actively promoting lifestyles that go directly against these goals by promoting overconsumption and excessive travel. At the same time, there are also influencers trying to promote ideas in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and show a different way of living however they face many constraints. There is an opportunity to understand their experiences more to help develop ethical influencer practices that are fit for a sustainable future.

Paper 4: Sustainable fashion influencer communication strategies in the dominant social paradigm*

This work builds on my thesis research where I identified three approaches that sustainable fashion influencers on Instagram adopt and four main strategies they use to communicate about sustainable fashion on social media. This work could benefit industry by helping practitioners know when, why, and what the implications are of using the identified strategies in the marketing communications. This research could be particularly relevant for small businesses and sustainable fashion influencers. I am targeting this paper at *the Journal of Macromarketing* because it contributes to the literature around sustainable communications.

Next Project: Sustainable influencer best practices

Building on my work on communication strategies of sustainable fashion influencers, I aim to develop best practices around sustainable influencing which may result in more inclusive images and discourses around sustainability. I would apply for an ESRC grant to develop a range of knowledge exchange outputs. To gain an international perspective, I would aim to partner with academics at Copenhagen Business School because of their close relationship with Mistra Future Fashion, a leading research organisation dedicated to systemic sustainable fashion solutions. I

would work with the internal research grant team in preparing any bids. Potential outputs for the overall project could include a toolkit and workshops to help sustainable influencers be more effective changemakers in light of the dominant social paradigm. I plan to utilise my connections with the influencers I have interviewed to call for and develop more standards for sustainable influencing.

Paper 5: Authenticity and Ethical Dilemmas in Sustainable Influencing*

Sustainable fashion influencers have to maintain their public persona that somewhat depends on their private actions. However, perfect sustainable consumption is impossible to maintain so what is an influencer to do? The outcomes of this piece will be useful for sustainable influencers to help them to develop strategies to deal with ethically vague decisions. I am targeting this paper at the *Journal of Marketing (CABS 4*)*.

Paper 6: Theorising sustainability's digital gatekeepers

Sustainable fashion influencers have a lot of influence over their audiences. When a brand collaborates with them they hope to gain legitimacy in the eyes of sustainable fashion world. In this way sustainable fashion influencers act like gatekeepers to consumers. The aim of this project is to understand the dynamic relationship between sustainable fashion influencers, their audiences, and brands. The outcomes of this piece will be useful for sustainable influencers to help them make more informed decisions when it comes to brand partnerships. I am targeting this paper at *European Journal of Marketing or Social media + Society*.