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What Shapes Pro-Environmental Attitudes and Intention for Sustainable Fashion Consumption during a Stressful Time Event?

Elfriede Penz * and Katrin Lara Drewes

Institute for International Marketing Management, Vienna University of Economics and Business, 1020 Vienna, Austria

* Correspondence: elfriede.penz@wu.ac.at; Tel.: +43-1-31336-5102

Abstract: The fashion industry is one of the biggest polluting industries globally. It negatively affects the environment throughout all stages of the product life cycle because it requires large amounts of water for production, long supply chains and utilizes unsustainable materials. At the demand side, consumers' awareness regarding sustainability has grown and they increasingly question the consumption of fast fashion. This study aimed at investigating whether and how stressful events, such as the current health crisis, influence sustainable fashion consumption intention. In particular, it analyzed the impact of pro-environmental attitudes and susceptibility to social influence on consumers' intentions to engage in sustainable fashion consumption. To account for the impact of the recent stressful event, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, and following attachment theory, it was tested whether and how the perceived stress due to crisis determines consumers' pro-environmental attitudes and susceptibility to social influence. A quantitative survey, with 576 young respondents, during the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2021, was used to test the hypotheses. The findings showed that perceived stress due to crisis impacts their susceptibility to peer's influence, providing evidence for attachment theory. In addition, one stress factor, i.e., perceived self-efficacy with regard to COVID-19, increased pro-environmental attitudes and, in turn, sustainable fashion consumption intention. From a managerial perspective, the research helps to understand how individuals' consumption behaviors may change during a crisis and how to serve best their needs.

Keywords: sustainable fashion consumption; pro-environmental attitudes; susceptibility to social influence; COVID-19 pandemic

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1. Introduction

Stressful life-events, such as the health crisis COVID-19 that currently concerns the whole world population [1,2], change individuals' consumption choices [3] and their pro-environmental attitudes. At a more general level, crises may enable a re-evaluation and shift of priorities regarding fashion consumption, as well as to changes of behavioral patterns [4,5]. Climate change has been addressed in the news during the pandemic and it was reported that a large reduction in carbon emissions resulted in improved air quality [6–9]. However, having a pro-environmental attitude and thus a tendency to engage in environmental behavior does not necessarily translate into sustainable fashion consumption, although it is often a strong predictor [10–12].

In order to cope with stress, individuals often seek support from the people closest to them [13,14]. Close people can exert a high amount of social influence as individuals like to fit in with their interpersonal environment and adapt their behavior accordingly [15–17]. For instance, there has been some research on the effects of COVID-19, primarily with a focus on psychological illnesses and health concerns e.g., [18,19]. Uncertainty and quarantine increased mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and stress during the first seven month of the pandemic [20]. Existing research on sustainable behavior in the field of

fashion is scarce and impacts of the current health crisis on consumer behavior are only now becoming visible e.g., [21–23].

Hence, this paper aims to understand the impact of a current crisis, i.e., COVID-19, on sustainable fashion consumption behavior. More broadly, the study contributes to the literature on sustainable consumption and how crises may mitigate global environmental change and the associated problems. The focus will be on investigating whether susceptibility to social influence and perceived stress due to a crisis (COVID-19) affect the adoption of sustainable fashion behavior. The aim is to explore the impact of a stressful life-event on one area of the daily life, i.e., sustainable fashion consumption patterns, and thereby contributes to the limited research on this recent topic.

The research is structured as follows: first, it gives an overview of the literature on sustainability in the fashion industry, with a particular focus on pro-environmental attitudes, susceptibility to social influence, the effects of stress due to a crisis (COVID-19) and fashion involvement. These constructs were chosen to explain consumers' intention to consume sustainable fashion. Based on a theoretical research model, an online questionnaire study is presented, which examines the relationships between the variables using a structural equation modelling approach. The paper concludes with a discussion on the results from a theoretical and practical perspective.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

From a global perspective, the fashion industry is not only one of the biggest, but also the second most polluting, industry [23]. The fashion industry accounts for 2.4 trillion US$ of the manufacturing value worldwide, employing approximately 86 million people. In total, 80 billion new pieces of clothing are consumed every year, whereas the total world population only amounts to 7.8 billion, as of 2020. These numbers are projected to rise even more in the future [24].

The apparel industry negatively affects the environment throughout all stages of the product life cycle: beginning with fibre growth and manufacturing, dyeing and printing, transportation to stores and selling, until the disposal at the end of the garment's life [25].

The primary paradigm of the fashion industry is called 'fast fashion'. This term refers to the quickly changing offerings, for little money, that encourage overconsumption and regular disposal of intact items [26,27]. Given that apparel production has doubled in the time span of 14 years (2000 to 2014), and that common practices in the industry directly oppose recommendations by sustainability advocates, experts believe that the fast fashion-mindset of consumers and companies causes many environmental, economic and social problems [24,25].

The sustainable fashion market has experienced growth, even during periods of economic slowdown [28]. However, despite positive efforts, fashion waste is still projected to increase by 60% from 2015 to 2030 [29]. The clothing industry is responsible for a large amount of the environmental degradation, however, equally responsibility can be attributed to individual consumers. Indeed, consumers can decide themselves at which rate and what number of items they buy, how they treat their clothes, how long they keep them and how they handle the process of disposal [23,30]. Yet, the choice of sustainable clothing is still limited, and prices are often not comparable to most fast fashion items available. Furthermore, consumers consider sustainable apparel options as less attractive and aesthetic [31,32]. This is problematic as fashion is utilized as a means to express individuality, status and character, and thus does not only serves a functional purpose e.g., [33,34]. Nevertheless, sustainable clothing is considered to be more durable and of higher quality than apparel from the high street [28,34].

Previous research indicates that if a general pro-environmental attitude is present, the purchase behavior of sustainable apparel is affected positively e.g., [14,35–37]. Existing ecologically friendly behavior can be a predictor of sustainable fashion consumption

because consumers acknowledge the effects their behavior has on the environment and hence apply it to another area, too [11]. In this context, the formulated hypothesis is:

H1. *Pro-environmental attitudes influence the intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption.*

2.2. Susceptibility to Social Influence and Fashion Involvement

Human behavior is often conditional to the attitudes and behaviors of the surrounding social environment [37]. Social influence either takes place in the form of normative or informational influence [38]. *Normative* influence describes the tendency to assimilate to the expectations of others. The motivation to conform stems from the desire to avoid negative consequences or gain a reward (utilitarian influence) or from wanting to improve or protect the self-concept (value expressive influence). *Informational influence* is the propensity to believe the information obtained from others is the truth. It can manifest itself in two ways: a person might actively look for information from people who are deemed knowledgeable or infer conclusions from observations [39]. Individuals react differently to social influence, i.e., some are susceptible while others are consistently resistant. Thus, they differ regarding their susceptibility to social influence, which is defined as a general trait. In this respect, "a person's relative influenceability in one situation tends to have a significant positive relationship to his or her influenceability in a range of other social situations" (p. 473) [39].

Fashion is a vehicle through which a person expresses their personality, social status or professional position. It is used as a tool to impress; individuals can differentiate or assimilate themselves and members of society can be classified according to their clothing. For these reasons, people are highly conditioned by society with respect to their apparel choices. Purchasing or possessing a socially-approved item increases commonality to other social group members and, therefore, the sense of belonging and identification [40,41]. Thus, social groups are deemed important in providing relevant information to young individuals when buying conspicuous and publicly consumed goods such as fashion apparel and accessories [42]. In addition, interpersonal influence also has the power to evoke changes regarding sustainable apparel consumption [42,43]. Research showed that susceptibility to interpersonal influence have significant, positive impacts on fashion consciousness [44]. Consumers' self-expression through fashion items is determined by their motivation to seek the approval and opinions of peers [45].

In fact, acting in accordance with the social group was shown to be a more relevant driver than interest in or concern for sustainability itself e.g., [46–48]. Humans show high willingness to create and keep relationships; this craving for interpersonal connections dates back to the attachment theory by Bowlby [13].

Consequently, the hypotheses are:

H2a. *Susceptibility to informational social influence affects fashion involvement.*

H2b. *Susceptibility to normative social influence affects fashion involvement.*

2.3. The Effects of Stress Due to Crisis

Stressful life-events affect individuals differently depending on their ability to cope with the resulting tension [49]. Experiencing stress refers to a lack of predictability and controllability, and some overload in an individual's life e.g., [50,51]. In situations such as the recent health crisis COVID-19, which cannot be controlled or solved by the individual, strategies of meaning making are often utilized [52]. Consequently, goals and beliefs may be revised [53], leading to changes in the appraisement of situations and an altered identity or world view [54].

The stress associated with the pandemic might evoke the desire to create more meaning in life. Confronted with climate change as a topic in daily life, pro-environmental norms may be salient. Acting more sustainably and having a higher pro-environmental attitude may be the meaningful coping mechanism individuals choose to cope better with the stressful life event. This is in line with Lazarus' cognitive theory of stress [55], which states that threatened personal goals and self-efficacy may activate problem-focused coping, which

can consequently lead to pro-environmental behavior [56]. Current consumer insights show signs that individuals have transitioned to a more sustainably conscious lifestyle by spending their money more deliberately since the beginning of the pandemic [57]. With increased environmental awareness, consumers are shopping more locally and purposefully, and these habits are expected to last [58].

In his attachment theory [13], Bowlby suggests that every human has an innate attachment system which regulates support seeking behavior. This means that the stimulation of the attachment system is closely related to the stimulation of the fear system. The theory originally posits that the system is activated in threatening situations and corresponding signals of danger lead infants to seek closeness to attachment figures. It has been shown that this theory is relevant beyond early childhood or the relationship to the primary caregiver. In fact, the relations to friends, partners or other family members also play an important role in adolescence and adulthood [59].

The pandemic can be considered an external threat which activates the attachment system [17,60]. Mental health problems, such as anxiety and stress, were discovered to have risen during the pandemic [20]. Studies have found that individuals who sensed that they belong to their social environment, and whose members they can trust, responded better to the COVID-19 outbreak in China. They disclosed to feel less anxious or stressed and their sleep was more consistent [61,62]. Based on this previous research, the following hypotheses were tested:

H3a. *Stress due to crisis influences individuals' pro-environmental attitudes.*

H3b. *Stress due to crisis affects the susceptibility to normative social influence.*

H3c. *Stress due to crisis affects the susceptibility to informational social influence.*

2.4. Fashion Involvement

Whether a consumer engages in sustainable fashion consumption not only depends on pro-environmental attitudes, but it is also suggested that fashion involvement has a very influential role [63,64]. Existing literature states that the level of involvement has a strong effect on the purchase of products and services [65–67]. Involvement can be considered relevant in the field of fashion as it often serves as an important symbolic consumption field. It fulfils several functions, in addition to practical ones, such as displaying status, important values or image [64]. Consumers who are very involved with fashion constantly look for new information regarding apparel. Thus, they are more likely to be aware of sustainable clothing and motivated to become change agents in the industry [68].

Fashion involvement builds upon the basis of the five fashion consumer behaviour dimensions, which include all essential questions needed to assess the involvement and fashion consciousness of a person. Fashion involvement can influence consumers' choices in the marketplace for all types of products and services and directly influences their choices of fashion items. Several cross-classification analyses showed that consumers who are more highly involved in fashion are heavier buyers of fashion clothes in terms of both volume and price per unit than those consumers who are less involved in fashion [69].

Thus, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H4. *Fashion involvement influences the intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption.*

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed relationships that will be tested in the empirical research.

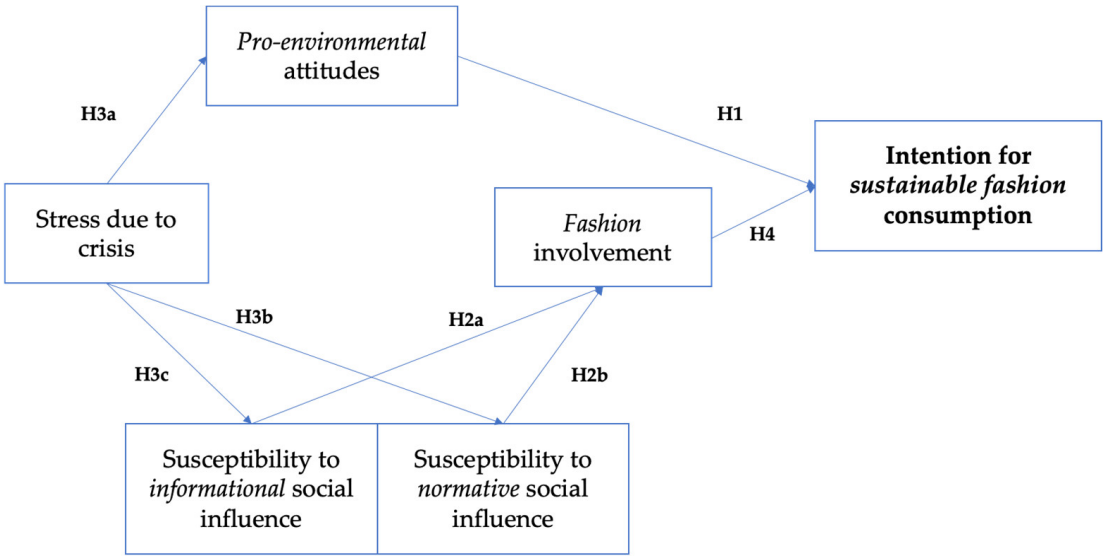

Figure 1. Theoretical model.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

A convenience sampling approach was followed, particularly targeting young and educated consumers living in Austria and Germany. Overall, 766 responses were collected in January 2021, out of which 576 sets (66.7% females, M_{age} = 27.45 years, SD_{age} = 12.19, youngest 16, oldest 83 years) were finished in entirety and therefore analysed. The majority of participants (85.9%, SD = 0.66) were single and lived in Austria (71.4%). Regarding education, 88% had at least a higher education entrance qualification and 45% had an income below 10,000 EUR. Most participants lived in a household with one or two persons (26.7%), three persons (20.1%) or on their own (17%). Table 1 shows the sample characteristics.

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Variable	Frequency	(%)
Gender		
Female	384	66.7
Male	189	32.8
Other	3	0.5
Country of Residence		
Austria	411	71.4
Germany	153	26.6
Italy	5	0.9
Switzerland	2	0.3
Slovenia	1	0.2
Slovak	1	0.2
Hungary	1	0.2
USA	1	0.2
Educational Level		
Secondary school	68	11.8
Higher education entrance qualification	244	42.4
Bachelor's degree	189	32.8
Master's degree	56	9.7
Doctoral degree	9	1.6
State examination	10	1.7

Table 1. *Cont.*

Variable	Frequency	(%)
Income		
Less than 10,000 EUR	259	45
10,000–29,999 EUR	139	24.1
30,000–49,000 EUR	44	7.6
50,000–69,999 EUR	25	4.3
70,000–89,999 EUR	9	1.6
90,000 EUR or more	11	1.9
Not specified	89	15.5
Marital Status		
Married	71	12.3
Divorced	10	1.7
Single	495	85.9

3.2. Materials and Methods

The questionnaire contained 67 items. The duration of the survey was approximately 10 min. With the exception of demographic questions regarding the country of residence, age and number of co-habitants, all variables were assessed with items on a 5-point Likert scale: "1" represented "strongly disagree" and "5" represented "strongly agree". In the variable "Stress due to COVID-19", the items were labelled from "1", representing "never", to "5", representing "very frequently".

In order to measure *intention for sustainable fashion consumption*, a scale combining three distinct scales, developed by Balderjahn et al. [70], Roberts and Bacon [71] and Chan and Wong [72], was used. This scale has previously been utilized to study fashion sustainability in the clothing sector.

The variable of *pro-environmental attitude* was assessed with the help of a ten-item scale, deduced from previous research. It combines aspects of environmental concern [71] with green consumerism [73] to represent the sustainable consumption behavior of an individual. Moon et al. [74] adapted this scale based on focus group interviews with fashion industry experts in order to enhance the scale's effectiveness.

Susceptibility to informational and normative influence was measured with a four- and eight-item subscale, from the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale [39]. The higher the score on the scale, the more susceptible to interpersonal influence regarding consumption the participant appears to be. The items in the informational influence scale measure the degree to which people acquire knowledge about products and services from asking and observing their surrounding environment. The normative influence scale evaluates how far an individual uses product purchases and brands to enhance their image. Moreover, it also depicts how content an individual is to adhere to the expectations of the social environment regarding buying decisions.

Stress due to crisis (COVID-19) was measured with a ten-item version of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). It evaluates the extent to which situations in life are apprehended as stressful [75]. The items include the main components with regards to experiencing stress, which include the predictability, controllability and degree of overload in an individual's life, e.g., [50,51]. In the original version, the PSS-scale included 14 items. However, the ten-item scale has been validated and it was demonstrated that the degree of stress can be measured with increased psychometric quality, although there are fewer items present. The scale was chosen as it is well suited for the evaluation of stressful life events and can easily be adapted due to the general nature of the items [76]. The scale was adapted to the context of COVID-19 by adding the respective term to the questions.

Fashion involvement was measured with a ten-item scale [69,74,77]. It builds upon the basis of the five fashion consumer behavior dimensions, which include all essential questions needed to assess the involvement and fashion consciousness of a person.

Demographic details (age, gender, education, income, residence, household size, marital status) of all participants were requested at the end of the questionnaire, with eight items.

4. Results

The data were analysed with the help of the statistics software SPSS 26. First, the data were screened for possible outliers or unfinished responses. Then, preparatory analyses, in the form of principal component analysis, reliability analysis and an assessment of Pearson's correlations, were executed. For all used measures, one factor was extracted, with the exception of PSS ("perceived helpfulness", "perceived self-efficacy") and susceptibility to social influence ("normative", "informational"), where two subscales were resulted for each. While the two-factor solution for *susceptibility to social influence* was anticipated and reflects the theory, the two factors of *stress due to crisis (COVID-19)* is an empirical result. Results from previous research suggest that, in addition to a one-factor-, there is also a two-factor solution, i.e., one factor with negatively phrased items and another factor with positively phrased items (Table 2). However, some authors ignore the second factor and perceive it as irrelevant. We follow research [78] that provides convincing arguments for using the two factorial structure of the perceived stress scale. This is why, in the following, H3a, H3b, and H3c will be further specified into H3a-1, H3a-2 etc. (see Table A1 in the Appendix lists all variables and their factor loadings).

Table 2. Reliability and correlations of scales and variables.

Scales/Variables	α	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
(1) Pro-environmental attitudes	**0.794**		−0.185 **	0.079	0.085 **	0.006	0.650 **	−0.159 **
(2) Susceptibility to normative social influence	**0.877**	−0.185 **		0.230 **	−0.072	0.116 **	−0.071	0.346 **
(3) Susceptibility to informational social influence	**0.798**	0.079	0.230 **		0.005	0.164 **	0.061	0.126 **
(4) Stress due to crisis (perceived self-efficacy)	**0.800**	0.085 *	−0.072	0.005		−0.624 **	0.067	−0.112 **
(5) Stress due to crisis (perceived helpfulness)	**0.884**	0.006	0.116 **	0.164 **	−0.624 **		−0.006	0.204 **
(6) Intention for sustainable fashion consumption	**0.894**	0.650 **	−0.071	0.061 **	0.067	−0.006		−0.047
(7) Fashion involvement	**0.925**	−0.159 **	0.346 **	0.126 **	−0.112 **	0.204 **	−0.047	

** = $p < 0.01$, * = $p < 0.05$.

Before the theoretical research model was tested, differences between the genders were inspected as past studies found that women are more likely than men to engage in pro-environmental behaviors e.g., [48,79–81], while some studies have found that men and women do not differ regarding their environmental behaviors [82,83]. In addition, women have been found to be more open than men to adapt their living habits in order to mitigate negative consumption effects on the environment [84].

Regarding social influence, women appear to compare themselves more with their social environment than men and are more susceptible to social influence. This is due to the fact that men often feel more certain and secure than women [48,85]. Moreover, women have been shown to place more importance on interpersonal connections and, thus, social rejections have a stronger impact [85,86]. However, one experiment showed that the probability of purchasing rose immensely when family or friends recommended sustainable products to men [48].

In addition, women are more involved in fashion than men. An explanation might be that fashion is socially associated with being more targeted to women, as can be seen by the amount of advertisements in magazines or proportion of female-only clothing stores [68]. In addition, a recent study, that was primarily conducted among Generation Z participants, showed that significant gender differences exist regarding sustainable fashion. Sustainable fashion choices were much more important to women than to men [87].

Since the sample was not representative and more females (66.7%) responded to the questions, only descriptive information is reported.

Female and male respondents differ regarding their *pro-environmental attitudes* significantly (t (571) = 2.947, $p < 0.05$). Women (Mean = 3.89, SD = 0.51) seem to have a higher pro-environmental attitude than men (Mean = 3.75, SD = 0.55).

An independent *t*-test comparing the *susceptibility to social influence* among men and women shows that women (Mean = 3.47, SD = 0.849) seem more likely to be *susceptible to informational influence* than men (Mean = 3.31, SD = 0.848). This difference is significant (t (571) = 2.192, $p < 0.05$). No significant gender differences regarding *susceptibility to normative influence* were found.

Regarding gender differences in *perceived stress due to crisis (i.e., the recent health crisis COVID-19)*, the findings depict that men (Mean = 3.71, SD = 0.659) seem to have responded more positively to stress associated with COVID-19 than women (Mean = 3.58, SD = 0.690). This difference is significant (t (571) = 2.092, $p < 0.05$). Women (Mean = 3.03, SD = 0.856) seem to have experienced more stress due to COVID-19 than men (Mean = 2.70, SD = 0.851). This difference is also significant (t (571) = 4.321, $p < 0.05$).

To test the hypotheses, we employed a structural equation model (see Figure 1). Using IBM SPSS AMOS 26 [88], an unconstrained model test was undertaken. The analysis verified the explanatory power of the theoretical model relating *pro-environmental attitudes*, *susceptibility to social influence (normative, informational)*, *positive and negative stress due to COVID-19 and fashion involvement to intention for sustainable fashion consumption* (CMIN(1, 729) = 1.377.61, $p < 0.001$, CMIN/df = 1.89, RMSEA = 0.04, Hoelter(0.05) = 331, CFI = 0.94). As the chi2-test specified that the data differed significantly from the theoretical model, additional relevant statistical tests confirmed that the significance was due to the large sample size (total 576 respondents). For instance, CMIN/df of below 5 indicates a reasonable fit [89], and the Hoelter (0.05) measure above 200 indicates that if the sample size were reduced to 405 respondents, the chi^2 would not be significant [90]. Finally, the CFI, above 0.90, is a sign for an acceptable fit [91]. This confirmed that from an overall perspective, our theoretical model held summarizes the findings from the SEM, i.e., standardized regression coefficients in the observed model (Table 3). In addition, stress due to crisis-related factors *perceived self-efficacy* and *perceived helplessness* correlate negatively significantly (−0.77, $p < 0.000$).

Table 3. Results from SEM: Standardized regression coefficients (β) of hypothesized paths.

	Hypothesized Paths			β	*p*
H1	Pro-environmental attitudes	→	Intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption	0.76	***
H2a	Susceptibility to informational social influence	→	Fashion involvement	0.10	*
H2b	Susceptibility to normative social influence	→	Fashion involvement	0.34	***
H3a-1	Stress due to crisis (perceived self-efficacy)	→	Pro-environmental attitudes	0.21	*
H3a-2	Stress due to crisis (perceived helplessness)	→	Pro-environmental attitudes	0.15	ns
H3b-1	Stress due to crisis (perceived self-efficacy)	→	Susceptibility to normative social influence	0.11	ns
H3b-2	Stress due to crisis (perceived helplessness)	→	Susceptibility to normative social influence	0.24	***
H3c-1	Stress due to crisis (perceived self-efficacy)	→	Susceptibility to informational social influence	0.39	***
H3c-2	Stress due to crisis (perceived helplessness)	→	Susceptibility to informational social influence	0.48	***
H4	Fashion involvement	→	Intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption	0.07	*

*** = $p < 0.001$, * = $p < 0.05$, ns = not significant.

The results indicate that the *intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption* is significantly influenced by *pro-environmental attitudes*. Opinions in this context include the desire to avoid excessive packaging or harmful products, to buy less and to pay more (support for H1).

The influences of individuals' susceptibility to *normative* and *informational social influence* on *fashion involvement* are significant (support for H2a and H2b). In particular, peer pressure, i.e., susceptibility to normative social influence, strongly influences one's interest in fashion.

In regards the impact of *stress* (both *perceived helplessness* and *perceived self-efficacy*) on *pro-environmental attitudes* (H3a-1, 2) and *susceptibility to normative and informational social influence* (H3b-1,2, H3c-1, 2), the following picture emerges. First, *perceived helplessness due to crisis* (feelings of nervousness and agitation, lacking control and being overwhelmed due to COVID 19) does not significantly influence *pro-environmental attitudes*, whereas *perceived self-efficacy*, i.e., having confidence despite COVID-19, impacts *pro-environmental attitudes*. Thus, *pro-environmental attitudes* serve as comforting beliefs help in problem-solving. Second, *stress due to crisis* determines the strength of *susceptibility to informational social influence*, i.e., stress due to COVID-19, leads people to adhere to the social environment's buying decisions and ask for advice. One stress-factor, *perceived helplessness,* increases *susceptibility to normative influence*, meaning that identifying with and buying the same items as others may be a useful coping mechanism.

Fashion involvement weakly influences individuals' *intention for sustainable fashion* (supporting H4).

Finally, inspecting the indirect effects of stress-related factors, some indirect effects of *stress due to crisis* on the *intention for sustainable fashion consumption* were found. In particular, *perceived helplessness* indirectly increases *intention* by 0.12 (not significant) and *perceived self-efficacy* by the value of 0.17 ($p < 0.05$). This means that, in addition to the direct impact of consumers' *perceived self-efficacy* on *pro-environmental attitudes* and *susceptibility to informational social influence*, it indirectly influences their *intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption*.

It was further shown that *susceptibility to normative social influence* indirectly influences *intention*, albeit at a small degree (0.025, $p < 0.05$).

Lastly, we found a significant indirect effect of *perceived helplessness* on *fashion involvement* (0.124, $p < 0.05$), which means that one *stress-factor* and *fashion involvement* are related (see Table A2).

5. Discussion

What is the impact of stressful life-events on sustainable fashion consumption and what will happen if circumstances such as the ongoing health crisis cause stress and tensions?

Pro-environmental attitudes shape consumers intentions to engage in sustainable fashion consumption [35–37]. In addition, the influence of significant others on fashion consumption has been shown in previous research [42]. The attachment theory by Bowlby [13] served as the theoretical framework for understanding how a stressful life-event, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, evokes individuals' needs to seek support from others.

The research assumed that stress associated with the crisis may evoke the desire to create more meaning in life. Therefore, sustainable fashion, instead of fast or conventional fashion, becomes prevalent [84].

Our research confirms that, during the crisis, people sought closeness to their social environment. In particular, we found that stress increases the susceptibility to social influence. Due to external threat (due to COVID-19), individuals turn to their social environment. Consequently, the perceived stress due to crisis impacts their susceptibility to peer's informational (for perceived helplessness also for normative) influence, providing evidence for attachment theory.

Our research revealed that perceived self-efficacy increases pro-environmental attitudes, thus providing evidence that one type of stress (positive) significantly impacts pro-environmental attitudes. In addition, consumers' perceived self-efficacy indirectly influences their intention to engage in sustainable fashion consumption, showing the impact of a stressful life-event on consumers' consumption intentions. Individuals' pro-environmental attitudes were not directly affected by negative stress.

As the motivation to consume sustainable fashion was investigated, the involvement in fashion, albeit weakly, may contribute to the intention. Again, one stress factor, i.e., perceived helplessness, had an indirect effect on fashion involvement.

From a managerial perspective, the research helps to understand how individuals' consumption behaviors may change during a crisis. First, its impact, i.e., feelings of self-efficacy, increases pro-environmental attitudes, thus turning more attention to doing something good for the environment. Given the strong impact of these attitudes on intention, fashion items that are sustainable are more sought after. This is a chance to inform consumers about sustainable alternatives in the fashion market and build on the already existing attitudes by turning the attention to respective offers in the stores. However, the idea is not to buy more, but rather to buy more responsibly and increase self-efficacy.

Second, perceived stress causes individuals to follow their peers' opinions more. If only self-efficacy, despite a health crisis such as COVID-19, is perceived (i.e., feeling confident), individuals are not susceptible to social influence, but they form pro-environmental attitudes as outlined above. This means that there are different reactions to a stressful event and knowing about these forms could help in formulating pro-sustainable fashion messages in advertising.

Third, involvement with fashion increases sustainable fashion consumption intention. Therefore, identifying and targeting fashion-interested sub-groups may increase sustainable fashion consumption. It may help to mention peers' opinions in this regard.

This research comes with several limitations. The data were collected during the third lockdown in Austria and the measured variables, pro-environmental attitudes and intention for sustainable fashion consumption, need to be interpreted in this context. In addition, intentions, rather than the actual sustainable fashion consumption, were measured. Furthermore, the sample was not representative and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to the population.

Future research could investigate whether these results hold in a representative sample and in other geographies, including behavioral measures. In addition, long-term effects of perceived stress due to a crisis on sustainable fashion consumption could be studied. The recent health crisis affected consumers' lives in many ways and may have led to a shift in priorities in terms of fashion consumption. Whether the identified changes remain or disappear is still to be seen.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to investigate how a stressful life-event influences consumers' fashion consumption, i.e., sustainable fashion consumption, and thus contributes to research on this recent topic. In more detail, we analyzed the impact of pro-environmental attitudes and susceptibility to social influence on consumers' intentions to engage in sustainable fashion consumption. To account for the impact of the recent stressful event, i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, and to follow attachment theory, it was tested whether and how the perceived stress determines consumers' pro-environmental attitudes and susceptibility to social influence. Applying structural equation modelling to a dataset of 576 respondents, the findings showed that perceived stress due to crisis appears in two dimensions, one expressing perceived self-efficacy and one expressing perceived helplessness, and that both impact consumers' susceptibility to the influence of their peers; this provides evidence for attachment theory. While perceived self-efficacy increased pro-environmental attitudes and, in turn, sustainable fashion consumption intention, perceived helplessness only indirectly influenced sustainable fashion consumption intention.

To conclude, we found empirical evidence that perceived stress affects consumers' sustainable fashion consumption intentions and several academic and managerial implications were developed to best serve consumers' needs in times of stressful events.

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Appendix A

Table A1. List of variables and factor loadings.

		Factor Loadings
Intention for sustainable fashion consumption		
1.	I intent to not buy new clothing items if I already have previous dresses in a good state.*	0.159
2.	I intent to buy clothing that is made out of recycled materials.	0.849
3.	I intent to buy clothing that is safe for the environment.	0.889
4.	I intent to buy clothing which can be disposed in an environmentally friendly manner.	0.825
5.	I intent to buy clothing which is produced in an environmentally friendly manner.	0.872
6.	I intent to limit my use of clothing which is made of or uses scarce resources.	0.740
Pro-Environmental Attitude		
1.	I believe every consumer can have a beneficial effect on the environment by purchasing environmentally friendly products.	0.544
2.	When I discard a product, I pay attention whether it is reusable or recyclable.	0.601
3.	I am willing to pay more for environmentally friendly products (e.g., organic, recycled etc.).	0.643
4.	I intent to not buy products which are excessively packaged.	0.706
5.	I consider the use of second-hand products as environmentally friendly behavior.	0.483
6.	I follow all governmental rules regarding environmental protection.	0.547
7.	I try to minimize the purchase of products that are unnecessary or have little use.	0.612
8.	I am always aware of the latest news regarding environmental topics and problems.	0.565
9.	If I know the potential damages products cause to the environment, I do not purchase them.	0.667
10.	I will use the products I have bought as long as possible.	0.542
Susceptibility to Normative Social Influence		
1.	I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase.	0.774
2.	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase.	0.753
3.	I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them.	0.580
4.	If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy.	0.747
5.	It is important that others like the products and brands I buy.	0.762
6.	When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of.	0.813
7.	I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others.	0.681
8.	If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy.	0.770

Table A1. *Cont.*

		Factor Loadings
Susceptibility to Informational Social Influence		
1.	I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.	0.818
2.	If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product.	0.850
3.	I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.	0.870
4.	To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using.*	0.429
Stress due to crisis (COVID-19, perceived helplessness)		
1.	In the last months, how often have you felt nervous and stressed due to COVID-19?	0.792
2.	In the last months, how often have you been angered because of things that happened due to COVID-19 that were outside of your control?	0.796
3.	In the last months, how often have you felt like difficulties were piling up so high due to COVID-19 that you could not overcome them?	0.690
4.	In the last months, how often have you felt that due to COVID-19 you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	0.708
5.	In the last months, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life due to COVID-19?	0.716
6.	In the last months, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly due to COVID-19?	0.862
Stress due to crisis (COVID-19, perceived self-efficacy)		
1.	In the last months, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems despite COVID-19?	0.902
2.	In the last months, how often have you felt that things were going your way despite COVID-19?	0.719
3.	In the last months, how often have you felt like you were on top of things despite COVID-19?	0.640
4.	In the last months, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life despite COVID-19?	0.698
Fashion Involvement		
1.	I like to talk about fashion-related issues with other people.	0.843
2.	I am more interested in fashion than most people.	0.849
3.	I like to provide fashion advice to my friends.	0.753
4.	I buy new clothing earlier in the season than most people.	0.633
5.	I keep my wardrobe up to date with fashion trends.	0.755
6.	I regard myself as a fashionable person.	0.781
7.	I like fashion shopping.	0.795
8.	I spend a large portion of my discrete income on fashion.	0.758
9.	I read news about fashion regularly.	0.786
10.	I have in-depth knowledge of famous fashion brands.	0.761

Note: * Item was deleted because of low factor loading.

Table A2. Overview of standardized indirect effects (SEM).

	Fashion Involvement	Intention to Engage in Sustainable Fashion Consumption
Stress due to crisis (perceived helplessness)	0.124 *	0.121
Stress due to crisis (perceived self-efficacy)	0.075	0.168 *
Susceptibility to informational social influence		0.007
Susceptibility to normative social influence		0.025 *

*** = $p < 0.001$, * = $p < 0.05$.

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