Article

Gen Z's Motivations towards Sustainable Fashion and Eco-Friendly Brand Attributes: The Case of Vinted

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Abstract: Vinted is a free digital sharing economy platform where individuals buy and sell second-hand apparel. It is an example of industry 4.0 that promotes an innovative and successful business model while favoring sustainable fashion consumption. Gen Z consumers are concerned about climate change and social and ethical issues. Their environmental awareness is significant. Nevertheless, their values do not always translate into sustainable consumption behavior; their role as heavy consumers in the fast-fashion market is proof of this. The research aims to delve into the motivations of Gen Z towards sustainable fashion and their perception of the eco-friendly brand attributes in the case of Vinted. From the methodological point of view, the qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined through focus group sessions and a pilot study based on a questionnaire. The results confirm that Gen Z consumers recognize and appreciate the eco-friendly attributes of Vinted, although other types of brand attributes are the ones that mostly mobilize their behavior. Some participants claim that the representation of sustainable values in Vinted's advertising campaigns is too soft. Among the conclusions, the opportunity to revise Vinted's brand strategy stands out, giving a more explicit role to eco-friendly attributes pursuing an effective change in Gen Z consumption behavior.

Keywords: Gen Z; sustainable fashion; sharing economy; industry 4.0; vinted; eco-friendly; consumption behavior; brand attributes; brand strategy; focus group

1. Introduction

The fashion industry is among the sectors that most damage the environment due to the excessive consumption of raw materials and energy, its high polluting effect, and the high generation of waste [1,2]. The seriousness of its impact requires urgent reflection and action from different areas, both in governance, legislation, and scientific research, as well as in the approach of new business and consumption models [3,4].

During the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the number of scientific publications addressing the fashion industry's sustainability issue [5,6]. Authors focus on this issue from various points of view, among others, the materials used and their traceability [7], the role that design plays in enabling the development of more sustainable products [8], and the ecological production and waste management [9].

On the other hand, firms that understand their responsibility and exercise corrective measures to favor a more sustainable production attract researchers' attention, apart from branding strategies to differentiate sustainable producers from fast fashion [2,10,11].

The fast fashion phenomenon portrays a response from the industry, which takes advantage of the continuous desire of the consumer to change clothes before exhausting the cycle of natural use. Many authors reflect on the environmental damage caused by this orientation of the industry and the lack of ethics in production under this model [12,13].

This article approaches the challenge of sustainable fashion from an alternative perspective to fast fashion. It presents the case of Vinted, a sharing economy platform that

allows the buying and selling second-hand clothing between individuals. In this way, users can reconcile their desire to change clothes frequently with a responsible and sustainable consumption mode, avoiding the massive purchase of new products and the massive waste of products that still maintain a satisfactory state of use [14].

The research focuses on discovering the perception of Vinted that Gen Z consumers have: what values they attribute to this business model and what motivations or barriers they identify for becoming users. Specifically, it questions if consumers in this generational cohort identify the sustainable mission of Vinted and if they consider this value a decisive attribute of the brand.

This point of view constitutes the novelty and originality of the research since most of the studies address the case of Vinted by analyzing its business model, the role played in industry 4.0, and its impact on sustainability [15–21], without analyzing the motivations of Gen Z toward sustainable fashion and eco-friendly brand attributes.

The selection of this generational profile has a double purpose. Firstly, to delve into an apparel controversy, Gen Z presents favorable characteristics to be a prominent potential audience for sharing economy fashion model; however, at the same time, this generation stands out for its high percentage of fast-fashion heavy consumers [2,22]. Secondly, to contribute to increasing sustainable consumption in this generation and the younger one, Alpha Gen, due to they both may significantly impact our planet's imminent future.

The research is based on a review of the scientific literature on sustainable fashion and Gen Z, including 46 references, of which more than 85% correspond to high-impact publications in the last five years. After carrying out a global vision of the state of the matter, the presentation of the case of Vinted serves as a context that allows an understanding of its relevance as a leading actor in sharing economy, sustainable fashion, and industry 4.0. Next, the research conceptualization defines the current work as an initial phase that subsequent stages will follow. In the methodology, the qualitative approach of the focus group combines with the quantitative one of a pilot questionnaire. Among the results, relevant findings support previous scientific works and serve as a basis to deepen certain aspects in the subsequent study phases. Likewise, the discussion identifies the study's limitations and recommendations for future research. The conclusion reflects the theoretical and practical contribution of the study; furthermore, it attempts to answer the thorny question of how to foster sustainable consumption in Gen Z.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion is often used as a synonym for eco-fashion [22,23] or green fashion [5]. It is a term with numerous definitions and different nuances. In essence, it applies three dimensions of sustainability (environmental, social, and economic) in the fashion sector, both in its production and consumption [24].

Sustainable fashion defines a model of producing and consuming fashion that respects the environment and cares for society, including the consideration of ecological and ethical factors while seeking profitable and fair business systems. This concept includes different categories, some related to the materials ("recycled", "organic", or cruelty-free animal products), others to the production process ("hand-craft", "vintage", or "custom-made fashion"), referring to the local character ("locally produced fashion") and the "fair trade" system [11] (p. 1703).

Fast fashion represents a current trend opposed to sustainability, characterized by excessive production that generates a tremendous environmental impact and fosters unethical labor and contractual situations for people who work in the production, distribution, and trade processes [1,25]. It consists of a system of gears in which excessive production fits with an accelerated and environmentally irresponsible demand, maintained by consumers who discard garments before being wholly used [26,27].

The diametrical trend to fast fashion is the slow fashion movement. From an ideological and strategic point of view, it emulates the slow food phenomenon that arose in

response to the increase in the fast food current [28,29]. However, slow fashion "is not merely the antithesis of fast fashion but a holistic philosophy that seeks to change the modes of production and consumption" [30] (p. 120699). According to these words, slow fashion and sustainable fashion share many similarities.

However, slow fashion also presents a distinctive characteristic: the production quality and the consumption rhythm. Slow fashion is concerned with creating a balance between designers, artisans, sellers, and consumers. The garments, in which the design and the nature of the materials are highly cared for, have a higher cost. At the same time, they are prepared to last longer, not only because of the more excellent resistance of the fabric but also because they have a more timeless fashion design that survives the accelerated obsolescence imposed by the obligation of having to keep up to date with the latest trends [29].

The role played by consumer attitudes and motivations in the fashion sector is especially relevant to meet the challenge of sustainability, perhaps more so in other sectors. Fashion involves "multifunctional products": garments and accessories, in addition to their practical function of covering the body and providing heat, stimulate the "hedonic value" [1] (p. 10). Since the beginning of marketing as a discipline, consumers have been sensitive and influenced by the attributes related to the illusion of an increase in social status; these factors lead them to conspicuous consumption, a behavior that may be in conflict with environmental awareness [31].

In parallel, the attribute of sustainability also has an influential impact on consumers. In recent years, numerous researchers have highlighted that sustainability increases the attractiveness of products resulting in a powerful brand attribute; consequently, it can affect consumers' preferences in their purchasing decisions [6,32–34]. Other studies delve into this subject by establishing a chain of effects: ecological and eco-friendly attributes favor an improvement in the image of brands which, in turn, promote the development of environmental awareness and has a positive effect on the behavior of consumers, favoring the purchase of sustainable products [35,36]. From this point of view, the attribute of sustainability operates as a gain creator in the design of the value proposition of a product [37].

At a psychological level, different authors agree on the point that sustainability generates a feeling of warmth [2], satisfaction, and happiness [10,38,39], affecting the consumers' perception towards the products and stimulating the desire to purchase them. Other researchers reflect on how the culture filter affects consumers' perception of sustainability as a marketing communication attribute; observe significant differences in consumers with different cultures and territorial origins [5].

In this sense, a recent study analyzes the attitudes of Italian consumers toward sustainable fashion. It stands out that the sustainability argument has a positive and mobilizing effect on this public, which mostly favors using garments produced from bio-based materials. However, the study warns that these consumers mostly reject buying second-hand clothes [40]. Cases like this emphasize the need to investigate consumers from different cultures, to discover their attitudes and motivations toward sustainable fashion.

2.2. Generation Z

Regarding the generational perspective, numerous Gen Z consumers show a favorable predisposition towards the value of sustainability. Some scientific studies suggest that environmental awareness and sustainable attributes can mobilize them, influencing consumer behavior [41–45].

According to Maslow's Theory of Motivations, motivation is human beings' impulse to satisfy their needs. There are different types of needs ranked in a pyramid. This hierarchy suggests that people are motivated to satisfy basic needs before moving on to more advanced needs. The first level represents the most basic needs (physiological), while self-actualization occupies the top level, which drives individuals to realize their true potential and achieve their ideal selves. Self-actualization relates to altruism, social work, and spiritual growth. Sustainable awareness may be also considered at this level. The intermediate levels include safety needs, love and belonging needs, and esteem needs [1,46].

Understanding the type of needs that Gen Z consumers strive to satisfy serves to identify different motivations.

This generational cohort encompasses individuals born from 1995 to 2009. They are also called centennials and are between the millennials or Gen Y, the immediately older generation, and the Alpha Gen (the immediately younger) [47,48].

In many Gen Z individuals, sustainability awareness affects their purchasing decisions in the food and beverage, technology, and fashion sectors. Particularly in fashion, Gen Z is concerned with knowing the origin and composition of the fabrics, as well as avoiding any animal cruelty. Marketing campaigns based on environmental, sustainable, and ethical attributes may significantly impact this generation, increasing awareness of these topics and reinforcing more responsible consumer behavior [49–51]. In this sense, a recent study points out the existence of a "strong relationship between positive attitude towards sustainable apparel and intention to purchase sustainable apparel" so companies "should develop strategies and promotional campaigns to nurture and stimulate a positive attitude amongst the customers, thus leading to favorable purchase intention" [43] (p. 180).

Concerning media, Gen Z members are digital natives. They have media consumption habits dominated by VOD platforms for audiovisual content, the recreational use of video games, and social networks. The most expedient and influential promotional formats to this generation are branded content and hybrid messages, which disguise the advertising objective under leisure or informative appearance [52–55].

Focusing on fashion, the content based on this topic is continuously growing in social media and digital channels from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives since there is an increase in the number of messages and greater diversity in the kind of formats (ads, posts, stories, testimonials, video reels, games, and apps). This uprising trend has been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which moved many traditional offline fashion events to live broadcasts on Instagram and Tik Tok, as with numerous fashion brand shows [56].

In addition, the role of content creators is consolidated as valid opinion leaders for Gen Z on the topic of fashion. As a result, brands in the sector multiply the contracts with influencers to get paid promotional support on social media. In this digital scenario, there is an emerging figure, the sustainable fashion influencers that follow the rule of "content creation calibration": they calibrate, in other words, balance their ethical message in favor of sustainable fashion with their desire to receive some financial or in-kind compensation from brands [57] (p. 150).

Aspects such as the personal image of the influencer, the online reputation, or the level of interaction with users are decisive for measuring each influencer's impact factor and credibility for the Z public [50,58,59].

Gen Z also shows a favorable attitude toward sharing economy. Being digital natives, Gen Z consumers naturally appreciate those innovative businesses that empower individuals' interaction and reciprocal satisfactory exchanging. In the fashion field, exploratory empirical studies point to a favorable attitude in Gen Z towards apparel rental or collaborative apparel consumption [60].

Nevertheless, despite Gen Z's environmental awareness, some authors argue [12] that the centennial's consumption behavior is often inconsistent with sustainability principles, producing a value-action gap [61], which means that their values are discordant with their actions as consumers. Proof of this is the high consumption of fast fashion exercised by this generation [12,13,22].

While some authors defend that sustainable fashion and the fast fashion phenomenon coexist naturally as two typical consumption trends in Gen Z [22], other authors appeal to economic factors to justify the discrepancies in Gen Z between their positive attitude toward sustainability and their actual purchase intentions. They argue that this generational cohort has lived through moments of the global financial crisis, including a universal pandemic that has influenced their money conception and spending capacity [45].

Authors who share this argument do not question the sustainable awareness in Gen Z nor how attractive sustainable values in advertising strategies are for them. According to a recent study, Gen Z constitutes "the human category who best feels the importance of green marketing measures and practices." Nevertheless, economic factors are still decisive in influencing their consumer behavior: "Generation Z is educated to desire healthy, green products, but they are trying to identify them at good prices, which is why organizations need to streamline both their production costs and promotion practices, without greatly affecting the final price." [44] (p. 17).

A review of the published literature shows that while there are numerous studies on consumer behavior, these studies are predominantly quantitative and focused exclusively on one country. They are produced mainly from an environmental or economic point of view, not so much from marketing, advertising, or communication. In addition, the issue of the attitude-behavior discrepancy still merits further scientific study.

After identifying this gap in the literature, the current research intends to address it by delving into the mentioned discrepancy between attitude and behavior in Gen Z from the marketing communication perspective, analyzing motivations and brand attributes. In addition, the research methodology presents the novelty of introducing a qualitative approach to the topic, which a quantitative one will later complement. Furthermore, it is relevant to mention that the current research pursues an international scope, gathering participants and respondents from different countries.

3. Case Presentation

Vinted is an online platform that enables the purchase and sale of second-hand items among its users. It is an example of sharing economy, an alternative consumption model based on social innovation that seeks to maximize the benefits for all the parties involved, allowing individuals to interact to cover their needs and find mutual satisfaction [15]. This Baltic firm meets the five dimensions identified in the sharing economy models [14] (p. 4): "ownership transfer", "professional involvement", "compensation", "digitalization", and "community scope".

Vinted's official website presents the brand mission with an advertising copytext written in an intentionally simple and natural verbal register: "We want to show you just how great second-hand can be. Sell the clothes that have more to give. Shop for items you won't find in stores. Vinted is open to everyone who believes that good clothes should live long" [62].

It is a Lithuanian company born in 2008. The business idea was started by Milda Mitkute who felt a need: she had a closet full of clothes she did not wear anymore. Her need found a solution thanks to the collaboration of a friend, Justas Janauskas, who created a website to help Milda sell her clothes [62].

Fifteen years later, Vinted is a consolidated leading platform for buying and selling second-hand clothing and other materials, with more than 65 million users and more than 1200 employees, operating in 16 countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, the UK, and the USA [62]. Its penetration rate is significantly high in territories with a long tradition of the second-hand market, such as the Netherlands [16] and others in Central Europe, such as Germany, Belgium, and France.

Vinted is a unicorn, "a privately owned start-up company, which has reached a valuation of $1 billion or more" [17] (p. 5). Additionally, it is a clear example of industry 4.0 since digitalization is in the DNA of its business model and execution [18,19], encompassing full-comprehensive intelligent networking of technology and process.

Although different categories of items are available on Vinted (home appliances, pottery, electronic devices, books, etc.), apparel sharing is the hallmark of Vinted app. This service results in fostering a more sustainable fashion consumption behavior.

In an interview with the business magazine Forbes, Thomas Plantenga, Vinted CEO, described the changing opportunities in the business scenario and Vinted's consumer

psychographic segmentation, apart from how these two factors interact to reach the brand's mission and vision:

> *"We are approaching an inflection point in the market for second-hand fashion. Consumers around the world are becoming increasingly conscious of their buying choices. We're grateful to our new and existing backers who believe in our mission to make second-hand the first choice worldwide"*. [20] (par. 7)

Vinted relies on the choices made by its users. It targets a consumer profile that chooses to complete the product's useful life instead of consuming and discarding insatiably [27]. For these consumers, Vinted broadens the traditional means to reuse (chain of sharing with family, acquaintances, and charities). In addition, it offers them a way to increase savings, generate income and be environmentally respectful [1]. Under the idea of giving a second life to products, Vinted synthesizes its commitment to sustainable consumption [21].

This strategy reflects an innovative and agile response to take advantage of market changes. In 2019, the annual report published by McKinsey & Company [63] already warned that in the next decade, it would be possible for the second-hand clothing market to surpass fast fashion, given that consumers increasingly value the attributes of sustainable consumption and price savings. Four years later, The McKinsey Fashion Status 2023 describes sustainability as "the biggest opportunity" for the fashion market; the second and third great opportunities are the "agility" to react in the market and "brand differentiation and customer experience" [64] (p. 15).

4. Methodology

4.1. Conceptualization

The present research fulfills an exploratory function within an investigation project of a further scope. At this first stage, it intends to test the methodology and the data collection instruments before being addressed to a higher sample in a later stage/s (Figure 1).
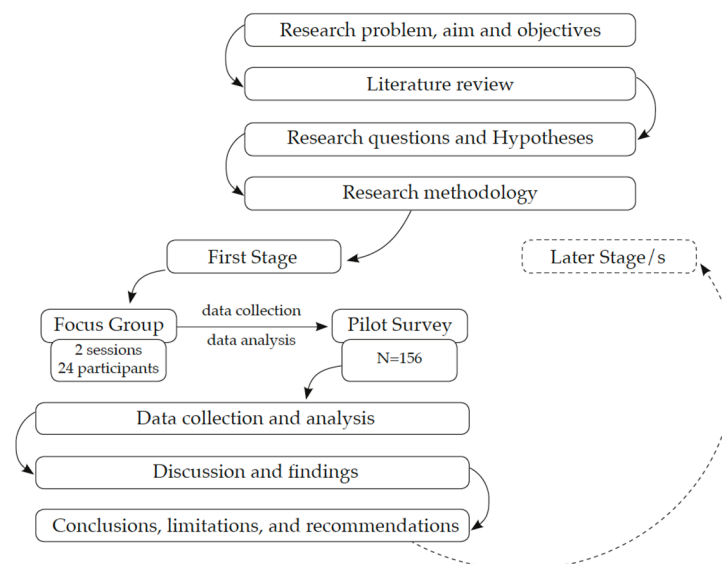
Figure 1. Research flow chart. Own elaboration.

After defining the research problem and analyzing the scientific literature, the following research questions (RQ) are posed:

- RQ#1. In the minds of Gen Z consumers, what are the defining attributes of Vinted?
- RQ#2. In the minds of Gen Z consumers, which of Vinted's attributes exert the most significant influence in motivating them to be Vinted's users?
- RQ#3. Do Gen Z consumers recognize themselves as Vinted's ideal users?

The proposed methodological conceptualization follows the recommendations of authors who defend the coordinated design of research questions and hypotheses [65,66].

Table 1 contains the hypotheses intended to be confirmed or rejected based on the answers to the research questions. The research hypotheses meet the criteria of being accurately formulated, without ambiguity, logical, approachable from critical analysis, generalizable, based on empirical events, and able to be verified [67].

Table 1. Correspondence between research questions and hypotheses.

Research Questions	Hypotheses
RQ#1	H#1. Gen Z consumers perceive sustainable fashion consumption as an attribute that identifies Vinted
RQ#2	H#2a. Gen Z consumers perceive sustainable fashion consumption as an attribute that motivates them to be Vinted's users H#2b. Gen Z consumers perceive other attributes in Vinted that are different from sustainable fashion consumption, which influence them more significantly in their motivation to be Vinted's users
RQ#3	H#3. Consumers belonging to Gen Z perceive themselves as Vinted's core target, feeling satisfied and/or proud of using this service

Own elaboration.

The hypotheses presented are articulated in the structural model described in Figure 2.
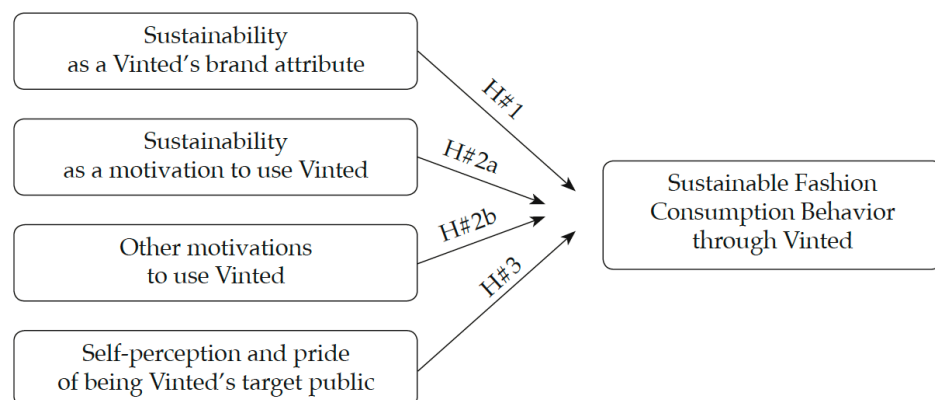
Figure 2. Structural model explaining the sustainable fashion consumption behavior through Vinted. Own elaboration.

4.2. Methodological Design

The methodological design combines two complementary techniques to answer the research questions and contrast the hypotheses, encompassing qualitative and quantitative approaches. This type of methodological triangulation is highly recommended in Social Science research, particularly in the field of Communication [68]. The two techniques are conducted sequentially: two focus groups in the first phase and a questionnaire in the second.

The scope of the research is extraordinarily ambitious, as it seeks to validate complex hypotheses in a broad generational segment. The present work corresponds to the first research stage, with an exploratory purpose. This stage intends to validate the research methodology and achieve provisional results. In later stages, it is proposed to repeat the methods (after the readjustment process) and conduct them on a larger scale to obtain greater validity in the results.

4.2.1. Focus Groups

The focus group is a methodology with a long tradition and proven effectiveness in Social Sciences. It consists of a group discussion on a specific topic, guided by a moderator or facilitator. The role of the moderator is to conduct the session in a relaxed atmosphere that encourages interaction among the participants. It is an essential requirement that questions are related to the research objectives. At the same time, participants should feel free when discussing, not forced to respond to too narrow-defined inquiries that may condition their answers. A certain degree of openness in the topics covered encourages the participants to provide a broader vision, suggesting aspects that, even if they were not considered as objectives in the research design, may give rise to valuable findings that open up new avenues of research [69–72].

According to this above, the focus group is of great value for exploratory investigation, as in this first stage. Also, it serves as a previous step to a quantitative survey; the focus group allows for capturing relevant insights from the participants and the type of vocabulary they use, which is of great help in developing later a higher-quality questionnaire.

In the present research, two focus groups were conducted in Lithuania (Vilnius), in October of 2022, with Communication university students from international groups (where, in addition to Lithuanian students, there are other nationalities), all with an age range of 18 to 23 years. This country is chosen because it is the origin of the brand. The criterion for selecting students from the Communication field is that they have more profound knowledge and sensitivity to appreciate concepts relevant to the research (e.g., brand attributes, consumer motivation). Two focus sessions were held instead of one to expand the exploratory role of the first stage of the research.

As in all steps of the process, the ethical standards of the research were followed, including those described explicitly for this methodology [73], requesting the participants' consent, guaranteeing their anonymity, confidentiality in the management of your data, and avoiding any situation that may entail some mental risk or against their image or integrity.

Authors differ regarding the optimal number of participants in this methodology; depending on the subject, the level of depth, and the research objectives, this number may vary [74,75]. The present research includes 12 members in each group, according to the recommendation to work with groups from 10 to 12 in projects of a broad scope [76].

As an innovative feature, the focus groups incorporate techniques and mechanics typical of design thinking [77], as has been successfully developed in other focus groups conducted with university students [69,78]. The goal is to make the sessions more dynamic and participatory.

The groups are defined with intentionally different sociodemographic compositions, referring to the categories of nationality and sex. The motivation is to observe the similarity or differences in results between both groups and to question whether these factors may influence the responses of the participants and the development of the sessions. Group A presents proportionate characteristics. Meanwhile, Group B has a female bias (see Table 2). Once the groups are composed, an alphanumeric code is assigned to identify the contributions of each participant without compromising their anonymity.

Table 2. Group composition: participants sex and nationality.

Group A	Group B
6 women 6 men	9 women 3 men
5 from Lithuania 2 from Poland 1 from France 1 from Italy 1 from Cameroun 1 from Portugal 1 from Ukraine	5 from Lithuania 1 from Azerbaijan 1 from Colombia 1 from Estonia 1 from Georgia 1 from Indonesia 1 from Nigeria 1 from Ukraine

Own elaboration.

The group discussion was fluidly articulated through the following semi-structured questions suggested by the moderator (see Table 3):

Table 3. Focus group suggested semi-structured questions.

Questions	Context/Response Dynamic
FGQ#1. Do you recognize this brand?	After showing the participants the logotype of Vinted
FGQ#2. What do you know of Vinted?	Group oral response
FGQ#3. Do you use Vinted?	Group oral response
FGQ#4. How is your experience with Vinted?	Group oral response
FGQ#5. Who use Vinted? How would you describe the people that use it?	Group oral response
FGQ#6. Say two things that you would buy/sell on Vinted	Sticky notes on the wall + oral response
FGQ#7. Say two things that you would never buy/sell on Vinted	Sticky notes on the wall + oral response
FGQ#8. Do those commercials represent well Vinted?	After showing the participants four Vinted commercial spots. Responses with green, yellow, and red cards to express level of agreement
FGQ#9. What would you tell someone to convince him/her to use Vinted?	Roleplaying
FGQ#10. Use 2 adjectives to describe Vinted	Sticky notes on the wall + oral response
FGQ#11. Say two reasons to use Vinted	Group oral response
FGQ#12. Say two ideas to improve Vinted	Group oral response

Own elaboration.

The semi-structured questions are related to the research questions. They address primarily the Vinted brand attributes perceived by Gen Z and the motivations of this generation towards sustainable fashion, considering, in particular, the case of Vinted. As observed in the literature review, different works point out the role of sustainability in creating brand attributes that positively influence user behavior [6,32–34,79]. On the other hand, motivation plays a crucial role in consumer behavior since it is one of the psychological factors influencing such behavior [80]; Maslow's Theory of Motivations (1954) will be used to analyze the participants' responses [46].

The design of these questions corresponds to the objective of responding to the research questions while generating an atmosphere in which the participants feel encouraged to interact with each other and to answer in a comprehensive, profound, and sincere manner; without stifling spontaneous contributions that may of value for this exploratory stage and that could be analyzed in subsequent phase/s. For this reason, some questions present a straightforward statement (FGQ#10: "Say two adjectives to describe Vinted"), while others are more open (FGQ#4: "How is your experience using Vinted?"). In addition, with the same purpose, the same issues are repeatedly addressed through several questions formulated in distinct ways and at different times of the investigation. Thus, questions FGQ#1, FGQ#2, FGQ#3, FGQ#6, and FGQ#7 stimulate interaction between the participants to debate different points of view about the three research questions. Questions FGQ#4, FGQ#8, and FGQ#10 focus on RQ#1, relating to brand attributes. Motivations (RQ#2) are addressed in questions FGQ#9, FGQ#11, and FGQ#12. Finally, RQ#3, referring to the core target, is approached in question FGQ#5.

4.2.2. Pilot Survey

The responses from the focus group serve to create a pilot survey. Pilot surveys are frequent in different areas of science; their use in the social sciences is prominent [81,82], particularly in consumer-focused research [83]. The motivation at this stage of the research is to test the validity of the questionnaire in a small-scale sample. The pilot survey intends to check the suitability of the words used in the questionnaire and also capture other relevant aspects for the respondents not included in the survey, which is done through open-ended questions or the "others" option [84,85].

The pilot survey was distributed from November 2022 to January 2023 to university students in the field of Communication in Lithuania and Spain (N = 156). Regarding the sex criterion, it is a sample in which women predominate (66% of the total). Regarding nationalities, participants from Lithuania and Spain have a higher weight, representing close to 30% in both cases. The remaining 40% is atomized among 33 countries. This percentage corresponds to international students studying at universities in Lithuania and Spain (see Table 4).

Table 4. Pilot survey respondents' distribution according to sex and nationality.

According to Sex	103	Women
	51	Men
	2	Non-binary
According to Nationality	47	Lithuania
	46	Spain
	10	Ukraine
	8	Kazakhstan
	5	Turkey
	3	Latvia, Russia
	2	Bangladesh, Estonia, Gambia, Ghana, Germany, Italy, Pakistan
	1	Argentina, Azerbaijan, Cameroun, China, Ecuador, Estonia, France, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Kosovo, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, UK

Own elaboration.

As explained above, the motivation at this research stage is to test the questionnaire. Once the validity of the questionnaire has been tested through the pilot study, the implementations or readjustments considered appropriate will be carried out for developing a new questionnaire. In a later phase of the research, this new questionnaire, whose design has been validated, will be distributed to a larger sample.

The complete questionnaire is available in Appendix A.

5. Results

5.1. Focus Groups

In general, the results obtained from both groups reach a high level of similarity.

In both groups, all the participants recognized the brand Vinted after showing them the logotype (FGQ#1).

Spontaneously, the participants began to describe the brand (FGQ#2 and FGQ#3). The descriptions made in both groups were highly similar. Participants were unanimous in pointing out the following ideas: "sharing economy", "app", "to sell and buy", "it is convenient", "very easy", "I never had a problem using it".

Up to this moment, no participant mentioned anything about sustainable fashion, environmental awareness, responsible consumption, or another related term.

There was only one point of disagreement in Group A: participants P#A8 and P#A10 thought that Vinted was a French business, given the extended use of Vinted in this country. The rest of the participants confidently expressed that it was a Lithuanian business.

The usage penetration is high. In both groups, around three-quarters of the participants are regular Vinted consumers.

Again, both groups coincide and express similar descriptions of Vinted's users (FGQ#5). They argue that "it is a type of App that anyone can use because it allows you to exchange many types of products, not just clothes" (P#B5). However, they agree that the core target of Vinted includes young consumer segments. In Group A, the term "centennials" is spontaneously mentioned (P#A7). In Group B, participant P#A11 said: "people like us, of our age".

Among the reasons they provide to justify why this segment is the predominant one, the following stand out: "this type of people are more interested in fashion" (P#B1), "they are young people, and young people have less money" (P#A3), "we use many apps, we like to buy and make deals with apps. Older people don't use these systems as much" (P#A9).

In Group B, in response to this question (FGQ#5), it is the first time that, spontaneously, a concept related to sustainable consumption is mentioned: "I think that people of our age, because it is an eco-friendly brand, because it helps you consume more sustainably, reusing things. And young people are very aware of this" (P#A10).

After watching the video commercials (FGQ#8), the two groups affirm that the explanation of how the app works is very exact; in that sense, they consider that these advertising formats fulfill a correct informative function. They also appreciate that the video commercials "have good production, good audiovisual quality, are pleasant, and generate a good brand image" (P#A6).

The main criticism in both groups is that the male audience profile is not represented. This topic is profusely discussed and pointed out as a severe mistake. It also seems like a mistake that only clothing items are displayed, not the other products that can be sold and bought on Vinted. Regarding this point, the commercial videos that the participants watched belong to the Real Feel campaign, created by the Deadbeat Films agency for the UK [86]. The reason for choosing this campaign was that it was in English, the language used as a bridge of understanding between all international participants. Other Vinted campaigns created for the French, German, or Italian markets show male users and other product categories, not just fashion.

In the minority, a participant from Group B mentioned that a more direct reference regarding the value of sustainable consumption is missing: "To me, it is a crucial point. And they talk about giving a second chance, a second life for the products. I understand that they mean this, they mean that sustainability is important and using Vinted we can be more eco-friendly. But I think this concept is so important that they should insist more on it" (P#B10).

In order to approach the concept of motivations in a participatory dynamic and favor a more spontaneous response, the participants were asked to do a role-play, pretending to convince someone to use Vinted (FCQ#9). The arguments given were collected and ranked according to their relevance, according to two criteria: the number of participants who mentioned each motivation and the time (in seconds) the participants used to emphasize the importance of each one (see Table 5).

Table 5. Motivations to use Vinted, in descendent order of relevance.

According to Group A	According to Group B
Save money, better prices Easy to use, accessible, safe system Many products Decluttering Environmentally friendly, second life for the clothes, recycling, an opportunity not to buy fast fashion	Save money, better prices Easy to use Finding more special clothes, quality brands, vintage clothes Environmentally friendly, second life for the clothes, recycling, an opportunity not to buy to fast fashion Decluttering Two functions on the same app: to buy and to sell Supporting local brands (expressed by Lithuanian participants)

Own elaboration.

At this point, the contributions of two participants from Group A (P#A9 and P#A10) and one from Group B (P#B10) were especially significant. They spontaneously spoke out negatively against fast fashion. Participants from Group A reported that fast fashion is against sustainability. In Group B, they denounced the lack of ethics of this system that "abuse of the environment, impose not fair trade. Even they do child exploitation in their factories in poor countries".

Once again, the results are practically identical in both groups when citing adjectives that describe Vinted (FCQ#10) or suggesting improvements (FCQ#11), so much so that they are represented jointly (see Table 6). The criterion considered to arrange the adjectives in order of relevance is the number of participants that mentioned each one.

Table 6. Adjectives and suggestions to improve mentioned by the two groups, in descendent order of relevance.

Adjectives	Suggestions to Improve
Economical, affordable, cheap Profitable, beneficial Accessible, easy Helpful, practical Innovate Reliable Multifunctional Unclear	Including men representation Not only clothes, more elements More specific communication about it is a sustainable brand

Own elaboration.

In the list of adjectives, those with a positive meaning abound. Among them, the participants do not make any allusion to terms related to sustainability.

However, in the suggestions for improvement, participants from both groups demand a more explicit communication of the value of sustainable fashion consumption by Vinted. Notably, in Group B, a debate begins on the suitability of the Vinted brand identity. A participant points out: "it seems outdated to me, it does not reflect sustainability values" (P#B1).

The answers to FGQ#4, FGQ#6, FGQ#7, and FGQ#11 are not commented on to avoid repeatedly offering the information since the participants answered these aspects in the questions above analyzed. The fact that the participants have responded the same to different questions indicates the consistency of their answers and the validity of the results.

Table 7 summarizes the main results from the two focus group sessions classified according to the research questions.

**Table 7.** Focus Group main results.

Related to RQs	Results
RQ#1: Vinted's Attributes	Positive brand attributes predominate. Consensus prevails around the main attributes indicated. The attributes related to economic and practical benefits are mentioned with greater relevance: to earn and save money, easy and safe to use, to decluttering. Few participants spontaneously mention sustainability; they consider it is an essential brand attribute. Most participants recognize the sustainability attribute but do not consider it essential.
RQ#2: Motivations to use Vinted	Participants distinguish between the general public and Gen Z's motivations towards Vinted. In the general public, motivations are mainly related to safety needs (earning money, saving, better access to resources, ease, and safety in the platform). In Gen Z, the motivations are related to the needs of: safety (same as above); esteem (Gen Z loves fashion, apps, and social media); self-actualization (Gen Z is highly concerned with sustainability).
RQ#3: Vinted's user profile	The participants argue that Vinted's broad target is extensive regarding age, gender, and culture. They identify Gen Z as Vinted's core target. As data of inductive value, all the focus group participants recognize the Vinted brand, and most are Vinted's users.

Own elaboration.

5.2. Pilot Survey

The data analysis from the Pilot Survey highlights those aspects directly related to the research questions.

Question PSQ#3 addresses the issue of Vinted brand attributes, discussed in RQ#1. In response to "For you, which of the following points are related to the Vinted brand? You can mark as many as you consider", 58 respondents associate this brand with the sustainability concept, which means 52.7% of the respondents stated that they know Vinted (Figure 3). Higher percentages identify attributes related to economic and practical benefits. The lowest percentage of responses corresponds to the only negative attribute. The last open field ("Others") received a negligible percentage of responses (1.8%, only 2 respondents).
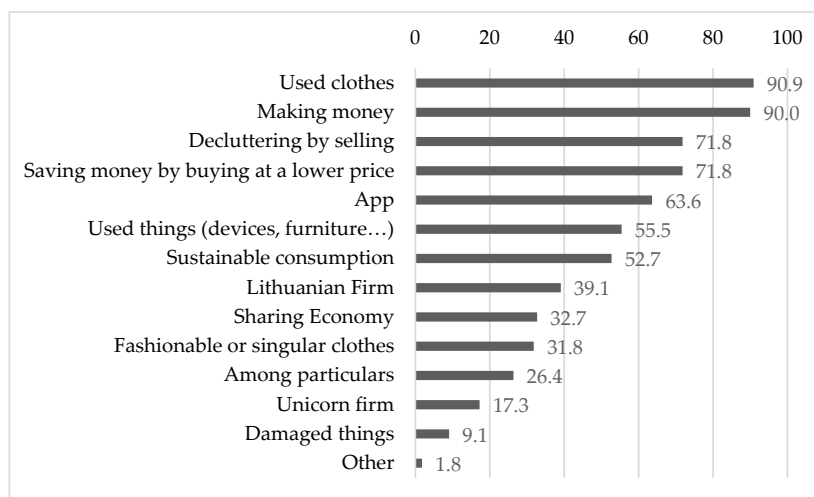
Figure 3. Attributes and ideas related to Vinted. Own elaboration.

From the questions PSQ#5 to PSQ#10, respondents expressed their level of agreement with some statements about Vinted made by the focus groups' participants. It was expressed on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "I don't agree at all" and 5 means "I absolutely agree".

In Table 8, three measures of central tendency are shown to describe the questionnaire responses: mean (x), median (Me), and mode (Mo). As well as the interquartile range (k), obtained from the difference between the third quartile (q3) and the first quartile (q1). Finally, the last column determines whether a sufficient group consensus level is achieved: for five-point Likert scale questions, a sufficient level of consensus occurs when the value of the interquartile range is equal to or less than 1 (k ≤ 1), and unanimity occurs when k = 0 [87].

**Table 8.** Level of agreement with statements about Vinted.

Statement	$\overline{x}$	Me	Mo	K	Consensus
PSQ#5. Vinted may help to save or earn money	3.67	4	4	1	Sufficient
PSQ#6. Vinted may contribute to consuming more sustainably	3.82	4	4	2	Not sufficient
PSQ#7. Vinted as an alternative to Fast Fashion Stores, that are far from being sustainable and ethical	3.65	4	5	2	Not sufficient
PSQ#8. Vinted as an alternative to Fast Fashion Stores, that only offer boring standard-style clothes	2.80	3	3	1	Sufficient
PSQ#9. Vinted contribute effectively to fostering a more sustainable model of consumption	3.87	4	4	2	Not sufficient
PSQ#10. Vinted may offer more fashionable clothes, singular products, good brands . . .	3.44	3	3	1	Sufficient

Own elaboration.

Three of the statements reach a sufficient degree of consensus. The respondents agree quite well with one of them, which refers to Vinted's economic benefits (PSQ#5); median and mode value 4 on the scale. In the other two, referring to the singular style of clothing in Vinted (PSQ#8 and PSQ#10), the respondents are at the neutral point of the scale (value 3), neither in favor nor against the statement, with inconclusive results.

The other three statements (PSQ#6, 7, and PSQ#9), which do not reach a consensus, relate Vinted to the attribute of sustainability. The respondents offered polarized answers: some were absolutely or quite in favor of the statement (values 5 and 4), others were quite against it (value 2).

Question PSQ#13 addresses the motivations, considered in RQ#2. It does so based on statements made by the focus group participants. In response to "What factors do you have in mind when you buy clothes? You can mark as many as you consider", 39 respondents (25%) declared concerned about the production system, sustainability and ethical working conditions (Figure 4).
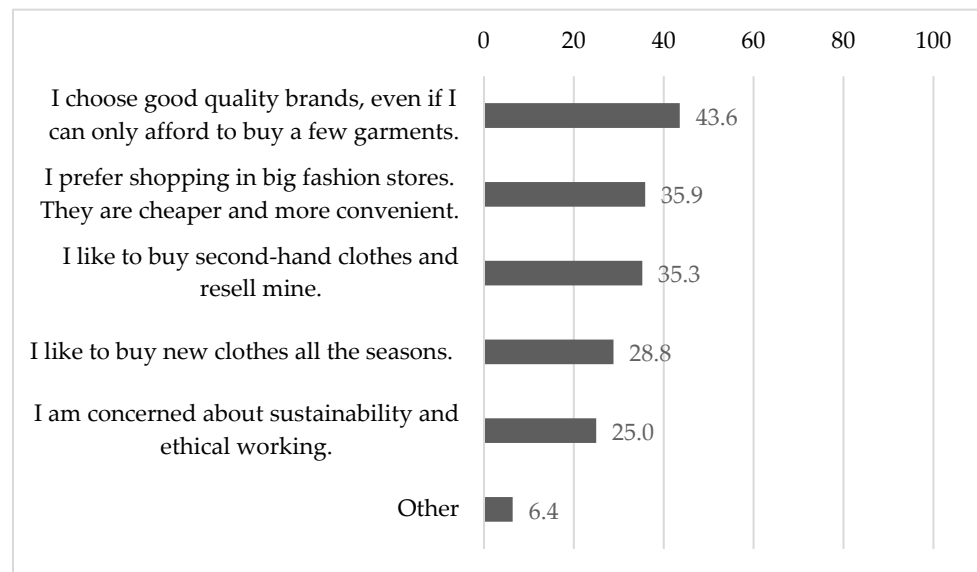
Figure 4. Concerns and motivations. Own elaboration.

The option that includes the term *sustainability* is the one with the lowest percentage of responses, except for the open field "other". This statement, "I am concerned about the production system, sustainability, and ethical working conditions are the most relevant for me", is understood as a type of motivation that responds to a need for self-realization at the top of Maslow's pyramid, which drives users to realize their true potential and achieve their ideal selves; in most cases, related to altruistic feelings and social commitment.

The two options that concentrate the highest response rates reflect two types of motivations that could be contradictory, portraying very different consumer profiles. The first one, chosen by 43.6% of those interviewed, describes a consumption model consistent with slow fashion: "I choose good quality brands, even if the price is higher and I can't afford to buy many clothes" (related to esteem needs, which include respect, self-esteem, social status, feeling of freedom). While the second most chosen option (35.9%), supports the fast fashion model: "I prefer to buy clothes at big fashion stores, they are cheap and convenient" (related to safety needs, relate to safety, property, resources management).

Although these two perspectives may seem contradictory, these declared motivations and behaviors co-occur in some consumers. Of the 68 respondents who declared that they prioritize the choice of good quality clothing, 20 (29.4%) state that they also like to shop in large clothing stores because they are cheaper and more convenient; 21 (30.9%) are additionally in favor of buying second-hand clothes; and 6 (8.8%) choose good quality clothes, prefer department stores and buy second-hand clothes.

In the "other" open field, vast majority of answers are divided into two blocks: one related to the idea of buying clothes that "make me feel good, to show my personality" (R#37); and another that emphasizes price and alludes to the fast fashion concept" the cheaper, the better; that way I can buy more" (R#82).

Regarding the idea that Gen Z is part of Vinted's core target group (related to RQ#3), the pilot survey takes a complementary approach to the focus group, analyzing the brand recognition and use penetration in the sample (PSQ#1).

The results show a high brand recognition (Figure 5, left). A total of 71% of the respondents stated that they identified the brand by seeing its logo and being able to explain its services and characteristics. Overall, 10% feel the logo is familiar but do not know the brand enough to define its services or features clearly. Compared to them, 19% of users do not recognize the brand. In the use penetration, the figures are also high. Almost two-thirds of the respondents declare themselves Vinted's users: 26% state that they often use the app, while 39% state that they occasionally do (Figure 5, right).
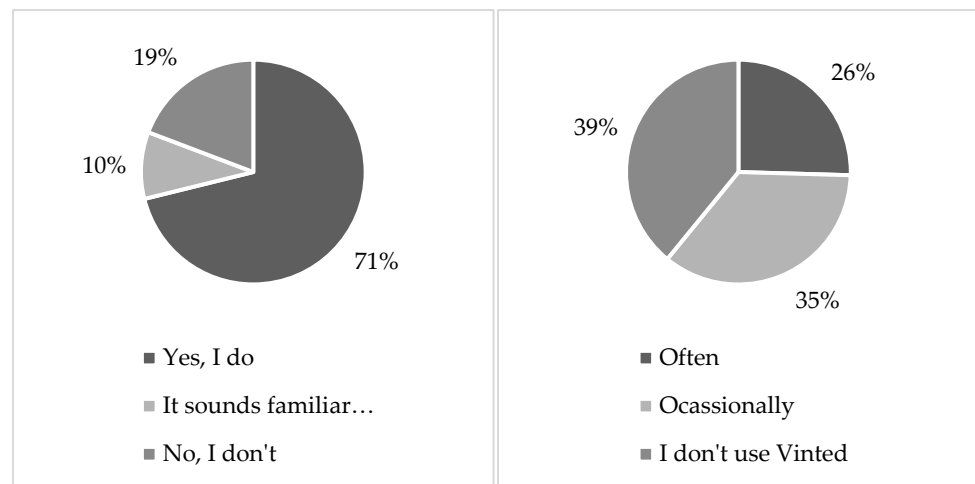
Figure 5. Vinted's brand recognition and use penetration. Own elaboration.

6. Discussion

A recent study [1] that analyses 59 scientific publications on sharing economy and fashion reveals that, even though there has been a significant increase in the literature on sustainable fashion in recent years, most publications do not reach conclusive findings yet. It is necessary to continue exploring the concepts, synthesizing better definitions, and answering further questions involving fashion and sustainability, industry stakeholders, consumers, and new economic challenges for the 21st century.

Numerous authors redound on this idea, insisting that the importance of the subject, its novelty, and its continuous evolvement requires more work from the researchers' side. "For those willing to address the gaps and limitations in the current literature base, represent a fruitful and long-term research opportunity" [88] (p. 1823).

In this sense, the present research fulfills a crucial mission to consolidate concepts pointed out in previous publications and open new avenues for analysis.

On the one hand, the results highlight the existence of sustainable consumption awareness among Gen Z in the matter of fashion consumption, corroborating what prior research already pointed out [2,10,32,38,39,41,42,50].

On the other hand, the findings also confirm what other previous studies have argued: despite Gen Z's environmental and sustainable awareness, this generation still presents a majoritarian consumption behavior that supports fast fashion and other non-sustainable models [12,13,22]. Consequently, the statement that fast and eco-fashion coexist in Gen Z's consumption behavior [15] is reaffirmed.

The results obtained from the focus groups are very consistent. There are hardly any differences in the responses of both groups. Internally, in each group, there are no significant differences of opinion that could be related to the sex or nationality of the participants. It is only noticed, as a slight difference, that the Lithuanian participants have a deeper knowledge of Vinted and express proud satisfaction for the business success of a company from their country.

Regarding the questionnaire, even though it must be understood as a pilot test, it provides results consistent with the focus group's findings.

A significant part, but not the majority of the study participants, appreciate Vinted's sustainable attributes and feel that these attributes motivate them, influencing their desire to become members of the Vinted community. For those participants, sustainable consumption is a responsible reaction to solve environmental, social, and ethical needs- but, simultaneously, a trendy attitude [1,22,26,89].

Meanwhile, for the majority, other attributes of a practical nature weigh more heavily in the decision to use Vinted; specifically, making/saving money, ease of use, and decluttering.

These attributes coincide with those that stand out the most in Vinted campaigns, focused on explaining how the app works, its simplicity, and that it is a way to get rid of what is no longer used while earning money. In this sense, Vinted advertising arguments are aligned with the motivations and interests primarily detected in Z group target.

This research also responds to one of the gaps in the scientific literature related to the opposition between the luxury fashion business and fast fashion, taking into account the perceptions of consumers and their attitudes [2]. At this point, the research shows that Vinted users appreciate the possibility of finding an alternative to fast fashion through this sharing economy platform. Vinted allows them to find more singular apparel. It is an idea that emerges spontaneously in the focus Group and receives a neutral response in the pilot questionnaire, with sufficient consensus.

Moreover, the research addresses an international sample of participants and respondents, intending to continue to advance along the lines of previous studies that have already pointed out the influence of cultural differences on consumers' sustainable awareness and behavior [5].

As previously stated, this research must be understood as an introductory stage to a subsequent study. The focus groups served as a key element for gathering insights for composing the pilot questionnaire. Its launch has tested the type of questions and captured new topics of interest to users through open-field questions. In subsequent research stages, a refined questionnaire will be distributed to a higher representative sample of the universe of study, with international diversity.

Even with its introductory nature, this research manages to validate the three hypotheses: Gen Z consumers perceive sustainable fashion consumption as an attribute that identifies Vinted (H#1); they perceive sustainable fashion consumption as an attribute that motivates them to be Vinted's users (H#2a), but other attributes in Vinted influence them more significantly (H#2b); furthermore, consumers belonging to Gen Z perceive themselves as Vinted's core target, feeling satisfied and/or proud of using this service (H#3).

The research limitations relate to the sample size of the pilot study, also, to the questionnaire conceptualization. The main recommendations for the subsequent research stage/s are to make a more precise delimitation of the variables involved and to design a factor analysis to discover the relationships between them. It will be essential to validate the construct to make statistical extrapolations from a larger sample. Regarding the type of questions, another recommendation is to increase the use of Likert scales to measure the respondents' degree of agreement on statements already collected in the present research stage.

7. Conclusions

Sustainability is a global challenge that calls to be addressed in all fields of science, professional sectors, institutions, and everyday life. In the case of marketing and advertising, this challenge involves reversing the usual objective of these disciplines, which have traditionally concentrated their efforts on increasing the consumption of all kinds of products and services.

Whether the fashion industry is sustainable depends not only on how we produce but also on how we consume. In this sense, the sharing economy model proposed by Vinted is valuable and empowers users to develop responsible and sustainable consumption.

Given the confirmation of a significant level of sustainable awareness in Z consumers and considering that this value is observed as a desirable and trending brand attribute, Vinted has the opportunity (and responsibility) to promote the sustainable fashion consumption value more explicitly. This decision in branding strategy may improve Vinted's positioning before Gen Z and reinforce the sustainable awareness in this generational cohort, even contributing to an increase in sustainable purchasing behavior.

The idea expressed by Vinted of giving a second life to products synthesizes the raison d'être of sustainable consumption. However, a more explicit and detailed brand message, with verbal messages emphasizing sustainability and respect for the environment, is recommended to generate a more holistic user awareness, with an aesthetic

and recreational perception attractive to Gen Z: "the ways of saying are constitutive of aesthetic experiencing, that together with other elements they configure it and not only communicate it" [90] (p. 31).

For this reason, when trying to answer the difficult question of how to enhance the motivation of Gen Z consumers towards sustainable fashion, the research conclusions point to connecting the motivations that respond to esteem needs and the self-actualization top level.

In a high percentage of Gen Z users, fashion consumption satisfies a need for esteem. Fashion gives them status, improves their perception of themselves and others, and reinforces their feeling of freedom. These motivations are present in those who prefer fast fashion, slow fashion, sustainable fashion, or second-hand clothes [1,22,31,46].

On the other hand, in the data analysis step, Gen Z's sustainable commitment has been considered a need for self-actualization, related to the motivation that guides a person to build the ideal self.

Now, in the conclusions, the question is served: why not present this sustainable commitment as a need for esteem? Why not carry out advertising campaigns that reinforce sustainability as an attribute that favors the user's self-esteem, improving the social image, recognition, strength, and freedom? This proposal for a branding strategy based on a reorganization of the motivations and a different perspective to present the brand attribute of sustainability intends to be a contribution of a practical nature, not only in the case of Vinted but also of the other firms in the sustainable fashion market.

This proposal for a branding strategy based on a reorganization of the motivations, jointly with a different perspective to present the sustainability brand attribute, intends to be a practical contribution, not only in the case of Vinted but also of the other firms in the sustainable fashion market.

From a theoretical point of view, the contribution focuses on expanding the knowledge of the motivations of Gen Z towards sustainable fashion through the shared economy, laying the foundations to continue a deeper analysis of the motivations and their connection with the attributes branded; in a perspective that assumes, as other authors [91,92] have already done, that although the needs identified by Maslow are universal, the order and obligation to satisfy them hierarchically are not.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Pilot survey questionnaire.

Question	Response Options/Information Displayed
PSQ#0. You will be asked about this brand	(Vinted's logotype)
PSQ#1. Do you recognize this brand?	Yes, I do. I know what brand it is, its service, and its main characteristics. The logotype sounds familiar, but I can't describe its service or characteristics. No, I don't.
PSQ#2. Are you a user of this brand?	Yes, I am. I often use it. I have used it only once or seldom. No, I am not.
PSQ#3. To you, what of the following points are related to the brand Vinted? You can mark as many as you consider.	Used clothes Making money by selling your stuff Transactions among particulars Lithuanian firmUsed things (electronic devices, furniture, accessories …) Sharing economy Unicorn firm Freeing up space at home by selling the stuff you don't use anymore Sustainable consumption App Fashionable or singular clothes Saving money by buying at a lower price Damaged things Other …
PSQ#4. From your point of view, what of these adjectives or characteristics are appropriate to describe Vinted? You can mark as many as you consider.	Easy Complicated Reliable Insecure process Fashionable Only for poor-value stuff Vinted is a brand that you can be happy/proud of using it Vinted is a brand that, if you use it, you prefer others not to know you do Other …
PSQ#5. Some people think that Vinted may help to save or earn money. To you, how important is this reason to move you to make the decision to use Vinted?	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not important at all" and 5 means "absolutely important".
PSQ#6. Some people think that Vinted may contribute to consuming more sustainably. To you, how important is this reason to move you to make the decision to use Vinted?	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not important at all" and 5 means "absolutely important".
PSQ#7. Some people use Vinted as an alternative to Fast Fashion Stores. They are against Fast Fashion Stores because, in their opinion, these international corporations are very far from being sustainable and ethical. Do you agree with this point of view about Fast Fashion Stores?	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not important at all" and 5 means "absolutely important".
PSQ#8. Other people that use Vinted as an alternative to Fast Fashion Stores argue that Fast Fashion Stores only offer boring standard-style clothes- all the products are alike and the quality is not good enough. Do you agree with this point of view?	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not important at all" and 5 means "absolutely important".

Table A1. *Cont.*

Question	Response Options/Information Displayed
PSQ#9. From your point of you, does Vinted contribute effectively to fostering a more sustainable model of consumption?	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not at all" and 5 means "absolutely".
PSQ#10. To you, is it possible to find in Vinted more fashionable clothes? For example, singular products from exclusive brands or of a higher quality.	Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "not at all" and 5 means "absolutely".
PSQ#11. Would you like to express another reason that is relevant for you in order to use or not to use Vinted?	Open question
PSQ#12. Do you think the fashion industry is very polluting?	Yes, it is one of the most polluting sectors. I think that it pollutes as many industries do, but not especially. I don't know.
PSQ#13. What factors do you have in mind when you buy clothes? You can mark as many as you consider.	I like to buy new clothes all the seasons. I prefer to buy clothes at big fashion stores; they are cheap and convenient. I choose good quality brands, even if the price is higher and I can't afford to buy many clothes. I am concerned about the production system. Sustainability and ethical working conditions are the most relevant for me. I like to buy second-hand clothes and resell my used ones Other . . .

Own elaboration.

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