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Multi-level Exploration of Value Co-Creation in a Service Ecosystem

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Anushka Patara
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Deciding to undertake doctoral studies, away from home, was a difficult and an emotional decision for me. In addition to the hard work that would be required in doing and completing the research, I would also have to leave a high-paying job and my family and friends in India. But I was passionate and determined and moved to New Zealand to pursue my PhD. Looking back, I got through three Covid 19 lockdowns and the resulting economic uncertainty in New Zealand; I lost my beloved paternal grandmother in October 2020 and my maternal grandfather in February 2023 and, went through many days of being under the weather, and other physical and mental health issues. Having said that, I couldn't have done this without the love and support of many people. This page is dedicated to all those who have played a part in bringing this research to actualisation.

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Abstract

This doctoral study explores multi-level value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem in New Zealand, guided by the theoretical lens of service-dominant logic and an ecosystems perspective. It critically examines how actors at the macro (experts), meso (a sustainable fashion retailer), and micro (consumers) levels co-create value. An interpretive qualitative design was employed, drawing on 34 in-depth interviews across macro, meso and micro levels, with data analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. The analysis identified four interrelated pathways to value co-creation – knowledge, future orientation, guardianship, and regeneration – and seven contextual factors shaping value outcomes. Promoting longevity, impact reduction, and a conscious consumption approach facilitates co-creation, whereas knowledge anxiety, limited accessibility, and inadequate infrastructure and regulation constrain it, creating conditions for value co-destruction despite pro-sustainability intentions. This study contributes to the service ecosystem and sustainability marketing literature by proposing a multi-level value co-creation framework, which reveals how actors' sensemaking and resource integration are conditioned by broader structural, institutional, and material contexts. It highlights the misalignments and tensions across levels that lead to fragmented efforts and limited systemic impact. By unpacking the interplay between actor narratives, practices and contextual constraints, the study offers insight into how sustainable transformation is both enabled and undermined. The findings inform the theoretical understanding of value co-creation in service ecosystems that are sustainable or transitioning towards sustainability. Practically, they offer guidance for businesses, policymakers, and leaders seeking to orchestrate more coherent, cross-level strategies for sustainable fashion. This research confirms that value co-creation is not just an outcome but an ongoing, negotiated process within complex and evolving ecosystems.

Keywords: Value Co-Creation, S-D Logic, Service Ecosystem, Sustainable Fashion

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract.....	4
Table of Contents	5
List of Tables.....	8
List of Figures.....	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	11
1.1 Background	11
1.2 Theoretical Lens of the Study	14
1.3 Research Objectives and Questions	16
1.4 Overview of Methodology	18
1.5 Contributions.....	19
1.6 Structure of Thesis	20
Chapter 2: Literature Review of Sustainability and Marketing.....	22
2.1 Overview	22
2.2 Wicked Problems.....	22
2.3 Sustainability, Sustainable Development and SDGs.....	25
2.4 SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production	28
2.5 Sustainability and Marketing Research.....	30
2.5.1 Sustainable Consumption	35
2.6 Chapter Overview	37
Chapter 3: Theoretical Lens – Value and Value Co-creation	38
3.1 Chapter Overview	38
3.2 Defining Value.....	38
3.2.1 Economic Perspective of Value	39
3.2.2 Concept of Value in Marketing.....	40
3.2.3 Value-in-use	43
3.3 Value Co-Creation	44
3.3.1 Service Logic Approach to Value Co-Creation	47
3.3.2 Service-Dominant Logic Approach to Value Co-Creation	49
3.4 Service Ecosystems	61
3.5 Multi-level Exploration of Value Co-creation.....	62
3.5.1 Macro Level.....	63
3.5.2 Meso Level	63
3.5.3 Micro Level	64

3.6 Value Co-Creation, Service Ecosystems and Sustainability	64
3.7 Chapter Summary.....	68
Chapter 4: Research Context	70
4.1 Chapter Overview	70
4.2 Emergence of Sustainable Fashion	70
4.3 Understanding Sustainable Fashion	72
4.3 Sustainable Fashion Research in Marketing	77
4.7 Chapter Summary.....	78
Chapter 5: Research Methodology.....	80
5.1 Overview	80
5.2 Philosophical Paradigm.....	80
5.3 Research Strategy: Qualitative Research Approach.....	82
5.4 Research Design: Multi-Level Exploration.....	84
5.5 Participant Selection.....	85
5.5.1 Macro Level Group	85
5.5.2 Meso Level Group	89
5.4.3 Micro Level Group	90
5.6 Research Method: In-depth Interviews	92
5.6 Data Collection.....	95
5.7 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis.....	96
5.8 Ethical Considerations	105
5.8.1 Informed Consent and Participant Rights.....	105
5.8.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity	106
5.9 Chapter Summary	107
Chapter 6: Pathways to Value Co-Creation	109
6.1 Chapter Overview	109
6.1.1 Analysis Process	109
6.1.2 Emergent Themes	110
6.2 Knowledge	111
6.2.1 Theme Description.....	111
6.2.2 Knowledge Empowerment	112
6.2.3 Knowledge Integration	116
6.2.4 Knowledge Anxiety	124
6.2.5 Theme Summary.....	128
6.3 Future Orientation	130

6.3.1 Theme Description.....	130
6.3.2 Macro-Level Future Orientation – Collective Vision.....	131
6.3.3 Meso-Level Future Orientation – Planning and Innovation.....	133
6.3.4 Micro-Level Future Orientation – Conscious and Ethical Consumption.....	134
6.3.5 Theme Summary.....	135
6.4 Guardianship.....	136
6.4.1 Theme Description.....	136
6.4.2 Macro-Level Guardianship – Collective Guardianship.....	137
6.4.3 Meso-Level Guardianship – Product Lifecycle Guardianship.....	138
6.4.4 Micro-Level Guardianship – Product Use Guardianship.....	139
6.4.5 Theme Summary.....	140
6.5 Regeneration.....	141
6.5.1 Theme Description.....	141
6.5.2 Macro Level Regeneration – Regenerative Infrastructure.....	142
6.5.3 Meso-Level Regeneration – Circular Business Approach.....	144
6.5.4 Micro-Level Regeneration – Reuse, Recycle and Repair.....	146
6.5.5 Theme Summary.....	149
6.6. Chapter Summary.....	150
Chapter 7: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation.....	154
7.1 Chapter Overview.....	154
7.1.1 Analysis Process.....	154
7.1.2 Emergent Contextual Factors.....	155
7.2 Facilitators of Value Co-Creation.....	155
7.2.1 Promoting Longevity.....	156
7.2.2 Impact Reduction.....	162
7.2.3 Conscious Consumption Approach.....	167
7.2.4 Summary of Facilitators.....	172
7.3 Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation.....	173
7.3.1 Accessibility.....	173
7.3.2 Inadequate Infrastructure.....	179
7.3.3 Inadequate Regulation.....	184
7.3.4 Summary of Inhibitors.....	190
Chapter 8: Discussion.....	193
8.1 Overview.....	193
8.2 Multi-level Value Co-creation in a Sustainable Fashion Service Ecosystem.....	194

8.2.1 First Quadrant – Knowledge.....	198
8.2.2 Second Quadrant – Future Orientation.....	200
8.2.3 Third Quadrant – Guardianship.....	204
8.2.4 Fourth Quadrant – Regeneration.....	207
8.2.5 Contextual Factors Affecting Value Co-Creation.....	210
Chapter 9: Contributions.....	222
9.1 Overview.....	222
9.3 Theoretical Contributions.....	222
9.4 Managerial Contributions.....	225
9.5 Limitations and Future Research Directions.....	229
9.6 Conclusion.....	231
Appendix A – Consent Form.....	233
Appendix B – Information Sheet Macro-Level Experts.....	234
Appendix C – Information Sheet Meso-Level Sustainable Fashion Retailer.....	237
Appendix D – Information Sheet Macro-Level Consumers.....	241
Appendix E – Research Participation Poster for Micro Level.....	244
Appendix F – Images Shown to Micro Level During Interviews.....	245
Appendix G – Initial List of Codes.....	265
References.....	267

List of Tables

Table 1: Many Definitions of "Sustainability" in Marketing Literature.....	32
Table 2: Definitions of Value Co-Creation.....	45
Table 3: S-D Logic Foundational Premise Development.....	53
Table 4: Summary of Sustainable Fashion Terminology.....	75
Table 5: Macro Level Participant Description.....	87
Table 6: Meso-Level Participant Descriptions.....	90
Table 7: Micro-Level Participant Descriptions.....	92
Table 8: Summary of Identified Themes.....	110
Table 9: Description of Knowledge.....	112
Table 10: Description of Future Orientation.....	131
Table 11: Description of Guardianship.....	136
Table 12: Description of Regeneration.....	142
Table 13: Summary of Identified Themes.....	151
Table 14: Facilitators of Value Co-Creation.....	156
Table 15: Description of Promoting Longevity.....	157
Table 16: Description of Impact Reduction.....	163
Table 17: Description of Conscious Consumption Approach.....	168
Table 18: Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation.....	173

Table 19: Description of Accessibility	174
Table 20: Description of Inadequate Infrastructure	180
Table 21: Description of Inadequate Regulation	184
Table 22: Contextual Factors Affecting Value Co-Creation	210

List of Figures

Figure 1: The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals	27
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*“There must be a better way to make the things we want, a way that doesn’t spoil the sky, or
the rain or the land” Paul McCartney*

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The present social, cultural and environmental landscape is afflicted, sadly, by ‘wicked problems’ that extend from climate change to poverty, unethical treatment of workers, social diversity, and more recently, the Covid-19 pandemic (Palakshappa, Bulmer, et al., 2024). These problems are rooted in systemic challenges and influence the global dynamics of business and society. Sustainability, although a megatrend (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014), is also deemed a ‘wicked problem’ (Conroy & Allen, 2010; McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). Focusing on ‘sustainability’ arguably includes the “triple bottom line” of caring for people, planet and prosperity (Elkington, 1997; Lelieveld, 2012). Despite the complexity of the term ‘sustainability’ (Barone et al., 2020), it is often encapsulated in three primary aspects: environmental (preserving natural resources), social (enhancing living conditions and promoting equal opportunities), and economic (achieving economic viability that ensures the well-being of both people and the planet) (Hans & Böhm, 2012).

Building upon this understanding, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are action-oriented goals addressing the sustainability-related issues currently agonising the world (Leal Filho et al., 2019; Leiserowitz et al., 2005; Persson et al., 2016). One of the 17 SDGs is SDG 12: ensuring sustainable consumption and production, which seeks to achieve a good life for everyone within the constraints of the planet’s biophysical capacity (Bengtsson et al., 2018). Sustainable consumption approaches sustainable development through the lens of consumption and production and has real potential for societal transformation towards sustainability (Fuchs & Boll, 2018).

The market system, traditionally held responsible for the world’s problems, is increasingly called upon to provide solutions to ‘wicked problems’ (Swaminathan et al., 2020) such as sustainability. What is evident is that production-related business practices within the market

system are frequently unsustainable, and current levels of consumption are untenable (Palakshappa, Bulmer, et al., 2024). Even though there has been research encouraging business communities, governments, and non-profit organizations to reduce and alter unsustainable behaviours, such behaviours still persist and are being strengthened (Assadourian, 2010; Sheth et al., 2011; Varey, 2012). Urgent appeals have been made for transformative change in business and society to promote a sustainable future, yet how to facilitate such transformation is often unclear (Moore & Milkoreit, 2020).

In response, marketing scholars and practitioners have demonstrated the role that marketing can play in creating sustainable markets (e.g. Chandy et al., 2021; Kemper & Ballantine, 2019). Research supports the proposition that marketing has the potential to create greater levels of sustainability (Lim, 2016; White et al., 2019). Marketing needs to adopt an orientation that “drives markets for sustainable products and services and builds sustainable societies” (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021, p. 150), thereby creating realistic and holistic solutions to sustainability challenges (Thomas, 2018). The marketing literature often remains focused on compartmentalised, differentiation-driven efforts to identify attributes that promote sustainable consumption (Palakshappa, Bulmer, et al., 2024). Despite the prevalence of this research approach, there has been minimal progress in advancing our understanding of marketing, consumer behaviour, and sustainability in a positive direction (Davies et al., 2020). This study supports marketing scholars who encourage moving beyond an isolated emphasis on individual responsibility for sustainability to embracing a shared and collective response.

Addressing the complex wicked problems that the world is facing requires a holistic perspective that spans the entire ecosystem, from production to consumption, and includes all stakeholders involved in this value provision chain (Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). Focusing solely on traditional, individual-level exploration is inadequate for initiating significant societal changes. A comprehensive perspective is needed, which encompasses how

value is generated among key stakeholders, especially those engaged in consumer and market sectors (Palazzo & Basu, 2007). The increased synergy from a holistic approach enhances the prospects for real transformation (Thomas, 2018). Advancing sustainable transformation requires considering how changes reconnect and reshape the meanings of relationships among people and between people and their surrounding ecosystems (Abson et al., 2017; Moore & Milkoreit, 2020). This entails shifting the practices and processes that mirror and sustain these systems (Haxeltine et al., 2017; Howaldt & Schwarz, 2017), as well as the underlying values and beliefs that uphold them (Antadze & McGowan, 2017).

Extant research shows the potential of value co-creation in shifting consumption and production domains towards sustainability (e.g. Firnkorn & Müller, 2011; Habibi et al., 2016), which is the primary focus of my research. The concept of value co-creation has evolved and is consistently described as an interactive and dynamic process where engaged actors, such as consumers and firms, collaborate to create value during the consumption experience (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014; Saha et al., 2022; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). Common themes in existing literature include value-in-context, co-production, and conceptualisations of a dynamic and experiential exchange process, emphasizing the importance of relationships and personalisation (see, e.g. Cova et al., 2011; Grönroos, 2011; Madhavaram & Hunt, 2008; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b). Value co-creation offers an approach to sustainability and sustainable futures by suggesting that value is achieved through the integration of resources from a wide range of social systems and stakeholders (Vargo, 2021). Implementing co-creation strategies focused on sustainability can also enhance awareness of sustainable practices and behaviours (Arnold, 2017).

My research supports the call for a 'systems view' to explore multidimensional and complex issues such as sustainability, and recognises that creating real transformation requires a multi-level perspective. Both market systems and ecosystem approaches consider business activities holistically. Layton (2007, p. 230) describes a marketing system as "a network of individuals,

groups, or entities connected directly or indirectly through sequential or shared participation in economic exchanges that creates, assembles, transforms, and makes available assortments of products, both tangible and intangible, provided in response to consumer demand”. In alignment with this systems perspective, adopting an ecosystems view can significantly contribute to sustainability and sustainable development by promoting change and action within the system through value co-creation at all levels: micro, meso, and macro (Saviano et al., 2017).

The fashion industry is intricately tied to many wicked problems – complex, interdependent issues such as climate change, resource depletion (Ray & Nayak, 2023; Sinha et al., 2023), and social inequalities (Busalim et al., 2022; Mukendi et al., 2020). It is criticized for its unsustainable practices in both production and consumption (Todeschini et al., 2017), and unfair employment conditions (Colucci & Vecchi, 2021). Issues include the use of fabrics made from non-renewable resources, promoting impulse buying, and encouraging frequent consumption through strategies such as the “marketing of acceleration and proliferation of ‘newness’” (Pucker, 2022, p. 1), as well as fast fashion greenwashing (Chan, 2022). This study is situated within the growing sustainable fashion industry, which is seen as the antidote to the perils of the fashion industry. Sustainable fashion has emerged as a solution to the industry’s negative impacts (Bly et al., 2015; Boström & Micheletti, 2016; Park & Lin, 2020).

1.2 Theoretical Lens of the Study

This research uses a Service-Dominant logic (S-D logic) and ecosystems perspective (Lusch & Vargo, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2011) as the theoretical lens. S-D logic is a marketing paradigm that shifts the focus from tangible goods to the co-creation of value through service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Introduced by Vargo and Lusch (2004a), it posits that all economic activity should be fundamentally grounded in service provision, with ‘goods’ merely serving as a medium or ‘vehicle’ for service delivery. S-D logic emphasizes collaborative processes

between multiple actors, such as consumers and producers, where value is co-created rather than embedded in products, and always includes the beneficiary. Vargo and Lusch (2016b) assert that “actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions” (p. 8). They also state that “a service-centred view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). Central to S-D logic are operant resources (skills and knowledge), in addition to operand resources (raw materials and machinery), which are essential to firms developing core competencies and organisational processes (Grönroos, 2011; Gummesson & Mele, 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). This does not discount intangible resources, relationships, and networks and thereby establishes how the S-D logic redefines the perception and generation of value in the marketplace.

In line with the ecosystems view and the S-D logic perspective, this research explored a sustainable fashion service ecosystem comprised of “keystone actors” (Iansiti & Levien, 2004) at three levels of participant aggregations: experts on sustainability and sustainable fashion (macro level); a sustainable fashion retailer (meso level); and consumers (micro level). Service ecosystems are dynamic, multi-level systems where actors integrate resources and co-create value through shared institutional logics and service exchanges (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Banoun et al., 2016). They are vital for addressing complex challenges, offering a framework for collaboration among individuals, organisations, and societal entities (Finsterwalder & Kuppelwieser, 2020; Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). Value co-creation within service ecosystems entails interactions across macro, meso, and micro levels, and can facilitate transformation by embedding sustainable practices and fostering innovation (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016; Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). The dynamic evolution of service ecosystems highlights the importance of maintaining stability while enabling innovation and adaptation (Banoun et al., 2016; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016).

Transitioning to a sustainable future aligns closely with the tenets of service ecosystems. Research has shown that service ecosystems inherently support resource efficiency, social equity, and environmental conservation. They also allow coordination between diverse stakeholders, advancing resilient, transformative outcomes (Dodds et al., 2022; Field et al., 2021). Sustainability-focused service ecosystems, referred to as sustainable service ecosystems, integrate economic, social, and ecological dimensions to address global challenges such as climate change and inequality (Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024).

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

S-D logic has emerged as a foundational perspective in service marketing, shifting attention from value as embedded in output to value as co-created by resource integration among actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). Despite substantial theoretical development, there are critical limitations in how value co-creation is empirically examined, particularly in sustainability-oriented service ecosystems.

First, there is a need to understand how value co-creation unfolds in service ecosystems that are either sustainability-focused or actively transitioning toward sustainable outcomes. Although S-D logic recognises the systemic and institutional nature of value formation (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2016b), empirical research remains disproportionately focused on dyadic brand-consumer interactions, often neglecting how value is shaped across multiple levels and by diverse actor constellations. Calls for more marketing research that investigates value co-creation across macro, meso, and micro levels – and involving actors beyond firms and consumers – have not been sufficiently addressed (Akaka et al., 2012; Edvardsson et al., 2012). Without such empirical investigations, important questions remain about how systemic alignment is achieved, how actor roles are negotiated, and how inconsistencies between levels may stall or reverse progress.

Second, in the context of sustainability marketing, research continues to prioritise individual consumer behaviour or firm-led sustainability strategies, without adequately situating these within the broader institutional and infrastructural contexts that enable or constrain value co-creation (Mukendi et al., 2020; Park & Lin, 2020). The absence of systems-level thinking creates a blind spot around how macro-level structures (e.g., regulation, policy, and infrastructure) interact with meso-level business practices and micro-level consumption decisions. This study responds to calls for marketing research that moves beyond narrow, firm-centric approaches to consider how collective and institutional action shapes sustainable outcomes (Frow et al., 2019; Saviano et al., 2017).

Third, while value co-creation is often framed as a positive or aspirational process, there is increasing recognition that not all interactions result in beneficial outcomes. Although concepts such as value co-destruction and no-value outcomes have been introduced (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010), empirical research remains limited on how such outcomes materialise and persist across service ecosystems. The risks, frictions, and barriers that actors encounter – particularly in complex sustainability transitions – are still under-theorised. Without attention to these dynamics, marketing scholarship risks presenting an idealised view of co-creation that overlooks structural misalignments, systemic inertia, and unintended consequences, as pointed out in reviews that are critical of co-creation research (e.g. Hansen, 2019)

Finally, in the context of sustainable fashion, existing research has typically drawn on the broader sustainable consumption literature, often overlooking the distinct characteristics of fashion consumption and identity performance. Yet fashion, as a domain of cultural and aesthetic meaning-making, presents unique tensions between sustainability, style, and self-expression. This study addresses this gap by drawing from fashion consumption literature, offering a more grounded and context-sensitive understanding of how sustainability is

negotiated by consumers, businesses, and institutional actors alike (Mukendi et al., 2020). In doing so, it contributes to the small but growing body of work that treats sustainable fashion ecosystems as complex and evolving service ecosystems worthy of focused empirical attention. In response to these intersecting gaps, this research adopted a multi-level lens to examine value co-creation, co-destruction, and stagnation within a sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It explores how actors across macro, meso, and micro levels align – or fail to align – in the pursuit of sustainability outcomes. In doing so, the research contributes to a more embedded dynamic, and critical understanding of value formation in complex service ecosystems and supports the theoretical development of S-D logic in sustainability contexts. This study asked two critical questions:

RQ1 - How do actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value?

RQ2 - What are the contextual factors that affect value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem?

1.4 Overview of Methodology

Employing an interpretive research paradigm grounded in constructionism, the research integrated macro, meso, and micro perspectives to examine the dynamics of value co-creation. A reflexive, iterative qualitative research strategy was adopted, comprising 34 in-depth interviews with three participant groups: macro-level sustainability and sustainable fashion experts, a meso-level sustainable fashion retailer, and micro-level consumers. Data analysis was completed using reflexive thematic analysis, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase approach, ensuring systematic coding and theme development. This allowed for in-depth, interpretive exploration of actor's experiences, capturing latent meanings and contextual influences.

1.5 Contributions

This study makes four key contributions to theory, methodology, and practice in service marketing and sustainability contexts.

1) Multi-level insight into value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem

While service ecosystems have been conceptualised as multi-level (Vargo & Akaka, 2012), empirical research has predominantly focused on dyadic or single-level analysis (Akaka, Schau, et al., 2013). This study addresses this gap by empirically investigating value co-creation across macro, meso, and micro levels within a sustainability context. By engaging experts, a sustainable fashion retailer, and consumers, the study offers a more holistic and layered understanding of how value is co-created, hindered, or reshaped through actor interactions. This complements recent calls in service ecosystem research to explore cross-level alignment and tensions (Frow et al., 2019; Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024), and supports a shift toward macromarketing perspectives that focus on sustainability and systemic transformation (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021)

2) Integration of non-positive outcomes into service ecosystem analysis

Rather than treating co-creation as uniformly beneficial, this research brings attention to co-destruction, no-value outcomes, and contested value (Helkkula et al., 2012; Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017; Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010). By examining how these emerge across actor levels – e.g., how knowledge anxiety, inadequate regulation, and inadequate infrastructure suppresses value co-creation – the study integrates these outcome types into a multi-actor service ecosystem framework. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of value co-creation, aligned with recent service research that calls for greater attention to value destruction and value plurality in complex ecosystems (Echeverri & Skålén, 2021; Lumivalo et al., 2024).

3) Contextualising S-D logic for sustainable fashion and SDG 12

While S-D logic has been widely applied to sustainability marketing (Lusch & Vargo, 2018; Vargo & Lusch, 2016b), its application to sustainable fashion and SDG 12 requires further exploration. This study contextualises S-D logic in a sector characterised by wicked problems, where fragmented knowledge, contested values, and power asymmetries prevail (Mukendi et al., 2020; Tregidga et al., 2018). By proposing a multi-level value co-creation framework informed by empirical insights, the study operationalises how actor collaboration can advance sustainable production and consumption, supporting emerging calls to integrate systems thinking and regenerative approaches into marketing scholarship (Muñoz & Branzei, 2021; Saviano et al., 2017).

4) Expanding methodological practice in ecosystem research

Methodologically, this study demonstrates how a qualitative, reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) can be used in conjunction with a deductive-inductive strategy to explore service ecosystems. It triangulates perspectives across three ecosystem levels while foregrounding the researcher's reflexive role in interpreting meaning. This contributes to the ongoing discussion on ensuring rigour and contextual depth in ecosystem-level qualitative research (Crick, 2021; Fischer & Guzel, 2023).

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis follows a standard monograph format, starting with an introduction chapter, followed by a literature review, theoretical lens, research context, methodology, findings, discussion, contributions, and conclusion. There are nine chapters in total. Chapter 1, the introduction, has provided an overview of the doctoral study. Chapter 2 presents the relevant literature on sustainability and marketing. The theoretical lens – value co-creation and S-D logic – is discussed in Chapter 3. This also includes a discussion of service ecosystems and a review of extant literature linking value co-creation, service ecosystems and sustainability. Chapter 4 elaborates on the research context. This study is situated in the context of sustainable

fashion in New Zealand. The research gaps and questions are presented at the end of Chapter 4. Following this, the research methodology is outlined in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 present the findings. Value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem is presented and discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 includes findings on the contextual factors that influence the value co-creation process. The discussion of the findings and contributions of this study are presented in Chapter 8 and Chapter 9, respectively. Chapter 9 also includes the conclusions, including the theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and future research directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review of Sustainability and Marketing

2.1 Overview

Global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and unsustainable consumption represent ‘wicked problems’ that require systemic solutions. Sustainability, which consists of environmental, social and economic dimensions, is positioned as a way to address these problems. The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) emphasises sustainable consumption and production as critical to fostering societal transformation within ecological limits. Marketing, traditionally viewed as a driver of unsustainable practices, has the potential to advance sustainability by creating markets for sustainable products and promoting shared responsibility among stakeholders.

Chapter 2 begins with a description of wicked problems. This is followed by a discussion on sustainability and sustainable development, including sustainable development goals (SDGs) and SDG 12 – sustainable consumption and production, specifically. The chapter concludes with a discussion of research linking sustainability and marketing, which highlights the role marketing can play in transitioning to a sustainable future.

2.2 Wicked Problems

Wicked problems are critical issues associated with sustainability, such as the trade-off between social, environmental, and economic perspectives or the obligation to future generation, and they exist in a very complicated context (Pederneiras et al., 2022), made up of various social, political, cultural, and economic elements that interact with one another to form a dynamic and multivariate system (Ben-Eli, 2018). Climate change (Grundmann, 2016), controlling illegal drug use (Alford & Head, 2017), and quality of higher education (Krause, 2012) are a few examples of wicked problems. Additional examples of these problems include obesity, environmental degradation, and fast fashion (Camillus, 2008; Kennedy, 2016; Kennedy &

Parsons, 2012; Lazarus, 2008). These kinds of problems are related to sustainability (Murphy, 2012).

The term “wicked problems” can be found across disciplines, including public administration, policy science, ecology and business administration (Batie, 2008). However, before describing wicked problems further, it is necessary to understand ‘problems’ first. A problem is “something worth finding or solving” (Pederneiras et al., 2022, p. 48). There are three problem types – tame, messy and wicked problems. The elements are defined, and solutions are verifiable, for tame problems. There is also agreement on why, what, and how the problem should be solved (King, 1993). Messy problems are understood as confusing and continuously changing. The solutions to these problems are difficult to describe since the causes and effects are unclear (Fergusson, 2019). Wicked problems are those social problems that are so complicated that they are difficult to define and essentially unsolvable (Kennedy et al., 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Historically, they have been described as a “class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision-makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing” (Churchman, 1967, p. 141). They have also been called social messes, untamed problems (Batie, 2008) and grand challenges (Ferraro et al., 2015).

Wicked problems are complex due to the presence of numerous potential causes and the absence of a linear relationship between variables (Pederneiras et al., 2022). They often include multiple stakeholders with different beliefs and values that, frequently, are contradictory (Horn & Weber, 2007; Kennedy, 2016; Kennedy & Parsons, 2012). Wicked problems tend to be intractable and elusive due to the influence of various dynamic political, social, and biophysical complexities (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Furthermore, most wicked problems are linked to, or are symptoms of, other problems (Carroll et al., 2007).

Researchers have frequently revisited Rittel and Webber's (1973) understanding to capture the essence of wicked problems better, and have provided a set of insights that aid in its understanding (e.g. Alford & Head, 2017; Camillus, 2008; Crowley & Head, 2017; Head, 2019; Peters, 2017). An important contribution to the understanding of wicked problems is made by (Alford & Head, 2017), who present various characteristics that identify a wicked problem –

- (a) Structural Complexity: it is concerned with elements of the issue rather than the stakeholders involved.
- (b) Knowability: there is insufficient information to address the problems at hand. These problems consist of multiple, complex variables, and operation requires efforts to discover causal relationships and likely results.
- (c) Knowledge Fragmentation: there are multiple actors with varying degrees of knowledge, and there are barriers between them.
- (d) Knowledge Framing: when stakeholders pay disproportionate attention to their knowledge, it can distort understanding.
- (e) Interest Differentiation: the values and interests of stakeholders vary.
- (f) Power Distribution: there is an imbalance in the allocation of power among the actors, with the more powerful actors having greater influence over the less powerful, even if the latter are a majority.

It is due to their complex interdependences that wicked problems are never solved (Conklin, 2006), but rather they become better or worse (Rittel & Webber, 1973). They cannot be resolved by finding 'right answers' or 'solutions'; instead, they must be managed (Dentoni et al., 2018).

As the world continues to grapple with complex and diverse wicked problems, systemic change is required through a coordinated and collaborative effort to achieve "true" transformation at individual, community, and societal levels (George et al., 2016). This study is an exploration in the domain of sustainability, which is recognised as a wicked problem (Conroy & Allen,

2010; McKenzie-Mohr, 2011). Palakshappa and Dodds (2021) posit that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) attempt to deal with the large and elaborate wicked problems persisting in the present-day socio-political landscape. Long-term sustainability is at the heart of the SDGs and the 17 goals are both visions and actionable measures to achieve sustainable development. To understand the significance of the SDGs, it is first critical to define sustainability, which is described in the next section. This is followed by a discussion of sustainable development and SDGs, specifically SDG 12 – responsible consumption and production. An understanding of sustainability and sustainable consumption is critical for addressing environmental challenges and promoting a more equitable and sustainable future (White et al., 2019).

2.3 Sustainability, Sustainable Development and SDGs

The concept of sustainability emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and eventually became widely popular in the 1990s (Caradonna, 2022; Kamara et al., 2006), as society became increasingly aware of the limitations of resources and the need to reduce the negative externalities associated with production and consumption. Although the term is inherently complex (Barone et al., 2020) and initially began as a focus on environmental conservation (Sharma et al., 2010), it has evolved into a broader concern for sustainability which includes three primary dimensions: environmental (preservation of natural resources), social (enhancing living conditions and fostering equal opportunities), and economic (ensuring economic viability to support the well-being of both people and planet) (Hanss & Böhm, 2012).

Sustainability has been defined and measured in innumerable ways (see Springett, 2003; Tregidga et al., 2018). However, the most popular understanding of sustainability comes from the Brundtland Report (1987) by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). According to the report, sustainability refers to changing the status quo, which may harm the environment, or improving the environment and society for future generations

(Brundtland, 1987). Sustainability is also often associated with the ‘triple bottom line,’ which emphasises care for people, the planet, and prosperity (Elkington, 1997; Lelieveld, 2012). Lim (2016) added to the triple bottom line by proposing two additional dimensions – ethics and technology – based on the belief that consumers today can exist sustainably if they are doing the ‘right thing’ and wisely using technology.

Sustainability is perhaps most frequently discussed in conjunction with the understanding of sustainable development, as mentioned in the Brundtland Report (1987). The report states that “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 24). Sustainable development aims to uphold economic advancement and growth while preserving the long-term value of the environment (Emas, 2015); it “provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies” (Brundtland, 1987). Sustainable development is deemed to be an attempt “without alternative” for the survival of humanity (Seiffert & Loch, 2005). To succeed, sustainable development requires the consolidation of economic, environmental, and social goals across sectors, territories, and generations, which implies the complete removal of fragmentation throughout the decision-making process (Emas, 2015).

At the centre of this shared agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that symbolise the development areas where an immediate call for action from all United Nations member countries is required (UN, 2015b). In 2015, the United Nations introduced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which the organisation described as “a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, aimed at fostering universal peace and ensuring access to justice,” with the overarching goal of “enhancing lives of all while leaving no one behind” (UN, 2022). By incorporating diverse dimensions – economic, social, and environmental – the 2030 Agenda was designed to serve as a comprehensive framework guiding global development initiatives

through to 2030 (Galan-Ladero & Alves, 2023). This established a unified framework aimed at fostering a better future for nations, governments, organizations, and individuals. The 17 SDGs encompass: (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (6) Clean Water and Sanitation, (7) Affordable and Clean Energy, (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth, (9) Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, (10) Reduced Inequalities, (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities, (12) Responsible Consumption and Production, (13) Climate Action, (14) Life Below Water, (15) Life on Land, (16) Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, and (17) Partnerships for the Goals. Figure 1 illustrates the 17 SDGs (the UN link provides extensive details on the SDGs and their targets).

Figure 1: The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals



Source: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

The SDGs are interconnected, creating a cohesive framework where the collective impact exceeds the individual contribution of each goal. They are a recognised, formidable effort to address existing wicked problems (Palakshappa & Dodds, 2021). Achieving these SDGs, however, requires a multifaceted approach that includes raising awareness, shifting attitudes, and most importantly, transforming specific behaviours (Galan-Ladero et al., 2023). As of

today, the half-way mark through the envisioned timeline for achieving these goals by 2030 has been crossed. While progress has been made on each of these SDGs, it is not at the desired level and pace (Galan-Ladero & Alves, 2023) and “we need to rescue the SDGs and get them back on track” (UN, 2022). Nevertheless, there is still an opportunity to accelerate progress, and even if the 17 SDGs cannot be fully achieved, significant partial accomplishments remain possible. However, a genuine collective effort and solidarity is required.

This study focuses on SDG 12, which is responsible consumption and production, and attempts to highlight how marketing can support progress on SDG 12 and thus the transition to a sustainable future. An overview of SDG 12 is provided below.

2.4 SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production

One of the main reasons for the environmental catastrophe the world is currently experiencing is the unsustainable levels of human activity (Furukawa et al., 2019). Questions surrounding consumption behaviour have increasingly become relevant to environmental policy and politics (Fuchs & Boll, 2018). Research has shown that patterns of consumption cannot continue at the current rate (Lim, 2016; Peattie & Collins, 2009b). The entire world is suffering because of rising consumption demands, both in developed and rapidly developing nations (ibid). Bengtsson et al. (2018) argue that there is an undoubted need for a global shift towards more sustainable production and consumption paradigms.

Dolan (2002) mooted the significance of understanding sustainable consumption for ensuring sustainable development. Sustainable consumption and production have been a part of United Nations discussions on the environment and sustainable development since the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (Gasper et al., 2019). The 1987 Brundtland Commission report, *Our Common Future*, argued that sustainable development needed:

- (a) ‘Promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible and to which all can reasonably aspire’ (Brundtland, 1987)
- (b) ‘a production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base from development’ (Brundtland, 1987)

The report also expressed the need to fundamentally alter unsustainable consumption patterns, in addition to the inter- and intra-generational equity challenges associated with growth (Holden et al., 2014). In 1994, at the Oslo Symposium, sustainable consumption and production was defined as “the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of further generations” (*Symposium on sustainable consumption*, 1994). The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002) asked all countries to promote sustainable consumption and production, with the developed countries at the forefront and other countries also benefitting from the process (Wang et al., 2019). The consolidation of production and consumption systems with sustainable development was formulated and executed as a major goal and critical necessity for establishing sustainable development (Akenji & Bengtsson, 2014; Lozano et al., 2015). The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in 2012, reaffirmed that sustainable consumption and production was at the heart of sustainable development. Sustainable consumption and production have an essential role in promoting sustainable development, as underlined by the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal 12 (SDG 12) (Wang et al., 2019).

SDG 12 is about “doing more and better with less” (UN, 2015b) or “not about consuming less, but consuming differently” (UNEP, 2010). It is also about separating economic growth from environmental degradation, improving resource efficiency, and encouraging sustainable lifestyles (Fuchs & Boll, 2018). Responsible sustainable consumption and production can also

contribute substantially to other SDGs such as poverty alleviation (SDG 1) and the movement towards low-carbon and green economies (SDG 11) (Fuchs & Boll, 2018). The United Nations Environment Programme (2010) has stated that sustainable consumption and production can not only aid growth, it can facilitate the creation of new markets, jobs, and opportunities for developing countries to move to the use of improved technology (Gasper et al., 2019).

For marketing to become a vehicle to realise the sustainability agenda and meet the SDGs, specifically SDG 12, future research needs to address how marketing and sustainability can be synergised to advance desired behavioural change and normalise sustainable practices (Rettie et al., 2012; Thøgersen & Zhou, 2012). Marketing has the potential to contribute to SDG 12 (Palakshappa & Dodds, 2021). A review linking sustainability with marketing is provided in section 2.5 to highlight the role of marketing in advancing sustainability.

2.5 Sustainability and Marketing Research

The relationship between sustainability and marketing is confusing to say the least: marketing is often considered the antithesis to sustainable consumption, yet has a strong role in recognising consumer decision making and driving them towards sustainability (Lim, 2016). Researchers suggest that marketing must evolve towards an orientation that “drives markets for sustainable products and services and builds sustainable societies” (Sheth & Parvatiyar, 2021, p. 150), enabling realistic and holistic solutions to sustainability challenges (Thomas, 2018). Despite the growing interest in sustainability in marketing and business, marketing has been held responsible for overconsumption, as well as the proliferation of unsustainable products and services (Jones et al., 2008; Peattie & Peattie, 2009; Sandberg & Polsa, 2015). Often, sustainability is merely a competitive advantage for increasing profitability and only incorporated in the corporate business philosophy, rather than being embedded in the brand and promotion of a sustainable lifestyle (Jones et al., 2008). However, research has also shown that marketing has the ability to promote sustainability amongst consumers and encourage

sustainable consumption decisions (Peattie & Peattie, 2009). Marketing has also been influential in promoting the sale of used goods, collaborative consumption, and sharing market systems (e.g. Charter et al., 2002; Peattie, 2001). Amidst this continuous confrontation that tries to declare marketing as either an ally or an enemy, sustainability and marketing have come together as sub-fields or smaller verticals within the field of marketing.

Peter Drucker was one of the first researchers to examine sustainability in marketing and management studies (Lunde, 2018). He stated that management “has to consider the action [that] is likely to promote the public good, to advance the basic belief in our society, to contribute stability, strength and harmony” (Drucker, 2012, p. 382). He further asserted that companies should produce a benefit for society (Drucker, 1974). In the 1970s and 1980s, sustainability was investigated in marketing research primarily with an environmental focus; for instance, regard for the environment in new product development (Varble, 1972), or the impact of changes in consumption on the environment (Uusitalo, 1982). Since then, it has become a strong research interest in marketing.

Attempts to define sustainability in marketing research have covered a variety of themes such as firms reducing their harm on the environment (e.g. Borland, 2009; Hult, 2011; Richey Jr et al., 2014; Soyez, 2012; Xie et al., 2015); providing for future generations (e.g. Hensen et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2012); implementing environmental, economic and social stability (e.g. Elkington, 1994; Olsen et al., 2014; Oruezabala & Rico, 2012); and promoting green behaviours to achieve quality of life and well-being (e.g. Karmarkar & Bollinger, 2015; Newman et al., 2012). However, in marketing, there is no agreed definition of sustainability and with the rising interest in the subject, research in this area has also become fragmented (Lunde, 2018). Furthermore, research suggests that broader definitions of sustainability are inherently context dependent and informed by various disciplinary perspectives. This diversity

in definitions can pose challenges when addressing large-scale sustainability issues that require comprehensive and integrated solutions (Palakshappa, Bulmer, et al., 2024)

Lunde (2018) completed a systematic review of the definitions of sustainability in marketing research. In addition to the Brundtland Commission (1987) definition and the triple bottom line (Elkington, 1994) definitions, he stated that “marketing researchers used 110 other definitions of sustainability” (Lunde, 2018, p. 88). Table 1 presents a few definitions of sustainability that have been proposed and used by researchers in the marketing literature.

Table 1: Many Definitions of "Sustainability" in Marketing Literature

Authors	Definition
Brundtland Commission 1987	“Brundtland Commission”: Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
Elkington 1994	“Triple bottom line”: Sustainability is the interlinking pillars of the Triple Bottom Line: economics, environment, and society (otherwise known as people, planet, and profits).
Varadarajan 2015	Sustainable innovation is a firm’s implementation of a new product, process, or practice, or modification of an existing product, process, or practice that significantly reduces the impact of the firm’s activities on the natural environment.
Olsen et al. 2014	Commitment to the well-being of the economy, society, and environment; looking at CSR-related initiatives that highlight commitment to the environment and the related effects.
Hult 2011	Market-focused sustainability can be a strategic resource that leads to competitive advantage for the organization and, ultimately, to superior performance.
Borland 2009	Strategic sustainability is the integration of the principles of sustainability with corporate strategic management processes, structures, cultures, systems, and technologies, enabling both competitive and functional level strategies.
Oruezabala and Rico 2012	Sustainability is defined as business simultaneously achieving three inter-linked goals – economic prosperity, environmental protection, and social equity.
Gordon et al. 2011	Sustainable marketing includes three facets: 1) green marketing practice, 2) social marketing, and 3) critical marketing.
Mittelstaedt et al. 2014	The effect of the rise of environmental issues on the ability of firms to deliver customer value; globalization of business, increasing magnitude and importance of environmental pressures and liabilities; rising competition for natural resources; the consideration of externalities in business decision making; consumer demand for sustainable products and processes; and the recognition that sustainable products and services can be profitable.
Newman et al. 2012	Sustainability is achieved when all people on Earth can live well without compromising the quality of life for future generations.
Karmarkar and Bollinger 2015	Environmental issues and the use of policies designed to encourage “green” behaviours.
Hensen et al. 2016	A sense of shared responsibility toward the environment, reflected in daily

	activities and actions focused on meeting personal and store-level performance targets. (2) Initiatives to improve the ways the store contributes to reducing the company's environmental impact. (3) Efforts to promote environmentally responsible choices by a wider range of customers while also meeting their demands.
Xie et al. 2015	Corporate environmental responsible behaviour is directed to prevention of, or relief from, harm to people or the environment. Such behaviours can elicit positive moral emotions that lead to supportive consumer responses to the company.
Soyez 2012	Sustainability is the idea that humankind has to change its behaviour fundamentally in order to minimize further environmental damage.
Richey Jr. et al. 2014	Green marketing strategy... is the adoption of environmentally friendly strategies or the creation of environmentally friendly initiatives that should increase that firm's performance.
Volschenk et al. 2016	Sustainability is where companies collaborate with their competitors to reduce harmful environmental impact or to create environmental value.
Burgh-Woodman and King 2013	Sustainable consumption is the idea of ethical consumption, anti-corporatism, and green responsibility.
Cornelissen et al. 2008	People's attitudes towards specific ecological behaviours have an important impact on their decisions, over and above their attitudes towards the environment.
Hensen et al. 2016	Consumers need to increase their pro-environmental behaviours if a decent standard of living is to be ensured for future generations.

Source: "Sustainability in Marketing: a systematic review unifying 20 years of theoretical and substantive contributions (1997 – 2016)" by Lunde (2018, p. 89)

Lunde's (2018) extensive review of sustainability in marketing and its various definitions, highlights that researchers and practitioners (such as Farley & Smith, 2013) have criticised the Brundtland Commission report's definition for its weak link with the field of marketing. Specifically, the definition fails to illuminate the role of consumers, firms, and marketing in reducing harm to the environment and its relationship to exchange of value (as proposed by Alderson, 1957 in the marketing discipline) (Lunde, 2018). The Triple Bottom Line explanation for sustainability has also been criticised for its lack of attention to marketing practices and impacts such as consumption and production (Lunde, 2018). Based on this review, Lunde (2018) offered a new definition of sustainability, using the term 'sustainable marketing'. While this term had previously been conceived and described by other researchers such as Lim (2016), Mitchell et al. (2010) and Gordon et al. (2011), these definitions explained sustainability marketing from solely a business or consumer perspective. Lunde (2018) stated that his 'new' definition of sustainable marketing took a more holistic perspective. He stated that

“Sustainable marketing is the strategic creation, communication, delivery, and exchange of offerings that produce value through consumption behaviours, business practices, and the marketplace, while lowering harm to the environment and ethically and equitably increasing the quality of life (QOL) and well-being of consumers and global stakeholders, presently and for future generations.” (p. 94).

The above definition (Lunde, 2018) has its roots in the American Marketing Association (2017) definition of marketing, and the research of both Alderson (1957) and Bagozzi (1975, 1978) on the theory of exchange. Lunde (2018) further argued that while his definition might not suffice for other disciplines, it works for marketing researchers and practitioners focusing on sustainability (see Dyck & Manchanda, 2021; Palakshappa & Dodds, 2020; Peterson et al., 2021). This definition is used in the present study to address sustainability in marketing because of its focus on the strategic exchange of value between consumer, firms and society (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014) during the exchange of products, services, and/or ideas. This definition also supports the exchange of value to reduce environmental damage (Polonsky, 2011). Lunde (2018) states that sustainable marketing is “an interlocking exchange of value between the environment, economics and society (the marketplace) that reduces environmental damage for present and future generations” (p. 95) and thereby strengthens the relationship between marketing and sustainability.

An understanding of sustainable consumption is essential in understanding marketing’s influence in addressing sustainability-related challenges, since it aligns marketing strategies with environmental and social goals, promoting responsible consumer behaviour and supporting sustainable development. Marketing has the potential to affect consumer attitudes and behaviours significantly, making it a powerful tool for advancing sustainable consumption (Greenland et al., 2023; Haider et al., 2022). A brief overview of sustainable consumption, from a marketing perspective, is provided in section 2.5.1.

2.5.1 Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable consumption has been an integral part of the global political agenda, initially in the form of Agenda 21 following the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (UN, 1992) and then, within the Sustainable Development Goals as “Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”, formalised at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit (UN, 2015a). Decreasing the environmental impact of consumption and considering the needs of future generations is the premise of sustainable consumption (Dalpian et al., 2015; Kilbourne & Mittelstaedt, 2012) and resource use minimisation is required to advance on sustainable development (Kotler, 2011; Peattie, 2001). Fuchs and Boll (2018) stated that focusing on sustainable consumption sheds light on the role of the current system of consumption, rather than condemning large firms and organisations or individual consumers for environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality. The political, economic, social and cultural characteristics of the present consumption system also have the potential to transition towards sustainable consumption (Fuchs & Boll, 2018). However, efficiency of consumption and resource utilization is no longer enough to achieve Goal 12; rather, a modification in consumption practices that allows for a greater transformative societal shift is needed (Palakshappa & Dodds, 2020).

The idea of sustainable consumption has received significant attention in marketing research, as evidenced by the promising efforts to encourage sustainable consumption and gauge how changes in sustainability may be initiated (Lim, 2017). However, sustainable consumption is deemed a challenging issue and field of scholarship (Lim, 2017). Researchers (see Gordon et al., 2011; Peattie & Collins, 2009a) note that critics see sustainable consumption as an ‘oxymoron’ since ‘to consume’ means to use up or destroy, which is completely opposite to sustainability. The majority of the sustainable consumption research in marketing focuses on two ends of the product consumption life cycle: acquisition (Gupta & Ogden, 2009; Moisander,

2007; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006; Young et al., 2010) and disposal, such as recycling (Bulkeley & Gregson, 2009; Ekström, 2014). Research has also examined consumers' attitude–behaviour gap, green consumption and morals, and collaborative and anti-consumption approaches as ways of reducing the negative effects of overconsumption (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). Action research directed towards effective change in consumer behaviour ranges from limiting over-consumption to better consumption decision making processes, and consumer-led anti-consumption movements (Cherrier, 2010; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006).

The extant research often emphasises individual behaviour change, such as green purchasing or mindful consumption. However, further research is needed on the interplay between individual and systemic factors, such as corporate practices and policy frameworks, that maintain unsustainable consumption patterns (Anantharaman, 2018; Testa et al., 2021). A significant gap that still exists in marketing research is bridging the gap between consumers' stated intentions to adopt sustainable practices and their actual behaviour (the 'attitude–behaviour gap'). Factors contributing to this gap, such as economic restrictions, social pressures and limited accessibility to sustainable products need further investigation (Haider et al., 2022; Testa et al., 2021). Sustainable consumption research in marketing is often generalised, and considerations of the nuances of specific industries, such as fashion, are weak. This study addresses the call for sector-specific research that provides actionable insights into industry practices and consumer behaviours (Sesini et al., 2020; Testa et al., 2021).

Understanding value, particularly value co-creation, could offer possible solutions to achieving sustainable consumption, because at the very heart of these concepts is the “purpose of exchange and foundation to markets and marketing”, wherein multiple actors participate and collaborate (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a). A detailed review of value co-creation and the theoretical lens for this study is provided in chapter 3.

2.6 Chapter Overview

This chapter examined the intricate relationship between ‘wicked problems’, sustainability, and marketing’s evolving role in addressing global challenges. ‘Wicked problems’, such as climate change and social inequality, are defined by their complexity, interdependence, and lack of definitive solutions. These challenges require systemic, collaborative approaches involving multiple stakeholders and perspectives. The chapter explored sustainability’s foundational concepts, grounded in the Brundtland Report and the Triple Bottom Line framework, which combine environmental, social, and economic priorities. Of the 17 United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production is a critical lever for societal transformation. However, progress towards a sustainable future remains insufficient and demands a shift in both individual behaviours and systemic practices.

Marketing, traditionally seen to promote unsustainable consumption, has transformative potential to influence attitudes, foster sustainable consumer behaviour, and align business practices with environmental and social objectives. Marketing research pertaining to sustainable consumption has critical gaps, including addressing the ‘attitude–behaviour gap’ and integrative systemic factors with individual-level solutions. In addition, sector-specific insights into industries such as fashion are underexplored. The chapter underscores the importance of value co-creation as a strategic approach to fostering sustainable consumption, potentially facilitating the transition to a sustainable future.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Lens – Value and Value Co-creation

3.1 Chapter Overview

This study uses the concept of value and value co-creation as its theoretical lens. Marketing scholars have repeatedly supported value co-creation as an idea or concept that can promote sustainability, particularly sustainable consumption, and thereby potentially provide a way forward to transitioning to a sustainable future. Almeida et al. (2021) highlighted the increasing visibility of sustainability and value co-creation in marketing research. Lozano (2014) suggested that sustainable consumption requires individuals to share their knowledge and collaborate with the different sectors of society, which are the tenets of value co-creation. There is research demonstrating that co-creation is an iterative process, which combines dimensions of the ‘triple bottom line’ and multiple stakeholders that can be used as a strategy to achieve sustainable development (Keeys & Huemann, 2017). Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2020) state that “co-creatively leveraging all stakeholder capabilities in mesh works of social, business, civic, and natural communities can lead to better states of governance, infrastructure, development, and sustainability, with ‘win more-win more’ outcomes and expansion of wealth-welfare-wellbeing all around” (p. 31).

This chapter begins with a detailed discussion of the definitions of value, followed by a discussion of the economic perspective of value and the understanding of value in marketing. Next, a comprehensive description of value co-creation and the dominant scholarly approaches to value co-creation are presented. This is followed by a discussion of service ecosystems and a review of research linking value co-creation, service ecosystem, and sustainability.

3.2 Defining Value

The concept of value has been in contention since the days of Aristotle (Vargo et al., 2008) and has been the subject of debate and exploration for many years (Grönroos, 2011; Vargo et al., 2008). Its evasive nature is partly linked to the concept having multiple meanings and

perspectives, as seen in the academic literature (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). ‘Value’ has its “roots in many disciplines, including psychology, social psychology, economics, marketing, and manage” (Woodruff & Gardial, 1996, p. 54). Pitta and Laric (2004, p. 452) agree that “value has been approached from an eclectic perspective building on the fields of economics, strategy, organisational behaviour, psychology, social psychology, biology and others. Each field has contributed to knowledge about value.”

Two concepts in relation to the understanding of value – ‘perceived value’ and ‘value-in-use’ – are important to this study. However, prior to discussing these two concepts, an understanding of the economic perspective of value is important because of its influence on marketing thinking, specifically on ideas of value-in-exchange versus value-in-use (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; Woodall, 2003; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996). The economic perspective of value is discussed in section 3.2.1, followed by a review of value in marketing and an elaboration of the notion of ‘value-in-use’.

3.2.1 Economic Perspective of Value

Aristotle, who is considered the ‘father of value theory’ by many scholars, unknowingly initiated the use-value and exchange-value schools of thoughts (Gordon, 1964). Because value is generated through the use of goods or services and can satisfy wants, he favoured use-value (the consumer utility approach) over exchange-value (a production, labour-oriented approach). Other scholars also acknowledge that Aristotle created the concept of value-in-use and distinguished it from value-in-exchange (see Kauder, 1953; Younkins, 2005). Despite this, a value-in-exchange labour-oriented approach dominated thinking for centuries. The labour theory of value, which purports that the value of any good depends on the amount of labour expended in producing it (Pressman, 2013), and the value-in-exchange idea which holds that value is simply “what can be ‘got’ for an item” (Woodall, 2003, p. 3), were both endorsed by classical economists Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and Karl Marx. In essence, according to

(McKnight, 1994, p. 465) “these economists regarded value as being an intrinsic part of commodities” and held that value was created by adding up the costs of “land, labour, and capital.”

The “father of economics” and founder of value theory (Pressman, 2013, p. 20), Adam Smith, was influenced by Aristotle’s work and considered cost – especially labour – to be a factor in the process of value determination (Gordon, 1964). Kauder (1953) contends that Adam Smith hindered the advancement of value-in-use and contributed to the idea that value is inherent to products, goods, and services, by endorsing a labour, as opposed to a utility theory of value. Vargo et al. (2008) associated Adam Smith’s value-in-exchange ideas with providing the theoretical underpinnings of the traditional goods-dominant logic. As a result, economic science and related disciplines, such as marketing, have focused on the idea that value is embedded and distributed in tangible goods, and provides the basis for exchange.

In the late nineteenth century, the Austrian school of economics, led by Carl Menger, challenged the labour-oriented and exchange theory of value, proposing instead that “value is derived from a commodity’s marginal utility” (McKnight, 1994, p. 466). Menger was one of the pioneers in developing the marginal utility theory, and an early proponent of the subjective theory of value. According to Menger, value is determined by subjective factors, such as utility or demand, rather than objective factors like production or supply. From this perspective, value arises from the fulfilment of human needs, with factors of production gaining value because they meet desires and are essential for producing goods that people want (Pressman, 2013). This concept aligns with the idea of value-in-use (McKnight, 1994).

3.2.2 Concept of Value in Marketing

It is argued that “value must be understood to understand marketing” Babin and James (2010, p. 472). Despite being ill-defined and elusive (Vargo et al., 2008; Woodall, 2003), many marketing scholars agree that understanding ‘value’ in marketing is crucial (Grönroos, 2006b,

2008b, 2011; Gummesson, 1995; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; Woodall, 2003; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996). In the last two decades, marketing scholars have studied 'value' with the objective of defining that concept, as well as exploring its role in marketing and consumer behaviour (Fernández & Bonillo, 2007; Grönroos, 2008b, 2011; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2006c, 2008a). An understanding of 'value' as a stand-alone term is rarely provided (Sandberg et al., 2018). The importance and influence of the concept of value has been suggested by many researchers, including Babin and James (2010), Grönroos (2006b, 2008b, 2011), Holbrook (1999), and Lusch and Vargo (2006). Several marketing scholars (Boksberger & Melsen, 2011; Grönroos, 2008b; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2006, 2007; Vargo et al., 2008; Woodall, 2003) have sought to unravel the concept of value within a marketing context, offering comprehensive literature reviews and/or proposing theoretical frameworks to better understand the concept.

In marketing and consumer research, 'value' (singular) has been conceptualised as multi-dimensional and referred to as evaluative judgements of products or services or consumption experiences (Fernández & Bonillo, 2007; Holbrook, 1994, 1999). This is different to 'values' (plural) which refers to the personal values (beliefs, goals, ideals, norms) that an individual holds (Blackwell et al., 2006), although a consumer's personal values often influence their judgement of value (Fernández & Bonillo, 2007).

Value, with its numerous meanings and diverse terminology, is one of the most frequently overused and misunderstood concepts in the social sciences, especially in the marketing and management literature (Khalifa, 2004). In marketing, a variety of terms and concepts have emerged, such as perceived value (Boksberger & Melsen, 2011; Fernández & Bonillo, 2007; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001), customer value (Gallarza et al., 2011; Holbrook, 1994; Khalifa, 2004; Woodruff, 1997; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996), consumer value (Holbrook, 1999; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2006; Sánchez-Fernández et al., 2009), value for customer

(Woodall, 2003), value creation (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2012; Lusch et al., 2008; Sheth & Uslay, 2007), and co-creation of value (Babin & James, 2010; Cova et al., 2011; Fisher & Smith, 2011; Grönroos, 2008b, 2011; Lusch & Vargo, 2011; Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004c; Vargo et al., 2008; Zwick et al., 2008), further contributing to the complexity and confusion surrounding the concept.

This study uses the term ‘perceived value’ to understand value in the context of the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Many scholars have used the term ‘perceived value’ in their contribution to understanding and attempting to define value within the marketing literature. For instance, Zeithaml (1988, p. 14) proposed “perceived value is the consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given.” Liljander and Strandvik (1993, p. 14) stated “perceived value equals perceived benefits/perceived price.” According to Fornell et al. (1996) perceived value is “the perceived level of product quality relative to the price paid” (p. 9). McDougall and Levesque (2000) claimed “broadly defined, perceived value is the results or benefits customers receive in relation to total costs (which include the price paid plus other costs associated with the purchase). In simple terms, value is the difference between perceived benefits and costs” (p. 394). A few scholars have used the terms ‘customer-perceived value’ and ‘perceived customer value’. Lapierre (2000, p. 123) suggested “customer-perceived value can, therefore, be defined as the difference between the benefits and sacrifices (e.g. the total costs, both monetary and non-monetary) perceived by customers, in terms of their expectations, i.e. needs and wants.” ‘Perceived customer value’ was used by Chen and Dubinsky (2003) and was defined as “a consumer’s perception of the net benefits gained in exchange for the costs incurred in obtaining the desired benefits (p. 326).

Subjectivity in the perception of value and the multidimensionality of value; i.e., the existence of varied forms of value beyond economic forms, contribute to the confusion around

understanding the value concept (Sandberg et al., 2018). Despite this, value (particularly consumer value) in marketing is seen as a holistic multidimensional construct (see Fernández & Bonillo, 2007; Holbrook, 1994, 1999; Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). For instance, Holbrook (1999) suggested that there are eight key dimensions to value, which include quality, efficiency, aesthetics, play, status, esteem, spiritual, and ethics. Sánchez-Fernández et al. (2009) argued that there are six key dimensions and conflated Holbrook's spiritual and ethics dimensions to altruistic value, and status and esteem to social value. Likewise, Sheth et al. (1991) suggested five types of value dimensions influencing consumer choice behaviour, which are functional, conditional, social, emotional, and epistemic. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) developed the PERVAL scale to assess what consumption values influence purchase attitude and behaviour. They identified four distinct value dimensions: emotional, social, quality/performance and price/value for money. This suggested that in addition to the perception of value in monetary or economic terms, consumer and other stakeholders may also recognise and acknowledge other forms of value (Sandberg et al., 2018).

3.2.3 Value-in-use

Value-in-use emphasises that value emerges during the use of a product or service, rather than being embedded in the offering itself, and fundamentally shifts the understanding of value creation from a transactional to an experiential and contextual process (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2008b, 2016b; Vargo et al., 2008). Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) define value-in-use as the value created by customers through their use of resources. It is inherently phenomenological; meaning that it is uniquely determined by the beneficiary through their experiences and interactions with resources in a specific context. Unlike the value-in-exchange perspective, which equates value with price, value-in-use focuses on the practical and contextual outcomes that beneficiaries derive when they engage with resources (Vargo et al., 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2016b, 2017).

Central to value-in-use is resource integration, wherein actors combine operant resources (skills and knowledge) and operand resources (tangible elements) within service ecosystems. Value is co-created through this integration, which involves multiple actors such as firms, customers and other stakeholders (Vargo & Lusch, 2006b, 2017). A review of value co-creation is provided in section 3.3.

3.3 Value Co-Creation

Value co-creation is a key concept in marketing and business management (Saarijärvi et al., 2013). It is descriptive of a move from organisations being regarded as the definers of value to a more participative approach wherein individuals and organisations collectively create and develop meaning (Ind & Coates, 2013). It symbolises the shift to customers governing the creation of value in their own consumption context, rather than it being a process occurring during manufacturing (Grönroos, 2008b; Normann & Ramirez, 1993; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2004b).

The beginning of the 21st century saw the emergence of the concept of value co-creation, which views value as being created in the interaction and/or collaboration between firms (Sandberg et al., 2018) and consumers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). Hajli et al. (2017) stated that co-creation is centred on the idea that value is not created for consumers; rather it is created with consumers via interaction, participation, and meaningful relationships between brand and consumer. Here the consumer is not considered a passive target (Sandberg et al., 2018); instead, value is regarded as a joint function of the value co-creation processes of the supplier and the consumers, and thus is considered to be co-created (Cova et al., 2011; Saarijärvi et al., 2013). Therefore, as Ind and Coates (2013) assert, “co-creation” is “an active, creative, and social process based on collaboration between organisations and participants that generates benefits for all and creates value for stakeholders” (p. 9).

Arguably, co-creation of value was introduced as a concept in the business management literature by (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a). In parallel, Vargo and Lusch (2004a) initiated a renewed interest in the value concept within the marketing literature and introduced the term ‘value co-creation’ as a fundamental premise of the Service-Dominant logic (S-D logic). They proposed a shift away from a goods-dominated orientation to a service-dominant orientation in marketing, wherein value is perceived and determined by the consumer, based on value-in-use (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, p. 7). Co-creation of value has been defined from different perspectives, with some similarities across those definitions (see Roncha & Radclyffe-Thomas, 2016). For instance, co-creation involves an effort between multiple stakeholders to co-create value collaboratively (Minkiewicz et al., 2014) as well as an avenue for continuous interaction (Ind & Coates, 2013). A review of the definitions of co-creation by value by Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas (2016) is provided in Table 2. Definitions of value co-creation by Lambert and Enz (2012) and Terblanche (2014) have been added to the table.

Table 2: Definitions of Value Co-Creation

Authors	Definition
Kambil et al. (1996)	Value co-creation by emphasising the role of customers in business strategy and marketing
Wikstrom (1996)	A company–consumer interaction (social exchange) for the purpose of attaining added value
Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000)	Co-creation of personalised experiences with the customers
Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b)	The consumer and the firm are intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the individual consumer ... the interaction between the consumers and firms becomes the new locus of co-creation of value
Lusch and Vargo (2006)	Value can only be co-created with and determined by the user in the consumption process and through use or what is referred to as value-in-use
Payne et al. (2008)	A process where the supplier creates superior value propositions, with customers equalling value to when a good or service is consumed
Xie et al. (2008)	Rise of prosumption as value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences
Gummesson and Mele (2010)	Co-creation is enabled by actor to actor (A2A) involvement and commitment. It is a time-based process which comprises parallel and sequential phases simultaneously
Prebensen and Foss (2011)	The consumer taking an active part in consuming and producing value within their experience
Ramaswamy (2011)	The process by which mutual value is expanded together, where value to the participating individual is a function of their experiences

Edvardsson et al. (2011)	Shaped by social forces, is reproduced in social structures and can be asymmetric for the actors involved
McColl-Kennedy et al. (2012)	Benefit realised from integration of resources through activities and interactions with collaborators in the customer's service network
Gronroos (2012)	A joint collaborative activity by parties involved in direct interactions, aiming to contribute to the value that emerges for one or both parties
Lambert and Enz (2012) *	Value co-creation is an economic and social process in which individuals have established roles that condition their behaviours and perceptions (p. 1590)
Roser et al. (2013)	An interactive, creative and social process between stakeholders that is initiated by the firm at different stages of the value creation process
Ind and Coates (2013)	A process that provides an opportunity for on-going interaction, where the organisation is willing to share its world with external stakeholders and can generate in return the insight that can be derived from their engagement
Grönroos and Voima (2013)	Customers' creation of value-in-use where co-creation is a function of interaction
Fadil (2014)	Creation and delivery of richer experiences to stakeholders as a part of the process along with tangible outcomes
Terblanche (2014) *	Co-creation of value "means that value is not created by the firm and transferred to the customer during the transaction, but rather is jointly created by the customer and the supplier during consumption" (p. 2)

Source: "How TOMS' "one day without shoes" campaign brings stakeholders together and co-creates value for the brand using Instagram as a platform" Roncha and Radclyffe-Thomas (2016)

The diversity of the concept is based on the differing interpretations of what comprises the "value", the "co-", and the "creation" within it (Saarijärvi et al., 2013). This matches Grönroos and Ravald (2011) argument that clarity on the roles of different actors in the value co-creation process is crucial when considering the concept's implications for marketing research and practice. There are a number of scholarly approaches and models relating to value co-creation, such as the DART Model (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b), S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a) and the service logic approach (Grönroos, 2006a). Despite various definitions and conceptualisations, two key schools of thought dominate: Vargo and Lusch (2004a) S-D logic and Grönroos (2006a) service logic.

Both the S-D logic and service logic views on value and value co-creation share a common feature: a broader perspective on value creation. Traditionally, a goods-dominant view has been prevalent (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b). This has also been referred to as the manufacturing logic, old enterprise logic, or, in a marketing context, product orientation or marketing myopia (Vargo & Lusch, 2008c, p. 25). However, many years ago, Normann and

Ramirez (1993) highlighted the inadequacies of existing marketing theory in explaining value creation, arguing that “traditional thinking about value is grounded in the assumptions and models of an industrial economy” (p. 65) and primarily focused on marketing as a value-adding activity (Porter, 2008). Instead, they advocated for redefining value in terms of the value-creating system, where various actors – suppliers, business partners, allies, and customers – collaborate to co-produce value.

Value creation should no longer be seen as occurring solely during the manufacturing process but as something that customers manage within their own consumption context (Grönroos, 2008a, 2008b; Strandvik et al., 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2008b). Customers are not passive recipients of marketing actions but are viewed as active operant resources, playing a key role in determining and creating value within their value-creating processes. They can shift from being mere consumers to becoming contributors and creators (Tapscott & Williams, 2008). Although there is a shared understanding of customers’ more active role and the subjective, process-oriented nature of customer value, the theoretical debate becomes more complex when the focus moves from value creation to value co-creation. An overview of service logic and S-D logic scholarly approach is provided in section 3.3.1.

3.3.1 Service Logic Approach to Value Co-Creation

Service logic clearly distinguishes between customer service logic and provider service logic (Grönroos, 2008b, 2011). Customer service logic involves customers integrating the firm’s resources with other resources within their daily activities and value-creating processes. In this view, the customer independently manages the value creation process, meaning that value is not co-created (Grönroos, 2008b; Heinonen et al., 2010). The customer is the sole creator of value, and only when the firm adopts provider service logic and establishes interactions between itself and the customer does co-creation of value occurs (Grönroos, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2008b). These interactions are reciprocal actions that allow both parties to influence each

other (Grönroos, 2011; Grönroos & Helle, 2010; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). Through interaction, the firm can influence the customer's value actualisation process, ensuring that value-in-use aligns with the value proposition (Grönroos, 2008b). During these interactions, both the firm and the customer are active participants, acting as dual subjects in the customer's value creation process (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). From a normative standpoint, firms must develop innovative methods to become part of the consumption process and create opportunities for interaction with customers. As Grönroos (2008b, p. 307); (Grönroos, 2011) argues "it is not the customer who becomes a value co-creator with a supplier; rather, it is the supplier which, by adopting a service logic and developing firm-customer interactions as part of its marketing offerings, can become a co-creator of value with its customers."

This study uses the S-D logic perspective to understand value and value co-creation due to its different perspective of viewing the economic and social world, moving away from the traditional microscopic view; i.e., a goods-dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). Two foundational premises, strongly related to value co-creation, are particularly relevant to this study. These are "value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary" (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b) and "value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary" (Vargo et al., 2008, p. 7). Additionally, the foundational premise that "all social and economic actors are resource integrators" (Vargo et al., 2008, p. 7) is also relevant since the study involves multiple actors. This study explores how actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value – a service ecosystem with multiple actors situated across different contexts and participant aggregation levels – and thus S-D logic's foundational premises on value and value co-creation provides an appropriate lens for the study. The S-D logic approach to value and value co-creation is discussed in section 3.3.2.

3.3.2 Service-Dominant Logic Approach to Value Co-Creation

Over the past two decades, there has been a revival of the value concept in marketing literature, sparked by Vargo and Lusch (2004a) seminal article *Evolving to a New Dominant Logic for Marketing*. They argued for a shift in marketing thought, moving away from the traditional economic goods-based exchange model towards a new perspective that emphasises a service-dominant view. They contended that marketing had long been guided by a logic focused on the exchange of “goods”, where “tangible resources, embedded value, and transactions” (p. 1) were central. In contrast, their service-dominant logic (S-D logic) posits that “value is perceived and determined by the consumer based on ‘value-in-use’” (p. 7)

The Service-Dominant (S-D) logic, proposed by Vargo and Lusch (2004a), represents a paradigm shift in marketing theory, moving from the Goods-Dominant (G-D) logic rooted in manufacturing to a service-oriented understanding of economic exchange. Vargo and Lusch (2004a) asserted that marketing thinking needed to move to a service dominant view, as opposed to a goods-based model of exchange which is centred on tangible resources, embedded value and transaction (Saarijärvi et al., 2013). The fundamental unit of exchange within S-D logic is service, not goods (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Vargo and Lusch argued that services should not be treated as a distinct sub-discipline from goods, but rather as an essential component of marketing as a whole, whether dealing with goods or services. S-D logic proposed that service, understood as the application of resources for the benefit of others, is the fundamental basis of all economic exchange (Merz et al., 2009). It defined ‘services’ (later refined to the singular ‘service’) as the “application of specialised competences (knowledge and skills) through deeds, processes, and performances for the benefit of another entity or the entity itself” (pp. 329-330). Goods are deemed to be transmitters of service, a medium for the consumer to benefit from the firm’s competences (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a; Vargo et al., 2008).

Vargo and Lusch (2004a, 2006c, 2008a) synthesized 30 years of service marketing research into a unified framework, introducing 'service' as a new logic for marketing (Grönroos & Ravald, 2011). This contribution was both timely and essential for advancing marketing theory (Lusch & Vargo, 2011). Rust et al. (2006) argue that many marketing scholars support the core premise of S-D logic and recognise the need for a shift in marketing thinking in response to evolving business and social contexts. Although previous calls by leading academics for a paradigm shift in marketing resulted in minimal change (Achrol & Kotler, 1999; Gronroos, 1994; Gummesson, 2002; Rust, 1998), Vargo and Lusch (2004a) succeeded in "generating a general theory of the marketing discipline by integrating various schools of thought in the marketing literature" (Theoharakis & Sajtos, 2007). This sparked widespread reactions from the international academic community (Aitken et al., 2006; Brodie et al., 2006; Brookes, 2007; Grönroos, 2006a, 2006b, 2008b, 2011; Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Gummesson, 2008; Merz et al., 2009; Peñaloza & Venkatesh, 2006; Rust et al., 2006; Schembri, 2006; Winklhofer et al., 2007; Wright & Russell, 2012). Many of these scholars have contributed valuable momentum and ideas to further the development of S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2006b).

According to S-D logic, value does not inherently reside in a product (whether goods, services, or experiences) but rather in the "service" the product provides. In other words, a product holds no value until it is used or experienced by the consumer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2006c, 2008a). Value only emerges during the product's use (Ledden et al., 2011). From this viewpoint, "the firm does not sell goods; it sells a need-satisfying offering" (Finney et al., 2011, p. 3) and value is not embedded in products but is instead determined by the consumer through their consumption experience (Vargo et al., 2008). Lusch and Vargo (2006b, p. 284) argue that "value can only be created with and determined by the user during the 'consumption' process and through use," a concept referred to as "value-in-use."

In S-D logic, firms use their knowledge and capabilities in the production and branding of a product/service, and consumers then employ their knowledge and capabilities in the daily usage of the product/service (Alves et al., 2015; Vargo et al., 2008). Consumers need to continue the marketing, consumption and creation of value to actualise the value of goods (Vargo, 2011). Value is thus built in the product or service via its actual use, i.e. “value-in-use”, rather than being determined by its sale price, known as “value-in-exchange” (Vargo & Lusch, 2006c) and the end beneficiary defines such value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008a). Since operant resources are heterogeneous, value co-creation is affected by the amount and quality of consumer skills and knowledge (Saarijärvi et al., 2013). Vargo (2009) suggested that within this logic all economies become service economies and social and economic actors are considered integrators of resources, thus making operant resources the foundation of competitive advantage. The idea of “value-in-use” is supported by several marketing scholars (Grönroos, 2008b, 2011; Gummesson, 2008; Gummesson & Grönroos, 2012; Holbrook, 2006; Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2012; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c; Woodruff, 1997; Woodruff & Gardial, 1996).

Value co-creation gained further prominence following the development of Service-Dominant (S-D) logic (Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2006c; Vargo et al., 2008). A central tenet of S-D logic is the notion that value is co-created. In contrast to the traditional view, where firms create value and consumers destroy or consume it, S-D logic posits that all parties in an economic exchange collaboratively create value. This co-creation process is inherently interactive, involving the integration of resources between firms, consumers, and other stakeholders. Vargo and Lusch (2012) state that “value relates to the benefit(s) for some actor(s) and these premises suggest that value is co-created through the establishment of new resources, from the resources provided by multiple sources (and their application, through service) and that it cannot be assessed except from the perspective of some beneficial actor, in the context

of their other available resource.” (p. 2). Vargo and Lusch (2008b) proposed that value is a joint function of the actions of the provider(s) and the consumer(s) and hence, is always co-created (Alves et al., 2015). They further suggested that value co-creation is a complex process that involves integration of resources from numerous sources in unique ways (Vargo, 2009). Co-creation is an integral part of the S-D logic since collaboration enables markets to gather supplies and generate benefits (Vargo and Lusch (2004a).

3.3.2.1 Evolution of S-D Logic

As S-D logic gained traction, a global community of academics contributed to its development. Since its introduction in 2004, the framework has been refined and extended to better explain the complexities of value co-creation and the role of institutions in facilitating this process. In their 2016 paper titled “*Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service – dominant logic*”, Vargo and Lusch offer an updated conceptualisation of the foundational premises and axioms of S-D logic, in addition to introducing a new axiom that addresses the role of institutions in value co-creation. Key changes were made to S-D logic in the 2016 paper, as discussed below.

The first change to S-D logic was made in 2008 (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b), in which the number of foundational premises expanded from 8 to 10. In 2014, as a response to the need for clarification and simplification within the framework, Lusch and Vargo (2014) consolidated these premises into four core ‘axioms’ (statements or propositions regarded as being established, accepted or evidently true), which served as a more parsimonious foundation for S-D logic. A fifth axiom, highlighting the role of institutions and institutional arrangements, was introduced in 2016 (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a). Table 3 summarises the modifications to the foundational premises by Vargo and Lusch (2016a).

Table 3: S-D Logic Foundational Premise Development

Foundational Premise	2004	2008	Update
FP1	The application of specialised skills and knowledge is the fundamental unit of exchange.	Service is the fundamental basis of exchange.	No Change AXIOM STATUS
FP2	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental unit of exchange.	Indirect exchange masks the fundamental basis of exchange.	No Change
FP3	Goods are distribution mechanisms for service provisions.	No Change	No Change
FP4	Knowledge is the fundamental source of competitive advantage.	Operant resources are the fundamental source of competitive advantage.	Operant resources are the fundamental source of strategic benefit.
FP5	All economies are service economies.	No Change	No Change
FP6	The customer is always the co-producer.	The customer is always the co-creator of value.	Value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary. AXIOM STATUS
FP7	The enterprise can only make value propositions.	The enterprise cannot deliver value, but only offer value propositions.	Actors cannot deliver value but can participate in the creation and offering of value propositions.
FP8	Service-centred view is customer oriented and relational	A service-centred view is inherently customer oriented and relational.	A service-centred view is inherently beneficiary oriented and relational.
FP9		All social and economic actors are resource integrators.	No Change AXIOM STATUS
FP10		Value is always uniquely and phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary.	No Change AXIOM STATUS
FP11			New Value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements. AXIOM STATUS

Source: "Institutions and axioms: an extension and update of service dominant logic" Vargo and Lusch (2016b, p. 8)

Vargo and Lusch (2016a) revisited the original foundational premises of S-D logic, providing updates to reflect its evolution since 2004. In the inaugural article, operant resources (skills and knowledge) were identified as the fundamental source of competitive advantage (FP4). In 2016,

Vargo and Lusch modified this to strategic benefit, moving from competition to collaboration and mutual benefit in service exchange. FP6 originally stated “the customer is always a co-producer”; however, it was later modified to “value is co-created by multiple actors, always including the beneficiary”, to reflect a more comprehensive understanding of value co-creation as a process involving multiple actors, transcending the initially discussed firm–customer dyad. The move from a firm-centric perspective to a more inclusive, actor-to-actor orientation is captured in the modification of FP7, which asserts that actors participate in the creation and offering of value propositions. The update on FP8 reinforces the focus on relational exchanges in S-D logic and states that a service-centred view is inherently beneficiary-oriented and relational. The change emphasizes the importance of the perspective of the beneficiary rather than the firm in understanding value creation. Lastly, Vargo and Lusch (2016a) added a fifth axiom that stated “value co-creation is coordinated through actor-generated institutions and institutional arrangements”. This formalised the role of institutions in shaping interactions between actors within service ecosystems.

A pivotal development between 2004 and 2016 was the conceptual move from focusing on firm–customer dyads to understanding value co-creation as taking place within service ecosystems. Service ecosystems are complex networks of resource-integrating actors that operate within shared institutional arrangements (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a). The role of institutions in assisting cooperation and coordination among actors within these ecosystems was also emphasised by Vargo and Lusch (2016a). Institutions encompass rules, norms, and shared meanings, which enable effective exchange of services and co-creation of value on a large scale. They help manage the intricacies of interactions between actors by providing shared frameworks that enable effective resource integration and service exchange (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a). While early iterations of S-D logic did feature the importance of institutional structures, the addition of a new axiom – “value cocreation is coordinated through actor-generated

institutions and institutional arrangements” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a, p. 8) – acknowledged the role of institutions and institutional arrangements as integral to coordinating the actions of actors in service ecosystems.

Another update was the shift from co-production to co-creation of value. The initial conceptualisation of the Service-Dominant logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a) often conflated co-production, referring to the involvement of customers in the production processes with co-creation of value. In 2008, Vargo and Lusch clarified this distinction, highlighting that “co-production” refers to the “creation of the value proposition – essentially, design, definition, production, etc.” and “value co-creation”, implying the “actions of multiple actors, often unaware of each other, that contribute to each other’s wellbeing” (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b, p. 8). This distinction was further strengthened in 2016, reflecting the systemic, networked nature of modern markets. Vargo and Lusch (2016a) stated that value co-creation occurs within complex networks of actors, and not just in direct, dyadic interactions between firms and customers.

The idea of ‘value-in-use’, where value is realised during the consumption or use of a good or service, also transitioned into ‘value-in-context’. This reflected that value is determined not just by the individual customer but is also influenced by broader social and institutional contexts in which the actors operate. In 2016, Vargo and Lusch expanded to ‘value-in-social-context’, which recognised that value creation is inherently social and contextual. ‘Value-in-social-context’ refers to the understanding that value is shaped by institutions, norms, and the actions of multiple actors within a service ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a).

3.3.2.2 Value-in-Context

The idea of ‘value-in-context’ (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b) is important to my doctoral research. ‘Value-in-context’ suggests that value co-creation is dependent on the availability and integration of other resources and is therefore contextually specific (Vargo et al., 2010). Value co-creation is systematic in nature since the resource combinations are always

changing (Vargo & Lusch, 2012). Vargo et al. (2017) elaborate on the phenomenological nature of value, arguing that value is always subjective and context-dependent, determined uniquely by the beneficiary. Each actor perceives value differently, contingent upon their social, cultural, and economic contexts. The concept of 'value-in-context' also resonates with FP9: all social and economic actors are resource integrators (Vargo & Lusch, 2012). Vargo and Lusch (2012) further proposed that the contextual nature of value co-creation comprises institutions and other socially constructed resources that are not random or exogenous. They are purposeful, systematic and not driven by connections, but rather governed by the rules of resource exchange, combination and the determination of the value, to some extent (Vargo & Lusch, 2012). The rules of resource exchange are collectively conceived by the actors during the process of value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2012).

Research on process dynamics and contextual properties regarding value co-creation is scant (Edvardsson et al., 2011; Gummerus, 2013). Most studies that have explored how context shapes value co-creation considered the context merely as a setting that promotes resource integration (see Akaka, Schau, et al., 2013; Chandler & Vargo, 2011), or they focused on a specific contextual level, which resulted in partial views of the influence of context on value co-creation (Leroy et al., 2013).

Extant research on value co-creation has predominantly focused on positive outcomes (i.e. value is co-created) (see Echeverri & Skålén, 2011). More research is needed on value co-destruction, conflictual value co-creation and the negative side or failure of value co-creation (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017). My study also explored instances where there is a negative or no outcome of the value co-creation process; i.e., value co-destruction (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011), conflictual value co-creation (Laamanen & Skålén, 2015) and value no-creation (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017) for the actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

3.3.2.3 Critique of S-D Logic

Since its introduction in 2004, the Service-Dominant logic has been widely acknowledged as a groundbreaking perspective in marketing theory, advocating for the conceptualisation of 'service' as the fundamental basis of exchange, rather than goods. However, despite the favourable reception, S-D logic has been subject to various critiques from scholars who questioned its assumptions, scope and practical applicability.

One of the primary criticisms of S-D logic lies in its conceptual ambiguity, particularly regarding the definition and use of terms such as 'service' and 'co-creation'. O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy (2011) argue that the distinction between 'service' and 'goods' remains unclear and often appears arbitrary. Although Vargo and Lusch (2008a) claim that service is a process (using one's resources for the benefit of another), critics argue that this distinction between goods and service is more rhetorical than practical. The broadness of the term 'co-creation' has also led to misunderstandings and inconsistent applications. An objection to S-D logic's emphasis on co-creation is the lack of precision, leading to challenges in operationalising the concept in empirical studies. Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) highlight that the overgeneralisation of 'co-creation' may dilute the concept, making it challenging for practitioners and academics alike to distinguish between varying degrees of customer involvement in value creation.

The practical applicability of S-D logic, particularly in its ability to guide marketing practices, is another significant critique. Grönroos and Gummerus (2014) dispute that S-D logic, while theoretically innovative, remains too abstract and lacks concrete managerial guidance for businesses to implement. Its idealistic nature has led to researchers questioning how firms can effectively use it in competitive, profit-driven environments. For instance, the emphasis on value co-creation challenges traditional practices, where firms have more control over value delivery. According to Grönroos and Gummerus (2014), S-D logic may overlook the

operational difficulties that businesses encounter in managing co-creation processes. These difficulties include resource constraints, lack of customer readiness, and difficulties in balancing co-created value across different stakeholders. The need for clearer guidance on how firms can systematically foster co-creation is one of the limitations.

The role of context and institutions in S-D logic has been another focal point of contention. Vargo and Lusch (2016a) extended S-D logic to cover institutional arrangements and context as critical levels of service ecosystems. However, Hietanen et al. (2018) claim that S-D logic fails to adequately address the implicit power dynamics and political influences that shape institutional arrangements. S-D logic portrays institutions as neutral enablers of resource integration and value co-creation, but one weakness is that it overlooks how institutional settings can favour certain actors over others. Hietanen et al. (2018) comment that S-D logic's emphasis on mutual value creation can obscure the unequal distribution of resources, knowledge, and power among market participants, which often results in unequal outcomes. Furthermore, the assumption of equality among the actors does not always match real-world markets (Hietanen et al., 2018).

Hietanen et al. (2018) also commented that S-D logic has implicit political and ethical assumptions that need to be examined. For example, it focuses on mutual value creation, implying an ethical stance in which all exchanges should be collaborative and beneficial for all actors involved. They ignored instances where value co-creation led to negative outcomes, such as exploitation or environmental degradation, or no outcomes. However, there have been developments by other researchers on negative outcomes or the failure of value co-creation such as value co-destruction (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011), conflictual value co-creation, (Laamanen & Skålén, 2015) and value no-creation (Makkonen & Olkkonen, 2017). Another problem with the S-D logic is its emphasis on operant resources – such as knowledge and skills – which undermines the role of material and tangible resources in value creation (Hietanen et

al., 2018). This, they argue, disregards the environmental implications of economic exchange, particularly in industries that are heavily reliant on material resources. Hietanen et al. (2018) reflect that by failing to incorporate the ecological dimension to value creation, S-D logic may inadvertently promote unsustainable practices. Nevertheless, there has been empirical research linking S-D logic and sustainability or sustainability marketing, which is discussed in section 3.5 of this chapter.

Vargo and Lusch (2008b) acknowledge that the dichotomy between value-in-use and value-in-exchange is overly simplistic and does not effectively account for the complexity of value creation.

In response to Vargo and Lusch's (2004a) inaugural article, Grönroos (2011) argued that the foundational premise of S-D logic, which states that "the customer is always a co-creator of value", is misleading, as it assumes that both the firm and the customer create value. He contends that "the customer creates value, and the firm facilitates value creation" (Grönroos, 2011, p. 289).

"Value creation is not an all-encompassing process. Consequently, design, development, and manufacturing of resources, and back-office processes, are not part of value creation... The total company process that leads to value-in-use for customers is needed to enable value creation, but all parts of it are not part of value creation for the customer. Logically, the creation of value-in-use by the user and value creation as an all-encompassing process including value-creating activities by both provider (firm) and the user (customer) cannot be included in the same analysis, as is done in the service-dominant logic literature" (Grönroos, 2011, pp. 282-283)

Wright and Russell (2012) highlight four philosophical problems with S-D Logic. These are (a) difficulties exist in empirically testing S-D logic; (b) it is over-explained and might not lead to strong normative power; (c) normative power must be adequately applied to the real world;

and (d) S-D logic is based on an invalid inference of a definitional argument, specifically the definition of 'service'. Wright and Russell (2012) further comment that S-D logic is "highly generalised" and "demonstrating that S-D logic can be used to describe marketing does not show that S-D logic ought to be used to describe marketing. Nor does showing that S-D logic may lead to better outcomes in some situations imply that it ought to be used in all situations" (p. 219).

Vargo and Lusch (2008b) have always stated that they do not "own" S-D logic. Rather, they see it as an "open-source evolution" that they have attempted to identify and refine, and ask other academics to support its evolution. Vargo (2011, p. 4) states that the authors have "acknowledged that S-D logic does not represent a theory; rather it is a lens, a perspective, for seeing the economic (and social) world differently from the traditional microeconomic and related marketing-management view; what we have called 'goods-dominant (G-D) logic'. Despite the "host of challenges associated with the further growth, development, and implementations of S-D logic" (Gummesson et al., 2010, p. 18), it does propose an interesting perspective on value, which has gained the support of many academics (e.g. Grönroos, 2008; Grönroos, 2011; Gummesson, 2008; Gummesson et al., 2012; Iniesta-Bonillo et al., 2012). Gummesson et al. (2010) emphasize that time is critical and a shift in marketing theory is necessary. They advocate for more empirical studies employing diverse research methods to advance S-D logic towards a more developed theoretical framework. Vargo and Lusch (2017) acknowledge the need for continuous refinement, particularly in addressing limitations associated with institutional contexts and value measurements. The concept of service ecosystems, which views value creation as part of a bigger, interconnected system of actors and resources, represents an effort to address a few of the critiques by incorporating a more systemic perspective of value creation.

3.4 Service Ecosystems

The focus in the service and marketing literature has evolved from traditional dyadic and value chain perspectives to a more interactive systems-oriented approach (e.g. Alderson, 1965; Dixon, 1967; Layton, 1985). This shift underscores the interconnectedness of market actors, framing markets as “complex social networks of individuals and groups linked through shared participation in the creation and delivery of economic value through exchange” (Layton, 2011, p. 303). Contemporary service research moves beyond earlier paradigms (El-Ansary et al., 2018), adopting a systems-based lens (Field et al., 2021) to illuminate how diverse actors – firms, organisations, individuals, and social networks – collaborate in the co-creation of value under dynamic and uncertain conditions (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b).

Within S-D logic, the concept of the ‘service ecosystem’ has become central (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). It is defined as “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional arrangements and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b, pp. 10-11). Actors – sometimes “keystone actors” (Iansiti & Levien, 2004) – play distinct roles that can substantially influence the ecosystem through supportive interactive activities (Frow et al., 2019). Service ecosystems are inherently dynamic and continually adapt as they face disruptions that require renegotiation of institutional arrangements (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Banoun et al., 2016).

Institutional arrangements, including shared norms, rules, and beliefs, coordinate actors’ interactions and either enable or constrain value co-creation (Edvardsson et al., 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). These institutions evolve through de-institutionalisation and re-institutionalisation as actors negotiate new “rules of the game” (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Vargo et al., 2020). Reflexivity – where actors observe themselves and act intentionally – enables them to influence and reshape emergent practices (Polese et al., 2021; Vink & Koskela-Huotari, 2022).

Service ecosystems are embedded in broader social, cultural, and economic contexts (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013) and can be analysed at micro, meso, and macro levels (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Lusch & Vargo, 2014). These nested structures allows researchers to “oscillate” between levels of analysis (Wieland et al., 2016), prompting attention to how value is co-created across interdependent layers. Consequently, service ecosystems have proven useful in examining systemic transformations, particularly regarding sustainability and circular economies (Fehrer et al., 2024).

Value co-creation, integral to service ecosystems, emerges through dynamic interactions and resource integration (Frow et al., 2016; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). Studies demonstrate that innovations often arise not solely from new goods or services but also from reconfiguring existing institutions to foster collaborative practices (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). Longitudinal evidence suggests that service ecosystems evolve from dyadic, goods-dominant exchanges to network-dominant relationships embodying S-D logic (Banoun et al., 2016). As marketers increasingly recognise the limitations of dyadic views (Vargo, 2011), the service ecosystem perspective provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how interconnected actors co-create value across multiple levels (Möller et al., 2020; Vargo et al., 2017; Wieland et al., 2016).

3.5 Multi-level Exploration of Value Co-creation

Service ecosystems are inherently complex, involving interactions among actors at the macro, meso, and micro levels. These levels allow an understanding of value co-creation processes, and the interconnectedness of these levels supports addressing sustainability-related challenges holistically rather than in isolation (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Biloslavo et al., 2018; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Institutions (rules, norms, and cultural frameworks) play a vital role in shaping value co-creation. By recognizing these at the three levels, researchers can investigate how institutional alignments or misalignments impact sustainability efforts (Banoun et al., 2016;

Biloslavo et al., 2018; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). This study explored a sustainable fashion service ecosystem comprising multiple actors situated across three levels: macro, meso, and micro. The description and relevance of each level to value co-creation is provided in the following sections.

3.5.1 Macro Level

The macro level involves broader societal and environmental governance systems. An exploration of this level enables the understanding of how policy frameworks and global sustainability goals (for instance, SDGs) interact with localised and individualised value co-creation efforts (Field et al., 2021; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021; Layton, 2007). The macro level sets the standard and priorities for sustainability efforts through institutional arrangements, such as global climate policies and international trade agreements. These arrangements impact how value is created and shared across service ecosystems (Field et al., 2021; Layton, 2019). Innovations at micro and meso levels often require assistance from macro level institutions to scale effectively. For instance, business sustainable practices and individual consumption decisions need to align with broader policy frameworks to achieve widespread impact (Biloslavo et al., 2018; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021; Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016).

3.5.2 Meso Level

The meso level, representing groups of actors such as businesses, retailers, and community networks, acts as a bridge between micro-level interactions and macro-level structures (Banoun et al., 2016; Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). It facilitates resource integration among actors that may not be directly connected (e.g. suppliers and consumers via intermediary organizations) (Banoun et al., 2016; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). The meso level can serve as a platform for negotiating and aligning institutional arrangements, strengthening coherence in how actors interpret and implement value co-creation activities (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Biloslavo et al., 2018).

3.5.3 Micro Level

The micro level focuses on interactions among individual actors, such as consumers, and involves direct exchanges and personal experiences (Biloslavo et al., 2018; Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). Actors at the micro level engage in immediate resource integration to co-create value, such as between a customer and a service provider (Banoun et al., 2016; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). Research shows that many innovations and sustainability practices originate from the micro level before being scaled to the meso and macro levels (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Chandler & Vargo, 2011). The micro level is where tangible sustainability activities and practices, such as recycling or energy conservation, are performed by individuals and are critical to driving broader systemic change (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Banoun et al., 2016; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). The activities of micro-level actors (e.g., customer preferences) influence meso-level operations (e.g., supply chain design), while meso-level decisions (e.g., industry standards) impact micro-level interactions (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Banoun et al., 2016; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021). Both levels contribute to shared value creation by aligning individual and group efforts with institutional frameworks and broader ecosystem goals. This alignment is crucial for achieving collective sustainability (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013; Gardiazabal & Bianchi, 2021).

3.6 Value Co-Creation, Service Ecosystems and Sustainability

Marketing scholars have repeatedly supported value co-creation as an idea or concept that can promote sustainability, particularly sustainable consumption. Voorberg et al. (2015) consider co-creation instrumental to sustainable consumption. Lozano (2014) suggests sustainable consumption requires individuals to share their knowledge and collaborate with the different sectors of society, which are the tenets of value co-creation. There is research that suggests that co-creation is an iterative process that combines the dimensions of the 'triple bottom line' and multiple stakeholders, and can be used a strategy to achieve sustainable development (Keeys

& Huemann, 2017). Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2020) state that “co-creatively leveraging all stakeholder capabilities in meshwork of social, business, civic, and natural communities can lead to better states of governance, infrastructure, development, and sustainability, with ‘win more-win more’ outcomes and expansion of wealth-welfare-wellbeing all around” (p. 31).

Sustainable production and consumption have often followed a goods-dominant logic with an emphasis on production standards, sustainability product labelling and customer education (Rex & Baumann, 2007). Sustainable development, however, needs new or combined resources, knowledge or ideas and fundamental changes in a firm’s corporate strategy and objectives (Hoffmann, 2007; Siebenhüner & Arnold, 2007). Co-creation is a way to share, combine and renew resources and capabilities between firms and consumers to create value via new forms of interaction, service and learning mechanisms (Von Hippel, 2006; Zwass, 2010). Co-creation processes should focus on the complete value chain, integrating different stakeholders (including consumers) to reduce adverse social and environmental impacts and to foster sustainable development (Arnold, 2017). Firms and businesses are related to multiple stakeholders as a part of extended networks and thus, sustainability strategies need to address to all stakeholders, keeping in mind that each stakeholder is different, with different resources, knowledge, skill and expectations (Biggemann et al., 2014). This might suggest that each stakeholder plays a key but different role in promoting sustainability, which this research investigated. This aligns with Vargo and Lusch (2017) who suggest that S-D logic can be used as an informative and robust framework for environmental stability due to its focus on service ecosystem viability and resiliency.

Value co-creation has been researched across multiple fields such as healthcare (e.g. Beirão et al., 2017; Elg et al., 2012; Greenhalgh et al., 2017), tourism (e.g. Chen et al., 2017; Grisseemann & Stokburger-Sauer, 2012; Mathis et al., 2016), social media (e.g. Kao et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2015; Quach & Thaichon, 2017; Rosenthal & Brito, 2017), public services (e.g. Osborne et al.,

2016; Saha & Goyal, 2021) and retail (e.g. Andreu et al., 2010; Fellesson & Salomonson, 2016). Research connecting value co-creation and sustainability, specifically sustainability marketing and sustainable consumption behaviour, is not unknown in the marketing literature (e.g. Aquilani et al., 2018; Keeys & Huemann, 2017; Lacoste, 2016; Sarmah et al., 2015). Lacoste (2016), using S-D logic as a theoretical lens and linking sustainability strategies to value co-creation, examined how B2B (business-to-business) companies use the concept of sustainability to co-create value. Her research demonstrates that sustainably driven value co-creation can lead to increased value being created at the end of the value chain or increased sustainable value being created along the supply chain (Lacoste, 2016). Palakshappa and Dodds (2021) posit that sustainability can be co-created during the consumption experience and via consumer engagement and resource integration of a firm's brand, products and/or services. While there is research integrating value co-creation and sustainability, more research is needed (Kruger et al., 2018). Specifically, research examining how organisations can be responsible for 'continuous' co-creation centred around sustainability is required (Arnold, 2017).

Given the increasing imperative for all organisations to help achieve the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, it is an opportune time to examine the role of service ecosystems in fostering real change towards sustainability. Large-scale and complex service ecosystems provide insight into how transformation across the value chain can establish a system where all stakeholders are actively engaged contributors to future progress, addressing the global sustainability challenge (Field et al., 2021). Although there have been advancements in understanding service ecosystems, additional empirical research is necessary (Banoun et al., 2016).

The academic discourse on service ecosystems and how they can advance sustainability has evolved to produce the concept of sustainable service ecosystems (e.g. Keiningham et al., 2024; Sarno et al., 2024; Teixeira et al., 2024). The fundamental difference between service

ecosystems and sustainable service ecosystems lies in their central focus and operational approaches. While service ecosystems are networks of interrelated actors who collaboratively create value through the exchange of services, sustainable service ecosystems incorporate principles of sustainability into their core operations. These sustainable ecosystems strive to balance economic success, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. This shift involves implementing practices that ensure the long-term viability and well-being of all stakeholders, including the environment itself (Keiningham et al., 2024; Teixeira et al., 2024). Sustainable service ecosystems adopt regenerative thinking, which focuses on restoring and renewing resources rather than merely sustaining them, and can trigger sustainability transitions by fostering continuous change and adaptation (Sarno et al., 2024). Value co-creation practices that embed a sustainable ethos are prioritised in sustainable service ecosystems. This involves implementing strategies that emphasise innovation, transparency, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve well-being outcomes for individuals, businesses, society, and the planet (Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). Furthermore, sustainable service ecosystems emphasise collaboration among all stakeholders, including consumers, who are deemed to be central drivers of sustainability (van Riel et al., 2021). Perhaps the most unique characteristic of sustainable service ecosystems is the recognition of the role of non-human actors, such as natural resources and ecological systems, in value co-creation. This integration aids mutual benefits achievement and supports the broader goals of environmental sustainability (Teixeira et al., 2024). Although sustainable service ecosystems try to address the significant challenges of sustainability, they are not without complexities and tensions. For example, reconciling the diverse interests of stakeholders and managing institutional conflicts within interconnected ecosystems can be difficult (Sarno et al., 2024). Moreover, the shift toward sustainability requires substantial changes in mindsets and practices, which may meet resistance from traditional business models that prioritize short-term profits (van Riel et al.,

2021). Despite these challenges, integrating sustainability into service ecosystems presents a promising route to achieving long-term sustainability, well-being, and resilience for both human and ecological systems. More research integrating a systems view within a sustainable service ecosystems perspective is needed (Frow et al., 2019; Ostrom et al., 2015; Vargo & Lusch, 2017)

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter explores the foundational concepts of value and value co-creation, framing them as essential theoretical constructs to advance sustainability and the potential role of marketing in this advancement. This study uses the multidimensional and evaluative form of ‘value’. A holistic, multidimensional view of value fits with this study because sustainability, by its very nature, is holistic and is intuitively understood (Partridge, 2011) and the actors involved in the study would determine value subjectively (see Gupta & Lehmann, 2005; Saarijärvi et al., 2013). Like the subjectivity of value, sustainability is also context-dependent, situation-specific and has different meanings for different individuals (Henninger et al., 2016).

The S-D logic perspective is adopted to explore value co-creation among multiple actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Service ecosystems—dynamic networks of resource-integrating actors governed by shared institutional arrangements—are instrumental in addressing sustainability challenges by fostering collective value co-creation across micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (societal) levels. This study supports the notion that the integration of sustainability into service ecosystems presents a promising yet underexplored avenue for creating systemic change. The study aims to contribute to this emerging discourse by providing insight into the dynamics of value co-creation and its implications for sustainable development.

Chapter 4: Research Context

4.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter 4 discusses the research context of this study, which is sustainable fashion. The chapter begins with a discussion of the emergence of sustainable fashion as a response to the ‘ills’ of the fashion industry. This is followed by a review of the various definitions and meanings associated with sustainable fashion. A review of marketing research focusing on sustainable fashion is provided next, followed by a discussion on the need for a service ecosystem perspective when exploring sustainable fashion.

4.2 Emergence of Sustainable Fashion

The fashion industry has been heavily criticised for encouraging unbridled consumption, unethical production practices, unfair labour conditions (Colucci & Vecchi, 2021), resource exploitation, and wasteful consumption patterns (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). The industry has also been deemed one of the world’s most polluting industries (Bly et al., 2015; Boström & Micheletti, 2016; Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011). Events such as the Rana Plaza disaster marked a turning point in the fashion industry, with the 2013 collapse of the Bangladeshi garment factory exposing the industry’s vulnerabilities and placing sustainability issues firmly in the spotlight. Concerns such as resource depletion, pollution, environmental degradation (Rashidi-Sabet & Madhavaram, 2022), exploitation, unsafe working conditions (Stringer et al., 2022), and the fragility of value chains connecting consumption in the Global North to production in the Global South (Hammer & Plugor, 2019) have gained increased visibility.

At the core of these challenges lies the driving force of consumer culture, which fuels large-scale garment consumption (Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015). The importance of market growth in the industry has strengthened the increasing demand for new products (Becker-Leifhold, 2018; Palakshappa & Dodds, 2021; Tokatli, 2008), which has led to the increased consumption of ‘disposable’ fashion garments, resulting in a negative impact on the environment and

sustainability (Dissanayake & Sinha, 2015; Todeschini et al., 2017). These social and environmental impacts of the global fashion industry have resulted in a mainstream focus on fashion consumption and production (mal)practices (Mukendi et al., 2020). This has fuelled discussion on sustainability within the fashion industry (Henninger et al., 2016; Mukendi et al., 2020; Shen, 2014). As a key component of a system that contributes to unsustainable practices, the fashion industry also has the potential to support and advance the United Nations' sustainable development agenda (Henninger et al., 2016; Todeschini et al., 2017). Persistent human and environmental challenges have spurred public and academic calls for innovative approaches to fashion production and consumption (Ozdamar Ertekin et al., 2020).

Within marketing research, issues related to sustainability in the fashion industry have received a lot of attention (Shen, 2014). For instance, existing research has covered consumers' perceptions and attitudes (e.g. Goworek et al., 2012; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Shen et al., 2013) and the influence of consumer purchasing behaviour (e.g. Shen et al., 2013). Sustainability discussions in the textile and apparel supply chains have touched on several issues and innovations such as product returns (e.g. Shen & Li, 2015), low carbon supply chains (e.g. Shen et al., 2017), corporate social responsibility (e.g. Perry & Towers, 2013), sustainable design operations (e.g. Li & Shen, 2016; Wang & Shen, 2017) and sustainable competition (e.g. Nagurney & Yu, 2012). Research in sustainable retailing in the fashion industry has looked at disposable fashion, fast fashion, slow fashion, green branding and eco-labelling (see Yang et al., 2017). Additionally, research on ethical fashion consumption has explored topics such as willingness to pay a premium for sustainable fibres, textiles and apparel (e.g. Bray et al., 2011; Choi et al., 2012; Connell, 2010; Fisher et al., 2008; Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008), resistance to fashion items produced via garment worker exploitation (e.g. Hustvedt & Dickson, 2009; Shaw et al., 2006) and concern for environmental impact (e.g. Connell, 2010; Fisher et al., 2008; Hustvedt & Bernard, 2008; Niinimäki, 2010).

To address the grave environmental and social challenges, sustainable fashion has emerged as an umbrella term encompassing clothing and practices that aim to reduce harm to people and the planet (Mukendi et al., 2020), and is recognised as a response to the environmental problems in the fashion industry (Mora et al., 2014; Park & Lin, 2020; Zarley Watson & Yan, 2013). Emerging in the 1960s, sustainable fashion was, at first, part of the slow fashion movement (Henninger et al., 2016) as consumers became aware of the negative environmental impact of clothing manufacturing and demanded industry-wide change (Jung & Jin, 2014). Sustainable fashion really started to appear in the academic literature around 2008, with pioneering work by researchers such as Fletcher (2008), De Brito et al. (2008) and Clark (2008). As the importance and relevance of sustainable fashion is increasing, its definition is also evolving (Henninger et al., 2016; Reimers et al., 2016). This may be due to the evolving nature of sustainability within fashion and the difficulties in identifying an ‘absolute’ sustainable fashion item or practice (Mukendi et al., 2020). This is linked with the subjectivity surrounding the understanding of sustainability, which is “intuitively understood, yet has no coherent definition” (Henninger et al., 2016, p. 402). A review of sustainable fashion definitions, within marketing research, is now provided.

4.3 Understanding Sustainable Fashion

Many significant attempts have been made to define sustainable fashion. Several studies have sought to define it from a consumer perspective (e.g. Hill & Lee, 2012; Joergens, 2006; Jung & Jin, 2014, 2015; Reimers et al., 2016). While academia considers sustainable fashion to encompass both social and environmental dimensions, consumers tend to focus primarily on its environmental aspects, often framing it in environment-friendly terms (Hill & Lee, 2012). However, this perspective is not without contradictions (Bly et al., 2015). Consumers generally expect brands to act ethically, uphold industry standards, and “do the right thing” (Reimers et al., 2016). Other researchers have taken a broader, macro approach, incorporating elements

such as infrastructure, societal norms, and the involvement of wider stakeholders into their definitions (e.g. Haug & Busch, 2016; Thomas, 2008). For instance, Dodds et al. (2022) suggest that sustainable fashion is defined as “fashion businesses that have sustainability at the core of their business ethos and implement sustainable practices that actively (co)create transformation through the retail service ecosystem, including creating and offering sustainable products, ensuring ethical and transparent supply chains, collaborating with suppliers and competitors and actively promoting sustainable practices and behaviour with stakeholders” (p. 826).

Mukendi et al. (2020) state that sustainable fashion represents “the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption and production practices” (p. 2874). Goworek et al. (2012, p. 938) define sustainable fashion as “clothing which incorporates one or more aspects of social or environmental sustainability, such as fairtrade manufacturing or fabric containing organically grown raw material”. This definition resonates with Henninger et al. (2016) who suggest that sustainable fashion covers environmentally friendly raw materials and/or more socially responsible production processes. Lundblad and Davies (2016, p. 150) state that sustainable fashion is an effort to “correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry, including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation”. More recently, Pires et al. (2024) state that sustainable fashion is characterised by manufacturing processes that lower environmental impact, such as using recycled and organic materials, and adhering to fairtrade principles. It also includes practices such as consuming second-hand goods, and designing garments to last longer (Pires et al., 2024).

It is important to acknowledge that while there are overlaps among sustainable fashion, ethical fashion, eco-fashion, slow fashion, and green fashion in academic research, these terms carry distinct connotations and rarely intersect in practice (Reimers et al., 2016). Sustainable Fashion

is not academically synonymous with slow fashion (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013) or eco-fashion (Carey & Cervellon, 2014). Instead, sustainable fashion is most closely aligned with ethical fashion, as evidenced by significant overlap in the literature and definitions (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). Joergens (2006, p. 361) defines ethical fashion as “clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers, by using biodegradable and organic cotton”, framing ethical fashion as both a process and a product. However, sustainable fashion has evolved this definition by replacing the restrictive “while” with the more inclusive “and/or” (Goworek et al., 2012; Henninger et al., 2016). For example, Goworek et al. (2012, p. 938) build upon Joergen’s definition, expanding the scope of what can be categorised as sustainable fashion, thus broadening its conceptual boundaries. Table 4, taken from a literature review by Mukendi et al. (2020) summarises the differences between the terms. The definitions and understandings of sustainable fashion by Mukendi et al. (2020), Dodds et al. (2022), Goworek et al. (2012), Henninger et al. (2016), Lundblad and Davies (2016) and Pires et al. (2024) have been added to strengthen the distinction.

Table 4: Summary of Sustainable Fashion Terminology

Term	Definition	Authors
Ethical Fashion	“fashionable clothes that incorporate fair trade principles with sweatshop-free labour conditions while not harming the environment or workers by using biodegradable and organic cotton”	Joergens (2006, p. 361)
	“the positive impact of a designer, a consumer choice, or method of production as experienced by workers, consumers, animals, society and the environment”	Thomas (2008, p. 533)
	“clothing that seeks to minimise its negative impact on the environment, employees, and animals via processes that include, but are not limited to, slow fashion”	Reimers et al. (2016, p. 388)
Eco fashion	“Any clothing item made in an environmentally friendly process including recycled materials, nontextile materials and reused clothing”	Carey and Cervellon (2014)
Slow Fashion	“A philosophy, design approach, and method of consumption that prioritises the relationship between the wearer and the clothing, local production and resources, and ethical treatment of workers”	Clark (2008), Pookulangara and Shephard (2013) and Tama et al. (2017)
Sustainable Fashion	“... Ecological integrity, social quality, and human flourishing through products, action, relationships and practices of use”	Fletcher (2008, p. 18)
	“the variety of means by which a fashion item or behaviour could be perceived to be more sustainable, including (but not limited to) environmental, social, slow fashion, reuse, recycling, cruelty-free and anti-consumption and production practices”	Mukendi et al (2020, p. 2877)
	“fashion businesses that have sustainability at the core of their business ethos and implement sustainable practices that actively (co)create transformation through the retail service ecosystem, including, creating and offering sustainable products, ensuring ethical and transparent supply chains, collaborating with suppliers and competitors and actively promoting sustainable practices and behaviour with stakeholders”	Dodds et al. (2022, p. 826)
	“clothing which incorporates one or more aspects of social or environmental sustainability, such as fairtrade manufacturing or fabric containing organically grown raw material”	Goworek et al. (2012, p. 938)

“covers environmentally friendly raw materials and/or more socially responsible production processes”	Henninger et al. (2016)
“correct a variety of perceived wrongs in the fashion industry, including animal cruelty, environmental damage, and worker exploitation”	Lundblad and Davies (2016, p. 150)
“characterised by manufacturing processes that lower environmental impact, such as using recycled and organic materials, and adhering to fairtrade principles. It also includes practices like consuming second-hand goods and designing garments to last longer”	Pires et al. (2024, pp. 18-19)

Source: “Sustainable fashion: current and future research directions” Mukendi et al. (2020)

Schiaroli et al. (2024) commented that sustainable fashion extends to the complete lifecycle of fashion products, from pre-purchase to post-use, emphasizing techniques that ensure product circularity through recycling and reusing. Sustainable fashion has also been conceptualised by its commitment to reducing environmental impacts, such as greenhouse gas emissions and waste generation. This includes adopting practices such as recycling, using eco-friendly materials, and implementing life cycle assessments to track and minimise resource consumption and emissions (De Ponte et al., 2023; Rehman et al., 2024). Social responsibility is another component in the conceptualisation of sustainable fashion, where the aim is to establish fair labour practices and improve human welfare. This also includes consideration for the welfare of animals and ethical production processes (Kaner & Baruh, 2022). While most research regards sustainable fashion as a solution to the challenges facing the textile and clothing sector, it remains a form of consumption. Nonetheless, it represents a deliberate effort to transition toward a more sustainable future (Palakshappa, Bulmer, et al., 2024).

Sustainable fashion, specifically, is being increasingly explored in marketing research as a response to the environmental and social challenges posed by the traditional fashion industry. The next section discusses the marketing research focusing on sustainable fashion. This also includes marketing research linking sustainable fashion and value co-creation.

4.3 Sustainable Fashion Research in Marketing

Marketing research focusing on sustainable fashion has gained significant traction due to the existing negative environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry. The role that clothes play in an individual's life, along with the complex claims around sustainability, distinguish sustainable fashion from conventional product categories (Mukendi et al., 2020), which had dominated research on sustainable consumption (McDonagh & Prothero, 2014). There has also been a call to shift from the application of extant theories in promoting sustainable consumption to an exclusive set of theory-building tools around sustainable fashion consumption behaviours, founded on fashion consumption literature as opposed to sustainable consumption literature (Mukendi et al., 2020). Within the field of sustainable fashion, there is a need for more research on areas such as supply chains (e.g. sustainability measurement and reporting), retailing (e.g. role of media influencers in reshaping fashion markets), consumer behaviour (e.g. expanding the demographic, cultural and social spectrum of participants in sustainable fashion studies), sustainable fashion business models, social marketing interventions, and future leaders (Mukendi et al., 2020).

Sustainable fashion business models, which promote circularity in their business model, range from *collaborative fashion consumption* models such as renting, sharing and swapping (e.g. Armstrong et al., 2015; Armstrong et al., 2016; Becker-Leifhold & Iran, 2018; Iran & Schrader, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016; Pal, 2017; Pedersen & Netter, 2015; Strähle & Erhardt, 2017; Todeschini et al., 2017; Zamani et al., 2017) to *second-hand retailing* (e.g. Chan et al., 2015; McColl et al., 2013; Pal, 2017; Strähle & Höhn, 2017; Strähle & Klatt, 2017), and *upcycled goods* (e.g. Janigo & Wu, 2015; Pal, 2017; Todeschini et al., 2017). Other studies have also looked at the practices of micro-organisations and their owner-managers (e.g. DiVito & Bohnsack, 2017; Gurova & Morozova, 2018; Henninger et al., 2016; Leslie et al., 2014; Lewis & Pringle, 2015).

This study adopts a service ecosystem perspective in sustainable fashion, which emphasizes collaboration among multiple stakeholders, such as consumers, producers, and other actors, to co-create value and integrate resources effectively. This approach is essential for tackling the environmental and social challenges faced by the fashion industry. The S-D logic perspective asserts that all actors within the ecosystem function as service providers, with value being co-created through their interactions. This perspective is critical for understanding how sustainable fashion can be marketed and consumed in a manner that delivers benefits to all stakeholders involved (Padhi, 2018).

4.7 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 establishes the research context by situating this doctoral study within the domain of sustainable fashion. It begins with an exploration of the industry's environmental and social challenges, which have led to the emergence of sustainable fashion as a counter-response. Sustainable fashion addresses the negative consequences of unbridled consumption, unethical production practices, and resource depletion that characterize traditional fashion. Events such as the Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 highlighted the urgent need for systemic change, sparking greater public and academic focus on sustainability within the fashion industry.

The chapter reviews the evolution and conceptualizations of sustainable fashion, highlighting its multifaceted nature, which encompasses environmental, social, and ethical dimensions. While academia emphasizes these interconnected aspects, consumer understanding often remains focused on environmental concerns. Sustainable fashion is defined broadly, incorporating practices such as slow fashion, eco-fashion, recycling, and fair trade, reflecting its dynamic and evolving nature.

Marketing research on sustainable fashion has examined consumer perceptions, supply chain innovations, and sustainable business models, yet gaps remain. These include insufficient focus

on cultural and demographic diversity in consumer behaviour studies, and limited exploration of circular fashion models.

The chapter concludes by emphasizing the need for a service ecosystem perspective, which integrates diverse actors to co-create value, enabling a holistic approach to addressing sustainability challenges in fashion. This perspective aligns with the study's focus on sustainable value co-creation.

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1 Overview

Chapter 5 outlines the strategy, design, and research method that framed this doctoral study, where the objective was to explore and understand how value is co-created in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem with multiple stakeholders, across three levels of participant aggregation: macro, meso, and micro. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, a reflexive and iterative qualitative approach was adopted. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants across the three levels were completed. Experts on sustainability and sustainable fashion in New Zealand (macro level) were interviewed first, followed by the leadership and senior management of a sustainable fashion business (meso level). Interviews with consumers (micro level) were completed last. The analysis process followed a deductive-inductive reasoning and reflexive thematic approach, using NVivo® to support and simplify the analysis and coding process.

The chapter begins with a description of the research paradigm, followed by a discussion of the research strategy, design and methods used in the study. The data collection and analysis approaches are then presented, concluding with the ethical considerations observed during research.

5.2 Philosophical Paradigm

Any study is founded on a philosophical paradigm, which is a researcher's perspective and position. This philosophical paradigm serves as a guide, shaping how a researcher conceives research objectives, approaches the research process, influences research outcomes, and to some extent, dictates the nature of the results. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 19) asserted that a paradigm has three key components: (a) the researcher's ontological view, which addresses the nature of reality, (b) their epistemological beliefs, which pertain to the relationship between the researcher and knowledge, and (c) their methodological principles, which govern how the

researcher acquires knowledge about the world. There are four essential facets of the research process, as outlined by Crotty (1998) – epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and research methods – which inform each other to establish the overarching research paradigm.

A researchers' 'worldview' (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), which is their overall philosophical orientation, influences the research approach they predominantly adopt and follow. The ontological view of this study is constructionism. Constructionism is defined by Crotty (1998) as a world view where meaning is not discovered but constructed, where "there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover", but that "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world", and suggests that "different people construct meaning in different ways" (pp. 8-9).

The research paradigm establishes a "broad set of beliefs that guides actions" (Guba, 1990, p. 7) in which the researcher positions their work. Fossey et al. (2002) define a paradigm as a "system of ideas, or world view, used by a community of research to generate knowledge" (p. 718). This has great significance in the selection of appropriate research methodology, including research strategy and data collection methods (Saunders & Lewis, 2017). The research paradigm adopted for this study is interpretive. Interpretivism supports developing a deep understanding of human behaviour or the world around them from an individual's own frame of reference (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Collis & Hussey, 2009). It assumes that reality is constructed via the meanings created through peoples' experiences and "individuals are actively involved in making sense of the world they are experiencing" (Schembri & Sandberg, 2002, p. 195). An interpretive paradigm follows an empathetic approach and assumes a subjective view of the social reality experienced by social actors (Bell & Bryman, 2007; Cavana et al., 2001; Collis & Hussey, 2009; Lawrence, 2014). "Interpretive research presents a rich and complex description of how people think, react and feel under certain contextually specific situations" (Cavana et al., 2001, p. 9).

Interpretivist marketing and consumer researchers engage in an open-minded process through which they unpack the interaction(s) between pre-existing, adapted, or novel conceptualisations of research contexts to generate general understanding and explanations (Belk et al., 2012). This theoretical perspective was beneficial in capturing the contextual factors that influence the relationships and value co-creation amongst the participants in a sustainable fashion ecosystem. An interpretive paradigm also enables an understanding and interpretation of value co-creation from each participant's perspective and can help to gauge their contribution towards the achievement of SDG 12. The research paradigm is an overarching umbrella that guides and influences the selection of an appropriate research strategy. The methodological aspect of the research paradigm pertains to the researcher's philosophical standpoint on the acquisition of knowledge about the world and dictates the selection and application of research methods (Crotty, 1998). The research strategy is discussed below.

5.3 Research Strategy: Qualitative Research Approach

This study is an exploration, designed to understand how multiple stakeholders in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value and the contextual factors that influence value co-creation. To achieve this understanding, it was important to capture the perspectives of each participant, and gauge how contextual factors influenced value co-creation. The exploratory nature of the study made it apposite to use a qualitative research strategy. Gummesson (2006, p. 167) suggested that a qualitative research strategy is desirable when research entails "complexity, context and persona and their multitude of factors, relationships and fuzzy phenomena". The interpretive research paradigm has also been equated with a qualitative research approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Esterberg, 2002; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Spiggle, 1994) which further supports the choice of a qualitative research strategy for this study.

Qualitative research has been described as a “situated activity” that places the researcher “in the world”, wherein the researcher uses various interpretive practices to help “make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). This involves an “interpretive, naturalist approach to the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3), that requires the researcher to develop a deep understanding of how individuals view the world around them. The aim of qualitative research is to build a rich, holistic picture, and a deep understanding of a phenomenon within a particular context (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Zalan & Lewis, 2004). Van Maanen (1983, p. 9) argues that qualitative research “is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.”

Qualitative methods are also inherently flexible and can be varied during the research, according to the nature of emerging findings. One of the advantages of qualitative research is that it allows the researcher to expand their understanding of data through verbal and nonverbal communication; the research can process data immediately, clarify and summarize material, check for accuracy of interpretation, and further explore unusual or unexpected responses (Merriam, 2002).

Critical qualitative inquiry in consumer research is essential to understanding consumers and consumption behaviour (Denzin, 2001). Qualitative research is recognised and respected for its contributions to consumer and marketing theory, management implications and policy (Bellenger et al., 2011). It has been used to identify gaps in existing theoretical frameworks and recommend novel approaches for promoting sustainable consumption. For instance, in their study on sustainable futures, Davies et al. (2020) highlighted the limitations of traditional cognitive behavioural theories and suggested alternative models for understanding and influencing consumer behaviour. Qualitative research is also appropriate for exploring complex phenomena associated with sustainability, such as the interplay between social norms,

environmental knowledge, and consumer behaviour, as it allows researchers to identify interrelationships among various factors that facilitate sustainable consumption (Bui et al., 2022).

These arguments reinforce that the objectives of my doctoral study could be best met by the application of a qualitative research strategy.

5.4 Research Design: Multi-Level Exploration

Finding a potential solution to the question ‘How can we transition to a sustainable future?’ needs a holistic view that covers the entire ecosystem, from production to consumption, including all stakeholders along the business value chain (Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). Adopting an ecosystem perspective can substantially enhance sustainability and sustainable development initiatives by fostering a comprehensive understanding of the interconnectedness between businesses, consumers, and the environment, and how these elements interact and influence each other (Theodoraki, 2024; Zhang & Watson Iv, 2020). An ecosystems perspective prioritises considering the broader context in which interaction between stakeholders occurs, enabling more effective strategies for promoting sustainability. It can aid in driving meaningful changes in consumer behaviour and business practices towards sustainability by integrating insights from various stakeholders and leveraging innovative practices.

This study adopted an ecosystem perspective and used a multi-level participant approach. This approach enables researchers to address the complexity of marketing phenomena by exploring interactions across multiple levels, including individuals, group, and organisation contexts (Szczepańska & Nadeem, 2016). Adopting this comprehensive approach enhances understanding of the diverse factors that shape marketing outcomes and drive consumer behaviour (Szczepańska & Nadeem, 2016). Furthermore, integrating insights from multiple levels allows researchers to uncover patterns and relationships that might remain hidden when confined to a single level of analysis. This approach enhances the accuracy and reliability of

research findings, providing a more nuanced understanding of complex phenomena (Szczepańska & Nadeem, 2016).

This study used a multi-level participant aggregation approach to gather a systemic, holistic understanding of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. The exploration covers three levels of participant aggregation: macro (government, civic bodies, academics, business strategists, and social media influencers), meso (sustainable fashion business), and micro (consumers). This approach enabled me to effectively address the research questions and the gaps in the existing literature. Specifically, it helped me to understand how value is co-created amongst the actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem and the contextual factors that influence value co-creation. This approach also enabled understanding of the nuances of the relations and processes required to co-create value within a sustainable fashion ecosystem to provide business owners, managers, and marketing practitioners with practical solutions and recommendations on how they can ‘collectively’ move forward successfully and contribute to achieving SDG12.

5.5 Participant Selection

5.5.1 Macro Level Group

The macro level group was comprised of experts in the field of sustainability and sustainable fashion in New Zealand. Experts are typically distinguished by their existing knowledge and experience within a specific domain. This expertise may be demonstrated through professional qualifications, substantial years of practice, or a respected role within a community or organisation (Saunders, 2012; Wan, 2019). The participants in this study were deemed experts as they had dedicated their professional lives to working on promoting sustainability and sustainable fashion in New Zealand, ranging from being involved in government and nationwide programmes to using social media to influence citizens to adopt sustainable practices. They had also been recognised, with accolades, for their achievements and influence

in advocating for change towards sustainability and sustainable consumption. Experts are expected to provide detailed and nuanced insights that enrich the depth of research findings. This is especially critical in qualitative research, where a deeper understanding is valued more than the breadth of data collected (Arcury & Quandt, 1999; Wan, 2019). Additionally, the expectation of experts in this study was to assist in building an understanding of the macro-level context of sustainability and sustainable fashion in New Zealand.

The selection of experts is inherently aligned with the research objectives. Experts are chosen based on the relevance of their expertise to the research questions, enabling a more profound exploration and understanding of the subject (Saunders, 2012), which was sustainability and sustainable fashion in this study. There were seven segments within the macro-level group, each representing a part of the context that surrounds the meso level and micro level. These seven segments were-

1. National level expert(s) on sustainability in New Zealand
2. Spokesperson(s) from a New Zealand sustainable business organisation helping other businesses to move towards sustainability
3. Business experts(s)/strategist(s) working with fashion businesses to help them become more sustainable
4. Academic(s) teaching sustainable fashion at a university in New Zealand
5. Consumer facing influencer(s) promoting sustainability and sustainable fashion
6. Media person(s) working on issues associated with sustainability within the fashion industry
7. Spokesperson(s) from civic agencies and/or not-for-profit firms working on sustainability-related issues in the New Zealand fashion industry

Table 5 provides descriptions of the experts interviewed in the research, along with their segments and pseudonyms that ensure participant anonymity.

Table 5: Macro Level Participant Description

Participant code	Participant type	Macro Group	Expertise	Recording	Pseudonym
MG1PF1	Sustainability in New Zealand	Macro Group 1	Corporate, working with sustainability issues across New Zealand	Audio + video	Eleanor
MG1PM1	Sustainability in New Zealand	Macro Group 1	Strategist and advisor on government and business projects focusing on sustainability in New Zealand	Audio + video	Daniel
MG3PM2	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 3	Strategist working with fashion businesses on sustainability issues	Audio + video	Jack
MG3PF4	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 3	Strategist and founder of non-profit agency working on sustainability issues within the NZ fashion industry	Audio + video	Scarlett
MG4PF3	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 4	Academic expert, teaching sustainable fashion at a NZ University	Audio + video	Violet
MG7PF2	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 7	Consumer influencer promoting sustainable fashion	Audio + video	Olivia
MG5PF5	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 5	Head of non-profit agency working on sustainability issues within the NZ fashion industry	Audio	Abigail
MG2PF6	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 2	Sustainable fashion expert at a national-level organisation	Audio + video	Grace
MG6PF7	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 6	Investigative journalist, specialising in certifications and brand greenwashing	Audio + video	Isabella
MG7PF8	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 7	Consumer Influencer promoting sustainable fashion and lifestyle	Audio +Video	Sophia
MG5PF9	Sustainable Fashion	Macro Group 5	Senior leadership at a non-profit agency/civil agency on sustainability	Audio +Video	Amelia

A combination of purposive sampling, snowballing sampling and self-selection methods were used to select participants in the macro group. Purposive sampling involves purposefully selecting participants identified as experts based on specific predefined criteria. It is a widely used method in qualitative research to ensure the collection of data that is both rich in detail and highly relevant to the research objectives (Saunders, 2012; Wan, 2019). Experts may sometimes self-identify or be recommended by others within their field. Snowball sampling is a useful technique for identifying and accessing experts who are well-connected and highly regarded in a specific domain (Saunders, 2012).

In this study, the first interview was held with Eleanor (MG1PF1), who I met at an academic conference focusing on New Zealand's performance on the Sustainable Development Goals. I attended an online seminar on advancing sustainability in the New Zealand fashion industry where Sophia (MG7PF8), a sustainability influencer, was one of the panellists, and decided to interview her for my doctoral study. A few participants, such as Scarlett (MG3PF4) and Abigail (MG5PF5), were recommended by my supervisors, who have extensive research experience in the domain of sustainable fashion in New Zealand. Academic experts, such as Violet (MG4PF3), were identified by visiting the staff profiles of potential participants on their respective university websites. Some participants were recommended by some of the experts who had already completed an interview for this study. Other participants were identified on LinkedIn®, using specific search terms like 'sustainability' and 'sustainable fashion'.

Potential participants were first messaged via the LinkedIn® messaging tool or emailed on the email addresses provided on their professional profiles. This message or email contained a short personal introduction and a brief description of the doctoral study. If the participant responded positively and was willing to be interviewed, a detailed information sheet and

consent form, containing the participant rights and required commitment, were emailed to them. A suitable day and time for the interview was then confirmed with the participant and they were asked to return a signed copy of the consent form prior to the interview commencing.

5.5.2 Meso-Level Group

The meso-level group participants comprised the founder and senior leadership members of a sustainable fashion retailer operating in New Zealand. Sustainable fashion retailers are businesses that embed sustainability into their core principles, prioritizing ethical production practices, maintaining transparent supply chains, and actively promoting sustainable consumption. The selection of the sustainable fashion retailer was a critical step as it represented the meso-level perspective, role and influence in value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It was essential to identify a business that not only claimed sustainability but also demonstrated it through its ethos and operations. The following parameters were used to select the business:

1. The business is committed to sustainability as a core value, ensuring that sustainability is embedded in their organisation ethos and not just a peripheral activity (Dodds et al., 2022; Palakshappa, Bulmer, et al., 2024)
2. The retailer demonstrates ethical sourcing and transparent supply chain practices, ensuring fair labour conditions and environmentally friendly production processes (Dodds et al., 2022; Palakshappa & Dodds, 2021)
3. The retailer has valid certifications from recognised bodies, such as Fairtrade or B Corp, indicative of their commitment to ethical practices (Dodds et al., 2022; Palakshappa & Dodds, 2021)
4. The business actively promotes sustainable practices through marketing and consumer engagement (Dodds et al., 2022; Palakshappa & Dodds, 2021)

The participants, their expertise and respective pseudonyms are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Meso-Level Participant Descriptions

Participant Code	Designation	Recording	Pseudonym
SFBPF1	Chief Executive Officer	Audio	Evelyn
SFBPM1	Product Designer	Audio	Rony
SFBPF2	General Manager	Audio	Ava
SFBPF3	Marketing and Communications	Audio	Luna

I contacted an expert from the macro group to connect with sustainable fashion businesses that could potentially participate in the study. The expert recommended a sustainable fashion retailer in New Zealand and shared the contact details of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Once connection was established, the CEO and I had a meeting over Zoom® to discuss the nature and purpose of the study and participant commitments in detail, as required by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The CEO agreed on behalf of the senior leadership team to participate in the study and stated that she would come back to me with possible date(s) to conduct the interviews. She also invited me to a tour and induction of the manufacturing facility, based in Auckland, covering all the functions of the business, highlighting how their garments are made, and the sustainability practices followed by the business. I visited the facility and completed the interviews on a single day. This helped me understand the sustainable business practices and how the garments were manufactured. All participants were asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, and all interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio recorded.

5.4.3 Micro-Level Group

Consumers in New Zealand made up the micro-level participants group. The participation criteria were as follows

1. 18 to 40 years old

2. New Zealand Citizens or residents having lived 10 or more years in New Zealand
3. Articulate, confident and felt safe to speak with researcher
4. Comfortable to communicate in English language
5. Had some understanding of sustainability and sustainable fashion

I was particularly interested in consumers aged 18 to 40 years old. This age group spans both Generation Z and Generation Y, who have been found to be particularly cognizant of sustainability (Dabija et al., 2019; Hill & Lee, 2012). Furthermore, to capture the consumption diversity in consumers of this age group, I attempted to recruit a variety of consumers with a range of knowledge and experience with sustainable consumption (Hardon et al., 2004, p. 58). Participants were recruited via a purposive, snowball sampling technique. Purposive sampling techniques are frequently linked with qualitative methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994), and are used for the selection of information-rich cases (Hardon et al., 2004). This approach to sampling enabled me to interview consumers with varied consumption behaviours, based on their understanding of sustainability and sustainable fashion, adding richness to the data.

I initially approached known potential participants who met the criteria. After this, participants were encouraged to recommend other potential participants. I also asked the supervising team and other members of the academic staff to recommend potential participants. Each participant who indicated an interest was emailed an information sheet that told them about the purpose of the research, the commitment, and their rights as participants as required by the University's human ethics committee. A \$40 gift card was given to all participants who completed the interview as compensation for their time. Participant details are provided in Table 7. To protect the identity of the participants they were all given a pseudonym. The pseudonyms are included in Table 7 and are used in the following chapters.

Table 7: Micro-Level Participant Descriptions

Participant Code	Gender	Occupation Sector	Sustainable Fashion Practice (s)	Pseudonym
CPF01	Female	Education	Thrift shopping	Phoebe
CPF02	Female	Student	Thrift shopping, hand-me-downs from friends	Lauren
CPF03	Female	Education	Sustainable fashion brands, thrift shopping, donating clothes	Briar
CPM04	Male	Medicine	Vegan fashion brands, boutique store shopping, sustainable fashion brands	Alex
CPF05	Female	Retail	Mainstream brands with sustainable fashion options, op shopping	Millie
CPF06	Female	Student	Mainstream fashion label, second hand shopping	Monica
CPF07	Female	Retail	Recycled materials, second-hand shopping, making own clothes	Elizabeth
CPF08	Female	Hospitality	Thrift shopping, second-hand shopping	Alexis
CPM09	Male	Student	Sustainable fashion brands	Jayden
CPF10	Female	Interior design	Thrift shopping, sustainable fashion brands	Rose
CPF11	Female	Brand Management	Second-hand shopping, sustainable fashion brands	Kelly
CPF12	Female	Content Marketing	Second-hand shopping, recycled clothing,	Nikita
CPF13	Female	Student	Thrift store shopping, hand-me-downs from friends, mainstream brands with sustainable labels	Emma
CPF14	Female	Education	Mainstream fashion brands	Sandra
CPM15	Male	Student	Opp shopping, thrift store, swapping with friends	Ben
CPM16	Male	Student	Mainstream outdoor fashion brands, recycled clothing	Robert
CPF17	Female	Education	Thrift stores, op shopping, swapping with friends, repair and reuse garments	Summer
CPF18	Female	Education	Swap clothes with family, fashion brands that are durable	Imaan
CPF19	Female	Nursing	Sustainable fashion brands, second-hand stores	Adele

In total, 51 individuals were contacted across the three actor levels. At the macro level, 16 individuals were approached, and 11 agreed to participate. At the meso level, 10 sustainable fashion retailers were contacted, and one agreed to participate: the senior leadership from the participating retailer formed the meso-level sample (n=4). Meso-level recruitment posed

significant challenges. Some businesses did not meet the selection criteria, while others cited time constraints or concerns about work disruption, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The micro level involved contacting 25 individuals, of whom 19 participated. These participants were aged 18 to 40 years and were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling and outreach via personal networks.

Sampling was purposive and informed by the research aim of capturing multi-actor perspectives across levels of aggregation. Data saturation was monitored iteratively through ongoing analysis and reflexivity during the interview and coding process. Saturation was assessed within each actor group independently, and it was considered reached when no new codes, sub-themes, or interpretive patterns emerged. Later interviews at the macro and micro levels confirmed the recurrence of key themes such as *knowledge integration*, *guardianship*, and *accessibility barriers*. These repeated insights enhanced the depth and confidence of the analysis (Fusch & Ness, 2015), while allowing me to discern level-specific nuances and shared ecosystem patterns.

5.6 Research Method: In-depth Interviews

I followed a narrative-style interviewing process as the tool for data collection with all three participant groups, with variations in the kind of questions that were asked for each group. The core element of a narrative interview consists of “a freely developed impromptu narrative, stimulated by an opening question – the narrative-generating question” (Hopf, 2004, p. 206). The emerging data consists of *storied* data which includes the ‘whats’, ‘whys’ and ‘hows’ of experience (Sarbin, 1986). Narrative data is often generated through open-ended and unstructured interviewing techniques, which enable the narrator/interviewee to produce stories about their experiences, which would otherwise be suppressed if more structured interviewing methods were used (Holt, 2010). Such interviews yield more detailed and authentic accounts

of individuals' experiences (Riessman, 1993) which was essential to the research objectives of this study.

I created an interview guide for each participant group, including one guide for each sub-group in the macro-level participants group. Each interview guide was discussed and vetted by the supervising team. Some questions were standard for each group, while other questions were crafted according to the participants' role and/or expertise. The macro-level participants group was composed of seven sub-groups, and an interview guide was created for each sub-group. For instance, some of the questions to the consumer influencer expert were focused on the role, responsibilities and challenges faced by consumers in New Zealand in association with sustainability and sustainable fashion, while some questions to the spokesperson of the civic body were centred around the role of such organisation in the advancement of sustainability in the fashion industry. Meso-level participants were asked about their role in the business, their working relationships with other members of the organisation, the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainability that they face as an organisation, and their engagement with consumers.

Questions for the micro-level participants group began with what they understood sustainability to be, followed by questions relating to role and responsibilities as a consumer towards advancing sustainability, the challenges they face when consuming consciously, and how they shop for clothes. The final aspect of the interview involved showing participants a series of images related to sustainable fashion; for example, consumers participating in the designing process, visits to a sustainable fashion brand's manufacturing unit, and clothing return and repair by consumers. The purpose of using visual images in an interview is to help to 'auto-drive' and 'elicit' information (Heisley & Levy, 1991). Humans are visual beings who tend to comprehend their visual environment immediately (Belk, 2013), and what we 'see' is often a reflection of what we value (Tian & Belk, 2005). Visual images enabled consumers to

explore and articulate deeper meaning and insights into the phenomenon being studied that cannot be elicited by interviews alone (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2016). I felt that a concept such as value co-creation might be difficult to understand or articulate for some consumers; hence, visual images were only used with the micro-level participants to help them with speaking about their thoughts, feelings and possible benefits associated with the process and engaging with sustainable fashion brands in such a manner, which was aligned with the purpose of this study.

5.6 Data Collection

The in-depth interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via Zoom®, primarily due to the Government-imposed restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, or in some cases, for the convenience of the participants. Due to the pandemic, interviews over platforms such as Zoom® have become commonplace and participants feel comfortable using this technology (Dodds & Hess, 2021). In some instances, even though restrictions had been lifted, participants requested to be interviewed via Zoom® because of the convenience. Despite having both face-to-face and Zoom® interviews, there was no obvious difference in responses. Research has shown that both interviewers and participants identified rapport, convenience, simplicity, and user-friendliness as the key advantages of using Zoom® for qualitative interviewing (Archibald et al., 2019). Any potential issues were mitigated by having an interview schedule with a list of questions that all participants were asked.

All interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. I used my mobile phone voice recorder to record the face-to-face interviews. The recordings were then transferred to my office desktop and kept in a password-protected folder. Interviews conducted over Zoom® were video recorded, except for one interview due to weak and inconsistent internet speeds. The video and audio recordings were downloaded from the Zoom® cloud base and transferred to the same password-protected folder. Only I had access to these recordings.

5.7 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

I completed the transcription of the collected data from the recordings to a text file. I practiced a reflexive, pragmatist approach during the transcription and the analysis, whereby reflexivity is considered as “conscious and consistent efforts to view the subject matter from different angles and avoid privileging a single, favoured angle and vocabulary” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 24). I used a ‘Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)’ approach to analyse the data using the NVivo® qualitative analysis tool.

Thematic analysis method helps in systematic identification, organization and observation of the patterns of themes of a particular research topic with a sense of collective and shared meaning (Aronson, 1994; Nowell et al., 2017). It is a method of qualitative data analysis that has a lot of accessibility and flexibility. Various patterns of data can be found with the purpose of finding a solution to some questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis encompasses the search of significant themes tied to the depiction of a phenomenon. This is achieved by iteratively examining the data, identifying patterns within the information. Thematic analysis is very useful for highlighting similarities and dissimilarities, and for generating new insights in an area of research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These emerging themes subsequently serve as the foundational categories for analysis, as outlined by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). I specifically followed Braun and Clarke (2006) approach to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Since the publication of their first paper on the subject in 2006, Braun and Clarke’s approach has become one of the most thoroughly described methods of conducting thematic analysis. The reflexive approach in thematic analysis emphasizes the active involvement of the researcher in knowledge generation (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Codes are viewed as reflections of the researcher’s interpretations of meaningful patterns within the dataset. Reflexive thematic analysis is seen as a manifestation of the researcher’s interpretive examination of the data, situated at the convergence of (1) the dataset itself; (2) the theoretical

underpinnings guiding the analysis, and (3) the analytical proficiency and resources of the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2019). RTA is about “the researcher’s reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process” (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). Proponents and users of RTA are encouraged to be cognisant that qualitative analysis does not contend to provide a single or ‘correct’ answer (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The coding process, including theme development, is adaptable and dynamic, often evolving during the analytical journey (Braun et al., 2019). As the analysis progresses, researchers typically gain deeper familiarity with the data, potentially leading to the discovery and interpretation of new patterns of significance (Byrne, 2022). Within the reflexive approach, themes are not predetermined to seek out codes; instead, themes emerge through the organisation of codes around a central organising concept, which the researcher interprets from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In comparison to other forms of qualitative analysis such as content analysis (Vaismoradi et al., 2013), and even other forms of thematic analysis such as Boyatzis (1998) approach, RTA abstains from any positivistic notions of data interpretation (Byrne, 2022). Braun and Clarke (2019) urge the researcher to embrace reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity as strengths in knowledge production.

As a researcher, I followed a paradigmatic framework of interpretivism and constructivism, encompassing a philosophical orientation that prioritizes subjective understanding, interpretation, and the active construction of knowledge by individuals within social contexts. I firmly believe that individuals do not just passively take in information, but rather learn and reflect upon their experiences, to build their own representations and incorporate new learnings into their existing knowledge. I also believe that actions or events should be viewed and assessed based on the beliefs, norms, and values of the culture of the society and context in which they occur. A key principle I adopted for this research was to reflect on the participants’

own accounts of their attitudes, opinions, and experiences as honestly as was possible, while also considering the reflexive influence of my personal interpretations as the researcher. I believe that RTA was well-suited to the theoretical and paradigmatic framework of my study, enabling me to gather and analyse qualitative data in a manner that honours and reflects the subjective perspectives of participants' attitudes. It also acknowledges and embraces the reflexive impact of my own interpretations as a researcher.

Latent coding, which was the coding process I followed, exceeds the descriptive level of data and endeavours to uncover deeper meanings, or implicit assumptions, ideas, or ideologies that might influence or shape the descriptive or semantic content of the data (Byrne, 2022). When coding is latent, the analysis becomes significantly interpretive, necessitating a more imaginative and engaged role on the part of the researcher. Indeed, Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013, 2021) have consistently argued that codes and themes do not simply 'emerge' from the data or exist passively within data, awaiting discovery. Instead, the researcher actively interprets codes and themes, identifying those that are pertinent to the research question(s).

While the study followed a reflexive thematic approach, the coding process was both inductive and deductive. Deductively, the study was informed by the theoretical framing of S-D logic and service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b), which provided sensitising concepts such as resource integration, institutional arrangements, and value outcomes. Furthermore, the extensive literature search on sustainability, sustainable consumption and sustainable fashion in New Zealand also guided initial attention during coding. Simultaneously, inductive coding allowed new patterns and meanings to surface from participants' narratives, particularly around sustainability concerns, value tensions, and lived consumers experiences. For instance, the theme of *knowledge anxiety* was not anticipated at the outset but emerged across data sets, prompting a re-evaluation of assumptions about consumer empowerment in sustainability. This

hybrid approach enabled alignment with the research questions while remaining open to the nuances of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024).

Another component of the coding and theme generation process was the consideration of ‘meaningfulness’. Adopting a constructionist epistemology has specific consequences for thematic analysis. This approach suggests that beyond the mere repetition of presumably significant information, the significance attached to the information plays a critical role in both the creation and interpretation of codes and themes (Byrne, 2022). From this perspective, a theme is considered significant through recurrence if it appears consistently across the dataset. Nonetheless, frequency alone does not guarantee that a theme is meaningful or relevant to the analysis (Byrne, 2022). The concept of meaningfulness can be understood in two distinct yet interconnected ways: initially from the researcher's perspective, where it pertains to the imperative of identifying themes that align with the objectives of the research questions, and subsequently from the standpoint of the respondent, as the expression of varying degrees of importance regarding the issues being addressed (Byrne, 2022). Through the lens of a constructionist epistemology, the researcher recognizes the value of recurrence while placing a greater emphasis on meaning and meaningfulness as pivotal elements in the coding procedure (Byrne, 2022). The six-phase analytical process of reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012, 2013, 2014, 2021) which I followed during the analysis stage, includes:

- (1) Familiarisation with the data: the first phase is characterised by an in-depth immersion in the data through meticulous reading and re-reading, aiming to achieve a comprehensive understanding. This phase is crucial for identifying patterns, ideas and potential codes that arise from the data. It could include listening to interview recordings or reading transcripts many times to capture the nuanced expressions, emotions, and contexts presented by the participants. This process sets the foundation for the thematic analysis by ensuring the

researcher is fully acquainted with the length and depth of the data, which is essential for the following analytical phases. I went about familiarising myself with the data by first listening to each interview recording before starting the transcription process. Once the manual transcription of each recording was completed, I read each transcript and made notes of the initial trends in the data, and of potentially interesting answers or quotes in the transcripts.

(2) Generating Initial Codes: in this phase, I began to organise the data into meaningful segments by generating initial codes. “Codes are the fundamental building blocks of what will later become themes” (Byrne, 2022, p. 1399). The coding process is executed to generate concise, abbreviated descriptive or interpretive labels of segments of information that could potentially have relevance to the research question(s). This systematic coding involved breaking down the data into discrete elements that capture the core of information relevant to the research questions. These initial codes act as headers that help categorise data, making it easier to identify patterns and relationships. These initial codes were detailed enough to convey specific attributes of the data while remaining concise. My aim was to go through the complete dataset systematically and diligently, ensuring that all potentially meaningful data was coded without bias. The initial codes are provided in the Appendix.

(3) Generating Themes: after coding the complete dataset, I moved my focus towards identifying broader patterns that appeared across the coded data, which were then developed into themes. This phase involved collating all codes and data points that had similarities and framing them as potential themes. It was an iterative process, requiring me to move back and forth between the dataset and the potential themes for their refinement and corroboration. The objective was to delineate comprehensive themes that faithfully

represented the significant patterns discerned in the data, resulting in an enhanced comprehension of the subject under investigation.

(4) Reviewing Potential Themes: this phase involves the researcher in conducting a recursive review of identified themes in relation to the coded data and complete dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 2021). I followed the list of key questions recommended by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 65) to review the potential themes, which are as follows:

- a. Is this a theme (it could just be a code)?
- b. If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the data set and my research question)?
- c. What are the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)?
- d. Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme thin or thick)?
- e. Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?

This phase requires a two-level review process: level one begins with checking whether the themes accurately represent the codes and data they are derived from. This is followed by level 2, where the researcher ensures that the themes contribute meaningfully to the research question(s). It is in this phase that the researcher redefines, combines, or discards themes. This is done with the aim of refining themes so that they yield a coherent and insightful interpretation of the data, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the research theme.

(5) Defining and Naming Themes: once the themes had been refined, the next step was to define and name them. This involved specifying what each theme meant, how it was different from other themes, and its applicability to the research question(s). The researcher is asked to delve deeper into each theme, providing rich and representative extracts from the data to illustrate the themes' meaning and significance. The name given to each theme is also crucial; it must be descriptive and captivating, precisely reflecting the core of what

each theme represents. This phase strengthens the thematic framework, which provides the foundation of the analysis presented in the research report. Braun and Clarke (2013, 2014, 2021) “encourage creativity and advocate the use of catchy names that may more immediately capture the attention of the reader, while also communicating an important aspect of the theme” (Byrne, 2022, p. 1408).

(6) Producing the report: Braun and Clarke (2012) comment that the write-up of qualitative research is strongly interwoven with the full analysis process. Phase six of reflexive thematic analysis entails compiling the analysis into a coherent and engaging report. The report ought to illustrate the way in which the analysis sheds light on the research theme, connecting the outcomes to existing empirical research. The write-up is an iterative process, often changing as the analysis develops, requiring the researcher to continuously revisit and refine aspects so that the final presentation or report accurately conveys the thematic analysis insights.

Braun and Clarke have published widely on reflexive thematic analysis; however, there is still confusion regarding the correct implementation of the approach. I followed Byrne (2022) paper titled “A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis” to complete the analysis for my doctoral study. The worked example of Braun and Clarke’s contemporary approach to RTA elaborated extensively on each phase of the analysis process, supplemented by the author’s comments on their personal experience of using RTA, which made it easier for me to navigate the process and move from one phase to the next. I now discuss the ethical considerations in my study.

5.8 Quality Criteria

Ensuring the quality of qualitative research is a central concern in interpretivist inquiry, particularly given the frequent critiques from positivist traditions that view such research as less rigorous or replicable (Crick, 2021; Grant & Giddings, 2002). In response, scholars have

articulated robust criteria that support rigour in non-positivist paradigms, notably the concept of trustworthiness as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Trustworthiness comprises four dimensions: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, each adapted to reflect the epistemological commitments of interpretivist research. This study also incorporated reflexivity as a foundational principle throughout the research process.

5.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree to which the findings are believable and authentically represent participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with the data, iterative analysis, and rich contextual description. Reflexive Thematic Analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2021) six-phase process and was conducted in a reflexive, recursive manner. Transcripts were revisited multiple times, and initial codes were generated both inductively and with sensitivity to existing theoretical constructs. Credibility was further supported through regular supervisory discussions that helped refine the development of codes, themes, and over interpretations.

Although the inclusion of macro, meso, and micro actors was primarily intended to advance a multi-level conceptualisation of value co-creation, this also enabled a form of data source triangulation. Comparing patterns across levels strengthened the credibility of the analysis by revealing both convergence and divergence in how sustainability was interpreted and enacted across the ecosystem. Thick descriptions and direct quotations in Chapters 6-8 reflect the alignment between data and interpretation. While traditional member checking was not pursued due to ethical considerations and the reflexive nature of analysis, transparency in coding decisions and alignment with established analytic frameworks supported interpretive plausibility.

5.8.2 Transferability

Transferability in qualitative research is analogous to generalisability in quantitative research by referring to the potential for resonance of findings across similar contexts (Fischer & Guzel, 2023; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, transferability was supported by detailed contextualisation of the New Zealand sustainable fashion ecosystem and its multi-level structure. The diversity of participants (experts, retailers, consumers) and the depth of thematic analysis provide a rich interpretive account of that can inform sustainability transitions in other service ecosystems and cultural contexts. The inclusion of detailed contextual information supports transferability by allowing the applicability of the findings to be assessed in relation to similar contexts.

5.8.3 Dependability

Dependability refers to the internal consistency and reliability of the research process over time (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure dependability, I maintained a clear audit trail of the methodological decisions, coding iterations, and theme development. NVivo® software was used to support systematic data management and to **trace code application** and changes. Reflexive engagement with the data was maintained through iterative review, revisiting early codes and interpretations throughout the analysis. Regular meetings with my supervisors also acted as informal audits, helping to interrogate interpretive stability and challenge potential research bias. The iterative nature of reflexive thematic analysis – as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2021) – was embraced rather than suppressed, acknowledging that insight deepens with engagement.

5.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the degree to which findings are shaped by the data and not unduly influenced by researcher bias. In reflexive thematic analysis, researcher subjectivity is not bracketed but acknowledged as an analytical resource (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Interpretations

were developed transparently and iteratively and challenged through meetings with supervisors. The inclusion of participant quotations and the presentations of both converging and diverging views supports the confirmability of themes. By tracing how meanings were constructed across actor levels, the analysis makes visible the interpretive work undertaken. This approach aligns with the recommendations by Nowell et al. (2017), who emphasize that confirmability emerges not from distancing oneself from the data, but from transparently narrating how interpretations evolve.

5.8.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was embedded throughout the research process. As the researcher, I engaged critically with how my own values and positionality influenced decisions, from topic selection and participant interaction to theme naming and writing. Reflexivity was enacted through continuous dialogue with supervisors and through a recursive analytic process that remained open to reinterpretation. Rather than seeking detachment, this study embraces the interpretivist premise that meaning is co-produced between research, participants, and context. Reflexivity thus underpins the study's trustworthiness and theoretical coherence.

5.9 Ethical Considerations

Appropriate ethical means of data collection, analysis and reporting were followed according to the Massey University code of ethical conduct. I sought separate ethics approvals for the in-depth interviews with each group. Research for all three groups was deemed low risk. Ethical issues specific to the research are discussed below.

5.9.1 Informed Consent and Participant Rights

All participants were informed of the nature of the study, time commitments, and depth of sharing required. Each participant in the study was asked to read the information sheet and sign a consent form (digital copy or physical copy) indicating that they had read the information sheet and had the details of the study explained to them by the researcher. Each participant's

safety and rights were paramount. All interview questions were kept non-threatening. With the sustainable fashion business specifically, I ensured that the participants understood that the study would not, in any circumstances, make claims or suggestions in the analysis and presentation of results that would tarnish the business or its perception. The researcher reiterated the degree of sharing required from these participants, especially information regarding the business such as operations, process and engagement with other stakeholders. All participants, in all three groups, were informed of their right to refuse to answer any particular question, withdraw from the research at any time, ask any question about the research at any time during participation, and provided information on the understanding that their name would not be used, and that they would be given access to a summary of the research findings when concluded, if requested.

5.9.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Participants were reassured that the researcher and others privy to the information gathered, such as PhD supervisors, would maintain confidentiality. Permission to audio or video record interviews was obtained prior to data collection. Each participant had the right to ask for the recorder or camera to be turned off at any time during participation. They were also entitled to ask for a digital copy of the recording before it was used and analysed in the research. All hardcopy documents such as printed transcriptions and signed consent forms were stored in a secure cabinet in my office to ensure that participants' information was kept safe. Digital files, such as voice recordings, typed transcriptions, participant contact details, were kept in computer files/folders that only I could access via a password. Information identifying the participant (or business) was not shared and they were assigned a pseudonym or code to ensure anonymity. The participants were not asked any identifying information about themselves, their business or their clients. The participants were informed that the information they provided would be analysed, reported and potentially published in an academic journal(s).

5.10 Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 details the research methodology guiding the exploratory study on value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem spanning macro (experts, government, civic bodies, and influencers), meso (a sustainable fashion retailer), and micro (consumers) levels. Anchored in an interpretive paradigm and constructionist ontology, the study adopted the view that reality and meaning are not “discovered,” but “constructed.” Accordingly, interpretivism was applied to capture individual experiences and nuanced social interactions in relation to sustainability in fashion, allowing participants’ perspectives to mould the emergent themes.

A qualitative research strategy was adopted, justified by its adaptability and capacity to explore a complex phenomenon such as sustainable fashion. In-depth interviews, conducted face-to-face or via Zoom®, generated rich, context-specific data. The chapter highlights the importance of adopting an ecosystems perspective to fully appreciate interdependencies between production and consumption as well as the broader socio-environmental context. A multi-level participant aggregation approach (macro, meso, micro) deepens understanding of how diverse actors engage, co-create value, and collectively contribute to achieving sustainability objectives.

Sampling strategies, including purposive and snowball methods, ensured that specialised insight from the experts informed the macro context, management insights enriched the meso perspective, and everyday experiences shaped the micro-level perspective. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent, anonymity, and secure data handling, were maintained throughout the research process.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), supported by NVivo®, was used for the coding and theme-building process. Emphasis was placed on iterative sensemaking, where meaningful patterns were identified through latent coding. This research methodology effectively assisted

in capturing the interactions and contextual factors vital to understanding value co-creation in sustainable fashion.

Chapter 6: Pathways to Value Co-Creation

6.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter 6 addresses the first research question in this doctoral study: *How do actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value?* The chapter begins with a description of the data analysis process used to analyse the findings from in-depth interviews with participants across the three participant aggregation levels – macro, meso, and micro. An overview of the identified themes in relation to the first research question is then presented. There were four themes identified related to how value is co-created by actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem: Knowledge, Future Orientation, Guardianship, and Regeneration. Each identified theme is then discussed, in detail, from the perspective of each level.

6.1.1 Analysis Process

The data analysis was completed using Braun and Clark's six-phase process (2022), as discussed in Chapter 5. The analysis process began with familiarisation with the data by listening to the audio recordings of each interview and then reading the transcripts. While reviewing the interview transcripts, specific attention was given to instances and mentions of value, resource integration, and mechanisms used for co-creating value within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Instances where value was not co-created or where interactions between the actors led to value co-destruction or no value co-creation were also identified.

An initial list of codes was generated; for example, *durability*, representing participants' requirement for garments to be sturdy and long-lasting, and *legislation*, reflecting participants' need for the government to execute and enforce rules and regulations around sustainability and sustainable fashion in New Zealand (see Appendix for full list of codes). This process was followed for all 34 participant interview transcripts. Once the initial list of codes was completed, the codes were reviewed to determine which could be compiled and categorized under one

theme. For instance, the codes *value for money* and *restoration* were combined under the emergent theme of *regeneration*.

A deductive-inductive reasoning approach was adopted to analyse the data. Some of the codes resulted from my existing awareness and knowledge on sustainability, sustainable consumption and sustainable fashion, developed during the literature review. This was supplemented by codes based on inferences drawn from iteratively examining data. Interviews with the macro-level participants also aided in building a contextual understanding of sustainability and sustainable, which influenced code generation and refinement, and eventually, the theme identification and generation process.

6.1.2 Emergent Themes

This study explored value co-creation in sustainable fashion, from an ecosystems perspective, using the Service-Dominant logic (S-D logic) as the theoretical framework. The themes identified in the data analysis related to how value is co-created by actors in the service ecosystem were *Knowledge*, *Future Orientation*, *Guardianship*, and *Regeneration*. Table 8 presents the identified themes in the data analysis, and is followed by an in-depth discussion of each theme and its respective sub-themes.

Table 8: Summary of Identified Themes

Identified Themes	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Knowledge			
(a) Knowledge Empowerment	Expert Influence	Operational Excellence	Sustainable Decision Making
(b) Knowledge Integration	Expert Knowledge	Strategic Knowledge	Experiential Knowledge
(c) Knowledge Anxiety	Guidance Deficiency	Impact Constraints	Information Reliability
Future Orientation	Collective Vision	Planning & Innovation	& Conscious & Ethical Consumption

Guardianship	Collective Guardianship	Product Lifecycle Guardianship	Product Use Guardianship
Regeneration	Regenerative Infrastructure	Circular Business Approach	Reuse, Recycle, Repair

6.2 Knowledge

6.2.1 Theme Description

The first theme identified in the data, which was evident across the three levels, relating to how value is co-created by the actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, is *knowledge*. Value is co-created in the ecosystem when there is *knowledge*, which refers to a participant level of information or ‘know-how’ about sustainability and specifically, sustainable living, sustainable consumption, and sustainable fashion in the research context. It is also a mechanism of value co-creation and the lack, or overload, of *knowledge* was found to lead to anxiousness and inability to participate in value co-creation.

Value is co-created amongst the actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem via *knowledge* through -

1. *Knowledge Empowerment* – for the participants across the three levels, *knowledge* empowered them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in relation to sustainable fashion, and thereby co-create value.
2. *Knowledge Integration* – participants across the three levels co-created value by acquiring and sharing *knowledge* to generate mutually beneficial outcomes for all participants.

Another component within the identified theme is *knowledge anxiety*, which refers to the apprehension or discomfort participants felt when they encountered gaps, inconsistencies, or an overwhelming volume of information in their existing knowledge base.

Table 9 summarises how *knowledge empowerment*, *knowledge integration* and *knowledge anxiety* is characterised across the three levels. This is followed by a detailed discussion of how actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value through *knowledge*.

Table 9: Description of Knowledge

Knowledge	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Knowledge Empowerment - empowered through knowledge	Expert Influence	Operational Excellence	Sustainable Decision Making
Knowledge Integration – acquisition and sharing of knowledge	Expert Knowledge	Strategic Knowledge	Experiential Knowledge
Knowledge Anxiety – apprehension or discomfort when encountered with gaps, inconsistencies, or overwhelming volume of information	Guidance Deficiency	Impact Constraints	Information Reliability

6.2.2 Knowledge Empowerment

The first sub-theme identified under *knowledge* was *knowledge empowerment*, which refers to how information about sustainability and sustainable fashion empowered participants across the three levels to fulfil their roles and responsibilities, and thereby co-create value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It emphasizes why each level within the service ecosystem valued *knowledge*. At the macro level, *knowledge empowerment* was observed as *expert influence*, as knowledge empowered them to fulfil their roles as ‘experts’ in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. *Operational excellence* is how *knowledge empowerment* is identified at the meso level since *knowledge* enabled the sustainable fashion retailer to successfully work towards advancing sustainability within their organisation and remain competitive. *Knowledge* for the micro-level participants empowered them towards *sustainable decision making*. *Knowledge empowerment* is now discussed in detail for the three participant aggregation levels.

6.2.2.1 Macro-Level Knowledge Empowerment – Expert Influence

Macro-level participants prioritised *knowledge* about sustainability and sustainable fashion, as it empowered and reinforced their role as ‘experts’ in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, which was essential for influencing industry practices and driving systemic change. Their professional positions, deeply embedded within sustainability sectors, necessitate continuous learning to effectively fulfil their responsibilities and provide valuable knowledge on sustainability and sustainable fashion. This demand creates a cyclical imperative – they must continually acquire advanced knowledge to disseminate it effectively, and perpetuate their status as ‘experts’ in the field. That is, they ‘required knowledge to provide knowledge to others.’

Violet, an academic in sustainable fashion, mentioned “We need to think about how the clothes are designed and the material they use” and commented that “I always encourage my students to think about the longevity of garments and think about reusing or upcycling old pieces of clothing.” The insights and learnings she provided to her students were focused on regenerative design. For her to efficiently fulfil her role and responsibilities, as an academic, it was important to keep herself informed about sustainable fashion research, which then she shared with her students. Business Strategist Scarlett helped sustainable fashion businesses, designers, and manufacturers across New Zealand to become more sustainable and profitable. She frequently collaborated with other professionals on research focusing on advancing sustainable fashion in New Zealand. She mentioned “We have put in a submission on behalf of the industry to the Ministry of Environment for the emissions reductions plan”. This symbolises how *knowledge*, provided by experts in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, is essential for promoting sustainability initiatives within the ecosystem. On the role of consumer-facing social media influencers, Olivia reflected, “[we] stand for something quite firmly and quite strongly and share about how they incorporate [sustainability] in their lives.” Such insights and experiences,

shared via social media platforms, can empower other actors with *knowledge*, thereby co-creating value in the service ecosystem.

Macro-level participants stated that education associated with sustainability and sustainable fashion is very important for *knowledge empowerment* and thus co-creation of value. Amelia said, “I would love to see more people getting in the education space because unless you’re educating people about where clothes come from and who makes them and how to look after them and what to do with clothes when you don’t know, when you no longer need them ... the issues are not going to go away.”

6.2.2.2 Meso-Level Knowledge Empowerment – Operational Excellence

At the meso level, *knowledge* empowered participants to make strategic business decisions, founded on sustainability. *Knowledge* was a strategic asset crucial for enhancing operational effectiveness and fostering innovation in sustainable practices. Their focus on information about sustainable business practices stems from the imperative to remain competitive while adhering to sustainability principles. This emphasis on *knowledge* was not merely for incremental improvements but was integral to driving transformative change within their organisation and the wider service ecosystem. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, valued insights and ideas from employees and business partners that led to “doing better”, which was the motto of the business. She explained, “If a merino wool supplier has an idea about a design pattern, then we are open to hearing it. Or someone from the technical design team has a suggestion about making our buttons more sustainable, we want to know how we can do better”.

The Head of Brand Communication, Luna, stated, “I’d love to see that sort of knowledge sharing. Yeah, a little less of people keeping their cards quite close. So yeah, more of sharing knowledge would be cool. Because I’d love to learn, you know”. By advocating for a more open exchange of insights and ideas, Luna highlighted how *knowledge* for the meso level can

lead to more comprehensive branding strategies and operational efficiencies, ultimately contributing to the retailer's sustainability mission.

Knowledge about how their consumers think, feel, and behave, especially in response to their garments, empowered the sustainable fashion retailer to make better business decisions. Rony, the Head of Design, mentioned that it's very important for him to have a great relationship with their salesperson because "I love to know how the customers are feeling, what they're gravitating towards, what they're not gravitating towards, what's working and what's not... So, it's really important for me to have a really good relationship with [salesperson]. I love knowing what the customers are saying, what the wholesalers are liking, all that kind of stuff".

6.2.2.3 Micro-Level Knowledge Empowerment – Sustainable Decision Making

At the micro level, value is co-created via *knowledge* as it empowers participants to become more mindful and sustainable consumers. This equips them with the necessary information needed to make consumption decisions, such as choosing sustainable and ethical products, services, and brands that can advance sustainability and sustainable fashion. Participants highlighted that *knowledge* allowed them to critically evaluate products and brands and make consumption choices that reflect their values linked with sustainability and sustainable fashion. Phoebe said, "I like to have information, so I can make an informed decision, make comparisons, and I can choose what might work for me". This thought was echoed by Sandra, who commented about "being aware or educated before you purchase something, about the consequences" supported her consumption decisions. She further added, "When I think of being responsible, I think of being educated and being knowledgeable about something. So, like you go out of your way to make yourself aware". This reflects how micro-level participants are empowered via *knowledge* and can then co-create value within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Participants at the micro level specifically stated that they valued *knowledge* related to sustainability and sustainable fashion, provided by the macro and meso levels, that is transparent and accurate. Ben mentioned, “Just knowing if any companies that I could be buying in from instead of the ones that I’m already buying from, are doing it better, more sustainability. Just knowing that would be great”. Briar reinforced this by stating, “If I was provided with more information regarding how the piece of clothing was made, I guess, that would change my perspective. It goes back to the point about being aware and being informed.” Alexis also mentioned, “I always try to find brands that have clear information about their sustainability practices. It’s really important for me to know that my money is going towards something positive and not harming the environment.”

Micro-level participants further mentioned that *knowledge* about sustainability and sustainable fashion empowered them to also lead more organised and less cluttered lives as consumers. It was evident in the data analysis that *knowledge* promoted lifestyle changes that contribute to sustainability, demonstrating a broader impact on personal well-being as well.

6.2.3 Knowledge Integration

The second sub-theme identified under *knowledge* was *knowledge integration*, which is important in terms of how value is co-created in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. There were two key aspects to *knowledge integration* – acquisition of knowledge and sharing of knowledge. Participants across the three levels acquired *knowledge* through other actors and various resources within the ecosystem. The acquired knowledge empowered participants, across the three levels, to innovate and improve retailer offerings, be informed to make consumption decisions, and inform specialist insights and learnings, respectively. Sharing of *knowledge* occurred through interactions between the participants across the three levels, exposure to information, both, actively and passively and formal and informal *knowledge* networks. *Knowledge integration* was affected by the participant’s position in the sustainable

fashion service ecosystem. *Knowledge integration* at the macro level was observed in the form of expert knowledge. At the meso level and micro level it was seen as strategic knowledge and experiential knowledge, respectively.

6.2.3.1 Macro-Level Knowledge Integration – Expert Knowledge

Macro-level participants – experts in sustainability and sustainable fashion in New Zealand – disseminate *expert knowledge* within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. *Knowledge integration* at the macro level is anchored in their extensive professional experience, research-based insights, and nuanced understanding of the complex issues surrounding sustainability and sustainable fashion.

These participants actively enable the flow of *expert knowledge* not only within the macro level, but also with meso-level actors and micro-level actors. This multidirectional *knowledge integration* fosters collaboration, innovation, and the co-creation of value throughout the ecosystem. An illustration of this is provided by Olivia – “I’m often talking with brands and it’s quite small brands and designers. And so that is educating me on what happens behind the scenes of their side of things and ... how fashion is made and the processes that they have to go through. And then I’m kind of teaching them about ... this what the consumer wants to know, this is what the consumer cares about. And so, from my perspective, it’s been quite collaborative. Because they’re teaching me, I’m teaching them.” Olivia’s experience draws attention to the reciprocal nature of *knowledge integration* at the macro level, involving meso-level actors and micro-level actors.

Knowledge integration for macro-level actors predominantly occurs through formal exchanges and interactions, such as public speaking events, conferences, workshops, and business meetings. Participants like Eleanor, Daniel, Scarlett, and Jack frequently engaged with other experts, civic societies, non-profit organisations, businesses and consumers, via these platforms to share learnings and insights. To acquire *knowledge*, macro-level participants employed a

proactive strategy that involves other experts, academic peers, and rigorous research. Participants such as Amelia and Abigail collaborate extensively with colleagues and other experts to deepen their understanding of sustainability practices and address challenges within the New Zealand fashion industry.

Daniel and Eleanor, individually, partnered with the government and other institutions across New Zealand and shared their expertise to advance and promote initiatives focusing on sustainability. Their partnerships with other actors in the service ecosystem underscore the strategic importance of expert learnings and insights in influencing systemic change. Amelia and Abigail, co-founders of two non-profit organisations, respectively, working in sustainability within the New Zealand fashion industry, engaged in value co-creation by sharing their learnings and insights with sustainable fashion businesses, designers, manufacturers and other stakeholders to make garments more sustainable. Olivia and Sophia, who are consumer-facing social media influencers, sharing content on how to be sustainable consumers and on sustainability in practice, via their social media platforms, were engaged in promoting sustainable fashion as a full-time profession. Sophia expressed, “I just want people to be more open to learning. I think a lot of people are just like ‘Nah, I love fashion, I don’t want to know about it’. But as soon as people are open to learning about it, I think, that’s when personal change starts to happen. When you actually learn about what’s going on.” This demonstrates how value can be co-created via *knowledge integration* in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Sharing and acquiring *knowledge* can result in value co-creation.

Participants also highlighted the significance of macro-level actors such as the government and civic society organisation in *knowledge integration*. Macro-level participant Jack suggested, “I think having maybe ... tools through the government or advisors that have access to that [expertise] could give a consultation to get one started”. As education was strongly linked to *knowledge empowerment*, it was also associated with *knowledge integration*. Scarlett’s

reflection on her educational experience exemplifies innovative approaches in education to *knowledge integration* - “What we used to do is study, go work for someone for five years, learn business, and learn trade secrets. It was about bringing groups together and running workshops with industry veterans, emerging designers, and students; all working together for a weekend, learning from each other, networking, and learning the ropes. It was a new form of knowledge transfer.”

6.2.3.2 Meso-Level Knowledge Integration – Strategic Knowledge

Meso-level actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem leveraged *strategic knowledge*, which is derived from personal research, internal team contributions, and daily operational practices, aligned with sustainable business principles. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, pointed to the importance of fostering an inclusive organisational culture that encourages *knowledge integration*. She stated, “I’d like everyone to have their own thoughts on it and a business our size, for people to contribute back. You know, to actually have a voice. ‘I’m doing this I think, I could do it this way.’ A clear example is one of our knitwear programmers that recently came into the business, and he was like ‘Oh, I see you do your buttons this way. I reckon I can find a better way to do it. We don’t have to do that process.’ So, you know that type of thing for me is, it’s great that it’s not our way or the highway. Each and every one can contribute. If they see something that they can be done better, so they might voice it.”

Ava, Head of Operations, reinforced the collaborative culture, within the organisation and with external partners, by highlighting the commitment to transparency and solution-oriented dialogue. She mentioned, “We’re not heavy-handed, we want to know the answer. And we want them [other members in the business and external partners] to have a solution and or suggestion. And we’re very open and transparent”. Luna, the Head of Brand Communications, emphasized that *knowledge integration* is not only common practice but also a valued component of the

retailer's operations. "We certainly [love] feedback or suggestions. Even from the standpoint of something as simple as, we shouldn't put the key label in the photoshoot, because you can see it in the photo. It's not [that] there's no collaboration. I'd certainly be able to suggest things." Externally, the retailer extends *strategic knowledge* through their brand communication channels, particularly social media. Luna explained, "Every decision that we make comes from the focus that all of our comms always talk about our zero-waste production or where the yarn's from or there's always some education piece for people because we don't want to just send an email out being like 'a new jumper, buy it'. It's always like this jumper was made this way, which means it's made with zero waste." While these platforms primarily serve branding and advertising purposes, they also function as *knowledge* tools to inform consumers about sustainability issues and practices.

Interpersonal interactions within the organisation are a pivotal medium of *knowledge integration* at the meso level. An open-door policy and the encouragement of direct communication with senior leadership fosters *knowledge integration*. However, recognising the limitations of internal *knowledge*, the sustainable fashion retailer actively engages with macro-level actors, such as business strategists, academics, designers, social media influencers, and sustainable fashion activists, to acquire specialised insights on sustainable business practices, policies, and regulations. This *knowledge integration* often materialises through client meetings, workshops, and networking events aimed at advancing sustainability within the New Zealand fashion industry. Evelyn highlighted the strategic importance of such interactions and partnerships, "...and that's what [civil society organisation] is identifying, and acknowledging, and pushing and advocating for. So as a business we pay to be a member of [civil society organisation] for them to advocate with the government for us. And then they're banging the drum, they're making noise and that's going to advance the situation better than we could do on our own." This reliance on external expertise illustrates the interconnectedness

of actors within the service ecosystem and underscores the importance of *knowledge integration* in value co-creation.

6.2.3.3 Micro-Level Knowledge Integration – Experiential Knowledge

Knowledge integration for micro-level actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem was based on the participants' *experiential knowledge* – information and learnings derived from personal observation, exposure, experience, and social interactions. Millie mentioned, “I did have a sustainability coach [colleague at work] for a while. It was helpful because she gave me insights into small changes that make a big difference.” *Experiential knowledge* reflects the significance of personal experience and social influence within the service ecosystem. Participants acquired *knowledge* through multiple channels, including macro-level actors, meso-level branded communications, and interactions with family, friends, and peers at the micro level. Participants at the micro level recognised that they weren't very well informed on sustainability and sustainable fashion and relied strongly on actors across the three levels to acquire *knowledge*. For instance, by following sustainable living influencers like Olivia and Sophia on social media, a few participants accessed practical guidance on assimilating sustainability into their daily lives.

Interpersonal communication within social reference groups emerged as a critical avenue for *knowledge integration*. Word-of-mouth information sharing among family and friends facilitates dissemination of *knowledge* through trusted relationships. Nikita reflected on this influence: “I didn't have an education at all, like an understanding, until I had someone who was strongly believing in it. And just because we were friends and stuff. So that's how I was introduced [to sustainable fashion], and then of course COVID happened, and I started reading a lot about this and how things have been, so I think that kind of impacted me”. The trust and credibility inherent in personal relationships can enhance the effectiveness of *knowledge integration*.

The participants valued sharing *knowledge* about sustainability and sustainable fashion, such as information on sustainable businesses, prolonging the life of items such as garments, and sustainability-related news, with friends, family, and others in their reference group. *Knowledge integration* that led to influencing others around them positively towards sustainability and sustainable fashion made the participants feel proud. This was articulated by Nikita, who mentioned that she introduced a sustainable fashion retailer to her husband and was able to convince him to shop from the retailer; "...and then I think he brought his staff members who are also quite young and Kiwi and like they are in that zone as well who want to do something, and just not be cool. They want to be a part of it [sustainable fashion] and so he introduced them. Now they have started going there." This is an illustration of how *knowledge integration* leads to a ripple effect, where one's individual actions can influence multiple others. At the micro level, *knowledge integration* occurs through various media channels, academic sources, and interpersonal communications within social reference groups. Social media platforms like Facebook® and Instagram® emerged as predominant channels for acquiring and sharing *knowledge*, due to their accessibility and the participatory nature of content creation and dissemination. Robert noted, "I think that the things I see on social media or advertisements definitely impact what I think about sustainability and what I buy." Participants like Sandra and Charlotte also highlighted the educational value of social media in promoting sustainability awareness. Sandra mentioned, "Instagram® has been a big one for me. I follow a lot of influencers and brands that are focused on sustainability, and they often share tips and information." Charlotte reflected, "Social media is a big influence. I follow several accounts that focus on sustainable living and fashion, and they have a lot of useful information." Adjacent to social media are online blogs and forums, which serve as alternative platforms for *knowledge integration*. Alexis shared, "I get most of my information about sustainable fashion

from online forums and discussion groups. They're a great place to share tips and discover new brands."

While broadcast and journalistic media, such as television and newspapers, are traditionally influential in shaping public discourse, their impact appears limited in the micro level concerning *knowledge* on sustainability and sustainable fashion. Entertainment media, including platforms like YouTube® and Netflix®, also contribute to *knowledge integration*. A few micro-level participants acknowledged the role of documentaries and educational content in enhancing their understanding of sustainability and sustainable fashion. For instance, Millie said, "A lot of my knowledge comes from YouTube®. There are several channels that focus on sustainable fashion, and they provide a lot of good advice and information." This resonated with Lauren, who stated, "My interest really started from some documentaries I watched on Netflix® about environmental issues and sustainability. They were quite eye-opening".

Academic sources, such as books, journals, and formal education, play a supplementary role in *knowledge integration*, especially with the acquisition of knowledge. Elizabeth noted "I've read a couple of books and articles on sustainability and just seeing how things work globally, that has definitely influenced me". Robert also shared that he had learnt "What fast fashion brands are doing, is not actually recycled materials...they're trying to be ethical but they're not really" from an article he had read. Alexis mentioned, "Books and documentaries have been my main source of information. I've read a lot of material on the subject, and it has greatly influenced my lifestyle choices." Monica shared, "I learned a lot about sustainable practices from my university courses. They offered a lot of material and discussions around it which was really beneficial". Briar added to the relevance of formal education: "I feel like since year 12 it was forced on us at first. And some of us, you know, found it harder than others. But it isn't until you actually open your mind to the possibilities that, you know, then you can really appreciate sustainability". She further added, "I started paying more attention to sustainability

after taking an environmental science course at university. It really opened my eyes to the impact of our daily habits.”

Additionally, micro-level participants suggested direct engagement with meso-level sustainable fashion retailers through factory and manufacturing site visits in relation to *knowledge integration*. Participants perceived these visits as valuable opportunities to observe production processes firsthand and verify the authenticity of brands’ sustainability claims. This *experiential knowledge* can enhance transparency and build trust for micro-level actors (consumers). However, a few participants reported feeling sceptical due to the potential for brands to orchestrate these visits to present an idealised image of their operations. Briar expressed this cynicism, saying “You’re putting on a good show. But actually, then they’re working people 15 hours a day. I would be asking questions about the reality”. This scepticism highlighted the importance of authenticity and transparency in meso- and micro-level *knowledge integration*. It also underscored the potential limitations of *experiential knowledge* when micro-level actors (consumers) perceive possible manipulation or inauthentic representations by meso-level actors (sustainable fashion retailers).

6.2.4 Knowledge Anxiety

Knowledge Anxiety implies a form of apprehension or unease experienced by the participants when encountering gaps, inconsistencies, or overwhelming amounts of information within their information base. At the macro level, *knowledge anxiety* arose from the lack of reliable guidance and a comprehensive framework from governing bodies. It was articulated at the meso level as the inability to find industry-wide support to mainstream sustainability within the fashion industry. At the micro level, *knowledge anxiety* stems from insufficient and misleading information, as well as an overload of information.

6.2.4.1 Macro-Level Knowledge Anxiety – Guidance Deficiency

Most macro-level participants reported that the lack of reliable information and guidance from the government about sustainability in New Zealand caused anxiety and some frustration. Eleanor noted that it was the government's responsibility to provide an "overarching framework" for delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This resonated with other macro-level participants, who repeatedly alluded to the lack of a framework from the government, containing verified information about sustainability and associated challenges across New Zealand, and how to address these challenges and provide a standardised meaning of what sustainability is for New Zealand.

Many macro-level participants spoke about the challenges for the meso-level actors (sustainable fashion retailers) associated with guidance and information. They highlighted the importance of *knowledge* required by businesses and retailers, at the meso level, to transition to sustainability. Grace commented, "I think a lot of the time it's really overwhelming. And if you aren't a sustainability expert, it's really hard to decide where you spend your time and what you prioritise within the business." Scarlett echoed with Grace's statement. She mentioned, "It's a really overwhelming process for a lot of businesses because they're expected to be experts in something that they weren't trained to do and it's causing a lot of anxiety. They want to do the right thing but just don't know how." Another challenge discussed by some macro-level participants, in relation to the meso level, was the availability of sustainability-related *knowledge* for every stakeholder and employee, according to their role in the supply chain. Abigail stated, "The challenge of ensuring that all staff are capable and have the knowledge they need within their own roles to make the right decisions or know where to go to get that information...that's one of the biggest challenges." Another challenge mentioned by a few macro-level participants was the difficulties older, established businesses face when trying to transition to sustainable practices. Grace shared, "Only the new ones are the ones that are

coming out with quite radical sustainability policies whereas ... the older brands who haven't before, are kind of trying to play catch quite a lot".

6.2.4.2 Meso-Level Knowledge Anxiety – Impact Constraints

An important concern among the meso-level participants associated with *knowledge anxiety* related to educating the micro level (consumers) about sustainable fashion and getting fashion retailers with a greater market share to promote and advance sustainability in the New Zealand fashion industry. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer stated, "Truly shifting how people purchase things would be amazing. But we can't do that. We can't do that alone. And I don't really see any desire for [that in] the industry." Ava, the Head of Operations, also spoke about creating awareness amongst consumers regarding sustainable and slow fashion. She mentioned, "I think we are so little. We need to see the people that have the bigger voice supporting of shift in mind truly. We can start communicating it, but we are one little New Zealand company. So, I think if, to truly mainstream that, the big players have to get on board with it, which they don't. I mean they're the ones that have unfortunately the share of voice and the share of power to do that."

Another issue emerging at the meso level associated with *knowledge anxiety* was the pressure for retailers to continuously update themselves with the changes occurring in the fashion industry regarding sustainability, which was articulated by Ava, who stated "I think the big challenge is you've got a bit of knowledge, but you have to have knowledge on everything." This also resonated with *knowledge anxiety* reflections mentioned by a few macro-level participants.

6.2.4.3 Micro-Level Knowledge Anxiety – Information Reliability

Knowledge anxiety was identified as a significant sub-theme by micro-level participants, stemming from both a lack of reliable information and an overwhelming excess of conflicting information relating to sustainability. This anxiety reflects the complexity and confusion micro-

level participants faced when trying to make environmentally responsible choices. Charlotte encapsulated this sentiment by suggesting that “Even breathing nowadays is negatively impacting the planet”, highlighting the pervasive sense of guilt and helplessness that can accompany attempts to live sustainably. Nikita shared, “I, as a consumer, have very limited knowledge from my day to day lifestyle and stuff on what sustainability is or how can I contribute to, and I don’t have a full understanding, and I can’t claim to be completely [sustainable]. So, I think I’m kind of dependent as a consumer on brands or organisations to bring that knowledge to us, and how we can actually help in that”. Sandra mentioned, “I think there’s a lack of accessible information. It’s not always easy to find straightforward, trustworthy information about sustainable practices.” Jayden also pointed to the difficulty in finding trustworthy and reliable sources of information on sustainability and sustainable fashion. He stated, “I know there’s always wanting to learn something more about them. There are always ways of accessing it. It’s just knowing where to look.” These statements reflect information asymmetry in the service ecosystems, where the abundance of data does not equate to accessible information, impeding informed decision making at the micro level.

Some participants at the micro level reported that even if they had information on sustainability and sustainable fashion, they found it difficult to follow or adopt those recommendations to be more sustainable consumers. For instance, although Millie had a colleague who was her ‘sustainability coach’ and shared *knowledge* with her on leading a more sustainable lifestyle, “It was overwhelming at times trying to keep up with all the recommendations.” Ben also reflected, “It is hard to be motivated as an individual to recycle everything, when there is this confusion about what can and can’t be recycled.”

Evidence of greenwashing shared in the media also exacerbates the micro level’s *knowledge anxiety* by eroding trust in available information. Imaan said, “Sometimes it’s hard to know

what's true and what's just marketing. There's a lot of greenwashing out there, and it can be difficult to find reliable sources.”

6.2.5 Theme Summary

The first theme emerging from the data pertains to *knowledge* and its pivotal role in value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. *Knowledge*, in the research context of this study, refers to the participant's level of information or 'know-how' regarding sustainability, sustainable living, and sustainable fashion. It serves as both a catalyst and a mechanism for value co-creation across the macro, meso, and micro levels of the ecosystem. However, the data analysis also revealed that the absence or excess of *knowledge* can lead to anxiety, hindering active participation in value co-creation. Three sub-themes were identified under *knowledge*: *knowledge empowerment*, *knowledge integration* and *knowledge anxiety*.

Value is co-created through *knowledge empowerment*, where information equips participants to fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively. *Knowledge empowerment* was characterised as *expert influence* at the macro level. *Knowledge* empowers the actors, such as academics, strategists, and social media influencers, to assert their roles as experts, influencing industry practice and driving systemic change. Continuous learning is imperative for them to disseminate advanced knowledge and maintain their expert status. At the meso level, *knowledge* is a strategic asset, enabling businesses to make informed decisions rooted in sustainability, and can be summarised as *operational excellence*. It fosters innovation and business efficiency, crucial for competitiveness. The sustainable fashion retailer emphasised inclusive organisation culture, encouraging contributions from all employees to enable “doing better.” *Knowledge* about consumer behaviour further refined the retailers' strategies to successfully deliver on their sustainability commitment. For micro-level participants, *knowledge* empowered *sustainable decision making*. It allowed participants to critically evaluate products and brands, aligning their purchases with their values. Transparent and

accurate information from macro and meso actors was highly valued, aiding in informed decision making and promoting lifestyle changes that contribute to sustainability.

Knowledge integration involves both the acquisition and sharing of *knowledge*. Macro-level actors disseminated *expert knowledge* throughout the ecosystem via formal channels such as conferences, client meeting and workshops. They actively collaborated with meso- and micro-level actors, creating a multidirectional flow of information. Participants also shed light on the reciprocal nature of *knowledge integration* with brands and consumers: not only did macro-level actors share their specialised learnings and insights with meso- and micro-level actors, but they also acquired valuable *knowledge* from them. Meso-level actors leveraged *strategic knowledge* from internal and external sources to align operations with sustainable principles. An inclusive culture facilitated internal *knowledge* sharing, while partnerships with macro-level experts provided specialised insights. Brand communications served as a medium for educating consumers, extending *strategic knowledge* beyond organisational boundaries. Micro-level participants relied on *experiential knowledge* derived from personal experiences and social interactions. They acquired information through social media, interpersonal communications, and educational content, although they recognised limitations in their understanding in sustainability and sustainable fashion. Trust in information sources is crucial, with participants expressing that they heavily depended on credible actors at both the macro and meso level to bridge information gaps.

Despite the integral role of *knowledge* in how value is co-created in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, participants across all the three levels experienced *knowledge anxiety* due to information gaps, inconsistencies, or overload. At the macro level, this was characterised as *guidance deficiency*, which refers to frustration over the lack of comprehensive frameworks and reliable guidance from governing bodies, hindering the ability to drive systemic change towards sustainability and advancing sustainable fashion effectively. Meso-level actors felt

constrained by the limited influence they had on broader consumer awareness and the pressure to stay abreast of industry changes. This led to anxiety, characterised as *impact constraints*, about their impact on mainstream sustainability. At the micro level, *knowledge anxiety* was seen as *information reliability*. Participants reported facing difficulties in accessing trustworthy information, compounded by the prevalence of greenwashing, which erodes trust and creates scepticism. The overwhelming volume of conflicting information further exacerbated their anxiety, impeding making decisions that promoted sustainability and sustainable fashion.

Knowledge plays a multifaceted role in value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It empowered each actor or participant to fulfil their roles and responsibilities aligned with sustainability and sustainable fashion, and co-create value within the ecosystem. Value was also co-created through multidirectional and reciprocal *knowledge integration*, which enabled actors to make informed decisions and collaborate to promote sustainability and sustainable fashion. However, the actors across the three levels also expressed anxiety due to misleading, inconsistent, and excessive information on sustainability and sustainable fashion. *Knowledge anxiety* was characterised as *guidance deficiency* at the macro level, *impact constraints* at the meso level, and *information reliability* at the micro level.

6.3 Future Orientation

6.3.1 Theme Description

The second theme identified from the data analysis was *future orientation* in terms of how actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value. It represents a strong approach of ‘doing good for the generations that are yet to come’. This implied that participants, across the three levels, were ‘thinking ahead, for self and others’ and engaging in sustainable and ethical behaviour that would have a positive impact in the present, as well as the future. *Future orientation* was strongly reflected in the meaning participants attached to sustainability. For instance, macro-level participant Jack mentioned that sustainability to him is “Leaving the

world in a better place than you found it. I think that covers the kind of reducing damage by also the potential to go beyond that.” Meso level participant Evelyn said, “It is [about] doing better. Until you know something else could be done better again...it’s like a continuous doing better philosophy for me with the intention of improving for the next generation.” For micro level participant Jayden, sustainability meant “Being able to provide for future generations. It means not destroying the planet. Those are the two main ones, not destroying the planet and then having a sustainable future in terms of having enough resources.” These statements embody and represent the essence of the *future orientation* theme based on the data analysis.

This section discusses how value is co-created within the service ecosystem, through the macro level having a *collective vision*, the meso level focusing on organisational *planning and innovation*, and the micro level engaging with brands and individual *conscious and ethical consumption*. Table 10 summarises how *future orientation* is characterised across the three levels.

Table 10: Description of Future Orientation

Future Orientation	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Future Orientation – an approach that considers future generations and thinking ahead for self and others	Collective Vision	Planning and Innovation	Conscious and Ethical Consumption

6.3.2 Macro-Level Future Orientation – Collective Vision

Future orientation was discussed from the perspective of a *collective vision* for a sustainable future for all of New Zealand. Eleanor described this as “the contribution to keeping our planet and the planetary boundaries in place that will still be here when my grandchildren and great grandchildren [are around].” Daniel reflected, “One of the biggest gaps is kind of vision setting and change management is that part of the problem is we kind of talk about the problem of needing to fix the problem. But we don’t talk about what the future looks like and why that’s

better and how we're going to get there. And we don't do that in a way that we can kind of bring people along...how do we get people to buy into the greater good and show that everything matters? And it can be done?"

Participants specified that the government and leaders need to define a future for New Zealand in relation to sustainability and provide a framework to become a sustainable nation. This includes all industries, businesses, and citizens: this framework needs to define what each of these stakeholders need to do to collectively advance sustainability in New Zealand. Eleanor mentioned, "The government's role is to develop that overarching, regulatory framework for delivering on the SDGs as a nation, and that's about setting goals, setting targets and deliverables that New Zealand ought to be meeting in order to contribute to delivering on the SDGs."

Participants at the macro level also shed light on what *future orientation* implied for the meso level, and the challenges in identifying and defining the future for the actors in that level of the service ecosystem. Eleanor said, "We have the 2030 future, and we have the 2050 future. And the sectors are trying to unpack what sustainability looks like under 2030 and 2050." Scarlett commented, "So what is your business going to be of service to the world? What are you providing your customers and the world in general? It's just how you ensured this to how's your brand and service to the greater good."

Macro-level participants also alluded to the changing mindset towards sustainability, especially among students and youth in New Zealand. Violet said, "I do think there is a shift. I think we're becoming kind of; we're becoming less consumer driven." Eleanor mentioned, "I take heart actually from the fact that we are nurturing a group of young people who are climate and sustainability conscious" and "Those students are our current consumers and our future consumers, they are our future investors, our future employees, they are our future stakeholders."

They are definitely sustainable and climate conscious individuals, and they're going to be driving change by their very behaviour.”

6.3.3 Meso-Level Future Orientation – Planning and Innovation

Evelyn, the CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, described her business's philosophy as a “...continuous doing better cycle with the intention of improving for the next generation.” She also reflected on her personal values to articulate the business's philosophy of ‘doing better’. She stated, “My dad had this really strong feeling and value around, not ownership, it's custodianship of the land. And then his role and our role when we took onboard that land would be to make it better for the next generation and also to work with what the land has to offer versus working against it.”

Future orientation was reflected, firstly, in the business's practices as planning for the future. For instance, Evelyn stated, “We are ordering a lot in advance so the customers can order for a season to drop. So, there'll be ordering for winter in August to drop it in March the following year. So, we're making to that end date and so there's a lot of forward sort of [thinking], making sure we've got the yarn. So, a lot of forward thinking on a day-to-day basis to ensure your ‘now’ is covered.” Ava, the Head of Operations, shared “Even our daily operations focus on sea freight to reduce carbon emissions. It's about making thoughtful, impactful changes that add up for a sustainable future.”

Secondly, the retailer co-creates value through innovation, based on ‘doing better’, which is associated with *future orientation*. Luna, the Head of Brand Communication reflected, “I'd love for us to grow in terms of our size and also, I guess just continue on our trajectory of what we're already doing and refine, new yarns, new technology, just always evolving. I would hate to see us just reach a point and go that's good enough, I don't see that happening.” She further shed light on the product stewardship programme that the sustainable fashion retailer offers to its consumers. “The idea of [the product stewardship programme], where garments are repaired

even decades after purchase, exemplifies our commitment to reducing waste and ensuring long-lasting products for future use.” Rony, the Head of Design, shared, “As a designer, it’s important to create pieces that have longevity – not just in physical durability but in timeless style, so they continue to be valued rather than discarded.”

Lastly, *future orientation* required engagement between all stakeholders, which was a result of a change in the understanding of how garments were produced and consumed. An important facet of engagement was educating and encouraging young consumers and students in New Zealand to learn about sustainability in the fashion industry and join the industry. Ava shared, “We work to inspire the next generation by highlighting practical and skilled roles in manufacturing to school leavers, ensure the future of this industry.” She also highlighted engagement with macro-level actors such as civic society organisations in promoting industry wide engagement: “[Civil society organisation] is doing a beautiful, proactive approach of highlighting the industry to young people so they can think about it and hopefully be inspired to actually be a part of this [sustainable fashion industry].”

Meso-level participants spoke about a future where conscious consumption and ethical production practices become the standard. Ava reflected, “My hope for the future, I guess, is for it to become just far more of like a standard expectation. Not only in consumers’ minds, but in terms of what people are able to purchase.” Evelyn also added to this, stating “I’d love to see more of the industry trying to engage, change consumer mindset around how we purchase our clothing versus this expectation I walk in the store and everything I have is there.”

6.3.4 Micro-Level Future Orientation – Conscious and Ethical Consumption

At the micro level, *future orientation* was seen in *conscious and ethical consumption*, which positively impacts future generations, investing in objects and experiences, such as those associated with sustainable fashion, that can be sustained, and the availability of enough resources for others, in the future. Emma described this as, “Making sure whatever we do is,

like, able to be continued in the future, making sure that it's around, you know, for our kids and our grandkids and future generations.” Briar mentioned that she planned to have kids in the next five years or so, and said “I’m thinking a lot about the future for them. Yes, so I suppose it [sustainability] does play in my mind every day...I recognise that it’s necessary to have a good future for my kids.”

Future orientation was reflected in how micro-level participants described sustainability. For instance, Robert said, “Sustainability to me means practices which can be continued, perpetuated hundreds, thousands of years, that doesn’t harm earth’s systems in any way that’s destructive.” Sustainability to Briar meant “Being able to provide for future generations” and “not destroying the planet and then having a sustainable future in terms of having enough resources.”

6.3.5 Theme Summary

Future orientation is an important theme in how actors within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value. It involves an approach to benefitting future generations by engaging in sustainable and ethical behaviours with positive impacts both, now and in the future. At the macro level, *future orientation* is characterised as *collective vision* for a sustainable New Zealand, where government and leaders are urged to define a national sustainability framework that involves all stakeholders including industries, businesses, and citizens. *Future orientation* is reflected as *organisational planning and innovation* at the meso level. This refers to adopting forward-thinking practices such as advanced planning to ensure resource availability, continuous improvement in design and operations, and innovation in materials and technology. Collectively, this approach at the meso level assists with sustaining the business in the future. There was also a strong emphasis on engaging with all stakeholders, including educating and inspiring the next generation to participate in sustainable fashion. At the micro level, value is co-created through *conscious and ethical consumption*, in relation to

future orientation. Participants aimed to positively impact future generations by investing in sustainable fashion and ensuring resource availability for others, via their consumption decisions.

6.4 Guardianship

6.4.1 Theme Description

The third theme identified in the data related to how actors within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value is *guardianship*. It refers to an approach to taking on responsibility over the ‘life of the product’, involving both the production and consumption of a product; that is, a mindset that drives activities and practices that ensure products are cared for. *Guardianship* stems from concern about the increasing garment waste, with rising amounts of discarded and disregarded garments ending up in landfill. It is founded on the idea of pollution prevention and protection of garments.

At the macro level, this approach was observed as *collective guardianship*, which refers to a collective effort, headed by the government and leadership, to avoid garments going to waste via the establishment of recycling facilities across New Zealand. *Guardianship* was characterised as *product lifecycle guardianship* at the meso level, which focuses on business-led activities and practices to prolong the life of garments, such as encouraging consumers to return garments that need repair. *Product use guardianship* is how participants at the micro level co-created value through individual actions to avoid adding to garment waste, such as garment swaps and donating garments to op shops.

Table 11 summarises the description of *guardianship* across the three levels.

Table 11: Description of Guardianship

Guardianship	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Guardianship – a mindset that drives activities and practices that ensures products are cared for	Collective Guardianship	Product Lifecycle Guardianship	Product Use Guardianship

6.4.2 Macro-Level Guardianship – Collective Guardianship

At the macro level, *guardianship* was discussed as a collective effort, involving actors at all of the three levels, to reduce waste. The participants noted that *guardianship* could lead to value co-creation within the service ecosystem, with the government leading with the provision of infrastructure and providing rules and regulations to ensure that products are cared for; businesses being responsible for the products they sell; and consumers taking responsibility for the products they own. Macro-level participants critically addressed the pervasive issues of overconsumption and overproduction, which exacerbate waste generation and make *guardianship* indispensable to how actors within the service ecosystem co-create value. Eleanor highlighted, “The amount of emissions coming from landfill sites is growing year on year.” Emphasizing the environmental impact of discarded textiles, Jack pointed to structural challenges: “The biggest challenge in New Zealand is that it’s very much a consumption market for fashion, and because of open market strategies and deregulation, removal of protection of garments.” Grace critically observed that while New Zealand brands may prioritise sustainability, their efforts are undermined by high production volumes. “Even though your fabrics could be sustainable, the amount of clothing or producing garments kind of cancels out, in my opinion.”

Macro-level participants emphatically asserted that *guardianship* must become a priority not only for businesses and consumers, but also for government and leaders, emphasising that it required a collective effort to prolong product lifecycles and reduce waste for all of New Zealand. Grace articulated that *guardianship* is “a type of mindset in fashion that prioritises looking after the planet. Specifically in New Zealand, I think good sustainable fashion should have a focus on guardianship and circularity within that.” She advocated for businesses to assume responsibility for the entire lifecycle of the garments that they produce and sell, and that the government and leadership should be enforcing this. “Put the responsibility on a brand

to take responsibility for the garment that they created and its life. Because then it would mean that there would be a lot more consideration in the design process.” Furthermore, she stated that businesses should foster guardianship in consumers. “Ultimately, the message should be that the most sustainable thing you can do is not to buy anything, which is not something that many businesses are going to say. So, I think what they can do is probably educate their customers more on how to make their garments last longer.” This perspective underscores how value is co-created via *collective guardianship* by shifting the focus from promoting consumption to educating the micro-level on sustainable practices and fostering a collaborative relationship between the three levels aimed at reducing waste.

6.4.3 Meso-Level Guardianship – Product Lifecycle Guardianship

Guardianship at the meso level implies *product lifecycle guardianship*, which represents the responsibility of businesses for the complete lifecycle of a product, including its life after its intended use. The sustainable fashion retailer, in this study, had a product stewardship programme, which reflects their commitment to taking care of the garments they sell and their entire lifecycle. They also encouraged their consumers to send garments back to the retailer for repairs and mending, thus prolonging the life of the garment and avoid it ending up in landfill. Ava, the Head of Operations, articulated the understanding of *guardianship* at the meso level: “To me, personally, it’s about thinking about the full lifecycle of anything I’m purchasing and doing, and that sort of lasting impact, not just buying an eco-product and taking it at face value.” Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, asserted that other businesses and retailers should take responsibility for the lifecycles of the garments they are producing and selling. She commented, “There’s no responsibility after it’s left your factory and that customer has [the garment] in their house, they’re totally responsible for understanding how it’s recyclable, if it’s not how it can be, if it can’t be, where it should go? Or what happens to that byproduct of the packaging that surrounds the goods. And so that really also was another area that moulded me

to say, well, actually, it is our responsibility [to] care. And that founded the [product stewardship] programme we run, which is actually our commitment to caring for the life of something we're produced." She further added, "So yes, everything we do, it's just part of our process now, versus actually we need to talk about it, like the [product stewardship programme] is happening seamlessly every day. There are garments down there from customers that need mending and it's all part of the process." Rony, the Head of Design, also spoke about the product stewardship program and mentioned, "We see garments come back for repairs that are older than me."

Ava highlighted that as a sustainable fashion retailer, they vigorously followed their policy of zero waste production and had a robust waste management system. She mentioned, "Everything [waste] that gets collected from here is composted or recycled. We don't have a truck arrive to take away waste, even what we put to the roadside is standard council refuse, it's just a red lid bin. There's 40 people here. And we're manufacturing 2000 units a week. That's amazing." She shared, with much elation, "We're almost circular. We're almost completely local and local's obviously the most sustainable way possible." Such activities and practices followed by the sustainable fashion retailer represent *product lifecycle guardianship*.

6.4.4 Micro-Level Guardianship – Product Use Guardianship

Guardianship at the micro level was observed as *product use guardianship*, which represents individual activities and practices to care for products and avoid them going to waste. In the context of this study, this implied what micro-level participants did with their garments once they had lost interest in them, or they were no longer wearable. *Product use guardianship*, with respect to garments, was founded on the concern of excessive numbers of garments going to landfill and was articulated by Summer: "This is probably my biggest stressor, as someone who does enjoy fashion, is what do I do with the clothes that could still be used for something. Yeah, they've got holes or stains, they're not wearable, you cannot get a price for them. But I still

don't want to put that in the ground.” However, *product use guardianship* was not limited to garments. For instance, Summer added, “I try not to waste food. I try to eat everything I can. I only buy what I can eat. I have like low waste of food. And if I need to, if something's about to go off, I might freeze it as well.”

With respect to garments, clothes swaps with friends and family were mentioned by participants as an activity based on *product use guardianship*. Other practices included donating to op shops and putting garments in clothing bins. Briar shared, “That probably doesn't happen as much, like I tend to wear stuff to its ‘death’. But I do, I'll swap clothes with people. Or I'll give stuff away. I'll donate it to op shops.” Millie mentioned, “So either if the quality is not bad or still in a good condition, I give it to my cousin or my sister. So, we'll just do like a little clothes swap. She can either wear it herself or she'll sell it through her online thrift store. Otherwise, if the quality is not that great then I'll put it into a clothing bin.”

Participants reported that a retailer or meso-level activity that could support value co-creation at the micro level through *product use guardianship* was enabling the return of discarded or unwanted garments. Such activities demonstrated the meso level's accountability towards its product and sustainability. By placing boxes and installations within the store to return unwanted garments, the meso level would make it easier for the micro level to co-create value through *guardianship*. Alexis reflected, “I think if a brand is willing to take back and repair what they've sold to you, I think it shows that they believe they've created a good product, and they stand by what they've made.”

6.4.5 Theme Summary

Guardianship was identified as a pivotal theme in the co-creation of value within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It signifies a comprehensive responsibility for the entire lifecycle of garments – from production to consumption – ensuring that products are meticulously cared for to minimise waste. *Guardianship* as an approach to how actors within

the ecosystem co-create value stems from escalating concerns over garment waste and the environmental impact of discarded textiles accumulating in landfills. At the macro level, *guardianship* is embodied as *collective guardianship*, where the government and leaders spearhead efforts to establish recycling infrastructure and enforce regulations that promote taking responsibility for products, such as garments, by all actors across the ecosystem. Additionally, participants at the macro level highlighted the critical need to address systemic issues of overconsumption and overproduction, advocating for a mindset shift that prioritises stewardship over consumerism.

Guardianship at the meso level was seen as *product lifecycle guardianship* and characterised by businesses taking extended responsibility for their products after sale. The sustainable fashion retailer in this study exemplified this through its product stewardship program, which not only commits to zero-waste production but also encourages consumers to return garments for repairs, thereby prolonging product lifespans and reducing landfill contributions. Micro-level actors co-created value through *product use guardianship*, which involves individual practices such as garment swapping and donating to op shops, reflecting a personal commitment to take responsibility for the garments they own. Participants suggested that when retailers facilitate these actions – such as implementing take-back programmes – they can enhance value co-creation by fostering collaborative efforts across all levels to combat garment waste effectively, which was the foundational concern for *guardianship*.

6.5 Regeneration

6.5.1 Theme Description

The fourth theme identified in relation to how actors within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value is *regeneration*, which refers to activities, practices and an overall mindset that ensures change through restoring and rejuvenation. *Regeneration* is based on the idea of renewing the life of an item or product through practices such as upcycling, finding

alternative uses, or using services that enable restoration and rejuvenation. At the macro level, *regeneration* was discussed as the need to build effective infrastructure and make systemic changes that enable renewing the life of the products, specifically garments. *Regeneration* at the meso level was conceptualised as a *circular business approach*, through a focus on material quality, emphasising the use of recycled materials and creating products designed for recyclability and repairability. At the micro level, *regeneration* was observed in the *reuse*, *recycle*, and *repair* of products, such as garments, for maximum usage.

Table 12 summarises how *regeneration* is characterised across the three levels.

Table 12: Description of Regeneration

Regeneration	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Regeneration - activities, practices, and overall mindset that ensure change through restoring and rejuvenation	Regenerative Infrastructure	Circular Business Approach	Reuse, Recycle, Repair

6.5.2 Macro Level Regeneration – Regenerative Infrastructure

Regeneration at the macro level implies *regenerative infrastructure*. Participants asserted the need for government and businesses to establish infrastructure and regulations that enable the renewal, rejuvenation, and restoration of products, such as garments. They really pushed for change that focuses on the ‘end of life’ phase of garments, which results in a positive impact on ecological and social systems. Eleanor elaborated on this need further, stating, “Let’s face it, there’s this entire conversation and discussion and research into how we need to have a regenerative business model to work towards more circular design of working and functioning.” Scarlett emphasized the necessity of moving beyond sustainability, asserting, “I think we need to go one further [than sustainability] and think about regeneration and circularity because that’s ultimately what we need to do for the planet.” Abigail reinforced this by stating, “We need to be giving more than we take, which is really where the idea of regeneration and restoring systems comes in.” This emphasis on giving more than taking demonstrates how

regenerative infrastructure can lead to value co-creation within the service ecosystem, which has a positive impact on the environment.

Daniel expressed criticism of the current goals of sustainability, arguing that mere impact reduction is inadequate. He stated, “The goal should no longer be [to] minimise your harm. The goal should be to put back, be climate positive, be biodiversity positive. How are you making those sorts of contributions? If we’re actually going to get there, we need to start restoring, rebuilding, enhancing.” He also challenged businesses to rethink their value propositions, shifting from a defensive stance on sustainability, which he highlights was often used as a marketing gimmick rather than actual practice. Jack further questioned the adequacy of aiming for sustainability, commenting, “When we aim for sustainability, we’re not aiming at the right thing. And so, sustainability, it’s really just [not] maintaining harmony and equilibrium. But actually, what we do know is that we need to do more than that now.” By acknowledging the limitations of the existing understanding and directive of sustainability, he highlighted the imperative for *regenerative infrastructure* that actively restores and improve ecological and social systems.

Grace highlighted the practical aspects of *regenerative infrastructure* by pointing out the need for accessible infrastructure in New Zealand. She mentioned, “I think the top priority would be see some established recycling or actual circular solutions established in New Zealand because I think that is going to be an absolute game changer.” She argued that making regenerative practices mainstream and accessible would “...do wonders for creating a more circular system in New Zealand and also challenging the mindset.” Grace advocated for governmental support to prioritise infrastructure that promotes *regeneration*. She asserted, “I think pushing for those skills to be brought back to New Zealand and for the government to prioritise infrastructure in that way but also other recycling facility and reuse and that sort of thing” is essential for advancing sustainable fashion. This also highlights the role of policy and institutional support

in creating an enabling ecosystem for value co-creation through *regeneration*. This is linked to the contextual factors that facilitate value co-creation, which are discussed in the next chapter. To successfully co-create value, Amelia emphasized that *regeneration* must be adopted at the meso level and encompass the entire lifecycle of a garment, starting from the farming of raw materials. She stated, “Regeneration is important because it affects the first phase of the raw material, and we’re not going to stop using cotton and wool, etc. so how can we make those economies regenerative like [a] circular economy?” She also noted that even businesses already engaged in sustainable practices are seeking to elevate their impact. She mentioned, “Businesses that I’m working with, that have already been working in this way for a few years, they’re looking at how can we do more and what does that more look like. And that more looks like regeneration [and] restoration.” Grace critiqued the term ‘sustainability’ itself, observing that it has become “quite tarnished” due to “a lot of greenwashing connotations.” She argued, “You could be a sustainable brand, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re actually a brand who is prioritising regeneration.” Collectively, these insights reveal a consensus among macro level participants that *regeneration* is essential for co-creating value. The emphasis on infrastructural support, restorative business models, and systemic change illustrates a holistic approach, where value is co-created through *regeneration*.

6.5.3 Meso-Level Regeneration – Circular Business Approach

At the meso level, *regeneration* was conceptualised as a *circular business approach*, through a focus on material quality, emphasising the use of recycled materials and creating products designed for recyclability and repairability. This approach reflects a commitment to *regeneration*, where materials are kept within the production and consumption cycle for as long as possible, thereby minimising waste and resource depletion. Luna, the Head of Brand Communication, shared, “I think about sustainability as creating garments that can be renewed and rejuvenated over time. We focus on materials that can regenerate and continue to be used.”

She further stated, “Our approach to fashion is rooted in the concept of regeneration, where old pieces are brought back to life through creative design and sustainable practices.” Ava, the Head of Operations, also added, “I think it’s just what we live and breathe here. So, our plastics are all recycled. Our waste of garments is all recycled. When I’m ordering materials too, suppliers dispatch compostable packing; its plastic bits are recyclable. The tape we order is really expensive because the tape we put on plastics can be recycled. So, yes, it’s just what we do. We live and breathe it. It’s not that we have to consciously think about it. It’s just the seed principle of what we were doing.” These statements reflect how value is co-created via *regeneration*, which at the meso level is seen as *circular business approach*.

Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, elaborated on the *circular business approach* by stating, “We’ve used a recycled jean yarn, where they just repurpose jeans into yarn. We revisited it and there was no extra water or processes in doing that process, which we loved about it. So that’s an area we really love and want to get into more.” The Head of Design, Rony also elaborated on the sustainable fashion retailer’s sustainability commitment. He said, “In our line of work, the tangible goods we produce are a testament to our commitment to sustainability. We don’t just say we’re sustainable; our products, made from sustainably sourced wool and organic cotton, speak for themselves.” He added that “Our production process is very hands-on, from selecting the raw merino wool to the final stages of knitting. The physical aspect of handling the material at each stage ensures that we maintain the quality and sustainability of our products.” These statements indicate an active pursuit of renewal and improvement, key aspects of *regeneration*. By using recycled materials that require minimal additional resources, the sustainable fashion retailer not only reduces environmental impact but also adds value by offering sustainable products that appeal to their customers.

Evelyn further emphasized the importance of material quality and local sourcing, stating that “For us, the focus has always been on the quality of the materials we use. We source our wool

locally from New Zealand farmers, ensuring it's sustainably produced and of the highest quality. This not only supports local agriculture but also aligns with our sustainability goals." This approach fosters value co-creation by building relationships with local suppliers, enhancing community well-being, and providing their customers with high-quality, sustainable products. Ava reinforced this commitment to sustainable sourcing and production processes, commenting that "We work closely with our suppliers to ensure that the raw materials we receive meet our sustainability standards. For instance, yarns we use are not just any yarns; they are certified organic and dyed with eco-friendly dyes. This commitment to using sustainable raw materials is central to our production process." These practices demonstrate how meso-level actors co-create value through the *circular business approach*.

Another integral part of the *circular business approach* was human capital: skilled team members and meticulous craftsmanship. Ava highlighted the significance of skilled team members in designing and manufacturing regenerative garments. She stated, "We do a beautiful job here. And the team that we have making our products are all experts in the field. Like we are very skilled." This points to the role of human capital in value co-creation, where the expertise and craftsmanship of employees contribute to producing sustainable products that meet both environmental and consumer expectations.

6.5.4 Micro-Level Regeneration – Reuse, Recycle and Repair

Regeneration at the micro level is characterised as maximising the lifespan and utility of products, such as garments, through practices of *reuse, recycle and repair*. These practices emphasize personal engagement and responsibility in extending the life of possessions, reflecting a hands-on approach to *regeneration* that is deeply intertwined with individual value systems and each participant's personal meaning of sustainability. Four sub-themes under *regeneration* at the micro level were identified from the data analysis: material and quality,

access and apathy, usage maximisation, and value for money. Each of the sub-themes are now discussed in detail.

- (a) The focus on *material and quality* underscores the importance participants placed on durability and ethical sourcing. “How long can a garment stay with you? How long can it serve its use?” is how Phoebe viewed the *material and quality* of a garment. This was linked to her preference to invest in high-quality garments. Such choices reflect value-in-use, wherein durable materials and high-quality garments are used more frequently and can be repaired easily.
- (b) The sub-theme of *access and apathy* highlights the systemic challenges micro-level participants face in obtaining sustainable and ethical products, such as garments. While some participants like Kelly stumbled upon “amazing thrift stores”, while walking to work one day, others grappled with limited availability and inconvenient delivery times, when shopping for sustainable and ethical garments online. This inconsistency indicates an existing gap between consumer intentions and practical accessibility, suggesting that value co-creation is hindered by infrastructural shortcomings. This relates to contextual factors that hinder or inhibit value co-creation. The difficulty in accessing sustainable options can lead to consumer apathy, undermining efforts to engage in regenerative practices at the micro level. Such a gap between intentions and accessibility indicates no value co-creation, since consumers (micro level) and businesses (meso level) miss the opportunity to co-create value through a successful transaction. Consumers are unable to obtain the sustainable and ethical products they want, and the businesses and retailers do not profit from a potential sale. No new value is created for both actors.
- (c) *Usage maximisation* emerged as a central pillar of *regeneration* at the micro level, encapsulating actions and practices that extend the utility of a product, thereby extending its life and in some instances, renewing its life. For instance, Alex shared that he repurposes

ill-fitting garments through tailoring, demonstrating an active role in enhancing product utility instead of discarding them. Summer mentioned, “My mom knows a bit of stitching and embroidery. I sometimes get her to make some fixes that make old or damaged clothes more beautiful. I can then wear them again or sell them online.” Such individual initiatives contribute to value co-creation by personalising the consumption experience. Additionally, such actions and practices also reduce environmental impact.

(d) *Value for money* is a pragmatic consideration that influenced the participants’ willingness to engage in *reuse, recycle, and repair*. Participants like Alex and Nikita weighed the cost against the benefits, with Nikita expressing satisfaction in acquiring quality items at reduced prices. When sustainable product options were perceived as offering superior *value for money*, participants were more inclined to participate in regenerative practices. The acquisition of skills and services that support *reuse, recycle and repair* were important and repeatedly discussed by the participants at the micro level. Participants expressed a strong desire to learn practical skills such as sewing, embroidery, and upcycling. Robert expressed, “I would love to learn more about how to do home repairs”, as an effort to increase usage of items and products around his flat that can be repaired instead of being replaced. Kelly connected these skills to broader consumption patterns, noting that enabling individuals to repair their possessions could fundamentally alter consumption behaviour.

Participants alluded to the communal aspect of skill transfer and collaboration that can enhance *regeneration* at the micro level. Robert highlighted the untapped resource of experienced individuals, stating, “There’s a lot of bored grandmas right now in our society that have skills that we need”. This is linked with *knowledge integration*, discussed previously, which can foster community engagement and strengthen social ties, and thereby lead to value co-creation at the micro level. Such collaboration not only enriches individual skill sets but also amplifies

the collective capacity for *regeneration*, thereby co-creating value that extends beyond the individual to the community level.

Despite individual enthusiasm, there were critical barriers identified that limit the effectiveness of the activities and practices that restore and rejuvenate products and items. The scarcity of accessible repair services and skill-building opportunities impeded the micro-level actors' ability to fully engage in extending the life of their products. This gap suggests that while consumers are willing to participate in value co-creation through *regeneration*, systemic support is lacking. The reliance on personal initiative without adequate infrastructural backing dilutes the potential impact of *reuse, recycle and repair*. This is an instance of no value co-creation. While consumers are willing, they are limited in their ability to contribute and participate in value co-creation through regeneration due to barriers within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Regeneration at the micro level is characterised by a focus on *reuse, repair, and recycle*, where participants seek to extend the life and utility of their possessions through various means. This approach is intrinsically linked to value co-creation, as it involves active participation in practices that benefit both the individual and the environment. However, to fully harness the potential of *regeneration*, there must be a concerted effort to address systemic barriers, enhance accessibility to sustainable options, and foster skill development.

6.5.5 Theme Summary

The last critical theme identified from the data was *regeneration*, which illustrates how value is co-created in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem by restoring and renewing products, such as garments, through accessible regenerative infrastructure and individual actions. At the macro level, participants emphasised the need for robust, government-supported infrastructure and policies that facilitate *regeneration*, thereby moving beyond a narrow sustainability to include environmental restoration. They challenged the present understanding and practices

surrounding sustainability and sustainable fashion, asserting that mere impact reduction is insufficient; instead, the focus should be to actively replenish resources and improve environmental conditions. At the meso level, *regeneration* was characterised as a *circular business approach*, which focused on material longevity and recyclability. By sourcing high-quality, sustainable materials, and crafting repairable garments, the sustainable fashion retailer demonstrated that *regeneration* underpins both brand identity and *operation excellence (knowledge empowerment at meso level)*. This approach led to improved product quality, stronger local supplier networks, and enhanced consumer trust. *Regeneration* at the micro level was observed as the individual actions and practices of *reuse, repair, and recycle*. Participants engaged in personal initiatives – tailoring, upcycling, and seeking durable products and items – to extend product lifespan. Yet, despite their positive intentions, inadequate infrastructure and limited access to services and facilities that enable *regeneration* constrained their efforts. Overall, *regeneration* reflected a holistic, multilevel approach that required systemic support, infrastructural investments, and collaborative skill building, to co-create value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

6.6. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings from the in-depth exploration of how actors within a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value. Based on the data from macro, meso, and micro levels, the analysis identified four distinct, yet interrelated themes – *knowledge, future orientation, guardianship, and regeneration*. Alongside these, instances of value co-destruction, no value co-creation, and negative co-creation were also critically examined. Table 13 presents a summary of the identified themes, with the description and sub-themes of each theme, respectively.

Table 13: Summary of Identified Themes

Identified Themes	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Knowledge - participant level of information or ‘know-how’ about sustainability and specifically, sustainable living, sustainable consumption, and sustainable fashion in the research context			
(a) Knowledge Empowerment	Expert Influence	Operational Excellence	Sustainable Decision Making
(b) Knowledge Integration	Expert Knowledge	Strategic Knowledge	Experiential Knowledge
(c) Knowledge Anxiety	Guidance Deficiency	Impact Constraints	Information Reliability
Future Orientation - an approach that considers future generations and thinking ahead for self and others			
	Collective Vision	Planning & Innovation	Conscious & Ethical Consumption
Guardianship - activities, practices, and overall mindset that ensure products are cared for			
	Collective Guardianship	Product Lifecycle Guardianship	Product Use Guardianship
Regeneration - activities, practices, and overall mindset that ensure change via restoration and rejuvenation			
	Regenerative Infrastructure	Circular Business Approach	Reuse, Recycle, Repair

The first theme, *knowledge*, revealed that information and ‘know-how’ were critical drivers of value co-creation, empowering actors to make informed, sustainable decisions. At the macro level, *knowledge* empowered participants to fulfil their role as experts within the service ecosystem. It empowered the sustainable fashion retailer (meso level) to achieve *operational excellence* and enabled consumers (micro level) to engage in *sustainable decision making*. The second aspect of *knowledge* was related to the acquisition and sharing of information related to sustainability and sustainable fashion, which is described *knowledge integration*. This was observed as *expert knowledge* at the macro level, *strategic knowledge* at the meso level, and *experiential knowledge* at the micro level. A multi-directional flow of *knowledge integration* was visible within the service ecosystem. For instance, macro-level actors disseminated specialised insights that influenced industry practices and guided meso-level actors in

achieving *operational excellence*, while micro-level actors also relied on credible and transparent information from the macro and meso levels to make conscious consumption decisions. However, excessive or insufficient knowledge – termed *knowledge anxiety* – impeded interaction and engagement, and led to no value co-creation, as misinformation, greenwashing, or information distorted decision making, resulted in participant inaction, and eroded trust.

The second theme, *future orientation*, highlighted a shared approach, across the ecosystem, that considered future generations and thinking ahead for self and others. Macro-level *collective vision*, meso-level *planning and innovation*, and micro-level *conscious and ethical consumption* converge to ensure that current practices meet the needs of future generations. Value is co-created when actors align their strategies, investments, and day-to-day choices to secure a sustainable future. Nonetheless, in the absence of clear governance or strategic direction from leadership, *future orientation* may falter, stalling collaborative progress and resulting in missed opportunities for value co-creation.

Guardianship underscored a collective responsibility to care for products across their entire lifecycle. At the macro level, *collective guardianship* involved regulatory frameworks and infrastructure that discourage waste. Meso-level actors enact *product lifecycle guardianship* through initiatives such as product stewardship programs, while micro-level actors practice *product use guardianship* by repurposing or donating garments to reduce their landfill contributions. However, participants at the micro level reported that when infrastructural support is insufficient or efforts to encourage *guardianship* fail, the ecosystem risks no value co-creation: sustainable intentions are thwarted, resulting in lost value and potential harm to the environment.

The fourth theme, *regeneration*, encapsulated practices of renewal and restoration. Macro-level actors advocated for *regenerative infrastructure* to prolong product lifespan and thereby avoid

increasing waste at a national level. Meso-level actors practiced a *circular business approach*, focusing on locally sourced materials and design innovations, and micro-level actors increasingly engaged in *reuse, recycle and repair* activities, striving to restore and maintain the value embedded in garments. Without supportive infrastructure or accessible services that enable *regeneration*, however, these efforts may be constrained, resulting in no value co-creation.

Actors across the three levels of the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-created value through *knowledge, future orientation, guardianship, and regeneration*. The findings highlight that value co-creation is influenced by dynamic, interdependent relationships, shaped by resources, shared visions, responsibilities, and infrastructural capacities. This also directs attention to the contextual factors that influence value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, which are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. By examining instances of value co-creation and no value co-creation, this chapter advances a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms by which the actors within sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create or fail to co-create value.

Chapter 7: Facilitators and Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation

7.1 Chapter Overview

Chapter 7 discusses the findings in relation to the second research question, *What are the contextual factors that affect value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem?* The chapter begins with a description of the process, followed by analysis of the findings from in-depth interviews with participants across the three participant aggregation levels: macro, meso, and micro. The findings in this chapter provide evidence of the contextual factors that influence value co-creation within the service ecosystem. Two clear categories of contextual factors were identified: facilitators and inhibitors of value co-creation. The facilitators of value co-creation are discussed first, followed by the inhibitors.

7.1.1 Analysis Process

Similar to the analysis process described in section 6.1.1 of chapter 6, Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase methodology (see section 5.7 of chapter 5) was used to complete the data analysis. The initial steps involved familiarising myself with the data by listening to the audio recordings of each interview, followed by a thorough reading of the corresponding transcripts. Specific attention was directed toward identifying instances and references to factors that either furthered or impeded value co-creation. Additionally, the analysis focused on human elements that affected value co-creation.

Subsequently, an initial list of codes was generated. For example, *conscious consumption* first emerged as a code representing one of the meanings of sustainability, while *provenance* highlighted the origins and uniqueness of sustainably produced garments (see Appendix for the full list of codes). Once the initial code list was compiled, a systematic review was completed to determine which codes could be combined under a single category or theme. For instance, *conscious consumption* and *provenance* were integrated into a *conscious consumption*

approach theme. *Sustainable future* and *durability* were integrated to form *promoting longevity*. This process was followed for identifying both facilitators and inhibitors of value co-creation. A deductive-inductive reasoning approach guided the data analysis. Some codes were derived from my existing knowledge and awareness of sustainability and sustainable fashion, developed through the literature review. Other codes were generated through iterative examination of the data itself. The interviews with macro-level participants also contributed to building a contextual understanding of sustainability and sustainable fashion. This broader perspective influenced the process of code generation and refinement, as well as the eventual identification and development of emergent themes in relation to the contextual factors that influence value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

7.1.2 Emergent Contextual Factors

This study explored how actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value. The findings presented in chapter 6 showed how the actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-created value through *knowledge*, *future orientation*, *guardianship* and *regeneration*. Critical to this understanding are contextual factors that facilitate and inhibit value co-creation. Three facilitators of value co-creation were identified in the data analysis, which were *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction* and a *conscious consumption approach*. Three contextual factors that inhibited value co-creation were also identified and included *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure* and *inadequate regulation*.

7.2 Facilitators of Value Co-Creation

The data analysis identified three facilitators or enablers of value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem – *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction* and a *conscious consumption approach*. Descriptions of each of the facilitators are summarised in Table 14.

Table 14: Facilitators of Value Co-Creation

Facilitators of Value Co-creation	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Promoting Longevity	Developing the necessary foundational frameworks and policies, enforced by government authorities and leaders, that facilitate the extension of product lifespans	Ensuring that products are designed with longevity built in; business practices around reusability and recyclability	Choosing to consume goods that last; emphasizing the consumption of durable products
Impact Reduction	Developing systems that encourage and promote minimising impacts on people and the planet; government frameworks and policies related to reducing impacts	Implementing sustainability practices throughout the supply chain and lifecycle of the products that reduce impact	Engaging in individual consumption actions and practices to reduce personal impact
Conscious Consumption Approach	Promoting and implementing guidelines and policies that encourage mindful consumption and adherence to planetary limits	Making business decisions that consider sustainable production and consumption	Making personal decisions about consuming consciously and ethically; personal activism for sustainability-led initiatives and principles

7.2.1 Promoting Longevity

Promoting longevity was identified as the first significant facilitator of value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It represents a mindset that drives choices, actions and practices, focused on extending the lifespan of products, such as garments. A collective effort to increase the lifespan of products meant a reduction in waste generation. Participants across all levels highlighted that *promoting longevity* was not merely an attribute but a foundational element of sustainability and value co-creation in the ecosystem. An important component of *promoting longevity*, identified across the three participant levels, was *durability* of products. This implied that products were made from strong and natural raw materials, using sturdy designs, and did not fall apart quickly. By prioritising long-lasting, high-quality products that minimise environmental and social harm, participants across all three levels highlighted a collective understanding that *promoting longevity* facilitated value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

At the macro level, *promoting longevity* entailed developing the necessary frameworks and policies, enforced by the government and leaders, that enabled extending the lifespans of products. The meso level worked towards *promoting longevity* by producing and retailing products that were long-lasting and could be easily recycled or repurposed. Individual actions and practices that assisted with prolonging the lifespan of products were how the micro level addressed *promoting longevity*. The emphasis on extending product lifespans and creating enduring positive impacts, at all three levels, demonstrated how *promoting longevity* is integral to the co-creation of value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, fostering a synergistic relationship between consumer satisfaction, business success and sustainability. Table 15 summarises how *promoting longevity* is characterised at the three participant levels.

Table 15: Description of Promoting Longevity

Promoting Longevity	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
A mindset that drives choices, actions and practices, focused on extending the lifespan of products; prioritising durability	Developing the necessary foundational frameworks and policies, enforced by government authorities and leaders, that facilitate the extension of product lifespans	Ensuring that products are designed with longevity built in; business practices around reusability and recyclability	Choosing to consume goods that last; emphasizing the consumption of durable products

7.2.1.1 Macro-Level Promoting Longevity

Promoting longevity at the macro level was identified as developing the necessary foundational frameworks and policies, enforced by government authorities and leaders, that facilitate the extension of product lifespans. This implied that all actors within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem had the means and regulations, provided by the macro level, that allowed for extending product lifespans, thereby decreasing the number of products, items and objects that ended up in landfill. Grace highlighted the need for the macro level to provide resources for *promoting longevity*, which affects the entire sustainable fashion service ecosystem, stating that “We are still really struggling with end-of-life solutions for garments. So, I think there’s a

significant lack of infrastructure in New Zealand that brands need to work through if they are going to take meaningful steps towards sustainability and product longevity.” *Promoting longevity* facilitated value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem that could assist with transitioning to a sustainable future, or, as Jack stated, “leaving the world in a better place than you found it”. Olivia added to this sentiment, highlighting that “The message is shifting towards buying fewer but better-quality clothes, that last longer, which ultimately reduces consumption and waste.”

Promoting longevity was reflected in the macro-level participants’ meaning of sustainability and sustainable fashion. For instance, Scarlett mentioned that “...other words around sustainability [are] longevity...how long it lasts. And how well made it is.” Olivia viewed sustainable fashion as “Creating clothes that last, that don’t go out of style quickly, and that can be worn in many different ways”, combining *durability* with versatility. She stressed the importance of producing items that are “not harmful to the environment”, linking *promoting longevity* with *impact reduction*, which was the second facilitator of value co-creation identified in the data analysis.

Macro-level participants called upon actors at the meso and micro levels to also adopt the mindset of *promoting longevity*. Many participants at the macro level spoke about the actions and practices that could be taken by meso-level actors in connection with *promoting longevity*. Abigail said, “The brands that are doing this right are starting to look at designing products that can be disassembled and recycled, or even composted, and that inherently builds longevity into the garment because you’re not just thinking about use but also after-use.” Grace added, “If brands were responsible for the environmental impact of their product across its lifecycle, they would approach design differently – durability and the ability to recycle would be built into every step.”

With respect to the responsibility of the macro level in promoting *longevity* at the micro level, Grace stated, “Educating consumers on garment care and repair is critical for promoting longevity – getting them to think of extending the life of clothes rather than throwing them away.” Reflecting on her interactions with consumers, Abigail commented, “I always tried to encourage thinking of ways we can repair, repurpose, or extend the life of clothing rather than buying new every time.” Violet stated, “I’ve told my students...you will see me wearing the skirt I made in 2014. I’m wearing it today. And you will see me wearing it...once every three weeks or something like that.” Such interactions reflect how the macro level facilitates value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem through *promoting longevity*.

7.2.1.2 Meso-Level Promoting Longevity

At the meso level, *promoting longevity* was identified as ensuring that products are designed with longevity built in and adopting business practices around reusability and recyclability. *Promoting longevity* was strongly embedded in the brand philosophy of the sustainable fashion retailer. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, spoke about their product stewardship programme and its focus on *promoting longevity*: “Our [product stewardship programme] is actually our commitment to care for the life of something we’ve produced, meaning we mend and repair garments that customers return to us, so they can keep wearing them for years rather than replacing them.” Ava, Head of Operations at the sustainable fashion retailer, said “Longevity is built into our products by creating designs that are timeless and not trend-based. Customers come back to us because they can reorder the same black polo neck they loved from 10 years ago.” She further mentioned, “We use only high-quality fibres that embrace product longevity and repairability.” Luna, Head of Brand Communications shared, “Our garments are designed to be repairable. For example, buttons are made from recycled paper, and we ensure all components are easy to replace or fix, extending the lifespan of the item.”

Rony, Head of Design, connected sustainability with “quality and longevity”, suggesting that *durability* in garments was central to the retailer’s value proposition. He further added, “We want consumers to think about their purchases as investments, choosing items they can wear repeatedly over years, rather than just discarding after a season.” Rony emphasised that sustainable fashion to him meant focusing on “quality and longevity” with a “long-term scope” in consumption ensuring products “serve [their] use” over extended periods. Luna stated that a garment is sustainable “if it can go on and on and on, forever and ever”, implying that perpetual usability is key to both sustainability and building customer value. The sustainable fashion retailer’s focus on *promoting longevity* demonstrated how the meso level could facilitate value co-creation by producing enduring products that meet consumer expectations and promote sustainability.

7.2.1.3 Micro-Level Promoting Longevity

At the micro level, *promoting longevity* was seen as consumers opting to purchase goods that last, and prioritising consumption of durable products. Participants emphasised *promoting longevity* as essential to sustaining the value of a product or item over time. Nikita connected *promoting longevity* to the ability to “sustain for longer”, highlighting a desire for products, such as garments, that endure. Phoebe linked this to her understanding of sustainability – “something that can be sustained”, requiring minimal additional energy for its “continued survival” and emphasising “something with longevity.” Sandra reinforced this by stating “there being enough of something...it will continue, able to be sustained”. These perspectives illustrate a clear link between *promoting longevity* and continuous co-creation of value, where goods provide ongoing utility without excessive resource depletion.

Several micro-level participants connected *promoting longevity* with the other identified contextual factors, *impact reduction* and a *conscious consumption approach*. Briar associated *promoting longevity* with products that “live beyond a short lifetime” and are made in ways

that “minimise harm on the environment and on people”. Ben viewed it as practices that “can be continued hundreds, thousands of years” without causing destructive harm to the earth’s systems. Olivia stated that *promoting longevity* “means something that can happen over and over again. Without negative repercussions for other people, the planet, anything else.” Alex noted that “It’s probably related to the ability for something to be renewably created...its overall impact on the environment.” By emphasising long-term usability and environmental stewardship, the micro-level participants highlighted how *promoting longevity* facilitates value co-creation by aligning consumer benefits with the environment. Alexis and Summer supported consuming in ways that are “very future based” and “do not compromise the ability of the future generations to meet their needs”. This shows that *promoting longevity* facilitates value co-creation and extends it beyond immediate transactions to encompass long-term societal and environmental benefits.

Durability, in relation to *promoting longevity*, was also discussed at the micro level. It was associated with good product quality, thereby reducing waste and environmental impact. *Durability* implied that the product or items, such as garments, were made from strong and natural raw materials, with sturdy designs, and did not fall apart quickly. Summer encapsulated this by commenting, “How many wears can I get out of a garment I buy?” indicating that durability enhanced the value of her garments through prolonged use. Nikita suggested that sustainable fashion items that “can be sustained for longer” and are made with “good ethical practices”, integrating durability with ethical considerations, can amplify value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Millie preferred “purchasing high-quality products” that “will last a really, really long time”, prioritising long-term utility over short-term consumption. She further shared that *durability* is “something that you can reuse over and over again, and something that’s high quality, something that just won’t fall apart as soon as you

wear it or use it.” By prioritizing *durability*, consumers derive greater value from durable products.

Monica criticized the fashion industry for contributing to waste due to products that “fall apart after two washes”, advocating for garments “designed [and] made to last.” Sandra expressed frustration with easily disposable clothing, desiring “products that last” to avoid the cycle of constant replacement. These insights demonstrate how durability, observed through choices, actions and practices that *promoted longevity*, contributed to value co-creation by meeting consumer demands while mitigating environmental harm through reduced waste contribution at the micro level.

7.2.2 Impact Reduction

Impact reduction was identified as the second facilitator of value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It represents an approach that prioritises reducing harmful impacts on people and the planet. Participants across the macro, meso, and micro levels emphasised that minimising negative impacts on people and the planet is not only an important contextual factor that furthers value co-creation in the service ecosystem, but also a cornerstone in transitioning to a sustainable future. The focus on *impact reduction* reflects how responsible consumption and production practices can generate mutual benefits for consumers, businesses and society at large.

At the macro level, *impact reduction* implied the development of systems that help to minimise negative environmental and social impacts, through government regulations and policies. Meso-level *impact reduction* referred to the implementation of sustainability practices, through the entire supply chain and lifecycle of the products, that can reduce impact on the environment and people. At the micro level, *impact reduction* was observed as individual consumption actions and practices to reduce personal impact. Table 16 summarises the description of impact reduction across the three levels.

Table 16: Description of Impact Reduction

Impact Reduction	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
An approach that prioritizes reducing harmful impacts on people and the planet	Developing systems that encourage and promote minimising impacts on people and the planet; government regulations and policy related to reducing impacts	Implementing sustainability practices throughout the supply chain and lifecycle of the products that reduce impacts	Individual consumption actions and practices to reduce personal impacts

7.2.2.1 Macro-Level Impact Reduction

Impact reduction at the macro level was characterised as developing systems that encourage and promote minimising impacts on people and the planet, by creating and enforcing government frameworks and policies to reduce impacts on the environment and society. Amelia stated, “A voluntary approach is not enough; we need government-mandated regulations that hold brands accountable for their production and waste impact.” Abigail emphasised, “We need to focus on impact at all stages – design, production, use, and end-of-life – ensuring minimal harm and maximising positive contributions back to natural systems.” Grace commented, “If you’re producing massive volumes of clothing, even with sustainable materials, the impact cancels out – impact reduction means scaling down production overall.”

Impact reduction was also reflected in participants’ personal understandings of sustainability and sustainable fashion. Isabella viewed *impact reduction* as fundamental to her understanding of sustainability, which she described as “a system or a scheme or way of living that has minimal impact to the environment.” Jack stated, “To me, sustainable fashion means making choices that respect both people and planet. It’s about choosing materials that are renewable and processes that reduce waste and carbon footprint.” Abigail further illuminated this by emphasising the need for “maintaining harmony and balance between all interconnected systems”, recognising that “every action has a flow-on reaction.” By acknowledging the interconnectedness of their actions, macro-level participants highlighted how actors can co-

create value that extends beyond immediate transactions to broader ecological and social systems.

This mindset of *impact reduction* on people and the planet amplifies value co-creation by promoting continuous resource utilisation and minimising waste. Participants at the macro level urged the meso and micro levels to consider the impact of their practices and actions. Amelia stated, “Brands need to design products with transparency and reduced impact in mind, from sourcing of raw materials to the end-of-life management of garments.” She further discussed the need for product stewardship programmes to be made mandatory “where companies are held responsible for their products across their entire lifecycle, and this would directly reduce waste and environmental harm.” Grace emphasised “Taking responsibility for the impact that you have and working to regenerate natural systems and change the way you consume from being sustainable to circular.” She further noted that “The most sustainable thing you can do is to not buy anything new – overconsumption is a critical issue we need to address as part of reducing overall impact.”

7.2.2.2 Meso-Level Impact Reduction

Meso-level participants recognised that considering the impact of the entire lifespan of a garment – from design to production to end-of-life disposal – could enhance value co-creation for all actors within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. By embedding sustainability throughout the product life cycle, businesses and retailers can meet consumer demands for ethical products, thereby co-creating value through responsible practices. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, reflected that “For us, sustainability means thinking about every element. Just by making something new, there’s a risk in it. So how do we do that better? Are we using the most efficient wash water cycle? Are we using...a better way to make that up? So, it is reducing the waste even though we’re recycling our waste, reducing that down. It’s just a constant for us.” Ava, Head of Operations at the sustainable fashion retailer, stated, “We

focus on zero-waste production. Every piece of yarn and fabric is utilised, and off-cuts are recycled into new materials or composted, ensuring nothing goes to waste.” She further stated, “The waste generated from production is minimal – we compost or recycle everything. Even our packaging is compostable or recyclable, and we ensure that customers understand how to dispose of it responsibly.” Rony, Head of Design, mentioned “Our production process incorporates whole garment knitting, where garments are knitted fully formed, reducing fabric waste significantly, and ensuring durability through better construction.” Luna, Head of Brand Communication highlighted, “A huge part of the [retailer] identity is sustainability, and everything comes from that. We aim for zero waste production, where even the buttons are made out of recycled paper.” She further added, “our goal is to produce total garments that come off the machine requiring very little labour, reducing waste and inefficiency,”

Participants also discussed retailers’ efforts to innovate with a focus on *impact reduction*. Ava stated, “By making garments in New Zealand, we reduce the environmental impact of outsourcing. But we are constantly looking for ways to improve, such as using sea freight instead of air freight to lower carbon emissions.” Rony said, “We’re constantly poking our suppliers to find out if they have mills closer to us or alternative processes that can lower the environmental impact of what we’re buying.” He further mentioned, “There’s always a conversation about what’s next and how we can do better – from sourcing sustainable yarns to minimising energy usage in production.” Evelyn also added, “We’ve been testing recycled materials like yarn made from repurposed jeans and innovating with natural dyes to create processes with lower environmental impact.” Such efforts, focusing on *impact reduction* by the meso level to embed sustainability practices throughout the supply chain facilitated value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Impact reduction was also evident in the meaning participants attached to sustainability. For instance, Ava described sustainable fashion as “Going back 200 plus years...the clothes and

the wool and the natural fibres...they'd be made by hand, you know, they're not made in an industrial revolution way.” Her statement is reflective of *impact reduction* at the meso level, i.e., facilitating value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem by restoring or going back to the traditional slow way of producing garments.

7.2.2.3 Micro-Level Impact Reduction

Impact reduction at the micro level linked personal consumption choices to environmental impacts. Charlotte described this as “existing in a world in which your impact on the environment [is] the least it can be”, stressing the importance of mindful consumption to “lessen your footprint on the earth”. Monica described *impact reduction* as “having a sustainable impact” and “minimising your impact and making your existence sustainable.” These insights demonstrate how individual efforts to reduce negative impacts contribute to value co-creation by fostering a healthier environment and society.

Impact reduction, particularly in the context of sustainable fashion, underscored the necessity of reducing harm to co-create value. Briar viewed sustainable fashion as “Something that is created based on the principles of sustainability around the environment, people, and product...every part of that being sustainable.” If meso-level actors adopt such practices, they not only mitigate environmental and social harms but also enhance their value proposition to ethically conscious consumers.

Micro-level participants expected the meso level to offer sustainable end-of-life disposal options, as a means to *impact reduction*. Ben commented that sustainability in fashion also involved businesses “collecting those [garments] and recycling them somehow”, suggesting that the end-of-life disposal strategies focused on *impact reduction*, like recycling, enabled the micro level participants to participate in value co-creation. Lauren advocated for businesses “reusing fabric through using resources, recycling everything and not just destroying trees...to use more products.” Rose combined *impact reduction* with *promoting longevity*, another

contextual factor that facilitates value co-creation, noting that sustainable fashion could involve “using as much of a fabric as possible in the production or the system of recycling at the end of a garment’s life...a well-made garment that will last a good amount of time.”

7.2.3 Conscious Consumption Approach

Conscious consumption approach was identified as the third pivotal facilitator of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. The approach encourages thoughtful, ethical, sustainable decision-making within planetary boundaries. Participants across the macro, meso, and micro levels emphasised that mindful consumption and awareness of a product’s origins are not merely personal ethical choices but fundamental drivers of value co-creation. The emphasis on a *conscious consumption approach* highlights its role in fostering transparency, sustainability, and mutual benefits, thereby enhancing value co-creation in the service ecosystem.

It is evident from the data that a *conscious consumption approach* is critical to the co-creation of value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Micro-level consumers’ mindful consumption choices influence meso-level businesses and retailers to adopt sustainable practices in production. This dynamic creates a positive feedback loop: as the meso level responds to the micro level’s demands for sustainability and transparency, they enhance competitiveness and brand loyalty, while the micro level gains access to garments that reflect their personal values associated with sustainability. The macro level can further facilitate value co-creation by providing the framework, rules and regulations that ensure conscious consumption and living within planetary boundaries. Table 17 summarises the *conscious consumption approach* across the three levels.

Table 17: Description of Conscious Consumption Approach

Conscious Consumption Approach	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
An approach that encourages thoughtful, ethical, sustainable decision-making within planetary boundaries	Promoting and implementing guidelines and policies that encourage mindful consumption and adherence to planetary limits	Making business decisions that consider sustainable production and consumption	Making personal decisions about consuming consciously and ethically; personal activism for sustainability-led initiatives and principles

7.2.3.1 Macro-Level Conscious Consumption Approach

At the macro level, the *conscious consumption approach* was characterised as promoting and implementing guidelines and policies that encourage mindful consumption and adherence to planetary limits. Daniel stated, “To drive real change, business, government, and civil society need to align efforts through a shared vision and metrics. Without integration, efforts remain fragmented and lack scalability.” He further added, “Collaboration across sectors is vital. Smaller countries like New Zealand are better positioned to create synergies between government, businesses, and civil society due to closer networks and less polarisation.” This reflects the role macro-level actors can play in facilitating value co-creation with a *conscious consumption approach*.

Participants emphasised the importance of the *conscious consumption approach* at the meso and micro levels, which should be shaped and guided by macro-level actions. Abigail stated, “There’s an inherent conflict between overproduction and sustainability. Even brands pushing sustainability often fail to address their own contribution to overconsumption.” Daniel added, “We need to go beyond voluntary action. Businesses respond most effectively to regulatory requirements, such as mandated reporting or environmental compliance laws.” With respect to the micro level, Amelia mentioned, “Consumers demand sustainability but are unwilling to pay the true cost of sustainable practices. This underscores the need for macro-level regulatory intervention to standardise costs across the market.”

7.2.3.2 Meso-Level Conscious Consumption Approach

The *conscious consumption approach* at the meso level was identified as making business decisions that consider sustainable production and consumption. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, stated, “The mere fact that we are consuming, we are consumers, means [as] the byproduct of that there is some unsustainable element always going to be there, right? But we can do it better. So, let’s look at what we can do better in manufacturing and producing and working with our customers, to provide them with a better solution to consumerism.” She added, “We want to shift how people purchase things – changing the mindset from buying trends to buying quality and sustainability ... [and] providing consumers with a better solution to being part of fashion while reducing unsustainable elements.” Rony, Head of Design at the sustainable fashion retailer, stated, “The sustainable option should be the standard. It shouldn’t be a selling point but just part of how we operate every day.”

The *conscious consumption approach* at the meso level also involved focusing on the consumer or the micro level and building awareness of sustainability and sustainable fashion through marketing communications. Ava, Head of Operations, said, “When we communicate with our retail customers, we ensure they understand that our products are made locally and responsibly, creating trust and alignment with their conscious consumption values.” Luna, Head of Brand Communication, shared, “Our retail customers are buying into our values. They want sustainable and ethical production, and we provide that.” She also mentioned, “We consider the consumer in every decision...all our communications talk about zero waste production, where the yarns are from, or educate them on what makes our production sustainable.” Luna shared how they assist their consumers in being more sustainable: “We want people to receive the product, and they know what they can do...they’re educated on what they do with the packaging, what they do with the swing tag, what they do with...everything has to be considered by us rather than them.” She reiterated, “Everything we do has an extra step added

to it. We want to make it easier for people to make sustainable choices by ensuring that our packaging, processes, and communication educate them [consumers] on what to do with their products after use.” She reflected, “Our customers want to participate in sustainable practices but often lack the tools or knowledge. We make it easier for them by offering clear guidance on recycling and mending their products.” These statements reflect how a commitment to integrating sustainability into production, educating consumers, and encouraging change in consumption habits, i.e., a *conscious consumption approach* at the meso level facilitated value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

7.2.3.3 Micro-Level Conscious Consumption Approach

Micro-level participants reinforced the significance of the *conscious consumption approach* to value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. They emphasised the need to consider the long-term implications of individual consumption decisions, which influenced their participation and engagement in value co-creation. Nikita said, “I want to always do the right thing” and commented on “making a change in my behaviour of how I consume things.” Sandra shared, “I guess it’s about being like I said, sort of educated and aware before you purchase something. And being aware of the consequences when you purchase something that you know is not sustainable and effective.” Robert stated that “Thinking consciously about the resources we’re using, and the life those resources will have...looking at the entire process, rather than a singular outcome.” Kelly connected ethical consumption with futureproofing, stating that it involved “Using as little as needed...making as little impact on people, on the planet as possible.”

An important facet of the *conscious consumption approach*, identified within the micro level participants, was *provenance*, which advanced value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem by focusing on the origins and production conditions of the garments. Briar commented that “...where it’s made, and how it’s made, and for what purpose” are some of the

questions she thinks about before purchasing garments. Amelia shared that sustainable fashion to her involved “the entire supply chain being transparent and fair...knowing where your clothes come from and who made them, ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions.” Sandra connected *provenance* with *durability* and personal values in consumption, considering factors such as whether a garment is “handmade”, how workers are compensated, and whether the product is long-lasting. By evaluating these aspects, micro-level participants facilitated value co-creation by supporting the meso-level businesses and retailers that prioritise ethical practices and produce sustainable garments.

Another facet of the *conscious consumption approach* identified at the micro level was *personal activism*, which referred to the participants’ effort, through engagement or resistance, to support a sustainable or ethical cause, which often translated into supporting or opposing a retailer or business by ‘voting with their wallet’ as consumers. This is reflected in a statement by Summer: “I think the products that I choose to buy or the companies I even engage with, whether that’s online or in person, I’m really with by the dollar and with my attention, encouraging or denying how they can operate in the world. I think people have all the power, but we just don’t recognise that.”

Each micro-level participant reported a cause, associated with sustainability, that they were passionate about and which influenced most of their consumption decisions. For instance, Ben mentioned that he was passionate about worker’s rights. He said, “We have the power to say this brand is unsustainable and boycott them...as consumers, we choose what we want to buy. And so even one person can make a big impact. So, if you know that [fast fashion brands] have very bad worker rights, or they cause a lot of environmental damage, then don’t buy from there. Simple as that, and maybe advocate for it.” Participants also valued and chose to support businesses that had an embedded mission around sustainability, were transparent and potentially, did not indulge in greenwashing. *Personal activism* was also reported in the form

of supporting local New Zealand brands and businesses, and choosing New Zealand designed and made.

7.2.4 Summary of Facilitators

The data analysis identified three critical contextual factors – *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction*, and a *conscious consumption approach* – that facilitated value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. *Promoting longevity* fosters the development of durable, high-quality garments, extending product lifespans and reducing waste. At the macro level, it involved institutional frameworks and policies that encouraged extended product utility. The meso level facilitated value co-creation by integrating longevity into the design, manufacturing, and distribution, ensuring that garments remained functional and desirable over time. The micro level reinforced this by favouring garments that could be repaired, reused, or repurposed, thereby extending product lifespans by creating utility.

Impact reduction underscores the need to minimise environmental and social harm, which facilitates value co-creation in the ecosystem. Macro-level *impact reduction* involved developing systems to minimise impacts on people and the planet, by creating and enforcing government frameworks and policies to reduce impacts on environment and society. Meso-level actors integrated zero-waste methods, sustainable materials, and regenerative systems in their business practices to actively reduce their environmental and social impacts. At the micro level, mindful individual consumption decisions, such as purchasing fewer but better-quality garments, amplified *impact reduction* and thereby, facilitated value co-creation.

The *conscious consumption approach* encourages consumption that considers the origins, production methods, and lifecycle of garments. The macro level sets the norms, the meso level operationalises them, and the micro level upholds them. Collectively, these intertwined factors critically influence value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

7.3 Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation

Three inhibitors of value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem were identified in the data analysis. These were *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure* and *inadequate regulation*. These inhibitors, at each level, are summarised in Table 18.

Table 18: Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation

Inhibitors to Value Co-creation	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Accessibility	Lack of resources that make sustainability accessible to all	Difficulties in making sustainable fashion accessible; cost of producing and retailing sustainably made garments	Lack of easily accessible and affordable sustainable products and services for individual consumption; access to resources to be conscious consumers
Inadequate infrastructure	Lack of embedded infrastructure helping all actors to be sustainable	Infrastructural difficulties in producing and manufacturing sustainable garments	Individual action towards sustainability constrained by weak infrastructural support
Inadequate Regulation	Absence of standardised frameworks, legislation, and policies to address sustainability applicable to all actors	Weak and inconsistent sustainability-based regulations for businesses	Poor regulations and weak enforcement to allow consumers to live more sustainably

7.3.1 Accessibility

Accessibility was identified as the first inhibitor of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem and was strongly discussed by participants across all levels. It represents barriers to access to and availability of sustainable products, information on sustainability and sustainable fashion, and facilities that advance sustainability. This hindered participants from engaging fully in value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. A key aspect associated with *accessibility* was the high cost and unaffordability of sustainable products, such as garments, which directly inhibited value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem by creating a financial barrier.

Accessibility also extended to *inadequate infrastructure*, which further inhibits value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Participants across all three levels called upon the actors at the macro and meso levels to resolve issues linked to *accessibility*:

government and leaders by providing frameworks and foundations, and businesses and retailers by offering sustainably made products and transparently reporting their sustainability practices. Table 19 summarises *accessibility* as identified across the three levels in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Table 19: Description of Accessibility

Accessibility	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Barriers to availability and access to sustainable products, information, and facilities that advance sustainability	Lack of resources that make sustainability accessible to all	Difficulties in making sustainable fashion accessible; cost of producing and retailing sustainably made garments	Lack of easily accessible and affordable sustainable products and services for individual consumption; access to resources to be conscious consumers

7.3.1.1 Macro-Level Accessibility

Accessibility at the macro level was identified as the lack of resources that make sustainability accessible to all. Participants discussed *accessibility* challenges for the meso and micro levels, due to weak or missing support from the macro level. Collectively, participants called upon macro-level actors – government, leaders, and civil society – to provide access to both tangible and intangible resources that can advance sustainability and sustainable fashion.

Macro-level participants described how the geographical isolation and limited resources in New Zealand affected *accessibility* at the meso level. Grace stated, “New Zealand is geographically isolated, and that affects our ability to access global recycling programs or solutions easily. We’re often left to figure it out alone, and that’s costly.” She further mentioned, “I also think a lot of New Zealand labels are small to medium enterprises, and often don’t have the resources that other brands might have overseas...if we’re going to create sustainable solutions, often it means we have to do it ourselves, which is a lot more limiting.” Participants also highlighted other *accessibility*-associated challenges for the meso level. For instance, Sophia highlighted, “It’s very expensive to make sustainable fashion in New Zealand. The

factories aren't here, and so creating an affordable, sustainable option becomes financially unsustainable for the brand itself." Grace stated, "Small businesses want to do the right thing, but they're often playing catch-up. They don't have the tools, expertise, or funding to integrate sustainability."

Macro-level participants elaborated on cost-related considerations, associated with *accessibility*, for the micro level, which affected their engagement and participation in value co-creation. For instance, Scarlett stated, "Sustainable fashion is expensive. I'm sure I speak for others as well, it's easier for me to buy a \$20 t-shirt than to fit in a \$100 ethically made, sustainably produced in New Zealand t-shirt in my budget". This price disparity prevented micro-level participants from engaging with sustainable brands and products, thereby limiting the reciprocal exchange necessary for value co-creation. Grace commented that sustainable products "are not very accessible in terms of pricing for students or young jobbers", highlighting how economic constraints inhibit younger consumers in the micro level from making sustainable consumption choices and, consequently, the co-creation of value within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Accessibility was linked to *inadequate infrastructure*, the second inhibitor that hindered value co-creation. Grace shared, "I think as a community or as a country, the best thing that we can do...is to create infrastructure here that localises the industry...so there isn't that huge cost but also an accessibility to goods." The absence of local infrastructure elevates costs and limits product availability, preventing seamless interaction between meso and micro levels, enabled by the macro level, which is necessary for value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

7.3.1.2 Meso-Level Accessibility

Accessibility at the meso level was identified as difficulties in making sustainable fashion accessible and specifically, the cost of producing and retailing sustainably made garments.

Participants spoke about two key issues associated with *accessibility* that inhibited the meso level's ability to co-create value. The first issue was the high cost of making sustainable garments and the second was the challenge in justifying that cost to consumers to make sustainable fashion more mainstream and scalable. Ava, Head of Operations, mentioned, "Things that are sustainable, and ethical, tend to be more expensive, which is ironic, you know, when it's more of a natural product, but because it's not mass produced, therefore, it's got a higher price." Rony, Head of Design, added, "It's very expensive to make clothes in New Zealand...consumers don't understand and are comparing it to clothes that are made offshore for a lot less money. That's a challenge." Luna, Head of Brand Communication, commented that "Consumers don't understand the true cost of a garment...we're used to the [fast fashion retailers] model, where you pay \$20, and the sleeves fall off. But sustainable fashion doesn't work like that, and it's hard to convince people."

Accessibility, at the meso level, was also discussed in relation to the shrinking fashion industry in New Zealand and retailer dependence on offshore operational facilities. Such challenges affected the environmental impact of the retailer or business and as a result, made sustainably and ethically produced garments expensive. Ava stated, "The industry has shrunk and disappeared in our country because it wasn't economical. Now we have to export yarn to China for processing and dyeing, which is a huge ethical dilemma, but there isn't any other way." She further added, "Freight is one of the biggest challenges...we've made massive reductions to our carbon footprint by shifting to sea freight, but we're still reliant on air freight to meet demand, and that's our reality as a small business at the bottom of the world." Rony also commented, "We can't produce everything here because there's no infrastructure left. And that forces us into these unsustainable pathways like freight and offshore processing."

Participants also spoke about the lack of government and structural support in relation to *accessibility*, which restricted the meso level's ability to participate in value co-creation in the

sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Ava noted, “Government policies don’t incentivise local production. The cost of doing everything ethically here is enormous, but there’s no help or incentives for businesses to keep it local.” She also mentioned, “The fact that there’s no tariffs, no import duties on anything anymore, really doesn’t help us. It’s hard for local businesses to compete, and consumers are price driven.” Rony said, “There needs to be greater assistance from the government to keep the garment industry alive in New Zealand. It’s shrunk so much, and there’s so much potential for it to support jobs and the economy.”

Meso-level participants acknowledged that high costs and *accessibility* hindered their ability to co-create value, specifically with micro-level actors. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer mentioned, “I think accessibility and affordability are key challenges in making sustainable fashion more widespread”. Similarly, Luna noted that while consumers are “sold on the story” and “so invested”, they “simply can’t afford it.” She further emphasised, “I’d love to see accessibility improve. People want to buy things like our product. They love the story, but they simply can’t afford it. It’s a huge barrier for many.” This disconnect between consumer interest and purchasing ability disrupts value co-creation, as the businesses and retailers are unable to engage consumers fully due to affordability barriers. Rony reflected on this challenge from the production side: “There are challenges when you’re trying to convince ... people’s understanding of garment manufacturing has been so warped in the last few decades that their perspective on like what a garment should cost is really unrealistic.” This mismatch in micro level expectations and meso level’s production realities inhibits value co-creation, as consumers opt for affordable alternatives, and retailers struggle to convey the benefits of sustainably produced garments.

7.3.1.3 Micro-Level Accessibility

Accessibility at the micro level can be described as the lack of easily accessible and affordable sustainable products and services for individual consumption; access to resources to be

conscious consumers. Nikita elaborated on *accessibility* as an inhibitor to value co-creation. She stated, “Accessibility is a major issue. Sustainable fashion is often not available in local stores, and buying online can be expensive due to shipping costs. It limits my ability to buy sustainable products.” She further expressed that, in New Zealand, despite frequent discussions on sustainability and sustainable fashion, consumers faced “very limited options”, leading to “a huge shortage” of sustainable brands promoting their products. This scarcity impeded micro-level participants like Nikita from participating in co-creating value, as they are unable to access or contribute to sustainable consumption practices.

All micro-level participants mentioned that affordability often becomes a hurdle in making conscious consumption decisions, and restricts their participation in value co-creation. Despite reporting a preference for sustainable and ethical products, the higher prices made it difficult to commit completely, especially under the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis and inflation. Jayden said, “So it’s a hard one. Because as much as sustainability is a great thing, I kind of understand that it’s not always affordable, and it’s not always accessible to everybody.” Millie stated, “Price is a huge factor for why people don’t opt for sustainable products, which is understandable because, to live, you need to eat. And if you don’t have the bare minimum and with groceries being so expensive, food in New Zealand is just really expensive, then people can’t be more sustainable no matter how much you want to be.” Imaan shared, “I have a very old car. And it’s not eco-friendly. I would like a hybrid, but that wouldn’t be within my budget range.”

Jayden reflected that being a student, “Sometimes purchasing sustainably...can be more expensive”, highlighting how financial limitations restrict conscious consumption decisions and thereby, value co-creation. Alexis commented, “I think cost is a big barrier. A lot of sustainable fashion is just out of reach for the average consumer, especially with the current economic situation. It makes it hard to make those choices.” Sandra mentioned, “I think there

is a lack of affordable sustainable options. It's hard to justify spending so much more on something just because it's labelled as sustainable, especially when you're on budget."

This was also reinforced by Adele, who stated, "Generally, the companies that are ethically conscious and sustainable are smaller companies and therefore their products and services cost more, and as a poor student, that's a challenge." She added, "The fashion industry needs to make sustainability more mainstream. Right now, it feels like a niche market that not everyone can access and afford." This niche status of sustainable fashion limits micro-level engagement and thus, inhibits the collaborative processes essential to value co-creation.

7.3.2 Inadequate Infrastructure

The second inhibitor to value co-creation identified in the data analysis was *inadequate infrastructure*. In the context of the sustainable fashion service ecosystem explored in this study, *inadequate infrastructure* referred to weak or absent tangible resources and facilities such as recycling centres, efficient logistical networks, and effective waste management systems, which hindered value co-creation amongst the actors. It negatively influenced value co-creation by creating barriers between actors across the three levels. For instance, micro-level participants faced difficulty returning or sending discarded or damaged garments to sustainable fashion businesses and retailers at the meso level for repair and reuse due to slow or ineffective postal services and inadequate garment collection facilities. Participants across the macro, meso, and micro levels also highlighted that *inadequate infrastructure* in New Zealand impedes the advancement of sustainability and sustainable fashion, thereby obstructing value co-creation.

An important component of *inadequate infrastructure*, discussed by participants across the three levels, was *mobility* in the form of public transport and commercial transport systems, that were deemed expensive and ill-managed. This was a critical barrier to value co-creation

as it constrained the movement of people and goods, essential to the ability of participants to make sustainable choices.

Another critical issue within *inadequate infrastructure* was the challenges in the lifecycle management of garments. Both macro- and meso-level participants discussed how this deficiency constrained sustainable practices. Table 20 summarises *inadequate infrastructure* as identified and discussed across the three levels.

Table 20: Description of Inadequate Infrastructure

Inadequate Infrastructure	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Weak or absent tangible resources and facilities, hindering progress towards sustainability	Lack of system-embedded infrastructure supporting all actors to be sustainable	Infrastructural difficulties in producing and manufacturing sustainable garments	Individual action towards sustainability constrained due to weak infrastructural support

7.3.2.1 Macro-Level Inadequate Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure at the macro level referred to the lack of system-embedded infrastructure supporting all actors to be sustainable in their activities and practices. Scarlett mentioned, “We still don’t have the infrastructure here in New Zealand for circular solution.” Grace stated, “We are still really struggling with end-of-life solutions for garments. So, I think there’s a significant lack of infrastructure in New Zealand that brands need to work through if they are going to take meaningful steps towards sustainability and product longevity.”

Participants at the macro level highlighted that *inadequate infrastructure* at the meso level was a critical barrier to sustainable solutions and thus to value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Grace commented, “I think that the biggest thing is the lack of infrastructure that we have in New Zealand. We haven’t created recycling plants, circular solutions generally. So, a lot of the times, brands actually do want to do the right thing when clothes have come to the end of their lives...there isn’t really an option for them to close the loop.” This absence of recycling plants and other waste management solutions in New Zealand

hampers the efforts of retailers and businesses to ‘close the loop’ at the end of a garment’s life, leading to frustration and disengagement among both meso-level and micro-level actors eager to adopt sustainable practices. Scarlett elaborated, “I think for a lot of people, it probably feels quite overwhelming and also disappointing when you think, ‘Oh, we might actually be able to close the loop’, and then you’re not able to do that. And so, it sort of sets you back.” This instance of *inadequate infrastructure* not only impedes the meso level’s capacity to implement sustainable business practices, but also disrupts the co-creation of value with consumers (micro level) seeking sustainable options.

Macro-level participants emphasised the need for government support in establishing industry-wide facilities to enable these processes. As Scarlett remarked, “If we’re to be sustainable or if brands are to be sustainable, we have to consider the sustainability of the industry, not just in terms of the environment...creating a bit more infrastructure with jobs would be really good and would go a long way for making them a bit more circular.” She further added, “We need investment in plants to process product waste. For instance, having textile recycling infrastructure here would mean businesses could create closed-loop systems, rather than just shipping everything offshore and losing visibility at the end of life.” Without the macro-level facilitation of the necessary systems and frameworks, meso-level organisations remain constrained, hindering their ability to engage in effective sustainability efforts and ultimately, limiting their capacity to co-create value.

Scarlett also highlighted, “There’s no perfect kind of circular supply of shipping containers...over the period of COVID, the cost of shipping containers was 10 times the price. So, the transport costs are massive.” She also noted “...the issues around scarcity...and in New Zealand, we don’t have a lot of capability manufacturing infrastructure to deal with that.” Participants at the macro level highlighted that exorbitant commercial transport costs hindered the meso-level sustainable fashion retailers and other businesses from operating sustainably

and economically, inhibiting their ability to offer sustainable garments at affordable prices to the micro level and as a result, effectively participate in value co-creation.

7.3.2.2 Meso-Level Inadequate Infrastructure

Participants at the meso level discussed *inadequate infrastructure* in relation to the lack of facilities and resources that support businesses to create and retail sustainable products, such as garments. The lack of infrastructure affects the production and manufacturing of garments, making it difficult for the sustainable fashion retailer to fulfil their sustainability goals. Ava, Head of Operations, commented, “The only reason why we don’t order yarn fully made in New Zealand is because it’s not available. The possum merino silk yarn we use for our biggest turnover brand is all New Zealand made, 100% made here. Whereas with fashion products, the merino fibre is grown here but gets exported for dyeing, processing, and spinning into yarn before being re-imported as finished yarn ready for production. It’s just a lack of infrastructure locally to handle the entire process.” It was inferred from the participant interviews that due to the lack of macro-level enabled infrastructure, the retailer was driven to be self-reliant and found their way around this weakness.

7.3.2.3 Micro-Level Inadequate Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure was identified as individual action towards sustainability being constrained by weak infrastructural support at the micro level. Participants shared their concerns on the growing need for better infrastructure to be able to live more sustainably. Sandra reflected, “I do worry in terms of when I think of infrastructure and communities, sustainable cities, when I see sort of the way Auckland is growing. It feels like in my own area, there’s a lot of apartments and townhouses going up where there’s one street of traffic to the motorway. So, knowing more bodies coming into that community is going to mean more traffic, more cars, more fuel, more energy, ... it sort of doesn’t feel like a long-term solution to the population increase.” She further mentioned, “it is sort of frustrating being in a community and

seeing the changes happening and kind of feeling like you have to move further away...then you have to move further from jobs, and you have to drive. So, thinking of the way the local government is working with housing and in the community...it feels unsustainable long term.”

Discussion of *inadequate infrastructure* at the micro level participants focused on the impact it had on everyday decisions directed towards being more sustainable consumers. One of the challenges associated with *inadequate infrastructure* was the ability to recycle or upcycle old or unwanted items such as furniture and garments. Monica shared, “I wish the resources were better in this country. I wish there were more ways that I could do better because I just had no option with [the] furniture, like I just had to chuck it out. And it felt terrible. There was literally no alternative.” Kelly stated, “I think there’s been a lot of changes with what can be recycled in New Zealand lately. And I guess that maybe [that] hasn’t been communicated to everyone, or people aren’t looking into it. And so, I guess in those situations, there’s been a few times where I’ll be like, I don’t know, I’ll just put it in the bin.”

Mobility related issues, specifically inefficient public transport, were discussed strongly at the micro level. Alexis shared personal challenges with public transport: “Ever since I’ve had my car, I’ve not caught the bus...there are lots of infrastructure issues, especially around public transport. In terms of wait times...there’s not enough people catching the buses so there’s not enough on, and then when they’re cancelled, a 30-minute wait is a really long time to sit and wait at the bus stop.” Lauren too shared her apprehension in using public transport. She mentioned, “It’s like you have to take two buses or a bus and a train. Or three buses. I don’t want to do [that], I’d much rather drive there. It’s like waking up earlier and all that sort of stuff to think about...I like 40 minutes’ drive in the car. And I’m just straight there.” Elizabeth shared, “I find it a bit ridiculous when I walk all the way to the bus to go to university, and there are no buses, and they always cancel at peak hour [in] mornings.” These infrastructural challenges

discouraged micro-level actors, such as Alexis and Lauren, from using a sustainable way to commute, limiting their engagement in sustainable practices.

Millie said, “I find that public transport is not very reliable in Auckland. It’s not something that’s easily accessible for me. I have to actually drive to a bus station to even use a bus, especially in [bad] weather. So, getting from place to place is actually a little bit difficult. So, I do have to rely on a car.” She further added, “They could do better at their public transport system, incentivising people instead of fighting people for driving or you know, increasing fuel tax, which just seems like a money grab. They could do better at the public transport system; they could try to incentivise people to use public transport instead of just making people angry.”

Such *inadequate infrastructure* deterred micro-level participants from fully engaging and immersing themselves in a more sustainable way of living, and thus inhibited value co-creation.

7.3.3 Inadequate Regulation

Inadequate regulation, encompassing the rules, policies, and legislation governing sustainable practices in New Zealand, was the third significant inhibitor of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. The lack of standardised frameworks, paucity of rules, and ineffective enforcement hamper the efforts of consumers, businesses, and leaders to advance sustainability and thus inhibit value co-creation. Participants across all levels highlighted how *inadequate regulation* inhibited the co-creation of value. Table 21 summarises the description of *inadequate regulation*.

Table 21: Description of Inadequate Regulation

Inadequate Regulation	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Lack of frameworks, rules, and regulations in relation to sustainability	Absence of standardised framework, legislation, and policies to address sustainability applicable to all actors	Weak and inconsistent sustainability-based regulations for businesses	Poor regulations and weak enforcement at the consumer level to enable living more sustainably

7.3.3.1 Macro-Level Inadequate Regulation

Inadequate regulation at the macro level was identified as the absence of standardised frameworks, legislation, and policies to address sustainability applicable to all actors. Eleanor stated, “Government’s role is to develop that overarching framework and regulatory framework...setting goals, setting targets, and deliverables that New Zealand ought to be meeting in order to contribute to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals.” Scarlett emphasised, “Legislation and regulation and policy really drive the market.” However, *inadequate regulation* fails to provide adequate guidance and enforcement, inhibiting the market’s shift towards sustainable practices. Jack commented, “Government support for the fashion industry in New Zealand is limited. We don’t have clear guidance, incentives, or regulations to drive sustainability forward.” Amelia added, “There’s a lack of legislation around fashion manufacturing and fashion.” These statements reflect how the lack of regulation, which is expected from the macro level, inhibits or restricts value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Participants also shared how *inadequate regulation* at the macro level impacts the meso level and thus affects their ability to co-create value. For instance, Scarlett noted, “We need some regulation, we need a framework for regulation around it. That gives businesses surety of investment. For instance, in Europe, from 2025, textiles are banned from landfills, but in New Zealand, we still don’t have such measures.” Amelia stated, “Legislation around product stewardship programmes, where companies are responsible for the products and the entire lifecycle, would be a game-changer. But right now, it’s voluntary in New Zealand.”

Amelia spoke about the need for a global governance body that focuses on sustainability in the fashion industry: “There has been conversation globally that there needs to be like a single governance body that standardises sustainability in the fashion industry. I think it comes from the fact that there are so many agents and so many participants in the industry; there are too

many definitions of sustainability in general. I think the industry just needs somebody who sets accountability and maybe manages legislation.” The absence of a centralised regulatory body and standardised definitions creates confusion and inconsistency, hindering coordinated efforts towards sustainability in the fashion industry. Amelia also explained, “There is no due diligence legislation. So, it makes it easy for companies here in New Zealand to import goods with unknown origins, that were made with unknown working conditions.” This regulatory gap allows unethical practices to persist, undermining trust and transparency between the micro and meso level. This is also linked to *a conscious consumption approach*, which is essential to value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Commenting on what is required to advance sustainable fashion in New Zealand, Amelia stated, “...definitely legislation. Having a product stewardship programme where companies are responsible for the products and the entire lifecycle – that will be a game changer. If companies have to foot the bill for the environmental impact they produce in fashion, that will be a game changer.” The lack of such legislation inhibited the meso level from fully engaging in sustainable practices and interacting with the micro level to co-create value. In relation to retailers and businesses trying to become sustainable, Grace mentioned, “I think [regulation] would definitely be helpful. Almost like a set of regulations that you still abide by if you want to be a fashion brand and kind of like a bit of a playbook as to how to be sustainable.” *Inadequate regulation* leaves the meso level without a roadmap for implementing sustainability, inhibiting their ability to contribute to and benefit from the value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

7.3.3.2 Meso-Level Inadequate Regulation

Inadequate regulation at the meso level referred to weak and inconsistent sustainability-based regulations for businesses, which prevented them from operating more sustainably. Although the participants did not discuss in depth the lack of standardised frameworks or rules and

legislations for businesses, in relation to sustainability, they did talk about existing practices that affected retailers in meeting their sustainability goals, and which could be abolished through regulation. For instance, Rony, Head of Design at the sustainable fashion retailer, said, “I do think that there should be a greater tax on clothing imports. Or I don’t know the best way to achieve that kind of thing, but something that gets the concept of quality and longevity across to people.” He further elaborated, “The fact that there’s no tariffs, there’s no import duties on anything anymore, really doesn’t help us. So yeah, our customers do have to pay a premium for what we do, because we’re competing against cheap imported garments that are made cheaply, and not necessarily ethically or sustainably, even though they may advertise that they are.” The absence of regulatory measures such as import taxes on unsustainable clothing allows cheap, low-quality products to flood the market, making it difficult for sustainable retailers and businesses (meso level) to compete and engage consumers in value co-creation based on sustainability principles.

Participants also shared that they relied on actors at the macro level to voice their concerns and push for regulatory change focusing on sustainability in the fashion industry in New Zealand. Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, mentioned, “Creating industry leads like [civil society organisation] has been a positive step towards creating parameters and better solutions...[them] being the conduit between industry and government. I’d like to see that flourish and grow, being led by the right values.” She further stated, “As a business, we pay to be a member of [civil society organisation] for them to advocate with government for us. They are banging the drum and making noise in a way that we couldn’t do on our own.”

7.3.3.3 Micro-Level Inadequate Regulation

Participants at the micro level also expressed the need for stronger and stricter regulations, highlighting how *inadequate regulation* inhibits value co-creation. It was identified as poor regulations and weak enforcement at the micro level, which resulted in consumers getting away with unsustainable practices. Alex commented, “I’m sceptical of the real ability for us to cause change simply by the demand side of things. I think you might get a little bit of a shift, but actually, you’d need to introduce regulations. That’s going to do the majority of the heavy work because people are going to do what’s easiest and cheapest generally.” Robert mentioned, “It would be great if things were more clear on that front. But I definitely agree that the government has a larger role in sustainability, because businesses will just sell what people will buy, then people will buy things that are cheap, and convenient, and easy.” He further added, “But if that's not sustainable, then either a massive education campaign should be run, probably by the government, to let people know that what they are doing as consumers is not good enough. And they should look for these things in brands that they're buying from, or, like, take it back to the source and say, ‘No, you can't make this kind of plastic anymore. That's against the law’. And then companies have to adjust the way that they're making things and then consumers have to adjust the way they're buying this seems like the right solution.” Such a lack of regulatory pressure, expected from the macro level, allows unsustainable practices at the micro level to continue unchecked, inhibiting consumers from moving towards sustainability and thereby, co-creating value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Alex stated, “I think it’s unrealistic to put all that responsibility on the consumer. I think you need to put, as a society, regulations on industry.” Without regulatory intervention, the burden falls disproportionately on consumers to make sustainable choices, which is insufficient to co-create value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

Adele expressed that she would like “more stringent regulation around [sustainability]” and noted “It’s kind of finding a balance – making sure that the products that we allow into our

country for consumers to have, meet a set of regulations that sort of align with the clean and green image that New Zealand has always portrayed for itself.” She further added, “I think without proper regulation, sustainable fashion will struggle to become mainstream.” *Inadequate regulation* prevented sustainable practices from being widely adopted, and thus inhibited the meso and micro levels from interacting and engaging to co-create value. Robert mentioned, “It’s unrealistic to expect the industry to be self-regulating, but I would love to see that happen. And I think government regulation can help with that.” The reliance on voluntary industry self-regulation is insufficient, and the lack of governmental regulatory frameworks inhibits the establishment of consistent sustainable practices essential for value co-creation.

Besides garments, participants discussed other areas where they expected regulation based on sustainability. For instance, Alexis said, “I’d definitely like to see more regulation around packaging and advertising. That’s pretty big.” *Inadequate regulation* in these areas allowed misleading practices, such as greenwashing, to persist, undermining consumer (micro level) trust and inhibiting the transparent interactions necessary for value co-creation. Ben said, “We need stricter regulations to ensure that the materials and chemicals used in fashion are safe and sustainable.” Charlotte commented, “There should be laws that hold companies accountable for their environmental impact.” The lack of accountability measures, emerging from *inadequate infrastructure*, prevented the micro level from trusting retailers and businesses at the meso level and effectively engaging in value co-creation.

Some micro-level participants commented on *inadequate regulation* around workers’ conditions and well-being within the fashion industry. For instance, Alex stated, “I would like to see regulation which, from the labour side of things, pushes this concept of a universal minimum, wage and universal worker rights. We’re in New Zealand, it should be illegal, basically, [to] buy a product from a brand which doesn’t have transparent and universal worker rights.” In relation to worker rights and well-being, *inadequate regulation* allowed unethical

labour practices to persist, inhibiting value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

7.3.4 Summary of Inhibitors

Accessibility – stemming from high costs, limited availability, and its link to *inadequate infrastructure* – was identified as a significant inhibitor of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. This barrier prevented the micro level from engaging fully with sustainable products and practices, hindered the meso level from reaching and satisfying consumer needs for sustainable brands and products, and disrupted the collaborative relationship essential for co-creating value.

Inadequate infrastructure was an important inhibitor of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. The absence of essential facilities and resources prevented effective interaction and collaboration between consumers, businesses, and other stakeholder to co-create value. Addressing these infrastructural barriers is crucial for enabling value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, where all actors can actively participate and benefit.

Inadequate regulation was identified as the third significant inhibitor to value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. The absence of standardised frameworks, inadequate legislation, and insufficient enforcement mechanisms, provided by the macro level, prevented the meso level from fully committing to sustainable business practices, and hindered the micro level from making informed, ethical consumption choices. This regulatory vacuum undermines trust, transparency, and collaboration amongst the actors in the service ecosystem, obstructing the collective efforts necessary for advancing sustainability and sustainable fashion, and thereby co-creating value.

7.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically examined the contextual factors influencing value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, drawing on a multi-level analysis of macro-, meso-, and micro-level actors. It identified six factors, segmented into facilitators and inhibitors, that either enabled or impeded value co-creation.

The facilitators – *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction*, and a *conscious consumption approach* – emphasise the interconnected roles of policy frameworks, sustainable business practices, and individual consumption behaviour. *Promoting longevity* underscored the importance of durable, high-quality goods, specifically garments, in reducing waste and enhancing utility. *Impact reduction* reflected efforts across the three levels to mitigate environmental and social harm, fostering sustainability and value co-creation. The *conscious consumption approach* advocated for informed, ethical decision making, aligning consumption and production patterns with planetary limits. Collectively, these contextual factors exemplified the ecosystem's potential to co-create value by integrating sustainability into production, consumption, and governance.

Conversely, the inhibitors – *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure*, and *inadequate regulation* – highlight critical barriers. *Accessibility* issues, such as high costs and limited availability of sustainable options, disproportionately hindered micro-level participation and disrupted meso-level capacity to engage ethically oriented consumers. *Inadequate infrastructure*, comprising the absence of recycling facilities and logistical inefficiencies, prevented actors within the service ecosystem from completing sustainable actions and practices. *Inadequate regulation* reflected the absence of robust policy enforcement, which specifically left the meso-level retailers and businesses and micro-level consumers with insufficient guidance and accountability mechanisms to advance sustainability.

The findings presented in this chapter illuminate the complexity of fostering value co-creation within a sustainable service ecosystem, where progress necessitates addressing systemic barriers while leveraging enablers to co-create value.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8.1 Overview

This study identified how actors co-create value, the contextual factors affecting value co-creation, and the development of multi-level value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem framework. The key findings in relation to the two research questions, which were

RQ1 - How do actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value?

RQ2 - How do contextual factors influence value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem?

provided important foundations for the proposed framework. Specifically, this study determined how the actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem engaged, interacted, and collaborated to co-create value, and what contextual factors facilitated and inhibited value co-creation in the service ecosystem. The discussion of the specific findings relies on pivotal extant research in marketing, specifically service marketing, pertaining to value co-creation grounded in the service-dominant logic. Firstly, this study identified four pathways to value co-creation – *knowledge*, *future orientation*, *guardianship* and *regeneration*. It also identified seven contextual factors – three facilitators and four inhibitors – that influenced value co-creation. Collectively, these form the tenets of multi-level value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem framework, which is discussed in this chapter.

This chapter is organised in the following manner. First, the multi-level value co-creation in sustainable fashion service ecosystem framework is presented and discussed. Thereafter, each section provides an elaboration on each dimension of the framework. These are followed by a discussion of the contextual factors that influence value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem in conjunction with existing research.

8.2 Multi-level Value Co-creation in a Sustainable Fashion Service Ecosystem

A significant contribution of this study is the development of a multi-level value co-creation in sustainable fashion service ecosystem framework (Figure 2), based on the evidence from the findings. The proposed framework represents how value is co-created in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem with multiple stakeholders, situated across three levels – macro, meso, and micro – of participant aggregation. This framework explains the value co-creation process in a sustainable fashion context, comprising multiple actors at different levels of participant aggregation, and illustrates the complexities of this process, including the contextual factors that influence the process of value co-creation.

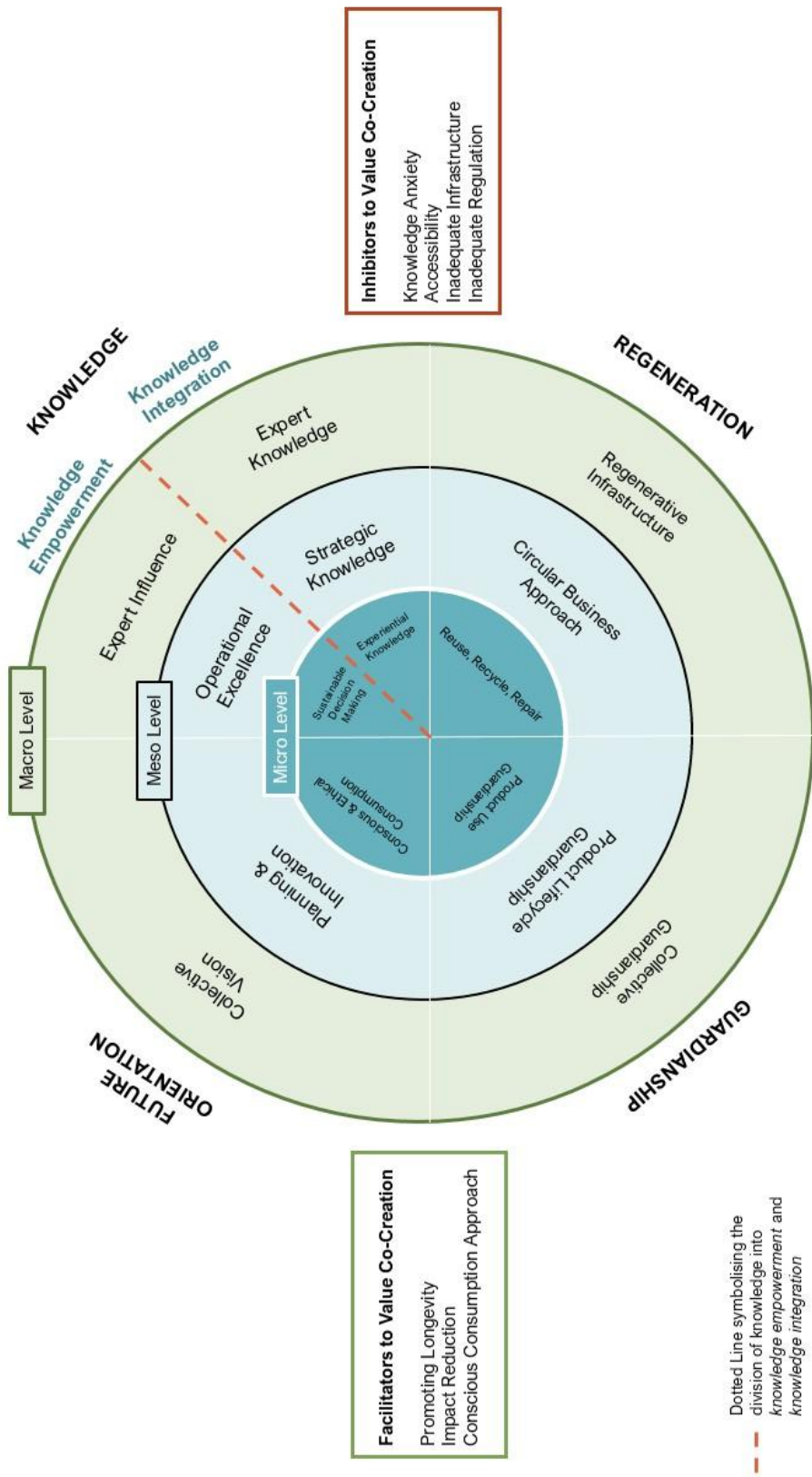


Figure 2: Framework of Multi-Level Value Co-Creation in Sustainable Fashion Service Ecosystem

The proposed framework comprises three rings, in the form of concentric circles, where the outer ring represents the macro level, the intermediate ring represents the meso level and the micro level is represented in the centre circle. The structure is further segmented into four quadrants, each representing a pathway through which actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value. These are *knowledge*, *future orientation*, *guardianship* and *regeneration*. *Knowledge* is presented as two separate segments – *knowledge empowerment* and *knowledge integration*. External to the main circular structure, there are two boxes representing the contextual factors affecting value co-creation in the service ecosystem. To the left are the facilitators of value co-creation, which are the positive influences that promote value co-creation. These include *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction*, and *a conscious consumption approach*. To the right of the circular structure are the inhibitors of value co-creation, which include *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure*, and *inadequate regulation*. *Knowledge anxiety* is also placed with the inhibitors of value co-creation, as it impeded engagement and collaboration between the actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem due to the lack of information, misinformation or excessive information pertaining to sustainability and sustainable fashion. These facilitators and inhibitors affect value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

This proposed framework shows that value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem is a complex process, involving multiple actors, and is influenced by individual actions, organisational competencies, and systemic frameworks. It emphasises that to foster value co-creation, multiple levels of participation must be considered, ranging from personal choices to institutional policies, and the interplay of enabling and disabling contextual factors must be recognised. In essence, the proposed framework illustrates a holistic view of value co-creation, which involves the alignment of micro, meso, and macro levels, along with

understanding the facilitators and inhibitors crucial for the co-creation of value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

A fundamental premise of S-D logic is that value cannot be created or delivered by a single actor (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a). Instead, actors are only capable of proposing value. Instead, value is collaboratively created (Vargo & Lusch, 2008b) through a system of interdependent actors governed by shared rules, norms and, institutions (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). According to S-D logic, every social and economic actor serves as a resource integrator, actively engages in value co-creation, and operates within interconnected systems of service exchange (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Although multiple actors participate in the value co-creation process, it always includes the beneficiary, who remains essential in determining value from a phenomenological perspective, informed by both usage and the broader social context (Edvardsson et al., 2012; Edvardsson et al., 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2008b).

S-D logic emphasises how value is co-created within dynamic contexts that underpin the emergence and transformation of service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). This study explored a service ecosystem, which has been described as a “relatively self-contained, self-adjusting system of resource integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange” (Vargo & Akaka, 2012, p. 207). The proposed framework adopted an ecosystem perspective, as it was vital to consider the holistic dynamics of complex systems, which demands a shift away from a firm-centric standpoint towards the broader context of an interconnected world (Gummesson, 2008). Such an approach made comprehending a complex environment like sustainable fashion easier by employing systems-level thinking (Lusch & Spohrer, 2012). Each instance of resource integration, service provision, and value co-creation alters the ecosystem’s character, reshaping the context for interaction and influencing subsequent value co-creation outcomes (Chandler & Vargo, 2011). Consequently, to establish the distinct social contexts conducive to value co-creation, it was

important to examine how resources were integrated across different systemic levels – macro, meso, and micro (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Edvardsson et al., 2011). Although these levels are conceptually separate, they function interdependently within the larger system (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

The proposed framework aligns with S-D logic's emphasis on value co-creation within service ecosystems, where multiple actors integrate resources to generate mutual value (Vargo & Lusch, 2016a). It also demonstrates the importance of dynamic, multi-level interactions with service ecosystems (at macro, meso, and micro levels) (Field et al., 2021; Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). The multi-level value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem framework is now discussed in detail. First, each quadrant is described and discussed, followed by the contextual factors affecting value co-creation.

8.2.1 First Quadrant – Knowledge

Value in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem is co-created through *knowledge*, which is represented in the first quadrant. It is referred to as information or ‘know-how’ about sustainability and sustainable fashion. *Knowledge* was not only valued for its empowering capabilities but also served as a mechanism for value co-creation across the three levels of the service ecosystem. In this framework, *knowledge* has two components, *knowledge empowerment* and *knowledge integration*, which have been represented separately. *Knowledge empowerment* refers to how *knowledge* empowered actors across the three levels to fulfil their roles and responsibilities with regard to advancing sustainability and sustainable fashion, and thus co-create value in the service ecosystem. At the macro level, *knowledge empowerment* was identified as *expert influence*, as *knowledge* empowered the actors to fulfil their roles as ‘experts’ in the service ecosystem, and with that co-create value. *Operational excellence* is how *knowledge empowerment* is described at the meso level, since *knowledge* enabled the actors to

successfully work towards advancing sustainability through organisational practices. *Knowledge* for the micro-level actors empowered them towards *sustainable decision making*. *Knowledge integration* collectively represents the acquisition and sharing of *knowledge*. Actors across the three levels acquired *knowledge* from other actors and various resources in the service ecosystem, which led to *knowledge empowerment*. Sharing of *knowledge* occurred through interactions between the actors across the three levels, exposure to information, both actively and passively, and formal and informal *knowledge* networks. The type of *knowledge* shared depended on the actor's position in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. *Knowledge integration* at the macro level occurred through the dissemination of *expert knowledge*. At the meso level and micro level it was identified as *strategic knowledge* and *experiential knowledge*, respectively.

In S-D logic, knowledge has been described as a pivotal operant resource in the co-creation of value, enabling dynamic interactions between the actors within a service ecosystem. Service ecosystems have been conceptualised as systems of actors exchanging resources to co-create value. Knowledge is an important element in this process, which facilitates resource integration and coordination. Actors within these ecosystems exchange specialised competences, such as knowledge, to achieve mutual benefits (Vargo et al., 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Knowledge, as an operant resource, acts on other resources to create value instead of being consumed directly. In their inaugural paper, Vargo and Lusch (2004a) stated that operant resources, such as skills and knowledge, are the primary drivers of value creation in service exchange, moving away from the traditional goods-based paradigm (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2014). The proposed framework also identifies and validates that *knowledge* is an instrumental operant resource in value co-creation.

Knowledge empowerment and *knowledge integration*, as mechanisms for co-creation across the macro, meso, and micro levels, support the principle in S-D logic that value is co-created

through the integration of operant resources (knowledge and skills) among actors and that knowledge flow enables actors within service ecosystems to fulfil their roles effectively at each level (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2016b). *Knowledge empowerment*, as discussed in the proposed framework, demonstrates how operant resources enhance actors' abilities to contribute to value co-creation in specific roles or contexts (Vargo & Lusch, 2014). For instance, *expert influence* aligns with the institutional role of knowledge in shaping norms and practices, and enabling other actors to fulfil their roles in service ecosystems (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b, 2017). *Operational excellence* achieved through *knowledge* supports the notion that the meso-level actors act as resource integrators to achieve specific goals (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). At the micro level, *knowledge* empowers consumers in *sustainable decision making*, which resonates with value-in-use, wherein value emerges from how resources are utilised (Vargo & Lusch, 2004a, 2008b).

The acquisition and sharing of *knowledge*, described as *knowledge integration* in the proposed framework, aligns with resource integration within service ecosystems, which involves actors interacting to access and exchange resources. The nature of *knowledge integration* in the proposed framework – through interaction with other actors, active or passive exposure to information, and formal and informal *knowledge* networks – illustrates context-specific resource integration (Vargo et al., 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Dissemination of *expert knowledge* by macro-level actors serves as an institutional mechanism for advancing sustainability goals (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). *Strategic* and *experiential knowledge*, at the meso and micro levels respectively, resonate with the importance of context-specific knowledge sharing for enabling sustainable practices (Vargo et al., 2017).

8.2.2 Second Quadrant – Future Orientation

Actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-created value through *future orientation*, which reflects a shared commitment to sustainability that transcends individual interests and

focuses on the well-being of future generations. It refers to an approach that involves ‘doing good for the generations that are yet to come’. This implied that participants, across the three levels, were ‘thinking ahead, for self and others’ and engaging in sustainable and ethical behaviour that would have a positive impact in the future, as well as the present. At the macro level, *future orientation* is observed as a *collective vision* for advancing towards sustainability and is applicable to all actors. The sustainable fashion retailer’s focus on organisational *planning and innovation*, and consumers engaging with brands and adopting *conscious and ethical consumption* is how *future orientation* was characterised at the meso and micro levels, respectively. *Future orientation* is an approach, grounded in the strong relevance of advancing towards sustainability, that guides and encourages actors, across all three levels, leading to value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

At the macro level, *future orientation* is seen in a *collective vision* for a sustainable future for New Zealand, emphasising the need for systemic change. Actors highlighted the importance of the government in defining a sustainable future, setting goals, and creating frameworks that guide all actors towards unified action. They also firmly pushed for the government to provide a standardised and comprehensive definition and structure for sustainability for New Zealand. Macro-level actors’ observations about the lack of vision underscores the need for shared narratives that can mobilise collective efforts towards sustainability. By focusing on what the future looks like and why a sustainable one would be better, macro-level actors provide a shared purpose that aligns the actions and practices of actors across the three levels with broader societal goals. The emphasis on bringing people along and getting them to buy into the greater good reflects the need for institutional arrangements and shared meanings that facilitate resource integration and value creation for multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). Furthermore, the recognition of changing mindsets in younger generations indicates a shift in institutional logic within the service ecosystem. As macro-level actors noted, younger consumers are

increasingly ‘sustainability-conscious’ and can drive systemic change through their behaviours and choices. This shift aligns with the formation of institutional arrangements, according to S-D logic, where actors contribute to shaping and transforming institutions to support value co-creation (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016).

At the meso level, business practices centred on *planning and innovation* reflected *future orientation*. Meso-level actor Evelyn’s description of a “continuous doing better cycle with the intention of improving for the next generation” illustrates a commitment to ongoing improvement and adaptability. This resonates with existing research that suggests firms are developing abilities to sense and respond to changes in the environment, co-creating value through innovation and collaboration (Karpen et al., 2012). The focus on *planning and innovation*, strengthened by the desire for continuous evolution and avoidance of complacency, highlights the importance of proactive strategies in co-creating value. Meso-level actor Luna’s emphasis on refining new yarns and technology reflects an investment in operant resources (skills, knowledge, and innovation) that enhance the retailer’s ability to contribute to value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem (Lusch & Nambisan, 2015). Engaging stakeholders and aiming to change consumer mindsets towards conscious consumption further demonstrates the retailer’s role as a resource integrator within the service ecosystem, leading to the co-creation of value through collaborative interactions (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

At the micro level, *future orientation* is closely tied to *conscious and ethical consumption*. Micro-level actors viewed their consumption choices as a way to positively impact the environment and ensure resource availability for others. By making sustainable choices, consumers actively participated in value co-creation, contributing to the advancement towards sustainability. *Future orientation* at the micro level reflects a form of moral responsibility and intergenerational equity, which can drive sustainable consumption behaviour. This aligns with extant research highlighting the role of ethical considerations and long-term thinking in

promoting sustainable consumption (Balderjahn et al., 2013; White et al., 2019). By prioritizing the future well-being of their children and grandchildren, micro-level actors integrated personal values with consumption practices, co-creating value that extended beyond immediate gratification.

The shared emphasis on *future orientation* across all levels of the sustainable fashion service ecosystem reflects the importance of institutional arrangements in shaping behaviours and guiding value co-creation. According to S-D logic, institutions and institutional arrangements are the rules, norms, and beliefs that guide actors' behaviours and interactions (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). In the multi-level value co-creation framework, *future orientation* serves as a shared institutional logic that aligns actors towards common goals. At the macro level, the call for government leadership and framework development indicates a need for formal institutions that can coordinate actions and establish shared meanings. Such frameworks can provide guidelines for the meso and micro levels, enabling resource integration and collective action towards sustainability (Wieland et al., 2016).

Actors at the meso level act as intermediaries who translate macro-level *collective vision* into operational practices, engaging with stakeholders to co-create value. By adopting future-oriented strategies and fostering innovation, firms and retailers contribute to the transformation of the service ecosystem, influencing consumer behaviour and market dynamics (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2016). This agrees with existing evidence that sustainable organisations at the meso level can generate and influence change throughout the whole ecosystem (Little et al., 2019).

Future orientation highlights the interconnectedness of actors in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem and the critical role of shared visions and values in co-creating value.

The consideration of future generations and thinking ahead for self and others is intricately linked with the co-creation of value in service ecosystems.

8.2.3 Third Quadrant – Guardianship

Guardianship in the multi-level value co-creation framework in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem reflects a shared concern about increasing garment waste and the environmental impact of discarded textiles. It refers to an approach to taking on responsibility over the ‘life of the product’, involving both the production and consumption of a product; that is, a mindset that drives activities and practices that ensure products are cared for. Specifically, in relation to the research context, it represents responsibility over the entire lifecycle of a product, encompassing the production, consumption, and post-consumption phases of a garment.

At the macro level, *guardianship* was identified as *collective guardianship*, requiring collaborative and shared efforts from government entities, businesses, and consumers to address the challenges of overconsumption and overproduction in the fashion industry. Existing research supports this perspective by highlighting the importance of collaborative governance in promoting sustainable consumption and production. For instance, Moorman (2020) highlighted the role that brands – and, by extension, industries – can play in shaping policy discussions. It also demonstrated how macro-level actors might collaborate to reduce waste and overconsumption. Lusch and Vargo (2014) have illustrated how macro-level institutions interact with micro-level actors in a service ecosystem, emphasising resource integration, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

Macro-level actors emphasised that *guardianship* must become a priority to prolong product lifecycles and reduce waste, helping to move the industry towards sustainability. Grace highlighted that *guardianship* involves “A type of mindset in fashion that prioritises looking after the planet.” She advocated for brands to take responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their garments, suggesting that such responsibility would lead to greater consideration in the design process. This perspective aligns with the S-D logic view of actors as resource integrators who collaboratively create value within a service ecosystem (Vargo & Lusch, 2017). By shifting the

focus from promoting consumption to educating consumers on sustainable practices, macro-level actors co-created value through enhanced consumer engagement and *knowledge integration* (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). This approach resonated with the understanding of sustainable consumption, where consumers are empowered to make choices that reduce environmental impact (White et al., 2019)

Macro-level actors also addressed structural challenges, such as open market strategies and deregulation, which have led to increased consumption and waste. By advocating for policy interventions and regulatory frameworks that promote *guardianship*, macro-level actors engage in institutional work that can reshape norms and practices within the service ecosystem (Koskela-Huotari et al., 2016). One good example of this is extended producer responsibility (EPR). Diddi and Yan (2019) have discussed how EPR policies can encourage brands to take ownership of their products throughout their lifecycle, reinforcing the idea of guardianship at the macro level. Implementing EPR shifts the accountability to producers for the environmental impacts of their products, promoting design for longevity and facilitating recycling and reuse. This aligns with the S-D logic emphasis on institutions and institutional arrangements as key factors influencing value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b).

At the meso level, *guardianship* manifested as *product lifecycle guardianship*, with actors (retailers and businesses) taking responsibility for their products throughout the entire lifecycle, including the post-consumer stages. The sustainable fashion retailer implemented a product stewardship programme, encouraging consumers to return garments for repairs and mending, thus prolonging their life and preventing them from ending up in landfills. Meso-level actor Evelyn, CEO of the sustainable fashion retailer, emphasised that “It is our responsibility [to] care”, highlighting the retailer’s commitment to the lifecycle of the garments they produce. This practice exemplifies the co-creation of value through service provision, where businesses offer repair services and engage consumers in sustainable practices (Hazée et al., 2017). This

also illustrates that by integrating circular principles into their operations, meso-level actors can enhance resource efficiency and contribute to sustainable service ecosystems (Bocken et al., 2016). The retailer's focus on zero-waste production and robust waste management also reflects strategic efforts to minimise environmental impact. These practices demonstrate the role of meso-level actors in value co-creation by embedding sustainability into their core business models (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2019).

At the micro level, *guardianship* was observed in consumers' efforts to avoid sending garments to waste and their practices of looking after their garments, which were collectively termed *product use guardianship*. Actors engaged in activities such as garment swapping, donating to charity shops, and using clothing bins, reflecting a commitment to prolonging the life of their garments and reducing waste. Summer expressed concern about what to do with clothes that are no longer wearable but still could be used for something, stating, "I still don't want to put that in the ground." This sentiment underscores the ethical considerations driving consumers towards sustainable consumption behaviours (Valor, 2008). By actively participating in product stewardship, consumers become co-creators of value within the service ecosystem (Yi & Gong, 2013). Additionally, micro-level actors indicated that brand-led initiatives, such as take-back programmes, promote *guardianship* by making it easier for consumers to engage in sustainable practices. Alexis noted that such programmes show that brands "stand by what they've made", enhancing trust and strengthening the customer-brand relationship. Iran and Schrader (2017) explored how collaborative consumption practices, such as clothing swaps and second-hand shopping, contribute to sustainability by extending product lifecycles. This aligns with the S-D logic perspective that value is co-created through interactions and relationships between actors (Chandler & Vargo, 2011).

Guardianship involves integrating resources across actors, including the meso-level offering repair services, the micro level engaging in sustainable behaviours, and the macro level

supporting regulatory frameworks (Akaka, Vargo, et al., 2013). This collective effort enhances the operant resources (knowledge, skills, and competencies) essential for value co-creation. Adopting and implementing the mindset of *guardianship* requires changes in institutional norms and rules. Research has suggested that institutional support is essential for promoting sustainable practices. Koskela-Huotari and Vargo (2018) have argued that institutional work can move service ecosystems towards sustainability by altering shared meanings and practices.

8.2.4 Fourth Quadrant – Regeneration

The fourth quadrant in the multi-level value co-creation framework represents *regeneration*, which refers to activities, practices and an overall mindset that ensures change through restoration and rejuvenation. It is based on the idea of renewing the life of an item or product through practices such as upcycling, finding alternative uses, or using services that enable restoration and rejuvenation. The macro level emphasized the need for systemic change led by government and businesses to establish infrastructures and legislation that accelerate renewal, rejuvenation, and restoration of products such as garments: in other words, a *regenerative infrastructure*. The call for systemic change reflects a recognition that isolated efforts are insufficient, and that collaborative actions across the service ecosystem are necessary to advance towards sustainability. Scarlett's assertion that we need to "go one further [than sustainability] and think about regeneration and circularity" challenges the present sustainability paradigm for being insufficient in addressing ecological degradation. This concurs with previous research suggesting that sustainability often focuses on maintaining the status quo rather than actively improving environmental conditions (McDonough & Braungart, 2013) and the need to move beyond sustainability towards regenerative practices that actively restore and enhance ecological systems (Gummesson & Mele, 2010).

Businesses generating economic value in a way that also produces value for society by addressing its challenges is not new (Porter & Kramer, 2011) and is also reflected in the macro

level's emphasis on giving "more than we take". By asking for restorative business models, macro-level actors promote a form of value co-creation that transcends mere economic transactions, nurturing positive environmental and social outcomes through collaborative efforts. From an S-D logic perspective, this macro-level shift represents a transition from goods-dominant logic, which focuses on transactional exchanges, to service ecosystems where value is co-created through collaborative networks (Lusch & Vargo, 2014). The integration of regenerative practices into business models signifies an evolution towards sustainable service ecosystems, where the co-creation of value includes environmental stewardship as a core component (Edvardsson et al., 2012).

The meso-level *circular business approach* focused on material quality and the lifecycle of garments, emphasising the use of recycled materials and the creation of products designed for recyclability and repairability. This approach is rooted in the principles of the circular economy, which aims to keep products, components, and materials at their highest utility and value at all times (MacArthur, 2013). By using recycled materials and designing for longevity, businesses are engaging customers and suppliers in co-creating value that extends beyond the point of sale. Evelyn's use of recycled jeans yarn with "no extra water or processes" exemplifies this approach and highlights how the retailer is innovating to reduce environmental impact while delivering value to consumers. This is an example of sustainable business models that incorporate environmental concerns into their value propositions (Bocken et al., 2014). However, while these practices contribute to sustainability, they may not fully embrace the restorative potential of true regenerative practices. The emphasis on operational efficiencies and product attributes may limit the extent to which businesses contribute to the regeneration of ecological systems (Jones & Wynn, 2019; Kuppelwieser & Finsterwalder, 2016).

The micro level approached *regeneration* through *reuse, recycle and repair*, to maximise the lifespan and utility of products. This reflects consumers' active participation in value co-

creation, as they engage in practices that extend product lifecycles and reduce environment impact (Black & Cherrier, 2010). Actors at the micro level expressed a strong desire to acquire skills that would enable them to extend the life of their garments, such as sewing and upcycling. This is related to building 'value-in-use' (Vargo & Lusch, 2006c), where consumers make an effort to continue the 'consumption' of garments, enhance product utility and promote sustainability. Consumers expressed a strong desire to learn regenerative skills, indicating an opportunity for businesses to facilitate value co-creation by providing resources and workshops. This is a strong example of how operant resources (skills) drive value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). However, systemic barriers such as limited access to repair services and skill-building opportunities impede the full realization of regenerative practices at the micro level. This suggests a need for businesses and policymakers to create enabling environments that support consumer participation in sustainability initiatives (Hazée et al., 2017; Ramaswamy & Ozcan, 2018). Without such support, the potential for value co-creation through individual regenerative actions remains constrained, limiting progress towards sustainable consumption. Using S-D logic as a theoretical lens, it becomes evident that *regeneration* is a multifaceted concept that is understood differently at the three levels of aggregation, but is strongly linked to value co-creation within service ecosystems. At the macro level, regeneration involves systemic changes that reshape market logics and policies, promoting sustainable consumption and production (Vargo & Lusch, 2017; Vargo et al., 2015). At the meso level, businesses contribute to value co-creation by integrating sustainable practices into their operations and engaging stakeholders in collaborative efforts (Lüdeke-Freund et al., 2019). At the micro level, consumers actively participate in value co-creation by adopting sustainable consumption behaviours and acquiring skills that actively shape regenerative practices that enrich the entire service ecosystem (Schau et al., 2009).

8.2.5 Contextual Factors Affecting Value Co-Creation

The multi-level value co-creation framework also includes the contextual factors that influences how actors within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value. The contextual factors comprise the facilitators and inhibitors of value co-creation and are presented in the two boxes external to the circular structure (Figure 2). The facilitators are to the left of the structure and include *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction*, and *conscious consumption approach*. The inhibitors are presented on the right of the circular structure and include *knowledge anxiety*, *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure*, and *inadequate regulation*. Table 22 presents the contextual factors affecting value co-creation and their description at each level.

Table 22: Contextual Factors Affecting Value Co-Creation

Contextual Factors Affecting Value Co-Creation	Macro Level	Meso Level	Micro Level
Facilitators of Value Co-Creation			
Promoting Longevity - A mindset that drives choices, actions and practices, focused on extending the lifespan of products; prioritising durability	Developing the necessary foundational frameworks and policies, enforced by government authorities and leaders, that facilitate the extension of product lifespans	Ensuring that products are designed with longevity built in; business practices around reusability and recyclability	Choosing to consume goods that last; emphasizing the consumption of durable products
Impact Reduction - An approach that prioritizes reducing harmful impacts on people and the planet	Developing systems that encourage and promote minimising impacts on people and the planet; government frameworks and policies related to reducing impacts	Implementing sustainability practices throughout the supply chain and lifecycle of the products that reduce impact	Taking individual consumption actions and engaging in practices to reduce personal impact
Conscious Consumption Approach - An approach that encourages thoughtful, ethical, sustainable decision-making within planetary boundaries	Promoting and implementing guidelines and policy that encourage mindful consumption and adherence to planetary limits	Making business decisions that consider sustainable production and consumption	Making personal decisions about consuming consciously and ethically; personal activism for sustainability-led initiatives and principles
Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation			
Knowledge Anxiety - apprehension or unease experienced when encountering gaps,	Guidance Deficiency – lack of reliable guidance and a comprehensive	Impact Constraints – inability to find industry-wide support to make	Information Reliability – anxiety arising from insufficient, misleading

inconsistencies, or overwhelming amounts of information	framework from governing bodies	sustainability mainstream	and overload of information
Accessibility - Barriers to availability and access to sustainable products, information, and facilities that advance sustainability	Lack of resources that make sustainability accessible to all	Difficulties in making sustainable fashion accessible; cost of producing and retailing sustainably made garments	Lack of easily accessible and affordable sustainable products and services for individual consumption; access to resources to be conscious consumers
Inadequate infrastructure - Weak or absent tangible resources and facilities, hindering progress towards sustainability	Lack of embedded infrastructure helping all actors to be sustainable	Infrastructural difficulties in producing and manufacturing sustainable garments	Individual action towards sustainability constrained by weak infrastructural support
Inadequate Regulation - Lack of frameworks, rules, and regulations in relation to sustainability	Absence of standardised frameworks, legislation, and policies to address sustainability applicable to all actors	Weak and inconsistent sustainability-based regulations for businesses	Poor regulations and weak enforcement to allow consumers to live more sustainably

8.2.5.1 Facilitators of Value Co-Creation

There are three facilitators of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem – *promoting longevity*, *impact reduction*, and a *conscious consumption approach*. Each of these is discussed in detail below.

8.2.5.1.1 Promoting Longevity

Promoting longevity, in the proposed framework, refers to a mindset that drives choices, actions and practices, focused on extending the lifespan of products, such as garments. That is, a collective effort is made to increase the lifespan of products, resulting in the reduction in waste generation. The emphasis on *promoting longevity* reflects a growing demand for products, especially garments, that offer extended utility, high quality, and reduced environmental impact. Actors across all levels highlighted that *promoting longevity* was not merely an attribute but a foundational element of sustainability and value co-creation. This aligns with existing research in sustainable marketing, which has emphasized the importance of product longevity in reducing environmental degradation and promoting sustainable consumption (Armstrong et al., 2016). By producing durable products, businesses can facilitate extended use, and thus reduce the frequency of purchase and the associated environmental impacts of production and disposal.

Promoting longevity as a mindset reflects the wider shift in marketing and business research towards sustainable value creation and resource stewardship (Armstrong et al., 2015). This approach also resonates with the concept of a circular economy, which advocates for designing products with longer lifespans to minimize waste (Bocken et al., 2016).

Actors at the macro level affirmed that extending product lifespans is not merely a design or manufacturing challenge; it demands developing the necessary foundational frameworks and policies, enforced by government authorities and leaders, that facilitate the extension of product lifespans. When macro-level actors, such as government authorities, implement legislation or provide resources to help meso-level and micro-level actors to prolong product life, they effectively catalyse the co-creation of value across the service ecosystem.

Promoting longevity aligns with evolving consumer values that prioritise eco-friendly choices and responsible consumption (White et al., 2019). End-of-life solutions, highlighted by Grace, become integral to a system that rewards the maintenance, repair, and repurposing of garments (Cooper, 2016). This focus on longevity underscores a broader perspective on the product lifecycle: one in which after-use considers influence design, material selection, and consumer education (Bocken et al., 2015).

Promoting longevity supports the notion that value co-creation is iterative and relational (Payne et al., 2008). By advocating for repair, maintenance, and durability, as illustrated by Abigail's emphasis on repurposing garments and Violet's personal commitment to repeated wearing of garments over extended periods, macro-level actors can facilitate consumer engagement in resource integration practices. This engagement, in turn, fosters shared responsibility. Actions at the micro level, shaped by macro-level incentives, materialise the S-D logic premise that value co-creation is a collaborative achievement (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b)

At the meso level, the focus on *promoting longevity* in product design and brand philosophy indicates a strategic alignment with consumer values. The emphasis on "quality and longevity"

suggests an understanding that durability enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty, contributing to competitive advantage. This strategic orientation supports the notion that businesses play a crucial role in shaping sustainable consumption patterns through their offerings (Kumar et al., 2021). Embedding longevity into business practices carries reputational and competitive advantages for the meso level, as it resonates with increasingly sustainability-conscious markets (Jones & Comfort, 2020). By aligning product longevity with both functional and aesthetic dimensions – such as style versatility and material durability – sustainable fashion businesses and retailers at the meso level can differentiate themselves and contribute to a circular economy framework (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011). This demonstrates that *promoting longevity* is not just an environmental imperative but also a strategic avenue for value co-creation, as it underpins responsible consumption, nurtures enduring consumer-brand relationships, and supports the broader transition to a sustainable future.

8.2.5.1.2 Impact Reduction

Impact reduction, for both environment and society, emerged as the second critical facilitator of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It refers to an approach that prioritises reducing harmful impacts on people and the planet. A focus on *impact reduction* underscores the evolving priorities in existing research in marketing, exploring sustainability, where minimising harm to people and the planet has become integral to competitive advantage and long-term viability (Chandy et al., 2021; White et al., 2019). From an S-D logic perspective, *impact reduction* is a critical facilitator of value co-creation by aligning the interests and resources of multiple actors, such as governmental authorities (macro level), sustainable fashion retailers (meso level), and individual consumers (micro level), to generate shared benefits for society and the environment (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). Service ecosystems emphasise the interconnectedness of actors at the macro, meso, and micro levels, highlighting how each actor integrates resources to co-create value (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). When these

actors focus on mitigating negative environmental and social impact or *impact reduction*, they collectively facilitate value co-creation, and transformations towards sustainable outcomes. At the macro level, *impact reduction* implied developing systems that encourage and promote minimising impacts of people and the planet, which included government regulation and policy related to reducing impacts. *Impact reduction* at the meso level was identified as implementing sustainability practices throughout the supply chain and lifecycle of the products that reduced impact. Individual consumption actions and practices to reduce personal impacts is how *impact reduction* was observed at the micro level.

The macro level facilitates value co-creation through systemic interventions and policy frameworks grounded in *impact reduction*, which can enhance environmental stewardship and social equity (Kirchherr et al., 2017). This shows that when macro-level actors, such as the government, enact regulations based on *impact reduction*, they create a context that compels organisations to minimise waste and pollution (White et al., 2019). Voluntary approaches often fall short of delivering substantive outcomes, and mandates and strong institutional support from macro-level actors can ensure that meso-level actors embed sustainability from product design through end-of-life disposal. This top-down influence fosters value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem.

At the meso level, businesses and retailers integrate *impact reduction* throughout the product lifecycle, from design and sourcing to manufacturing and distribution (Bocken et al., 2016). Actors' emphasis on zero-waste production, lower-carbon transport options, and ethical material sourcing highlights how businesses and retailers can differentiate themselves through tangible harm reduction (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011). These strategies, in turn, build stronger brand identities and foster trust among sustainability-conscious consumers, demonstrating that organisational alignment with *impact reduction* can be both economically viable and ethically sound (Jones & Comfort, 2020).

Consumers' personal choices around shopping, use, and disposal reflect how the micro level can drive *impact reduction* across the service ecosystem (De Keyser et al., 2019; White et al., 2019). As the actors observed, mindful consumption practices – buying fewer, long-lasting garments or engaging in repair and reuse – reduce resource depletion and waste generation (Niinimäki et al., 2020). In doing so, micro-level actors co-create value not just for themselves, but for society and the environment by reducing the demand for unnecessary new garment production (Armstrong et al., 2016). This resonates with pro-environmental identity formation, in which consumers view themselves as active contributors to ecological balance (White et al., 2019). The consolidation of macro-level policy support, meso-level operational innovations, and micro-level responsible consumption behaviour shows that *impact reduction* is a unifying facilitator that can support the transition to a sustainable future in the fashion sector (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b).

8.2.5.1.3 Conscious Consumption Approach

A *conscious consumption approach* as a facilitator of value co-creation underscores the rising prominence of ethical and sustainable decision making in service ecosystems (White et al., 2019). It refers to an approach that encourages thoughtful, ethical, sustainable decision-making within planetary boundaries. Grounded in S-D logic, the sustainable fashion service ecosystem comprises multiple actors who align their resources and actions to generate mutual benefits (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). When these actors prioritise mindful consumption, transparency, and accountability, they co-create value that extends to environmental and societal well-being (Niinimäki, 2015).

At the macro level, governmental authorities and policy makers play an integral role by establishing the frameworks, regulations, and standards that encourage and mandate sustainable business practices (Henninger, 2015; Todeschini et al., 2017). By aligning legislation with planetary boundaries, macro-level actors help to institutionalise a *conscious*

consumption approach, ensuring that it becomes a widespread and measurable norm (Niinimäki, 2015).

At the meso level, the sustainable fashion retailer operationalised this *conscious consumption approach* via strategic decisions that integrate sustainability throughout the product lifecycle. From material sourcing to end-of-life disposal, the retailer invests in zero-waste manufacturing and consumer education, which demonstrates their commitment to social and environmental responsibility. This not only lowers ecological harm but also strengthens brand equity by resonating with sustainability motivated consumers (Todeschini et al., 2017). A *conscious consumption approach* at the micro level is observed as mindful, informed purchasing and disposal practices (White et al., 2019). Whether through selective patronage – described as ‘voting with their wallet’ – or through personal activism, consumers reward businesses that prioritise ethical production while withholding support from those engaged in unsustainable or environmentally detrimental practices. This bottom-up pressure pushes the meso-level businesses and firms to innovate and adapt, bridging market demands with ecological imperatives (Niinimäki & Hassi, 2011).

The *conscious consumption approach* functions as a critical facilitator of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem by instilling a mindset centred on responsibility and interdependence across the macro, meso, and micro levels (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). This also supports the S-D logic tenet that value is co-created through coordinated, reciprocal resource integration (Vargo, 2021).

8.2.5.2 Inhibitors of Value Co-Creation

In the proposed multi-level value co-creation framework in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem, there are four significant inhibitors that impede value co-creation – *knowledge anxiety*, *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure*, and *inadequate regulation*.

8.2.5.2.1 Knowledge Anxiety

In line with the S-D logic, value co-creation depends on the reciprocal integration of resources, including reliable knowledge, among all actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). However, when actors experience apprehension or unease due to gaps, inconsistencies, or overwhelming amounts of sustainability-related information, they struggle to coordinate effectively, hindering collective efforts to advance environmental and social well-being and co-create value (Chang & Watchravesringkan, 2018).

At the macro level, *knowledge anxiety* centres on *guidance deficiency*: specifically, lack of reliable guidance and a comprehensive framework from governing bodies. Without well-defined standards and validated information, actors at the macro level lack direction on how to align sustainability initiatives with national or global sustainability goals (Todeschini et al., 2017). This ambiguity affects the meso and micro levels, creating uncertainty about the authenticity or efficacy of potential sustainability solutions. Consequently, macro-level actors and meso-level actors risk inconsistent or piecemeal approaches to addressing sustainability, diminishing the potential for integrated, large-scale impact (Kozlowski et al., 2015).

At the meso level, *knowledge anxiety* manifests as *impact constraints*, reflecting a perceived inability to find industry-wide support to make sustainability mainstream within the fashion industry. Meso-level actors noted that smaller-scale fashion retailers may find themselves without the shared knowledge base required to shift consumer mindsets and industry standards (Henninger, 2015). The actors elaborated on the compulsion to track evolving regulations, technological advancements, and consumer trends, grounded in sustainability, yet they often lack the resources to manage this influx of *knowledge* comprehensively (Chang & Watchravesringkan, 2018).

Knowledge anxiety reflects *information reliability* at the micro level and implies anxiety arising from insufficient, misleading and excessive information related to sustainability and

sustainable fashion (Niinimäki, 2015). Excessive and contradictory claims about sustainability – supplemented by increasing instances of greenwashing – erode trust and make it difficult for micro-level actors to discern genuine from faulty environmental commitments (Torelli et al., 2020). This confusion and frustration results in decision paralysis, low motivation, and ultimately, impedes the co-creation of value through informed consumption (White et al., 2019). Even well-intentioned actors at the micro level may become discouraged by the perceived complexity, further illuminating how *knowledge anxiety* stifles engagement across the ecosystem. Collectively, this demonstrates that *knowledge anxiety* experienced by actors across the service ecosystem can fragment actor interactions, weakening the resource integration processes central to value co-creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b).

8.2.5.2.2 Accessibility

Accessibility resonates with the notions of availability and affordability of sustainable products, information and facilities. Within the context of this study, the lack of immediate availability and high costs of sustainable fashion prevented micro-level actors from fully engaging in value co-creation. Nikita elaborated on this barrier, noting that sustainable fashion is often not available in local stores and is challenging to purchase online due to shipping costs and long delivery times. This comment on scarcity and cost barriers aligns with existing research that emphasises that *accessibility* relates to issues that hinder consumer participation in sustainable consumption practices (e.g. Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Testa et al., 2015; White et al., 2019). Moreover, geographical isolation and scarce local production resources accentuate these cost differentials, deepening the inequities between larger markets and smaller, more remote ones (Niinimäki, 2015).

From an S-D logic perspective, value is co-created when multiple actors collaboratively integrate resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). However, this collaborative integration is disrupted due to *accessibility*. The high cost of sustainable fashion, as reported by macro-level

actors, creates a financial barrier that inhibits actors, especially micro-level actors (consumers) from participating in sustainable consumption, and consequently, value co-creation. This challenge is exacerbated for younger consumers and those with limited financial means.

Actors at the meso level acknowledged that high costs and *accessibility* hindered their ability to co-create value with consumers. The disconnect between consumer interest and purchasing ability disrupts the value co-creation process, consistent with the observations of Gleim and J. Lawson (2014), White et al. (2019), and Ranjan and Read (2016) who suggest, in their respective research, that affordability is crucial for mainstreaming sustainable consumption. The mismatch in consumer expectations and production realities, as highlighted by Rony (“It’s very expensive to make clothes in New Zealand...consumers don’t understand and are comparing it to clothes that are made offshore for a lot less money. That’s a challenge”) further inhibits alignment necessary for value co-creation. *Accessibility* also extends to *inadequate infrastructure*, another inhibitor of value co-creation in the proposed framework, as it affects cost and product availability. This illustrates how systemic barriers within service ecosystems hinder interconnected actors and resources in value co-creation (Akaka et al., 2019; Wieland et al., 2018).

8.2.5.2.3 Inadequate Infrastructure

Inadequate infrastructure is a significant inhibitor of value co-creation as it prevents effective collaboration and implementation of sustainable practices. It also impedes the advancement of sustainability and sustainable fashion. It refers to weak or absent tangible resources and facilities, hindering progress towards sustainability. The lack of recycling centres, efficient logistical networks, and waste management systems obstructs value co-creation among micro-, meso-, and macro-level actors.

The absence of recycling plants and circular solutions prevented the meso level from implementing circular solutions, essential to advance sustainability (Kozłowski et al., 2019).

This deficiency inhibits their ability to co-create value with the micro-level, who are eager to participate in sustainable practices. The frustration and demotivation resulting from infrastructural shortcomings align with the findings of Bocken et al. (2018), which suggest that infrastructure is critical for enabling circular business models and facilitating value co-creation. *Inadequate infrastructure* concerning transport was a critical barrier. High commercial transport costs and inefficient public transportation systems hinder both meso- and micro-level actors from engaging in sustainable practices. These challenges reflect the broader systemic issues in service ecosystems, where infrastructural elements are integral to resource integration and value co-creation (Wieland et al., 2016). *Inadequate infrastructure* focusing on the lifecycle management of garments further inhibits sustainable practices. Without macro-level support in building the necessary facilities, the meso-level is constrained in implementing circular or sustainable solutions. This gap underscores the need for institutional arrangements and supportive infrastructure to enable value co-creation within service ecosystems (Field et al., 2021).

8.2.5.2.4 Inadequate Regulation

Inadequate regulation is the fourth inhibitor of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. It refers to the lack of frameworks, rules, and regulations in relation to sustainability. Actors across the three levels of the service ecosystem recognised that it was the responsibility of the macro level to provide these regulations, and to lead the collective advancement towards sustainability. Inadequate legislation, lack of standardised frameworks, and ineffective enforcement prevent the meso level from fully committing to sustainable business practices and hinder the micro level in making informed, ethical decisions.

Amelia emphasised *inadequate regulation* around fashion manufacturing and the need for a single governance body to standardise sustainability for the fashion industry. This absence creates confusion and inconsistency, hindering coordinated efforts toward sustainability and

obstructing value co-creation. The regulatory gap allows unethical practices to persist, undermining the trust and transparency (see Ozdamar Ertekin & Atik, 2015; Shen, 2014; Turker & Altuntas, 2014) essential for value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. Micro-level actors expressed scepticism about achieving significant change without regulatory intervention. Relying solely on consumer demand places an unrealistic burden on the micro level and is insufficient for systemic transformation necessary for value co-creation. This is consistent with existing research (e.g. Geels, 2011; Giesler & Veresiu, 2014; Mol, 2015), which highlights that effective regulation is crucial for facilitating sustainable consumption and production practices. *Inadequate regulation* also allows misleading practices such as greenwashing to persist, undermining consumer trust and restricting the transparent interactions necessary for value co-creation.

Collectively, the inhibitors of value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem highlight systemic challenges within the service ecosystem. From an S-D logic and service ecosystems perspective, value co-creation is contingent upon the integration of resources and collaboration among actors within a network influenced by institutions and institutional arrangements (Vargo et al., 2017). The inhibitors – *knowledge anxiety*, *accessibility*, *inadequate infrastructure*, and *inadequate regulation* – represent the institutional voids and misalignments that hinder resource integration and collaborative processes necessary for value co-creation. When systemic barriers inhibit resource flows and interactions, opportunities for co-creation diminish (Todeschini et al., 2017).

Chapter 9: Contributions

9.1 Overview

My doctoral research journey began with a central question that has guided the entire process – *How can society transition to a sustainable future?* While the need for and urgency of such a transition were evident, the specific steps required to achieve this goal remained unclear. As a marketing scholar and practitioner, I also aimed to explore the role marketing could play in enabling this transition. This interest stemmed from the frequent critique that marketing is often positioned in opposition to sustainability, with notions such as sustainable consumption being perceived as contradictory.

Chapter 9 is dedicated to the contributions this study makes to marketing theory and practice. This research explored the processes through which value is co-created in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem by adopting a multilevel approach, and makes valuable contributions by integrating S-D logic and service ecosystem perspectives into the domain of sustainable fashion. First, building on S-D logic (Vargo & Lusch, 2016b), it offers an in-depth examination of the factors and outcomes associated with value co-creation at the various ecosystem levels, illustrating how these levels are interlinked and jointly shape the ecosystem. Second, it broadens the scope of value co-creation inquiry in sustainable fashion by providing an ecosystem lens that clarifies the interplay and dynamics among multiple actors.

This chapter begins with the theoretical contributions, followed by the managerial. Conclusions and the limitations of the study are provided at the end of the chapter.

9.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study advances theoretical understanding at the intersection of S-D logic, sustainability marketing, and fashion consumption by empirically developing and applying a multi-level service ecosystem framework. It contributes to a richer understanding of how value is co-created, constrained, and sometimes undermined across the macro (e.g., policy and advocacy),

meso (organisational), and micro (consumer) levels of a sustainability-oriented service ecosystem.

First, this research responds to long-standing calls within S-D logic for deeper insights into how value co-creation unfolds across layers of aggregation (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Vargo & Lusch, 2016b). Most of the previous research has focused on dyadic relationships or single-level interactions. In contrast, this study demonstrates how actors across three levels of the sustainable fashion service ecosystem engage in resource integration and negotiate institutional arrangements to advance (or sometime impede) sustainability. In doing so, it shows how policy, production, and consumption roles are not only interdependent but together define and influence value outcomes.

Second, this study broadens the scope of the value outcomes considered in S-D logic by empirically integrating not only value co-creation but also value co-destruction and no-value outcomes into a multi-level analysis. While value co-destruction has been conceptually acknowledged (Echeverri & Skålén, 2011; Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010), research mapping how negative outcomes unfold across ecosystem levels remain scarce. This study contributes by showing how factors such as knowledge anxiety, inadequate infrastructure, weak regulatory enforcement and accessibility limitations inhibit collaboration, erode trust, and reduce actors' willingness to engage. These are not one-off failures but structural conditions that shape value dynamics throughout the system. In particular, the findings illustrate that when enabling conditions are absent at one level (e.g. macro-level regulatory failure), efforts at other levels often stall or fail to scale (e.g. meso-level innovation stagnation or micro-level disengagement), exposing the fragility of sustainability transitions within ecosystems. This aligns with recent service ecosystem literature, which emphasises that structural and actor-level forces are interdependent and mutually shaping, such that disruptions on one level can reverberate across the system (Frow et al., 2019; Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). These findings challenge

idealised assumptions of seamless co-creation by illustrating how misalignments across macro, meso, and micro levels – such as inadequate regulation, limited accessibility, and knowledge anxiety – disrupt coordinated action and constrain value co-creation in sustainability-focused service ecosystems.

Third, the doctoral study offers a theoretically grounded framework – the multi-level value co-creation in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem framework – that identifies four pathways (knowledge, future orientation, guardianship, and regeneration) through which value is co-created. By incorporating actors' lived practices, meanings, and constraints, this framework deepens the understanding of how sustainability emerges (or stalls) through alignment in resource use, actor expectations, and institutional conditions. In doing so, it advances the emerging agenda in marketing research to operationalise “regenerative” ecosystem logics (Muñoz & Branzei, 2021; Saviano et al., 2017)..

Finally, this research contributes to fashion marketing research by contextualising S-D logic within one of the most environmentally and socially problematic industries, which represents a wicked problem (Rittel & Webber, 1973) marked by distributed agency, conflicting values, and ambiguous solutions. The study situates popular sustainability practices, such as repair, reuse, resale, regulation, within an S-D logic framework, illustrating how operant resources are unevenly distributed and inconsistently used. This makes visible the conditions under which sustainability initiatives are taken up, ignored, or resisted. It adds depth to the conceptualisation of consumer agency, showing that sustainable consumption is not solely a matter of consumer intention but also of institutional support, cultural legibility, and systemic accessibility. The answers obtained in this study call for marketing research (Henninger et al., 2016; Moorman, 2020; White et al., 2019) that can bridge micro-level behaviour and macro-level policy and infrastructure, moving toward an integrated, systems-aware understanding of change.

Taken together, these contributions extend the theoretical scope of S-D logic and sustainability marketing by shifting attention from idealised co-creation scenarios to real-world service ecosystems where value is co-created, withheld, or destroyed amid institutional frictions. They help to clarify how sustainability transitions might be supported or stalled depending on how well actors can align practices, resources, and meanings within and across levels. In Lange and Pfarrer's (2017) terms, the study moves from sense to structure, offering both empirically grounded insights and a structured framework that refines how marketing scholars understand systemic value processes in sustainability transitions.

9.3 Managerial Contributions

This study offers actionable insights for multiple stakeholders engaged in advancing sustainable fashion. By adopting a multi-level service ecosystem perspective, it reveals how value co-creation is shaped not only by actors' practices and interactions, but also by broader contextual conditions that either enable or constrain sustainability efforts. The framework developed through this study can serve as a strategic guide for decision-making across macro (policy/advocacy), meso (retailers), and micro (consumers) levels.

9.3.1 Macro-level (Policy, Advocacy, Education)

Macro-level actors – such as policymakers, regulators, educators, and advocacy groups – can shape the structural environment in which sustainable fashion either thrives or struggles. This study identifies several systemic barriers, such as inadequate regulation, fragmented infrastructure, and the lack of a standardised understanding of sustainability and unified vision or plan to achieve SDGs.

- Policymakers can strengthen value co-creation by introducing enforceable product stewardship laws, funding closed-loop infrastructure and integrating sustainability literacy into national education frameworks.

- Cross-sector partnerships between government, academia, and industry can help align fragmented efforts, reduce duplication, and increase the visibility of high-impact initiatives.
- Advocacy groups can play a role in reframing sustainability narratives in culturally resonant ways, bridging the gap between technical policy and lived consumer realities.

A coordinated macro response is especially important to address *knowledge anxiety* and greenwashing, which erode trust across the ecosystem and hinder co-creation efforts.

9.3.2 Meso-level (Sustainable Fashion Retailers)

Retailers occupy a bridging role between policy and consumers. They play a critical part in shaping consumption norms, product lifecycles, and the perceived accessibility of sustainable fashion. Of the four pathways to value co-creation, meso-level actors can enhance value co-creation through three pathways, specifically: future orientation, guardianship, and regeneration.

- Firms can embed *future orientation* by designing for longevity and transparency, aligning business goals with broader sustainability timelines.
- *Guardianship* is activated when businesses take responsibility not just for production but for repair, reuse, and end-of-life processes.
- *Regeneration* implies going beyond harm reduction to restore or enrich ecological and social systems; for example, through local sourcing, indigenous design partnerships, or community repair workshops.

Sustainable fashion retailers must also navigate contextual inhibitors such as infrastructure gaps and regulatory uncertainty. Collective investment in sector-wide solutions (e.g., circular logistics, standardised garment labelling) may reduce fragmentation and accelerate sustainable transition.

For retailers transitioning towards sustainability, this research offers several actionable insights grounded in the practices of established sustainable fashion retailers. First, the formation of a

clear and authentic sustainability ethos – anchored in core values – is critical, regardless of the business’s maturity. Embedding sustainability into decision-making processes, including product design, supplier selection, and pricing, enables alignment between commercial viability and environmental and social impact. Second, sustainability transition requires a reconfiguration of internal capabilities and external relationships. Retailers should invest in building transparent value chains and fostering resource collaboration with suppliers and stakeholders, even incrementally, to enhance traceability and accountability. For businesses in their early stages, starting with one part of the chain (e.g., ethical sourcing) can demonstrate credibility and lay the foundation for further transformation. Third, consistent leadership commitment and communication are central to mobilising internal teams and engaging consumers. Retailers must align brand messaging with sustainability practices and create spaces for consumer education and participation, which can reinforce brand trust and co-create value. Importantly, the research acknowledges the operational tensions and uncertainties that accompany sustainability transitions, such as balancing financial pressures, capability gaps, and institutional divergences. Managers must adopt adaptive strategies, recognising that sustainability is a continuous journey rather than a fixed outcome.

9.3.3 Micro-level (Consumers)

Consumers play an active and evolving role in value co-creation within the sustainable fashion service ecosystem. This study highlighted that consumers do not passively absorb sustainability related knowledge; rather, they engage with it through the lens of their values, constraints, and sense of agency. Micro-level value co-creation often involved navigating trade-offs between sustainability, convenience, affordability, and availability. Consumers must make sense of fragmented information, evaluate competing priorities, and reconcile ethical aspirations with practical realities.

The findings showed that value is co-created when consumers developed a ‘forward looking’ mindset, engaged with the community, looked after their possessions, and participated in prolonging the life of garment through repair, reuse, and recycling. These actions were often motivated by intrinsic values such as care, responsibility, and creativity, as much as by external rewards. However, barriers such as knowledge anxiety and limited accessibility undermined these efforts and led to no value co-creation or value co-destruction. Consumers can enhance their role in the ecosystem by:

- Seeking out knowledge about garment provenance, durability, and care
- participating in clothing swaps, repair initiatives, and peer-to-peer resale
- using their purchase power and social influence to support brands aligned with sustainability principles
- demanding transparency and accountability from meso- and macro-level actors

Importantly, this study revealed that consumers want to act sustainably, but need systemic support to do so. Managerial strategies and policy frameworks should therefore support the micro level. Recognising consumers as resource integrators, meaning-makers, and potential catalysts for change is essential to advancing sustainability.

One of the central insights of this study is that no single level within the service ecosystem can drive systemic change alone, even though there is an urgent and pressing call for the macro level to develop regulations and policies to address the SDGs. Positive and effective value co-creation depends on interdependent relationships across levels. The multi-level value co-creation framework developed in this study can be used by organisations as a tool to identify where interventions are most needed, and how actions at one level may enable or constrain outcomes at another. Advancing sustainability requires attention to both structure and influence, and to how meaning, resources, and responsibilities are distributed across actors. Only through

such alignment can sustainable fashion and sustainability move from isolated initiatives to coherent, system-wide transformation.

This study contributes to marketing practice by offering a holistic, multi-level perspective on how value co-creation can support the transition toward sustainable service ecosystems. While the service ecosystem lens holds promise for sustainable fashion, the coordination of diverse actors and resources remains a challenge. The multi-level framework developed in this study offers a way forward by illustrating what effective value co-creation can look like in practice. It highlights how marketing can move beyond transactional campaigns to act as a coordinating and sense-making function within the system.

The findings suggest that marketing managers and brand strategists can enhance brand authenticity by adopting a stewardship approach, which acknowledges the interdependence of policy, production, and consumption. Meso-level actors who proactively collaborate with civic groups or advocate for regulatory change can demonstrate more credible commitment to sustainability (Henninger et al., 2016). In addition, the study surfaces potential triggers of value co-destruction, such as knowledge anxiety, ambiguous messaging, and greenwashing, which may erode consumer trust and deter engagement. Pre-empting such risks through transparency, accessible information, and participatory consumer education can strengthen relationships and foster longer-term brand value (Hardcastle et al., 2025; Liljeroos-Cork & Luhtala, 2025; Lumivalo et al., 2024).

Sustainable fashion exemplifies a ‘wicked problem’: goals are contested, information is fragmented, power is unequally distributed, and there is no definitive solution (Alford & Head, 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). The multi-level framework developed in this thesis clarifies how these characteristics play out across macro, meso, and micro levels, and what a practicable response looks like from a marketing perspective.

First, the four pathways identified – *knowledge*, *future orientation*, *guardianship*, and *regeneration* – map onto key challenges of wickedness. *Knowledge* addresses ambiguity by improving transparency and the translation of expertise into everyday practice. *Future orientation* counters short-termism through durability, repair, and betterment for those after us. *Guardianship* focuses on responsibility and care beyond the point of sale. *Regeneration* moves beyond “less harm” to restoring social and ecological value. Together, these pathways provide direction while recognising plural values and multiple viable pathways rather than one optimal solution.

Second, the contextual factors – promoting longevity, impact reduction, and a conscious consumption approach (facilitators) versus knowledge anxiety, accessibility, inadequate infrastructure, and inadequate regulation (inhibitors) – explain why well-intended initiatives stall. These factors mirror the characteristics that make problems “wicked”: competing values (e.g. affordability versus ethics), institutional gaps (rules and infrastructure lag), and uneven capabilities across actors.

Lastly, the framework indicates how marketing can serve an integrative role, coordinating across levels: convening actor collaborations, creating credible information systems, designing participatory offers (repair, resale, take-back, etc.) and running low-risk, small-scale pilots designed for learning and subsequent scaling. By specifying where alignment is required and where tensions predictably arise, this study operationalises the concept of wicked problems into guidance for transitioning towards SDG 12 in service ecosystems.

9.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

Despite offering valuable insights into multi-level value co-creation in the sustainable fashion service ecosystem, this research has several notable limitations. First, it focused on a single geographic context, which may restrict the transferability of findings to other regions with different cultural, economic, and regulatory conditions (White et al., 2019). Future studies

could explore multiple countries to deepen the understanding of how different market structures and cultural norms influence both the facilitators and inhibitors of sustainable fashion initiatives.

Second, although the qualitative, multi-stakeholder design enabled rich, context-specific insights, it inevitably limited the potential for broader statistical generalization (Bryman, 2016). Future researchers could adopt mixed-methods or large-scale quantitative surveys to validate and extend the findings, particularly in measuring the impact of *knowledge empowerment* and *knowledge integration* or the inhibitors on co-creation outcomes.

Third, the study concentrated primarily on the senior leadership of the sustainable fashion retailer in the meso-level. Including additional actors, such as raw material suppliers, design technologists and manufacturers, beyond the retailer and mid- and junior-level employees would offer a more holistic picture of the diverse forces driving or impeding sustainability transitions.

Fourth, the research design did not involve a longitudinal element, thus limiting insights into how macro, meso, and micro dynamics evolve over time (Palakshappa, Dodds, et al., 2024). Longitudinal or ethnographic studies could uncover how relationships among service ecosystem actors strengthen or weaken, and how perceived value evolves throughout the product lifecycle.

By addressing these limitations, future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumption in sustainable fashion, enhance methodological diversity in service-dominant logic scholarship, and provide broader and deeper insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to advance sustainable initiatives.

9.5 Conclusion

This study advances the understanding of how actors in a sustainable fashion service ecosystem co-create value across three levels of participant aggregation: macro, meso, and micro. Guided

by the theoretical lens of Service-Dominant Logic, the study offers a nuanced view of how *knowledge, future orientation, guardianship, and regeneration* shaped value co-creation among diverse stakeholders, including government and policy experts, a sustainable fashion retailer, and consumers. These interlinked processes show that the transition to sustainable fashion involves more than isolated brand strategies or consumer choices; rather, it requires a systemic realignment of institutional logics, resource integration, and collaborative capabilities across the entire service ecosystem.

In addition to identifying pathways for positive value co-creation, the study highlights contextual barriers such as *knowledge anxiety, accessibility, inadequate infrastructure, and inadequate regulation*. These inhibitors emphasise that the mere intent to participate in sustainable fashion is constrained by macro-level policy gaps, meso-level cost and design hurdles, and micro-level uncertainty regarding reliable information. By incorporating instances where value is not co-created—or even co-destroyed—the findings emphasise that meaningful progress toward sustainability demands the addressing of both organizational and contextual weaknesses.

Contributions to both theory and practice are clear. The study enriches the literature by synthesizing multi-level insights into a comprehensive framework that situates sustainability within a broader service ecosystem. Practitioners, policymakers, and academics will find that fostering collaboration, developing robust infrastructures, and clearly articulating sustainability standards are integral steps to overcoming inertia and progressing towards sustainability. Ultimately, this research affirms that co-creating a more sustainable fashion industry requires aligned, iterative, and collaborative efforts across all levels of the service ecosystem.

Appendix A – Consent Form



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Sustainable Fashion in New Zealand

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signature: **Date:**

Full Name - printed

Appendix B – Information Sheet Macro-Level Experts



Sustainable Fashion in New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET

Who am I?

Hello! My name is Anushka Patara. I am a PhD Candidate in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University, Albany. As a researcher I am interested in sustainable consumption, slow fashion, collaborative consumption, and sustainable fashion businesses.

Overview of the research project

Despite decades of research on sustainability, unsustainable consumption behaviour and production practices persist. There is a need to adopt a more macro level approach to address sustainability, particularly the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 12 – ensure sustainable consumption and production. Specifically, there is a lack of understanding on how all actors in the value network “co-create” value to achieve sustainable consumption. This doctoral research explores how sustainability can be co-created throughout the value network. Specifically, the purpose is to understand how value is co-created throughout the value network of a sustainable fashion business that has adopted a circular approach to achieve sustainable consumption. To develop the macro level approach, I will be meeting other experts associated with sustainability and fashion in New Zealand. This will help gain insight of the wider context of sustainable fashion in the country.

Participant commitment and involvement

The commitment involves a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The session will be a free-flowing conversation covering topics such as sustainability and fashion in New Zealand. I will be asking you some specific questions addressing the research purpose. I will only follow up or probe where required.

Research ethics and participants rights

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

Please note all measures have been taken to ensure your rights and privacy is protected. If you agree to participate you will be asked to read the following and sign a consent form.

To ensure anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality your identity and the identity of any organization you are affiliated with will be fully anonymous. You will be given a pseudonym in any written documentation. You will not be asked for any identifying information about yourself, your business, or clients. All data collected via interviews will be kept in a secure environment in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University, Albany. The information you provide will be analysed, reported, and potentially published in an academic journal.

The interview will be kept safe and non-threatening, and you will be given the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the research at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

This is a study of personal experience and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. I would prefer to digitally audio record the interview, but this would only be done with your consent. You may ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview. If you wish to have a digital audio copy of your interviews, we will provide this for you. I intend transcribing the audio files into written documents myself. However, in the event that a professional transcription service is required, the transcriber(s) will be required to sign an agreement to protect the confidentiality of the research data and the participants.

Project Contacts

Anushka Patara is carrying out this project as a requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing under the supervision of Dr. Nitha Palakshappa and Dr. Sarah Dodds, who can be contacted at the details shared below. The researcher and the supervisors are happy to discuss any queries or concerns you may have about the participation in the project.

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If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for your interest in the research.



MASSEY
BUSINESS
SCHOOL

Value Co-creation in Sustainable Fashion

INFORMATION SHEET

About Me

Hello, my name is Anushka Patara, PhD Candidate and Assistant Lecturer at the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University (Albany Campus). As a researcher I am interested in responsible consumption, slow fashion, collaborative consumption, and sustainable fashion businesses. This interest started in 2017, when I read an article on the impact of fashion waste on climate change, and one sentence caught my attention – “the fashion industry is one of the largest polluters in the world.” Although I did not believe the sentence, it led me to ask more questions, and eventually became the context of my doctoral research.

Overview of the research project

Despite decades of research on sustainability, unsustainable consumption behaviour and production practices persist. There is a need to adopt a more macro level approach to address sustainability, particularly the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 12 – ensure sustainable consumption and production. Particularly, there is a lack of understanding on how all actors in the business network “co-create” value to achieve sustainable consumption. This doctoral research explores how sustainability can be co-created throughout this business network. Specifically, the purpose is to understand how value is co-created throughout the business network of a sustainable fashion business that has adopted a circular approach to achieve sustainable consumption.

The first stage of data collection for the doctoral research has been successfully completed. It involved in-depth interviews with New Zealand based expert working in the field of sustainability or sustainable fashion, such as activists, fashion designers, strategists, academics, journalists, and consumer influencers.

Key Findings from Stage 1

Sustainability is a critical need and requires immediate collective action. Usually, the environmental impact of sustainability is given more prominence than the economic and social impact. All experts (interviewed in Stage 1) expressed a need for stronger and unified leadership. They felt that, at present, the slow policy and regulations development, couple with weak enforcement from the government and other civic agencies was impeding the advancement towards sustainability in New Zealand.

Furthermore, the progress towards sustainability is slow and fragmented due to its varied understanding, which results in different solutions and strategies to address it. Another challenge that the experts shed light on was the difficulty to access 'sustainability', which includes access to ethical products, access to information, access to infrastructure that helps individuals and groups be more sustainable. With respect to the requirements to advance sustainability, the experts stated that three actions are needed – education, enforcement, and collaborations.

These challenges and requirements transcend and apply to the sustainable fashion sector in New Zealand. Specifically, businesses associated with sustainable fashion need to strengthen accountability and transparency. As for consumers, they need to be assisted with finding a balance between their fashion needs and purchasing sustainable fashion garments, which includes challenges like prices, awareness, social trends, etc.

Participant commitment and involvement

The commitment involves participation in Stage 2 of the data collection for the doctoral research project. This includes

- **Face-to-face interviews**
In-depth interviews with individual(s) working with the sustainable fashion business. This includes the retailer, raw material supplier, garment designer, garment manufacturer or any other individual in the supply chain. The interview will last up to 60 to 90 minutes. Preferably each interview is held at the workplace of the participant.
- **Observation-based field research**
This entails the researcher taking photographs, making notes and if required, asking questions while observing the participant in their workplace. The idea is to spend time and follow each participant as they proceed with their daily work, engage with other participants/colleagues/team members and fulfill their role in the business.

Research ethics and participants rights

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) names in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

Please note all measures have been taken to ensure your rights and privacy is protected. If you agree to participate you will be asked to read the following and sign a consent form.

To ensure anonymity, privacy and confidentiality your identity and the identity of any organization you are affiliated with will be fully anonymous. You will be given a pseudonym in any written documentation. You will not be asked for any identifying information about yourself, your business or clients. All data collected via interviews will be kept in a secure environment in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University,

Albany. The information you provide will be analysed, reported and potentially published in an academic journal.

The interview will be kept safe and non-threatening and you will be given the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the research at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

This is a study of personal experience and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. We would prefer to digitally audio record the interview but this would only be done with your consent. You may ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview. If you wish to have a digital audio copy of your interviews we will provide this for you. We intend transcribing the audio files into written documents ourselves. However in the event that a professional transcription service is required, the transcriber(s) will be required to sign an agreement to protect the confidentiality of the research data and the participants.

Who to contact with regards to the research

If you have any queries or concerns about this [project](#) then please feel free to contact any of the following researchers on this project.

Dr Nitha Palakshanna
Associate Head of School
School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing
Massey University
Private Bag 102 904
North Shore City 0745
Auckland
Telephone: 4140800 Ext 43313

Dr Sarah Dodds
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Massey University
Private Bag 102 904
North Shore City 0745
Auckland
Telephone: 4140800 Ext 49071
Email s.dodds@massey.ac.nz

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director (Research Ethics), email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Thank you for your interest in our research.

Appendix D – Information Sheet Macro-Level Consumers



MASSEY
BUSINESS
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Sustainable Fashion in New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET

Who am I?

Hello! My name is Anushka Patara. I am a PhD Candidate in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University, Albany. As a researcher I am interested in sustainable consumption, slow fashion, collaborative consumption, and sustainable fashion businesses.

Overview of the research project

Despite decades of research on sustainability, unsustainable consumption behaviour and production practices persist. There is a need to adopt a more macro level approach to address sustainability, particularly the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as SDG 12 – ensure sustainable consumption and production. Specifically, there is a lack of understanding on how all actors in the value network “co-create” value to achieve sustainable consumption. This doctoral research explores how value is co-created throughout the value network of a sustainable fashion business that has adopted a circular approach to achieve sustainable consumption. Interviews with experts, in sustainability and sustainable fashion, and a sustainable fashion organisation have been completed. Consumers are also an integral part of the value network and its pivotal to get their perspective to truly understand how to advance SDG 12.

Participant commitment and involvement

The commitment involves a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The session will be a free-flowing conversation covering topics such as sustainability and fashion in New Zealand. I will be asking you some specific questions addressing the research purpose. I will only follow up or probe where required. The interview can be completed face – to – face or over Zoom/Microsoft Teams. Each participant will receive a \$40 gift card after completion of the interview.

Research ethics and participants rights

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

Te Kunenga
ki Pūrehuroa

School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing
Private Bag 102 904, North Shore City 0745, Auckland, New Zealand www.massey.ac.nz +64 9 414 0825 F +64 9 414 0826

Please note all measures have been taken to ensure your rights and privacy is protected. If you agree to participate you will be asked to read the following and sign a consent form.

To ensure anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality your identity and the identity of any organization you are affiliated with will be fully anonymous. You will be given a pseudonym in any written documentation. You will not be asked for any identifying information about yourself, your business, or clients. All data collected via interviews will be kept in a secure environment in the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University, Albany. The information you provide will be analysed, reported, and potentially published in an academic journal.

The interview will be kept safe and non-threatening, and you will be given the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the research at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

This is a study of personal experience and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers. I would prefer to digitally audio record the interview, but this would only be done with your consent. You may ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview. If you wish to have a digital audio copy of your interviews, we will provide this for you. I intend transcribing the audio files into written documents myself. However, in the event that a professional transcription service is required, the transcriber(s) will be required to sign an agreement to protect the confidentiality of the research data and the participants.

Project Contacts

Anushka Patara is carrying out this project as a requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing under the supervision of Dr. Nitha Palakshappa and Dr. Sarah Dodds, who can be contacted at the details shared below. The researcher and the supervisors are happy to discuss any queries or concerns you may have about the participation in the project.

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Thank you for your interest in the research.

Appendix E – Research Participation Poster for Micro Level



The poster features a background with a purple-to-blue gradient and stylized leaf illustrations at the top and bottom. A small icon of a cross with a plus sign is on the left, and a small square box is on the right.

WANT A WESTFIELD GIFT CARD WORTH \$40?

Participate in a 45-60 minutes interview for a research study on fashion and sustainability

Anyone aged between 18 to 40 years old can participate in this study.

The interview will be conducted in English, can be face-to-face or over Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

The interview will be audio recorded.

Each participant will be asked to sign a consent form and will receive the gift card at the end of the interview.

Interested? Please send an email to Anushka Patara at A.patara@massey.ac.nz

RESEARCH OPEN TILL 31ST JULY 2023

Appendix F – Discussion Guide/Interview Schedule for Macro Level

Discussion Guide for Phase 1 of Doctoral Research Data Collection

Value Co-creation in Sustainable Fashion Businesses: A Macro Perspective

Interview Details

Participant Type	Government/Nation-level spokesperson on sustainability in New Zealand Sustainable Business Network
Interview Objective and Contribution	National level sustainability discourse – government interventions, public responsibility, and response
Interview Time	45 - 60 minutes (approx.)

Introduction:

Anushka: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement. Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start? [Answer any question that the participant may have]

[Ask them to sign the consent form]

Anushka: Before starting the interview, I would like to give a brief background and explain how the interview will proceed. For my doctoral research, I want to understand, with your help, sustainability in New Zealand. I would like to keep this discussion more conversational, rather than formal and I will only probe with specific questions where needed. You are free to stop me at any time and decline to answer any question. Just to remind you again, I will be recording this interview. You can ask me to stop the recording at any time.

Question 1

Let's begin with a very broad question. What does sustainability mean for New Zealand?

Follow-up questions:

- With respect to UN Sustainable Development Goals, how are they interpreted or understood in New Zealand?
- Is this different from other nations? Are some SDGs more important to New Zealand?
- If you could summarise in a sentence or few words, what is New Zealand's take on sustainability?

Question 2

Is the meaning of sustainability different for governments, businesses, citizens, or different agencies? How is it different?

Follow-up questions:

- What is the role of each of these agencies in the advancement of sustainability in New Zealand?
- What is the relationship between these agencies? How does it impact the advancement of sustainability?

Question 3

In the last two decades, what have been some of the key government initiatives that have shaped New Zealand's response to sustainability or the SDGs?

- What makes these initiatives significant? Why were they needed?
- What was the response towards these initiatives from other agencies – citizens, businesses etc.? What was the role and responsibility of each of the agencies in these initiatives?
- Have they been successful? What has been their impact? Any negative outcomes?

Question 4

I want to talk a little about integrating government, businesses, and consumers. There is a need for multi stakeholder participation and collaboration. Could you shed light on what's happening in New Zealand? What improvements are required?

Question 5

There are only 9 years left to achieve Agenda 2030. How is New Zealand doing in achieving these? What more does New Zealand need to do?

Follow -up questions:

- What are or could be hurdles in the achievement of Agenda 2030 for New Zealand?
- How would you describe New Zealand's response to the sustainability "grand challenge"?
- Beyond Agenda 2030, what more needs to be done? What can each of the agencies, that we discussed above, do?

Question 6

What does sustainability mean to you?

Interview Details

Participant Type	Business Expert/Strategist working with fashion businesses on sustainability
Interview Objective and Contribution	To understand sustainable fashion businesses in New Zealand; how do sustainable fashion businesses function; industry progress and direction
Interview Time	45 - 60 minutes (approx.)

Introduction:

Anushka: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement. Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start? [Answer any question that the participant may have]

[Ask them to sign the consent form]

Anushka: Before starting the interview, I would like to give a brief background and explain how the interview will proceed. My doctoral research focuses on sustainable fashion businesses and with your help, I want to understand more about sustainability and fashion in New Zealand, from a business perspective. I would like to keep this discussion more conversational, rather than formal and I will only probe with specific questions where needed. You are free to stop me at any time and

decline to answer any question. Just to remind you again, I will be recording this interview. You can ask me to stop the recording at any time.

Question 1

How would you describe sustainable fashion in New Zealand?

Follow-up questions

- How is it similar or different to the global conversation and understanding of sustainable fashion?
- How is sustainable fashion understood? What are some of the associations or meanings of sustainable fashion in New Zealand? **[in case participant doesn't understand the question]** For instance, in India, one of the associations with sustainable fashion is heritage or restoring artisan craft and tradition.
- "Sustainable fashion" and "sustainability in the fashion industry" – Are these different? How? What do they mean in the context of New Zealand?

Question 2

When I look at sustainable fashion, I see two distinct categories of businesses. The first is established brands integrating sustainability in their clothing and the second is businesses that make sustainable or ethical garments. Could you share your thoughts on this?

- How would you describe fashion businesses in New Zealand?
- How sustainable is the fashion industry in New Zealand?

Question 3

Does the sustainable fashion industry in New Zealand need to change? If yes, how?

Follow-up questions:

- If we focus on sustainable fashion businesses, what direction and support are they getting from governments, international agencies, certification bodies and strategists?
- How can they scale and become more accessible to citizens? What is the role of businesses in promoting behavioural change towards sustainability?
- What are the difficulties that sustainable fashion businesses are or may face in functioning?

Question 4

If I were to start a sustainable fashion business tomorrow, what are the steps that I need to follow and complete?

Follow-up questions:

- Where should I start? For certifications or approvals do I need?
- What are the regulations specific to New Zealand that I will need to follow?
- How is setting up a sustainable fashion business different from a regular, fast fashion or high street fashion brand?

Question 5

Where do you see sustainable fashion in New Zealand in the next 5 years?

Follow-up questions:

- Some experts and commentators say that we need to move towards circularity. What does this mean for sustainable fashion businesses? Where do you think New Zealand stands or is with respect to circularity in sustainable fashion?
- What changes do businesses need to make to advance sustainable fashion?

Interview Details

Participant Type	Civil society/agency/organisation spokesperson on sustainability in fashion
Interview Objective and Contribution	Role of agency in advancing sustainable fashion in New Zealand; relation with other entities; future of sustainable fashion in New Zealand
Interview Time	45 - 60 minutes (approx.)

Introduction:

Anushka: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement. Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start? [Answer any question that the participant may have]

[Ask them to sign the consent form]

Anushka: Before starting the interview, I would like to give a brief background and explain how the interview will proceed. My doctoral research focuses on sustainable fashion in New Zealand and with your help, I want to understand more about it. I would like to keep this discussion more conversational, rather than formal and I will only probe with specific questions where needed. You are free to stop me at any time and decline to answer any question. Just to remind you again, I will be recording this interview. You can ask me to stop the recording at any time.

Question 1

How would you describe sustainable fashion in New Zealand?

Follow-up questions

- How is it similar or different to the global conversation and understanding of sustainable fashion?
- How is sustainable fashion understood? What are some of the associations or meanings of sustainable fashion in New Zealand? **[in case participant doesn't understand the question]** For instance, in India, one of the associations with sustainable fashion is heritage or restoring artisan craft and tradition
- "Sustainable fashion" and "sustainability in the fashion industry" – Are these different? How? What do they mean in the context of New Zealand?

Question 2

Within the area of sustainable fashion, or promoting sustainability within the NZ fashion industry, what is your role (*the civil society, non-profit organisations, agencies*)?

Follow-up questions:

- How do you support sustainable fashion in New Zealand? What are your responsibilities? What do you hope to achieve as an agency?
- Could you describe your relationship with other bodies or agencies? How would you describe your engagement and relationship with the government, citizens communities, businesses?
- Could you elaborate on challenges you face in working with other entities and/or agencies? How do you resolve these challenges?

Question 3

Does the sustainable fashion industry in New Zealand need to change? If yes, how?

Follow-up questions:

- If we consider the different entities that are involved in the fashion industry, such as the government, businesses, citizens/consumers and civil societies, how are they working now? What needs to change for each of these?
- If we are to achieve Agenda 2030, how should the above-mentioned entities engage or work together? What needs to change within or for civil societies, such as yours?
- What is expected from each of the entities?

Question 4

Within the fashion business network, there are designers, manufactures, suppliers, and other individuals working together to make and sell garments. According to you, how is each group working towards achieving sustainability?

Follow-up questions:

- What are the challenges that these groups are facing? How do or can they resolve them?
- What does sustainability mean for each of them?
- In your opinion, how can they work better to advance sustainability?

Question 5

There has been conversation that there needs to be a global governance body that standardises sustainability in the fashion industry. What are your thoughts on this?

Follow-up questions:

- How do you respond to the need of a global syndicate to reform the fashion industry?
- What should be the responsibilities of such a body? What are your expectations from it?
- What are some of the immediate challenges that need to be resolved by such as body?
- How will the establishment of such a governance body impact other entities, such as certification agencies and civil society, like yours?

Question 6

Where do you see sustainable fashion in New Zealand in the next 5 years?

Follow-up questions:

- Some experts and commentators say that we need to move towards circularity. What does this mean for New Zealand? Where do you think New Zealand stands or is with respect to circularity in sustainable fashion?
- What are your thoughts on the emergence of fast fashion resistance groups/organisations? Do we need to move away from challenging business/industry, and move towards working with businesses on sustainability?
- According to you, what would be the best way to address the sustainability challenge?

Interview Details

Participant Type	Academic Expert
Interview Objective and Contribution	Research on sustainable fashion; role of academic researcher; bridging the gap between academia and practice; future of research
Interview Time	45 - 60 minutes (approx.)

Introduction:

Anushka: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement. Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start? [Answer any question that the participant may have]

[Ask them to sign the consent form]

Anushka: Before starting the interview, I would like to give a brief background and explain how the interview will proceed. For my doctoral research, I want to understand, with your help, sustainable fashion in New Zealand. I would like to keep this discussion more conversational, rather than formal and I will only probe with specific questions where needed. You are free to stop me at any time and decline to answer any question. Just to remind you again, I will be recording this interview. You can ask me to stop the recording at any time.

Question 1

How would you describe sustainable fashion in New Zealand?

Follow-up questions

- How is it similar or different to the global conversation and understanding of sustainable fashion?
- How is sustainable fashion understood? What are some of the associations or meanings of sustainable fashion in New Zealand? **[in case participant doesn't understand the question]** For instance, in India, one of the associations with sustainable fashion is heritage or restoring artisan craft and tradition.
- "Sustainable fashion" and "sustainability in the fashion industry" – Are these different? How? What do they mean in the context of New Zealand? Of which is needed more to address the sustainability challenge?

Question 2

What is the role of academic experts, such as yourself, in addressing the sustainability challenge in New Zealand?

Follow-up questions:

- How would you describe your relationship and engagement with other entities such as the government spokesperson, civil bodies, and businesses working in the fashion industry?
- How would you describe your relationship and engagement with consumers/citizens?
- Does your role need to change? If yes, how and why?

Question 3

In the last 20 years, what have been the main areas of research in sustainable fashion?

Follow-up questions:

- What has been the impact of this research?
- Are there certain topics or themes that need more research?
- What have been the challenges with research in fashion and specifically, sustainable fashion?

Question 4

According to you, what kind of research should be initiated in sustainable fashion?

Follow-up questions:

- Why is this research needed? Are there any changes needed in research methodology?
- What are the challenges that academic research/researchers could expect?

- According to you, what should be the future of academic researchers or research groups? What are your expectations with respect to support given to academic research? What do you need from other entities in the fashion industry to achieve the future you want for academic research?

Question 5

Where do you see sustainable fashion in New Zealand in the next 5 years?

Follow-up questions:

- Some experts and commentators say that we need to move towards circularity. What does this mean for New Zealand? Where do you think New Zealand stands or is with respect to circularity in sustainable fashion?
- What are your thoughts on the emergence of fast fashion resistance groups/organisations? Do we need to move away from challenging business, and move towards working with businesses on sustainability?
- According to you, what would be the best way to address the sustainability challenge?

Interview Details

Participant Type	Consumer facing influencer
Interview Objective and Contribution	Thoughts and feelings of consumers; role of consumer facing influencer; consumer contribution in achieving sustainability in fashion
Interview Time	45 - 60 minutes (approx.)

Introduction:

Anushka: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement. Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start? [Answer any question that the participant may have]

[Ask them to sign the consent form]

Anushka: Before starting the interview, I would like to give a brief background and explain how the interview will proceed. For my doctoral research, I want to understand, with your help, sustainable fashion in New Zealand. I would like to keep this discussion more conversational, rather than formal and I will only probe with specific questions where needed. You are free to stop me at any time and decline to answer any question. Just to remind you again, I will be recording this interview. You can ask me to stop the recording at any time.

Question 1

How would you describe sustainable fashion in New Zealand?

Follow-up questions

- How is it similar or different to the global conversation and understanding of sustainable fashion?
- How is sustainable fashion understood? What are some of the associations or meanings of sustainable fashion in New Zealand? **[in case participant doesn't understand the question]** For instance, in India, one of the associations with sustainable fashion is heritage or restoring artisan craft and tradition.

- “Sustainable fashion” and “sustainability in the fashion industry” – Are these different? How? What do they mean in the context of New Zealand? Of which is needed more to address the sustainability challenge?

Question 2

With respect to sustainability and fashion and its current discourse, where is the citizens/consumers? Could you describe their thoughts and feelings?

Follow-up questions:

- How does the common Kiwi understand sustainable fashion? What does it mean to them?
- What is their role? What is expected from citizens/consumers? Any challenges?
- What kind of support or guidance do they need from other entities associated with sustainability and fashion?

Question 3

What is the role of influencers, such as yourself, in addressing the sustainability challenge in New Zealand?

Follow-up questions:

- How would you describe your relationship and engagement with other entities such as the government spokesperson, civil bodies, and businesses working in the fashion industry?
- How would you describe your relationship and engagement with consumers/citizens?
- Does your role need to change? If yes, how and why?

Question 4

There are only 9 years left to achieve Agenda 2030. From a citizens/consumer’s perspective, how is New Zealand doing in achieving these? What more do we need to do?

Follow-up questions:

- What are or could be hurdles in the achievement of Agenda 2030 for New Zealand?
- How would you describe New Zealand’s response to the sustainability “grand challenge”?
- Beyond Agenda 2030, what more needs to be done? What can each of the agencies, that we discussed above, do?

Question 5

Where do you see sustainable fashion in New Zealand in the next 5 years?

Follow-up questions:

- Some experts and commentators say that we need to move towards circularity. What does this mean for New Zealand? In your opinion, what is the role of consumers in promoting circularity?
- What are your thoughts on the emergence of fast fashion resistance groups/organisations? Do we need to move away from challenging business/industry, and move towards working with businesses on sustainability?
- According to you, what would be the best way to address the sustainability challenge?

Interview Details

Participant Type	Certification agency spokesperson
Interview Objective and Contribution	Understanding of sustainability challenge; role of certification agencies
Interview Time	45 - 60 minutes (approx.)

Introduction:

Anushka: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. You have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement. Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start? [Answer any question that the participant may have]

[Ask them to sign the consent form]

Anushka: Before starting the interview, I would like to give a brief background and explain how the interview will proceed. For my doctoral research, I want to understand, with your help, more about sustainable fashion and the role that certification agencies play. I would like to keep this discussion more conversational, rather than formal and I will only probe with specific questions where needed. You are free to stop me at any time and decline to answer any question. Just to remind you again, I will be recording this interview. You can ask me to stop the recording at any time.

Question 1

How would you describe 'sustainability challenge within the fashion industry'?

Follow-up questions

- "Sustainable fashion" and "sustainability in the fashion industry" – Are these different? How? Of which is needed more to address the sustainability challenge?

Question 2

With respect to the advancement of sustainable fashion, how would you describe your role?

Follow-up questions:

- How do you support sustainable fashion? What are your responsibilities? What do you hope to achieve as an agency?
- Could you describe your relationship with other bodies or agencies? How would you describe your engagement and relationship with the government, citizens communities, businesses?
- Could you elaborate on challenges you face in working with other entities and/or agencies? How do you resolve these challenges?

Question 3

Let's talk a little about consumers of garments and textile. As a certification body, how would you describe your relationship with them?

Follow-up questions:

- What should they expect from you? How do you engage with them?
- There is still an unclear or no unified understanding of sustainable fashion within consumers – a wide 'attitude-behaviour' gap. What are your thoughts on this? What role does a certification agency, such as yours, play to reduce this gap?

Question 4

There has been conversation that there needs to be a global governance body that standardises sustainability in the fashion industry. What are your thoughts on this?

Follow-up questions:

- How do you respond to the need of a global syndicate to reform the fashion industry?
- What should be the responsibilities of such a body? What are your expectations from it?
- What are some of the immediate challenges that need to be resolved by such as body?
- How will the establishment of such a governance body impact other entities, such as certification agencies, like yours?

Question 5

Where do you see sustainable fashion in the next 5 years?

Follow-up questions:

- Some experts and commentators say that we need to move towards circularity. What does that mean for agencies such as yours?
- What are your thoughts on the emergence of fast fashion resistance groups/organisations? How does it impact your role and functioning?
- According to you, what would be the best way to address the sustainability challenge?

Appendix G – Discussion Guide/Interview Schedule for Meso Level

Sustainable Fashion Businesses in New Zealand

Interview Questions/Guide

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to help with my doctoral research.

Hope that you have read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement?

(Go through information sheet highlighting participants rights and what is required of them; highlight anonymity).

Are you happy for the interview to be recorded? *(Audio recorded if face-to-face/ Audio + Video recording if Zoom)*

Are there any questions you'd like to ask before I start? *(Ask them to sign the consent form)*

Give a brief background of the project and myself.

Interview process

I will start by asking you a few broad questions about your journey and sustainable fashion in New Zealand and then move onto more specific questions relating to the business, your role within the organization, and working with other partners/stakeholders.

As we progress, I will ask specific questions according to your responses. It will be more of a discussion, a bit like a conversation. Please remember you are free to stop at any time or decline to answer any questions.

1. I want to start by getting an understanding of what does sustainability mean to you.

What is sustainable fashion according to you?

Probing questions *(ask if participant does not mention):*

- a) When did you start becoming interested in sustainability/sustainable fashion? /
How did you come to know about sustainable fashion?
- b) What motivates you towards sustainability/sustainable fashion?
- c) Does sustainability feature in other aspects of your life? How?

2. I'd like to now learn about your journey and get a deeper understanding of your work within the organisation.

Probing questions (*ask if participant does not mention*):

- a) When did you join this organisation? How did you come to know about them?
Why did you decide to work with this organisation?
- b) What is your role in the organisation? Please describe some of your objectives and responsibilities.

3. I want to learn about the different aspects of the business, focusing on how your organisation is positioned vis-à-vis stakeholders.

- a) Tell me about all the stakeholders in your business (*researcher to make a note of all stakeholders mentioned. For instance, designers, suppliers, manufacturers, investors, manufacturers, society, community, etc.*)
- b) How do you work with each stakeholder? What is your relationship with them?
- c) How do you benefit from working with them? How do they benefit from working with you?

4. I am interested to know how you (and the organisation) contribute towards advancing sustainability and sustainable fashion.

Probing questions (*ask if participant does not mention*):

- a) What motivates or drives you (and the organisation) to be sustainable? How does your brand promote sustainable fashion?
- b) What role do you specifically play in ensuring the organisation's goals and objectives (towards sustainable fashion) are met?
- c) Are there any challenges that you (and the organisation) face in trying to achieve goals and objectives?
- d) Is there any support you (and the organisation) need to resolve these challenges?
If yes, from whom?

5. I'd like to discuss your consumers now. How would you describe your consumers and their relationship with the organisation?

Probing questions (*ask if participant does not mention*):

- a) What role do your consumer have in helping you (and the organisation) meet goals and objectives towards sustainable fashion?
- b) How do you benefit from them? How do they benefit from you?
- c) Are there any changes or improvements that could be made to the relationship with your consumers? How will this help?

6. Finally, I would love to hear about your future vision.

Probing questions (*ask if participant does not mention*):

- a) What are the changes you would like to see in the sustainable fashion industry?
- b) How can these changes be achieved?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us and giving up your time today.

Appendix H – Discussion Guide/Interview Schedule for Micro Level *Sustainable Fashion in New Zealand*

Interview Questions/Guide – Consumers

Thank you for agreeing to help with my doctoral research.

Have you read the information sheet outlining the project and your involvement? (*Go through information sheet highlighting participants rights and what is required of them*).

Are you happy for the interview to be recorded (*audio recorded if face-to-face/audio + video recorded if Zoom meeting*)

Are there any questions you'd like to ask before we start?

(Ask them to sign the consent form. I will then give a brief background of myself and my interest in sustainability and sustainable fashion)

Interview Process

I will begin by asking a few broad questions about sustainability and sustainable fashion. As we go along, I will ask specific questions according to your responses. It will be more of a discussion, a bit like a conversation. There are no right or wrong answers, and I would like to focus on your thoughts and experiences. Please remember you are free to stop at any time or decline to answer any questions. (*Specify participant anonymity and confidentiality*)

1. What does sustainability mean to you?

Follow up questions:

- a) Does sustainability feature in your life? If yes, how? Could you share some instances or examples?
- b) When did you start becoming interested in sustainability? What motivates you towards sustainability?

2. Have you heard about the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals?

(Researcher to show an image with all the SDGs. Ask the participant to share their thoughts and feelings after seeing the image)

Follow up questions:

- a) What comes to mind when you see these goals/this image? What does it mean to you? (*Researcher to discuss SDGs with participant after getting initial response. Explain that the SDGs function at a global level → country →*

organization → individual level; give a comprehensive background about the SDGs)

- b) What are your thoughts and feeling about SDG 12 – Responsible consumption and production?

3. As a consumer, I am interested to know how you contribute towards advancing sustainability.

Follow up questions:

- a) What role and responsibility do you have in advancing sustainability?
- b) Are there any challenges that you face in doing your role?
- c) Do you need any support or guidance to do your role? If yes, what form of support do you require? From whom? (*Note mention of government, civil society, businesses, and other consumers*)

4. What are the changes that you would like to see with respect to sustainability in New Zealand?

Follow up questions:

- a) How can these changes be achieved?
- b) What role do you think you will have to play to achieve these changes? How will you have to contribute to achieve these changes?

5. I would now like to move to sustainable fashion. What is sustainable fashion according to you?

Follow up questions:

- a) When did you start becoming interested in sustainable fashion? How did you come to know about sustainable fashion?

6. I want to learn about your experience related to sustainable fashion.

Follow up questions:

- a) Where/how do you shop for sustainable fashion garments? When do you go shopping?
- b) Which brands do you buy? Why? (*Note if participant has mentioned Standard Issue*)
- c) How/where did you learn about these sustainable fashion brands?
- d) What happens to the garment(s) once you have it with you? What do you do with the garment after you don't wear/use it anymore?

7. I'd like to discuss a bit more about sustainable fashion brands. How would you describe your engagement with these brands? (*Might use the word 'interaction' if participant does not understand engagement, can give examples*).

Follow up questions:

- a) How do these brands engage with you? What do they do? (*Researcher to show images of possible co-creation techniques and methods*)
- Innovation, ideas, and feedback (in garment creation and design)
 - Engagement on brand owned platform (e.g., Instagram posts)
 - Marketing and user-generated content
 - Facility visits and workshop participation
 - Garment return and exchange
 - Repair and mend service

Researcher to note any other form of co-creation activity mentioned by participant;

EXPLAIN WHY THESE IMAGES HAVE BEEN SELECTED

- b) How do you respond to these activities? How do you feel about these activities?
- c) What is your role in these activities? How do you benefit from these activities? How does the brand benefit from you?

8. Finally, I would love to hear about the future with respect sustainable fashion. What are the changes that you would like to see in the sustainable fashion industry?

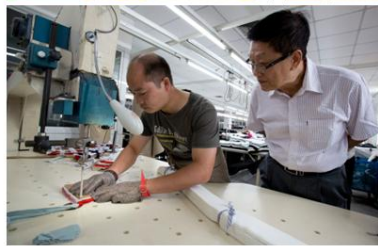
Follow up questions:

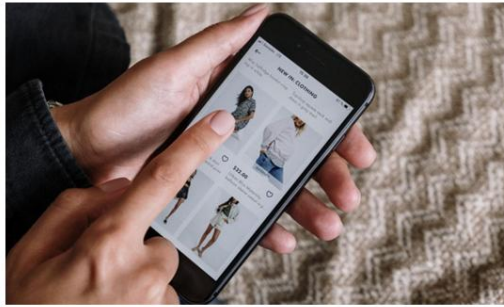
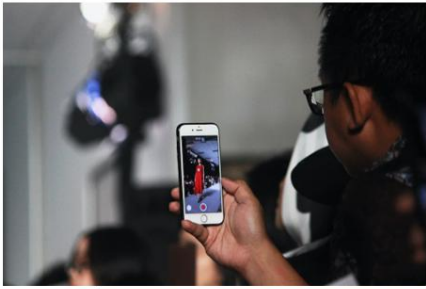
- a) How can these changes be achieved?
- b) What role do you think you will have to play to achieve these changes? How will you have to contribute to achieve these changes?

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with me and giving up your time today. I am very grateful to you for assisting me in my research.

Appendix I – Images Shown to Micro Level During Interviews









Appendix J – Initial List of Codes

Appendix 1 Initial Codes Emerging from Participant Interviews

<i>Emergent Codes</i>				
Broad codes	Initial codes	Sub	Meaning	
Quality	Qm		Natural materials	
	Qg		Lifetime guarantee	
	Qt		Transitioning to sustainable materials	
	Qd		Durable/high quality,	
	Qsp		Sustainable practices, ethical production, low carbon emission	
	Qb		Impact on body, feeling on skin	
	Qtech		Technology and innovation	
Efficiency	Em		Money, cost of sustainable fashion, affordable brands, value for money	
	Et		Thrift shopping, not spending on ‘new’	
	El		Longevity	
	Er		Return, recycle, repair, renewed, regenerated	
	Ea		Apathy, takes time to ship sustainably, not convenient	
	Ei		Investing in sustainable fashion	
	Eacc		Access to sustainable products and brands	
	EPO		Access to product options	
	Eis		Information source to assist with making sustainable decisions	
	Efd		Organised, de-clutter, minimalism	
	Eifs		Availability of infrastructure	
Sustainability Ethics	Ethwc		Workers’ rights and conditions	
	Ethenv		Protecting the environment, environmental impact	
	Eths		Ethically sourced	
	Ethmiss		Embedded mission around sustainability	
	Ethnz		NZ designed, NZ made, supporting local	
	Ethgw		Not greenwashing	
	Etht		Being transparent – where made, how made	
	Ethpa		Personal activism – voting with the wallet, asking questions, raising concern, supporting ethical and sustainable brands	
		Ethrc		Resisting consumption, buying what you ‘need’
		Ethcl		Choice of leadership – government, policy makers
	Ethle		Positive contribution to economy, especially developing and poor	

Emotional Association	EAcc	Being a conscious consumer, conscious consumption
	EAr	Self-responsibility, self-awareness, feeling good about self
	EAIM	Impression management – being seen to be sustainable, other’s impression
	EAt	Being trendy, thrift shopping or buying sustainably
	EAF	Swapping with friends, connection with friends doing the same (being sustainable, thrift shopping), shopping with friends, group sustainable consumption, community engagement
	EAI	Either associate with identity; also trying to disconnect clothes with identity
	EASh	Sharing stories, sharing on SM
	EACHI	Changemaker, influencing others to make sustainable choices, sharing opinion to influence behaviour
	EArw	Rewarding purchase, feel good
	EAm	Negative emotions associated with sustainable consumer choices, guilt, helplessness, anxiety
<i>Additional Codes</i>		
Knowledge/Education	K	Gaining knowledge and learning about sustainability
Future Orientation	FO	Long-term focus, being sustainable for future generations
	PL	Prolonging life, adding value to garment, saving from end-of-life disposal
	CPP	Caring for planet and people, connecting with mother earth
	PPI	Positive Personal Impact

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