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Maltese Consumers' Knowledge of Textile Labelling Information:  
An Exploratory Study

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Masters in  
Access to Education.

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## **Abstract**

### **Maltese consumers' knowledge of textile labelling information: An exploratory study**

The fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world. Studies have been conducted on how consumers can lower the negative impact of clothing on the environment (e.g Health and Environment Justice Support International, 2018). The importance of reading care labelling when selecting, buying and caring for clothing and textile items contribute towards creating less pollution and conserving the world's natural resources. Shin (2000) argues that innovations in textiles and fibres make consumers' decision-making process more complex. Sonnenberg and Erasmus (2005) point out that the textiles industry needs to effectively communicate their product information, as textiles care labels serve as the first point of contact between consumers and retailers or manufacturers (Chowdhary, 2003). Local research on the attitudes and knowledge of Maltese citizens regarding textiles care labels is non-existent. This investigation gathers data from university students reading for a Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) (2019-2021 cohort) regarding their awareness on textiles care labelling. The focus of this study is on educating University students who are prospective teachers about their role in reducing the impact of textiles on the environment through improving their knowledge on the interpretation of textiles care labels. This study made the participants more aware of how to make informed choices when choosing and purchasing textile items, such as clothing and accessories. The research uses mixed method approach and the main research tools were an online questionnaire sent to the whole cohort of MTL students (2019-21) and one focus groups. In this dissertation, it was discovered that there is a lack of understanding regarding care labels and environmental degradation caused by the textile industry, while there is a misconception about textile workers. An informative poster has been disseminated to the whole cohort through the MTL Facebook group.

### **KEYWORDS**

**MTL students  
Knowledge**

**Textile care labels  
Attitudes**

**Environment  
Consumers**

## **Dedication**

***To my parents Sonia and Anthony,***

***my Fiancé Darryl,***

***family and friends,***

**for all the support all throughout my journey of education.**

**Without them I would have never been able to achieve such accomplishments.**

**Thank you.**

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Finally, I'd like to thank the MTL students from the 2019-2021 cohort for their involvement in my research.

## List of Abbreviations

<b>COFREET</b>	Comité Français de l'Étiquetage pour l'Entretien Textile
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GINETEX</b>	Groupement International d'Étiquetage pour l'Entretien des Textiles (International Association for Textile Care Labelling)
<b>GOTS</b>	The Global Organic Textile Standard
<b>ISO</b>	International Standardization Organization
<b>MCCAA</b>	Malta Competition and Consumers Affairs Authority
<b>MPI</b>	Market Performance Index
<b>MTL</b>	Masters in Teaching and Learning
<b>QR</b>	Quick Response
<b>RAPEX</b>	Rapid Alert System for Non-Food Consumer Products
<b>REACH</b>	Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## 1.1 Introduction

The fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world (Blote et al., 2020). Key studies have been conducted on how consumers can lower the negative impact of clothing on the environment (Luz, 2007; Bick et al., 2018).

The importance of reading care labelling when selecting, buying and caring for clothing and textile items contribute towards creating less pollution and conserving the world's natural resources. Shin (2000) argued that innovations in textiles and fibres make consumers' decision-making process more complex. Sonnenberg and Erasmus (2005) pointed out that the textiles industry needs to effectively communicate their product information, as textiles care labels serve as the first point of contact between consumers and retailers or manufacturers (Chowdhary, 2003).

Local research on the attitudes and knowledge of Maltese citizens regarding textiles care labels is limited, therefore the researcher had these important questions that follow:

- Do consumers consider textiles care labels as important?
- Are consumers aware of the negative impact of textiles products on the environment?
- How do consumers choose their clothing and textiles products?

This investigation shall focus on gathering data from university students reading for a Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) (2019-2021 cohort) regarding their awareness on textiles care labelling. The focus of this study is to enhance the knowledge of university students who are prospective teachers about their role in reducing the impact of textiles on the environment through improving their knowledge on the interpretation of textiles care labels. This study aims to make the participants more aware of how to make informed choices when choosing and purchasing textile items, such as clothing and accessories.



## 1.2 Research Rationale

Having graduated with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Home Economics and specialising in textiles, fashion and interior studies, has increased my interest on such topics. The significance of this dissertation is to create more awareness on something that is taken for granted by some people, that is, the care of their clothes.

Clothes serve as a protection from many things including weather conditions (Elmokadem, 2020). People also purchase clothes for functional and social reasons (Elmokadem, 2020). Clothing can influence someone's feelings as well as their perception of each other (Burns et al., 2019). Nonetheless for a consumer to be able to make an informed decision, they have to be provided with compulsory information of the product or service that is yet to be purchased (Vella, 2019).

Garments and clothes are one of the most common purchased items (Vella, 2018). In a study conducted by Investopedia (2020) on what consumers spend most of their money on, topping the list was the food eaten at home, followed by take-away food and the third most purchased item was apparel and services. Hence, consumers should be aware of the information placed on the garment's care label. The label provides the consumers with information and care instructions (Chowdhary, 2003).

Nevertheless, reading the garments' care label is significant, as even though it does not contain data about the chemicals the material has been treated with, one would still be aware of the fabric content to prevent any possible allergic reactions (Svedman et al., 2019).

Therefore, the researcher believes that more education is needed on something we use everyday, and that not everyone is aware of, including the consequences that the textile industry has on the environment.

## 1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to enhance the understanding of the relative importance of care labels of textiles for future educators. The objectives of this research are:

- To recognise the perceptions and knowledge of future educators on care labels.
- To assess the future educators' awareness of the impact of textile products on the environment.
- To enhance the understanding of consumer's purchasing decisions with regards to clothing and textiles.

Thereby this dissertation aims to uncover further information about the soon to be teachers' shopping patterns; their awareness of the environment's deterioration, their laundering habits, whether they give importance to care labelling and their knowledge of consumer rights. This study will enable MTL students to be more informed customers and will aim at raising awareness of the textile industry's negative environmental impacts.

When a business practice incorporates inaccurate information, it is deemed misleading since it has the potential to deceive customers (Vella, 2019). Participants will also be asked if they are aware of the possibility of filing a complaint regarding inaccurate or misleading information on the textile care label, and whether they have ever filed a complaint with the MCCA.

#### 1.4 The Organisation of this dissertation

This dissertation starts with an overview and presents the research aims and objectives. The practical relevance of this study is noted in this chapter.

Chapter two presents the literature review focusing on care labelling, environmental and safety aspects, regulatory and legal obligations and consumer behaviour. The local scenario will be presented to support the context of this study.

Chapter three introduces the research methodology, in particular the data collection and analysis methodology, the sample selection, and the methodological limitations.

Chapter four presents the results of the online questionnaire.

Chapter five is a thorough discussion of the findings of research compared with that of literature.

Chapter six presents the conclusions of the study which includes a summary of the main research issues, a synopsis of the results and the discussion, the knowledge contribution to academia and stakeholders and recommendations for further research.

# **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## 2.1 Overview to the Literature Review

In this chapter, various literature relevant to the research questions will be presented to support a critical review of care labelling, safety aspects, regulatory and legal obligations, the effects on the environment and consumer behaviour. The local scenario will also be presented to support the context assessment of this study.

## 2.2 Introduction to Care Labelling

A garment's care label is the first means of communication between the consumer and the manufacturer (Chowdhary, 2003). On *Care Labels - Guide on Care Labelling Systems – Apparel* (n.d.) it was argued that the country of origin and the manufacturer must be listed on the care label as the manufacturer is accountable to the information on the label. A care label should be permanently affixed to the garment (Mastamet et al., 2008), so that it is easily accessible by the consumers. Care labels should also be durable enough to withstand the laundering and care throughout the lifespan of the garment (Nadiger, 2007). Labels, according to Merwe et al. (2014), are used to safeguard the manufacturer against consumers seeking reimbursement for damage to the garment caused by incorrect laundering. As a result, a care label is the means through which the proper care instructions for such a specific clothing are communicated.

### 2.2.1 The Evolvement of Care Labelling

The International Association for Textile Care Labelling (GINETEX, n.d.b) stated that until the 1950's there was no need for a care label as most of the clothes were made from natural fibres such as cotton and linen, wool and silk and therefore, the care for garments and textile products would be similar. Kativa (2016, para. 10) referred to 1950's documentation that showed synthetic fabrics started to 'satisfy' the people's demand for clothing after years of "economic depression and war".

GINETEX (n.d.b) argued that washing machine popularisation in the 1960s led to a quantum leap in the industry. In view of the introduction of synthetic fibres on the market, more information was required on how to care for the items. The care labelling system using symbols as we know them today, dates back to 1963. The symbols originated in Switzerland and they were developed by GINETEX, and they co-owned the trademarks of the symbols together with Comité Français de l'Etiquetage pour l'Entretien Textile (COFREET).

According to GINETEX (n.d.a), “For greater clarity, the full series of symbols must be included on the labels without exceptions. The following sequence is applicable since 2006” (n.p).

## Figure 2.1

*GINETEX basic care labelling symbols*



Note. Adapted from GINETEX (n.p). (n.d.a). Basic Principles of Care Labelling. (<https://ginetex.net/GB/labelling/care-labelling.asp>).

Since other countries such as Japan, America and Canada also wanted to create a care labelling system using care symbols, standardisation had become even more important. The International Standard Organisation (ISO) then “supported the global standardisation of care labels since 1970” (GINETEX n.d.b). With the standardization of the care symbols, consumers across the world will be able to recognize the care labelling system without having to use any language. The ISO 3758 standard has been reviewed in 2012 primarily to include drying symbols. ISO 3758:2012 applies to all textile articles in the form in which they are supplied to the end user.

### 2.2.2 Technology and Care Labelling

As different garments are manufactured differently, they have completely distinct care labels. The process of making various textile labels takes time and increases the cost for the manufacturer (Sanad, 2017). Textile care labelling is highly significant for both the consumer and manufacturer (Sanad, 2017). However, some consumers may feel that the tag could be visible when the fabric of the garment is thin and it makes them feel like a 'walking advertisement' for the brand (Felicioni & De Backer, 2019). Some people do not want to retain the care label that shows the information on the clothing after removing the care label since it is inconvenient for them. (Felicioni & De Backer, 2019).

According to Bruce (2012) and Daurer et al. (2012), as cited in Strähle (2017), the increased use of smartphones for transactions and information lookup has changed the customer-seller relationship. Labels with interactive Quick Response (QR) or scanable codes linked to the internet for supplying information have become possible thanks to technological advancements (Ziegler, 2012).

If the QR code were to be used as a care label, it would be permanently printed on the garment (Vargas et.al, 2020). In 2012, QR codes were even suggested as a possible application for apparel (Raman & Kokonya, 2012). Through this application, one would have the care information when laundering the garment and throughout the garments' life. With such application, the discomfort issues of the labels would be eliminated (Vargas et al., 2020).

Since the use of smartphones has increased drastically, phone readable codes can be used to look up all the data originally printed on the care label of the garment. These readable codes can be used to start a mobile-customer experience linked with social media and brand education (Vargas et al., 2020). It provides data management to the company as it contributes to protection from any counterfeit activity or infringement.

## 2.3 Regulatory Background and Requirements, Safety Aspects and Care Labelling

Textiles sold in the EU must conform with Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2011 on textile fibre names, related labelling and listing of the fibre content of textile products. Labelling or marking of the fibre composition is required by the same regulation to guarantee that proper and uniform information is made available to all Union consumers.

Labelling requirements in Malta conform to the EU regulations. MCCA is responsible for the national regulations that incorporate labelling requirements for several different sectors. According to Chapter 427 of the Laws of Malta and its subsidiary legislation, the consumer shall be able to understand the information listed on the textile label, which clearly specifies the material of different areas of the garment if different materials are used.

This section will summarize the key points of Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011 and evaluate literature on textile composition and labelling regulations, makers' and distributors' duties, safety considerations, advertising, and eco labelling.

### 2.3.1 Textile Composition

The European Commission (2016) stated that textile products must also have “full fibre composition and indicate any non-textile parts of animal origin” (Export Helpdesk for Business, n.p). Hence, every textile product manufactured from real leather or any animal must be labelled, as this should make it easier for consumers to determine whether or not what they are paying for is genuine or not.

### 2.3.2 Labelling Requirements

Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011 differentiates between labelling and inclusive labelling. Labelling is defined as “means affixing the required information to the textile product



by way of attaching a label”. Inclusive labelling is defined as “the use of a single label for several textile products or components” (p.9).

Article 4 of the above-mentioned regulation stipulated that any textile product put on the market, should be labelled and marked. Article 9 (1) stated that textile products shall be labelled with the percentages by weight according to the type of fibres used, in descending order.

Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011 stated that, Information should be written in the official language(s) of the EU country where the textile will be marketed. Chapter 427 of the Laws of Malta, stated that the labelling should be specific according to which part of the garment is made using which material listed.

### 2.3.3 Responsibilities of Manufacturers and Distributors

On *Care Labels - Guide on Care Labelling Systems – Apparel* (n.d.) it was stated that products can be imported in a country without a care label, however a care label must be attached to the garment before being purchased by the end consumer. The manufacturer is responsible for the information provided on the care label attached to the garment (Draxlerová et al., 2015).

According to Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011(2011), Article 15 (2), if a distributor, alters the information of the label, while making sure that the product has the right labels, and if the product is placed on the market under the business’ trade name, the distributor shall be considered as a manufacturer, and can be held responsible for any false information. “The labelling and marking of textile products shall be durable, easily legible, visible and accessible and, in the case of a label, securely attached” (Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011, 2011).

### 2.3.4 Advertising and Greenwashing

Regulation (EU) No 1007/2011 refers to misleading commercial practices, which include purchasing decisions based on false information. These are restricted under Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of the 11th of May

2005 against unfair business commercial practices to consumers in the internal market.

Unfair business practices are also addressed in Regulation (EU) 2017/2394 of the European Parliament and of the Council on 12 December 2017 on cooperation between authorities responsible for enforcing consumer protection laws.

The Consumer Agenda published by the European Commission in November 2020, prioritises 'greenwashing' and sustainable consumption. The term greenwashing refers to a company that makes false claims regarding the sustainability of their products, so that it is perceived as a sustainable company and in return gain more popularity with consumers (Strähle et al. 2015 a, b).

Regrettably, the action of greenwashing has been used by several companies. Since consumers are still not completely aware of what sustainable products entail, therefore companies started using 'greenwashing' to seem sustainable. As part of the planned 'green transition' the European Commission is planning to fight greenwashing through a series of measures, such as contacting the companies concerned and ensuring that such false claims are retrieved (European Commission, 2021).

### 2.3.5 Product Safety and Textile Workers

Textile labelling helps consumers to identify that the product is safe. All information provided on the label is the responsibility of the manufacturer, regardless, the community must also cooperate to ensure the consumers health and safety (Draxlerová et al., 2015).

Ramsøedh (2017) argued that fabrics and textile products go through rigorous testing. With such testing a lot of harsh chemicals are used and after the production some of those chemicals would be embedded in the fibres of the garment or textile product. Such chemicals endanger both the environment and human health, increasing the likelihood of allergies worsening and having unknown long-term repercussions on our health (Ramsøedh, 2017).

Ramsøedh (2017) argued that businesses do not want to reveal that their products might contain harmful chemicals as this might harm the business' reputation. It would

also be likely that the consumers would then start to think that all the products manufactured by a certain brand, must contain chemicals. To put it mildly, owing to the prevalence of labels such as ‘environmentally friendly’, if corporations declare that their products include such harmful substances, they may be labelled as unsafe and not environmentally friendly.

The EU (n.d) is restricting the use of around thirty-three different chemicals in all textile products that are constructed and marketed in the European industry. As another means to ensure safety within Europe, the EU has a rapid Alert System online where European Member States can inform each other when dangerous products are found on the market. This system is called RAPEX (Rapid Alert System for Non-Food Consumer Products).

In the evaluation done by RAPEX in 2019 (Figure 2.2), clothing and textiles were the 3<sup>rd</sup> most notified products as being unsafe. Even though most of the posts are related to children’s clothing safety, others are related to excess chemicals found in products.

**Figure 2.2**

*Five most notified products*



Note. Adapted from European RAPEX 2019 Annual Report: Focus On Children’s Safety (n.p). (2020). (<https://www.sgs.com/en/news/2020/07/safeguards-10920-european-rapeX-2019-annual-report-focus-on-childrens-safety>).

The EU is also limiting the use of certain chemicals that they are keeping track of when imported to Europe by the means of REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation

and Restriction of Chemicals). Through this regulation importers and producers are required to register the quantity of chemicals found in their products.

According to the Eurostat (2019), a study conducted in 2018, revealed that the top three countries that the EU imports its clothes from are: China, Bangladesh and Turkey (see Figure 2.3).

**Figure 2.3**

*Top three countries for import of clothing to the EU*



Note. Adapted from Eurostat (n.p). (2019). Where do our clothes come from? (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/EDN-20190422-1>).

When mentioning the textile industry, one cannot overlook the calamity that occurred in Bangladesh on April 24, 2013. Bolle (2014) argued that the tragedy at Rana Plaza happened due to negligence by the owners, as workers witnessed the cracks on the building a few days earlier. However, the operators knowing that they had production deadlines to be met, brushed the concerns of the workers assuring them that the building is still safe. An hour later, the eight-story building had collapsed leaving more than 1,100 textile workers dead. This news had raised some awareness of the low wages and that the working conditions must be improved.

High street competition in advanced countries increases customer expectations for cheap, throwaway apparel (fast fashion), causing manufacturers to cut back on cotton

purchases and instead increase their demand for synthetic materials such as polyester (Fairtrade Foundation, 2015). Consequently, every year in India, a large number of cotton farmers commit suicide as a result of the high costs of cotton seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, due to large amount of debt (Fairtrade Foundation, 2015).

Around seven years after the collapse of the Rana Plaza, according to the European Commission (July, 2020), it was estimated that there are sixty million garment workers working in the textile industry, and most of them work in “indecent” working conditions, including extremely poor wages and long hours. The following picture shows where the money is most invested when it comes to simple t-shirts.

**Figure 2.4**

*Breakdown costs of a T-shirt*

## BREAKDOWN OF COSTS OF A T-SHIRT



Note. Adapted from European Commission (n.p). (July, 2020). #FashionChecker: Calling for a living wage for garment workers and a more transparent supply chain. ([https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/stories/fashionchecker-calling-living-wage-garment-workers-and-more-transparent-supply-chain\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/stories/fashionchecker-calling-living-wage-garment-workers-and-more-transparent-supply-chain_en)).

### 2.3.6 Eco label

To create more awareness on sustainable and environmentally friendly products, the European Commission established the EU ecolabel back in 1992 (European Commission, n.d.b). The ecolabel signifies that the product has been produced with 'environmental excellence' and to high standards throughout its whole production process, from raw material extraction through the disposal of unsold or surplus products. According to the European Commission 2020, in the EU Ecolabel Clothing and textiles catalogue, EU Ecolabel Licence Holders must meet the following criteria,

“✓ Limited use of substances harmful to health and environment

✓ Reduction in water and air pollution

✓ Colour resistance to perspiration, washing, wet and dry rubbing and light exposure” (European commission, n.d.b, box. 1).

The European Commission (n.d.b), stated that the ecolabel promotes and encourages producers to create less waste and lower their CO<sup>2</sup> emissions during manufacturing. Therefore, its main aim is to lower the negative impact on the environment.

Ramsoedh (2017) says that the aim of the ecolabel was to minimise stakeholders from using the word organic inappropriately as to “engage in unfair competition” (p.13)

An eco-labelled product therefore is much safer and ecologically friendly than the conventional purchased clothes. If stakeholders would start to adopt such criteria, it will reduce the negative effects on the environment drastically.

## 2.4 Environmental Considerations

Literature regarding the environmental impact of the textile industry, corporate social responsibility (CSR), second-hand clothes, natural fibres (made from animals or plants), green detergents and upcycling will be reviewed in this section, as an attempt to create some awareness of the negative effects on the environment.

#### 2.4.1 Effects of the Textile Manufacturing Industry on the Environment

According to Wahab and Hussain (2020), the textile industry is the second-largest polluter of pure water after agriculture (Denchak, 2018). Water, energy, land use, garbage, and the influence on wildlife and the marine environment are all examples of the influence.

##### *Water and Energy*

The textile industry pollutes quite a large amount of clean water all over the world. In an article published by the European Parliament (2019, p.3), it was mentioned that in a study done by GFA and Boston Consulting Group, it was estimated that in 2015, “the global textiles and clothing industry was responsible for the consumption of 79 billion cubic metres of water, 1715 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 92 million tons of waste”. This goes to show on which level the clothing and the textile industry harm the environment.

The use of fabric dyes and other chemicals are one of the main environmental concerns as a recurrence. Problems might include freshwater pollution, human toxicity and health problems, danger of aquatic life and earthbound animals (Wahab and Hussain, 2020, p.1).

According to Kaye (2013) as cited in Strähle (2017), untreated water that has been used by the textile industry and has been contaminated with various chemicals, will then be released into rivers and streams causing such natural sources to also be polluted. Such instances most often happen in India and China, where there is high textile production (Kaye, 2013 as cited in Strähle, 2017). After the water is removed from the clothing, they must be dried for long periods of time, which consumes a lot of energy. As a result, air pollution and carbon emissions will increase. Furthermore, toxicity to humans and animals, particularly aquatic life, increases with each passing year (Wahab and Hussain, 2020).

Allwood et al., (2006) cited in Kim et al., (2015) on the negative effects and the energy consumption contributed by the consumers, during the ‘use’ phase of the textile products when laundering, drying and caring for the garments. Allwood et al. (2006) as cited in Kim et al., (2015), argued that, “the dominant portion of energy profile for a



conventional cotton T-shirt was taken by the 'use' phase (65 %) among the phases of 'material', 'use', 'production', transportation' and 'disposal'" (p.928). This goes to show how a single garment creates so much environmental degradation during its making and using time.

During the study conducted by Kim et.al (2015), it was reported that the environmental impact might vary with the washing and drying process of the garment, since if one is using higher temperatures to launder the clothes, more energy is being consumed. This is also valid in the scenario of drying the garments, tumble drying requires more energy consumption than line drying.

### *Waste and Microplastic*

Doyle, Moore, and Morgan (2006) as cited in Bhardwaj & Fairhurst (2010), stated that the fashion industry changed drastically recently. The fashion industry wanted to evolve, so more clothes were being produced with cheaper prices, variety of designs and having 'speed to the market'. This gave rise to fast fashion.

As stated by Morgan and Birtwistle (2009, cited in Strähle, 2017), fast fashion promotes the idea of 'throwaway culture', meaning that one will discard the product after a couple of uses, either to keep up with fashion trends or to dispose of something that one does not really want or need. In other words, fast fashion has given rise to disposable fashion. Consumers are buying textile products due to an emotional need rather than the actual need to dress (Cao et al., 2014, cited in Strähle, 2017). The increase of disposal of textile products is contributing to further global warming (Strähle, 2017).

This 'throwaway culture' has increased the number of garments that end up in landfills or incinerated. This number has reached around 5.8 million tonnes annually in Europe (Carolin Wahnbaeck, 2015; Garcia, 2013, as cited in Strähle, 2017).

Smith et al., (2018) argued that around eight million metric tons of plastics end up in the ocean each year. While most of the plastics found in the oceans are the cause of marine operators, the other percentages are from land such as microplastics found in the water used in our homes to launder or from the industry. Amongst some of the



sources of microplastics, there are microfibrils coming from synthetic textiles. Some of these microplastics can infiltrate the oceans through laundering of clothes at home (Eunomia, 2016 as cited in Henry et al., 2018). Such microplastics are affecting the human food chain such as the aquatic species, since fish are ending up ingesting the microplastics (Wright et al., 2013b; Carbery et al., 2018; Nelms et al., 2018 as cited in Henry et al., 2018).

Smith et al., (2018) stated that, the American Health Authorities encourage people to consume and incorporate more fish in their diet due to their nutritional value, as is done in Malta. However, due to the awareness and worries that fish contain plastics, consumers may be reluctant to consume fish as a part of their diet (Smith et al., 2018).

Henry et al., (2018) argued that despite the speculations of the microplastics ingested by fish, there is not enough evidence that shows that the consumption of aquatic species is affecting human health, as it is challenging to evaluate and it is still debatable.

### *Land*

Piegsa (2010), as cited in Strähle (2017), mentioned how the textile industry contributed to the usage of land for the production of natural fibres. In the meantime, man-made fibres make use of many resources such as oil, energy and chemicals in order to be produced and processed (Piegsa ,2010, as cited in Strähle, 2017).

Despite the fact that wool is renewable fertilizers are not needed, soil erosion can happen from overgrazing by sheep and runoff becomes contaminated with manure (Chen & Burns, 2006).

### *Animals*

The textile industry has an impact on the environment that is not restricted to the sea. Most animal-derived fibres are not by-products, such as sheep wool, but rather require the death of the animal to obtain the fibre, as is in the case of fur, silk, and leather (Draper et al. 2007 as quoted in Strähle, 2017). In early years fur was needed for the

purpose of warmth (Roth, 1997, as cited in), nowadays fur is usually only worn as a fashion item on the outer parts of clothing (Stanton, 2021).

#### 2.4.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

According to Corporate Social Responsibility (2019), the term CSR “is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable; to itself, its stakeholders, and the public. Companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society, including economic, social, and environmental”. In other words, CSR is a model that connects both the economic and ethical value of the company.

Elkington (2002) stated that, the most challenging thing for companies is to follow the model of the 3p’s which are ‘people, profit and planet’ and to distribute equal resources to them. In a simpler term Elkington (2002) also referred to them as ‘the social, economical and ecological (environmental)’. According to Strähle (2017), when referring to profit (economy), one would be including the cheap resources used and the lack of quality in the materials. When referring to the conservation of the planet (environment) it is important to conserve energy and water, decrease the use of landfills by producing less waste, reusing the same materials and lowering emissions. Regarding people (society), more jobs would be created in the community. If companies manage to master balance between all three, it will help improve everything as they would increase the economy in the country which benefits the company and the people, and they would be reducing the burden on the environment.

The number of retail companies that import and sell environmentally friendly textile products are limited, not to mention the lack of information there is available on environmentally sustainable clothing and attitudes (Connell & Kozar, 2014). According to Harbaugh et al., (2011, pp.1512-1513), “a consumer cannot rely on the mere presence of an ecolabel to determine a product's environmental quality”. This means that the consumer will never truly know how the product is contributing to a better environment unless it has been explained to the public. Nonetheless, no textile product can ever be 100% environmentally friendly since importing products from other countries is contributing to the creation of carbon footprint (Umbra, 2019).

Harbaugh et al., (2011) argued that if consumers start to easily identify environmentally friendly garments from the ecolabel, there may be a greater demand for such products. Furthermore, if there is a larger market for such products, corporations and enterprises will begin to increase their output, and the competition among companies will be to see who can be the most environmentally friendly.

According to the Directorate General for Internal Policies (2010) of the European Parliament and consumer organisations, even though more consumers are becoming aware of ecolabelling and environmentally friendly clothing, there is still a long way to go. The demand for such products needs to increase drastically, before companies would start to take into consideration such changes, as the cost is significant. So, they would first need to see the potential of investing in such a market.

NEXT Malta carries products such as Eco Buckle Cross Body bag made out of 100% natural vegetable dyed and chemical free leather. Some of Bershka's jeans are made with a percentage of recycled cotton. Bershka has also created a programme in collaboration with Caritas, where people can take their unwanted clothes to be resold in charity shops. BBees Malta (BBees, n.d), is an online baby store that sells environmentally friendly baby items, and Chloe's Closet Malta (Chloe's Closet Malta, n.d.) is another online store that sell clothes for children that are made with 100% organic cotton.

Patagonia once launched an advertisement warning people not to buy a particular jacket they produce. This advertisement was posted on Black Friday (Patagonia, 2020), when people are encouraged to buy clothes they don't necessarily need because of the discounts given (Foster, 2019). The goal of this advertisement was to urge consumers to consider before they buy, because even if some of the things sold by Patagonia are created from organic or recycled materials, they still contribute to greenhouse gas emissions during manufacturing (Patagonia, 2020). A co-founder of an eco-friendly clothing brand confessed that individuals nowadays buy clothes not out of necessity, but rather out of temptation (Foster, 2019).

### 2.4.3 Synthetic Fibres, Natural Fibres and Green Detergents

Van Dam (2008) stated that cotton is the most used crop around the world with almost '25 million tons produced' yearly. This contributes to around 40% of the fibres found on the fashion market. Van Dam (2008) continues to argue that other natural fibres are produced in lesser quantities. For instance, wool in Malta was used more a couple of decades ago than today. In fact, the demand for Maltese wool has decreased considerably due to the time and effort required to adequately clean it and weave it. The Maltese farmers who still raise sheep throw away their wool, which ends up in our landfill (Personal communication, email sent by Merill Rural Networks/ Merill Eco Tours dated 28th December, 2020, see Appendix A).

According to Sandin and Peters (2018) as quoted by Stone et.al (2019), there has been an increase in production of textile products, but this has also resulted in the rise of negative environmental impacts especially in the manufacturing process, using and discarding of the product. Van Dam (2008), concurred that most often, the majority of the clothes manufactured today are 'blended yarns' meaning that a single garment would be made using both natural fibres and synthetic material, in order to enhance comfort and appearance. Whenever garments are made of blended fabrics, it has shown an extension in the product use. Therefore, the increase in blended fabrics was brought along due to the demand as mentioned by Sandin and Peters (2018).

When it comes to geotextiles, these fabrics can be either woven or non-woven. Geotextiles are members of the geosynthetic family, which are used to improve the soil structural performance (Methacanon et al., 2010). Geotextiles were also found to be 'fully biodegradable', (Van Dam, 2008). When natural fibres are used in agriculture, such as fibre-based twine, it was found that they help enrich the soil structure since they are compostable (Van Dam, 2008).

As mentioned by Van Dam (2008), cotton demands less use of fossil fuel resources during its production, about 40% less energy than is used to produce polyester (Kalliala and Nousiainen, 1999). Despite this, cotton production requires fossil fuels used by 'agricultural machines, irrigation, ginning and baling' (Kalliala and Nousiainen, 1999). Also, cotton requires considerably more water for irrigation than synthetic materials such as polyester (Van Dam, 2008). In fact, during its production, polyester uses less than 0.1% of the water needed for cotton growth. In his article Strähle (2017),

also wrote that to grow enough cotton to make a single pair of denim trousers, more than 10 tons of water are needed (Draper et al. 2007). Conventional cotton uses large amounts of pesticides, that when analysed it represents about '25% of pesticides used in agriculture' (Eyupoglu, 2018, p.165)

When comparing organic cotton to conventional cotton, organic farming has a lower negative impact on the environment and a higher positive impact. Improved soil efficiency and moisture retention, reduced soil erosion, and reduced water pollution are just a few of the favorable effects (Eyupoglu, 2018).

According to Eyupoglu (2018), the World Health Organization classified agrochemicals as highly dangerous. In fact, such chemicals are harmful to both human health and life as well as the environment. The consequences of the use of such chemicals in conventional cotton, results in lots of workers dying everyday from pesticide poisoning and detriment causing chronic diseases such as lung cancer (Eyupoglu, 2018). On the other hand, synthetic fabrics such as polyester are also not as environmentally friendly due to the release of microplastics and their origin from fossil fuel resources (Sandin et al., 2019).

Despite all this, the significance of both fibres (cotton and polyester), cannot be denied regardless of the fact that both materials are completely different in so many aspects such as 'physical and chemical properties (Kalliala and Nousiainen, 1999), as they are so highly used and produced that one cannot replace the other.

### *Green detergents*

The use of regular laundry detergents, is causing an increase of harmful chemicals found in wastewater (Pistner et al., 2013). Most of the surfactants found in detergents are not biodegradable and end up into the laundry wastewater, which eventually can end up in the ocean.

Unlike regular detergents, green laundry detergents are environmentally friendly because they are non-toxic, do not contain perfumes or dyes, are typically phosphate free, biodegradable and hypoallergenic (Dougherty, 2011).

Felizarta et al., (2016) postulated that green laundry detergents were highly sustainable but were of a lesser quality than other detergents. However, it had been found that green detergents were perceived both excellent in sustainability as well as usability when compared to other detergents (Felizarta et al., 2016)

Pistner et.al (2013), carried out an experiment in which both an environmentally friendly laundry detergent and a regular detergent were used to remove several 'caused' stains. The results demonstrated that, while no detergent is totally successful in removing all stains, the green detergent seemed to have cleaned some of the stains better than the other detergents. This may imply that if detergents are to be replaced with green ones, consumers would not have to compromise sustainability for performance, since it was displayed that green detergents are also excellent in cleaning. Thus, consumers can also reduce the negative environmental impact when laundering their clothes.

#### 2.4.4 Environmentally Friendly Logos

When seeking environmentally friendly garments, one can look out for logos which exhibit these 'ecolabels'. There are many logos that one can encounter; the following logos are some of them.

#### **Figure 2.5**

*BMP Certified Cotton Logo*



Note. Adapted from *All ecolabels on textiles: Ecolabel Index* (n.p). (n.d.). (<http://www.ecolabelindex.com/ecolabel/bmp-certified-cotton>).

One of the logos, one might encounter is the BMP Certified Cotton as seen in Figure 2.5. This trademark signifies that the cotton grown to make the product, has been grown with the use of practises that respect the environment (*All ecolabels on textiles: Ecolabel Index, n.d.*).

## Figure 2.6

*EU Ecolabel*



Note. Adapted from European Commission (n.p). (n.d.a). More about the EU Ecolabel. (<https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecolabel/the-ecolabel-scheme.html>).

The EU Ecolabel (Figure 2.6) is a voluntary scheme and whoever chooses to apply can then apply this label to their product. The criteria of products with an ecolabel differs from product to product (European Commission, n.d.a). Since fabrics have a high environmental impact when dyeing, printing and bleaching, when ecolabel is used on textiles it means that there was a reduction of damage in the manufacturing stage (European Commission, n.d.a).

## Figure 2.7

*The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) Logo*



Note. Adapted from Global Organic Textile Standard (n.p). (n.d.). (<https://global-standard.org/>).

Another logo is the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). This logo shows that the product has been grown organically, following all the standards necessary. It is most commonly used to indicate that the product was created from organic cotton (*All ecolabels on textiles: Ecolabel Index, n.d.*).

## Figure 2.8

*Soil Association Organic Standard logo*



Note. Adapted from Soil Association (n.p). (n.d.). (<https://www.soilassociation.org/>).

The Soil Association Organic Standard logo might be more common than the rest as apart from textiles, producers of food, health products and beauty manufacturers can use it on their products as well. This logo means that the products were grown by an



organic certified farmer, while respecting the environment and animal welfare, as well as protecting human health (*All ecolabels on textiles: Ecolabel Index, n.d.*).

## Figure 2.9

*Oeko-Tex Standard 100 Logo*



Note. Adapted from Oeko-Tex (n.p). (n.d.). (<https://www.oeko-tex.com/en/our-standards/standard-100-by-oeko-tex>).

The last logo to be mentioned is the Oeko-Tex Standard 100. This logo ensures that vigorous testing has been done on the textile material. The certification of this mark would have covered a wide range of human-ecological properties, such as toxic compounds that are prohibited or controlled by law, as well as compounds that are known to be hazardous but have not been formally banned. It is said that the closer to the skin the product will be, the more intense the testing will be, ensuring the safety of the people (*All ecolabels on textiles: Ecolabel Index, n.d.*).

### 2.4.5 Second-Hand Clothes Shops

As the awareness on the negative effects on the environment caused by the generation of waste increases, the number of consumers opting for second-hand shops has also increased (Rucker et al., 1995; Soiffer and Herrmann, 1987; Belk et al., 1988 as cited in Yan et al., 2015). In recent years, second-hand clothes shops have gained more popularity, especially among young consumers such as college students (Hansen, 2004, cited by Yan et al., 2015). Studies show that younger

generations are choosing a more environmentally conscious approach, along with budget restrictions and a desire to express themselves in their own unique way (Yan et al., 2015).

In the aftermath of the war, most Maltese families stricken by poverty would opt to hand-down garments to younger siblings to save money. Later, this practice of handing down items was becoming less common as families were making more money and preferring to buy new while donating their used clothes (Yan et al., 2015 as cited in Horne and Maddrell, 2002).

It has been quite recent for such second-hand, charity shops to open around Malta. Locally, most charity shops sell second-hand clothes that are given freely by the public. These shops sell anything that is donated and is still in good condition. People donate clothes, books, shoes and anything else that they no longer have use for. Second-hand clothes shops are helping to improve waste management and are giving new purpose to used items (Waxman, 2018, Thomas, 2003).

Vintage items create a nostalgic feeling that is related to the age of their production and the mystery of their previous owner/s (Strähle 2017). Despite their age, most second-hand clothes are cheaper than new items and are of good quality. Wearing vintage clothing has become popular in recent years, due to the influence of celebrities and the media through movies like *Midnight in Paris* or *the Great Gatsby* (Strähle, 2017).

During a study on second-hand clothes shops conducted by Yan et al., (2015), the authors discovered that people's aversion to the previous owners' sanitary habits was not an issue. Consumers, rather, find the purchasing of second-hand items to be embarrassing due to society (Watson, 2008).

The European Parliament Research Service (2019) identified brands such as Filippa K. as pioneers of recycling, by selling used clothes in their shops. Other companies such as H&M run a 'voluntary collection scheme' (p.6), where consumers donate used clothing in return for a small reward (The European Parliament Research Service, 2019).

Social media is also facilitating this process. For example, a Facebook Group entitled 'Swap & Shop – Cloths Exchange Malta' has almost 1300 members and has

regular activity related to the reuse and upcycling of clothes. A company that operates in Gozo named Vogue xchange, collects second-hand clothes to be resold or swapped (VOGUE XCHANGE, n.d.).

#### 2.4.6 Upcycling

Smith et al., (2018) stated that some companies are trying to adopt the idea of upcycling materials to minimise the plastics dumped into the ocean by using recycled plastics to create synthetic fibres.

According to Harris et al. (2015), interventions are required to target consumers, suppliers, and retailers in order to support more sustainable clothing production, purchase, maintenance, and disposal. The same author discusses the shift in clothing washing habits as well as an increase in upcycling, recycling and mending.

Paraz and Curteza (2018) list several benefits of upcycling, including the fact that used clothes are cleaner as chemicals have been washed away. Such upcycling projects create jobs, extend the longevity of products, and increase the interest of consumers. Furthermore, less energy and raw materials are needed, decreasing waste, environmental degradation and generating sustainable consumption and income.

Six main solutions have been identified. These include the craftsmanship and innovation of the designer along with a desire for change and readiness to devote time to it. Retaining the original products' story enhances the possibility of purchase of upcycled products by consumers (Paras and Curteza, 2018).

In a research carried out by this author, between June and July 2020, it was found that there are few companies operating in Malta that sell products that are environmentally friendly.

### 2.5 Consumer Behaviour and Labelling Implications

Shin (2000), (as cited in Merwe et al., 2013), argued that consumers are confused by the overwhelming number of new textiles being introduced in the market.

According to Nadiger (2007), care labelling instructions represented in symbols, can be internationally recognised, are easier to understand, take less space to be printed and are cheaper for the manufacturer to produce. Additionally, Merwe et al., (2013) argued that “despite the availability of textile label information, a lack of knowledge in this regard can result in misinformed consumer decisions (Sonnenberg and Erasmus, 2005) and inappropriate purchases (Blythe, 2008)”. Consequently, due to the consumers’ lack of knowledge, they might be deceived into buying products they do not really need. According to Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), most consumers have insufficient knowledge on the production of textiles and are unaware of the negative effects on the environment caused by their production and disposal.

According to Sanad (2017), in a study carried out by Arbaugh (1974), care instructions were not relevant to shoppers purchasing clothing and apparel. It was also discovered that consumers who were more likely to refer to the care label during care practises were the ones who scored higher in textile knowledge (Arbaugh, 1974 as cited in Sanad, 2017). Even though such experienced consumers were keen on adhering to the instructions, they did not need to consult the label as much as they would have enough experience to know how to care for their garments. Further on in the article, it was said that educating consumers on the information found on the care label is essential and that through this, consumers can make an educated purchase (Arbaugh, 1974 in cited by Sanad, 2017).

Studies referred to by Diddi et al., (2019) examining sustainable clothing consumption behaviours in consumers showed that “values, knowledge, attitudes, and social and moral normal behaviours are good predictors” (p.201) at showing people who are willing to purchase environmentally friendly garments.

Since young consumers might be captivated by the latest fashion trends, they are more likely to impulse buy when shopping for clothes (Park, 2015 cited by Diddi et al., 2019). Beatty and Ferrell (1998) as cited in Chen-Yu & Seock (2002), defined impulse shopping as suddenly making a purchase without any previous planning to buy a certain item. Moreover, according to Cone (2017) (Diddi et.al, 2019), young consumers are willing to change their lifestyle to become more sustainable in most aspects apart from fashion (Lundblad and Davies, 2016 as cited in Diddi et.al, 2019).

Fast fashion is still being accepted today as people are still unaware of the negative consequences that 'overconsumption' is causing on the environment (Lundblad and Davies, 2016 as cited in Diddi et.al, 2019).

Strähle (2017) argued that social media leaves a huge impact on our lives and contributes to impulse buying which sustains the idea that social media may be the way forward in changing such habits and increasing people's awareness.

Due to the Maltese consumers' lack of knowledge about care labels, they are easily confused and may be discouraged in buying a product as they would not know how to maintain it correctly. As Harbaugh et al., (2011) said in their article, "focusing on the case of ecolabels for environmental quality, we show how even small amounts of uncertainty can create consumer confusion" (p.1512). It was also explained how such confusion can result in fewer companies willing to produce environmentally friendly garments or a line of eco-labelled products.

Due to the endless variety of choice in the marketplace, consumers end up purchasing products that simply satisfy their needs (Yarrow, 2014). Marketers, understanding the psychology of consumers, take this advantage to persuade consumers in making impulse purchases (Yarrow, 2014).

People intending to go window-shopping, become enticed in entering a store and making a purchase (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002). Yarrow (2014), mentions the following reasons why certain marketing approaches don't work with consumers anymore: the 'lust for the new'; wanting to purchase something that is new even though one does not need it and 'strong emotional drivers'; as most consumers are driven to make a purchase depending on their feelings.

The fast-paced advance in technology has resulted in changes in our brains that would not have been possible years ago. Technology has created new emotional needs resulting in cognitive and emotional shifts (Yarrow, 2014).

## 2.6 Local Scenario

In Malta, the MCCA is the competent authority for regulation (EU) No 1007/2011 (European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2011) on textile fibre

names, labelling and marking of the fibre content of textile products. The MCCA is also the competent authority responsible for dealing with misleading commercial practices. The authority is in close collaboration with the customs office to ensure market surveillance at the entry stage of the product in Malta and inspections on the local market (MCCA Annual Report 2018).

The office for consumer affairs in the MCCA helps guide consumers towards the 'promotion and protection' of their consumer rights. The authority educates the public and provides it with the necessary information whilst assisting consumers with any complaints they might have (MCCA - Office for Consumer Affairs, n.d).

In an article on the labelling of textile products by the European Parliament & Directorate General for Internal Policies (2010), it was noted that in Malta there is no mandatory care labelling regime.

An online search conducted in September 2020 by the author, showed several economic operators which offer the service of printing labelling for garments for both the local manufacturing industry and importers from third-world countries who wish to sell in the EU.

The number of tailors in Malta has drastically decreased over the past decades (Fenech, 2003). This may be in view of a wider cultural shift and the fact that most of the time, it is more financially feasible to buy ready-made clothes than sewing, especially when one considers the costs associated with buying fabric and the human resource involved.

In an article published by the Malta Chamber (2020), it stated that "nine out of ten Maltese consumers have purchased goods or services online" (n.p). Two thirds of these consumers purchase something online at least once a month. The most purchased items by women online are clothing, footwear and accessories.

The Consumer Markets Scoreboard (2018) provides an overview of the EU citizens' performance in 40 consumer markets. The market performance index (MPI) for clothing and footwear for Malta is 83.9 which is higher than the average MPI of 83.2. The MPI is based on three main criteria, namely, trust and confidence in traders, choosing products and services and the in-market experience (European Commission, n.d.c).

## 2.7 Conclusion to the Literature Review

This chapter presented a literature review of relevant topics related to the research question. Areas such as labelling, environmental and safety aspects and regulatory and consumer behaviours have been investigated. A synopsis of the regulatory requirements both at a European and National level have been underlined. An overview of the local scenario was presented to support the context assessment of this research.

# **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**



### 3.1 Overview of the Research Methodology

This chapter focuses on the mixed methodology tools used to answer the research questions. The research tools are further discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

### 3.2 Choice of Research Methodology

Since both the quantitative and qualitative methods result in a better understanding of the research problem (Plano Clark et al., 2008), a mixed methodology approach was best, making the results of this study more effective (Piccoli, 2019). From the different tools chosen (Piccoli, 2019), such mixed methods have shown higher chances of success in confirming results. Furthermore, when combining the findings of both data sets, the researcher is provided with additional validity regarding the evidence discovered (Plano Clark et al., 2008).

Following the combination of mixed methods, the limitations of each are minimised (Creswell, 2014). Both qualitative and quantitative research provide different types of detailed data that should be similar when compared (Creswell, 2014).

**Table 3.1**

*Advantages and disadvantages of Mixed Methodology, qualitative and quantitative research tools.*

	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Mixed Methods</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Beneficial to provide better understanding.</li><li>• Capable of answering questions both confirmatory and exploratory.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Models or theories are not adequately presented.</li><li>• Concepts can be inaccurate and ambiguous.</li></ul>
<b>Quantitative Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Standardized steps to reduce bias.</li><li>• Results can be reliable.</li><li>• Involvement of a larger population.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Susceptible to mistakes in sampling techniques.</li><li>• Certain topics are more challenging to quantify.</li></ul>
<b>Qualitative Research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attainment of quality descriptive data.</li><li>• Involves further interpretation of the research question.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Time consuming for the gathering and analysis of data.</li><li>• Not generalizable for the public.</li><li>• Influence of data with conscious or unconscious bias.</li></ul>

Note. The data for the advantages and disadvantages of the quantitative and qualitative research is adapted from “Advantages & Disadvantages of Qualitative & Quantitative Research” by Dowd, 2019, Copyright 2021 Leaf Group Ltd. / Leaf Group Education.

The data for the advantages and disadvantages of the mixed methods is adapted from “Lessons learned: advantages and disadvantages of mixed method research” by M. A.Malina, H. S. O.Nørreklit, F. H.Selto, 2011, Volume 8 No. 1, pages 59-71, Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

### 3.3 Data collection Tools and Method

For the mixed methodology, a questionnaire was used as a quantitative approach and a focus group was used as a qualitative approach. The research has been conducted with the cohort of (2019/2021) students also reading for a Masters in Teaching and Learning.

Questionnaires are a widely used data collection tool in multiple fields of study (Regmi et al., 2017). With the increased use of technology, online questionnaires have become more popular in recent years (Regmi et al., 2017). Collecting data online has become a more convenient method of data collection by leveraging the use of modern technology (Mertler, 2002 as cited by Lefever et al., 2007).

According to Carbonaro and Bainbridge (2000) as cited by Lefever et al., (2007), there are multiple important factors one should keep in mind when conducting data collection online. Such factors include ease of access, making it simpler for participants to complete and having a security system as to ensure anonymity. Since the main aim of this study is to have a better understanding regarding the knowledge of Maltese citizens, the means of online questionnaires has allowed the researcher to gather a lot of significant data.

While observations may have been conducted to gain a better understanding of the purchasing habits of a bigger demographic sample of Maltese citizens, the researcher believes that such an approach would have limited the questions that might have been asked. As a result, the researcher would have acquired less information about consumer knowledge of care labels and eco-friendly products or shops.

The option of making use of all the tools and research online was also beneficial when taking into consideration that the covid-19 pandemic had started. The possibility of doing everything online meant limiting gatherings with other people and thus limiting

the spread of the virus as much as possible. Nonetheless, the researcher had planned to do everything online before the spread of the virus started in Malta.

### 3.4 Online Questionnaires

#### 3.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages

Data collection through an online survey appears to have created the opportunity to collect larger amounts of data more efficiently since there is a lack of human error when transferring data from a hard copy to a soft copy. Additionally, online data collection has also made it possible to include hard to reach people and people abroad in the data (Regmi et al., 2017).

Online questionnaires have become less time consuming (Lefever et al., 2007), as one can simply share the link of an online questionnaire to the target audience and can start receiving responses immediately. Online questionnaires have become more convenient for both the researcher and participants. From the researcher's point of view, it takes less time to distribute the questionnaires and to collect and analyse them, as everything is done online. The participants are able to answer the questionnaire at a convenient time. They are also able to take as much time as needed since the survey does not have to be completed in one sitting (Regmi et al., 2007). When possible, awareness of the environment and the implications of the researcher's actions are also kept in mind. With online questionnaires less papers and ink are used, reducing the cost. Nowadays it has become significantly cheaper to conduct your research (Lefever et al., 2007).

Some disadvantages that the researcher might have had with the questionnaire are that, in a questionnaire people might not always answer truthfully to avoid sounding insensitive. Others might also rush in an attempt to finish the questionnaire quickly. Certain questions may be misunderstood or have a limited answer as a response. It was challenging to find participants that are willing to fill in the questionnaire even though it was conducted online and could have been filled at any time. While there were some setbacks to using questionnaires, there were also upsides, as online

questionnaires render rapid, valid and reliable results. Moreover, the identity of the participants is always kept confidential.

#### 3.4.2 Different sections of the Online Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into four parts; personal information, shopping practices, environmental awareness and care labelling. Since the information could be easily distributed, the researcher separated the questionnaire into sections in an attempt to make it easier for participants to fill in, while aiming to help keep them concentrated on the task at hand.

The questions asked relating to personal information were age, gender and what subject the participants will be teaching following their graduation. Even though the above information was compulsory, it was not a means for differentiating any student or revealing their identity. Possible ethical issues for participants were also kept in mind.

In the questionnaire section enquiring about shopping practises, the researcher acquired better insights into participant's purchases, habits, and behaviour relating to shopping. Through these results, the researcher is able to conclude the awareness the participants have regarding the environment, if they attempt to limit their purchases or if they buy what they desire, with no additional regard to the consequences of such actions.

In the section of environmental awareness, the researcher acquired a clearer picture of how ready participants are to support the environment while testing them on their current knowledge. Through the gathered information, the researcher was guided on what significant data needs to be included in the informative leaflet to be shared with the Maltese Citizens. In addition, the researcher has a better view of what education and awareness is needed to ensure that Maltese residents are aware of the negative impacts on our environment caused by the textile industry.

Finally, in the section relating to care labelling, the awareness of important information required on a care label was examined. The researcher also tested the participants on their knowledge regarding some of the most common care symbols. From this division,

the researcher also evaluated the participants' traits as wise consumers, and whether they are aware of any of the rights they have when shopping.

Overall, the questionnaire has allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding regarding the experience and knowledge of tertiary level students when reading and understanding care labels.

### 3.4.3 The Participants

The online questionnaire was conducted with the cohort of MTL students of the same period (2019-2021) as the researcher. It took about four drafts in order to finalise the questions for the questionnaire.

Before the link to the online questionnaire was distributed to MTL Students, an email to the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Dr Calleja, was sent on the 26th June, 2020. Even though the participants are all adults, the Dean was contacted as a sign of respect (kindly find the aforementioned email attached in Appendix B).

A link to the online questionnaire was posted for MTL students on Facebook, in a group the researcher forms part of, to communicate and share important notices. The target number of questionnaires to be collected was originally around a hundred and forty. However, this was later reduced to one hundred and twenty as this was the number of students that were still attending the course until 13th May, 2020 (proof of this communication with the secretary of the Faculty of education, Ms Micallef, can be found in appendix C). However, due to a significant number of the students dropping out of the course and an unexpected lack of collaboration from the participants, in the end the number of gathered responses was sixty-two.

Before distributing the questionnaire to the intended participants, the researcher first conducted a pilot study with seven people of Tertiary level education. This was done in order to improve and change any faults that the researcher had not identified after having read the questions so often.

After conducting the pilot study, some people pointed out that in the question about care label symbols, there was no option to choose 'I don't know' given to participants.

So, even if participants were completely unaware of a care symbol, they had to choose any answer they deemed fit, and could have gotten it right without knowing. This would have resulted in an inaccurate or unreliable outcome for that particular question. Other minor changes were also made after the pilot study such as rewording some questions to make it easier for participants to understand. Other questions were also added to gain further insight on a particular topic.

From the results obtained, one can see how female students had a greater inclination to participate as from the sixty-two participants, forty-seven were female and only fifteen participants were male.

Since the online questionnaire was anonymous the researcher would not have known who answered the questionnaire and could not contact or encourage any further participants to respond.

In order to encourage participants to collaborate, the estimated time for them to finish the online questionnaire was kept around ten minutes.

According to Galesic and Bosnjak (2009), it was hypothesized that one of the reasons for lack of participation was that online questionnaires are usually too long leading to a lack of willingness to participate. Longer questions towards the end of the questionnaire may discourage participants from answering (Helgeson and Ursic 1994, Krosnick et al., 2002, as cited by Galesic and Bosnjak 2009). Some also argued that general lack of interest from the participants, relating to the discussion or topic of the questionnaire, could also result in a reduction of participation (Fung & Carr, 2000 as cited by Fung 2004).

## 3.5 Focus Group

### 3.5.1 Different types of Focus Groups

According to Biedermann (2017), virtual focus groups enabled members to gather and share their opinions as well as experiences in a safe environment that they were already familiar with. It also allowed participants to participate in focus group discussions at times that were convenient for them (Biedermann, 2017).

Stewart and Shamdasani (2016) argued that there are different types of online focus group communications. There are two kinds of online focus groups: synchronous groups and asynchronous groups. All groups differ in terms of the research's time and dimensional aspects.

The discussions can either take place in real-time, meaning in a synchronous manner, or at any time convenient to them also known as asynchronous.

In asynchronous online focus groups, the participants are provided with probing comments to keep them engaged (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2016). Synchronous online focus groups, on the other hand, are the closest approach to conventional face-to-face focus groups since they feature real-time conversations usually having up to eight members (Poynter 2010; Sintjago and Link 2012 as cited by Stewart & Shamdasani, 2016).

### 3.5.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Focus Groups

In a study done by Fung (2004), many researchers revealed several advantages in group online learning. However, they are not simple to attain since one cannot assume that all learners would actively participate in online conversation (Fung, 2004). It was also claimed that students in a remote learning course were fairly inactive in terms of raising questions and contributing ideas via online conversation.

Recently, online focus groups have become increasingly popular. This gives the interviewer an opportunity to interact with participants in an online setting (Regmi et al., 2017). Even participants tend to prefer online focus groups rather than face-to-face, as it provides the possibility to participate at any time they are available (Zwaanswijk and van Dulmen, 2014). Another advantage mentioned was that participants could contribute from the comfort of their own home. On the other hand, it might be easier to have more detailed discussions with group members when the focus group is carried out in person.

Participants in an asynchronous focus group can participate several times, going back and forth over previous posts and adding to their prior comments. They also have time



to consider their answers, with all participants having an equal opportunity to participate (Biedermann, 2017).

Since asynchronous focus groups can be anonymous, participants may feel freer to participate and provide honest answers (Zwaanswijk and van Dulmen, 2014). Nonetheless, if the focus group is asynchronous, the participants must write their responses. This provides immediate data to the researcher and also reduces the time needed for data entry (Zwaanswijk and van Dulmen, 2014).

On the other hand, in a non-synchronous focus group, the researcher misses on nonverbal cues, such as the tone of voice, facial expressions, hand gestures and all other non-verbal communications that may have revealed the feelings of participants towards a particular question (Biedermann, 2017).

### 3.5.3 Approach Taken

The focus group discussion was conducted with a number of students from the same group that answered the questionnaire, meaning the cohort of MTL students. The final question of the questionnaire invited the participants to take part in a focus group which would later take place online as well. The researcher had intended to have two focus groups of around six to eight participants each but instead only conducted one focus group consisting of seven students. This was due to a lack of interest on the part of the participants.

The online focus group was conducted in an asynchronous manner, meaning that there was no specific date or time for the participants to attend to. The platform on which the researcher conducted the focus group was Facebook. This was taking into consideration that it would be easier for the participants to access and answer the questions, seeing how most of the participants all have Facebook accounts. The group was set to private and was only accessible by the researcher and participants to ensure privacy and protection of their identity.

On the 3rd of August 2020, the focus group began. The researcher had ten questions in total with two questions being posted on Monday, Wednesday and Friday respectively. This resulted in a week and a half worth of probes. It was decided that

two questions would be posted at a time, to shorten the process that would have taken three weeks, potentially losing participants' interest. The decision to post during weekdays, was to ensure that the participants would not be frustrated with having to answer questions during weekends.

Setting clear rules from the start is critical to ensuring that group members feel secure sharing their experiences (Biedermann, 2017). Therefore, a few days before the focus group questions started being posted, the researcher wrote a post to the participants, reminding them the length of the focus group and when the questions would be published. In addition, the post encouraged participants to reply to each other's comments, while respecting each other's opinions. Lastly, the researcher thanked the participants again for accepting to take part in this research.

Biedermann (2017) argued that virtual focus groups with the use of Facebook as a platform may result in less detailed results since participants may say less while typing it. In fact, this could be evidently seen in the results, as most replies given by participants were short and straight to the point, whether they knew about the information or not. While participants had been encouraged to comment and reply to each other's answers, most of the time participants did not create further discussion amongst themselves, but simply referred to or agreed with someone that had already answered before them.

It took longer than a week and a half for the participants to answer all the questions. There was also a participant that chose to answer the questions all at once after they had all been posted. The researcher was pleased with almost all the answers from participants and was also impressed with some of the points that had been brought up and the knowledge that participants had expressed.

### 3.6 Methodology Limitations

Obtaining enough participants for the online questionnaire was challenging, as it took a month to gather sixty-two people. The researcher also had to keep posting frequent reminders to encourage participation. The first post took place on the 30th of June

2020, with the last attempt being posted on 27th July, 2020. The researcher posted around four times, twice weekly.

The researcher had expectations of receiving at least thirty answers the first time the questionnaire was posted. It was believed that participants were going to be more cooperative since they were partaking in the same challenging course. Even though the process was being conducted fully online, it still took a month to acquire and only half of the number of students that were taking the course answered the questionnaire.

Meanwhile, the focus groups posed their own challenges, as once again it proved difficult to get participants to volunteer and partake in the focus group. Another downside was that some of the participants might not have felt comfortable sharing certain information with each other. Due to the focus group being conducted online, it limited and changed the dynamic of the focus group completely than if it had been done in person. Some of the participants might have revealed more valuable information, possibly having felt encouraged to speak further due to the additional support and prompting from others. On the other hand, one of the benefits of having conducted the focus group online was that it was easier for the researcher to follow the participants' replies. Should it have been done physically, multiple participants could end up talking all at once, making it more difficult to follow and keep track of who said what.

According to Biedermann (2017), participants need to be engaged and encouraged to discuss deeper, in order to keep the momentum going. However, the researcher believes that this was not accomplished adequately, due to the fear that participants would get flustered with any further questions on answers they provided. In fact, when following up with a question to a reply, the replies to the secondary questions were short and brief. Furthermore, the researcher thought that the participants had already provided all of their knowledge in response to certain questions without looking up additional information. This was, after all, the aim of the research, to know the real current knowledge of participants regarding care labels.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

The proposal for this dissertation was submitted on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2020. The proposal was accepted by the MTL Dissertations Board on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 (Kindly find the accepted proposal attached in Appendix D). The researcher filled in the Faculty Research Ethics Committee's (FREC) application on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2020. This was only for records purposes since the researcher will not reveal the identity of the participants in any of the tools used. The researcher received an acknowledgement from FREC immediately after, saying that the application would be filed for possible future auditing purposes on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2020 (See FREC form attached in appendix E). Even though participants were involved in this research, there was no physical harm done, no vulnerable participants involved and the identity of all participants were kept anonymous. Therefore, since there was no need for any further review on the ethical form by FREC, the questionnaire and focus groups were conducted the following summer.

Prior to the initiation of the tools, the Faculty Dean, Dr Calleja, had been contacted, as mentioned before.

The online questionnaire (a copy can be found in Appendix F) was first shared with participants on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2020, and the last attempt at collecting further data was made on the 27<sup>th</sup> of July, 2020. As for the online focus group, the researcher posted the first set of questions on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, 2020, with the last questions being published on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020. However, not all participants had answered all the questions up until the 26<sup>th</sup> of August, 2020.

Due to the primary research data containing information collected from participants, the researcher has kept all the rational ethical issues in mind when creating the questions for the questionnaire and the focus group probes.

All participants were free to stop their contribution at any time during the questionnaire and focus groups. They were also free to request that the researcher would not use any of the information the participants had previously provided.

The type of questions in the questionnaire were focused on the topics relating to shopping behaviour, understanding of the care labelling instructions and the information that should be present, as well as questions regarding the environment.

During the focus groups the researcher was careful to be respectful of the intellectual knowledge of all participants, always being honest to any questions asked. The researcher was also open to sharing their own knowledge while seeking to create a calm and comfortable atmosphere for participants to speak and discuss. The participants have been given pseudonyms so that not even the supervisor will know who the participants were (see the focus group transcript attached in appendix G). Furthermore, as this was a small group, the researcher made sure not to ask any further personal questions or any data that would reveal a participant's identity.

### 3.8 Conclusion of Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research tools chosen, stressing some of the reasons for their selection as well as the limits that the researcher had to contend with. The analysis of the findings of the online questionnaire will be detailed further in the next chapter.

# **Chapter 4: Analysis results of the questionnaire**

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the results of the online questionnaire given to the cohort of MTL students for the academic year 2019-2021. In order to maintain complete anonymity, none of the data presented in this and the subsequent chapters will reveal the identities of the participants. The focus group discussion will be addressed in the following chapter, along with a discussion of the questionnaire, including references to the literature.

## 4.2 Participants information

The first section of the online questionnaire was concerned with the participants' personal information. However, as previously noted, the participants were not asked any questions that may expose their identity. Such data is necessary in order to have a better knowledge of the demographic.

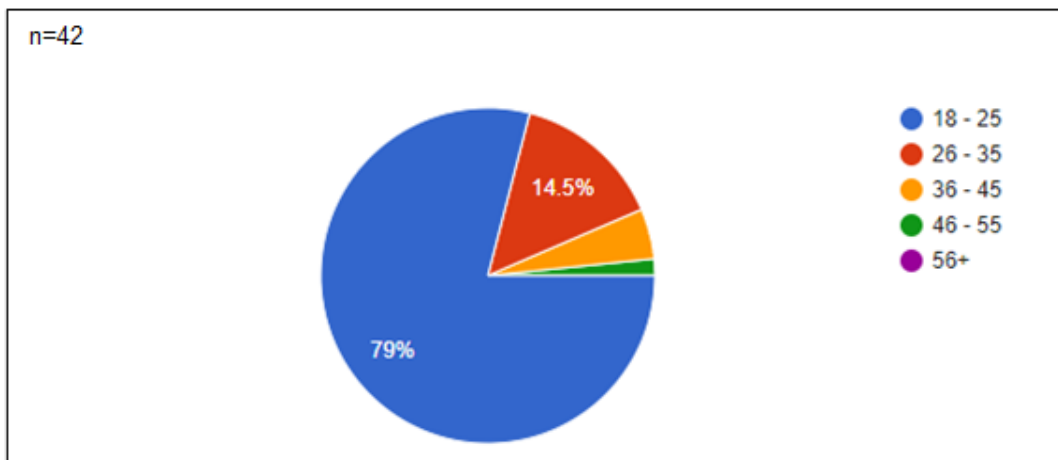
#### 4.2.1 Age of Participants

The first question was about the participants' ages, and it was vital to examine if this factor made a difference in their understanding of the information on the care label. Does age change the way we perceive or understand information?

Figure 4.1 shows that for the online questionnaire, 79% (49) of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 25, 14.5% (9) were between the ages of 26 and 35, indicating that the majority of the participants fit into these two categories. Nonetheless, 4.8% (3) of the participants were between the ages of 36 and 45, while the remaining 1.6% (1) were between the ages of 46 and 55. There were no responses aged 56 or older.

**Figure 4.1**

*Question 1: How old are you?*



#### 4.2.2 Gender

The majority of responders, 75.8% (47) were female, while the remainder, 24% (15) were male, and none of the participants chose the gender option, 'other.'



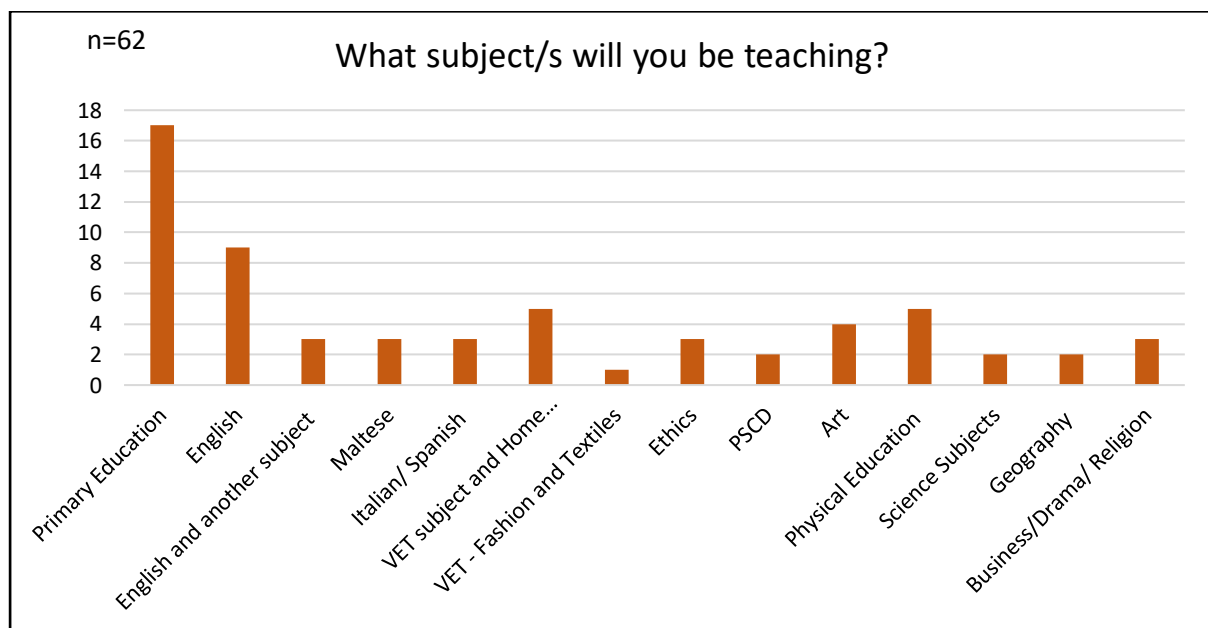
### 4.2.3 Subject Area

This was an open-ended question, and participants were required to indicate what subject(s) they will be teaching after completing the MTL course. The majority of participants will be teaching only one subject, while others will be teaching two areas of subject specialisation.

As depicted in Figure 4.2, a substantial proportion of the responses 27.4% (17) of the online questionnaire participants were all studying to become primary school teachers. English was the following specialization of 14.5% (9) of the students. While the rest would be teaching other courses such as other languages, drama, PSCD, VET subjects such as fashion and textiles, and others.

**Figure 4.2**

*Question 3: What subject/s will you be teaching?*



### 4.3 Shopping Practices

In this section, participants were asked questions on their purchasing habits, and behaviour. Using this information, the researcher could determine whether or not the participants were ecologically concerned when shopping.

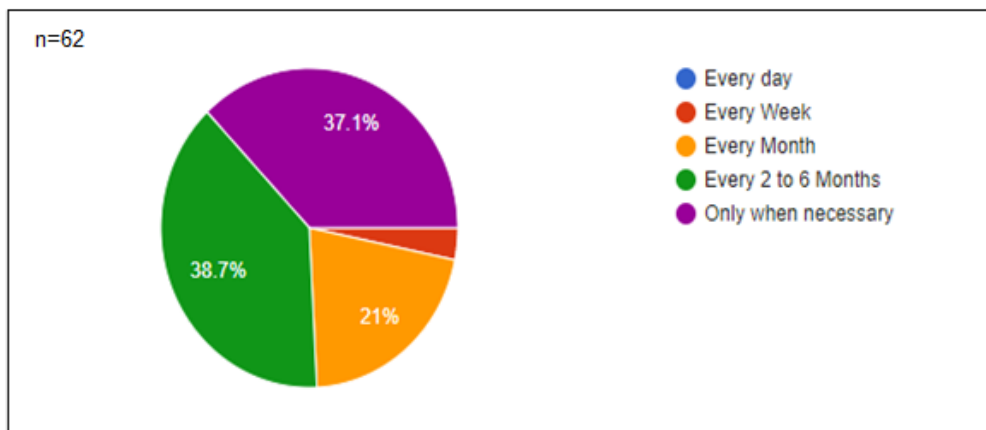
### 4.3.1 Frequent Purchases

Figure 4.3 reveals that 38.7% (24) of the participants buy clothing every two to six months, which might imply that they buy new clothes even if they do not need to. On the other hand, 37.1% (23) of participants buy garments only when necessary, indicating that they are very careful about their shopping habits. 21% (13) of participants admitted to purchasing clothing on a monthly basis, indicating that there are still a considerable number of customers who overindulge while purchasing apparel. Another 3.2% (2) of those respondents said they buy clothing at least once a week.

If this study had been conducted with a larger population, it may have showed that there are more customers who buy apparel every week, dismissing any concerns about the environmental effect. No individuals stated that they buy apparel on a daily basis.

**Figure 4.3**

*Question 4: How often do you buy clothes?*



### 4.3.2 Impulse Shopping

Respondents were asked if they regarded themselves to be impulsive shoppers or whether they planned their buying. Respondents were offered a third choice, which allowed them to select both impulsive shoppers and planners. 54.8% (34) of respondents stated that they may be both impulsive shoppers and planners. While

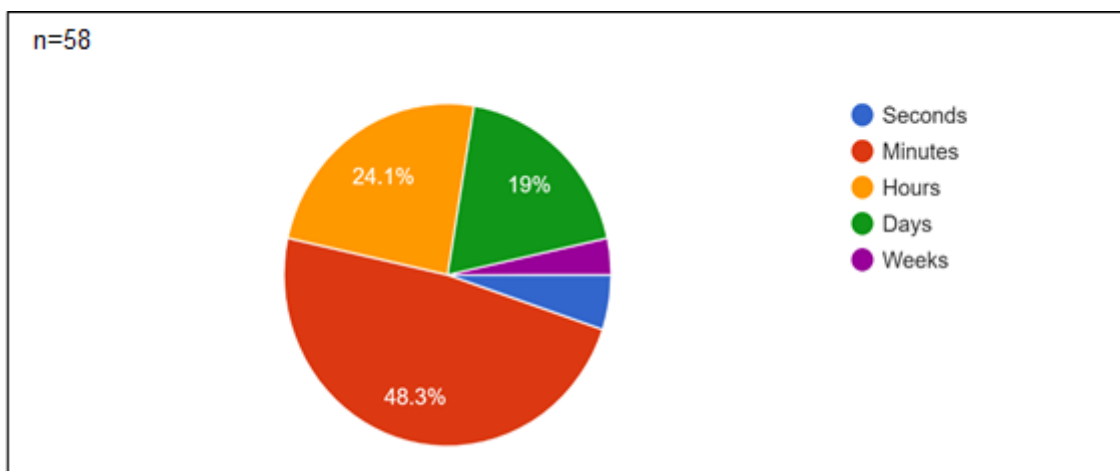
38.7% (24) said they planned their buying and 6.5% (4) said they were impulsive shoppers. As a result, they do not take long to make a decision to buy.

#### 4.3.3 Time Taken for Decisions

Not all participants were required to respond to this question; only those who indicated in the preceding question that they were planners or both planners and impulsive buyers were required to do so. As a result, 93.5% (58) of those participants responded to this question (see figure 4.4). In this question, participants were asked how long it takes them to decide whether or not they should buy something. 5.2% (3) of those participants stated that it just takes them a few seconds to decide whether or not to buy anything new. Despite considering themselves planners, they admit to only taking seconds to make this decision. 48.3% (28) of participants claimed that they just require a few minutes to make a decision. Whereas 24.1% (14) of participants answered that it takes them hours, 19% (11) claimed that it takes them days, and just 3.4% (2) claimed that it takes them weeks to decide whether or not they should buy the item.

**Figure 4.4**

*Question 6: If you answered (b or c), how long does it take you to think about whether or not you should purchase something.*



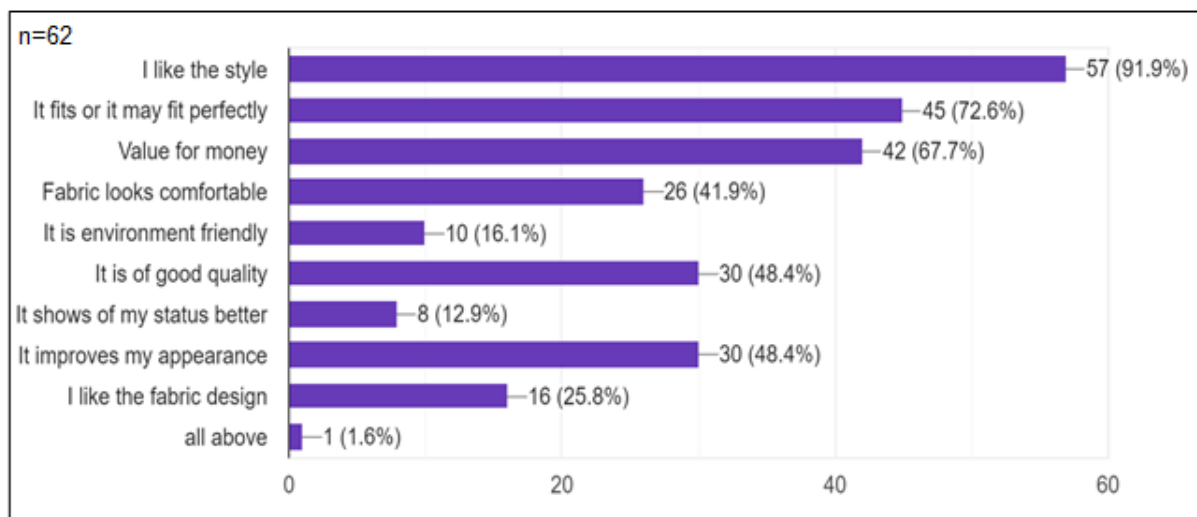
#### 4.3.4 Reason for Purchasing Clothing

In this question, participants were asked to give reasons for purchasing a specific item of apparel. The participants were given nine alternatives to pick from (see Figure 4.5). Other comments could have been added by the participants, however, only one person added the comment "all of the above". The options available to participants included: like the style, fit, value for money, fabric appears comfortable, ecologically friendly, excellent quality, displays status, enhances appearance and like the fabric design.

The most common choice selected by participants, 91.9% (57), was because they liked the style, followed by fits perfectly 72.6% (45) and value for money 67.7% (42). The environmentally friendly option was practically the least chosen option 16.1% (10 participants), behind the choice that indicates their status 12.9% (8) participants. This demonstrates that environmentally friendly textile items are not prioritized by participants when compared to the design or fit of the garment.

**Figure 4.5**

*Question 7: Why do you purchase a particular item of clothing?*



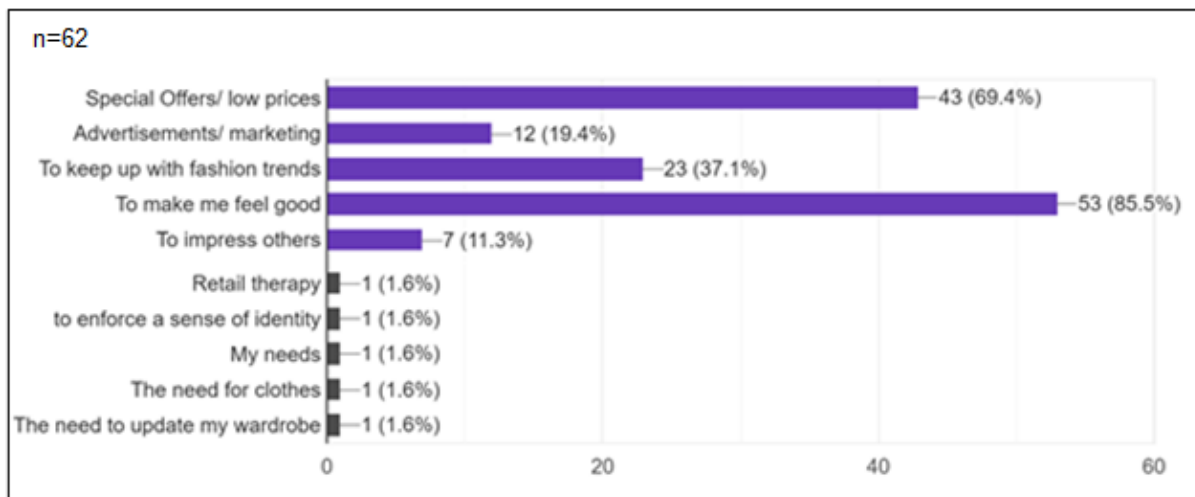
### 4.3.5 Purchase Driven Factors

In figure 4.6, respondents were asked what factors influence their decision to purchase anything. Special offers/low pricing were chosen by 69.4% (43 respondents), advertisements/marketing by 19.4% (12 respondents), keeping up with fashion trends by 37.1% (23 respondents), making them feel good by 85.5% (53 respondents) and impressing others by 11.3% (7 respondents). The last option was 'other', in case respondents wished to add anything new that wasn't already on the list. Other reasons (shown in a different colour in Figure 4.6) were retail therapy, in which the individual shops as a kind of treatment; to reinforce a sense of identity; the need for clothes and the desire to upgrade the wardrobe.

When looking at the most popular response to this question which was 'to make them feel good,' one may inquire if some of the respondents were telling the truth when in a previous question, they said they only buy clothing when it is absolutely necessary (Figure 4.3), as this resulted in a conflict in the answers.

**Figure 4.6**

*Question 8: What makes you want to buy clothes?*



#### 4.3.6 Ownership of Branded Clothing

When asked if they owned branded apparel, participants were given three options: 58.1% (36) selected that they did, 25.8% (16) marked that while they did possess branded apparel, they did not make the purchase, and 16.1% (10) did not own any. This revealed that the majority of participants possess branded apparel. In comparison to Figure 4.6, this shows that participants are prepared to spend more money on branded items rather than environmentally friendly apparel.

#### 4.3.7 Reason for Not Owning Branded Clothing

Interested as to why some individuals do not possess branded things, the participants were asked an open-ended question, having the option to give their response. Despite the fact that 16.1% (10) of participants indicated no to the previous question, 19.4% (12) answered this question.

The most common reason why individuals do not buy branded apparel is that it is too expensive. Others have expressed their dissatisfaction with the purchase of such expensive clothing when it would only be worn a few times. Some have stated; it is not worth the money to have a little brand name put down, that branded clothes do not give anything distinct than mainstream apparel, and that they do not provide any significance when compared to anything acquired from a street markets overseas.

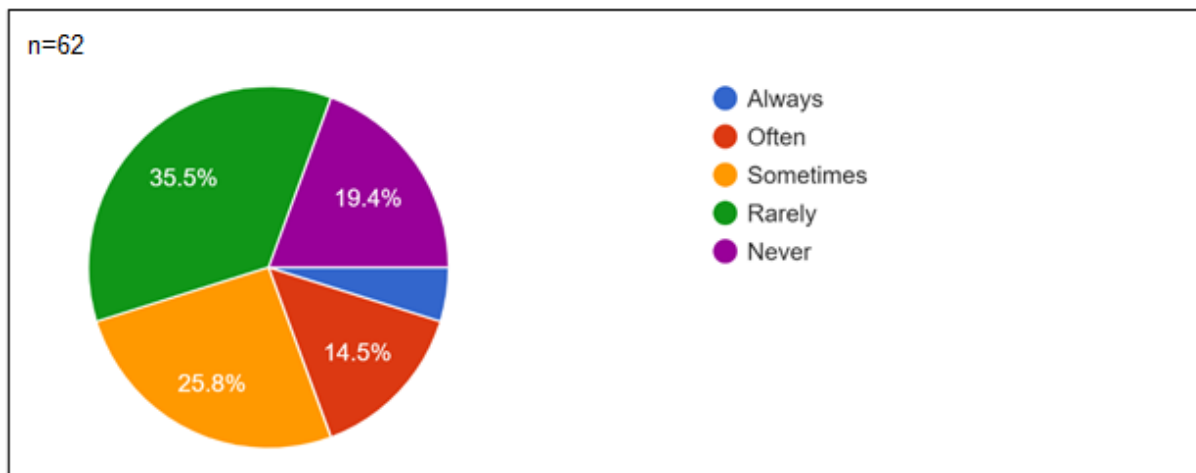
#### 4.3.8 Importance Given to Care Label Before Purchase

The researcher finally drew the respondents' attention to the care label in this question. Participants were asked how frequently they read the care label before purchasing a textile product. This question would assess whether the respondents were aware of the care label and whether or not it was essential to them.

Figure 4.7 shows that just 4.8% (3) of respondents said they always examine the garment's care label. 14.5% (9) said they often check the care label, 25.8% (16) said they check it sometimes, 35.5% (22) said they check it rarely and 19.4% (12) said they never check the care label before purchasing a textile product. This suggests that most respondents are unconcerned by the information on the care label.

**Figure 4.7**

*Question 11: A care label shows the instructions given by the manufacturer on how to properly care for the garment. How often do you check the care label before purchasing a textile product?*



#### 4.3.9 Purchase Decline Due to Care Label

When asked if they had ever declined to purchase something after reading the care label, the majority of participants 61.3% (38) answered in the negative. Only 24.2% (15) responded 'maybe', while only 14.5% (9) said they had declined to buy an item because they were dissatisfied with the information on the care label.

#### 4.3.10 Views on Textile Workers

Participants were informed that most textile employees are often given extremely low salaries while working long hours in a mass manufacturing environment (European Parliament, 2014). In addition, they were invited in an open-ended inquiry to give their thoughts on the subject.

Only 85.5% (53) answered this question of those polled. After reviewing the written comments of the participants, several indicated that it was unjust and that they should be given a reasonable wage. Others justified the situation by claiming that at least they had a job, or that if shoppers do not buy the inexpensive items created by fast fashion, the textile workers may lose their jobs. People buying these mass-produced garments, may almost feel as they are helping. Others stated that they are aware that it is unethical, yet they continue to buy such apparel.

Other participants stated that they were unaware of the situation or that there was a general lack of awareness and information about such concerns. Some were more sympathetic, stating that they are shopping for sustainable businesses or participating in clothes exchanges now that they are more aware of such awful working conditions.



## 4.4 Environmental Awareness

This section on environmental awareness, was intended for the purpose of divulging deeper knowledge on the significance the environment has for the participants. What level of awareness do these Maltese participants have about the detrimental effects of the textile industry on our environment? Throughout this section, an investigative technique was used to gain a greater understanding of the participants' knowledge of the environment.

### 4.4.1 Knowledge That the Textile Industry Is the Second Largest Polluter

When asked if they were aware that the fashion sector is the world's second greatest polluter, the majority of participants, 66.1% (41), were unaware of such a fact, while only 33.9% (21) of those polled were aware of such issues.

### 4.4.2 Fashion Industry Cause of Pollution

In this question the participants were asked, how they think the fashion industry can be contributing in the degradation to the environment.

A number of participants identified trash generation as a factor, stating that the majority of undesired or surplus apparel would end up in a landfill. Others listed water consumption, water pollution caused by the leakage of dyes and chemicals into rivers and air pollution caused by equipment, transportation, shipping and the production of greenhouse gas emissions. There were 12.9% (8) of participants who had no knowledge of any polluting practices, while other participants mentioned the quantity of materials utilized, such as plastic, as well as the usage of land and crops to create textiles.

### 4.4.3 Perception of Second-Hand Clothes

After raising awareness about the detrimental environmental effect of the textile industry, the researcher sought to know what participants thought about second-hand clothing stores.

Some commented positively, stating they appreciate the initiative and that it is a good idea if the clothing donated are of decent quality. Others commented that it is a sustainable approach to help the environment while still getting new clothes. Some people noted that the clothes would be a good purchase and that it is an excellent method to find vintage apparel and that each piece of clothing has a story. One respondent mentioned that they operate a small shop that offers second-hand apparel, and thinks it is an intriguing notion.

There were a handful of critical responses stating that they had never purchased or would never purchase second-hand clothing. There were two individuals who stated that there are not enough of these stores in Malta. Furthermore, the majority of those who stated a reason for avoiding purchasing used apparel claimed cleanliness as the reason. One person stated that they are not interested and that garments are much more inexpensive nowadays, indicating a lack of consideration for the effects of their actions. Another comment was that second-hand clothing would be beneficial to working-class citizens rather than them.

#### 4.4.4 Purchase from Second-Hand Shops

Given that many participants disliked second-hand clothing stores, when asked if they had ever purchased something from a second-hand store, the majority of participants 66.1% (41) replied in the negative, while the rest 33.9% (21) replied in favour.

#### 4.4.5 Reason for Refusal of Purchase or Item Bought at a Second-Hand Shop

Following the preceding question, participants were asked to explain what they had purchased from a second-hand store, and those who said no were asked to state a reason for refusal.

The most common argument cited by participants for not buying anything second-hand was cleanliness, quality and the notion of a stranger wearing the items

before them. Others mentioned a lack of information about such stores, or that they had never had the desire or chance to visit one.

The participants who said yes, mentioned goods ranging from jackets to children's apparel, purses and accessories, coats, shirts, skirts and trousers. Someone also expressed how they had purchased a pre-owned blouse and now have a narrative to tell others about how and where they purchased it. Others commented that they had purchased practically everything except for underwear.

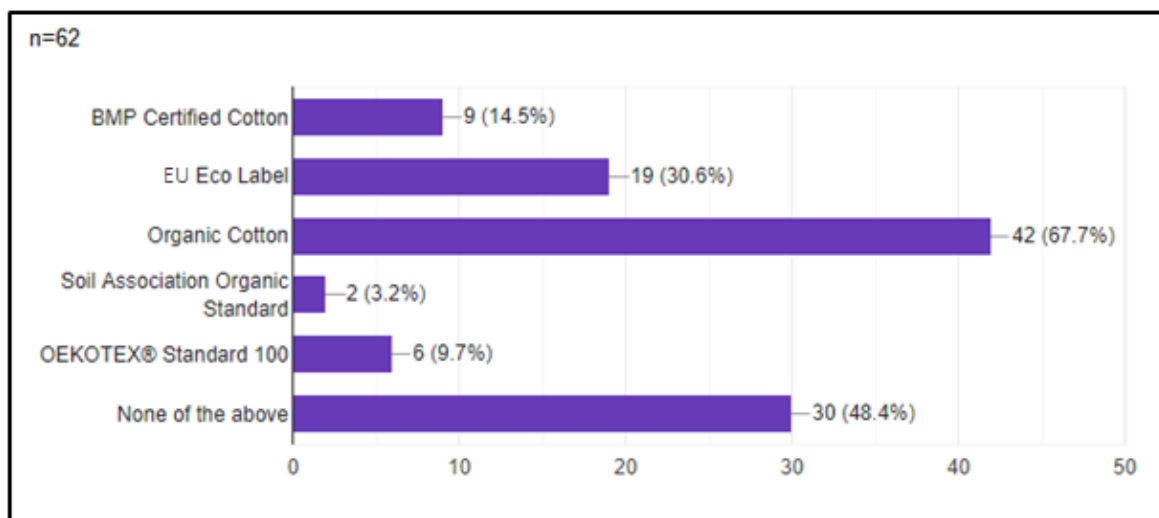
#### 4.4.6 Familiarity with Environmentally Friendly Logos

Figure 4.8 shows how there is a conflict when the participants were questioned if they had ever seen the logos listed below. The discrepancy is with the organic cotton logo, as 67.7% (42) participants stated they have seen it on textiles goods previously, yet 48.4% (30) participants indicated they had never seen any of the logos.

14.5% (9) of participants said they've seen the BMP certified cotton logo on textiles, 30.6% (19) said they've seen the EU eco label, 67.7% (42) said they've seen the organic cotton logo, just 3.2% (2) said they've seen the Soil Association organic standard logo, and 9.7% (6) said they've seen the OEKOTEX® standard 100 on textiles.

**Figure 4.8**

*Question 19: Which of the following logos have you ever seen on textiles items? (tick where necessary)*



#### 4.4.7 Willingness to Pay more for an Environmentally Friendly Garment

In this question, respondents were asked if they would be ready to spend more money on ecologically friendly clothing. 72.6% (45) said yes, while 27.4% (17) said no, indicating that even if they are aware that the product to be purchased was created in a more sustainable manner, they are unwilling to spend more money on such garment.

#### 4.4.8 Reason for Previous Question

For this question, participants were asked to explain why they were willing or unwilling to spend additional money on ecologically friendly clothing. When the responses were analysed, it was discovered that the majority of the participants would be willing to purchase such apparel, but they are sceptical of how sustainable the garments would be. On the other hand, others have no such concerns and have stated that because it benefits the environment, they are willing to spend more money. Several participants stated that they would be willing but would be unable to do so due to financial constraints; in fact, some stated that as soon as they have a good pay, they will begin to give more to the environment. Others commented on how such environmentally friendly items would be more expensive, and one person stated that because they are so costly, they are buying second-hand alternatives to still assist the environment. There was one who stated that ecologically friendly garments should not be more expensive because it is not the consumer's responsibility to pay the difference in cost and another who stated that they would rather have a variety of affordable clothing.

Having said that, there were still participants who care about the environment and stated that they are prepared to spend more since it is more ethical, the clothes are of higher quality, the workers are fairly compensated, and such clothing may have a possibility of lessening allergic reactions. Others just stated that if the ecologically friendly clothes fit them and their style, why not?

#### 4.4.9 Familiarity with Laundry Green Detergents

The final two questions in this part concerned green laundry detergents. When asked if they knew what green washing detergents were, 56.5% (35) of the participants responded in the negative, while the remaining 43.5% (27) said that they did know.

#### 4.4.10 Use of Eco-Friendly Washing Detergents

When asked if they had ever used green washing detergents, 34 persons answered, despite the fact that only 27 were required to do so because the remainder were unaware of the existence of such goods. From these 34, 64.7 % (22) said no, 32.4% (11) said yes, and 2.9% (1) said they are not the ones who buy the laundry detergents, therefore they don't really have a voice in the matter.

#### 4.5 Care Labelling

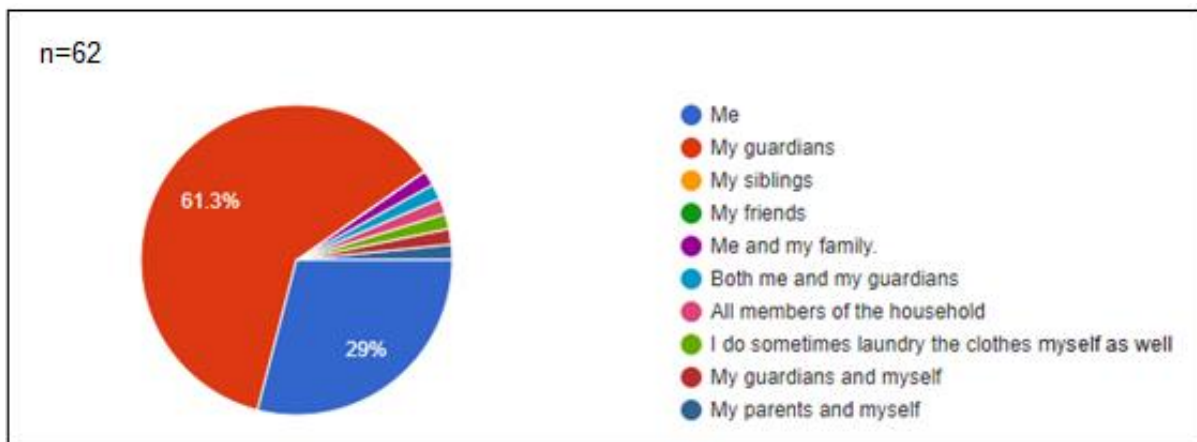
Finally, the final section of the online questionnaire focused on the participants' understanding of care labelling. The researcher's goal was to broaden the participants' understanding as consumers when shopping for apparel. Participants were also tested on their current knowledge of the care labelling symbols displayed on the care label.

#### 4.5.1 Laundering of Clothing

In this inquiry, participants were asked who washes their garments in order to uncover the truth about their knowledge of care labelling. The participants were given four options: myself 29% (18), my guardians 61.3% (38), my siblings (0), and my friends (0). The participants were also given the option of 'other,' allowing them to input any information that was most relevant to their situation. There were 3.2% (2) of participants who indicated that they or other family members laundered the clothing, another 4.8% (3) who identified themselves and their guardians, and someone else who stated that they occasionally washed the garments themselves, meaning that they and the guardians both do this duty. As seen in Figure 4.9, the majority of participants continue to have their guardians clean their clothes, although some may assist.

**Figure 4.9**

*Question 24: Who launders your clothes?*

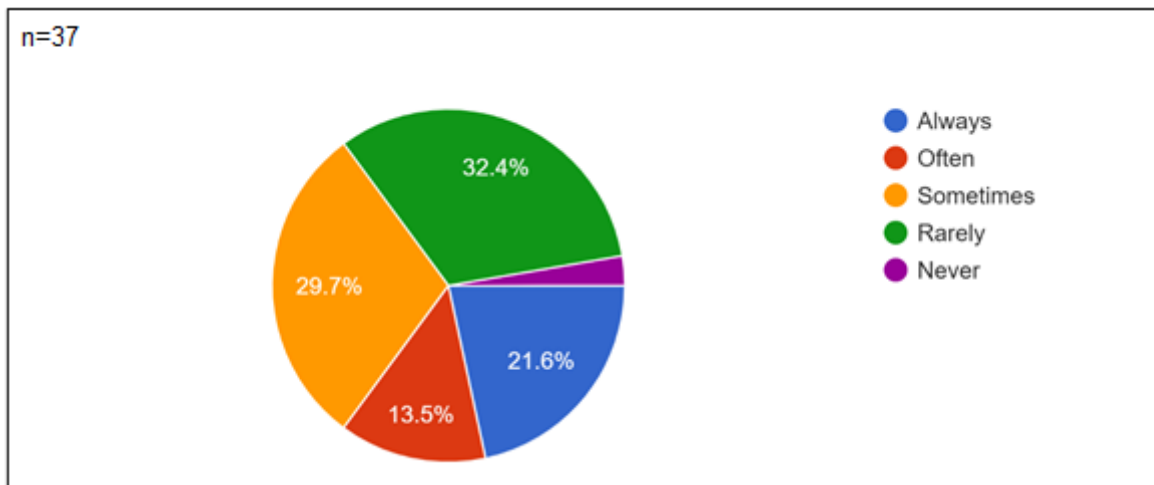


#### 4.5.2 Examination of Care Label Before Laundering by Yourself

Figure 4.10 shows that respondents who launder their own clothing were asked if they read the care label before washing the garments. Out of 37 responses, 21.6% (8) replied always, 13.5% (5) said frequently, 29.7% (11) said sometimes, while the choice rarely has the greatest proportion of participation 32.4% (12) and 2.7% (1) stated never. This suggests that the majority of participants who do their own laundry almost never look at the care label information to determine how to properly wash the items.

**Figure 4.10**

*Question 25: If you do your own laundry, do you check the care label before washing the garments?*





#### 4.5.3 Examination of Care Label Before Laundering by Others

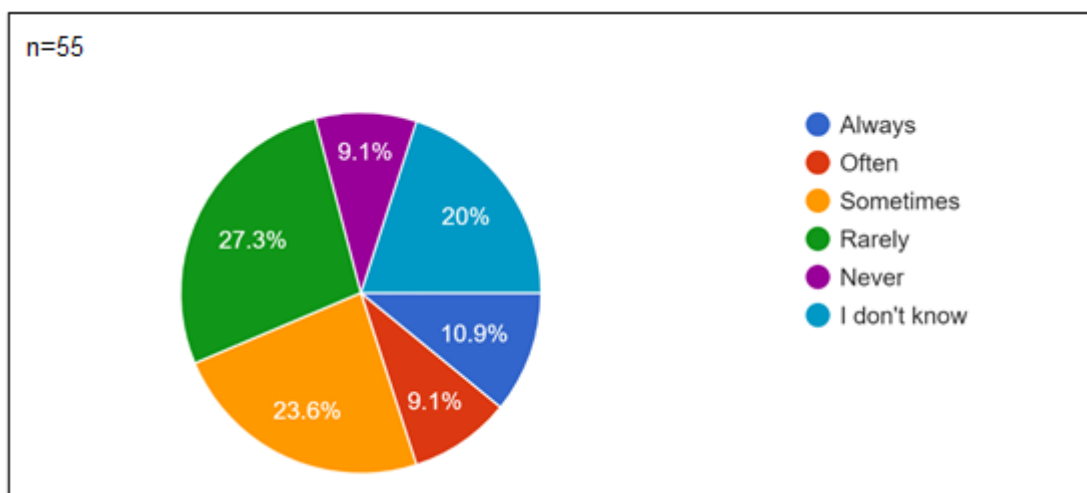
This question was designed for persons who have their clothes laundered by someone else, as the question asked participants if the individuals who laundered their clothes read the care label before washing. 55 responses were obtained, with nearly all of the respondents responding, indicating that, as university students, guardians still launder their clothes most of the time.

There were a wide range of replies, as seen in Figure 4.11. With 27.3%, the most popular response was 'rarely.' The second and third options were 'sometimes' 23.6% and 'I don't know' 20%. The choices of 'always,' 'often,' and 'never' all yielded similar findings, with 10.9%, 9.1%, and 9.1% respectively.

This suggests that, while some individuals do examine the care label, more awareness has to be established on the subject.

**Figure 4.11**

*Question 26: If other people do the laundry for you, do they check the care label before washing the garments?*



#### 4.5.4 Where the Participants Obtained Knowledge for Laundering

For this inquiry, participants were asked how they would know how to properly clean items if there was no reference to the care label. The majority of the participants 82.3% (51) replied via experience, advice from others was selected by 53.2% (33) of the participants, reading was chosen by 33.9% (21), habits were chosen by 19.4% (12), information received from school was selected by 11.3% (7) and the internet was added by one participant.

If the option 'internet' had been listed as one of the alternatives available to everybody, the outcomes could have been different since most young people rely on the internet for information. Based on these findings, it is clear that the majority of knowledge for laundering is obtained from experience, with school being the least chosen option. Should such vital knowledge, which might be utilized by anybody, be taught in schools for everyone, rather than just the particular chosen subjects? Will Maltese citizens be better educated about this issue if this occurs? Would it assist them in making more informed decisions?

#### 4.5.5 Obligatory Information on a Care Label

When asked which of the given information must be presented on a care label, participants had to choose from six possibilities. Almost majority of the participants 91.9% (57) indicated they must have care symbols. 80.6% (50) of participants believed fabric composition should be listed, 59.7% (37) believed size should be listed, 46.8% (29) felt manufacturer should be mentioned, while 41.9% (26) and 30.6% (19) believed carbon footprint and brand should be given, respectively. There was another person who just stated, "I don't know". In the meantime, nobody mentioned the country of manufacture.




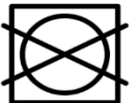
#### 4.5.6 – 4.5.9 Identify the Meaning of The Care Symbol

In the following four questions, the participants were evaluated on their knowledge of some of the most regularly used care symbols seen on care labels. As shown in table

4.1, some individuals were more familiar with the iron and tumble dry symbols, however the majority of participants were unsure about the bleach and dry clean symbols. In reality, these two symbols had the highest rate of inaccurate answers. As a consequence of the findings in Table 4.1, it is clear that individuals would not know how to properly launder a garment if not accompanied by written instructions or a quick search on the internet.

**Table 4.1**

*Question 29 – 32: Do you know what the following care label symbol means?*

Symbol	Total Participants (n=62)		
	Participants answered correctly	Participants answered incorrectly	Participants answered 'I don't know'
 Q29	72.6% (45)	4.8% (3)	22.6% (14)
 Q30	29% (18)	17.8% (11)	53.2% (33)
 Q31	32.3% (20)	19.4% (12)	48.4% (30)
 Q32	67.7% (42)	6.4% (4)	25.8% (16)

Note. The meaning of the symbol: Q29 means Iron medium temperature, Q30 Any Bleach, Q31 Do not dry clean and Q32 Do not tumble dry.

#### 4.5.10 Recognition of the MCCA

The MCCA is the Authority in charge of protecting the interests of consumers. The participants were asked if they were aware that they may file a complaint with the

MCCAA if the care label on a bought textile product included misleading or false information.

The majority of participants 40.3% (25) stated that they were unaware that they could file a complaint with the MCCAA, 32.3% (20) stated that they had never heard of the MCCAA and just 27.4% (17) stated that they knew.

Regardless, more individuals should be aware of their consumer rights and knowing that they may file a complaint or seek competent advice on any consumer topic is essential to becoming an informed consumer.

#### 4.5.11 Care Labelling Information Complaint

Participants were asked if they had ever filed a complaint (not necessarily with the MCCAA) about the content on a care label. The majority of participants, 77.4% (48) said never, 19.4% (12) said they didn't know they could, 3.2% (2) said "yes, once," and none said "yes, a couple of times." Does this indicate that they have never had a complaint or that they have never bothered to file a complaint over the information listed on the label?

#### 4.5.12 Purchase of a Textile Produce Without a Care Label

The final two questions of this online survey were regarding textile products that did not include a care label. When asked if they had ever purchased a textile item that did not have a care label, the majority of the participants 74.2% (46) said no, while the remainder 25.8% (16) said yes. Since all textile products should contain a care label, as a result it indicates such items were sold on the market with no guide or instruction on how to clean the textile product.

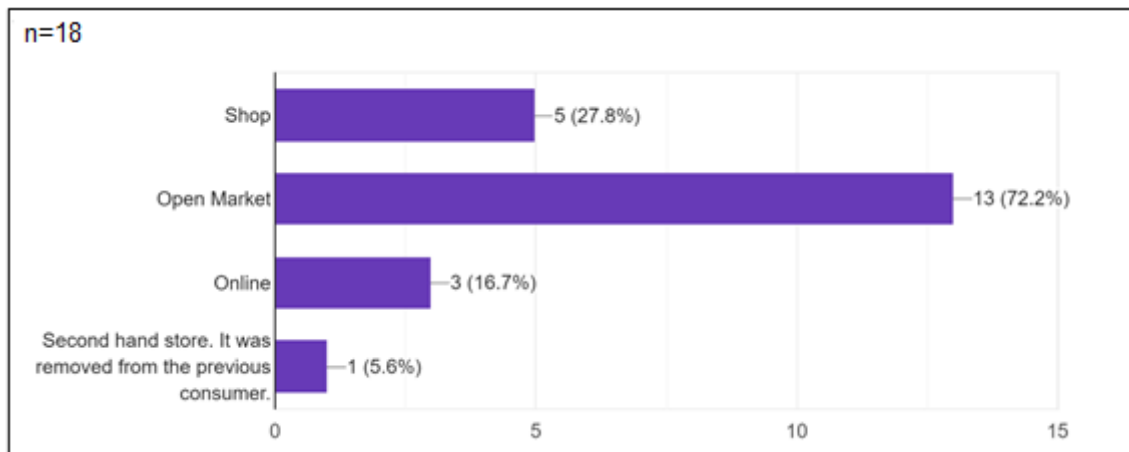
#### 4.5.13 Whereabouts the Product Without a Care Label Was Purchased

Figure 4.12 shows that the majority of the items that did not have an information care label were obtained from a street market 72.2% (13).

Others stated that they acquired their goods at a store 27.8% (5) or online 16.7% (3) and one participant said from a second-hand clothing store, but it did not have a care label since the previous owner had removed it.

**Figure 4.12**

*Question 36: If you ever bought a textile product that did not contain a care label, where did you buy it from?*



#### 4.6 Conclusion of Analysis

The next chapter will be a discussion of the outcomes of the online questionnaire and focus group compared to the data acquired from literature. This discussion will mostly focus on the knowledge gained through the research tools, which will be contrasted to previously existing knowledge.

# **Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings**

## 5.1 Introduction

An overview of the results from the online questionnaire, as well as the findings from the focus group and the evidence from the literature review, will be analysed in this chapter. Consumer shopping behaviour and practices, the value of care labelling, environmental consciousness and the detrimental impact of the textile industry on the environment, and the relationship to the Maltese local context are some of the issues that appear in all areas of this study.

## 5.2 Consumer Behaviour and Practices

According to Park (2015), as cited by Diddi et al., (2019), since young people are more up to date with fashion trends, they are more likely to buy clothes on impulse. Given that the majority of the respondents to the online survey were between the ages of 18 and 25, they are categorized as young consumers. However, only 23 out of 62 participants picked fashion trends as one of the most important factors to consider when buying clothes (see Figure 4.6). Nonetheless, when asked if they perceive themselves to be impulse shoppers or planners, the majority of the participants 54.8% (34) said they are both. Henceforth, not all young consumers are impulse buyers, and the reason for their spontaneous purchases of clothing might not be to keep up with fashion trends.

When asked how frequently they buy clothes, only 37.1 % of the online questionnaire participants claimed they 'only buy when required', while the remainder chose alternative answers, with some even indicating they buy once a month. Clothes are no longer purchased as a necessity, but rather as a desire (Foster, 2019). In reality, the majority of participants in the online survey stated that they buy clothes because they like the style, the fit and the garments are a good value for money. While most participants end up making a purchase because it makes them feel good and because the deal of discovering something at a low price or with a special offer is appealing. As a result, Foster (2019) was correct when it claimed that discounts exist to encourage consumers to buy more.

### 5.2.1 The Reality of the Fast Fashion Industry for Workers

According to the European Commission (July 2020), textile workers face inadequate working conditions, including extremely low earnings and long hours. Indian cotton farmers suffer tremendously from large debts due to the demand of fast fashion which leads many to suicide (Fairtrade Foundation, 2015).

When asked about their views on textile workers in the questionnaire, not all of the participants responded, and of those who did, some were unaware of such situations, while others stated that it is unjust and immoral, and that something should be done. Others have indicated that they might be helping if they purchase the fast fashion apparel in order to help the textile workers to retain their jobs.

## 5.3 Care Labelling

### 5.3.1 Labelling requirements

The manufacturer is responsible for the following information on the label (*Care Labels - Guide on Care Labelling Systems – Apparel*, n.d.); the country of origin, manufacturer information (*Care Labels - Guide on Care Labelling Systems – Apparel*, n.d.), full series of symbols (GINETEX, n.d.a) and full fibre composition (The European Commission, 2016).

In the online questionnaire, when asked what data they believe is found on the care label, most respondents (91.9%) chose care symbols and 80.6 % chose fabric content. However, only 46.8% choose the option of having the name of the manufacturer, indicating that the participants are unaware of the details that must be found on a garment care label. A focus group participant said that they are aware that the manufacturer is responsible for the information provided on the label.



### 5.3.2 Acknowledgement of the Care label

Through literature research, it was found that consumers remove care labels as they may be visible undergarments. These labels are not retained for further reference as consumers regard it as an inconvenience (Felicioni & De Backer, 2019). In the focus groups, the participants were asked if they removed the care label and why. Results obtained by the focus group show that one out of seven people agreed with the findings of the literature. They said that they remove the label as it might be visible under clothing. Others mentioned how it irritated their skin and so they removed it while only one participant said that they do not mind them.

In contrast to what Felicioni & De Backer (2019) found in their study, one of the participants said that they keep the labels or take note of the information. Some of the participants declared that after doing the questionnaire they felt more aware of the care label's importance and declared that in future they will think twice before removing it. Furthermore, two participants suggested labels should be printed on the clothing so that they stay on the garment and do not irritate the wearer.

### 5.3.3 Reference to the Care Label

Consumers who had a high level of textile understanding were more likely to refer to the care label (Arbaugh, 1974 as cited by Sanad, 2017). In this online questionnaire the participants were asked if they look at the care label when they launder the clothes and only 21.6% affirmed that they do. Participants who were not responsible for washing their own clothes, were asked if the launderer reads the care label and only 10.9% confirmed that they do.

Generally, knowledgeable people do not need to consult the label since they have sufficient experience (Arbaugh, 1974 as cited by Sanad, 2017). When asked where they got their expertise from, 82.3% of the participants said they learned through experience. The second most common response (53.2 %) was receiving advice from others.

### 5.3.4 Awareness and Care Instructions

According to Nadiger (2007), care labelling instructions that are conveyed with symbols are easier to grasp since they reduce linguistic barriers. However, when in the online questionnaire the participants were inquired about four different care symbols (reference to table 4.1), most of the participants only managed to recognise the symbol for the 'iron with medium temperature' and 'do not tumble dry'. While the 'bleaching' and 'dry cleaning' symbols were not recognised by the majority.

When the focus group participants were asked if after the questionnaire they felt more knowledgeable about care symbols, most of them answered yes, while only one participant said that they were already knowledgeable about the subject. Nonetheless, all the participants realised that from one garment to another the symbols are not the same and learned that since garments have different fabrics, they require different care.

## 5.4 Environmental

### 5.4.1 Negative Effects of Textile Industry

After revealing to the online questionnaire participants that the fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world (Blote et al., 2020), they were asked if they were aware of such information. 66.1% of the participants said that they were not aware of this, while only 33.9% knew this to be true. As a result, individuals are being encouraged to think about methods to be more ecologically friendly in the world we live in.

### 5.4.2 CSR and Branded Clothing

In the online questionnaire the participants were asked if they own any branded clothing and in total there were 52 that said yes. When the other ten participants were asked why they did not own branded clothing, the most prevalent response was that it was too expensive.

As mentioned by Fernandez (2009), participants associate branded clothing with good quality. In the focus group, the participants were asked why they think branded clothing is expensive. Half of the participants in the focus group mentioned quality as one of the reasons, while the rest mentioned paying for the brand name, the time and energy it took for the item to be made and the assurance of a designer finish. According to one of the focus group members, such branded enterprises exist as a result of the capitalist society that we have established, and that branded clothes just give the appearance of value, quality, and aesthetics.

Another probe in the same question of the focus group was about CSR. CSR is a model for companies to be aware of their impact on all aspects of society (Corporate Social Responsibility, 2019). When the participants were asked if they think that big companies practise CSR, most of them said that they believe companies care more about making a profit than the impact they are leaving on the environment. Others mentioned how this was their first time hearing about CSR. Furthermore, when asked to name some environmentally responsible brands, they did, including Body Shop, L-Arka, Patagonia, Dr. Martens, and others.

#### 5.4.3 Green Laundry Detergents

Felizarta et al., (2016) conducted a study with college students and found that only 9% of participants knew about green laundry detergents before completing the survey. Participants of this papers' study who took the questionnaire were asked if they knew what green detergents were. Slightly more than half of the participants (56.5%) answered no, while 43.5% answered yes. When contrasted to the study by Felizarta et al., (2016), this indicates that there is some understanding of what these eco-friendly detergents are in Malta; nonetheless, more awareness is required for the Figures to increase. We must continue to encourage people to use green detergents instead of traditional detergents. Since, when individuals who were aware of green detergents were questioned if they had used them, the majority of those surveyed (64.7 %) admitted to never used them.

#### 5.4.4 Second-Hand Clothes

In a study conducted by Yan et al., (2015), it was first assumed that individuals do not buy second-hand apparel for hygienic concerns; however, cleanliness was not a problem. Instead, it was found that some people refuse to purchase second-hand clothes due to the social stigma. It was also discovered that some people hesitate to buy used clothing due to societal shame. When this survey's participants were asked why they do not buy used clothes, cleanliness was the most often given reason, followed by quality and the notion of a stranger wearing the products before them. When someone suggested that second-hand garments would be excellent for working-class citizens but not for them, societal stigma was obvious. This demonstrates that some believe that purchasing used clothing is a viable alternative to new clothing for the poor.

Not everyone has this attitude toward second-hand clothing; in fact, some individuals believe that vintage items provide a pleasant sense because of the garment's history (Strähle, 2017). This was recognized in the questionnaire answers, since several participants stated that this was a sustainable strategy to help the environment. Some users commented that this is a good method to find vintage clothing, while others noted that they had purchased a garment and now have a tale to tell, about how and where they got it.

#### 5.4.5 Natural Fibres and Eco-friendly

Natural fibres, such as cotton, are not completely eco-friendly unless they are organic. When harvesting cotton, many fossil fuel resources must be used (Van Dam, 2008), yet less than the amount needed to manufacture polyester (Kalliala and Nousiainen, 1999). Nonetheless, cotton consumes a large amount of water (Van Dam, 2008), as well as 25% of agricultural pesticides used globally (Eyupoglu, 2018, p165).

Natural fibres, particularly cotton, are seen by focus group members to be more eco-friendly than synthetic fabrics, kinder on the skin, more comfortable, and easier to care for.

In reality, when one of the focus group participants remarked that natural fibres must be better because they are used in baby products, they were correct. BBees Malta and Chloe's Closet Malta, two online baby stores that sell environmentally friendly baby products, provide outfits for children that are produced with 100% cotton, but the cotton is organic.

Synthetic textiles, such as polyester, are also unfriendly to the environment due to the release of microplastics and their reliance on fossil fuel supplies (Sandin et al., 2019). This concept was also evident in the responses of the focus group members, who stated that synthetics are composed of plastic and are detrimental to the environment. Others have reported that anytime they wear products made of synthetic fabrics, they begin to itch or get a rash. While wearing cotton, such as cotton underwear, there was a reduction in rashes and increased breathability.

As a result, people are aware that natural fibres may be more beneficial for the environment as well as the wearer, and they appear to be interested in helping the environment. However, when questioned in the online questionnaire if they would be willing to spend more money on eco-friendly apparel, only 17 of the 62 participants said they would not be willing to pay extra to help reduce some of the harm produced by the textile industry.

When asked why some participants would not be ready to spend more money on something that had been produced in a more sustainable way, there were a few who replied that such products should not be more expensive. Financial constraints and suspicious doubts of how sustainable the clothing had been constructed, were other reasons.

58.1 % (36) responders admitted to owning branded items and had purchased them personally. This suggests that consumers are prepared to spend more money on something that is more expensive in order to own a branded item but refuse to pay for a sustainably produced product.

#### 5.4.6 Decreasing Waste Production

With an increase in textile market output, the negative environmental impact during manufacturing, clothing utilization, and product discarding, grew substantially (Sandin and Peters, 2018 as cited in Stone et al., 2019). In the article of the European Parliament (2019), it was also stated that the textile sector was responsible for around 92 million tons of waste in 2015.

When asked in this study's focus group how they get rid of old clothing, all of the participants indicated that tossing clothes away in the garbage seemed like the last choice and mentioned several other options to avoid waste and delay the final disposal as much as possible. Some of the replies included donating unwanted garments to charity, giving them to friends or family, or putting them in the 'clothes banks' that can be found in various areas around Malta. People can drop off unwanted clothing in the 'clothes banks', which are later shipped for re-use in other countries (Zammit, 2017).

Other alternatives that the participants mentioned to decrease waste include, to use worn-out garments as cleaning rags for windows or cars, as rags for paint, or for different arts and crafts with students during the summer. Later on, another participant revealed that reading through the other respondents' comments had provided ideas of crafts to perform in class during teaching practice.

Another answer that was frequently expressed was the concept of upcycling garments, to give them a new significance or to modify their appearance. This demonstrates that some are concerned with helping the environment by decreasing waste production; one person even suggested that in order to minimize textile waste further, mass production must cease.

#### 5.5 Local Context

The MCCA's consumer affairs office exists to protect customers' consumer rights. The authority claims to educate the public and supply them with the required information, as well as helping customers with any complaints (MCCA - Office for

Consumer Affairs, n.d.). However, according to the results of the online questionnaire, 32.3 % are unaware of the MCCA, its function, or even that it exists.

When asked if they knew that they could file a complaint with the MCCA over deceptive commercial practices, the majority of respondents 40.3 % (25) indicated they did not know they could. While referring back to those that are unaware of the MCCA's existence, if these findings were representative of the entire country, it would suggest that almost one-third of Maltese individuals are unaware that the MCCA exists and offers assistance in educating people on their consumer rights.

When asked if they had ever lodged a complaint about the care label information, 77.4% of the online questionnaire participants stated they had never done so, while 19.4% stated they did not know they could.

The researcher contacted the MCCA and asked if they believe Maltese consumers are aware that they may complain about misinformation found on the garment care label (personal communication, email sent by MCCA dated 12th January,2021, see Appendix H). The reply obtained was that instead of being aware of the information on the care label, consumers would become aware of the misinformation after caring for the garment.

Upon contacting the MCCA and inquiring about how frequently they get complaints about clothing, the researcher was told (personal communication, email sent by MCCA dated 12th January,2021, see Appendix H) that from January 2019 to December 2020, almost 2 years, there were only 18 complaints lodged (email sent by MCCA dated 12th January,2021, see Appendix H). As a result, with a population of around 440,372 in 2019 and 441,543 in 2020 (Malta Population, n.d.), only around 0.004% of the total population made a complaint about the poor quality of the items. This implies that more customers should be taught about their rights so that they may make use of their rights should they need to.

When asked whether they felt more confident to file a complaint after the questionnaire, one of the focus group participants stated that they had previously done so in the past, two participants stated that they do not normally file complaints, and another stated that the time and energy involved in the dispute would not be worth it. Furthermore, with the exception of one person, nearly all of the participants answered that if they were to lodge a complaint, they would first contact the seller before calling

the MCCA, whereas the remaining participant claimed that they would not go as far as calling the MCCA and would solely deal with the seller.

## 5.6 Conclusion of Discussion

Following a review of the findings in relation to the literature, the results indicate that more information for Maltese consumers must be provided. As a result, as stated in the proposal, an educational poster (please find the poster in Appendix I) was distributed through the MTL Facebook page to raise awareness and share knowledge about care labelling.

The informative poster included details on what must be found on the care label, such as the manufacturer, country of manufacture, care label symbols and the material's content. This is intended to inform consumers of which essential information could be absent from the care label. Furthermore, the poster includes a guide on how to file a complaint about misleading information, thus increasing customer awareness of their rights and allowing them to make better-informed decisions.



# **Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations**

## 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, a further conclusion to analyse if the main research question 'Do consumers consider textiles care labels as important?', has been answered, together with the secondary questions, will be made. Recommendations to consumers on their rights and recommendations to both the manufacturers and the consumers, will be discussed in an effort to mitigate some of the harmful environmental effects of textile marketing.

## 6.2 Main findings

### 6.2.1 The Importance of Textile Care Labelling for Consumers

The study's key research concern is about consumers' perceptions of textile care labelling. According to the data gathered from both the online questionnaire and the focus group, Maltese consumers are less concerned about what is written on the care label when compared to consumers in other countries. Furthermore, when asked whether the details on the care label had ever influenced their purchase, the majority of the participants said no. When the participants' understanding of frequently used care symbols was examined, the participants either responded incorrectly or did not know the meanings of two symbols (see Table 4.1).

When asked whether they make any reference to the care symbols before washing the garment, the majority of the participants responded that they do not. When asked about the removal of the care label, later in the focus group, some participants admitted that they remove it because it is irritating to the skin, leaving the garment without any instructions for maintenance. Hence, this further emphasizes the importance of having an alternative way on how to provide the purchaser with information regarding the care of the garments and their rights as consumers when confronted with misleading information.

It was also revealed that Maltese customers are unlikely to notice any deceptive information immediately and as a result, are unlikely to file a complaint. Some were

unaware that the MCCA, is the authority in charge of assisting customers in such disputes with sellers.

### 6.2.2 Environmental Awareness of The Garment Industry's and Production's Detrimental Consequences

One of the secondary study questions was concerning whether or not customers are aware of the detrimental environmental effect of the textile industry. According to what was discovered in the previous chapter of the discussion, when revealing to the participants that the textile industry is the second largest polluter in the world, most participants did not know. The majority of the participants were also unaware of what sort of negative impacts the textile industry is truly responsible for. When, the participants were asked to share what they think some of the impacts might be, the most prevalent answers for some of the negative outcomes stated by respondents were; waste generation, water contamination and air pollution, all of which are accurate.

Furthermore, even though there were questions in the online questionnaire that indicated the participants' readiness to lessen such environmental degradations, they still seemed hesitant to modify their behaviour. Such evidence is obvious when participants demonstrate a lack of readiness to purchase eco-friendly clothing, while still choosing to purchase branded clothing. When asked if they had ever purchased something from a second-hand store, the majority of the participants said no. Despite the fact that participants are aware that re-buying second-hand garments is more sustainable than purchasing new, the majority of participants are hesitant to change their minds and consider purchasing second-hand garments.

### 6.2.3 Consumers Choice of Garments and Textile Products

The other secondary question of this study was concerned with the reasons why consumers purchase garments. When asked why they purchase a particular piece of apparel, the majority of respondents said it was because they liked the style, it fit them well, and it was good value for money. While the least preferred reasons for individuals

purchasing garments were to exhibit their status or because the clothing is environmentally friendly. The fact that style and fit are the most popular selections indicates that participants are concerned with their appearance, followed by financial considerations.

Later, when asked what motivates them to make a purchase, the participants responded with the desire to feel good, and this sustains their emotional need and a financially enticing deal like special offers. When asked how frequently they buy clothing, the majority of respondents said every two to six months, only when required, and once a month, respectively.

### 6.3 Recommendations

After analysing the main conclusions of this study, the researcher has many suggestions to be considered. The following recommendations are directed at Maltese consumers, the Maltese government, textile manufactures and hope to create more awareness towards environmental conservation.

#### 6.3.1 Recommendations for Raising Awareness on Care Labelling

It is suggested that more manufacturers print QR codes on the inside of the garment so that it does not irritate the skin and eliminates the probability of being removed. Furthermore, if the care label information is accessed after scanning the QR, more detailed information may be available without the need for additional material for the care label and ink for printing.

#### 6.3.2 Recommendations to Maltese Consumers

Some of the recommendations in this section include:

- More people should be made aware of the reality of greenwashing, making the people aware of honest sustainable manufacturers. Consumers can reduce their

chances of being misled by greenwashing by looking out for world-wide certification of sustainability, which is proof that the company is truly eco-conscious.

- More people should be aware of their consumer rights, and knowing that they may file a complaint or seek competent advice on any consumer topic is essential for making educated decisions.
- Consumers should understand the meaning of the care label symbols so that, with appropriate washing, it takes a longer time for the items to wear out, extending the product's life. Working with the MCCA to communicate the meanings of the symbols can help to spread knowledge.

### 6.3.3 Recommendations to the Maltese government

Some of the recommendations in this section include:

- More information on care labelling instructions and the negative impact of the textile industry should be taught in schools as part of the educational curriculum.
- A research similar to this one, should be conducted on a nationwide level to assess the current, local realities.
- A study similar to this can be undertaken with secondary school students pursuing the VET subject of Fashion and Textiles, to see whether the knowledge offered in schools is sufficient for them to make well-informed decisions in the future. They could also be asked whether they share knowledge learnt in school with their family and friends.
- To increase awareness, each home should be given a list of competent authorities from which Maltese people may seek aid on a daily basis, such as the MCCA, the authority responsible for supporting consumers. Local councils might also share this knowledge on their 'Facebook' pages and groups for each locality, allowing everyone to have access to additional information.
- The researcher's educational poster, or one similar to it, should be distributed to Maltese citizens so that further information may be provided.

### 6.3.4 Recommendations for Manufacturers

Textile manufacturers should try to minimise their negative impacts as much as possible by lowering their use of fossil fuels and their contribution to waste generation. In addition, if change is to occur, the fast fashion trend must be eliminated.

### 6.3.5 Recommendations for More Environmental Consciousness

The researcher advises people to:

- Think twice before buying clothes they do not actually need, and strive to buy items only when absolutely necessary.
- Instead of tossing away garments, try upcycling, donating or selling them.
- Shop at second-hand stores before purchasing new items, or engage in clothing swapping with friends or people online.
- When feasible, choose goods that are sustainable and constructed of quality materials, as these products will last longer.
- When washing clothes, read the care label and, if possible, use low temperatures and full loads, and hang dry clothes rather than tumble dry to conserve energy.

## 6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, even if many individuals were unaware of the aforementioned realities, the researcher believes that this study has already made a difference by raising awareness about the importance of care labelling and its contents. The reality of the detrimental effects the textile industry is leaving behind, and the fact that some textile employees are not working in the correct conditions was also passed on. Recommendations about what people may do to assist in lessening the harmful effect on the environment, were indeed suggested, such as buying second-hand clothing instead of new, using green detergents instead of conventional ones and opting for environmentally friendly garments such as those that contain an eco-friendly logo. A participant of the focus group stated that "Thanks to your study, I feel more

knowledgeable about the information that should be found on the care label" (refer to Appendix G for the focus group transcript). Everyone could be part of a positive change as long as we try and do our part.

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# Appendices

# **Appendix A Email from Merrill Rural Network**



Merill Rural Network <info@merill.com.mt>

Mon, 28 Dec 2020, 10:15 ☆ ↶ ⋮

to [redacted] me ↕

Dear Chantelle,

Thanks for reaching out.

Yes unfortunately most wool goes to waste (keep in mind that in Malta it's sheep's wool that is used, not goats').

The reason, as you said, is that working with wool has become something quite rare, and even when you find someone still practicing the craft it is time consuming. So the demand is much lower than the supply.

On a positive note, we've been cooperating very well with Antoine tan-Newl locally for over 8 years and we've seen great improvement, and much more awareness in this segment.

In 2015 Merill concluded a funded project so that, apart from various other actions, Antoine could acquire more efficient equipment (a carder and a spinner). Nowadays Antoine is also teaching students the art of working with sheep's wool, and producing handwoven items on the loom.

Funded project - <http://merill.com.mt/strengthen-empower-and-assist-mm-action-4135>

Video - <https://youtu.be/pm1tASgK3KE>

Antoine's IG - <https://www.instagram.com/weavingmalta/>

Antoine's FB - <https://www.facebook.com/AntoinetanNewl/>

Feel free to get in touch with them directly for more information

Best wishes

[redacted]

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[redacted]  
Co-founder & Network Manager

M: +356 [redacted]  
E: [info@merill.com.mt](mailto:info@merill.com.mt)

# **Appendix B Email from the Dean of the Education Faculty**



**Chantelle Vella** <chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt>  
to colin.calleja, Lorraine ▾  
Dear Dr C.Calleja,

Fri, 26 Jun 2020, 15:14 ☆ ↶ ⋮

I am Chantelle Vella a second-year student reading for Master degree in Teaching and Learning in Fashion and Textiles with Home economics. As a part of my studies, I am conducting my dissertation 'Maltese consumers' knowledge of textile labelling information: An exploratory study', I shall collect data for this study from the current 1<sup>st</sup> year MTL students (2019 – 2021). I shall be using our Facebook group to upload a questionnaire and also invite them to take part in a focus group discussion. None of the participants will miss any lectures due to my research. This study is being supervised by Dr Lorraine Portelli in copy.

I am writing to inform you about my work and that I shall be contacting the MTL group to do the above-mentioned research.

Thank you and Regards  
Chantelle Vella (79697m)  
BSc (Hon)



**Colin Calleja** <colin.calleja@um.edu.mt>  
to me, Lorraine ▾

Fri, 26 Jun 2020, 18:44 ☆ ↶ ⋮

by all means Chantelle, You have my blessing... go ahead. Take care and good luck on your studies.



**Dr Colin Calleja**  
Dean  
B.Ed (Hon.), M.Ed (Malt.), PhD (Leipzig)

Head of Department for Inclusion and Access to Learning  
Let Me Learn National Coordinator  
Faculty of Education  
Room 285, Old Humanities Building  
University of Malta  
Msida, MSD 2080  
Malta  
+356 2340 3363

# **Appendix C Email from the Secretary of the Education Faculty**



Studnets in MTL Course Inbox x



**Chantelle Vella** <chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt>  
to Stefania, Lorraine ▾

Wed, 13 May 2020, 09:21 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Good Morning Ms Micallef,

Could you please tell me how many students are still attending the MTL first year course please, as I have to update the number of participants for my dissertation.

Thank you and Regards  
Chantelle Vella  
MTL 1st Year



**Stefania Micallef** <stefania.micallef@um.edu.mt>  
to me, Lorraine ▾

Wed, 13 May 2020, 10:01 ☆ ↶ ⋮

Good morning Chantelle,

full-time = 120 students  
part-time = 26 students

regards,  
Stefania

Stefania Micallef  
Administration Specialist  
Department of Health, Physical Education and Consumer Studies  
Faculty of Education  
University of Malta

# **Appendix D**

# **Accepted Proposal**



## Masters in Teaching and Learning

### Dissertation Proposal Form

Date	Day	Month	Year
	24	01	20
Proposal Number	1 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Proposal Identifier			
Course Years	2019-2021 (2yrs)		

1. Name of Applicant:	CHANTELLE VELLA		
1.1 I.D. 79697(m)	1.2 Teaching Area Fashion & Textiles with HE		
1.3 Mobile [REDACTED]	1.4 Tel. 21437546		
1.5 Email chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt			

2. Name of Principal Supervisor * BLOCK LETTERS	Dr. LORRAINE PORTELLI		
2.1 Faculty / Department / Institute	Faculty of Education		
2.2 Telephone (office/mobile)	[REDACTED]		
2.3 Email lorraine.portelli@um.edu.mt			
2.4 Post	Full Time <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Part Time <input type="checkbox"/>	TR status
2.5 I confirm that, as Principal Supervisor, I have discussed the proposed research with the student and endorse this M.T.L. dissertation proposal	Signature [REDACTED]		

3. Name of Advisor *			
3.1 Faculty / Department / Institute			
3.2 Telephone (home, mobile)			
3.3 Email			
3.4 Post	Full Time <input type="checkbox"/>	Part Time <input type="checkbox"/>	TR status
3.5 I confirm that, as Advisor, I have discussed the proposed research with the student and endorse this M.T.L. dissertation proposal	Signature		
* External Supervisor / Advisor / Co-Supervisor to submit short CV where applicable			

<b>4. Title of Research Study/Project (max.15 words)</b>
Maltese consumers' knowledge of textiles labelling information: An exploratory study
<b>4.1 Research Question/s</b>
Main research question - Do consumers consider textiles care labels as important? Secondary questions - Are consumers aware of the negative impact of textiles products on the environment? How do consumers choose their clothing and textiles product?
<b>4.2. Abstract of the proposed research or project work</b>
<p>The fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world. Studies have been conducted on how consumers can lower the negative impact of clothing on the environment (e.g. Health and Environment Justice Support International, 2018).</p> <p>The importance of reading care labelling when selecting, buying and caring for clothing and textile items contribute towards creating less pollution and conserving the world's natural resources. Shin (2000) argues that innovations in textiles and fibres make consumers' decision-making process more complex. Sonnenberg and Erasmus (2006) point out that the textiles industry need to effectively communicate their product information, as textiles care labels serve as the first link of communication between the consumers and the retailer or manufacturer (Chowdhary, 2003).</p> <p>Local research on the attitudes and knowledge of Maltese citizens regarding textiles care labels is non-existent. This investigation shall focus on gathering data from University students reading for a Masters in Teaching and Learning (MTL) (2018-2021 cohort) regarding their awareness on textiles care labelling. The focus of this study is on educating University students who are prospective teachers about their role in reducing the impact of textiles on the environment through improving their knowledge on the interpretation of textiles care labels. This study will make the participants more aware of how to make informed choices when choosing and purchasing textile items, such as clothing and accessories.</p> <p>The research shall take a mixed method approach as the main research tools shall be an online questionnaire sent to the whole cohort of MTL students (2019-21) and 2 focus groups. The results and information regarding awareness and choice of textile items in relation to care labels will be disseminated through the MTL Facebook page.</p>

<b>5. Keywords (3 – 6 keywords related to the content of dissertation)</b>		
<sup>1</sup> MTL students	<sup>2</sup> Textile care labels	<sup>3</sup> Environment
<sup>4</sup> Knowledge	<sup>5</sup> Attitudes	<sup>6</sup> Consumers

6. Description of Research Methods to be applied.			
6.1 Tick one or more of the following as applicable:			
Questionnaire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Text Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual Interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	Focus Group Interview	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Case Study/ies	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bibliographic Search	<input type="checkbox"/>
Curriculum Study	<input type="checkbox"/>	Curriculum Development/Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resource Development/Evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	Educational Intervention	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combined (state combination)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.2 Will your research involve collection of primary data from human participants?		YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
If YES - Where will the participants come from?			
Sector:	Primary <input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary <input type="checkbox"/>	Tertiary <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>		
6.3 If applicable, explain primary data collection from human participants for the different Research Methods chosen:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who will be your sample? (Indicate salient characteristics, such as age, gender, nationality, occupation)</li> <li>• What is the minimum-maximum number of participants?</li> <li>• How will the participants be recruited? (a brief explanation of how researcher proposes to gain access to potential informants for EACH research method ticked)</li> <li>• What will participants be required to do?</li> </ul>			
<p>This research shall utilize mixed methodology where an questionnaire will be sent to MTL students and two focus groups shall be the main research tools. The data shall be gathered from online questionnaires distributed to students attending the University of Malta and are undertaking the MTL course. The target amount of questionnaires that shall be collected is intended to be around 140. These questionnaires will be sent through the MTL Facebook page. The two focus group discussions shall be conducted with the same group of people who answered the questionnaire. A final question will be inviting the participants to accept to take part in a focus group which will take place on campus at a later stage. Each focus group will consist of 6 - 8 students.</p> <p>Information regarding awareness and choice of textile items in relation to care labels will be disseminated through the MTL Facebook page.</p> <p>Reference - Health and Environment Justice Support International (2018) The Sustainability of Fashion: what role can consumers play? Available online from <a href="https://hej-support.org/">https://hej-support.org/</a></p> <p>Reference - Shin, S. (2000) Consumers' use of care-label information in the launder-ing of apparel products. <i>Journal of the Textile Institute</i>, 91, 20-28.</p> <p>Reference - Sonnenberg, N.C. &amp; Erasmus, A.C. (2005) An exploratory investigation into the role of extrinsic factors in consumer decision-making for interior soft furnishings. <i>Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Sciences</i>, 33, 10-19.</p> <p>Reference - Chowdhary, U. (2003) Labels and hangtags: tools for consumer empow-erment and education. <i>International Journal of Consumer Studies</i>, 27, 218-251.</p>			
6.4 How long is the duration of the data collection process?			
4-6 months			



# **Appendix E FREC Form**

**UNIQUE FORM ID:** 5407\_19052020\_Chantelle Vella

No self-assessment issues ticked. Submitting to FREC for records.



## ETHICS & DATA PROTECTION

### PART 1: APPLICANT AND PROJECT DETAILS

1. **Name and surname:** Chantelle Vella

**Email Address:** chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt

2. **Applicant status:** UM student

3. **Faculty:** Education

4. **Department:** Department of Health, Physical Education & Consumer Studies

If applicable

5. **Principal supervisor's name:** Dr Lorraine Portelli

6. **Co-supervisor's name:**

7. **Study-unit code:** MTL course, EDU 5001

8. **Student number:** 79697(M)

9. **Title of research project:** Maltese consumers' knowledge of textile labelling information: An exploratory study

10. **Research question/statement & method:** Main Question - Do consumers consider textiles care labels as important?

Secondary questions - Are consumers aware of the negative impact of textiles products on the environment?

How do consumers choose their clothing and textiles product?

11. **Collection of primary data from human participants?**

Yes/Unsure (PLEASE ANSWER NEXT QUESTION)

12. **If applicable, explain:** The target amount of questionnaires that shall be collected from a cohort of University students is maximum of 120, ages vary but mostly the participants are in their 20's. The data shall be gathered from online questionnaires distributed to students attending the University of Malta and reading for Master in Teaching and Learning. The participants shall be invited to answer my questionnaire which will not take longer than 10 minutes. The participants will be asked to take part in online focus groups conducted on Facebook. The identity of the participants shall remain anonymous as no audio recording would be done. The participants will benefit by becoming aware of the importance of textiles care labels and they will increasing their knowledge about sustainability of textiles. No inducements will be offered. As all participants are all of tertiary level education and are university students all information will be distributed in English only.

### PART 2: SELF-ASSESSMENT

#### Human Participants

1. **Risk of harm to participants:**



**UNIQUE FORM ID:** 5407\_19052020\_Chantelle Vella

No self-assessment issues ticked. Submitting to FREC for records.

2. Physical intervention:
3. Vulnerable participants:
4. Identifiable participants:
5. Special Categories of Personal Data (SCPD):
6. Human tissue/samples:
7. Withheld info assent/consent:
8. Opt-out consent/assent:
9. Deception in data generation:
10. Incidental findings:

#### **Unpublished secondary data**

11. Was the data collected from human participants?
12. Was the data collected from animals?
13. Is written permission from the data controller still to be obtained?

#### **Animals**

14. Live animals out of habitat:
15. Live animals, risk of harm:
16. Dead animals, illegal:

#### **General considerations**

17. Cooperating institution:
18. Risk to researcher/s:
19. Risk to environment:
20. Commercial sensitivity
21. Other potential risks:

**Self-assessment outcome:** No self-assessment issues ticked. Submitting to FREC for records.

#### **PART 3: DETAILED ASSESSMENT**

1. Risk of harm to participants:
2. Physical intervention on participants:
3. Vulnerable participants:
4. Identifiable participants:
5. Special Categories of Personal Data (sensitive personal data):
6. Collection of human tissue/samples:
7. Withholding information at consent/assent:
8. Opt-out consent/assent:
9. Deception in data generation:
10. Incidental findings:
11. Unpublished secondary data - human participants :

**UNIQUE FORM ID:** 5407\_19052020\_Chantelle Vella

No self-assessment issues ticked. Submitting to FREC for records.

12. Unpublished secondary data - animals:
13. Unpublished secondary data - no written permission from data controller:
14. Lasting harm to animals out of natural habitat:
15. Risk of harm to live animals :
16. Use of non legal animals/tissue:
17. Permission from cooperating institution:
18. Risk to researcher/team:
19. Risk of harm to environment:
20. Commercial sensitivity:
21. Other issues
  - 21a. Dual use and/or misuse:
  - 21b. Conflict of Interest:
  - 21c. Dual role:
  - 21d. Use research tools:
  - 21e. Collaboration/data/material collection in low/lower-middle income country:
  - 21f. Import/export of records/data/materials/specimens:
  - 21g. Harvest of data from social media:
  - 21h. Other considerations:

#### **PART 4: SUBMISSION**

1. Which FREC are you submitting to? : Education
2. Attachments: Information and recruitment letter<sup>o</sup>, Consent forms (adult participants)<sup>o</sup>, Data collection tools (interview questions, questionnaire etc.)
3. Cover note for FREC :
4. Declarations: I hereby confirm having read the University of Malta Research Code of Practice and the University of Malta Research Ethics Review Procedures., I hereby confirm that the answers to the questions above reflect the contents of the research proposal and that the information provided above is truthful., I hereby give consent to the University Research Ethics Committee to process my personal data for the purpose of evaluating my request, audit and other matters related to this application. I understand that I have a right of access to my personal data and to obtain the rectification, erasure or restriction of processing in accordance with data protection law and in particular the General Data Protection Regulation (EU 2016/679, repealing Directive 95/46/EC) and national legislation that implements and further specifies the relevant provisions of said Regulation.
5. Applicant Signature: Chantelle Vella
6. Date of submission: 19052020
7. If applicable data collection start date: 22062020
8. E-mail address (Applicant): chantelle.vella.18@um.edu.mt
9. E-mail address (Principal supervisor): lorraine.portelli@um.edu.mt
10. Conclude: Proceed to Submission

# **Appendix F Online Questionnaire**

## Online Questionnaire Questions

### **Section 1: Participants Information**

#### **1. How old are you?**

18 – 25

26 – 35

36 – 45

46 – 55

56+

#### **2. Gender**

Male

Female

Other

#### **3. What subject/s will you be teaching?**

---

### **Section 2: Shopping Practises**

#### **4. How often do you buy clothes?**

I. Every day

II. Every week

III. Every month

IV. Every 3 months ,

V. Every 6 months

VI. Only when necessary

#### **5. Do you consider yourself an impulse shopper or do you plan your shopping?**

a. Impulse shopper

b. I plan my shopping

**6. If you answered (b), how long does it take you to think about whether or not you should purchase something.**

- I. Seconds
- II. Minutes
- III. Hours
- IV. Days
- V. Weeks

**7. Why do you purchase clothes?**

- I. I like the Style
- II. It fits or may fit perfectly
- III. Value for money
- IV. Fabric looks comfortable
- V. It is environment friendly
- VI. It is of good quality
- VII. It shows of my status better
- VIII. It improves my appearance
- IX. I like the fabric design
- X. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**8. What makes you want to buy clothes?**

- I. Special offers/ low prices
- II. Advertisements/ marketing
- III. To keep up with fashion trends
- IV. To make me feel good
- V. To impress others
- VI. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Do you own branded clothes?**

- I. Yes  (Go to questions 11)
- II. Yes, but I did not buy them myself  (Go to questions 11)
- III. No

**10. If you answered the above question no, state the reason why.**

---

---

**11. A care label shows the instructions given by the manufacturer on how to properly care for the garment. How often do you check the care label before purchasing a textile product?**

- I. Never
- II. Rarely
- III. Sometimes
- IV. Often
- V. Always

**12. If you look at care labels, have you ever refused to purchase something after reading the label?**

- I. Yes
- II. No
- III. Maybe

**13. Most textiles workers are usually paid with very low wages while having to work in a mass production environment. What are your views on textile workers?**

---

---

**Section 3: Environmental Awareness**

**14. Are you aware that the fashion industry is the second largest polluter in the world?**

I. Yes

II. No

**15. How do you think the fashion industry can be polluting the environment?**

---

---

**16. What is your perception regarding second-hand clothes shops?**

---

---

**17. Have you ever bought any textile product from a second-hand shop?**

I. Yes




II. No

**18. If you answered no for the above question, give the reason why? If yes, what was the textile product that you bought?**

---

---

**19. Which of the following logos have you ever seen on textiles items? (tick where necessary)**

	BMP Certified Cotton	
	Eu Eco Label	
	Organic Cotton	
	Soil Association Organic Standard	
	OEKOTEX® Standard 100	
None of the above		

**20. Would you be willing to spend more money on an environmentally friendly garment?**

- I. Yes
- II. No

**21. Give a reason for the above question: Why are you willing/ not willing to spend more money on environmentally friendly garments?**

---



---



---

**22. Green laundry detergents are environmentally friendly because they are not toxic, they don't have perfumes or dyes, and are typically phosphate free and biodegradable, making them hypoallergenic. Also, the products wouldn't be tested on animals. Did you know what green laundry detergents are?**

- I. Yes
- II. No



**23. If you know what green detergents are, have you ever used them?**

- I. Yes
- II. No

**Section 4: Care label**

**24. Who launders your clothes?**

- I. Me
- II. My guardians
- III. My siblings
- IV. My friends
- V. Others \_\_\_\_\_

**25. If you do your own laundry, do you check the care label before washing the garments?**

- I. Always
- II. Often
- III. Sometimes
- IV. Rarely
- V. Never

**26. If other people do the laundry for you, do they check the care label before washing the garments?**

- VI. Always
- VII. Often
- VIII. Sometimes
- IX. Rarely
- X. Never
- XI. I don't know


**27. If there is no reference to the care label, how would one be able to launder the clothes properly?**


- I. Knowledge gained from school
- II. Through experience
- III. Advice from others
- IV. Reading
- V. Habits
- VI. Other \_\_\_\_\_


**28. Which of the following information do you think MUST be found on a care label?**

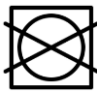
- I. Manufacturer
- II. Size
- III. Fabric content
- IV. Brand
- V. Care symbols
- VI. Carbon footprint
- VII. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**29. Do you know what the following care label symbols mean? (please select appropriately)**

	Do not steam	Iron high temp	Iron low temp	Iron med temp	I don't know
					

	Line Dry	Any bleach	Wash any temperature	Dry clean	I don't know
					

	Do not dry clean	Do not bleach	Do not dry	Do not wash	I don't know
					

	Do not bleach	Do not dry	Do not wash	Do not tumble dry	I don't know
					

**30. Do you know that you can make complaints with the MCCA (Malta Competitions and Consumer Affairs Authority) if the purchased textile product has misleading or incorrect label information?**

- I. Yes, I knew
- II. No, I did not know
- III. I have never heard of the MCCA

**31. Have you ever lodged a complaint about care label information?**

- I. Yes, a couple of times
- II. Yes once
- III. I did not know I could
- IV. Never

**32. Have you ever bought a textile product that did not contain a care label?**

- I. Yes
- II. No

**33. If you ever bought a textile product that did not contain a care label, where did you buy it from?**

- I. Shop
- II. Open Market
- III. Online

Apart from this questionnaire, I am also conducting two focus groups to gather further data. I would greatly appreciate if you can take part in one of my focus groups. These focus groups shall be conducted online via Facebook. If you need further information, or want to take part in one of my focus groups, kindly send me an email [chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt](mailto:chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt)

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

# **Appendix G Focus Group Transcript**

## Focus Group Transcript

### 1<sup>st</sup> Post

Hi, my name is Chantelle Vella and I am reading for a Master's degree in Teaching and Learning (MTL) in Fashion and Textiles with Home Economics. The name of my dissertation is Maltese consumers knowledge on textile labelling information: an exploratory study. I decided to focus more on Fashion and Textiles and my aim is to understand better the knowledge that future teachers have on care labels and information that must be listed on something that we make use of and wear every day. You will also become more aware on your rights as consumers and this will also help me to extract the most important information that Maltese consumers need to know. While also creating conscious awareness on the environment.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Post

How it going to work:

I will be posting 2 questions on Monday 3rd, Wednesday 5th, Friday 7th and Monday 10th. On Wednesday 12th I will post a poll and it is going to be the last post.

Whenever you answer the questions, I also encourage you to comment on each other's answers to create a discussion, while respecting each other's opinions at all times.

Again, THANK YOU so much for accepting to take part in my focus group and I hope that you will learn something new.

## Probes/ Questions

**1. After you have answered the questionnaire, do you feel more aware of the textile care labels? Have you checked the care label of an item you're wearing or was going to purchase?**

**Daisy:** Yes, I was more aware of the care labels on my clothes. I looked at the care label before ironing my top this morning

**Rose:** I am more aware of the textiles care labels. Before purchasing an item, I make sure to check the care label, as it's interesting to know the texture and other important information about the garment before actually buying it.

**George:** Prior to the questionnaire, I had no idea of its existence. It definitely impacted my consumer awareness and I will put the environmental factor at top priority when buying clothes. With regards to the care labels, I should pay more attention to them but It didn't seem to register so strongly as a habit or behaviour.

**Lily:** What impacted me most from the questionnaire was the environmental issues related to the clothing market. The questionnaire helped me remember what some of the labels meant but I did not really look at the labels on my clothes I own. I do look at the labels when I need to iron or wash a garment which has a different material from which I am used to.

**Jasmine:** Although I know how important care labels are, I still sometimes tend to forget or deny them from the questionnaire I can say that my attention drifted towards the environmental labels although they are not commonly found on common clothing items.

**Ron:** Yes, I feel more aware of the textile care labels after having answered the questionnaire. Thanks to the questionnaire, from now on I will try my best to check the textile care labels and any other environmental information when buying clothes (because as Isaac said it has never been a habit of mine doing so).

**Fred:** Yes, I do feel more aware, however, I rarely check any care labels. I'll be honest, I mostly check a care label when I buy something which is above my usual budget.

**2. Do you feel more knowledgeable about what the care symbols mean and their importance? Have you noticed that the symbols and the care instructions change with every garment depending on the fabric? Why do you think they are different?**

**Daisy:** Yes, I feel I am more knowledgeable about care labels and their importance. Yes, I noticed a change of the care labels according to the clothes fabric and texture. They are different as different fabrics require different iron heat temp, different washing instructions and some might not be suitable for the tumble dryer

**Rose:** Yes, I feel more knowledgeable! In my opinion care labels are essential when making a decision to purchase clothing. Care labels let the buyer (consumer) to be aware of any special instructions regarding the care and/or cleaning of the garment.

I am aware that symbols and care instructions change with every garment and this is because different fibres require different care. For instance an item made of synthetic fibres such as polyester can be ironed in a low to medium heat, while a garment made of cotton can be ironed at a higher temperature setting. Therefore, a care label is a guide of how one should take care of the garment.

**Lily:** Yes, the questionnaire has opened my eyes to see the relevance of textile labels. It is the manufacturer's responsibility to inform the consumer on how to care for the product purchased. Different fabrics require different symbols as they require different methods of care being that they are different materials. High temperatures can deteriorate certain fabrics.

**Jasmine:** I had an idea before of what the care labels are and their importance, therefore I also knew that they change according to each garment... What I find interesting is that although many times are made from the same fabric the labels and its care instructions within are different. Also, I believe they are different because for example certain drying methods are not ideal for certain fabrics and also even temperatures and chemicals may not always be ideal for the fabric used and thus care labels must be arranged accordingly

**George:** I became a bit aware of the label, but I'm afraid the awareness of the label only lasted for about a week to be honest.

**Ron:** Yes, I feel more knowledgeable about care labels and their importance. Having looked at a number of different clothes, I have observed different care labels according to the clothes fabric and texture. Yes, different fabrics require certain



washing instructions and iron heat temperature. One must be careful and knowledgeable about these factors to avoid future disappointment.

**Fred:** Rather than more knowledgeable, I am more aware about the differences. Yes I've noticed that the symbols and the care instructions change with every garment depending on the fabric. I assume that this is so because every material requires different care, furthermore, I imagine that it is the manufacturer's responsibility to make sure that every clothing has the adequate labels and instructions attached to it.

**3. Information that must be found on the care label are: the manufacturer and county of manufacture, care symbols and fabric content. How often do you remove the care label because it irritates you or think it is useless? Now that you know the worth of the information on care labels, are you still going to keep the habit of removing labels? Why?**

**Lily:** Well to be honest, I don't see the harm in removing the label. Having the clothing label exposed underneath your clothes is far worse than ruining your t-shirt. Just buy another one... Maybe I don't own too complicated clothes which are simply happy to be thrown in a standard washing machine.

**The Author:** What if you are not familiar with the material and you have removed the label, what would you do then?

**Lily:** I would treat the garment very delicately. Most probably I'd wash it by hand to be safe and try not to iron it. If it necessarily requires ironing I will do so using the lowest heat or iron it with a handkerchief over it to reduce the heat contact on the garment. Like and said, trial and error. If i ruin it, well better luck next time.

**Rose:** I normally remove care label when they are irritating and too long, so I usually cut them off. Though if the piece of clothing require a special care I either keep the tag or take a photo, in order to keep record of it.

I believe the information on care labels is important so I'll try to keep it on the garment or else, as I said take a photo or take note so I remember.

**Jasmine:** I don't have the habit of removing the care labels. I don't know why maybe I don't mind it bugging me also knowing how important it is could be another reason why I don't remove it. But if I were to suggest something I think that with today technology, at least the care info should be printed on the inside.

**George:** It depends on how irritating the label is. If it is not too irritating I would leave it. I'll put it into consideration before cutting it off though, after having done the questionnaire.

**Ron:** As George said, it depends on how irritating the label is. There were times where I had to remove the label. After having answered the questionnaire, I will definitely think twice before removing the care label.

**Daisy:** It depends on how irritating the label is. I usually remove all paper labels and leave only cotton care labels on clothes. lately, I have purchased t-shirts that have the care label printed at the back, which made it comfortable to wear. I think this should become common practice for all garments.

**Fred:** I think I remove the label with about 10% of my clothing. I think I will still remove the labels, mainly because I imagined that nearly all clothing and materials are taken care of in the same way.

**4. If you have a garment without a care label because you had removed it, and you have to launder it, how will you launder this garment? Would you buy a garment without a care label?**

**Lily:** I would still buy a piece of clothing without a care label. It doesn't really effect my buying behaviour. I generally remove the care label for most clothing. Especially underwear and beach wear where the label is bigger than the actual garment and tends to get exposed while wearing the garment. I find when that happens it is a little embarrassing. When caring for an item I usually don't look at the label and just reflecting on past experience of using similar materials and caring for them similarly. Trial and error seem to work with caring for clothes in my opinion. Of course, when in doubt, ask mum. However, after this interview I think I would definitely be rethinking buying clothing without a care label.

**Rose:** If I am going to purchase a garment without a care label, I think I would ask the shop assistant or the person from whom I am going to buy and ask why it's without a care label, because as far as I know care labels are a legal requirement. However, if I'm buying an item which is handmade, I would ask how I should take care of the garment, just to be safe and also because I like to know some information about the piece of clothing I am buying.

**Jasmine:** I tend to have a good sum of items without care labels, because they are either bought from a cheap manufacturing company such as Joom or AliExpress... But I simply wash them in low temperatures and with separate colour.... The price is so cheap so I don't really mind if they shrink or discolour to be honest.

**George:** I would buy an item without the care label. When it comes to laundering I would either wing it or google it. Or resort to past experience. OR make a mess and put that into experience!

**Ron:** I would still purchase a garment without a care label. However, I would ask the shop assistant or the seller (or even Mum/Dad) how this can be laundered. As Yasmine said, I also think it's best to simply wash them in low temperatures and with separate colour to be on the safe side. After all, you need to have some common sense - you are not going to wash let's say a red t-shirt with whites.

**Daisy:** I would still purchase clothes without care labels, as I said before I usually remove them so I'm used to laundering clothes without the label. I usually feel the fabric and arrange the machine temperature accordingly, especially in winter with woollen jumpers. I still remember an incident where I placed the woollen jumper in the dryer by mistake. It ended up to shrink to the size of a very young child. From then on I learnt my lesson, I always hang them up to dry.

**Fred:** I'm not sure, most probably I'll ask other people for guidance or look it up. Would you buy a garment without a care label? Not sure, but I think so if it's something I really like.

**5. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a self-regulating business model that helps a company be socially accountable; to itself, its stakeholders, and the public. Companies can be conscious of the kind of impact they are having on all aspects of society, including economic, social, and environmental.**

**Branded clothes are way more 'expensive', why do you think this is so? Do you think that large companies care about corporate responsibility, or is it all about the profit? Can you name a company that promotes fair trade and is conscious about the environment?**

**Jasmine:** A personal opinion of course, I don't understand why branded t shirts are so expensive. considering that half the population is wearing them, nothing original in that. But I do understand that the status of the brand on its own is expensive to buy.

On the other hand, having one of items, or limited-edition items, I believe it's worth the money if they are branded and expensive.

I highly doubt that they think about corporate responsibility, considering how expensive a Nike sneaker is and the label stating made in Vietnam doesn't go so well, I think! Also, high profit always shines better on the CEO's side so I don't think they s/he would really care about the actual workers of the company....

Patagonia for sure because I just got across recently. I think monsoon is also introducing Fairtrade or ethical fashion in some way or another but not 100% sure! Apologies xx the body shop is also working towards ban on animal testing and I believe they make use of natural resources with care towards the environmental impacts.

**Rose:** I think branded clothes are more expensive because of course you'll be paying for the time and energy to create the garment; they might be more expensive because they are designer and luxury brands. Also in my opinion, some of the branded clothes use better quality material and because items aren't mass produced, which makes that another reason why branded clothes are more expensive!

As Jasmine said I doubt whether they care and think about corporate responsibility, unfortunately I think profit is the first thing that's it's important for large companies.

Companies that I know of are Body shop (the beauty brand) follows a Ethical Trade programme. There is a shop in Valletta called Tal-Arka who sells fair trade items such as candles, bags and jewellery. Fashion revolution is not a company but it's community that place events to promote ethical fashion and point out large brands that have a negative impact. If I'm not mistaken Bortex are attempting to reduce impact on the local and global environment and it is committed for environmental improvement.

**George:** well, when you're buying branded clothes, you could be paying just for the brand alone which is a bit absurd because the brand is what the people make it at times. there is also the issue of quality perhaps when it comes to certain brands.

With regards to corporate companies caring about such issues, I would make an assumption and say that the majority of them don't, because that is the nature of modern business.

I would imagine that your request for a fair-trade brand was regarding clothes, in which case I know none. But I am quite aware of fair-trade labels when it comes to buying food and food-related items.

**Lily:** Honestly, I am defiantly not the type of person who buys branded clothes, I abhor the thought of buying a garment which looks exactly like everyone else's. I

believe that companies like this exist out of the capitalist culture that exists today, where having something trendy and commercial gives it a high sense of value and everyone wants to look and think the same. These brands feed into the mentality that having a brand increase the value, aesthetic and quality of the object. In fact, we also find fake brands with cheaper prices which still sell a lot. So high brands aim to sell an image and whether one can afford to be that image, reflects on that person's position in society. With regards to CSR, to be honest, I just heard about this concept today and I am not really in tune with the clothing industry, but I am guessing that it is some sort of European regulation, which I guess companies should abide to if they aspire to be transparent and fair in their prospects. Companies that come to mind which promote the environmental and fair-trade issues are The Body Shop and Lush Cosmetics, but they are not clothing companies just cosmetics. A brand which I also know of which promotes sustainable materials and use of vegan-cruelty free materials in their products is Dr Martens, which to be honest they are the only high branded company which I would be ready to buy a pair of shoes costing over €100. This is because Dr Martens shoes have a certain image which I subscribe to and value.

**Ron:** I think branded clothes are more expensive because of the 'brand' itself. Hopefully, branded clothes use better quality material and are not mass produced. In my opinion, it's all about the profit. However, one must not generalise and I believe that there are some responsible companies where they abide by CSR. An example of a company that exercises fair trade (and is conscious about the environment) is 'JCrew Clothing'. By wearing Fair Trade Certified clothing, I think we can help create sustainable livelihoods, safer working conditions, and desperately-needed transparency in the fashion industry.

**Daisy:** I think branded clothes are more expensive as one is paying for the quality of the fabric, paying for the company's name, for the time they took to design the garment etc. I don't believe that these companies care about the corporal responsibilities, they only think about the profit of the company. I don't know of any clothing brands that are fair-trade. I only knew about Body Shop which was mentioned previously by Rose.

**Fred:** I'm not sure, but I assume that determining factors include branding, fabric, material and working process. I think there's a mix of companies that may or may not care about CSR. I'm not knowledgeable enough, however, I suppose that a good company has to also have a good 'relationship' with its clients which could be maintained by correctly attending to CSR. Name of a company, Hollister, I think.

**6. The textile industry is the second largest polluter in the world. Due to clothes being a necessary item, fast fashion productions have increased. This has led for the textile manufacturers to believe that consumers care more about the price than the quality of the garments, resulting in little to no environmental concerns in order to mass produce.**

**Now that you know that the textile industry is doing a great deal of harm to the world and the environment, when you are purchasing clothes, whether online or directly from the physical shop, are you planning to become more environment friendly? How?**

**Are you going to look for eco labels? Are you aware of any local eco-friendly businesses? If yes, can you mention them.**

**Jasmine:** While I'm aware and had been for a good time now. I still find it hard to purchase garments eco/environmentally friendly for 2 main reasons; 1 the price is extremely expensive when compared to others and the options are quite limited, I mean often you'll see common t shirts, flowy dresses and they are not my style. I try to purchase a tote bag but nothing special... Although I'm loving the idea of buying second hand... I loved the idea when I was in Ireland it should flourish more in Malta.

Yes, I do look, most of the time there are posters to gather attention.

If I am correct in Sliema there's Atelier Arya, it's not Maltese I think but it has eco-friendly clothing and vintage wear, I've seen it on (an influencer's name) Instagram a while ago.

**Rose:** I have been aware but I don't usually find many shops or brands that sell environmentally friendly garments and as Jasmine said options are limited.

Of course, I'll try to look for eco-labels now, as I am aware of other negative environmental impacts.

Through Fashion Revolution, I heard about a small business called Gazed who have fair trade items, they use organic fabrics and promotes ethical fashion. Another local business is Chloe's closet which offers clothing for kids all made from organic materials.

**George:** Currently, I had tried to live with a more consumer conscious oriented lifestyle, with everything I purchase. At some point it becomes a bit challenging and I had just gone back to being an average consumer.

In the future when I live alone and no one is influencing my consumer habits it is a big goal of mine to live as sustainably as possible.

All this being said, I am more aware of the issues with the clothing industry, so much so that I have even looked into several documentaries after having taken the questionnaire. So, I would say that it will surely impact my habits.

**Lily:** I must admit that I find it surprising to see that the textile industry is the second polluter in the world. I would assume that fossil fuel operated business or even the catering industry contribute more than the fashion industry. Nevertheless, I would agree that it does contribute to pollution. However, the price of the garment is the most motivating factor which drives me to buy a product. Admittedly, after taking part in this study I have become more aware on eco-friendly textile products and will probably look out for them more when I am purchasing clothes.

**Ron:** As the others said, I have been aware too, but I don't usually find many shops or brands that sell environmentally friendly garments. In Malta, options are limited. Yes, hopefully I will look for the eco labels. Unfortunately, I'm not aware of eco-friendly textile businesses.

**Daisy:** Now that I have participated in this study, I am more aware of the pollution that the fashion industry has posed, I will try to be more cautious when buying clothes. But this might not always be possible, especially if I have to purchase a garment quickly due to an unexpected event. Moreover, I believe that there aren't a lot of companies in Malta that are Fairtrade or advertise to the public that they are, so it would be more difficult to find such shops. Next time I shop I will try to look out for the eco-care label. Unfortunately, I'm not aware of any eco-friendly businesses.

**Fred:** I think it's crucial, especially in these times, to not only be aware about the environment but to also start making the 'small decisions' that in the long run make a difference. I'll be honest, I haven't yet really started making these decisions in my clothing, however, I'm acknowledging that I should take it seriously. I am willing to become more environmentally friendly by looking for eco labels and checking care labels. At the moment, I am not aware of any local eco-friendly businesses.

**7. How do you discard unwanted textile items? Do you know how textile waste can be reduced? What are you willing to do to reduce textile waste?**

**An example of ethical garment is when a shirt is made into a skirt or using old towels to make a bathroom mat. Have you ever made a project using old/recycled textiles? If yes, what was it? If no, are you willing to create an ethical garment? What would it be?**

**Jasmine:** most often than not, I elongate the process of discard as much as possible, call me crazy, but I get super attached with the items. once time has definitely come; I look for classic items such as black tops or dresses, common jeans and hand them over to younger friends of the family and the rest I place in the blue bin in our locality. To be fair it's been a while so I'm not sure if there is still one in (location mentioned), another way as family (rather than myself) discard woollen or clothing items is by placing them under the dog beds in winter to prevent cold. I believe the textile waste is reduced when new clothing stop coming out every few weeks. reusing and re-imaging textile products is another way how textile waste is reduced. I think I would aim to start re-imaging of clothing; considering how many ideas are on Pinterest I don't know why I haven't started before. I did but all for assignment purposes; I've done an open poncho out of denim trousers and a puffed sleeve t-shirt out of old scraps and a male shirt bought from a charity shop; honest opinion I never wore either of them.

**George:** In the past, I've tried to repurpose clothes by modifying them, but I'm no tailor and the results are often strange. Any piece of fabric is a welcome addition for me, in my arts practice I always need more rags for oil painting. so, clothes often get reused in this way, eventually full of paint and thinner they get thrown out in the black waste bag.

**Ron:** I have never discarded any unwanted textile items in my life because whenever I have grown out of certain clothes, I give them to charity/people in need or else recycle them, say, I would use old clothes to wipe appliances/my car/windows etc. Also, I have made crafts out of old/recycled textiles.

**The Author:** Can you name some of the crafts?

**Ron:** When I used to work as a playworker (Skola Sajf), using small pieces of cloth, we made sails' for a raft, a pencil holder, a tiny bag, animals, etc.

**Lily:** I love making new clothing items from my clothes. In fact, this summer I started the trend of making my own pairs of shorts from old jeans rather than buying new shorts. Shorts are just not worth it, they cost almost as much as a new pair of jeans so might as well buy a good pair of jeans with that money and make shorts out of the old jeans. When wanting to rid of clothing I always try to pass them down to my friends or family. If not, I usually take them to the women's shelter where I work and donate them there. Then if I still can't get rid of them, I throw them in the recycled clothes bin (the blue one). If a garment is torn and unwearable, I just chuck it in the black garbage bag.

**Rose:** I usually discard unwanted clothing, either by giving them to my sisters or other relatives or else I throw them in the ReFab Clothes banks (the blue recycles



bins like Jasmine mentioned). When transforming unwanted materials into something useful or something new, would be a way of how one can reduce textile waste.

Yes, I've made a few projects using old/unwanted/recycled textiles. The first project I did was part of an assignment where I had created a laptop case from different old shirts and formed the case using patchwork (creative textile technique). From that project, I liked the idea of upcycling to re-use old or torn items and create something different, unique and new. So, I usually get some ideas from Pinterest on what I can experiment and do with recycled textiles. I've done a shopping bag and a make-up bag from extra curtain fabric and from remaining fabrics that we tend to have from throughout the year I did some cushion covers and a pencil case.

**Daisy:** When I don't need a piece of clothing any more, I usually give them to my sister-in-law or else I throw them in the blue recycle bins when they are in good condition. If the clothes are torn or damaged, I usually used them to clean my car, mirror and windows. I have never created anything from fabrics as I never thought of it before, but now that you have mentioned it you gave me a great idea for an arts and crafts session during my teaching practice.

**Fred:** Usually I give them to other people in need of them rather than throwing them away. I've used old/recycled textiles as cleaning materials.

**8. As you may know, the natural fibres are wool and silk, that come from animals, while cotton, linen and recently hemp that come from plants.**

**How many of you are aware of the benefits of wearing 100% natural textile items?**

**Do you know what synthetic fabrics are? Can you name some? Why do you think natural fibres could be better than synthetics?**

**Jasmine:** I am aware and in case of intimate/undergarment clothing I aim to have 100% natural fabric (mainly cotton). I noticed that ever since I started to opt for such natural materials, I had reduction in rashes and skin irritations. also considering that baby items are made from 100% cotton or natural fibres I think that it results that these materials are kind on soft and sensitive skin. synthetic fibres are man-made fibres, which are commonly made from plastics or petroleum such as nylon, polyester, polyamide, acrylic. these synthetic fibres are being used as a cheaper version of the natural fibres but they still lack a lot of properties the natural fibres have such as breath ability, absorption (that's why I mentioned undergarments) and after all they are harmful to the environment.

**George:** I think Polyester is a synthetic fabric. With regards to preference, it never really passed my mind and I have never really given it any thought. With regards to natural fabrics, I always avoid silk because of how it is made. Leather is something I also try to avoid as much as possible. Thinking about it, cotton is quite comfortable!

**The Author:** Are you aware of any other benefits of wearing natural fibres? I assume you avoid silk due to the silkworm, right?

**George:** not particularly, but I would imagine some are gentler on skin or perhaps when it comes to cleaning them?

**Ron:** Yes, I am aware of the benefits of wearing 100% natural textile items. If you had to look at my wardrobe more than 75% of my clothes are 100% cotton. Whenever I used to wear clothes that are made from synthetic fibres like polyester, I used to frequently scratch my skin and then end up with red marks/rashes.

**Lily:** I am aware that polyester is a synthetic fabric, I've learnt about how horrible the texture is when purchasing items online and having them turn up being made of this horrible fabric. I love buying natural products and fabrics, especially recycled products. I think they are better than synthetic as they feel better when worn and last longer. They are easier to care for as well. Therefore, you get a better quality for money when you buy such products.

**Rose:** I am aware of the benefits of wearing 100% natural fibres. Natural fibres such as cotton, linen and silk are hydrophilic (very absorbent) materials, which makes them the suitable for Summer. Another benefit of natural fabrics is that they have low resiliency and they do not irritate the skin.

Synthetic fibres are manufactured materials produced by humans rather than nature, made from plastics, petroleum and chemicals. Synthetic fibres are strong, durable and able to retain creases, though they have low moisture absorbency. Polyamide (nylon), polyester, acrylic, poly-acrylic, olefin, elastane and lycra are all synthetic materials.

Natural fibres could be better than synthetics for various reasons, for instance, they are better absorbents, they have a better comfortable feeling when wearing an item made from natural fibres, are produced from plants and therefore they do not harm the environment.

**Daisy:** Yes, I am aware of wearing 100% natural fibres. In fact, I usually look out for 100% cotton underwear as synthetic fibres irritate my skin. I find that 100% natural fibres keep you feeling fresh all day as they are really absorbent, unlike the synthetic fibres such as lycra and polyester.

**Fred:** I am aware, but have no idea in which way. At the moment, I know that nylon and polyester are synthetic fabrics. I think that natural could be better cause it's natural, might be more 'compatible' with our bodies.

**9. Would you feel more confident if you were to lodge a complaint, now that you are more knowledgeable about the information that should be found on the care label? Why? What changed? Who would you contact first, the seller or the MCCA?**

**Daisy:** The same as before as I had carried out a complaint beforehand so I am familiar with the process.

**The Author:** What did you do? Did you contact the seller first or the MCCA?

**Daisy:** My mum had a faulty Washing Machine. We contacted the seller on numerous occasions before going to the MCCA but the seller wasn't of any help. Then we contacted the MCCA and followed their protocols

**George:** I'm not one to lodge complaints, unfortunately, unless the case is severe. Though if I were to do so I would first check the label for any details. I would probably contact the seller first, if need be, take it to the MCCA.

**Ron:** Like George, I would be reluctant to lodge a complaint. However, thanks to your study, I feel more knowledgeable about the information that should be found in the care label. I would first check the label for any details and then probably contact the seller. If the case is so severe, then I would contact the MCCA.

**Jasmine:** My first instinct would be to discuss with the seller, yes if one is knowledgeable about the care labelling is better since s/he cannot be fooled; because store managers tend to do so...I still won't proceed to MCCA because most of than not the time and energy involved is not worth it.

**Lily:** I think I would issue a complaint say if I would buy a garment with a missing care label. I would bring it forward with the seller, but won't proceed to MCCA.

**Rose:** Since I know about the importance of care labels, I think I would first contact and discuss with the seller, then if no action is taken, MCCA would be the following step to lodge a complaint.

**Fred:** I think so, because I have a better understanding that when I have the right to buy something, I also have a right to know the origin, materials and processes of such purchases. Also, it is a way in which i can contribute to nature and society. I would first contact the seller.

**10. Truthfully, what percentage would you say, you used the internet to search information before answering the questionnaire and the focus group questions?**

Never 0%: 6 votes

Regularly 30%: 0 votes

Often: 50%: 0 votes

Sometimes 70%: 0 votes

Always 100%: 0 votes

**Jasmine:** I didn't know we could!

**The Author:** It was not advised, as to have the truth for all answers

**Jasmine:** Okay, I assumed right mela.

**Fred:** Never 0%

Last Post

As I mentioned before, today would be the last time posting. I would appreciate if you go through the questions and answers the ones you didn't.

Thank you so much for your participation and time. I hope that you have learned something new and that you feel more knowledgeable next time you go shopping.

# **Appendix H Emails from MCCA**



██████████ at MCCAА <██████████@mccaa.org.mt>  
to Bezzina, me, Stivala ▾

Tue, 12 Jan, 09:09

Dear Chantelle,

Further to your request for information regarding your dissertation questions, below please the Office for Consumer Affairs feedback concerning questions 1 and 2.

Should you require further information or any clarification do not hesitate to contact me again.

Kind regards,

██████████

Director  
Information, Education and Research Directorate  
Office for Consumer Affairs

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MALTA COMPETITION AND  
CONSUMER AFFAIRS AUTHORITY

From: Chantelle Vella <chantelle.vella.16@um.edu.mt>  
Sent: Wednesday, 16 December 2020 15:31  
To: ██████████ at MCCAА <██████████@mccaa.org.mt>; ██████████ at MCCAА <██████████@mccaa.org.mt>  
Subject: Dissertation Questions, Research on Textile Labelling Information

**CAUTION: This email originated from OUTSIDE the Government Email Infrastructure. DO NOT CLICK LINKS or OPEN attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.**

Dear Ms ██████████ and Mr ██████████

I am Chantelle Vella, a University student reading for a Masters In Teaching and Learning (MTL) with Fashion & Textiles and Home Economics. I decided to focus on the main area of my studies – Fashion & Textiles for my dissertation. Through my dissertation I wanted to uncover more information regarding the importance of garment/ textile products' care labels and to discover further, the knowledge of the Maltese consumers. The title of my dissertation is: Maltese Consumers' Knowledge of Textile Labelling Information: An Exploratory Study.

As MCCAА, I understand that you have direct contact with the Maltese consumers and so you can assist me in understanding better the Maltese consumers' knowledge.

I would appreciate it if you could kindly respond to the below questions since you work in the Consumer Affairs and Technical Regulations Division.

1. Do you think that the Maltese consumers are aware that they complain regarding misinformation found on the garment care label?  
**More than complaining about misinformation on garment care labels, consumers would eventually become aware of such misleading information when they actually wash the garment as per the care label and it gets damaged, such as for instance it shrinks or the colour fades. In that situation consumers would be entitled to request a free remedy from the seller for the damaged garment, which remedy could either be free replacement or money refund.**
2. How often do you have complaints regarding garments or textile products?  
**It is not a common complaint. For instance last year the Office for Consumer Affairs received a total of 18 complaints related to garments or textile products. Attached please find more details concerning these complaints. Kindly note that we have removed the consumers' and traders' details for data protection purposes.**
3. How common is it that during an inspection, you will find garments/ textile products without a care label? If so, are stakeholders required to remove the item from the market?  
Thank you in advance for your help.

Kind Regards  
Chantelle Vella



CLOTHING COMPLAINTS 2019/2020							
Ref No:	Name of Consumer	Trader	Nature of Complaint	Status	Pending On	Amount Claimed	
1	8383		Quality of Material of 2 Tops-Burned	Tribunal	7/1/2019	Euro 100	
2	2748		Faded Material of Leggings after first wash	Withdrawn	16/1/2019	Euro 14	
3	8871		Suit Shrunk after DryCleaning	Withdrawn	18/1/2019	Euro 182	
4	8950		Shrunk Jacket after DryCleaning	Tribunal	22/1/2019	Euro 72.45	
5	9191		Defective Motor Jacket-not fit for protecting from accidents	Tribunal	28/1/2019	Euro 400	
6	12274		Faulty Jacket Zip	Tribunal	11/6/2019		
7	12559		Holy Communion Blazer-tearing from Seams	Tribunal	26/6/2019		
8	12997		Discolouring of Trousers	Settled	18/7/2019	Euro 43	
9	13315		Damaged Trousers after DryCleaning	Withdrawn	29/7/2019	Euro 75	
10	13812		Colour Run of Bathing Suit	Settled	19/8/2019	Euro 165	
11	13837		Beads fell off from Occasion Dress	Tribunal	19/8/2019	Euro 850	
12	15061		Bathing Suit-tearing from metal eyelet	Withdrawn	21/10/2019	Euro 47.23	
13	16009		Colour Fading of Jersey	Withdrawn	21/12/2019	Euro 20	
14	24201		Damaged Jacket after DryCleaning	Tribunal	27/7/2020	Euro 800	
15	25433		Defective Bikini-Bubbles coming from Top	Settled	25/8/2020	Euro 38.48	
16	25513		Defective Swimsuit-Material stretches when wet	Settled	27/8/2020	Euro 189.95	
17	27562		Ripped Jeans	Settled	26/10/2020	Euro 29.95	
18	28792		Damaged Jacket after DryCleaning-Care Label shows DryClean	Tribunal	10/12/2020	Euro 189	

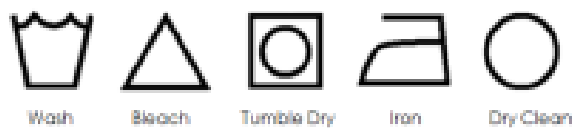
# **Appendix I**

# **Informative Poster**

## A Guide to Becoming a more Informed Textile Product Consumer

On a care label, one must always find written details of the manufacturer, the country of where the item was manufactured, the fibre content and care label symbols. The symbols guide consumers of how to care for the garment/ textile product.

Knowing how to care for your garments or textile products will extend the life of the product. The following symbols are used by the manufacturer to explain to the consumer how to care for the product. There are many variations of the symbols, however, the meaning stands the same.



The production of textile products has increased dramatically, resulting in the fashion industry being the second-largest polluter in the world. The importance of reading care labelling when selecting, buying and caring for clothing and textile items contribute towards creating less pollution and conserving the world's natural resources.

What can you CAN DO:

- Wash clothes with low temperatures;
- Hang dry instead of tumble drying;
- Use green laundry detergents instead of regular ones;
- Mend or upcycle clothes before throwing them away;
- Buy clothes only when necessary;
- Donate clothes that you no longer use to second-hand shops, give them to family members or engage in clothes swapping.
- Choose to purchase environmentally friendly/sustainable products.

How to Lodge a Complaint and be a more knowledgeable consumer:

- Know whose fault it is before complaining (yours or the sellers).
- Contact and reach out to the trader (seller).
- Have something in writing, either a letter or an email. While making sure to always have a copy.
- If you do not come to an agreement with the seller, register a complaint with the Malta Competition and Consumer Affairs Authority (MCCAA).
  - Make sure to have a copy of your correspondence with the seller and a copy of the receipt and guarantee.

Chantelle Vella as a part of the dissertation