

Master Thesis

# Fast fashion firms striving for sustainability: mission impossible?

A qualitative analysis of the motives of fast fashion firms to join the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment and Textile (AGT)



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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a very popular topic within Business Administration nowadays and is heavily discussed throughout academic literature (Lougee & Wallace, 2008). However, different literature state that not a clear definition exists of CSR (Jones, 1980; McGuire, Sundgren & Schneeweis, 1988; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Dahlsrud, 2008; Wang, Tong, Takeuchi & George, 2016). Turker (2009, p.189) defined CSR as follows: “CSR can be defined as corporate behaviours which aim to affect stakeholders positively and go beyond its economic interest”. This definition of CSR will be used in this research. Within the field of CSR there are numerous challenges and there are already numerous initiatives. This master thesis focuses on one initiative in which stakeholders collaborate, namely the multi-stakeholder initiative.

A continuously increasing number of for-profit organizations include CSR activities in their strategy and business practices (Carroll & Shabana, 2010; De Jong & Van der Meer, 2017). These organizations add sustainable standards as instruments to improve social and environmental practices in their supply chains and communicate these improvements to their customers (Lambin & Thorlakson, 2018). To improve standards of CSR practices, organisations strive for cooperation. One way in which organisations can work collaboratively is by uniting in multi stakeholder initiatives (MSIs). MSIs are defined as “initiatives where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and for-profit organizations play an active role in the design and implementation of standards and a variety of reporting, auditing, monitoring, verification and certification systems” (Utting, 2002, p. 65). Supply chains today operate globally and since the government cannot regulate all social and environmental practices of organizations around the world, private initiatives of this kind are needed (Mena & Palazzo, 2012). Mena & Palazzo (2012, p. 2) state that "companies intervene where governments are unwilling or unable to play their regulatory role". New standards in society are aimed at improving the socially responsible performance of companies and to achieve these higher standards NGOs, for-profit organisations and (international) governments work together (De Bakker, Rasche & Ponte, 2019). MSIs have become a vital part of the organisational landscape for CSR (Moog, Spicer & Böhm, 2015).

The garment and textile industry are known for its pollution and poor working conditions (Sinkovics, Hoque & Sinkovics, 2016). An increasing amount of attention is being paid by customers, NGOs, but also by organisations, to make the supply chain more sustainable. In the Netherlands, an MSI called the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile (AGT) has been founded. This is a coalition of the Dutch government, NGOs and for-profit organizations in the Dutch garment and textile industry that have agreed on signing an agreement regarding international responsible business conduct in the garment and textile sector (SER, 2017-a). The aim of this agreement is to safeguard the human rights of the employees who are working in the factories that produce the clothes which are being sold in The Netherlands. The countries where the garment and textile are being produced need improved human

rights, worker health and safety, environmental protection, and animal rights (SER, 2017-a). Dutch garment organizations have signed the agreement, as have participating NGOs, unions, industry organisations and the Dutch Government (SER, 2017-a, 2017-b). In the Dutch fashion market consumers demand more and more sustainable clothes and therefore claim that operating companies in the garment industry need to be more transparent and open about their sustainable performances (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Signing the AGT obligates the organizations to be transparent about their supply chain. This master thesis focuses on the Dutch clothing organizations that have signed the Dutch AGT. Particularly, it will focus on fast fashion firms within the AGT.

This research will be examining the motives of fast fashion firms that participate in the Dutch AGT. In this master thesis, motives are roughly defined as the reasons for determining behaviour, in this case the choices of organizations to engage in MSIs. Prior literature exists on motives for CSR and motives for cooperating in MSIs. Common motives for organizations to engage in CSR are either intrinsic motivation or motives that are beneficial to the organization. Other motives found in literature are instrumental, relational, and moral motives (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams & Ganapathi, 2007). Motives can be mixed, which means that for organizations there can be more motives for engaging CSR instead of one dominant motive (Bansal & Roth, 2000). Motives for participating in MSIs have been studied, for instance Cetindamar & Husoy (2007) found that both economical and ethical reasons co-exist. Airike et al. (2016) concluded that organizations have four motivational drivers for participating in MSIs: collaborative advantage, altruistic values, self-interest, and external pressures. In the end, an organization joins the MSI to gain benefits, whether this is related to acting in a more socially responsible way or to gain more financial profit (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007; Zeyen et al., 2016; Airike et al., 2016).

However, the motives of fast fashion firms joining MSIs to strengthen its CSR strategy have not been addressed so far in literature. Fast fashion firms are garment organizations that meet three criteria: quick response, frequent assortment changes, and fashionable design at affordable prices (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). Fast fashion firms and their business models have become increasingly popular in recent years, mainly because of the successful companies such as Zara and H&M (Long & Nasiry, 2019). “Despite their economic success, fast fashion companies are criticized for having a negative environmental impact” (Long & Nasiry, 2019, p.2). For fast fashion firms, being sustainable seems challenging because their business models rely on being fast, cheap, and according to the latest fashion. The fashion industry has created a supply chain with a high amount of pollution and the factories which are producing the clothes have poor working conditions for their employees (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). This is particularly the case because the characteristics of fast fashion business models increase pressure on suppliers, thereby increasing the existing social, environmental, and animal problems within the supply chain. The objectives of the AGT to make the garment industry more sustainable and the business models of fast fashion firms seem difficult to reconcile, if not contradictory.

Therefore, it seems particularly interesting to ask what motives fast fashion firms have to join the AGT. This master thesis aims to answer this question.

The research question is as follows: How do fast fashion firms motivate their choice to participate the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile? The goal of this study is to gain insight in the motives of fast fashion firms to participate in the AGT. For answering this question, a qualitative research was conducted. Interviews were held with employees of fast fashion firms that signed the AGT and they were asked what motives they have to participate in the MSI. Besides interviews, documents were analysed, such as codes of conducts, but also documents that state the vision, mission and strategy of the fast fashion firms that entail their business model and other relevant documents related to the socially responsible performances. The societal relevance of this research is to have a better understanding of the motives of organizations for participating in MSIs. These results can help founders of MSIs convincing new organizations to participate in MSIs. This is important given that global collaborations are becoming increasingly important because the problems cannot be solved by one actor, either an organization, a NGO, or government, alone. This research also found motives why fast fashion firms consider not joining the AGT. These are briefly mentioned in the results section but are not the focus of this study.

## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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This chapter discusses motives and relevant literature regarding MSIs, the garment industry and fast fashion firms. The researcher aims to argue what the scientific relevance of this research entails, discusses relevant perspectives regarding the key concepts and provides an outline with regards to these key concepts.

### 2.1 MULTI STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES

The garment industry is known for its operations in the global economy, where multinational companies operate in transnational markets (Baumann-Pauly, Nolan, Van Heerden & Samway, 2017). Labour rights were historically dealt with at governmental level, as states developed labour law in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to secure justice in employment relations (Martens, Gansemann, Orbie & D’Hease, 2018). As a result of globalization and the expansion of supply chains worldwide outside the jurisdiction of one state, neither domestic nor international institutions have been able to govern labour standards appropriately (Martens et al., 2018). That is why there is a need for regulation across international borders. However, given that regulation is not yet sufficient, actors are currently working together to make a start on addressing current global problems. One form of this cooperation between different actors is the MSI. MSIs are a relatively recent phenomenon and are important CSR initiatives that require more research (De Bakker et al., 2019; Fransen & Kolk, 2007). As mentioned in the introduction, the definition of MSIs this research uses is as follows: “initiatives where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and for-profit organizations play an active role in the design and implementation of standards and a variety of reporting, auditing, monitoring, verification and certification systems” (Utting, 2002, p. 65). MSIs can add real value in global governance to the gaps that governments have regarding sustainable regulations (Utting, 2002). However, they have a voluntary character and therefore stakeholders have to commit to MSIs and their capacities to participate (Wigell, 2008). Actors voluntarily participate in MSIs, therefore the motive why actors participate is relevant for conducting research.

Previous studies show that MSIs are designed to cover a broad range of initiatives ranging from best-practice sharing learning platforms, to certification bodies, and those targeted at addressing governance gaps (Baumann-Pauly et al., 2017). MSIs are initiatives where multiple organizations collaborate to strive for socially responsible performances. The focus of most MSIs is to regulate the global value chains’ negative social and environmental side-effects (Mena & Palazzo, 2012). CSR practices can only be performed by a single organization where MSIs are collaborations of multiple organization. Because the garment and textile industry as a whole are known for their criticized approach regarding their polluting and unethical supply chain (Claudio, 2007), it is an advantage to work together by means of an MSI. The entire supply chain is currently responsible for the negative impacts on humans, the

environment, and animals. Organizations are already improving their individual CSR strategies, but cooperation is needed to improve the entire supply chain and reduce pollution. Therefore, it is relevant to study MSIs in this specific industry and what motives organizations have when participating the MSI, in this case the garment industry.

Within the academic literature, MSIs are not the only form or definition used to address the lack of binding government regulation. Transnational regulations aim to control business activities that are globalized due to internationalization and globalization (Backer, 2007; Sum & Ngai, 2005). MSIs play a role in transnational governance. Non-state market driven (NSMD) governance systems ‘encourage compliance by recognizing and tracking, along market’s supply chain, responsibly produced goods and services. [...] united into a community that accepts “shared rules as appropriate and justified”’ (Bernstein & Cashore, 2008). Furthermore, international framework agreements (IFAs) is used in academic literature to define agreements between multinational enterprises, trade unions, and NGOs to secure workers’ rights which goes beyond governmental regulation (Riisgaard, 2005). However, IFAs and MSIs do differ from one another. The difference between IFAs and MSIs is that with IFA one singular organizations has an agreement with for instance a trade union or NGO, where at MSIs several organizations sign the same agreement, among multiple NGOs, trade unions and (inter)national governments (Colenbrander, 2016). All these definitions refer to a collaboration between non-profit and for-profit organizations and aim to go beyond existing governmental regulation. This research focuses solely on MSIs.

## **2.2 DUTCH AGT**

A historical tragedy, the factory disaster in Bangladesh called Rana Plaza, was the cause for many (international) organizations to work together to strive for better working standards worldwide, but especially in countries where clothing factories are located (Labowitz & Baumann-Pauly, 2014; Taplin, 2014). Western costumers are used to buying cheap fashion items and are unwilling to pay more for fast fashion products (Taplin, 2014). The factory owners in emerging countries are minimizing their costs and maximizing their profits, thereby not considering the working conditions within the factories (Taplin, 2014), and not being able to prevent the pollution footprint the fast fashion firms within the garment industry now leaves to the world (Claudio, 2007). To take care of these complex sustainability issues, several stakeholders are working together to fight forced and child labour, support health and safety standards, and try to reduce the negative impacts on the environments the clothing factories have. One way these stakeholders are working together is through multi stakeholder initiatives (MSI), such as the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment and Textile Sector (AGT). This is a recently founded MSI in the Netherlands within the garment industry. The AGT is a coalition of the Dutch government, NGOs and for-profit organizations in the Dutch garment industry that have agreed on signing an agreement on international responsible business conduct in the garment and textile sector (SER, 2017-a). The aim of

this agreement is to safeguard the human rights of the employees who are working in the factories that produce the clothes which are being sold in The Netherlands. Besides the human rights, the AGT focuses on animal welfare and climate responsibility. The factories that produce the clothes being sold in The Netherlands are mainly outsourced to countries such as Turkey or Bangladesh (SER, 2017-a). The AGT is founded in 2016 by the Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands (SER), who assists the agreement partners with their activities (SER, 2017-c). The agreements ask participants to be transparent when it comes to identifying risks and working together and there are clear targets that need to be made among a strict timespan. The participants must report annually their progress and share their plans with the SER each year as they have more information available (SER, 2017-c). A total of nine themes are central for the AGT: discrimination and gender; child labour; forced labour; freedom of association; living wage; safety and health in the workplace; raw materials; water pollution and use of chemicals, water and energy; animal welfare.

The reason for founding the AGT is because emerging markets in developing world are often complex and lack of national laws and regulation to protect employees in the garment factories. There are low labour standards and the safety and health of the environment is often not taken care of (Claudio, 2007). These complex problems will be dealt with through a collaboration with businesses and organizations by signing the agreement and thereby committing to fighting discrimination, child labour and forced labour. Furthermore, signing the AGT entails that the participants strive for reducing the negative impacts of their activities on the environment, reduce pollution, and taking care of animal welfare (SER, 2017-a). The aim of the AGT is to improve the working conditions and wages in textile-producing business, the animal welfare, and environmental protection. The garments and textiles will be produced fairly and sustainable in order to meet the higher standards demands of the consumers (SER, 2017-a).

The participants of the AGT are either signatories, participating parties (industry organizations, NGOs, Dutch government, and trade unions), or supporters (SER, 2017-b). The signatories are businesses in the garment industry (consumer garments, sportswear, and work wear) and textile industry (home textile and technical textile) (SER, 2017-b). The signatories involve fast fashion firms who are characterized by three characteristics: quick responses, frequent assortment changes and fashionable designs at affordable prices (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). The next paragraph will elaborate more in depth what fast fashion firms entail.

### **2.3 FAST FASHION VERSUS SLOW FASHION**

The focus of this study is on fast fashion firms that signed the AGT. Besides fast fashion firms, other signatories have signed the AGT that operate in the garment and textile industry. The garment industry entails consumer garments, sportswear, and work wear (SER, 2017-b). The supply chain of the garment industry has become extremely complex due to globalization and the emerging markets in developing

countries (Airike, 2016; Baumann-Pauly et al., 2017; Martens et al., 2018). Different formats of fashion exist within the garment industry. While clear distinctions are difficult to draw, one could depict the variety of fashion firms along a continuum, with fast fashion and slow fashion as two ends of the continuum and various conventional fashion firms positioned in between. Conventional fashion is characterized by fashion cycles related to the four seasons of the year, different prices, and is not explicitly ethically produced (Pedersen, Gwozdz & Hvass, 2018). Fast fashion and slow fashion will now be explained in more detail.

Fast fashion has been researched in academic literature and defined by several researchers. Cachon & Swinney (2011) state that fast fashion is a system that combines two components: first, short production and distribution leading times, referred to as quick response techniques, and secondly, highly trendy and fashionable product designs, referred to as enhanced design techniques. The fast fashion industry has a structure that is highly competitive, characterized by high pressure on costs, but also being able to offer the latest trends at all time (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz (2015) depict the business model of fast fashion firms with three elements: quick response, frequent assortment changes, and fashionable designs at affordable prices. The first two elements focus on the operational side of the firm, whereas the last element entails the value proposition the operational elements strive to deliver (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). These three elements will be used as criteria throughout this research to decide whether the fashion firm is defined as a fast fashion firm. Fast fashion is thus fast, cheap, and according to the latest fashion.

Besides fast fashion, slow fashion is a concept used within the garment industry. Slow fashion is the opposite of fast fashion (Barnes, Lea-Greenwood, Watson & Yan, 2013). Slow fashion relates to retailers that produce long-lasting, high quality clothes that is not in response to the latest fashion trends. Furthermore, slow fashion is about creating timeless items, sustainable luxury and embraces simplicity and focuses on detail (Barnes et al., 2013). Gockeln (2014) explains that slow fashion is more novel and is a response to the fast fashion industry, focusing on improving the sustainability and ethics of the supply chain by making use of local resources and expand the product lives. Fast fashion is about buying many pieces for small prices and creates a 'throw-away culture', because consumers always want to follow the latest and fast changing fashion trends. Whereas slow fashion enables consumers to think about their purchase and tries to incorporate green thinking into the fashion world (Pookulangara & Shephard, 2013).

The business model of fast fashion companies compared to slow fashion companies is relatively paradoxical. Where slow fashion companies focus on sustainable practices, fast fashion companies are related to cheap prices, frequent assortment changes and affordable fashionable clothing. These are particularly interesting to study, given that their business model does not align well with sustainability more generally and the goals of the AGT. Why does a fast fashion firm want to cooperate with other

businesses and organizations aiming for sustainability and better working conditions? What are their motives?

## **2.4 MOTIVES FOR ENGAGING IN CSR**

An MSI is a CSR initiative and therefore it is relevant to know the motives actors may have to act socially responsible. The definition for motives cannot be found in academic literature regarding motives for CSR or MSIs, which is noteworthy. To find a definition of motives in academic literature, one must go back further in time. Strauss (1992, p.1) defines human motivation as “the product of interaction between events and things in the social world and interpretations of those events and things in people’s psyches”. In the academic field of psychology motives are defined as “the biological needs and psychological drives that influence the behavior of organisms” (Strauss, 1992, p.2). In this master thesis, motives are roughly defined as the reasons for determining behaviour, in this case the choices of organizations to engage in MSIs. Many researches have been conducted with regards to motives for organizations for engaging in CSR practices. Academic literature consists of studies questioning whether engaging in CSR comes from intrinsic or extrinsic motivation and what other explanations may drive the organizations to engage in CSR.

Aguilera, Rupp, Williams and Ganapathi (2007) provided a multilevel theoretical model in order to explain why organizations increasingly adapt CSR initiatives. The actors of their multilevel framework consisted of a micro (individual), macro (organizational), meso (country), and supra (transnational) level (Aguilera et al., 2007). The study identified that all the actors are driven by instrumental, relational, and moral motives which all lead the actors on the different levels to push for positive social change. One of the limitations of the research of Aguilera et al. (2007) is that further research is needed to different types of CSR. Further research should study whether CSR activities might be contradictory to the core business practices. “That is, a firm might be pressured to engage in a number of CSR-related activities, but also, at times, the collection of activities called for may be internally inconsistent” (Aguilera et al., 2007, p.856). This master thesis tries to partly fill this gap, by answering the question what the motives are for fast fashion firms to participate in a specific MSI.

Bansal and Roth (2000) studied motivations of corporations questioning why companies act ecologically responsive. The drivers legislation, stakeholder pressures, economic opportunities and ethical motives were tested in the study (Bansal & Roth, 2000) and the study concluded with three motivations for corporate ecological responsiveness, namely competitiveness, legitimation, and ecological responsibility. Motivations can be mixed, which means that for organizations there can be more motives for engaging CSR instead of one dominant motive (Bansal & Roth, 2000). This study tries to find multiple motives for joining the AGT and therefore motives also can be mixed for fast fashion firms.

The different literature studies show that the motives for organizations to engage in acting CSR are not solely based on economical or instrumental motives. The studies also all consistently conclude that more research is needed in order to fulfil the knowledge on motives for organizations to engage in CSR (Aguilera et al., 2007; Bansal & Roth, 2000). Aguilera et al. (2007) explains: “future research should give attention to different types of CSR, as well as their differential effects in fostering social change.” This master thesis’ goal entails to gain insight in the motives of fast fashion firms for a particular type of CSR: MSIs.

## **2.5 MOTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN MSIS**

Besides academic literature regarding motives of organizations for engaging CSR initiatives, studies have been conducted with regards to motives for participating in MSIs. As this research is focusing on motives of fast fashion firms to participate in the AGT, it is relevant to discuss what motives already have been found in literature for participating in MSIs.

Cetindamar & Husoy (2007) found that not a single reason can be named for participating MSIs and adopting environmentally responsible behaviour. Both economical and ethical reasons co-exist. “When the relationship between business and society is considered, companies face a conflict of aims between maximizing shareholder and stakeholder value” (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007, p.163-164). In the end, an organization joins the MSIs to gain benefits, whether this is related to acting in a more socially responsible way or to gain more financial profit (Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007). In addition, Zeyen et al. (2016) found two other motives actors may have when participating MSIs. Results in this research state that firms may have two main motives: first, a company is interested in reputation. The company wants to differentiate from poorly performing competitors by establishing an exclusive club that provides them with distinctive capital. Second, a company’s competitive position benefits from pushing for a norm whose application improves the competitive position of the firm. This means that the company tries to establish the same norm for their competitors in the attempt to improve their position in the context of firm rivalry’ (Zeyen et al., 2016). Both explanations Zeyen et al. (2016) gives are focused on competitors that firms relate to. These motives given by Cetindamar & Husoy (2007) and Zeyen et al. (2016) are all related to gain benefits for the organization when participating in an MSI.

Lundsgaarde (2017) provided an article regarding business motives in global MSIs within the sustainable energy industry and found that companies mainly participate in MSIs because of two reasons that are also both related to gaining benefits. The first reason is the benefits spawned by the initiatives and consists of financial advantages and contribution to resources. The second reason are the added access and visibility towards governmental partners, referred to as the networking function (Lundsgaarde, 2017). Finally, the study of Airike et al. (2016) found that organizations have four motivational drivers for participating in MSIs: collaborative advantage, altruistic values, self-interest, and external pressures. Single organizations cannot solve the societal and environmental issues that the

global supply chains entail, therefore MSIs are necessary to address the complex problems such as the labour conditions (Airike et al., 2016). The study by Airike et al. (2016) was conducted within the electronics supply chain.

In view of these studies, it can be concluded that the motives for participating in MSIs are related to the achievement of benefits for both social and business purposes. The motives to participate in MSI appear to correspond with the motives to participate in CSR practices. This study is a qualitative study into the motives of fast fashion companies to participate in the AGT. Existing studies on motives to participate in MSI have focused on specific industries or MSIs, such as the sustainable energy industry (Lundsgaarde, 2017) and electronics supply chain (Airike et al., 2016). MSIs differ widely in purposes, focus areas, timeframes and also in industries and therefore it is important to further investigate MSIs in an industry that has not yet been sufficiently researched, namely the garment and textile industry and the MSI the Dutch AGT. This research inductively searches for motives of fast fashion firms and the motives found in the literature provide the researcher with information on what potential motives could be. However, these motives are not specifically questioned in the interviews and the respondents' own motives are examined. The discussion chapter then describes the similarities and differences between the motives found in the existing literature and in the study.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

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In the third chapter the methodology of this research is elaborated. First the research design can be found, in which the inductive approach is explained. Then the data collection entails how the data is collected, by conducting interviews and collecting relevant documents. Thirdly, the data analysis is being discussed, followed by the limitations and research ethics.

### **3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The goal of this research is to gain insight in the motives of fast fashion firms to join the Dutch AGT. To achieve this goal, qualitative research methods will be used for this study. Qualitative research method is considered as most appropriate because this allows the research to be open-minded when entering the empirical field (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Qualitative research is more suitable for the researcher when the aim is to gain insight because it gives the respondents space to share thoughts and ideas and elaborate their statements. This is rather difficult when using quantitative methods (Symon & Cassell, 2012).

This study takes an inductive approach. Gioia, Corley & Hamilton (2013) studied the inductive research design as a qualitative research method. This study investigates motives of fast fashion firms who participated the AGT and inductively tries to find these motives. Finding these motives will help filling a gap in existing literature, namely the fact that motives for participating the AGT as a specific MSI has not been studied yet. Besides filling this gap, the inductive approach is chosen to fit the research design by making use of interviews and documents as data collection method. The inductive approach is a design for revelation, rich data and to improve trustworthiness (Gioia et al., 2013). Gioia et al. (2013) state that when conducting research on new phenomena, an open mind is necessary, which entails inductive research. The researcher does have general knowledge about motives to participate in MSIs and CSR practices, but is open to investigate new insights the interviewees may come up with.

### **3.2 DATA COLLECTION**

This study will draw on both interview data and documents. For the interviews, first the fast fashion firms will be identified out of all the organizations that signed the AGT. The research question is as follows: How do fast fashion firms motivate their choice to join the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile? As explained before, fast fashion firms are characterized with three elements: quick response, frequent assortment changes, and fashionable designs at affordable prices (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). To decide which organizations to investigate, the researcher listed all the organizations who have signed the AGT whether they fit the criteria of a fast fashion firm. In total 91 organizations signed the AGT. The outcome of this evaluation gave the researcher 15 organizations that fit all the three criteria. Approximately 9 organizations fit two out of three criteria points. The reason

that the researcher does not fully approach these organizations as fast fashion are due to the fact that the researcher doubts whether the products that are being sold are seen by consumers as fashionable or when the researcher thinks the prices are not considered as affordable. In the appendix an overview of potential fast fashion firms can be found. The researcher first contacted all 15 fast fashion firms and invited their CSR managers or CSR officers for an interview. Eventually, the researcher was able to arrange an interview with three respondents of the organizations who fit all the three criteria as fast fashion firm. Three other organizations that fit two out of the three criteria also agreed on participating for this study.

Interviews are used because they help the researcher to explain, better understand, and explore the research subjects' opinion, behaviour, experiences, and phenomenon (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The aim of the researcher was to interview at least six fast fashion firms who signed the AGT and the researcher was able to reach this minimum. The interviewees were involved in the decision to participate in the AGT and/or are employed as CSR manager of officer. The researcher developed an interview guide before the interviews were held. The interview guide can be found in the Appendix and is drafted by the researcher. After each interview, the interview guide was adjusted to strengthen the quality of the questions and improve the order of the interview questions. The interview consisted of semi-structured questions and the interviewer questioned the interviewee by telephone or an online communication medium such as Skype, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams. This was dependent on the preference of the interviewee and researcher. Face-to-face interviews were currently not possible due to the current coronavirus. The audio of the interviews was recorded, to improve the reliability and validity of this research. After interviewing the respondents, the researcher transcribed the interviews and used the transcripts for coding and data analysis.

In addition to conducting interviews, six documents were analysed. Document analysis is a useful and beneficial method for qualitative research because it can provide background information and provide supplementary research data (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Document analysis helps to contextualize the research (Bowen, 2009). The documents that were analysed, were first evaluated with regards to the original purpose of the document and the completeness of the document (Bowen, 2009). The documents that were analysed are codes of conducts of fast fashion firms that signed the AGT, but also documents that state the vision, mission and strategy of the fast fashion firms that entail their business model and other relevant documents related to performances regarding the AGT. These documents have all been found online and are public. Besides the transcripts of the interviews and the analysed documents, field notes written by the researcher was important data. The researcher made field notes during the data collection stage of the study, writing down commentary, thoughts, emerging ideas, and reflections. This also improved the reliability and viability of the study.

Due to the use of multiple methods of data collection, this research made use of data triangulation. The data was collected in a period of approximately four to six weeks. First the participants were

identified, using the criteria as described above. Then, the design of the interview was made using an interview guide written by the researcher. The design of the interview was tested by use of a pilot interview. This gave the researcher the opportunity to make changes in the interview guide and fine-tune the interview guide. The interviews were held in April and May 2020 as well as the data collection and writing down the field notes.

### 3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

After conducting the interviews, collecting the documents, and writing the field notes, the data analysis was performed. The interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews were held. This made sure that the conversations during the interviews were relatively fresh in the memory of the researcher, which made it possible to write down extra field notes what the right interpretation could be when, for example, the interviewee agrees or disagrees with statements. For analysing the collected data, the researcher made use of Atlas.ti. This is a software program that helped the researcher to structure and analyse the collected data. Atlas.ti is freely available for Radboud University students and can process multiple documents, texts, and audio recordings. When analysing the data, the researcher made use of a simple notebook and wrote down thoughts, considerations, or interesting exceptions that the data shows. This helped the researcher later in the study writing the discussion section.

This research will make use of a template analysis (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). This is a type of analysing research data which provides a relatively high degree of structure in the data analysis. Template analysis lies between inductive and deductive reasoning and is relatively flexible in structuring the data analysis (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). The ‘Gioia Method’ of Langley & Abdallah (2011) is used for this research which is specifically used for inductive research. The rhetoric of the writing is to establish a gap in the literature, which this study tries to fill with newly found results. This master thesis takes an inductive approach and by making use of the ‘Gioia Method’ of the template analysis enables the researcher to analyse the data in flexibly and easily (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). There is no fixed number of levels of coding hierarchy and the template analysis is less rigid than grounded theory.

The researcher made use of coding in three stages. First, the researcher read through all the collected data and during the second time of reading the researcher made use of open coding. Whenever a combination of words, this could be in the form of a sentence or multiple sentences, could be relevant in terms of being a possible motive, the researcher used an open code to highlight the words. The open codes started with advantages or disadvantages, so that the researcher knew whether the motive was related to a positive or negative motive to participate in the AGT. For example, the section of text of transcript 3 was coded with the code: ‘Advantage – collaboration’:

*“Government, and companies together to make the world's clothing more sustainable, let's say. And that's beautiful. Because we also see that it brings a lot of awareness in*

*the first instance and after that also a lot of positive results. So we're all now working on better raw materials again, on better risk analysis in the chain, on better risk management, so for me it's cooperation, learning from each other and supporting each other. So that's what's really positive about it..." (Transcript 3)*

The first phase of open coding gave the researcher a total of 55 codes. After the second and third phases, not all codes turned out to be relevant. An example of one of the open codes is the code ‘–intrinsic motivation’, which has been used in a total of 54 times when coding the data. This is after the code ‘advantage – collaboration’ the code most used. The researcher selected this code, when the data consisted of trigger words such as ‘intrinsic motivation’, but also words used in sentences as ‘feeling responsible’, ‘feeling obligated’, ‘moral duty’ or ‘concerned about’. Considering the fact that the focus of this study is only related to motives in favour of joining the AGT only the codes with ‘advantage’ was considered as important by the researcher. The codes with ‘disadvantage’ helped the researcher in understanding that not only motives in favour of joining the AGT were found, but also motives not to join the AGT were found. These motives are shortly discussed in the end of the Findings section.

After the first phase of open coding was completed, the researcher read through all the data again and tried to find groups of motives. This was done by first reading all quotes related to one open code and then linking these open codes together in Atlas.ti using Code Groups. For example, all codes consisting of benefits are grouped into one Code Group Advantages. A total of 13 Code Groups have been formed, where after the researcher again read through all the quotes of the open codes. Lastly, selective coding was performed, where the researcher focused on finding the most important quotes and sentences for this study. This third and final phase consisted of building Networks in Atlas.ti. The Code Groups found in phase two were in fact reorganised because it appeared that these original Code Groups had not been grouped correctly when the groups of motives were found in phase three. Therefore, open codes from different Code Groups were merged into one Network in the final phase. This phase helped the researcher enormously to see the bigger picture of the research because it provided an overview. Three groups of motives were found: collaborative advantages, intrinsic motivation, and competitive advantage. These groups of motives consisted of multiple motives. In the end, this study consisted of three levels: quotes, motives, and group of motives. The Code Groups were so mixed with each other that in the end they no longer represented a level. An overview can be found in Table 1

**Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden..**

Example quotes	Motive	Group of motives
<i>“As a company, in the countries where you produce, you can't do that much yourself. You really need the power of the collective, the collaborations, to make an impact.” (Transcript 1)</i>	Collaboration	Collaborative advantage

<i>“So, the biggest advantages are first and foremost the great amount of knowledge they offer. The workshops and the Webinars and those best cases.” (Transcript 5)</i>	Knowledge sharing	
<i>“So, on the one hand it can be very nice that you have fixed guidelines that you can stick to. But on the other hand, it can also sometimes work against you if it doesn't fit in with how your company is set up. You can't change your entire company structure in a few years.” (Transcript 2)</i>	Obligation	
<i>“Well, because we got a lot of knowledge there about due diligence. How do you handle audits? You know, we could make that up. But now we could learn it from how she did it, or from Amfori who was in it, too. No matter how WE deal with it, or Hunkemöller or whatever. You could do things faster because you had a lot of knowledge on loan.” (Transcript 3)</i>	Network	
<i>“Well, the pros were very clear. There is something that suits us completely and we fully support the objectives and the definition, so to speak, of the covenant. I think that's just the main motive”. (Transcript 5)</i>	Feeling responsible	Intrinsic motivation
<i>“Because clothing is super bad, in production, and also in the handling once it is used. When it's thrown away. So that's what we feel responsible for, that's why we're working on more sustainable raw materials. That's why we're looking at how it can be better recycled. We do that on our own” (Transcript 3)</i>	Awareness pollution	
<i>“I get all the space and freedom to do my thing, so to speak. Quite frankly, otherwise I wouldn't have started. If you don't have your management and MT with you, it just won't work” (Transcript 1).</i>	Back up MT	Competitive advantage
<i>“But there are advantages, it has an end date for the covenant, so if you entered earlier, you could also get more training courses, more workshops, more information and support from the covenant” (Transcript 2).</i>	Forefront	
<i>“Without IMVO or without CSR policy. I make a nice website, with a nice page about it and I say that I do my best [...] It's the famous greenwashing, isn't it? Which, of course, still happens very often” (Transcript 4).</i>	Image	
<i>“Increasingly and rightly, our customers want us to proactively make the environment better and look after those we work with” (Hunkemöller, 2018)</i>	Pressure consumers & disinterest consumers	

Table 1 Overview data analysis

In addition to the fact that three groups of motives were found by means of data analysis, it became clear that three motives were the most important motive to participate, namely: collaboration, intrinsic motivation, and knowledge sharing. Table 2 gives an overview of the frequency of the motives mentioned by the respondents or found in the documents. As can be seen in Table 1, collaboration and knowledge sharing are both sectioned in the group of motives collaborative advantage. Intrinsic motivation did not fit in the two other groups of motives and after reading through all the quotes of intrinsic motivation again, the researcher decided to split up this motive up into two motives, namely feeling responsible and awareness of pollution. This way the third group of motives was realized.

Motive	Frequency
Collaboration	82
Intrinsic motivation	58
Knowledge sharing	52
Network	45

Pressure & disinterest consumers	38
Obligation	24
Image	9
Back-up MT	7
Forefront	5

*Table 2 Frequency motives found in data analysis*

### **3.4 LIMITATIONS**

One important limitation for this study is the corona crisis. This crisis limits the researcher to interview respondents face-to-face, thereby being able to make better use of non-verbal communication. The researcher was only able to conduct interviews by telephone or via an online platform, such as Skype. Using these communication channels had consequences for questioning and responding to the respondent's answers because interrupting was sometimes difficult. Also, organizations, especially the larger fast fashion firms were holding back which created difficulties for the researcher to collect respondents. Therefore, the researcher chooses to include document analysis to be ensured enough data will be collected.

Secondly, there is not a measurement standard to check whether an organization is a fast fashion firm. Literature is analysed by the researcher to check for criteria. Three characteristics were found in the study of Caro & Martínez-de-Aléniz (2015). However, these characteristics had no absolute measurement scales the researcher was able to use to determine whether an organization is categorized as a fast fashion firm. The researcher checked the organizations by herself.

Another limitation is the fact that this research solely focuses on one MSI, namely the AGT. When making use of a broader scope within the garment industry and perhaps compare the AGT to MSIs in other countries such as Germany will give further insights and knowledge regarding MSIs. Besides the garment and textile industry, other industries include MSIs and are relevant to conduct research. A study comparing multiple industries will conclude if giant differences exist or mainly similarities can be found for motives for organizations to participate in MSIs.

### **3.5 RESEARCH ETHICS**

When conducting research, research ethics are important to bounder. In this section, ethical concerns will be discussed. First, the researcher aimed to design a study with a high-quality standard, following academic literature as an example. Recent literature was used for analysing the available knowledge with regards to the key concepts of this study, as well as the fact that the methodology used will be in line with prescribed and tested theory.

For the data collection, the researcher aimed to treat participants in the best ethical way possible. The interviews were audio-recorded, but only if the interviewee agreed before the interview took place.

Before the interview, the interviewee knew what the subject of this research entails, namely the search for motives why fast fashion firms aim to participate in the AGT. The reason this information is given beforehand, is because it gives the interviewees the opportunity to think about this subject and perhaps discusses the subject with their colleagues. During the interview, the interviewer tried to be in control of the conversation and was prepared. This entails that the researcher was informed about the organizations the interviewee works for and the researcher is informed about the AGT. After the interview, the researcher communicated clearly towards the interviewee what he or she can expect with regards to the outcomes of the interview and the study. The transcripts were not sent to the interviewees, because the researcher chooses to anonymously analyse the data and not further expand the transcripts. The transcripts will be saved in the cloud of the researcher, protected with a password. The collected data will be handled confidentially, and the findings is anonymously reported in this master thesis. The dissemination of this master thesis will be done in consultation with the supervisor of the researcher, here the student, and the participants of the interviews. The final master thesis will be sent to all respondents who have indicated that they would like to receive the result.

## 4 FINDINGS

In this chapter the results of the data analysis are described and discussed. The research question entails: how do fast fashion firms motivate their choice to participate the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile? The goal of this study is to gain insight in the motives of fast fashion firms to participate in the AGT. During the data analysis a total of three groups of motives are found, consisting of multiple motives. These groups of motives contain of two to four motives given by respondents or found in the documents why they joined the AGT. An overview of all motives can be found in Table 3.

Collaborative advantage	Intrinsic motivation	Competitive advantage
Collaboration	Feeling responsible	Back-up MT
Knowledge sharing	Awareness pollution	Forefront
Obligation		Image
Network		Pressure consumers & disinterest consumers

Table 3 Overview motives to join the AGT.

First the collaborative advantages will be discussed, then the intrinsic motivation, and finally the competitive advantages. The chapter ends with a paragraph regarding motives not to join the AGT. This is not the focus of the study, however, were considered as important findings in the data for further research and therefore these motives will be discussed shortly in the final paragraph of this chapter.

### 4.1 COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE

The first group of motives is collaborative advantage. Collaboration and knowledge sharing are two motives that are included in the top three most frequent mentioned motives, as shown in Table 2. Both these motives are related to collaborative advantage, which is described as the benefits of collaborating for organizations when they participate with the AGT. The respondents and documents refer to these benefits on a frequent basis and next to collaboration and knowledge sharing other motives related to the collaborative advantage are found during the data analysis. These motives will be discussed in this paragraph and an overview is shown in **Fout! Verwijzingsbron niet gevonden..**

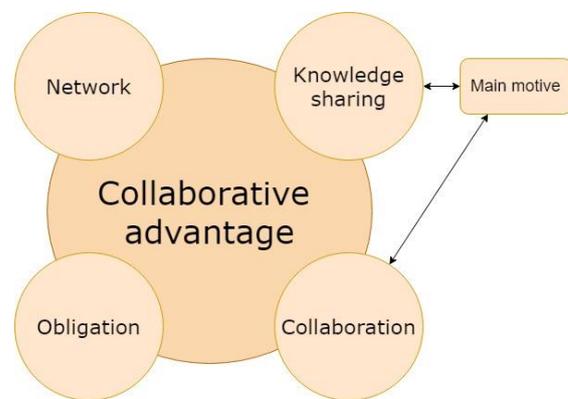


Figure 1 Group of motives collaborative advantage

#### 4.1.1 Collaboration

The first motive that will be discussed is collaboration. Collaboration is mentioned most frequently in the data analysis, which makes clear how important this motive is considered by respondents. Organizations feel intrinsically motivated to act responsible and sustainable and to solve worldwide

problems but find troubles to achieve improvement. However, solving these problems as an individual organization is hardly impossible. Respondent 1 tells: “you can make a stand together, which alone you just can't” (Transcript 1). Therefore, being a member of an initiative such as the AGT brings along an important benefit, namely collaboration. When respondents were asked how they would describe the AGT, respondent 3 answered the following:

*“Government, and companies together to make the world's clothing more sustainable, let's say. And that's beautiful. Because we also see that it brings a lot of awareness in the first instance and after that also a lot of positive results. So, we are all now working on better raw materials again, on a better risk analysis in the chain, on better risk management, so for me it's cooperation, learning from each other and supporting each other. So that's really what's positive about it.” (Transcript 3)*

This quote gives examples in which ways the collaboration is implemented within the AGT. Only by asking to describe the AGT, the motive collaboration is recalled as important by respondent 3. The collaboration brings awareness and positive results for organizations. Respondent 4 was also asked to describe the AGT in his own words and also mentioned the advantage of collaboration:

*“The covenant is, let me take a quick look, how would I describe it, quite concrete. It is a platform in which the various fashion companies, clothing companies in the Netherlands, together with stakeholders, NGO's, ensure that we are. Yes, we call it that beautiful, to apply due diligence. To look now, what are the risks in the chain. First with self-research, but then mainly. I think the added value of the covenant is that we work with each other, with the representatives of different disciplines. So not only from companies, but also from NGOs and stakeholders in particular, that together we try step by step to buy yes, a piece of fair clothing, more sustainable clothing.” (Transcript 4)*

The motive collaboration is closely related with the goal of the AGT, namely, to make the supply chain of the garment and textile industry more sustainable. To achieve that goal, collaboration is necessary and beneficial for organisations. In the first place because organizations cannot do it by themselves, but also because collaboration offers advantages in terms of sharing knowledge, making use of each other's network, and exchanging experiences about what does and does not work. Respondent 1 mentions: “As a company, in the countries where you produce, you can't do that much alone. You really need the power of the collective, the collaborations, to be able to make an impact” (Transcript 1). The collaboration with the AGT therefore also leads to advantages in terms of taking a better position in relation to the factories where the clothing is produced. As an individual organisation you do not achieve the same as when collaborating with several organisations. You stand stronger together and you have more influence.

Respondent 6 makes an argument regarding the collaboration and achieving the common goals of the AGT: “And yes also to join forces, but also to take the right steps together. Because if the covenant would not be there, that common thread would be wafer-thin. Or that common thread is not even there, so everyone does something” (Transcript 6). The fact that the organizations are a member of the AGT brings along that they have common goals and collaborating helps to achieve the common goals. America Today (2018) relates to this: “where relevant we will collaborate with other brands and organizations to collectively come to better or more influential solutions” (America Today, 2018). Collaboration is seen by America Today as a helpful tool to achieve goals and be more influential. Hunkemöller also feels the same about this: “collaboration and long-term solutions are necessary to achieve true sustainability worldwide” (Hunkemöller, 2018) and “we aim to continue our engagement with the government as we believe collaborations is the best way to industry wide success” (Hunkemöller, 2018). Hunkemöller state that they are aware of the worldwide challenges existing regarding sustainability and states that facing these challenges solely is not possible, collaboration is the key to success according to Hunkemöller (2018). Finally, Hunkemöller explains in what forms collaboration can be used to achieve the common goals:

*“By collaborating with others through discussions, partnerships, joint project and shared efforts we aim to help deliver positive social and environmental impact at scale. We want to use our influence to bring transformational change and believe leveraging partnerships is the best road towards true sustainability.” (Hunkemöller, 2018)*

Expresso gives examples of common goals: “by joining forces with sector organisations and trade unions, among others, we improve working conditions and tackle environmental pollution together” (Expresso, 2019). According to Expresso, collaboration is needed to tackle these worldwide problems.

Cooperation also helps to get to the heart of the problem. Understanding the problems in turn helps to solve them. Miss Etam explains how collaboration helps for their organization and explains why it is valuable:

*“The collaboration with the various parties is very valuable to Miss Etam since child labor is often the result of other structural problems in society. By working together, Miss Etam hopes to gain a better understanding of the underlying causes of child labor to ensure that a sustainable alternative solution can be found to the poor conditions under which children have to work.” (Miss Etam, 2019)*

In sum, collaboration is mentioned as motive because it is considered as the biggest advantage of being a member of the AGT. Achieving goals and solving worldwide problems is nearly impossible as a singular organization and therefore a collaboration is helpful. Furthermore, the step-by-step plan of the AGT helps the organization in giving directions where to start and to go to together. The fact that the goals of the AGT align with the goals of the separate organizations also triggers the organizations to

collaborate and finally collaborating in joint projects and shared efforts help to deliver positive impact for currently existing sustainable problems.

#### **4.1.2 Knowledge sharing**

Knowledge sharing is another motive related to collaborative advantage. Knowledge sharing is called by respondents as a main motive for joining the AGT and is also called as one of the most frequent motives in favour of joining the AGT. Knowledge sharing is a motive within the group of motives of collaborative advantage because sharing knowledge is one of the benefits related to collaborating. The knowledge that is shared comes from both participants within the AGT, such as the participating organizations, NGOs, and the government, as well as from the secretariat of the AGT itself. Respondent 3 explains that learning from each other and sharing knowledge was very helpful and speeded them up in terms of acting more sustainable:

*“Well, because we have gained a lot of knowledge about due diligence there. How do you handle audits? You know, we could make that up ourselves. But now we could learn from her, or from Amfori who was in it too. However, WE handles it, or Hunkemöller or you name it. You could do things faster because you had a lot of knowledge to borrow.” (Transcript 3)*

The fact that knowledge is shared, helps organizations to move forward on a faster pace. The AGT has a ready-made step-by-step plan that the organizations must follow, but also gives workshops, seminars, and webinars to gather the knowledge to be able to comply with this step-by-step plan. Respondent 5 admits that he had little knowledge when his organization joined the AGT. He explains how the AGT helped him:

*“But I was not yet an expert in that area. And the covenant also helps with that, in that they really take you into the story of what is sustainability in the textile industry and how do you achieve it? And they do that with Webinars and with workshops and best-case examples. And yes, basically everything about how to implement sustainability step by step.” (Transcript 5)*

In sum, the AGT helps organizations to achieve the goals of the step-by-step plan and this is experienced by organizations as helpful. When you do not join the AGT in an early stage, then self-discipline is important: “for example, at the beginning, I can see, there have also been webinars or even meetings of those day meetings where the whole process is explained and I have to figure that out myself and that is the disadvantage” (Transcript 1). As explained by respondent 1, joining the AGT later brings both advantages and disadvantages. The step-by-step model is there for every organization, but when you join the AGT later you will not be guided through the beginning steps, as the first organizations did have as an advantage. On the other hand, respondent 1 tells: “yes, that is also very nice and a bit of sparring. Whatever we just said a little bit ... that's the advantage that we just got in now, I can really learn from them. I don't always have to find out for myself” (Transcript 1). Joining later as an

organization has the advantage that you can use the knowledge and experiences of the first organizations. This is related to the motive forefront as discussed later and definitely consists of overlapping reasoning.

The secretariat of the AGT shares their knowledge by organising day meetings, workshops, seminars, and now webinars because of the corona virus and this is seen as a great advantage of being a member of the AGT: “the biggest advantages are therefore initially the great knowledge they offer. The workshops and the Webinars and those best cases” (Transcript 5). Respondent 2 also mentions that he experiences the AGT as an initiative he can rely on because of its expertise: “well, that you can also rely on the expertise of the covenant” (Transcript 2). Next to the knowledge shared by the secretariat of the AGT, also NGOs and organizations share their knowledge: “because I really did learn things that you just don't know. NGOs are sitting at the table. Yes, for example, solidarity, the FER foundation. It's a big think tank, too. Let me call it that. It is very nice” (Transcript 1). This is knowledge that organizations themselves may not even have been able to acquire. America Today tells in their sustainability report that they voluntarily share their knowledge: “the tools and lessons learned from this exercise will be made available so that other companies' in the sector can also use them” (America Today, 2018). This is an important advantage of the collaboration because everyone benefits from the knowledge that is built up.

Furthermore, the quality of the AGT is called as a motive to join the AGT because respondents are in favour of the methods used and mention that the step-by-step plan and the guidelines are helpful.

*“The covenant is, of course, set up in such a way that at the end, or after a few years, you have a better idea as a brand of how you can implement your CSR policy yourself. What are important ideas you can work on and that is of course very valuable”*  
(Transcript 2).

The participating organizations value the fact that the AGT guide them through the process of implementing sustainability in the organization. Respondent 5 explains that the AGT helped *Organization 5* by saying: “if we hadn't been a covenant member, we wouldn't be standing where we are now on sustainability. Then we really would still be at the beginning” (Transcript 5). The themes that are discussed within the AGT are also mentioned by respondents as the relevant themes regarding sustainability in the garment industry: “No, I thought the covenant helped. They did have clear themes, but those are the relevant themes. They do. I did think the agenda of the covenant was right in that sense. We incorporated the same themes into our policy. That's no different” (Transcript 3). Not only *Organization 3* incorporated the themes of the AGT in their sustainability policy. The sustainability reports of America Today, Hunkemöller, WE Fashion, Expresso and Miss Etam consists of the same themes as the AGT. Finally, respondent 4 mentions that the quality of the AGT is related to the professional tools that is being provided by the AGT and helps organizations to improve their CSR policy:

*“You have a certain moral duty that you feel when you buy in, but the covenant gives you clearer tools and procedures, rules to make at least that impact. To offer you some more professional tools, which will eventually make your international CSR policy more concrete and realistic. And better implemented in practice.” (Transcript 4)*

In addition to the results of the AGT, the working method of the covenant is also regarded as positive. For example, an organization can ask questions to the secretariat but there is also one account manager assigned per organisation with whom direct contact is maintained. The organisations can contact their account manager for questions, advice and to get in touch with other stakeholders of the AGT. “You have an account manager, who is assigned to you” (Transcript 1). These account managers are experienced as valuable by organizations, as indicated by all respondents. Respondent 2 summarizes the added value of an account manager in the following quote:

*“but you just have one regular person with whom you can approach all your general questions and who can then refer you to contacts from different NGOs who may know more about it. It's just easy to have one regular person who knows where you stand as a company and where you can ask general questions” (Transcript 2)*

In addition to the account managers, the guidelines and step-by-step plan are also mentioned as benefits of the quality of the AGT. Respondent 6 tells: “So, it gives a very good step-by-step plan and a guideline. And it doesn't force you to do that, but it does allow you to funnel a bit more. So actually, find your way a bit. Throughout the entire CSR forest” (Transcript 6). However, respondent 2 indicates that these guidelines work in two directions:

*“So, on the one hand it can be very nice that you have fixed guidelines that you can stick to. But on the other hand, it can also sometimes work against you if it doesn't fit in with how your company is set up. You can't change your entire company structure in a few years.” (Transcript 2)*

The guidelines and step-by-step plan need to be implemented in the business models of the organizations and respondents point out that this can be difficult. On the other hand, the AGT facilitates organisations with tools and knowledge to make this implementation easier. Miss Etam summarizes the above discussed benefits of knowledge sharing in their CSR report of 2019. The AGT provides knowledge and connects organizations or even NGOs with each other to collaborate, share their knowledge, and find solutions for problems experienced together:

*“To begin with, Miss Etam works closely with the secretariat of the Covenant for Sustainable Clothing & Textiles. They regularly organize meetings where various topics and themes are discussed and advice and tools are given on how to put certain things into practice. They also try to bring different companies into contact with each*

*other who may encounter the same problems, to see if solutions can be jointly sought.”*  
(Miss Etam, 2019)

Hunkemöller agrees that collaborating benefits all parties and results in better solutions: “collaboration and discussion with other companies and stakeholders will result in better solutions to common challenges” (Hunkemöller, 2018). Finally, Expresso uses a clear statement:

*“Together we are strong. By working together with leading organizations in the fashion industry, we can combine and make maximum use of expertise and knowledge. Most important are the Fair Wear Foundation and the secretariat of The Covenant for Sustainable Clothing & Textiles.”* (Expresso, 2019)

In summary, knowledge is voluntarily shared by actors within the AGT which is perceived as pleasant by the organizations. They also mention this as a motive to participate in the AGT. Joining the AGT earlier provides better and more intensive guidance on the AGT's step-by-step plan but joining the AGT later means that you can learn from the experiences of others. The knowledge and experiences that are shared with the organisations that join later are also seen as a motive to join later. The methods used and the quality of the AGT are also considered as a benefit and motive to join the AGT.

#### **4.1.3 Obligation**

The motive obligation is used by organisations when they refer to the fact that the AGT obliges organisations to produce results, which means that there is a pressure to perform. Respondent 1 explains:

*“And what I like very much myself, I also see as a big advantage, precisely because... it is also a big booster. Precisely because you have to deliver on the basis of the covenant and because you have to give them a lot of information that you can use, and I mean based on facts, for example good organizations and good NGOs and not just anyone who calls something, you make a kind of, what is it, a kind of flywheel that you tighten, which makes you go faster. You're forced so to speak. I like that very much.”*  
(Transcript 1)

This booster, as respondent 1 refers to, is also called by other respondents. Respondent 2 came up with a quote that was confirmed by amongst others respondent 4 and 6 in later interviews as extremely accurate: “the covenant is a voluntary commitment, but not without obligation” (Transcript 2). Expresso also mentions the commitment they made when signing the AGT: “by signing the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment & Textile (AGT) we commit ourselves to the ongoing process of due diligence. We also seek the cooperation with other (third) parties or companies to support this process” (Expresso, 2019). So, being part of the AGT comes with obligation and this is not seen by organizations as a bad thing at all. In fact, it helps them to go forward in acting sustainable.

An alternative of the AGT would have been legislation, as mentioned by respondent 3: “it's nice how, because the alternative would have been legislation. And actually, the minister also says: I can legislate, but I'd rather, and we as a sector also say that organise ourselves to do better” (Transcript 3). Respondent 4 came with the same explanation regarding legislation:

*“So this was actually, yes you could almost say that this is a way for the government to say: try to solve it as a sector first, we leave you free in this, we encourage you in this, we facilitate you in this. Try to solve it. But if it doesn't go fast enough, there will be an alternative. And that is regulation.” (Transcript 4)*

So, for the AGT was also a pressure to perform from the government. The obligation for organization to perform is helpful and a motive for organizations to join the AGT. When you sign the AGT, you have an obligation to perform and the AGT itself also has obligations to achieve high quality and goals. This together ensures that a high quality is achieved, which both the AGT and the organizations strive for.

#### **4.1.4 Network**

The motive network refers to the advantages related to the parties that are participants of the AGT. First, the stakeholder the secretariat of the AGT itself provides a step-by-step plan, tools, and knowledge to the organizations to manage the work they must carry out. Respondent 2 says: “that you have clear guidelines, after one year you have to comply with them, after two years you have to comply with them. That also gives you something to hold on to for companies that don't have the know-how their selves” (Transcript 2). So, the fact that the secretary of the AGT provides all these tools is an advantage of the motive network. Furthermore, organizations refer to other brands and NGOs as important stakeholders within the AGT, for example respondent 5:

*“Another good thing about it is the cooperation with other brands and with those NGOs. I think it's with. We are also in a multi-stakeholder initiative with Arisa, which was in front of a national children's working group, and with that we are in projects in India with them. That's just so valuable that it's covered by the covenant. Because without the covenant we would not have been in this project. And that would have been a shame! [...] In addition, I would also say that it is a great advantage to work with these brands. Because on all those member days you also get in touch with the other brands and you have quite a lot of contact with each other.” (Transcript 5)*

In summary, the parties related to the AGT are valuable to the organizations and therefore the network of the AGT is seen as a motive to join the AGT. These parties are the secretary of the AGT, fellow organisations and NGOs. Respondents mention these parties and collaborations relatively often, which is why the frequency in the analysis of this motive in Table 2 is so high.

## 4.2 INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

The second group of motives is related to intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is related to an organization's choice, in this case the decision of fast fashion firms to join the AGT, for the satisfaction of its own organization rather than for some separable consequence. Two motives were found in the data analysis related to intrinsic motivation, namely feeling responsible and awareness of the pollution nowadays present in the supply chain of the fast fashion firms. These motives will now be discussed.

### 4.2.1 Feeling responsible

The first motive related to intrinsic motivation is feeling responsible. This feeling is expressed several times by respondents in the interviews. For example, respondent 3 said: “But I think the ultimate reason is that you think it's important to get in” (Transcript 3). Respondent 3 also mentioned: “Well, I think we feel intrinsically that this is important” (Transcript 3). The fast fashion firms feel intrinsically motivated and explain that they think it is important to join the AGT and to act responsible and therefore choose to collaborate with others and join the AGT. Respondent 5 mentions that these feelings of responsibility have increased in the past few years: “yeah, there's more freedom. There's more willingness. There's more interest. In the end, you remain a commercial company so everything that has a cost and there must be something to gain, but it is becoming more and more important” (Transcript 5). An increased amount of willingness can be found in the fast fashion firms resulting in feeling more responsible to act sustainable. This is translated into the motive to join the AGT.

Organizations also choose to join the AGT because they feel intrinsically motivated and thus feel responsible, for example because of experiencing moral duty. Respondent 4 stated: “You have a certain moral duty that you feel when you buy in, but the covenant gives you clearer tools and procedures, rules to increase your, at least that impact” (Transcript 4). Respondent 6 states that joining the AGT was a logical choice, because joining the AGT was in line with their business model: “I think it was really from our own DNA, what I said, from our own replenishment. Is. Was then, and still is” (Transcript 6). In sum, respondents explain that their decision to join the AGT were in line with their organization strategy and business model and they choose to join the AGT because they felt intrinsically motivated to do so.

Not only organizations as a whole experience intrinsic motivation, also singular persons within the organization feel passionate about sustainability and feel responsible. This can be seen for example in the quote of America Today (2019): “many of our colleagues in the America Today family feel very strongly about sustainability and we work together with experts and our suppliers to offer a more sustainable collection” (America Today, 2019). Respondent 5 also explained the importance of motivated individual employees.

*“Yes, we now have a few people in each department who are already working on something relating to sustainability themselves and who are also now participating in*

*our internal CSR working group with which we are also starting the transition. So yes, I think these people are very important within your organisation. If you don't have them, it becomes a lot harder to find the motivation to take part in these kinds of initiatives” (Transcript 5).*

Respondent 5 mentions two times that having personnel who feel passionate about sustainability within your organization is essential to integrate sustainability throughout the whole organization. *Organization 5* has employees in each department who work on sustainable subjects and who participate in one central CSR workgroup. This helps to integrate sustainability throughout the whole organization and the intrinsic motivation to act more sustainable was already present at multiple employees:

*“I think also because people who were there within the organization thought it was important. [...] But you can be pushed a lot externally, but if no one is interested internally, then nothing happens. Then nothing changes. So there really have been people within the organization who have said, this seems important to me to participate. And you can see that now, within our company culture, that there are very sustainably interested colleagues. And that, yes, that's what you need within the company. You have to have people like that who push the transition forward a bit.” (Transcript 5)*

First of all, you need these employees to make the definitive decision to participate in the AGT and secondly, you need these employees to ensure that the transition towards sustainability is an ongoing process and are interested and motivated to make this happen. However, this is not the case in all organizations. Respondent 2 mentions:

*“It can be better embedded in the whole organization. Look, we're working on it as a department now, but it's still seen as a real departmental thing. It is for a lot of people within Organization 2, they have had many years, yes actually nothing to do with it. And now we are at the point that it should become part of everyone's work” (Transcript 2).*

Another respondent, respondent 3, explains that in their organization sustainability is integrated throughout the whole organization because a lot of people feel responsible: “what you have at *Organization 3* is that a lot of people are passionate about sustainability and by having those people do that, it is also directly integrated in the operations. So, it's not a stand-alone thing, it's an integrated thing. And there, we believe in that” (Transcript 3). WE Fashion translates their feeling of responsibility through their business strategy: “To emphasise that sustainability should have a holistic approach, it is also integrated into our overall WE business strategy: sustainable business. Our business strategy aims for optimal balance in creating sustainable and socially responsible fashion that can be enjoyed by all” (WE Fashion, 2018).

To summarize, feeling responsible is a motive to join the AGT and is related to intrinsic motivation. Feeling responsible and intrinsic motivation can be translated through the organization strategy and business model, but is also translated through multiple employees within an organization which can serve as a motive for joining the AGT.

#### **4.2.2 Awareness of pollution**

The second intrinsic motivation is the awareness of the polluting clothing and textile industry. This awareness resulted in an intrinsic motivation to join the AGT, because the fast fashion firms want to take responsibility for the consequences. For respondent 4 it was the huge accidents in the clothing industry that motivated him to commit to a more sustainable supply chain.

*“The factory that collapsed where more than a thousand people were killed. I think that was a breaking point, well, I'm sure it was. From that moment on, let me say. You know the risks. Because I, I came from. I think I was first in Dhaka, Bangladesh in '99. You know the circumstances there. Unsafe factories, unsafe workplaces. And you do business with factories where it's okay, but it can't be adequately controlled, adequately inspected. And then you see where that leads, where it doesn't lead at all, what causes such a disaster. Then you start to realize that, yes, it doesn't work. The way we do it, with the limited resources, well that's not going to work. So for me that was a reason to say, from now on we're gonna join the covenant.” (Transcript 4)*

Respondent 4 is aware of the bad conditions for human beings and nature and this is his motivation to participate in the AGT. The fact that the supply chain of clothing is polluting is also known by respondent 3:

*“Because clothing is super bad, in production, and also in the handling once it is used. When it's thrown away. So that's what we feel responsible for, that's why we're working on more sustainable raw materials. That's why we're looking at how it can be better recycled. We do that on our own.” (Transcript 3)*

These quotes show the awareness of the fast fashion firms in terms of how polluting the current supply chain of the garment industry nowadays is and how this is a motive to join the AGT, the AGT strives for a more sustainable and responsible supply chain where products are produced in a better way. The goals of the AGT align with the goals the fast fashion firms strive to achieve. Respondent 1 explains that this motive is relevant to sign the AGT: “the products must be produced in a decent way. Both for the people who work on them and for the environment. And with that in mind, I think it has been decided to sign the covenant” (Transcript 1). Respondent 6 agrees, the conditions for people and nature are so important that joining the AGT is useful.

*“Look at what it means for me, or for our organisation 6, is that the covenant stands for the good welfare of our production sites, of our production countries and then both the product-oriented and the workers in the factories. It's actually everything that happens abroad, what is exported, to countries including, in this case, the Netherlands. That that happens in a responsible way.” (Transcript 6)*

Public documents of organizations that signed the AGT consists of several statements where the awareness of pollution is explained. A statement of Hunkemöller (2018) shows this for the organization as a whole: “we have a passion to create a sustainable business where everyone makes the best decisions to protect the environment and look after those we work with.” Hunkemöller (2018) also states: “We take our responsibility seriously to adopt a holistic sustainable approach to all our business processes with the right balance between people, planet and profit.” These quotes show that Hunkemöller includes sustainability in their strategy and business model because of their awareness of pollution. Besides Hunkemöller, WE Fashion elaborates on their responsible feelings and awareness of pollution and translates these feelings in their sustainability strategy:

*“WE Fashion aims to take responsibility for people and the environment. That is why sustainability plays an important role in our strategy. In both the short and long term, WE Fashion would like to make a contribution towards structural improvements to the lives of people and the environment” (WE Fashion, 2018).*

This quote shows the awareness of pollution of WE Fashion translated through their strategy. Silvercreek and Madness make a statement about their desire to reduce the pollution left by the garment industry for people, planet and animals: “B32 Groep (Open32, Silvercreek and Madness) wants to make nice products together with their business partners which are made in good labor conditions, have lowest possible environmental impact and have no negative impact on animal welfare.” (Silvercreek & Madness, 2019). These wishes are originated from the organization and can therefore be defined as intrinsic motivations. Finally, Miss Etam also explains their desires regarding sustainability and by doing so, show their awareness of pollution:

*“Miss Etam is happy to do its part to reduce our carbon footprint, to treat the planet with a little more love and to create a pleasant working environment for employees in our stores, in our service office, in our warehouse, and in our supply chain, including factories abroad. Together, we strive to produce fashion items for our customers in a responsible manner” (Miss Etam, 2019).*

To summarize, the fast fashion firms feel intrinsically motivated to join the AGT because of the awareness of the polluting industry and because they feel responsible for improvement of the supply chain. The garment industry is known for its polluting consequences and the fast fashion firms are aware of this and therefore want to join the AGT to decrease the pollution.

### 4.3 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The third and final group of motives is competitive advantage. This group of motive consists of motives referring to the business benefits of the organizations who decide to join the AGT because it would fit within their strategy and business model. The motives related to competitive advantage are explained hereafter and an overview can be found in Table 4.

Motive	Explanation
Back-up MT	The management team or top management of the organization supports the decision to join the AGT. This is needed to sign the AGT.
Forefront	The advantages of being (one of) the first to sign the AGT fits within the business model of the organization in being responsible and sustainable.
Image	The advantages of being a signatory of the AGT in terms of organization image. This code is also used when indicating that image is not the right reason for signing.
Pressure and disinterest consumers	The organisations experience pressure from consumers to act responsibly and therefore choose to sign the AGT. However, other organisations point out that sustainability is not in the interest of consumers and is not under pressure from consumers to behave responsibly, and even if they choose to sign the AGT because they themselves need to do so.

Table 4 Group of motives related to competitive advantage

#### 4.3.1 Back up MT

The first motive within the group of motives related to competitive advantage is the back-up of the management team. The fact that the management team is in favour of the decision to join the AGT is important:

*“You find that to do this with the covenant, you just need top support, that's the most important thing. If they support it, then the rest becomes pretty simple. And it has a lot... And in the end it just depends on the people at the top. And with that we had a number of changes and until there were the good people who got it and then we were able to get results quickly” (Transcript 3).*

Support of the management team is crucial to engage in the AGT. Respondent 3 also experienced what it feels like when there is lack of support of the management team. He told the researcher that when he was hired as CSR manager, he had to convince top management to participate in the AGT again. One board member had signed the AGT, without the rest of the top management agreeing. For the respondent, this meant that he had to convey his own conviction that it was good to participate to the top management. Respondent 3 concludes regarding intrinsic motivation and back-up of the management team with the following statement: “so two things are important. An own sense of responsibility and top management support. I think those are the success factors” (Transcript 3).

In the end, the management team needs to support the decision to join the AGT, because the management team consists of the persons who decide if the AGT will be signed as the respondents from

Organization 4 and 5 confirmed. Respondent 1 works directly with the directors of Organization 1 and therefore was able to convince the directors to join the AGT:

*“Yes, I work, so to speak, with the directors, with the CEO's, of both company X and 1. I have a direct link with that and my managing director is purchasing director, so yes, very flat, if I say we're going to do it, then we're going to do it. Yes, no, but we just think it's so important and sure, yes we work in the textile industry, we produce denim, yes if there's something to do somewhere, it's with us. And that's where the challenge lies right in front of me, that's great fun” (Transcript 1).*

Respondent 1 also mentions that the management team needs to be in favour of the AGT, otherwise it is not possible to join the AGT: “I get all the space and freedom to do my thing, so to speak. Quite frankly, otherwise I wouldn't have started. If you don't have your management and MT with you, it just won't work” (Transcript 1). With all these quotes it can be concluded that the fact that the management team is supporting the choice to join the AGT is crucial. Therefore, having the back-up of the management team is a motive to join the AGT.

#### **4.3.2 Forefront**

The next motive that will be discussed is forefront. With forefront is meant the advantage of being (one of) the first to sign the AGT which fits within the business model of the organization in being responsible and sustainable. Not all organisations are directly affiliated with the AGT and respondent 5 explains what the benefits are if you join later as an organisation:

*“I also speak to companies that are affiliated later on and I think it is an advantage for them to be able to see how things went with other companies. And then, yes, that's natural. The second... advantage of course. They can learn from us from the mistakes we've made or from the progress we've made. Whereas in 2016, in the beginning, at that time, of course, it was all pretty new. At that time they didn't know how difficult it would be to achieve those goals in those 5 years. So yes on the one hand not on the other hand I think it's a good thing that it happened. Because if we hadn't started in 2016, we wouldn't be where we are now. I do think that where we are now that really goes in the right direction, so to speak” (Transcript 5).*

Respondent 5 mentions that being one of the first signatories is not necessary an advantage. Of course, if you are one of the first to sign, you are currently the most advanced in the tasks associated with membership of the AGT. Respondent 2 however claims that being a first participant is in fact an advantage: “but there are advantages, it has an end date for the covenant, so if you entered earlier, you could also get more training courses, more workshops, more information and support from the covenant” (Transcript 2). When joining the AGT as a first participant, this brings advantages in terms of being able to attend all the available workshops, seminars, and trainings as described by respondent 2. Organization

I joined the AGT three years after the start, in 2019. Respondent 1 explains that joining the AGT later resulted in extra work to catch up:

*“The disadvantage at the same time is that I have to read a lot to catch up, because I also see... They have, so to speak, an online share-point, a site where you can collect all your information when you are a member. In the beginning, as I can see, there were also webinars or even meetings of those day meetings in which the whole process is explained and I have to figure that out for myself and that is the disadvantage” (Transcript 1).*

Hunkemöller and America Today were both organizations that signed the AGT in its first month of existence. Both the organizations state in their sustainability reports that they have taken a position in the forefront of all the organizations within the AGT. They help other organizations with their knowledge and strive to become more responsible and sustainable. Hunkemöller (2018) also explains that it wants to make use of their influence as a large organization to bring change: “We want to use our influence to bring transformational change and believe leveraging partnerships is the best road towards true sustainability” (Hunkemöller, 2018).

In summary, the motive is used in favour of the AGT, because being in the forefront has as advantage that the fast fashion firms are further with their sustainable transition. Moreover, fast fashion firms can share their own knowledge with others when they are further in the process of the AGT. Connecting later has as a result that fast fashion firms themselves have extra work to catch up on knowledge, but it also means that organizations can learn from the experiences of organizations who were previously connected. The forefront motive applies to organizations that wanted to be the first to join to be sure that they can directly add sustainability to their organization's strategy and business model in the best possible way.

### **4.3.3 Image**

The third motive discussed in this paragraph is image. Within this research, the motive image entails the advantages of being a signatory of the AGT or using the AGT for greenwashing. This motive is both used for quotes in favour of a good image of the organizations, as quotes that state that the image of the organization is not a good motive to join the AGT. For example, respondent 3 mentions several positive motives to join the AGT and then claims that the motive image is a negative one:

*“Learning from each other, gaining knowledge faster. It might also be a loss of face if you don't participate. That would be a negative reason to get into it. But I think the ultimate reason is that you think it's important to get into it” (Transcript 3).*

Respondent 1 mentions the same thing in his own words: “as long as it's about intrinsic motivation. I think that's very important. And not about image, greenwashing, you name it” (Transcript 1). In fact,

respondent 1 tells the researcher this another two times that joining the AGT for a better image is a negative reason: “because I think it has to do with an intrinsic motivation. If you really want to do better, yeah, how am I gonna say that. I don't think you fit in to create a good image for your company” (Transcript 1). Respondent 4 regrets that greenwashing still happens: “without IMVO or without CSR policy. I make a nice website, with a nice page about it and I say that I do my best [...] It's the famous greenwashing, isn't it? Which, of course, still happens very often” (Transcript 4). Interestingly, *Organization 5* does believe that image is in a way important. Respondent 5 believes that joining the AGT was partly because more and more companies joined and that aroused their interest:

*“How it had gone, was that the covenant suddenly came as a great initiative. And more and more companies joined. At a certain point, because we noticed that a lot of other companies were involved, it was kind of like that. That you become a little more interested in taking part. So I think that's how it would have been. That we then saw that a lot of companies were involved, that we also took that step.*

*Interviewer: And could you say that it was only in arousing interest? Or also a bit of group pressure? Or wanting to be part of it?*

*Respondent 5: Both, I think. Both. You know what it is, we're of course just a commercial company and if the whole market goes in one direction and you go in another direction. Then that's probably not the right direction.” (Transcript 5).*

This quote gives a lot of information, namely the fact that not only image is important because you need to stay in line with the rest of the organizations within the branch. Also, the fact that the organization has a commercial mentality, brings pressure to follow the other organization. So, to maintain a good image, you need to stick with the other organizations within your branch. In sum, most organizations do not think you join the AGT for a better image. However, the fact that other organizations join the AGT leads to a certain interest for organization to decide to join as well.

#### **4.3.4 Pressure consumers & disinterest consumers**

When the data was analysed, an interesting dichotomy emerged with contradictory statements. On the one hand, it was claimed that consumer demand for sustainability was high, by, for example, respondent 2: “because this is a subject that is also becoming increasingly important to consumers, and that if you stay behind now, consumers will eventually also drop out” (Transcript 2). Evidence to support the high demand for sustainability by consumers also comes from the public documents of the organisations that signed the AGT. For example, Hunkemöller states: “Increasingly and rightly, our customers want us to proactively make the environment better and look after those we work with” (Hunkemöller, 2018) and:

“Above all else, our Sheroes<sup>1</sup> care about the world around them and the role they can play to make things better” (Hunkemöller, 2018). Hunkemöller clearly claims that the reason to act sustainable is an answer towards the demanding consumers. America Today says so too: “we are working to match our supply better with customer demand, so we have less rest stock, which saves material and energy use” (America Today, 2019). Respondent 4 tells that the consumers nowadays are more aware of sustainability and want more and more fair clothing. However, the price of fair clothing is a concern:

*“But now, about millennials, I also have children in the millennials, and at least they're aware of it. Something's going on. Just because of the fact that... The willingness to take action, so the difference we say more often, between the citizen and the consumer. The citizen wants fair clothing, but the consumer says: yes, but wait a minute, yes, I have uh... if I see that I can buy that t-shirt for four euros, why should I buy it for forty euros where a uh where a DOTS label hangs on it.” (Transcript 4)*

Respondent 5 agrees with the fact that there is more awareness at the consumers and thinks that is a reason of the creation of the AGT:

*“But you do notice that the market is more concerned about the garment industry and that is not surprising when you see how much pressure has been put on it in recent years from all kinds of stakeholders, NGOs, all kinds of consumers. And of course, it is also a product that is very close to you, as a consumer. You wear it every day, you probably buy it every month. So, I understand that those concerns are higher there. And I think that's another reason why that also plays a role in where we are now.” (Transcript 5)*

On the other hand, it was claimed that the consumer demand was not at all as high as was thought. Besides, large competitive brands such as H&M are at the forefront regarding sustainability, but they are still an organization within the fast fashion supply chain:

*“Yes, we see more and more chains or brands that come with sustainable collections. H&M is making a nice effort with Conscious. They are also at the forefront with social compliance in all respects. Perfect, wonderful what they do, but they're still in a fast fashion system. They are stuck in a system in which, in my opinion, the sustainable clothing has no place.” (Transcript 4)*

According to respondent 4, sustainability and fast fashion is not possible in the same supply chain. Respondent 5 says that to deal with the low demand of consumers is to think about your own intrinsic motivations. “You can also ask yourself; even if there is no demand for it, don't I as a brand have a

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<sup>1</sup> Sheroes is defined by Hunkemöller as follows: “We call our customers our Sheroes and they are at the heart of our business. They are attracted by inspiring stores and web-shops, well-designed products with our distinct brand hand-writing, great prices and, not least, our inclusive approach to make every Shero feel their most beautiful self.” (Hunkemöller, 2018)

responsibility towards society? So, you know, if you're totally unsustainable, then you don't have a right to exist in this culture anymore.” (Transcript 5). The respondent regrets that the consumers do not feel the intrinsic motivation to buy sustainable clothes, because of the price, but feel obliged to act sustainable to improve the complete supply chain and therefore the disinterest of consumers is linked to the motive competitive advantage. The organization chooses to join the AGT because it fits their business model and organization strategy. This dichotomy results in two motives. First, the pressure from consumers in favour of organisations to join the AGT and second, the disinterest of consumers in the intrinsic motivation of organisations. Even though consumers do not show any interest in buying durable clothing, the organisation still chooses to join the AGT.

#### **4.4 MOTIVES NOT TO JOIN THE AGT**

The research question of this study is related to motives of fast fashion firms to join the AGT and is described in the previous paragraphs. However, the researcher also found motives not to join the AGT and although this is not the core of this study, these motives will be discussed shortly as they may be useful for future research.

##### **4.4.1 Absence of leading organizations**

Despite the motive collaboration being called most frequently as an important motive, the fact that organizations are not a member of the AGT or that the AGT is only an initiative for Dutch organizations is called as a motive against joining the AGT. This motive is called absence of leading organizations. This motive refers to the fact that organizations regret that certain organizations are not a member of the AGT, large companies such as H&M or Zara.

*“I was convinced of the participation, but it didn't go without a fight. Because, let me say, there were promises made at the beginning by the members of the companies. Then, being Organization 4, you actually want the big brands to participate as well. It was not possible to give such a guarantee beforehand. So, it took us some time to think of it is wise to become a member of this club.” (Transcript 4)*

Respondent 4 regrets that, despite the promises upfront, big brands eventually choose not to join the AGT. This was for them a motive to join the AGT, that the large organizations would also be a member. Respondent 5 explains that the absence of these large companies is discussed between the participants of the AGT but is also understood. These companies have such a large size and an initiative like the AGT does not only exist in the Netherlands, but also in other countries. It is not possible for these companies to join every initiative.

*“Yeah, there's some talk about that, but I think it's understood. Because those big brands like H&M and Primark and Inditex who, yes, I know why I think they don't participate. That's because they work on such a large international market, at least,*

*there are initiatives like that not only in the Netherlands. You also have them in Germany and I'm sure you'll have them in Scandinavia as well. If she has to join a separate initiative in each country, then of course you also go crazy as a company. So I understand that they're not there and at the same time I see an H&M as a frontrunner in the field of sustainability. I think that all of us in the Netherlands can still learn a lot from that. Because they really do a lot of good things if you take a closer look at them. It's really not the case that it's fast fashion and that everything is produced under poor conditions. On the contrary, they have a very good sustainability strategy with which they want to lead the transition.” (Transcript 5)*

On the other hand, respondent 5 mentions that having large companies such as H&M or Primark would benefit the whole initiative because they could be a leading organisation within the AGT. These large companies could strengthen the AGT by having a greater influence towards the factories and because they are already more advanced in terms of sustainability, they also bring additional knowledge and experience.

#### **4.4.2 Level playing field**

The following motive, level of the playing field, refers to the preference mentioned by respondents to take the initiative to the next level, to Europe instead of the Netherlands. Respondent 4 explains:

*“You're too small as a Dutchman. We've already achieved quite a bit in the meantime. But yes, this is about a market that is European wide, and I see the advantages of working together, I have also experienced in the meantime. So, I think that if we can take that to a higher level, we can also create a lot more impact.” (Transcript 4)*

Respondent 4 points out that the problems that exist and the goals that are set are related to bigger issues that exceed the Netherlands and therefore need to be discussed on a higher level, namely Europe. The respondent of *Organisation 6* agrees: “look, now it's in the Netherlands, but on a European level you need to join forces even more” (Transcript 6). Hunkemöller already started working on sustainability in multiple countries: “Hunkemöller also has three Work Councils, one in the Netherlands, one in Belgium and one on a European level, in which discuss important developments within the organization with the CEO in an open and honest way” (Hunkemöller, 2018). The fact that Hunkemöller is working on sustainability in several countries at the same time also provides additional knowledge, resources and experience, which gives the organisation a stronger sustainability strategy. The Netherlands as a small country can fuel change, but the supply chain of the clothing industry is global. This also explains why large companies are not willing or able to cooperate, as explained by respondent 5:

*“because those big brands like H&M and Primark and Inditex who, yes, I know why I think they are not participating. That's because they work in such a large international*

*market, at least, there are initiatives like this not only in the Netherlands. You also have them in Germany and I'm sure you'll have them in Scandinavia as well. If she has to join a separate initiative in each country, then of course you also go crazy as a company.” (Transcript 5)*

So to summarise the above, organisations use the motive level of the playing field to explain why organisations would not participate in the AGT. This is understood by organisations, as it is considered unrealistic to join any covenant with any country. However, Hunkemöller shows that it is indeed possible to work on sustainability in several countries and to translate this into a sustainability strategy in your organisation.

#### **4.4.3 Unrealistic goals**

Another motive for not joining the AGT are the unrealistic goals. Respondent 2 says: “a number of very ambitious goals have been set which, after only a few years of the covenant, actually turn out not to be achievable in reality” (Transcript 2). The objectives of the AGT were considered unrealistic and could not be achieved in the timeframe preferred by the AGT. Respondent 5 explains that the objectives of the AGT also contradict the demands of the customers:

*“That's what you as a company have to respond to in a certain way. So, they want sustainability, but not for a higher price. And of course, that's two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. So then you have to find a way to make that happen. And that is something I think every company, not only in the textile industry, but in every industry, struggles with. That really makes it harder. If there really was a business case for it, for sustainability, then every company would already have done it. But there isn't. On one op. That's not ready, and that makes it harder.” (Transcript 5)*

The consumer does want sustainability, says respondent 5, but does not want to pay extra for sustainable products. This makes it more difficult to achieve the AGT's sustainable objectives. Respondent 5 also refers to their business model, which must be in line with both the AGT's objectives and the customer's requirements. The objectives are unrealistic because not every company has the same business model and these different business models do not make it possible to use the same way of execution. Respondent 2 explains this: “but on the other hand, one size fits nobody. So sometimes you have the idea of yes, this is now imposed from the covenant but this does not fit the reality of how a company works” (Transcript 2). Finally, respondent 6 tells: “if you look at us as members of the covenant, what's the downside. For us personally, yes there are a lot of subjects in the covenant that are very difficult for us to get to grips with” (Transcript 6). In short, the goals of the AGT are first of all seen as unrealistic because the goals are difficult to control. In addition, the goals of the AGT are not aligned with the business models of the organizations that focus on customer requirements and finally, AGT has a certain

'one size fits no one' method where organizations have to figure out for themselves how to implement the roadmap to ensure that it fits their own business mode.

#### 4.4.4 Unclear goals

The second motive related to the disadvantages of the content of the AGT are the unclear goals. Respondent 6 explains: “from the beginning it was not entirely clear what would be expected per year” (Transcript 6). Respondent 6 experienced a lot of uncertainty within *Organisation 6* before it wanted to join the AGT. Targets were set for each year that one is a participant, but at *Organization 6* there were many questions:

*“Yes, targets are set for year 1 when you start. But what is expected then, what kind of tones and pros are you going to discuss? How is the communication? What is the guidance if you run into something? What is a piece of relaxation, or just a piece of tightening the belts. So actually, that was also a bit unclear. Also, an assessment framework, an assessment framework was established from the start. But that has changed every year.” (Transcript 6)*

This uncertainty caused doubts in *Organization 6* and was a motive for them not to join. Eventually, they did join the AGT and they took the leaps of faith. “It's just, we've stepped into the deep end, but so has the covenant itself. [...] And I also think it's pretty cool, on the one hand, what we've accomplished now. But even that covenant hasn't been able to estimate how much work there was and is” (Transcript 6).

Not every respondent agrees with the fact that the AGT was unclear beforehand. Respondent 1 mentions: “you'll really get an explanation beforehand, that you know what you're getting into” (Transcript 1). Before the covenant was actually started, there were years of discussions on how the AGT should be designed. Respondent 2 explains that this has made the AGT sometimes a bit bureaucratic, but also very complete:

*“It is very complete. There was also prior, before it was signed by brands, several parties negotiated for years about what kind of topics it should contain. So, a lot of different parties and NGOs have thought about it. So that's for sure. That may be a bit too bureaucratic for the reality of the clothing industry, but it has certainly been thought about with a lot of attention and knowledge. What are the topics that come back in it.” (Transcript 2)*

Finally, prior to signing the AGT, it is impossible to know which terms and conditions you, as an organisation, have to comply with. Respondent 4 explains: “of course, there are also all kinds of conditions and terms that you cannot see at that time in the sense of what signing a covenant means regarding your CSR. Regarding you, which is a crucial point for us, do we provide openness about our

production channels?” (Transcript 4). Thus, the AGT's motive unclear objectives refers to the fact that it was not clear in advance to organisations what they could expect from the work that awaited them. The AGT was well thought out and the topics had been under negotiation for years, which made the AGT perceived as complete.

#### **4.4.5 Workload**

The third and final motive discussed in this chapter is the workload. The workload relates to the amount of work associated with participating in the AGT, which is seen as both a disadvantage and a burden associated with achieving the objectives. Respondent 1 simply says: “it's a lot of work” (Transcript 1). *Organisation 1* signed the AGT later, which resulted in extra work that had to be carried out independently: “The disadvantage at the same time is that I have to read a lot to catch up” (Transcript 1). Other respondents see the workload not as a disadvantage, but a learning opportunity: “yes, it takes a lot of time, but you can also learn a lot through it” (Transcript 2).

The fact that the workload is high is a given fact for organisations. They know this in advance and take it into account in their decision whether to participate in the AGT. A negative part of the high workload is the fact that a lot of work also has to be done, which is considered irrelevant or ineffective for the organization. Respondent 3 explains: “The negative side is that we are spending a lot of time filling in questionnaires, filling in lists, taking courses, which we... are not always very well attended or are not always relevant, so it takes a lot of time and, which is not always very effective” (Transcript 3). Despite the high workload, all respondents indicated immediately that it felt like it was worth it. Respondent 6 says: “but that weighs, the important thing is that we can achieve something. And what we see is that we have achieved results in recent years. And I think that's the most important pillar, no matter how much time it's taken” (Transcript 6).

In short, the workload is high for the organizations and they were all aware of this fact before they signed the AGT. This was a motive for the organizations not to participate in the AGT. A negative side effect of this high workload is the feeling that a lot of irrelevant and inefficient work has to be done. However, the intrinsic motivation to participate in the AGT and achieve the goals set out outweighs the fact that it is a lot of work.

## 5 DISCUSSION

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This chapter first discusses the interpretation of the results, where the findings will be discussed considering existing knowledge found in the literature. Hereafter the knowledge contribution will be elaborated, followed by the managerial implications. The limitations will be explained after and finally suggestions for further research are presented.

### 5.1 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

This master thesis tries to answer the research question: how do fast fashion firms motivate their choice to participate the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile? This study resulted in three groups of motives consisting of collaborative advantages, intrinsic motivation, and competitive advantages. First, collaborative advantages refer to the benefits of collaborating for the fast fashion firms when they participate with the AGT. Secondly, intrinsic motivation is related to an organization's choice, in this case the decision of fast fashion firms to join the AGT, for the satisfaction of its own organization rather than for some separable consequence. Finally, competitive advantages are referring to the business benefits of the organizations who decide to join the AGT because it would fit within their strategy and business model. The motives for participating in MSIs found in the literature partly overlap with these groups of motives and differences can also be found. The motives for participating in MSIs in literature are mostly related to gaining benefits for the organization. So are the collaborative and competitive advantages, but the group of motives with respect to intrinsic motivation are not. Intrinsic motivation is referring to the satisfaction of the organization itself because the organization feels responsible or acknowledges the importance.

The definition of an MSI used in this research is: “initiatives where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and for-profit organizations play an active role in the design and implementation of standards and a variety of reporting, auditing, monitoring, verification and certification systems” (Utting, 2002, p. 65). The AGT is an example of an MSI and is a solution to the governmental gap that is existing regarding the worldwide sustainable problems within the supply chain of the garment industry (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). Thus, this specific MSI fits within the definition. The findings of this study are different from those of previous studies and are different in such a way that groups of motives have been found with multiple motives. This study focused on the garment industry, which is an important industry given its impact on mankind, animals, and the environment. Sustainability problems within the clothing industry are well known and therefore it is important for this industry to become more sustainable. The results of this study are motives for organizations to participate in an MSI and are specifically aimed at fast fashion firms, whose business models are according to the literature not at all focused on sustainability (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). The fast fashion firms are characterized by three criteria: quick response, frequent assortment changes, and

fashionable designs at affordable prices (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). The studies in the literature section of this study all related to achieving benefits for both social and business destinations. The motives found in this study also related to benefits, but also resulted in motives for organisations not to join the AGT. These insights are important to emphasize, because knowing these motives helps to understand the dilemma organization experience in their decision-making phase before signing the AGT.

Similarities found in this study with existing motives in literature are as follows. Firstly, the results of the study by Airike et al. (2016) are closely related to the results of this study. The motives found by Airike et al. (2016) are collaborative advantage, altruistic values, self-interest, and external pressure. The collaborative advantage can also be found in this study and regarding altruistic values an overlap can be found with the group of motives related to intrinsic motivation. Altruistic values and intrinsic motivation align. The fast fashion firms choose to act responsible and strive for sustainability by signing the AGT because of the satisfaction of its own organization rather than for some separable consequence. Altruistic values refer to acts of selflessness and this selflessness is the characteristic that is closely related to intrinsic motivation. External pressure is another motive of Airike et al. (2016) which does not directly relate to one of the group of motives found in this study, but does fit to one particular motive, namely the motive image. The data in this study shows that organizations consider joining when they see other organizations join the AGT because the fact that other organizations do leads to a certain interest for organization to decide to join as well. The motives found by Airike et al. (2016) seem to be relevant for other industries than the electronics supply chain because of these similarities. The four drivers found would appear to provide a complete picture of organisations' motives for participating in MSIs.

Secondly, the reasons found in the Centindamar & Husoy study (2007) were economic and the ethical reasons. The focus of the results of this study are more on ethical reasons than on economic reasons, however competitive advantages are more aligned with economic reasons. Ethical reasons are closely related to the motives found in this study. Here a link can also be found with the moral motives for engaging in CSR found in the study of Aguilera et al. (2007) and the ethical motives of the study of Bansal & Roth (2000). These motives are most closely related to the motive intrinsic motivation. Finally, the Lundsgaarde study (2017) identified two reasons, both linked to the achievement of benefits: either financial benefits with a contribution to resources, or the network function. The group of motives regarding collaborative advantages are closely related to the network function found in the study of Lundsgaarde (2017). This is one of the two reasons found in the research referring to the added access and visibility towards governmental partners (Lundsgaarde, 2017).

The most important difference between the motives in this study and those in the existing literature is that the motives in this study focus at least on economic motives. The motives in this study focus on

the benefits of the MSI itself, the AGT, on the competitive advantages of the organisations and on the benefits associated with collaboration. The motives found in this study are contradictory to the motives found by Zeyen et al. (2016), where the motives are focused on the competitors. This is interesting because, for example, this study mentions collaboration, knowledge sharing and intrinsic motivation as the main motives for organizations to join the AGT. According to the data analysis, these motivations are the most important and are not at all comparable with the results of Zeyen et al. (2016). The motives found in this study are not related to economic benefits, as they focus on benefits in terms of acting more sustainable and responsible. This is rather surprising given the definition of fast fashion firms and the characteristics related to fast fashion firms. The fast fashion industry has created a supply chain with a high amount of pollution and the factories which are producing the clothes have poor working conditions for their employees (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). This is particularly the case because the characteristics of fast fashion business models increase pressure on suppliers, thereby increasing the existing social, environmental, and animal problems within the supply chain. One would not expect the fast fashion firms to act this selflessness and would expect that the fast fashion firms would mainly strive for economic benefits. This questions whether the business model of the fast fashion firms is changing into a business model where sustainability is a central theme or whether the fast fashion industry is changing as a whole. For fast fashion firms, being sustainable seems challenging because their business models rely on being fast, cheap, and according to the latest fashion (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015). The objectives of the AGT to make the garment industry more sustainable and the business models of fast fashion firms seem difficult to reconcile, if not contradictory. However, the fast fashion firms motivate their choice to join the AGT with motives referring to intrinsic motivation and collaborative advantages. The fast fashion firms choose to improve the fast fashion supply chain their selves even though this does not align their business model and strategy.

## **5.2 KNOWLEDGE CONTRIBUTION**

Previous studies have focused on motives for organisations to engage in CSR (Aguilera et al., 2007; Bansal & Roth, 2000) and more recent research is conducted regarding motives for participating in MSIs (Airike et al., 2016; Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007; Lundsgaarde, 2017; Zeyen et al., 2016). This study focuses on a particular MSI within the garment industry, namely the AGT and thereby extends the existing knowledge of motives of organizations to participate in an MSI. This industry is interesting for conducting research, as the garment industry is currently one of the biggest polluting industries worldwide (Caro & Martínez-de-Albéniz, 2015) and these problems need to be addressed. Furthermore, this research is looking into collaboration to act sustainable together, through making use of a CSR initiative, namely the AGT. The motives of fast fashion firms joining MSIs to strengthen its CSR strategy have not been addressed so far and thus results in knowledge contribution. The importance of adding this knowledge to literature is because it examines motives for organizations for joining MSIs in another industry and the industry of focus is relevant because of its polluting character.

Besides the new industry, this study resulted in a total of ten motives regarding fast fashion firms who joined the AGT. Other studies regarding motives for participating an MSI only found a maximum of four motives (Airike et al., 2016; Cetindamar & Husoy, 2007; Lundsgaarde, 2017; Zeyen et al., 2016). This increased amount of motives provided a clear and more complete picture of what motivated fast fashion firms to join the AGT and for the academic literature this contributed to extended knowledge in motives of organizations for participating MSIs. In addition, this research has shown the frequency of the motives mentioned as can be seen in Table 2, which underlines the importance of motives in relation to other motives. Collaborative advantage, knowledge sharing, and intrinsic motivation are considered as most important motives for fast fashion firms to join the AGT and are also mentioned the most frequent. This ranking is the final knowledge contribution for this study.

### **5.3 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

This research provides insights into the motives that organisations had to participate in the AGT. All stakeholders of the AGT can become aware of this, for example by checking whether the motives match the goals set for the participants in the AGT. In addition, the knowledge about motives can be used to recruit new organisations to join the AGT. Also, this study provides motives for organisations not to participate in the AGT. This ensures that stakeholders can understand what potential motives may be against an MSI. For example, large organisations cannot join MSIs in every country, because this is causing excessive workload. A large organization such as H&M and Zara then benefits more from implementing a good CSR strategy instead of joining all the national MSIs. This is relevant knowledge for the SER, the founder of the AGT. This knowledge could be translated in an advice that perhaps the leading organizations in the fashion industry, such as H&M and Zara, are no participants but could work together with the organization in different forms. It is a possibility to invite non-participants for workgroups, seminars, or other meetings to share knowledge and take advantage of collaborating without the obligation. In this way, the leading organizations can share their knowledge and experiences, without having to sign the national agreement and having to deal with the downside of the AGT, namely the workload. This motive not to join the AGT is given as an explanation why the leading organizations currently do not participate and will probably not participate in the future as well when the agreement is solely focused on national level.

Recommendations for the founders of the AGT are that these motives should be discussed to tighten up the objectives. The motive collaborative advantage is seen by the fast fashion firms as one of the most important motives to participate. The other stakeholders may wonder whether this also applies to them, and if so, whether they can benefit even more by expanding their opportunities to share knowledge and to lead or support initiatives. For example, the Dutch government could use these findings to learn what motives are considered by the organizations as most important. This knowledge could help the Dutch government to understand why organizations struggle with the workload related to the AGT and

perhaps even reduce this workload. Furthermore, this study has indicated that the AGT's working method is perceived as clear and positive. The advantages and disadvantages have been mentioned by the respondents, such as sharing knowledge by means of webinars, which is experienced as pleasant. These facts can help the organisers of the AGT to keep the quality of the AGT high.

## **5.4 LIMITATIONS**

This study began by questioning the business models of fast fashion companies in terms of their ability to commit to sustainability. However, more research is needed. Only three of the fast fashion companies that signed the AGT and met all three criteria were able to give an interview. The other respondents were from organisations that met two of the three criteria. That is why it is necessary to collect more data and take a critical look at business models of fast fashion firms, how they can combine sustainability and fast fashion. The motives found in this study should be assessed with other organisations to see whether these also apply to them to join MSIs.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that not all respondents from the organisations were involved in the AGT negotiation process. This resulted in assumptions and lost knowledge. Moreover, this survey was conducted a few years after the decision was made to participate in the AGT. In this investigation, the researcher tried to find out the motives of a organization before the organisation had made the decision to join the AGT. Despite the researcher's efforts to find out these motives, this research is subject to the prejudices associated with the experiences gained through the AGT's participation that is already occurring. This led to the loss of knowledge, experiences and thoughts that were present during the process of deciding to participate in the AGT.

A third limitation of this study is the fact that the data analysis is hindered by the global outbreak of the corona virus. The interviews could not be conducted face-to-face and therefore had to be arranged by telephone or an online media platform, such as Skype or Google Meet. As a result, it was not possible for the investigator to respond directly to statements, it was not always possible to read facial expressions and to collect non-verbal information. Future research could use other approaches, for example face-to-face interviews. This is important because it gives more insight into the motives why organizations participate in MSIs and by which motives organizations are influenced to reach a decision.

Reflecting on my own role as a researcher, I think I performed well in the interviews in terms of asking open questions and being a researcher with an open-minded standing point. After an interview was conducted, I used the data received, the experiences and answers that were given to improve the interview guide. This made me as a researcher feel more confident to conduct the interviews. Things I struggled with, was combining the existing literature with the results found in the data analysis. The planning I made upfront turned out to be realistic, which I was sceptical about. I experienced this study as challenging because for me it was hard to get to the heart of the problem I was investigating, and I

found difficulties in translating the problem in the right words for this thesis. Moreover, my interest in this specific research theme on sustainability within the fast fashion industry has increased during the data collection. The interviews made me feel more passionate about my thesis. In my opinion, the results of my research actually add something to the existing literature, and this gives self-confidence and appreciation.

## **5.5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study is limited since relatively limited data has been collected, therefore an extension of this study is recommended for future research. Besides, interviews could be conducted face-to-face in the future, which gives the researcher richer information about interpretation and non-verbal expressions. This study is focusing on the AGT, but other MSIs within the Dutch garment industry are worthy for investigation. Testing whether the same motives apply to the organizations to participate in the MSI provides important information and results for future research. This is important because this information will help potentially new founders of MSIs to recruit new participants and help them understand what motives participants may have to participate or not.

Another important topic for future research is an extension of the research regarding whether the fast fashion industry is capable of being sustainable. The respondents in the interview explained that the goals of the AGT were in line with the goals of the fast fashion firms to act more sustainable. Further research should first check whether these goals are in fact in line with each other and another focus should lie on the business models of fast fashion firms. Research should be done focusing on the implementation of the AGT's requirements within fast fashion firms who joined the AGT and whether or not the participation changed their business practices or even business model. Is it in fact possible for the fast fashion industry to act sustainable, or does that change the whole definition of fast fashion? This is an important research question because it could completely change the existing fast fashion industry.

According to Aguilera et al. (2007) further research should study whether CSR activities might be contradictory to the core business practices. "That is, a firm might be pressured to engage in a number of CSR-related activities, but also, at times, the collection of activities called for may be internally inconsistent" (Aguilera et al., 2007, p.856). This master thesis tries to partly fill this gap, by answering the question what the motives are for fast fashion firms to participate in a specific MSI. However, this research focuses on motives for fast fashion firms for joining the AGT and does not conduct research regarding the business model, whether joining the AGT fits the business model of a fast fashion firm. This is a relevant research topic because combining fast fashion and sustainability is challenging and research can help develop a best case and tools how fast fashion firms can integrate sustainability into their business model.

As discussed in the findings section in this study, the motives not to join the AGT are considered as important for further research. This was not the focus of this study and that is why no further analysis has taken place, but the findings in this research are a starting point for further studies. The motives not to join an MSI is relevant knowledge because this also explains the choice and behaviour for organizations, as does motives in favour of joining the AGT.

Further research should also be conducted regarding organizations that have left an MSI. For the AGT, a total of 18 organizations have signed the agreement, however, are no longer a participant of the MSI. It is relevant to study what the motives of the organizations were to leave the MSI, or whether the AGT decided that the organizations no longer could be a participant. Knowing what these motives could be is relevant for scientific contribution, but also for practical contribution. Understanding what motives made organizations leave an MSI is relevant knowledge because it will help the founders of the MSI improve their initiative in terms of recruiting the right organizations and retain the right organizations.

Finally, MSIs were studied from the business perspective, but future studies could examine them from the perspective of civil society and government actors, creating a more holistic picture. Multi-perspective research also provides an opportunity to compare perspectives and motives, resulting in greater knowledge and understanding of motives for participating in MSIs. Moreover, more knowledge leads to improved initiatives and solving difficult sustainability problems in the supply chains.

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## APPENDIX

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### 1. FAST FASHION FIRMS

100% Fast fashion firms	B2B	2/3 criteria
1. C&A	1. C.A.G. BV Gerlon	1. De Bijenkorf
2. <i>America Today</i>	2. Fully Fashion Knits Only	2. <b>Yongo Group:</b> <b>GCM Henderson</b> <b>GCM Originals</b> <b>Arrivee</b>
3. Esprit		3. Wibra
4. <b>Garcia / Jeans Centre/ Garcia Outlet (1 holding)</b>		4. Je m'appelle
5. <i>Espresso</i>		5. <b>Ten Cate</b>
6. HEMA		6. Michaelis
7. <i>Hunkemöller</i>		7. <b>Wehkamp</b>
8. O'Neill		8. Zeeman
9. Open32 /Steps		9. NINE & Co B.V.
10. PME Legend		
11. <b>Prénatal</b>		
12. <i>Silver Creek/Madness</i>		
13. <i>WE Fashion</i>		
14. <b>The Sting</b>		
15. <i>Miss Etam</i>		

The organizations in **bold** have been interviewed and documents of the organizations in *italics* have been analysed.

## 2. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Good morning, good afternoon. (name)

(Brief proposals)

Thank you very much for your participation in my survey. May I record this interview?

By doing this interview you are participating in my research into the origins of the Dutch Sustainable Clothing and Textiles Covenant. Our goal is to conduct 5 to 10 interviews with different parties that also have signed the covenant. Our research focuses on explaining the origins of the covenant. I am interested in the motives of organisations to participate. I focus mainly on companies within the fast fashion industry. I will ask you several questions about your organisation's participation in the Covenant on Sustainable Clothing and Textiles. First, I will ask some general questions about your position within the organization and regarding the covenant.

(This interview will last a maximum of one hour to one and a half hours.) Any information you provide in this interview will be treated confidentially and will only be used for research purposes. Names and other confidential information will be made anonymous.

After I have completed my master theses, I will send a copy of our final reports, with insights about the covenant and the participants.

*(questions in italics are meant to ask for further details).*

### General

- Can you briefly tell us something about your organization?
- What is your function within your organization?
- What is your role regarding the covenant? *To what extent are you involved in the decision-making on participation in the covenant?*
- Do you believe that your organization considers as fast fashion? *Cheap, fast, fashionable?*

### Participation in the AGT

- Can you explain in your own words what you think the covenant means?
- How did your organisation encounter the covenant? *What did you know about the covenant?*
- How did the decision to participate in the covenant come about? *What steps were taken in the decision-making process? What was the decisive factor to participate?*
- What did the organisation expect from participation in the covenant? *What did the organisation think in advance of the consequences of participation? (e.g. having to draw up reports, extra sales, etc.).*

- What does participation in the covenant mean for your organisation? *What is your organisation already doing about sustainability? Do you think the organization does enough? What else could you do?*

### **Motivations to participate in the AGT**

- What were the main reasons for participating in the covenant?
- What were the advantages of becoming a member? *And specifically for your organization?*
- What benefits did you know in advance? *Are there also disadvantages?*
- What were important considerations to participate in the AGT?
- What is the greatest importance of your organization when participating in the covenant?
- How does participation in the covenant fit within *Organization* business model?
- A lot of criticism on clothing industry because biggest polluter: does it have an impact?
- Preparing for the future?
- What do you expect *Organization* to achieve by participating in the covenant?
- What do you think are the most important reasons for other organizations to participate in the covenant?
- To what extent would you recommend participation in the covenant to other organisations? *Why would you recommend it?*
- *You were the first organisation to sign; is this an advantage? Why yes/no? check before interview date of signing.*
- Are there already documents/statements/public documents?
- Do you think that signing the covenant will affect your business model? *Are adjustments to the business model necessary?*

### **Finally**

- Are there any other factors that have led Organization to participate in the covenant that you have not yet mentioned?
- Do you have any further questions, recommendations, comments and/or tips for us?

Thank you very much for participating in my research. I am going to transcribe and analyse this interview. Do you mind if I contact you if something is not yet clear or if I have enlightening questions? Would you like to receive a copy of my analysis so you can check if my conclusions are correct? And further, do you know of any others who might be able to interview?

After completing my master thesis, I will forward the reports to you.

### 3. RESEARCH INTEGRITY FORM

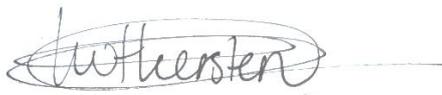
Name: <b>Linda Kersten</b>	Student number: <b>1009024</b>
RU e-mail address: <b>l.w.kersten@student.ru.nl</b>	Master specialisation: <b>Organizational Design and Development</b>
Thesis title: Fast fashion firms striving for sustainability: mission impossible? A qualitative analysis of the motives of fast fashion firms to join the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment and Textile (AGT)	
Brief description of the study: This master thesis tries to answer the research question: how do fast fashion firms motivate their choice to participate the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile? The goal of this study is to gain insight in the motives of fast fashion firms to participate in the AGT. For answering this question, a qualitative research was conducted. This study resulted in three groups of motives consisting of collaborative advantages, intrinsic motivation, and competitive advantages.	

It is my responsibility to follow the university's code of academic integrity and any relevant academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of my study. This includes:

- providing original work or proper use of references;
- providing appropriate information to all involved in my study;
- requesting informed consent from participants;
- transparency in the way data is processed and represented;
- ensuring confidentiality in the storage and use of data;

If there is any significant change in the question, design or conduct over the course of the research, I will complete another Research Integrity Form.

Breaches of the code of conduct with respect to academic integrity (as described / referred to in the thesis handbook) should and will be forwarded to the examination board. Acting contrary to the code of conduct can result in declaring the thesis invalid



Student's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020

#### To be signed by supervisor

I have instructed the student about ethical issues related to their specific study. I hereby declare that I will challenge him / her on ethical aspects through their investigation and to act on any violations that I may encounter.

Supervisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **4. CONSENT FORM FOR SUBMITTING A THESIS IN THE RADBOUD THESIS REPOSITORY**

Radboud University Nijmegen (hereafter Radboud University) has set up a thesis repository. The purpose of this repository is twofold:

1. To archive theses for a minimum period of seven years, in accordance with legal requirements (Wet versterking kwaliteitswaarborgen hoger onderwijs, Art. 7.3, lid 5).
2. Wherever possible and allowed, make theses available to potential users inside and outside Radboud University.

This supports the process of creation, acquisition and sharing of knowledge in the educational setting.

The repository serves as an archive in which all theses will be included. This consent form serves to also enable the publication of those theses.

By submission and publication in the theses repository copyright is not transferred. Therefore, students can at any time revoke their consent for publication.

### **Rights and obligations of the student**

If the student grants permission to Radboud University to make his/her thesis available within the thesis repository to users inside and outside Radboud University, the student states that:

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- Neither the organization offering internship nor the client of the thesis has any objections against making the thesis publicly available in the thesis repository.
- The student has obtained permission from the copyright holder of any material used in the thesis to incorporate this material as part of the thesis in the theses repository and make it available to others inside and outside Radboud University.
- The student grants Radboud University the right to make the thesis available in the thesis repository for a minimum period of seven years, barring earlier withdrawal by the student. Permission to make the thesis available to third parties will take effect on the date indicated on this form.
- The student grants Radboud University the right to change the accessibility of the thesis and limit it if compelling reasons exist.

### **Rights and obligations of Radboud University**

The student's non-exclusive license grants Radboud University the right to make the thesis available to users inside and outside Radboud University.

- Radboud University is allowed to include the thesis, in accordance with legal requirements, in the theses repository for a minimum period of seven years.
- Radboud University can make the thesis freely accessible for users of the theses repository inside and outside Radboud University and allow them to use the thesis for private study and/or educational and research purposes, in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act (Auteurswet), with full mention of the name of the student and the location of the thesis.
- Radboud University will ensure that the author of the thesis is listed and make clear that if the thesis is used, the origin must be clearly stated.

- Radboud University will make clear that for any commercial use of the thesis the student's explicit consent is required. In relevant cases, explicit consent of the organization offering internship or the client of the thesis is required as well.
- Radboud University has the right to change the accessibility of the thesis and limit it if compelling reasons exist.

**Rights and duties of the user**

As a consequence of this consent form a user of the theses repository may use the thesis for private study and/or educational and research purposes, in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright Act (Auteurswet), with full mention of the name of the student and the location of the thesis.

Student number: 1009024

Student name: Linda Kersten

Thesis title: Fast fashion firms striving for sustainability: mission impossible? *A qualitative analysis of the motives of fast fashion firms to join the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garment and Textile (AGT)*

- Yes, I grant permission to make available my thesis with the above title in the Radboud thesis Repository.
- No, I do not grant permission to make available my thesis with the above title in the Radboud thesis Repository, but the thesis is allowed to make available with effect from ..... (temporary embargo).
- No, I do not grant permission to make available my thesis with the above title in the Radboud thesis Repository (permanent embargo).

Signature: 

Date: June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020