

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Stitching the Gap: Feedback as a Mechanism for Reinforcing Sustainable Fashion Consumption

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how positive feedback can elicit pride in sustainable fashion consumption and influence two key behavioral outcomes: willingness to buy sustainable fashion products and word-of-mouth endorsement. Drawing on framing theory and existing research on pride as a motivational emotion, we conducted two experimental studies with U.S.-based participants recruited via Prolific. In the first study ($N=403$), a 2 (product type: sustainable vs. non-sustainable) $\times$ 2 (feedback: positive vs. neutral) between-subjects design showed that positive feedback significantly increased pride only when the product was sustainable. The second study ($N=309$) focused solely on sustainable products and confirmed that positive feedback elevated pride, which fully mediated its effects on both behavioral outcomes. These findings demonstrate that positive feedback can be used to strategically reinforce pride and offer a low-cost, scalable mechanism for promoting sustainable behavior in the fashion domain.

1 | Introduction

“You made a great environmentally friendly choice.” Messages like these are becoming increasingly common after online purchases of sustainable fashion. More than just feel-good slogans, they may serve a deeper psychological purpose. But what exactly do they trigger?

Although sustainability is considered a valuable attribute among fashion consumers, their actual purchasing behavior often reflects other priorities. As early as 2006, Joergens (2006) identified a gap between ethical awareness and fashion consumption, demonstrating that even explicit knowledge of poor labor conditions seldom affected purchasing decisions. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2010) has promoted the importance of using marketing communication to influence consumers' choices in a more sustainable direction by encouraging more sustainable shopping behaviors (as cited in Jones et al. 2014). However, nearly two decades later, the pattern

remains largely unchanged (Abreu et al. 2022). Consumers continue to prioritize price, availability, and style over sustainability (e.g., Rausch et al. 2021), and concerns about aesthetics and cost still deter even among well-intentioned shoppers (Rausch and Kopplin 2021). This persistent attitude–behavior gap has been widely acknowledged in both industry (e.g., Zalando 2021) and academia, and remains one of the most pressing challenges in sustainable fashion today.

A key explanation for this gap is that fashion consumers tend to prioritize immediate personal benefits over long-term environmental outcomes (e.g., Eckhardt et al. 2010; Ryoo et al. 2020). Sustainable fashion alternatives often fail to deliver the same hedonic benefits, such as excitement or pleasure, that conventional fashion provides (e.g., Busalim et al. 2022). While industries such as food and electronics have effectively promoted sustainability by highlighting health and economic benefits (Green and Peloza 2014), fashion presents a different challenge. Although sustainable garments can offer similar advantages,

such as reduced exposure to harmful chemicals (e.g., Laitala et al. 2015) or improved durability (e.g., Niinimäki 2012), these arguments often carry less persuasive weight in fashion decisions. This is because fashion, unlike many other consumer domains, is deeply tied to identity and social signaling (e.g., Belk 1988; Niinimäki 2010; McNeill and Moore 2015), rather than purely rational cost-benefit evaluations (Griskevicius and Kenrick 2013). As a result, rational appeals used in other sectors do not translate as effectively to fashion (e.g., Ritch 2015). This highlights the ongoing challenge of developing communication strategies that can effectively promote sustainable fashion choices.

When rational arguments fail to shift consumer behavior, framing theory (Goffman 1974; Entman 1993), which posits that the way information is presented influences how individuals interpret and respond to it, may offer a useful way to encourage more sustainable choices. Recent work highlights the need to account for non-rational, emotional, and relational factors in sustainable fashion consumption (Zollo 2024). For example, Lindenberg et al. (2018) show that subtle changes in how sustainable behavior is presented can influence whether individuals act on their pro-environmental attitudes, highlighting the powerful role of framing in sustainability contexts. More recent research continues to demonstrate the relevance of framing for sustainable consumer behavior also in fashion-related contexts (Grappi et al. 2024). However, in order to frame information in ways that effectively influence consumers, it is essential to understand what truly drives fashion consumption.

Fashion consumption is profoundly emotional, offering pleasure, stimulation, and feel-good experiences to the wearer (Raunio 1995). However, sustainable fashion consumption has been found to provide additional emotional benefits compared to its non-sustainable counterpart, especially the feeling of pride (e.g., Bly et al. 2015; Lundblad and Davies 2016). Several studies suggest that consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions toward sustainable fashion items are higher when their pride is elevated (e.g., Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Islam et al. 2022). Pride has also been shown to positively affect word-of-mouth endorsement (e.g., Septianto et al. 2020; Pangarkar et al. 2023), implying that pride is essential in motivating a range of sustainability-related consumer behaviors. Importantly, research suggests that sustainable fashion consumers not only enjoy the feeling of doing the "right thing" but also value external confirmation of their decision (Lundblad and Davies 2016).

In recent years, social media platforms have become increasingly influential in shaping consumption behaviors, particularly among younger generations. Beyond influencing purchasing patterns, these platforms also have the capacity to drive broader social change (Hilbert 2022). This is especially relevant in the fashion industry, which has a particularly strong presence and influence on social media (Vladimirova et al. 2024). In this context, individuals and communities frequently use social media not only to promote sustainable consumption, but also to gain social recognition for their efforts (Hauth et al. 2022). Such dynamics suggest that sustainable fashion choices may be closely linked to pride and its potential

to drive pro-environmental behaviors such as word-of-mouth endorsement.

Recent work has hinted at the potential of positive feedback interventions to enhance pride in sustainable fashion contexts, for example, through environmental badges (Hu and Meng 2022) or social recognition during use (Ta et al. 2022). In this context, positive feedback can be seen as a form of goal framing (Levin et al. 1998) that draws attention to the positive consequences of a consumer's action. By highlighting the positive consequences of making a sustainable choice, such feedback may validate the decision as worthwhile, potentially giving rise to feelings of pride. When such purchases are perceived as more gratifying than unsustainable alternatives, the latter may struggle to compete.

Despite these conceptual insights, empirical research on how positive feedback can elicit pride and thereby encourage sustainable behavior remains scarce, particularly within the fashion domain. To address this gap, this study investigates the following question:

RQ. Can positive feedback foster pride in consumers, and does this emotional response increase intentions to engage in sustainable fashion consumption?

This paper contributes to the literature on sustainable fashion by proposing and testing a novel mechanism: the use of positive feedback to elicit pride and, in turn, enhance both willingness to buy sustainable fashion items and word-of-mouth endorsement. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: The next section introduces framing theory as the theoretical framework. We then discuss how pride functions as a key emotional mechanism in sustainable fashion consumption and position positive feedback as a communication strategy based on framing theory. Next, we develop hypotheses that link feedback, pride, and behavioral intentions. Based on this framework, we present two experimental studies that test our predictions. Finally, we discuss the implications of our findings for theory and practice, along with limitations and directions for future research.

2 | Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

2.1 | Framing Theory

Framing theory explains how individuals interpret and respond to information based on how it is presented. Rooted in sociology and cognitive psychology, this theory suggests that messages emphasizing certain aspects of reality, so-called "frames," can shape perception, judgment, and behavior (Goffman 1974; Entman 1993). In consumer contexts, framing influences how people understand products, decisions, and consequences (Chang et al. 2015). Valence Framing (Levin et al. 1998) extends this perspective by examining how the tone of a message, whether it emphasizes positive or negative aspects of a situation, influences how individuals process information and make decisions. One form of valence framing is goal framing, which distinguishes between messages that underline the advantages of engaging in a behavior (positive frame) and those that stress the drawbacks of not doing so (negative frame) (Levin et al. 1998).

A growing body of research in sustainability communication shows that the way messages are framed can significantly influence not only consumers' cognitive evaluations but also their emotional engagement and behavioral intentions (Chang et al. 2015). In sustainability communication, positively valenced goal framed messages may highlight the benefits of a behavior (e.g., "You made a great choice"), while negatively valenced messages may emphasize potential harm or missed opportunities (e.g., "Not choosing these harms the environment"). These differences in presentation can affect how individuals interpret the meaning of a message, how it makes them feel, and how likely they are to act on it.

Luan and Phan (2024), for example, highlight the importance of emotional framing in enhancing consumers' willingness to support cause-related products. In their study, they explicitly manipulated message framing by contrasting positively framed appeals, which emphasized the positive consequences of supporting a cause (e.g., helping children access healthy food), with negatively framed appeals, which focused on the negative consequences of not supporting the cause (e.g., children being forced to beg).

While framing can influence how messages are perceived and acted upon, its effectiveness ultimately depends on the psychological mechanisms it engages (Levin et al. 1998). In the context of sustainable fashion, Guedes et al. (2020) emphasize that positively framed messages may be more effective than negative ones, as they can elicit positive emotions and thereby encourage behavioral change. Given the emotional nature of fashion consumption, it becomes crucial to understand the specific emotions that drive sustainable fashion choices.

2.2 | Pride in Sustainable Consumption

As one of the first empirical studies examining actual consumers of sustainable fashion, Bly et al. (2015) found that purchases of sustainable fashion differ from other fashion purchases by evoking warm emotions such as goodness, hope, and, most notably, pride. This finding was supported by Lundblad and Davies (2016), who further demonstrate that sustainable fashion purchases are linked to a sense of accomplishment. They argue that accomplishment acts as a motivation for gaining further beneficial consequences. Accordingly, the main consequence of achieving a sense of accomplishment is the positive feeling it provides, in which pride is the most prominent (Weiner 1985).

Moreover, research on pride has found that the feeling has two facets: Hubristic and Authentic (Tracy and Robins 2007a). The first, characterized by arrogance and self-enhancement (Tracy and Robins 2007b), is often connected with luxury consumption (McFerran et al. 2014). The latter aligns with the warm, prosocial, and achievement-oriented conceptualization of pride, deriving from specific accomplishments (Tracy and Robins 2007a; Mascolo and Fischer 1995; Weiner 1985), and is consistent with the type of pride identified by Lundblad and Davies (2016) in their study on sustainable fashion. Since this study focuses on the sustainability-oriented aspects of pride, we exclusively consider its authentic facet. For simplicity, we will refer to authentic pride simply as 'pride' throughout the remainder of the article.

To synthesize and position this study within the existing body of knowledge, we present an overview of key empirical studies on pride in sustainable consumption in Table 1. The table outlines each study's context, theoretical framework, role of pride, and key findings.

In broader sustainability contexts, pride has been consistently identified as a key driver of pro-environmental behavior. Wang and Wu (2016) showed that among several emotions (i.e., pride, guilt, respect, and anger), pride is the best option when using emotional appeals to promote sustainable consumption. Moreover, Tang et al. (2020) emphasize that hedonic motives, such as pride, can be more influential than normative concerns in predicting green choices.

Further, Antonetti and Maklan (2014a) claim that pride can regulate future sustainable purchases, activated by only a single consumption episode, by affecting consumers' perception of effectiveness, meaning that consumers feel that their actions make a real difference. This is explained by emotions providing feedback about whether an individual is achieving the desired goal, and that this feedback influences future conduct (Antonetti and Maklan 2014b). These claims are supported by previous research, showing that consumers are more likely to act if they feel that their decisions will make a difference (e.g., Roberts 1996) and that the feeling of pride is triggered by the perception of oneself as the cause of the event appraised (Tracy and Robins 2004).

Another explanation for how pride drives sustainable consumption is through anticipated emotions (Onwezen et al. 2013; Rowe et al. 2019). According to Mellers and McGraw (2001), anticipated emotions play a central role in decision-making, as individuals mentally simulate future emotional experiences and tend to choose options associated with greater anticipated pleasure. In fact, Rowe et al. (2019) specifically argue that anticipated pride is necessary for regulating all kinds of sustainable behavior. Islam et al. (2022) demonstrate that anticipated pride is associated with stronger attitudes and intentions to purchase sustainable fashion items, emphasizing its critical role in motivating environmentally responsible behavior within the fashion context as well.

Beyond reinforcing sustainable purchases, Septianto et al. (2020) demonstrate that fashion consumers are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth communication when consumption outcomes evoke feelings of pride. Word-of-mouth refers to informal, consumer-to-consumer communication about products or companies (Westbrook 1987), typically motivated by favorable evaluations and a desire to encourage others. At its core, pride motivates individuals to seize opportunities for public differentiation and status enhancement (Griskevicius et al. 2010), creating a strong urge to share personal achievements with others (e.g., Fredrickson 2001), especially when accomplishments are visible and contribute to elevated social status (e.g., Verbeke et al. 2004; Williams and DeSteno 2008). Moreover, Berger and Milkman (2012) claim that positive emotions, such as the feeling of pride, increase the willingness to share information because pride is a high-arousal feeling that activates the potential sender.

Although prior research has identified pride as both an outcome of sustainable behavior and a motivator for engaging in

TABLE 1 | Overview of prior research on pride in sustainable consumption.

Author(s), year	Main focus	Context	Role of pride	Type	Key findings
Onwezen et al. (2013)	Anticipated emotions in sustainable behavior	General sustainable behavior	Anticipated pride predicts choices	Survey	Anticipated pride mediates the effect of personal norms on sustainable intentions
Antonetti and Maklan (2014a)	Moral emotions and sustainable behavior	General sustainable consumption	Pride enhances perceived effectiveness and reduces neutralization	Experimental	Pride increases perceived effectiveness and indirectly drives sustainable purchase intentions
Antonetti and Maklan (2014b)	Moral emotions in decision-making	General sustainable consumption	Pride as emotional feedback	Experiment + Interviews	Pride arises from personal and social appraisals and motivates future sustainable behavior
Bly et al. (2015)	Motivations and experiences of sustainable fashion pioneers	Sustainable fashion consumption	Pride as part of the emotional reward	Qualitative interviews	Sustainable fashion provides emotional reward, including pride, well-being, and identity
Lundblad and Davies (2016)	Values and motivations in sustainable fashion	Sustainable fashion consumption	Pride as emotional payoff	Qualitative interviews	Pride and accomplishment drive sustainable use and reinforce identity
Wang and Wu (2016)	Pride and consumption intentions	General green consumption	Pride promotes green intention	Survey	Pride leads to sustainable intention
Rowe et al. (2019)	Anticipated pride in behavior regulation	General sustainable consumption	Pride as a regulatory mechanism	Experimental	Recalled pride increases sustainable intentions via anticipated pride and guilt
Septianto et al. (2020)	Emotional appeals and eWOM for sustainable luxury brands	Sustainable luxury fashion consumption	Pride encourages public sharing	Experimental	Pride increases eWOM via status motives and broadcasting
Tang et al. (2020)	Goal framing and green behavior	General green consumption	Pride as a hedonic driver	Survey	Hedonic goals and pride predict green behavior

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Author(s), year	Main focus	Context	Role of pride	Type	Key findings
Adigüzel and Donato (2021)	Pride and perceived novelty in upcycled vs. recycled luxury fashion	Sustainable luxury fashion consumption	Pride mediates the effect of sustainable luxury products on purchase intention	Experimental	Authentic pride increases preference for upcycled luxury fashion products
Ta et al. (2022)	Customer experiences of circular clothing	Sustainable fashion consumption	Pride as part of emotional reward and social feedback	Qualitative interviews	Pride arises from purchasing and using sustainable clothes; pride supports new buying behaviors and identity signaling
Hu and Meng (2022)	Digital literacy and psychological drivers of green consumption	General green consumption	Anticipated pride mediates the link between digital literacy and green consumption	Survey + experimental	Pride significantly mediates digital literacy's effect; availability strengthens its impact
Islam et al. (2022)	Pride, face consciousness and sustainable fashion choices	Sustainable luxury fashion consumption	Authentic pride increases intention to purchase sustainable fashion	Survey + experimental	Authentic pride strengthens sustainable intentions; hubristic pride reduces them
Yan et al. (2023)	Emotions in sustainable decisions	General sustainable consumption	Pride seen as central motivator	Experimental	Pride predicts sustainable behavior when self-enhancement values are salient

sustainable consumption, little attention has been given to how this powerful emotion can be strategically elicited to drive consumer action. Recent studies, however, have begun to propose concrete strategies for activating pride in consumers to reinforce sustainable behavior. For instance, Ta et al. (2022) argue that because pride and social feedback are central to the emotional experience of wearing sustainable apparel, companies could foster these emotional experiences by building communities where sustainable choices are socially recognized and celebrated, thereby strengthening consumers' feelings of pride and encouraging further engagement with sustainable products.

Moreover, Ryoo et al. (2020) propose the use of appraisal messages such as "We are proud of you" and "You are important and valuable to us," directed at fashion consumers following sustainable decisions as a potential way to increase the effectiveness of sustainability marketing and further encourage sustainable fashion behavior. Likewise, Hu and Meng (2022) suggest that adding environmental protection marks to consumers' online accounts after green purchases could function as positive feedback, helping consumers feel that they are making a difference. These proposed strategies are intended to enhance consumers' sense of pride and, in turn, promote further sustainable behavior, although they have not yet been extensively validated through empirical research.

While these studies have proposed mechanisms for activating or elevating pride, Yan et al. (2023) provide repeated experimental evidence that emotionally charged slogans, such as "Feel proud to recycle" and "Be proud of your choice," can successfully prime pride and enhance sustainable behavior. Similarly, Septianto et al. (2020) show that emotional appeals emphasizing personal achievement can serve as an effective marketing strategy to elicit pride and subsequently increase word-of-mouth behavior for sustainable brands. Specifically, their findings demonstrate that highlighting consumers' contributions to environmental causes through messaging such as "For every moment you are proud of" significantly increases the intention to publicly share content related to sustainable brands. Although neither Septianto et al. (2020) nor Yan et al. (2023) explicitly refer to their approaches as message framing, their use of emotional appeals effectively frames the consumption experience to elicit pride.

Given the emotionally driven nature of fashion consumption, messages that are framed to emphasize the positive aspects of making a sustainable choice may elicit feelings of pride by providing recognition for having made the "right" decision. As such, this type of framing may be particularly effective in motivating sustainable choices.

2.3 | Positive Feedback

Building on prior evidence that pride can be strategically elicited through emotional appeals and social recognition, positive feedback offers a practical strategy for reinforcing emotions like pride by affirming consumer accomplishments in sustainable consumption. Positive feedback can be understood as a form of goal framing within the broader framework of valence framing (Levin et al. 1998), whereby emphasizing the positive consequences of a consumer's action serves to affirm the behavior as a meaningful accomplishment. This affirmation acts as

emotional reinforcement, strengthening the consumer's sense of having done the "right thing."

Feedback typically consists of specific information about the impact of individuals' actions, and it is expected to be more successful when tailored to the specific situation (Lehman and Geller 2004). However, for feedback to drive behavioral change, it must be paired with a reinforcing consequence, and it is usually combined with recognition-based procedures, such as praise or incentives (e.g., money), to enhance its effectiveness (Daniels and Bailey 2014). An essential distinction between praise and incentives is that the former is based on recognition, while the latter is tied to reward. Verbeke et al. (2004) claim that pride is especially strong when achievements are socially acknowledged, while Pham and Sun (2020) argue that pride can be amplified when consumers receive positive feedback and social recognition for meaningful behaviors, making it a powerful tool in marketing communication.

This emotional mechanism is particularly potent for sustainable purchases, where consumers already associate their behavior with social and moral value. External validation through positive feedback strengthens these associations, reinforcing the experience of pride in making a socially and morally significant decision. In contrast, non-sustainable purchases lack inherent signals of moral virtue or social responsibility, thereby providing a weaker emotional foundation for pride. As a result, positive feedback in these cases lacks the same emotional reinforcement and may therefore be less effective in eliciting pride. This asymmetry suggests that positive feedback will be more impactful in eliciting and reinforcing pride among sustainable fashion consumers. However, few have specifically investigated how positive feedback might elicit pride in this context.

2.4 | Hypotheses

Drawing on the theoretical and empirical insights outlined above, we argue that positive feedback, compared to neutral feedback, can enhance consumers' willingness to buy sustainable fashion products and increase word-of-mouth endorsement. These behavioral outcomes are expected to be driven by the emotional experience of pride. Specifically, we propose that pride mediates the relationship between positive feedback and both willingness to buy and word-of-mouth. However, we also expect that positive feedback will only elicit pride in the context of sustainable (vs. non-sustainable) consumption, establishing a boundary condition for the effectiveness of feedback-based interventions. Based on this rationale, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1. *Positive (vs. neutral) feedback increases consumers' willingness to buy sustainable fashion products.*

H2. *Positive (vs. neutral) feedback increases consumers' word-of-mouth endorsement.*

H3. *Pride mediates the relationship between positive (vs. neutral) feedback and consumers' willingness to buy sustainable fashion products.*

H4. *Pride mediates the relationship between positive (vs. neutral) feedback and consumers' word-of-mouth endorsement.*

H5. *Positive (vs. neutral) feedback increases pride for consumers who purchase sustainable fashion products, but not those who purchase non-sustainable fashion products.*

3 | Overview of the Studies

We tested our hypotheses in two experimental studies. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model for the current research. As a first step, we tested whether pride is more likely to be elicited in sustainable (vs. non-sustainable) fashion purchases in response to feedback (H5). Study 1 served to establish a boundary condition for when feedback elicits pride. By demonstrating that this effect is specific to sustainable consumption, H5 provides the rationale for focusing exclusively on sustainable purchases in the main mediation analyses. In addition, Study 1 included a manipulation check to ensure that the T-shirt used in the study was perceived as either sustainable or non-sustainable, as intended. Study 2 examines whether positive (vs. neutral) feedback in sustainable fashion purchases increases consumers' word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy sustainable fashion products (H1 and H2), and whether this effect is mediated by pride (H3 and H4). It also explores differences between two types of positive feedback by comparing them to each other and to a neutral control condition.

3.1 | Study 1

Study 1 was conducted to examine whether positive (vs. neutral) feedback increases the feeling of pride when purchasing a sustainable fashion product and whether the same effect occurs when purchasing a non-sustainable fashion product. The study aimed to test if positive feedback enhances pride in sustainable fashion purchases, while also investigating whether a similar effect is present for non-sustainable fashion purchases.

3.1.1 | Pre-Test

A pre-test was conducted to examine whether the product framing (organic vs. classic) influenced participants' perceptions of

sustainability. Data were collected from a total of 303 respondents via Prolific, in a controlled environment. Participants were required to be U.S. residents, have English as their first language, and be between 18 and 70 years old. Participants were compensated in accordance with Prolific's fair pay guidelines, at a rate of approximately \$9 per hour.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions. In one condition, the T-shirt was framed as *organic*, while in the other, it was framed as *classic*. The visual and factual product information (e.g., color, fit, product code) remained identical across both conditions; only the language used to signal sustainability differed. In accordance with Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018), we used "organic" and "eco-friendly" rather than "sustainable" to enhance clarity and consumer understanding.

Three respondents were excluded due to not completing the survey or providing invalid demographic data, resulting in 300 valid responses. The effective response rate was therefore 99.0%. Of the final sample, 58.67% identified as women, 41.00% as men, and 0.33% as "other." The mean age was 39.17 years (SD = 11.79).

Participants rated the perceived sustainability of the T-shirt on a composite index consisting of three 7-point Likert-scale items (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much), measuring to what extent the product was perceived as sustainable, organic, and eco-friendly. An independent-samples t-test revealed that participants in the sustainable (organic) T-shirt condition ($M = 6.01$, $SD = 1.00$) rated the product as significantly more sustainable than those in the classic condition ($M = 5.26$, $SD = 1.24$), $t(287.44) = 5.82$, $p < 0.001$. The effect size was large with *Cohen's d* = 1.13, 95% CI [0.67, 0.90], indicating that the manipulation was successful and that participants clearly differentiated between the sustainable and non-sustainable product.

3.1.2 | Sample, Design, Procedure and Measurements

Study 1 was designed using Qualtrics, and the data was collected in controlled environments using Prolific. Four hundred and nine respondents aged 18–70 participated in the study. Participants were required to be U.S. residents, have English as their first language, and be between 18 and 70 years

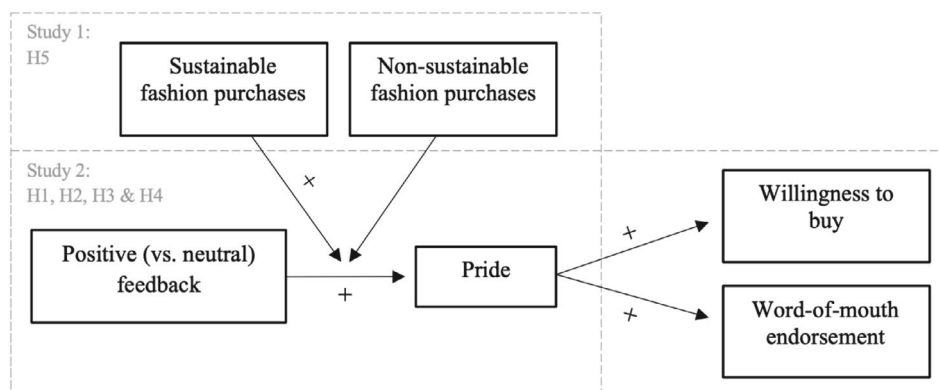


FIGURE 1 | Overview of the studies and the hypotheses.

old to qualify. They were recruited via Prolific and compensated fairly, consistent with Prolific's recommended guidelines, at a rate corresponding to approximately \$9 per hour. Five participants were excluded for failing an attention check, and one was excluded due to an invalid ID number, resulting in 403 valid responses.

To ensure data quality, we included a screener question as an attention check, where participants were asked to select which product they had been exposed to in the study. Respondents were randomly given five garments to choose from. The five alternative items in the attention check were a jacket, a sweater, trousers, shoes, and a T-shirt. In terms of gender distribution, 48.39% were men, 49.13% were women, and 2.48% identified as "other." The mean age of the respondents was 37.18, with a standard deviation of 11.38.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions, according to a 2 (sustainable fashion product vs. non-sustainable fashion product) $\times$ 2 (positive feedback vs. neutral feedback) between-subjects design. We used the terms organic and environmental friendly instead of "sustainable" when communicating with our respondents in these studies. According to Evans and Peirson-Smith (2018), the term sustainable is too abstract and delivers an ambiguous message, thereby confusing the consumer, while eco and organic are clearer and more understandable.

Participants first answered questions about their gender and age. Then, they were instructed to imagine buying a T-shirt. The T-shirts were framed in our descriptions as organic (see Figure 2) or classic (see Figure 3), where organic represented the sustainable fashion product and classic represented the non-sustainable fashion product. Both T-shirts looked identical and had the same descriptions (color, fit, and product number). To make the experiments as authentic as possible, we designed it to resemble a natural online environment based on the layout usually found in online stores.

After the imaginary purchase, the participants were given feedback that thanked them for their purchase and welcomed them back. The feedback varied across the four experimental conditions (i.e., type of T-shirt and feedback). The two groups in the positive feedback condition received feedback stating they had made a great choice, thanking them for the purchase

and welcoming them back (see Figure 4). We used the adjective "great" to give positive feedback based on the selection of positive adjectives in the Evaluative Lexicon scale (Rocklage and Fazio 2015).

Great is an adjective scoring high on valence, in which valence measures positive and negative adjectives. When designing the neutral feedback condition, we did not provide any positive description of the customer's choices. The two groups in the neutral feedback condition received feedback that thanked them for their purchase and welcomed them back (see Figure 5) because this kind of feedback is commonly practiced in offline and online stores. The respondents were roughly equally distributed in terms of gender and age, and among the four groups.

Pride was measured using four items (e.g., "I feel proud based on the purchase I have made"; $\alpha = 0.94$), adapted from Tracy and Robins (2007a) and Roseman (1991). All items were rated on a 7-point agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) and are presented in Appendix A.



FIGURE 3 | Organic white T-shirt.



FIGURE 4 | Positive feedback.



FIGURE 2 | Classic white T-shirt.

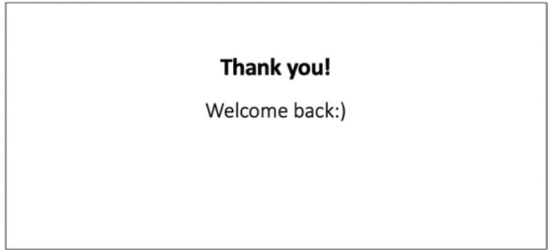


FIGURE 5 | Neutral feedback.

3.1.3 | Results

We tested H5, which posits that positive feedback (vs. neutral feedback) will increase the feeling of pride for consumers of sustainable fashion purchases, but not for consumers of non-sustainable fashion purchases, through multiple analyses conducted across the sustainable and non-sustainable fashion conditions.

3.1.3.1 | Main and Interaction Effects. To test H5, we conducted a two-way ANOVA with pride as the dependent variable and feedback type (positive vs. neutral), product type (organic vs. classic), and their interaction as fixed factors. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of product type, $F(1, 399) = 20.34$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$, indicating that participants in the organic product condition reported significantly higher pride ($M = 4.78$, $SD = 1.23$) compared to those in the classic product condition ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.21$). There was also a significant main effect of feedback, $F(1, 399) = 12.92$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$, such that participants in the positive feedback condition reported higher pride ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.24$) than those in the neutral condition ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.23$). The interaction effect between product type and feedback was not statistically significant, $F(1, 399) = 2.46$, $p = 0.12$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$.

However, a visual inspection of estimated means (Figure 6) suggests a pattern consistent with the hypothesized conditional effect, indicating that further exploration may be warranted. Following the guidance of Tybout et al. (2001), we acknowledge that in the absence of a statistically significant interaction, any observed simple effects must be interpreted with caution, as they may reflect additive main effects rather than a true moderation.

Nonetheless, because the hypothesized conditional effect was theory-driven and specified a priori, we proceeded with planned comparisons within each product condition. This analytic approach is consistent with established practice in consumer behavior research (e.g., McFerran et al. 2014; Gaustad et al. 2019).

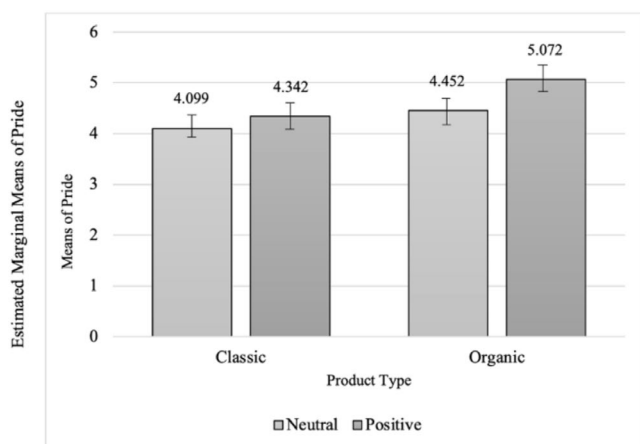


FIGURE 6 | Illustration of the effect on pride for the different types of feedback (positive vs. neutral) regarding product type (sustainable fashion vs. non-sustainable fashion). Note: The “Classic” condition refers to non-sustainable fashion purchases, while the “Organic” condition refers to sustainable fashion purchases. Error bars indicate the confidence interval at a 95% confidence level.

3.1.3.2 | Control for Covariates. To test the robustness of the main effects and account for potential demographic influences, we conducted an ANCOVA with age and gender included as covariates. The main effects of product type ($F(1, 396) = 17.89$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$) and feedback ($F(1, 396) = 13.71$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$) remained significant, while the interaction between the two was not significant ($p = 0.12$). Neither gender ($p = 0.27$) nor age ($p = 0.16$) significantly predicted pride. These results suggest that the observed pattern supporting H5 is robust and not explained by demographic variables.

Given that the observed main effects remained robust after controlling for demographic covariates, and in line with our a priori hypothesis (H5), we proceeded with planned contrasts within each product condition to further explore the potential conditional effect.

3.1.3.3 | Planned and Pairwise Comparisons. First, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the means between two groups in the sustainable fashion condition (Group 1 receiving positive feedback and Group 2 receiving neutral feedback) for pride. Before conducting the t-test, Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was performed and found to be non-significant, $F = 0.11$, $p = 0.74$, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was met. The independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in pride between the two groups, $t(188) = 3.56$, $p < 0.001$, with a mean difference of 0.62 (95% CI [0.28, 0.96]).

Effect sizes were calculated to further assess the magnitude of the difference between the two groups. Cohen's d was found to be 0.52, with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 0.23 to 0.81. Hedges' g was 0.52, with a 95% confidence interval from 0.23 to 0.80. Glass's delta was 0.51, with a 95% confidence interval between 0.21 and 0.80. These effect sizes indicate a moderate effect between the two groups.

Second, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the means between two groups in the non-sustainable fashion condition (Group 1 receiving positive feedback and Group 2 receiving neutral feedback) for pride. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was not significant, $F = 0.01$, $p = 0.87$, indicating that the assumption of equal variances was not violated. The t-test revealed no significant difference in pride between the two groups. The t-statistic was $t(211) = 1.47$, $p = 0.14$, with a mean difference of 0.24 (95% CI [-0.08, 0.57]).

To test this further, we conducted a pairwise comparison (e.g., McFerran et al. 2014; Gaustad et al. 2019; Wien and Peluso 2021). Consistent with H5 and the t-tests, when the condition was sustainable fashion and the feedback was positive, participants reported feeling significantly prouder ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.18$, $p < 0.001$) than when the condition was sustainable fashion and the feedback was neutral ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.22$). In contrast, when the condition was non-sustainable fashion, the effect of positive feedback was not significant ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.19$ vs. $M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.21$, $p = 0.11$).

Taken together, the findings of Study 1 provide support for H5, demonstrating that positive feedback enhances pride in sustainable fashion purchases but does not significantly impact pride in non-sustainable fashion purchases. Figure 6 illustrates these effects.

3.2 | Study 2

Study 2 aimed to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1 by exploring whether the emotionality of positive feedback influences the feeling of pride and its subsequent effects on word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy sustainable fashion products. Moreover, the study introduced an additional experimental condition to distinguish between emotionally neutral and emotionally charged positive feedback.

3.2.1 | Sample, Design, Procedure and Measurements

Study 2 comprised data from a total of 309 respondents (aged 18–71) collected in controlled environments using Prolific. Participants were required to be U.S. residents, have English as their first language, and be between 18 and 70 years old to qualify. One participant who reported being 71 years old was nevertheless included in the final sample. Participants were recruited via Prolific and compensated fairly, consistent with Prolific's recommended guidelines, at a rate corresponding to approximately \$9 per hour. Seven participants were removed due to a failure to pass the attention test (same test as in Study 1), and two respondents were removed due to an invalid ID number, resulting in 300 valid responses. Thus, the effective response rate among eligible participants was approximately 97.1%. In terms of gender distribution, 43.67% were men, 55.33% were women, and 1% identified as “other.” The mean age of the respondents was 29.38, and the standard deviation 9.64.

In Study 1, we used a positive adjective for giving positive feedback based on the selection of adjectives in the Evaluative Lexicon scale (Rocklage and Fazio 2015). Apart from valence, this scale also considers two additional components (Extremity and Emotionality). *Great* is a highly positive, medium extreme, and relatively high emotional adjective. We wanted to test if the emotionality score in feedback impacted the feeling of pride by including a more neutral adjective. We chose the positive adjective *Smart* with a significantly lower and an almost neutral emotionality score. The two other components were kept at a similar level.

We used a 1 (sustainable product) $\times$ 3 (positive emotional feedback, positive but neutral feedback, and neutral feedback) between-subjects design, and participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. Participants first answered questions about their gender and age. Then, they were asked to imagine buying an organic T-shirt (the same organic T-shirt as in Study 1). After the imaginary purchase, the participants were given feedback that thanked them for their purchase and welcomed them back. The type of feedback varied across the three experimental conditions. Two groups received positive feedback expressing that they had made either a *smart* or a *great* choice. The last group got neutral feedback, which thanked them for their purchase and welcomed them back. The respondents were roughly equally distributed among the three groups.

Willingness to buy was measured using three items (e.g., “I am likely to buy an environmentally friendly product again in the future”; $\alpha=0.90$), adapted from Dodds et al. (1991). Word-of-mouth endorsement was measured using six items (e.g., “I am likely

to say positive things about the product to others in person”; $\alpha=0.91$), adapted from Eisingerich et al. (2015). All responses were rated on a 7-point agreement scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Full item lists are included in Appendix A.

3.2.2 | Results

To systematically examine the effects of different feedback conditions on pride, word-of-mouth endorsement, and willingness to buy, a series of analyses were conducted. First, we assessed the direct effects of the three feedback conditions (neutral, positive but emotionally neutral, and positive emotional) on pride. Following this, we explored the mediating role of pride in the relationship between feedback and both word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy.

3.2.2.1 | Direct Effects of Feedback Type on Pride. As an exploratory check, we tested whether the three feedback conditions differed in their ability to elicit pride using a one-way ANOVA. The analysis revealed a significant direct effect between the neutral feedback group and the positive emotionally neutral feedback group ($MD=-0.41$, $SE=0.17$, $p=0.048$) as well as between the neutral feedback group and the positive emotional feedback group ($MD=-0.64$, $SE=0.17$, $p<0.001$). However, there was no significant difference between the two positive feedback groups ($MD=-0.23$, $SE=0.17$, $p=0.369$). The results for the variables, including mean differences (MD), standard error (SE), significance levels (p), and the lower (LB) and upper (UB) bounds of a 95% confidence interval, are presented in Table 2.

3.2.2.2 | Mediation Analyses: Direct and Indirect Effects of Feedback. To test H1–H4, we conducted two mediation analyses using PROCESS Model 4 (Hayes 2018) with 5000 bootstrapping samples. In both models, feedback type (neutral vs. positive feedback) served as the independent variable (X), pride as the mediator (M), and either word-of-mouth endorsement or willingness to buy as the dependent variable (Y). Rather than merging the two groups receiving positive feedback (“Smart” and “Great”), we excluded the “Smart” condition to maintain conceptual consistency with Study 1, where emotionality within positive feedback was not manipulated.

In the first model, testing H1 and H3, the results showed that positive emotional feedback significantly increased pride

TABLE 2 | The mean differences in pride between the three groups.

Conditions	MD	SE	p	LB	UB
0.00 1.00	−0.41**	0.17	0.048	−0.817	−0.003
2.00	−0.64***	0.17	<0.001	−1.048	−0.238
1.00 0.00	0.41**	0.17	0.048	0.003	0.817
2.00	−0.23	0.17	0.369	−0.640	0.171
2.00 0.00	0.64***	0.17	<0.001	0.238	1.048
1.00	0.23	0.17	0.369	−0.175	0.640

Note: Conditions coded as follows: 0 = neutral feedback, 1 = positive but emotionally neutral feedback (“Smart”), 2 = positive emotional feedback (“Great”). *** $p<0.001$; ** $p<0.05$.

($b=0.65$, $p<0.001$), explaining 7.4% of the variance in pride ($R^2=0.07$). Pride, in turn, significantly predicted willingness to buy ($b=0.51$, $p<0.001$), explaining 35% of the variance in willingness to buy ($R^2=0.35$). The indirect effect of feedback on willingness to buy via pride was significant ($b=0.33$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.49]). The direct effect of feedback on willingness to buy was not significant ($b=-0.11$, $p=0.418$), indicating full mediation. These effects are illustrated in Figure 7 and summarized in Table 3, which reports the direct and indirect effects of feedback on willingness to buy via pride, as well as explained variance (R^2) in the outcomes.

In the second model, testing H2 and H4, the direct effect of feedback on pride was again significant ($b=0.64$, $p<0.001$), and pride significantly predicted word-of-mouth endorsement ($b=0.64$, $p<0.001$), explaining 32.1% of the variance in WOM ($R^2=0.32$). The indirect effect of feedback on WOM via pride was significant ($b=0.41$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.58]), while the direct effect of feedback on WOM was not significant ($b=0.01$, $p=0.969$), supporting full mediation. These effects are illustrated in Figure 8, and summarized in Table 3, which reports the direct and indirect effects of feedback on word-of-mouth endorsement via pride, as well as the explained variance (R^2) in the outcomes.

3.2.2.3 | Control for Covariates. Finally, to assess the robustness of our mediation models, we re-ran all key analyses with age and gender included as covariates (PROCESS model 4, 5000 bootstrap samples). The respondents were roughly equally distributed in terms of gender and age. The results remained fully consistent with our theoretical framework. Feedback significantly predicted pride ($b=0.62$, $SE=0.16$, $p<0.001$) in both models. For willingness to buy, pride was a significant predictor ($b=0.52$, $SE=0.05$, $p<0.001$), and the indirect effect of feedback via pride was also

significant ($b=0.32$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.53]), while the direct effect was not ($b=-0.09$, $p=0.471$, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.15]). Similarly, for word-of-mouth endorsement, pride had a strong positive effect ($b=0.61$, $SE=0.07$, $p<0.001$), and the indirect effect of feedback via pride was significant ($b=0.38$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.60]). The direct effect was not significant ($b=0.02$, $p=0.89$, 95% CI [-0.30, 0.34]), indicating full mediation. These findings confirm that the effects of feedback on both behavioral outcomes are fully mediated by pride, even when controlling for demographic variation.

4 | General Discussion

Across two experimental studies, we empirically tested the effectiveness of positive versus neutral feedback in the context of sustainable fashion purchases. In Study 1, we tested the effects of positive and neutral feedback on consumers' pride in the context of both sustainable and non-sustainable fashion purchases. In Study 2, we tested whether positive versus neutral feedback on sustainable fashion purchases indirectly affects word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy, with pride serving as a mediator. Additionally, we explored the impact of two distinct positive feedback conditions (one neutral and one emotionally positive) on consumers' feelings of pride.

In Study 1, we found that positive feedback significantly increased consumers' pride for sustainable fashion purchases, whereas it had no significant effect on pride for non-sustainable purchases. In Study 2, we demonstrated that positive feedback (compared to neutral feedback) on sustainable fashion purchases indirectly enhanced word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy sustainable fashion products, with pride serving as

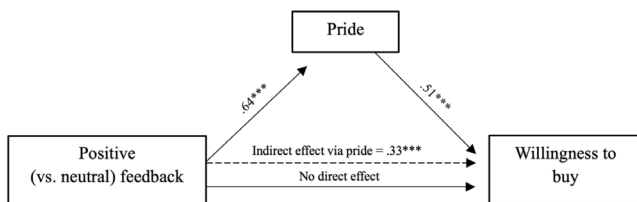


FIGURE 7 | The effects of positive (vs. neutral) feedback on willingness to buy. Solid arrows indicate significant direct effects, except when they are explicitly denoted as no effect. Dotted arrows indicate significant indirect effects via pride. *** $p<0.001$.

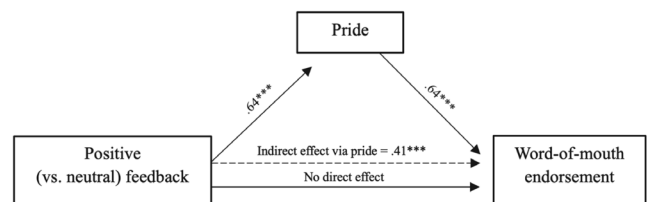


FIGURE 8 | The effects of positive (vs. neutral) feedback on word-of-mouth endorsement. Solid arrows indicate significant direct effects, except when they are explicitly denoted as no effect. Dotted arrows indicate significant indirect effects via pride. *** $p<0.001$.

TABLE 3 | Summary of direct and indirect effects of feedback on word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy via pride.

Outcome variable	Effect type	<i>b</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	R^2
Willingness to buy	Direct	-0.11	0.418	[-0.33, 0.15]	0.35
	Indirect	0.33	<0.001***	[0.18, 0.49]	
Word-of-mouth	Direct	0.01	0.969	[-0.30, 0.34]	0.32
	Indirect	0.41	<0.001***	[0.25, 0.58]	

Note: Effects estimated using PROCESS Model 4 with 5000 bootstrap samples. Indirect effects are mediated by pride. R^2 values refer to the amount of variance explained in the dependent variable. *** $p<0.001$. [Correction added on 8 September 2025, after first online publication: In Table 3, the data 'Total effect' and '0.22' were removed in this version.]

a mediator. Importantly, our results showed that the effects on word-of-mouth and willingness to buy were not directly caused by the feedback itself but were rather mediated through pride, which underscores the emotional mechanism driving consumer behavior.

Additionally, while both positive feedback conditions significantly increased pride compared to neutral feedback, no significant differences were observed between the two positive feedback conditions. In sum, the present research shows that increasing the feeling of pride through positive feedback in sustainable fashion purchases positively affects word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy sustainable fashion products.

4.1 | Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the growing literature on sustainable consumption by providing deeper insights into the emotional mechanisms underlying sustainable fashion purchases, particularly the role of pride. Prior research has demonstrated that sustainable purchases evoke feelings of pride, with foundational contributions from Bly et al. (2015) and more targeted insights by Lundblad and Davies (2016). Our findings specifically support Lundblad and Davies' (2016) conclusion that a sense of accomplishment underpins this emotion. Specifically, by showing that pride is amplified when consumers receive positive feedback explicitly recognizing their sustainable actions, our study substantiates the role of accomplishment as a key emotional antecedent of pride in sustainable fashion contexts.

Moreover, pride has been shown to increase both willingness to purchase sustainable fashion products in contexts such as luxury fashion (e.g., Adıgüzel and Donato 2021; Islam et al. 2022) and circular fashion (Ta et al. 2022). It has also been linked to word-of-mouth endorsement in the context of sustainable luxury fashion (Septianto et al. 2020), where pride emerged as a driver of consumer advocacy. While these studies support the relationship between pride and pro-environmental outcomes, they predominantly conceptualize pride as a passive emotional response to completed sustainable actions. In contrast, our study contributes by examining pride in a mainstream sustainable fashion context, where the emotion is elicited proactively as part of the consumption process.

More recently, a few studies have begun to propose that pride can be elicited through emotional reinforcement strategies (e.g., Septianto et al. 2020; Hu and Meng 2022; Yan et al. 2023). However, our study is among the first to experimentally test whether positive feedback can effectively reinforce pride in the context of sustainable fashion consumption. We show that this form of post-choice communication amplifies pride and subsequently promotes both willingness to purchase sustainable fashion and word-of-mouth endorsement. These findings contribute to emotional framing research by demonstrating that pride can be elicited not only through pre-purchase persuasive appeals, but also through post-purchase reinforcement strategies such as positive feedback.

We also position these findings within a broader theoretical framework. Specifically, we situate our research within framing

theory and goal-framing theory to better understand how external feedback influences consumer emotions and behaviors. By demonstrating that the way a sustainable purchase is externally communicated (through positive feedback) can shape consumers' emotions and subsequent behaviors, our study extends framing theory into the post-choice domain. While traditional goal-framing approaches (e.g., Levin et al. 1998) focus on how the framing of potential outcomes influences behavioral adoption before a decision is made, our findings show that framing feedback after a sustainable action can reinforce positive self-evaluations and strengthen subsequent pro-environmental intentions.

In addition to its emotional effects, positive feedback can also generate cognitive and informational benefits, particularly through word-of-mouth mechanisms. Recent research underscores the critical role of word-of-mouth not only as an emotional outcome but also as a rational facilitator of sustainable purchase decisions (e.g., Vladimirova et al. 2024). Chaohua Huang et al. (2024) show that electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) through online customer reviews significantly enhances consumers' perceived diagnosticity, thereby supporting more informed and sustainable consumption choices. Integrating these perspectives, our findings suggest that promoting word-of-mouth through emotional reinforcement, such as pride, can complement the rational benefits of eWOM identified in previous work, thus amplifying its overall impact on sustainable fashion consumption.

This insight enriches the literature on communication strategies for sustainability, emphasizing the importance of emotional framing, specifically through pride-driven feedback, complementing prior work that has largely focused on rational or moral appeals. By leveraging pride as an emotional motivator and enhancing word-of-mouth endorsement, as well as increasing willingness to buy, this study demonstrates how feedback mechanisms can reinforce sustainable consumption behavior, offering both immediate emotional rewards and social validation that strengthen consumer commitment to sustainability.

4.2 | Managerial Implications

Given the urgency of environmental challenges, fashion companies are uniquely positioned to influence consumer choices and promote more sustainable behaviors. Our findings suggest that boosting consumers' feelings of pride through positive feedback is an effective, low-cost way to encourage sustainable fashion purchases. Positive feedback not only increases consumers' intention to repurchase sustainable products but also fosters word-of-mouth endorsement, which can drive additional sales.

As Villanueva et al. (2008) demonstrate, customers acquired through word-of-mouth contribute significantly more long-term value to a firm than those gained through traditional marketing. In their study, word-of-mouth customers added nearly twice as much long-term value to the firm. While word-of-mouth may be a slower customer acquisition process, it is cost-effective and tends to yield more valuable, loyal customers. Therefore, integrating positive feedback and facilitating social sharing can not only strengthen immediate sales but also amplify the long-term benefits derived from word-of-mouth endorsements.

Firms can leverage online checkout messages to offer compliments, such as “You made an excellent choice buying this eco-friendly item!” when customers select sustainable products. This positive feedback not only boosts customers’ feelings but also encourages them to share their experience. Since digital media makes it easy for consumers to spread information (Septianto et al. 2020) and reach a broad audience (Pham and Sun 2020), it can amplify the brand’s message through pride-driven word-of-mouth endorsement. As a result, customers’ sustainable actions gain social visibility, further reinforcing their commitment to sustainability.

One way to enhance this effect is to integrate social media sharing functions immediately after checkout and the positive feedback. For example, after receiving a message affirming their sustainable choice, customers could be offered an option to share their purchase on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok. The shared content could celebrate the customer’s sustainable choice and encourage others to take similar actions. Companies could provide ready-to-share content that highlights the customer’s sustainable action, such as badges (“Eco Champion”), pre-written messages celebrating their contribution, links to the purchased product, or invitations encouraging friends to make similar sustainable choices (e.g., “Join me in choosing a better future, one eco-choice at a time!”). By encouraging immediate sharing shortly after purchase, when pride is activated, companies can increase the reach of their sustainability messaging and strengthen consumer identification with the brand’s environmental values.

Moreover, integrating social media sharing can showcase sustainable purchases, giving consumers an audience for their actions while satisfying their desire for social approval and pride. By making sharing easy and immediate, companies selling sustainable products can gain enhanced visibility, credibility, and popularity (Septianto et al. 2020). However, these strategies should be further explored in future research to ensure they are effective without appearing manipulative.

From a broader managerial perspective, sustainable brands can integrate pride-driven communication into their brand identity, using it consistently across key touchpoints, from advertising and website design to post-purchase email communications, thereby reinforcing the emotional benefits associated with sustainable actions identified in this study.

4.3 | Limitations and Future Research

While our study offers valuable insights into how positive feedback affects sustainable fashion purchases, there are several limitations that suggest important avenues for future research. First, empirical research examining actual behavior, rather than attitudes or intentions, is crucial in sustainable fashion consumption, as positive attitudes and purchase intentions often fail to translate into actual purchasing behavior (e.g., Joergens 2006; Rahman and Koszewska 2020; Rausch et al. 2021; Abreu et al. 2022). Therefore, we propose field experiments in a real-world setting as the most appropriate method for further research in this area. Field experiments conducted in online stores could be particularly valuable, as they offer access

to a large audience and data that could make the findings more actionable for marketers. Additionally, online stores offer significant potential as they can easily facilitate and motivate consumers to share information at the point of purchase.

Furthermore, conducting research in stores that offer both sustainable and non-sustainable fashion products is an advantage because it gives access to those consumers who did not initially intend to buy a sustainable fashion product. Online field experiments also provide the opportunity to track the purchasing behavior of individual consumers over time.

Future studies could explore how feedback impacts different product categories. For instance, feedback on the purchase of more complex fashion items, like jeans, could have different effects on pride and consumer behavior compared to simpler items like T-shirts. Similarly, it would be valuable to examine whether feedback on purchases of very simple items, such as socks, elicits comparable emotional responses.

Moreover, exploring the effects of feedback on luxury fashion purchases could provide valuable insights into how feedback functions across different price points. While sustainable fashion is strongly linked to authentic pride stemming from personal achievement, luxury products are more often associated with hubristic pride, tied to social status (e.g., Tracy and Robins 2007a). Research findings indicate that feedback emphasizing exclusivity significantly amplifies hubristic pride, especially in the context of new luxury purchases, leading to increased positive word-of-mouth intentions (Arnesen 2025). Further, investigating how feedback influences these two forms of pride in the luxury sector could deepen our understanding of consumer behavior in both sustainable and luxury fashion.

Another important avenue for future research involves the credibility and framing of the feedback message itself. In our study, we assumed that the positive feedback was perceived as genuine encouragement. However, in real-world settings, consumers could interpret generic praise as a marketing tactic if it lacks sincerity or if the company’s sustainability claims are questionable. Recent work highlights that when consumers trust the impact of their sustainable choices, it can increase the pride they feel (Arnesen et al. 2024). Thus, ensuring that positive feedback is specific and credible is crucial. All these avenues could provide a deeper understanding of how, if, and why the mechanisms of pride and feedback work in fashion and other types of consumption.

Moreover, future research should investigate how the source and content of the feedback influence its effectiveness, for instance, does feedback coming from a sales associate versus a peer consumer have different effects? Does a message that explicitly ties the purchase to environmental impact (“Your choice saved X liters of water, great job!”) evoke more pride than a generic “good choice” compliment? Initial insights suggest people find specific information more sincere than abstract platitudes (Thomas 2008), which could mean that detailed positive feedback might be better received. Testing various feedback designs (different wording, levels of detail, emotional tone, timing, and frequency of feedback) would help identify the most impactful

approach. It would also be valuable to analyze if repeated feedback over time continues to build pride or if there are diminishing returns, echoing evidence from behavioral psychology that feedback extended over a period can reinforce behavior more effectively (Daniels and Bailey 2014).

Finally, future studies might integrate other emotions or comparative frames (e.g., pride vs. guilt appeals) to see how positive feedback interventions compare with alternative motivational strategies. Addressing these questions will move us closer to finding the optimal ways of influencing fashion consumers through positive feedback. All these questions and more need further exploration to find the optimal way of influencing fashion consumers through positive feedback.

In conclusion, our work provides empirical evidence that a simple intervention, giving positive feedback, can increase consumers' pride in sustainable fashion purchases and thereby encourage desirable outcomes like word-of-mouth endorsement and willingness to buy sustainable fashion products. By harnessing a fundamental emotional reward, this approach speaks to consumers' self-oriented motives and offers a win-win: consumers feel good about themselves, and sustainable consumption is promoted. We hope our findings inspire more research and creative strategies in this area, as it is increasingly urgent to find diverse solutions to encourage consumers to shift away from unsustainable fashion consumption.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Appendix A

Measurement Items

Scale	Item wording	Source	Mean	SD	FL	CA
Pride (Study 1)	I feel proud based on the purchase I have made.	Tracy and Robins (2007a)	4.33	1.36	0.85	0.94
	I feel accomplished based on the purchase I have made.	Tracy and Robins (2007a)	4.17	1.47	0.84	
	I feel good about myself based on the purchase I have made.	Roseman (1991)	4.61	1.32	0.90	
	I feel pleased based on the purchase I have made.	Roseman (1991)	4.82	1.29	0.82	
Pride (Study 2)	I feel proud based on the purchase I have made.	Tracy and Robins (2007a)	5.10	1.36	0.86	0.93
	I feel accomplished based on the purchase I have made.	Tracy and Robins (2007a)	4.79	1.39	0.81	
	I feel good about myself based on the purchase I have made.	Roseman (1991)	5.33	1.28	0.87	
	I feel pleased based on the purchase I have made.	Roseman (1991)	5.37	1.22	0.79	
Willingness to Buy	I am likely to buy an environmentally friendly product again in the future.	Dodds et al. (1991)	5.63	1.16	0.86	0.90
	I am likely to buy an environmentally friendly clothing/fashion product again in the future.	Dodds et al. (1991)	5.60	1.15	0.87	
	I am likely to choose the more environmentally friendly one between two similar products.	Dodds et al. (1991)	5.35	1.38	0.73	
Word-of-Mouth	I am likely to say positive things about the product to others in person.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)	5.24	1.27	0.67	0.91
	I am likely to encourage friends and relatives to buy the product in person.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)	4.89	1.41	0.68	
	I am likely to recommend the product to others in person.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)	5.01	1.33	0.72	
	I am likely to say positive things about the product on social sites such as Facebook.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)	3.64	1.85	0.82	
	I am likely to use social sites to encourage friends and relatives to buy the product.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)	3.66	1.85	0.91	
	I am likely to recommend the product on social sites such as Facebook.	Eisingerich et al. (2015)	3.45	1.84	0.85	