

# **Exploring Behaviours of Zero Waste Consumers**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree  
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by  
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## ABSTRACT

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Zero waste consumers are investigated in the context of alternative consumption lifestyles, in order to generate both an understanding of how one becomes a zero waste consumer, the barriers, facilitators and motivators faced and advance the literature on zero waste as a whole. Due to the absence of current literature, the research extended its scope to voluntary simplifiers. Data was captured through a netnographic study with three participants, then thematic analysis was employed to produce new findings for this area. The findings revealed individuals were seen to encounter a number of motivators, barriers and facilitators which counteracted each other, however, they occasionally led to the withdrawal of the lifestyle choice. These findings contribute to a framework representative of the key results, alongside a number of additional themes. Primary contributions offered by this research are to the existing literature on zero waste and the extended area of alternative consumption lifestyles. Identifying how zero waste consumers practice zero waste in light of the barriers, facilitators and motivators they experience when on their journey. This study presents zero waste consumers as a new topic to the alternative consumption literature for future studies to explore further.

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# GLOSSARY

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## **Marketing**

This research will be using The American Marketing Association (2017, np) definition which defines marketing as an “activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large”.

## **Social Marketing**

Andreasen (1994, pg. 110) defines social marketing as “the adaptation of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society of which they are a part”.

## **Sustainable development**

Sustainable development is debated as shown in the presented literature of sustainability, in terms of this research the chosen definition follows the Brundtland Commission. “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987, p. 43).

## **Sustainable consumption**

Sustainable consumption is additionally a highly debated term as illustrated in Chapter Two. Therefore, the researcher has chosen to follow a comprehensive definition by the United Nations Environment Programme, which follows, the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations (UNEP, 2019).

## **Ethical consumption**

Cooper-Martin and Holbrook, (1993, pg.113) define ethical consumption as “decision making, purchases, or other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer’s ethical concerns”.

## **Zero waste**

The conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health (The Zero Waste International Alliance, 2018).

# CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Overview

*“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”*

Jane Goodall

Today's consumers live in a highly globalised world that affects consumption choices which in turn increases levels of waste. The world generates 2.01 billion tonnes of solid waste annually with at least 33% not managed in an environmentally safe manner (World Bank Group, 2020). Within New Zealand, each person sends about 401 kilograms of 'residential' waste to landfills each year. When industrial waste is included, our 'total' landfilled waste comes to 898 kilograms/person (Ministry For The Environment, 2020). Solid waste management affects everyone, however, the environment is often paying the price.

To counter this, zero waste has emerged as a waste reduction approach that calls for the elimination of waste production. This approach looks at waste through a new perspective rather than seeing it as inevitable or without value. Zero waste aims to emulate sustainable natural cycles where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use (ZWIA, 2009). Not only is zero waste used in production and waste management, but consumers have begun adopting zero waste as a lifestyle, altering their consumption by focusing on reducing the amounts of trash they produce with the aim of eliminating it altogether. Although this may seem unrealistic in today's disposable society, the zero waste movement has grown rapidly in the last decade (Murphy, 2018).

The term zero waste has gained popularity in both the production and consumption industries. Despite this, due to the novelty of the topic there is a lack of in-depth understanding of how one becomes a zero waste consumer and the journey of the zero waste consumer. This thesis seeks to fill this gap, providing a greater level of understanding of zero waste consumers and the journey these consumers take through the utilisation of qualitative research methods. Specifically, a netnographic investigation into how one becomes a zero

waste consumer, what behaviours, values, needs or wants lead them to live a zero waste lifestyle, and identifying the consumer's motivators for altering their consumption to zero waste and the barriers and facilitators they can face.

## **1.2 Background**

The researcher's interest in this area stems from their own passion of conscious consumption and involvement in sustainable communities. From this position they observed the difficulties consumers face when trying to purchase products that fit their lifestyle and align with their values. Investigation regarding alternative consumption is vital as this type of consumption is growing at a rapid rate. Whilst research has been conducted regarding sustainable consumption identities such as voluntary simplicity (Alexander 2011; Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Shaw & Moraes, 2009), research on zero waste consumers is yet to be explored in depth.

Sustainability has seen an increased prominence in society and in businesses with an expansion in academia, specifically marketing (Belz and Peattie, 2009; Kemper and Ballantine, 2019). This has led to the rise of terms such as 'sustainable marketing' and 'sustainable consumption'. Sustainable marketing has debuted as a way to responsibly communicate products to consumers. There is a growing interest in sustainable marketing, specifically how consumers are adopting sustainable lifestyles and sustainable purchase behaviours (Helsen, 2018). This is because marketing has the ability to encourage consumers to recycle, buy Fairtrade, eat healthily and purchase ethically (Gordon, Carrigan, and Hastings, 2011). So, there is the potential in marketing's ability to influence and motivate sustainable lifestyles by brands displaying their own sustainability, being transparent in where their product comes from, and also giving their consumers tips on how they can be more sustainable (Peattie and Peattie, 2009; Peyer *et al.*, 2017).

Now more than ever consumers have begun adapting to sustainable consumption practices and changing their lifestyles to become more environmentally conscious (Yarimoglu and Binboga, 2019). Due to the rise of concerns about the consequences of consumption patterns (Minton *et al.*, 2018) there has been an emergence of new consumption identities (Carrington and Chatzidakis, 2018; Carr *et al.*, 2012; Cherrier *et al.*, 2011; DopieRafa, 2017 ; Govind *et al.*, 2019; Kushwah, 2019; Penaloza and Price, 2003; Perren and Grauerholz, 2015; Prendergast and Tsang, 2019; Ulusoy, 2015). Research on these identities has highlighted

how these types of consumers experience the marketplace differently as they are often faced with a variety of consumption choices (Banerjee, Gulas, and Iyer, 1995). With consumption being a way of defining personal identities (Mont and Plepys, 2008), two consumption identities have gained popularity: voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers.

The literature on zero waste primarily focuses on zero waste production and zero waste as an approach to solid waste management. Zero waste gained popularity in 1990s (Veleva, Bodkin, and Todorova, 2017), however, due to the complexity of the term, there has been confusion in the literature around what constitutes waste (Greyson, 2007; Zaman, 2016) and therefore how to implement zero waste practices (Zaman, 2016). Nonetheless, zero waste practices have been enforced across the globe as companies choose to avoid landfill and incineration disposal methods (Lehmann, 2011; Renou *et al.*, 2008). Zero waste has taken on another meaning for consumers as a movement. Consumers have begun adapting to a waste-free lifestyle in order to eliminate waste from their lives, placing an emphasis on personal consumption choices (Murphy, 2018). However, the literature does not examine zero waste as a lifestyle, therefore, an in depth examination of voluntary simplifiers is vital to allow for a holistic picture of alternative consumption identities.

Voluntary simplicity has been viewed as a broad response to living an exhausting, unethical and environmentally damaging consumer lifestyle (Huneke, 2005). This lifestyle is once again a result of consumers withstanding the current culture of consumerism. The core values of voluntary simplifiers include material simplicity, self-determination, ecological awareness, social responsibility, spirituality and personal growth (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; García-de-Frutos, *et al.*, 2018). These consumers have chosen to simplify their lifestyles in order to live more meaningfully. The literature has categorised simplifiers into three groupings: downshifters (Shaw and Newholm, 2002), strong simplifiers (Etzioni, 1998) and holistic simplifiers (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977), and each vary in commitment to the lifestyle. These consumers have chosen to pursue this lifestyle for a number of reasons that will be explored in Chapter Two. Due to the pro-environmental overlap in behaviour and motivators of voluntary simplifiers and alternative consumption identities, the researcher is expecting zero waste consumers to have additional overlaps. The problem that arises from the literature after examining sustainable consumption and voluntary simplifiers is that there is no research focusing solely on zero waste consumers and examining the journey of these consumers.

### **1.3 Description of Research Process**

As previously mentioned, the researcher chose a qualitative, exploratory study keeping with the intention of the research and nature of the study as a whole. The increasing prevalence of zero waste consumers has led the researcher to construct the following research questions. These questions aim to provide an insight into sustainability and marketing, specifically alternative consumption identities and lifestyles.

RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer?

RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumer's zero waste journey?

RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators on the consumer's zero waste journey?

These research questions were developed with the intention of encompassing and exploring the context investigated. The questions aim to guide the researcher's choice regarding methodology and method; developing results that are practical, insightful, and valuable – findings that a marketer can effectively apply in the field of alternative consumption.

Given the way this research has been conducted, the researcher has chosen to conduct a netnographic study in the form of online vloggers, with three participants. Each participant has a prominent YouTube presence, however, all have different backgrounds and values which has provided a diverse range of research from zero waste consumers who were at different stages of their journey, gaining different perspectives. After completion of the netnographic studies and transcription, thematic analysis was applied to discover and identify the provision of codes and subsequently themes, which were then grouped and analysed.

### **1.4 Thesis overview**

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter Two begins with the necessary definition of sustainability and its relationship with marketing and consumption. It discusses waste as one of many of society's challenges and how the modern day consumer is tackling it. The chapter then defines what sustainable consumption means and how it has led to the evolution of numerous sustainable consumption identities. Following this, due to the focus of this thesis on zero waste consumers, the two relevant identities are discussed: zero waste and voluntary simplifiers. The chapter outlines the current literature on zero waste and claims that there is a lack of literature, particularly on the zero waste consumer. This subsequently leads the researcher to extend the literature

review to include voluntary simplifiers ensuring a holistic understanding of alternative consumption identities. Lastly, the literature on zero waste is reviewed and the research gap is presented, followed by a conclusion.

Chapter Three discusses the research methodology used in this thesis. It justifies the researcher's epistemological beliefs and theoretical perspective, detailing how knowledge is communicated. The researcher then justifies the choices of methodology, including the choice of a qualitative study over quantitative, conducting a netnography study, and the selection process for the choice of online platform and subsequently, the YouTube channels chosen. After this, the chapter outlines the chosen participants for the research, the analysis that the researcher will conduct, and the trustworthiness and ethics of the research process which has been followed.

Chapter Four contains the findings of the research. It begins with the definitions of sustainability and zero waste by the researcher and by each participant and then goes on to report and explain the findings from the participants. These findings are divided into five main themes which are each broken down into subthemes which detail descriptions of their contribution to a key theme all of which are supported by text units from the netnographic studies.

Finally, Chapter Five discusses the findings from Chapter Four and links them back to the two research questions showing that they have been met in relation to the literature review. Following this, the importance of the findings are presented with the academic contributions of the thesis, managerial implications, directions of future research, limitations and a final conclusion.

## **CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the findings from a literature review carried out on existing knowledge in the subject area. The research areas include: sustainability, sustainable marketing, sustainable consumption and alternative consumption identities, specifically zero waste consumers and voluntary simplifiers. This chapter claims that zero waste research – explicitly on zero waste consumers – is in its infancy. As a result, the review extends its scope to voluntary simplifiers due to the pro-environmental behavioural overlap with zero waste consumers. The limited literature on zero waste consumers provides justification for the research conducted in this thesis.

The chapter begins by presenting the umbrella concept of sustainability and why it's important in light of the world's problems, then outlines sustainable marketing and sustainable consumption. Alternative sustainable consumption identities are then discussed, specifically zero waste consumers and voluntary simplifiers. The relationship between these two identities are examined which leads to the justification behind exploring voluntary simplifiers. Next, the chapter makes sense of the disparate zero waste literature, considers what waste is, and offers an overview of how zero waste is currently addressed in academic literature. This allows for the identification of current gaps in the literature. Finally, the researcher discusses categorisation, motivations, misconceptions and the future direction of voluntary simplifiers. This then reveals the gap in literature which this thesis endeavors to fill.

### **2.2 Sustainability**

Today, sustainability is regarded as a vitally important business goal by multiple stakeholders including investors, policymakers and importantly, consumers (Belz and Peattie, 2009; Dyllick, and Muff, 2016; Rettie, Burchell and Riley, 2012; Peattie and Crane, 2005; Armstrong and Reich, 2015). However, what is meant by sustainability – both within and outside of marketing – is still contested. The debate surrounding sustainability allows a variety of interpretations and definitions to emerge which all differ with the emphasis they place on environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability (Connelly, 2007;

Davidson, 2014; Hopwood, Mellor, and O'Brien, 2005; Lim, 2016; McDonagh and Prothero, 2014).

Sustainable development is often used interchangeably with sustainability (Dahdouh-Guebas, Koedam, & Block, 2013; Hugé, Waas). The popularity of the term stems from the Brundtland Commission (1987) which introduced it into international policy discourse (see Glossary), although prior to this, the term had been in use for some time (e.g. UNEP, WWF 1980). Sustainable development has been portrayed to include three pillars: economic (the ability for enterprises and activities to be sustained long term), social (an equal distribution of benefits and a reduction in poverty) and environmental (conserving natural resources) (Kemper and Ballantine, 2019; Purvis, Mao, and Robinson, 2019). Despite the three pillars becoming well known throughout the literature, they are not universal. Some academics consider additional pillars including cultural (Soini and Birkeland 2014) and institutional (Turcu 2012).

A series of United Nations summits and conferences followed the Brundtland Commission and sought to encourage sustainability in all major industries worldwide. The Earth Summit on Sustainable Development in 1992 continued the work of the Brundtland Commission and brought about a fundamental shift in the mandate of environmental policy. The focus was on how to organise majorities amongst citizens for a collective effort on a societal transformation towards sustainability (John *et al.*, 2016). As a result, a variety of institutional programmes on sustainable consumption were established. Additionally, the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development formalised the widely used definition of sustainability as being composed of the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social, and environmental.

Sustainability and sustainable development have become two key terms within the literature and thus, the rise of the sustainable consumer and businesses adopting sustainable practices has become evident. Consumers are altering their lifestyles (Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Autio, Heiskanen, and Heinonen, 2009; Carr *et al.*, 2012; Sethia and Srinivas, 2011) and businesses are engaging in corporate social responsibility and putting efforts in place to actively reduce their environmental impact (Chapple and moon, 2005; Jamali, and Mirshak, 2005; Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, and Schwarz, 2005). Along with this they are implementing more sustainable waste management strategies (Fuldauer *et al.*, 2019; Zanman, 2014) and



marketers are using sustainability as a point of difference when delivering customer satisfaction (Cantele and Zardini, 2018; Shahbazpour and Seidel, 2006).

### **2.2.1 Sustainable Marketing**

Sustainability has entered the vernacular of many disciplines and marketing is no exception (Kemper and Ballantine, 2019). Sustainable marketing according to Martin and Schouten is “the process of creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers in such a way that both natural and human capital are preserved or enhanced throughout” (2014, p.18). However, Fuller (1999) believes sustainable marketing is the process of planning, implementing and controlling the development, pricing, promotion and distribution of products in a manner that satisfies the following three criteria: (1) customer needs are met, (2) organisational goals are attained, and (3) the process is compatible with ecosystems. We must take into account how to harness marketing responsibly in order to recognise the key role of consumers as decision makers in moving towards sustainability.

The debate regarding the relationship of sustainability and marketing already exists. What is clear from the American Marketing Association’s definition of marketing (see Glossary) is that sustainability is not considered in the broad definition of marketing. This portrays the contradictory nature of sustainability and marketing: questioning whether marketing – following the current definition – can actually be sustainable when it places heavy importance on continuous consumption despite ecological limits to growth (Jones, Clarke-Hill, Comfort, and Hillier, 2008). Additionally, Pereira Heath and Chatzidakis (2012) note how the quest for sustainability poses a significant challenge to business corporations and, specifically, marketers regarding the prevailing ideology of consumption. Showing how marketing currently plays a secondary – not central – role in driving sustainable centric goals in companies, which can be a disadvantage for some.

On the contrary, marketing can encourage us to recycle, reuse, buy Fairtrade, eat healthily, drink sensibly, save energy and support good causes (Gordon, Carrigan, and Hastings, 2011). There is potential in marketing’s ability to influence and motivate sustainable lifestyles (Peattie and Peattie, 2009; Peyer *et al.*, 2017) and supply sustainable products (Ageron, Gunasekaran and Spalanzani, 2012). There is a growing number of companies that are looking to emphasise their commitment to sustainability in an attempt to help to differentiate themselves from their competitors and to enhance their corporate brand and reputation (Jones

et al., 2008). Corporate attitudes towards sustainable marketing has undertaken a dramatic change in the last decade (Helsen, 2018). Recognising that although marketing has been severely criticised throughout the literature for contributing to environmental problems through promoting an unsustainable culture of consumption (Kilbourne, 2012), it is clear that the relationship between marketing and sustainability is constantly evolving.

In the 30 years since the launch of the *Journal of Marketing Management*, sustainability marketing research has been increasing (McDonagh and Prothero, 2014). There is a growing interest in sustainable marketing, how consumers are adapting sustainable lifestyles and sustainable purchase behaviours (Helsen, 2018). This is outlined in the indicative studies shown in Table 1.

| Area Studied                   | Description   | Indicative studies  |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Sustainability</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defining sustainability</li> <li>- Origins</li> <li>- Principles of sustainability</li> <li>- Sustainable societies and communities</li> <li>- Sustainable worldviews</li> <li>- Transforming from consumerism to sustainability</li> </ul>        | Assadourian (2010);Connelly (2007); Dunlap (2008); Dunlap, and Van Liere (1978); Dresner (2008); Fuller (1999); Holden, Linnerud, and Banister (2017); Kotler (2011); McDonagh and Prothero (2014); Springett (2005; 2010)  |
| <b>Sustainable Development</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Multi-perspective approach</li> <li>- Limitations</li> <li>- Ethics</li> <li>- Definitions</li> <li>- Indicators</li> <li>- Development opportunities</li> <li>- Exploring contradictions</li> </ul>   | Blewitt (2014); Bruntland (1987); Bossel (1999); Carley and Christie (2000); Carter (2018); Davidson (2014); Elliot (2012); Hopwood, B., Mellor, and O’Brien (2005); Langhelle (1999); Lélé (1991); Sharma, Iyer, Mehrotra, and Krishnan, 2010); Rao (1999); Redclift (2002)                          |
| <b>Sustainable Marketing</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defining sustainable marketing</li> <li>- Relationship between marketing and sustainability</li> <li>- Competitive advantage</li> <li>- Sustainable marketing framework</li> <li>- Sustainable marketing strategy</li> <li>- Worldviews</li> </ul> | Adams et al., (2016); Belz and Peattie (2009; 2012); Gordon, Carrigan and Hastings (2011); Hunt (2011); Kemper and Ballantine (2019); Kumar, Rahman and Kazmi (2013); Martin and Schouten (2014); Purani, Sahadev, and Kumar, (2014); Rettie, Burchell and Riley (2012); van Dam and Apeldoorn (1996) |

*Table 1: Areas Addressed Using Sustainability*

### **2.2.2 Sustainable Consumption**

Consumption is one of the cornerstones of social welfare and an important part of people's lives, serving as a measure of success and a way of defining personal identities (Mont and Plepys, 2008). The question of sustainability often discussed around issues of sustainable consumption as a major cause of damage to the natural environment is high levels of consumption in western developed societies (Assadourian, 2010; Connolly and Prothero, 2003; Kjellberg, 2008; Pereira Heath and Chatzidaki 2012). While any realistic assessment of environmental issues must take into account the fact that we need to consume to live, we should also reflect critically upon the necessity for the increasing levels of consumption in the developed world (Assadourian, 2010; Bond, 2005).

Sustainable consumption is a highly prevalent term used throughout the academic literature. As an idea, sustainable consumption is rapidly gaining momentum within decision making circles (Tseng and Chiu, 2018). As a concept, it is understood with a strong link to broader environmental and sustainability framings (Middlemiss, 2018). However, similar to sustainable marketing, there is no clear agreement on what sustainable consumption means. Heiskanen and Pantzar (1997) discuss the ambiguity of the concept leading to multiple interpretations and to a general acceptance that there is no clear definition of sustainable consumption. Differences between these definitions tend to revolve around the question of whether sustainable consumption means consuming alternatively, consuming responsibly or consuming less (Jackson, and Michaelis, 2003). However, Di Giulio and Fuchs (2014) highlight the importance of not defining the limits of sustainable consumption, not once and forever, nor should they be based on scientific, descriptive knowledge alone. Instead, they need to be negotiated and checked regularly and, if necessary, adjusted.

The unsustainable consumption of food, energy and natural resources has created wide-ranging environmental and social problems (Rezvani, Jansson, and Bengtsson, 2018). This has led to the evolution of sustainable consumption behaviours. One of these behaviours is ethical consumption, and as the body of knowledge on ethical consumption has expanded, so has the tendency towards multiple interpretations. Ethical consumption is a complex and challenging phenomenon to academic researchers and theoreticians (Pecoraro and Uusitalo, 2014). It is often criticised for being only attainable to those with privileged statuses that

enable them to have higher levels of economic and cultural capital (VanRemoortel, 2018). Examples of these behaviours include purchasing fair trade coffee and chocolate (Low and Davenport, 2007), organic and homegrown food (Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008; Cairns and Johnston, 2013) and ecologically conscious products (Chatzidakis, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2012).

Consumers who choose to minimise detrimental environmental effects are then faced with a variety of consumption choices. For example, choosing a particular type of transportation can be influenced by environmental concerns. Choosing to drive a smaller car may reflect a shallower involvement in a green lifestyle than choosing to ride a bicycle. Selecting a detergent packed in recycled paper over one that is not, or switching to a brand of detergent that contains less toxic chemicals are other examples of pursuing a green lifestyle. Such choices represent different types of greenness, but they all involve (1) assessment of the environmental impact of product/service choices and (2) behavioural change in purchasing, consuming, and disposing of the product (Banerjee, Gulas, and Iyer, 1995). Having a range of sustainable products for different types of consumers is fundamental.

Given the long history of interest and critique, we now find a growing body of work engaging and analysing the issues of over, hyper, affluent, and sustainable consumption within academic marketing, this is shown in Table 2. Highlighting a range of literature is vital as it details the specific areas studied in consumption and outlines the growth of interest in the broader areas of sustainability and sustainable consumption.

| Area Studied                                    | Description   | Indicative studies   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>Consumption</b>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moral complexity of consumption</li> <li>- A model of consumption</li> <li>- Policy for consumption</li> <li>- Ordinary consumption</li> <li>- What people do when they consume</li> </ul>   | Borgmann (2000); Dauvergne (2008); Fine and Leopold (1993); Gronow and Warde (2001); Hansen and Schrader (1997); Holbrook and Hirschman (1982); Holt (1995); Princen, Maniates and Conca (2002); Sanne (2002)  |
| <b>Over-consumption</b>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What consumers perceive as their responsibility</li> <li>- Excessive consumption</li> <li>- Consumption levels</li> </ul>  | Assadourian (2010); Bond (2005); Dupor and Liu, (2003); Ehrlich and Goulder (2007); Pereira Heath and Chatzidakis (2012); Kjellberg (2008)   |
| <b>Conscious consumption and Consuming less</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Socially constructed conscious consumer</li> <li>- Relationships between conscious consumption and environmental concern</li> <li>- Conscious consumption over periods of time</li> </ul>  | Carr <i>et al.</i> , (2012); Ellen, Wiener and Cobb-Walgren (1991); Jackson (2005); Lorenzen (2014); Muldoon (2006); Roberts and Bacon (1997); Szmigin, Carrigan, and McEachern, 2009); Sheth, Sethia and Srinivas (2011); Tsarenko <i>et al.</i> , (2013); Webster (1975) |
| <b>Sustainable Consumption</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limitations of the concept of sustainable consumption</li> <li>- Sustainable consumption governance</li> <li>- “Double dividend” inherent in sustainable consumption</li> <li>- Integration of sustainable communication and the dominant social paradigm</li> <li>- Sustainable consumptions relationship with voluntary simplifiers</li> </ul> | Carr <i>et al.</i> , (2012); Cohen (2007); Dolan (2002); Fuchs and Lorek (2005); Jackson (2006); Kilbourne (2004); Kilbourne, McDonagh and Prothero (1997); Schaefer and Crane (2005); Spaargaren (2003); Young, W, Hwang, McDonald and Oates (2009;2010)                  |
| <b>Ethical consumption</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotions and dissonance in ethical consumption</li> <li>- Ethical consumption as anti-consumerism</li> <li>- Food consumption</li> <li>- Ethical consumption experiences and space</li> </ul>  | Adams and Raisborough, (2010); Cooper-Martin and Holbrook, (1993); Gregory-Smith, Smith, and Winklhofer, (2013); Lewis, and Potter, (2013); Pecoraro and Uusitalo, (2014)  |

Table 2: Areas Addressed Using Consumption

## **2.3 Zero Waste**

Zero waste gained greater popularity in the 1990s with the growing environmental and sustainability movement (Veleva, Bodkin, *et al.*, 2017), although it is apparent that there is a lack of consensus between how to define the term. The Zero Waste International Alliance (2018, np) states that zero waste is defined as “the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health”. Whereas the Zero Waste Network (2018) illustrates zero waste as a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use. Earth Savvy HQ (2019) suggests that zero waste means sending as little waste to landfill as possible. This thesis adapted The Zero Waste International Alliance (2018) definition for zero waste (see Glossary).

### **2.3.1 Making Sense of the Disperse Academic Literature on Zero Waste**

This section addresses how zero waste is currently addressed in literature and the complexity and dangers of current discard methods. Concluding that due to the confusion on what waste is, academia lacks a clear view on zero waste as a whole (Greyson, 2007; Zaman, 2016). Firstly, this section outlines what waste is and the previous and current techniques of dealing with waste revealing how zero waste strategies hold solutions to prevailing problems. Secondly, this section explores what constitutes zero waste and lastly, illustrates how zero waste has been addressed throughout the literature.

### **2.3.2 Waste**

One of the major challenges society faces is the complex and interrelated issue of waste. Increasing economic activity, consumerism, globalisation, commercialisation and population growth has led to an increase in the quantity of waste generated in our society. Various academics have highlighted over the last decade that society has transitioned away from a reusable society into a ‘throwaway society’ (Cooper, 2013; 2016; Gregson, Hellmann and Luedicke, 2018; McCollough and Bayramoglu 2019; Metcalfe and Crewe, 2007). Since the beginning of industrialisation, and especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the throwaway mentality has become a part of western society (Cooper, 2013) as products are designed with short lifespans and are swiftly consumed and discarded (Edbring, Lehner, and Mon, 2016). Our

society now ceaselessly discards and abandons products as excess and as part of an endless desire for the new. Consequently, this has led to the undeniable matter of waste.

The problem with waste is that there is too much of it, and there is no consensus between how to identify it. Dranker (2005) discusses the debate between academics on what actually constitutes waste. It has become clear that this ambiguity extends beyond academic knowledge and is a current uncertainty within our society. This is evident in regards to our development into a 'throwaway society' (Lucas, 2002; Gregson, Metcalfe and Crewe, 2007), the ethics of waste (Hawkins, 2006) and how to value waste (Reno, 2009; 2015). The current state of waste is based on a linear system in which the production cycle covers the following stages: raw material extraction, manufacturing goods, sales, consumption and disposal (Pietzsch, Ribeiro and de Medeiros, 2017). In contrast, zero waste redesigns the resource life cycle so that all products are reused. The zero waste concept has been embraced by policymakers because it stimulates sustainable production and consumption, optimum recycling and resource recovery, and restricts mass incineration and landfilling (Zaman, 2015).

### **2.3.3 Dangers of Discard Practices**

Modern waste management practices are fundamentally reliant on two core technologies: landfill and incineration. These burying and burning technologies have become the basis for an enormous multi-billion-dollar waste management industry over the last 50 years (Zero Waste Network, n.d). High income countries mostly rely on landfill and incineration (Zaman, 2016), for example in New Zealand we discard 15.5 million tonnes of waste each year with the majority sent to landfill (Wilson *et al.*, 2017). Traditional methods of waste disposal such as landfill and incineration have become globally recognised as unnecessary and environmentally detrimental (Costa, Massard and Agarwal, 2010). In response, governments are advocating for zero waste strategies and a change in current legislation and policy.

### **2.3.4 Landfill**

The landfill method for the ultimate disposal of solid waste material continues to be widely accepted and used due to its economic advantages (Renou *et al.*, 2008). However, the inevitable consequences of solid waste disposal in landfills include gas and leachate generation which is primarily due to microbial decomposition, climatic conditions, and landfilling operations (El-Fadel *et al.*, 1997). Landfills not only mitigate the impacts of the

linear society but have negative impacts to the surrounding environment. Physical impacts are those resulting directly from the products generated by the landfill. These include contamination of groundwater and surface waters by landfill leachate, migration, and atmospheric release of landfill gases and fires (Hirshfeld, Vesilind and Pas, 1992). The gases produced during biological degradation of buried organic wastes include methane, which when released to the atmosphere can contribute to global climate change (Huber-Humer, Gebert, and Hilger, 2008). Furthermore, waste comprises one of New Zealand's five dominant sectors of total greenhouse gas emitters and in 2017 the waste sector emissions were 2.1% above 1990 levels. There is evidence that this will continue to rise over the next 5-10 years (Ministry for the Environment, 2019).

### **2.3.5 Incineration**

When we burn discarded materials in an incinerator we are forced to go back to square one of the linear society. The waste industry claims that burning organic materials produces less global warming than landfills because carbon dioxide from incineration produces less global warming than methane does from landfills (Connett, 2013). However, even with the best systems working at optimal levels burning at extremely high temperatures and using cleaning systems, incinerators have problems with flue gases (dust, carbonate, dioxins and NO<sub>x</sub>) and solid residues (fly ash, and ash containing chlorides and fluorides) (OECD, 2002). So, it is clear cut that burning waste is not an efficient way of dealing with resources nor a sustainable alternative (Lehmann, 2011).

### **2.3.6 Zero Waste as a New Approach to Solid Waste Management**

Watson *et al.*, (2008) suggest that sustainable waste management follows a shift from a “disposal paradigm” to “waste-as-a-resource paradigm”. Waste is considered an ‘end-of-life product’ produced in the last phase of product consumption. Hence the management techniques are mainly based on ‘end-of-pipe’ solutions. Zanman (2014) discusses that while thermal treatment and landfill may be temporary waste management solutions, for a permanent and zero waste solution these technologies need to be transformed into zero-incineration and no-landfill systems by implementing long term zero-depletion principles.

### **2.3.7 Zero Waste as a Waste Education Goal and New Vision**

The zero waste concept is relatively new. Palmer (2004) first used the term zero waste in 1973 for recovering resources from chemicals. By 1995 the idea that the human race could



reduce consumption, recycle or reuse our waste and encourage manufacturers to design products with zero waste goals was beginning to become popular (Connett, 2015). The understanding and practice of zero waste varies greatly, from a waste reduction goal and aspirational statement, to a tool for resource management and a solution to pollution and global climate change (Kozlowski, 2009). More recently, zero waste has been seen as a strategy for better industrial design and waste management (Cole *et al.*, 2014; Mason *et al.*, 2003; Matete and Trois, 2008; Song, Li, and Zeng, 2015; Zaman and Lehmann). A number of organisations worldwide have adopted zero waste practices (Zaman, 2015) and there is now an opportunity to replace the dominant waste disposal practices of landfilling and incineration.

### **2.3.8 Zero Waste as a Design Philosophy**

Another term closely related to zero waste is the circular economy (CE) which traces its origins to the concepts of cradle-to-cradle and industrial ecology. The cradle-to-cradle concept was developed by McDonough and Braungart (2002) and focuses on remaking the way we make things, which mimics the regenerative cycle of nature in which waste is reused. This is based on the idea that waste in nature is regenerative and human systems can mirror natural processes by being designed to restore natural capital and utilise materials indefinitely in closed loops (Veleva, Bodkin, and Todorova, 2017). For example, vehicle owners can decide whether to have their used tyres repaired or regrooved, rather than being dumped, used tyres are collected by waste managers and sold to the highest bidder (Stahel, 2016). The reprocessing of goods and materials generates jobs and saves energy while reducing resource consumption and waste. The European Commission (2020) associates the move to a more circular economy with strategies including boosting recycling and preventing loss of valuable materials, creating jobs and economic growth, and reducing greenhouse emissions and environmental impacts.

Zero waste also has the ability to make positive impacts when focusing on design and production (Zaman, 2015). If products are designed and manufactured by applying cradle-to-cradle principles, it would be easier to recover all resources from waste. Thus the zero waste design would ensure effective resource utilisation and optimum recycling programmes. This association with closed-loop systems means that zero waste is often cited as a design principle (Zaman and Lehman, 2011; Black and Phillips, 2010; Braungart *et al.*, 2007). This

closed-loop design principle requires a shift in manufacturing techniques from a linear process of production to a more circular system.

### **2.3.9 Zero Waste as a Lifestyle**

The zero waste movement has attracted a growing following in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lombardi (2011, pg. 44) states that “the movement is more than just a vision. It is a movement that is actually changing the world.” The Zero Waste International Alliance (2009) definition highlights how zero waste impacts lifestyle change. They state zero waste is a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary, to guide people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use (ZWIA, 2009). Consumers have begun to follow this waste-free lifestyle or adapt their lifestyle in their own way to eliminate waste from their lives in order to save the environment, placing an emphasis on personal consumption choices (Murphy, 2018).

## **2.4 Alternative Consumption Identities**

The rise of concerns about the consequences of consumption patterns (Minton *et al.*, 2018) has led consumers to withstand the force or effect of consumer culture (Cherrier, 2009) by creating new consumption identities. These attitudes have begun to take place in forms including: new consumption communities (NCCS) (Kushwah, 2019), consumer resistance (Penaloza and Price, 2003; Ulusoy, 2015), collaborative consumption (Perren and Grauerholz, 2015), responsible consumption (Prendergast and Tsang, 2019), ethical consumption (Carrington and Chatzidakis, 2018; Govind *et al.*, 2019), conscious consumption (Carr *et al.*, 2012), non-consumption (Cherrier *et al.*, 2011), minimalism (DopieRała, 2017) and zero waste consumers (Zero Waste Network, 2019). It has become evident that the marketplace no longer represents an authentic environment for consumers. Two prominent and fast growing movements of sustainable consumption are voluntary simplifiers and zero waste groups. Kraisornsuthasinee, and Swierczek (2018) discuss how voluntary simplifiers concentrate on necessary consumption while zero waste consumers effectively purchase products which have no waste associated, redirecting such waste away from landfill and incineration (ZWIA, 2019).

#### **2.4.1 Zero Waste Consumers**

Consumers are not turning a blind eye to increasing levels of waste. Now more than ever, consumers have begun adopting sustainable consumption practices and changing their lifestyles to become more environmentally conscious (Yarimoglu and Binboga, 2019). The concept of zero waste, while relatively new, is becoming well known amongst businesses and communities worldwide (Pietzsch, Ribeiro and de Medeiros, 2017). Zero waste requires participants to mimic nature as a closed loop system: designing and using products for continual reuse and allowing for the harmless return to nature at the end of a product life cycle (Braungart, McDonough, and Bollinger, 2007). Zero waste consumers avoid sending any items to landfill.

#### **2.4.2 Voluntary Simplifiers**

Some academics view sustainable consumption behaviour as an act of voluntary simplicity (Shaw & Moraes, 2009). In terms of promoting sustainable consumption, voluntary simplifiers are an important target group and, in contrast to non-voluntary simplifiers, can help in building an understanding of the process of moving towards sustainable consumption (McDonald, Oates and Young, 2006). Voluntary simplicity has been viewed as a broad response to living an exhausting, unethical and environmentally damaging consumer lifestyle (Huneke, 2005). Consumers choose to simplify in whatever way will allow for them to live a more meaningful enriching life.

#### **2.4.3 Relationship between Zero Waste Consumers and Voluntary Simplifiers**

Voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers both have a presence in the literature. Zero waste academia mainly speaks of zero waste as a waste management solution and practice. Pietzsch et al., (2017) conducted a systematic review and found that out of 100 articles, 28 focused on zero waste as a form of cleaner production (eg. Clay et al., 2007; Greyson 2007; Geng et al., 2013; McCormick et al. 2013; Pauli, 1997; Uyarra and Gee 2013), 21 as a waste management (eg. Boyle 2000; Chang *et al.*, 2008; Cherubini *et al.*, 2008, Lu et al., 2006; Matete and Trois 2008; Russel, 2007; Song and Zeng, 2015; Zhang *et al.*, 2011) and 14 as zero waste as a strategy for resources, conservation and recycling (eg. Cole et al. 2014; Burlakovs *et al.*, 2016; Kelly, 2006, Zaman and Swapan 2016). Although the concept of zero waste is grounded in the academic literature, it is evident that there is a lack of identifying and analysing the zero waste consumer.

The voluntary simplicity literature is broad and well researched. Research has been conducted on identifying what a voluntary simplifier is (Alexander 2011; Alexander and Ussher, 2012; Craig-Lees and Hill, 2002; Doherty and Etzioni, 2003 Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; McDonald *et al.*, 2006; Shaw and Newholm, 2002), their motivations (Miller and Gregan-Paxton, 2006; Shama and Wisenblit, 1978; Wu *et al.*, 2016; Zavestoski 2002), categorising voluntary simplifiers (Ballantine, Arbouw and Ozanne, 2011; Oates *et al.*, 2008; McDonald *et al.*, 2006; McGouran and Prothero, 2016; Kraisornsuthasinee and Swierczek, 2018; Walther, Sandlin and Wuensch, 2016; Young and Hwang, 2004), their consumption behaviours (Ballantine and Creery, 2010; Bekin, Carrigan and Szmigin, 2005; Boujbel and d'Astous, 2012; Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; McDonald, 2014; Peyer, *et al.*, 2018) and providing future directions for the research (Ballantine and Creery, 2010; Chang, 2018; Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; McGouran and Prothero, 2016; Rich, Hanna and Wright, 2017; Zamwel *et al.*, 2014).

The literature does not discuss the relationship between the two lifestyles but it is important to note that while zero waste consumers can learn from voluntary simplifiers we cannot assume they are the same. It can however be expected that zero waste and voluntary simplifiers have some similarities within their lifestyles. Despite having independently developed outside one another they both share pro-environmental behaviours, therefore further expecting zero waste consumers to have similar motivations for adapting their chosen consumption lifestyle to those of the voluntary simplifier.

## **2.5 Gap in Current Knowledge**

After analysing the literature on zero waste it is apparent that zero waste consumers have not been studied in depth before. However, as mentioned in Section 2.5.3, due to the overwhelming studies conducted on voluntary simplifiers an in depth examination of voluntary simplifiers is vital to allow for a holistic picture of alternative consumption identities, to understand what behaviours overlap and therefore, to gain a better understanding of the gap in the literature.

## **2.6 Voluntary Simplifiers (VS)**

Another manifestation that is growing in popularity is the practice of ‘voluntary simplicity’ (VS). Despite its rise in literature, the term itself is not new. The idea of voluntary simplicity

was first introduced by Gregg (1936) who took his inspiration from great spiritual leaders of history who he believed practiced the lifestyle such as Buddha, Moses and Gandhi (Ballantine, Arbouw, and Ozanne, 2011; Hwang, 2004). Elgin (1981) also references Quakers as one of the main foundations for voluntary simplifiers. The origins of voluntary simplicity originate from a wide range of beliefs portraying how the practice can be interpreted a number of ways. Following Gregg's (1936) influential work on this topic, several academics have characterised the core values of this lifestyle (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Etzioni, 1998; Huneke, 2005; García-de-Frutos, *et al.*, 2018) which include material simplicity, self-determination, ecological awareness, social responsibility, spirituality and personal growth.

### **2.6.1 Categories of Voluntary Simplifiers**

Kraisornsuthasinee and Swierczek (2018) suggest that consumer behaviour has been split into two directions about consumption. One is pro-green consumers who are willing to switch to environmental products yet maintain their lifestyle. The other is consumers who actively consume less by changing their lifestyle and consumption patterns. A contrary position is taken by Ehrnrooth and Gronroos (2013), revealing that there is a continuum of hybrid consumption types. Considering the broad characteristics of hybrid behaviour, it seems appropriate to consider consumption behaviour on a continuum. This is supported by Young, *et al.*, (2004) who suggest that voluntary simplifiers should be conceptualised as a continuum which can be viewed as the extreme voluntary simplifier and non-voluntary simplifier and everyone in between. Understanding both of these groups and the process of moving between them can be further enhanced by studying a third group: beginner voluntary simplifiers. At one end are the consumers whose majority of purchases focus on middle market offerings and blending in – these are identified as traditional consumers. At the other end are polarised hybrid consumers who generally purchase either premium or discounted products. This type of consumer can be viewed as both a bargain hunter and a big spender. Although this type of consumer has made a clear identification of what is worth spending money on and what is not. Finally, between the two are hybrid consumers who purchase from a wide range of price categories showing scattered consumption patterns without a larger purpose (Ehrnrooth and Gronroos, 2013).

The first group of simplifiers identified are 'downshifter' and this term is used frequently throughout the literature however there is little consensus to the meaning. Shaw and

Newholm (2002) describe the term as a form of voluntary simplicity that is used to refer specifically to the mostly self-centred responses to the perception of a rushed and mediocre lifestyle of contemporary society. A similar position is taken by Etzioni (1998) who believes people downshift their consumptive rich lifestyle. Bekin *et al.* (2005) describe them as being focused on resolving the unsatisfactory ‘hurried and harried’ condition of current life. It can be seen that downshifter act on some grounds of voluntary simplicity but may not hold the same central values as simplifiers.

The next degree of simplification is ‘strong simplifiers’ (Etzioni, 1998). This group choose to buy and earn less and to give up income and fast-track success for more free time and a lower-stress life. Etzioni (1998) states that people who voluntarily and significantly curtail their income tend to be stronger simplifiers than those who only moderate their lifestyle because a significant reduction of income often leads to a much more encompassing simplification of lifestyle than selective downshifting of select items of consumption. McGouran and Prothero (2016) illustrate the last group as the most dedicated of them all: ‘holistic simplifiers’. They adjust their entire life patterns according to the ethos of voluntary simplifiers. Elgin and Mitchell (1977) view this as full voluntary simplicity as they fully and wholeheartedly live a life of voluntary simplicity. Holistic simplifiers are similar to strong simplifiers, however their entire lifestyle emulates the core beliefs of voluntary simplicity (Ballantine and Creery, 2010).

### **2.6.2 Motivations of Voluntary Simplifiers**

Much of the academic literature on voluntary simplifiers has concentrated on the difficult task of defining or operationalising the term (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; Etzioni, 1998; Rich *et al.*, 2017; Walther, Sandlin, and Wuensch 2016) and providing categories of voluntary simplifiers. At the same time, attempts have been made to explain the motivations behind living such a lifestyle. Boujbel and d'Astous (2012) express there are different motivations behind adapting a voluntary simplifier lifestyle due to the nature of the lifestyle itself.

#### **2.6.2.1 Personal Motivations**

Findings from the Boyd-Thomas, *et al.*, (2013, pg. 299) study indicate how participants wanted to “be able to differentiate between a want and a need and gain self-control to say ‘no’ to the wants”. Zavestoski (2002) argues how some consumers are motivated as a result of feelings of a personal or family crisis, as a result of years of stress, fatigue, and

unhappiness, or as a result of disillusionment from the relentless pursuit of wealth for the purpose of consuming material goods in order to create a particular self-image. Elgin (1977) also notes the importance of personal growth when adapting a voluntary simplifiers lifestyle and clearing away external clutter so as to be freer to explore the “inner life”. There is an array of personal motivations as stated by academics regarding why consumers choose to pursue a voluntary simplifier lifestyle. It is important to note that personal motivations can be both positive and negative (Zavestoski, 2002).

#### **2.6.2.2 Economic and Financial Motivations**

The literature revealed another common motivation was financial: for the consumer to reduce their current spending and allow for the money to be spent on things more meaningful. The study of (Boyd-Thomas, 2013, pg. 301) study reinforced this as a subject of the study decided to join the lifestyle for a “peace of mind from excessive and unnecessary spending”. Alongside this, the lifestyle often requires greater effort when spending money to ensure products are socially or environmentally suitable (Alexander and Ussher, 2012). This was apparent as Alexander and Ussher (2012) asked participants how they directed their expenditure toward organic, local, fair-trade, or ‘green’ products. The responses were: 31% said ‘almost always’, 43% said ‘often,’ 21% said they ‘sometimes’ would do so and only 5% said they would ‘not often’ do so. This also acknowledges that those living a more conscious lifestyle are more likely to purchase more expensive products which align with their environmental concerns. Additionally, purchasing products sends the message that by changing their spending habits they can change the market by pushing for more sustainable products to be created (Micheletti, 2010).

#### **2.6.2.3 Environmental Motivations**

There are various forms in which simplifiers choose to use environmentally friendly alternatives for the means of reducing their ecological impact. Newholm and Shaws’ (2002) study revealed a significant number of ethical consumers observed deliberately did not use or own a car, whilst others found ways to moderate car use. One of the case study respondents – who might be thought to need a car because of his work as a schools inspector – expressed a common concern about the increasing levels of private transport. He added that this was “a feeling which continues to get stronger” (pg. 176). Another motivation for simplifiers is to incorporate the use of cleaner and greener technologies and appliances into their lifestyle to reduce their carbon emissions. Stern (1984) showed that being committed to voluntary

simplicity strongly correlates with being more willing to install insulation, buy solar heating equipment and engage in other energy-saving behaviours, promoting the use of greener forms of energy.

Etzioni (1998) states how it should be noted, that while the values and motives of environmentalists and voluntary simplifiers are highly compatible, they are not identical. Environmentalists are motivated by concerns for nature and the negative effects of the growing use of scarce resources. Despite these different motivational and ideological profiles, often one and the same person is both a simplifier and an environmentalist.

#### **2.6.2.4 Social Motivations**

Elgin (1977) believes that simplifiers hold a sense of social responsibility and worldly involvement to what otherwise could be a relatively isolated and self-centred way of life. Cafaro and Gambrel (2010) suggest simplicity can give rise to a more developed sense of communal responsibility and connectivity with others, therefore helping us to develop social relationships that enrich our lives. By freeing up more time to spend with loved ones, neighbours, and community members, simplicity can help us develop the social relationships that enrich our lives. Additionally, simplicity helps when building content with our current level of status and possessions and reducing levels of life satisfaction (Cafaro and Gambrel, 2010). However, Shi (1985) has a contrary position about the social elites and their abandonment of simplicity as a standard for itself stating that perhaps their commitment to traditional hierarchical social assumptions is stronger than their commitment to simplicity and portraying that humans as a collective don't want to be perceived as going against the crowd and living differently. The traditional hierarchical structure does not praise living within our means and simplifying may be viewed by some as a lower standard of life.

#### **2.6.2.5 Spiritual Motivations**

Alexander and Ussher (2012) report that 62% of voluntary simplifiers do so for spiritual reasons. Elgin (1977) suggests the most common reason for choosing a simpler lifestyle was the desire to find a balance between the inner self and the outward expression of that self in various aspects of living. Craig-Lees and Hill's (2002) study confirms 7 out of 53 participants talked about their religious and/or spiritual beliefs as being important and the central reason for their lifestyle choice. The Walther *et al.*, (2016) study explored the connection between voluntary simplifiers and western spirituality. The findings revealed respondents used



western spirituality and voluntary simplifier identities to “be closer to God,” feel happy, think of others, and be content.

Richard Gregg (1936) has drawn the lineage of simple living back to Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Mohammed, and to more recent saints and leaders such as Francis of Assisi, Hindu rishis, Hebrew prophets, Moslem Sufis, and even to Lenin and Gandhi (Zavestoski, 2002, pg.150,). Elgin (1981) also advises that the tenets of voluntary simplicity originated from the traditions of the Quakers, the Puritans, transcendentalists such as Emerson and Thoreau, and various world religions that provide philosophical underpinnings to living a simple life (Etzioni, 1998, pg. 626). Many evangelical Christians follow ideas of voluntary simplification through stewardship and environmentalism (Orr 2002) while many mainline and liberal Protestant denominations and individuals have their own ways to stewardship and simple living, arguing that one’s relationship with God is linked to one’s relationship with money (Walther, *et al.*, 2016).

### **2.6.3 Misconceptions and Future Direction of Voluntary Simplifiers**

The literature not only focuses on operationalising the term and categorising voluntary simplifiers, but also examines key misconceptions of voluntary simplifiers. Elgins (1977) suggest that voluntary simplifiers should not be equated with a back-to-nature movement. Similarly, Alexander (2011) discusses how voluntary simplifiers can be misinterpreted as glorifying or romanticising poverty by stating that living simply does not necessarily imply leaving the city to live in the country, nor does it mean becoming a hippie or joining a commune. Despite these misconceptions of voluntary simplifiers the future seems to be fulfilling for simplifiers. Chang’s (2018) study confirms the activities of voluntary simplicity are motivated by a future-oriented outcome that benefits other people and society. Voluntary simplifiers live for a simpler life and the movement is centred on the individual’s journey. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that consumers will choose to live by the echoes of voluntary simplicity if they don’t resonate with what the lifestyle represents. Those that truly want to live simply will be doing it for themselves and not following the latest trend or doing what they believe society wants from them (Merrick, 2012).

## **2.7 Gaps in Literature**

A major cause of damage to the natural environment is high levels of consumption (Heath and Chatzidakis, 2012) this has forced consumers to reassess their current levels of consumption and turn to alternative lifestyles, including zero waste. Although alternative lifestyle is growing in popularity the literature has failed to highlight how zero waste consumers live. A clear gap in the literature has been identified: there are no current studies on zero waste consumers – why they become zero waste consumers, how they change their consumption behaviours and the motivators, barriers and facilitators they face during their zero waste journey. So, this study is therefore a necessary step in furthering the knowledge. As previously identified, previous zero waste literature has tended to focus on zero waste production and failed to illustrate zero waste consumers. This gap is likely due to the infancy of zero waste as a lifestyle since it is only within the last decade consumers have begun to vocally document their zero waste journeys online. This has led to the mass spread of the movement, however, current studies do not often address this.

Although the literature highlights a range of alternative consumption lifestyles, the voluntary simplifiers literature does not suffice. As established earlier, although voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers have some behavioural overlap they are not the same consumer. Therefore, grouping them under the voluntary simplifier literature does not capture zero waste consumers so it cannot provide businesses with knowledge on how to cater for these consumers, shape policy or show how to live a zero waste lifestyle.

From the literature gaps proposed above, the following research questions were developed and shall be addressed in this thesis:

RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer?

RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumer's zero waste journey?

RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators on the consumer's zero waste journey?

## **2.8 Chapter Summary**

The research in this chapter offers an important contribution to the movement towards zero waste – a field which is in its infancy and is expected to grow at a rapid rate. With the

world's population acknowledging that they must change their consumption habits this research is more relevant than ever. This chapter has presented the key academic contributions for two areas of literature: sustainable consumption and zero waste. It has also presented a review of two main consumer identities: voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers. The chapter concludes that there is a gap in the literature on zero waste consumers that needs to be filled, but it cannot be filled by the literature on voluntary simplifiers despite the similarities between the two identities.

To give a more in-depth overview, the chapter examined the key debate on what sustainability is and the role it plays in marketing and consumption, specifically the birth of sustainable marketing. Following this, the chapter discussed how sustainable consumption became a commonly used term in the literature. Then, the emergence of alternative consumption attitudes, specifically voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers was discussed, detailing how they both have been examined in previous literature and the relationship between the two. Importantly, this chapter made sense of the disperse literature on zero waste identifying how current literature explores the term. This revealed the lack of literature on zero waste consumers. It was then proposed that voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers can be expected to have similar motivations due to the overlap in pro-environmental behaviour. Therefore, a review on voluntary simplifier's motivations, categorisation and future research was conducted. This review has led to identifying the current gaps in literature which this thesis aims to rectify which needs to happen in order for businesses to cater for this group of consumers. The next chapter reviews a range of research methodologies and outlines the adopted methodological approach for this research along with justification for this selection.

## **CHAPTER THREE – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews the logic behind the decisions made in this research. It begins by addressing the reasoning behind why the research was undertaken. The chapter then moves on to the researcher's beliefs about knowledge. Following this, the researcher discloses the theoretical perspective and beliefs that have shaped methodological decisions in this thesis. The following sections then detail the methodology, method, participants and transcribing techniques used in the research which give detailed accounts of the expected research approach. Lastly, the data analysis is outlined, followed by a conclusion.

### **3.2 Research Purpose**

Global waste is expected to grow by 70% by 2050 unless urgent action is taken.

- (The world bank, 2018)

The burden of hyperconsumerism and a highly globalized world has forced consumers to adapt their consumption to alternative lifestyles, including zero waste. However, little is known about the lives and experiences of zero waste consumers today. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative netnography (Kozinets, 2010; 2015; 2019) was to explore the daily lives and personal experiences of zero waste consumers. The research questions of the study were designed to explore the journey of the lifestyle, identifying the motivators, barriers and facilitators. This research is a step in understanding how to convince consumers to live better lifestyles, shape policy and allow businesses to produce and supply sustainable products. Additionally, a better understanding of zero waste consumers would prove useful for both academics and practitioners looking to generate strategic implications. Sustainable practices are constantly evolving and becoming more current, therefore this research proves relevant for both academics and practitioners. The research gaps that will be filled by this research are addressed in Section 1.7 of the literature review. The main one being, that there is no current studies conducted on zero waste consumers.

Thus the research objectives which help to frame this study are:

RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer?

RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumer's zero waste journey?

RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators on the consumer's zero waste journey?

### **3.3 Research Approach**

The following section will address the epistemological beliefs and the theoretical approach of the researcher (as per Crotty, 1998), detailing the assumptions made about reality and knowledge.

These not only inform the research decisions made regarding methodology and research techniques, but provide a foundation for the research. Next, the theoretical approach is addressed in detail.

#### **3.3.1 Epistemology**

This study takes the view of constructionism as its epistemological belief, with individuals having their own understanding and meaning of objects and their reality. This approach was most suitable as the researcher holds the beliefs of constructionism and the social construction of meaning. This consists of the belief that people assign their own meanings to zero waste according to their previous experiences and consumption habits. People also construct meaning for zero waste through stories and shared experiences. This is shown through YouTube videos and collaborations of zero waste vloggers sharing their experiences and lifestyle. Although it is important to recognise there may be some disagreement between individuals due to differing ontological and epistemological views. However, this approach is most appropriate for this research context and the researcher's views.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge in the sense that it is the theory we use to explain what we know and understand in the world and how we have come to learn it (Crotty, 1998). In essence, epistemology deals with the existence of meaning by looking at the beliefs of the researcher regarding how knowledge is created. Alongside, the beliefs about the relationship between the researcher and participant (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Constructionism emphasizes that we do not create meaning, but instead construct it using the already existing world and objects within it. Through interaction with the world around us, we gain the ability to construct meaning. Showing how humans view external reality differently due to different experiences that have influenced perceptions (Crotty, 1998). Thus, this research will seek

people's interpretations of zero waste which were created through participant's lived experiences. Participants have reflected on their experiences, in their YouTube videos.

Therefore, this study assumes that to create a worldview of its participants, there must be consensus of their constructions through analysis. Thus, the representations of different individuals must be compared in order to gain a consensus of these multiple realities. It is also assumed that as these realities are created through interactions, that the process by which individuals are studied may affect their interpretations. The researcher is seen as being a part of the social reality of the research context by interpreting participants viewpoints to create meaning. So too, the interpretations will be affected by the researcher's own knowledge and assumptions. Thus, the researcher has an active part in interpreting the constructions of those studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 1994; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

### **3.3.2 Theoretical Perspective**

The theoretical perspective refers to the philosophical approach which determines the methodology and the grounding of logic (Crotty, 1998). The above assumptions of constructionism lead to a theoretical perspective that is based on hermeneutical beliefs. Hermeneutics is the belief that language is the basis of our understanding and sharing of meaning. It is also concerned with the interpretation of understanding, the social aspect of creating meaning, deciphering indirect meaning, and the interaction between researchers and their research (Arnold & Fischer, 1994; Crotty, 1998). Hermeneutics also considers that individual constructions differ based on previous experiences and perceptions (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). It sees constructions that can only be realised and created through social interaction, therefore hermeneutics beliefs can be viewed as aligned with those of constructionism (as outlined in Section 3.3.1). This research will assume that understanding is linguistic and is shared via language, the same stance as hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics stresses that language is the medium that facilitates understanding. Arnold & Fischer, (1994, pg.58) state "language shapes and constrains our experience of the world. There is no world outside of language to be discovered with language as a tool; language is the world we know". Thus, language links the construction with its meaning helping the researcher gain a deeper understanding of participants constructions, even deeper than the understanding those participants have themselves. Language can be seen as a key ingredient for shaping pre-understanding. Pre-understanding is the idea that the researcher will have at

least some knowledge and understanding of what they are researching before conducting the task. It exists prior to the interpretation, as the researcher is already a part of the world in which the participants and the subject matter exists. Thus, hermeneutics enables the researcher to draw more consciously, critically, and powerfully on their own pre-understanding of the chosen phenomena (Crotty, 1998). Although, this can be viewed as a negative aspect of preunderstanding, it is noted that without it simple research concepts can become unnecessarily complex for the researcher. On the contrary, other research approaches seem to regard pre-understanding largely as an obstacle to be overcome (Arnold & Fischer, 1994). However, this research acknowledges that pre-understanding could have influenced analysis but accepts that it was necessary in order to understand the topic and to develop further insight into it.

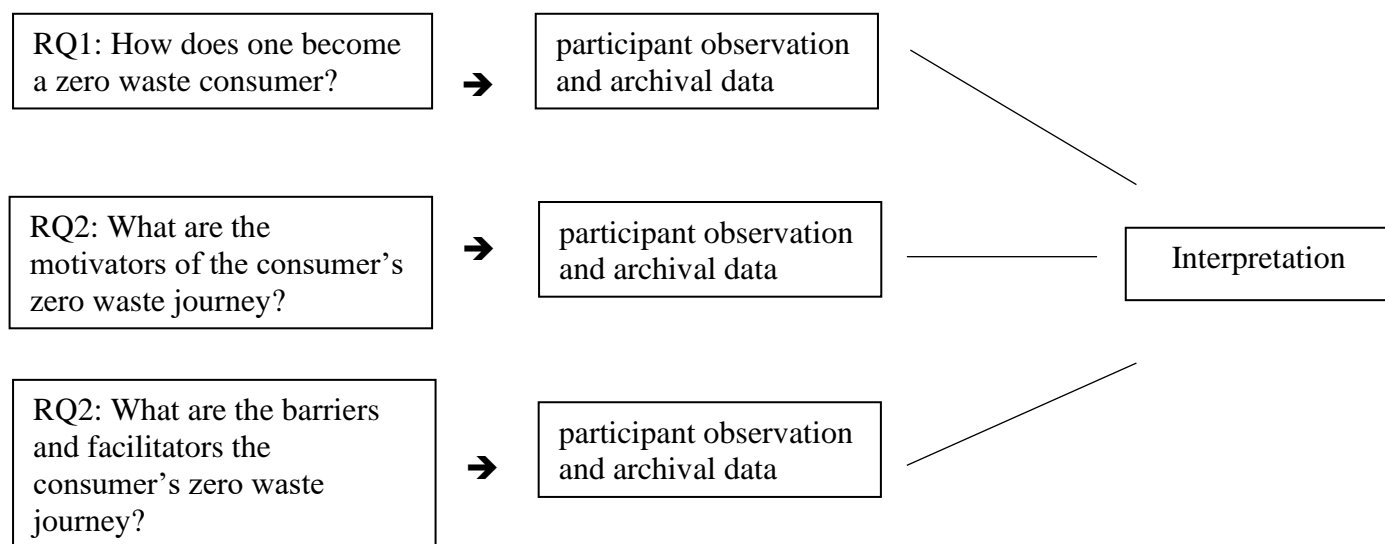
### **3.4 Methodology**

Methodology is an important consideration of the research process. Holden & Lynch (2004) highlight the importance of a methodology that compliments ontological, epistemological, and theoretical assumptions. A methodology is the underlying strategy or plan of action in order to develop an understanding of the topic under investigation (Crotty, 1998). In this research, constructionism is the stance taken and an appropriate qualitative method was selected as a result. The intention behind the research and the scope of the research questions were also considered in this process. Subsequently, netnography is the methodology selected with observation as the data-collection method.

#### **3.4.1 Netnography**

When researching and selecting the methodology by which an investigation is conducted, it is vital that the appropriate method is employed to achieve a more desired outcome of the study. In this study, the researcher used a qualitative ethnographic approach into an online community, also known as netnography (Kozinets, 2010; 2015; 2019). As the study lies within the context of online communities, it aims to answer the research questions by analysing online platforms and cyberspaces, which according to virtual ethnography are valid field sites (Hine, 2000). This technique allowed the researcher to gather both a large amount and wide range of data in an efficient manner. This was an important consideration due to the time constraints of this research.

Ethnography is a qualitative research methodology whereby a researcher immerses herself in the everyday life of a community with the goal of understanding life from community members' perspectives (Kozinets, 2010; 2015). Kozinets (2019) defines netnography as a form of qualitative research that seeks to understand the cultural experiences that encompass and are reflected within the traces, practices, networks and systems of social media. In this sense, netnography uses an ethnographic lens to understand online communities and can be considered a branch of ethnography. Therefore, as would occur in any ethnography, netnography also makes use of participant observation, archival data and other forms of data available to the researcher. Netnography differs from other forms of online or digital ethnography by its emphasis on online traces and interactions (Kozinets, 2019). That is not to say that these traditional ethnographic methods do not work for online work, but rather netnography provides a useful guide-map for navigating research online.



*Figure 1: Netnography's uses in this research*

Kozinets (2010) argues that the concept of netnographic research does not solely provide for the observation of online cultures but rather it profoundly understands online communities and social interactions. It is important for researchers to embrace new media and explore its features, users and uses, content and effects and development within contemporary society. Thus, to make sense of new dynamics, the researcher used a netnographic approach to observe the YouTube video content and participants' social exchanges and interactions as per Figure 3. Due to the fact that YouTube is such a popular and rich site of information it proves to be a data rich platform for netnographic investigation (Kozinets, 2019).



### **3.4.2 YouTube**

YouTube is a video sharing service, where users have access to unlimited amounts of videos in which they can rate, share, subscribe and comment on. In 2018, YouTube was rated the number one social media site in America, however, not only is this platform popular in America but is an international social media phenomenon (Kozinets, 2019). Conversations also take place on YouTube mainly in the comments section. The world of video blogging or ‘vlogging’ is highly popular on YouTube. Vloggers in industries such as beauty, health, fashion, fitness, food and lifestyle have large amounts of devoted followers. Zero waste has become a trending topic with an increasing amount of vloggers dedicating their videos to the topic.

Netnographic researchers are not just dealing merely with words, but with images, sound files, edited audiovisual presentations and other digital artifacts. YouTube content is produced both individually and co-produced with compatible YouTube zero waste channels. The data has been sitting in digital archives with various videos uploaded numerous years ago. Access is freely given to viewers and videos vary from highly interactive like a conversation with viewers asking personal questions and compelling them to leave their comments, personal experiences and recommendations in the comments below. Alternatively, it can be interpreted as reading the diary of an individual with some videos simply outlining their beliefs on zero waste subjects and experiences (Kozinets, 2007).

### **3.4.3 Justification**

Compared with traditional and market-oriented ethnography, netnography is far less time consuming and elaborate. Researchers can obtain an extensive amount of conversational data more quickly than from interviews, because netnographers benefit from the immediate transcription of online discussions (Kozinets, 2002). Another contrast with traditional and market-oriented ethnography is that netnography is capable of being conducted in a manner that is entirely unobtrusive. Compared with focus groups and personal interviews, netnography is far less obtrusive, as it is conducted using observations of consumers in a context that is not fabricated by the researcher (Kozinets, 2010). It also can provide information in a manner that is less costly and timelier than focus groups and personal interviews (Kozinets, 2002). As per Kozinets (2002), there is no need for the researcher to be physically present with individuals from the community, to have direct physical contact, nor

to observe behaviours in real time, as many cyber-communications are archived. The subjects can be local, remote, or scattered worldwide.

Kozinets (2010) contended that netnography does not require that a particular theory be applied to the study of online communities. Instead, netnography allows online communities to develop freely and is well supported by an interpretive theoretical perspective (Crotty 1998), as hermeneutics is a type of interpretivism. The constructions of participants, through netnography, will be able to be richly described and interpreted by the researcher by adopting an openness to new insights without a preconceived view of the findings. Lastly, video entries are generally archived and stored (Jiyao & Reynolds, 2010; Kozinets, 2015), resulting in the ability for researchers to access not only current but also past discussions. Consequently, the availability of digitally archived data greatly increases the scope of research. However, the most important benefit comes from increasing the researcher's scientific understanding of the social phenomena (Kozinets, 2019).

As with any methodology, netnography has limitations which need to be understood and mitigated before beginning a netnographic study. One large area of concern for researchers when using social media discussions is anonymity. Specifically, the inability to verify the identity of online participants and the ability to trust that they are reporting actual behaviours (Scanfeld et al., 2010). However, this challenge is not unique to netnography; in any data gathering situation involving self-reporting, false information may be given, and researchers often have no means to verify claims made by participants in relation to such details as country of origin, age, occupation, and so on (Mkono, Markwell & Wilson, 2013). In addition, there is a challenge with establishing the provenance of data (that is, the authenticity of persons claiming to have created the content). A question is raised how the researcher has verified that the comments made by consumers are truthful and legitimate. Be that as it may, the view of constructionist is the view of reality is that there is multiple and is based on interpretations. Therefore, the legitimacy argument is subjective. Additionally, academics agree that "fake" content is quickly overwhelmed by genuine content (Mkono, Markwell & Wilson, 2013). Lastly, netnographic research is limited to examining the perspectives of people who have internet access and are literate. However, digital technologies have made hard to access groups or samples more accessible through the use of netnographic enquiry especially consumer-issue-focused collectives (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018).

Rival qualitative research designs were considered such as an online survey and semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to guide the conversation, however, they leave room and flexibility to change the direction of conversation and uncover insight that may have been otherwise left undiscovered. One of the main advantages is that the semi-structured interview method has been found to be successful in enabling reciprocity between the interviewer and participant, enabling the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on participant's responses (Kallio *et al.*, 2016). Interviews also have the potential to overcome the poor response rates of a questionnaire survey (Barriball & While, 1994). However, there were numerous reasons why interviews were not used in this research including; time constraints, scope of the research and creation of excessive amounts of data.

Surveys provide access to a large amount of data in a very time efficient manner. One advantage of online survey research is that it takes advantage of the ability of the internet to provide access to groups and individuals who would be difficult, if not impossible, to reach through other channels (Wright, 2005). In many cases communities and groups exist only in cyberspace, and this is applicable to the zero waste community. Additionally, online survey researchers can also save money by moving to an electronic medium from a paper format. When conducting online research, investigators can encounter problems as regards sampling and access as relatively little may be known about the characteristics of people in online communities. For example, some researchers access potential participants by posting invitations to participate in a survey on community bulletin boards, discussion groups, and chat rooms. However, members of online communities often find this behaviour rude or offensive, or consider this type of posting to be "spam" (Wright, 2005). Surveys contradict the researcher's epistemological beliefs as they do not believe in multiple truths and realities. Additionally, surveys do not detail participants zero waste journey which does not answer the research questions of RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer? RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumers zero waste journey? RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators the consumers zero waste journey? Consequently, a netnographic approach deemed more suitable to study due to the overwhelming video entries from participants detailing their zero waste journey.

A netnography was chosen over alternative methods, to fulfil the need to explore issues the researcher needed to observe during the archived online process of data collection. As stated,

there are several reasons why netnography is suited to this study which provides researchers an inconspicuous way for studying online communities. The use of netnography also complimented the researcher's epistemological beliefs, as she believes that meaning is socially constructed. Therefore, having participants discussing the topic freely and vloggers encouraging viewers to do so allowed the researcher to gain a consensus interpretation of the research context.

### **3.5 Method**

This section details how the methodologies were used when gathering participants responses (Crotty, 1998). First outlining the selectin criteria for social media, then for vloggers, finishing with the data collection process of observation.

#### **3.5.1 Selection Criteria for Social Media**

The first step for the researcher was to identify the digital platform the researcher was to use. Search terms related to the zero waste area and research questions were entered into the main Google search window. Kozinets (2015) suggests using your research focus and research questions as the source of key words. Various keyword combinations were formed and searched with terms "zero waste", "zero waste challenge", "zero waste journey", "plastic free challenge", "minimalism", and "minimal living". A large number of platforms arose, and in order for the researcher to identify the most appropriate platform for the study, Table 3 was drafted with the most relevant platforms. Kozinets (2015) suggests drawing a table and utilising the criterion to rate each platform on a ten-point scale:

1. Relevance details how the platform relates to the research focus and question.
2. Active is how recent and regular communications are.
3. Interactive regards the flow of communications between participants.
4. Substantial reflects the energetic feel and the critical mass of communicators.
5. Heterogeneity signifies whether they have a variety of difference or a consistency of similar type of participants.
6. Rich in data offers more detailed or descriptively rich data, as with lots of well-crafted postings, blog entries or videos.
7. Experiential offers the netnographer a particular kind of experience.

This table enabled the researcher to identify the top four sites, YouTube, Reddit, Facebook groups and Instagram. Facebook offered closed zero waste groups, where members post advice, experiences and seek out a relationship with other members bonding over their mutual interest and participation in the lifestyle. However, posts are arbitrary and do not answer RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer? RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumers zero waste journey? RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators the consumers zero waste journey? Additionally, the issues of ethics and privacy arose, as the groups are closed groups. Reddit provides zero waste boards where individuals post about a zero waste topic on a discussion board and others comment or share the post. However, this platform seemed to have a wide range of users with most sharing pictures of zero waste products or using the platform as an outlet to vent to like-minded users. Instagram provided an abundance of visual materials surrounding the consumer's personal life. This led to YouTube being the most suitable platform for the study. YouTube allowed for easy identification of zero waste consumers and provided multiple video entries detailing their journey and transition to zero waste. Therefore, the researcher chose YouTube as a source of rich data via audiovisual, narrative, and interactive content. Justification of specific participants is outlined in Section 3.6.

| <b>Weighted ranking factors</b> | <b>YouTube</b> | <b>Facebook groups</b> | <b>Reddit</b> | <b>Twitter</b> | <b>Instagram</b> | <b>Websites</b> | <b>Bulletin boards</b> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Relevance                       | 10             | 8                      | 7             | 5              | 4                | 8               | 4                      |
| Activity                        | 10             | 10                     | 10            | 10             | 9                | 5               | 6                      |
| Interactivity                   | 10             | 10                     | 10            | 7              | 9                | 1               | 8                      |
| Substantiality                  | 10             | 10                     | 7             | 5              | 7                | 1               | 5                      |
| Heterogeneity                   | 10             | 10                     | 6             | 6              | 3                | 1               | 7                      |
| Richness                        | 10             | 7                      | 5             | 5              | 6                | 5               | 5                      |
| Experientiality                 | 10             | 10                     | 10            | 5              | 10               | 5               | 6                      |
| <b>Total score</b>              | <b>70</b>      | <b>65</b>              | <b>55</b>     | <b>43</b>      | <b>48</b>        | <b>26</b>       | <b>41</b>              |

*Table 3 Choosing a site selection table (adapted from Kozinets, 2015)*

Identifying the relevant zero waste channels on YouTube was the next step. This involved keyword searches on YouTube.com, a search engine for video publications. The same keywords were used to identify relevant channels these were, “zero waste”, “zero waste challenge”, “zero waste journey”, “plastic free challenge”, “minimalism”, and “minimal living” Relevant search results were then identified and compiled for more detailed thematic analysis.

The researcher conducted an initial search resulting in 87 total channels; then scanned the results until channels provided relevant content. A total of 18 YouTube channels were identified and selected in this way. Kozinets (2015) states data must be directly related to the research focus, topic and particular questions. The researcher used the three research questions: RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer? RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumer’s zero waste journey? RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators on the consumer’s zero waste journey?. Two channels the researcher came across had videos titled ‘zero waste lifestyle challenge’. This related to research question one: How does one become a zero waste consumer? A third channel had videos titling ‘discovering a zero waste paradise’, ‘the biggest zero waste mistake, and ‘what’s in my zero waste kit’ all of these can provide the researcher insight into the drivers of following the lifestyle, answering RQ1, RQ2 and RQ3.

Three YouTube channels under the category ‘zero waste’ were chosen by the researcher. These channels have been established between nine to six years prior to the research. The YouTubers constantly post videos regarding zero waste topics and have accumulated greater levels of awareness and following over the years.

### **3.5.2 Selection Criteria for Vloggers**

Excluding the researcher and moderator, a total of three participants were included in the study. All were females and of the participants, two sourced their all of their income from YouTube. Zero waste YouTubers were sought for this research because of their explicit documentation of the transition to a zero waste lifestyle. To ensure this research was well rounded, an extensive online search was conducted identifying all zero waste YouTubers in the community and choosing which ones were the most influential and followed by

consumers. This search allowed for participants to be found quickly to combat the time constraints of the research. However, this showed a skew in age and gender as all participants are female and are inside the 25-30 age bracket. The selection criterion for participants included:

- 1) Identification of being on a zero waste journey or had gone through the transition
- 2) Over the age of 18
- 3) Had a subscriber count over 50,000
- 4) Had a YouTube presence for a minimum of one year
- 5) Frequently posted videos at minimum once a fortnight
- 6) Videos must have a minimum of 10,000 views
- 7) Videos must be older than 2017
- 8) Videos are only sourced from the participants zero waste playlist

Once YouTube channels were identified which met all parts of the criteria videos from the channels were then selected. Participants had to be over the age of 18 in order to comply with ethics. They had to have a subscriber count over 50,000 to ensure they had built up a significant following to which they are well known in the zero waste YouTube community. Additionally, being active for over a year was vital to ensure participants had gained their footing and had the opportunity to build up their following. Posting at least once a fortnight allows for continuous relevant vlogs to be interpreted and videos having a minimum of 10,000 views shows the vlogs are relevant and reaching their following. Videos are only interpreted from 2017 and sourced from the zero waste playlists to ensure that the study remains in the time and resource constraints.

### **3.5.3 Data Collection**

Data collection is an important part of the research process. This section details the observation process, discussing why observation was deemed most suitable for the research, how observation was conducted in two parts; observing the participants vlogs and the interactions in the comments section of each vlog. Then discussing why observation was chosen over the rival data collection method of interviews.

### **3.5.3.1 Observation**

This research has followed observation as its data collection method, meaning the investigative data is the sole type of data collection used. There are two aspects of observation for this study, observing the participant vlogs and the interaction between participants and followers in the comments section of each vlog. Additionally, it is important to highlight the researcher has conducted non-participant observation. This is when the researcher observes and records naturalist behaviour but does not become a part of the unfolding events (Kozinets, 2019).

Observation methods are useful to researchers in a variety of ways. They provide researchers ways to interpret nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with who, grasp how participants communicate and identify where and when things happen (Jorgensen, 2015; Kawulich, 2005). Additionally, Jorgensen (2015) states observation is most appropriate when 1) the research problem is concerned with human meanings and interactions viewed from the insiders perspective; 2) the researcher is able to gain access to the appropriate setting; 3) the phenomenon is sufficiently limited in size; 4) the research problem can be addressed by qualitative data gathered by direct observation. Observation is best suited for this research as it meets all of the above criteria and the content of the vlogs and comments are sufficient enough to address the research questions.

The first type of observation used was that of the participants vlogs. The fieldwork was conducted in November 2019, although the videos examined are not limited to this period, but varied across each channel starting from the first upload and ending at the start of the research period. During the fieldwork, the researcher took field notes of the videos, describing the observations. For video attributes, the researcher captured vlog title, date, vlogger name, length, numbers of views, and top three comments. For descriptive information, the researcher recorded / observed key quotes which related to the research questions and themes which emerged from videos. Also, following Kozinets's (2015) recommendations about the crucial role of field notes in netnography. He illustrates how researchers can choose to record their own observations regarding subtext, pretexts and contingencies, during their time online. As a result of adopting this approach, the researcher gained key insight into how the zero waste YouTube community interact and transpire.



Viewer comments were the second aspect observed by the researcher. Kozinets (2019) acknowledges how YouTube is such a popular and rich site filled with information, displaying how video comments can range from the tens to millions. This overload of information allowed the researcher to record the top three comments, this was an appropriate number as it ensured the researcher stayed within the scope and time period of the research. Top comments were either pinned by the YouTuber meaning that they were automatically put to the top or the comment had the most likes from viewers. The researcher observed the interactions in the comments section between the followers and participants. Noting down the top three comments on each vlog, as this was a chance for the followers to connect with the participants and share their personal stories or words of wisdom. Often participants prompted followers to leave a comment detailing their zero waste experience or thoughts in relation to the video, resulting in strong community-building.

Rival qualitative data collection methods were considered, specifically interviews. However, observation was chosen over interviews as interviews does not explicitly document the participants going through a zero waste transition. Interviews are heavily reliant on participants memories (Smith and Leffingwell, 1999), whereas observation allowed for the researcher to observe vlogs over multiple years uncovering data which may have been missed in interviews.

Observation additionally ensured participants were not altering their behaviours or responses in any way, avoiding social desirability response bias (Randall and Fernandes, 1991) which often occurs in interviews. The researcher could then observe participants and the interactions knowing that the participants were not changing their vlogs to what they preserve to be more desirable for the researcher. Its important to note that even studies that rely mainly on interviewing as a data collection technique employ observational methods to note body language and other cues (Jorgensen, 2015). Interviews is a suitable method for many studies, however observation is most suitable for this research.

### **3.6 Participants**

As a result of the selection criteria three participants were chosen in total, pseudonym were used for their names which are; Andy, Sarah and Bex.

Participant one, Alex is female and resides in Texas, United States. She is assumed to be in her mid to late twenties and has been on her zero waste journey since high school. However, only started documenting her journey when in the month of July 2017 she challenged herself and her partner to go zero waste. This then led to the spark of excitement for Alex as she decided to commit to the lifestyle long term. Alex has 111 videos in her zero waste playlist dating from 5th July 2017 to 24th November 2019.

Participant two, Sarah is female and has recently relocated from New York to Seattle, Canada. She is assumed to be in her early to mid twenties. Her zero waste journey sparked when she first went vegan as her mindset about consumption began to change. The plastic free challenge had another impact on her awareness of alternative movements and her journey on the zero waste movement started shortly after completing the challenge in mid-2017. Sarah has 60 videos in her sustainable low waste living playlist dating from June 8th 2017 to October 29th 2019.

Participant three, Bex is female and lives in London, United Kingdom. She is assumed to be in her mid to late twenties. Her zero waste journey began as she became vegan in 2012. Her transition between a non zero waste lifestyle and zero waste was not documented on her channel unlike Sarah and Alex. Bex's zero waste playlist has a total of 48 videos and are mainly educational and focus on product alternatives. These videos date from February 19th 2017 to August 14th 2019.

| Participant | Total views | Subscriber count | Video uploads | Channel start date | Geographic location |
|-------------|-------------|------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Alex        | 16,768,912  | 177,000          | 320           | 15/12/2010         | USA                 |
| Sarah       | 5,798,934   | 164,000          | 179           | 11/07/2012         | Canada              |
| Bex         | 4,918,072   | 71,100           | 155           | 24/03/2011         | UK                  |

*Table 4: Summary of YouTube Channels*

### **3.7 Transcribing**

Transcription is understood as the graphic representation of selected aspects of the behaviour of individuals engaged in a conversation. Transcripts are needed to make momentary conversational behaviour permanently available on paper for scientific analysis (Kowal, & O'connell, 2004) The transcript plays a central role in research on spoken discourse and aspects of interaction in categories of interest to the researcher (Edwards & Lampert, 2014). Transcription enables the researcher to focus efficiently on the relevant and important content without getting distracted by irrelevant details. In this research context, the transcription aims to report all relevant content of the YouTube videos in order to allow for increased accuracy for analysis. Due to the ethical considerations of the information, the privacy and security of the raw data was highly important. YouTube automatically transcribed videos as well including the option of timestamps. However, it is important to note that due to the automation not all transcripts were verbatim, to overcome this transcripts were confirmed by the researcher.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

The methodology employed for this research is thematic analysis. Braun & Clarke (pg 57, 2012) offer the definition of “systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set”. It helps to form different patterns and themes in the data which in turn allows researchers to compare and contrast their findings (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore is widely used as a form of qualitative analysis playing a key role when comparing and contrasting sets of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The experiences and perspectives of those being investigated are inherently subjective. As no two investigators have the same store of experience (Spiggle, 1994). Thematic analysis is an appropriate choice as it searches for and examines themes that emerge which hold relevance and importance for the described phenomenon (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). It is anticipated that thematic analysis will facilitate the researcher in the development of insight into the zero waste context. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility, as it can be conducted in a number of different ways. Thematic analysis has the ability to straddle three main continua along which qualitative research approaches can be located: inductive versus deductive or theory-driven data coding and analysis.

Strategic decision making is a fundamental process when conducting thematic analysis. These include; deciding what constructs theme, whether to use theoretical or inductive

analysis, and assessing the level of fit with ontological and epistemological assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When evaluating the difference between inductive versus theoretical analysis, an inductive approach shows the themes being identified are strongly linked to the data (Patton, 1990) where coding entails fitting into a pre-existing coding frame. In contrast to theoretical analysis coding where coding is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This research involves an inductive approach to the analysis of qualitative data. This allows for answering the research questions to the best ability.

Subsequent decisions involve the level that themes are analysed in the research, adapting either a semantic or latent approach. A thematic analysis typically focuses exclusively or primarily on one level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With a semantic approach, themes are identified from what the participant has stated researchers assess the surface meanings of the data and do not look further than this. Conversely, the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, identifying and examining ideas assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis within this latter tradition tends to come from a constructionist paradigm which is in line with the researcher's epistemological assumptions. Therefore, thematic analysis is the best method to employ when analysing the collected data. This is due to the adaptability, flexibility, ability to analyse latent themes at a range of levels and lastly, and suitability in regards to the chosen epistemological stance.

The researcher utilised the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), their article discussing thematic analysis from a psychological viewpoint and includes a guide on how it should best be applied. The approach has six phases; familiarising yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In phase one the researcher transcribed data from the YouTube videos, then once transcribed re-read the scripts searching for meaning and patterns in the data, Braun and Clarke (2006) state how it is ideal to read through the data set at least once before your coding usually through repeated reading. The researcher then generated codes, detailing interesting features from the zero waste videos. Coding identifies features in the data that refers to 'the most basic element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998, pg. 63). The researcher identified codes including; haul, zero waste alternatives, zero

waste swaps, educational, zero waste transformational and how to videos. Once the codes are collected, the researcher then collated codes into potential themes and gathered data into each relevant theme. The next step was for the researcher to refine and review the initial themes, during this phase there were various themes which did not have enough data to support the argument or collapsed into other themes. This then led the researcher to phase five which included defining and naming the themes and identifying those subthemes under a theme. Each theme name immediately gives the reader a sense what the theme is about; pilgrim, catalyst; human; power distance and social paradigm as outlined in Chapter Four. Lastly, the researcher produces the report which involves the final analysis and write-up of the findings chapter.

### **3.9 Establishing Trustworthiness**

The traditional terms of validity and reliability are not applicable for this research as they emphasize one true reality. Guba and Lincoln (1985) highlights the analysis of validity, detailing how one variable causes another, whilst reliability deals with the variables levels of consistency. This is contrary to the researcher's epistemological beliefs of multiple truths that are dependent on interpretation of reality by the individual. This has led to the concept of 'Trustworthiness' to be chosen to evaluate the collected data. Trustworthiness is broken down into four key aspects; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

#### **3.9.1 Credibility**

In qualitative research, credibility signifies internal validity. Guba and Lincoln (1985) define internal validity as the amount of variation in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variable. Additionally they state that a causal connection between both variables is usually assumed. Internal validity focuses on 'one truth' by looking for a conclusive explanation for the chosen phenomenon. This is not appropriate for the researcher's epistemology as in order to have credible research, it is fundamental for the researcher to show that 'multiple truths' have been interpreted.

The researches credibility was ensured by the use of peer debriefing. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985) debriefing provides crucial support to the credibility of the data in qualitative research, providing a means toward the establishment of the findings overall trustworthiness. In debriefing, a researcher and an impartial peer overlooks and conducts constructive discussions about the progress of the investigation. Additionally, debriefing confirms that

findings are interpreted as honest, worthy and authentic (Spall, 1998). In this research the debriefing was performed by the supervisor of the researcher who reviewed and audited the coding and themes which had been identified. This allowed for an external source to judge the interpretations of the data to ensure they accurately represent the data and are in a logical manner. Thus ensuring the research was credible (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

### **3.9.2 Transferability**

Guba and Lincoln (1985) refer to transferability as external validity, which refers to how successfully the research results can be generalized if alternative participants and measures were applied. However, due to the researchers epistemological beliefs and emphasis on 'multiple truths' the concept of external validity cannot be applied. The researcher believes that each participant experiences their own reality, therefore exactly recreating this research with alternative participants would not be possible. However, transferability is different to generalizability because generalizability refers to the researcher's perspective. Based on the extent to which the study's results are potentially generalizable to another environment or population. This research is reliant on thick description, therefore, the researcher has provided an extensive, comprehensive description of the findings in order to strive for high levels of transferability. This includes a thorough description of the participants (Section 3.7), selection criteria for the participants (Section 3.6.2), Chapter Four exclusively detailing findings with supporting quotes as evidence from the participants, and lastly, Chapter Five dedicated to the discussion of how the findings will influence future studies and the literature. The mentioned sections should provide enough information for future researchers when determining whether or not this research is transferable to their chosen population and phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

### **3.9.3 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and conditions of the study (Connelly, 2016). It can be seen as similar or the equivalent to reliability in quantitative research, but with the understanding stability of conditions are dependent on the nature of the study. In a qualitative research such as this, involving netnographic studies with participants of varying ontological and epistemological perspectives results in a variance of interpretation. However, the use of a supervisor that can review and analyse the researchers findings and thematic analysis minimizing misinterpretation, or variable interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher's supervisor aided the process and facilitated the methodological

decisions. According to Baxter and Eyles (1997) this supervisory relationship is an effective form of maximising both appropriate interpretation and research dependability.

#### **3.9.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability of research is dependent on whether or not the researcher has allowed their own biases to reflect in their research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define it as the degree of which findings are determined by the respondents and conditions of inquiry rather than biases, interests, motivations or perspectives of the inquirer. However, the removal of all bias is unrealistic as humans hold their own subconscious biases. Therefore, mitigation techniques must be employed. In this study, the researcher chose Baxter and Eyle's (1997) methodology of accounting for their own biases and detailing the influence it may have on the research. The researcher reflected and noted her personal biases she may hold towards the studied context. The researcher has been living towards a zero waste lifestyle themselves, and has been a part of the sustainability network and community within her local area for the entirety of her studies. Additionally, the researcher is of similar age to those studied therefore understands the language terminology and type of zero waste culture the generation lives in. This provides valuable insight for this research context, aiding the understanding of the phenomenon and individuals being investigated. Furthermore, analysis and data interpretation was strongly supported by current literature in the sustainability field and thus was grounded in legitimate academic research, rather than the interpretation and possible bias of the researcher.

#### **3.10 Ethical Considerations**

Due to the nature of the topic of this research and the use of netnography, this thesis was classified as low risk and had minimal ethical concerns. The few ethical concerns that arose from this research were mitigated by the use of pseudonyms. The University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee granted ethical approval to this study on the ninth of September 2019. The reference for the ethical approval of this study is 2019/53/LR.

#### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the qualitative research methodology used to explore topics outlined in Chapters One and Two. The contents of this chapter illustrate and explain the rationale and strategies that underpin this research. It has highlighted the research approach of the researcher and discussed in detail every major decision made throughout the

research. This research applies the qualitative method of netnography (as per Kozinets, 2010; 2015; 2019) to explore its objectives regarding zero waste consumers lifestyles. This is a qualitative piece of research and as such, the researcher holds the view of constructivism which leads to the use of hermeneutical techniques. Chapter Four outlines and explores the findings that were derived from the data.



## **CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to discuss the data collected from the netnographic study. Gaining insight into the topics that were outlined in Chapter One. From these netnographic study the research identified three suitable YouTube channels. Thematic analysis was applied to analyse the data as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Coding initially provided background into the concepts of sustainable consumption and the zero waste journey. Eventually, the researcher generated five key themes; pilgrim, catalyst, human, power distance and social paradigm. These themes are addressed through examining their subthemes, which form each theme. All themes are explored through supporting text units from the netnographic study.

### **4.2 Definitions**

Due to the complexity of both sustainability and zero waste individuals often define the term based on their personal experiences and beliefs. Therefore it is important to outline the participants definitions and how it may differ to the researchers.

#### **4.2.1 Sustainability**

As previously mentioned the term sustainability is defined in many different ways due to the complexity and constant development of the term (Section 2.2). However, the researcher has chosen The Brundtland Commission as it provides the most widely used definition for sustainable development ‘as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Brundtland, 1987, p. 43). Despite this broad definition, and understanding of the term is determined by the individual. As the researcher’s definition states it’s all about consuming differently and efficiently, ultimately this is up to consumers interpretation. Further, the context dependent nature of sustainability means that a number of factors including individual’s current living conditions, income, values and beliefs play a part in the construction of meaning. Thus, defining what sustainability means for the participants is a central part of this research. Below details how each participant interprets sustainability.

Sarah illustrates how sustainability isn't defined in a term but rather through actions that benefit the environment. Quoting *"I definitely don't call myself a sustainable environmental activist in any way, so I'm definitely in no way an expert on this subject. I'm just a human living my life and that's kind of the way I see it. I think that we can make changes we don't have to become this radical activist environmental human, if you do that's amazing it's just making positive small changes where you can"* (video 10).

Bex believes sustainability is focused on values and beliefs and the lens that someone views the world. Whether or not they will change their behaviours and actions to help the planet. Stating *"I think that this way of sustainable living is holistically thinking and it's not just about you. I mean you're not reducing waste because you personally don't want waste it's to protect the environment, to protect the animals, to have better health and that's a holistic way of looking at the world. I think that it's important to not only look at yourself but to look to others because that's for me what sustainability is all about it's about the holistic viewpoint and helping everybody involved which is everybody on planet earth and beyond"* (video 38).

Alex believes in order to live sustainably eco-minimalism is the best suited practice. Stating *"eco minimalism is a lifestyle technique used to create the smallest demand possible. Reducing natural resources in efforts to save mother earth. It is a method used to form a holistic view of your footprint (carbon, water, waste) left on this planet"* (video 2).

All the participants definitions focus on aligning their behaviours with sustainable living, showing that in order to be sustainable you must act sustainably in your everyday life. However, Sarah illustrates that she is "just a human living her life" and any change is beneficial in the long run. Whereas Bex believes it's about changing your state of mind and way of looking at the world. As humans we have a duty to care for other aspects of life such as the animals and our environment. Alex states that living an eco-minimalist lifestyle echoes sustainable living, by creating the smallest demand possible we are not leaving our planet worse off for future generations. Although the participants definition is different to the researchers, they all have the general idea of making changes that will beneficially impact our planet and not sacrifice any resources for the future.

#### 4.2.2 Zero Waste

Zero waste is additionally a difficult term to conceptualise. Definitions vary from a philosophy, behaviour or an overall goal (Section 2.6). Therefore, it's important to outline what characterizes zero waste for the participant's. The researcher has adapted a definition from the Zero Waste International Alliance and the Zero Waste Network. It follows "zero waste is a form of responsible consumption, reuse, and recovery of products. It is a goal that is ethical, economical, efficient and visionary and guides people in changing their lifestyles and practices to emulate sustainable natural cycles, where all discarded materials are designed to become resources for others to use."

Sarah believes that zero waste is a long term lifestyle which involves questioning ourselves and educating others. *"I think that zero waste isn't like an any one end goal, it's a way of living. It's not this idea of having zero items and a trash jar and having this life perfectly curated Instagram feed. It's about just being here and being responsible with our choices and using what we have. Questioning the way that things are done, questioning business and getting the word out"* (video 43). She additionally quotes *"this movement within the low waste sustainability movement is a lifelong thing, it's a lifestyle. It's not necessarily like something that you can do for a short period of time and eradicate all of the harm that you've done to the planet"* (video 43).

Bex believes that zero waste has a strong focus on the individual's footprint and how to reduce one's footprint. Stating *"zero waste is about reducing our ecological footprint. When you opt for a more sustainable lifestyle like zero waste you make the commitment to kind of lessen your footprint on our planet environmentally speaking and opt for more sustainable options"* (video 35).

Alex illustrates that zero waste is a production term and the end consumer is not meant to tackle the burden of becoming zero waste. She states *"the term zero waste was meant to be used for businesses. Walmart was meant to take on the term zero waste, because we produce waste in our home right, however much waste you produce in your home picture in your mind and then picture that every time you take out that bag of trash upstream there is 70% more waste coming from businesses. The whole point of zero waste originally when the term originated when it was first introduced into society was meant to be so that Walmart could*

*reduce their waste because that actually has a much bigger impact. They actually have a lot more power to change the way we look at waste, the way we create waste, and the way we dispose of waste. They truly have the power. Us as consumers have the choice every single time we spend our money with our dollars. Whether or not we want to support said business because of what practices they are using” (video 75).*

The participants definitions of zero waste vary widely, as Sarah believes zero waste represents a way of living and challenging the status quo, questioning our choices and businesses choices. Bex places the importance on reducing our ecological footprint, stating that committing to zero waste results in a reduction of your footprint. Contrarily, Alex believes that zero waste was created for businesses it was not a term to be applied to your everyday consumer. Stating that the point of zero waste was to reduce massive amounts of waste upstream. The differences between the three illustrate the complexity of the term as each participant has interpreted it a completely different way. In addition, the researcher’s definition differs to the participants, by highlighting how the consumption of zero waste products does not harm land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health.

### **4.3 Key Themes**

During the data analysis (See Section 3.9) the researcher initially coded the data into nine themes. However, after peer debriefing and further coding the themes were broken down into three main themes with subsequent sub-themes. These themes; pilgrim, catalyst, human, power distance and social paradigms act as motivators, providing insight as to why they are living a zero waste life, and why YouTube is their chosen platform to connect with the community. The five themes analysed provided the most relevant and significant data for the zero waste journey.

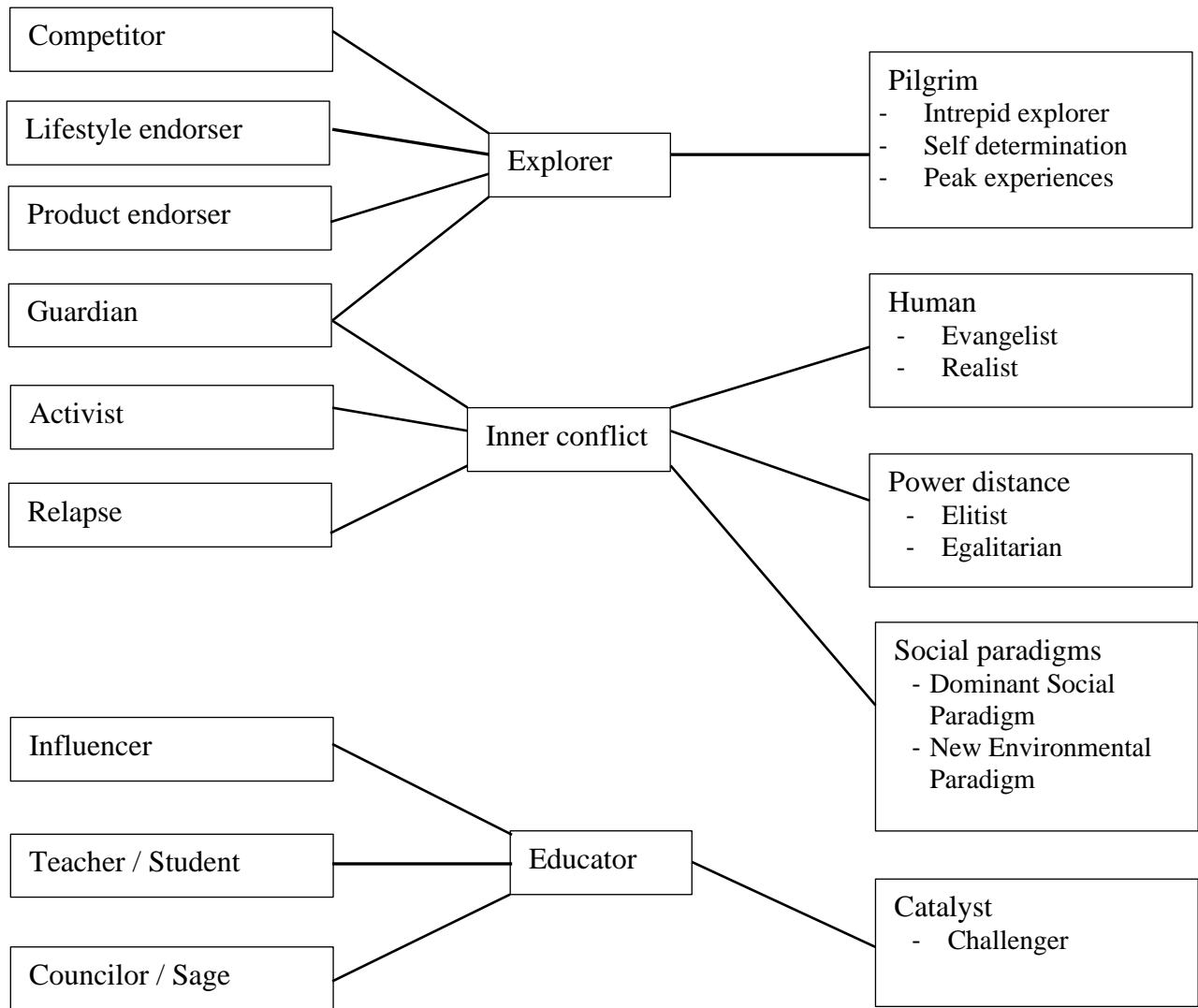


Figure 2: *Coding of themes*

#### 4.3.1 Pilgrim

The participant's act as pilgrims on journey of self-actualisation. A pilgrim is a person who is on a journey to a sacred place, often for religious reasons (Oxford Dictionary, 2020).

Although, in this thesis, the journey is adapted to self-actualising within their zero waste lifestyle. A pilgrim asks what the journey means to them and sees the journey as a part of the overall goal (Ford-Grabowsky, 1992) or in this case zero waste living. Participants are questioning products and purchase choices in their journey in order to live the best zero waste lifestyle.

Pilgrims desire true happiness and that happiness leads them into self-actualisation (Scaperlanda and Scaperlanda, 2004). Maslow believes self-actualisation is the ability to become the best version of oneself (Maslow, 1943). Stating “this tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming” (pg. 372). Maslow suggested that self-actualizers tend to have characteristics including; creativity, independence, concerns about humanity, and acceptance of themselves and others. It’s important to note that each individual holds particular values and beliefs, therefore the journey can manifest differently. During the netnographic study, many references were made by participants describing reasoning and motivation to start their zero waste journey, which included being their best self. Zero waste allowed them to progress into their best self and align their actions with values.

Sarah states *“My interest in doing this is solely for myself. I would like to be really conscious of just like the impact that I have on the planet because the plastic that I was buying and like things like that just got really excessive”* (video 1). Sarah has begun this journey for personal development reinforcing Maslow’s theory on self-actualisation. She has acknowledged that her current spending habits are not sustainable and starting a new lifestyle which reflects her beliefs is how she wants to move forward. Eventually becoming the best version of herself which is mirrored in her purchase behaviours. Alex describes how she has been pondering a zero waste lifestyle for a while and an easy way into zero waste would be completing a zero waste month. She states *“I have been thinking about doing this zero waste challenge for a little while and now that it's coming to fruition. I am realizing just how many things I will need to change and just how many things we could have been doing all along. But I was just suffering the consequences of throwing stuff away not realizing that there are alternatives, you just got to get creative”* (video 1). Alex has recognised that along her journey change is required and although that might be difficult at first, it is just about reassessing the situation and taking a different approach. She states *“I realized that my mentality has always been well I can't not buy this I need it so I have to suffer the consequences that come along with the waste. For example, like Tippy's cat food I've always thought well there's no way I can get around this packaging”* (video 1). This shows that Alex is on a journey of admitting to herself that it is possible to live zero waste however changing mentality is just as important to changing behaviours.

Sarah and Alex both act as pilgrims, they are constantly on a journey within zero waste living. Learning how to work towards the best versions of themselves and adapt practices that support the planet by aligning their purchasing habits with their values. Developing as a consumer and identifying products which don't have guilt or ramifications associated with the purchase.

#### **4.3.1.1 Intrepid Explorers**

Participant's self-actualisation journey led them to becoming intrepid explorers. The word intrepid suggest a lack of fear in dealing with something new or unknown (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). Therefore, an intrepid explorer represents a person who is willing to delve into the unknown and give it their all. They are characterised by their endurance and fortitude. In the participant's journey, persistence has played a vital role in the success of living a zero waste lifestyle.

Alex has gone down a new path in which she is identifying how to navigate the lifestyle and tailor it to her values and beliefs. Alex said she is going to be committing to this lifestyle with her girlfriend for an entire month, exploring the lifestyle for a prolonged period of time.

*"Madison and I are going to be committing to going zero waste for the entire month of July. We're going to talk about how much waste we've been producing, you know even as a couple who each of us have a degree in environmental science we live very conscious lives. I'm trying to get my channel on track of being like eco-friendly we still produce not a lot of trash. We used to only take out our trash once every two to three weeks which was really good, so we are producing very little trash. But I realized that my mentality has always been well I can't not buy this I need it so I have to suffer the consequences"* (video 1). Endurance and perseverance is a key characteristic of intrepid explorers and this is shown through Alex's commitment for one month. Once completing the month challenge she stated *"I've been really enjoying doing this this month it definitely has gave me a new excitement to my life"* (video 10). Alex is then able to justify adapting zero waste living as she as fully devoted her time and energy to the lifestyle change. Alex identified through exploring the zero waste lifestyle that *"even as someone who has really thought of herself as someone who was living in conscious life and eco-friendly life, I am pretty unconscious about some of my waste habits"* (video 1). This once again reinforces how Alex's willingness to try a new way of living resulted in positive outcomes which she can now use to help change her lifestyle towards a zero waste.

Sarah details how exploring zero waste is one of her favourite aspects of the lifestyle. She states *“I love that I get to explore zero-waste things now and get to share them with you guys. Because I feel like I’m being this guinea pig and can now help you guys find solutions”* (video 25). Sarah takes the opposite approach to many when tasked with something new she is excited and eager to share her experiences. She also explains that living zero waste is about exploring new habits and breaking old routines and purchase behaviours. Quoting *“In any lifestyle change like what you know now is your life, it's your routine, it's your comfort, it's your culture, right. It sounds stupid that buying products is part of your culture but it is. It's like the way you operate in the way you live, so detaching from that there's gonna be things that come up”* (video 35). This emphasises Sarah acting as an intrepid explorer whilst on her zero waste journey. In addition she promotes her discoveries to her followers allowing them to find solutions when undertaking a zero waste lifestyle transition.

#### **4.3.1.2 Self-determination**

Self-determination played a substantial role in integrating zero waste to their lifestyle. The term self-determination has two primary meanings, both of which have a long history of use outside the sustainability field. The Oxford Dictionary (2020) identifies self-determination as 1) the process by which a person controls their own life; 2) freedom of the people of a given area to determine their own political status. The first use of the term is the chosen definition for this research. It’s important to note the confusion between determination and self-determination (Wehmeyer, 1998), determination is defined as the quality that makes you continue trying to do something even when this is difficult (The Oxford Dictionary, 2020). However, the terms are different self-determination reflects individuals determining their own life, whereas determination is used in times of difficulty.

The participants zero waste journey have shown tendencies of self-determination. Taking control of the lifestyle, by purchasing and advocating for zero waste products. That enabled participants to make the changes they wanted to live alongside the environment. Additionally, admitting to one’s self that adapting this lifestyle is a challenge which they are determined to do one’s best.

Self-determination has played a big role in Alex’s zero waste journey. At the start of her journey she quoted *“I’m definitely not a zero waste at this point in my life, but I am trying to*



*mix in a lot of different things that make me more zero waste” (video 19).* She is taking control of her lifestyle and has done so through experimenting with creating her own zero waste products. She begun sharing videos that were DIY focused, proving to herself and her following that it is possible to make zero waste products at home. Alex states *“I use for bronzer just cocoa powder, now of course this works for my skin tone but it might not work for everybody's I'm well aware of that. I don't know of any for like darker skin people or if you're too light skinned for the cocoa powder, I've heard that you can mix arrowroot powder with it maybe if your skin is darker you can mix like charcoal with it” (video 20).* Not only has Alex been determined to find beauty zero waste swaps but has also begin swapping household items. Stating *“I have recently started transitioning a lot of things in my life over to be zero waste, and I am by no means completely zero waste yet. But a reason swap that we did make is our mouthwash, so I went ahead and did a little DIY of this mouthwash” (video 27).* It is evident that along Alex’s journey she has taken control of the products she has been purchasing and alternatively making products she cannot find instore. She quotes *“I have definitely tried my fair share of DIY zero-waste makeup, but honestly that experiment didn't go too well. I'm very interested in finding zero-waste makeup brands that are better” (video 55).* Alex has learnt that not all her DIY efforts are going to be successful but it’s about trial and error. Navigating her journey has been manageable as she has been willing to trial a range of zero waste products and then choose which one works best with her.

Sarah has disclosed the issues she has faced during her journey. She states *“I feel like I'm still on this train to like figuring the whole thing out, and I still don't really know like what my videos are about or like I don't know I'm not perfect with” (video 37).* Sarah is persistent to take control and identify what products are well suited for her. Quoting *“since embarking on a zero waste lifestyle I've been trying out things left and right. My goal is to make this lifestyle as accessible to as many people as I can without making them feel like they have to give up any of their comforts that they have in their existing lives” (video 6).* It is evident she is taken the reins of living zero waste and is motivated to encourage others to start the journey with her. Sarah additionally encourages her audience to leave comments on her videos on some of their zero waste personal challenges and how to tackle them. Similarly, Bex has created a number of videos showing her audience that controlling your life is key when transitioning into a zero waste lifestyle. She states *“hopefully this video shows you that it can just be really simple and easy to be zero waste. You don't have to buy crazy expensive products, you don't even actually have to buy products. You just upcycle will you already*

*have and do the best that you can, so obviously this has taken me a little while to get to this stage. You guys have seen previous bathroom tour videos I have, where I was kind of like mid transition and I still had a couple of things that I was using up. I didn't want to just throw everything that I already had out in favour of like zero waste products. So I would suggest using up what you already have and when you go to replace them replace it with something more eco conscious” (video 21).* Bex has controlled her lifestyle transition and proved to her followers that the zero waste lifestyle isn't as challenging as it seems.

#### **4.3.1.3 Peak Experiences**

Participants journey to self-actualisation involves peak experiences. Peak experiences are often described as transcendent moments of pure joy and euphoria. These are moments that stand out from everyday events (de Jager Meezenbroek *et al.*, 2012). Maslow (1943) suggested that peak experiences are the wonderful experiences in your life, those of complete and utter happiness. However, due to the constant barriers (see section 4.5) participants face in their zero waste, minor experiences and successes can be recognised as peak experiences. These range from, finding a second hand item of clothing, educating or on boarding someone to the zero waste movement, or finding a new zero waste product can be recognised as peak experiences. It is important to note that while anyone can have a peak experience, self-actualizers have them more frequently (Maslow, 1943).

Bex discusses how purchasing ethical fashion and second hand clothing plays an important role in her zero waste journey. Bex's peak experience occurred when she went ethical shopping, she quoted *“when I saw it I had to get it and I just I loved it. I've been wearing it so much, this jumper is made by a company called people tree. It's again fair trade and made with organic cotton and even the label is made from organic cotton. So both of these jumpers I picked up from a place called the Third Estate they sell 100% vegan and ethical clothing there and they're all about sustainability. When I stumbled across this place I fell in love instantly it reminded me actually of going to like the first ever 100% vegan restaurant. As a vegan and you go in and it takes a little while to like acclimatize and realize that you don't have to ask for the ingredients in anything. You can literally have anything on the menu that you want without all the fat and the questioning and the overthinking about everything, you can just go in close your eyes pick something. It is so amazing this feeling” (video 25).*

Alex discusses her experiences when finding new zero waste products that she has been looking to swap out. These peak experiences play a vital part in participants journey to self-actualisation as it helps cement why they have chosen to live a zero waste lifestyle. She states *“stasher bags are reusable silicone bag one of the things that I personally swear by and use every single day love my stasher bag and honestly wouldn't know what to do without it, so thankful I found this swap”* (video 55). She additionally discusses zero waste companies that has brought joy throughout her journey. *“I'm going to be talking about one of my favourite companies for years and that is lush so if you guys didn't know lush has a huge line of what they call their naked products which basically means you can get all these items I'm going to be talking about today package free. It just makes it that much easier for purchasing zero waste. I do love them and I have been using them for years and I think they're probably the most accessible eco-friendly body care brand that I know of right now that has package free options and very clean ingredients”* (video 41). Finding products and companies that make zero waste living easier for Alex has proved a main motivating factor in her journey. These peak experiences have allowed her to encompass the small successes in the big picture.

The pilgrim journey to self-actualisation is filled with obstacles and hardships along the road. This lead Sarah, Bex and Alex to become intrepid explorers as they have begun zero waste living and are exploring what it means to them. Hence, the need for self-determination along the journey, being a pilgrim in a new lifestyle is tiresome and often confusing. Therefore, the participants need to have strong motivation and determination is vital. Although peak experiences are notably different to the definition, these moments have proved key throughout their journey.

#### **4.3.3 Catalyst**

For those viewers and subscribers who do not currently live a zero waste lifestyle, Sarah, Bex and Alex acted as a catalyst for change. Additionally, those viewers which already lived a sustainable lifestyle but were unaware of how to change their behaviour, sought out the participants for support and guidance. This led to various viewers adapting a zero waste lifestyle and switching to zero waste products. Based on recommendations made from Sarah, Bex and Alex.

Comments below are from Alex's viewers. The comments detail the part Alex played in changing their behaviour. Whether it be through purchasing a zero waste product, becoming

more aware of waste alternative or showing a realistic way to progress in their journey. A viewer commented *“it’s not a big step but your vids inspired me to buy my first reusable water bottle 😊 thanks for that! I wish I could take bigger steps quicker, but since subscribing to you I’ve been more conscious than ever about my waste and it feels good every time I fill up my water bottle!”* (Comment 2, video 64). Another viewer commented *“I can truly say you are one of the only youtubers I can trust with product recommendations. You changed my life and I am starting to become more eco-friendly and talking my family’s ears off about it. Thanks for all your work, girl!”* (Comment 1, video 70). Viewers have also become more knowledgeable on what products have easy zero waste alternatives because of Alex’s videos. One viewer stated *“because of you and your channel, I have become so much more aware of our families waste. I started with not using plastic grocery bags. I’ve slowly stopped using paper towels, bottled shampoo and conditioner (love the bars!), ziplock, laundry soap (soap nuts are great), disposable razors and containers of swifter wipes (I bought cloth)”* (Comment 3, video 63). Alex has provided her viewers with the knowledge to change their behaviours and live a more zero waste lifestyle and various viewers have onboarded in result of Alex’s videos.

Sarah’s viewers reflect on how grateful they are to watch her videos and become more educated and inspired about the lifestyle. One viewer commented *“I love how accessible you make the whole zero waste thing! Some zero waste advocates here on YouTube kind of put themselves on a pedestal or give off the idea that you either have to be 100% zero waste in every aspect of your life or don’t attempt it at all. The way you share zero waste and sustainable living, as more of a ‘try your best and if it doesn’t always work out, it’s okay’ is really inspiring and helpful”* (Comment 3, video 15). Sarah shows her viewers that zero waste is possible and if you don’t get it right the first time to keep going until you find what works best with your current lifestyle. Another viewer commented *“when I started to care more about sustainable lifestyle, I typed on YouTube zero waste and one of your videos was recommended, I couldn’t be happier that I click on your video. Your channel has been one of my favourites to watch for inspiration and tips or maybe my only favourite so far”* (Comment, 2, video 28). Sarah has shown her viewers a range of ways to change your behaviours to align with zero waste living and this has proven very successful among her viewers. This is evident in another viewers comment *“I love what you are doing. I live in Italy and here nobody knows what zero waste is, and you gave me the inspiration to help other people going zero waste! (Also myself obv)”* (Comment 3, video 32). Sarah has given

her viewers an outlet to educate themselves and change their behaviours towards living more sustainably.

Bex's viewer's comments feel a sense of comfort and community from her videos. Some viewers comment some additional tips and tricks on specific topics, for example, *"Hi, just a little bit of advice to improve your compost. 1. You have quite a lot of kitchen waste so no need to water your compost (especially because those black compost bins hold quite a bit of moisture) 2. Put more browns into the bin, such as branches and twigs, straw or wood chip, shredded paper"* (Comment 3, video 5). Bex has given her viewers zero waste tips and tricks enabling them to speak out about how they have changed their behaviours when living zero waste. One viewer commented *"Thank you for this. I love the bag in a bag idea. It's so simple and practical. I have most of the items you suggested. I can do this right now. You're awesome"* (Comment 1, video 17). Another stated *"Hi live in South Africa, I am 14 and my family isn't really into sustainable living I get discouraged because I don't have the resources to pursue my mission. Your videos inspire me to carry on and I am slowly transitioning to zero waste and becoming a vegan"* (Comment 3, video 39).

Alex, Sarah and Bex have acted as a catalyst to drive behavioural change for their viewers. They have additionally created an environment where their viewers feel comfortable detailing how they have changed. This has created a climate which not only praises transitioning to zero waste but voicing the process and helping others in the journey.

#### **4.3.3.1 Challenger**

YouTube vloggers including Sarah, Bex and Alex have previously filmed challenge videos. These challenges range from; living plastic free, exercises or frugal living. These challenges act as a personal catalyst for Alex, Sarah and Bex as they guide them towards a zero waste lifestyle. Completing personal challenges has shown to be a starting point for the participants and encourages them to embark on new adventures.

Alex's first challenge she documented on her YouTube channel was freeganism. She states *"last time I did a challenge on this channel was with freeganism. That's not something I really like highly hard core continued"* (video 11). Alex found herself beginning her zero waste lifestyle as challenge, herself and her girlfriend challenged each other to commit to the lifestyle change for one month. Stating *"Madison and I are going to be committing to going*

*zero waste for the entire month of July” (video 1). Similarly, Sarah challenged herself to go plastic free, which led her to discover zero waste. “I tried to do like a plastic free challenge all on my own again. I didn't know that is zero waste was like a thing and I actually had filmed a YouTube video about it, but it's not on my channel anymore. Anyways long story short I failed at it after like two days, and then a year later I discovered what zero waste was. I saw like all these resources and blogs and things talking about it and I was like you know what I'm gonna give it a go” (video 28). Although Sarah was not successful in her plastic free challenge it initiated a spark for trialling new ways of living which eventually led her to zero waste. Bex set monthly challenges which align with living holistically and zero waste. She stated “instead of doing one big resolution this year I decided to do like one a month instead. So I decided to write some of them down and go through the process of making it my resolution every month. In my book journal I have written down right started to write down a few things I'd like to achieve this year” (video 46).*

Setting personal challenges has allowed all three participants to be held accountable. Further, they allow for building a routine and habits, a critical element of the zero waste lifestyle. The participants recognised that once they have established good habits in one area, they then have the ability to improve consumption habits in the next. This shows how challenges can catalyse behaviour change and allow participants and viewers to align their purchasing habits to zero waste living.

#### **4.3.4 Human**

Participants are only human, therefore relapsing and making mistakes is a part of the lifestyle. When participants relapse they return to their former state, in this case a non-zero waste lifestyle. However, they as humans do we often want to entice others to live what we preserve is the best lifestyle for them and our environment. Participants are often caught between evangelising and setting realistic expectations for themselves and those around them.

Sarah states she’s “*kind of getting out of a rut within this journey*” (video 43), she discusses how her passion has begun to fade and moving to a new city and apartment has taken the light away from zero waste. “*I just felt like maybe my passion for zero waste has kind of diminished. Since I first got into it which kind of like I was beating myself up for. I think what really like shines the light on this for me is when I moved. I think I what really brought it out*

*was like I all of a sudden I needed to buy furniture, and like things to furnish an apartment. So I was shopping for things second-hand but at some point there are moments where I was like will it be so much more convenient if I could just like go on Amazon. Then I could buy all these things now and also just the idea of shopping kind of like came back into my life. Then all of a sudden it was sparked again, that like old-school consumer girl, who literally used to go to the mall on her school lunch. Maybe as well was like a little bit triggering, because I feel like you know you go through all this self-care. Then all of a sudden something from your past comes up and you feel like you've fallen into it again” (video 43).* This shows how although the participants have dedicated their lives to zero waste, they often catch themselves questioning their journey and whether it’s worth it or not. It’s natural for them to encounter setbacks that surfaces old habits.

Bex discusses how she has fallen into old habits of hoarding clothes again. She is justifying her behaviour by purchasing only second hand. She states *“I can get into kind of this optimistic mind-set where I can go to a thrift shop and I'd be like oh my god it's so cheap. everything so make it friendly at second-hand everything's up for grabs and I'll just get something over like that so if you can super cute I'll buy that which is not great. I started hoarding clothes again because I'm like they're second-hand and they're really cheap. I thrifted them so why not, but then I had a load of clothes that I don't actually really love. It became quite frustrating, it's not actually that eco-friendly to hoard a load of clothes if you're not using them” (video 40).* Bex has acknowledged how she can relapse with something that she thinks is sustainable but is actually damaging to the environment.

Bex and Sarah have felt a sense of disenchantment and discouragement during their zero waste journey. However, how to overcome these speedbumps is up to the individual, participants can let these moments define their journey or use it as learning moment to reflect. Ultimately, it is a continuous journey for all three participants, falling in and out of love with zero waste.

#### **4.3.4.1 Evangelist**

Evangelism is shown in the zero waste journey through trying to convince others to live a more sustainable life and adapt zero waste practices. However, the participants have slowly gained awareness and knowledge that evangelising does not lead to long term change. For

this reason, they are educating their viewers on best practices when advocating for zero waste.

Alex filmed a highly requested video: 'How to convince your friends and family to go zero waste'. She states *"we're gonna talk about the conversation that so many of you asked me, which is how to convince your friends or family to go zero waste, this is a pretty big topic"*(video 43). Alex has learnt throughout her journey that evangelising is a tactic many people adapt to try manipulate people down the path of zero waste. Although enticing it has proved highly unsuccessful. Alex starts off the video by stating that *"I wanted to tell you guys is that 99.9 percent of the time you are not going to be the sole reason someone changes something so drastic about their life. You think about maybe whatever encouraged you to change your mind even if it was me. Some people told me that I'm the one that inspired them to change their life maybe that's true but something within you connected with this movement. It wasn't just me, it also probably wasn't just me telling you once or twice or 30 times"* (video 43). Because Alex has been practicing a zero waste life for multiple years now she no longer tries to convince others of living a zero waste lifestyle, but rather leads by example. She states *"I worry that you guys are going to try convince your family and the first try it won't work, or the second, then you will give up and I don't want that for you. That's not good for any of us or the movement more importantly"* (video 43).

Alex then goes on to discuss the reasons why you can't evangelise others when it comes to zero waste. But, offers some alternative solutions and promotes viewers to comment their story and discuss with others. *"Shoving zero waste down people's throats and endlessly trying to convince them of something is not normally the way to go, I have found it doesn't work, live by example instead"* (video 53). She additionally states *"there is normally four main reasons why people don't want to have anything to do with zero waste; the time, money, cost and lastly because they simply don't care. What's important to note is the last reason we can't worry about them, nor focus on them because we will never be able to convince them to change"* (video 43). This shows how difficult it is to successfully evangelise and that more than often it doesn't result in a positive outcome. Alex offers her viewers for alternative ways to address the topic of zero waste. Stating *"switching the way you are thinking about things, and changing the way you are presenting it to them can really help convince others"* (video 43). She ultimately states *"don't waste your time on people who say they simply don't care, you are not going to be the reason someone makes a huge life change. You need to be okay"*



*with that, nobody in my life has changed their lifestyle because of me and you guys see how much I care about zero waste and advocate for it” (video 43).*

In addition to Alex sharing her best practices, viewers left comments on the video sharing their personal experiences and tips. Viewers discussed their personal successes with their family and friends and encouraged others on the journey. One viewer stated *“my best tip is: Choose your battles! My whole life I was trying to convince my mom not to buy stuff only because it's on sale. She was a hoarder, she never had enough money. But now that she is dead I wish I would have spent my time with her differently. Just live by example. And if someone is curious why you try to live zero waste tell your story. And if someone asks what they can do just help them with their first steps. Thanks Shelby for that talk and for all your videos! I love you!”* (comment 2, video 43). Another viewer commented *“I don't think this really had to do with me but it is a success story in its own right. This year my dad wanted metal water bottles and reusable straws. He has seen me take my reusable straw with me to restaurants but I think the biggest was when he saw how many water bottles he was recycling every week. He would easily go through a case a week. And I get it. When traveling have a resealable lid is nice but the waste is unbelievable. I was so happy to see him make the change”* (video 53).

Evangelism as a form of communication has shown to be one of the least successful ways of communicating zero wastes values and practices. Alex learnt that comparatively early in her zero waste journey and now has become an advocate for leading by example.

#### **4.3.4.2 Realist**

In contrast to evangelising, participants have applied realistic goals and boundaries to their lifestyle. Realist is defined as accepting in a sensible way what it is actually possible to do or achieve in a particular situation (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). All three participants have expressed the importance of tailoring zero waste to their current living situation and needs, making the lifestyle manageable and sustainable long term.

Alex expresses how although her challenge is centred on zero waste she needs to be realistic about certain things that are achievable. Stating *“I think there's a lot of interesting things around travel and like things like that I wouldn't call it a mistake, but I'm not the perfect zero waster for sure. If I fly, it would have taken five trains and three buses, three days and eight*

*hours to get here. So what is 36 plus eight however many hours, that is how long it would have taken without a plane. I just feel like that's there and that's like non-stop top travel to like it's not like you're you know got a break it's unrealistic for even me"* (video 36). This shows that if Alex were to restrict herself and strictly live zero waste it is not sustainable for her as she is human and still bases her decisions on what the best outcome for herself. She has learnt that even someone who has been on this journey for multiple years still adjust zero waste living to their lifestyle.

Additionally, Alex states how *"I don't think any of us can be perfect. I think that is okay to accept, especially so we can get more people coming into this movement and trying to reduce their waste dramatically. Our environment obviously needs it, and it doesn't help to scare anyone away by making them think that the only way that they could be zero waste is giving up their deodorant, that's the only one that works for them that comes in plastic. So you have to be stinky to be zero waste I don't think that's a great marketing tactic for the movement"* (video 82). This reflects that ultimately everyone is human and making mistakes is a part of the process. In order to live zero waste being realistic about what works for you and what doesn't is key. Sarah builds on this by highlighting the importance of realistic expectations. Not putting extensive amounts of pressure on one's self to strictly be zero waste allows for important changes to be made and avoids burnout. Sarah quotes *"keeping yourself in this movement and doing whatever works for you to lower your impact for the next you know 50 60 70 years however long your beautiful life is. Just the idea of keeping yourself on this lifestyle, and having this like minimal impact for as long as you can like that is what's gonna make the biggest difference"* (video 43).

The participant's also document their 'slip ups'. This portrays their personable side and allowing viewers to avoid feelings of guilt and restriction when trying to live a zero waste lifestyle. Sarah details how she ordered non-zero waste food, however treats it as a learning curve and invites her viewers to do similar. Stating *"I ordered sushi, so I know I'm still trying everything I'm not going to beat myself up about it. Because I think anytime you like fail at something it's just a learning lesson. It's not something that you should beat yourself up for, because then it becomes restrictive and just negative"* (video 2). She additionally discloses that she does buy packaged items, stating *"I just want to point out I'm not perfect and I do occasionally buy things from the middle of the grocery store that do come in packaging. I just try to be mindful support cool companies that have Fairtrade items"* (video 16). Once again

showing her viewers that she is human and realistic when setting herself expectations as *“it's not about being perfect, it's about making good the best choices that you possibly can with the means that you have”* (video 17).

Alex dedicated a whole video on non-zero waste habits to be transparent and reinforce how she has been realistic throughout her journey and not restricted herself from things she loves but are not zero waste. Alex details her love for her house plants and states *““I think someone living a zero waste and completely plastic free lifestyle basically wouldn't be able to own any real house plants or fake house plants because those are plastic. But, I don't really know how you would get most plants without their plastic nursery pot so recently that's probably been one of my biggest zero waste flops”* (video 81). She reinforces how although it appears she is living an impeccable zero waste life she is not, quoting *“I definitely know that my online presence like my YouTube and my Instagram makes it seem like I'm the perfect zero waster. That I have all the answers to everything and I definitely just I flat-out don't”* (video 81).

Alex has learnt that the lifestyle isn't about living by a strict set of rules and having some aspects of your life which isn't zero waste is acceptable when you are trying as hard as you can holistically. Alex reinforces this through her purchasing habits, stating *“as you can see not everything is zero waste yet there are some packaging still but I do try.... for example things in these recyclable cardboard packages rather than in plastic or even ten containers because it is better for the environment”* (video 4). She states how it is not possible for her to be completely zero waste but she is making smart choices about purchasing items which are not zero waste. Quoting *“I wanted to show you guys realistically currently I'm not able to get everything completely zero waste yet. This is the best that I can do and so this is what I've always opted for over going somewhere like Tesco or Sainsbury's or co-op who have everything wrapped in plastic absolutely everything, this is the lesser of the two evils really”* (video 13).

The array of quotes shown details participants struggles and practices they have had to implement to ensure that their zero waste lifestyle is sustainable. Being realistic is key for both viewers and participants, without it the movement would not have the ability to attract a wide array of people. What is interesting is the fact all participants have detailed their ‘slip ups’ and its shown viewers that it is completely normal to purchase a product which is not

zero waste. This has portrayed the zero waste movement as less daunting for new-comers showing how realism is an essential aspect of the lifestyle.

The participants are only human which has resulted in a number of highs and lows. Learning to overcome zero waste obstacles and find how to express their love for zero waste without evangelising is an ongoing challenge for both participants and viewers. Additionally, learning to be realistic about setting yourself goals and targets within their zero waste journey.

#### **4.3.4 Power Distance**

Power distance measures how a culture perceives power relationships between people.

Hofstede (2011) defines it by the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. Suggesting that a society's level of inequality is endorsed by the followers as much as by the leaders. There are two types of power distance portrayed by the participants within their zero waste journey, elitist mentality and egalitarian. Both act in contrast with one another, as one is exclusive with the focal point on owning all the zero waste 'necessities'. The other preaches inclusivity and discredits the need to follow the picture perfect zero waste lifestyle, purchasing all the zero waste product recommendations.

##### **4.3.4.1 Elitist**

Elitism is the belief that the society or system should be led by the elite (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). The elite is a select group of people with an intrinsic quality, high intellect, special skills, or experience. The growth of zero waste living has invited a range of products to market which are seen as essential when living zero waste. The participants have endorsed this by creating video content including; 'Zero Waste swaps for everyone', 'Zero Waste Essentials', '5 Free Zero Waste Swaps' and 'My Zero Waste Starter Kit'.

Sarah illustrates how zero waste living has created a brand image which portrays exclusivity which is not accurately reflecting the lifestyle. She states *"I feel like a zero waste living has this branding of it being like really exclusive and like you needing all these tools and gadgets"* (video 37). Alex builds on this by quoting *"zero waste makes it seem so perfectionist that I think it scares a lot of people away"* (video 30). This elitist mentality has grown as a result of social media, YouTube and social pressures. Viewers are constantly bombarded with zero waste kits or sustainable products they must have in order to live that

lifestyle. Bex suggests *“people are seeing bamboo straws and metal utensils and glass, tupperware and feeling like oh if I want to be sustainable I have to own these things. Like there's a certain kit that we should all have, and if you don't have it then you're not sustainable and you don't fit in with the in crowd of sustainable living”* (video 35). The participants have explicitly stated how an elitist mentality is damaging to the zero waste movement. At the core of living zero waste is bettering our environment and working towards solutions as a collective, whereas the elitist mentality invites purchasing products that fit the zero waste theme but are not necessary. Bex states *“when you opt for a more sustainable lifetime you lifestyle you make the commitment to kind of lessen your footprint on our planet environmentally speaking and opt for more sustainable options. But I feel like with the zero waste trends it's become almost trendy to throw out all of your old things to bring in new more sustainable options”* (video 35).

Aspects of zero waste living along with other sustainable ways of life have resulted in consumers creating an elitist type mentality around the lifestyle and products. All three participants have witnessed this and reflected on how this damages the lifestyle.

#### **4.3.4.2 Egalitarian**

Contrarily to the elitist mentality, egalitarian is a person who advocates or supports the principle of equality for all people (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). All three participants advocate for zero waste living by using YouTube as a platform to connect with a network of people and create a safe, inclusive space for the zero waste community.

Alex details how YouTube led her to discover the zero waste community. Stating the main reason she came to YouTube was *“because my friends and my family did not want to take my advice, did not care about the things that I did, so I turned to the internet to find a community of people that would connect with me”* (video 43). This illustrates how YouTube has become Alex's platform to connect with others that share the same passion for zero waste. Alex then reinforces that you should not feel guilty when having to purchase things zero waste. Stating *“I am not zero waste, nobody is, don't feel guilty for things that you do at work or hobbies that you might have, or things that you can't avoid if you don't have a bulk shop. It's mostly out of your control and I find it very admirable that in light of all of those challenges that you may face you still reach out to me and ask me how can I fix this. But a lot of it is not up to you a lot of it is honestly up to the corporations to take responsibility for the things that they*

*create” (video 30). Alex has learnt that making mistakes is a part of the journey and showing she is not superior and that everyone is in the movement together, we all make mistakes together and then learn from them and move forward. Sarah reinforces this as she states “we suck at the zero waste thing - we're all in this together it's better to have a million people making small changes than it is to have one person making every absolute change” (video 35).*

Viewers feel as if they can connect with the participants and other members of the movement, whilst having the ability to voice their challenges, successes and tips. This is evident in a viewer commenting on Alex’s video detailing *“I like that some things were not completely zero waste or eco-friendly. I feel like a lot of these channels make it seem like you have to be miserable if you don't find better replacements. And I think it's important to at least try, something is better than nothing” (comment 2, video 72).* Another viewer commented on Sarah’s video stating one of their personal tips *“pro tip! You can make stuff like produce bags and reusable cotton rounds by thrifting/upcycling fabrics. Don't be afraid to buy something secondhand and turn it into something new, like gauzy curtains for produce bags. Also natural fibers tend to be more durable.” (comment 1, video 25).* YouTube has become a place where viewers feel confident enough to share their stories and express personal tips because Alex, Bex and Sarah have created a space which invites discussion and learning.

Bex states *“so my advice to you if you're looking into zero waste if you're just starting out is to just assess your day, see what you'll need and just do the best you can with the things that you have accessible to you” (video 32).* It is evident that the participants have emphasised how anyone can join zero waste and their YouTube channels encompass a safe space where viewers come to learn and speak freely about zero waste.

It is evident there are two types of power relationships identified amongst the participants. That of the elitist mentality and egalitarian, both representing opposite approaches to the zero waste lifestyle. Sarah, Bex and Alex acknowledged that elitism has done damage to the lifestyle, portraying it as an exclusive group which only the elite can join. Opposed to egalitarian as they advocate for anyone to join zero waste and seek to make their transition as smooth as possible. By creating a community which supports one another and builds a network of zero waste hacks, ideas and lifestyle tips. These two power relationships continue

to develop within the movement, with the participants trying for egalitarian to eventually overcome the elitist mentality.

#### **4.3.5 Social Paradigms**

A paradigm is a description of the interactions of mankind within society. There is an array of paradigms that individuals live in, including the dominant social paradigm (DSP) and the new environmental paradigm (NEP). The DSP is defined as “the metaphysical, beliefs, institutions, habits, etcetera that collectively provide social lenses through which individuals and groups interpret their social world” (Milbrath, 1984, p7). In other words, it is the emphasis on the institutional structures, objectives, values and behaviours that govern worldviews and characterise a society (Kennedy, McGouran, and Kemper, 2020). The NEP views that humans represent one of many species and Earth and must live in harmony and alongside others. Humans are additionally strongly dependent upon the resources that the environment provides, we must protect and avoid exploiting them (Dunlap, 2008). The DSP does not support strictly pro-environmental practices and its proposed alternative, the new environmental paradigm (NEP).

##### **4.3.5.1 Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP)**

The dominant social paradigm is held by many individuals within society, Cotgrove (1982) suggests that the paradigm is dominant because it is held by dominant groups in society who use it to legitimise and justify current economic conditions. However, the current DSP does not acknowledge the limitations of continuous growth, the intimate connection between humans and nature and the relationship of the economy to nature (Dunlap and Van Liere, 1984). Although it is important to note that you can still follow sustainable practices whilst living in the dominant social paradigm.

Alex, Sarah and Bex all live a zero waste lifestyle. However, due to YouTube being both Alex’s and Sarah’s only source of income they rely on view counts, subscribers and sponsorship. However one of the core values of zero waste is not to buy what you don’t need and use what you have. Sarah states *“I think a huge part about sustainable living is just being okay with the things that you already own. Not feeling like you need to go out buy something new just because you want something new”* (video 10). Bex additionally quotes *“I would suggest using up what you already have and when you go to replace them replace it with something more eco conscious a little bit more eco-friendly”* (video 21). However,

participants have had sponsorship for their YouTube videos promoting their viewers to purchase products which they may not necessarily need. Alex quotes *“If you are interested in trying out carob you can get 25% off of your order of personalized vitamins. It literally has my name on it how cute is that, and it's compostable so I'm super stoked about it. If you guys want to pick up a pair do you guys want to pick up a packet of your own vitamins click the link in the description, you use a discount code to get a discount get any sort of vitamins”* (video 87). In addition stating *“this video is brought to you by swell investing. We'll talk more about them throughout the video but they are offering my viewers \$50 to start investing in sustainable things today. If you want to go ahead and jump ahead you can click the link at the top of the description”* (video 72). This shows that although Alex promotes living within her means she is still promoting products and services which may not necessarily reflect living zero waste. However, whilst living in the dominant social paradigm, Alex has chosen to accept sponsorship from companies which align with her sustainable values.

Sarah made ethical merchandise for her viewers to purchase in support of her channel, highlighting that her subscribers that purchased her merchandise allow her to continue making videos. However, the creation of merchandise which is not necessary for the everyday consumer let alone zero waste consumers contradicts her mentality of only purchasing what we need and within our means. As she states consumers should be *“okay with the things that you already own”* (video 10). She states *“I made merch zero waste and ethical merch, the theory is to be able to give you guys little zero-waste tools that you're gonna be looking for a long your zero waste journey while you can also support me and this channel”* (video 20). A viewer commented *“I would love to buy your bamboo straws, but shipping to Austria is so expensive :( still, sending you lots of love!”* (comment 1, video 21). Reflecting how Sarah is stuck as she wants to continue her passion of YouTube, however she needs to create merchandise as a form of income to ensure she can continue creating videos. Seeking help from her fanbase to purchase her merchandise, she quotes *“videos and podcasts are made possible by my lovely patrons and merch supporters”* (video 33).

Alex, Bex and Sarah also illustrate that our society is brought up into this DSP worldview, showing how our culture is centred around convenience, waste and single use products. Alex quotes *“I mean our culture is centred around waste. It is centred around getting something disposable, to consume it very quickly, and then toss it out. It's insane once you start thinking about it and actively trying to stay away from it you it's insane how much you'll realize it is*



*everywhere” (video 11). Alex additionally discusses her background, stating “I come from a family of consumers, they buy stuff when they don't need it they buy things just because they have money. Just because it's on sale, just because no reason” (video 27). Alex reflects on how our society is wired and her personal experiences with consumption. She discusses that transitioning to a new lifestyle and a new way of consuming can be difficult because of societies structure. Sarah builds on this stating “in my opinion like don't feel bad about having those thoughts. Because we grew up in a society that was not programmed for this way of living so occasionally those thoughts are gonna slip in” (video 16). Sarah additionally provides guidance when transiting to a zero waste lifestyle, stating, “in any lifestyle transition like what you know now is your life, it's your routine, it's your comfort, it's your culture. Which sounds stupid that buying products is part of your culture, it's like the way you operate in the way you live so like detaching from that there's gonna be things that come up” (video 35).*

The participants have reflected on their relationship with the DSP and assured themselves and their viewers that although our society is wired towards a certain system we are allowed to act and consume differently. Bex quotes *“it's important to remember that most of us weren't born into a zero-waste household. None of us were born into a zero-waste world. So, although it's important to work towards a more circular economy but we don't live in a circular economy yet” (video 39).*

#### **4.3.5.2 New Environmental Paradigm (NEP)**

The New Environmental Paradigm was coined by Dunlap and Van Liere in 1978. They published a NEP scale to which it has become a widely used measure of environmental concern in the world (Dunlap, 2008). The NEP challenges the DSP, placing importance on sustainable consumption and living.

All three participants have a worldview which applies to the NEP, as they have outlined in their videos that consuming less is an important aspect of environmentalism. Alex states *“I think what a lot of people miss about true environmentalism is that what you call it true sustainability at its core means to consume less” (video 28).* She also discusses how her videos are made to help viewers choose the more sustainable and environmentally friendly alternative *“my videos are all about showing you guys how to go through the process of thinking about what could be a better option for the planet” (video 74).* Illustrating that

purchasing products that are beneficial for the environment is the ethical decision to make. Avoiding single use consumables and consuming less is aligned with NEP worldview. Sarah discusses how owning her own business did not support her pro environmental worldview. Stating *“I owned my own business at the time and I felt really bad about the impact that that business had on the planet. Even though it was an ethical and relatively sustainable business, it still wasn't perfect so I decided to let it go”* (video 28). This reflects Sarah living alongside the NEP as she is prioritising what is right for the environment, rather than keeping her ethical business.

Alex promotes only purchasing within your means, her video on ethical gift giving highlighted how *“it's always really weird for me to make these types of videos where I'm talking about things that are not like necessities. I'm kind of just telling you about things that you could give as a gift or recommendations for gift-giving. It's just a little weird for me because I'm normally very like don't just buy things. But I understand that this time of year everyone's kind of in that spirit and even if you're not the kind of person who wants to receive gifts more than likely, you have people in your family that you need to give gifts to and so that's kind of what this is going to be just a few suggestions of things that I have found that I think would make great gifts”* (video 49). This shows how Alex acknowledges that living within our means is important as we live in a society that values high levels of consumption and materialistic items.

The two different paradigms, DSP and NEP reflect different ways of living, however, although the NEP reflects participants values some of their decisions echoes the DSP. As highlighted earlier (Section 4.3.5.1) it is possible to practice sustainable living whilst living in the DSP, participants have made this clear. They are seeking to make profit from their merchandise and sponsorship of videos but still place great emphasis on the environment and purchasing responsibly.

#### **4.4 Barriers**

Although the concept of living a zero waste lifestyle is relatively new for businesses and communities, those practicing a zero waste are constantly faced with barriers, whether it be day to day or inner challenges based on their values and beliefs. Participants on a zero waste journey first face barriers to enter the movement, then barriers when finding their footings and place. Identifying how zero waste works with their current lifestyle and what habits they

have to change. Lastly, participants face barriers of progression within their zero waste journey. Once they have found how zero waste works for them, learning how to communicate their values and how to maintain their new routines and purchasing habits.

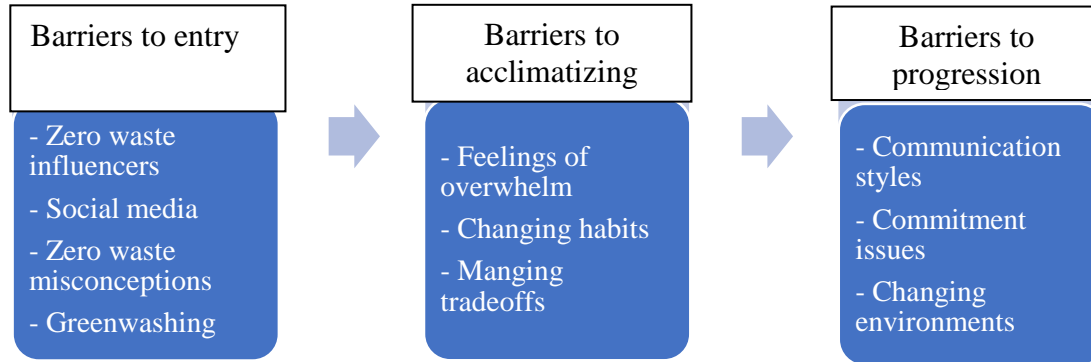


Figure 3: Zero waste journey barriers

#### 4.4.1 Barriers to entry

Switching to any new lifestyle comes with its barriers when penetrating. Adapting a different type of living can prove challenging for many, changing purchasing habits, consumption levels and diet can be discouraging and overwhelming. The zero waste lifestyle has various barriers to entry due to the image some associate the movement with. Alex highlights how social media can make it appear that people who are zero waste have it all worked out perfectly. She states *“I definitely know that my online presence like my YouTube and my Instagram makes it seem like I’m the perfect zero waster, and that I have all the answers to everything and I definitely just I flat-out don’t”* (video 81). Social media can act as a barrier for beginner zero waste viewers as they can get intimidated by those that have been living the lifestyle for a period of time. Alex tries to combat this by making ‘Zero Waste Beginners Guide’ videos on her channel. She expresses how she is *“so excited to make this video is because I haven’t made my beginner’s guide to zero waste video on this channel yet. I have been waiting until I have become somewhat of you know a season zero waste veteran”* (video 22). Additionally zero waste influencers can act as a barrier as a result of the picture perfect image and products that must be followed in order to be successful in the movement.

Zero waste misconceptions act as an extensive barrier to entry for many. Zero waste can often seem unattainable as it is viewed as time consuming, expensive and places high reliance on accessibility of sustainable shops. Alex states *“it can seem expensive, it can seem like you need to go buy every perfect zero waste swap, that you see that makes the perfect aesthetic on*

*Instagram. But one of my big goals is to make living and more eco-friendly lifestyle seem more attainable and achievable. I definitely know that in my family and just in the general public it can often be perceived that living a more sustainable lifestyle can be expensive. I have to admit that yes there are areas in which you will spend a little bit more money for the more sustainable option. But in the long run if you look at all the aspects of your life that you will change, I guarantee you that overall living a more sustainable lifestyle will save you money”* (video 50). All participants get an array of questions about how expensive zero waste is, Sarah quoting *“a lot of people ask me how much I have to fork out to live a zero waste lifestyle”* (video 50). But the participants debunk that zero waste is expensive and time consuming, focusing on getting into a routine and the initial cost outweighs the costs long term.

Lastly, greenwashing has been a barrier for participants. Greenwashing is defined by Terrachoice as “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (Delmas and Burbano, 2011, pg. 85). Due to the novelty on zero waste there has been an influx of zero waste products brought to market. However, many are not zero waste and it has been difficult for participants and consumers to differentiate. Sarah states *“I know there's a lot of greenwashing when it comes to sustainable brushes. A lot of them are like we're bamboo brushes but we come wrapped in plastic”* (video 33). Participants have repeatedly illustrated that along their zero waste journey they have purchased products that are not zero waste. Occasionally on purpose due to convenience and lack of alternatives, but also some greenwashed products. It has been a process for participants to identify greenwashed products. YouTube has allowed the participants to trial numerous zero waste products as they are helping guide their viewers when living zero waste. This has resulted in participants identifying greenwashed products on camera. However, YouTube has not prevented them from purchasing these types of products, it is still a learning curve within their journey.

#### **4.4.2 Barriers to Zero Waste Acclimatizing**

Once participants have begun their zero waste journey it has been difficult to find their footing and place within the movement. All the participants have highlighted that the zero waste lifestyle is a long journey which doesn't happen overnight. Alex states *“I want to make this really clear, it is a long process I have been trying to be more sustainable since I left high school 7 years ago, back then I didn't even know the term zero waste existed”* (video

67). Because of the longevity participants can become overwhelmed with what products to purchase, how to make this lifestyle manageable and how to manage trade-offs. Sarah quotes *“A lot of the time I'm out and I'm hungry, and I just like kind of get overwhelmed with what's the best choice. There have been a lot of times, I'm not gonna lie where I just said it and I bought things at the grocery store that weren't zero waste at all. I'm slightly embarrassed by it, but also I think it's been part of my journey and that's just the way it goes. When it comes to zero waste there are so many hidden questions that you don't know as the consumer, and it's intimidating and it's stressful and just the market isn't there yet it's a new trend”* (video 16). Combating these emotions has proved difficult for Sarah as she is still learning within her zero waste journey. Managing her feelings when shopping has been a long process for Sarah, as she has had to establish new routines and explore numerous amounts of shops to find products which work for her.

Managing trade-offs has been a difficult task for participants. The participants have taken on additional lifestyle changes which encompass sustainable living such as veganism, vegetarianism, ethical and local purchasing and purchasing Fairtrade. However, finding products which fit all of the participants requirements has proved a great challenge. Therefore they are often faced with trade-offs, Sarah states *“a lot of the stuff that comes in the bulk bins it's been hard to find like Fairtrade certified ones. Because chocolate itself has a lot of like ethical dilemmas behind it. I do try to hit up the bulk bins as much as I can if I have access to them. But when I do buy something packaged the way I've counteracted that is there's actually a chocolate company based out of Seattle, and I and the way I counteract it is it is like locally made Fairtrade”* (video 40). Often vegetarian and vegan products are plastic wrapped, Bex states *“two biggest things that I just can never find without plastic packaging is tofu and frozen fruit. So this is like my exception to buying things without plastic, again we try not to eat too much of it. I would eat tofu every day if it came loose but it doesn't unfortunately”* (video 39). Alex quotes *“I like to indulge in vegan junk food I find that for some reason food is a source of gratification for me... I definitely see food as a reward, so I do still buy things like those faux meats that come in plastic. Faux cheeses to make burgers and things like that”* (video 32). The participants have had to manage these trade-offs and not feel guilty for purchasing products with packaging as they have no alternative options.

#### 4.4.3 Barriers to Zero Waste Progression

Lastly, a barrier for the participants is progressing in the movement. Changing environments has proven difficult for Sarah as she has lost momentum and passion for zero waste. She quotes *“I have been making new friends as I've moved and I'm close to the city. I have more opportunities to hang out with people see the way that they are you know buying. You know like new things from the store, buying packaged food, and it just it kind of becomes like tempting”* (video 43). She additionally stated *“when I moved I think I what really brought it out was like I all of a sudden needed to buy furniture and like things to furnish an apartment. So I was shopping for things second hand but at some point like there are moments where I was like will it be so much more convenient if I could just like go on Amazon. Being able to buy all these things now, and then also just like the idea of shopping kind of like came back into my life”* (video 43). When the participants are faced with changing their routines and environments it proves to be a barrier to continue on their zero waste journey.

Communicating zero waste living to family and friends has shown to be disheartening and demotivating to participants and viewers. All three participants state that their zero waste lifestyle is a continuous journey in which they are learning new things every day. However, communication techniques is a constant challenge with discussing zero waste living to those that are foreign to the concept. Alex states *“honestly the best recommendation I have and the thing that has worked best for me is just to lead by example. Don't be the one to kind of bring up the subject if that makes sense, if someone asks you figure out how you're going to communicate in a way that it's not offensive to them. Please don't spend all of your energy trying to convince other people to believe the way you do. Yes, living an eco-friendly lifestyle is not really a subjective thing it is a better thing for the planet for humanity overall. However, a lot of people don't have the same processing functions as you do they don't think the same way you do”* (video 53). It has taken Alex a lengthy time period to find what communicate style works best with her and has allowed her to progress in her zero waste journey.

#### 4.5 Facilitators

Despite the barriers the participants encounter there are various facilitators which aid zero waste living. These facilitators occur alongside barriers counteracting one another, balancing out the lifestyle for participants, making it attainable and manageable. Accessibility proves to be one of the main facilitators for the participants, so much so that Alex choose to live in a

city which had access to zero waste retailers and products. Additionally, having access to education and constantly keeping up to date with information around sustainable consumption. Privilege also facilitates the participants zero waste journey. As many state due to their privilege they have the ability to live zero waste, however that is not the case for many people in society. Lastly, outreach further facilitates zero waste living for participants as they have the ability to reach thousands of people, communicating pro environmental behaviour and purchase decisions. Outreach allows participants to feel as if they are making a difference in the zero waste movement, connecting with the community and promoting zero waste living.

Now will be discussed the facilitators which aid the participants journey, starting with access, then privilege and lastly, outreach.

#### **4.5.1 Access**

Access has played an essential role when facilitating the participants journey. Access to zero waste products, shopping chains, education and information are critical facilitators to ensure the success and sustainability of a zero waste lifestyle. Sarah states *“I want to make zero waste living as accessible to as many people as I possibly can”* (video 6). Sarah, Alex and Bex have all tested and trialled zero waste products so their viewers don’t have to. Furthermore, the access to sustainable information regarding consumption, disposal of products and certification of products has facilitated successfully living zero waste.

##### **4.5.1.1 Access to Zero Waste Products and Retailers**

Participants illustrate how accessibility to local farmers markets, zero waste shops and bulk bins has facilitated their journey. Without this access, they may not have had the ability to not only gain their footings but thrive within the lifestyle. Alex filmed a video on zero waste snacks on the road and stated *“definitely consider fruit as the first thing on your zero waste road trip. The other things I wanted to mention are, things I got package free in bulk and I recognize that that is a privilege and I'm pretty spoiled in that way. But I purposefully live where I live because of the access”* (video 29). She emphasises that living in an area that has bulk bins and zero waste grocery shopping was fundamental for her. Alex explains that *“a mess up for me is small Amazon purchases. Every once in a while there's something that I just don't have access to what I've needed”* (video 6). Access to zero waste retailers mitigates the barriers consumers face, however, those that don’t have bulk bins in their city struggle to

purchase zero waste. A viewer commented on Alex's video stating *"I've hit a wall in my zero waste journey. Got down to a really low level of plastic whilst at uni, but I've returned to my parent's house for summer, and they live such a wasteful lifestyle. I've tried to encourage them by buying my mum reusable produce bags, steel straws etc but she won't even use them. It's a frustrating set back. I don't have access to bulk bins annoyingly, perfectionism isn't possible until society changes"* (comment 3, video 47). Additionally, another view states *"I wish I had more accessible no-waste options available where I live!"* (comment 2, video 45). Viewers also have confided in participants asking how to overcome access barriers. Sarah dedicated a video to answering questions from her viewers, one asked *"what's the best way to go zero waste if you don't have access to farmers markets and stuff in your local area use the local grocery store?"* (video 28). Sarah replied *"I don't really go to farmers markets. I just go to the grocery store and I opt for the things that don't come in plastic bag. In a lot of cases, again it's just asking yourself do I really need it or do I not need it, can I survive without it. Can I use something else it's a little bit more sustainable to achieve the same goal"* (video 28).

#### **4.5.1.2 Access to Education**

In addition to access to zero waste products and retailers, access to education and information about sustainable consumption, zero waste certified products and sustainable product alternatives facilitates one's journey. Sarah, Alex and Bex have all become extremely well educated on zero waste and circular product lifecycles. Alex states that her degree in environmental science played a large part in choosing to live a more conscious lifestyle. Having access to education allows for the development of participants' zero waste knowledge. They then are able to identify which zero waste products to choose for and vote with their wallet. Sarah states *"don't forget that companies do make waste behind the scenes, so really thinking outside of the box, and being like what are my options here, and what can I do with the resources that I have. Where is the best resource for me to put my money to vote with my dollar as I'm buying my food"* (video 36). Sarah has the power consumers hold, this is evident when it comes to voting with your dollar and opting for more sustainable alternatives. Bex describes how *"we have now keep in mind we do live in a linear economy, and although I'm shopping with a circular economy in mind. We don't actually have that infrastructure in place yet and the society that we live"* (video 40). Bex has learnt about society's current economic infrastructure which has allowed for her to live zero waste to the best of her



abilities. She states to her viewers *“my advice is to just do the best you can with the things that you have accessible to you”* (video 33).

#### **4.5.2 Privilege**

Participants privilege has facilitated their journey through the means of purchasing behaviour, undertaking new zero waste experiences and new zero waste approaches. Sarah, Bex and Alex all have videos detailing reviews on zero waste products they have bought and tested. Their privilege has allowed them to navigate zero waste products and then recommend them to their viewers. However, Alex states there is a common misconception between privilege and zero waste living. She believes *“a lot of people it seems like going eco-friendly or going zero waste etc can be a thing of privilege. A thing that only people who are more affluent can do. I disagree with that notion and that's because at its core, like I said, it means to buy less. In turn, obviously spend less money, so I'm gonna say that the number one way being zero waste or being more environmentally friendly has saved me the most money”* (video 27). Sarah additionally discloses that her and Alex's privilege has played a role in the zero waste mistakes they have made. *“All of these mess ups and reasons why we suck at this zero waste thing they're all really relative to both mine and Alex's privilege that we have because we do have access to a decent amount of things in a low waste way”* (video 27). It is important to note that although there is a common misconception around environmental living is for upper class, privilege still does play a role in facilitating ones zero waste journey. Whether it's through understanding what zero waste products to purchase and why, allowing to test multiple zero waste products and then choose the best suited, or trialing multiple supermarkets and zero waste groceries to find which fits in the participants lifestyles.

#### **4.5.3 Outreach**

All three participants have a large audience, whereupon they communicate zero waste practices and document their journey. Their outreach helps facilitate participants zero waste living as they feel they are making change in the wider community. Alex disclosed to her viewers that *“the main reason I came to YouTube is because my friends and my family did not want to take my advice, did not care about the things that I did, and so I turned to the internet to find a community of people that would connect with me”* (video 43). Besides the fact that YouTube has allowed the participants to be a part of the zero waste community it has also allowed participants to reach wider parts of the zero waste network which they perhaps never could have without their YouTube presence. Sarah states *“I feel like if I wasn't on YouTube I*

wouldn't be as strong with zero waste. Because I feel like I have a voice, and I have a platform, and I'd really like to use my life for good and just try to be as selfless as possible. So I think that's really good for me being on social media, is really what keeps me accountable and keeps me going with it" (video 28). Using YouTube as the participants main communication channel and the reach the videos get has facilitated their journeys by keeping them accountable and connecting with the community.

#### 4.6 Chapter Summary

The findings in this chapter highlighted the three key themes that emerged from the data collection. These themes were *Pilgrim*, *Catalyst* and *Human*; *Power Distance* and *Social Paradigms* was analysed as well. All themes have an influence on the zero waste journey.

These themes provide new insight that can be used in future research. A zero waste pilgrim is made up of three aspects. These are zero waste individuals becoming intrepid explorers, testing the waters of the movement and finding their place. Self-determination is fundamental as participants constantly face barriers and new obstacles. However overcoming these obstacles led to participants having peak experiences within their zero waste journey. Together these three aspects combine creating the ultimate zero waste pilgrim. Catalyst consists of two aspects, the participants acting as catalysts for viewer's behavioural change. Additionally, the challenges the participants took part of acted as a catalyst for personal behavioural change. These challenges included the plastic free challenge and freeganism. Next, is a zero waste human. This consists of evangelising and realism, two traits which all the participants hold and battle with finding a balance within the movement. The participants are therefore finding themselves falling in and out of love with the movement. Then, power distance highlights the participants opposing power relationships. The following subthemes emerged; elitist and egalitarian. The elitist mentality focusing on the essential products individuals must have in order to live a successful zero waste lifestyle. Whereas, the egalitarian worldview teaches inclusively and shows that anyone can live a zero waste lifestyle. Lastly, social paradigms show the participants worldview and what they place importance on, where the two subthemes of DSP NEP. The participants show to be living under a NEP, however still have links to the DSP highlighting how majority of our society is brought up only knowing DSP. Therefore, breaking free and finding an alternative worldview is challenging.

Next, the barriers participants faced during their journey were highlighted. The three main barriers, barrier to entry, barrier to acclimatization and barrier to progression have all proved difficult for participants and viewers. From this it can be said that those that follow a zero waste lifestyle are constantly faced with internal and external challenges. Therefore when they find a zero waste product that caters for their needs, it's seen as an achievement and something worth celebrating. This could be due to the novelty of the movement and lack of businesses providing zero waste products. Lastly, the facilitators are highlighted, access, privilege and access all played a considerable part in facilitating the journey of participants. Helping further develop their knowledge and practices within their zero waste lifestyle. How the themes, barriers and facilitators impact on the zero waste journey will be discussed along with future implications in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This section addresses and discusses the findings of this thesis. This study set out to explore the zero waste consumer's journey. Therefore, the researcher has applied the findings to the research questions outlined in Chapter Two and discusses the answers, also illustrating the relationship between zero waste consumers and voluntary simplifiers. Then, the researcher provides an overview of the academic contributions, managerial implications and potential limitations of the study. Lastly, directions for future research are discussed and conclusions are drawn.

### **5.2 Interpretation and Discussion of Findings**

The literature review gave a comprehensive overview on sustainable consumption identities, specifically voluntary simplifiers and zero waste practices. The concept of sustainability and the evolvement of sustainable consumption were introduced, along with their relation to zero waste. The researcher made sense of the disparate zero waste literature, illustrating the limited research on zero waste consumers which required the extension of research to include voluntary simplifier's journey and their motivations. This therefore gave the researcher insight into what a zero waste consumer's journey may resemble.

The literature established that zero waste was commonly discussed in relation to production and waste management practices (Cole *et al.*, 2014; Mason *et al.*, 2003; Matete & Trois, 2008; Song, Li, & Zeng, 2015; Zaman & Lehmann, 2013; Zaman, 2014). Zero waste as a waste reduction goal was also highlighted, detailing the history of the term which led to organisations worldwide adopting a zero waste practice (Zaman, 2015). It was also established that zero waste can be applied to design and production through using cradle-to-cradle principles (McDonough & Braungart, 2010). From the literature a number of questions arose; these surrounded why there was limited literature on zero waste consumption and the zero waste consumer comparatively to zero waste production. The idea of zero waste consumers is a relatively new concept to the literature on alternative consumption lifestyles, additionally, their motivations, barriers and facilitators. To understand what a zero waste consumer is and how to identify their journey the following research questions were proposed:

RQ1: How does one become a zero waste consumer?

RQ2: What are the motivators of the consumer's zero waste journey?

RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitators on the consumer's zero waste journey?

The following section provides answers to these questions.

### **5.2.1 Research Question One**

The following section examines how the findings answered research question one. This question is answered through a framework detailing how one becomes a zero waste consumer. This framework is built from research question two and research question three providing a holistic picture, encompassing the entirety of a zero waste journey.

#### **5.2.1.2 Key Findings of Research Question One**

RQ1 aimed to identify how one becomes a zero waste consumer. The framework illustrated in Figure 4 provides a thorough account of the journey. The framework first begins when consumers engage with zero waste living, this represents the first motivator, pilgrimage. This represents the consumers exploration of the lifestyle, trialling new consumption behaviours and working on becoming the best versions on themselves. Next consumers are faced with barriers to entry which often results in failure to adopt a zero waste lifestyle. This barrier represents consumers trying to enter the lifestyle but failing to practice zero waste living. Barriers to entry include the influence of social media, specifically when zero waste influencers portray the picture perfect image online, time commitment and income restraints. These barriers ultimately deter consumers away from the lifestyle before giving it a real go.

However, those consumers that overcome barriers to entry, are then faced with a number of motivators and facilitators which encourage their journey, discussed in Section 5.2.2 and 5.2.4. These include, consumers acting as zero waste catalysts, promoting zero waste living for themselves and their viewers. Additionally, wanting to change their social paradigm to reflect their core values and beliefs, transitioning from DSP into the NEP. Consumers also act as egalitarians, advocating and supporting for the equality of all within the zero waste community. Lastly, acknowledging they want to live more sustainably and promoting this through their YouTube channel. These motivators and facilitators show the consumers that

living a zero waste lifestyle is possible and can be very rewarding when connecting with the wider community and aligning your values with actions. Next in the framework consumers are faced with their second barrier, barriers to acclimatize to the zero waste lifestyle. The zero waste journey often takes years; therefore, due to the longevity of the process consumers are often faced with overwhelming feelings and difficulties when managing trade-offs. For some, this proves too much and can lead to withdrawal. However, those that manage to overcome this barrier are then facilitated along their journey through access and privilege. These both play a vital role by allowing consumers to continuously engage with zero waste living by purchasing products from zero waste retailers and voting with their dollar, supporting sustainable businesses (Section 5.2.4).

The barriers to progress in the lifestyle are next encountered in the framework, as consumers are constantly changing environments, career paths and living situations. These barriers include changing environments which often result in a loss of momentum and passion and issues of communicating zero waste living to non-zero waste consumers. Participants have shown that when placed in new environments often zero waste living is one of the first things to be left behind. Nevertheless, when overcoming the final barrier to progression, the framework's final component reflects the consumer's human nature. Those that practice zero waste fall in and out of love with the journey, as they get new information their values and beliefs change. These zero waste consumers are living in a dynamic everchanging world, therefore their lifestyle is expected to change. Often consumers will find themselves stepping back from zero waste living or re-entering the lifestyle at a different stage.

Ultimately there is a range of motivators, facilitators and barriers encompassed in how one becomes zero waste and it is up to the consumer how they choose to progress within the lifestyle. The research findings have uncovered a framework (see Figure 4) which represents zero waste consumers' journeys and what is encountered when on a journey. Conclusively showing there is not one final destination with zero waste, it is a constant cycle of making mistakes, learning and changing behaviours. This is different to other ethical consumption lifestyles such as veganism because consumers are vegan, they eat vegan food and purchase vegan clothing. However, zero waste consumers are not zero waste, they practice zero waste, consumers practice living zero waste and cannot be identified as zero waste.

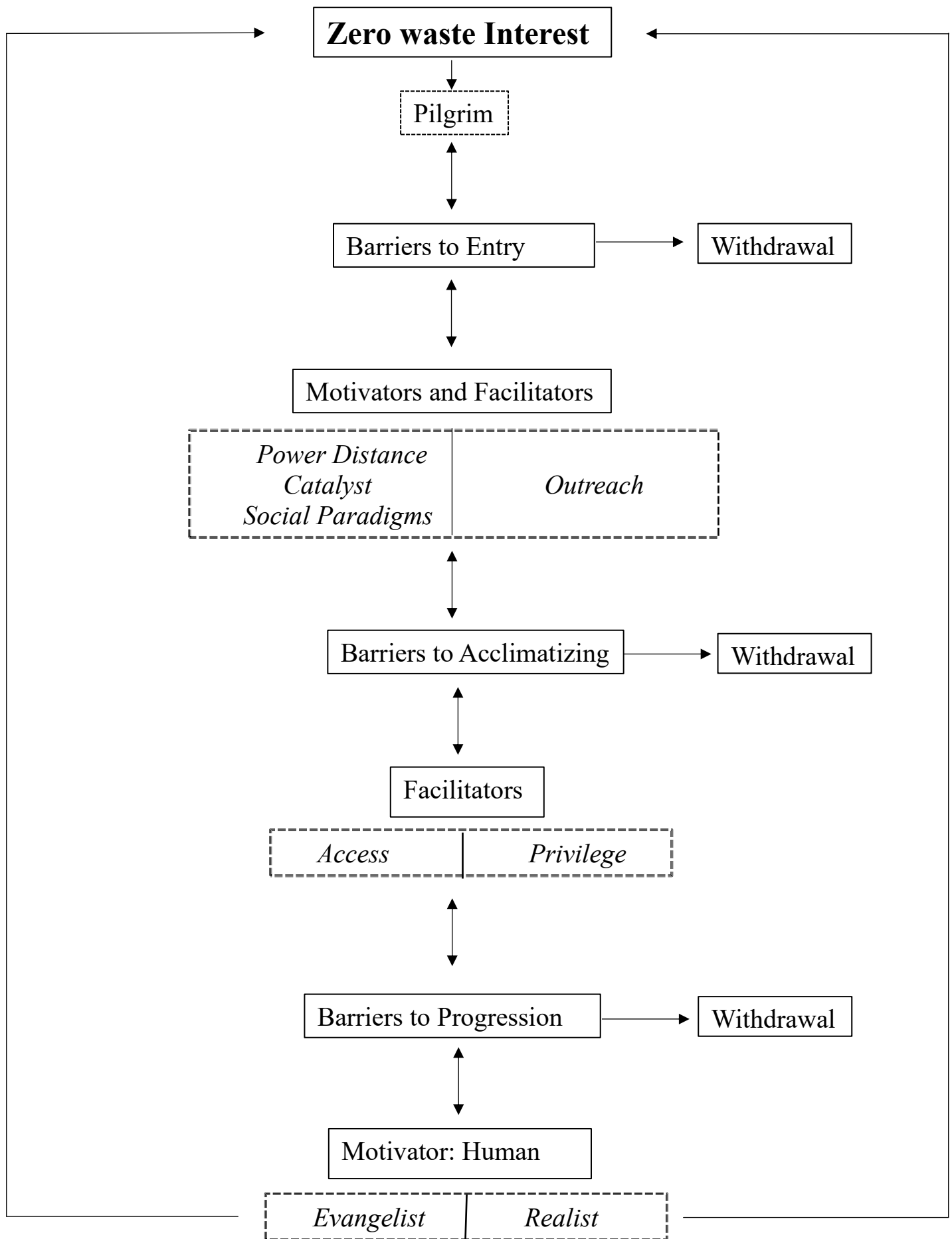


Figure 4: Zero Waste Journey Framework

### **5.2.2 Research Question Two**

This section answers RQ2 and is answered through the main themes that evolved from the netnographic study. These five themes contribute to a greater understanding of what motivates and constructs a zero waste journey. The themes identified were pilgrim, catalyst, human, power distance and social paradigm, all seen to be motivators for zero waste consumers.

#### **5.2.2.1 Key Findings of Research Question Two**

RQ2 sought to identify zero waste consumer's motivations. The already existing literature highlights voluntary simplifier's motivations (Section 2.5.2) and details that due to the nature of the lifestyle there are a number of differing motivators (Boujbel & d'Astous, 2012). This was expected to be similar for zero waste. These findings reveal new zero waste motivations to the already established literature, these include; pilgrim, catalyst, power distance, social paradigms and humanity.

The netnographic studies uncovered five main themes which acted as motivators within participants zero waste journey. First participants start as pilgrims, exploring the lifestyle, then catalysts encouraging viewers and themselves to practice zero waste. However, they are only human therefore encounter highs and lows which motivate them to rethink the lifestyle and make necessary changes. They struggle with power distance, wanting to debunk zero waste as an exclusive movement and lastly, participants shift between environmental and non-environmental social paradigms. All five of these themes motivated participants to continue their zero waste journey, some more directly than others.

The findings related to pilgrim were consistent with the literature, identifying that zero waste consumers have characteristics of exploration and adventure. Additionally, consumers were shown to be working towards their best self, on a journey of self-actualisation. This is consistent with Maslow's theory of self-actualisation (1943), showing zero waste consumers realise their true potential during their journey. Furthermore, D'Souza, J., & Gurin (2016) state that Maslow's theory of self-actualization assumes that individuals are deeply motivated to follow a path called growth motivation that shifts focus from self-interest to social interest, resulting in personal satisfaction. The findings support this, as participants are portrayed to be pilgrims, their motivation for personal growth and satisfaction has become evident during



their journey. The theory of self-actualisation has not previously been identified in the zero waste literature or for voluntary simplifiers.

The three subthemes of pilgrim are intrepid explorers, self-determination and peak experiences (Section 4.3.1). Zero waste consumers' need and want for adventure and exploration is highlighted in the literature of Coles and Crang (2011). These findings build upon the knowledge that ethical consumers invite exploration and channel their inner spirit of adventure. The finding of intrepid explorers support Coles and Crang (2011), as zero waste consumers are confident to delve into areas of the unknown and commit to trialing out a new way of living. Participants self-determination reinforces the literature of the self-determination theory (SDT). SDT is an empirically derived theory of human motivation and personality in social contexts. The findings reflect that participants are inherently active, motivated and orientated towards developing into their best self (Deci & Ryan, 2011). Participants showed they were self-determined as they took control of their life by choosing a lifestyle that represented their beliefs and values. Participants peak experiences provided counterevidence to current literature. Maslow (1943) suggests that peak experiences are utter ecstasy and euphoria. Contrary to the literature, the findings highlight that due to the complexity of the lifestyle and barriers encounters, participants peak experiences were joyful but not moments of absolute ecstasy. Despite this, Maslow (1964) states that in peak experiences, there is a tendency to move more closely to a perfect identity, or uniqueness, of the person or to their best self. The findings support this, as participants are on their self-actualisation journey, evolving to become one's best self. The findings related to the subthemes are new findings to the zero waste literature.

This research also revealed that participants use their zero waste lifestyle as a catalyst for integrating environmental values, or uncovering their own and viewer's dormant values. This motivated others and themselves to live a more sustainable lifestyle, aligning their values with their actions (see Findings Section 4.3.3). This finding is consistent with the literature on conscious consumption behaviour (Lorenzen, 2014; Muldoon, 2006), sustainable consumption (Kilbourne, McDonagh & Prothero (1997) and ethical consumption (Cooper-Martin & Holbrook, (1993). Reinforcing that consumers who hold sustainable values have begun to alter their lifestyle to reflect their core values, withstanding the force or effect of consumer culture and going against the 'norm' (Cherrier, 2009). In addition, Kennedy, Kapitan and Soo (2016) found that sustainable and ethical retailers can kindle perceptions of

the retailer's brand as an inspiration for the consumers' own sustainable values. Showing that retailers and consumers can act as catalysts driving change within sustainable communities. The findings reflect participants challenging their prior purchase behaviours and encouraging change from viewers.

Further findings showed that participants are only human, therefore like the rest of us they encounter highs and lows within their lifestyle. Due to the longevity of the lifestyle, participants showed signs of disinterest and detachment to zero waste living. The literature on voluntary simplifiers illustrates how participants can detach from the movement, due to loss of passion (Shaw & Newholm, 2002), demonstrating that it's natural for consumers who are following an alternative lifestyle to have varying levels of commitment. However, this motivated participants to reassess their core beliefs and query how they were going to overcome these feelings. The voluntary simplifier literature illustrates categorising the consumer (Wu *et al.*, 2013, McGouran & Prothero, 2016, Oates *et al.*, 2008), noting that often consumers can go between categories depending on their motivation and commitment. Once again, this is a new finding to the zero waste literature, as no previous literature has identified the normality of going back and forth within the lifestyle.

The findings reinforce literature on behavioural change, specifically the theory of trying. The subtheme of realism was shown through maintaining expectations and being transparent with viewers detailing zero waste slip ups. A theoretical framework of the theory of trying (Bagozzi and Warshaw, 1990), reinforces this, the theory was designed to explain striving to perform "difficult" behaviours or achieve goals. Zero waste is a trailing process in which the participants are constantly seen to be achieving or failing. Additionally, the theory conceptualizes attitudes towards acts as having three components: trying and succeeding, trying and failing, and the process of striving itself (Xie, Bagozzi and Troye, 2008). The findings present evidence that participants place heavy importance on the process of striving itself. Showing that zero waste living is a long process in which you are constantly striving to find how to tailor the lifestyle and not expect too much from oneself.

Two types of power distance were identified in the findings, elitist and egalitarian. A branch of voluntary simplicity literature highlights the misconception that only the elite or the wealthy can choose to live an alternative lifestyle such as voluntary simplicity or zero waste (Boujbel and d'Astous, 2012). The findings support this as participants have worked hard to

debunk the need for purchasing trendy zero waste products, which often are expensive implying the need for a disposable income. Instead, they advocate for joining the community and starting your own journey, which can be achieved through spending minimal amounts of money. Boujbel and d'Astous (2012) query whether wealth and material possessions correlate with happiness and whether those that live more simply are more happy. Researchers have found an overall negative correlation between wealth and subjective well-being (Kasser and Ryan, 1993; King and Napa, 1998). The findings support this as when participants were shown to be egalitarians that was when they were their most content. They felt there was equal ability for viewers to join the lifestyle and together the community could progress.

The participants were seen to associate with, and shift between, two types of paradigms. Firstly, the DSP and secondly the NEP. These two ways of living represent different core values, however it is possible to follow practices of one paradigm whilst living in another. This is what the participants found themselves doing, seeking job security through sponsorship and creating merchandise despite advocating to consume less. The DSP acted as a motivator to pursue making YouTube a viable career path. However, this was only possible through sponsorship and merchandise purchases. The literature has highlighted how the NEP could potentially drive the transformation of society, encouraging those to transition into sustainable ways of living (Dobson, 1990). This is evident as the NEP motivated participants to aligning their core beliefs with their actions and lifestyle, thus practicing zero waste. These paradigms have not been addressed or applied in previous zero waste literature, illustrating zero waste consumers in a different light, identifying how paradigms can alter ones behaviour.

All five themes have guided participants in their zero waste journey, acting as motivators when the lifestyle was feeling bleak. The participants need for exploration led them down a zero waste path, challenging others and themselves to commit to zero waste. However, realising that they are only human, and must be realistic, when living this lifestyle. This led them to advocate for zero waste living and encourage their viewers and outsiders to join the movement. The participants found themselves battling between two types of worldviews which motivated them to continue their passion of YouTube whilst communicating the practices of zero waste living.

### **5.2.3 Research Question Three**

RQ3 aimed to identify and examine the barriers and facilitators zero waste consumers encountered and overcame. Three major barriers were identified, along with three types of facilitators. These were: barriers to entry; barriers to acclimatizing and barriers to progression, the facilitators included: access; privilege and outreach.

#### **5.2.3.1 Key Findings of Research Question Three**

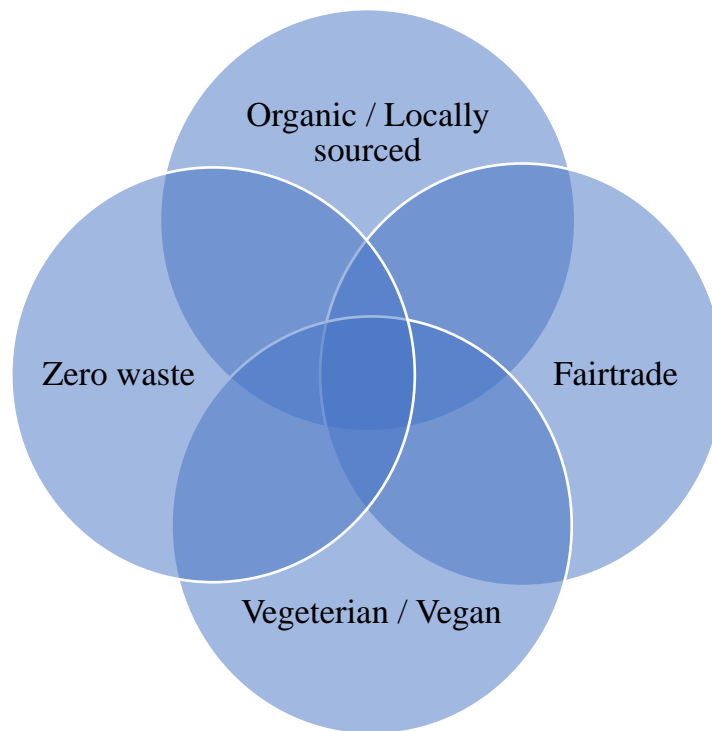
Three types of barriers and facilitators were identified within participants' zero waste journeys. The barriers have been systematized into entering the lifestyle, settling in, and progressing. The first barrier is the barrier to entry, participants became discouraged due to the image associated with zero waste, especially the role social media plays in portraying the perfect zero waste lifestyle. The literature highlights how social media can be used to increase interest in environmental measures, aiming to better communicate sustainability issues (Kanter and Fine, 2010). Bamberg and Möser (2007) state that social media has gained increased attention for their potential to amplify environmental concerns and encourage sustainable behaviours. However, contrary to the literature, consumers exploring zero waste through social media are often intimidated and discouraged. This leaves consumers questioning whether they should engage in the lifestyle if they don't fit the image that is portrayed. This finding is new to zero waste literature by illustrating that social media does have the ability to influence behaviour, including deterring consumers away from a sustainable lifestyle.

The findings related to the subtheme of greenwashing was consistent with ethical consumption literature. Participants found identifying products which were truly zero waste challenging, due to the levels of greenwashing. Lewis and Potter (2013) state that ethical consumers are becoming increasingly aware of greenwashing tactics by marketers. This is applicable for zero waste consumers, however, their rising levels of knowledge have led to a real struggle when navigating the marketplace. In order to overcome this barrier, participants used YouTube as their outlet to test and trial alleged environmentally friendly products. This reinforces Delmas and Burbano (2011, pg. 71) study which stated that "often YouTube campaigns and other internet based platforms [are] an easy and inexpensive means to spread information about and campaign against greenwashing". This finding illustrates how participants used their platform as a means to overcome the barrier of greenwashing.

Furthermore, this is a new finding for zero waste literature as greenwashing as a barrier to entry for sustainable consumption lifestyles has been overlooked in previous literature.

Barriers to acclimatising has additionally proved challenging for participants due to struggling to find their footings and how make the lifestyle change manageable. The literature supports this by presenting a range of challenges relating to the feelings of being overwhelmed and confused, detailing difficulties for voluntary simplifiers and ethical consumers. This Suggests that excessive information can overwhelm consumers and prevent effective processing, resulting in ill-informed decisions (Hasanzade, et al., 2018), leading to purchases which may not resemble their lifestyle. Participants stated that the lifestyle was not just black and white, there lies some hidden questions that excessive amounts of information proved to be yet another barrier when selecting zero waste products. Participants found themselves experiencing feelings of overwhelmingness and waves of anxiety when shopping zero waste. Gregory-Smith, *et al.*, (2013, pg. 1203) states how “heightened emotions have the power to influence cognitive variables involved in decision making”. Consequently, participants found themselves purchasing products which were not zero waste.

Past research has shown that ethical consumers perform a number of trade-offs during the decision-making process (Strong, 1997; Shaw & Clarke, 1999; Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2013). Participants were often caught at a crossroads as they rarely found products that meet all of their primary sustainable concerns and were constantly having to ‘trade-off’ between these concerns. The findings revealed that managing trade-offs proved yet another barrier which led to participants questioning the zero waste lifestyle. Ultimately this impacted participants’ ability to adapt, resulting in a longer time period to acclimatise. The literature supports this, as Carey *et al.*, (2008) state that ethical decision-making may be considered paradoxical from its beginning through to its occurrence (ethical purchase) as it is comprised of a series of contradictions and trade-offs. Participants have included additional ethical behaviours such as purchasing Fairtrade, organic, ethical, local or vegetarian/vegan as shown in Figure 5. These trade-offs therefore make the purchase process even harder for zero waste consumers as they are adding additional product requirements. This is a new finding for the zero waste literature, highlighting the additional zero waste behaviours participants include which in turn adds to the difficulty of acclimatising within zero waste.



*Figure 5: Types of ethical consumption*

The last contributing barrier is barriers to progression. This highlights the difficulties in gaining momentum in the lifestyle and adapting suitable communication strategies when interacting with others regarding zero waste. The literature on lifestyle migration and voluntary simplicity (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Osbaldiston 2010; García-de-Frutos, 2018; Craig-Lees & Hill, 2002) indicates that lifestyle change impacts upon the individual's progression, however, the change can often be a barrier to long term success (Kargillis, 2013). The findings supported this as participants struggled when adjusting to new environments or routines. An extension of ethical-consumption literature suggests that consumers who enter new environments often oppress their values and practices (Franke, 2019). The findings reflected this as one participant moved cities and found herself steering away from living zero waste due to practicality concerns. Her world opened up into exciting new opportunities and zero waste may have been holding her back from a consumption lifestyle she felt she wanted. Questioning how she was going to progress in her lifestyle if she can't manage it when she changes environments. This barrier is a new finding for the zero waste literature portraying that although participants are actively engaged in a lifestyle they still face a number of barriers.

The findings revealed a number of facilitators that aided the participants journey. The three facilitators identified were: access, privilege and outreach. These helped counteract the barriers, making zero waste living more bearable. Access encompasses access to zero waste products, zero waste shops, education and information about the lifestyle. A branch of ethical consumption literature states that greater access to information allows for consumers to form opinions about the 'what' and 'how' of ethical consumption (Beck, 1999). The findings support this as once participants engaged in zero waste living they conducted extensive amounts of research surrounding the practices, products and shops in their area. The information sought made the lifestyle transition smoother for participants as they were more knowledgeable on zero waste product alternatives and DIY products. Additionally, the literature highlights how access to bulk foods, organic shopping centres and sustainable growers promote living sustainably (Seyfang, 2007). One participant explicitly chose her living area due to the large amounts of access to sustainable retailers. Additional research states education is a strong determinant of ethical buying (Starr, 2009). Access to information and retailers resulted in participants and viewers becoming more educated about the lifestyle which reinforced their lifestyle choices.

Privilege was viewed by newcomers and viewers as vital when entering an alternative lifestyle. The participants often referred to voting with your dollar when shopping, opting for more sustainable items although they are more expensive. This is reinforced in the literature on green consumption. Johnston (2008) states its also known as "voting with your dollar", and that some individuals have a lot more votes, while others have none. Additionally, the builds on the knowledge and understanding that sustainable options such as organic food and compostable packaging is more accessible to the elite or wealthy on grounds of price, and claimed to be inaccessible to lower-income groups (Seyfang, 2007). Participants counter this argument by stating there is a large misconception that alternative living such as zero waste is only accessible for those that have a disposable income. Stating that anyone can choose to practice zero waste and often you will save money long term. However, the participants acknowledged how their privilege allowed them to experiment on YouTube with a range of zero waste products they may not have done otherwise, thus facilitating their progress within the lifestyle.

Participants claimed that if it wasn't for YouTube and their ability to connect with a wide range of people within the community, their zero waste journey may have taken a different path. YouTube facilitated their journeys by constantly providing new content for their viewers, helping assist viewers in their zero waste transitions. This finding aligns with (Wuest, Hustvedt and Kang, 2014) who implies accountability promotes sustainable consumer behaviour. One participant stated YouTube gave her a voice which in turn kept her accountable and motivated during her journey. Participants additionally facilitated behavioural change within their viewers zero waste journeys through YouTube partnerships and sponsorship. Guiding viewers to trusted sustainable companies which are endorsed by participants and other members of the zero waste community. This supports literature suggesting that direct consumer outreach and partnerships with retailers are recommended as effective means of changing consumption patterns (Kong *et al.*, 2002). Outreach facilitated both viewers and their own journey through accountability and promoting behavioural change to a large audience.

### **5.3 Voluntary Simplifiers and Zero Waste Consumers**

The scope of this research included voluntary simplifiers due to the lack of literature on zero waste consumers (Section 2.7). It was expected that zero waste consumers and voluntary simplifiers were to have some similarities within their lifestyles. The findings revealed some overlap in pro-environmental behaviours, motivators and barriers. This is a new finding to the literature as highlighted in Section 2.5.3 the literature does not discuss the relationship between the two lifestyles.

#### **5.3.1 Barriers**

Voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers face significant barriers in adopting pro-environmental behaviours. The voluntary simplicity literature highlights the barriers during the transitional process, and Pravet and Holmlund (2018) discuss the following: avoidance, lack of opportunities and capabilities, social obligations and negativity. Because of various difficulties and barriers, many who start the transformational process never finish it. The findings of this study support the literature, as the first barrier encountered for zero waste consumers is barriers to entry. Revealing that the pressure of the lifestyle often discourages consumers prior to commencing. Participants discuss how it is a difficult adjustment once you enter the lifestyle but once you begin to immerse yourself it becomes easier, especially



with the YouTube community as a support network. This correlates with voluntary simplifiers' barrier of avoidance, as zero waste viewers found themselves believing that the transition wasn't attainable, so the participants made it their goal to make the lifestyle as manageable and achievable as possible.

Once consumers have transitioned into zero waste living they are then faced with barriers to acclimatizing, firstly facing trade-offs when making consumption choices. Participants voiced their previous battles with purchasing a product that met all of their needs (Section 5.2.4). This expands on the understanding of "unavoidable trade-offs" in the voluntary simplicity literature (Bekin et al, 2005) It can be understood from this new finding that consumers who choose to practice sustainable consumption, specifically, voluntary simplifiers and zero waste are often caught at a cross roads when purchasing products. Exposing the limited amount of products that cater for all the requirements of these consumers.

The findings revealed zero waste consumers are additionally faced with barriers to progression. Progressing in both the lifestyle and communication techniques when discussing their lifestyle change to those that are foreign to zero waste living. Drawing on existing voluntary simplicity research, McDonald (2014) illustrates how often simplification goes unnoticed by friends and family, until they reach a point where they need to make a major lifestyle change in order to progress. This has shown to be a challenge for simplifiers, dealing with a lifestyle change and then communicating this to their family and friends. Zero waste consumers are found to encounter a similar barrier, especially with regards to communication methods. Participants disclose their battles when communicating their chosen lifestyle and provides tips to viewers. Claiming that its best to focus on your own progression within the journey and not let communicating be too disheartening and demotivating.

The barriers zero waste consumers and voluntary simplifiers face are inevitable, and those that choose to follow an alternative lifestyle and re-evaluate their consumption choices encounter a number of challenges along the journey. The findings have supported voluntary simplicity literature in that due to the pro-environmental behaviours of both voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers involves confronting barriers which average consumers would not have to handle. However, those that live zero waste and a life of simplification have often chosen so to align their beliefs and values to their actions (Sandlin and Walther,

2009). Therefore, they are willing to work towards overcoming these barriers in order to live a more meaningful life. The new finding for zero waste consumers which makes them different to simplifiers is zero waste consumers encounter three stages of barriers. First, barriers to entry, second, barriers to acclimatizing and third, barriers to progression.

### **5.3.2 Motivators and Values**

Consumers who practice sustainable consumption methods often involve behavioural and life changes. A large aspect of changing one's lifestyle is to reflect core values, where these values often act as a motivator to pursue a new way of living. A branch of the voluntary simplicity literature characterises the core values of the lifestyle to include material simplicity, self-determination, ecological awareness, social responsibility, spirituality and personal growth (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977; García-de-Frutos, et al., 2018). The findings support these values, as participants detail their deep-seated connection to the environment, perceiving it as their duty to change their behaviour and promote zero waste living on their YouTube channel. Participants have acknowledged environmental issues on their channel and use the information to connect with viewers, broadcasting sustainable living, portraying their sense of social responsibility. What's more, all three vloggers disclose only purchasing products which add value to our lives, disclosing their emphasis on material simplicity. Overall, the findings expose zero waste consumers to have overlapping values as voluntary simplifiers, a new finding to the zero waste and voluntary simplicity literature.

The findings have uncovered the motivators behind zero waste consumers (Section 5.2.2). In addition, Chapter Two illustrated voluntary simplifier's motivations (Section 2.8.2). Similarly to the values, the researcher has observed an overlap in some motivations. The literature on voluntary simplifiers categorised motivations into: personal, economic, environmental, social and spiritual (Alexander and Ussher, 2012; Boujbel and d'Astous, 2012; Boyd-Thomas *et al.*, 2013; Elgin, 1977; Newholm and Shaws, 2002). However, this research identifies motivators on a more explicit level, defining a broad theme and then breaking it down into motivators. Some of these motivators correlate with those of voluntary simplifiers, for example the motivators of exploration and self-determination parallel with personal motivations for simplifiers. The literature supports this, as Elgin (1977) notes personal growth as an important factor when adapting a voluntary simplifier's lifestyle. The literature also states how personal motivators can be both positive and negative, for example being tired of the

pressure to consume and environmental concerns (Zavestoski, 2002). Zero waste participants challenged themselves to change their behaviours and adapt zero waste living to lessen their current consumption outputs on the environment. This mentality can be viewed to resemble that of simplifiers' personal, environmental and social motivators. In addition, the zero waste motivator of egalitarian correlates with simplifiers social motivations. Elgin (1977) believes that simplifiers hold a sense of social responsibility, likewise the findings of zero waste consumers who use their platform to connect with a wide number of people, advocating for and promoting the message of sustainable living.

It has become apparent that there is a number of correlations between voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers' values and motivations, a new finding to the literature. However, it is important to note that although the research has identified the connections, both simplifiers and zero waste consumers are individual consumption behaviours. They share similar practices due to their overlap in environmental behaviours and values but they have evolved outside one another. Simplifiers may choose to simplify via purchasing less products, or purchasing locally which results in less waste, although this they may not class themselves as a zero waste consumer. Participants have shown to consume only within their means as a practice of zero waste, however they may not choose to identify as a voluntary simplifier.

## **5.4 Implications of Research**

### **5.4.1 Academic Implications**

This research has contributed to the extant literature on alternative consumption lifestyles, by exploring the journey of a zero waste consumer, identifying their motivators, barriers and facilitators along said journey. The researcher highlighted the gaps in the literature in Chapter Two. This section will show how this thesis has endeavoured to fill, or contribute to filling, these gaps.

This thesis has contributed to academia in zero waste by identifying a zero waste consumers journey. The zero waste literature has not addressed at the area of zero waste consumption before, thus the notion of zero waste consumers and their journey is the first academic contribution of this research. Building on this, due to the absence of literature this research has identified zero waste consumer motivators for engaging with the lifestyle, and perusing it.

Additionally, the barriers and facilitators the consumers encounter when on their lifestyle journey. The idea of a zero waste consumer encountering a number of motivators, barriers and facilitators during their journey has not been proposed before.

The first way that this thesis contributes to zero waste literature is by conducting a study on zero waste consumers, specifically analysing online communities through the method of netnography. Previous literature on zero waste places a heavy focus on zero waste production, waste management and design (Section 2.5.3). That work fails to investigate zero waste as a way of living, and does not identify the zero waste consumer. Therefore, this research has contributed to the academic area of alternative consumption lifestyles, as it has provided an in-depth analysis of zero waste consumers, a focus that has not been addressed in the literature before. The second way this research has added to zero waste knowledge is providing a framework detailing the entirety of a zero waste consumers journey. This framework identifies how consumers enter the lifestyle, the transitions they go through to progress within the lifestyle, and the exit paths some may take when zero waste becomes overbearing. This is an academic contribution to alternative consumption lifestyles and zero waste consumers as it provides a framework which academics can choose to adapt and apply to other sustainably driven lifestyles.

The findings related to the relationship between zero waste consumers and voluntary simplifiers are an entirely new contribution to the areas of alternative consumption lifestyles, zero waste and voluntary simplicity. Previous voluntary simplicity literature has focused on operationalising the term (Elgin and Mitchell, 1977), categorisation (Kraisornsuthasinee and Swierczek, 2018), and attempts towards explaining the motivations behind living such a lifestyle (Alexander and Ussher, 2012; Boujbel and d'Astous, 2012; Boyd-Thomas *et al.*, 2013; Elgin, 1977; Newholm and Shaws, 2002). Voluntary simplicity has also been addressed in the literature has been associated with sustainable and ethical consumption (McDonald, Oates and Young, 2006). However, the relationship between simplifiers and zero waste consumers has not been explored. This research compares simplifiers and zero waste consumers motivations, barriers and facilitators identifying a number of overlapping behaviours. Building on current knowledge of voluntary simplicity and expanding the knowledge on zero waste consumers.

On top of this previous literature, the current study has identified the application of the self-determination theory and Maslow's theory of self-actualisation within the consumer's journey. The literature on the self-determination theory states that humans are inherently active, motivated and orientated towards developing into their best self (Deci & Ryan, 2011). This is applicable for the findings as participants detailed living zero waste to be a crucial part in the evolution towards becoming their best self. This finding is supported by literature on Maslow's theory of self-actualisation (1943) which assumes that individuals are deeply motivated to follow a path called growth motivation. Participants became exceedingly motivated to pursue zero waste and use their lifestyle transition as an avenue to become their best self through aligning their behaviours with values.

#### **5.4.2 Practical Implications**

Alongside the academic implications, there are several practical implications for commercial and social marketers. Most significantly, how commercial marketers can increase accessibility of zero waste products, through product placement and retailers. In addition, how social marketers can create successful zero waste campaigns and promote behavioural change. This can be achieved through creating a zero waste symbol which resonates with the audience, similarly to the turtle with a plastic straw stuck in its nose.

Social marketing is defined by Andreason (1994) and incorporates marketing for behavioural change. Findings detail how the barrier of greenwashing and facilitator of education impacts the ability to adapt a zero waste lifestyle. Therefore, it is recommended for social marketers to campaign publicly against waste and plastic products. Previous social marketing campaigns have seen massive success in plastic reduction, the sea turtle has become a marketing symbol for anti-plastic movements (Chiu, 2019; Eagle, Hamann and Low, 2016). Giving the public a powerful visual image for the first time in the history which can be directly correlated to the movement (Chiu, 2019). Social marketers have the ability to create an image to educate consumers about zero waste. The marketers may choose to adapt an information-based awareness campaign to show why living zero waste is a favourable choice for our environment. There are various strategies social marketers can adopt when promoting zero waste living, however campaigns must be truthful to avoid further greenwashing.

The findings showed participants struggle to find zero waste products at retailers. This invites retailers to firstly assess the current packaging of products to see whether they are suitable to cater for this market and secondly identify what they can implement to become more zero waste friendly. Participants illustrated the necessity of bulk bins, an easy waste free alternative. Retailers which had bulk bins catered for both the zero waste consumer and the average consumer. Moreover, in the stage of barriers to acclimatisation, participants found themselves making trade-offs between products that did not fit all their requirements. Additionally, shopping at numerous retailers to find zero waste products as findings revealed that accessibility was a prominent facilitator within the zero waste journey. Marketers can use this knowledge when positioning products instore, by placing zero waste items next to regular products, such as moon cups, bamboo toothbrushes or stainless steel razors. Not only does this strategy target consumers who are trying to live zero waste but further creates awareness among consumers who are unaware of zero waste.

Additionally, that participants were involved in both paid and voluntary product endorsement on their YouTube channel. Participants began filming zero waste product reviews, providing their truthful and sometimes negative opinions about certain products. For practitioners, vlogs are considered a powerful marketing channel for companies (Lee & Watkins, 2016), one that allows their brands or products to directly target certain consumer demographics. Due to the community built around the zero waste YouTube vloggers, viewers trust their reviews and often comment in the videos their willingness to try a product if one of the participants recommended it. Commercial marketers can utilise this community when promoting their zero waste products, however this would be at their own risk as participants will discuss their honest opinion of the product.

Lastly, viewers placed high value on the opinions and thoughts of participants and other members of the zero waste YouTube community, regarding lifestyle tips, product recommendations, DIY's and hacks. Viewers found themselves placing more levels of faith to the members of the community all of whom have no affiliation with the brand. These members included complete strangers and the participants themselves, rather than official voices or brand ambassadors. Commercial marketers can choose to partner with community voices, benefiting marketers as viewers sought advice from members in the community when purchasing new zero waste products. These opinion leader endorsements therefore have the

ability to influence viewers to purchase specific zero waste products as long as the leader is speaking for the interests of the zero waste community, not a business entity.

## **5.5 Limitations**

While this research has findings that have added to the body of knowledge surrounding zero waste consumers, it additionally has potential limitations which may influence the outcome of the study. Specifically, the research encountered limitations surrounding netnography, methodology, sampling and participants. These limitations are outlined below, alongside how the researcher mitigated each.

The limitations of netnography draw from its more narrow focus on online communities and verification concerns (Kozinets, 2019). However, netnography was deemed most suitable as a method for collecting and analysing data. This was due to the novelty of the zero waste lifestyle, it was necessary to capture the consumers entire journey and having explicit documented videos detailing ones experiences was imperative to the research. This therefore avoided relying upon a participant's memory which is required for quantitative survey and interview research (Costello, McDermott & Wallace, 2017). The first challenge encountered was the researchers inability to verify the authenticity of participants claims. However, it was deemed according to Mkono *et al.*, (2013) that this challenge is not unique to netnography; in any data gathering situation involving human participants, false information may be given, and researchers often have no means to verify claims made by participants. Additionally the researcher has taken a constructivist approach, therefore does not require verification from participants and so is not seen as a limitation.

Focusing exclusively on online communities was necessary due to time and resource constraints. The research was conducted primarily over a five month period which led to the inability of a mixed method approach. Additionally, this was applicable when choosing the social media platform, as netnographic studies recommend analysing multiple platforms, however this was not possible due to time and resource constraints. Another limitation identified is that the researcher only interpreted the participants' public self through netnography. However, the researcher has taken a constructivist approach and acknowledged that participants have assigned their own meaning to zero waste. Therefore, participants zero

waste lifestyle is up to interpretation, allowing them to be their most authentic and true self as there is no set guidelines.

The study is of exploratory nature, there is potential that interviews may have provided further in-depth information. However, as noted earlier, it was vital for the research to capture the participants' entire zero waste journey. Interviews in the time allowed could not have provided the level of detail which was extracted from the vlogger video entries., Guest et al. (2006) state that a sample size of 14 is an appropriate amount in order to achieve saturation of data. Due to the scope of the study, being worldwide, it may have been difficult to contact 14 participants from across the globe who can provide detailed experiences regarding their journey from the beginning.

Sampling limitations arose as this research consisted of all females in the same age group. However, due to the criteria for vloggers and time and resource constraints this was the most appropriate, as all participants were reputable and had built up a steady following on YouTube. One participant restricted her content more on her YouTube channel; this was because she had created eBooks to guide her viewers through transitioning into a lower waste lifestyle. Due to her YouTube channel being the only platform analysed this led to the potential of missing data. However, due to her detailed vlogs the researcher was still able to gain enough insight into her zero waste journey. If it were possible, an analysis of all participant's social media platforms and additional material would have been analysed, but the time constraints did not allow for this.

## **5.6 Future Research Directions**

As previously mentioned, there is little mention of the zero waste consumers journey in the literature, therefore there are various directions for future research in each area. Following this study, future studies can incorporate the framework created in Figure 4 into behavioural change intervention. The framework can be used as a tool when navigating consumers journey or interest in the lifestyle. Research can be conducted on how this framework alters behaviour and whether it benefits consumers to be more aware of the upcoming barriers they are predicted to face. Additionally, the framework can be applied to other alternative consumption lifestyles such as voluntary simplifiers or ethical consumers. Research on whether the zero waste journey is similar to other alternative consumption is therefore required.



Another avenue of research that may be worth pursuing interacting with the online community. Kozinets (2019) recommends that netnographers fully immerse themselves in their chosen online community. Therefore, this study could be repeated with the researcher interacting with the zero waste community, commenting on video's, liking vlogs, sharing their own personal experiences with products, even becoming an opinion leader within the community. Additionally, the researcher could choose to extend their scope to include participants other forms of social media, such as Instagram, Snapchat or Facebook.

This study could be repeated and participants could be sourced from a specific country, segmenting the study by country would generate different outcomes by virtue of differences in culture. As this study each participants was from a different country, therefore representing a variation in cultures, opinions and attitudes. Further research could include interviews to develop a deeper understanding of zero waste consumers. This would be beneficial to the current knowledge as it would allow researchers to direct the conversation and go deeper than the content on the vlogs. Additionally, a quantitative study could be adopted to grasp how many members are in the zero waste YouTube community. This would be useful for practitioners when using product endorsement and the sponsorship of vlogs. Moreover, academic researcher could better understand the community and ensure interactions were meaningful and productive.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This thesis set out to explore zero waste consumers, with the ultimate goal of identifying how one becomes a zero waste consumer, the motivators, barriers and facilitators faced during their journey. From the findings an array of themes emerged, all of which completely new to the existing literature on zero waste. A framework was created, explicitly identifying the zero waste journey; identifying that zero waste consumers are on a constant journey as there is not a destination where one becomes a true zero waste consumers. Additionally, a new finding of the overlap in pro-environmental behaviours between voluntary simplifiers and zero waste consumers was revealed. Ultimately, this research has successfully fulfilled its intended purpose by addressing a gap in the literature, as well as determining future avenues to explore, furthering our knowledge zero waste consumers. The new themes and framework

contributes to a lifestyle which is not yet greatly understood, therefore it is hoped that this thesis will serve as a foundation for future zero waste research.

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