



Investigation Of Consumer Behaviour Towards Fast Fashion And Their Willingness To Adapt Sustainable Alternatives

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Abstract

This research examines the factors influencing consumer purchase decisions, perceptions of value, and willingness to adopt sustainable alternatives in the context of fast fashion, with a focus on consumers in Dubai. It provides a comprehensive analysis of consumer buying behavior concerning fast fashion and explores the barriers that deter consumers from adopting sustainable fashion alternatives. This research uses analytical and quantitative research methods by utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. The primary data was collected through a structured research instrument consisting of Likert scale-based questionnaires targeting 32 respondents aged 30 to 45, chosen via simple random sampling. The secondary data was gathered from literature reviews published in various academic journals highlights the disparity in visibility and accessibility between fast-fashion and sustainable brands.. The findings reveal a high awareness (94%) of the term "fast fashion" and its environmental impacts, yet this awareness does not translate into responsible purchase behaviors due to affordability, convenience, and trends being the primary drivers of fast-fashion consumption. While 52% of respondents expressed interest in supporting sustainable fashion, cost and lack of awareness about sustainable brands remain significant barriers. Recommendations include government subsidies and tax incentives for sustainable fashion brands, collaborations with artisans and large-scale retailers, leveraging social media for marketing, and fostering sustainability education. These measures aim to reduce costs, enhance visibility, and promote consumer awareness, thereby encouraging a shift towards more responsible purchasing behaviors and supporting the transition to a sustainable fashion industry.

Keywords: fast fashion, environment impact, sustainable clothing, consumer awareness and sustainable adoption barriers

I. Introduction

The rise of fast fashion has revolutionized the global fashion industry, offering consumers trendy clothing at affordable prices allowing consumers to frequently update their wardrobe at minimal cost. The global fast fashion market was valued at over \$36 billion in 2019 is expected to continue to grow further. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates, 11.3 million tons of textile waste were generated in the United States alone, with only 15% being recycled and the rest ending up in landfills (EPA, 2020).

Despite widespread awareness of the harmful impacts of fast fashion on the environment, consumer purchase behaviour has not shifted away from fast fashion. Studies such as McNeill and Moore (2015) and Joy et al. (2012) have elaborated on the factors of consumer awareness and purchase behaviour, highlighting affordability and fashion trends as key factors that continue the demand of fast fashion.

This research investigates consumer behavior towards fast fashion, focusing on the factors that drive their purchasing decisions and the extent to which the consumers are aware of the associated environmental impacts. By analyzing data on consumer preferences and factors influencing their purchase decisions, this study seeks to identify challenges and opportunities for promoting sustainable fashion alternatives and explores consumer willingness to shift towards it. Furthermore, the research provides recommendations to encourage a shift towards environment friendly choices.

II. Objectives of the study

1. To assess the extent of consumer awareness towards the harmful environment effects of fast fashion.
2. To assess the influence of consumer awareness regarding the environmental impacts of fast fashion on purchasing decisions.
3. To study the key factors such as affordability, fashion trends and convenience that drive consumers towards purchase decisions.
4. To investigate consumer interest towards sustainable fashion alternatives and access the barriers that hinder the adoption of sustainable fashion.
5. To develop recommendations to increase the adoption of sustainable fashion.

III. Literature Reviews

Fast Fashion is characterized by the rapid production of cost-effective clothing that mimics current fashion trends by becoming a dominant force in the global fashion industry but it has significant environmental repercussions. This section examines the various dimensions of fast fashion's environmental impact to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

3.1 The Environmental Footprint of Fast Fashion

The environmental impact of fast fashion begins with its raw materials. Cotton, one of the most commonly used fibre, is a water-intensive crop, and its cultivation has been linked to the depletion of water resources in various regions. According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), producing a single cotton T-shirt requires approximately 2,700 liters of water, an amount that could otherwise meet one person's drinking needs for two and a half years (Chapagain & Hoekstra, 2007). However, alternative sustainable materials like organic cotton, recycled polyester, and hemp are less resource-intensive and have lower environmental footprints compared to conventional alternatives. A study by Radhakrishnan (2017) demonstrates that organic cotton uses 71% less water and 62% less energy compared to conventional cotton, significantly reducing water and energy consumption (Radhakrishnan, 2017).

The environmental impact of fast fashion is profound, affecting everything from water resources and chemical pollution to waste generation and carbon emissions. The adoption of sustainable materials in fashion is crucial for reducing environmental impact. However, there is a significant gap in the existing research concerning consumer awareness of organic materials used in clothing. This study seeks to explore the extent of consumer awareness and identify the key factors that influence their adaptation of sustainable alternatives.

3.2 Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour plays a crucial role in perpetuating the fast fashion cycle. The allure of low-cost, trendy clothing often outweighs concerns about environmental sustainability. Joy et al. (2012) examined the psychology behind fast fashion consumption and found that the thrill of acquiring new items at low prices leads to impulsive buying behaviour, with little regard for the environmental consequences.

While studies like those by Joy et al. (2012) address consumer perceptions, there is insufficient data on how awareness translates into sustainable purchasing practices. This study aims to investigate how increased consumer awareness about the environmental impacts of fast fashion influences purchasing decisions and behavioural changes.

3.3 Industry Responses

The fashion industry has begun to recognize the need for more sustainable practices. Some brands have adopted circular economy principles, focusing on the reuse and recycling of materials. The H&M Group, for example, launched a global garment collection initiative, encouraging consumers to return used clothing to be recycled into new garments (H&M, 2018). Despite these efforts, the scale of change is still insufficient to counterbalance the rapid production and consumption model inherent in fast fashion.

Consumer perception of sustainable fashion is influenced by the perceived authenticity and transparency of brands. According to a study by McNeill and Moore (2015) also emphasized that consumers who are aware of a brand's sustainable practices are more inclined to trust and remain loyal to that brand (McNeill, L., & Moore, R. (2015). Existing research inadequately addresses the impact of sustainable fashion brands on consumer behaviour. This study aims to examine how the sustainable fashion brands influence consumer purchasing decisions and behavioural patterns.

The literature reveals a growing interest in sustainable fashion and substantial research on the harmful effects of the fast fashion industry, yet significant gaps remain in understanding how these brands influence consumer behaviour. While some studies have explored aspects of consumer awareness and the adoption of organic materials in clothing, there is a clear need for more comprehensive research on the behavioural impact of sustainable fashion brands. This study will address these gaps by examining the key factors that influence consumer decisions towards fashion choices.

IV. Methodology

The analysis of the interview transcripts from the four adoptive mothers (refer to Table 1) resulted in 69 free codes (refer to Table 3), naturally grouped into six themes: I) fertility issues as a motive for adoption, II) complexities of the adoption process, III) cultural and racial considerations, IV) bonding experiences, V) emotional challenges & ambivalence, VI) coping with motherhood & gratitude.

The intention of this research is to examine the factors that affect purchase decisions, consumer perceptions of value, and their willingness to choose sustainable alternatives, by raising awareness and encouraging responsible buying behaviors. A questionnaire has been designed to conduct the primary data for the study to have a clear understanding of consumers' perspective towards fast fashion, which consisted of basic demographic questions which included the name, age and area of the respondent which was specific to Dubai and also a set of 10 questions related to fast fashion choices such as awareness and clarity of the term 'fast fashion', brand awareness, factors that influence purchase decisions like price, convenience, available sizes, fabric comfort, and current trends. The questionnaire also covered aspects of sustainable

fashion which included organic textiles, awareness about sustainable clothing brands and the purchasing choices towards those brands. The questionnaire also had the respondents to think of the after effects of their choices in choosing fast fashion brands. The final question had been placed as a learning curve for the respondent to understand the harmful side effects on our planet. 32 individuals have been used as respondents between the age groups of 30 to 45 by way of simple random sampling technique. This age group has been chosen keeping in mind that they have a dominant purchasing power over buying decisions for themselves and their families. The responses have been analyzed based on which graphs have been created as part of the structured analysis of the primary data.

The secondary data was derived from other research papers, news articles, bachelor study thesis, books and magazines from libraries.

V. Data Analysis

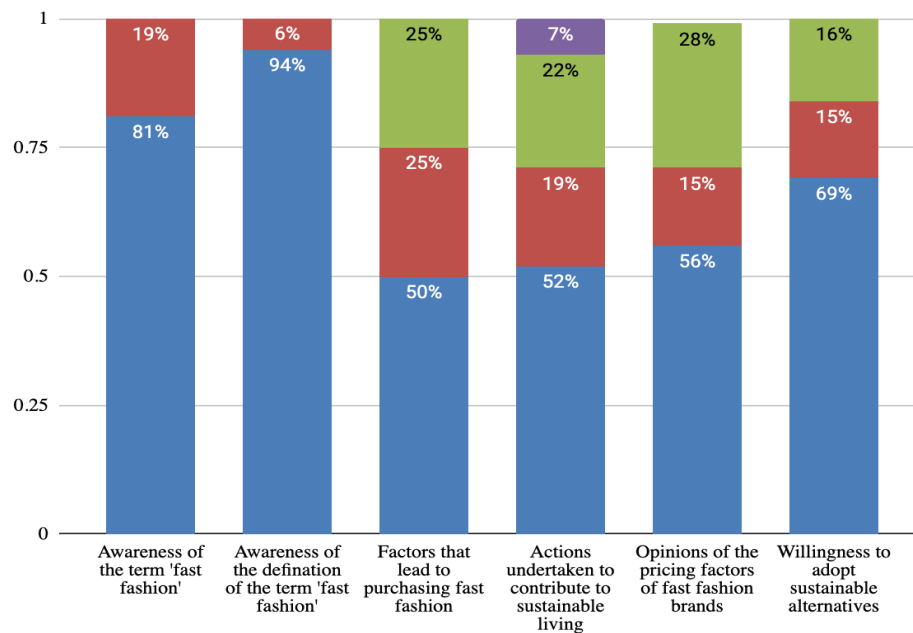


Figure 1. Survey results on awareness, purchasing behavior, and attitudes toward fast fashion and sustainable alternatives.

As part of the analysis, 81% of the respondents were aware of the term ‘fast fashion’, whereas 19% had not known of the same. 94% of the respondents were aware of the correct definition of the term fast fashion whereas 6% of the respondents remained ignorant. This indicates strong familiarity of the concept among the respondents.

88% of the respondents were aware that the fast-fashion industry is responsible for 2.1 billion metric tons of greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions which is 4 percent of the global total, ie; the fashion industry emits about the same quantity of GHGs per year as the entire economies of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. This indicates a high level of awareness about the environmental impacts of fast fashion.

50% of the respondents found 'price' to be one of the most influential factors in purchasing fast fashion whereas, 25% of the respondents found current trends and influences as their motivation in purchasing fast fashion. The rest of the choices mentioned by the respondents have been convenience or easy availability and another reason being fabric comfort for their choice in purchasing Fast Fashion products. This suggests that affordability plays a crucial role in consumer decision-making in this sector, fashion trends and societal pressure play a significant role along with convenience and fabric comfort.

Regarding the respondents' choices towards sustainable living 52% of the respondents have shown interest in supporting sustainable brands whereas 19% of the respondents shared that they would donate clothes to contribute to sustainability. 22% of the respondents said that they would try to reduce purchasing from the fast fashion brands. The rest of the respondents have stated that they would be purchasing organic fabric as part of their active contribution to sustainable living. 56% of the respondents have found sustainable fashion brands expensive to purchase and 15% of the respondents do not find sustainable fashion brands expensive whereas 28% of the respondents do not have an opinion regarding the same, the reason for this neutral approach could be because those respondents might not be familiar with sustainable fashion brands hence they might not have enough information to form an opinion. 69% of the respondents have stated that they would be willing to adopt sustainable alternatives like: organic cotton, bamboo, Hemp, Linen, Recycled polyester, organic silk, jute. 15% of the respondents do not have an opinion whereas 16% of the respondents stated that they will not be willing to adopt sustainable alternatives. This suggests that while there is interest in adapting to sustainable clothing choices yet there are barriers like price perception, comfort and familiarity of brands as a hindrance towards adoption of the same.

The data clearly indicates that there is strong awareness of the environmental impact of fast fashion and that the respondents were familiar with the various organic fabrics available in the market, which shows their interest in sustainability. However, the respondents demonstrated a notable lack of knowledge about sustainable fashion brands, respondents also found sustainable fashion brands to be expensive. There is an interest of consumers towards sustainable fashion, with many respondents willing to support sustainable fashion brands and consider alternative textile materials. This shows an opportunity for growth in this market segment if these barriers can be addressed, particularly through making sustainable fashion brands more affordable and accessible.

VI. Finding of the study

1. This research showed that 94% of the respondents were aware of the correct definition of the term fast fashion, which shows that fast fashion is a known terminology among individuals as they correctly understand the meaning, definition and the adverse effects of fast fashion on the environment. This research finds that the citizens are well aware of the adverse effects of fast fashion on the planet yet no transformation in this situation has been found. McNeill and Moore (2015) conducted a study that examines consumer awareness and perceptions of fast fashion and its environmental impact. The study found that in spite of a large percentage of consumers being aware of the harmful impacts of fast fashion, this awareness does not translate into sensible purchase choices. Many consumers continue to purchase fast fashion due to its affordability.
2. The research data clearly shows that price is a major factor driving fast-fashion purchases followed by current trends and influences. This suggests that affordability plays a major role in the decision making process in this sector. A study by Joy et al. (2012) explores the key factors influencing consumer behaviour in the fast fashion industry. The study highlights that affordability is a primary driver behind fast fashion purchases, as it allows consumers to frequently update their wardrobes as per fashion trends. The research also emphasizes that the

business model around the fast fashion industry thrives on low-cost production and quick turnaround times, making trendy items accessible at all times.

3. The data indicated that 52% of the respondents have shown interest in supporting sustainable brands and that they would be willing to adopt sustainable alternatives, yet they have found them expensive to purchase. According to a report by the Ethical Consumer Research Association (2018), sustainable fashion is frequently perceived as niche and expensive, which may limit its exposure to a broader audience. This factor often reduces the likelihood that consumers will become familiar with these brands (Ethical Consumer Research Association, 2018).
4. It is found that most citizens are unaware of sustainable fashion brands hence there is an urgent need to market and publicise the brands that sell sustainable fashion clothing. A study by Joy et al. (2012) highlights that sustainable fashion brands often struggle with limited visibility compared to fast fashion brands, which benefit from extensive marketing and media presence. This disparity in visibility can result in lower consumer awareness of sustainable options (Joy et al., 2012).

VII. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, recommendations have been suggested to address the challenges and encourage a shift towards sustainable fashion choices.

1. The government could provide tax-incentives or subsidies to sustainable fashion brands, this could not only bring down the price range of sustainable clothing but also help in lowering production costs to a very large extent. This could be achieved by offering financial support for brands purchasing organic cotton, recycled fibers, or plant-based dyes and providing tax deductions for brands investing in sustainable machinery or renewable energy for production. The brands could collaborate with large scale retailers to produce affordable product lines, such partnerships with large scale retailers could help scale production, reduce costs and bring in accessibility to sustainable fashion brands. Collaboration with local artisans could help strengthen local economies. Allocation of government funds for training local artisans in sustainable practices could bring a change in the current situation.
2. Sustainable fashion brands could utilize social media, partner with influencers and use targeted ads to reach a larger audience, especially new-gen buyers who may be likely to be influenced by fashion trends. Collaboration with celebrities could play a key role in making sustainable fashion more mainstream. Featuring artisans in promotional material on social media platforms will help develop emotional connections with consumers.
3. Social media could be used by sustainable brands to advertise campaigns that educate consumers about the benefits of sustainable fashion highlighting the impact of their purchasing choices on the environment. Marketing campaigns could be aimed towards bringing awareness on how sustainable fashion brands contribute to a healthier planet.
4. Sustainable fashion brands must focus towards making trendy designs that align with the current fashion trends, this could be done by blending traditional methods with modern technology to produce scalable, eco-friendly designs. This step will keep consumers motivated towards purchasing trendy fashion clothing while still encouraging eco-friendly options.
5. Brands must create partnerships with artisan cooperatives to ensure a steady supply of unique, high-quality materials. They could design exclusive product lines featuring traditional techniques, such as handloom weaving, embroidery, or block printing, integrated with modern aesthetics and launch limited-edition collections celebrating local festivals or heritage, aligning with global fashion cycles, on the other hand, artisans could teach their heritage techniques to brand designers, fostering mutual learning and respect. Highlighting artisans

as co-creators in brand advertising campaigns, could create a deeper connection with socially conscious consumers.

6. Government and non-government organisations could support the development of affordable organic fabrics like recycled polyester, hemp, jute, bamboo and educate consumers about the benefits of using such affordable organic materials. Also, stricter regulations on environmental practices in the fashion industry and encourage transparency from fashion brands regarding production practices by requiring labels to provide information on the environmental impacts of their products.
7. Encourage community level initiatives like cloth donation, thrift stores, second-hand markets, such initiatives could help promote a circular economy.
8. Integrating sustainability education into school curriculum will help in inculcating the next generation to have a mindset towards conscious purchasing which would help young minds prioritise quality and longevity. Educating them that investing in high quality sustainable clothing can be cost-effective and eco-friendly in the long run. Promotion of the cultural and environmental value of artisan-crafted sustainable products through government-backed campaigns and by providing a “Certified Sustainable-Artisan” label to build consumer trust and brand recognition would give a much deserved backing and support to eco-friendly clothing enterprises.

VIII. Limitations of the study

1. This study offers valuable insights into fast fashion, yet it is important to recognize its limitations. The limitations include, location, the respondents have been chosen from Dubai. since the researcher resides in the fashion hub of the middle east, hence the location is crucial for this research. The further scope of this study could be to extend the research into other regions within the Middle East, as well as to diverse geographic areas outside the region.
2. This study is limited to respondents from the age group 30-45. The reason this age group has been chosen is because they have more purchasing power over buying decisions for themselves and their families.
3. The sample for this research study is 32 respondents. This is being taken into consideration as a need for structured and detailed analysis. This sample space has enabled this research study to have an error free statistical finding.
4. This study is limited to the effects of fast fashion specific to the environment. The further scope of this study could be to include aspects like effects of fast fashion on the economy, on the labour laws, etc.

IX. Conclusion

Fast Fashion is temporary yet it does more harm to every aspect of the planet and the human mind by creating a superficial self-worth that changes as new trends arise, leading to a never-ending quest for validation through relentless consumption. Every trendy apparel adds to the colossal carbon footprint of fast fashion, accelerating climate change and endangering our planet's future.

This study highlights the relationship between consumer awareness and their adoption towards sustainable fashion. Despite a high level of awareness regarding the harmful impact of fast fashion on the environment, there has been no change in the purchasing patterns of consumers.

In the world of sustainable fashion, every garment tells a story of prioritizing organic materials, recycling, and reducing waste at every step to grow into a cleaner, greener world. There is an urgent need to address the barriers towards adoption of sustainable lifestyle choices. Although there is substantial interest among consumers to adopt to sustainability, the

perception of high cost and limited availability of these brands stands as a stumbling block to this interest. It is essential to implement strategies that make sustainable fashion affordable and accessible for the larger audience. By addressing the challenges identified and the recommendations suggested in this study, all stakeholders across the fashion industry can drive an impactful change towards a sustainable future for all by reducing the carbon footprint and mitigating the impacts of climate change thereby hand-holding a positive legacy for the next generation.

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