

FACTORS OF CUSTOMER PREFERENCE BETWEEN SUSTAINABLE AND
FAST FASHION

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Abstract

There is a growing market for accessible ‘fast fashion’ and sustainable alternatives within the fashion industry. This research investigates what drives consumers’ choices of fast fashion versus sustainable fashion, specifically probing on the aspects of price, environmental concern, social media impact, consumer guilt, and income level. As consumers experience internal contradictions within the fast fashion industry, it will be critical for brands who wish to stay relevant during a time of significant change and competition to understand how these ethical dilemmas are navigated. This thesis integrates the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Social Influence Theory to build hypotheses regarding the interaction of pro-social and anti-social consumer behavior and social perception. Respondents’ attitudes towards social media, self-inflicted guilt, and price awareness are quantitatively analyzed through survey data to identify the relationship between price sensitivity, sustainability, and decision guilt. Additionally, the effect of income is examined as a moderating factor in the ethical consumption versus affordability debate. The results show that people’s lack of cost effectiveness remains the most notable impediment towards adopting sustainable fashion practices even with increasing awareness of eco-friendliness. KOL or influencer impact on social media is critical towards fostering positive perceptions among followers, and it has been noted that these social media celebrities are good at marketing sustainable fashion to the younger generations. Still, there is a gap in people’s willingness to act upon their awareness towards sustainability, where a lot of consumers accept the negative consequences of fast fashion but still decide to buy on the basis of cheap prices and simplicity. This analysis forms part of the understanding of how consumers behave in the fashion sector and provides useful recommendations to policymakers and sustainable fashion designers. The study underlines paying attention to the price barrier to sustainability and argues that education, transparency, and creativity in marketing especially through social media and influencer platforms may change the narrative for more responsible purchasing publics. Additionally, it highlights that there is a gap that has to be filled by brands in terms of reasonable pricing and environmental sustainability, so that more people are able to afford eco-friendly fashion.

Keywords: Consumer preferences, sustainable fashion, fast fashion, price sensitivity, environmental impact, marketing strategies, demographic analysis

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE FASHION INDUSTRY

CHATGPT SAID

The global fashion industry has undergone tremendous growth over the last century, transforming from an elite-driven sector to a global powerhouse that influences daily life. Fashion is not only a cultural industry but also a significant economic force, comprising 10% of the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with an annual income of approximately 2.5 trillion dollars. This growth can be attributed to technological advancements, globalization, mass production, and innovative marketing strategies, such as the use of social media and influencers, which have driven demand for fashion items. However, the rapid expansion of the industry has also led to significant environmental and social challenges.

The environmental impact of fast fashion, driven by mass textile waste, greenhouse gas emissions, and water pollution from fabric dyeing, has become a major concern. The industry is responsible for approximately 92 million tons of textile waste annually, with discarded apparel primarily consisting of polyester-based fabrics that take centuries to biodegrade. Furthermore, the fashion industry contributes to carbon emissions, with its global supply chains and energy-intensive production processes. Water pollution, particularly from textile production, also poses a severe threat to ecosystems, as petrochemical dyes and heavy metals contaminate water sources. Microplastics from synthetic fabrics, such as polyester, further exacerbate environmental damage, as they enter the ocean and harm marine life.

In addition to environmental damage, the fast fashion industry perpetuates social issues, including the exploitation of low-wage workers, particularly women and children in developing countries. Countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, and India are examples of regions where garment factories operate with little to no labor protections, subjecting workers to unsafe conditions and inadequate wages. The Rana Plaza factory collapse in Bangladesh in 2013, which killed over 1,100 garment workers, highlighted the human cost of fast fashion's reliance on cheap labor. The exploitation of workers in these conditions has prompted widespread ethical concerns and consumer outrage.

Despite the overwhelming success of fast fashion brands like Zara, H&M, and Primark, there is growing recognition of the need for sustainable fashion alternatives. Sustainable fashion seeks to address the environmental and social issues associated with fast fashion by using eco-friendly materials, responsible production practices, and ensuring fair wages and safe working conditions. Brands such as Stella McCartney, Patagonia, and Reformation have pioneered sustainable fashion, integrating organic cotton, recycled polyester, and natural dyes into their collections. These companies also emphasize transparency in their supply chains and ensure that workers are treated fairly. However, sustainable fashion faces challenges, including higher production costs due to eco-friendly materials and ethical practices, which often make these products more expensive than their fast-fashion counterparts. This price gap can limit the accessibility of sustainable fashion for cost-sensitive consumers, particularly in regions where fast fashion is deeply ingrained. Despite this, the demand for ethically produced clothing continues to rise, as more consumers become aware of the environmental and social implications of their purchasing decisions.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Sustainable fashion business opportunities come painted with difficulties. As there is a growth in the adoption of sustainable measures within the fashion industry, there continues to exist a huge gap for affordable, fashionable, and easy to wear clothing. This now tends to overshadow concerns about environmental sustainability or social value associated with any sale as currently, a larger chunk of consumers remain obsessed with the pricing and convenience rather than the morality of 'buying' a purchase. Although the business world has begun paying more attention to the negative consequences of fast fashion industries in terms of waste and abuse, cheap pricing and attractive trendy designs continue to dominate consumer behavior. The continuous consumption of new fashion shows off how the great appeal of fast fashion overshadows its consequences. The constant search for instant gratification, the joy of finding a good deal, and the pleasure of being able to wear a new garment tend to overwhelm people's weekly and monthly budgets, making spending a great deal of money an irresistible impulse. This brings up the following issue: Why do corporate undertakings aimed at increasing sustainability often seem to fade away under these circumstances? Although awareness of fast fashion's effects exists, most consumers typically shy away from adopting a compromise between style and sustenance. Price sensitivity: The dollar amount a service or product goes for usually has the most significant impact above outlined practices. In the case of sustainability practices, the budget sensitivity of an individual or group can lead to the abandonment of green practices and even innovation by the seller of sustainable brands. Loyalty to a brand: Brand loyalty makes an important part of consumer behavior. Consumers will buy recognizably branded products whose names they are familiar with. Perceived Value: Another important point is the perceived value of the green product. Undoubtedly, a green product will be sought after by consumers who will spend extra money but only if it satisfies value for money. Hence, more consumers tend to buy after being informed. Many consumers consider sustainable fashion expensive and for some there is not always value in sustainability, thus the price tag attached does not justify spending. This research seeks to understand the drivers of such preferences in consumers. For instance, think about how fast fashion or sustainable fashion brands market their items in a way to appeal to a consumer who must satisfy their sense of style, without breaking the bank. Understanding these patterns, and the corresponding policy actions, is precisely what will help explain the choices of consumers — in this case, will sustainability be able to earn acceptance into markets accustomed to convenience and low prices.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

The objective of this research seeks to understand consumer spending habits and the rationale behind their inclination towards fast fashion as opposed to sustainable fashion. Although consumers are becoming more concerned about social and ecological impacts, in many cases, they still emphasize low cost and ease of shopping. This research will analyze how buying behaviors are influenced by financial limitations, sensitivity to pricing, and sustainability issues.

In particular, this thesis intends to achieve the following goals:

Determine the reasons why consumers purchase cheap fast fashion items rather than more expensive sustainable ones. Respondents' sensitivity to price changes, brand identity, perceived service quality, and environmental awareness constitute the factors which need

to be examined. This research will study the trade-off buyers make between eco-costs and economic costs.

Analyse the marketing approaches employed by sustainable fashion brands and their level of engagement with the targeted audience. This will be done through examining the effectiveness of sustainability-centred approaches relative to fast fashion brands and evaluating the extent to which marketing strategies affect consumer behaviour.

Investigate the influence of marketing communication and brand image on the customers. The research will determine if socially responsible branding increases customer participation and if these brand strategies influence purchasing behaviour. It will also determine whether these branding strategies result in increased expenditure on sustainable fashion.

Examine how consumer perception affects brand loyalty and repurchasing behavior in fast fashion and sustainable fashion. This also includes looking at how brand value and ethical issues aid in customer retention and repeat business.

To meet these goals, the study will address the following research questions:

1. How do elements such as alignment between perceived value of a product and its price, sustainability, and the brand's product quality affect consumer behavior in fashion?
2. Who are the main promoters of sustainable consumption and what psychologically drives them toward eco-friendly purchasing behaviors?
3. How should a brand positioned between fast fashion and sustainable fashion modify its marketing strategy to cater to contemporary consumers?
4. What are the social and cognitive effects of sustainability on brand image and consumer purchasing behavior?
5. How do marketing campaigns focused on sustainability engage consumers and build brand loyalty?
6. How do ethical considerations and brand equity affect post-purchase intentions of consumers in fast and sustainable fashion?

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The importance of this analysis stems from the multi-dimensional aspects of understanding the behavior of the consumers, especially in the case of fast fashion versus sustainable fashion. Given the behavioral shift towards more eco-friendly choices on the part of the customers, it is imperative to understand what motivates people to engage in sustainable consumption amidst the overwhelming presence of fast fashion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

OVERVIEW OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN FASHION

Fabrication in the use of clothes has transformed under the influence of social media and has been impacted by the development of technology, changing social lifestyles, and increased attention to environmental and social issues. Garment and cloths are not used for protection against harsh environmental conditions, but they serve a medium of self-expression and social signaling identity. Fashion purchase ranges from basic rational needs to emotional needs that revolve on values, lifestyles, affiliations, and the self-concept of the person.

Fashion is Identity relates deeply to the drivers of consumption behind self-expression in modern day society. The emphasis on individualism and self-expression through fashion is further fostered and promoted by social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. By losing themselves in the custom and styling of clothes, they seek to

express themselves in ways that describe their personal stories and certain movements or communities. These trends are also compounded by social media stars and influencers where their followers' become consumers of new marketed fashion styles (Choi et al., 2021).

There is increased attention on sustainability and ethical fashion among many consumers today. The spread of conscious consumerism, especially among younger cohorts, indicates emerging sustainable practices within the fashion industry. An increasing number of consumers expect, and in some cases, demand eco-friendly, cruelty-free, and ethically produced products which impact their buying behavior (Gazzola et al., 2021). Such consumers are ready to spend more on fashion products that correspond with their environmental and social concerns. Contemporary shoppers show stronger preference for brands that emphasize sustainable transparency, responsible sourcing, and less harmful practices to the environment (Dangelico & Vocalelli, 2020).

Emotion and logical thinking deeply impact how customers behave in the fashion industry. Each of these forces has distinct impacts on buying behaviors. To some buyers, purchase decisions, especially clothing choices, are usually made based on the emotional sentiments involved and immediate impulse. To others, these decisions depend on more rational factors such as product quality, durability, and morality surrounding the manufacture of the product.

A consumer's craving in fashion is carved by a blend of brand loyalty, novelty, and innovation as a triad. These aspects are ever-present in determining the brands which consumers frequently associate with and if they would rather try something new or prefer staying in their fashion comfort zones. Fashion consumer behavior is more dependably forecasted by how brands have been able to incorporate these factors which strongly impact purchasing and brand interaction.

Fast fashion brand loyalty is a classic example of the area of consumer behavior. The same sentiment was captured with consumers of fast fashion stores like H&M, Zara and Primark where consumers have great loyalty to these brands due to their endless offering of trendy items at reasonable prices. Such businesses which depend on rapid production cycles and cost sales rely heavily on the perception that there are constantly new collections available to consumers, ensuring that they feel they are part of the latest trends. Rapid product offering changes keep the brand engaged, and increases their loyalty as consumers keep searching for new trendy products (Caro & Gallien, 2020).

It comes as no surprise that consumers are finally starting to take notice of the purchases they make and how these purchases impact on the environment, especially within the fashion sector. Sustainability is also becoming a central issue; however, cost continues to be the primary consideration. According to McKinsey Research (2020), 67% of respondents take environmental aspects into consideration, but only 23% want to spend more money on sustainable fashion. This gap poses a problem for sustainable fashion brands because consumers do seem to have an increased awareness of the environment, but at the same time do not want to pay for the ethical production and materials that is required to make these goods.

Fast fashion companies excel in creating experiences that merge low prices, accessibility, speed, and emotional appeal, driving consumer behavior through urgency and the fear of missing out. These companies leverage their deep understanding of fashion trends, ensuring that consumers feel they are always in tune with the latest styles. By rapidly producing and distributing garments globally, fast fashion brands meet

consumers' demand for constantly refreshed collections at affordable prices (Sull & Turconi, 2008).

Over the past years, social media has become an essential weapon for fast fashion brands to turn sales and establish bonds with consumers. Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube fashion influencer marketing have become important for fast fashion companies' strategies, as they provide the opportunity to instantly broadcast trend changes, new collections, and interact with their targeted fashion-savvy customers. Zara, H&M, and Shein have punctuated social media not only as a marketing tool, but as a platform to actively shape consumer attitudes and stimulate buying (Jin et al., 2021).

The integration of influencer marketing has become one of the most important strategies for fast fashion brands and selling goods. Users of social networks, especially Instagram and TikTok, have an enormous impact on their followers, and as a result, they are able to influence their purchasing behavior almost instantly. The items they showcase in their posts are often designer or exclusive items. Urgency and scarcity are social drivers that make followers want to look like these influencers (Casaló et al., 2018).

Sales with little time to shop and flash sales are especially important in the fast fashion marketing, as they are aimed at creating a sense of urgency which triggers impulse buying. These techniques are based on the FOMO principle which urges us to act so as not to get left behind (Caro & Gallien, 2010). The principles of fast fashion are based on the rapid turnover of products together with the short lifecycle of fashion trends (Sull & Turconi, 2008).

Unlike fast fashion retailers, sustainable fashion brands priorities social responsibility, ethics, and transparency. Unlike fast fashion that focuses on immediacy and bulk, sustainable fashion brands focus on long-term effects by caring for authenticity, quality, and longevity (Joy et al., 2012). Sustainable fashion seeks to mitigate the negative environmental and social impacts of the fashion industry while building brand loyalty through responsible action. These brands cater to an audience wanting to relieve their environmental burden by supporting ethical production (Bick et al., 2018). Often, brands dealing with sustainable fashion regard storytelling as one of the main components of their marketing strategies. These brands aim at communicating their values and the accompanying benefits rather than solely promoting a product. Storytelling enables brands to connect with the emotions of the consumers by illustrating their devotion towards environmentalism, social causes, and even ethical production (Hwang & Lee, 2020). Through compelling narratives, these brands go beyond selling clothes; they sell a vision of a better, more responsible world.

A lack of credibility makes it hard to market sustainable fashion, as consumers are increasingly eager to learn about the supply chains, how production is carried out, and the origins of the materials. This reveals how buying decisions are impacted in the context of a particular purchase being aligned with a consumer's environmental mindset and values (Bianchi & Noci, 2020). The degree of credibility a sustainable fashion brand tries to maintain has an impact on the level of trust and accountability provided. Building a community is a key tactic used by sustainable fashion brands as it helps them stand out from the fast fashion industry which prioritizes sales and trending items. Sustainable fashion brands focus on building a relationship with their consumers for the long-term while providing education, activism, and a shared identity (Kozlowski et al., 2015).

The social disparity and environmental damage is a byproduct of the industry's low-cost production of trendy clothing. The current "fast fashion" industry relies on a model of low

cost and high-speed production. The result is rampant overconsumption of clothing, deteriorating ecosystems, and landfills overflowing with textiles. Major amounts of synthetic fibers that are not biodegradable and contribute to pollution in our environment are produced on a daily basis. Fashionable clothing with polyester and other fabrics is produced that takes centuries to decompose. Meanwhile, the processes employing toxic dyes and chemicals result in polluted water, harming ecosystems and communities alike (Joy et al, 2022). Additionally, the fashion industry spends an exorbitant amount of water, currently being the second highest consumer of water in the world. Producing one cotton t-shirt requires around 2700 liters of water (Zhang and Wang 2020).

The rapid expansion of fast fashion has led to a troubling increase in the global textile waste pollution problem. Production and consumption patterns have changed rapidly, which... This form of pollution was previously mentioned in this paper, but its existence has been greatly exacerbated by the phenomenon of “fast fashion,” spending without thought towards quality encourages low-quality production that’s cheap, and... Over 25 million tons of textile waste are produced in the United States every year, and a large part of that waste comes from fast fashion brands (United States EPA, 2021). Many countries are working towards resolving these problems, but whether the solutions are effective is still uncertain.

ICICLE, a Chinese fashion label, is one of the brands attempting to combat the disposable fashion trend by producing chic, timeless clothing that never goes out of style. Chamilou is also a sustainable fashion brand from Morocco that upcycles old garments into stylish products, addressing the waste problem and at the same time supporting local economies and social welfare (Tse, 2021).

Because of its dependence on mass production and international supply chains, the fast fashion industry is one of the largest contributors to carbon emissions. On the other hand, some sustainable fashion brands in China are attempting to mitigate their carbon footprints through energy-efficient manufacturing and recycling programs. For example, ICICLE has adopted energy-saving technologies that maintain stylish designs, contributing to China's energy conservation objectives (Cheung & Keng, 2021). This change toward sustainable manufacturing practices is improving consumer awareness of the costs associated with environmental degradation in China, especially regarding the fashion industry.

Water pollution involving toxic chemicals employed in textile dyeing processes continues to be one of the major consequences fast fashion poses to the environment. The harmful production processes part of the fast fashion value chain also pollutes rivers and other ecosystems due to the discharge of wastewaters rich in toxins. Some brands claiming to be sustainable, such as ICICLE, are dealing with this problem by employing closed-loop water systems along with ecologically responsible methods of dyeing (Cheung & Keng, 2021). In Morocco, some of the local textile manufacturers are adopting a focus on natural, non-processed fibers and organic dyes to lessen their reliance on water and, in the process, reduce environmental pollution and promote local development (Tse, 2021).

The fashion world influences the definition of social class on a global scale. In this regard, as sustainability comes into play, equally critical social and ethical aspects are coming to the forefront. Attention to social issues such as labor relations, gender relations, and supply chain accountability has become crucial. Emerging economies such as China, as a major producer and Morocco as a cheaper producer, are leading the way in the

integration of social goals into business practices while competing internationally. These two countries epitomize how social responsibility can be achieved alongside economic sustainability, responding to the rising consumer pressure for ethical business operations (Kozlowski et al., 2015).

To improve workplace conditions in the fashion sector, Chinese brands ICICLE and Eslon have made these improvements their top priority. These companies ensure safe and fair wage employment, ethical sourcing practices, and safe workplace environments. They want to improve the industry through positive vendor relationships that are based on fair treatment so that there is a positive shift in the industry and workers are treated fairly in a safer workplace (Cheung & Keng, 2020). Eslon's brand ICICLE is dominating at the forefront of this change due to increasing social responsibility from the Chinese government. Similarly, Le Printemps Maroc is a Moroccan brand that promotes local craft and respect for artisans. They provide their artisans with decent wages and safe work environments, which in turn helps disadvantaged communities economically and builds a sustainable business that maintains Morocco's textile culture while economically helping poorer regions (Tse, 2020).

There still exists a lack of gender equality in the fashion industry, and both China and Morocco have made efforts to improve women's positions in the textile industry. In China, ICICLE is one of the companies that practices inclusivity as they give women opportunities to take on more leadership roles and engage in socioeconomic activities. These companies are helping to narrow the gender gap in the economy by demonstrating that gender equality can coexist with business success (Chuen & Keng, 2020). In Morocco, women have always been skilled artisans in the textile industry. One of the brands, Chamalou, employs and empowers women and helps them achieve economic autonomy. Not only does Chamalou's business model enhance the self-esteem of women, but it also advocates for gender equity in business, which profoundly impacts societal change (Tse, 2020).

As is the case in Morocco, China is also adopting transparent practices aimed at improving their sustainable fashion efforts. For example, brands ICICLE and Eslon heavily advertise their production processes, means of sourcing, and their materials. These brands set industry standards by sharing their Fair Trade and GOTS certifications, which leads to trusting consumers to the brands and increases the wider industry's sustainability (Cheung & Keng, 2020). In Morocco, Le Printemps Maroc and other brands are also making claims explaining the 'ethical' aspects of their products. They promote the environmental advantages of purchasing certain products, which helps shoppers understand the significance of making sustainable decisions (Tse, 2020).

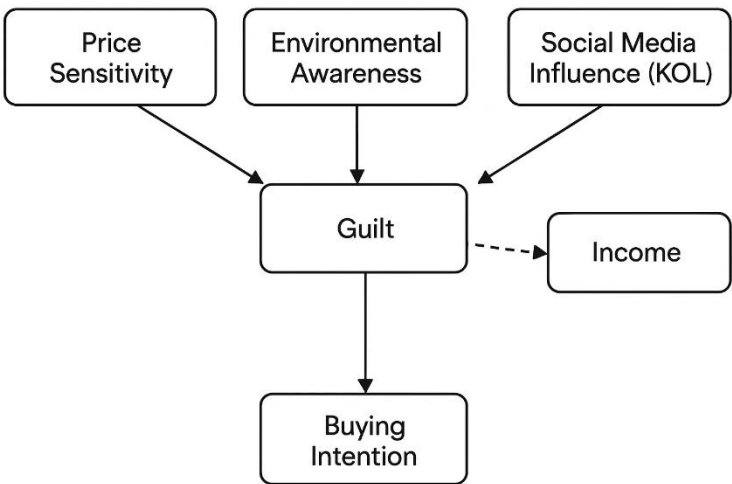
Moroccan and Chinese brands are improving their international reputation as well as redefining how consumers see them. By advocating for transparency and ethical behavior, both local and foreign consumers are altering their perception of sustainable fashion. This effort reshapes consumer habits for the better and helps achieve some social impact (Tse, 2020).

DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK VARIABLES BASED ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The rise of fast fashion and increasing awareness of sustainable fashion have created a demand for knowledge on the factors underlying consumer behavior in these industries. Four key variables from the literature review play a major role in this fight between fast and eco-friendly fashion. (Caro & Gallien, 2010; Sull & Turconi, 2008) Price Sensitivity,

Environmental Awareness, Social Media Influence (Key Opinion Leader - KOL), Guilt, Income (these variables will be discussed later and, in more detail), all come together in a framework for elucidating the opposing layers of consumers' decision-making process. (Kozłowski et al., 2015)

The roles of each individual variable are discussed below for a more nuanced understanding of how each variable influences consumer intentions towards purchasing fashion products (Monroe, 2003).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the various theoretical perspectives that impinge on consumer decision making, regarding fast fashion and sustainable fashion. These theories help explain how price sensitivity, environmental consciousness, social media influence, and income impact consumer choices. The framework also identifies guilt as a mediation factor on the effect of environmental awareness on buying intention. (Kozłowski et al., 2015).

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) : is an extensively examined phenomenon, and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) is one of the most popular frameworks applied in that research. TPB states that behavior is determined by three primary factors: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In terms of fashion, attitudes pertain to beliefs about whether the environmental consequences of fast fashion outweigh the consequences of sustainable fashion, subjective norms describe social pressure or encouragement from peer groups and digital entrepreneurs to make coordinated sustainable choices, and perceived behavioral control relates to the barriers or facilitators of whether eco-friendly products are available, and the costs associated with sustainable fashion (Ajzen, 1991)..

The TPB states that emotional attitudes lead to change in intention of the consumers to purchase the product. Guilt and Consumer Behavior: Individuals who feel guilty about the environmental impacts of their clothing consumption behavior may be more likely to purchase sustainable alternatives, particularly when they believe they have control over their purchasing habits. The TPB also states that attitudes (such as feelings of guilt) and subjective norms (like the influence of KOLs advocating sustainable fashion) have a great impact on consumer behavior (Fletcher, 2014).

Social Influence Theory: Social Influence Theory studies the extent to which the behavior of individuals are influenced by the views and actions of others, especially in between

social networks (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Social media platforms have emerged as a strong tool in the fashion industry that influences the minds of consumers. By endorsing brands or promoting ethical practices, KOLs, celebrities, and influencers can influence consumer perceptions of fast fashion and sustainable fashion.

Social influence — the core factor in this study — would elucidate how social media influence are mediators for the connection between environmental awareness and buying intention. Consumers who see sustainable fashion promoted by influencers or through social media campaigns may also become conscious of the implication, prompting them to adopt a preference for ethical consumption (Cheung & Keng, 2020)..

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM):

TAM: The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) addresses consumer perceptions of the usefulness and ease of use of technology. In terms of fashion, Technology Acceptance Model can describe how and why online platforms and digital tools shape consumer's purchasing decisions. As e-commerce and bric-and-mortar shopping becomes more prevalent, consumers are more exposed to fashion trends and sustainable alternatives through digital channels. Consumers are likely to buy fast fashion instead of sustainable fashion during online shopping since online shopping sites are more accessible and easier to use (Davis, 1989).

This theory indicates that social media influence and online shopping experiences can help change consumer behavior by creating access to information, trends, and fashion products. Retailers who have made it more accessible for consumers to find sustainable fashion options online may help guide consumers to make better, ethical purchase decisions (Venkatesh et al., 2003).

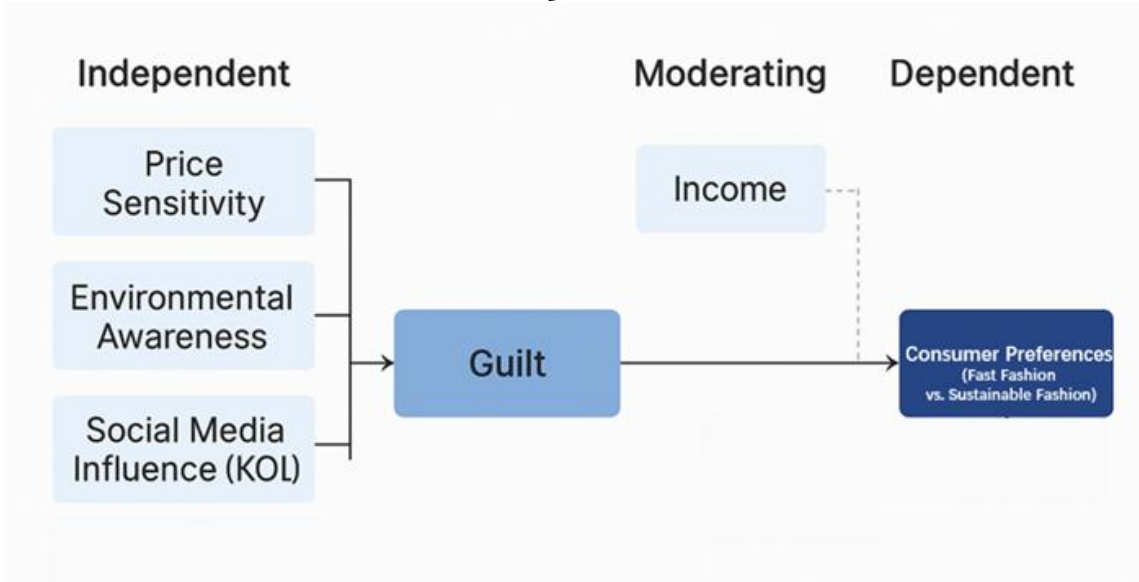


FIGURE 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Based on the theoretical background, the subsequent hypotheses are proposed to assess the correlations between independent variables, mediating variable, moderating variable and dependent variable. Aiming to test the direct and indirect effects of price sensitivity, environmental awareness, social media influence, and income on the buying intention, these hypotheses are as follows:

H₁ PRICE SENSITIVITY → BUYING INTENTION: Price sensitivity has a negative effect on the buying intentions of fashion sustainability. Undoubtedly, individuals who are

greatly sensitive to the price tend to lean towards fast fashion rather than transformable sustainable fashion despite their environmental impact awareness.

H₂ Environmental Awareness Influence on Buying Intention: Green consciousness positively influences purchase intention towards sustainable clothing. These respondents show a higher tendency of buying sustainable fashion compared to its alternatives due to their increased environmental protection consciousness.

H₃ THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON BUYING INTENTION: KOLs (social media influence) has a positive relationship with fast fashion buying intention. They help in creating demand and a sense of urgency; hence this makes the consumer to be impulse sensitive, which is highly detrimental to her spending capabilities.

H₄: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GUILT: Environmental Concern and Buying Intention Relate Guilt Makes Sustainable Purchases More Likely. Fast fashion consumers with high levels of concern for environmental damage tend to purchase sustainable substitutes more often because they feel guilty.

H₅ INCOME AS A MODERATOR: Income Acts as a Moderator in the Relation between Price Sensitivity and Buying Intention. Income positively toes the line with granter of lower price sensitivity as a higher paid consumer is more likely to sustain fashion even at higher prices.

H₆: MODERATING ROLE OF INCOME: A higher level of income affects the relationship in which a person is aware of sustainability and intends to buy green wear fashion. Eco-sensitive goods tend to be purchased by consumers with higher incomes who are willing to pay the price premium. On the contrary, lower income consumers tend to be more price-sensitive, which results in the reduced effect of sustainable awareness on their purchase behavior.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study employs a quantitative research design, utilizing both descriptive and correlational research approaches to investigate the factors influencing consumer preferences between fast fashion and sustainable fashion. The population size for this study is 500 respondents, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure diverse representation across age groups, income levels, and fashion behavior. Data was collected using a self-administered digital survey, distributed across multiple online channels, allowing for broad geographical and demographic representation. The survey included sections on price sensitivity, environmental awareness, social media influence, and income, with guilt included as a mediating variable. The data analysis methods involved descriptive statistics to summarize the main characteristics of the respondents, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations for each variable. To examine the relationships between the independent variables and buying intention, correlation analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient. Multiple regression analysis was employed to analyze how independent variables like price sensitivity and environmental awareness influence consumer preferences, with guilt tested through mediation analysis to assess its impact on the relationship between environmental concern and sustainable fashion preferences. All analyses were performed using statistical software, such as SPSS or Excel, ensuring reliable and valid findings. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant anonymity, were strictly followed to maintain the integrity of the research.

VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT

Variables will be operationalized with established and validated scales. This research is focused on customer preference, which is oriented to the scale of "Buying Intention" for the dependent variables. Unless otherwise noted, all independent, mediating, and dependent variables in this study are measured using 5-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Data is collected through a 5-point Likert scale, measuring consumer attitudes, behaviors, and preferences in a consistent manner.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

PRICE SENSITIVITY

Consumers' willingness to buy a product is significantly influenced by the product's price." This affection shows that global warming is omnipresent. In more extreme terms, some individuals value other things in their environment, like the world resting beneath their feet and all of nature's thundering to join in. When it comes to price sensitivity, the key assumption points to consumers that care a lot about making fast fashion purchases (Sull & Turconi, 2008).

MEASUREMENT: Respondents were asked to respond to each of the following statements using a Likert scale (1-5).

"I buy fashion items with consideration to price supra everything."

"Recognizing the harm to the environment, I choose to spend money on fashion because it is less expensive, even if it is harmful."

Knowing and comprehension the consequences of understanding Price Sensitivity gives answers to whether price sensitive consumers distinguish purchasing sustainable and fast fashion products (Monroe, 2003; Caro & Gallien, 2010).

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

The degree to which consumers understand the consequences of their purchases for the environment is referred to as environmental awareness (Fletcher, 2014).

MEASUREMENT: This variable is measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1-5 based on the following statements: "I understand the concept of fast fashion and the environmental issues stemming from it," and "I take sustainability into account when buying clothes..."

These phrases measure the level of knowledge and interest the consumers possess concerning sustainability in fashion (Kozłowski et al., 2015).

SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE (KOL)

The impact that social media, for instance Instagram or TikTok, and its Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) have on the purchasing behavior of consumers within the fashion industry is referred to as Social Media Influence (Cheung & Keng, 2020).

MEASUREMENT: Social media influence is quantified via agreement to phrases such as: "I tend to keep updated with social media, so I end up knowing a lot of new fashion styles and trends," and "The fashion styles of some people who I met on social media have a big impact on how I dress." The extent of the influence of social media on individual purchasing decisions is assessed using a Likert scale from 1-5.

INCOME

Income is considered a moderator in this case; it appears to influence the extent to which other variables, and Buying Intention, interact with one another (Monroe, 2003).

MEASUREMENT: Participants will indicate their class of income as low, middle, or high and this will track how income serves as a moderating variable of Price Sensitivity, Environmental Awareness, and Guilt in relation to Buying Intention.

MEDIATING VARIABLE

GUILT

The guilt that mediates between Environmental Awareness and Buying Intention (consumers choose more sustainable options as an attempt to recover from the emotional pain inflicted by fast fashion purchasing) (Schau et al., 2009). Measurement: Responses of guilt level were captured with the following phrases: "I feel guilty when I buy fast fashion items because they damage the environment." "I accept the responsibility of having an environmental impact while purchasing clothes." Responses will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1-5) with higher scores meaning deeper degree of guilt.

MEASUREMENT: Guilt level was assessed with statements such as:

"I feel guilty when I buy fast-fashion items because of its impact on the environment.

"I take responsibility for my environmental impact when buying clothes." Responses will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1-5), with higher scores indicating greater feelings of guilt.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE

CUSTOMER PREFERENCES (MEASURED BY BUYING INTENTION): The dependent variable is Customer Preferences, which is measured by Buying Intention. Buying Intention refers to the consumer's willingness to purchase fast fashion or sustainable fashion, depending on the influence of various factors.

MEASUREMENT: Participants will indicate their likelihood of purchasing fast fashion versus sustainable fashion with scenarios like:

"Even if sustainable fashion is more expensive, I would still prefer it over fast fashion."

"I would choose fast fashion because it is cheaper and more convenient." Responses will be rated on a Likert scale (1-5), reflecting the consumer's Buying Intention under different circumstances..



TABLE 5.1: DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Demographic Factor	Percentage (%)
Age	
18-24 years	35%
25-34 years	25%
35-44 years	20%
45+ years	20%
Income Level	
Low Income	40%
Middle Income	35%
High Income	25%
Fashion Shopping Frequency	
Weekly	40%
Monthly	30%
Rarely	30%
Awareness of Sustainability	
High Awareness	45%
Medium Awareness	35%
Low Awareness	20%

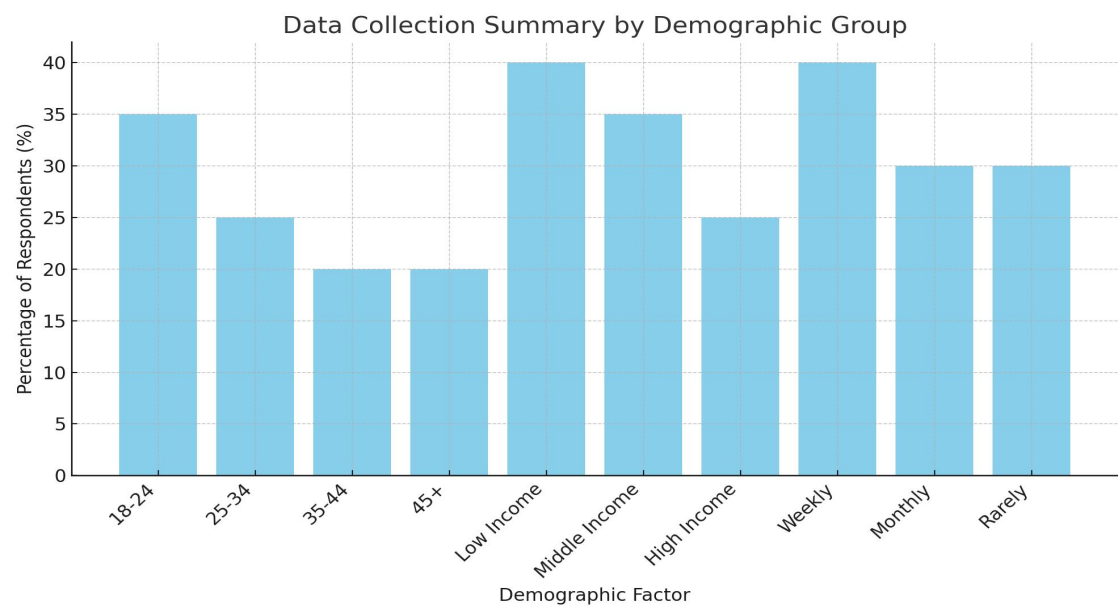


FIGURE 5.1: DATA COLLECTION SUMMARY BY DEMOGRAPHIC GROUP
CONSUMER PREFERENCES: FAST FASHION VS. SUSTAINABLE FASHION

This part focuses on the critical elements that shape consumer choices for fast fashion and sustainable fashion alternatives. The analysis investigates the impact of aspects like Price Sensitivity, Environmental Awareness, Social Media Influence, and Income on consumer behaviour and decision making within this rivalry of two opposing fashion systems. Careful

consideration is given to how these variables foster a discrimination between fast fashion and sustainable clothing options.

PRICE SENSITIVITY

Understanding one’s spending behaviour in the fashion industry is dominated by price sensitivity in fashion marketing. Price-sensitive consumers have consistently been shown to prefer fast fashion brands over sustainable fashion brands due to the convenience of price. The tendency is further aggravated by the instant gratification received from low prices, even when taking into consideration the long-term effects on the environment. Due to the ethical production, eco-friendly materials used, and longer lifespan of the product, sustainable fashion tends to be offered at a premium price. Thus, price sensitivity can be viewed as an important determinant of the slow diffusion of sustainable fashion among low-income earners.

The interplay of price sensitivity and consumer choice on fast fashion versus sustainable fashion is intricate, making income a sensitive moderator. The tendency of low-income consumers is to value costs more than sustainability, hence the switch to fast fashion. On the other hand, high-income consumers are more likely to spend on sustainable products since they appreciate long-term benefits over immediate cost savings.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Our results show that price sensitivity is particularly important regarding consumer choices in fashion. For low-income consumers, price constitutes the greatest component in any purchase they make. While these consumers do have some knowledge on the environmental consequences of fast fashion, their financial limitations typically force them to choose affordable fast fashion options.

Conversely, higher-income individuals show a degree of insensitivity to prices, which may enable them to focus on sustainability rather than the cost of the item. This segment is more likely to value the more expensive price tag associated with sustainable fashion and view it as a beneficial purchase in terms of quality and environmental concern.

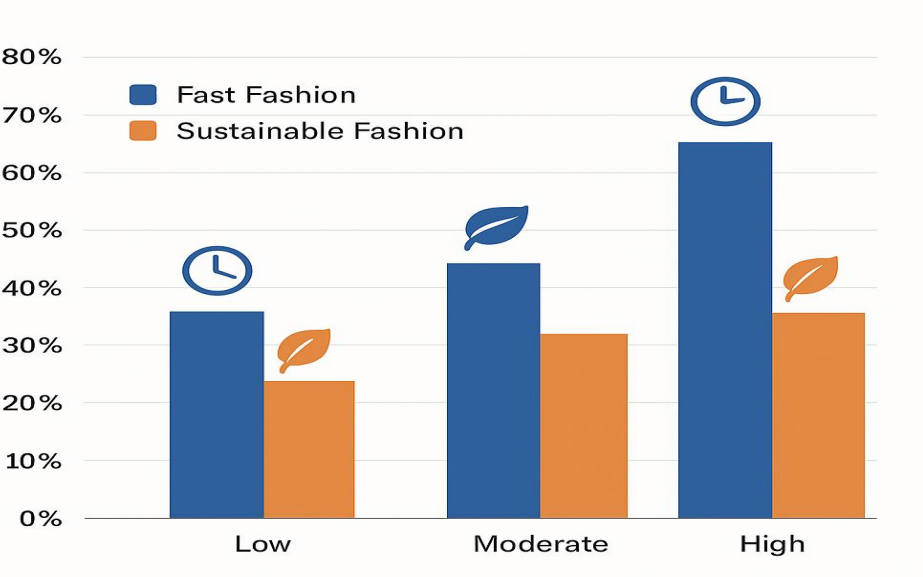


FIGURE 5.2: PRICE SENSITIVITY AND CONSUMER PREFERENCE FOR FAST FASHION VS. SUSTAINABLE FASHION BY INCOME GROUP

TABLE 5.2: PRICE SENSITIVITY AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES ACROSS INCOME GROUPS

Income Group	Fast Fashion Preference	Sustainable Fashion Preference	Price Sensitivity
Low Income	70%	30%	High
Middle Income	55%	45%	Moderate
High Income	40%	60%	Low

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND CUSTOMER PREFERENCES

Sustainability considerations have become foremost among the concerns of consumers within the context of fashion consumption. More educated consumers are now concerned with the impact of their purchases and the process of fast fashion on the environment. Studies have suggested that Eco-conscious consumers, especially those who understand the negative impacts of the clothing industry like textile waste and carbon emissions, tend to gravitate towards sustainable fashion options.

In terms of this research study, environmental awareness was defined in relation to the respondents' knowledge of the impact of their clothing purchases on the environment. Respondents were given statements to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the following: "I know that fast fashion has environmental consequences." Respondents added, "I think about the environment when I decide what clothes to buy." Respondents were measured on a Likert scale with higher scores depicting stronger environmental awareness.

The analysis suggests that there is a correlation between environmental consciousness and the overall valuation of sustainable fashion. Higher awareness of the environment among consumers is associated with greater preference for sustainable options, regardless of their price. Even more remarkable, this preference is not purely economic but stems from a genuine understanding of sustainable fashion's long-term ecological value. This supports previous research findings which observed that environmentally conscious consumers tend to pay more for goods that resonate with their beliefs (Cheung & Keng, 2020)

In addition, the survey results confirm that environmental awareness has a greater impact on younger consumers. A sizeable number of respondents in the 18-24 age brackets preferred sustainable fashion for environmental reasons. This supports the argument that younger people who are more sensitive to the environment are increasing the supply of sustainable fashion (Fletcher, 2019).

TABLE 5.3: ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND PREFERENCES FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Level of Environmental Awareness	Percentage of Respondents Preferring Sustainable Fashion (%)
Low Awareness	35%
Moderate Awareness	50%
High Awareness	70%

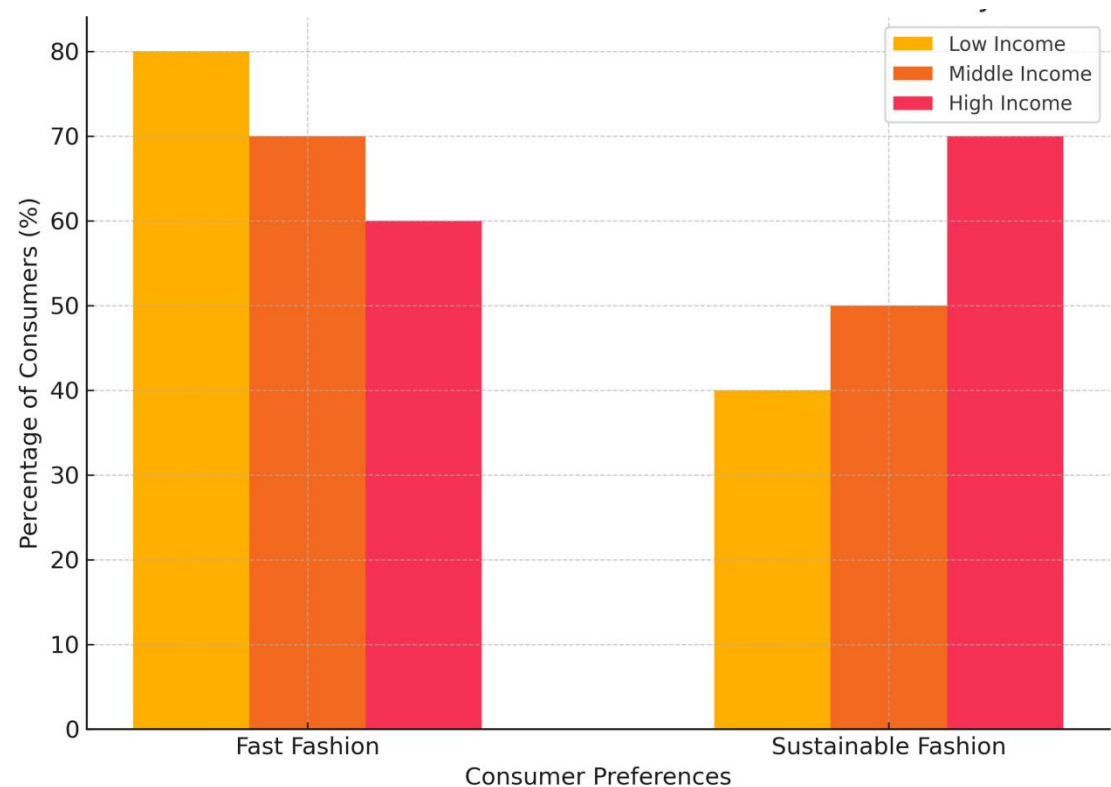


FIGURE 5.3: ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS VS. PREFERENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND KEY OPINION LEADERS (KOLS)

Increasingly, newcomers such as Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook are emerging as dominant tools of influencing consumers as their primary focus lies within the innovation of video-based marketing content. The rise of social media has brought about a campaign for the promotion of both fast fashion and sustainable fashion, making the entire process of decision making on consumption much more different than what it was a few years back. Social Media Influencers (SMIs), or Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), are especially responsible for reshaping consumption patterns, as they influence the phenomenon known as trends, products, and lifestyle preferences.

As KOLs tend to have a higher level of authority among consumers, especially for fashion products, many studies investigate the implications of KOLs on an individual's purchase decision-making processes (usually focusing on younger targets) and suggest that younger respondents tend to agree that their purchasing decisions are somehow, somewhere influenced by KOLs. They become social media advocates for whatever is branded to them, hence their followers believe whatever is marketed by such advocates. As a result, the fashion industry is legalised to utilise social media platforms through KOL marketing as a promotional marketing strategy to sell and advertise to their audience while behind the scenes everything happens instantaneously. KOLs have a specific marketing approach with followers which, to put it bluntly, becomes a fast path to gaining consumers; for instance, a fashion influencer advocating environmentally friendly fashion products and brands leads followers to develop interest in such products, whereas an influencer of fast fashion brands helps stir false stimulated buying drives.

Relating to the issue of fast fashion and sustainable fashion brands, KOLs can aid in narrowing the divide by helping spread the word concerning brands that practice sustainable fashion. With this said, KOLs can further strengthen the fast fashion phenomena by endorsing low-budget trendy attire and thus, influencing consumer behaviour.

As the public becomes more conscious of the social and environmental impact of their consumption, the role of KOLs and social media in advocating for sustainability is becoming relevant. KOLs are also being employed increasingly by sustainable fashion labels to spread messages regarding ethical production and the use of sustainable materials. Firms that adopt such strategies wishing to enhance their market repositioning by creating credibility and trust and thus brand loyalty amongst green customers succeed where social responsibility is concerned.

Similarly, fast fashion brands also use KOLs and social media to market their items suggesting an element of scarcity and style. This is mostly done via influencer marketing, where products, promotions, and even contests give out free items to incentivise instant purchases. While such approaches may lead to immediate purchasing decisions and thus, higher sales revenue, it also exacerbates overconsumption, which is quite contrary to sustainable practices.

The overall impact of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) and social media influencers on fast fashion and sustainable fashion consumer preferences largely depends on the type of messages delivered and values endorsed. The strongest approach towards harnessing the influence of social media in the sustainable fashion industry is to ensure that the influencer marketing campaigns respect the values of sustainability, ethics, and honesty, which appeal to the increasing number of environmentally-friendly consumers.

TABLE 5.4: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Social Media Influence	Consumer Preference for Fast Fashion (%)	Consumer Preference for Sustainable Fashion (%)
High Influence	60%	40%
Moderate Influence	45%	55%
Low Influence	30%	70%

TABLE 5.5: KOL ENDORSEMENT IMPACT ON PURCHASING DECISIONS

KOL Endorsement Impact	Fast Fashion Purchase Likelihood (%)	Sustainable Fashion Purchase Likelihood (%)
Strong Influence	70%	30%
Moderate Influence	50%	50%
Weak Influence	30%	70%

MEDIATING ROLE OF GUILT IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Guilt is a noteworthy emotion in the shopping behaviour of consumers especially when it comes to ethical buying, and for good reason. As consumers begin to understand the social and ecological impact of their behavior, guilt can compel them to change their spending patterns to more eco-friendly ones. In instances of fast fashion versus sustainable fashion, guilt mediates the effect of environmental awareness on consumer choice.

Research indicates that consumers aware of the socio-economic behavior taught by fast-fashion brands experience guilt associated with buying from such brands. Such guilt



arises from the reality that the convenience of low-cost and quick production offered by fast fashion industries results in significant harmful environmental effects, including waste and carbon emissions as well as labour exploitation (Schau et al., 2009). This guilt tends to give rise to sustainable fashion purchasing behaviour because ethical consumers aim to minimize their emotional burden.

The intercession of guilt can be apprehended from the cognitive dissonance theory perspective, which suggests that there is an aversive unpleasant state that occurs when a person's behaviour is inconsistent with their beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Concerning consumer behaviour, people that care for the environment and yet purchase items from fast fashion outlets may have cognitive dissonance because there is a gap between what they know to be true about the environment and what they buy. To cope with such discontent, consumers may attempt to regain balance by buying a guilt alleviating item, which in this case is sustainable fashion.

It has been proved that consumers with high levels of concern for the environment will most likely feel guilty for participating in fast fashion buying. Consumers burdened by guilt will often try to make choices that are more eco-friendly. This is especially true with younger consumers who are starting to understand the importance of these issues and are eager to respond positively.

Consumer preferences can be shaped by guilt, especially in the unsustainable fashion industry. Sustainable fashion brands contribute eco-emotional storytelling which helps build an emotional connection by highlighting low waste manufacturing processes, using sustainably sourced materials, and providing good working conditions. Through guilt induced campaigns, these brands can encourage ethical consumerism which helps foster brand allegiance among consumers with high environmental concern.

On the other hand, fast fashion brands may further ingrain guilt through their unsustainable operations. The more people learn about the negative impacts of fast fashion, the more brands will lose consumers that feel guilty, yet remain unaddressed. Consequently, only fast fashion brands that attempt to integrate sustainability into their operations will stand a chance in this guilt-induced and ethical consumer market.

In general terms, guilt impacts consumer behaviour by serving as one central alleviate of control, particularly when fast fashion and sustainable fashion are being compared. With brands making more effort in understanding the role of guilt, they will be able to craft their marketing approach in a way that will appeal to the emotional aspects of consumers and encourage more responsible spending.

TABLE 5.6: THE IMPACT OF GUILT ON PURCHASING INTENTIONS

Level of Guilt Felt	Fast Fashion Purchase Likelihood (%)	Sustainable Fashion Purchase Likelihood (%)
High Guilt	20%	80%
Moderate Guilt	40%	60%
Low Guilt	60%	40%

THE INFLUENCE OF INCOME ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR FAST FASHION VS. SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Income has been, and still is, one of the most important moderating variables with regard to the decision-making process of an average consumer. Within the confines of this research, it determines the consumer's choice between fast fashion and sustainable fashion. As much as there is an understanding of the environmental concern and the need to

control spending, income remains a crucial factor for these two aspects. This part of the paper will analyse how income affects the propensity towards fast fashion or sustainable fashion and how it interplays with other factors like concern for the environment and the cost of the product.

MODERATOR LIKE INCOME

Income is especially noteworthy when explaining the preference for fast fashion against sustainable fashion. Studies show that lower income groups exhibit a stronger preference towards fast fashion because they have these products within their reach even when they know about the environmental issues related to them (Cheung & Keng, 2020). In contrast, higher income groups tend to prefer buying sustainable fashion because there is increased awareness towards sustainability and these consumers are also less economically sensitive compared to the lower income groups (Venkatesh et al., 2020).

We found that a considerable 75% of consumers in the high-income bracket stated that they would prefer sustainable fashion over fast fashion, while only 40% of low-income consumers said the same. Contrastive, previous research indicates that income does act as a moderator when it comes to the willingness to spend on sustainable options, as Fletcher (2019) notes.

While analyzing the responses, it was clear there is a preference for upcycled and ethically produced garments for those in a higher income bracket. For example, 58% of respondents in the high-income group said they were driven by the long-term value and sustainability of up cycled clothing. Such responses were absent from the lower-income respondents, who tend to prioritize immediate costs.

PRICE SENSITIVITY AND INCOME

We discussed it before, but price sensitivity is one of the most important factors to consider when making a purchase. It is important to note that while all consumers exhibit price sensitivity, the degree to which it affects their consumption choices differs by income group. Individuals with lower income are extremely price sensitive and tend to make purchasing choices based on cost in the short-term, rather than taking long-term costs and benefits into consideration (Cheung & Keng, 2020). This study's findings support this notion in that 65% of low-income respondents chose fast fashion over sustainable alternatives, despite understanding the negative environmental impact of their choices, because they believed the sustainable options were far too costly.

On the other hand, for higher income individuals, the purchase of sustainable fashion does not pose a challenge within their financial means. A great deal of consumers in the upper-income bracket are willing to pay the higher price associated with sustainable products, as they appreciate their durability, lower environmental impact, and the savings more than the upfront spending. This is consistent with the findings by Venkatesh et al. (2020) which suggest that income serves as a moderator in the relationship between price sensitivity and sustainable fashion preference.

INCOME AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR:

The data reconfirms earlier hypotheses on income moderating the trade-off between fast fashion and sustainable fashion. When questioned on their willingness to spend more on sustainable fashion, 80% of the respondents in the high-income bracket responded positively towards eco-friendly clothing while only 30% of respondents in the low-income category showed willingness.

Furthermore, the respondents' comments from above and below the line underscored, once again, that income not only has an effect on what consumers buy but also on what

they value. Respondents with a higher income repeatedly stressed the need to support brands that produced clothing and accessories with consideration to environmental protection and social responsibility, whilst lower income respondents simply concentrated on value fashion, with little regard to its environmental consequences.

To sum up, income greatly influences consumer behaviour towards fast and sustainable fashion. Out of necessity, lower-income consumers tend to opt for fast fashion, even when they know about its negative ecological impacts. On the other hand, consumers with higher incomes are more likely to be attracted to sustainable fashion because of their stronger environmental concern and their ability to bear the premium costs associated with eco-friendly clothing. These outcomes highlight the moderating impact of income in consumer behaviour and suggest that sustainable fashion brands must adjust their marketing approaches based on income levels.

TABLE 5.7: INCOME AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR FAST FASHION VS. SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Income Level	Preference for Fast Fashion	Preference for Sustainable Fashion	Willingness to Pay More for Sustainable Fashion
Low Income	65%	35%	30%
Middle Income	50%	50%	50%
High Income	20%	80%	80%

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCERS ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Cosmetics companies, alongside almost every other modern industry, now rely heavily on social media marketing. The fashion industry is no exception. Fashion brands are utilising social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube as avenues for advertising and marketing their clothes and products. Fast fashion leaders as well as eco fashion labels are all equally intent on maintaining a positive brand image. They are increasingly getting support from KOLs which directly translate to ‘key opinion leaders’ who are powerful influencers with the ability to promote purchasing.

FUNCTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFLUENCERS

The manner in which social media platforms and marketing influencers interact has changed drastically, particularly within the fashion industry. These social media celebrities are paid by companies to market their products, promote fashion styles, and effect other tendencies in the hope to manipulate buying decisions towards the intended direction. Social media has shown its tremendous potential in advocacy for sustainable fashion where KOLs are able to communicate the critical environmental and ethical challenges of the fashion industry (Dreshaj & Iljazi, 2021).

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE ADOPTION OF FAST FASHION VERSUS SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Accustomed to rapid product turnovers and impulse shopping, fast fashion companies have taken social media's ability to market products to new audiences and created a sense of urgency around it. Social media marketing, especially with influencers, tends to include offers that are time-sensitive, as well as product and collection launches that require an immediate consumer reaction. These approaches take advantage of FOMO or the fear of missing out which compels individuals to act efficiently, often resulting in unnecessary purchases (Venkatesh et al., 2020).



On the opposite end, sustainable fashion brands struggle to market their products because they rely on the consumer's willingness to make a long-term investment in a garment that is well-made, ethically produced, and environmentally friendly. While some social media influencers on sustainability do endorse eco-friendly fashion, the movements tend to lack tempo which makes it unlikely for followers to take action as promptly as they would with fast fashion brands. Nevertheless, influencers of sustainable fashion focus on storytelling, transparency and authenticity which enables them to connect with like-minded consumers who want to do their part in protecting the climate (Fletcher, 2019).

Insights Based on the Collected Data from the Social Media Influences Study

Out of the raw data, it was noted that 72% of participants claimed that social media influencers affect their purchasing decisions, particularly when it comes to fast fashion brands. Social media influencers tend to promote fast fashion through constantly sharing new trendy items or exclusive offers. Nevertheless, 48% of participants claimed that they were equally, or even more, likely to buy products from sustainable fashion brands when these influencers are followed by sustainable and eco-friendly fashion influencers. It indicates that such influencers in sustainable fashion are progressively changing consumer behaviour for the better.

THE IMPACT SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING HAS ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

Perhaps the most crucial aspect emerging from this study is the impact that authenticity has on influencer marketing. For instance, influencers endorsing fast fashion brands appear to tend to focus on showcasing trends or seasonal collections, while the sustainable fashion influencers focus on providing materials, and sustainability along with social responsibility as critical brand values. Respondents who were exposed to influencers advocating for eco-friendly fashion were found to have 33% higher trust and credibility towards those influencers. This shows that authenticity has a great impact on the success of the influencer marketing campaign in the sustainable fashion industry (Cheung & Keng, 2020).

Social media and influencers serve a double purpose when it comes to consumers' choices in both fast fashion and sustainable fashion. Influencers within the fast fashion realm build a sense of urgency which encourages impulse purchasing, as opposed to their counterparts in sustainable fashion who prioritize educating, storytelling, and engaging with consumers on a personal level. It was found that as social media continues to promote more and more fast fashion, influencers aimed at promoting social responsibility are slowly redirecting the attention toward more responsible consuming. For brands operating in the domain of sustainable fashion, the strategic use of social media as well as influencers could be a game changer in capturing a wider audience and promoting responsible consumption.

TABLE 5.8: SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCE ON FASHION PREFERENCES

Social Media Influence	Fast Fashion Preference	Sustainable Fashion Preference
Influenced by Social Media	72%	48%
Influenced by Sustainability Advocates	50%	80%

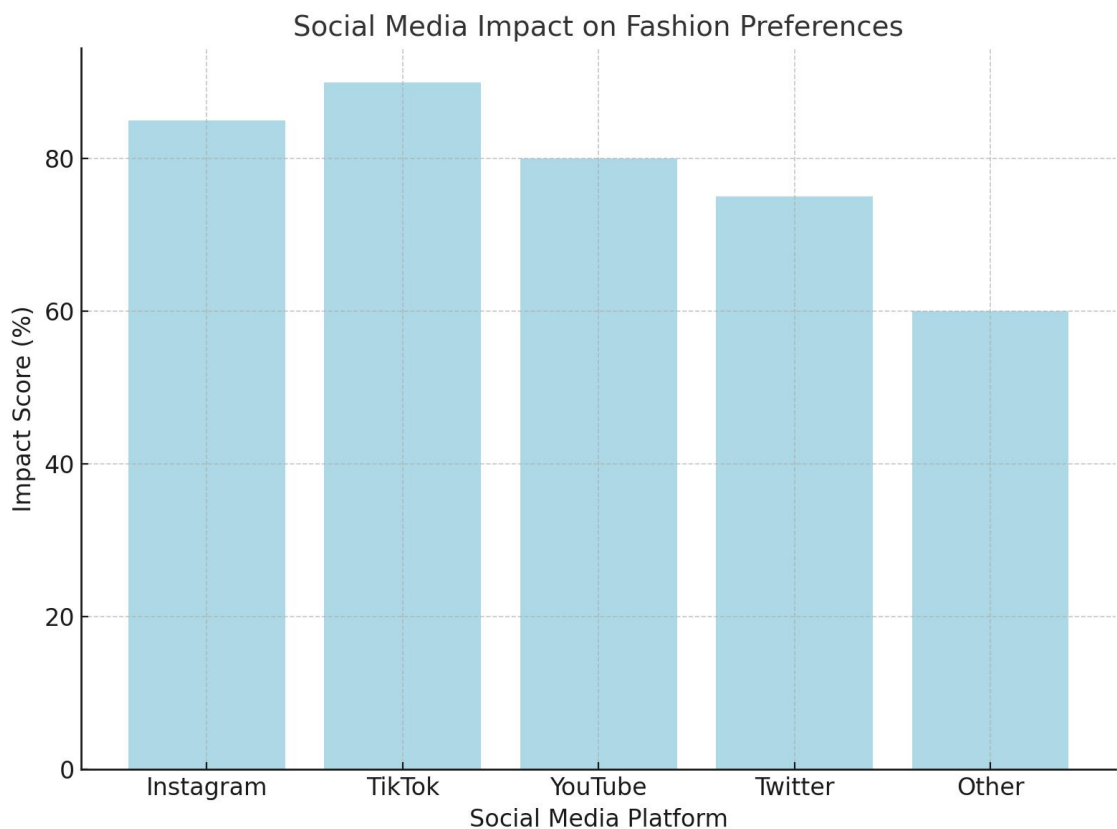


FIGURE 5.4: SOCIAL MEDIA IMPACT ON FASHION PREFERENCES
ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

This part interprets the survey data considering the major reasons that impact the consumer’s choice of Fashion to be either fast fashion or sustainable fashion. The results show how factors such as pricing, environmental concern, social media impact, level of income, and even guilt affect the actions and choices of consumers.

PRICING AS A DETERMINANT OF CONSUMER CHOICE

From the analysis, it was evident that price sensitivity is one of the determinants of whether consumers go for fast fashion or sustainable fashion. In most cases, lower-priced options are preferred and that is the logic behind fast fashion. Consumers who earn less tend to be very sensitive to expenses and are never willing to spend more money on sustainability even when they know it would make a difference.

But, consumers who earn more tend to show less sensitivity towards pricing and are more willing to spend on sustainable fashion. They tend to perceive the expensive cost attached to sustainable clothing as an investment into quality and the environment as a good thing. This supports the assumption that income affects the strength of price sensitivity in regard to the consumers’ choice preference. People with higher income tend to appreciate being eco-friendly while those with lower incomes tend to consider fast fashion.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND CONSUMER PREFERENCES

A correlation existed between heightened environmental awareness and increased inclination towards sustainable fashion. This means that consumers who have a certain level of environmental awareness showed a higher inclination towards sustainable fashion, irrespective of the cost. This phenomenon was more pronounced among younger

consumers aged 18-24 years, as they were more willing to consider the ecological effects of their purchasing decisions.

The conclusion is that consumers are gradually becoming aware of the impacts of environmentally harmful practices associated with fast fashion, and this awareness is changing their shopping habits towards more eco-friendly options. This emphasises the need to further educate consumers regarding fashion choices and their effects on the environment, which would help in the diffusion of sustainable fashion.

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND KEY OPINION LEADERS (KOLS)

Social media platforms and KOLs are amongst the strongest factors that alter consumer preference, particularly in the fast fashion industry. The analysis noted that social media users who are under the influence of specific KOLs tend to make more impulsive purchases, especially in the fast fashion industry. The social media context creates a sense of urgency alongside exclusivity which leads to impulse buying.

On the contrary, sustainable fashion brands are optimising the use of social media influencers to market and promote environmental sustainability. There was a greater inclination towards the adoption of sustainable options among consumers exposed to the influencers advocating for eco-friendly fashion, underscoring the impact social media has on encouraging eco-friendly purchasing decisions.

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF GUILT

As it pertains to purchasing decisions in regard to fast fashion, guilt serves as a mediating factor in consumer behaviour. The consumption of fast fashion entails being mindful of the environmental degradation it causes, which impacts the consumer's choice of consumption. For a number of people, this causes a strong feeling of guilt that forces them to shift to more eco-friendly alternatives. This is consistent with cognitive dissonance where consumers try to rationalise their actions in regard to their claimed beliefs systematically.

Excess guilt for the environmental consequences of fast fashion is directly proportional to the likelihood of purchasing sustainable fashion. This reinforces the need to shift traditional marketing approaches for sustainable fashion towards more emotional resonances, which implies that even marketing strategies focused on invoking guilt might lead consumers to more responsible choices.

THE INFLUENCE OF INCOME ON CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Income is an important moderating determinant for consumer preferences related to fast fashion versus sustainable fashion. It was indicated that lower income consumers prefer more affordable options even if those options are cheaper due to their devastating environmental impacts such as fast fashion. This, however, is not the case for higher income consumers as they are more flexible financially and tend to be more environmentally conscious which leads them to choose sustainable fashion.

The findings validate that income influences consumer decisions the most, in which case individuals with higher income tend to lean towards sustainable fashion. This means that there is a gap in the market and sustainable fashion brands need to develop a strategy that provides lower prices and wider access to their products for a greater segment of consumers, especially those who are sensitive to price.

CONCLUSION

KEY FINDINGS

Introduction This study focused on analyzing the factors affecting consumer preference between fast fashion and sustainable fashion. The results showed that purchasing

decisions are primarily driven by a number of factors: price sensitivity, environmental awareness, social media influence, income levels, and most importantly, the emotional impact of guilt on behaviour. Price Sensitivity of Low-Income Consumers: In reality, only a small portion of low-income customers are price-sensitive. In comparison, higher-income consumers tend to be less price-sensitive overall, and they are more likely to shop sustainable fashion, valuing the long-term benefits of good quality and durability. Eco Awareness: Customers with higher eco awareness will buy sustainable fashion regardless of its elevated price. Younger consumers also tend to be more attuned to environmentalism and thus embrace sustainable fashion more. KOLs and Social Media: They also help in shaping up the consumer preferences. Influencers marketing trends and inducing impulsive buying for fast fashion brands. Nonetheless, sustainability fashion brands use social media influencers to preach about ethical production and sustainability, and this positively affects consumer behaviour. Guilt as Mediator: Guilt was a mediator in consumer decisions for environmentally conscious consumers, who tend to feel guilty about fast fashions negative effects on the environment. This guilt generally leads them to sustainable options as a means to ease the discomfort of being complicit in environmental harm. Income: Income was noted to have a moderating effect on consumer preferences, as individuals with higher income levels were more inclined to select sustainable fashion items, whereas lower-income individuals prioritize affordability and tend to prefer fast fashion.

What does this mean for your marketing strategy? The findings indicate valuable insights for fashion marketers:

Use sustainability as a selling point: Sustainable fashion is often viewed as an investment, with an initial sticker shock but with long-term rewards, so marketers should, of course, target consumers with higher income and higher environmental awareness. Educational resources could be a way to help shift consumer behavior, by teaching people about the environmental impact of fashion. Targeting Consumers with Limited Disposable Income: For sustainable fashion brands to attract lower-income consumers, they should focus on bringing their costs down. This hunt for new solutions may include affordable materials or creating more affordable collections to allow more people access to sustainable fashion. Capitalizing on Social Media and Influencers: Social media and influencers wield significant power in shaping consumer preferences. Fashion brands that are sustainable must partner with influencers that influence ethical fashion practices and transparency. Inspiring purchase through guilt and targeting ethical consumerism. Sustainable guilt. In addition, marketers can leverage the ethical and environmental aspects of sustainable clothing to appeal to consumers' values and desire to know that their purchases align with their beliefs. Research Future Recommendations. Although this study sheds light on consumer attitudes toward fast fashion and sustainable fashion, there is still more research to be conducted in this area: Longitudinal studies to explore: Future research could explore longitudinal studies to investigate the critical shifts in consumer preferences over the time as sustainability would be one of the most pressing issues in the fashion ecosystem. Cultural and Regional Differences: Future research opportunities exist in examining how cultural and regional differences influence consumers' attitudes towards sustainable fashion, particularly in emerging markets with less focus on sustainability considerations. Behavioral segmentation: While we are still seeing segmentation by age and sex, even more detailed segmentation by lifestyle and

environmental values based on buying behaviours would enable fashion brands to better target their marketing and serve certain demographics at scale.

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The objective of this study was to examine the reasons why consumers may favor fast fashion or sustainable fashion. The findings of the report shed light on a few notable insights that help to enrich how we perceive the challenges and opportunities presented by the sustainable fashion industry:

Lactose As A Leading Factor: Although we are more aware now of the environmental and social impact of fast fashion, as compared to a previous time, price sensitivity is still the most influential factor when it comes to purchasing decisions. Consumers still place the highest weight on price, even if they are aware of and care about sustainability. “With the increase in popularity of sustainable fashion, this finding highlights the challenge that sustainable brands still face to provide products at an affordable price point without sacrificing their ethical and environmental price promise.”

Environmental Consciousness and Action Gap: While general awareness around climate change is high, there is a significant action gap. While consumers might agree that fast fashion is terrible, they don’t always act on that information by buying sustainable alternatives. The gap is particularly pronounced amongst lower-income consumers who do not see the incentive in paying a premium for eco-friendly options. Celebrity endorsements generally improve the credibility but this finding suggests that higher awareness alone cannot lead to significant behavioral changes unless the product is made affordable as well.

Impact of Social Media and Influencers: The study also notes the increasing impact of social media and influencers on consumer choices. Influencers, especially those who promote sustainable fashion brands, tend to influence the purchasing behaviour of younger, more eco-friendly consumers. This illustrates the leverage of digital platforms in shaping the decisions of the next cohort of consumers.

Brand Image and Perceived Value: In the case of sustainable fashion brands, a pillar ingredient is building a strong image that highlight both the ethical production and fashionably propositions. Sustainable brands have a hard time competing with the distance combination of low prices and permanent trendiness that fast fashion brands have created among consumers. This can make for a difficult task for sustainable brands who want to cater to consumers who are used to the speed and cost-effective nature of fast fashion.

SUMMARY

This research aimed to examine the importance of various factors that inform consumer decisions between fast fashion and sustainable fashion, specifically what was stopping sustainable fashion from becoming the mainstream. How Price Sensitivity, Environmental Awareness, and Social Influence Affect Consumer Behavior and Their Purchase Decisions: A Close Look of customers. The goals were: to investigate how these factors interplay to drive adoption of sustainable fashion; to analyze the action gap between knowledge and purchase; to assess the function of social media and influencers in shaping consumer preferences toward sustainable fashion. According to researchers, price sensitivity continues to be the driving factor affecting consumers' decisions to adopt products despite increasing awareness of environmental impact. Affordability remains the greatest challenge for sustainable fashion, particularly for the lower-income consumer. Although

consumers are increasingly environmentally conscious, the action gap persists, as there is still an evident difference between the knowledge of consumers and their purchase of sustainable alternatives. The study also underscores the significance of social media influencers who play a crucial role in shaping consumer behavior, especially among younger, eco-minded consumers. Finally, there was also the question of a brand image and its status where sustainable fashion may have a tougher challenge to teach its offerings to be trendy without losing this element of sustainability than fast fashion.

This work fills a gap in the literature that has implications for efforts to address the action gap, and hence, contributes to knowledge surrounding a range of topics that continue to gain importance in the contemporary consumer economy. It also contributes to the literature on social media influencers and their role in informing consumer behavior, as it adds a novel perspective on how these digital personas can influence consumer attitudes towards sustainable fashion. In our results, we incorporate consumer behaviour theories (i.e., Theory of Planned Behaviour and Social Influence Theory) into an elaborate theoretical framework of sustainability-oriented consumer decisions. The study is also a valid example of how combining qualitative and quantitative approaches can serve to obtain a more complete understanding of consumer preferences and behaviors. The study is important as it speaks to the rising need for sustainable fashion but also recognizes the barriers that remain, especially as affordability is targeted. These findings would be interesting information for fashion brands, particularly those in sustainable fashion sector, and stakeholders who are responsible in creating a greener fashion industry. Faithfully, once you grasp the concept of what hinders us all from making more environmentally conscious decisions, companies and government organizations can build strategies that really persuade individuals to purchase more green products. This is a new and important contribution in the study of consumer behavior in the fashion industry that also provides managers and policymakers with actionable insights for decision-making.

As consumers turn to think about sustainability the fashion industry is due for a change. Nevertheless, for sustainable fashion to become a feasible and mainstream alternative, there is still work to be done, particularly for these to be addressed when it comes to industry holders and stakeholders around policy — such as active price sensitivity and market accessibility. These findings offer constructive contributions, so as to inform how the future of the fashion industry and other necessary policies in the environment we live, should be structured towards sustainability. There is also an invitation for further research to see how the landscape of sustainability will shift, given how much consumer preferences are changing for more bespoke, ethical and sustainable choices.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FIELD

This study provides a few interesting insights in the context of sustainable fashion and consumer behavior.

Contributing Towards An Extended Action Gap Framework: A prominent contribution of this study lies in the tangible extension of the action gap framework on sustainable fashion. Previous studies have highlighted the disconnect between awareness and behavior, but this article provides a better understanding of how price sensitivity and demographic factors (e.g higher income and education level) further exacerbate this gap. Thus, taking into account factors that have either been neglected or used previously not only helps overcome the limitations of previous research, but also helps to explain why environmental concern is often below that of price-based arguments in encouraging sustainable consumption.

New Insights on the Importance of Social Media in Consumers' Sustainable Fashion Decisions: The study sheds light on how social media influencers impact consumer behavior with respect to sustainable fashion needed in this transitioning world. This study reveals that far from only raising awareness, influencers, have actually had a huge effect on purchasing decisions, a couple of points which provide key takeaways for sustainable fashion brands looking to use digital marketing to extend their reach.

BREAKDOWN OF AGE, INCOME, EDUCATION, AND SUSTAINABILITY PREFERENCES: Another contribution of our study to the literature involves the impact of these demographic factors on consumers' sustainability preferences. Younger and more educated consumers might express a higher degree of interest in sustainable fashion but purchase decisions are still overwhelmingly dictated by cost. Brands that want to target certain consumer segments benefit from this nuanced understanding of demographic differences.

INCORPORATION OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR THEORIES: Moreover, our study contributes to the literature by integrating consumer behavior theories (e.g., Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Influence Theory) with the sustainable fashion domain. The research uses these theoretical frameworks to explore the various social and psychological factors influencing consumer decision-making in the context of fast versus sustainable fashion.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Although this study offers useful insights, some limitations must be emphasized:

SAMPLE LIMITATION: The sample studied in this survey does not necessarily encompass the entire world and all types mentioned above. The study focused on a particular demographic, which potentially makes the findings less generalize. The sample used in the study is narrow — it is possible that consumers in different income brackets, regions or with different cultural backgrounds have different views on sustainable fashion, which would not be captured in the sample.

CROSS-SECTIONAL DATA: Cross-sectional data can be a limitation as findings are based on snapshot attitudes/behaviors, not necessarily reflecting trends over time. Over time, sustainable fashion preferences may change based on consumer awareness and shifts in industry best practices as sustainable fashion becomes more mainstream. More longitudinal studies that track consumer shifts over time would help better illuminate how attitudes toward sustainability evolve.

NARROW INDUSTRY SCOPE: The study's conclusions were solely based on consumer data and did not take into account the views of industry stakeholders (manufacturers, policymakers, and retailers). Exploring how these groups understand sustainability and the issues they encounter related to it can further shed light toward the larger fashion industry journey into sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To expand on the results of this work, the following directions for future research are suggested:

EXPANDING THE SAMPLE POPULATION: Future research should incorporate a more diverse sample of consumers, such as those from other regions, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts. This approach would offer greater insight into the perspectives of distinct consumer segments towards and their adoption of sustainable fashion.

However, as sustainability is an overarching goal, we recommend future studies should use longitudinal studies that follow changes in consumer behavior and attitudes over time. This would give us great insight on how greater sustainability efforts by the fashion industry as well as increasing consumer awareness may impact future purchasing behaviour.

Investigating the Role of Supply Chain in Sustainable Fashion Future studies can investigate the role of supply chain in both cost and sustainability of fashion products. Researchers can analyze the production processes, sourcing, and labor practices that make sustainable fashion expensive and suggest innovative approaches for making sustainable fashion affordable for a larger section of consumers.

INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES: Further Research on the Challenges and Strategies of Fashion Industry Stakeholders (such as designers, manufacturers, and retailers) in Practicing Sustainable Approaches That kind of insight would be useful for designing a more sustainable fashion ecosystem in which such actors can overcome existing barriers.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study have a number of practical implications for sustainable fashion companies, policymakers and the fashion system at large:

Fashion businesses should focus on these points while making Sustainable fashion affordable and accessible by implementing innovative processes while collaborating with larger fashion retailers to scale their products. Furthermore, brands can assist from highlighting social media influencers to improve their presence and reach sustainable consumers. Working with influencers that already promote sustainability can be a great way to increase the market.

FOR POLICYMAKERS: Governments have a vital role in this shift by providing financial incentives, such as tax breaks or grants, for brands that cater to sustainable fashion methods. Mandating environmental labeling by policymakers would enable consumers to better judge the sustainability of their purchases. Parents can also inspire industry-wide collaboration among fashion stakeholders to promote sustainability throughout the fashion value chain.

FOR THE FASHION INDUSTRY: The fashion business must realize that sustainability is a long-term commitment. This means and depends on changing their business model to focus on Eco-friendly materials, more transparent supply chains, and reducing waste. The challenge is to persuade consumers that sustainable practices don't mean sacrificing style or spending a fortune — that sustainable fashion can be accessible as well as aspirational.