

Chapter 1

Consumers' Choice Behavior Towards Sustainable Fashion Based on Social Media Influence

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ABSTRACT

Social media is now a marketing platform effectively utilizing influencer marketing to connect with the target consumers. The young Generation Z consumer is extremely active on social media attracted by the lure of influencers, opinion leaders, and active creators, and they utilize social media to gain knowledge about their brands. Fashion brands nowadays have been trying to meet the consumer demand for sustainable products by utilizing social media and influencer marketing to develop, advertise, and showcase corporate social responsibility (CSR) around green sustainable fashion products. The consumer seeks cognitive information from their social media experience, fulfilling aesthetic and entertainment gratification, received through appealing images, social media videos, stories, influencer content, and interaction enabling information gathering, entertainment, and allowing consumers to transform their knowledge into intent by purchasing green, sustainable fashion brands.

INTRODUCTION

In an environmentally conscious era, consumers have demanding requirements in many areas. Being aware of environmental issues, nowadays, consumers seek eco-friendly products. People have started looking for “Green Products” everywhere (Hasan et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022). In terms of fashion apparel, consumers’ purchasing decisions were previously based upon comfort, style, aesthetic appeal, etc., but now more on the eco-friendliness of products. Sustainable fashion can be described as eco-friendly clothing (Elisa & Cecilia, 2016; Wagner et al., 2019), slow fashion focusing on style orientation rather than fashion orientation (Gupta et al., 2019), consumers’ long-term relationship with their clothing (Pettersson McIntyre, 2021) and the positive role of biosphere and altruistic values influencing sustainable

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clothing consumption as opposed to the negative role of hedonistic values promoting overconsumption and excess (Geiger & Keller, 2018). Many clothing companies have started providing clothes made from eco-friendly fabrics, and the demand for these green products is increasing (Bielawska & Grebosz-Krawczyk, 2021). The criteria to judge any material as “environmentally friendly” are renewability, the ecological footprint of the resource, and the usage of any chemical to grow/process to make the product ready for use. If textile-producing companies embrace these trends, they capitalize by increasing profits and sleep better, knowing they are playing their part in protecting our environment. Adopting friendly practices such as reusing and recycling wastewater is an excellent start for accomplishing these goals. Current business models are directly linked to sales and production volumes, with sustainable consumption leading to reduced volumes and decreasing profitability in production, not as an opportunity for a new kind of green business (Meyer, 2001). Green brands such as H&M, Zara have been implementing environmental conservation and environmentally sustainable practices through their products (Albino et al., 2009; Y. S. Chen, 2010).

Social media usage is among the most popular activities, with 4.59 billion people in 2022, projected to increase to six billion in 2027 (Stacy, 2023b). Worldwide, 64% of consumers are showing deep concern for the environment and sustainability, with 79% of consumers centralized around developing economies such as China, India, and Indonesia and 55% of consumers in developed countries like the U.S. and Europe (Faelli Francois, Blasberg John, Johns Leah, 2023). Generation Z consumers have emerged as protagonists concerned more about sustainability than their older counterparts, with 72% of Gen Z consumers and 68% of boomers extremely concerned about the environment (Schneider Benjamin & Lee Diana, 2022). Social media hence provides an effective forum to promote green product awareness amongst consumers and to ratify to the consumers whether the brands are stringently following the green sustainability route through their fashion or just using it as a ploy to increase sales and profitability (Cronin et al., 2011) Generation Z consumers are known digital natives primarily because they were born in a digital age spending at least 8 hours online on social media, internet, and media second only to the time spent sleeping (Deloitte, 2022; Djafarova & Bowes, 2021) with their purchase decisions influenced by opinion leaders, bloggers, influencers, peers, and older peers from their social networks (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021; Liu, 2022). A 2022 study done by McKinsey and Co. on European consumers during the Covid-19 crisis identified that 67% of consumers considered the usage of sustainable materials from their fashion brands, while 63% consider a brand promotion of sustainability as a deciding factor in choosing a fashion brand (McKinsey & Company, 2020). Sustainability overlaps with the notion of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), responsible for producing ethical, social, and environmentally responsible production of apparel respecting judicial and ethical guidelines, fair treatment of employees, and prevention of harmful environmental and social activities through organizational activities (Jermstiparsert et al., 2019; MOHR et al., 2001). Companies like Patagonia, People Tree, and Eileen Fischer are renowned for producing sustainable apparel, while fast fashion brands like Zara, H&M, Primark & Gap, earlier known to focus on costing and production processes, have now integrated sustainability into their apparel (Arrigo, 2013; Cachon & Swinney, 2011). Thus, companies, through their CSC (Corporate Social communication), need to communicate socially responsible practices, mainly ethical labor conditions, and sustainable production practices, and communicate to the consumers about mindful clothing consumption and disposal habits (Shen, 2014; Shen et al., 2014; Strähle & Chantal, 2016).

Nudging through social media, therefore, proves to be an effective tool for promoting eco-friendly behavior, with verbal nudging showing a significant influence and visual nudges to a lesser extent influencing consumers' choice of eco-friendly sustainable fashion apparel (Goldsmith et al., 2015; Roozen et

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