


Generation Z, Circular Fashion, and Sustainable Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Generation Z's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors regarding sustainable fashion, focusing on the contradiction between their environmental awareness and consumption patterns. Using a mixed-method approach that includes a literature review and surveys of young consumers, the research aims to understand the motivations and barriers they face when considering sustainable fashion options. The key finding reveals that, despite high levels of environmental and ethical awareness, Generation Z continues to prefer fast fashion, primarily due to its affordability and the constant influx of new trends. The premium pricing associated with sustainable fashion is identified as a significant barrier to its adoption within this demographic. The study concludes by recommending that the fashion industry and policymakers enhance transparency, affordability, and authenticity in their practices. By positioning sustainability as a core brand value and addressing perceptions of greenwashing, the industry can foster more responsible consumption patterns among younger generations.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Marketing, Generation Z, Externality, Circular Fashion, Price Sensitivity, Fast Fashion

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the efforts of a large part of the industry, fashion continues to be an activity with a significant negative environmental impact. The manufacturing process is resource-intensive (material, human and energy) and generates a significant amount of waste. The logistical process results in a high carbon footprint. In addition, consumer habits, especially among younger people, are oriented towards ephemeral trends, constant renewal and shortening the useful life of the garment.

Among younger people, fashion is a form of personality expression, a sign of belonging to a social group, a status symbol and even a means of self-fulfilment. Consequently, the times in which a fashion item is trendy are becoming shorter and shorter, which puts pressure on the industry, demanding more and faster collections, while clothes worn a few times go straight from the wardrobe to the dump in a short period of time.

In recent years, a third of consumers, aware of the impact of the global textile industry, have broadened the criteria on which they base their purchasing decisions, incorporating principles and

DOI: 10.4018/IJDMML.367035

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values related to sustainability. In this way, they use the act of consumption as a way of expressing these beliefs (Larios, 2019). However, in the fashion sector, the sustainability attribute is associated with a premium price, which younger people (Generation Z or Centennials) cannot afford, as they buy up to 60 new garments every year (Gestal, 2020).

The study investigates the disconnect between Generation Z's sustainability awareness and their actual purchasing behaviour in the context of fast fashion. It explores the extent to which economic barriers, such as the perceived "premium price" of sustainable fashion, and issues of trust, such as greenwashing, hinder the adoption of sustainable consumption practices. By focusing on this dynamic, the research aims to uncover actionable insights for businesses and policymakers to address this sustainability paradox.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to analyze Generation Z's attitudes and behaviors toward sustainable fashion. This design enabled the exploration of both subjective factors, such as perceptions and motivations, and quantifiable consumption patterns.

- Justification for focusing on Galicia, Spain: Galicia was chosen as the study area due to its notable tradition in the textile industry and its increasing emphasis on sustainability within this sector. Moreover, the region provides a unique geographic and cultural context to examine Generation Z's consumption behaviours in a European setting. This focus not only enriches the local understanding but also offers valuable insights for generalising findings to similar contexts in other regions.
- Literature Review: An extensive review of previous studies on sustainable fashion consumption, Generation Z's behavior, and marketing strategies in the textile industry was conducted. The sources included academic articles, market reports, and representative case studies.
- Sampling techniques and participant selection: Questionnaires A purposive sampling method was employed, targeting students and graduates in the textile sector in Galicia. These participants were characterised by their specialised knowledge and high exposure to fashion and sustainability trends. This selection ensured the relevance and suitability of the sample for the study's objectives.
- Data Analysis: The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify key consumption patterns. Additionally, qualitative analysis was employed to interpret open-ended responses, providing deeper insights into the quantitative findings. The integration of both approaches enhances the validity and reliability of the results.

3. FAST FASHION AND SUSTAINABILITY: THE CHALLENGE OF CIRCULAR FASHION. A LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of *fast fashion* can be defined as the "retail strategy that adapts the assortment to current and emerging trends as quickly and efficiently as possible" (Arrigo, 2020). The traditional push strategy of the fashion industry (from the designer to the market) is replaced by a pull strategy, where retailers respond to market changes within a few weeks.

The business model is characterised by low-cost garments that reflect the (increasingly ephemeral) trends of the catwalks and streets (Wojdyla and Chi, 2024). Consumers of this type of fashion are increasingly demanding and fashion-conscious (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood, 2010) and this means a constant updating of their wardrobe.

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