

“Investigating The Driving Factors Behind Generation Z’s Fashion Consumption”

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Abstract: The fashion industry is one of the leading forces behind global warming due to its manufacturing process's adverse effects on the environment. Sustainable clothing sources can combat this only if consumers choose their products over fast fashion companies. Generation Z has been a leading force in the climate movement, emphasizing it as one of their top concerns.

However, they are also one of the leading consumers of fast fashion companies such as Zara, Shein, and Princess Polly. This gap between Gen Z's exclamation of concern for the environment and their shopping habits within fast fashion is called the "value-action" gap. Several factors may contribute to this, such as the price of an item, its accessibility, quality, whether it is in season or not, and more. Looking at these factors and which is the most important to Gen Z when evaluating clothing pieces may help sustainable fashion companies attract the Gen Z market more. Therefore, I am hoping my findings will help slow the adverse effects of the fashion industry on climate change.

Introduction:

With global warming becoming an increasingly important issue in today's world, it is necessary to investigate the forces that contribute to this problem. One of these is the fashion industry which was "responsible for 10% of annual global carbon emissions, more than all international flights and maritime shipping combined" ("How Much Do Our Wardrobes Cost to the Environment?"). This is only the beginning. Over the past 20 years, the production of garments has doubled due to the increased number of clothes purchased by the average customer, mainly supported by the rise of fast fashion (Jacometti). Fast fashion is a sector of the fashion industry that capitalizes on impulse buying through offering low prices and trend-led merchandise, causing customers to continuously return for more (Niinimäki). This constant cycle of purchasing new garments fuels production levels and further stimulates the environmental detriments caused by the industry. However, this increase in fashion consumption in recent years contrasts with Generation Z's (Gen Z) increased worry of global warming and the environment. Recent studies state the Gen Z ranks climate change as a top concern and believes that businesses have a responsibility to confront this problem (Williams). While there are substantial studies on the motivations behind sustainable fashion consumption and Gen Z's role in this, there seems to be a gap between these findings and the rise of fast fashion amongst Gen Z. Consequently, I want to explore the driving forces behind Generation Z's fashion consumption to discover the reasons for their support of environmentally safe practices while increasingly supporting the fast fashion industry.

Background/Related Work:

Much research is done on the adverse environmental effects of the fashion industry. Clothing has a long and intricate life cycle which includes the aspects of "resource production

and extraction, fibre and yarn manufacturing, textile manufacturing, apparel assembly, packaging, transportation and distribution, consumer use, recycling and ultimate disposal” (Kozlowski). These steps each use their own set of resources that increase as more garments are produced. Therefore, the rise of fast fashion is very dangerous to the environment. Fast fashion’s primary goal is to produce as many garments as possible without care of their quality and lifespan, causing many of these pieces to reach their disposal phase long before other garments. An increase in production fueled by the increase of clothes disposed of has been detrimental to the planet. Statistics published by the UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) details that “At this pace, the fashion industry’s greenhouse gas emissions will surge more than 50 % by 2030” (“How Much Do Our Wardrobes Cost to the Environment?”). One company in specific that has contributed to this significantly over the past few years is a Chinese-based company named Shein (Nguyen). Shein has become so popular that it took over Amazon on the iOS App Store, becoming the top US shopping app (Nguyen). Additionally, in 2020, the company generated over \$10 billion in revenue, its eighth consecutive year of revenue growth over 100 percent, and was the most visited fashion website in the world (Nguyen). The majority of Shein’s sales were generated by Gen Z, who are successfully targeted through social media sites such as Tik Tok, Youtube, and Instagram (Nguyen). At the same time, studies have found that over 50% of Gen Z would spend more money on sustainable clothing in comparison to only 23% of baby boomers (Petro). This shift illustrates the increase in popularity of sustainable fashion items amongst generations. Another study reports that 62% of Gen Z prefer sustainable brands (Petro).

One specific study that has also found the gap between Gen Z’s commitment to sustainable clothing and their shopping habits, naming this phenomenon the “value-action gap” (Williams). The study names various factors that may keep people from supporting sustainable

fashion, including price, scarce options, convenience, scarcity, its unfashionable nature, and uncomfortable materials (Williams). Through focus group discussions, this study found that while participants exclaimed that they were concerned about the environment, their actions within fashion consumption did not reflect these opinions. Therefore, I want to formulate a study that would establish the value-action gap within Gen Z and test which factor of fashion consumption (such as price, availability, quality, and more) is most important to them when purchasing garments.

Methods:

The research question of this study will be measured through a survey sent out to members of Gen Z.

Sample: A random sample of at least 30 members of Generation Z between the ages of 16 to 24 will be selected to participate in the study. The intent is for the sample to be diverse and represent every gender, race or nationality, and other demographic factors to get the most accurate data.

Procedure: The survey will consist of close and open-ended questions. First, several forced-choice demographic questions will be asked to establish the sample's integrity. Then, the survey will transition into the participants' environmental opinions. Questions will consist of ranking world issues from most to least important. This is to determine where members of Gen Z would rank climate change without a leading question. Once this is established, a question consisting of a scaled ranking from one to ten on which they can place the extent to which they worry about climate change will be presented. The following section will cover Gen Z's shopping habits asking how often they go shopping, which stores they will shop at, and how much money they think they spend on clothing every month. Further questions will be surrounding the drivers

behind their shopping habits, such as what factors within clothing they find most important (price, sustainability, accessibility, and more)

Analysis: After collecting all the data, it will be analyzed for similarities and differences. The stores that participants listed they shop at will be researched to put into either the fast fashion or sustainable categories. The rest of the data can be compiled into charts and graphs for easy comparisons and analysis.

Expected Results:

Based on the study outlined above, I expect to find that Gen Z cares about the environment, but the stores they shop at will fall in the fast fashion category. Additionally, the factors that they mostly look for in clothing will be price, accessibility, and style (whether it is in season or not). Meaning, Gen Z cares the least about quality and fabric. This can reveal several things about the Generation. Possibly, Gen Z does not understand or is not educated on the lifecycle and detriments of the fashion industry. Therefore, they may not know that they are not supporting sustainability efforts by purchasing fast fashion clothing. It can also show that Gen Z would like to support sustainable clothing, but if factors such as pricing, accessibility, and style do not fit their requirements, they will turn to other options.

Conclusion:

Although Gen Z cares about sustainability, when it comes to fashion, Gen Z tends to pick stores that fit their needs more than their environmental goals. This means that factors such as price, accessibility, and style may take precedence over the garment's environmental impact. The fashion industry can use this research to determine ways to incorporate sustainability and market their merchandise to Gen Z by emphasizing these factors. It is challenging to incorporate lower prices, higher accessibility, and up-to-date styles in sustainable garments. However, as the world

is experiencing the adverse impacts of fast fashion, it is imperative that changes are made to the industry and companies find ways to close the value-action gap within Generation Z successfully.

References:

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Budget and Timeline:

Week 1-2: Research topic and questions to include in survey, find random sample

Week 3: Create survey and send it to sample

Week 4-5: Analyze survey results, create write up of results, and publish findings

Week 6: Look into possibilities of expanding study such as by holding a focus group to gather more data

For this proposal I will be requesting funds as compensation for my research efforts based on LMU's standard undergraduate research hourly wage of \$15/hour. Using the timeframe and an effort of 3 hours a week, I would be compensated \$270. Additionally, I would be requesting funds as compensation and incentive for participants. With a sample size of 30 students and a pay of \$15 per survey, I would need \$450 for my participants. Therefore, my study would overall request a budget of \$720.