Original Research Article

Purchasing Fast Fashion: Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior in Teenage Girls

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ABSTRACT

It is clear that fast fashion has a negative effect on the environment and that the industry is motivated to continue because it is profitable. However, it is not clear why consumers continue to purchase fast fashion. This study aimed to explore why consumers choose to purchase fast fashion, employing an anonymous survey to capture the purchasing decision making factors of teenage girls in the New York and New Jersey area of the United States. Through this survey, the research investigated which factors, such as price, trendiness, convenience, and awareness of environmental & socioeconomic impact, had the biggest impact on purchasing decisions. Although limited by a small and geographically narrow sample size, this exploratory study's findings suggest that price and high desire for clothing items positively influenced fast fashion purchasing decisions, while understanding the environmental and social impacts of fast fashion appear to have had the opposite effect on purchasing decisions in survey participants. The results highlight areas for future research and advocacy in shifting consumer behavior towards sustainability, as they help to better understand consumer fashion purchase decisions, helping to accurately target efforts to reduce fast fashion consumption.

Keywords: Fast Fashion; Consumer Behavior; Environmental Consciousness; Purchase Decisions; Secondhand Fashion

INTRODUCTION

Fast fashion is characterized by clothing that is produced via low-cost labor in developing countries, mass production of this clothing, quick production to move with the trends, and short shelf lives of clothing. It exists because the unethical and non-environmentally conscious methods of production used to create fast fashion items are the cheapest and most convenient for clothing brands. It is abundantly clear why these brands choose to produce clothes in this way, even with the socioeconomic devastation and environmental pollution that fast fashion can cause. Fast-moving trend cycles allow the fast fashion industry to thrive [1]. However, it is not clear why consumers make the usually conscious choice to purchase clothing from these fast fashion brands, even as their negative effects are commonly known. This study aims to understand the consumer behavior behind fast-fashion purchases. Consumer behavior is the study of how individuals decide to purchase, use, and eventually dispose of goods. Psychological, social, and economic factors are all considered. This poses the question: What are the factors that influence consumers to purchase fast fashion? Existing research has identified key motivators such as price, convenience, and social perception [2-4]. The author hypothesizes that desire and convenience are the biggest drivers in consumers' decisions to purchase fast fashion items, as they are particular to fast fashion

as well as to the preferences and constraints of teenage consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic and convenience-driven factors have consistently been identified as primary motivators of fast fashion consumption. Studies have shown that the prices and convenience of fast fashion are factors that positively influence consumer purchase decisions (2,4). These findings establish economic and convenience-related incentives as foundational drivers of fast fashion consumption. One case study was done on a particular H&M store in Indonesia and determined that only price and quick response influence purchasing behavior (2). This shows that convenience and affordability can outweigh other factors in purchases. Another research paper studies pre- and post-purchase factors of consumer behavior. It aims to investigate the relationships between perishability, scarcity, low price, attitude, impulses, and emotions in the context of fast fashion. They found that consumers attracted to scarcity, low prices, and perishability had a positive relationship with fast fashion. This positive relationship was also shown to encourage impulse purchases (5). Together, these studies show that fast fashion purchases are influenced by short-term economic benefits and psychological responses tied to impulse. Price sensitivity, convenience, and emotional motivation are resultantly investigated in this study.

Beyond price and convenience, research has increasingly focused on the role of social responsibility, brand perception, and marketing in shaping fast fashion purchasing behavior. A growing body of research has examined the psychological, social, and environmental factors that influence consumer behavior in relation to fast fashion. Beyond economic benefit, researchers have explored whether consumers consider social responsibility and sustainability in purchasing decisions. Another study surveyed a sample of consumers from a variety of countries. They found that consumers' perceived social responsibility and trust in the brand were the two biggest factors influencing consumers' purchases (3). Similarly, it has been found that brand awareness impacts consumer purchasing decisions (6). The findings of this study suggest that marketing and brand perception may also motivate consumers to make fast fashion purchases. Accordingly, social responsibility, environmental awareness, and marketing effects are explored.

Despite growing awareness of fast fashion's environmental consequences, emotional and psychological factors often outweigh sustainability concerns in consumer decision making. A study was done on consumer attitudes to the sustainability of fast fashion in the United Kingdom. The study found that while there has been an increased awareness of fast fashion's negative environmental impact in recent years, that does not directly translate to how unlikely one is to purchase fast fashion (4). The contrast between awareness and behavior contrasts with previous assumptions that environmental knowledge dissuades consumption. This is supported by the fact that other research has found social factors to have a much lesser impact on fast fashion purchasing decisions than psychological and personal factors (7). It has also been found that fast fashion consumption can lead to hoarding behaviors in consumers (8). These studies indicate the role of emotional responses is stronger than that of social responsibility, reinforcing a need to study desire, perceived necessity, and instant gratification.

However, the research done in this paper is unprecedented. Despite extensive research on adult and international consumer populations, fast fashion purchase decisions among teenagers in the United States have remained unexplored. Little research regarding consumer behavior, and specifically decision-making in fast fashion, has been conducted with the population of teenagers in the United States. The adolescent population is an important one to explore, as changes in adolescent behavior can become lifelong and make the fashion industry more sustainable in the long run. Adolescents are also particularly susceptible to trends, social media influence, and impulse-driven purchasing decisions, making them uniquely relevant to fast fashion. Thus, this paper fills a gap in the existing literature on the subject by focusing on teenage girls in the New York and New Jersey area, investigating how factors such as trendiness, price, convenience, marketing, and social and environmental awareness among other factors influence fast fashion purchasing practices. This study also contributes to the literature by examining more emotional factors, like desire and perceived necessity, which have been less explored. By assessing a broader range of motivators, this paper provides a more nuanced understanding of fast fashion consumer decision making among teenagers. While prior research had identified key economic, social, and psychological drivers of fast fashion consumption, the interactions between these factors within adolescents in the United States remain unclear, and this study directly addresses that gap.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Study Design

In this study, data was collected via an online survey. The targeted population of the survey was girls aged 13-19 from the states of New York and New Jersey. The survey was administered via the researcher's social media account using convenience sampling, so findings are exploratory.

Participant Recruitment

There were approximately 2000 people who were exposed to the survey and could have responded, and almost all were students or recent graduates of New York and New Jersey high schools. Of those followers, approximately 300 of them viewed the post with the survey which was open for 24 hours. It is unlikely that any non-followers responded to the survey, but it is not impossible. The distribution created a bias in the survey's participants, so findings may not be representative of the overall population of teenage girls.

Survey Development and Implementation

All participants answered all 19 questions, eight being background information and 11 being Likert scale questions about purchasing choices. At the beginning of the survey, participants were asked questions about their backgrounds. First, participants were asked about their age, gender, and location. Due to the sampling method, none of this information could have been used to identify participants. With all survey items coming from the researchers' own network and being students or recent alums of high schools, ages were only collected to ensure that data was usable in this study. Then, they were asked about their clothing consumption habits. Participants shared the average number of items of clothing that they purchase in a month, with responses ranging between less than 2, 2-5, 5,10, and greater than 10 items. They were then asked about the average amount of money that they spend on clothing in a month, ranging between $0-50, $50-100, $100-200, $200-400, $400-1000, and $1000+. Next, they were asked to characterize themselves as not environmentally conscious shoppers (does not factor into purchasing decisions), somewhat environmentally conscious (it's a factor in purchasing decisions), or very environmentally conscious (it is a main factor in purchasing decisions). Environmental consciousness is awareness of the environmental impact that an action, such as producing or consuming fast fashion, can have on the environment. Typically, it includes making an active effort to reduce waste, conserve resources, and support eco-friendly products and businesses. They were asked if they mostly shop for secondhand clothing, fast fashion, or other sources of clothing. Lastly, they were asked if they would be willing to spend more money on a sustainable alternative to a fast fashion item of clothing.

Then, participants moved into the next part of the survey, where they were asked to rank their likelihood of purchasing a fast fashion item of clothing based on certain factors. They had to rank these factors from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely). The full list of survey items is presented in Table 1.

These questions aimed to investigate the impact of the factors of trendiness, sale price, value, convenience, marketing, desire, perceived necessity, instant gratification, known short shelf life, understanding of environmental impact, and understanding of the social impact on the decisions of consumers, in this case, teenagers from New York and New Jersey, to purchase fast fashion.

Ethical Considerations

The survey was administered anonymously via Google Forms, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Participants were informed of the study's purpose prior to participation, and informed consent was obtained through voluntary completion of the survey.

Data Analysis

Results were compiled into a spreadsheet and then analyzed by exploring the counts and average value of responses to the different Likert scale questions to identify patterns and dominant motivators, and Chi-square analysis was used to test association between amount of spending and place of shopping.

RESULTS

Twenty-four people responded to the survey. A large portion of the study's population was 16-17 years old at the time of the survey's completion, with 45.8% being 16 and 29.2% being 17, but the range of participant ages was 13-19. Twenty-two participants were female, one was male, and one did not disclose their gender. Given the targeted population of the study was teenage girls, the following data are only those of the 22 female respondents. The majority of the respondents lived in New York State (90.9%), with the others residing in New Jersey. Half of the respondents purchase 2-5 items of clothing per month. The amount that they spent on these

Table 1. Likert-scale survey items assessing factors influencing fast fashion purchasing decisions.

Number	Survey Questions
1	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if it was trendy?
2	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if it was on a good sale?
3	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you perceived it to have good value in terms of price?
4	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if it had free and fast shipping?
5	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you saw it being promoted on social media?
6	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you loved it?
7	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you needed an outfit for an upcoming occasion?
8	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you needed instant gratification (e.g., taking your mind off of a bad day)?
9	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you knew it would remain in your closet for two years or less?
10	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you were aware that it created a lot of waste during production?
11	How likely would you be to purchase a fast fashion item of clothing if you were aware that the person who made it was not being paid a livable wage?

Response scale: 1 = very unlikely, 2 = unlikely, 3 = neutral, 4 = likely, 5 = very likely.

items varied, with 27.3% spending between $50 and $100 and the same amount of people spending $100-200. The majority of participants characterized themselves as somewhat environmentally conscious, with participants who characterized themselves as not environmentally coming as a close second. Only 4.5% of respondents described themselves as very environmentally conscious. The split between participants who mostly shopped second-hand and fast fashion was almost even, but only 22.7% of respondents shopped from other sources including small businesses and luxury brands, as seen in Figure 1.
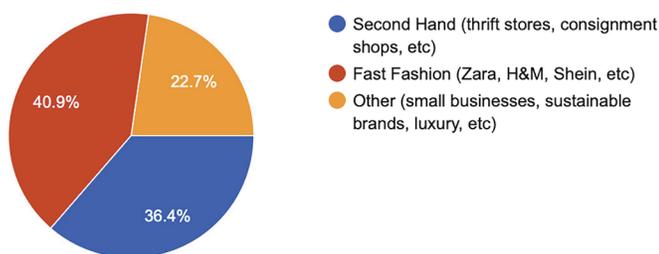
Figure 1. Distribution of teenage girls' primary place of shopping (n=22, ages 13-19, New York and New Jersey). Possible responses included second hand (blue), fast fashion (red), and other (yellow).

Responses indicated willingness to spend more on sustainable fashion. Most participants said they would be willing to spend more money on a sustainable alternative to fast fashion, and a similar number of participants said "maybe," in total comprising 95.5% of the surveyed population. No correlation was found between the amount spent in a month and main place of shopping using a Chi-square test of interdependence. Spending was grouped into <$200/month and >$200/month and was tested against the main place of shopping (fast fashion, secondhand, or other). The test indicated no significant association between amount of spending and place of shopping ($\chi^2(2) = 1.46$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting no correlation in this sample.

Factors with a mean >3.5 were considered to be factors that positively impact consumers' decisions to purchase fast fashion, and those with a mean <2.5 were considered factors that negatively impact these decisions. These thresholds were selected to distinguish responses that were clearly above the neutral midpoint of 3 on the 5-point Likert scale used. All other factors were considered neutral. Sales, with a mean of 3.55; desire, with a mean of 4.59 and, notably, a standard deviation of 0.73 (Figure 2); and perceived necessity, needing an outfit for an occasion, with a mean of 4.27 were deemed

positive factors. Alternatively, short lifespan, with a mean of 2.36; waste during production, with a mean of 2.32; and workers not being paid a livable wage, with a mean of 1.95 (Figure 3) and standard deviation of 0.86 were deemed negative factors. The factors of trendiness, low price, fast shipping, social media marketing, and need for instant gratification were not impactful to participants' shopping choices as the means of those data were between 2.5 and 3.5, inclusive. For all of these factors, standard deviation was less than 1.2, implying that neutrality towards these factors was common.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, though exploratory and indicative only of preliminary trends, were somewhat supportive of the author's initial hypothesis that convenience and desire for a clothing item would be the biggest factors in purchasing fast fashion. In the study, price appeared to be a major factor driving fast fashion purchases, which is consistent with findings from existing research (2, 5). However, it did not find that convenience was a major factor as free and fast shipping was a neutral factor, instead finding that the desire for an item was likely to encourage individuals to purchase fast fashion. It is possible that convenience was not found to be a factor in this study due to proximity to New York City, a place with endless shopping destinations, making anything from thrift stores to luxury brands equally accessible in terms of convenience. Further, the abundance and availability of online shopping may also reduce the importance of convenience as a motivator.
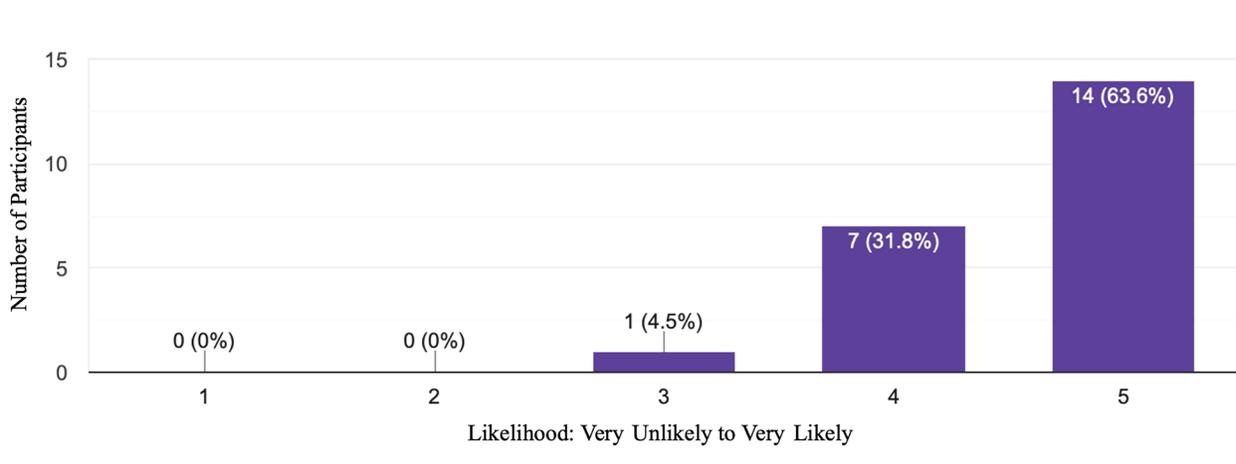
Figure 2. Likelihood of fast fashion purchase when teenage girls love the item (n=22, ages 13-19, New York and New Jersey). Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely).
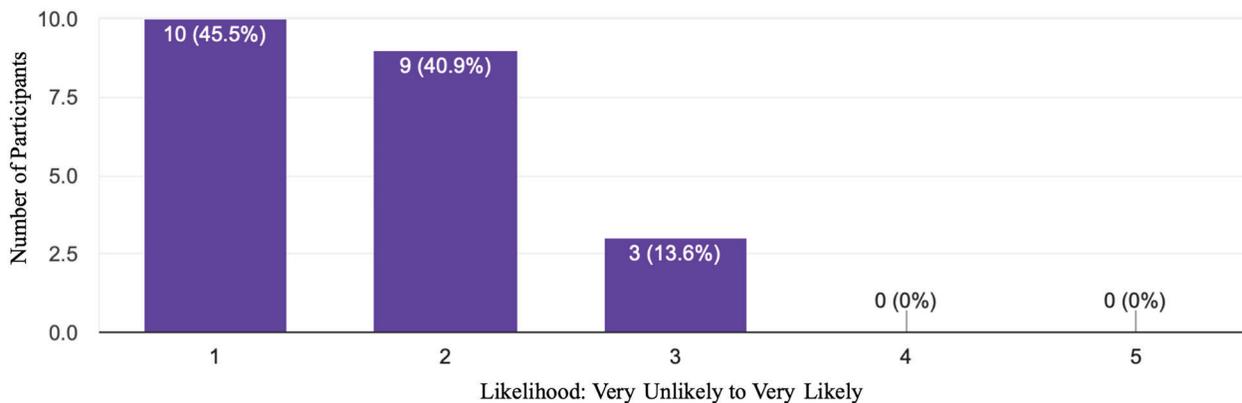
Figure 3. Likelihood of fast fashion purchase with awareness of workers producing garment not being paid a livable wage (n=22, ages 13-19, New York and New Jersey). Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely, 5 = very likely).

This study's findings were relatively consistent, as price was found to be one of the main factors.

Desire appears to play an important role in motivating fast fashion purchases amongst teenage girls, consistent with previous findings (5). This suggests an emotional or impulsive aspect of purchasing, particularly among teenagers, that may override rational environmental concerns. Interestingly, social media marketing, which is often believed to be highly influential among Gen Z, ranked low as a motivator, indicating possible skepticism or desensitization to such promotions. A notable finding is the role of environmental and social awareness in reducing fast fashion purchases. This suggests that educational campaigns could effectively shift behavior, particularly if paired with accessible sustainable clothing options.

There are some limitations to this study, as indicated earlier, that do not allow for deeper understanding of consumer behavior, nor for saying for certainty that these results are reflective of the entire teenage girl population in New York and New Jersey or for the entire US teenage girl population. The survey was shared within the researcher's network, so responses came only from teenage girls living in New York and New Jersey. Given the number of respondents, it is not possible to generalize decision-making factors to the population of girls in New York and New Jersey, and given the geographical concentration of respondents, the responses may not fully reflect the decision-making factors of teenage girls more broadly in the United States. Additionally, the study did not include open-ended questions, which might have enriched understanding of motivations. Future research could explore the importance of these factors in a larger and more diverse population of teenage girls or include longitudinal studies to assess how attitudes and behavior evolve over time.

Due to the recruitment of participants through the researcher's social media, participants are biased. Many attend private or specialized public New York City high schools and may be in a higher socioeconomic class than the average teenage girl. Additionally, the researcher's friends may have felt more compelled to answer the survey, and participants could assume there is a 'right choice' and attempt to select it in the survey. The aforementioned biases and convenience sampling method prevent these data from being generalizable to a larger population. Additionally, many participants may be attuned to environmental issues due to their rigorous academic environments, which often emphasize relevant social issues.

Applications of this research could include marketing campaigns, reduction of consumption volume, and new material production methods. Rather than the traditional emphasis that a product is sustainable, campaigns showing the issues that a product is not contributing to (e.g. bad working conditions, pollution) could be more effective. Reducing consumers' desire to purchase a high volume of clothing items could lead to high-spenders buying fewer items that are sustainably produced. Lastly, new textile and dye production methods could be investigated to lower the price of sustainable fashion items of clothing, as their prices often drive consumers away from making those purchases. Which of the aforementioned solutions are investigated or implemented in the future is dependent on the socioeconomic demographic being targeted. For high-spenders (>$200/month), the first and second proposals would be relevant, while only the third would be relevant for low-spenders (<$200/month). This is because high-spenders could buy a lower volume of more expensive clothes, but a major price change is inaccessible for low-spenders.

CONCLUSION

This study found among teenage girls in New York and New Jersey that good pricing and desire for a fast fashion item of clothing appear to be key motivators in fast fashion purchasing decisions. Awareness of the environmental impacts and labor concerns are associated with lower likelihood of purchasing fast fashion items. While not generalizable to a larger population, these findings align with broader patterns in the literature and highlight the economic and emotional complexity behind fast fashion consumption.

To promote sustainable consumer behavior, educational interventions should target increasing consumer awareness of the negative impacts of fast fashion while also offering viable alternatives. With further understanding of what drives these purchasing decisions, the world can begin to move towards a more sustainable fashion industry by shaping more effective strategies to reduce fast fashion consumption and therefore its negative environmental and ethical impacts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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