

**Generation Sustainable: A Look into the Relationship Between Generation Z Attitudes and
Behaviors and Sustainable Fashion**

Emalee Buckley

Arts and Entertainment Management Major

Thesis Advisor: Deborah Fain

Lubin School of Business

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Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between Generation Z attitudes and behaviors, and sustainable fashion. Specifically, it seeks to explore whether Generation Z consumer attitudes are reflected in their purchasing behavior of fashion products. For the purposes of this paper, sustainable fashion is defined as fashion that is as sustainable as possible through every step of the product life cycle, taking into account both environmental and socio-economic effects. 198 participants from Generation Z took part in a survey that measured their relationship with the environment, sustainability, and the fashion industry, to gain a better grasp of how they think and behave as consumers. With study limitations in mind, the survey shows Generation Z to be slightly more sensitive as a consumer to environmental issues and their impact on society, as well as more supportive of sustainability and sustainable fashion than other generations, but not to a particularly high extent. There is also an attitude-behavior gap presented among participants of purchasing behaviors not reflecting highly sustainable attitudes that is consistent with existing research on consumers. Results have implications for possible shrinking of this gap in the future spearheaded by Generation Z consumers, and potential growth for the sustainable fashion industry.

Introduction

Understanding the minds of consumers is the backbone for marketers and the development of companies. Research on big generations like Millennials and Baby Boomers has deluged society with information, but with the youngest millennial heading into their mid-twenties and the oldest baby boomer at 65, there are younger consumers that are beginning

to have the power to shape the future of industries. Generation Z, born between 1997-2010 is a young and powerful generation of consumers with incredible buying power, and a limited amount of research currently existing that explores them. In understanding consumers, researchers need to know what they think, what motivates them, and how they behave. The few studies that exist with a focus on Generation Z show them to be a somewhat difficult group to understand due to a contradictory nature in their values and behaviors, but aside from that, there is not enough information available to provide a solid understanding and encourage more research.

There has been a rise of sustainable fashion in recent years in tandem with rising environmental concerns, companies boasting their conscious, sustainable behaviors and practices throughout the supply chain. Sustainable fashion is practically the antithesis to fast fashion which has dominated the fashion industry for decades. It is up to consumers which reigns more successful, and a fall in fast fashion recently suggests that sustainable fashion is gaining clout among consumers. There is research on how consumers overall feel about sustainable fashion, though there is not enough focus on where individual generations stand on their relationship with it.

This study explores Generation Z's relationship with sustainable fashion, particularly their attitudes toward it and their resulting behavior when making purchases. It involves looking into how generation Z shops, how they feel about environmental issues, their thoughts on sustainability and sustainable fashion, and their purchasing choices. A relevant purpose of this paper is to better understand Generation Z and their relationship to fashion in order to get some insight on the potential future paths the fashion industry could take, and how instrumental

Generation Z is to constructing that future.

Literature Review

The Conscious Consumer

Amidst rising concerns about the environment and these issues having been brought front and center in recent years, a more conscious type of consumer has emerged – the conscious consumer – with new behaviors that retailers and advertisers have had to adjust to meet.

Research shows the strongest causes for conscious behavior are climate change efforts and natural disasters (We Are Social [WAS], 2019) which have been heavy in news rotation in the past decade. Market research studies show that implementing some form of sustainability into business is essentially the new normal, in light of 61% of consumers worried about climate change, and 53% believing that their purchases could make a difference in the world.

Additionally, 30% of consumers will pay more for clothes if they last longer and if the steps in the manufacturing process produce less waste (Edelson, 2018). 30% is not particularly high in comparison to the percentage of consumers that feel concern for environmental issues, but research shows that this could be due to a lack of transparency and traceability across the supply chain (Edelson, 2018). Maria Coronado, a senior consultant with Euromonitor International, a leading provider for global business intelligence and strategic market analysis, attests that “understanding where products come from, how the materials were sourced, transported and manufactured could make a difference in their willingness to pay more for ethical products” (Edelson, 2018, p. 1). Ethical products cost more to make, so are naturally more expensive.

When consumers are better educated on products and the process of how they’re made, they will

then become more conscious of the purchasing choices they are making and more receptive to higher pricing, if they have the available income to do so.

The conscious consumer market is now a \$300 billion market, with 40% of consumers participating in it, and retailers are taking notice (Cohen & Muñoz, 2017). Existing brands have taken steps to implement more ethical practices and be more transparent about where their products come from. New sustainable brands have also emerged that truly cater to the conscious consumer from a positive brand identity and story, to educational resources that help make buyers feel more enthusiastic about spending more for a product that aligns with their morals. A good conscious consumer will take the time to do research into the brands they buy from to make sure their values align with the company and that the companies are not exaggerating their sustainability through “greenwashing” (Cohen & Muñoz, 2017). Greenwashing is defined as “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (UL, 2019). Many argue that greenwashing needs to be regulated because of its deceiving nature, and how it could potentially keep companies from truly going green when they can just implement greenwashing (Cruz & Shankar, 2018). Research also suggests that even being a conscious consumer and concerned for the environment is not enough for a consumer to detect greenwashing in advertising (Schmuck, Matthes & Naderer, 2018).

Generation Z as an Appealing Target Market

Millennials have long been the primary focus of companies, marketing campaigns, and

researchers As an aging population, its members now between the ages of 24-39, the attention of market researchers has started to turn to the following generation of younger consumers with more buying power - Generation Z consisting of those born from 1997-2010 (Dimock, 2019). With the youngest of this generation at just over 10 years and the oldest at 23 and just starting to enter the workforce, they are an important group for retailers to look to next to in order to continue to thrive and to understand the future of consumer behavior. Research suggests that this post-millennial generation is on track for becoming the most well-educated generation to date and is already the most diverse (Fry & Parker, 2018). Consumers become more interested in conscious consumption when they're properly educated on the extent of the environmental problems we face, and with Gen Z being a well-educated group and more exposed to social and environmental issues, they are the prime candidates for being pro-sustainable and a conscious consumer. Marketers are still trying to get a grasp on Generation Z - how they think, how they behave, and what motivates them (WAS, 2019) but research so far is consistent with the fact that sustainability is important to them. Generation Z consumers are the most likely to focus on the story of a product and all the connections between the resources used, the production process, the environment, and the consumers (Dimock, 2019).

With the shift to focusing on Generation Z still being somewhat new, research on consumers of this generation is not yet particularly diverse or expansive; though the literature available suggests Generation Z has a lot of power in dictating the future of retail. Gen Z is very attractive as a target market not because of their socially conscious views, but because of their immense buying power. Studies show they have an estimated \$150 billion in buying power, and also make up the largest percentage of the population than any other generation, accounting for

about 40% of global consumers now in 2020 (Blake & Callahan, 2019). McKinsey & Co., one of the world's largest consulting firms stresses that being concerned and taking action over environmental and social issues is not restricted to the younger consumers of Millennials and Generation Z (Blake & Callahan, 2019). Considering the age, large population, and buying power of Generation Z however, they do have the most power to affect the retail industry and generate change, so, therefore, are where companies should be placing their focus.

Generation Z buying power is often cited as a reason to focus on that group of consumers (Blake & Callahan, 2019), but not all studies take into account that a large portion of Generation Z are currently children, still being supported by a family, and therefore their enormous purchasing power is not necessarily their own. Where the buying power originates from isn't important for marketers right now though. Coronado states that "interest globally in ethical [issues] peaks after age 30" but "interest is usually higher in consumers with children" (Edelson, 2018, p. 1). Additionally, a 2015 *Cassandra Report* finds that Generation Z is responsible for influencing 93% of all household purchases, meaning parents purchasing is directed a lot by kids of Generation Z still living at home (Deep Focus, 2015). With a higher interest in sustainability in older generations with children and interest among the children themselves, implementing sustainability has become a priority for many companies.

Fast Fashion

Fast fashion emerged in response to consumer desire for access to the latest clothing trends for a fraction of the price, and since the early 2000s has become a staple of the fashion industry and has been able to dominate the industry for a number of reasons. The ever-changing

consumer attitudes in regards to clothing, combined with low-cost production and therefore low prices for shoppers, “has led to a culture of impulse buying in the fashion industry” (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Consumers didn’t think much of fashion's impact on society until recently, or to ask where their clothes were coming from and how they were being made (Beard, 2008). In his paper on “The Branding of Ethical Fashion and the Consumer”, Nathaniel Beard refers to the ideas of Abigail Petit (2007), and how the lack of questioning could be due to how clothing is related to the body, not health, and any detrimental effects of clothing to the body are less noticeable or rarely acknowledged (as cited in Beard, 2008). It is also a possibility that people have not truly seen until recently the big impact fashion can have on society and the environment. Another reason fast fashion has been so big and long-lasting a trend is simply because of its convenience for consumers. People have become so accustomed to easily available and affordable on-trend fashion, with little guilt when it comes to throwing it away (Beard, 2008) which has allowed the fast fashion empire to continue to thrive. Identity is additionally very important to consumers, and fast fashion has enabled consumers to stay on trend with fashion and create their desirable identity. This desire to put a certain version of themselves forward often outweighed any motivation to be sustainable and ethical (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

There is no shortage of studies on how the fashion industry affects the environment across the supply chain. It is one of the highest polluting industries and leaves an enormous carbon footprint. The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions (Conca, 2015), contributes largely to industrial waste, particularly water pollution (Brewer, 2019), and the quick turnover and cheap prices of fast fashion promote high production and disposal of products. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), estimates that 12.8 million tons of

clothing and footwear were generated in 2017, 8.9 million tons of which ended up in landfills (EPA, 2019).

The fashion industry needs to keep up with consumer demands and desire to always have the latest trends, and that is what caused it to evolve into a fast-fashion dominated industry. Even before fast fashion took center stage, there was always the need to be producing new, on trend products that defined the industry. That however used to be exclusive to the wealthiest of consumers only, those with the most money being able to show so by having access to the latest trends. Over the years, fashion adapted to accommodate the average consumer, reducing financial costs but creating large environmental costs (Brewer, 2019). The fast pace of fashion has only sped up in the past decade even among environmental concerns. Fashion as an industry appears to be “inherently diametrically opposed to sustainability” (Brewer, 2019). It seems like the two could not possibly go hand in hand, but brands and consumers have challenged that in recent years.

Sustainability in Fashion

Studies have found young consumers don't generally associate sustainability with fashion but do have an interest in environmentalism (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012). The growth of ethical consumption among consumers, and an interest in understanding the production side of fashion and seeing sustainability there, provides a solid enough framework for a new market of consumers for sustainable fashion (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). In response to the rise of the more conscious consumer, fashion companies have begun to incorporate

sustainability practices to appeal to the growing market, some making it the pillar of their companies, others doing just enough to show they practice corporate social responsibility. Research has suggested that while consumers exhibit concern for the environment in terms of fashion, “egotistical values” show more than “altruistic values” when it comes to sustainable fashion consumption in consumers. This maintains the idea that high quality properties of sustainable fashion will appeal to both egotistical and altruistic needs for the targeted consumer (Lundblad & Davies, 2016).

Providing a concrete definition of sustainable fashion is tough because there is no industry standard or regulation. There has been more usage of terms like eco-fashion, fair trade, and slow fashion among brands, but a movement to the term sustainable fashion might be less confusing for consumers as it encompasses all these terms (Lundblad & Davies, 2016). In contrast to fast fashion, “companies that emphasize more sustainable practices make up the slow fashion movement, prizing craftsmanship, good stewardship, and quality products” (Brewer, 2019, p. 7). Companies that embrace the slow fashion movement incorporate and promote sustainability through every part of their company including sourcing resources, the materials used, production techniques, and labor practices (Brewer, 2019).

Another sustainable option, particularly among younger consumers, is resale. Over the last decade, there’s been steady growth in this market, something previously primarily for lower-income families, that have been rebranded into a cool shopping experience for vintage or exclusive items (Beard, 2008). There is much less stigma among younger consumers about thrift shopping, and they are a major contributor to the recent growth of the second-hand clothing industry (Xu, Chen, Burman & Zhao, 2014). There are also findings that consumers don’t just

partake in thrift shopping for its sustainable nature, but also because they feel motivation for it for the feelings of fun and being “thrifty” that have become associated with it (Bardhi & Arnould, 2005). As for the sustainability of thrifting and choosing resale “buying a used garment extends its life, on average, by 2.2 years, which reduces its carbon waste and footprint by 73 percent” (Edelson, 2018, p. 1).

Gap between Attitude and Consumer Behavior

Even though consumers have become more environmentally conscious, our society isn’t at a point where that is the primary driver in consumer purchasing behavior (Global Fashion Agenda [GFA], 2019). There is a significant gap across the generations between consumer attitudes and their behaviors. While society continues to get greener, people wanting to make more disciplined shopping choices depends a lot on their demographics (Edelson, 2018). Most studies do not show whether consumers that express concern for environmental issues actually follow through and purchase sustainable products, and only survey what the consumer may believe and want. Many may advocate for greener choices in fashion but merely from a lifestyle standpoint, yearning for approval from society for making and believing in smart choices rather than actually caring about the effects (Beard, 2008).

In the “Pulse of the Fashion industry 2019 update”, published by Global Fashion Agenda, the report discusses how consumer considerations of sustainable practices aren’t yet at the point of being powerful enough to be the primary driver of purchasing behavior. While 75% of surveyed consumers “view sustainability as extremely or very important” to them only 7% reported that sustainability is their “key purchasing criterion”. (GFA, 2019, p. 1). With this

considerably large gap between attitude and behavior, it suggests that while consumer attitudes may be in the realm of consumer consciousness, their purchasing behavior may not necessarily reflect that. Evidence shows “there is a polarization in behavior, amongst consumers, on the matter of ethical or ecofashion” (Beard, 2008, p.449).

This gap between attitude and behavior lends to “the fast fashion conundrum” where consumers need to support sustainable fashion by buying it, but even though consumers admit to caring more about unethical behavior among companies, their attitude in favor of sustainability isn’t always reflected in their resulting purchasing behavior (McNeill & Moore, 2015). It is important to note that often this is because of these consumers not being able to afford sustainable fashion, it being naturally more expensive due to the production being more expensive. A study of young consumers showed that they have a concern about how their buying decisions in relation to non-fashion purchases may have negative impacts, but they didn’t display this concern when it came to purchasing fashion, and there was a disconnect between their choices in fashion and their values (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012).

Generation Z has been identified as “a paradoxical generation, shaping their world view through what seems like a kaleidoscope of contradictions” (WAS, 2019). There is not much existing literature on Generation Z specifically in regards to the attitude-behavior gap among consumers, but research available on millennials, and the paradoxical nature of Generation Z suggests that this gap is similar. Generation Z has so far displayed a paradox when it comes to sustainable fashion and fast fashion. This is possibly due to understanding sustainability in fashion being a bit more confusing than other industries. There are a plethora of different words used to advertise sustainable fashion like “ethical” “eco” “ecofashion” “fair trade” “organic” and

“natural” that overwhelm consumers, and with no official regulations in place in the industry, they are left to navigate these companies themselves (Beard, 2008). A study diving into understanding the attitude-behavior gap in relation to the sustainable fashion industry introduced price as the largest contributor in not purchasing ethical fashion, and that a lack of information and transparency further influences consumer decisions (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Current literature on the topic shows there is a significant gap between consumer attitude and their subsequent buying behavior in the sustainable fashion industry. Understanding these factors that contribute to purchasing decisions can help produce new approaches and tactics to tackling sustainable fashion in the future (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018).

Price is a big contributor in the decision-making process that leads to choosing to not buy sustainable, but research shows that a larger number of people committing to sustainable fashion could help decrease its price. A story in Harper’s Bazaar compares it to organic food. Organic food prices run higher, but more people purchase it now, so prices have started to go down, consumers paying 7.5% more in 2018 in comparison to 9% more in 2014 (Davis, 2019). If more people are convinced to take part in the sustainable fashion movement, eventually prices will drop (Davis, 2019).

Research Question

The purpose of my research is to explore the attitudes and consumer behavior of Generation Z in relation to sustainable fashion. There is no specific industry definition for sustainable fashion, but for the purposes of this paper, it is defined as fashion that is as sustainable as possible through every step of the product life cycle, taking into account both

environmental and socio-economic effects. This means products remaining sustainable along every step of the supply chain from material sourcing, product manufacturing, marketing, and shipping.

As the generation that has had a front-row seat to climate change and the effects it has on society, Generation Z has been the most exposed to these issues. This paper seeks to determine if Generation Z is more sensitive to environmental and climate issues and whether they are more receptive to sustainable fashion and more willing to support sustainable practices and be a conscious consumer within the fashion industry. There is a significant gap among consumers between their attitudes and their purchasing behaviors, and this paper also seeks to determine if that gap is smaller in Generation Z than older generations, or if there is evidence that it will become smaller.

Methodology

To observe the relationship between Generation Z consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior with sustainable fashion, quantitative methods were employed in the form of an online survey. My review of the existing literature suggests that more statistical data and research on Generation Z would be beneficial in further understanding them as consumers. As a still young population, information on Generation Z is not yet very extensive, and there are some conflicting results in existing data when it comes to consumer behavior due to contradictory and unpredictable behavior they have been shown to exhibit, possibly just due to not enough studies to create an average in data. The purpose of the survey is to try and gain a better understanding of Generation Z consumer choices in fashion in relation to their attitudes. Participants completed a survey of 27 questions including general demographic questions, attitudes toward the

environment and sustainable fashion, shopping habits, etc. I believe that my research has provided information that contributes to existing literature, and can offer insights on what the future direction of fashion may be and exactly how Generation Z consumers may factor into that future.

Participants

The participants that are under consideration for this study are adults ages 18 and over within Generation Z. Therefore participants were between the ages of 18-23. A sample of 198 participants was surveyed. Respondents were recruited through social media and emails sent out to students at Pace University. Of the participants, 37 are 18 years old, 27 are 19, 27 are 20, 52 are 21, 38 are 22, and 17 are 23.

Results

Data was collected from 198 participants that completed the survey. Participants were between the ages of 18-23. The majority of respondents were female (81.8% vs 18.2% male) and age 21 (52 participants). Answers were not surprising based on current market research on consumers. This paper's purpose was to determine if Generation Z is somewhat more concerned with and aware of environmental issues including sustainability, and willing to commit more to sustainable brands than older generations.

Nearly 72.2% of respondents said they are concerned about the environment either a great deal or a lot, and for nearly 74% of respondents sustainability is extremely or very important to them. 78.2% of participants agree that the fashion industry has a high to very high

impact on the environment, and 73.2% are supportive to very supportive of the sustainable fashion industry. Results revealed however that despite Generation Z's environmental concerns and support for sustainability, only 6.6% of respondents purchase sustainable fashion often with it making up most of their wardrobe, while 46% say they sometimes purchase sustainable clothes.

25.3% say they are willing to pay more for sustainable fashion, 54% willing to pay up to 10% more, and 29.8% willing to pay up to 25%. A larger nearly 59.6% say they would purchase sustainable fashion if it was cheaper. This response is understandable, as 79.1% of respondents report a yearly income of under \$15,000 dollars not leaving much in terms of disposable income, fast fashion options, therefore, being cheaper and often more attractive. Much of Generation Z is still in school, and at least partially still supported by other sources such as parents. The positive results of other survey questions in regards to support for and interest in sustainability suggest there could be an uptick in Generation Z purchases of sustainable fashion as many of them enter the workforce and pursue jobs with higher salaries offering more disposable income. Price is also the main quality survey participants said they consider when shopping for fashion with nearly 95% saying the price is a key factor, with quality, style, and fit also ranked as important factors. Sustainability is not as relevant of a factor, though still 27.8% of respondents say it is a key factor, and 52% said it was a somewhat important purchasing criteria for them when shopping. 14.1% say it is very important as a purchasing criterion, and 30.3% admit it is not very important or not important at all.

As discussed, there is no industry standard when it comes to sustainable fashion, so there are many different words associated with it. According to the survey, the words participants

associate most with sustainable fashion are sustainable packaging (73.2%), use of recycled materials (71.7%), and high quality/long-lasting (66.7%). The words least associated are transparent supply chains (34.8%), donation (40.9%), and other (1%). A large percentage of participants agree that having some sort of regulated measuring system for sustainability (i.e. scale of 1-10) would be effective. 86.8% strongly agree or agree that it would encourage them to shop sustainable fashion more, and 87.7% agree it would make it easier to understand what features define sustainable fashion. Additionally, nearly all respondents (96%) agree that brands should be transparent about where the materials used in their products come from, and 94% have medium to high interest in knowing what brands they use do to minimize their impact on the environment. 59.4% of participants also agree that the government has a duty to ensure clothing is produced sustainably. Survey results suggest that implementing some government regulation like a system to measure sustainability and laws to ensure a level of sustainable clothing production would garner more interest in the industry.

The results of this survey also support research presented in the available literature that consumers do not associate fashion with environmental purchases as much as they do other industries and products. 29.8% of participants always or often consider the social/environmental impact of their overall purchases before they buy them, but in comparison, only 22.4% always or often consider this when buying specifically fashion. Some respondents also express not having much knowledge of the different aspects of the fashion industry. 22.7% are not sure if they already had sustainable fashion in their wardrobe, and 17.7% report not being sure what fast fashion is.

Responses reveal a somewhat less positive relationship among Generation Z and fast

fashion than other generations. No participants exclusively purchase fast fashion, and only 24.2% often purchase it. In comparison, 27.7% rarely or never purchase fast fashion. Respondents also show to be very responsible when it comes to disposing of their old and unworn clothing. 83.7% choose to donate when they get rid of them, and no participants flat out throw them away.

Finally, the survey's Generation Z responders presented interesting results in their shopping habits. 69.4% say they prefer shopping in store, and most of them do the majority of their shopping in store (53.3% doing all or most of it), despite the major popularity of online shopping today. Still, 36% say they do most of their shopping online, possibly due to the more convenient nature of it. Fast fashion, in particular, is very easy to buy online, constant sales, and consistently low prices making the risks associated with making impulsive buying decisions very low, where more care may go into sustainable fashion purchases considering the higher price and a therefore higher need for good fit and quality.

Discussion

In this study, it shows that Generation Z is sensitive to and concerned about the environment, and it shows very positive attitudes toward sustainability and sustainable fashion. Results are similar to existing research on consumers but show Generation Z to be somewhat more receptive to environmental concerns and sustainability than other generations. The study also reveals the attitude-behavior gap to be much the same for Generation Z as other generations, but based on highly positive results in terms of questions pertaining to attitude, it suggests that it could potentially continue to get smaller as this generation's members get older and enter the

workforce. In theory, a portion of the population will begin to secure jobs that allow them to be self-supportive and give them access to the disposable income they may not have had before, and could use towards things like being a more conscious consumer. This study also shows that price remains to be the biggest barrier towards becoming a conscious consumer and making sustainable fashion purchases and closing the attitude-behavior gap in the sustainable fashion industry. It is also shown that another contributor to consumers not making sustainable fashion choices could be due to the continued lack of transparency and clarity in the industry due to no regulation of the industry

Rising Concern

Research has shown a rise in consumer concern for the environment, resulting in a more conscious consumer. Research shows conscious consumers respond the most to climate change and natural disasters (We Are Social [WAS], 2019). 61% of consumers have been reported to be concerned about climate change (Edelson, 2018), and this study revealed that 72.2% of Generation Z participants were concerned about the environment a great deal or a lot. This shows evidence that Generation Z consumers are more sensitive to environmental concerns than other generations.

Generation Z is expected to become the most well-educated generation (Fry & Parker, 2018), and research suggests that the more properly educated on the environmental problems we face, the more interested consumers will be in conscious consumption (Edelson, 2018). This study shows that participants are knowledgeable about the issues our environment face and care about these issues to a high degree. Despite the Generation Z concern, however, research

participants show that it is not enough to dictate their decisions when shopping and that they let other factors dictate their shopping.

Factors Negatively Affecting Sustainable Fashion Growth

Price

Consistent with existing research, the price was the largest contributor for participants in not making sustainable fashion purchases (Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018). Additionally consistent was the fact that the majority of study participants are very supportive of sustainability, but it has not yet reached a point where that is powerful enough to drive purchasing behavior over stronger factors like price. A report published by the Global Fashion Agenda revealed 75% of consumers believe sustainability to be very important, with only 7% actually using it as a key factor when shopping (GFA, 2019, p. 1). In this study, results were similar, with 73.8% finding sustainability very or extremely important, but only 6.6% admitting they actually purchase sustainable fashion often.

Fast Fashion is the big substitute that stands in the way of sustainable fashion, addressing consumer desire for affordable products. Price has shown to be a strong enough motivator that consumers are willing to ignore their values in order to get cheaper prices. In this study, Generation Z consumers did show that they wouldn't sacrifice everything for price. 66.7% of respondents say quality is a key factor for them when shopping for fashion, and 27.8% consider sustainability a key factor to consider. Research has shown through other sustainable trends that the more people that are buying, the cheaper prices will eventually become. With organic food only 7.5% more expensive in 2018 from 9% in 2014, that is lower than the 10% more that 54%

of survey participants are willing to pay for sustainable fashion.

Lack of Transparency

Research has also shown that a lack of transparency in fashion could negatively affect the growth of sustainable fashion. This survey is consistent with research that says consumers understanding the products they buy from where they come from, how materials are sourced, and how products are transported could change their willingness to pay more (Edelson, 2018). The majority of study participants agree that brands should be more transparent, and have an interest in knowing what brands they use do to minimize their impact on the environment. They also agree that in addition to more transparency, a more clear understanding of sustainability like a measuring system would encourage them to purchase more sustainable fashion.

Generation Z Attitude-Behavior Gap

The attitude-behavior gap indicated by this study and others shows that there are factors in play stymying the growth of sustainable products, companies, and practices. This study, in combination with other studies, shows the price to be the biggest culprit behind the attitude-behavior gap of consumers. This gap is even more relevant within the fashion industry, previous research shows that while young consumers worry about the negative impacts of their buying decision, this concern for some reason does not translate over the same way with fashion buying decisions. This presents a clear disconnect between their values and their choices (Joy, Sherry, Venkatesh, Wang, & Chan, 2012). This was the same for this paper's study, there is a 7.4% gap in participants always or often considering the social/environmental impact of fashion purchases vs other purchases, the impact being considered less when it comes to fashion.

This attitude-behavior gap being larger when it comes to the fashion industry could be

due to consumers not fully understanding the negative impacts of fast fashion, or what sustainable fashion entails. Study participants agreed that some type of measuring system for sustainability would make it easier to understand. While participants showed a strong understanding of environmental issues, there was some evidence that they may not have all the relevant information. Even though they agreed the fashion industry has a high impact on the environment, 17.7% of respondents not knowing what fast fashion is, and 22.7% not sure if they own sustainable clothing. So many different factors, words, and phrases are associated with sustainable fashion, which can confuse consumers, and with no government regulations in place, which 59.4% of survey respondents think is a duty of the government to implement, consumers are left to navigate companies themselves (Beard, 2008).

Implications for the Fashion Industry

The fashion industry is ever-changing, and it is impossible to know exactly where it is headed next. By understanding consumers, however, predictions can be made on what will be the next big style or trend. In determining the relationship between Generation Z attitudes and behaviors and sustainable fashion, this study has collected some useful information that could be used to predict the effect Generation Z could have on the fashion industry. With 73.2% of respondents supportive or very supportive of sustainable fashion, 52.6% sometimes or often purchasing it, and 83.8% being willing to pay 10-25% more for it, things look positive for the future of sustainable fashion. Additionally, 27.7% of respondents reporting that they rarely or never purchase fast fashion, coupled with the recent struggle of some fast fashion brands that could further support reports of a fast-fashion decline. Since Generation Z shows to be just as, if

not more interested in sustainable fashion as other consumers and is still a young generation with room to grow and be influenced, they are an excellent target market for sustainable fashion brands to consider. With price being the main factor that prevents them from buying sustainable, targeting them in a way that makes a slightly higher purchase worth it could be the key to making sustainable fashion the first choice in fashion for Generation Z.

Study Limitations

One limitation of this study was the lack of access to a portion of the target group. Due to the focus of my research being Generation Z, the age range being 10-23, a portion of my target group are minors and under the legal age of 18. Because of time limitations, from Pace University's internal review board I received an exempt determination for my thesis research. The revised Common Rule for the exempt determination excludes conducting research with minors/children, so therefore results of the study only include participants 18 and over. Research has been conducted and the results reviewed with an understanding that the outcomes will be slightly skewed due to a portion of my research demographic being unable to provide their responses.

Another limitation is that respondents of my survey were of a convenience sample, many respondents being Pace University students or peers on social media. Due to my limited method of survey distribution, diversity of respondents was limited and the majority of my respondents ended up being female, neither of which is representative of the general population. Random sampling would have been a better option for this type of research which allows for a more unbiased representation of the population, though it is more difficult to do, and resources did not

allow for random sampling, therefore convenience sampling was used. Another limitation is that my data comes from a smaller sample size than preferable for a study. A larger, more widely distributed survey including Generation Z minors ages 10-17 being included, would yield more reliable results.

Suggestions for Future Research

Generation Z is starting to gain more attention, so research on its consumers has increased, though data and literature available on the topic is still relatively limited. Research on Generation Z and their standing as conscious consumers as well as their relationship with sustainability are even more limited. There is a lot of research available on consumers as a whole and focused research on older generations like Millennials, but there is a need for more focused research on Generation Z in order to understand them as consumers and market to them. It is possible that the results of this study were due to chance, sample size, or certain factors not being considered, so there is a need for replication of the research in this study on a larger scale to add to the literature available.

Future studies should start with gaining a better understanding of Generation Z as a whole, so later research can be conducted on a more focused area like sustainable fashion, with copious amounts of reliable information available to make research easier and more consistent. Generation Z is still a young generation, with much growing up to do, but the sooner more research is conducted the more in-depth data there will be available for research down the line.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to explore the relationship between Generation Z and sustainable fashion and to determine whether Generation Z displays a smaller gap between attitude and behavior when it comes to shopping for fashion than other generations that present a noticeable disparity between the two, in the form of behaviors not reflecting otherwise sustainable attitudes. Ultimately, this study shows positive attitudes towards caring about the environment and sustainability and sustainable fashion. Generation Z appears to be more aware of and concerned about the environment as well as more interested in sustainability but there is evidence of an attitude-behavior gap just as large as other consumers.

Existing research has shown that the average consumer does care about the environment and how their choices affect it and that there is a rise of the conscious consumer. With a rise in the popularity of sustainable fashion, and Generation Z being the generation most exposed to environmental issues, it is logical to consider that they may, therefore, be more sensitive to problems in the environment and more supportive of sustainable fashion practices. The study results show that environmental consciousness and sustainable practices are important to them and relevant to their profile as consumers. While Generation Z did not prove less susceptible to the attitude-behavior gap, they showed strong support for the environment and sustainability and sustainable fashion, and are a young generation with room for growth. There is a chance that as Generation Z continues to get older and more independent and self-sufficient, they will become even more invested in the environment and sustainability like sustainable fashion. This could result in the attitude-behavior gap proceeding to shrink for Generation Z in the next several years and turning them into the most sustainable generation seen yet. Only further research and time, however, will tell how Generation Z's relationship with sustainable fashion will continue to

develop.

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