

FAST FASHION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The fashion industry has undergone significant transformation, specifically in the last two decades. Fashion industry changes have forced manufacturers to seek low cost and multiple options in design, as well as quick to market, which are crucial strategies for maintaining a beneficial position in an increasingly globally competitive market. The purpose of this article to review the literature on changes that have taken place in the fashion apparel industry since the 1990s, with particular emphasis placed on the development of the concept of "throwaway" or "fast fashion." It provides an overview of fast fashion v/s sustainable fashion from both a supplier and a consumer's point of view, and it attracts attention to a number of potential research questions.

Key words: Fashion industry, fast fashion, sustainability, consumer behaviour

Introduction

Fashion is based on emotions, such as being "aesthetically beautiful, conquering others, and the emotional components being dependent on the feelings and emotions of the customer." Most people do not choose fashion things based on their comfort, durability, value, or quality. And where fast fashion comes into the picture.

Fast fashion is a widely known term which is used to readily available inexpensive clothing. The phrase "Fast" itself explains the quick fashion which speedily transits designs from the ramp walk to the store, keeping up with the ongoing desire for new, unique and trendy looks amongst consumers and making them obsessed with getting the next thing (Joy et al 2012). It is similar to fast food... addictive and disposable. It is a common phenomenon that fashion represents the strata and an individual's personality, and fast fashion products ensure fulfilment of consumer demands, ensuring quick product cycles, and speedier production.

Fast fashion become a method of producing new inventory which is constantly released across the year at prices that are significantly lower than those in other sectors of the industry. It started in the 1980's when the life cycle of clothing was continuously shortened and the use and disposal of clothing became faster and faster (Bick et al 2018). According to the McKensey Global Fashion Index 2019, Since 2019 overall fashion segment has grown between 3.5-4.5% and, on the contrary, fast fashion has grown by 21%. In this context Niinimaki et al (2020) mentioned that if its continues the overconsumption of clothes...it is going to be major threat to the environment.

Why consumers prefer to buy Fast Fashion products?

Fast fashion is a commercial phenomenon that enables each and every

person to dress in the most recent fashion trends (Bhardwaj, V.; Fairhurst, A.,2010). Today's consumers always looking for something new and pocket friendly products. They buy products and services to meet their physical requirements, express themselves, and share their views and values. This means that the items and services clients buy suit not just their bodily needs, but also their psychological and societal ones. Robertson and Kassarian (1991) clearly defined consumer buying behaviour as physical, emotional and mental activity which can be witnessed in people while selection, purchase, use and dispose of services and goods to satisfy their needs. Kotler (2011) also opined that consumer's buying decisions have influence by various psychological elements such as motive, perception, knowledge, opinions and attitudes. Consumers purchased 60% more clothes in 2014 than they did in 2000 and discarded 85% of them the next year (Remy, Speelman, & Swartz, 2016). Today's consumers take pleasure in seeing new products in their favourite stores every week or in a two week, which has resulted in an increase demand for new fashion collections in a quicker period of time from a fashion industry. To sustain in the competitive and demanding environment industry strive to achieve the demand by compromising sustainable ethics. And that's the reason consumer's need not to wait for a long time; new collections are readily available in no time. They have an ample number of choices, which ignites the impulsive buying behaviour. This type of behaviour is mostly seen amongst young consumers. These young consumers show more receptiveness and adoption towards fast fashion. The question arises why these consumers are more adoptive or have an inclination towards fast fashion in their daily lifestyle. The answer lies within the term "Fast fashion" itself. It means enhanced design, affordable price, and quick response.

Eiman Medhat negm (2019) suggested that the consequent quick fashion buying habit is a reaction to the various cues. “With more discretionary income, access to knowledge, and competition, customers are able to require more and set greater expectations. They are no longer driven by their demands for a product, but rather by their desires, which is typical nature of the fashion industry.” Consumers buy clothes and modify their wardrobes for hedonic and intangible motives - to look current and appealing and easily available information on social media helps to satisfy their impulsive buying behaviour.

In that way social media is constantly influencing the purchasing decisions of customers. When it comes to the impact of social media, Nguyen T. (2020) made a strong remark, stating that corporations work in collaboration with influencers and rely on their advertisements, which has created a niche and increased sales, particularly for e-commerce merchants.

Fashion Industry and its impact on environment

Given the current state of there is a growing recognition that as a consumer, manufacturer, or retailer, our aesthetic taste, preference, and judgement have a huge impact on environmental consequences (Sandra,2018).

This industry is facing tremendous criticism due to its environmental impact. It was mentioned by UN Climate Change news (2018) that industry produces 10% of global CO2 emissions which is globally around 4-5 billion tonnes annually.

Today, the industry is under fire for massive energy consumption, heat emissions, water consumption, and the dangerous nature of numerous chemicals employed from raw material extraction through disposal, causing environmental disruption (Pal & Chatterjee, 2017). Despite the

negative environmental repercussions, the fashion industry is growing continuously, which relies on low-cost manufacture, frequent use, and short-life of garment use to fuel its growth and expansion (Global Fashion Agenda,2017).

The environment is a component of our society's responsibilities; perhaps, the notion of sustainable manufacturing will be widely adopted and discussed sooner rather than later. With the rise of industrialism and disposable affluence, the fashion sector has seen fast growth in the last decade, with the introduction of global firms in the markets of developing countries. While most other costs and raw materials remain constant over time, global merchants have targeted and exploited manufacturing costs in order to acquire a competitive edge and jeopardise the ecological, social, and cultural well-being.

As reported by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2017), the current scenario of clothing system is highly wasteful and contaminating the entire eco-system. Approximately half of all apparel created from nonrenewable resources is disposed of in landfills or burned within a year of its manufacturing.

Dahlbo (2017) cited that the fashion industry is a substantial consumer of water (79 trillion litres per year), is accountable for almost 20% of industrial water pollution from textile treatment and dyeing, contributes approximately 35% (190,000 tonnes per year) of oceanic primary microplastic pollution, and produces vast quantities of textile waste (>92 million tonnes per year), the majority of which ends up in landfill or is burned, including unsold product.

Referring to the International Organization for Standardization, in last 15 years clothing utilisation has declined by 36%— the average life of a garment has been declined by 36% means it has been discarded without

proper use. Many low-income nations have a very high rate of garment consumption rates in comparison to another segments of the world which are significantly lower. Such as, in the United States, clothing is only worn for about a fourth of the time that it is worn globally. China is showing the similar trends, where apparel consumption has declined by 70% in the last 15 years. (Ellen MacArthur,2017).

Leading ladies Kate Middleton and Michelle Obama have both been sighted in clothes from fast fashion merchants such as Zara and H&M, providing the products a prestigious endorsement. It would have been unimaginable just a few eras ago for such important ladies to embrace "disposable fashion," but it points to the "democratisation of fashion" facilitated by mass production which allows more people to express through clothing irrespective of their social and economic environments.

In order to capture the feeling of the moment, the product is often ephemeral and only accessible for purchase for a short period of time, estimated in months or even weeks, before it is no longer available for purchase.

Since many fashion stores are constantly in pressure to "refresh" their product lines in today's highly competitive fashion industry, the number of "seasons," or the frequency with which their whole stock is updated, will unavoidably increase as a result of the constant need to "refresh" product lines. In extreme cases, such as the case of the successful fashion firm Zara, a year could feature as many as twenty distinct seasons. This propensity has far-reaching implications for supply chain management, as well as for the length of time it takes to restock inventory. (Lee H.L., (2002), Soni G., Kodali R., (2010).

Bairagi N (2017) mentioned in his study that with a population of more

than 1.33 billion people, India is producing a growing amount of post-consumer textile waste. However, only a few studies have been conducted in India on the recycling networks for post-consumer apparel waste. Currently, only a few Indian brands recycle post-consumer clothing waste to make designer goods. The resale of pre-owned clothing through online apps of companies and brands is another alternative channel that has emerged in India. The small-scale industries that turn post-consumer apparel waste into fibres and yarns are the other channel. In the unorganised market, the fibres from shredded garments are commonly used as fillers for mattresses, pillows, and cushions, or turned into recycled yarns.

What next to attain Sustainability in Fashion?

There is a pressing need for structural modifications in the business model of fashion industry, such as a slowdown in production and the implementation of environmental friendly practices in the supply chain, as well as an alteration in customer behaviour, such as less clothing consumptions and longer garment lifecycles.

Ethical consumption, which is often known as conscious consumerism, is not a new topic of discussion. Ethical consumption involves making positive choices like buying fairly traded or environmentally friendly products, as well as avoiding and boycotting specific goods or corporations (Cherrier, 2007; Newholm and Shaw, 2007).

Niinimäki et al (2020) added that the abandonment of the fast-fashion industry completely, which is associated with a reduction the result of excessive production and consumption, with an accompanying decrease in quality of life reduction in material throughput, is necessary for the long-term stability of the fashion sector. Such transformations necessitate international collaboration as well as shifts in thinking at the

market and customer levels. Collective effort is critical to changing people's attitudes towards fashion because nowadays, consumers want to see new products in their favourite stores like a quick fix solution which has resulted in an increase in the need for new fashion collections in a quicker period of time which seems to help in the survival of the fashion industry.

Quality or quantity...what is important is a big question. In general, consumers still have the same overconsumption mindset, valuing quantity over quality and prioritising quantity over quality, but the percentage of conscious purchases is steadily increasing, and the fashion industry is attempting to adapt to the new processes (Rath & Bay,2015).

There are three critical elements that must be present in order for sustainable fashion to flourish: firstly change in consumer attitudes from quantity to quality, which involves inspiring people to buy higher-quality items less frequently, thereby reducing the purchase of low-quality products; the second is facilitating sustainable production practises that " does not take advantage of natural and human resources to increase the speed of manufacturing" and the third is a shift in consumer consumption to "entail a longer product life cycle" (Jung et al, 2014).

When it comes to sustainability, customers, according to Summer N (2019), bear the same responsibility as businesses. They make decisions about what they buy, how long they keep it, and when they discard it, among other things. While engaging and changing behaviour for a sustainable mindset is tough in a society where there is a strong consumption culture, which is a major driving force affecting how consumers act, it is possible.

Due to an ongoing cycle of mass manufacturing and overconsumption, the fashion industry and its customers have been derided for quite some time. However, despite corporate initiatives to employ sustainability as a marketing method and an escalating body of research into consumers' reactions, the concept of sustainable clothing product consumption (SCCP) remains vague and understudied. Consumer knowledge and behaviour are not adequately discussed in the academic literature when looking at SCCP from the standpoint of consumer knowledge and behaviour. There is also no widely accepted measurement tool for this topic, which is a further limitation. Finally, the validated evaluation tool will aid in the diagnosis of clothing customers' mental and behavioural states, as well as the development of consumer recommendations aimed at alleviating the environmental and social issues connected with clothing use. (S.; Lee, Y. 2021).

The idea of sustainable clothing, as well as the upcycling or recycling of clothing, has gotten a lot of attention in recent years. Several studies on sustainable consumption of clothing products (SCCP) from the perspective of consumers have been carried out. (S.; Lee, Y. 2021). Studies suggest that by adopting sustainable practises like upcycling, recycling, secondhand clothing can help us reduce our carbon footprints by 82% and It is expected that secondhand clothing would eclipse high-end fashion in the next several years, thereby alleviating the water crisis caused by fashion waste.

Santosh Tarai and K Shailaja (2020) stated that a large amount of post-consumer textile waste has resulted from the short lifecycles of apparel products which is a result of short lived fashion cycles and the expanded purchasing power of Indian consumers in urban areas. Textile recycling has long been a domestic craft in India practised at both

industrial and domestic levels. Many ancient arts and crafts were created using recycled materials. In low-income states like Odisha, India, there is plenty of space for marketing and enhancing secondhand clothing. Over the years, young people in India's second-tier cities have become increasingly interested in purchasing second-hand clothing.

Defila and Digiulio (2020) elevate that the investigation of citizen consumers' approval of the concept of "Consumption corridor" as a policy guide, taking the subject of drastic lifestyle modifications to a more general level. The notion involves defining minimum and maximum consumption levels in order to achieve consumption sustainability. McEachern et al. (2020) used a different approach to consumer empowerment in terms of environmentally friendly product selections. They describe how more engaging tactics, such as participatory upcycling workshops and contemplated creator performances, have helped raise consumer knowledge of the environmental implications of garment purchasing and encourage behavioural changes.

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Conclusion

In spite of this culture of overconsumption due to fast fashion, sustainable fashion focuses on ethics, durability, and the reuse of products. Bruntlandt (1987) have defined "sustainability as the term

implies, sustainable development is defined as development that meets our current needs while not jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their own requirements." Sustainable consumption aims to meet an individual's needs while minimising adverse effects on the social, economic, cultural, and environmental spheres.

In aftermath of the pandemic, the entire world have seen a shift in values, culture, and, most importantly, practises toward more sustainable consumption. it is becoming a new driver in consumers' purchasing decisions. Conscious or responsible consumers strive to maintain an equal balance of all aspects of sustainability throughout the entire life of a product, beginning with procurement and ending with disposal (Lundblad, L., & Davies, I. A. 2016). This conscious behaviour of sustainable consumption is equally important and should be applied for fashion products also.

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