



**SCHOOL OF
ECONOMICS AND
MANAGEMENT**

**To Buy or Not to Buy:
An Exploratory Study of Gen Z and their Consumption of
Fast Fashion**

by

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore fast fashion consumption patterns of Gen Z/Young Millennials and the degree to which sustainability plays a role in their consumer decision-making process. The aim of this research is to contribute to the current body of literature in identifying and determining the distinction between different types of consumers within the fast fashion industry. Furthermore, the research intends to explore and understand how Gen Z consumers utilize their knowledge of unsustainable practices related to fast fashion and whether it reflects in their consumption of clothes.

Theoretical Perspective: Along with an extensive review of the academic research available on fast fashion, various drawbacks and consumption behavior within the industry, the authors employed the Consumer Decision-Making Process by Blackwell et al. (2006). The study also utilizes the CDP by Blackwell et al. (2006) as a guide for the interviews.

Methodology: The study employed an exploratory research strategy conducted qualitatively with data collected from Twelve Individuals, belonging to the Generation Z/Young Millennials demographic, through semi-structured interviews guided by an abductive approach. A thematic analysis was conducted of the collected data.

Findings and conclusion: The data analysis gave birth to three global themes namely, 'Knowledge of Fast Fashion', 'Different Consumption Behaviors', and 'Divestment Motivations'. These themes have various underlying categories that contribute to the understanding consumption behavior among Gen Z and their attitude towards sustainability. The findings of this study identified three archetypes of fast fashion consumers with varying degree of fast fashion consumption along with fluctuating concern and consideration for sustainability. Although all participants possess knowledge about the environmental and social impact of the fast fashion industry, only a few consider it an important attribute when making clothing-related purchase decisions.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Guillaume Decombe', written over a horizontal line.

Rafae Ahmad

Guillaume Decombe

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1. Introduction

This chapter will introduce the topic at hand to familiarize the reader with first, the background and emergence of fast fashion, as well as an introduction to the issues within the industry. A research gap will then be presented to position this study among the current academic literature surrounding the topic to illustrate what this study aims to achieve. Furthermore, the research purpose and research questions will be presented. Lastly, an outline of the structure of this research will be presented.

1.1 Background

According to Taplin (1999), near the turn of the century, the term ‘quick fashion’ was used to describe retailers applying a model where the process of designing fashion apparel and accessories was made significantly shorter. Bhardwaj and Fairhurst (2009) describe the period as when the boundaries of how fashion is conceived and consumed started to expand. This period is credited as when the focus went away from mass production towards an increase in fashion seasons, flexibility in the supply chain, and an increase in speed and agility with design and production (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2009). Historically, the fashion industry relied on forecasting consumer demand and predicted fashion trends a long time ahead of a clothing line’s release into the market for consumption. However, fast fashion revolutionized the industry by making this gap to market shorter and increasing the number of seasons in a year, making the availability to the consumer significantly faster (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst, 2009).

Fast fashion, in recent decades, has become the dominant business model within the industry owing to the consumers’ demand for quickly acquiring the latest styles (Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin, 2020). According to McNeill and Moore (2015), fast fashion is a business strategy that focuses on creating an accelerated supply chain that assists in producing and distributing apparel to meet the customer’s needs. A newer version of fast fashion, known as ultra-fast fashion, aims to increase efficiency within the supply chain further to reduce the time between conception of design and delivery to consumers to a matter of days (Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin, 2020). Fast and ultra-fast fashion brands have reportedly increased inventory turnover during the ongoing global pandemic.

Mckinsey & Company's annual report centered around the state of fashion in 2021 reported that fast fashion players have been introducing new products in limited quantities to drive demand almost every day. These products are designed by analyzing what consumers search for in clothing using consumer data (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). However, a year earlier, the report stated that the fashion industry had lost over 30% of its growth and had contracted due to the pandemic (Mckinsey & Company, 2020). According to Mckinsey & Company (2021), fast fashion companies face increased scrutiny over their products' environmental and social impact and financial turnovers. According to Kaikobad et al. (2015), fast fashion brands are known for manufacturing, distributing, and selling fast fashion with a sole purpose to maximize profits with little to no consideration for its environmental and social impact. An industry that is widely regarded as the second largest contributor to pollution and waste (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017) is also widely recognized as one of the most significant contributors to severely unethical workplace practices such as poor working conditions and exploitation of labor (Bick, Halsey and Ekenga, 2018).

The State of Fashion (2021) report states that there is an apparent contradiction within fashion going forward with the significant rise in production of fast fashion products as well as a section of the consumer base who are becoming mindful of the impact of their purchases (Mckinsey & Company, 2021). A survey conducted by Vogue Business (2021) termed Gen Z to be the largest consumer demographic for fast fashion brands. The survey gathered 105 million responses, with over half the respondents claiming to shop from fashion brands (Arnett & Maguire, 2020). According to the survey, respondents used 'Accessible,' 'Affordable,' and 'Fast delivery' to be key reasons for their preference for fast fashion clothing (Arnett & Maguire, 2020).

Generation Z, also known as Gen Z, are individuals born between 1994 to 2010 (Williams & Page, 2011; Lan, 2014). However, there are some discrepancies in the definition of the age bracket from this generation which often merges with the age bracket defined for millennials. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, this generation will so forth be referred to as Gen Z/young millennials. Numerous studies surrounding green consumption patterns of Gen Z and young millennials characterize this generational cohort to be the most sustainable generation to date with a focused commitment to the environment (Dabija, Bejan, & Puşcaş, 2020; Lavuri, Jusuf, & Gunardi, 2021). According to Gazzola, Colombo, Pezzetti, and Nicolescu (2017),

young millennials/Gen Z are willing to spend more on sustainable alternatives and support businesses and brands that reflect their values.

According to Vajkai and Zsóka (2020), Gen Z actively avoid fast fashion for many reasons, including but not limited to their sensitivity towards environmental issues, the reflection of their values, and contempt for uniformity. While studies such as those mentioned above point to Gen Z and young millennials disregarding fast fashion as an unsustainable form of clothing, there is also overwhelming evidence pointing to the same generation being the most avid consumers of fast fashion. This is in line with McNeill and Moore (2015), who state that the consumption behavior of fast fashion consumers is unaffected by their knowledge of the environmental and social issues caused by the industry. This is the reason behind a heightened interest in studying the consumption behavior of fast fashion consumers, and in the case of this study, the most prominent target audience of most fast fashion brands: Gen Z and young millennials.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Although there is an abundance of literature available surrounding fast fashion and its issues regarding sustainability (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017; Kaikobad et al., 2015), there is an apparent lack of research surrounding Gen Z's decision-making process related to fast fashion and consideration of sustainability within their decisions, a gap that this study aims to fill. The authors will conduct an explorative qualitative study to investigate and analyze the motivations of Gen Z to invest in fast fashion products while being fully aware of the unsustainable practices within the industry and the environmental footprint of their purchase. Although research indicates that Gen Z is more aware of issues faced within the realm of sustainability and that advocating for such causes is a top priority, fast fashion remains a favorite among this generational cohort. The authors aim to understand the gap between intentions and actions with respect to Gen Z's consumption of fast fashion. This study will utilize the Consumer Decision-Making Process by Blackwell et al. (2006) and highlight areas where consumers justify their purchase throughout the various steps in the process. The Consumer Decision-Making process will be used to create the interview guide as a technique to elicit responses from purchase intentions to purchase and post-purchase behavior.

1.3 Research Purpose and Research Question

This research aims to build on and contribute to the extensive literature present on fast fashion consumption by exploring a dimension of fast fashion consumption within the generational cohort known as Gen Z and young millennials. This study will also aim to explore the touchpoints within the customer journey and how each step is influenced by the consumer's awareness surrounding sustainability issues within the fast fashion industry.

This study aims to fill a gap in research to analyze and interpret how this younger generation views fast fashion, the degree of their awareness regarding the environmental impact of their fast fashion purchases and discover how many types of consumers exist within in generational cohort. The research questions that the authors aim to answer in this research are:

- I. What are the consumer archetypes of fast fashion?*
- II. What role do sustainability-related issues play in the decision-making process of Gen Z and young millennials?*

1.4 Intended Contributions

It can be theorized that there are numerous types of fast fashion consumers, even within its target demographic. These all hold different values, opinions, and attitudes regarding sustainability. This is obvious in the current state of academic literature, where some studies present Gen Z as a generation that cares deeply about sustainability and only supports ethical and sustainable consumption (Gazzola et al., 2017). On the other hand, Vogue Business (2020) categorizes Gen Z as the most significant contributor to fast fashion consumption. This study intends to contribute to the existing literature by clearly identifying different archetypes of fast fashion consumers and analyzing their consumption behavior to assess the degree to which they value sustainability in their purchase decisions. The findings of this research could also assist marketers and fast fashion brands to help target this generational cohort with value based on specific attributes that they consider important. The study also intends to shed light on Gen Z's consumption behavior and assess how their intentions regarding the environment play a part in their purchase decisions.

1.5 Thesis Outline

This section is meant to provide an outline of the thesis for the reader's convenience. First, the Introduction provides an overview of the central theme of this thesis, namely, fast fashion, then highlights both the purpose of this study as well as the expected practical and theoretical contributions. Secondly, the Literature Review provides general knowledge about fast fashion, the functioning of the supply chain, how companies feed environmental and social issues and try to limit their impact on them, the consumer decision-making process, and finally, the purchasing behaviors of fast fashion consumers. Third, the Methodology is presented to understand how and by what methods the study was conducted, the data collected and analyzed, and how reliable and valid it is. Fourth, the Findings highlight the main results of the research and underline the uniqueness of this thesis. Fifth, the Analysis/Discussion of findings is conducted to display the research outcomes. Sixth, the Conclusion of the study aims to show the academic and managerial implications, as well as the limitations and insights for future research. Finally, the last part is dedicated to the peer References used in this study.

2. Literature Review

This second part of the paper is dedicated to the review of the existing literature on fast fashion and different aspects related to it, as well as the Consumer Decision-Making Process (Blackwell et al., 2006). This section aims to frame the research field, overview the main subjects of this study, and get insights into the key terms and concepts. First, definition and general knowledge will be presented to understand how the fast fashion industry works and how it is consumed. Then, an explanation of the supply chain will be given. Furthermore, environmental and social issues and other problems will be presented to learn about the hazards created and empowered by fast fashion companies. The section also explains the Consumer Decision-Making Process by Blackwell et al. (2006). The literature review concludes with an overview of different aspects of the purchasing behavior of consumers, such as their motivations and how they divest their used garments. Then, it sheds light on contradictions between their intentions and actions and briefly explains guilt-related post purchase behavior of consumers.

2.1 Fast fashion

Sull and Turconi (2008, p.5) define *fast fashion* as “the retail strategy of adapting merchandise assortments to current and emerging trends as quickly and effectively as possible.” Camargo, Pereira, and Scarpin (2020) highlight that fast fashion is constructed on a well-defined business model based on mass production and tailored to achieve vast economies of scale by offshoring production to many suppliers. With the increase of large quantities sold at low prices, fast fashion has contributed to overconsumption behaviors (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Further, fast fashion can be seen as a business strategy that creates the most efficient supply chain to produce and make ready-to-buy garments for customers as fast as possible (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Buzzo and Abreu (2019) define this business model with three different fundamentals: quick response, frequent change in trends, and fashion designs with low prices.

Regarding the quick response (Buzzo & Abreu, 2019), Camargo, Pereira, and Scarpin (2020) point out that companies’ goal is to make sure garments are ready to be sold between 5 and 6 weeks after the first ideation of the product. Indeed, fast fashion companies make sure that they fill consumers’ demand for newness, which can now be counted every week (McNeill &

Moore, 2015). Joy et al. (2012) also indicate that fast fashion consumers can now go shopping every three weeks and find new collections. Fast fashion disrupted the original fashion industry, which contains two seasons, by bringing up around 52 seasons to the clothing industry (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017). This statement supports the frequent changes in trends exposed by Buzzo and Abreu (2019).

Joy et al. (2012) agree that low-cost garments are based on the actual luxury fashion clothes and that this phenomenon favors the development of disposability. Indeed, Kaikobad et al. (2015) refer to fast fashion as an industry that brought coveted runway clothing to the mainstream, replicating very similar designs at lower costs. For Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018), the term “fast” comes from the ability of retailers to offer clothing from the catwalks directly in their stores in record time to meet the novelty needs of consumers. Moreover, while Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006, p.269) talk about the consumer’s “insatiable demand for newness,” McNeill and Moore (2015) argue that it has become the norm for companies to put the focus on the speed of the supply chain rather than on the aspects of sustainability. The fashion industry had indeed taken a turn when consumer behaviors started to be impulsive regarding garments, pushing the overall industry to produce more from overseas markets at lower costs (McNeill & Moore, 2015).

Similarly, Joung (2014) sheds light on the changing behaviors of consumers who tend to purchase fast fashion with more impulsiveness and consistency. To make it happen, fast fashion companies try to shorten their whole supply chain to provide consumers with fast trends at lower prices (Joung, 2014). This monetary characteristic has profoundly changed the way people consume and dispose of clothing (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Thus, although fast fashion has its most loyal followers, it is clear that the economic aspect surrounding this industry has largely taken advantage of sustainable and ethical practices and has almost legitimized the role of fast fashion in the textile industry (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Alexa, Apetrei, and Pîslaru (2021) highlight that this industry is one of the most polluting, with approximately 26.5 million people working for it worldwide.

2.1.1 How it works

First, the ability to forecast new trends, develop and maintain adaptation, and share awareness of new trends that change at breakneck speed is one of the ingredients in the recipe for the

success of sizeable fast fashion companies, notably Zara (Sull & Turconi, 2008), H&M and TopShop (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Indeed, fast fashion forces companies wishing to be sustainable to adapt their supply chain quickly to meet consumers' new demands and desires (Sull & Turconi, 2008). Further, the retail leaders H&M, Zara, Forever 21, and the other most influential ones like Top Shop, Mango, and New Look use in-house designers to reproduce the fashion trends of high fashion luxury brands as fast as possible, generally, between three to five weeks (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). Then, consumers can buy their favorite garments right away instead of waiting for sales (Kaikobad et al., 2015) as they used to do before the high development of the fast fashion supply chain. In addition, Joy et al. (2012) emphasized that companies succeed in developing fast cycles that allow them to stock almost ready-to-buy garments thanks to their supply chain developed to minimize time costs. Everything is thought to optimize the resources, mainly time and costs, such as rapid prototyping, optimized transportation, or delivery (Joy et al., 2012; Kaikobad et al., 2015).

Second, to respond to the high demand for garments, the fast fashion industry had to find solutions that would still allow companies to maximize their profit. Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016) argue that fast fashion companies severely cut costs and streamline their supply chain, so that purchase prices for consumers have a downfall compared to other goods. Now, supply chains are organized so that almost all production processes, such as the growth of fibers, the manufacturing process, and the garments assembly line, are outsourced internationally, mostly in low and middle-income countries (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018) show that to cut costs, companies have relocated their assembly lines to countries where hourly wages are low, the most popular of which are China and Bangladesh.

Thanks to these processes allowing retailers to reduce their production costs as much as possible, companies succeed in guaranteeing low prices to consumers who are even more demanding in terms of inexpensive clothing (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). However, it is sometimes at the expense of ethical and environmental practices.

2.1.2 Communication and Consumption

Fast fashion is an industry that does not hesitate to use all the communication and promotion channels at its disposal. Quite often, using the idea of Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018)

referring to the inspirations that retailers take from fashion shows, the big companies in fast fashion reach their target customers directly through emblematic figures such as models or public figures able to influence them (Sull & Tuconi, 2009). Raustiala and Sprigman's (2021) findings go along with the fact that brands raise their brand awareness and image with mass advertisement and communication through social media and by using many marketing strategies such as discounts to promote a new collection or highlight a flagship product of a particular brand, for example via influencer marketing.

Beyond the promotional aspect and the marketing tactics employed by the big fast fashion brands, consumers have adopted new and radically different modes of consumption over the past few decades. For example, clothing production doubled between 2000 and 2014, reaching over 100 billion units that year (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). In addition, annual purchases by an average consumer increase by 60% each year (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). In addition, 80 billion pieces of clothing are purchased each year (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018), which testifies that fast fashion has enormously contributed to the development of overconsumption behaviors in the fashion industry (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017). This increase in production and consumption is explained by the fact that the major brands have brought new collections at a very high-frequency thanks to the time savings linked to the supply chain. Zara produces 24 new collections each year, while H&M is said to offer between 12 and 16 (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). Also, online companies such as Fashion Nova can provide consumers with more than 600 to 900 new clothing pieces every week (Raustiala & Sprigman, 2021).

Similarly, Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016) highlight that more and more people from developing countries have the tendency to increase their consumption of fast fashion clothing, particularly in Brazil, China, India, Mexico, and Russia. According to these authors, this could be explained by the increase in the number of citizens joining the middle class. In comparison, sales of fast fashion companies in developed countries such as Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States are growing eight times slower than in the countries mentioned previously (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016).

Nevertheless, many authors point out the controversial aspects of fast fashion. McNeill and Moore (2015) claim that many brands design their clothes so that their lifespan does not exceed ten uses. In other words, the quality deteriorates very quickly. Joy et al. (2012) shows that

companies themselves assume that their clothes lose their original value after ten washes because of the lower quality materials used in their manufacture. Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016) claim that, on average, consumers stay in possession of their clothes about half as long as in the early 2000s because they judge fast fashion clothes as more prone to being thrown away easily and quickly. Thus, consumers continue to spend more each year on fast fashion without necessarily considering the environmental and social aspects behind this entire industry (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Additionally, Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016) argue that if growing middle classes in developing economies cause more than 80 percent of these populations to consume as much as the Western World by 2025, the environmental footprint associated with the fashion industry will increase drastically if nothing changes on the sustainable side of production practices and the reprocessing of used or unsold clothing.

Even though the fast fashion industry is economically prominent, opinions about it vary. Sull and Turconi (2008) claim that the fast fashion business model can be a nightmare for some retailers due to the supply chain and the material and garments stocks since the turnover of new collections is excessively fast. By contrast, fast fashion customers are delighted to have companies that respond to their almost instantaneous desires and satisfy their compulsive purchases (Sull & Turconi, 2008). Nevertheless, many controversies surround the fast fashion industry, particularly the ethical, environmental, and social aspects of the practices used by companies to produce more to satisfy the consumers' needs and wants. Notwithstanding, literature points out that consumer behavior is sometimes contradictory. Indeed, trends show that consumers are more inclined to consider the ethical values of brands in their willingness to buy, although their final actions show the opposite. (McNeill and Moore, 2015).

2.2 Supply Chain

The fast fashion supply chain is somehow different from the one of the classic fashion industries. Niinimäki et al. (2020) agree that the supply chain is particularly complex due to the many steps throughout the supply chain and the different actors implied, such as farmers, manufacturers, suppliers, and consumers. The fast fashion supply chain regroups the significant elements such as the production of raw materials, textile manufacturing, production, transportation, distribution, and consumption (Craik, 2009). The manufacturing step is tailored to the consumer changing tastes regarding clothes (Craik, 2009). There is a well-defined managerial system that includes two critical stakeholders, such as manufacturers responsible

for the production and material purchases and wholesalers responsible for authorizing the manufacturing of clothes (Craik, 2006). However, as Craik (2009) points out, the fast fashion supply chain implies various challenges such as the different monetary and timely costs, the coordination and reliability during the whole process, and the product quality. Bruce et al. (2004) observe that the fast fashion supply chain is very complex and that to overcome some of the problems faced, companies use strategies to reduce the buying cycle times while responding to the increasing demand of consumers, such as relocating to developing countries. However, some difficulties encountered through the supply chain sometimes come from large geographical distances between retailers and manufacturers (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006).

Nevertheless, as stated before, fast fashion is globally perceived with many ethical, environmental, and social concerns. One of the main challenges of this industry is to make every single actor or stakeholder be treated fairly, in other words, ethically, in every step of the supply chain (Joy et al., 2012). Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018) show that negative externalities rise in every step of the supply chain, creating an environmental justice dilemma. On top of that, it has been argued that fast fashion manufacturing is likely to be less transparent than agribusiness due to its complex supply chain (Joy et al., 2012).

2.3 Sustainability Issues

Joy et al. (2012, p.274) define sustainability as “sustainability involves complex and changing environmental dynamics that affect human livelihoods and well-being, with intersecting ecological, economic, and socio-political dimensions, both globally and locally.”

As aforementioned, the fast fashion industry is highly criticized, especially for its environmental and social issues. The first reason for this criticism is the fast-paced fashion cycles that rose in order to meet increased consumer demand and to keep profit margins ever higher (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Accordingly, companies had to change their production techniques, making them less sustainable (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Kaikobad et al. (2015) go hand in hand with the idea that the technology, the production methods, and the low-quality products and materials used during the production process of fast fashion clothing to generate more profits represent a considerable danger for the environment and for social aspects.

In his study, Shen (2014) shows that more than thirty million tons of garments are consumed every year, which highly supports the social and environmental hazards created by the industry. Some companies like H&M, New Balance, The North Face, and Uniqlo consider the aspects of sustainability in their supply chain to make it greener (Kaikobad et al., 2015). However, one of the reasons why companies are in no rush to make their supply chain more sustainable is consumer perception. McNeill and Moore (2015) note that although consumer awareness of the environment and social ethics linked to their consumption is increasingly present regarding fast fashion, their behavior is nevertheless contradictory. Frame and Newton (2007) go along with this contradiction and state that no correlation exists between environmental issues acknowledgment and consumer behavior. Indeed, although they are looking for clothes produced in an ethical and environmentally friendly way, they are always tempted and attracted by new collections and therefore contribute to clothing overconsumption and waste (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Similarly, Papadopoulou, Papisolomou, and Thrassou (2021) support consumers being aware of environmental issues lack resistance when it comes to buying fast fashion, thus, creating a gap between their purchasing behavior and their intentions. This behavior is guided by the thought that if clothing is produced more ethically with more ecological materials and of better quality, the prices will be consequently higher (Kaikobad et al., 2015), which comes in contradiction with one of the first criteria of the fast fashion, thus, repelling some of these consumers.

Therefore, the fast fashion industry tries to hide as much as possible behind the scenes linked to the production of their clothes, which results in both direct and indirect risks to the environment and human health (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Alexa, Apetrei & Pîslaru (2021) add that this industry generates various problems which have consequences both for production and consumption.

2.3.1 Environmental Issues

The fast fashion industry has transformed the fashion industry so that it has negatively upset sustainable ecological practices (McNeill & Moore, 2015) to the point of becoming the second most polluting industry after the oil industry (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017). Indeed, many costs are attributed to it, particularly to the environment. The manufacture of garments in this industry is extremely demanding in terms of water, requiring numerous pesticides and fertilizers in the cultivation of cotton, which represents approximately 30 percent of the fibers used (Remy,

Speelman & Swartz, 2016). Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018) highlight that around 90% of the garments sold in the US are made with cotton or polyester. During the last ten years, cotton production has had to intensify, requiring genetic modifications in 80% of total production and the use of large quantities of water, pesticides, and insecticides (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017). Dependence on these chemicals is a problem because the more they are used, the more needed they are, as soils are polluted (Ozdamar-Ertekin, 2017). An added problem is the use of dyes in the garment manufacturing process. Used waters and dyes are often not treated or recycled and are essentially discharged into common waters, implying problems for fauna, flora, and local inhabitants (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018).

Moreover, clothing waste is one of the biggest scourges resulting from fast fashion. According to Remy, Speelman & Swartz (2015), the collection rate of clothing would only reach 15 percent in the US, particularly because of recycling technologies that are not yet sufficiently developed, implying that approximately three-fifths of all clothing is sent to incinerators or landfills every year. Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018) put forward that 85% of the clothes consumed by Americans end up in landfills, which represent approximately 3.8 billion pounds each year. Most of the time, landfills are in low and middle-income countries, which lack the resources and support to strengthen laws and actions to protect the environment and human health (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). In addition, Ozdamar-Ertekin (2017) adds that only 10% of clothing is recycled or donated between individuals or in thrift shops; the rest is either incinerated or sent to landfills where they remain for around 200 years by continuously releasing gases.

Finally, although environmental awareness is increasingly present, the fast fashion industry has still not succeeded in proposing viable solutions to reduce its environmental impacts, which are growing each year at the demand rate (Kaikobad et al., 2015). Moreover, if emerging markets increase the level of consumption per capita in the West, CO₂ emissions will increase by 77 percent in 2025 compared to 2015 (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016)

2.3.2 Social Issues

The fast fashion industry employs more than 40 million people worldwide for garment assembly alone (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). Fast fashion companies have outsourced their

production to countries with low labor costs in a quest for financial savings, cost reduction, and profit maximization. They have thus contributed to creating one of the industries less ethical and sustainable (Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin, 2020). *Social costs* can be defined as “all direct and indirect losses sustained by third persons or the general public due to unrestrained economic activities” and include environmental, health, and human rights costs. (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018).

Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016) show that employees who, on the one hand, are underpaid are, on the other hand, prone to work in dangerous and even deadly working conditions. The 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh is an example when the factory where Primark garment workers worked collapsed, causing more than 1,129 deaths (Ozdamar-Ertekein, 2017). Following this event, working conditions and regulations were taken into greater consideration, especially at the European and American levels, without this having impacted developing countries (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018). On the other hand, these low and middle-income countries make sure to keep the salaries of employees in this industry low and not to strengthen the laws protecting them in order to pursue their quest for competitiveness and keep the production chains of the largest fast-fashion companies in their country (Ozdamar-Ertekein, 2017).

The fast fashion industry also rhymes with social problems. Intensive cotton farming for the fast fashion and fashion industry, more demanding and costly for farmers due to the growing prices of seeds, pesticides, insecticides, and other treatments, is proving to be considerably deadly. Within 16 years, more than 250,000 farmers have committed suicide for these causes in India (Ozdamar-Ertekein, 2017).

There are many ethical and physical, and psychological safety issues. Garment workers, 90% from low and middle-income countries (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018), are, for example, exposed to breathing unfiltered air, dust, smoke, and toxic products when working in a noisy environment. These disastrous working conditions lead to greater long-term damage, such as increased birth mortality rates, cancers, and physical and mental problems in the regions concerned (Ozdamar-Ertekein, 2017).

Ozdamar-Ertekein (2017) puts forward that the word of garment workers does not weigh the face of the regulations put in place by governments and the working framework imposed by

multinationals, implying a stagnation of their working conditions. and their rights. Bick, Halsey, and Ekenga (2018) also argue that disasters on human health and disasters like that of Rana Plaza have not significantly changed the standards of worker safety in developing countries where fast fashion is evolving.

2.3.3 Other Issues

Fast fashion is the initiator of many disasters, both environmental and social. Various factors are responsible for this, including consumers and their fluctuating demand. Indeed, consumers are more and more inclined to want the latest novelties and to get tired of what they already have, which increases their demand and puts pressure on retailers who want to satisfy their customers and, consequently, on suppliers who must now deliver products in record time (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood, 2006). However, the forecasts of fast fashion companies are not optimal, which leads to excessive stocks of clothing (Camargo, Pereira & Scarpin, 2020), which are then thrown away or exported to developing countries to be sorted, then sold on second-hand markets, or even stored in landfills (Bick, Halsey, Ekenga, 2018). In 2015, the United States exported more than \$700 million worth of used garments to low and middle-income countries, contributing to the pollution of rivers and parks and general environmental and human damage every year. (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018).

Moreover, all these excesses are not insignificant. Consumer awareness of the environment and worker health in countries where most companies delegate their production is changing. Younger generations are often the most inclined to be aware of these environmental and social hazards (Becker-Leifhold & Heuer, 2018). However, as aforementioned, despite this awareness, consumers' actual actions do not follow their words (Joy et al., 2012). Thus, Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016) point out that the constant increase in sales of fast fashion companies testifies to the fact that consumers tend to turn a blind eye to the real problems linked to this industry. McNeill and Moore (2015) also show that although companies tend to offer more respectful alternatives to the environment and workers, real changes will be possible when consumers are also ready to support these changes over the long term. For now, Wiederhold et al. (2018) show that consumers prioritize their style over the environmental issues, and Becker-Leifhold and Heuer (2018) highlight that despite awareness of these issues, the consumption patterns keep being repeated.

2.4 Overcoming the Issues

Today, consumers are more and more inclined to choose a brand that is more respectful of the environment and the human aspect rather than a brand that pays little or no attention to these ethical aspects (Alexa, Apetrei & Pîslaru, 2021). Given their increased awareness in terms of environmental and social values (Kaikobad et al., 2015), companies are gradually developing more ethical practices such as fair employment, eco-friendly products, diversity of quality, and design, for example (Kaikobad et al., 2015). However, aware of changes in consumer mentality, fast fashion companies resort to sometimes dubious practices to attract or retain them more.

There are groups created at the initiative of several fashion industry companies that aim to fight against environmental and social challenges (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals brings together 22 companies fighting for the implementation of non-toxic products throughout the supply chain and The Better Cotton Initiative, which includes 50 retailers and brands and about 700 suppliers who engage in the production of ecologically and socially more responsible cotton (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). Another example of partnership is H&M, Levi's, and I:CO, whose goal is to collect as many clothes and accessories as possible for recycling and resale (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016). Patagonia is one of the best-known examples of the environment and sustainable practices thanks to their collection of clothing in stores and their repair service to give clothing a longer life expectancy (Remy, Speelman, & Swartz, 2016). Finally, C&A is also an example of an environmental approach since its objective for 2020 was to purchase only organic cotton (Remy, Speelman, & Swartz, 2016).

Moreover, even in the luxury fashion industry, which has one of the greatest influences on consumption processes, some companies are becoming leaders in sustainability by offering more ecological clothing, such as Salvatore Ferragamo and Stella McCartney, for example (Joy et al., 2012). McNeill and Moore (2015) show that more and more producers are using more sustainable textile fibers and advocating more ethical working conditions. According to Remy, Speelman, and Swartz (2016), fashion industry companies should focus on two segments of their supply chain: the heavy resource demands and difficult labor issues in the production process and all the disposability and waste of garments. Moreover, from the increased number

of new clothes offered each year by fast-fashion, availability, and recycling companies, the second-hand industry was born prosperous and now benefits both the economy and the environment indirectly (Kaikobad et al., 2015).

One of the most influential players in fast fashion is H&M which, thanks to its large base of consumers and employees, has the responsibility and a strong role to play as a model of change in sustainable practices and circular economy (Alexa, Apetrei & Pîslaru, 2021). In addition, H&M has created a sustainability program, “Conscious Action,” which helps create jobs in less developed countries, where the resources used are more recyclable (Kaikobad et al., 2015). However, although the supply chain is more sustainable in ecological and economic terms, the challenge remains to reconcile profits and sustainability throughout the supply chain (Kaikobad et al., 2015). Indeed, more sustainable production methods are often more expensive but can, in the long term, avoid shocks in the supply chain, reduce the risks associated with a tarnished reputation, or even increase profitability (Remy, Speelman & Swartz, 2016).

Nevertheless, despite the will to exert effort seen so far, fast fashion companies will find it more challenging to have a positive impact on the sourcing of their products, the assembly lines, the distribution, the repair processes and treatment of clothing, or on the efficient use of materials (Joy et al., 2012) and many challenges are still present and will have to be met in the coming decades.

2.5 Purchasing Behaviors

2.5.1 Motivations and Contradictions

Consumers tend to be more aware of environmental and social issues in this industry. Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) claim that if their awareness were increased about these issues, they would be more likely to change the way they consume fast fashion or fashion. Moreover, McNeill and Moore (2015) show an increasingly negative opinion from consumers regarding this side of the fashion industry and that, therefore, they try to reduce their consumption of fast fashion clothing. This is confirmed by Gazzola et al. (2017), who state that younger generations being more aware of sustainable and ethical hazards, tend to change their purchasing types to more ethical, sustainable and long-lasting clothing. Further, it has been shown that consumers are motivated to buy more sustainable and ethically produced garments to differentiate

themselves from the fast-fashion buyers, allowing them to display their personality through clothes (Becker-Leifhold & Heuer, 2018). Lastly, Papadopoulou, Papisolomou, and Thrassou (2021) state the importance of consumers' values in their decision-making process, which, coupled with a greater sensitivity to environmental and social concerns, directly influences the way they consume and their loyalty toward a brand.

Besides, as aforementioned, even if consumers are increasingly aware of the hazards surrounding the fast fashion industry, most of them still consume garments from this industry. First, impulsiveness and the desire to be fashionable push consumers to direct themselves to fast fashion stores (McNeill & Moore, 2015), where they can find trendy garments for low prices that fit their desire to wear the latest trends (Valaei & Nikhashemi, 2017). Indeed, Valaei and Nikhashemi (2017) argue that price and purchasing intentions are positively correlated, thus supporting that consumers tend to buy fast fashion mainly because of the low-price aspect. Nevertheless, McNeill and Moore (2005) assert that the price of a garment is not the primary concern for wealthier consumers as long as the desire they have for a garment that fulfills their expectations is satisfied. Lastly, Hur (2020) shows that consumers who buy second-hand clothes give importance to the value for money and the possibility of developing their identity through differentiation of their fashion style.

2.5.2 Feeling of Guilt

As environmental and social awareness changes more and more over time, it is inevitable for some consumers to feel a sense of guilt or an expression of remorse following the purchase of fast fashion clothing. Some consumers reduce these feelings with different actions, such as giving away their old clothes to charities for example, which make them feel better (Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Joung, 2014) or by buying clothes of better quality instead of higher quantity (Watson & Yan, 2013). Likewise, slow fashion encourages consumers to purchase clothing of better quality, thus, at a higher price to reduce the overall consumption levels since they will keep their clothes longer before divesting them, thanks to a higher value for money perception (Jung & Jin, 2016). Subsequently, Watson and Yan (2013) implemented the "buyers' remorse avoidance" concept in their study, which describe how consumers try to avoid remorse or feeling of guilt after buying garments, especially in fast fashion. Remorse is usually a feeling expressed by consumers in the post-consumption step of the CDP, as aforementioned. In their study, Watson and Yan (2013) show that consumers try to avoid

remorse and guilt by purchasing inexpensive clothing since the price tag of the clothes maintains these feelings to an acceptable level. Then, it is noticeable whether consumers avoid guilt by comforting themselves with the low prices or by supporting more sustainable clothes.

2.6 Consumer Decision-Making Process (CDP)

Blackwell et al. (2006) constructed a protocol that explains the set of activities undertaken by a consumer when making a purchase decision. The model presented by Blackwell et al. (2006) extends the work introduced by Engel, Kollart, and Blackwell in 1978, which was then referred to as the EKB model. This model is now known as the EBM model, an evolution of its EKB theory. The current EBM model talks about seven stages that a consumer goes through to make a decision. The first stages are ‘Need Recognition,’ ‘Search for Information,’ and ‘Pre-purchase evaluation of alternatives’ then the later stages include ‘Purchase,’ ‘Consumption,’ ‘Post-consumption Evaluation,’ and ‘Divestment.’ Several authors, such as Kotler & Keller (2016) and Stankevich et al. (2017), also supported this model in both structure and content. The difference that can be noted in the work of these authors mentioned above is that their proposed consumer decision-making models include five stages rather than the seven presented by Blackwell et al. (2006). To leave no room for doubt and confusion, the EBM model by Blackwell et al. (2006) will henceforth be denoted as the consumer decision-making process. The stages within the model will be explained in detail below.

2.6.1 Need Recognition

The first stage of the consumer decision-making process is ‘Need recognition,’ where the consumer gains awareness regarding a need that has yet to be fulfilled (Blackwell et al., 2006). This is also in line with ‘The Buying Decision Process Model’ proposed by Kotler and Keller (2016) also states that the entire buying decision process begins with ‘Problem recognition’ which can be identified as the same as ‘Need recognition’ in the CDP model by Blackwell et al., (2006). At this stage, the customer will be urged to correct or take action to make sure the current state is improved. According to the model, if the consumer believes that the perceived value of a product to solve a problem is higher than the cost of purchasing it, then it will result in a purchase. Blackwell et al. (2006); Kotler and Keller (2016); and Stankevich et al. (2017) explain that instead of needs, the consumer can feel the same way about desires; however, it is easier for desires to be negotiated away if their ability or authority is lower, and then, if the

fundamental need is met, the desire may be discarded. An example of this could be the purchase of a high-end and expensive watch. A Rolex watch could be a commodity that a consumer desires; however, the purchase may not be accommodated by their purchase ability. Therefore, the consumer might settle for a cheaper alternative. According to Blackwell et al. (2006), need recognition could result from and be triggered by various influences. There are seven of these influences during this stage that are divided into two categories; environmental and social influences (Skankevich et al., 2017; Blackwell et al., 2006). The aforementioned factors determine consumers' perception of what classifies as a need.

2.6.2 Search for Information

After the first stage is fulfilled and the consumer recognizes the need, a search for information is initiated to fulfill the need and fill the gap (Blackwell et al., 2006; Stankevich et al., 2017). This is in line with the models presented by Kotler and Keller (2016) and Court et al. (2009), as they also propose information search and evaluation respectively, hence, reflecting similar criteria as the CDP model by Blackwell et al. (2006). Stankevich et al. (2017) classify this stage into two categories: internal search and external search. External search deals with gathering information and knowledge through secondary sources; these sources could include personal connections or the marketplace in general. In contrast, the internal information search could rely on retrieving knowledge from previous experiences and memories or could be dependent on the knowledge disseminated through generations. Blackwell et al. (2006) also explain that sometimes a consumer searches for information actively from sources like the internet, experiencing the product first-hand in a physical store, talking to the sales representatives, or watching ads. In some instances, consumers do things to be more perceptive to information; this is when consumers search for information passively.

2.6.3 Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives

Pre-Purchase Evaluation of Alternatives is used to describe the stage where the consumer is attempting to answer the questions that have appeared during the previous phase in the model (Blackwell et al., 2006). The alternatives are being compared against each other to determine the answer to questions such as, 'Which alternative will best fulfill my need?' (Blackwell et al., 2006). This evaluation uses the information acquired by the consumer in the previous stages of the model, creating a decision based on the information they possess (Stankevich et al., 2017). As there might be transactions following a similar question or topic in the future, an

evaluation conducted at any time could play a role in future purchase decision processes. Each consumer has a unique criterion for evaluation that might differ from other consumers, even within the same product category. Consumers seek the best alternative per their evaluation criteria (Stankevich et al., 2017). A consumer's evaluation criteria often reflect their values, lifestyles, and, most of all, their needs, including past experiences. Nevertheless, Stankevich et al. (2017) note that consumers who already have previous preferences and brand loyalty might not go through this stage of the decision-making process as they might have a predetermined answer to the questions in the previous stage, depending on the level of their brand loyalty or preferences. Additionally, in this stage, the place of purchase is assessed and decided on (Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2016; Stankevich et al., 2017).

2.6.4 Purchase

The fourth stage in the process is when consumers complete the purchase. There are two phases associated, the first being the choice for the place of purchase, for example, based on price, easiness of purchase, preferences, and loyalty towards vendors. Kotler and Keller (2016) describe this step as the Purchase Decision. The second stage is the 'In-store Choices,' meaning the choices made during purchasing can be affected by website advertisements, media, salespeople, or point-of-purchase advertising (Stankevich et al., 2017). This purchase execution does not always go according to plan; however, sometimes, due to a lack of stock or persuasion by sales staff (Blackwell et al., 2006; Stankevich et al., 2017). Also notable is that the period between purchase decision and the actual purchase may be short for non-durable items, while it might be longer for items that do not expire (Stankevich et al., 2017).

2.6.5 Consumption

Consumption is the fifth stage in the process, where the consumer puts the product or service to use after making the purchase. This stage is unique and exclusive to the consumer decision-making model by Blackwell et al. (2006). However, other models, such as Blackwell et al. (2006), include this as a separate stage for the CDP model. Consumption is a crucial stage in determining the satisfaction of the product and can be seen as affecting the likeliness of repurchase or the possible return of the purchased product. Kotler and Keller (2016) additionally mention that the sales frequency is affected by the product's consumption rate. Furthermore, the customer's carefulness in using and maintaining the product affects the lifespan and rate of replacement for the product (Blackwell et al., 2006.; Block et al., 2016).

2.6.6 Post-Consumption Evaluation

This stage occurs after the consumption, where the consumer evaluates the satisfaction of the purchase and use after consuming a product or service. This satisfaction depends on the degree to which the consumer's expectations regarding the perceived performance of the product or service are met. If these expectations are not met, the consumer experiences dissatisfaction (Blackwell et al., 2006; Kotler & Keller, 2016). This evaluation is a critical part of future pre-purchase and purchase evaluations. Customers satisfied with their experience are more likely to complete the same purchase again, and they are more difficult to turn to alternative products. Satisfaction can be assured in some ways, and one of them is to introduce the correct use of the purchased product since, if misused, dissatisfaction is likely to occur (Blackwell et al., 2006). Another is to ensure that the customer has the correct expected benefit and that the pre-purchase information is accurate so that the customer is not expecting something different from what is delivered to avoid dissatisfaction and a gap between expected and perceived outcome or benefit. In this stage, the consumer might experience a varying degree of reaction depending on how well these match (Stankevich et al., 2017).

Furthermore, consumers seek to gain validation about the correctness or incorrectness of their purchase after the decision, and they are more likely to do so after an expensive purchase (Blackwell et al., 2006). Here, after-purchase cognitive dissonance can appear, including an innately emotional aspect (Sweeney et al., 2000). The evaluation can be affected by emotional behavior that can increase or decrease satisfaction. Consumers also evaluate the purchase price as their satisfaction determines whether the price was appropriate (Blackwell et al., 2006).

2.6.7 Divestment

Divestment is the last stage of the process where multiple options are available for the consumer. This contains, for example, the disposing, recycling, reselling, and other behaviors. The item purchased has a significant effect on this; usually, a higher purchase price or sustainability orientation of the customer can affect the decision they make of the divestment of the product (Blackwell et al., 2006). This stage is also present in the decision-making process by Kotler and Keller (2006) as part of post-purchase behavior.

3. Methodology

This chapter aims to identify and explain the methodological aspects of this study. The authors will first define the research approach and research design, highlighting its congruence with the given research purpose. This section will also explain the choices made regarding the selection of the data collection method, sampling technique, and data analysis approach.

3.1 Research Approach

Two main research paradigms are commonly used in academic research, Positivism, and Interpretivism (Collis & Hussey, 2014). For the purpose of this research, an interpretivist approach was utilized given the qualitative nature of this study as well as the interpretive nature of how the authors plan to analyze the interview data. This research paradigm argues that human nature is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood using statistics and mathematical variables. Interpretivism believes that human behavior is highly influenced by and dependent on many factors, such as the surroundings, environment, etc., all of which are highly subjective. This research philosophy allows researchers to analyze the data collected to uncover its meaning and interpret its importance. However, this research philosophy also means that researchers are immersed in the study and can never be subjective (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015).

In general, a qualitative method is a research approach that focuses on gathering non-numeric data and finding data of quality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). With qualitative research, the researchers aim to collect information about the participant's interpretation of the world; hence it is of explorative nature. It allows for a deeper understanding of topics that other methods could not achieve (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). As this research aims to explore and analyze consumer purchase behavior, a qualitative method was most suitable as it will allow the researcher to understand the views the consumers have of the phenomenon in question and their decision-making processes. A quantitative approach would not be suitable for this study as it would not be able to gauge the highly subjective and perceptive nature of this research. In contrast, qualitative research would provide the researchers with the flexibility to gain a deeper understanding of the data collected and interpret it in relevance to the theoretical framework.

However, the use of a qualitative research method and the small sample size means that the study will be limited in terms of generalizability.

3.2 Research Design

Data collection methods that utilize open-ended questions are usually part of qualitative studies to gain comprehensive data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Therefore, this study will undertake an exploratory qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the consumption patterns of Generation Z and young millennials. The type of data that will be collected through the semi-structured interviews is classified as ‘talk,’ which allows researchers to view and interpret the collected data from the respondents’ perspective (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). This type of data is beneficial since it comes directly from the participant through first-hand contact. Another benefit is that it is not bound by data collection restrictions of quantitative methods. Lastly, it allows for a rich discussion as the researchers can add follow-up questions and comments (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). A disadvantage of qualitative studies is that participants might contradict their true opinions. This can be rectified by creating a discussion where interviews are asked to elaborate in some instances and be specific in some.

According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2021), abductive and inductive approaches are the two forms of reasoning when analyzing qualitative data. The authors of this study have selected the abductive methodology approach for the purpose of this research. Abductive reasoning is formed by observing and assuming plausible connections between what is observed. A deductive approach means applying theory to the data with the purpose of testing the theory. Whereas in inductive reasoning, the main goal is theory development. Abductive research could therefore be labeled as a combination of these two approaches. The abductive approach is often used when there is a lack of theory or research regarding the chosen topic, requiring the researcher to base the reasoning on their observations (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The given research is based upon interpreting interview data collected and connecting it to an established theory, the Consumer Decision-Making Process by Blackwell et al. (2006). Therefore, the researchers have had to reason based on the trends they have observed and what they expect.

3.3 Data Collection Method

There are different data collection methods within qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Researchers need to choose a data collection method that will provide sufficient empirical data. Hence, it is important to consider the study's goal and what will generate the best discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As this research aims to speculate and explore the view of the consumers on fast fashion, the chosen data collection method was a semi-structured interview. *Interviews* are a qualitative research strategy that allows for an in-depth discussion on a particular topic. It entails assessing topic discussions in an individual context and interpreting what is said and how it is said (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Semi-structured interviews result in rich and in-depth discussions and allow interviewers to ask follow-up questions to gauge a participant's extensive opinions on a subject. When conducting the semi-structured interviews, each researcher was assigned a different role. One acts as a facilitator that leads the interview and ensures relevant discussions but encourages further discussion about the topic, while the other takes observations and is in charge of the transcripts (Saunders et al., 2009).

The data collected for the purpose of this study was using semi-structured interviews with 13 participants, which were designed to be around 45 minutes each. The interview guide was designed to build on existing theory in accordance with the exploratory and abductive nature of this study. The interview questions were designed to extract highly relevant information from the participant, and more questions were added in case the answers received did not contribute sufficient information. The interview guide was based on the steps of the consumer decision-making process presented by Blackwell et al. (2006).

3.4 Sampling Method

When deciding upon the sampling method to use for a study, it is important to consider the objective of the research. As the objective of this research is to use a qualitative and abductive method, hence, to explore the different potential perspectives, a non-probability sampling method was decided upon. Non-probability sampling entails that there is no probability upon who will be chosen for the given research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, there is potential for self-selection bias, meaning researchers choose participants for the given study that will contribute with the best-given answers. Therefore, to ensure that this does not happen, a purposive sampling technique was chosen (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). *Purposive sampling*

is a non-probability strategy that focuses on identifying particular criteria and a sample unit to ensure that the participants picked are appropriate for the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). In most cases, participants are sampled based on their ability to contribute to the research question; however, the researchers may pick participants based on their characteristics to provide a variety to the research (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

In addition, purposive sampling can provide a theory guide for the research as through the sampling; the researchers can discover new themes that may be of interest to look into further (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). The sampling frame is the population from which the sample is derived, the list of units (Bryman & Bell, 2011). When deciding on a sample frame, the researchers should keep the aim of the study in mind. Therefore, because the sampling method chosen was purposive sampling, the participants needed to meet a set of criteria. Since the focus of this study is to explore the consumer behavior of Gen Z related to fast fashion, the sampling frame needed to consist of participants interested in fashion and under 25 years of age to be considered for this study.

Deciding on the sampling size, there are certain criteria to consider. The first criteria to consider is whether the chosen sample size offers precision (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The precision is whether it allows for making inferences about the population; in general, the bigger the sample of the population, the more precise it will be, allowing for better generalizability (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). However, researchers must consider two criteria that can impact sample size: time and cost. These two criteria can limit the ability to achieve the highest precision as researchers often have time constraints and cost constraints (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The time constraint was a significant limitation in this study, as the authors only had eight weeks to complete this study, which affected the size of the sample. This is reflected in the sample size, consisting of 12 participants. However, the goal is not to achieve full saturation but to build an understanding of consumers' opinions. See Table 1 for a breakdown of the interviews.

Participant	Interview type	Age	Date of Interview	Duration
Participant 1	In-person	21	06/05/2022	41
Participant 2	In-person	23	06/05/2022	40
Participant 3	In-person	20	07/05/2022	41
Participant 4	In-person	19	08/05/2022	41
Participant 5	In-person	18	08/05/2022	44
Participant 6	In-person	18	08/05/2022	43
Participant 7	In-person	20	09/05/2022	45
Participant 8	In-person	24	09/05/2022	46
Participant 9	In-person	19	09/05/2022	41
Participant 10	In-person	26	10/05/2022	39
Participant 11	In-person	25	10/05/2022	38
Participant 12	In-person	19	10/05/2022	43

(Table 1. Breakdown of Interviews)

3.5 Interview Preparation

To ensure the smooth running of the research conducted during this study, an interview guide was carefully prepared prior to the interviews. This guide contains twenty-one questions in a logical order. It is divided into five categories, namely ‘Need recognition,’ ‘Searching for information,’ ‘Evaluation of alternatives,’ ‘Purchase decision,’ and ‘Post-consumption behavior and divestment,’ which follows the theoretical model of the Consumer Decision-Making Process (Blackwell et al., 2006). The questions have been formulated to ensure that all topics necessary to gain insights into the subject of the study are covered and to attempt to answer the research question. In order to respect the method of semi-structured interviews, most of the questions are open-ended to encourage a greater collection of information. Finally, the subject of fast fashion and its consumption can be taboo for some and create different biases. Thus, the questions were formulated to reduce these biases as much as possible, and the question about post-purchase feelings was asked by the end of the interview, allowing participants to be more comfortable answering it. (For interview guide see Appendix A)

3.6 Data Analysis Method

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

Through the semi-structured interviews, the authors collected 502 minutes of interview data which was then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic analysis refers to a rigorous, systematic, and accessible process of coding and developing themes. According to Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield, there are two approaches to thematic analysis. One is known as the ‘Big Q’ approach, which pushes for the active involvement of the researcher in the study and emphasizes the importance of the researcher embracing their subjectivity rather than considering it an issue (2015). The second approach to thematic analysis is known as ‘small q’, which strives for the development of qualitative methods to be accepted by quantitative researchers by “bridging the gap between qualitative and quantitative approaches” (Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield, 2015).

The ‘Big Q’ thematic analysis approach was selected due to the explorative qualitative nature of this research. There are six stages of conducting a thematic analysis: Familiarization, Coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining, and naming themes, and writing (Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield, 2015). The thematic analysis allows researchers to identify themes and underlying patterns within the qualitative data collected. According to Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield, a data analysis approach also suits inexperienced researchers to produce trustworthy findings (2015).

3.6.2 Coding

The coding process is an important step when analyzing the empirical data gathered. The coding process essentially breaks down the transcripts to find patterns and themes and provide useful insight (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The coding process is quite an extensive process researchers must go through as it requires an in-depth analysis of the transcripts gathered after the data collection method. There are three steps within the coding process, the first is to create open codes, the second is to only focus on the open codes and group them, and the third step is to create patterns from the open codes that have been grouped together, which are called categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In the first step, it is important to review the transcripts and ensure that nothing is missed. For the transcripts after the interviews consisting of thirteen participants, some of the open codes created were ‘Awareness,’ ‘Problems when shopping for fast fashion,’ ‘time spent looking at attributes,’ ‘amount spent on clothing.’ The researchers

went through to ensure that no open codes had been missed within the transcript that provided important research input. Once open codes were created, they were gathered and compared to see if some could be grouped into the same categories, which is the second step in the coding process—each of these open codes grouped form categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In the open-code process, when grouping them, one example of a category that was formed was combining the open-code ‘sensitivity for sustainable attributes,’ ‘awareness about second-hand clothing,’ ‘brand preference,’ and ‘brand’s sustainability rating/ranking.’ The last and third step of the coding process is to form the categories into themes. The process of forming these themes is to look at existing patterns or a link between the different categories (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Hence, this led to the themes; ‘Knowledge of fast fashion,’ ‘Different consumption behaviors,’ and ‘Divestment motivations.’

3.7 Validity and Reliability

3.7.1 Validity

Validity determines whether the research is justifiable and genuine (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Validity measures the degree to which research measures what it intends to measure. There are two components to validity, internal and external validity. Internal validity is concerned with whether the generated theory and the observations align, also known as Credibility. It is the core strength of qualitative research as it answers the questions if the research is transparent and genuine. External validity is whether the generated theory and observations can be generalized in different settings, also known as Transferability. The sample size of qualitative research can damage the external validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Researchers can ensure the credibility of the research by accounting for the preconceived biases that might affect the study's findings (Saunders et al., 2016). The authors of this study also shared the interview transcriptions and preliminary findings with all the interview participants to ensure their sentiments and opinions were portrayed appropriately. Another technique to ensure credibility is to have a transparent process in terms of data analysis and meticulously indicate a clear decision trial (Saunders et al., 2016). Both authors of this study were present during all 12 interviews, transcription, coding, and analysis of the interviews. This was done to reduce biases and increase transparency throughout the process.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of a particular study can be transferred to other research conducted surrounding similar phenomena and contexts—the measure of how a study can be generalized (Saunders et al., 2016). In the context of this study, generalizability is challenging to achieve, given the qualitative exploratory nature of the research. The transferability of this study is also affected due to the sample size of the participants, only accounting for 12 individuals from Sweden aged 18 to 26. This limits the transferability of this study to other research investigating individuals from other age groups and countries.

3.7.2 Reliability

Reliability focuses on whether the research is transparent about the observations done and the interpretation of the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2021). Reliability can be divided into two concepts, internal and external. Internal reliability regards the agreement between the observers upon what they have heard and seen during observations; this is applicable if there is more than one observer (Bryman & Bell, 2011). External reliability concerns whether research can be replicated or not. However, replication is quite difficult in qualitative research as results and observations are dependent on social settings and cannot be frozen in time, meaning the same observations may not be generated (Bryman & Bell, 2011). To ensure reliability, all the researchers were involved in the transcribing process to reach a consensus and ensure no misinterpretations or misunderstandings. This was also applied in the coding process. Furthermore, despite the difficulty of replicating qualitative research, an explanation of how the research was conducted, creating an interview guide, how the participants were chosen, how they were sent out a consent form, and how the coding process was conducted has been done. Although, despite this preparation, it does not entail that the replication of this research will guarantee the same findings or observations.

4. Findings

The following section highlights the key findings gathered through the 12 semi-structured interviews conducted by the authors. These interviews provided the authors with 411 minutes of data that was first transcribed, then coded, and then categorized into themes. Through coding the data using a thematic analysis approach, the authors discovered three global themes ‘*Knowledge of fast fashion*’, ‘*Different consumption behaviors*’ and ‘*Divestment Motivations.*’ These themes have various underlying categories that will be explored in detail.

4.1 Theme 1 – Knowledge of Fast Fashion

The first theme displays the knowledge about the environmental and social issues regarding the fast fashion industry that participants expressed throughout the interviews. Participants were all aware of and shared common knowledge about it, even though some were more aware of the side effects of this industry, especially those with more sustainable purchasing behavior. Interviewees noticed changes in the fashion industry through the years, including the increase in overconsumption; some denounced various companies for being responsible for creating unnecessary needs. Interviewees shared their feelings and incomprehension about the disastrous social issues for workers, mainly coming from Asian countries, and reflected on various environmental disasters. Moreover, participants were also able to express their emotions and feelings regarding their purchasing behavior in fast fashion, slow fashion, or second-hand clothing. The data also shows interesting results on either consistency or inconsistency between how consumers perceive the negative effects of fast fashion and their post-purchase feelings.

4.1.1 The Side Effects of Fast Fashion

The first category identified is the side effects of fast fashion that all participants expressed on different scales. They all mentioned important changes in the fashion industry and social and environmental hazards related to fast fashion. Participant one expressed the changing in the fashion industry by stating:

“It seems that there are new collections of clothes every two months. It's not even seasonal anymore.”

Participant four shares the same thought while mentioning that there are now around 52 seasons each year, which is far from the two or four seasons that the fashion industry used to propose. To that statement, participant four expressed a certain resentment towards this drastic change that had occurred in a few years and affirmed:

“It’s the most unsustainable and damaging clothing consumption for the environment, animals, and people.”

Participant seven also highlights the scourge of overconsumption which is growing year by year in this industry and holds responsible the fast fashion companies, which always offer more different clothes to create previously unexpressed desires and needs in consumers. They then affirm:

“I think the issue there is that we’re just living in a very time and place where overconsumption is such a big problem and people evaluate based on ‘why buy one shirt for a certain price when you can get five shirts instead’. I think it’s just this whole way of wanting and not really needing things that contributes to the problem. And fast fashion empowers you to access and purchase a bunch of things that you don’t really need.”

Furthermore, participant eight sarcastically expressed that everyone is now aware of how fast fashion works and the negative aspects that come with it and explained how companies can offer paltry prices so appealing to consumers:

“We live in the year 2022 and you normally know what’s going on there. If brands sell stuff for five euros, there’s definitely someone not getting paid well or working under dangerous conditions”

Moreover, all participants expressed their knowledge of the situation regarding the disastrous social aspects surrounding the fast fashion industry. Most expressed disgust and incomprehension with the current situation, and that despite some human disasters brought by participants four and six, little has changed in terms of working conditions and safety for employees:

“Fast fashion is also well known for very poor labor practices and there were a lot of tragedies surrounding that, for instance, the Dhaka garment factory collapse.” - Participant four

“I remember that from Mango for example, which I think is owned by Zara, there was a factory that got destroyed. They discovered there were a lot of underaged people working there and also of course the labor hours there were horrible.” - Participant six

On the other hand, participant one expressed their stupefaction that everyone knew about the scandal around the Uyghurs and that nothing changed:

“I know that people that make the clothes are working in terrible conditions most of the time in Asia. They work crazy hours in a toxic environment and have low salaries. We all heard about the Uyghurs and those working camps, like, how can that still exist today?”

Also, most participants raised that social hazards occur particularly in third world countries, often in Asia, for the low labor cost. Participant eleven called for the need for change in fast fashion manufacturing, a sentiment that any other participants did not share. They said:

“Oh well, it is horrible. Labor abuse in those third-world countries like Vietnam, Cambodia and India. Those workers have to work overtime with small pay, in horrible conditions to produce more and more clothes every single week. This needs to change.”

Also, participants two and five shared the same fact when they mentioned the exploitation of workers in South Asian countries.

Finally, the information that came out the most during the interviews mainly concerns the working conditions of the employees, the miserable salaries, the deplorable infrastructures, and, in short, the human exploitation within this industry. Thus, some participants declared:

“Concerning the social impact, I am thinking of the working conditions of the workers, which can be disastrous. Generally, they work a lot, in bad conditions, and are poorly paid.” - Participant five

“The conditions are really bad. There are child labor, no safety requirements, for example bad working hours and almost no air conditioning, minor breaks, or no breaks. The conditions are really bad.” - Participant six

In addition, participant three directly denounced Zara and Bershka by placing them at the center of the controversies, as did participant 6 who underlined their opinion on Primark:

“Primark, I remember, I never bought from that store ever because I knew that they were massive, heavily involved with child labor and bad labor conditions, et cetera.”

From an environmental point of view, the participants almost all referred to the same elements, particularly soil and air pollution, and the indecent quantities of water used in the manufacture of clothing. These elements can be illustrated by participants two, four, and six, who respectively stated:

“They also do not care too much about the environment and it is well known the way they are polluting rivers in those countries.” - Participant two

“There is a lot of textile waste, the production process is damaging because of the CO2 emissions, the use of water is huge and at the same time, water pollution is another big issue surrounding fast fashion production. There are a lot of different chemicals used that pollute the environment and communities.” - Participant four

“They of course need a lot of water to grow cotton, et cetera.”- Participant six

Finally, participant five compared the fast fashion and fast-food industries together to show that, from an external point of view, they promote the same consumption model and want to spread the same kind of attractiveness:

“Fast fashion is just like fast food. You get your fashion, and you get it for cheap and you get a lot of it. So, it's very heavy on the environment.”

Participant five made an enumeration of environmental hazards, and they were stunned when they realized how far it can go:

“Regarding the environment, it is certain that brands that regularly renew their collections generate more CO2 than others and need more raw materials. I recently heard that it takes the equivalent of 5 bathtubs of water to make one jean. Can you imagine the total amount of water used for a whole collection of jeans made in millions of copies and renewed several times a year? That’s just crazy! But there is also the whole logistical side because the majority of clothes come from Asian countries, so you have to think about all the journeys made by plane, then by road to get to the warehouses and all the stores. For sure, when the collections are fast, all these factors are multiplied.”

4.1.2 How People Feel About The Fast Fashion and Its Effects

The second category shows the different emotions participants have when buying fast fashion clothes. Three approaches stood out among the twelve participants.

First, several participants expressed feelings of guilt. Participant two, who has not consumed fast fashion for five years, said they would feel guilty about buying this type of fashion today. Participant four, who almost completely stopped consuming fast fashion in the last few years, mentioned:

“Fast fashion brands always have a negative aspect to me, that’s why I try to avoid it. Whenever I need to buy even a single piece of clothing, I feel some guilt.”

From the same opinion, participant seven admitted to feeling guilty and bad about their post-purchase behavior. They stated:

“After buying new clothes I always feel happy I always like it but then there's always a part of me that feels bad when it is fast fashion because then I usually question myself and ask did I really need this or did I just want it and because of the price point I bought it.”

Second, some other participants acknowledged that their purchases do not support the actions to combat corporate practices from a social and environmental point of view and did not express much remorse. Supporting this, participant five highlighted that most of the population, including them, maintains the fast fashion system. Most of the time, participants admitted to a

kind of addiction to buying fast fashion, sometimes through comparison, like the participant five and nine, who said:

“It's horrible and sad, but I'm so used to buying from these kinds of shops that, despite the environmental and societal impact it includes, I keep buying there, without feeling really bad. It's like Mcdonald's, you know? Everyone knows it's bad, but everyone keeps going there.” –

Participant five

“I feel, like, well ... It's kind of like watching porn, you feel bad afterward, but you just do it. So, I think I don't feel that bad, but I'm aware that it's not a good thing to support and to do.”-

Participant nine

Finally, some interviewees expressed no remorse or felt no guilt after making a fast fashion purchase. Participant one expressed a dislike of buying fast fashion and described the hazards associated with this industry as a disaster. Nevertheless, later in the interview, they mentioned not thinking about feeling pleasure or remorse about their purchases:

“I am not thinking about it honestly, I'm just focusing on what I bought and the fact that I found something I like.”

It was the same thoughts for participant six, who was very deep into their consciousness toward the social conditions of workers in the manufacturing part. They first acknowledged:

“I think that's horrible and the labor conditions as well, I really care about people”

And later, participant six stated:

“How do I feel after a fast fashion purchase? Let me tell you, I feel good because I'm done with it. I bought it. I know it will look nice, so I'm excited to try it on with some outfits that I already have in my current wardrobe, and I have no guilt or remorse feelings whatsoever. Yeah, maybe it's bad, but, I don't even think of that, you know? I only have the money damage to my bank account that I am a bit sad about sometimes, but for the rest no. That's the only feelings that I usually have, enjoyment and excitement.”

At the same time, participant twelve asserted that they feel great after purchase and express only excitement when they receive their clothes and start wearing them. Participant eight claimed to be indifferent to their purchase and noted it to be a basic mundane function and basic human need.

4.2 Theme 2 – Different Fashion Consumptions

The second theme captures the sentiments of avid fast fashion consumers related to how much they spend on fast fashion, why their purchases are justified, and highlights their dependency on fast fashion apparel given their current economic, social, or situational circumstances. This theme also showcases the growing trend of avoiding fast fashion or reducing consumption of fast fashion clothing once consumers either realize the impact of their purchase or can afford more expensive clothing. The participants state that the attributes they value most after price when making clothing purchases vary based on the purchase, such as the occasion, nature, and longevity of the planned use. While most interviewees opt for fast fashion retailers due to the low price and wide variety of options, some participants are habitual consumers and do not consider sustainability or the environmental impact as a factor when making a purchase decision.

4.2.1 Frequency and Quantity of Purchase

The interviewees were asked to describe their purchase behavior regarding the frequency of their purchases and whether some fast fashion brands are preferred over others. The findings illustrate the participants' preferred brands and their spending patterns across different fashion categories. Their fashion choices are also informed by whether the nature of the purchases is well throughout or taken on impulse. There is a consensus among participants regarding fast fashion purchases being partly made on impulse instead of a longer search when spending a higher amount on better quality clothing.

While consumers agree on the low perceived quality associated with fast fashion consumption, their purchases are habitual in nature. Many of the interviewees who consume fast fashion could answer with precise figures that they spend on clothing.

“I used to go several times a month, like 5 or 6 times to H&M, Pull, and Bear, and Bershka. I buy on average around \$100 per month on fast fashion clothes and when I throw out something from my wardrobe, it forces me to buy an item of the same type quickly.” - Participant three

“I think I spend €500 max; I hope. However, when you buy something from Bershka or H&M, you already know that the quality is probably going to suck a little.” - Participant six

Participant five underlines a clear division of preference between fast fashion and more sustainable alternatives.

“I think I buy 80% of my clothes from shops like Zara, H&M or Stradivarius. These shops are everywhere, affordable and trendy. For the remaining 20%, it’s a mix between Shein and Vinted.” - Participant five

Another participant draws a connection between compulsive and impulsive purchases and fast fashion clothing. Furthermore, the difficulty associated with finding sustainable clothing is deemed to be the cause for their purchases.

“More compulsive purchases usually lead to buying fast fashion and more well thought purchases are well researched and lead to choosing for slow fashion brands. It is easier to find something that I want quickly in fast fashion stores as compared to researching the Internet to find sustainable solutions.” - Participant four

Participant 8 argued that fast fashion brands are affordable and are the preferred choice when buying clothing for one-time use. This also illustrates a dependency created by fast fashion brands by becoming brands of choice. *“Yes, I would say I prefer to buy fast fashion when I need something for a one-time event. For example, for a certain type of party or if I just need a basic shirt, then I just go there because most of the time they have it, and it's affordable.”* While more expensive brands are considered when buying something for a long-time use. participant eleven had a similar sentiment to share *“I only shop fast fashion when I need it for a one-time event, and I would never use it again”*

Participant seven presents a unique insight into their post-purchase behavior by associating making a purchase with excitement and thrill. While talking about their purchase behavior they

stated that *“I think what I like about buying fast fashion is just that I don't have to break my wallet to purchase something that I like or that I want and there is a thrill to purchasing new clothes and wearing those new clothes”*

4.2.2 Fast Fashion Purchase Justifications

Participants use different metrics to measure their satisfaction related to their fashion consumption and similarly use a variety of justifications to combat their sentiments about the side effects of fast fashion. Participant six states that the financial constraints that come with being a full-time student are the reason for their purchase decision:

“I think the main reason that pushes me into buying fast fashion is mostly price. You know I'm a student, I don't really have a steady income yet and because of that, cheap clothes are obviously appealing to me.” - Participant six

Similarly, other participants mention that financial restraints cause their preference for fast fashion brands. While one participant explicitly states that the value for money on some deals makes it very difficult to pass on:

“The first reason I buy fast fashion is that it's cheap. And I can't really spend a lot of money on clothes” - Participant one

“I'm still a student and I don't have that much money which forces me and pushes me to buy fast fashion. Also, there are some deals that you just cannot say no to.” - Participant nine

Deals and bundles offered by fast fashion brands seem to affect consumers' impulse purchase habits. Like participant 9, others shared the sentiment of being driven to purchase a bundle due to the value for money even if there is no need to make a purchase.

Participant one explains: *“Sometimes I make purchases based solely on impulse as I like that the prices are low and allow me to buy 2 or 3 items. If I shop in another store, then maybe it will be just one thing for the same amount.”* While participant five justified their purchases by highlighting a combination of the above-mentioned reasons in addition to the wide selection

offered by fast fashion retailers, they stated: *“I know it's not the best decision, but for the moment, as a student, I don't have the choice to buy fast fashion because slow fashion brands are, most of the time, too expensive and, in my opinion, they don't offer a large choice of "trendy" products as fast fashion. I get a ridiculous value for money when buying bundles too, which is unheard of in the world of slow fashion”*

Fast fashion outlets and their wide selection seem to be a key reason why participants prefer these brands as they *“have something for everyone irrespective of size, gender and financial situation, which I believe to promote inclusivity”*, states participant five. Participant eight had a similar insight and noted price to be the deciding factor in some instances, where letting go of an offer is too difficult and accessibility to be the key motivator for purchase. Their preference is also for timeless pieces intending to use the clothing item for a long time. While accessibility and value for money seem to be a key trigger when it comes to impulse purchases, the findings show that some participants characterize fast fashion stores to be the perfect place to buy clothing for either single-use or to shop for basic timeless items that are mainstays in a person's wardrobe.

According to participant seven: *“I try to find more basic pieces or timeless pieces that will work for a longer time and also just here and there I buy certain pieces that are maybe a little more fun or fitting to a certain occasion for one time use”*

This is supported by participants three and twelve, who identified a similar habit:

“The availability plays a big part when I buy fast fashion, also combined with small prices when it comes to buy basics, it's just perfect” - Participant three

“My ever-evolving sense of style is the reason that I purchase fast fashion as it allows me to experiment with styles while not spending a large amount of money. I could buy basics for a longer use while also not breaking the bank if I need a piece for a special occasion, that's the beauty with fast fashion.” - Participant twelve

4.2.3 Change of Perspective

A shift in purchase behaviors can be noted among participants who have started to reduce their consumption of fast fashion or boycott fast fashion brands in favor of more sustainable alternatives. This change is owed partly to actively searching for sustainable alternatives, finding similar value in second-hand options, and investing in clothing that has a longer life cycle.

Participant one, who has recently discovered a second-hand clothing platform recognizes the value it has to offer and sees the potential of buying fast fashion through the platform to reduce its environmental footprint.

“I recently just started to look for second-hand clothes and shoes. Several people told me about Vinted so I tried to see what I could find and it's not that bad. Actually, there are some good deals and most of the items come from fast fashion. It feels to be a better alternative to buying new clothing every time, even if it does come from a fast fashion store.” - Participant one

Another participant confirmed adding sustainably produced and sourced to the desired attributes in clothing. Although they still purchase fast fashion, this change has been made after learning how the material used in fast fashion products is more harmful than others. However, this is done when the clothing price is not a deterrence.

“I have become, over the past months, more conscious of the material that my clothing is made out of and I try to buy clothing that's more cotton or using recycled materials instead of clothing that only uses polyester. I now look at product descriptions a bit more carefully now than I did in the past. I do this whenever my budget allows for it” - Participant seven

Budget constraints remain a solid deciding factor for clothing; however, a few participants make more environmentally conscious purchase decisions by reducing the volume of their purchases. Their purchases are made to have a higher quality piece of clothing that would last longer. A few participants claim to only invest in clothing when their budget allows them to afford slow fashion and support brands that have an acceptable sustainability rating and reflect their values.

“It’s been 5 years now that I don’t buy fast fashion due to sustainability reasons, I usually buy from Ralph Lauren, Lacoste, Levi’s, and Vans. I never buy fast fashion; I only buy brands that I like and that fit my tastes and values. I have tried to shop ethically for years now because I learned a lot about fast fashion issues and everything that this industry creates negatively.” -

Participant

two

“Now I prefer to go less often to buy brands like Balenciaga, Gucci, Palm Angels, Stone Island, or Off White. I take my time while doing research and look for long-term utilization. I place importance on what materials are used to produce the item and the reputation the brand has, the spirit behind it, and especially the quality of their clothing.” - Participant three

Participant eleven mentions the abysmal quality of fast fashion clothing to be the reason why they *“stopped buying cheap clothes because the quality is so bad and when you wash it one time there’s stuff that shrinks, and then you can basically just throw it away”*. However, the participant later admitted that they still buy clothing from fast fashion retailers but less than they used to. The participant also noted that sustainability is also a prominent attribute they consider when making the purchase, now more than ever.

One participant highlighted specific methods for searching for environmentally conscious clothes, taking active steps to reduce consumption of clothes, and supporting businesses that are climate positive.

“If I have to buy a down/feather jacket, I will always search for a RDS (Responsible Down Standard) certificate, which means that down was sourced responsibly. I also use the app called ‘Good on You’, which gives ratings for brands in regard to how they are doing in three different aspects: labor, environment, and animals.” - Participant four

To sum up, the participants highlighted the importance of maintaining a balance in consumption and policing themselves to make informed choices regarding fast fashion clothing items. While all participants claimed to know in detail the problems within the fast fashion industry, only a select few have made conscious decisions to break out of the habit of overconsumption of fast fashion clothing.

4.3 Theme 3 – Divestment Motivations

The third theme illustrates the third phase in the behavior of fast fashion consumers, post-purchase behavior, and divestment. The findings revealed charitable behavior about old clothes that participants wanted to get rid of. The data collected shows that all the participants, without exception, told us about the same practices to give a second life to their used clothes. Nevertheless, actions to recycle or process these garments sometimes conflict with the buying practices of some participants.

Some participants said they wanted to profit from the sale of their used clothes without mentioning any reason, except to be able to buy other clothes in some cases. This is, for example, the case of participants two and five, who said:

“I usually sell these items through specific second-hand apps like Depop or Vinted.” - Participant two

“Most of the time, when my clothes are in good condition, but I don't wear them anymore or they have become too small, I sell them on Vinted.” - Participant five

Participant six, on the contrary, mentioned that the sale of their used clothes was a laborious task, which took time and did not lead fruit before. Thus, they abandoned the idea of continuing their path and now prefer to give their articles to associations:

“I never usually throw it away. I usually donate it to the Salvation Army. They will either sell it again as a thrift shop idea, actually, at a good price, or they will reuse the garments to create new clothes with it, which I think is super cool.”

In the same vein, several participants also donated their old clothes to charities and associations, even to fast fashion companies such as H&M or C&A, in exchange for coupons, as participant three claimed. Participants one and eight recycle their clothes in clothing recycling bins:

“I never throw my clothes in the trash because I don’t like something anymore. I use those big boxes that are available to recycle my clothes.” - Participant one

“Most of the time, I put my used clothes into clothing boxes where they send these things to countries that need it.” - Participant eight

Participant 9 claims that fast fashion clothing items have a shorter shelf life in their closet due to the sudden trend and season changes, and they stated:

“I just donate it to charity places where you can just hand in your clothes, so I don't dispose of them in the trash.”

Finally, almost all of the participants said that one of their options was to give away their used clothes to family and friends. Only if the garments are in awful conditions, some admitted they would throw them away:

“I give them to people of my family, or to associations except if they are in a deplorable state in this case, I throw them away” - Participant three

All in all, for some participants, giving away their old clothes is truly meaningful:

“I try to think that if the garment that I had can be useful for someone else, then I feel better about buying a new one. But if it is just going to waste, then I don’t feel good about acquiring a new item.” - Participant four

Participant six showed some contradiction with their feelings between after purchases and disposal of clothes. While they were stating that they do not feel guilty at all toward the environment and social causes after purchasing fast fashion, they stated later:

“I don't just disregard it easily, I'm very mindful about that as well because of the environment and because of poverty in some countries. I think it's such a waste to just throw it away, you know.”

5. Discussion/Analysis

The semi-structured interviews conducted during this study made it possible to formulate a precise structure in three distinct themes, highlighting the participants' varied modes of thought and consumption. The findings shed light on repetitive behaviors classified into three different consumer archetypes related to the fast fashion industry. The authors have termed these archetypes: the Dependent, the Mover, and the Maverick and are described below. This section will also present revised versions of the Consumer Decision-Making Process by Blackwell et al. (2006) for two consumer archetypes presented below – The Dependent and The Mover. Changes or the lack of within the consumer journeys and the stages in the CDP will be explained in detail.

5.1 Fast Fashion Consumers Archetypes

The semi-structured interviews conducted during this study made it possible to formulate a precise structure in three distinct themes, highlighting the participants' varied modes of thought and consumption. The findings shed light on repetitive behaviors classified into three different consumer archetypes related to the fast fashion industry.

5.1.1 The Dependent

Two elements mainly characterize the Dependent. Firstly, their financial situation dictates their consumption of fashion items, and secondly, their impulsive purchasing behavior and their desire to be fashionable.

On the one hand, Theme 1 of the Findings revealed that the Dependent is well aware of the fast fashion industry's issues, both in social and environmental terms. This is in line with Becker-Leifhold and Heuer (2018) who claim that younger generations of consumers tend to be more aware of the unethical impacts of their clothing consumption. In addition, the Dependent sometimes displays stupefaction and dismay about these issues. However, the data shows that knowledge of this industry's ethical concerns comes at odds with their post-purchase feelings. The findings show the Dependent takes pleasure in buying clothes in fast fashion stores and does not express regret. Watson and Yan (2013) explain this contradiction by the fact that

consumers having impulsive buying tendencies avoid feeling guilty or expressing remorse by purchasing inexpensive clothing.

On the other hand, if the Dependent does not proudly express their love for fast fashion, they tend to justify their purchases by different criteria. As highlighted in Theme 2, the primary element that describes the motivations of the Dependent is the price. This is supported by Valaei (2017) who states that the intention of purchasing fast fashion and the price is positively correlated. This element plays a significant part in their purchasing behavior. Consumers have increased their impulsive fast fashion purchases and purchasing in general through the years because of trendiness and low prices (Joung, 2014). In particular, the Dependent justifies irresistible, unmissable promotions and low prices that resonate with their financial situation. Indeed, low prices reduce customers' resistance to buying fast fashion garments, making them more reliant on the industry (Papadopoulou, Papasolomou & Thrassou, 2021). Thus, the Dependent finds themselves a prisoner of their budget and prefers to consume clothing that is not only budget-friendly, but also trendy and current in fashion - namely, fast fashion brands. The Environmental Protection Agency (2019) highlights that fast fashion creates desires that are not present in consumers, causing them to purchase more than they need due to the low prices. Also, the Dependent's desire to be fashionable and their impulsive purchasing behavior dictate the fast fashion products' attractiveness (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Valaei (2017) supports this by stating that consumers buy fast fashion because they can display their personality for low prices.

In addition, Theme 3 raises a second behavior which either corroborates the fact that the Dependent is eager to earn money from selling their clothes to buy new ones, thus underlining the dependency, or corroborates that disposing of their item helps them to have a better conscious toward environmental and social hazards. Joung (2014) showed that consumers are motivated to donate their used or rarely worn clothes for practical reasons and to relieve them from feelings of guilt. In the first case, the Dependent's first option is to sell their used clothes either to individuals or by giving them to fast fashion companies to receive discount coupons in exchange. In the second case, the Dependent donates his clothes to his relatives or charities. Frame and Newton (2007) show that the relation between acknowledging the environmental problems and how consumers behave is nonexistent, which explains the Dependent motives to part with a garment. However, the Dependent justifies these donations as a gesture in favor of the environment and affirms that this good deed makes them feel good at the idea that their

clothes can have a second life. Morgan and Birtwistle (2009) highlight that consumers being conscious of their abundant amount of clothes tend to be motivated to give to charities, mainly because it makes them feel good.

In short, if the Dependent does not admit to simply liking fast fashion as a reason to buy it, they first display much concern for social and environmental problems. After purchasing new garments, they tend to ease their conscience both by claiming to be a prisoner of their budget, thus justifying their purchases of fast fashion, and donating their used clothes. McNeill and Moore (2015) argue that the consumers' behavior toward fast fashion is sometimes incoherent with their attitudes, which in this case means their awareness of sustainable and ethical issues. However, as its name suggests, the Dependent remains dependent on the fast fashion industry that offers precisely what attracts them: low prices, wide availability, and a wide choice of clothing. This is supported by Becker-Leifhold and Heuer (2018), who claim that even if consumers claim to be caring for the sustainable and ethical issues, they sometimes ignore them and repeat their purchasing patterns. Finally, the Dependent tends to care less about the environment when they have the opportunity to satisfy their desires. This is what Wiederhold et al. (2018) put forward by emphasizing that environmental concerns take second place to clothing style, which is the most important element during the purchase phase.

Upon analyzing the findings of this study, the authors have developed an altered version of the consumer decision-making process for the dependent, initially presented by Blackwell et al. (2006). Given the reduced time spent searching for information and comparing alternatives, as the consumers belonging to this archetype have stated, these stages could be removed from the consumer decision-making process for this type of consumer. Most search is conducted internally, which according to Stankevich et al. (2017), is dependent on information gained from previous experiences. Consumers identified that their purchases are often fueled by impulsivity, a characteristic associated with Gen Z and millennial consumer behavior (Djafarova & Bowes, 2021). Consumers recognize the need due to various triggers or by reaching the divestment stage of a previous purchase journey. This archetype also reflects less on their purchase than the other archetypes, given the little consideration or thought put into the purchase. The consumption is focused mainly on value for money over the utility provided by the clothing. In the divestment stage, as stated above, the dependent desires to not contribute to waste and responsibly discard the piece of clothing.

5.1.2 The Mover

The Mover is a type of fast fashion consumer categorized by being open to change, making conscious efforts to educate themselves on alternatives to fast fashion, and actively making purchase decisions that reflect their will to be more environmentally positive. This is supported by Gazzola et al. (2017), who claim that younger generations are defined by their need to seek out sustainable, ethically manufactured, and long-lasting products.

Moreover, they are self-aware of the impact of their purchases and how harmful they can be to the environment, and the circumstances their clothes are being manufactured in. The Mover, although bound by the same situational circumstances as the Dependent, makes efforts to control spending in a way that allows them to explore different avenues of fashion. This comes in support of the argument of Morgan and Birtwistle (2009), stating that consumers might change their clothing purchasing behavior if their environmental and social consciousness were increased.

This consumer might still have justifications for their purchase of fast fashion clothing and feelings of guilt, but counters that by reducing the amount of money they spend, and the quantity purchased on less sustainable clothing to accommodate sustainable fashion, while also investing in clothing that either lasts longer or supports brands that offer sustainable clothing. As Watson and Yan (2013) show, consumers tend to avoid the feeling of guilt by prioritizing quality over quantity.

The Mover is also open to buying second-hand clothing, mainly for economic reasons and to support their values toward environmental issues. Hur (2020) goes along with it and states that one of the main vectors of second-hand consumption is the value for money and that it allows consumers to develop their self-identity through a different fashion style.

Finally, the Mover disposes of their used clothes without thinking of any personal benefit and feels good about the idea that they can serve other people. They know that they will have a second life, whether they are recycled, given to relatives, donated to associations, or sold by second-hand shops. The Mover are also aware that their action has a positive impact on the environment.

Overall, this consumer archetype feels they contributed more to sustainability than their counterparts who do not consume any other, more sustainable alternative to fast fashion. However, Papadopoulou, Papasolomou, and Thrassou (2021) claim that consumers with increasing consciousness and concerns about the environment are not sufficiently resistant to what fast fashion promotes and sells, which creates a gap between their intentions and their behavior.

The consumer decision-making process of The Mover possesses all stages presented by Blackwell et al. (2006); however, there is a higher focus on certain elements than others. The need recognition stage for The Mover is similar to the Dependent. The information search and comparison of alternatives stages place higher importance on attributes dictated by the nature of the purchase and use. Consumers belonging to this archetype prefer an item of higher quality, and comparison is based, to some extent, on price, quality, and often sustainability. Furthermore, the Mover prefers clothing to last longer, and therefore quality and longevity are key metrics of evaluation in the post-purchase behavior stage. The divestment stage is similar to the other archetypes.

5.1.2 The Maverick

A more progressive way of thinking characterizes the Maverick. As its name suggests, the Maverick is defined here as a consumer who differentiates themselves from others, thinks differently from the majority, and shows a particular form of independence which, in this study, suggests freedom from fast fashion chains. Papadopoulou, Papasolomou, and Thrassou (2021) state that consumers with a higher consciousness of environmental and social issues are driven by their dedication and values, leading them to advocate sustainability and opt for new consumption styles. Moreover, their consumption is often driven by self-focused needs, seeking to find cool or unique products or styles.

According to their convictions, the Maverick has made or chosen transit to a more responsible and sustainable approach to either satisfy new desires or to fight and, in some form, denounce the excesses of fast fashion. McNeill and Moore (2015) show that this type of consumer has a very negative opinion of fast fashion and tends to reduce clothing consumption by brands in

this industry as much as possible. Thus, the Maverick makes conscious decisions to ensure their clothing purchases do not have a negative environmental impact.

First, the Maverick may want to satisfy new cravings that fit their commitments and values in terms of sustainability. Sometimes, after overcoming the barriers - mostly financial - that prevented them from escaping from the fast fashion industry that did not meet their needs but satisfied their situation, the Maverick wants to satisfy their previously unattainable desires. Thus, the Maverick who was forced to buy fast fashion for lack of budget, for example, can now meet their needs for differentiation by turning to the luxury fashion industry, for example, when their financial situation is no longer a problem. Similarly, McNeill and Moore (2015) explain that for this type of consumer, a conflict lies between the aspiration of reducing their fashion consumption and the desire to be fashionable.

Second, the Maverick can devote much time to finding alternatives to fast fashion that best correspond to their values and consumption patterns. A factor such as the price of the garment is usually not important, as long as the item meets their criteria. McNeill and Moore (2015) reinforce this statement while sustaining that price is not a concern for this type of consumer since they genuinely desire the garment they pay for. Generally, the Maverick seeks clothing whose materials are of higher quality, respectful of the environment, and comes from brands where the working conditions of the employees are dignified and safe. Thus, the Maverick generally turns to responsible brands for purchasing new fashion pieces. This argument is reinforced by Papadopoulou, Papasolomou, and Thrassou (2021), who state that the purchasing behavior and brand loyalty of consumers that are more aware of environmental and social concerns are influenced by their values.

In the two previous cases, the Maverick often refers to the second-hand industry and advocates all these aspects without considering the financial aspects because it is one of the best alternatives to limit overconsumption and the production of new fashions and new products constantly. Secondly, it is a good option to build a unique style. Becker-Leifhold and Heuer (2018) highlight that ethically produced garments allow consumers to differentiate themselves and enhance their singularity.

Lastly, the Maverick parts with their used clothes for the same reasons as the Mover and feels good about giving their used clothes. In short, the Maverick differentiates itself from the others

by renouncing fast fashion to denounce its practices, fight against its growth, and finds alternatives allowing it to be in phase with its values.

The consumer decision-making process for The Maverick covers all the steps of the consumer decision-making process by Blackwell et al. (2006) to its full extent. These consumers are willing to pay a premium for their preferred brands and sustainable alternatives to fast fashion. Due to the higher price, these consumers spend a substantial time searching for and comparing attributes. Their preference for brands and search for attributes is representative of their values and lifestyle. The post-purchase evaluation of this cohort is based on the satisfaction of their expectations of high quality, sustainability, long-lasting, and fashion-forward. The divestment stage is also responsibly executed, in line with their purchase behavior of being driven by care for the environment.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Academic Implications

The study offers several new contributions to the literature surrounding fast fashion consumption among young millennials and Gen Z. Through the analysis of the findings, the authors have recognized several unique insights that could also be avenues for future research. These theoretical contributions are presented below.

- *Thought attitude gap*

The most apparent and obvious insight gained from the semi-structured interviews was the extent of knowledge each participant had regarding fast fashion and the numerous issues related to the industry. Studies surrounding sustainability and consumer behavior often suggest that consumers are not particularly aware of the specifics regarding sustainability within the fashion industry (Gam & Banning, 2011; Connel, 2010). Researchers also suggest that sustainable consumer behavior might not transfer to the clothing industry due to confusion and ignorance (Connel, 2010). However, each interviewee for this study was able to list the sustainability issues within fast fashion and point to specific underlying issues and incidents of neglect by fast fashion companies and their causes. All participants expressed their concern for fast fashion's environmental and societal issues. This is in line with multiple studies indicating

sustainability to be a key factor when consumers within the Gen Z and Millennial generations make purchase decisions (Dabija, Bejan, & Puşcaş, 2020).

Current academic literature has heavily addressed the severity of the fast fashion industry's environmental and social impact (Bick, Halsey & Ekenga, 2018; McNeill & Moore, 2015) and how sustainability is an important element in modern-day consumption (Dabija, Bejan, & Puşcaş, 2020). However, this study extends this area in research by highlighting that consumers' consideration of sustainability and concern for the environment appears and disappears throughout the consumer decision-making process. This is what the authors of this research consider to be the most prominent contributions to academic literature surrounding this topic and phenomena. The findings of this study stipulate that consumers' concern for the environment and attitude toward the impact of their purchase change throughout the customer journey as per convenience. The findings show that consumers do not necessarily transfer their knowledge of issues and concern about fast fashion consumption into action when making purchases. At the divestment stage, the concern for the environment and the need to make sustainable decisions return at the end of the consumer's decision-making process. At this stage, the consumer is more conscious of concepts of 'sustainable consumption,' 'waste,' and 'circular economy.' Their motivation is then to contribute to more sustainable practices such as donating or selling their second-hand clothing. Researchers believe that two complimenting aspects of conscious consumption are sustainable purchases and reducing waste caused by unsustainable practices of discarding clothes (Quoquab & Mohammad, 2016). Convenience seems to be a driving factor in consumers deciding whether sustainability is a relevant metric during different stages of the consumer decision-making process.

- *The Price Factor:*

Another contribution that this study makes is to provide evidence that clarifies an element of research surrounding Gen Z and young millennials. Price has been noted as a critical factor in consumers' decision-making process related to clothing (McNeill & Moore, 2015; Wiederhold & Martinez, 2018), while other factors such as style, trendiness, accessibility, and shipping costs are also considered important (Gabrielli, Baghi & Codeluppi, 2013). As mentioned above, a growing body of literature also suggests sustainability to be a key attribute that consumers search for in their purchases (Gazzola et al., 2017; Vajkai & Zsoka, 2020).

According to Dabija, Bejan, & Puşcaş (2020), consumers from Gen Z and Millennial generations are often open to spending a higher amount of money on a premium sustainable product. However, Gen Z and Young Millennials are also the largest target market for fast fashion brands. There is a clear discrepancy in the literature surrounding Gen Z's purchase motivations related to their clothing consumption. A significant contribution of this study is the distinction between these motivations for Gen Z and Millennials.

The findings of this study indicate that price is a determining factor for most consumers and the value for money acts as the most prominent motivation among consumers. Even though research suggests that the tide has started to shift, and consumers consider sustainability important, the findings from this research suggest otherwise. The post-purchase behavior of most consumers suggests satisfaction based on price and value of money over other evaluation attributes. Moreover, consumers who value price over other attributes, did not admit to any feelings related to disappointment or remorse for their purchase. The findings illustrate that consumers use various justifications to counter concerns regarding the sustainability of fast fashion consumption. These justifications highlight a tradeoff consumers make between the value and utility provided by fast fashion brands and the consumer's values and concerns regarding unsustainable practices within the fast fashion industry.

- *Consumer Archetypes and Fast Fashion Consumption*

Lastly, another significant academic contribution of this study is the development of three consumer archetypes informed by the findings of this research and analyzed with relevant literature. These archetypes are the Dependent, the Mover, and the Maverick. Our findings show that these three consumer types are different in their sensitivity to environmental and social issues related to fast fashion, their arguments for and against fast fashion, and their purchasing and post-purchasing behaviors. While the Dependent provides reasons justifying their fast fashion purchases, the Mover accepts their situation and hopes to transition to more sustainable purchase behavior and a state of mind, similar to the Maverick. The consumer decision process of these three types of consumers is also very distinct and unique to one another. The Dependent is more prone to skipping the information search and comparing alternatives stage of the process, and their post-purchase behavior often displays signs of indifference. The Mover, on the other hand, makes more strategic purchases focused on longevity of use, thus paying special attention to comparing alternatives and care for products

in their post-purchase behavior. On the other end of the spectrum of fast fashion consumption, the Maverick has no interest in the product category. This consumer has made a conscious decision to dissociate from fast fashion brands and supports more sustainable alternatives.

5.2.2 Managerial Implications

The findings from this study offer several practical implications for fast fashion brands and manufacturers, who either aim to bring in more audiences to their brand or make efforts to rectify the tainted image of the fast fashion brands.

Firstly, the findings of this research study highlight the dependency that has been created by fast fashion brands on their target consumers. The value for money provided by fast fashion is one of the key reasons consumers find it difficult to avoid purchasing. Being exposed to communication surrounding deals and bundles being offered has a positive relationship with impulsive buying behavior. This insight could be used in marketing collections that have not performed well in terms of sales. Marketers could designate a section of their e-commerce platform to specifically market and promote these bundles. Doing so would reduce waste from the manufacturer's side and allow consumers to still avail value for money.

The analysis of the findings also points to brands' sustainability ranking as a growing metric for comparing alternatives by consumers. Consumers, especially Gen Z and young millennials, are aware of most issues related to the fast fashion industry. As presented in the analysis, fast fashion consumers go through a journey of being dependent on fast fashion to outgrowing this phase to boycotting it. Brands must strive to minimize their environmental footprint and educate consumers on the active efforts made by the company towards sustainable manufacturing and sourcing of the clothing.

Lastly, the findings of this study also indicate consumers' interest in recycling their clothing, which in some cases fuels the need to buy newer pieces. Brands could focus on this last stage of a product's life cycle and create programs that drive consumers to the point of sale in order to donate their used clothing in exchange for discounts. Brands could use this to enhance their sustainability rating by motivating consumers not to contribute to waste and dispose of clothes in a responsible and sustainable manner.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore Gen Z's consumption behavior within the fast fashion and the role that sustainability plays in their decision-making process. The study employed a qualitative research approach and, using a thematic analysis of twelve semi-structured interviews, aimed to gain a deeper understanding surrounding Gen Z's Fast fashion consumption. The research questions that the authors aimed to answer were:

- I. *What are the consumer archetypes of fast fashion?*
- II. *What role do sustainability related issues play in the decision-making process of Gen Z and young millennials?*

The participants in this study had varying degrees of consumption of fast fashion clothing. However, all participants in the study agreed that fast fashion gives birth to an abundance of issues, environmental and social. Interviewees were also in agreement that fast fashion consumption contributes to waste as the quality of the clothes is poor, which fuels a recurring need and desire to repurchase. Another recurring theme from the interviews was the participants' inability to act on their concerns and limit their fast fashion consumption. Some participants used various reasons to justify their purchases, while others declared that the value provided by fast fashion was a worthy trade-off.

The findings of this study also showed price to have an overbearing influence over participants' decision-making. Other attributes such as quality, style, and, most importantly, sustainability were secondary to price. The authors utilized the consumer decision-making process by Blackwell et al. (2006) to construct the interview guide to elicit responses that would provide a description of the customer journey from need recognition to divestment. Participants showed worry tendencies at the beginning of the customer journey as fast fashion's environmental and social downsides were brought into question. However, most consumers only display signs of valuing sustainability at the last stage, where used clothing is either donated or sold.

The findings also showed that a few participants take sustainability into consideration and are more responsible with their consumption. These participants either compliment their fast fashion purchases with brands with a better sustainability rating, second-hand clothing, or other sustainable alternatives when their financial situation allows for it.

In conclusion, fast fashion brands are here to stay, and they have created a dependency on them within their target audience. This dependency is why consumers are willing to forego their beliefs, opinions, and concerns for the environment and support the brands they love. However, it is also apparent that once monetary reasons are not an issue, consumers search for more quality products, something that fast fashion is not known for. Then, slow fashion brands that offer higher quality for a higher price are what consumers gravitate toward. This transition satisfies their desire to be more responsible and sustainable since slow fashion brands are known to have a better sustainability rating. Once in the transition phase, consumers begin to show signs of dissent towards fast fashion brands, and other sustainable options such as second-hand clothing and even vegan alternatives are considered. If fast fashion brands want to continue to be the preferred clothing option for Generation Z/Young Millennials, there needs to be a higher focus on reducing the environmental footprint of their clothing. Thus, providing consumers with a sense of satisfaction surrounding their clothing consumption and not something they should feel guilty about.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research

This chapter will discuss all the limitations entailed by this study. This is done so future research can be conducted within the field without these limitations challenging the credibility of this research area.

First and foremost, due to the qualitative research approach employed for this study, there are limitations to this research's verifiability. The small sample size of participants from Sweden belonging to Gen Z also poses limitations to the generalizability of this study. This is exacerbated through the use of a convenience sampling technique. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be applied to the general population. However, this research aimed to explore Gen Z's fast fashion consumption patterns, and further research could be undertaken with a larger sample size to elicit more holistic and generalizable findings. The proposed future research could also utilize a purposive sampling technique with the criteria limited to the participant belonging to this generational cohort and not inquiring if they possess prior knowledge or experience with fast fashion clothing.

A limitation was the time that the authors had to complete this research, and due to the time restraint, the authors only managed to conduct 12 interviews. If the authors had more time and the sample size was increased, they might have been able to identify more patterns in the consumption behavior of Gen Z and improve the contributions made to the existing body of literature on the subject. Another key area for future research would be to study fast fashion consumption among Gen Z in relation to their socio-economic situation. This future research would be of high relevance given the nature of the findings of this study. Another area for future research could explore the idea of investigating how awareness of the negative effects of fast fashion has a much greater impact on the process of recycling clothes than on the purchase of clothes. This is also in line with one of the key findings of this research paper.

Lastly, this study's qualitative and exploratory nature might have caused a level of unintentional bias in the interpretation of the data collected from participants. Furthermore, many of the participants admittedly had not reflected upon their fast fashion consumption, and given the time constraint to conduct the interviews, their answers might be deemed as inconclusive and be subject to change on further reflection. Future research could be conducted to compare the consumption difference between fast fashion and slow fashion to rectify this limitation. Interviewees could then have more reflective answers and identify precise consumption behaviors.

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Appendix A – Interview Guide

Hello [participant name], thank you for accepting and taking the time to participate in this interview; it is very appreciated. The estimated time to conduct this interview is approximately 40 minutes.

We are the two researchers of this study based on Gen Z and their consumption of fast fashion. We both are students in the Master of International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University, Sweden. I am Guillaume/Rafae, and I will be the one leading this interview. My partner Rafae/Guillaume will be the assistant and make sure to listen and take notes.

Before answering the questions, please attest your consent to using your answers in the context of this scientific theoretical study. According to the GDPR rules, all your answers will be confidential and anonymous and will only be used for the sole purpose of this research. Your name and personal information will not figure in the paper. You are free to stop and ask for your answers to be deleted at any moment of the interview. Also, we will be using auto-transcribing software for real-time transcription. Once the interview is completed, it will be sent to you for your approval. You will also need to sign a participation form allowing us to use your answers anonymously. As a second proof of consent, please state your surname, first name, and age, and say, "I agree that my answers may be used anonymously for this research."

If you have any questions, feel free to ask me anytime. Are you ready to start?

Recognition of the problem

1. How often do you shop for clothes?
2. What brands do you usually buy from?
3. Are you aware of the term fast fashion? If yes, what do you know about it?
4. Are there certain occasions that push you to buy fast fashion?
5. Does the occasion (compulsive, thought, special event) dictate whether you buy fast fashion or slow fashion?
6. Can you describe any other triggers that push you towards buying fast fashion?
7. What do you know about the issues regarding fast fashion? (Environmental, social)

Finding information

8. Where do you search for information about the clothing? What type of information? And why?
9. What is of importance to you when you consider buying clothes?
10. How much time do you usually spend looking at the attributes of a certain clothing item?
11. Are there attributes that you value more or less than others? (Quality, sustainability, country of origin, price, etc.)

Evaluation of alternatives

12. Do you spend time comparing alternatives? If yes, what is the deciding factor? (Example: price, shipping, brand, second hand, etc.)
13. How do brands play a role in your comparison of alternatives?
14. Does a brand's sustainability rating play a part in your decision?

Purchase decision

15. How much do you spend a month or a year in fast fashion?
16. What do you like when buying fast fashion?

Post-purchase and divestment

17. What are the criteria for you to evaluate your fast fashion purchases? (Durability, style, price, quality, choices, availability, instant fashion, etc.)
18. How do you feel after a fast fashion purchase?
19. What criteria do you have when discarding a clothing item?
20. How do you dispose of your clothing after you have discarded them from your wardrobe?
21. How does this disposal play a part in your next purchase?