

CONSUMERS' PURCHASING BEHAVIOR OF SUSTAINABLE FASHION

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Abstract

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Abstract <p>The fashion industry has changed drastically within the last two decades. The concept of fast fashion has only been created a few decades ago and it has already become one of the world's main causes of pollution. It has changed some of the main driving factors within the industry, such as quality, speed of market, cost, and demand. These changes have also created multiple severe problems in the industry that are affecting the environment, and labor conditions in an alarming way. Because of these drastic changes and problems fast fashion has caused; sustainable fashion has been created as a response to it. It aims to create fashion on more ethical and environmental terms. The Purpose of this study is to find out what factors affect the consumers purchasing decisions of sustainable fashion.</p> <p>Data was collected through a survey that was shared on social media to find out consumers purchasing habits as well as attitude and knowledge towards sustainable fashion. The theoretical part focuses on the fashion industry and the information was gathered from various different digital sources.</p> <p>The results show that consumers attitude towards sustainable fashion is positive and curious. The steps consumers are taking towards being more sustainable as well as showing what factors affect their purchasing decisions are presented in the empirical research and data analysis section.</p>		
Keywords Fast fashion, sustainable fashion, sustainability, ethics, purchasing behavior, responsibility		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

The fashion industry has a long history. However, fast fashion has only been created few decades ago and it already has become one of the main causes of pollution in this world. Thus, sustainability has become a huge topic of discussion as well as a trend in different industries. Especially in the fashion industry sustainability is an extremely relevant topic among the consumers as well as businesses. The fashion industry highly depends on consumers and therefore it is important for the consumers to receive enough information about brands process of production and the issues in the fast fashion industry. In order for the fast fashion industry to start being more responsible there also needs to be a significant change in consumers purchasing behavior.

The aim of this study is to examine the factors that affect the consumers purchasing behavior of sustainable fashion as well as their attitude and knowledge towards it. Therefore, a survey was shared on social media to find out these factors.

1.2 Thesis Objectives, Research Questions and Limitations

The objective of this thesis is to examine consumers' purchasing behavior of sustainable fashion and what factors affect the purchasing decision. The aim is to also find out consumers attitude towards sustainable fashion as well as their knowledge about fast fashion and the issues with it.

The main research questions of this study are:

- What factors affect the consumers' decision on buying sustainable fashion?
- Are consumers aware of the issues that fast fashion creates?

The possible limitations of the study can be the number of responses the survey got. Higher amount of responses could have made the research more reliable. Since the survey was shared on two Facebook groups about fashion, the group members might have more knowledge and interest towards fashion than an average consumer. Therefore, there can be a lack in responses of people that are not

specifically interested of fashion. The issues within the fashion industry are broad and the study has not been constructed to cover all of them.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical part of this study includes the explanation of key concepts that will be used throughout this thesis, explanation of fast fashion and sustainable fashion, ethics in purchasing behavior as well as issues in the fashion industry such as pollution, working conditions, and brand transparency. These parts can be found on the chapters two and three. The theoretical parts have been carefully researched using digital sources that are reliable and from recent years.

1.4 Research Methodology and Data Collection

The empirical part of this study is done using quantitative research method. The data is collected through a survey that will be presented in the Appendix 1.

The data is carefully analyzed giving reliable and specific information about the consumers purchasing behavior and attitude towards sustainable fashion as well as knowledge about the issues within fast fashion. The data from the survey also gives answers to the two research questions of this thesis.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis starts with an introduction that explains the purpose of this research as well as the structure of it. The first chapter covers the research background, thesis objectives, research questions and limitations, theoretical and empirical framework, research methodology and data collection as well as research structure.

After the introduction the next two chapters explain the fashion industry, the key concepts, and the issues within the fashion industry. The fourth chapter, empirical research and data analysis covers the research method and the process of empirical collection of data and analysis of the findings. The survey questions and layout can be found in the Appendix 1.

Chapter 5 concludes and answers the main research questions of this study. Moreover, it covers the validity and reliability as well as suggestions on further

research. The very last chapter is summary. References and appendices are listed at the end of the thesis.

2 FASHION INDUSTRY

2.1 Key Concepts

Here will be explained some important concepts that will be used through the thesis: purchasing behavior, greenwashing, and synthetic fabrics.

Purchasing behavior means consumers' actions made before making the purchasing decision. Different factors such as social, cultural, personal, and impulse play part in the purchasing behavior (Hambleton 2020).

Greenwashing is a term used, when a brand claims and markets themselves to be more sustainable than they actually are (Nylon Singapore 2020). Greenwashing is currently a major issue within the fashion industry since it gives wrongful image of the brand and misleads the consumers.

Synthetic fabrics have a long history, starting with the production of artificial silk. Later on, the discovery of plastic-made fibers such as polyester and nylon that majority of today's clothes are made from, overtook the imports of cotton. These synthetic fabrics are extremely harmful to the environment since they easily find their way into oceans and are hard to decay. (Stanton 2020).

2.2 Fast Fashion

Although fashion industry has a long history, fast fashion has only been created a few decades ago. During this short period of time, it has already changed the fashion industry drastically, such as speed of market, quality, and mass production (Bhardwaj & Fairhurst 2020). The main purpose of fast fashion is to produce massive amounts of clothing to maximize profit.

Fast fashion brands do not design their clothes to last, but rather create them for seasonal trend purposes. The usages of cheap materials on garments, forces consumers to purchase new ones more often, since the materials are poor quality that are not made to last long. Using lower quality materials as well as outsourcing production and manufacturing to Asia where it is cheaper, is the way fast fashion companies can react fast to trends. The constantly changing fashion trends that comes from high fashion holds huge popularity among consumers. Since these

changes happened in the fashion companies' supply chains, consumers can now purchase desired garments faster than ever before. Fast fashion brands' main driving factor is low prices, which also means lower quality with unethical production.

Fast fashion is heavily influenced by high fashion. Fast fashion companies often copy the runway looks and make them a bit more wearable and affordable for the average consumers (Bruculieri 2020). By doing this, fast fashion allows the consumers to feel trendy and up to date at a lower price.

Before fast fashion overtook the industry, there was mainly just two seasons which were Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter. Fast fashion companies started doing 52 "micro-seasons" per year (Whitehead 2014). The goal of this change was to make consumers purchase garments more often, since the garments they purchase would feel off-trend after a week. This also makes the garments somewhat more exclusive, since they are in stores only for a short period of time, due to the next trends coming out every week.

There are a lot of issues within the industry of fast fashion. Many fast fashion brands have been accused of having unethical working conditions, using child and immigrant labor as well as being unethical towards the environment. However, consumers are starting to be more and more aware of these issues in the industry and have started to demand more responsibility from these fashion companies. This has resulted to many fast fashion companies starting to change their ways slowly. For example, by including collections that are made from eco-friendlier materials. However, fast fashion is not designed to be sustainable. Therefore, it is challenging for these types of companies to implement more sustainability into their supply chains. Companies have also started to be more transparent about their production and these days a lot of information can be found on their websites. This change happened due to consumers demanding it (Aguirre 2020).

2.3 Sustainable Fashion

Sustainable fashion simply described is opposite of fast fashion. Sustainable fashion aims to create fashion on more ethical and environmentally friendly terms, taking more responsibility on the faced issues within the industry. It uses more organic and non-artificial materials such as cotton, wool, and linen which are more

environmentally friendly fabrics since they are easier to decay compared to much used material like polyester, that takes multiple years. Some artificial materials might be also used such as polyester, although it is made from recycled plastic items such as plastic bottles (Van Elven 2018). Sustainable brands also aim to be more ethical in the labor regulations and conditions that has been and still is a huge issue within the industry.

Sustainability has become a driving trend these days in many different industries, especially in the fashion industry. This is because people have started to become more aware of issues such as labor conditions and environmental challenges due to having much more information out to reach than a few decades ago. Because of this fast fashion companies have also started to take steps towards being more sustainable, although there needs to be a lot more done.

Sustainable fashion faces many different types of issues. One of them being that it comes with an expensive price tag compared to fast fashion companies. This is due to using long-lasting high-quality materials, producing and manufacturing domestically/locally. Because of these factors, not everyone can afford it, which could be sustainable fashion's biggest disadvantage. (Chan 2020). Due to the fact of not being able to match fast fashion companies' prices, it is hard for sustainable brands to even try and compete in the same markets.

Although greenwashing is not a new concept, it is a major issue since it has become so general in the industry within the last couple of decades. Some of the biggest fast fashion companies such as Zara, H&M, and Primark have been accused of greenwashing. (Assoune 2020). Since sustainability has become desired by the consumers, fashion brands have been greenwashing more and more. Brands that are actually sustainable can easily get lost with brands that are greenwashing since they only show what consumers want to see.

2.4 Ethics in Purchasing Behavior

In order to create and achieve a more sustainable and ethical fashion industry, the biggest change needs to happen in the consumers purchasing habits. The mind set needs to be changed more towards buying better and buying less. Consumers hold

a certain power in the fashion industry and should use it to push fast fashion brands towards being more responsible and sustainable.

There are multiple factors that affect the purchasing behavior: self-image, social, impulse purchases, costs, and lack of awareness (Hambleton 2020). In today's purchasing behavior, it has become more of a norm to constantly buy more than you need. It might be very hard for some people to change their mindset, especially if they lack knowledge and awareness of issues in the fashion industry, and how purchasing goods from fast fashion companies only fuels it.

McKinsey & Company did a survey about "Consumer sentiment on sustainability in fashion". The survey was directed to European consumers during the COVID-19 crisis and how it has affected their sentiment toward sustainability. The survey shows that consumers have changed their purchasing behavior towards being more sustainable and environmentally friendly during the COVID-19 crisis. (Granskog 2020).

Change in behavior during COVID-19 crisis, % of respondents (n = 2,004)¹

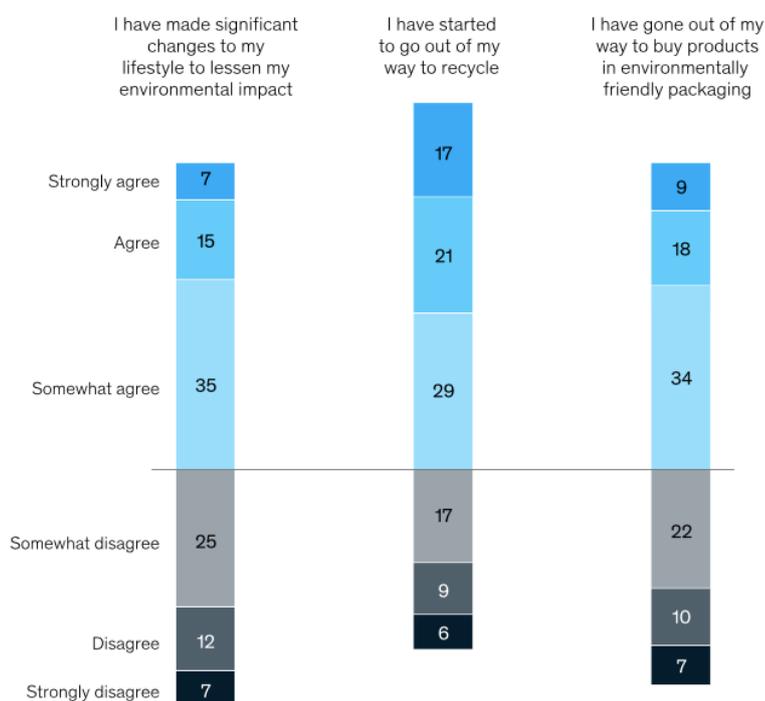


Figure 1 Change in behavior during COVID-19 crisis (Granskog 2020)

Figure 1 shows how majority of the respondents have already made changes to their lifestyles in order to meet sustainability goals. (Granskog 2020). This comes to

show how different situations can affect the consumers purchasing habits relatively easy.

Changes in purchasing behavior after COVID-19 crisis, % of respondents (n = 2,004)¹

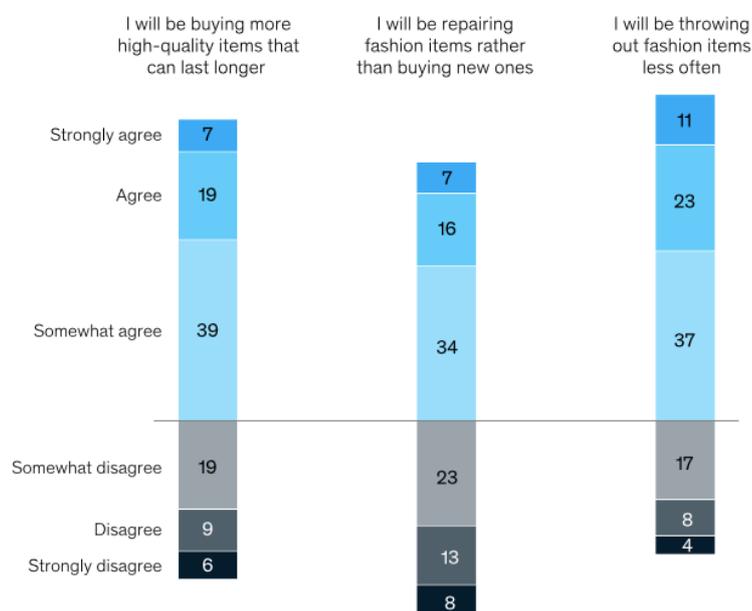


Figure 2 Changes in purchasing behavior after COVID-19 crisis (Granskog 2020)

Figure 2 shows changes in purchasing behavior after the COVID-19 crisis. Majority of the respondents agree on going to buy more high-quality items that lasts longer, repairing fashion items rather than buying new ones as well as throwing out fashion items less often. The survey also shows different aspects changing in consumers purchasing behavior. Ethics are one factor that affects the behavior and being in a difficult situation can certainly change the behavior as the results of McKinsey & Company's survey shows.

There seems to be a shift in consumers purchasing behavior to being more ethical during a pandemic which is inevitably positive change, although it will be in the future to see if the same behavior will continue even after the pandemic.

3 ISSUES IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

3.1 Pollution

In a short amount of time, fashion industry has become one of the world's main polluters. The main reason for this is fast fashion brands and the way that they operate. The aim of fast fashion is to maximize profit which means mass producing without prioritizing quality or ethics.

The carbon footprint in the fashion industry is extremely high. This is due to the fact that producing and manufacturing their clothes in different countries in Asia and not domestic. This forces more use for cargo ships and planes in order to transport goods. This is part of the reason why sustainable brands try to produce their goods domestically/locally to reduce the use of such transportation that has a high carbon footprint.

Now more than 60 percent of clothes are made from synthetic fabrics such as polyester for example. The production of synthetic fibers releases significant amounts of greenhouse gases. In addition, the synthetic microfibers end up into the oceans after every wash (Fashion Revolution 2020). Fabrics being made out of plastic causes the clothes to not decay over time when they end up in landfills. This clearly is a huge issue since it is extremely damaging for the environment. According to New York Times 85 percent of textile waste in the US goes to landfills (Schlossberg 2019).

The production in textile industry creates lots of wastewater. In China, it is estimated that 70 percent of this wastewater ends up into the rivers and lakes which is a product of largely unregulated textile industry (Webber 2017). Since the regulations of production and waste handling is very poor in the Asian countries, there should be more responsibility held against to the fast fashion companies that outsource their production to these types of countries.

In the recent years multiple big fast fashion brands have started to create sustainable and eco-friendly collections. For example, a brand called Reserved (Reserved 2020) states,

Eco Aware is a dedicated collection including more responsible and sustainable fashion. We implement our strategy virtually at each stage of

production. Eco Aware is more than employing ecological fabrics which are produced and processed in a manner which causes the least harm to the environment – it cares for transportation process as well.

Even though it is positive that various brands have started to do this, the problem is still nowhere near fixed. This is just one collection, meaning the brand's majority of other collections and lines are not eco-friendly.

Although fast fashion companies play the biggest part on the current alarming state of the fashion industry, all the blame should not go to them. Consumers hold an extremely high responsibility as well. Consumers have the power to decide where to shop, what brands to support and also how they act after the purchase. Throwing away clothes that have no use anymore is also an extremely huge issue, since majority of it ends up in the landfills (Schlossberg 2019). The consumers need to take more responsibility with their purchases, and what they do with them after.

There are multiple different ways to deal with garments that have no use anymore. For example, some alternative ways are donating them to those who are in need, correctly recycling them, selling them as second hand, or even finding a new purpose for them such as using them in cleaning.

3.2 Working Conditions

The textile industry has been abusing the labor rights for a long time. Many fast fashion brands such as H&M and Zara have been accused multiple times of using child and immigrant laboring as well as having unethical working conditions for their employees (Nissen 2017).

Fast fashion companies often outsource their production to Asian countries since the labor force costs less than in Europe for example. Due to this, in many Asian countries the labor regulations are lot less strict leading to having unethical working conditions. A great example for this is the Rana Plaza disaster that happened in 2013. Rana Plaza was a factory in Bangladesh that collapsed killing over 1,000 of their workers. Rana Plaza was a supplier to some major fast fashion companies such as Mango and Primark. (Clean Clothes Campaign 2020).

Many companies own little to no factories themselves but use multiple different suppliers. For example, H&M does not own any factories or production plants. Instead they work with around 800 independent suppliers (Career Hennes & Mauritz 2020). Having numerous amounts of suppliers in different countries brings its own issues. All countries have different legislations and regulations on laboring as well as environmental factors such as waste handling. The operation in the factory solely depends in the supplier itself. Therefore, it is hard for these companies to know exactly what goes on in the factories. However, the responsibility is on H&M and other companies themselves to do research and choose their suppliers carefully.

Fashion industry labors millions of people especially on Asia. If these fast fashion companies would move laboring domestic, millions of jobs would disappear from Asian countries which would cause a new problem itself. The issue of bad work conditions is not just only in Asia. According to Forbes over 46,000 individuals who make up Los Angeles's second-largest industry the so called "cut-and-sew" labor force, 71 percent of them being immigrants (Meagher 2020), which is also a huge ethical issue since many of them are undocumented.

3.3 Brand Transparency

One main question arises in regards the issues within fast fashion. Do consumers know what is happening in the industry and chooses to ignore it or are they just unaware of it?

Within the past couple of years sustainability and being environmentally responsible have become trends in the fashion industry. Consumers have also learned about it and became more and more aware of the issues, which has caused fast fashion brands having to react to it. Due to consumers demand many brands have become more transparent of where their materials origin, the process of their production, carbon footprint, suppliers etc. Although this is a good thing, there are still some major factors lacking. For example, greenwashing. Brands can easily push a narrative of what consumers want to see. In this case it is them showing of being more eco-friendly than they actually are.

For example, H&M has made their supply chain very transparent. They have revealed all their suppliers, materials, working conditions, sustainability etc. (H&M

Group 2020). Although this is a highly positive action, however, this is not the main step towards being more sustainable and ethical industry. The most important step is to produce less and to make their supply chain as sustainable as possible. The best way to impact the environment is to simply produce, buy, and consume less.

4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH AND DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative research method was used in this thesis for the empirical part. The questions of the survey were created based on topics of the theoretical part of this thesis. The survey had 11 questions where 10 of them were multiple choice questions and one open answer question in the end. The aim of the first three questions were to get basic information about the consumers, such as gender, age, and residence. The rest of the questions aimed to find out the respondents' purchasing behavior of fashion, what factors affect it, how aware they are of the issues in the fashion industry, and how they feel about sustainable fashion.

The survey was done using Google Forms platform and it was posted in two Facebook groups called "Beauty& Style" as well as "Ethical, Ecological, and Responsible Fashion". The aim of posting it to groups in Facebook was to reach different age groups as well as to reach more people around different parts of Finland. All together the survey was answered by 214 people during a one-week period. The results of the questioner will be first looked through and explained as well as later on they will be analyzed. The survey questions and layout can be found in the Appendix 1 at the end of this thesis.

4.1 Results

The first question (Figure 3) was about the gender of the respondents.

1. Gender

214 responses

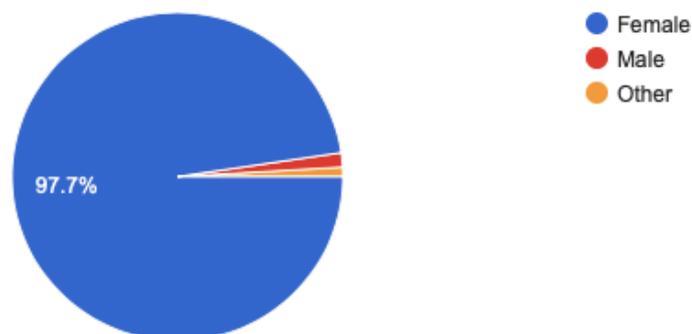


Figure 3 Gender

This was in order to find out whether women/men are more interested in fashion and sustainability issues. Majority of the respondents were females by 209. Three of the respondents were males and two identified as other.

The second question (Figure 4) was about the age of the respondents.

2. Age

214 responses

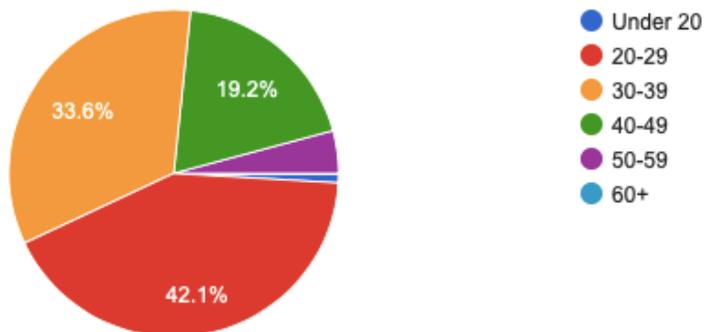


Figure 4 Age

This was in order to find out which age group is more interested in fashion and sustainability issues as well as to see how their purchasing behaviors differ between the age groups. Out of the 214 respondents, 90 were 20 to 29-year-olds. Seventy-two were 30-39, 41 were 40-49 and 9 were 50 to 59-year-olds. There were only two respondents who were under 20 years old.

The third question (Figure 5) was about the respondents' residence.

3. Residence

214 responses

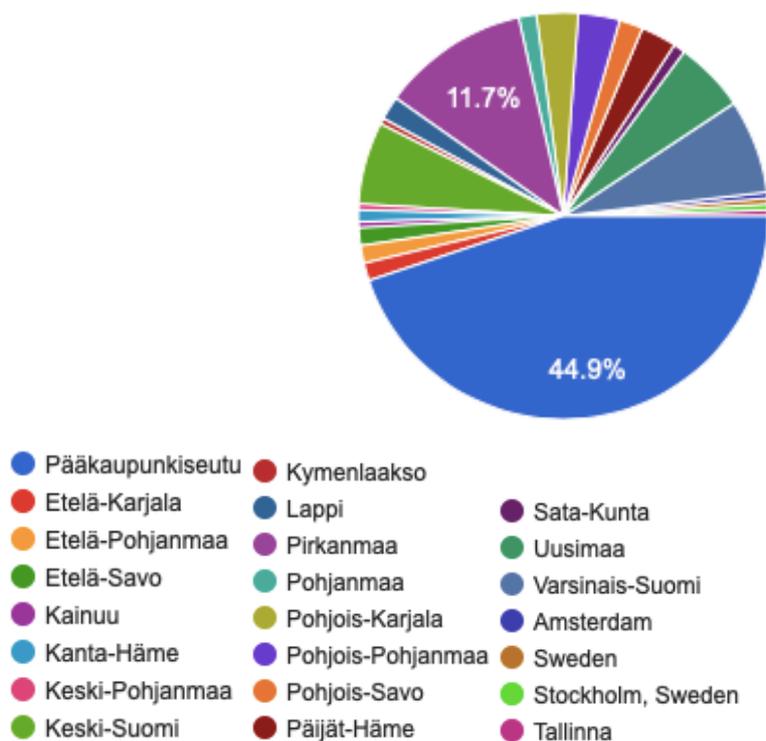


Figure 5 Residence

This was in order to find out if the area of residence plays a part in consumers purchasing behavior, and how/if they differ from one another. Majority of the respondents were from the main capital area of Finland. The second largest area where 25 of the respondents were from was Pirkanmaa. Rest of the respondents were from various other parts of Finland as well as few of the respondents were from other European countries.

The fourth question (Figure 6) was about whether the respondents are aware of how fast fashion is affecting the environment.

4. Are you aware of how fast fashion is affecting the environment?

214 responses



Figure 6 Are you aware of how fast fashion is affecting the environment?

Majority of the respondents answered yes to being aware. Only three of the respondents said no and 5 respondents answered mainly, yes to a certain amount, but not enough.

Majority answered yes to being aware of how fast fashion is affecting the environment; however, looking at the answers to some upcoming questions indicates, that they are aware of the issue but to some extent, choose to ignore it.

5. In a scale of 1-5 what factors affect your decision when purchasing clothes?

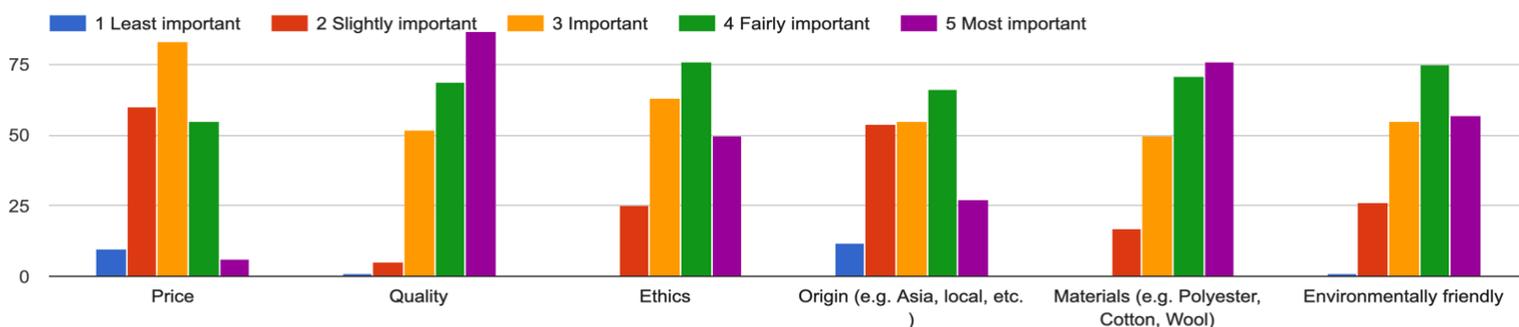


Figure 7 In a scale of 1-5 what factors affect your decision when purchasing clothes?

The fifth question's (Figure 7) purpose was to find out how much these five factors: price, quality, ethics, origin, materials, and environmentally friendliness affect the

respondents purchasing decision. Majority of respondents answered price being an important factor, however not the most important. Second largest answer was price being only a slightly important factor. Quality and materials were answered being the most important factors for the respondents.

Ethics, origin, and being environmentally friendly got most answers of being slightly to fairly important factors. However, 12 respondents answered origin being the least important factor for them when purchasing clothes. This could indicate that these consumers do not know the labor conditions being extremely poor in developing countries, where over 60 percent of this worlds clothing are being manufactured (International Labour Organization 1996).

The purpose of the sixth question (Figure 8) was to find out do the respondents research the brands they shop at and if they are environmentally responsible.

6. Do you research if the brands you shop at are environmentally responsible?

214 responses

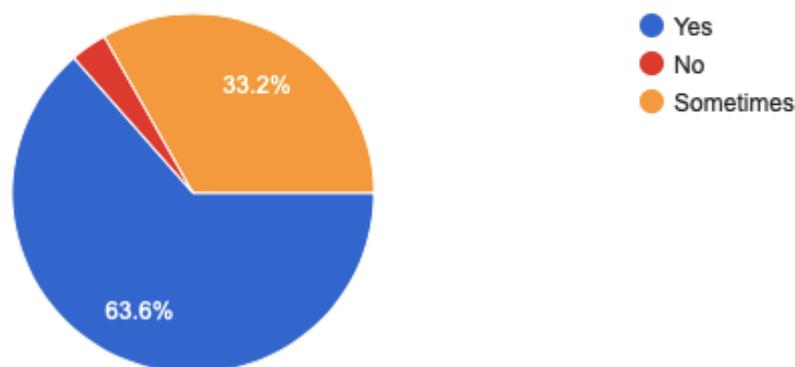


Figure 8 Do you research if the brands you shop at are environmentally responsible?

Over half responded that they do research if the brands they shop at are environmentally friendly. Seventy-one responded that they research the companies sometimes and only 7 responded that they do not research the companies at all.

In the question 4 (Figure 6) 96.3% of the respondents answered being aware of how fast fashion is affecting the environment, but still 33.2% answered researching only sometimes companies they shop at if they are environmentally responsible, again, proving that some consumers choose to ignore the issues to some extent.

The seventh question (Figure 9) was about whether the respondents shop at thrift stores and why.

7. Do you shop at thrift stores and if so, why?

214 responses

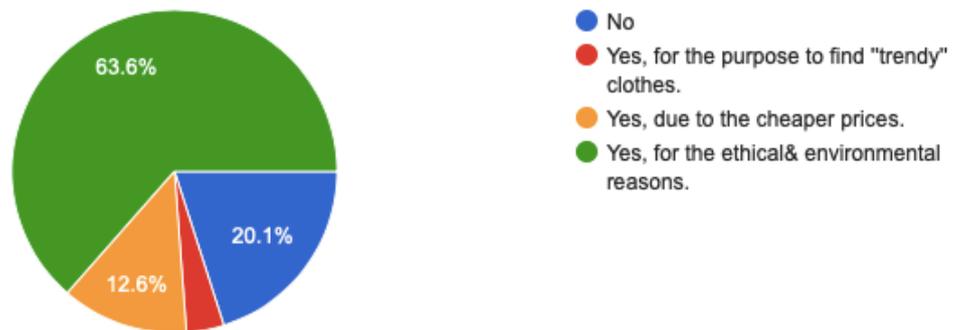


Figure 9 Do you shop at thrift stores and if so, why?

Shopping at secondhand stores is a great alternative from having to buy brand new garments. It is also better to buy fast fashion clothes from secondhand stores than brand new. This gives the garment a longer life span as well as possibly saving it from ending up in a landfill.

Majority of the respondents answered that they do shop at thrift stores for the ethical and environmental reasons. Forty-three responded that they do not shop at thrift stores at all, the reason for this remaining unknown. 27 answered shopping at thrift stores due to the cheaper prices and 8 responded the reasoning being, to find trendy clothes.

The eighth question (Figure 10) was about finding out if the respondents think fast fashion companies have enough information out about their production, origin of materials, employees working conditions, etc.

8. Do you think fashion companies have enough information out about their production, origin of materials, employees working conditions, etc?

214 responses

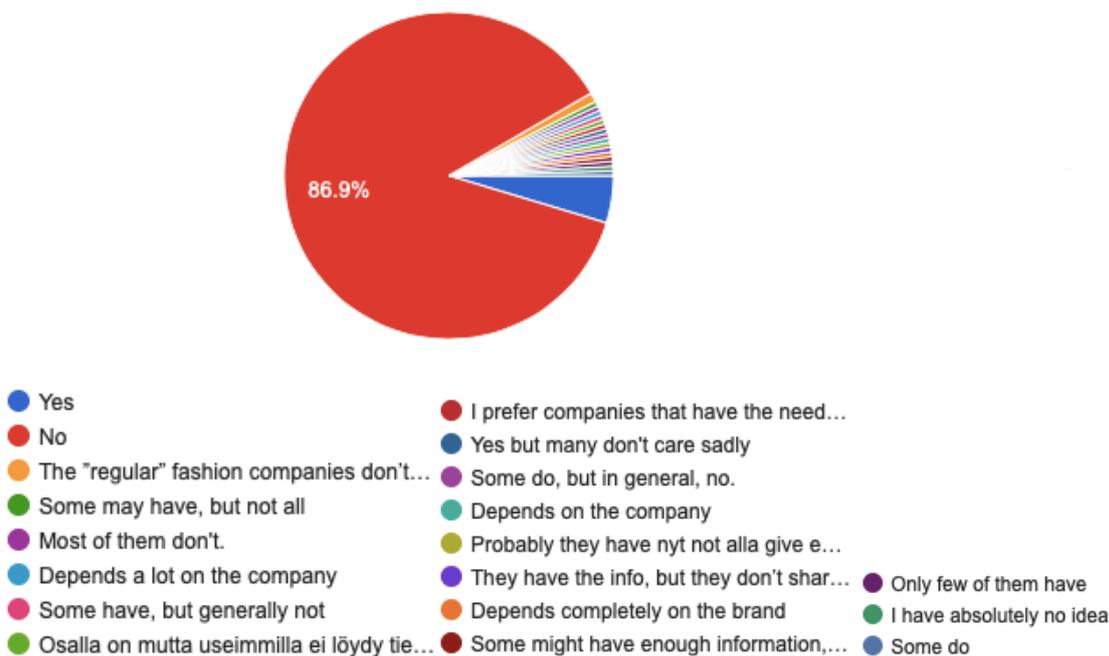


Figure 10 Do you think fashion companies have enough information out about their production, origin of materials, employees working conditions, etc?

This question was asked since many companies do not provide that information easily on their website for the public to read.

Majority of the respondents thought that fashion companies do not have enough information out about their production, origin of materials, and employees working conditions. 10 respondents thought there is enough information out about these factors. This answer is quite alarming, since many companies do not have much information about these factors out for consumers to research. This could indicate, that for some consumers, these issues do not concern them or that they do not know enough about these issues to even be researching information about them.

Various other responds were mainly stating that it depends on the company; some companies do some do not.

The ninth question (Figure 11) was about finding out the consumers' purchasing behavior.

9. Of the following, what best describes your purchasing behavior?

214 responses



Figure 11 Of the following, what best describes your purchasing behavior?

The purpose was for the respondents to answer which of the following describes their purchasing behavior the best:

- The ethical, environmental, and sustainable factors do not affect my purchasing decisions.
- I try to buy from brands that are more ethical and environmentally friendly, but price is the main factor.
- I mostly only buy from brands that are ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly.

Out of these three answer options 114, which is over half of the respondents, stated that they mostly only buy garments from brands that are ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly. 98 described their purchasing behavior being, trying to buy from brands that are more ethical and environmentally friendly but price being the main factor. Due to sustainable fashion being more expensive and being unable to compete with fast fashion prices, possibly multiple consumers purchase fast fashion just because the price is cheaper, but do not support the ideology of the company. Only two of the respondents answered, that the ethical, environmental, and sustainable factors do not affect their purchasing decisions, which is still alarming. Since in Europe the labor legislations are higher, it might be hard for some consumers to understand the severe situations that are in the Asian countries as

well as they might be unaware of the environmental causes the fashion industry creates and therefore these factors do not affect their purchasing decisions.

The tenth question (Figure 12) was about whether or not the respondents feel like they know enough about sustainable fashion.

10. Do you feel that you know enough about sustainable fashion?

214 responses

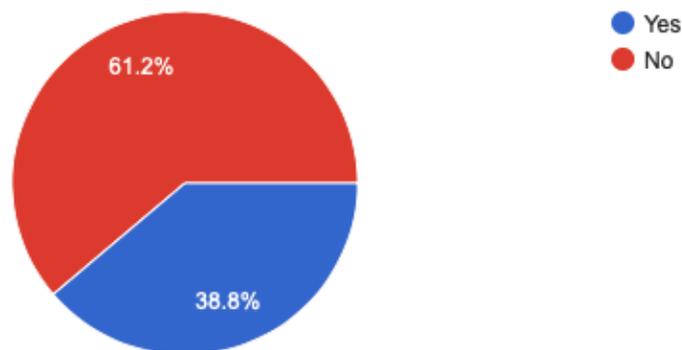


Figure 12 Do you feel that you know enough about sustainable fashion?

This question was asked since sustainable fashion is a somewhat newer concept that many people do not know much about if they have not researched about it themselves.

Out of all the responses 131 answered that they feel like they know enough about sustainable fashion and 83 answered they do not know enough. However, since this questioner was posted in "Ethical, Ecological, and Responsible Fashion" Facebook group the result was somewhat expected. This is due to people who are part of the group, are expectedly more interested about the topic and possibly already know more about it than the average person. Having 38.8 percent responding not knowing enough proves that there needs to be more information and the topic needs more media attention.

The last and final part of this questioner was an open answer question (Figure 13) about what the respondents think about sustainable fashion.

11. What are your thoughts about sustainable fashion?

102 responses

Figure 13 What are your thoughts about sustainable fashion?

This question got 102 answers all together, and the answers will be analyzed later on.

4.2 Data Analysis

Looking at the respondents' answers there are some major contradictions. The general conclusion is that many consumers say they are aware of the issues in the fashion industry but then act in a favor of these fast fashion companies and to some extent choose to ignore the issues.

The Figure 5 showed the residences of the respondents, with majority of the respondents coming from more populated areas of Finland. Looking over their responses and comments they made, residence did not play a huge factor on purchasing behavior or general knowledge about the fashion industry and its problems.

Age groups also did not play a huge factor. The Figure 4 showed the respondents ages where majority were 20-29-year-olds. Price was being answered to be more important factor within the younger age group than among the older age groups but however not majorly. None of the age groups did not averagely answer price being the biggest factor affecting their purchasing decision, but in open answer question mentioning sustainable fashion being too expensive. This result also holds a contradiction.

The last question of the survey was "What are your thoughts about sustainable fashion?" (Figure 13) and it was an open answer question. Majority of the answers all related to each other in some way and there were multiple similar ones. The most commented and relevant concepts by the respondents' will be now analyzed.

There were multiple comments about sustainable brands being too hard to find. One respondent commented

There are quite many sustainable brands, but they are too hard to find unless you are an enthusiast. I am convinced that more people would buy them if they just knew about them.

This is a problem that sustainable brands are facing. Majority of them are only online shops which means it is more challenging to reach some audiences such as older people. Having a retail store would expose the brand to more age groups than only having an online store that could also be extremely challenging to come across without being an enthusiast. Both retail and online stores have their own benefits and disadvantages. Retail stores can provide more personal and different types of shopping experiences as well as consumers being able to try on the clothes before making the purchase. This is another field where sustainable brands are not able to compete with fast fashion brands that have both, online and retail store.

Multiple respondents expressed wanting to purchase more from sustainable brands but different types of factors being obstacles such as price and variety of sizes. Many respondents commented how sustainable brands lack of having bigger sizes and therefore being forced to shop at brands that do have more variation on sizing but may not be as sustainable. It is easier for fast fashion brands to create multiple different types of models and sizes that fit for everyone since it is cheap and fast for them to produce. Comparing to sustainable fashion where producing is more expensive and takes longer. Therefore, some consumers have to choose fast fashion regardless if wanting or not.

The next concept that got mentioned multiple times was greenwashing. It is very positive that multiple consumers are aware of the issue of greenwashing and are most likely able to look and do research on companies past that. If more consumers would know about greenwashing, the easier it would be to demand companies of doing it. Since fashion industry solely depends on its consumers, they hold a certain power and therefore are able to demand companies to act more responsibly. Great examples for these are, fast fashion companies starting to take more responsibility of their actions, being more transparent of their supply chains, and adding more eco-friendlier collections.

Some respondents explained that it is hard to do research on brands and to know if they are genuinely sustainable and environmentally friendly since there is so much greenwashing being used. The respondent then proceeded to explain that the way they make purchasing decisions now on, is solely based on the quality and material of the garment. Making purchasing decisions based on these two criterias helps,

since the consumer is only buying garments with good quality materials that most likely will last long. However, this may still end up supporting fast fashion brands since some of these types of brands have more expensive collections that are made with higher quality materials than the rest of their general garments. One respondent mentioned buying lower quality garments for trend purposes from fast fashion brands only from secondhand stores. This is a great alternative way of buying these types of garments. Since buying them secondhand it does not directly support the brand financially and it gives the garment a longer usage that could prevent it from ending up to a landfill.

One respondent expressed that "Is there such a thing as sustainable fashion, since all clothes production causes pollution in some way." The aim of sustainable fashion is to minimize the pollution and waste it creates as well as trying to find innovative ways to reuse and recycle materials. However, there still are some problems within sustainable fashion too. Using recycled plastic in a way is good, but in the end, it is still plastic that most likely will end up in landfills and oceans. (Van Elven 2018). So, a question arises, is sustainable fashion actually sustainable and can the fashion industry ever really be sustainable due to using plastic materials.

The need for changing consumer purchasing habits was also mentioned multiple times on the answers. Everyone would be able to change their purchasing habits in some way. Knowing that price plays a huge factor in purchasing decisions, there still are many different ways to change purchasing habits than just buying from sustainable brands. Such as buying less and considering if they really are in the need of the garment or if they could possibly borrow the item from someone rather than having to buy it brand new.

Multiple respondents also mention that since the fashion industry's issues are so severe why there is not more laws regulating it. Making strict laws to the industry would seem to fix the issue, however countries such as India, Vietnam, and Bangladesh do not have the organizational structures in place to hold textile manufacturers accountable. Having laws on the matter in the US and EU only pushes companies even more to outsource their production to these countries since the goal of maximum profit stays the same. (Lauren 2019). It is hard to find effective solutions to problems like these, however, like said earlier, consumers hold power.

Boycotting brands that use suppliers from these countries could be effective, although having enough people around the world on same page would be extremely challenging.

The fashion industry, both fast and sustainable, hold massive problems that needs fixing. To an industry that is this big it is hard to make changes on a fast phase, however changes to the industry are slowly being made.

5 CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Answers to Research Questions

What factors affect the consumers' decision on buying sustainable fashion?

Based on the answers from the survey one of the main factors that affects the purchasing decision the most is price. Since sustainable fashion is often more expensive than fast fashion, some consumers still have to buy from them due to cheaper prices. Other factors that affect the consumer purchasing decisions are materials and origin. Majority of clothes from fast fashion brands are made from synthetic fabrics such as polyester, which is plastic, many consumers value organic materials such as cotton, wool, and silk. These are more environmentally friendly and long-lasting quality materials. The origin of the garments also seems to be an important factor for some consumers. Many like to support local and domestically made and are more skeptical of the garments that are made in the Asian countries, although it does not necessarily mean that they are always made unethically.

The need to change purchasing habits to consuming less also got mentioned multiple times, meaning the purchasing behavior might be slowly changing to only buying something if needed and not just wanted.

Are consumers aware of the issues that fast fashion creates?

The drawn conclusion based on the answers of the survey is that majority of consumers are aware of the issues to some extent. Many consumers are aware about issues such as bad working conditions in the Asian countries in the textile industry but might not know how bad the situation actually really is if they do not do their own research about it. Since the general media does not cover much about these issues in the fashion industry, the consumers have to do their own research to know about factors such as greenwashing.

The consumers who are well aware of the multiple issues the fashion industry has, are trying to affect it with their own purchasing decisions as much as they can. For example, buying less, buying secondhand and from sustainable brands.

5.2 Validity and Reliability

The theoretical parts on chapters 2 and 3 comes from relevant digital sources, that are reliable and from recent years. All the sourced used are listed in the end of this thesis.

The primary source of data of this thesis is the survey that was posted on two different Facebook groups about fashion. The survey got 214 responses in total from around different parts of Finland. Bigger amount of responses as well as posting the survey to variety of different kinds of groups could have made the research more valid. However, the survey got very specific and valid information about the respondents purchasing behavior that was carefully analyzed.

5.3 Suggestions on Further Research

The primary research data was only collected from Finland through a survey. Further research could be collected form bigger regions such as Europe or United States to analyze and compare consumers purchasing behavior from different countries and regions. The survey was posted on two Facebook groups about fashion, one being specifically about ethical, ecological, and responsible fashion. By passing the survey to different types of groups would give information about purchasing behavior on consumers who are not specifically interested in fashion. The survey for this thesis was answered by 214 people. By including bigger regions, there would be more respondents, which would give more accurate information on consumers' purchasing behavior generally.

In addition, the further research may concentrate only to online purchasing behavior since online shopping is a big trend that is only getting bigger each year.

6 SUMMARY

The objective of this thesis was to find out what factors affect consumers purchasing decisions when purchasing sustainable fashion as well as to focus on the current issues faced in the fashion industry. The main research questions of this study were: “What factors affect the consumers’ decision on buying sustainable fashion?” and “Are consumers aware of the issues that fast fashion creates?” To be able to give answers to these questions quantitative research method was used.

The research starts with theoretical part that opens important concepts within the fashion industry. The theoretical part consists of explaining fast fashion, sustainable fashion, and ethics in purchasing behavior. The third chapter explains the issues within the industry which consists of pollution, working conditions, and brand transparency.

Chapter 4 goes through the survey questions and result that are also analyzed later on in the chapter. The primary data was collected thorough an online survey that was posted on two Facebook groups about fashion. The results of the survey showed the main factors that affect consumers purchasing decisions as well as general attitude and knowledge about sustainable fashion and fashion industry’s issues.

On chapter 5 the main research questions were answered based on the results of the survey and theoretical findings. Moreover, it covers the validity and reliability as well as suggestions on further research.

The future of fashion is changing, and sustainability is more and more present in all aspects. The more people will learn and be more aware of the challenges within the industry the more they would be able to demand actions from companies to change. It is positive that companies have already started to take more responsibility and actions towards being more sustainable although there needs much more to be done.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Questionnaire

1. Gender

- Female
- Male
- Other

2. Age

- Under 20
- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

3. Residence

- Pääkaupunkiseutu
- Etelä-Karjala
- Etelä-Pohjanmaa
- Etelä-Savo
- Kainuu
- Kanta-Häme
- Keski-Pohjanmaa
- Keski-Suomi

- Kymenlaakso
- Lappi
- Pirkanmaa
- Pohjanmaa
- Pohjois-Karjala
- Pohjois-Pohjanmaa
- Pohjois-Savo
- Päijät-Häme
- Sata-Kunta
- Uusimaa
- Varsinais-Suomi
- Other...

4. Are you aware of how fast fashion is affecting the environment?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

5. In a scale of 1-5 what factors affect your decision when purchasing clothes?

	1 Least important	2 Slightly important	3 Important	4 Fairly important	5 Most important
Price	<input type="radio"/>				
Quality	<input type="radio"/>				
Ethics	<input type="radio"/>				
Origin (e.g. Asia, local, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>				
Materials (e.g. Polyester, Cotton, Wool)	<input type="radio"/>				
Environmentally friendly	<input type="radio"/>				

6. Do you research if the brands you shop at are environmentally responsible?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes

7. Do you shop at thrift stores and if so, why?

- No
- Yes, for the purpose to find "trendy" clothes.
- Yes, due to the cheaper prices.
- Yes, for the ethical& environmental reasons.

8. Do you think fashion companies have enough information out about their production, origin of materials, employees working conditions, etc?

- Yes
- No
- Other...

9. Of the following, what best describes your purchasing behavior?

- The ethical, environmental, and sustainable factors do not effect my purchasing decisions.
- I try to buy from brands that are more ethical and environmentally friendly but price is the main factor.
- I mostly only buy from brands that are ethical, sustainable, and environmentally friendly.

10. Do you feel that you know enough about sustainable fashion?

- Yes
- No

11. What are your thoughts about sustainable fashion?

Long-answer text
