

Consumers' intentions towards sustainability: an analysis of the Spanish fast fashion industry

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper contributes to an on-going debate within the academic literature: the attitude-behaviour gap, by examining consumers' intentions towards sustainability within the context of the Spanish fast fashion industry. Although it could be argued that fast fashion and sustainability provides an idiosyncrasy seeing as fast fashion is based on speed, efficiency, and associated with low quality, sustainability implies contrary attributes. Yet, H&M's conscious line and their close loop textile recycling initiatives could be seen as first steps towards a more sustainable future. Similarly, Zara, Spain's number one fast fashion retailer has recently introduced their 'Join Life' collection, and thus, following in the footsteps of H&M to create a more environmentally friendly choice, within their fashion line remit. With Zara being predominantly associated with a two-week stock turnover and heavily trend influenced collections, popular among Spanish consumers, we have chosen the Spanish context to explore consumers knowledge, attitudes, and behavioural response to sustainability within the fast fashion offering.

Design/methodology/approach: Research was conducted using a mixed method strategy. The qualitative inquire allowed for an understanding of what sustainability means within the Spanish fashion industry and more specifically in the context of the fast fashion segment. Broader themes surrounding consumer knowledge and their attitudes were explored through eight in-depth semi-structured interviews. In order to gain a more representative portrayal, a survey was distributed and completed by 175 participants, which allowed to statistically validate initial qualitative findings. The survey was underpinned by the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Findings: Consumer familiarity with sustainable fashion was found to be high and broad in definition scope. Social aspects of sustainability were predominant tangents. A disjuncture between company's sustainable communication and consumer perception was apparent as well as attitudes and actual purchase intentions towards sustainable fashion. Opportunities to foster further sustainable fashion business practices and communication were identified.

Practical implications: Findings highlight that fashion retailers should clearly communicate the meaning of sustainability and their proactive response to sustainability. The development of effective communication strategies that clearly highlights retailer's compliance with and efforts to becoming more sustainable is a prerequisite arising from the study.

Originality/value: This study contributes to burgeoning research on sustainable fashion within mainstream marketing and management literature. By contextualising it to the Spanish market, it provides a novel counter-point consumer perspective on attitudes and intentions towards sustainable fashion.

Keywords: sustainability, ethical-fashion, eco-fashion, fast fashion, purchase intention, Spain

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