

The consumption side of sustainable fashion: price sensitivity, value and transparency demand

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Abstract

Statement of the issue/problem, and the relevant background:

The fashion industry has undergone several waves of 'sustainability' awareness since the 1960s. In 1996, James A. Roberts wrote, "Once again there is renewed sensitivity toward the environment and toward social consciousness", and, since 2013, after the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in which over 1'130 fashion workers were killed, we can say again that the global concern about fashion and sustainability has reemerged. Furthermore, as Roberts (1996) assessed, the current sustainability sensitivity focuses on consumer purchase behavior, in contrast to the 1960s and 1970s, when the emphasis went mainly to political solutions.

However, within the literature, limited research investigates the motivations driving consumers of sustainable fashion (Wiederhold and Martinez 2018). Davies et al. (2016) note there is minimal research observing actual buying behavior in sustainable consumption literature, questioning how much we genuinely know about sustainable consumption practice. A better understanding of why and how consumers engage in a particular behavior is needed. To do so, we have opted for a mix-method approach: three focus groups – one focalized on sustainable fashion consumers and the other two dedicated to a broader range of consumers to contrast the purchase behavior between both groups - and a survey with 1'063 respondents to validate

the results with a statistically relevant sample. Note that, in the present research, clothing consumption refers to an individual's clothing acquisition decisions, use and its end of life. It encompasses acquiring, storing, using, maintaining, and discarding clothing products (Winakor 1969). Under the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen 1991), we explore the differences in Environmental Concern (EC), Subjective Norm (SN), Perceived Consumer Effectiveness (PCE), and Purchase Intention of sustainable consumers, drawing a comparison with the average consumer through descriptive statistics.

Finally, culture and the social environment play a crucial role in a person's decision making. A cross-national study conducted by Bucic, Harris, and Aril (2012) showed that country of residence shapes decision making on sustainable products. For the present research, we have focused on Spanish consumers and the Spanish fashion market.

In this context, this research aims for the following objectives: 1) To explore consumers' perception and consumption of sustainable fashion in Spain; 2) To identify and portray the sustainable fashion consumers and their purchasing process, drawing a comparison with the average consumer; and 3) To define the barriers and drivers for sustainable consumption, further contributing to the attitude-behavior gap literature and providing guidance for practitioners and decision-makers.

Description of how the issue/problem is approached, methodology:

Combining three focus groups and an online survey, this research, exploratory in nature, delves into consumers' perception and consumption of sustainable fashion in Spain. We try to identify and profile the under-researched segment of sustainable consumers, contrast their behavior with the average consumers, and determine the drivers and barriers for sustainable fashion consumption.

Summary of findings, conclusions and implications for theory and practice:

Based on a sample of 1'063 respondents and 23 focus group participants, the results indicate that sustainable fashion consumers demonstrate greater fashion consciousness, environmental concern, perceived consumer effectiveness, and a higher subjective norm. However, the perception of 'pressure' to buy sustainably comes more from within their moral values than from their inner circle or society overall. This may indicate that Spain still lacks a strong 'sustainable culture'. It also appears that the more sustainably conscious consumers are, the less they buy brand-new, preferring alternatives as second-hand (mainly), and renting. For the

average consumers, price is still a critical purchasing driver, giving preference to fast-fashion stores. Respondents indicate that lack of trust in companies and their sustainable statements is the main reason preventing them from buying sustainable products or doing it more often, an issue that asks for further analysis.

Originality/value:

The present study adds to the under-researched segment of sustainable consumers' behavior by describing them (demographically and their purchasing behavior process) and comparing already sustainable consumers and the average consumer. Moreover, to our knowledge, it is one of the first researches studying the sustainable fashion market in Spain and digging into the reasons for the attitude-behavior gap among Spanish consumers.

Keywords: sustainable fashion consumption, collaborative fashion consumption, slow fashion, price sensitivity, transparency.

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